



case study

equal opportunities



Objective One is part-financed by the European Union



The Objective One Partnership for Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly

UNION LEARNING CENTRE

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the project

The Union Learning Centre project is a partnership between Cornwall College who provided office space to the value of 22K, the Learning and Skills Council who provided 24K from their Local Initiative Fund, the TUC Educational Trust who provided £110,366 in cash and SWTUC who provided in kind support to the value of £44,024.

The Programme has invested £154,670 from the European Social Fund (ESF) in the project which has a total cost of £355,060.

Using a network of trade union members the project has delivered and increased the demand for learning, training, skills and employee development across Cornwall. It has recruited and trained voluntary Union Learning Reps in the work place who will continue to generate demand for learning and address the learning needs of their work colleagues.

measures of equal opportunities adopted

The creation of the role of a Union Learning Rep has given women the opportunity to become pro-active in the work place. All Learning Reps undergo equal opportunities training as part of their induction and also receive regular refresher training.

The project made a point of targeting Remploy, a company which employs a large number of people with disabilities, and helped it set up its own learning centre which has gone on to draw many people into learning who would otherwise have been excluded.

The project has also arranged for interpreters for deaf learners, used accessible venues for learning and child care was provided at the cost of the project.

Publications are available in large print and a variety of



Newly qualified Learning Reps

formats. Events are organised with due regard being paid to venue accessibility and the gender balance of speakers.

benefits of equal opportunities

There are over 100 active Learning Reps in Cornwall and the number is growing.

The gender split has remained fairly constant, 55% men 45% women. This is very unusual, as traditional the union movement has been predominantly male led. The project co-ordinator said "We have found that the 'softer' role of a Learning Rep tends to attract women more than the traditional Union rep role, where 'hard nail' negotiations are common place. The Learning Reps have seen this as an opportunity for additional personal development and a means of increasing their own skills."

Few unions have offices in Cornwall - this project is able to support union members and their learning needs in the work place.

Shift workers and part time workers are able to participate in learning opportunities and people who traditionally don't or haven't had access to learning are able to participate in a safe and secure environment.



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In addition, Geoff Hale, the project co-ordinator, said *“Training the Learning Reps has resulted in these individuals being more empowered, they feel more able to challenge inappropriate behaviour especially in the work place.”*

economic benefit

The Learning Reps are playing an important role in driving the skill base of the local workforce. They act as an important three way bridge between business, the employees and training providers by promoting and helping in the upskilling of the work force.

This is beneficial to both the individual, in terms of their employability and ability to earn higher wages, and the business concerned in providing a skilled and motivated workforce.

REMPLOY UNION LEARNING REP

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The union learning reps are a network of trade union members developed to promote and deliver the solutions required for learning, skills enhancement and personal development in the workplace across Cornwall.

Remploy is the largest employer of people with disabilities in the United Kingdom and the factory at Redruth currently has 62 employees. Mary Holland, the Union Learning Rep, helped to set up the in-house learning centre which has gone on to draw many people into learning who would otherwise have been excluded.

measures of equal opportunities adopted

Mary meets all new employees and prepares a personal development plan for each individual. She said that numeracy and literacy were very sensitive subjects and people are often worried and embarrassed about admitting that they need help. Mary said that she always talks to these individuals on a confidential one-to-one basis and if necessary training is provided on the same basis.

Team briefings are held every morning for all employees when Mary notifies people of new learning opportunities or training.

Training is provided either in-house, for example the European Computer Driving Licence in IT skills, or

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Studying for the role of Learning Rep

at Cornwall College, for example Health and Safety. Mary arranges time off for attendance on courses, interpreters for deaf learners and works with 'Access to Work' when specialist equipment or transport is required.

Equal opportunities is covered during the induction process in respect of acceptable behaviours and language and the company's grievance procedure. Publications are available in large print and a variety of formats.

Events are organised in fully accessible venues and the gender balance of speakers is monitored.

All Learning Reps undergo equal opportunities training as part of their induction and also receive regular refresher training.

benefits of equal opportunities

All learners achieve a qualification. These have ranged from Level I and II in numeracy and literacy to a Diploma in Management. As a result of the learning activity, morale and confidence is higher in the factory, there is an improved working environment with a happier workforce and most importantly for the business, production has increased.

Mary said *“It is important to help people to find out what learning is available and to allow them to fulfil their own potential. It helps some employees access mainstream employment which they would otherwise not have been able to consider. Remploy has a very strong equal opportunities policy and everyone is respected for what they CAN do.”*

For more information about how you can incorporate equal opportunities into your project please contact the Objective One Partnership Office on 01872 241379 or email objectiveone@cornwall.gov.uk.