

Empowerment through Lifelong Learning  
The threat of a good example

# Work Based Learning In Northern Ireland

Research into the impact of the UNISON / WEA Learning at Work programme



UNISON





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## Research into the impact of the UNISON/WEA Learning at Work programme.

### By Paul Donaghy

Based on research carried out by Paul Donaghy UNISON and Anne Ringland WEA (N.I)

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I would like to thank all those who have given their time to contribute to this research. In particular I would like to thank Anne Ringland, WEA (N.I.) who contributed so much to the questionnaire design and remains so central to the delivery of the UNISON / WEA Learning at Work programme in N.I.

A poem by a past UNISON/WEA Learning at Work student in N.I

*When I was a girl of just 16,  
I really was a fool. I had O levels,  
but no career, And decided to  
leave school.*

*No uniforms or flat black shoes,  
No end of term exams, Just get a  
job, earn some cash, And find  
myself a man.*

*As time went past, I had 6 kids,  
And stayed home with my mob,  
The kids all grew, so did my bills,  
I got a part time job.*

*Conditions were poor,  
management bad, With no  
solution in sight, I became a  
steward with UNISON,  
To stand up for my rights.*

*Confidence building was 1st on  
my list, Followed by shop  
stewards training, R2L was my  
biggest challenge, With the  
weekends "quite" entertaining.*

*Negotiating skills and health and  
safety, Then CCT and Clait,  
Lay tutor training, part one, came  
next, This education's great.*

*The learning bug has bitten me,  
And I've tried to pass it on,  
Through ILA'a and Open Days  
And even with this poem.*

*My eldest girl has grown up,  
And is doing her degree,  
Someday, Thanks to UNISON,  
The Graduate will be me!*

**Siobhan Edgar  
Craigavon**





## Empowerment through Lifelong Learning - The threat of a good example

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## Foreword

By the Minister of Employment and Learning



*Carmel Hanna*

**Carmel Hanna MLA**

Minister for Employment and Learning

For more than 10 years UNISON's Return to Learn programmes have established it as a pace-setter in the field of encouraging and, equally importantly, supporting its members to take up learning opportunities.

Many people in work often feel that the chance to improve their knowledge and skills has passed them by, and for some this is unfortunately the result of a less than satisfactory previous learning experience. Learning through work-based arrangement, and the opportunity to learn alongside ones work-mates can be a powerful incentive for those for whom traditional provisions are unattractive, or because of shifts or work patterns, are inaccessible.

I am particularly alive to the needs of the unacceptable high proportion that need special help in the vital area of essential skills for living. All of our people deserve to have the chance to improve their self-confidence, their skills, and their lives generally through learning that meets their needs and challenges their abilities.

I welcome in particular UNISON's commitment to achieving it's learning strategies through active and effective partnerships. In recognition of the role trade union led partnerships can play in helping to achieve our lifelong learning goals, I recently announced the creation of a new Union Learning Fund for Northern Ireland. The first projects supported by the fund are now getting underway and I look forward to their success.

The case studies in this report show clearly what adult learners of all levels and backgrounds can achieve. They highlight what can be accomplished through the vision and support of committed and professional partners.

I congratulate UNISON and its partners on what has been achieved to date, and I look forward to its continuing successes in the future. I commend this report to all those interested in the subject.



## Empowerment through Lifelong Learning - The threat of a good example

### Lessons Learned - a summary

This research points to the following as being central to developing an effective workplace learning initiative.

- ◆ A new wider definition of workplace learning is needed - such a definition could be, 'Learning to be, learning to do, learning to know and learning to live and work together.'
- ◆ Collaboration and Partnership are central to success - A win/win scenario is possible if all partners invest in innovation and collaboration.
- ◆ To mainstream effective workplace learning initiatives the necessary infrastructure must be created.
- ◆ A partnership board representative of all interests should be considered.
- ◆ A workplace learning policy statement detailing the partners commitment and responsibilities is recommended.
- ◆ Resources need to be made available - as an investment - not a cost.
- ◆ Effective promotion and communication is essential.
- ◆ Programmes that deliver empowerment and emancipation and are liberating, and develop active citizenship, are as valid as vocational programmes designed to develop learning for earning.
- ◆ While learning for earning motivates some, to widen and deepen participation, workplace learning must incorporate the social, democratic and citizenship motivations for learning.
- ◆ The many barriers that prevent adults from engaging in learning must be tackled. Differing partners and particularly the trade union partner brings differing abilities to overcome these many barriers.
- ◆ Learner support structures, both formal and informal must be provided to build learner confidence.
- ◆ The workplace has the potential to become an engine of social change by actively managing the creation of a learning organisation and building a learning culture within the workplace.
- ◆ Learning can work, and can be a win/win for all.

**R2L helped me gain confidence in myself and really helped to open my mind to further education and enjoy it.**

Student



## Background

Got me back into education and given me confidence to go onto other courses

Student

The development of lifelong learning is a key part of the Government's strategy to encourage a culture in which education and training is available and accessible to everyone. Reaching people who have, in the past, had only limited access to learning is central to this strategy.

For a number of years, UNISON has been at the forefront of developing lifelong learning for non-traditional learners. As the largest trade union in the UK, UNISON has recognised the importance of learning opportunities for members and recognised particularly the need to provide a second chance for workers to access education.

This research report is an attempt to look at the impact of the UNISON/WEA "Learning@Work" programme in Northern Ireland, and set this in the context of the wider social debate around lifelong learning.

Learning, in this context does not just mean vocational training - getting the skills needed to do a particular task or job - however important that is. What is meant is learning in the broadest sense, providing people with the skills knowledge and confidence to participate and progress to further education or other opportunities.

UNISON programmes, such as the award winning Return to Learn, (R2L) have enabled hundreds of members in Northern Ireland to get back into education, often for the first time since leaving school.

The UNISON programmes are increasingly being delivered in the workplace through partnerships with employers and while this approach enables UNISON to reach many non-traditional learners who might otherwise lose out, it creates many new dynamics about who adult education is for, who it benefits and why employers and unions should be involved.

This report assesses the role and impact of the programme on the participants, i.e. the learners, the union, the employers, the providers (WEA) and others such as the accrediting body (NIOCN) and the role of Learner Support through the views of the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA).

The holistic approach adopted in the Learning@Work programme as it has evolved in Northern Ireland is rather unique in the world of workplace learning in N.I.

UNISON believes that the power and value of education and training can benefit everyone and that learning takes place throughout life, not just at school or in a traditional classroom. The UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme is about bringing training and education to thousands of people: to those who have been excluded from education, to those for whom the first chance school system has failed and to those who work in the front line of delivering public services.

It is also about providing opportunities for people to update their skills and knowledge in this rapidly changing world, whenever they want to, and wherever they are. It is also, crucially, about the personal development of these workers using learning to empower them as individuals, as employees and as trade union members. The UNISON experience throws new light on a number of key issues regarding lifelong learning. For example, there has been much debate about whether the lifelong learning agenda is about economic competitiveness, or about citizenship and this research attempts to tease out some of these issues which are quite central in a new Northern Ireland emerging from 30 years of community conflict. Courses like "Return to Learn" (R2L) are designed to reach those who are most



## Part 1

likely to be excluded from learning. The courses are specially designed for people in lower paid occupations who have been out of education for some time, who have few or no formal qualifications and lack confidence in their ability to learn. These courses can be complementary to conventional work related vocational training courses which relate to specific jobs and functions. They are however primarily about personal development, confidence building and developing skills to learn. As previous research shows adults most successfully learn when they “own” their own learning and so the UNISON/WEA programme is designed to get people back into the swing of learning so that they can find their own future pathways. Many R2L students had negative experiences at school and yet after Return to Learn some 81% of respondents in this survey said they had become further involved in learning since R2L or intended to do so. The significance of R2L is how it helps learners break through the barriers, develop confidence and move on to other opportunities

### Ethos of the Learning@Work Programme

UNISON believes that learning is about the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

The UNISON programme in Northern Ireland is built around this notion and is centrally about;

#### Equality

- ◆ Targeting the educationally disadvantaged
- ◆ Helping to deliver social inclusion and tackle social exclusion
- ◆ Targeting non-traditional learners

- ◆ Targeting women and mothers
- ◆ Targeting low paid and part time workers

These are many of the groups traditionally excluded from learning opportunities.

#### Partnership

- ◆ With workers and their trade union from all sections of the public sector and the voluntary and community sector
- ◆ With employers from health, local government, education boards and the voluntary and community sector
- ◆ With providers (Workers Educational Association and Open University)
- ◆ With accrediting bodies (NI Open College Network)
- ◆ With adult guidance supports (EGSA)
- ◆ With all the key social partners

This partnership approach has been recognised as critical to any effective lifelong learning strategy. (see National Advisory Group Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning Report 1998 & 1999).

#### Targeting Social Need

- ◆ Many of the learners are low paid, part time workers and come from areas of social need. A high percentage of these workers are women. They sometimes become workplace or community mentors or advocates for learning which is central to the success of lifelong learning initiatives.

#### Empowerment, Citizenship and Skills for Life

- ◆ These programmes seek to help people help themselves; to help them develop their true potential and thereby benefit themselves, their family, their community, the economy and Northern Ireland as a whole. This is particularly important in the context of our Northern Ireland community

“Made my brain active again, met lots of nice new friends of both religions plus it has made me more confident”

Student



“Made me feel much better about my self - the course has helped me work with my children and help them with their homework”

Student

emerging from conflict and in the context of moving to a "knowledge based economy". (See DENI and T&EA "Lifelong Learning - A New Learning Culture For All" HMSO 1998).

## Research, Context and Rationale

*“In the study of participation in work-based or work-related learning in Britain, it is the low paid, low skilled, part-time, mainly women workers who miss out; and generally those in the lower socio-economic groups and those who leave school early who are missing from all learning opportunities. These are the people that UNISON is attracting and motivating to progress in education and training. The evidence is there for all to see and learn from.”*

Tony Uden, Associate Director, NIACE, the National Organisation for Adult Learning (1996)

UNISON has been involved in second chance education work in Northern Ireland for some 7 years, and nationally for longer.

UNISON members work in the health service, local government, community and schools. Eight out of every ten members are women, many part-time and low paid. Many left school with no qualifications. Many gave up on formal education first time around and have had little money spent on them in education and training since joining the workforce. In lifelong learning jargon, they are non-traditional learners.

In the Health Service for example, where most UNISON members in Northern Ireland work the 'lion's share' of the staff education and training budget is spent on a small percentage of staff (managers, doctors, professionals, etc) and little on the lower paid and part time staff (porters, domestics, home helps etc). To

build a culture of Lifelong Learning in workplaces, this inequality in resourcing learning opportunities must be addressed.

What UNISON in Northern Ireland is attempting to do is to provide a ladder of educational and personal development opportunities for members, from skills for life education (numeracy, literacy and language) through women's development courses, Return to Learn and Lifelong Learning Advisers courses to a university access course or an Open University degree. UNISON members are thereby able to step on and off the ladder as they wish, or as their circumstances allow. Moreover, they can also move to other ladders and access other and different opportunities. To achieve this however, the barriers have to be removed.

At each stage of the learning journey the individual's learning is accredited, so that the learning achievement is recognised and transferable.

## Return to Learn (R2L) Programme - A life changing experience for many

The flagship of the UNISON/WEA work has, and will continue to be, the award winning Return to Learn (R2L) programme. From a handful of students seven years ago, the programme now recruits some 100 workers each year from places as far apart as Belfast, Newry, Armagh, Craigavon, Enniskillen, Linaskea, Omagh, Derry, Antrim, Magherafelt, Carrickfergus Bangor, Lisburn, Newtownards, Downpatrick and Coleraine. More recently UNISON has developed employer partnerships with many health trusts and with a number of other public service employers in Northern Ireland. These employers pay the cost of providing the course in the workplace and support learners with paid release from work to study.



The Return to Learn programme is not about becoming a UNISON shop steward, rather it offers stepping-stones to a second chance at education. Many learners do however want to give something back to the union and often become activists and sometimes stewards. R2L is about life skills, report writing, communication skills and working in groups. It gives workers an opportunity to work and develop skills at their own pace. Most of all, it is about building confidence in the students own abilities and getting a recognised qualification for their work. The students work is accredited through the NI Open College Network at levels 1, 2 or 3. R2L gives people a second chance at education, confidence and a certificate to prove their ability. It helps individuals develop their communication skills and interpersonal skills. UNISON provides a study pack and workbooks and in the partnership schemes, the employer provides 12 half days off, once a fortnight and four full days (or two residential weekends) off over a period of 9 months.

**R2L empowers UNISON members to help themselves and others they work with and this holistic approach to learning stands in sharp contrast to many workers previous experience of education.**

While the employer gives 60 hours time off, the students commit themselves to a minimum of 120 hours home study. There are no exams. The course is accredited by ongoing assessment and the programme is quality controlled by the NIOCN. Students can achieve up to 'A' level standard qualifications.

The achievements of the students who have studied under the programme have been well-documented in Helen Kennedy's report 'Return to Learn: UNISON's fresh approach to trade union education' (1995) and also a report by

Anne Munroe, Helen Rainbird and Lesley Holly entitled "Partners in Workplace Learning - A report on the UNISON/Employer learning and development programme" (1997). These achievements are also present in N. Ireland as this report clearly shows.

In employer partnerships, progressive employers have committed themselves to working with UNISON to achieve education and training objectives. This allows the parties to recognise an area of mutual interest, to work as partners, pooling resources and expertise and to develop a joint approach towards the education and development of groups of workers whose needs are often ignored. An increasing number of employers accept the value of this approach and recognise the value of this for their staff. This report examines the perspectives of partners - employers, the union, WEA tutors and principally the students themselves, and includes autobiographical statements by some students and the views of representatives of other partners in this process.

### How does the Course Run?

The R2L course takes approximately 9 - 10 months to complete, and can be started at any time of the year. The group of students are allocated a tutor who is responsible for individual progress and can be contacted for informal advice, support and guidance. The study group is made up of about 10/12 students from the local workplace. The aim is to provide an opportunity to carry out activities relating to course assignments, discuss student progress and share ideas. They are held on a day and at a time that suits students, in venues which are chosen as being safe and non-intimidating, often in their own workplace. This approach is an attempt

**"R2L has given me back my hopes and dreams for a future filled with possibilities"**

Student



**“R2L awakened a deep longing to learn and be taught”**

**Student**

to address workers reluctance to engage in learning in more formal educational colleges and is consistent with acknowledged best practice in the delivery of learning to non-traditional learners.

Assignments form the basis for the course, structured around the key skills of writing, investigating, analysing and working with figures. Because R2L is accredited it can therefore contribute towards higher education access and a significant number of past R2L students have gone on to higher education with

N.I. universities and colleges. The programme is also being mapped to NVQ and other qualifications and the underpinning knowledge gained through R2L or similar programmes can then be accredited through the wider qualifications framework. It is hoped that the work of the N.I.C.A.T.S (Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation Transfer System) initiative will tackle issues around qualification transferability and currency further over the years ahead, and bring more transparency and equality to these issues.



## Research, Methods and Findings

## Part 2

This research has utilised a number of different approaches. The main focus of the research is student experiences, using responses to a questionnaire, then backed up by limited biographical research. Other partners experiences take the form of comments made in the context of discussions about the UNISON/WEA programme in Northern Ireland.

A significant part of the research is to establish the R2L learner cohort and seek views of past R2L students.

It is important, at the outset, to state that all learners are not the same; they do not come to learning from the same starting point; nor do they come to learning for the same reasons or purpose. As such care must be taken in relating these results to wider theories of lifelong learning but an important part of the UNISON programmes is to provide the opportunity for all to access or construct their own future learning pathway.

The research was carried out over the period of June - September 2001.

### Findings and Analysis - Students Experiences

From 1995 to June 2001 in Northern Ireland, 538 people participated as students in the R2L programme and a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was sent to all of these in early June 2001. The statistical analysis and commentary regarding student experiences is based on the responses received to this survey. No reminders were sent and 133 (25%) responded to the questionnaire. This was a relatively high response rate compared to similar type research. This indicates in itself a positive experience of R2L for many who have accessed it.

The responses were subjected to SPSS computer analysis and the following are the main findings.

**“R2L course has made me more aware of my rights as an adult and a student”**

Student



“Gained confidence to stand up for myself - made me realise I do have qualities and I can be taught”

Student

## Key Findings of the Student Questionnaire

Figure 1 shows nearly 83% of Learners are female. This may reflect the potential student population as 80% of UNISON members in N.I. are female.

It may also however be a reflection that many women are easier to attract into learning than men of the same age. Much previous work has been carried out into the relevance of gender issues in second chance learning and to achieve a 17% male uptake is also significant.

Figure 2 shows that, 83% of respondents are age 36 or over.

Figure 3 shows that over 65% of respondents were age 16 or under when they left school.

These statistics indicate that the programme is attracting a student cohort largely missing from college-based programmes.

Figure 1 Gender



Figure 2 Age Profile

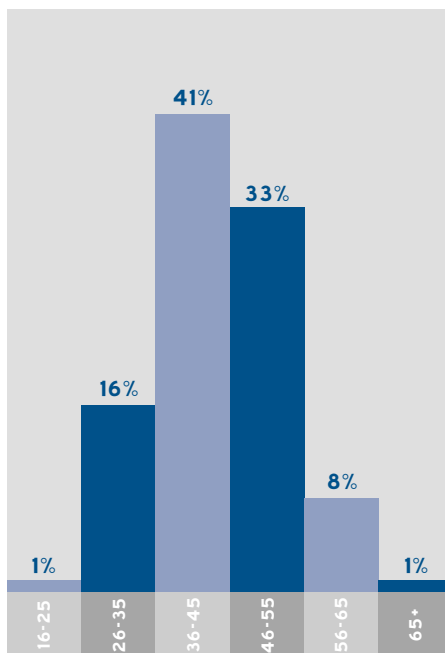


Figure 3 School Leaving Age

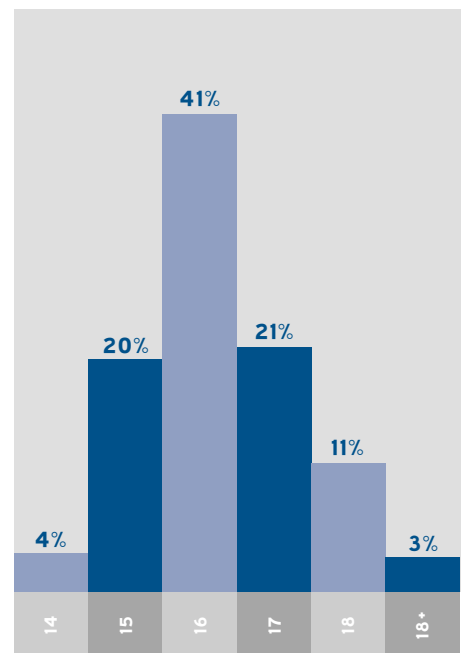
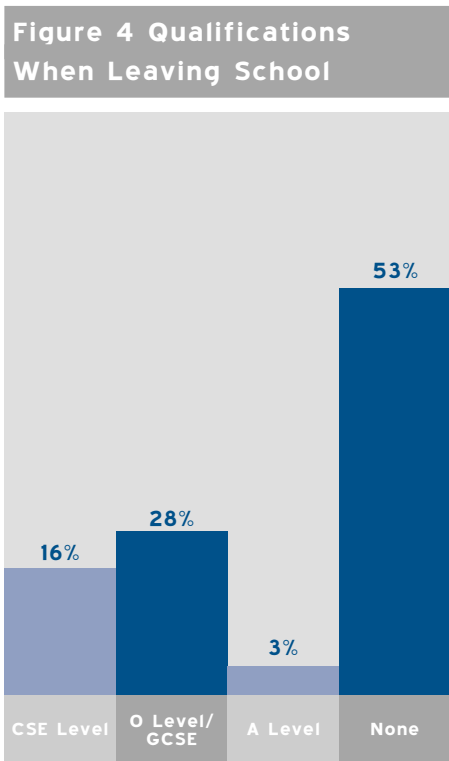




Figure 4 shows that nearly 53% of respondents had no qualifications when leaving school. This response is significant when considered alongside SACHR research which showed that in Northern Ireland there was a higher percentage of students leaving school with no qualifications than any other part of Britain. (SACHR 1997)

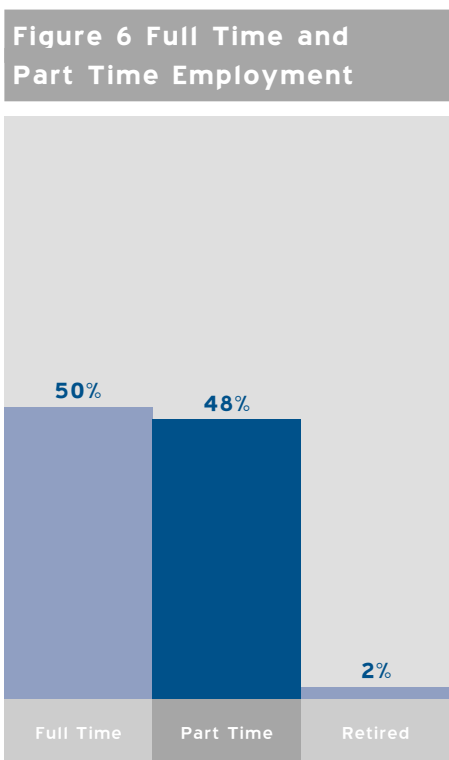
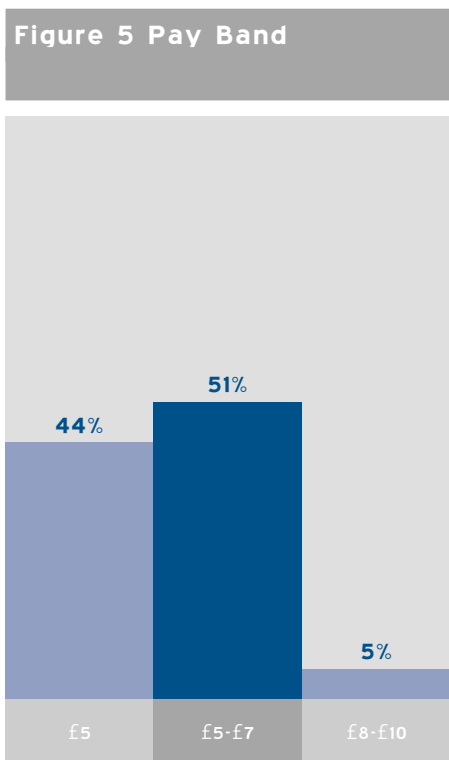
Figure 5 shows that nearly 95% of respondents earn less than £7.00 per hour which makes them officially defined as low paid workers in that they earn less than the Council of Europe Decency Threshold.

Figure 6 shows that nearly 48% of respondents are part time workers, which again are a particularly difficult group to get to return to learn.



“Just finishing my first year of a two year foundation studies course with the help of the R2L course”

Student





“Given me a lot more confidence not only educationally but socially as well - I have made new friends and discovered that I have a talent for short story writing”

Student

These statistics show clearly that the cohort of students accessing the UNISON programme is quite atypical and missing from most traditional learning programmes. The programme is attracting non-traditional learners and many of the barriers outlined by academic researchers are clearly being overcome in the way the programme is being organised and delivered in Northern Ireland.

The results in the next section of the questionnaire attempted to ascertain if respondents felt the UNISON / WEA programme helped them develop more independence.

The responses in figure 7 show clearly that the programme helped respondents

move across the bridge from dependence to independence:

- ◆ 80% said that they will now speak up for themselves
- ◆ 29% have taken on additional responsibilities at work
- ◆ 86% say that they are now able to help themselves
- ◆ 73% said that they now feel more confident about helping others help themselves
- ◆ 23% have changed jobs or job roles.

This is especially significant when it is considered in the context of some 32% of those who responded had 16 or more years of service in the public sector in Northern Ireland.

**Figure 7 How The UNISON/WEA Programme Helped**

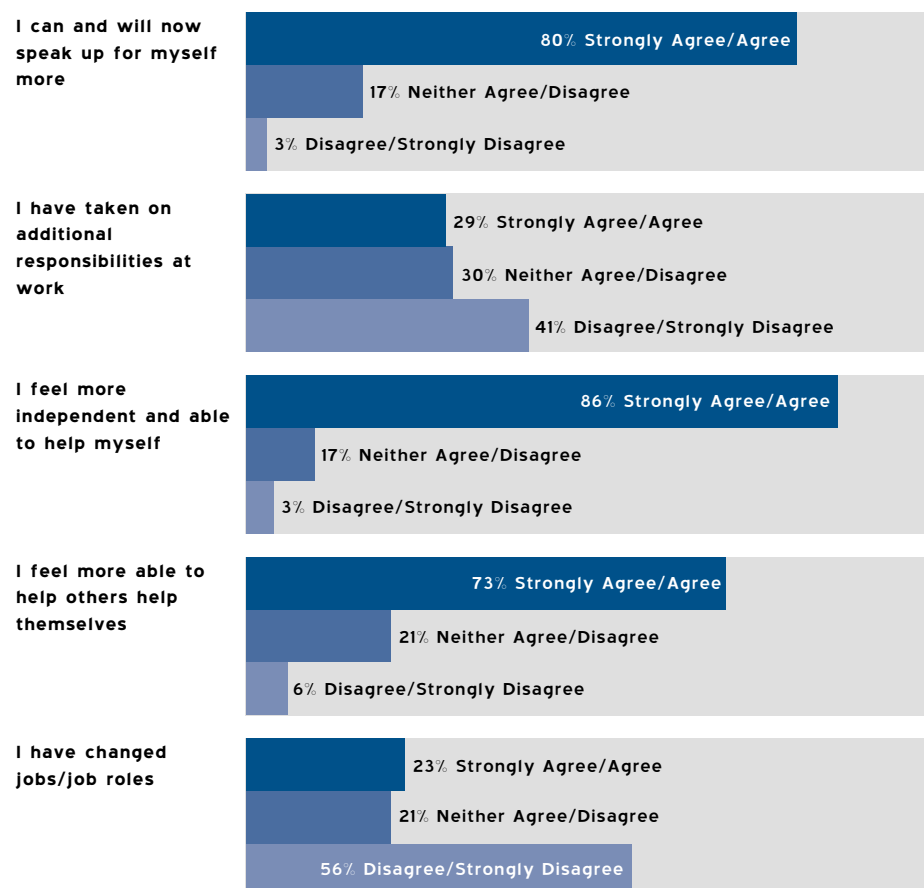




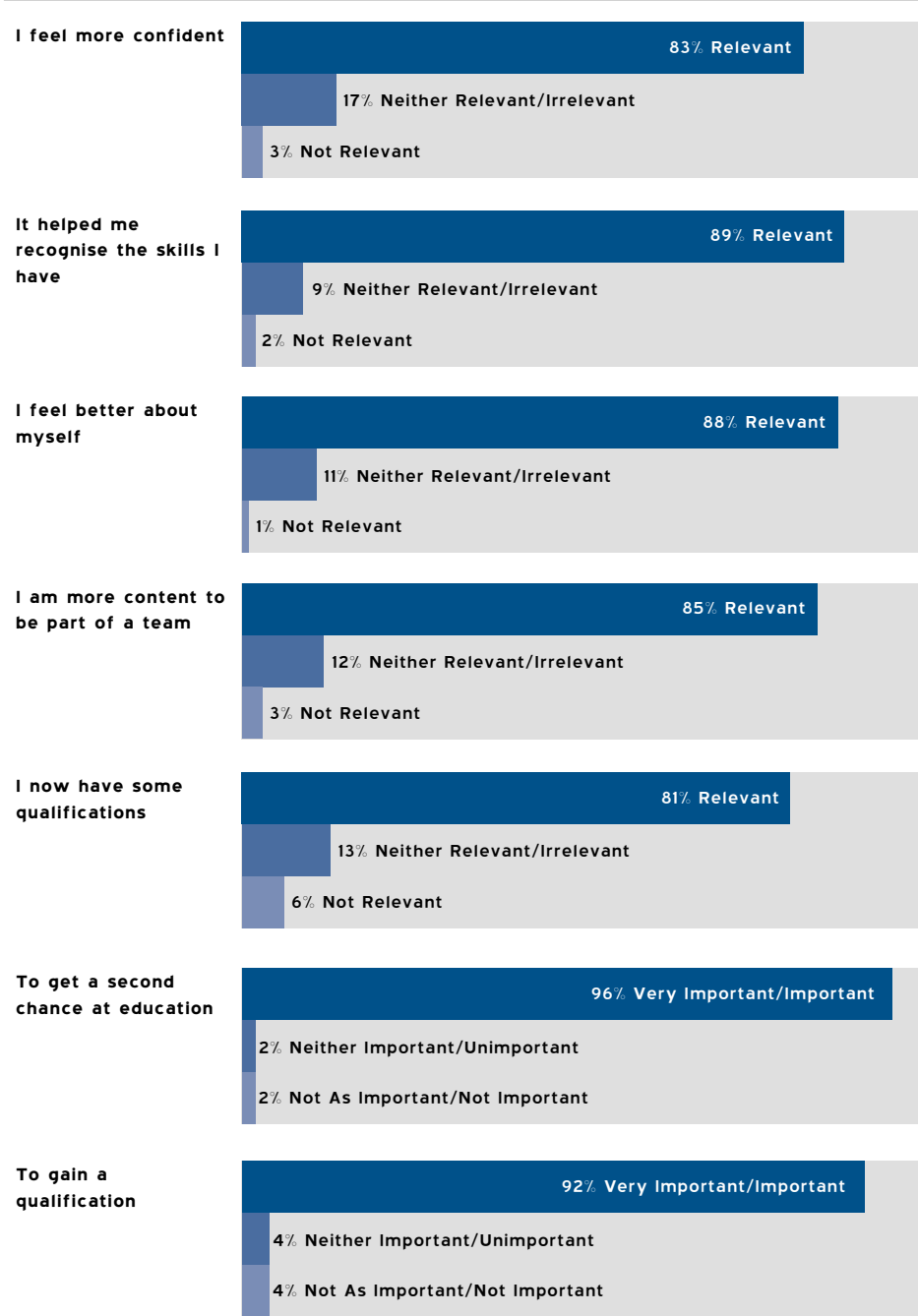
Figure 8 covers areas in the questionnaire such as, confidence and reasons why students undertook the UNISON /WEA Learning@Work programme. Here also the results are very noteworthy:

- ◆ 83% of respondents record increased confidence
- ◆ 89% report that it helped them to recognise the skills they already had
- ◆ 88% said that they felt better about themselves after participating in the

“Before I did R2L I had no qualifications. Now I have. I never felt completely stupid but had nothing to show for whatever education I had at school. I now feel confident to do something different”

Student

**Figure 8 Why Students Undertook the Programme**





**“I am more self assured and will make my point of view heard and I will not be taken for granted again”**

Student

programme

- ◆ 85% reported that they were more content to be part of a team afterwards
- ◆ 80% said that gaining qualifications was important to them.

This seems to confirm the view that a transferable recognised certificate or credit for learning was important (as previous researchers argue). This is further emphasised by the response to the two questions in the next section of the questionnaire:

- ◆ 95% stated that it was important to get a second chance at education;
- ◆ 92% said that getting a qualification was important. Some 81% said that they had gone on to or intended to go on to other learning opportunities after R2L.

In Figure 9 (page 18) the areas for investigation in the questionnaire tried to tease out what was important for students when joining or remaining on the programme:

- ◆ An approachable tutor was crucial with 76% highlighting it as very important and a further 12% highlighting it as important.
- ◆ Student centred techniques used with assignments and confidential feedback was also vital to some 94%.
- ◆ The fact that its not like school was very important to over 90% of respondents.
- ◆ UNISON support was felt important by over 85% of respondents.
- ◆ More than 91% said that working with other adults was important.
- ◆ The fact that assessment was by means of continuous assessment rather than exams, was pinpointed as important by over 84%.

Finally, and as a test of whether students actually felt the programme was valuable the question was asked whether the participant would

recommend the programme to others and very significantly, **no one answered this in the negative with a huge 97.7% saying that they would recommend it to others.**

The final section of the questionnaire was aimed at qualitative information relating to the R2L programme. The full results of the qualitative questions are reproduced In Appendix 2. As can be seen all comments were of a positive nature. As an example one student commented as follows:

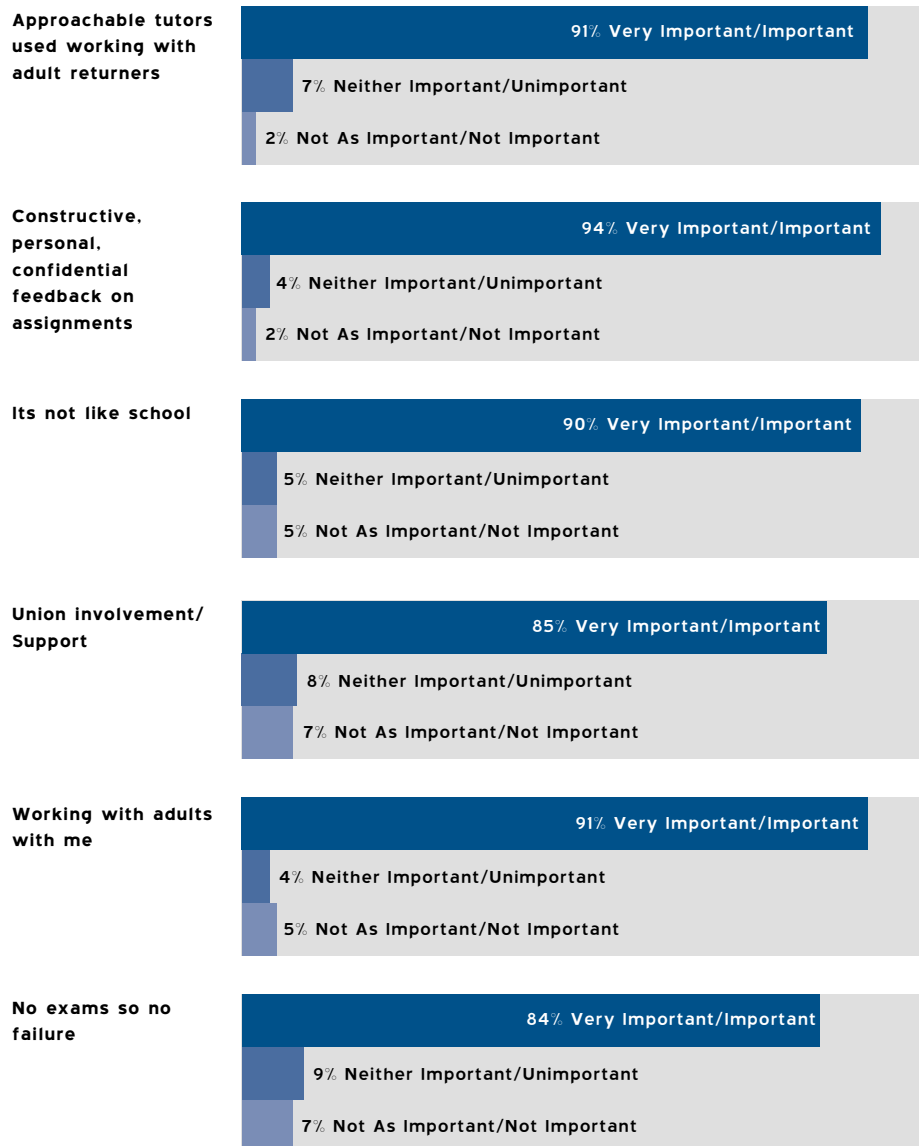
*“Your questionnaire has given me the opportunity to express my gratitude and sincere thanks for introducing me to further education via your excellent R2L course. It was always my intention to write to UNISON to describe what the initial involvement has done for me personally. I enrolled in a diploma course at the local adult education centre and have just completed my two-year part time course which was self funded, but I applied for a yearly book grant from UNISON which was much appreciated. I am at present awaiting my results and am reasonably confident that I have achieved an entry into the second year of a degree course at one of the local universities.*

*Please pass on my deep felt and honest appreciation to my tutor in Newry and all UNISON education staff who encouraged me to realise a life time ambition of which I wouldn't have believed three years ago I was capable of completing.”*

A full qualitative analysis can be seen from each questionnaire response, and these one line comments are reproduced fully in Appendix 2. They are powerful comments which add significantly to the quantitative research results.



**Figure 9 What Was Important When On The Course**



“I am able to speak out without feeling stupid and know that if I want to try something new I have the ability to do so”

Student

## Biographical Research

In addition to the key findings from the responses to the questionnaire, 4 past Return to Learn participants were asked to provide a short résumé of what R2L had done for them. These are set out below and provide some deeper

personal analysis of what R2L can achieve. While these may not reflect the experience of all students, from the questionnaire responses they are not untypical of the experience of many undertaking the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme.



“Shown that learning is not that hard and that I could learn at my own pace and that not everyone is super brainy”

Student

**Joan Truesdale,  
Down/Lisburn Health Trust**

*My name is Joan Truesdale and I am what is commonly referred to as a Mature Student.*

*I, like many of my counterparts in the 60s, left school with very few formal qualifications. Training as a Dental Nurse followed, with Public Relations, negotiation and book-keeping skills standing me in good stead throughout the years.*

*In 1990, a successful application for the post of Nursing Auxiliary in the community, opened many new doors, as my line manager actively encouraged all aspects of further learning.*

*The opportunity to study with the UNISON Return to Learn programme has been of enormous benefit in many ways. I have gained confidence to move forward in both education and my employment. The worry of ‘being too old’ has been totally dispelled, as positive feedback from tutors has motivated me to set targets for achievement levels. Meeting new people and enjoying friendly rivalry has also helped in producing results I had previously thought impossible.*

*My experience with Return to Learn encouraged me to continue with the W.E.A. bridging course, which once again was well co-ordinated and positive.*

*Embarking on an Open University course, at first appeared a daunting experience. However my fears proved groundless as the step-by-step approach of Return to Learn had prepared me well for both tutorials and assignments.*

*Recognition at work has been swift and at times intimidating. I now have responsibility for Treatment Rooms both in Newcastle and Castlewellan, as well as training and my own caseload. After*

*intensive training, I became an Activate leader with the Down/Lisburn Trust and currently run exercise classes for the elderly on a regular basis. However, being given the opportunity to qualify as a Phlebotomist, (only the second Nursing Auxiliary ever to be offered this opportunity), must rank as my greatest achievement to date.*

*I will be forever grateful for the doors ‘Return to Learn’ opened and all thanks must go to the UNISON/W.E.A. R2L programme for offering this unique second chance at education.*

**Philip Irvine, UNISON activist**

*Since doing the Return to Learn course in the year 1998/9, I would like to let you know of the advances, achievements and increased confidence that I have experienced since that time.*

*When I first went to the course I was a person with no qualifications and very little confidence. One thing that played on my mind constantly was the idea that I had left school and had not sat any exams. I thought at that time that an apprenticeship was of more importance.*

*Since Return to Learn, I have done something I thought a total impossibility: I went back to school. I enrolled for a Certificate in Personnel Development course in B.I.F.H.E. and to my amazement, I passed these exams and have since gone on to do my NVQ4 and Certificate in Management Studies. I also hope to do the European Computer Driving License course.*

*I applied for an up-grading/promotion from my original post to a Grade 5 and was granted this in April this year. I chair staffside meetings. I was for 2 years the Secretary for a local community health committee, and I have arranged and led delegations to meet various Health Ministers, including the present one. Not bad for someone who lacked*



self-esteem and confidence!

I can personally relate my personal triumphs back to the R2L course. I am and will continue to be an advocate and have gone out locally within the Trust to recruit staff to our local R2L partnership with the Trust.

**Olive Wylie,  
Sperrin/Lakeland Health Trust**

I attended Return to Learn in 1997-98. I was a UNISON steward and I wanted to know what the course was about before I tried to get others interested in doing it. I was not really looking forward to it as learning situations had never been great experiences for me. I disliked school and throughout my nurse training had hated the time spent in classroom. I dreaded being asked a question and if I was pounced upon by a tutor, I could never answer even if I knew exactly what I should say. I had attended several study days but my problems in participating in discussion just seemed to worsen.

My tutor on Return to Learn was excellent. I told her at the outset about how I did not like to speak out in class and felt I learnt more by listening. She never pounced on me but still somehow did not make me feel excluded from the group.

The weekend residentials really built up my confidence. I dreaded the workshops and did not want to participate but both the tutors and the rest of the group gently encouraged me to become involved. Without realising it, I joined in discussions and roleplay. Return to Learn was the most relaxed and enjoyable educational experience I have ever had and it greatly helped my development.

Since completing the course, I have become Joint Branch Secretary and I am Chair of our Trust Staff Side Committee. I have addressed a meeting of over three hundred people on the issue of saving our local hospital. I have been

interviewed on television regarding this. I negotiate with managers throughout the trust and recently I gave a talk to Senior Managers about the role of the Staff Side Representatives in the management of absence.

I cannot believe how easily I can talk to people and how much less introverted I have become.

However, I still do not feel entirely comfortable in classroom style situations. My childhood ghosts still haunt me but if I do another couple of courses like Return to Learn, I might soon lay them to rest.

**Martin Gallagher, Stradreagh.**

My name is Martin Gallagher and I work as an Enrolled Nurse in Stradreagh Hospital, which caters for people with learning disabilities in Derry.

In my time I have completed numerous courses with UNISON as an official and when the opportunity of R2L became available to me through talking to the Education Officer, Paul Donaghy in Belfast, I decided to give it a go. I was afraid of exams as exams didn't agree with me.

I was concerned too that funding was involved and wondered where I was going to obtain the money to complete the course. I was amazed to find out however that the course was free to all members of UNISON, there were no exams at the end and no funding was involved. The main aim of the course is to provide all members of UNISON with the chance to return back to education and fulfil ways of bettering themselves for the future i.e. in their career or move on to university.

The course is run by UNISON in conjunction with the Workers Educational Association (WEA). The materials are all supplied by UNISON and

**“I feel a lot more confident and I can put myself forward for various activities when before I would have quite happily taken a back seat”**

Student



**“R2L was a kick start for me - it was a confidence booster- you were praised at the end of the day whether your work was right or wrong”**

Student

*they provide two separate weekends away, free. The weekends provide a chance to meet other people in the region of Northern Ireland who are also taking part in the course with you and to socialise and work as a group. There is also a personal tutor who meets with the class once per week/fortnight and who you can also make contact with, if any difficulties arise during the course. They provide the help and assistance that you need on a 1 - 1 basis if required. The duration of the course runs over a period of 1 year and is completed at your own ease. For each piece of work submitted to the tutor feedback is provided which gives you the opportunity to correct any mistakes etc that might have been made. Once completed the course work is sent to an external moderator.*

*I mentioned at the beginning that when I first started this course my confidence was at a reasonable level. At that stage I would never have thought about going on to further my career or to do better things. I was just happy to sit back and stay put as an Enrolled Nurse.*

*However, this course became a confidence builder for me, making me more assertive and feeling on top of the world, so much so that my confidence is at an all time high. When the opportunity arose to do the Enrolled Nurse Conversion Course I jumped at the chance to give it a go. Knowing that an exam exists at the end of the course, I am looking forward to giving it a shot, where in the past I would have been nervous and sick with worry.*

*As an official the course has provided me with the confidence and assertiveness I need to go and be able to argue my corner on behalf of the members if it means getting justice for everyone.*

*To conclude I will finish by saying that the R2L course has been a milestone in my life, providing me with the confidence, assertiveness and inspiration I required to give me the push to go on and better myself in my career. I would encourage all those members out there in the workplace to avail of this course free as it may one day provide you with the push that you need to move on.*

These are a sample of comments by some past R2L students and many other similar positive testimonies could be reproduced.

This student research seems to confirm many researchers previous analysis that education must be liberating and empowering if it hopes to attract non-traditional participants. The research also shows clearly that for many adults their bad experiences of school mar their views and attitudes to education, and this experience influences their future attitude to learning.

UNISON believes that flexibility in the delivery and accreditation of such learning (particularly moving away from exams) is critical if non-traditional participants are to be encouraged back into (or for some encouraged into) learning. This research clearly supports this view as 84.4% said that it was either important or very important that there were no exams in the R2L programme.

The hegemony of the first chance education system and indeed the wider educational establishment is so strong that it bolsters our existing clearly unequal educational system. This inequality must be addressed if our society is to target social need and educational disadvantage and this research shows that the workplace could be a valuable vehicle to do just that.



The research also indicates that adult education and learning can be liberating and emancipatory. This role for adult education is not an optional extra but a social imperative. This research shows how the existing hegemony can be challenged, and reveals how it is possible to challenge inequality and remove barriers to learning. The views of students as researched in this project seems to confirm the analysis of many, including UNISON in Northern Ireland and nationally, that to attract adults to learning and thereby widen and deepen participation in formal learning, a more relevant, holistic and strategic approach is required. Central to this strategic approach is a new definition of workplace learning which encompasses “learning to do, learning to be, learning to know and learning to live and work together.”

## The Views of Other Key Partners

The support of employers is critical and set down below are the perspectives of a number of employer representatives in Northern Ireland.

Elaine Kehelly is the assistant Director of Human Resources at one of Northern Ireland's largest hospital trusts, the Royal Group of Hospitals. This is what she says about the UNISON Learning @ Work programme.

*“The Royal Hospitals is pleased to have worked in partnership with UNISON to offer this opportunity to staff to Return to Learn. As an organisation we are committed to ensuring all staff are provided with the opportunity to develop and retain all necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to carry out their jobs effectively. Return to Learn has helped individuals to develop their communication skills,*

*interpersonal ability and self-confidence, as well as offering participants the opportunity to gain accreditation through the Open College Network for their assignments. We feel that this has been a worthwhile partnership and excellent development opportunity which has brought benefits to the individual and the organisation.”*

These sentiments are echoed by an increasing number of public sector employers in Northern Ireland with whom UNISON has a Learning @ Work partnership. The fact that each year more participants from more public sector employers join forces with UNISON provides testimony to the value they see in the UNISON pioneering approach to workplace learning. The programmes attract a cohort of learners missing from elsewhere and the employers recognise the value of encouraging non-traditional learners into work based education and training.

### The following are typical of the type of comments by employers;

*“The flexibility of this programme accommodates the needs of employers and staff.”*

Newry & Mourne Trust

*“Jobs in the public sector are changing rapidly, with the single task, supervised job becoming a thing of the past. Workers now have to take increased responsibility for their own management and with the move to more team working and team problem solving staff now have to frequently read, analyse and write reports. The UNISON programme helps workers to make this change, and at the same time can help take the fear out of change.”*

Linda Davison, Down/Lisburn Trust

**“Became more aware of my abilities, to become committed to study and classes. I now feel more confident in groups”**

Student



**“Gave me confidence and helped me believe in my capabilities. Encouraged me to gain more qualifications and more self-esteem. Do not feel a failure”**

Student

*“A number of our school meals staff have undertaken the Return to Learn (R2L) programme with UNISON. Traditionally many of these staff have had little opportunity or encouragement to engage in workplace learning and those who have done so through the unique UNISON approach have enjoyed the experience. As an education provider we recognise the value of learning throughout life and the value of giving adults a second chance to learn.”*

Sarah Lowe, South Eastern Education and Library Board

## Wider Industrial Relations Benefit

Employers have also commented on the value of the learning partnership arrangement with the trade union. It provides a non-adversarial partnership approach in the industrial relations arena which can have a positive impact on other areas of union/employer relations. A number of employers described how these learning partnerships have facilitated the development of mutual respect and trust which must be good for all in the workplace. While issues of conflict do not disappear, there is often a more solid relationship in which to deal with a range of industrial relations issues.

## Other Key Players

Tutors using student centred learning techniques rather than didactic techniques and who have experience working with adult returners are key to the success of the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme.

Shauna Kane is a Return to Learn tutor and has been involved in the development of the UNISON Learning@Work programme since it began in N.Ireland some seven years ago.

She comments;

*“The partnership at the Royal Group of hospitals proved to be very successful for both the students and the employers; the students felt they had developed their skills and said they were more confident in the workplace when carrying out their duties. As the course tutor I was initially sceptical about how well the group would gel and whether or not we would have as much fun as we had on the evening course in the local WEA kitchen! My fears were soon allayed as the jokes flew back and forth across the table and the study groups formed in students living rooms in the evenings (wine and nibbles included) and - believe it or not - the work flooded in!*

*The formal atmosphere of the hospital whilst initially appearing too clinical (no pun intended) was actually very conducive to study and meaningful discussion. For many students this was the first opportunity to experience a long, in-service course and they appreciated the contribution of the hospital. The day schools, which we held off the premises, helped greatly in forming the group and getting big topics covered. From a tutor’s point of view, after a couple of teething problems, the support of the hospital was second to none. Overall the partnership was a new and exciting venture and one which I certainly look forward to being involved with again.”*

Shauna Kane

The Workers Educational Association (WEA) is key in the Learning@Work programme. Clair Morgan, WEA, comments;

*The WEA and UNISON have worked together on membership development programmes now for seven years in Northern Ireland, and in that time the type of work and the scale of the work has changed greatly. When the*



programme began UNISON offered Return to Learn and funded the courses to run part-time in the evening. Over the past 3-4 years in particular there has been a greater emphasis on employers funding the programmes. The success of the programme has meant that employers feel confident about investing in these high quality and enormously beneficial courses. This was an important step for UNISON as it models a unique partnership between employers the trade unions, and is an important step forward for potential learners, as the programme can now be offered where and when it is required. It has also impacted on the way that courses are delivered. Courses now can be day or evening, may have day schools or residential; and each programme is negotiated to suit the workplace environment where it will be offered.

The research that was carried out was crucial for WEA as well as for the employers, and UNISON. We now have a great deal of evidence of the success of the programme including building learners' confidence, and learners' increasing willingness to take responsibility. The improvement in skills such as teamwork are key to the developing knowledge economy, and are more often the skills that employers demand. The Return to Learn programme has given some participants an ambition to go further, we see more UNISON R2L students taking on the WEA access course, moving through into the Bridging Programme for OU, and other courses both in the workplace and outside it. For most the opportunity to develop a career progression with their employer is the goal, sweeping away fears that investments in training people are lost as they move to new employment.

The research and its publication coincides with a General Inspection of our organisation of which the Return to Learn provision was a part. The provision was

very favourably reviewed with the students achievements clearly recognised. This is good feedback too for the talented WEA tutors, and the Development Worker, Anne Ringland, who have worked hard to maintain and improve the quality of these programmes.

UNISON too has worked hard expanding the range of courses available to their members. The Learning@Work programme now offers a range of shorter courses, courses relating to essential skills, ICT, and those with direct links to the workplace context, and NVQs. This new programme of activity, some of which has already been piloted in Northern Ireland, will be opened up more fully over the coming year.

Each year in September the graduation ceremony for successful UNISON learners reminds us all of how much these programmes mean to the learners, and how much they achieve. It is perhaps the informal feedback from students at events such as these that remind us of how powerful these courses are. Participants achieve so much, many gain accreditation for the first time, and all have recognised their own talents, skills and abilities.

Claire Morgan Programme Manager  
Second Chance Initiative WEA(NI)

The experience and expertise of the WEA and the quality and commitment of the R2L tutors, who have years of experience working with adult returners, and who have wide experience in student centred learning techniques and who act as mentors, friends and supporters of students is also key to the success of the programme. As one tutor commented

*"you certainly do not undertake this work for the financial payment involved - you do it because you can be instrumental in changing peoples lives for the better and what better pay could you hope for?"*

June Snape R2L tutor BCH group

**"Gave me confidence to study and to take part in-group discussions. Given me the challenge to study some more for myself"**

Student



“I have gained more knowledge in all fields. Most of all I was quite a shy person. Through R2L I feel more confident in expressing myself”

Student

## Accreditation

The UNISON / WEA programme is accredited by the NIOCN (although students do not have to have their work accredited).

Cherry Cantrell, Deputy Director of the NIOCN comments;

*“The UNISON / WEA programme is a good example of why the Open College Network accreditation system, based on learning outcomes, came into being. The O.C.N. system, which is now becoming widely acknowledged as a very appropriate accreditation system for adult learning (by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority amongst others), is based on the ongoing assessment of student assignments and the gathering of evidence to show that the learning outcomes set for students during the learning process is achieved. No exams are involved, and this modular approach to gaining transferable educational credits in bite sized chunks which builds confidence, suits particularly those who have had poor experiences of education in the past. We are glad to be associated with the pioneering work being undertaken in workplace learning by UNISON.”*

Cherry Cantrell NIOCN

## Educational Guidance and Identifying Future Pathways

The central role of guidance and support to adults in helping them consider the myriad of educational and other pathways is recognised in the UNISON/WEA programme.

Towards the end of the nine-month R2L programme the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) meets students to offer advice on future educational opportunities and pathways worthy of consideration. This helps reinforce the guidance aspect of the programme and the commitment to ensure that the student is at the centre of all actions within the programme.

Eleanor Spears, Deputy Director of EGSA in Northern Ireland has praise for the UNISON / WEA programme. She comments,

*“If we are to move away from the dominance of the first chance education system that currently exists in Northern Ireland, and give adult second chance education its rightful place, the role of solid advice and guidance for students is central. The holistic approach of the UNISON programme and its pioneering approach could become a role model for others.”*

Eleanor Spears EGSA



## Learning@Work and Lifelong Learning

### Part 3

Debates around lifelong learning encompass many different issues which include the purposes, contents, outcomes and motives for learning. The research undertaken for this report touches directly or indirectly on many of the major policy issues currently being debated in the context of lifelong and workplace learning.

The report attempts to set out how the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme responds to many of these major policy issues and on the basis of these findings comment on the appropriateness of the UNISON approach.

The research show that the UNISON/WEA programme remains at the cutting edge of best practice in workplace learning and as such, benefits all.

The NAGCELL reports (reports of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (1998 and 1999) chaired by Professor R.H. Fryer updates and builds on much previous research and it is useful therefore to set this report within the wider policy debates around lifelong learning.

#### **The Fryer reports identify the following key ingredients as essential to creating a culture of lifelong learning;**

- ◆ An understanding of lifelong learning to community development and citizenship
- ◆ Widening participation and access for non-traditional learners
- ◆ Stimulating demand from under-represented groups
- ◆ Creating partnerships/collaborations which deliver a win-win scenario for all involved

The following issues also need to be considered:

#### **Change**

We live in a world of constant change and challenge where workers no longer have a job for life. Lifelong Learning can give people the opportunity to manage change rather than have it imposed on them but *“unfortunately many of those who could most benefit from lifelong learning in helping them deal with social change are currently excluded from or unaware of its pleasures and achievements often lacking the self-confidence or opportunity to get involved.”*

NAGCELL Report 1999

The UNISON initiative is innovatively different and pioneering. The UNISON programmes attract a very specific cohort of students. The way the programme has evolved overcomes many of the barriers for adults returning to study and provides students with the opportunity to be empowered and begin to manage change. When a sufficient critical mass is reached in a workplace, community or society then the potential exists for a truly collective way to manage such change. This collective approach is central to the ethos and development of effective trade union organisations. The programme clearly accesses participants from those generally excluded from education, the learning poor, and attracts a student cohort in terms of gender, age and social/community background normally outside the learning loop.

#### **The Business Case Versus Citizenship**

The global economy and increased global competitiveness has brought into sharp focus the need to have well - educated and motivated employees, and lifelong learning initiatives can certainly help make workforces and business more competitive.

**“Being involved in R2L made me realise there are other adults just like myself who want the opportunity to get back into learning. It has helped me build up my confidence a bit more and made me more assertive”**

Student



**“Got me back into education and gave me confidence to go on to other courses”**

Student

But the Lifelong Learning agenda will not succeed on a purely business case or vocational training axis alone. The UNISON programmes suggest that the holistic approach to learning is central to success. The UNISON programmes succeed for a number of reasons - not least that they are about personal development and about developing social capital. They are about moving adults from dependence to independence and then from independence to interdependence.

A radical vision for lifelong learning intervention is becoming reality through the UNISON approach, but the positive change has to be accelerated. The UNISON programme centrally acknowledges that to succeed, programmes must be liberating and empowering and, this forms an essential part of the programme and is not a bolt-on optional extra.

The Fryer report states *“learning cultures at work can underpin adaptability, creativity, flexibility and responsiveness. This can contribute to competitiveness, profitability and business success generally. Mutual commitment to workplace learning should increasingly figure as an element in the compact between employer and employee which breathes life into the legal formality of employment contracts. Trade Unions should increasingly both bargain for members’ learning at and through work and provide it themselves, as part of the package of membership services and benefits they offer.”*

This research shows that the UNISON project is built around this approach - and is about developing active citizens as well as more effective workers and trade union members.

The UNISON programme has at its heart empowerment for participants, widening participation, flexibility and student

centred learning techniques and approaches. The research shows that while there is a clear business case for learning, to be successful in attracting non-traditional learners the business case is not sufficient - it is a social, democratic and economic imperative built on a new definition and ethos of workplace learning.

## **Building Effective Partnerships**

*“Effective partnerships will be crucial to the success of the University for Industry and in the operation of the national network of local lifelong learning strategic partnerships”*

NAGCELL second report 1999. It further states; *“Many bodies which could make a marked difference to lifelong learning by acting in concert have spent the recent past developing their own individual strategies, often in response to an explicit policy drive of mutual competition and institutional single-mindedness. For them learning the habits and good practices of collaboration will be part of the cultural changes we are advocating, including acting as bridges and connecting points in a society characterised by increasing fragmentation, isolation and individualisation.”*

This research shows that building effective partnerships and collaboration is central to the success of the UNISON programme. The partnership of the learner, provider, union and employer is key.

The interdependence of all the players provides a visionary model of effective partnerships in operation leading to a win/win for all.



## Participation or Exclusion

The research shows that those generally excluded from the benefits of education are participating in the UNISON programme. The barriers identified by previous research are being overcome and the way the programme is designed and delivered is key to this success:

- ◆ the accreditation process with ongoing assessment rather than exams;
- ◆ the modular framework which builds self esteem and confidence,
- ◆ the flexibility of the programme using accessible locations and times for study,
- ◆ the use of experienced adult tutors,
- ◆ the use of group work and collaborative learning and sharing.

The support of mentors and others provides a real opportunity to build a learning community within the workplace. This is created through partnership - the individual, the group, the provider, the union, the employer and the government in a demonstration of effective collaboration.

While 'learning for earning' is important, a successful Lifelong Learning strategy is not only an economic necessity but also a democratic and social imperative, and **while work continues to be the main way we distribute wealth, education remains, for most, the passport to work and for many the better the educational achievements the better the access to better paid work, and more choice.**

The value of education and learning is how it provides the skills and opportunities for workers to engage and actively participate in civil society, workplaces and their trade union to bring about change.

**The UNISON programme, is a timely success story in widening and deepening participation and**

**reaching out to those traditionally outside the learning loop, many of whom fall into that group of 50,000 workers in Northern Ireland who have learning support needs, and need to brush up their numeracy, literacy or language skills.**

This research shows that students in the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme are empowered to become engaged participants rather than outsiders in the change process and it shows that the students value deeply the opportunity to do just that.

The UNISON/WEA programme shows that the barriers that exist for adults to get into the swing of learning can be overcome.

**The research shows that these non-traditional learners recognise the UNISON / WEA programme as a major opportunity. Of those responding to the questionnaires,**

- ◆ 82.6% were women
- ◆ 47.7% were part-time workers
- ◆ 94.7% were paid less than £7 per hour
- ◆ 86.4% left school at age 17 or under
- ◆ 53.1% had no qualifications when starting the course
- ◆ 81.9% were aged over 36 years of age
- ◆ 81% said they had become further involved in learning or intend to do so since undertaking the course and,
- ◆ 28.8% had taken on additional responsibilities since completing the programme.

These statistics show that lifelong learning can indeed provide real opportunities to workers and help achieve a new vision of learning. This research shows that personal development opportunities are crucial to attract adults into learning and the move to vocationalisation or the business case alone for workplace learning will not succeed in motivating non-traditional

**"I can now focus on my own personal needs. It has highlighted my strengths and weaknesses. It has given me the confidence to go and investigate possible courses for the future."**

Student



“Improved my self esteem and made me realise my capabilities - the kick start to further education”

Student



learners to engage in learning. This research confirms that due to the many structural barriers to learning for non-traditional participants, adult learning cannot be solely the responsibility of the individual. Many of these structural barriers can be overcome with collective provision of learning at work and the collaboration of the employer and UNISON supplemented by a high level of individual commitment. **Collectivism and collective action, in particular through trade unions can be a critical ingredient in challenging the existing inequality and exclusion.**

The process itself has the potential to reinvigorate interest and commitment in the trade union movement as the union becomes relevant to its members in a new, dynamic and positive way.

## **Learning to Live Together, Learning to Know, Learning to Do and Learning to Be**

Defining learning can be difficult but Jacques Delors, in the report entitled *“Learning - The Treasure Within”*, offers a visionary definition that UNISON supports. Delors says that Lifelong Learning must encompass *“learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be”* and this is a solid working definition, which can usefully influence all our thinking and action.

On the basis of this research, and those who experience the programme, the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme is at the cutting edge of providing adults with the opportunity to make lifelong learning a living reality and is making sure progress in bringing to life this definition of learning in the workplace, particularly with non-traditional learners and those generally excluded.

**The UNISON/WEA programme has at its heart widening participation, flexibility, and student centred learning techniques, and this research shows that it works.**

**The challenge for the future is to mainstream this type of initiative within workplaces throughout these islands and spread the undoubted benefits to employees, employers, unions and society as a whole and ensure that lifelong learning helps deliver a better life for all.**

**This investigation into work based learning, and this research into the impact of the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme in Northern Ireland, addresses key considerations in debates around Lifelong Learning policy and practice.**

**The UNISON/WEA programme is both an innovative and pioneering model of success in the delivery of effective workplace learning for non-traditional learners.**

**The UNISON/WEA Learning@Work Programme is a cost effective, timely model of success which needs to be shared across the public sector and across workplaces in Northern Ireland and beyond.**

**If this approach provides a threat to anyone involved in workplace learning, it is only the threat of a good example - of Empowerment through Lifelong Learning.**

**Our challenge is to ensure that this good practice is mainstreamed to the benefit of all.**

Paul Donaghy, Regional Education Officer, Workplace Learning, UNISON N.I.



# Appendix 1 - Research Questionnaire

Please complete the following by marking the appropriate answer:

**Gender** Male  Female

**Age band** 16-25  26-35  36-45  46-55  56-65  66+

**Age you left school** 14  15  16  17  18  18+

**Qualifications on leaving school** CSE Level  O Level/GCSE   
A Level  None

**Pay band** £5  £5-£7  £8-£10  £11+

**Are you** Full time  part time  retired

**Length of service (approx. years)** -3  3-6  7-10  11-15  16+

**In what year did you finish R2L** \_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

(1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree)

Since completing the R2L programme:

I can and will now speak up for myself more 1  2  3  4  5

I have taken on additional responsibilities at work 1  2  3  4  5

I felt more independent and able to help myself 1  2  3  4  5

I feel more able to help others help themselves 1  2  3  4  5

I have changed jobs / job roles 1  2  3  4  5

I have a higher commitment to UNISON 1  2  3  4  5

I am more active in the union 1  2  3  4  5

On a scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not very important) please grade the following in terms of their importance to you following your involvement in R2L:

Confidence (I felt more confident) 1  2  3  4  5

Skills (it helped me recognise the skills I have) 1  2  3  4  5



Personal development (I feel better about myself) 1  2  3  4  5

Teamwork (I am more content to be part of a team) 1  2  3  4  5

Qualifications (I now have some qualifications) 1  2  3  4  5

**Was the group you attended a partnership (employer funded) group?** Yes  No

**Are you a member of UNISON?** Yes  No

**Were you a member of UNISON before R2L?** Yes  No

**On a scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not very important) please score the following factors in respect of your joining / remaining on the course:**

Employer support 1  2  3  4  5

Time off (if given) 1  2  3  4  5

The course was free 1  2  3  4  5

I knew someone who had done the course 1  2  3  4  5

Approachable tutors, used to working with adult returners 1  2  3  4  5

Constructive, personal and confidential feedback on assignments 1  2  3  4  5

Union involvement / support 1  2  3  4  5

It's not like school 1  2  3  4  5

To get a second chance at education 1  2  3  4  5

To gain a qualification 1  2  3  4  5

Working with adults like me 1  2  3  4  5

No exams, so no failures 1  2  3  4  5

**Would you recommend R2L to others?** Yes  No

Continued on next page...



**Please tell us about any other learning opportunities you have been involved in since R2L**

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**Please describe what you think your involvement in the R2L course has done for you**

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**Please add any other comments**

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## Appendix 2 Student Comments

### Please tell us about any other learning opportunities you have been involved in since R2L

- ◆ None as yet but I hope to do K100
- ◆ My husband had a work accident last year resulting in the loss of an eye. I have spent this last year helping him come to terms with this. I hope to do something in September - depending on cost.
- ◆ Computer course
- ◆ I have attended Computer and Internet courses at QUB
- ◆ As yet I have not been but hopefully in September
- ◆ Having just completed R2L I hope to enrol in a CLAIT course in September
- ◆ Joined a computer course
- ◆ I went to an Irish language class which was a ten week course
- ◆ Since R2L I continued as a VEA I completed a bridging course for the OU
- ◆ Computer courses at high school
- ◆ I have applied to join a course to improve my computer skills. My individual learning account will make this a lot easier on my pocket
- ◆ Have found about computer courses that I am interested in. Will enrol for the September term
- ◆ Having just finished R2L in May I intend to do a computer course and hopefully K100 course. This year I start them. Over the summer I am doing a course at Learning Direct Bangor.
- ◆ I am doing a computer course EDL that has been set up by Unison
- ◆ Since I have done the R2L course I have started a basic computer course
- ◆ I contacted Learn Direct and found them most unhelpful. I am looking for other courses of personal interest
- ◆ I am now involved in a NVQ level 3 in a care setting
- ◆ I did a Health and Safety course NVQ through my employer
- ◆ Recently contacted Learn Direct and am now deciding on what course to do
- ◆ I have joined a computer course with Learning Direct and hope for more in September
- ◆ I have attended a night class to learn a foreign language
- ◆ Our class are trying to follow on by doing a computer course together. Learn Direct are still keeping in touch by sending out lots of information on courses
- ◆ First aid course to update my experience from a nursing course
- ◆ NVQ level 3 - Early years childcare and education
- ◆ Since R2L I have had no further learning opportunities done by the union. Any other learning skills I have taken on I have paid for them. It was very good of the union/work backing the course
- ◆ I am looking into doing a computer course
- ◆ I did a science course
- ◆ Negotiating skills in Unison and lay tutor training stage one
- ◆ Since I done R2L I have completed a CLAIT course also run in conjunction with Unison and I am now doing a trainer accessor's award at UUJ
- ◆ I offered to join WEA as a volunteer for the next R2L as a VEA but had no response. I have since done a few minor course within work as Backcare, Aids Awareness, Vulnerable Adult Awareness
- ◆ I have only made enquiries NVQ level 3, K100 class; hope to start a computer course in September. I would like to pursue a career in caring
- ◆ Floral Art and Design hope to go onto a computer course in September I also found your Building Confidence 2 day workshop very interesting. I hope you will continue to have those on your courses



- ◆ OU DD121 and CLAIT computers
- ◆ I have just completed the first year of the Open University course offered to me by Unison
- ◆ I completed Part 1 of RSA stage 2 word-processing and hope to be able to continue to part 2. I am also researching different degree courses to see what my options are and how I can juggle my time effectively.
- ◆ Since I have only completed R2L recently I haven't had a chance for any other learning opportunities as yet. I will hopefully do a computer course in September and possibly health and social care or counselling
- ◆ I said in one of my assignments that I would like to be able to paint - I have joined an art class and have used water and oils
- ◆ I completed the R2L course last month. When it finished it left a void in my life. Next week I will be doing CLAIT RSA Stage 1. I am also looking into the possibility of a part time degree next year
- ◆ I have completed a foundation course at university of Ulster finishing a degree course and various other courses at the local technical college
- ◆ Hope to start a CLAIT course in the autumn 2001. Considering K100 Open University course commencing in Jan 2002
- ◆ During the course we had the opportunity to acquire a learning card. This card has enabled me to register for courses at my local college at much reduced cost
- ◆ BTEC Childhood studies (Nursery Nursing), British Sign Language stage 1 and Qualified First Aid
- ◆ I am waiting to do a few NVQ's when the time comes I believe I will be able to cope with the course. This is from doing the R2L course
- ◆ Since completing R2L I have gone on to gain further qualifications in computers namely CLAIT, IBT 2, Desktop Publishing stage 1 and 2 Word and Text Processing, Diploma information technology, EDCL and internet skills at Synergie
- ◆ Have taken education further - through OU Courses
- ◆ Life Long Learning Advisor course - Stewards Course
- ◆ CLAIT Stage 1, IPD - CTP and D32 and D33
- ◆ Have completed NVQ level 2 and am now onto level 3
- ◆ I went on the University part time and hope to graduate this summer with a BA Hons in Social Science
- ◆ WEA Preparing to study with OU course. OU Social Science (1st year completed)
- ◆ Computers - RSA stage 1 and 2, English language - higher, counselling course and NVQ level 2
- ◆ I have gone on to do a 2 year course in advanced Health and Social Care completed on June 2001
- ◆ I have taken on the VEA course and computer training and preparing for university course and OU Social Science DD121
- ◆ Counselling for beginners, RSA Word Processing Stage 1 and BTEC intermediate Diploma in care
- ◆ Computer science Government funded at Queens, about to start another computer course. I was to start an OU course but due to ill health was unable to. Stress management and Relaxation tutors course completed two years ago
- ◆ A two year Foundation Studies which included assignments and exams. I completed this course and I am now doing a course at BIHFE which is a diploma in the Humanities
- ◆ Presently involved in an HNC in Management and Social Care at Lisburn Institute. Intend to go to achieve a Diploma
- ◆ I have went on to the different course regarding H & S issues, also started as an

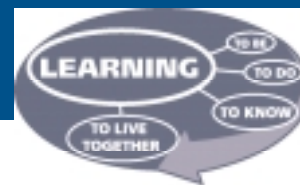


VEA. Also now put in for computer course and got on it. Learning to communicate better with others ps Branch Education Officers

- ◆ I have signed up to do the EDCL
- ◆ I intend to enrol in a computer course in September
- ◆ We have not had time yet but hope to do a CLAIT course in September and perhaps even another computer course
- ◆ Have sat and completed and passed GCSE English. Started creative writing class the following year but due to ill health had to leave after the first term. Disappointing union course in Stranmillis - Social Sciences - not for me
- ◆ English GSE, RSA word and text processing stage 3
- ◆ I am trying to get on a computer course
- ◆ As I only finished the course at the end of May 2001 I have not yet been involved in anything but I do hope to take up a course in computers in the near future when my child has commenced nursery education
- ◆ Completed shop steward training day courses on bullying, stress, education members problems and building confidence for women
- ◆ Bridging course, OU course an introduction to social care - the first year is now over
- ◆ EDCL very difficult but I enjoyed it. I will miss the R2L because I enjoyed doing the assignments, the company, the weekends and the tutors. The tutors were very encouraging
- ◆ Just finishing my first year of a two year foundation studies course with the help of R2L course
- ◆ I am waiting to hear about a computer course as I have bought a computer in anticipation. I have also made enquiries about a creative writing course due to start in September
- ◆ I have since passed CLAIT and I am in the process of completing ECDL on computers and once this is finished will be looking to start another course.

### **Please describe what you think your involvement in the R2L course has done for you**

- ◆ Made my brain active again, met lots of nice new friends of both religion plus it has made me more confident
- ◆ Made me feel much better about my self - the course has helped me work with my children and help them with their homework
- ◆ Given me confidence and helped to raise my self esteem - it has given me a taste for education
- ◆ It has boosted my confidence and eased me back into learning
- ◆ R2L has given me self-respect, self esteem. I have gained in confidence of my abilities as a person in my own right. R2L has given me back my hopes and dreams for a future filled with possibilities
- ◆ More confidence
- ◆ R2L awakened a deep longing to learn and be taught - I really miss doing my assignments
- ◆ R2L course has made me more aware of my rights as an adult and a student
- ◆ Confidence builder awakened skills, which had been lying dormant. I would certainly endorse this course to my fellow workers
- ◆ Confidence - I am now able to speak in a group of people
- ◆ Gained confidence to stand up for myself - made me realise I do have qualities and I can be taught
- ◆ R2L has helped me gain more confidence and the chance to go on to further education



- ◆ I feel more confident. I have taken on more responsibility at work and as a union activist
- ◆ Improved my grammar and spelling, improved my skills I didn't know I had has certainly improved my confidence
- ◆ Since my R2L course I have gained more confidence. I became chair of my local hospital committee and I also stood for councillor in my local area.
- ◆ Given me a lot more confidence not only educationally but socially as well - I have made new friends and discovered that I have a talent for short story writing.
- ◆ Improved confidence improved writing skills. Helped me recognise the skills I have and made want to go on to study further.
- ◆ Made me more confident especially in the skills that I already had and the new skills gained.
- ◆ Before I did R2L I had no qualifications now I have. I never felt completely stupid but had nothing to show for whatever education I had at school. I now feel confident to do something different.
- ◆ Gave me back my confidence and I feel I can go forward now to choosing a new career. I know I can do further education and I intend now to do so
- ◆ Given me confidence to go on other courses and has given me the confidence to approach management with problems
- ◆ It has made me a different person
- ◆ I can now realise the dream of writing short stories
- ◆ R2L has given me more confidence and also the opportunity to further my education with the prospect of doing a degree in the future
- ◆ R2L has given me the confidence to go back to education. It has helped my self esteem and has made me determined to continue my education and hopefully achieve my true potential
- ◆ I am more self assured and will make my point of view heard and I will not be taken for granted again
- ◆ It has brought my brain alive again. It has made me sit up and take stock
- ◆ I have gained a lot of experience and confidence. I help other in my group and they help me, it has also helped me put my life in order and do something for myself
- ◆ It has shown me at 59 that it is not too late to return to education and learn something new
- ◆ Made me realise that just because I have family commitments I can still have an education. It has made me sit back and look at my life
- ◆ I feel it has given me confidence and I am able to speak out without feeling stupid and know that if I want to try something new I have the ability to do so
- ◆ This course has definitely given me more confidence in myself and my ideas I feel my ideas have some worth and feel more able to express them to others also I realise I have much more skills than I thought
- ◆ Shown that learning is not that hard and that I could learn at my own pace and that not every one is "super" brainy
- ◆ I felt more confident and not so uncertain about taking on something new even joining younger people who are so confident in a class
- ◆ It has given me more confidence. I have changed roles completely - I was a Nursing Auxiliary and now I work as a Grade 3 Higher Clerical Officer
- ◆ Given me confidence an insight into skills I did not know I had - writing and listening skills. I will go onto further education
- ◆ Ability to recognise my own personal skills. I feel a lot more confident and I can put myself forward for various activities when before I would have quite happily



taken a back seat

- ◆ Given me more confidence and made me aware I was capable of further education
- ◆ R2L was a kick start for me - it was a confidence booster- you were praised at the end of the day with you work right or wrong
- ◆ Sense of achievement, general all round good feeling
- ◆ My involvement in R2L gave me the chance and the ability to recognise my own talents and abilities in a positive attitude and enabled me to undertake the course above
- ◆ More confidence in myself - able to work with a team of people and was successful in obtaining a higher post at work
- ◆ It has given me more confidence and more independence and I can now speak up for myself. I am really glad I did the course as it got me back into education and also to better myself
- ◆ It has given me more confidence to write things down on paper and to word letters better
- ◆ Prepared me and made me buck up my ideas to return to education at a higher level. It has also made me recognise my strengths and weaknesses when coming to learning.
- ◆ Became more aware of my abilities, to become committed to study and classes. I now feel more confident in groups
- ◆ I am motivated to learn
- ◆ Confidence to continue my education
- ◆ Shown me the skills I have and helped me develop them, it has boosted my confidence and let me meet lots of different people who work within the trust it was a very enjoyable experience which I highly recommend to my work colleagues
- ◆ Able to participate in-groups and team meetings. Able to speak out and voice my opinion
- ◆ Gave me confidence and helped me believe in my capabilities. Encouraged me to gain more qualifications and more self-esteem. Do not feel a failure
- ◆ It let me see that I was not as stupid as I thought. I had many qualities I did not know I possessed It made me new friends and showed me that there were many people just like myself
- ◆ I feel it has improved my self-confidence and think of myself in a better light as a person.
- ◆ Gave me confidence to study and to take part in-group discussions. Given me the challenge to study some more for myself
- ◆ Helped me with my confidence and has also helped me get back into full time education - I will be able to do other courses
- ◆ More confidence to write letters and reports
- ◆ Helped me to regain my confidence and helped me realise what I can do with the right support
- ◆ It's never too late
- ◆ It has made me contemplate my future and look forward in a way I hadn't seen before. More opportunities for me and I took them
- ◆ I have gained more knowledge in all fields most of all I was quite a shy person through R2L I feel more confident in expressing myself
- ◆ It has given me the confidence to continue with my education and go for a better paid job.
- ◆ It made me realise how much I could achieve with work and commitment



- ◆ It gave me a chance to meet different "UNISON" members from various backgrounds
- ◆ Being involved in R2L made me realise there are other adults just like myself who want the opportunity to learning. It has helped me build up my confidence a bit more and made me more assertive
- ◆ I can now focus on my own personal needs. It has highlighted my strengths and weaknesses. It has given me the confidence to go and investigate possible courses for the future.
- ◆ Confidence in myself and has enhanced my personal skills and team building skills
- ◆ Improved my self esteem and made me realise my capabilities - -the kick start to further education
- ◆ Made me more aware of the benefits of learning. I am more aware of lifetime learning and that I am capable of doing a more challenging occupation. More people should be given the opportunity of this course
- ◆ I can communicate a lot easier within a group or with people I have met for the first time
- ◆ I am strongly thinking about doing a JEB in Computers all thanks to R2L
- ◆ Given me a second bite at the apple - shown me that I have abilities and enabled me to take the step further with a view to gaining qualifications for myself.
- ◆ Given me an idea on how I could cope in a learning situation and gave me confidence to take up more courses.
- ◆ Made me aware that I had something more to offer others and myself
- ◆ Confidence to believe in myself - showed me that education does not have to be like it was in school
- ◆ Given me the confidence to apply to Queens to further my education
- ◆ Very positive experience. My confidence and self-esteem have risen considerably. I have been given added responsibilities at work, beyond my expectations and I have made a considerable number of new friends
- ◆ Made me realise I was not on my own in returning to education. I gained a lot of knowledge and skills and became more confident which in turn has released a happier person within myself.
- ◆ Given me more confidence and I am more aware of my capabilities having been away from full time education since 1975
- ◆ It has raised my self esteem and confidence I now feel I can talk and deal with managers etc with renewed confidence R2L has wetted my appetite for education - I may well be addicted to learning
- ◆ Got me back into education and given me confidence to go onto other courses
- ◆ R2L helped me gain confidence in myself and really helped to open my mind to further education and enjoy it.

## **Please add other comments**

- ◆ R2L was a challenge being left school for so long I was pleased with the commitment and effort I put in
- ◆ I have recommended the course to other workers
- ◆ Very interesting and I made new friends, very impressed with the residential weekends
- ◆ I would now love to do another course hopefully with a recognised qualification. I feel that the previous R2L groups should have kept in touch and had discussions on further courses. It seems that after R2L it comes to a halt and I feel that while the apathy and numbers are there they should be worked at
- ◆ Knowing that there are those willing to help me is a big bonus



- ◆ It was a good way of getting back into learning
- ◆ Tutor was excellent, classmates were very supportive. Met lots of great people who I would not have met if I had not done the R2L course
- ◆ Return 2 Learn Programme is an excellent course as it is fully supported by UNISON. It enables people to become more confident in their role at work as I feel everyone is a valued member within the whole primary setting
- ◆ Have thoroughly enjoyed the course. It was very worthwhile and beneficial to me. I would be most interested in any other courses available this way
- ◆ I would highly recommend this type of study to anyone wishing to return to education. It has given me confidence and awakening skills which have lain dormant for many year
- ◆ I enjoyed the course - it disciplined me to set time aside for study particularly enjoyed the weekends away
- ◆ Thank you UNISON for the chance to do the course
- ◆ I enjoyed every minute of the R2L
- ◆ I fully endorse the R2L and would encourage adults to part take of this course. It is never too late
- ◆ R2L was a fabulous course - I would recommend it to anyone
- ◆ I just don't want it to end I would like for a more advanced course with UNISON
- ◆ Really really enjoyed the course - can't say enough what it has done for me
- ◆ I would definitely encourage everyone to partake of this excellent, well organised course regardless of their educational qualifications as no matter how little you may feel you have to contribute you will reap the rewards academically but most definitely personally. My personal thanks to UNISON for providing this course open to all members "free" of charge - there aren't enough of them
- ◆ I would recommend this course to others - I certainly feel I have achieved something
- ◆ I have recommended this course to 2 of my colleagues and they have successfully completed the course this year
- ◆ I have gained some new skills and enhanced some old skills - most of all it has given me confidence in myself and my own ability
- ◆ Thank you for the course most enjoyable
- ◆ As much as I enjoyed the course there were parts, which could have been more interesting. Our course received the "Guide to Accreditation" much later on; it would have helped us to have it at the beginning.
- ◆ R2L helps people like me who left school at 16 with no qualifications
- ◆ It is a real confidence builder- no matter what hurdles you come up against there is always some one there to help you and support you at all times
- ◆ I made numerous friends as well as learning
- ◆ I would love to be able to persuade other people to just give it a try I think I would put more effort into it if doing it again. You need to set aside time and be a little bit selfish
- ◆ The course was very relaxed and informal - everyone was on par with each other and the tutor was great and very understanding to everyone
- ◆ I hated school - R2L put me onto the road to self-improvement. I'll always be grateful to all involved in R2L in showing me a side of education and starting me off on a good footing
- ◆ I found it quite difficult to motivate myself into studying but as the course progressed I enjoyed the challenge. Great workshops on the residential weekends
- ◆ UNISON excelled themselves in their approach to supporting us on the road back to education
- ◆ I would like to thank UNISON for the opportunity to get into education the fact



R2L was "free" left me with no excuse not to try. I have not looked back since starting the course

- ◆ I would also like to thank the WEA for such excellent tutors
- ◆ I would like to see more courses being provided locally. I would like to see more follow up on R2L and more recognition of qualifications
- ◆ All in all very enjoyable
- ◆ I have enjoyed things so far and would love to do more, so would be grateful to know of any new courses coming up.
- ◆ Our tutor Francis Morgan was very helpful and it was never like school
- ◆ The course and the tutor were very good and I would recommend it to anyone interested in learning.
- ◆ Our tutor Betty Given was a fantastic person to have on the course. She made everything so easy, was very approachable and patient with us. I really enjoyed the course and would recommend it to all mature working people
- ◆ Due to work commitments I would have found travel to Jordanstown impossible I would be interested in an OU type course
- ◆ Longer classes so that people can help each other because people all come from different areas and find it hard to get somewhere to study together.
- ◆ I really enjoyed R2L I will be encouraging other people from the workplace to do it next year
- ◆ I would recommend the course to a friend
- ◆ I would recommend R2L to others as a great confidence builder even if they were never to go on to further education
- ◆ R2L is an excellent course, which I would recommend to everyone. The tutors are great and the feedback very good. You are at no time made to feel stupid which does wonders for your confidence. Thanks to everyone who made R2L possible
- ◆ I would definitely recommend R2L to others even if it is only to give the confidence in themselves
- ◆ I really enjoyed doing this course. It obviously took time and commitment but I have gained a new belief in myself, new friends and a sense of achievement. We had a very good tutor who gave us a lot of support.
- ◆ Could have done more away days - too much course work had to be completed at home
- ◆ I feel good about myself and the fact that I actually did something for me. It has certainly boosted my confidence. I would definitely recommend the course to others as it was very enjoyable
- ◆ Thanks to UNISON for giving people like myself the chance to make something of ourselves.
- ◆ I really enjoyed R2L - the tutor was excellent, the other people on the course were great we all got on well and worked together. We plan to go on as a group to do other courses. The day schools were relaxing and enjoyable. Found out a lot of information from people speaking at them
- ◆ I would certainly recommend R2L to anyone but especially to women because I do think people were never given the chance, and I thank UNISON's education for given me the chance.
- ◆ The R2L process is a great foundation on which to edge yourself back into the learning field. I made many friends and thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience
- ◆ I thoroughly enjoyed R2L and would recommend anyone to join if they have the chance
- ◆ The support from UNISON and the WEA tutors was excellent, but I think that they could have been a little more input from my Trust and its trainers if only for



encouragement and to show support for the training of its employees at lower grades.

- ◆ I would just say to anyone having doubts about doing the course just go for it. If nothing else, it lets you know what's involved, meeting other people in the same situation and I feel you would definitely feel satisfaction of some kind if you complete the course
- ◆ R2L really enjoyable but felt too much was packed in the residential weekends.
- ◆ I think there was a difference between the Guide to accreditation wanted and what the work programme expected. A closer look at this would help next year.
- ◆ Although I found making time a struggle I would definitely recommend to others R2L. After being out of school for 25 years I had forgotten how enjoyable learning can be.
- ◆ My tutor was absolutely brilliant in both R2L and a very close personal thing in my life. She gave me hope and confidence that I could finish the course and I did. She is a well-valued asset to your course and a very good listener.
- ◆ I would like to say a big Thank You to all who have helped me on this course and who provided R2L. It is definitely a stepping stone. If I can do anything to help please ask
- ◆ R2L is one of the best things I have ever done. It is a really enjoyable course, the tutors help is always available, you know you are not alone, I would recommend the course most highly. The lack of exams is an added bonus as I personally fall to pieces at the thought of the exam situation.
- ◆ I really enjoyed the course and Francis was a very lovely lady - she helped me enormously. There were some very strong personalities taking part in the course and I am very shy and retiring, so she helped me overcome some of my difficulties.





**UNISON, the UK's largest trade union, is rapidly building a reputation amongst public services employers and employees for its pioneering partnership approach to workplace learning and employee development.**

At the core of UNISON's strategy is the ability to provide in partnership with employers, major programmes of accredited learning designed to enhance work-related skills and personal development.

These initiatives currently focus on providing learning opportunities for those employed in lower paid, often part-time occupations who, too frequently have missed out on educational and training opportunities. Few of the participants in the programmes have any formal academic or vocational qualifications. Many have been out of education for several years and lack confidence in their ability to learn.

UNISON's programmes, delivered in partnership with the WEA (Workers Education Association and the Open University (OU)) are tailored to meet the needs of these groups. Common features of all programmes are that they:

**Help students to progress in their employment, education and personal development.**

**Develop learning skills and build confidence and interest in education.**

**Are taught in a friendly and supportive way by experienced adult educators.**

**Combine group work with individual attention and support**

**Provide students with professionally produced learning materials**

**Are accredited through the National Qualifications Framework.**

## Managing Change

Change in the Public Sector is ever present.

As public bodies try to cope with Section 75 and a renewed emphasis on workforce development, new demands are made to deliver high quality, cost efficient public services, develop good relations and respond to changes in Public Administration in Northern Ireland.

Investing in staff, workforce development, promoting good relations, growing our own professionals from within, empowerment through learning are becoming everyday issues for managers and staff working within the Public Sector. Change is ever present, and effective learning strategies are needed to ensure workers are equipped with the skills and confidence to meet the new challenges inherent in change.

Employers need a confident, effective and skilled workforce. Workers need new skills, and the confidence and the capacity to be flexible.

Equality is central to this agenda - enabling front line staff, who are traditionally forgotten about, to learn and become empowered to make choices.

The UNISON led workplace learning initiative attracts such non traditional learners - the low paid, part time workers and mothers. It is about Empowerment, Citizenship, Equality, Targetting Need and Partnership.

### **The Learner Profile is;**

**82.6%** women

**47.7%** part-time workers

**94.7%** paid less than £7 per hour

**86.4%** left school aged 17 or younger (**65%** were under 16)

**53.1%** had no qualifications when starting the course

**81.9%** were aged over 36 years of age

**81%** said they had become further involved in learning or intend to do so since undertaking the course and **28.8%** had taken on additional responsibilities since completing the programme.

## Workplace Learning

### **Empowerment through Lifelong Learning**

### **The threat of a good example**

**This report details research into the impact of the UNISON/WEA Learning@Work programme in Northern Ireland.**

This programme has at its heart widening and deepening learning participation, flexibility and student centred learning techniques and is a timely success story for anyone interested in adult workplace learning.