

Union Learning Representatives

Evidence from the UK

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Union Learning Representatives

- Legislation introduced April 2003
- Right to paid time off to undertake their duties
- Often non-traditional union activists - more women and members from ethnic backgrounds
- Help create and drive demand for learning among workforce
- Sometimes seen as a vehicle, by Government, for implementation of Government policy

UK Government Policy on vocational training

- Seeks **Supply Side** reform to better meet Demand
- Giving employers greater voice and control over vocational training
- Leitch Report (December 2006) increase in funding for first level 2 qualification
- Resists calls for statutory measures to improve training
- Wants employers to shape qualification structure

UK Government Policy

- Government raises profile of ULRs
- Government Policy takes into account ULRs
- ULRs seen as one very important way of gaining workforce support for training and driving up demand
- However –
 - Employers who do not wish to train, don't – no legal compulsion
 - Not all employers recognise ULRs
 - Danger of ULRs seen as part of management
 - Deliverer of Government policy ?

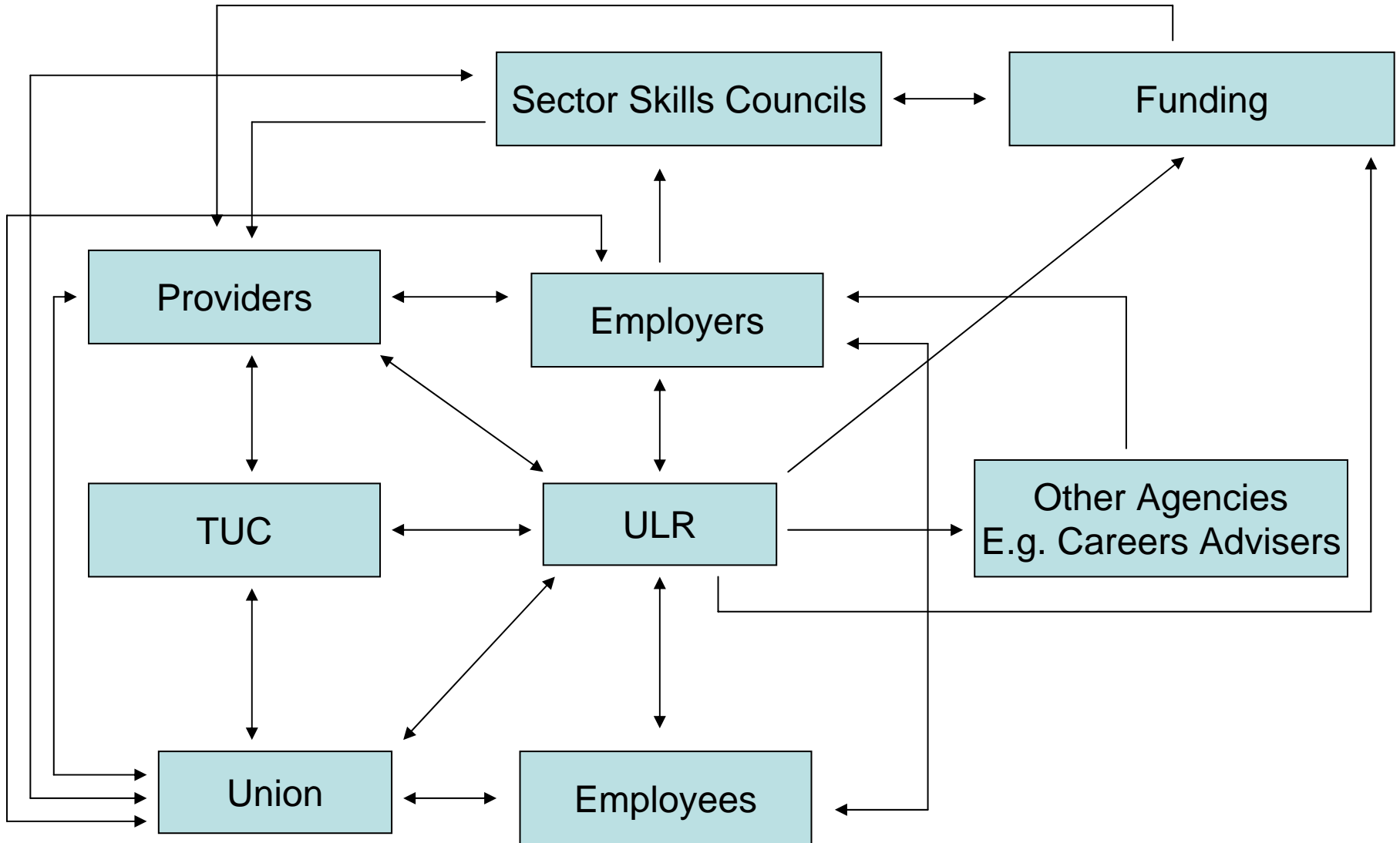
Where do they fit in ?

- ULRs are union members – although service all workers
- Tend to exist where union organisation is good
- Fit into Government policy by creating demand
- Operate within an infrastructure of union learning initiatives – Union Learning Fund projects
- Amicus has Regional Learning Organisers who support ULRs and recruit, develop and support ULRs
- ULRs in the Amicus Rule Book as activists

ULRs Interacting

- ULRs work with employer and employees (not just union members)
- ULRs have a relationship with training providers – discuss provision (brokerage)
- A range of agencies want to reach ULRs – TUC, Learning and Skills Councils (funding)
- Talk to other agencies – i.e. Careers advisers
- Work with other agencies on specific issues – for example when redundancies occur

How should it work ?



How can ULRs influence Vocational Training policy ?

- Feedback, via union, to **Sector Skills Council** network about relevancy of existing qualifications and levels of demand
- Feed information on training issues at work back to the union
- Feedback to employer, providers and members on training provision – quality, content etc
- Ensure Government policy on 'Demand Side' is effective
- Articulate needs of employees in the workplace

Case Study

Print Industry National Agreement

- National Agreement covering all terms and conditions
- Between British Industries Federation and Amicus
- Makes provision for:
 - 0.5 per cent payroll levy for training
 - Use of ULRs to drive up demand for training
 - Discussion over training between Employers and union
 - Manpower Planning – ULR and Stewards involvement
 - Introduction of Statutory measures if this doesn't succeed by April 2008



How does it work in reality ?

- ULRs and Stewards talk with management about implementing the Agreement
- Jointly agree way forward
 - workplace training agreements
 - training committees involving Stewards, ULRs and employer reps
 - discuss policy on time off for training
- Support from ULF Project Workers
- ULRs talk to providers
- Create demand for training in workplace
- Undertake skills surveys

How does it work in reality ?

- Employer and Committee can plan training – who gets it, who needs it, when will it happen ?
- ULRs liaise with providers – meeting to discuss this with manager, ULRs and providers
- What are the best methods of training – distance, modular, accredited ?
- ULRs work with employer to design and distribute Skill Needs Survey
- Analysis of survey results and agree way forward

Positives

- ULRs have been largely successful to date
- Developing relatively sophisticated role – See H&S Reps in 1970s
- Ensure workforce involvement and ‘voice’ in training and learning via the union
- Legislation for time off essential – but doesn’t always happen
- ULRs are the missing link between providers, employers, government policy and workforce

Negatives

- Trade union must be recognised by employer for rights of ULRs to apply
- If no training happens, ULR works in vacuum
- Employers see ULRs as 'another troublemaker' and share time off with other activists – H&S and Stewards
- Nationally recognised but not so regionally – lack of willingness to engage by LSCs, RDAs etc
- Many employees do not see training as an important issue
- ULRs can be excluded from mainstream union

Questions ?

