

**The Union Learning Agenda and Trade  
Union Revitalisation in Wales**

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## Abstract

This thesis evaluates the Union Learning Agenda (ULA) in Wales using Behrens, Hamann and Hurd's (2004) model of trade union revitalisation. The political, economic, membership and institutional spheres of union learning activity were explored through a mixed-method study that utilised a quantitative survey of 246 ULRs in Wales, alongside interview, observation and documentary research methods. The examination showed that within a political social partnership environment unions extracted resources from government and gained policy influence. The evaluation of workplace activity showed that ULRs were organising broadly defined learning for colleagues, and developing bargaining and consultation with employers over vocational and educational training (VET). Procedural mechanisms were more common where there was employer support for ULR activity and substantive outcomes were greater where procedural mechanisms were in place. Further, ULRs were engaging members through broad rather than narrow definitions of learning, and supporting the development of union-commitment behaviours (Snape and Redman 2004). The ULA was increasing the infrastructural resources, internal solidarity and network embeddedness of trade union institutional capacity (Lévesque and Murray 2010), thereby contributing to trade union revitalisation processes. The thesis contributes to empirical knowledge on the ULA by providing the first analysis of activity in Wales. Secondly, it assessed the content and importance of multi-union and multi-actor activity in ULA networks. The thesis argues that in a context where government and employer support for union involvement is strong, a partnership approach to the ULA can aid union revitalisation not only at the workplace but beyond it.

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## List of Abbreviations

ACAS	Arbitration and Conciliation Advice Service
AM	Assembly Member
BECTU	Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CfER	Council for Economic Renewal
CWU	Communication Workers Union
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales
ESB	Employment and Skills Board
ETUC	European Trade Union Congress
EP	The Employer Pledge
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
GMB	General Municipal Boilermakers
ITB	Industrial Training Boards
LA	Learning Agreements
LSC	Learning and Skills Councils
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NIACE-DC	National Institute for Continuing Adult Education in Wales
NoE	Networks of Excellence
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications

PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
SSC	Sector Skills Councils
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency
SULF	Scottish Union Learning Fund
T2G	Train to Gain
TEC	Training and Enterprise Councils
TSPC	Third Sector Partnership Council
TUC	Trade Union Congress
UKCES	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
ULA	Union Learning Agenda
ULF	Union Learning Fund
ULR	Union Learning Representative
VET	Vocational and Educational Training
WERS04	Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004
WERS11	Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2011
WDA	Welsh Development Agency
WDP	Welsh Development Programme
WG	Welsh Government
WSPU	Wales Social Partners Unit
WULF	Wales Union Learning Fund
WTUC	Wales Trade Union Congress
WTUC-LS	Wales Trade Union Congress Learning Services

# Chapter One: The Union Learning Agenda

## 1.1 Introduction

Trade union interest in vocational and educational training (VET) in the UK has grown since the 1990s and is a significant aspect of trade union activity in the UK. This thesis contributes to research on the union learning agenda (ULA) by assessing the impact of the ULA on trade union revitalisation in Wales. The ULA concerns the development of trade union VET activity since the 1990s, which led to increased support from government and statutory rights for a new union role, the Union Learning Representative. As we shall see, the key criticisms of the ULA to date reflect concerns within each of these areas, for example, around political isolation or competence (McIlroy 2008, Lloyd and Payne 2007), the consensual or integrative nature of the ULA (Stuart 1996), a lack of employer obligations to train workers (Hollinrake *et al.* 2010), the lure of training for new potential members (McIlroy 2008), and the potential of partnership-based union learning as contrasted with organising unionism (McIlroy 2008). This study assesses whether the ULA has supported trade union revitalisation in relation to four key areas of union activity which have been identified as significant factors for trade union revitalisation (Behrens *et al.* 2004). These four areas are the political, economic, membership and institutional (or internal) spheres of union activity. The central question of this thesis is, how and to what extent does ULA activity support capacity building in these four dimensions of revitalisation?

In order to assess the contribution of the ULA to trade union revitalisation, each dimension is considered within this thesis. Assessment of revitalisation involves considering four spheres of union activity, namely the political, economic, membership and institutional dimensions (Darlington 1994, Behrens *et al.* 2004). Firstly, political revitalisation refers to policy-related activity and union involvement at a political level. Political revitalisation is judged by trade union access to government policy decision-making, the ability to influence policy, and the ability to extract resources from government. Secondly, economic revitalisation refers to union-employer relations and the ability of unions to act as representative organisations through strong workplace organisation that creates benefits for workers. Economic revitalisation reflects union-employer relations and is measured by procedural and

substantive outcomes of engagement. Thirdly, the membership dimension is concerned with membership levels, the engagement of members and participation in union activity. Membership revitalisation concerns the power of trade unions to engage with and attract members, and their ability to increase participation. Finally, institutional revitalisation is concerned with the internal policies, procedures and practices that support the development of a strong trade union movement and is evaluated through the policies and practices that are used to create salient organisations. A model of union capacity has been developed by Lévesque and Murray (2010) that will be employed to explore institutional revitalisation through the ULA. These four dimensions of revitalisation are explored in the following chapter and are central to understanding how the ULA can, or cannot, aid trade union revitalisation. By exploring each of these areas in relation to ULA activity, this study assesses whether the ULA is contributing to trade union revitalisation. Elaborated.

The assessment of the impact of the ULA on the four complex and interrelated areas of revitalisation was conducted through a mixed-method research design. A range of qualitative methods and a quantitative survey were employed to gain understanding of the outcomes and processes associated with each aspect of revitalisation. Quantitative methods were employed to explore union activity in the first large-scale survey of ULRs) in Wales, providing a broad picture of ULR activity in Wales in relation to economic, membership and institutional revitalisation. Quantitative analysis was used to explore the type and extent of ULR bargaining activity and substantive and procedural outcomes at the workplace. The methods used to engage with employees and ULR recruitment activity, and ULR activism and involvement in union networks were also explored using survey data. This quantitative analysis was supported by qualitative enquiry. The use of three key qualitative methods - interviews, observation and documentary analysis - provided data to explore the processes and nuances behind each aspect of revitalisation. Qualitative analysis enriched the exploration of issues covered in the survey, whilst also allowing exploration of issues beyond the scope of the survey, particularly political revitalisation and the activities of ULA networks in Wales. By combining qualitative and quantitative enquiry the impact of the ULA on trade union revitalisation in Wales was assessed.

This chapter is organised into four sections. The first section explores trade union revitalisation strategies in the face of adverse indicators of union strength. The second section then focuses on institutional VET arrangements in the UK, highlighting key phases of change in national VET institutions and policy. Thirdly, the development of the ULA is explored and three key union resources that have been created are presented. These resources are the development of the ULR role, the creation of Unionlearn (a TUC organisation funded by government that targets skill development in the UK workforce), and the development of Union Learning Funds (ULF), which provides funding for union-led workplace learning activity. The central debates on the role of government, employers and trade unions as 'partners' in VET policy formation are discussed in relation to these developments. Finally, the thesis structure is outlined.

## 1.2 Trade Union Revitalisation

Trade unions in the UK, as well as other developed countries, have suffered decline in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the UK in the 1980s, trade unions faced a targeted political campaign to reduce trade union power under a succession of Conservative governments and a period of severe industrial unrest. Restrictions on industrial action and the abolition of 'closed shop' unionism had serious consequences for trade union membership and bargaining strength (Wright 2011). In the 1990s, declines in trade union membership, the number of workplace activists, and bargaining recognition coverage continued. Across a number of measures, the strength of trade unions diminished. For example, membership figures peaked at 13 million in 1979, but by 2013 this had halved to 6.5 million (ONS 2013). Just over a quarter of UK employees were trade union members in 2013, with membership density at 55 per cent in the public sector and 14 per cent in the private sector. Bargaining coverage has also diminished as fewer businesses collectively bargain with unions and fewer new businesses recognise unions (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013, Bogg 2012, Bryson *et al.* 2004). The decline in collective bargaining and membership density has led to claims by academics that there has been a 'collapse of collectivism' in regulating employment (Brown *et al.* 2009: 22, Bogg 2005). We shall see that a move away from national industrial regulation through tri-partite participation on industry level boards at a national level towards enterprise and

individual bargaining has diminished union influence in policy formation (Rainbird 1990).

Debates within the trade union movement and between industrial relations academics have been concerned with explaining the decline in union power yet there has also been a growing concern to understand union strength and the potential for revitalisation by exploring the organisation and activities of trade unions. This growing body of literature highlights the importance of understanding the processes associated with trade union strength and revitalisation (Hyman 2001, 2007, 2003, Lévesque and Murray 2010, Frege and Kelly 2003, Baccaro *et al.* 2003, Fernie and Metcalf 2005, Heery *et al.* 2003a). Revitalisation and renewal literature has become a significant area of enquiry within industrial relations research.

A number of different strategies of union revitalization have been identified within industrial relations research (Waddington 2005, Hyman 1999, 2001, 2007, Frege and Kelly 2003, Gall 2003a, Kelly and Willman 2004). Mergers have continued to be a significant union strategy that have created many larger organisations, often resulting in varied occupational and industrial membership diversity and complex internal structures (Waddington 2005). The number of trade unions operating in the UK has dwindled from 691 to 167 between 1950 and 2008. Strategies called for include building coalitions (Wills 2001, Wills and Simms 2004, Buttigieg *et al.* 2009, Cockfield *et al.* 2009, Fine 2006, 2007), social partnership at a political and workplace level (Fairbrother 1996, 2000, 2007, Ackers and Payne 1998, 2011, Geary and Trif 2011) and shifts in the focus of lobbying activity to European or global solidarity (Hyman 1996, 1999, 2001, 2004). Unions have also aimed to increase membership diversity (Pocock 1998), attract atypical workers (Healy *et al.* 2004, Gumbrell-McCormick 2011, Wills 2009), and promote recognition campaigns and organising (Gall 2003a, Heery *et al.* 1999, Heery and Simms 2008, 2009, Waddington and Kerr 2009). Whilst the list of revitalisation strategies presented here is not exhaustive, it shows the diverse and complex nature of trade union organisation, potential revitalisation strategies, and the varied approaches that are proposed to support trade union revitalisation.

At a national level, British trade unions and the TUC have promoted two significant strategies under the banner of 'new unionism': the learning agenda and the

organising agenda. The Union Learning Agenda (ULA), the focus of the study at hand, refers to the activity of trade unions in vocational and educational training (VET) as promoted by the TUC (TUC 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1999). The organising agenda focuses on a need to develop self-directed activists and strong workplace organisation (Wills 2007). These two strategies are often aligned with the differing approaches of cooperative or integrative unionism (the ULA) versus organising or adversarial unionism, though, as we shall see, the consensual and integrative nature of the ULA has been questioned (Stuart 1996, Cooney and Stuart 2012). Whilst the organising agenda is not the focus of this analysis, it is considered as a significant discourse within revitalisation research and the empirical analysis explores the relevance of organising practices in relation to the ULA. The development of the ULA, discussed in the following section, resulted from a period of exclusion in VET policy systems and employer prerogative in workplace training decisions and is a significant strategy that aims to restore union involvement in VET in Britain. It is therefore important to understand how, and to what extent, the ULA can contribute to union fortunes.

### 1.3 Vocational and Educational Training in the UK

VET in the UK context refers to full and part-time education and training, and work-related training for adult learners (Cuddy and Leney 2005:36). Participation in education beyond statutory school age is an individual choice and generally, 'the cost of training is borne individually, usually by the person requiring training' (Greinert 2004:21). Whilst post-compulsory education is presented as an individual responsibility, state attempts to influence VET practice have altered the role that trade unions can play in the development and delivery of VET policy.

Trade union involvement in VET at state, industrial and workplace levels has varied over the last century with four key shifts in the institutional landscape. These shifts represent a move from craft regulation to more corporatist regulatory systems, to market regulation which largely excluded unions, and finally to market regulation which sought to include unions as social partners in developing skill (Clarke 1999). These four periods signify a shift in the industrial relations environment, whilst some aspects of VET arrangements are maintained through these different periods, the role of trade unions has altered.



Under the craft-based model, unions regulated the apprenticeship market, controlling ratios of workers to apprentices employed, length of training and rates of pay. Apprenticeships were central to trade union VET activity. Erosion of union regulation of training via trade apprenticeships began in the 1950s and 1960s (Greinert 2004) and apprenticeships have 'suffered a sad fate' in the UK. This is despite government programmes introduced in the 1960s to respond to a decline in the number of workplace apprenticeships during the 1950s (Ryan 2001: 139). Craft regulation was replaced by corporatist regulation at a national industrial level (involving government, employers and trade unions) under the Labour Governments of the 1960s and 1970s. Tri-partite systems were introduced, focused on Industrial Training Boards (ITBs), which were established by the Industrial Training Act 1964. The ITBs became responsible for regulating apprenticeships and imposed training levies on employers and formalised union involvement in VET by providing industry level trade union representation. It was during this period that unions played their most significant role in VET policy in recent history.

The liberal market economy model (Greinert 2004) was introduced in 1979 under the Conservative Government in which employer-led institutions and employer needs guided training practice. The market model of workforce training was characterised by a focus on economic supply and training demand, regulated by the market, not by the state through levies or legislation aimed at employers. The voluntarist approach to training activity and union involvement, where unions were excluded from decision-making and had no formal method to bargaining with employers, resulted in an employer-led system (Ryan 2001). Workplace training decisions were subject to employer discretion and there was little legal obligation for employers to train workers (except in the construction and engineering industries, where firms continued to contribute to training levies).

Institutional changes made by the Conservative government in the 1980s resulted in the abolition of ITBs. In 1989 the tripartite Manpower Services Commission, which had been responsible for the coordination of training and employment practice and in particular the Youth Training Scheme, was also abolished. The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) that replaced ITBs represented a shift to a voluntarist, business-led approach to training. TECs delivered Youth Training which combined training and employment for young workers before the Modern Apprenticeship

programme was developed in the 1990s (Unwin and Wellington 1995, Fuller and Unwin 1998, Ryan 2001). These interventions represented government attempts to increase employer training provisions which excluded union voice and failed to stem the decline of apprenticeships or provide long-term, well-structured, well-paid training that are offered under tri-partite, negotiated apprenticeships (Marden and Ryan 1990).

Unions were largely excluded from VET structures from the 1960s and under the market model and opportunities for national level bargaining, not only on training issues, became more scarce (Smith 2009, Smith and Morton 2009). The voluntary and employer-dominated system elevated management prerogative, limited industrial democracy and provided weak institutional supports (Chan and Moehler 2009). As Rainbird (1990) argues, the prominence of employer need and employer responsibility in training decisions left trade unions isolated from training matters. Further the challenges of advances in ICT and flexible working in a deregulated economy meant that training became a more contested area between unions and employers.

The free-market institutional arrangements, where employer prerogative and scant state intervention are dominant, are believed by critics to have led to a 'low skills equilibrium' (Finegold and Soskice 1988). Here, individual responsibility to fund training and a lack of financial or regulatory stimulus to support employer-provided training were thought to constrain the ability of workers to increase skill levels. This lack of investment in skill development was understood to perpetuate a low skill economy and restrict economic performance. In order to address this problem it has been argued that government funding and intervention is important to address any shortcomings in compulsory education systems that have failed to deliver the skills necessary to participate in the labour market (Auer 1994). Further, in order to develop skills, unions were identified as important VET actors, particularly at the workplace level, a sphere that is often neglected by economic assessments on institutional arrangements at a national level (Heyes and Stuart 1994).

During the 1990s arguments for and against state intervention into training markets were put forward. Increased government investment in VET on the grounds that skills were essential to global economic competitiveness and growth were

questioned. For example, Shackleton (1992) argued that VET (as opposed to school education) was a minor aspect of national competitiveness, and that VET should be determined by markets and economic actors, namely individuals and firms. As such, government interventions and investment in VET, it was argued, would have a minimal impact on national economic performance. However, on the other hand it has been argued that state intervention was necessary as market failure in relation to skill formation was concerning for those who wish to generate a high skills economy (Schmitter and Streeck 1985). Streeck (1989) argues that given that employers will underinvest in skills to minimise costs, and further underinvest in order to avoid problems created by 'free-rider' employers, who pay a premium to employ skilled workers trained by other organisations (p.94). State intervention was deemed necessary to regulate employer behaviour. The free rider problem encourages firms not to train workers for fear of losing them to employers who will pay a higher premium. Streeck (1990) further argued that voluntary partnership arrangements were subject to management power and as such training should be regulated at the workplace through strong trade union organisation and involvement.

Our fourth period represents a move towards a partnership model which continued to be led by voluntarist and market principles. The Labour Government elected in 1997 developed VET strategy focused on both raising standards and increasing inclusion in order to raise low levels of productivity in the UK, which had been linked to inadequate skills in the workforce, and low levels of participation in training (Fryer 1997, 1999, Cuddy and Leney 2005: 15). The Government accepted that regulation was necessary in order to increase employer investment in skill formation but would not return to the tri-partite and levy system of the 1950s and 1960s.

Changes in the institutional VET structures that were implemented by the New Labour Government continued to approach VET as an employer-led agenda (OECD 2009). Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were replaced by the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) under the Learning and Skills Act 2001. The funding and planning of VET was the responsibility of the LSCs in England and Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) in Wales until 2006 at which point responsibilities were transferred to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education funding Agency in England and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales, which reported to the Sector Skills Development Agency

(SSDA). Separate institutions were created for England and Wales, as the responsibility for VET was devolved to the Welsh Government through the Government of Wales Act 1998. (The significance of devolution is evaluated in Chapters 2 and 4). The SSDA provides financial support to Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), which are employer led bodies tasked with skills forecasting and the development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and certification of apprenticeships. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), introduced in 2000 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, represents state intervention to control the quality of VET. The NQF, developed by the employer-led SSCs and the SSDA, increased the systemisation of NVQs by providing national standards which 'are specified in the form of units, aggregated to meet qualification needs of specific occupations, which are identified by a parallel process of occupational mapping' (Cuddy and Leney 2005:49).

The development of NVQs has been the subject of much critique (see Grugulis 2003). In an attempt to certify the skills of workers by providing a recognised qualification, NVQs were 'effectively seen both as a means of up-skilling the working population and as a way in which those skills can be measured' (Grugulis 2003: 458), yet Grugulis concludes NVQs did neither and that this was a failure of their design. Indeed the notion of a competence based model has been critiqued due to various understandings of the meaning of competence itself, which include skills, ability, actions, behaviours, attributes, personal qualities and performance as well as concern that the qualifications are unstandardized, subjective and do little to raise skill levels of workers (Stewart and Hamlin 1992). NVQs were deemed less effective than traditional apprenticeships in a number of industries (for example, in construction (Callendar 1992), and engineering (Senker 1996)). Furthermore, the advantage of obtaining an NVQ, either in terms of monetary gain or job promotion were lacking (Grimshaw *et al.* 2002). Grugulis argues that the failure of NQVs to deliver skill increase or job prospects was a result of the employer-led development that failed to incorporate the needs of individual employees, the voices of their representatives and the educational sector (2003: 471).

A new overarching body, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), was created in 2008 with the aim of creating and driving skills strategies, after the Leitch Review (Leitch 2006) highlighted the shortcomings in the UK skill base and

deficiencies in policy approach. The UKCES remit includes management of SSCs, promoting employer funding of training, and is comprised of 30 Commissioners including employers, education providers as well as five trade union representatives. The voice of workers was now (re-)included in national debates on VET.

Union involvement in VET was promoted by the Labour government through a strong narrative of lifelong learning, high skill labour, and economic competitiveness, alongside one of equality of opportunity and social inclusion (DfEE 1998, 1999, DfES 2001, Cuddy and Leney 2005). This dual strategy is encapsulated in the following passage:

*We seek a fair society which ensures that every individual, irrespective of background, ethnicity, gender, faith, disability or postcode, is helped to realise their own capability for learning, and raise their quality of life. We also seek a dynamic economy where our national and regional productivity is enhanced through high-skilled, well-rewarded employees working in companies committed to long term investment and leading the world in their business sectors.'*(DfES 2005).

Unions were included as key partners in government policy arenas (DfES 2001) in increasing VET activity as evidence suggested systematic inequality in access to training based upon personal characteristics, occupational status, and employment sector exists and that trade union presence is associated with better training provision for employees (Machin and Wilkinson 1995, Heyes and Stuart 1998, Green *et al.* 1996, Booth *et al.* 2003, Kersley *et al.* 2006, Stuart and Robinson 2007, Munro 2000, Rainbird *et al.* 2003, Sloane, and Theodossiou 1998, Stewart and Swaffield 1998, Taylor and Urwin 2001). In the Employment Relations Act 1999, unions with statutory collective bargaining recognition were given entitlements to consult on training plans and have access to information on worker training. The development of institutional supports for union involvement will be discussed in the following section.

Under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government elected in 2010, the structural supports for VET policy have remained. UKCES remains the key policy development forum, liaising with government, employers and unions. SSCs have remained as the key industry bodies. The political impact of the election of the

Conservative-led coalition government, and what this means for trade unions will be explored in Chapters 2 and 4.

#### 1.4 The Union Learning Agenda

The history of trade union interest in education is extensive. As we mentioned above, trade unions controlled worker education in through craft union apprenticeships. The provision of state education for the working classes was also a key demand of the labour movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Trade unions supported the development of the Workers Education Association (WEA) and Ruskin College, where trade unionists from across the UK engaged in socialist education (Williams 1998, Lewis 1993, Burge 2007, Egan 1987). In the latter half of the twentieth century, trade unions set up trade union education departments, that 'provided national programmes of education, alongside materials for the development of branch activists in regional programmes' (Munro and Rainbird 2000:229). These departments largely focused on the development of trade union education, in terms of training for union representatives.

The development of the Union Learning Agenda (the ULA), reflects a break from union preoccupation with apprenticeships and union activist education, and is considered to be 'a distinctive development in the recent history of the British training system' (Stuart *et al.* 2010: 1). The development of the ULA also stems from the changing structure of trade union organisation from one that represents industrial sectors or political affiliation to one that represents workers by occupational classifications. Rainbird (1990) argued that this enabled a return to the notion trade unions may legitimately represent the training of members within occupational groups rather than controlling skill as a form of craft protectionism, and as such unions could contribute to industrial strategy by developing skills of the labour force in order to extract gains for members. The ULA incorporates a wider remit of training and learning, focusing on skill as a tool for improving social and labour market inclusion or opportunities. Arguments for union involvement in VET focus on countering inequality as Cooney and Stuart (2012: 4) state:

*Those with greater skill requirements at work tend to receive the bulk of continuing training, whereas those with no or minimal qualifications, employed*

*in areas of low skill, receive little continuing training and so are more at risk of social exclusion. Those with minimal qualifications are most at risk of unemployment or of finding themselves in ongoing contingent employment. In this context, the development of skills becomes critical for overcoming social disadvantage in employment. As organisations with an abiding concern for social justice, unions have also had a concern for the public policy implications of addressing disadvantage in the labour market through skill upgrading.*

The ULA developed through union programmes that aimed to engage members in wider training in the 1980s and early 1990s (Rainbird 1990, Rainbird and Stuart 2011). The Ford Employee Development and Assistance Programme (EDAP) is often represented as a flagship partnership programme, where management and trade unions were involved in a joint venture that offered grants for education and training to all Ford employees. However, research into EDAP suggested that occupational type determined the level of qualifications gained, with few assembly line workers achieving degree level qualifications compared to non-manual workers (Roberston 1998), as well as issues with course completion rates (Moore 1994). Further, learning activity was completed in workers' own time, whereas other schemes promoted 'matched time', where 50 per cent of personal time and 50 per cent of work time could be used to complete training. Unions, such as the former Transport and General Workers Union (T&GWU) and the former Manufacturing Science and Finance union (MSF), also emphasised the use of workplace committees to pursue advances for worker training in the 1990s (Stuart 1996). UNISON's (formerly the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE)) project Return to Learn also represented a growing trade union interest in skills and training, beyond job-specific training, that expanded learning opportunities for their members (Munro and Rainbird 2000, 2003, 2004).

The TUC adopted the ULA as a significant strategy in the 1990s (TUC 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999). The involvement of trade unions, it was argued, could increase skill development and contribute to economic prosperity. Further union involvement was perceived as necessary to reduce employer dominance in VET decision-making at the workplace that led to a focus on job-specific training. As Keep and Rainbird state:

*Since union members' interests are best served through the development of*

*skills which have wide recognition in the labour market, as opposed to the task- and firm specific requirements of employers, the incorporation of unions is conducive to driving the training system towards meeting long-term skill requirements rather than employers' immediate needs. (1995:516)*

The aim of the ULA was 'to help trade unions negotiate learning opportunities... [and] build up trade unions' capacity to put training onto bargaining agendas' (TUC 1997: 34). The ULA was therefore set out as a bargaining agenda for unions, but also as a way to increase opportunities for learning and training that are of benefit to members (TUC 1998b).

The development of the ULA involved three key changes. The first significant development was the introduction of the Union Learning Fund (ULF), through which unions can access funds to support training and learning activity for all workers. The second key development was the formal introduction of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs), a new trade union representative role whose main responsibilities are to promote training activity and skill development amongst members and to represent member needs to employers. Finally, Unionlearn was established, funded by government, as a body to administer the ULF, provide support to ULRs and encourage employer investment in training. These three important developments are explored in turn.

The ULF was a first key strand of the ULA, introduced in 1998, and is a key source of funding from government aimed to promote learning up to Level 2 qualification (GCSEs or equivalent). The ULF gives public funds to unions for projects that support members' learning and represents greater external support for union promotion of work-based learning. (TUC 1998b, Monks 2000, Labour Research 2000). Unionlearn (see below) and ULF have received a considerable amount of funding from government and aim to enable a greater demand for training. The ULF has supported the development of learning, particularly over essential literacy and numeracy skills, engaging over 220,000 learners a year as well as training over 30,000 ULRs (Unionlearn 2013).

Within Wales, the Wales TUC (WTUC) has the responsibility for union VET activity, as a result of devolution arrangements (explored further in Chapters 2 and 4). The WTUC is responsible for the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF), and is supported



in doing this by the WTUC-Learning Services (WTUC-LS), the Welsh equivalent of Unionlearn, which is funded by Welsh Government.

Political support for union involvement in VET from the 1997 Labour Government succeeded in securing regulatory changes under the Employment Act 2002. This Act established rights for Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to reasonable paid time off to perform their functions, which are defined as performing analysis of training needs, providing information and advice to members, the promotion of training, and consulting with employers in order to perform these functions in workplaces with trade union recognition (s. 43 EA, s168 A TULA (C) A 1992). The Employment Act 2002 enshrined the ULR role, and afforded trade unions the ability to establish these representative in organisations with union recognition. ULRs encourage the low skilled to engage in training, support those with higher level skills and encourage continuous professional development. The rights and responsibilities of employers with regard to ULRs is set out in the ACAS Code of Practice (2004). The Code of Practice stipulates that employers must allow ULRs to: 1) analyse learning or training needs, 2) provide information and advice about learning or training matters, 3) arrange learning or training, 4) promote the value of learning or training, 5) consult the employer about carrying out any such activities, 6) time to prepare to carry out any of the above activities, and 7) paid time to undergo ULR training.

Despite TUC campaigning on the issue, the regulations did not entail any obligation on the part of employers to bargain with trade unions, no right for members to meet with ULRs during working hours, and contained exclusions based upon recognition status and workplace size. A right to a minimum number of days off for training had also been called for by the TUC, but this was not granted. Instead in 2010, individual employees were provided the right to request time off for training via amendments to the Employment Rights Act 1996. Whilst the limited nature of gains has been criticised given original trade union goals (McIlroy and Croucher 2013), the development of the ULR role, backed by legislation, was a significant gain for trade unions, the like of which has not been introduced since Health and Safety Representatives in the 1970s.

The third key outcome for trade unions, in the institutional landscape, was the funding and development of Unionlearn in 2006. Unionlearn is concerned with lobbying government, providing access to learning opportunities, supporting ULRs and the administration of the Union Learning Fund (ULF). Unionlearn is funded by central government and works closely with UKCES to promote employer engagement with VET and employee take-up of training. Assessments of the role of Unionlearn suggest that stakeholders value the organisation. As Stuart *et al.* (2010: 7) state:

*Unionlearn was seen to have a unique role within the learning and skills infrastructure: inputting into the skills strategy at the national level and at the operational level through the delivery of learning and workplace programmes.*

Whilst opportunities have arisen for trade union involvement in VET through government intervention, these regulatory and funding changes have been criticised by academics and trade unionists who aim to re-establish social democratic regulation akin to that of the 1960s when national industrial skill levies and boards supported tri-partite regulation of the skills economy (Daniels and McIlroy 2009). Furthermore the emphasis of skill development in relation to economic competitiveness, it is claimed, diminishes the significance of learning as an empowering activity and increases the importance of learning for productivity, supporting business case arguments over emancipatory discourses (McIlroy 2008). Employers are not obligated to engage with external regulation of adult training as:

*the discourse of human capital-led economic growth has not resulted in significant statutory constraints on employers' investment decisions and where perceived employer need is a central guiding force for any institutional change (Rainbird and Stuart 2011:203).*

It has also been argued that the individual focus on demand for learning problematized low skill as a labour issue, rather than regulating employer involvement (Cutler 1992). Despite these critiques a number of arguments for trade union involvement in VET have been put forward, including substantive gains such as the expansion of employee learning opportunities, and procedural gains, such as increased access to negotiation and consultation that may increase equity in access to training and reduce employer prerogative (Streeck 1989).

The role of trade unions in identifying training needs and encouraging participation are key arguments for union involvement in VET, as Ryan (2001:22) states:

*Union contribution to lifelong learning concerns their particular influence over participation in learning. Union representatives are typically better placed than employers, educators, trainers or government officials to win the trust of employed non-learners and coax them towards learning.*

The ULA represents a greater focus on continued workplace training as a bargaining agenda. Union involvement in training has been presented as an integrative issue (Mathews 1993), where both business and workers benefit from activity, and as such can cooperate to create consensus between parties to develop effective frameworks and procedures. However, conflicting interests may reduce the potential for cooperation as employers are focused on business outcomes and are not concerned with transferable market skills or the general employability of workers (Stuart 1996).

Trade union involvement in VET is conceived under the banner of social partnership through formal regulation by joint bodies representing employers and employees, government and learning providers as well. The TUC engaged with government on learning as part of a dialogue of social partnership (TUC 1997, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2007), yet criticisms have been raised over the limited potential of unions to influence government policy. McIlroy and Croucher (2009) critique the level of union involvement in both national and sectoral institutions where unions 'possess little power' and support the delivery of policy initiatives rather than influence 'policy creation' (p.301). They go on to argue that the development of a social partnership dialogue is misplaced and has resulted in limited substantive and procedural gains at the workplace as well as at a national industrial and political level. Rather than social partnership and an integrative approach to workplace bargaining (where unions and employers work together for mutual gains), critics argue that unions should instead focus on learning as a 'matter for conflictual cooperation and the imposition of joint regulation' (McIlroy and Croucher 2009: 303). However, advocates of closer cooperation between management and unions over VET do not, as McIlroy and Croucher (2013) suggest, fully accept the notion of consensual mutual gains, or the integrative nature of union and employer interests which has been questioned in

terms of skills needed, interests satisfied and control of decision-making by different parties (Rainbird 1990, Streeck 1989, Forrester and Payne 2000, Stuart 1996, Winterton and Winterton 1994). Concerns and criticisms have been raised over the narrative and processes which link VET to economic competitiveness, and the limited nature of regulatory changes made by the New Labour Government (McIlroy 2008). However, evidence from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) shows that unions have secured increases in the sharing of information, consultation and bargaining that occurs over VET at the workplace (Cully *et al.* 1999, Kersley *et al.* 2006) and union activists report increases in the time spent on training activity (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013), despite a decline in collective bargaining recognition in the UK. McIlroy also states that the ULA remains fragile, particularly as 'Conservative opposition have promised to abolish the ULF' (2008: 298). Given that a Conservative-led government was elected in 2010, and that Unionlearn and ULF continue to support ULR activity, the 'fragility' of the ULA may have been overstated. The ULA remains as an important facet of trade union activity and it is therefore important to understand how this activity can contribute to trade union revitalization. We shall explore the issues and debates raised here in more detail in the following chapter which reviews both the research literature on union learning and wider debates on trade union revitalization.

### 1.5 Outline of the Thesis

In the analysis that follows, empirical evidence is presented which forms the basis of the evaluation of how and to what extent the ULA has impacted upon trade union revitalisation in Wales. The account is set out over seven further chapters.

In the next chapter, concepts of trade union revitalisation are considered, exploring how the processes and effectiveness of ULA activity can be assessed, before evaluating further the academic debates and research on the impacts of the ULA. Trade union revitalisation is explored through Behrens *et al.*'s (2004) framework of political, economic, membership and institutional areas of activity and key concerns of industrial relations debates within each area and ULA research are identified. Within the discussion of political revitalisation a number of issues are raised. First, the importance of devolution of VET is established as a primary reason to conduct

research in Wales. Secondly, measures of revitalisation are identified at the political level, including policy influence and ability to extract resources. Thirdly, positions that support the development of union involvement in policymaking under a partnership discourse, and those that argue that partnership approaches to political engagement do not lead to increased union influence are evaluated.

In relation to economic revitalisation, debates that question the method of engagement with employers, the nature of bargaining, and the potential to develop procedural and substantive gains for employees are considered. Again, the question of partnership and union influence are raised as key concerns and the discussion highlights two positions, those who support partnership, integrative bargaining and/or consultation and those who promote adversarial bargaining for the development of economic revitalisation.

In exploring membership revitalisation, Snape and Redman's (2004) conception of economic, social and covenantal exchange is used to understand union-member relations and how unions can increase member activism, which is a key aim for membership revitalisation. The organising model, based on notions of conflict, as a significant union strategy, and the concept of 'relational' organising (Saundry and McKeown 2013) are considered in relation to the development of the ULA, which is often conceptualised as a service strategy.

In the fourth section of the conceptualisation chapter, Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of union capacity is identified as a useful tool to explore institutional revitalisation. They identify a number of power resources and capabilities that can enable institutional revitalisation. Infrastructural resources, narrative resources, internal solidarity and network embeddedness and how these resources can influence union strength and capacity are discussed. This is followed by an exploration of these resources in relation to existing evidence and debates on the ULA. The final section of this chapter highlights the key arguments and indicators of trade union revitalisation along each dimension and identifies gaps within the literature that this thesis will address.

In chapter 3, the research questions, methodology and methods utilised in the project are detailed. The project employs mixed methods, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, in order to explore how the ULA in Wales is

impacting upon various aspects of trade union revitalisation. The key instruments used to explore revitalisation include a quantitative survey of 246 ULRs, observation of ULA activity (including ULR training courses, WTUC conferences, ULA network meetings, and workplace learning events), documentary analysis of electronic newsletters, and interviews with union officers, ULRs, and W/TUC staff.

The empirical analysis begins in chapter 4 with a consideration of the effects of the ULA on political activity. An examination of the impact of devolution for the organisation of the ULA in Wales is presented, which highlights the role of the WTUC-LS as a significant institutional actor. Whether the ULA has resulted in gains in terms of inclusion in policymaking circles, and trade union influence on policy development are both explored. In assessing the whether the ULA has enabled political revitalisation the impact of devolution, policy-making access and trade union policy influence are explored.

Chapter 5 focuses on economic revitalisation. In evaluating workplace industrial relations, the assessment considers whether the ULA has resulted in the generation of significant mechanism to develop procedural and substantive gains for workers, such as bargaining agreements and increased training provision. The nature of relationships between employers and ULRs as cooperative or adversarial is also evaluated. The nature of bargaining, procedural and substantive gains, and union-employment relations are assessed as indicators of economic revitalisation. Patterns in variation are explored in relation to voluntary agreements, state initiatives, consultation mechanisms and partnership agreements.

In chapter 6, ULA activity in relation to membership revitalisation is explored. The study assesses whether ULRs consider recruitment to be part of their role, and whether they can attract new members. The methods ULRs use to engage employees, for example training needs analysis and one to one advice, are explored to provide further understanding of how the ULA might impact upon membership revitalisation. The perception of the ULR role as entailing recruitment, reported recruitment activity, and methods of engagement are utilised to evaluate the extent of membership revitalisation through the ULA. Snape and Redman's (2004) model of trade union commitment behaviours is used to explore the whether ULA recruitment

activity develops economic, social or covenantal relationships and whether this is dependent upon prior trade union experience.

Chapter 7 assesses the impacts of the ULA on institutional revitalisation. Employing Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of union capacity to frame the analysis, this chapter considered whether the ULA has provided unions with an opportunity to develop power resources and capabilities that are needed to improve trade union capacity and contribute to revitalisation. The analysis focuses on the development of infrastructural resources, narrative resources, internal solidarity and network embeddedness as indicators of institutional revitalisation.

Chapter 8 provides a concluding discussion about the research presented herein. The chapter aims to bring together the findings of the study, highlighting significant areas of ULA activity that contribute to trade union revitalisation and discussing these in relation to the debates and concerns identified above and within the next chapter. The practical and theoretical implications are reflected upon, and directions for future research are discussed.

## Chapter Two: Trade Union Revitalisation and the Union Learning Agenda

### 2.1 Introduction

In the UK, the adverse position of trade unions has been attributed to the political and economic environment of the 1970s and 1980s (Brown 1993, Millward *et al.* 2000, Kersley *et al.* 2006, Frege and Kelly 2003, Disney 1990). Whilst political and structural supports are important determinants of trade union influence and power, there has been increasing attention paid to the revitalisation strategies employed by trade unions in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. These assessments focus on the internal organisation and strategies of trade unions to revitalise their fortunes (Baccaro *et al.* 2003, Frege and Kelly 2003, Willman and Kelly 2004, Fernie and Metcalf 2005) and it has been argued that trade unions must remain important actors in capitalist economies in order to establish and defend worker rights and promote worker welfare (OECD 2002, Freeman and Medoff 1984, Hamann and Kelly 2004).

There has been a substantial amount of academic research directed at evaluating union attempts to achieve revitalisation. Issues that have attracted attention include organisational change such as union restructuring and mergers (Behrens, Hurd and Waddington 2004, Ebbinghaus and Waddington 2000, Willman 2004); union leadership (Charlwood 2004, Darlington 2013); and policies aimed at diversification of membership characteristics, for example, women and minority workers (Colgan and Ledwith 2002, Kirton and Healy 1999, Kirton 2006, Heyes 2009, Perrett and Martinez Lucio 2006, Anderson *et al.* 2007, Parker 2006, 2009, Pocock 1997, 1998). Strategic approaches such as labour-management partnership (Terry 2003, Roche 2009, Samuel 2004, Kelly 2004, Kelly and Badigannavar 2011), organizing unionism (Gall 2003a, 2011, Fairbrother and Yates 2003, Heery *et al.* 1999), coalition building and community unionism (Wills 2001, Wills and Simms 2004 Cobble 1991, Clawson 2003, Nissen 2004, Tatterstall, 2005, 2009, Black 2005, Fine 2006, 2007, Craft 1990). Political action and international solidarity (Hyman 2001, 2004, Hamann and Kelly 2004, Putnam 1993, 1999, Gordon and Turner 2000) have also been explored. A key strategy of British trade unions has been the union learning agenda (ULA)



(Rainbird and Stuart 2011, Clough 2004, 2008, 2012, Nowak 2009). This thesis focuses on the ULA as one aspect of trade union revitalisation activity.

This chapter explores theories of and research on trade union revitalisation that are relevant to the framing and investigation of the ULA. In the first section the concept of revitalisation is explored utilising Behrens, Hamann and Hurd's (2004) model to identify potential indicators of revitalisation. This model, in the following four sections, is used to identify industrial relations debates on political relations and policy development, employer relations and collective bargaining, membership relations and union organisation. The relevance of these debates for the evaluation of the ULA as a revitalisation strategy is considered. The literature review within this chapter is used to develop research questions, highlighting contested areas and gaps in the literature. A broad and encompassing framework is developed that is used to evaluate the contribution of the ULA to trade union revitalisation.

## 2.2 Conceptualising revitalisation

What constitutes trade union revitalisation? This is an important question to develop an understanding of how unions might overcome contemporary weaknesses with renewed vigour. Conceptualising revitalisation entails consideration of resources, processes and outcomes that result from internal trade union organisation and activity, as well as consideration of the external context and environment.

A useful framework to explore key aspects of trade union revitalisation has been developed by Behrens *et al.* (2004) who conceptualise revitalisation as an on-going process rather than an outcome or an end. Four key dimensions of union activity that can influence union strength are identified in Behrens *et al.*'s model: the political, economic, membership and institutional. These areas of union activity, which are complex, intertwined and unstable rather than unconnected, fixed or static, can be targeted to develop strong and relevant trade union movements. The key aspects of the four dimensions of the revitalisation model are briefly outlined, before considering broader debates on each dimension and related ULA research in turn.

The political dimension represents power relations and potential capabilities of unions in relation to political activity and influence. The central aspect of the political dimension is the effectiveness of unions in influencing national governance and this can be assessed in three ways: through parliamentary elections, regulatory influence

and policy development. Firstly, union influence on election outcomes represents the ability to instil a government that will be ideologically favourable to trade union organisation and aims. Judgements here are based on union influence on political candidates and successful parties. In the latter part of the twentieth century, Davies (2006) claims that Wales had imposed upon it a Conservative government that it did not want; and this is reflected in the General Election voting patterns with Labour gaining the majority of votes between 1979 and 2010 (see Table 2.1 below). Devolution of powers and the creation of Welsh Government was endorsed by Labour in the election manifesto in 1997 supported by the WTUC and unions, with UNISON donating £10,000 to the 'yes' campaign. Tony Blair stated that devolution would enable 'more inclusive' politics and greater democracy (quoted in Chaney and Fevre 2001: 22). It is important to note that in terms of the ability to elect an ideologically supportive party in Welsh elections to the Welsh Government since devolution have resulted in Labour victories or Labour-led coalitions with the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru (Wyn Jones 2011), excluding the Conservative party.

Table 2.1: General election voting patterns in Wales, 1979 – 2010

Party	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010
	Percentage of votes (Number of seats won)							
Labour	47.0 (22)	37.5 (20)	45.1 (24)	49.5 (27)	54.7 (34)	48.6 (34)	42.7 (30)	36.2 (26)
Conservative	32.2 (11)	31.0 (14)	29.5 (8)	28.6 (6)	19.6 (0)	21.0 (0)	21.4 (3)	26.1 (8)
Liberal Democrats	10.6 (1)	23.2 (2)	17.9 (3)	17.9 (1)	12.4 (2)	13.8 (2)	18.4 (4)	20.1 (3)
Plaid Cymru	8.1 (2)	7.8 (2)	7.3 (3)	8.8 (4)	9.9 (4)	14.3 (4)	12.3 (2)	11.3 (3)
Others	2.2 (0)	0.4 (0)	0.2 (0)	0.7 (0)	3.4 (0)	2.3 (0)	5.0 (1)	6.3 (0)

Source: Thrasher and Rawlings 2007, p. 223; NAW and Parliamentary Research Paper 61/54.

The second measure of political revitalisation is union influence on regulation. Regulatory influence involves an assessment of the ability of trade unions to alter industrial relations systems, impacting upon industry, labour markets, and legislation affecting the social conditions of members. Finally, judgements of union influence on the construction and implementation of policy can also be used to assess the influence of trade unions on the political dimension. Strength within these three areas, which are not mutually exclusive, can enable the development of the other dimensions of revitalisation. In the UK, debates related to the political dimension concentrate on the position of trade unions within national industrial relations systems and the influence of trade unions as partners of government, focusing primarily on the latter two aspects of political influence.

The economic dimension of revitalisation includes trade union ability to establish bargaining relationships with employers and to use these to secure substantive outcomes for their members, such as wage gains or contractual benefits (Behrens *et al.* 2004: 21). When assessing the economic influence of trade unions it is important to consider the techniques and mechanisms through which unions bargain and interact with employers. Gaining procedural concessions from employers – representation on workplace committees, collective bargaining agreements, and recognition – are significant aspects of economic revitalisation.

In assessing economic revitalisation union-employer relations and ‘adversaries’ organizational strength’ must also be considered (Behrens *et al.* 2004: 22). Where employers oppose union involvement in decision-making, generating gains for workers will be challenging to achieve. Where employers are successful in blocking ULA activity the potential for economic revitalisation will be weakened. The notion of ‘adversaries’ is key to debates on economic revitalisation that consider the nature of collective bargaining and labour-management relations. Collective bargaining may be described in distributional terms, where the conflicting interests between unions (who are attempting to achieve substantive gains for workers) and employers (who are pursuing profit) results in adversarial bargaining and one group losses out to the benefit of the other. Conversely, an integrative bargaining approach where cooperation is established under a partnership agenda is proposed as an appropriate strategy for trade unions where workers and employers can make ‘mutual gains’, rather than negotiating in ‘zero-sum’ games associated with

adversarial bargaining (Walton and McKersie 1965). Judgements along the economic dimension must therefore not only consider any procedural impacts of union activity, but also employer willingness to cooperate with trade unions, the relationship between unions and employers, and any substantive outcomes for workers.

Successful revitalisation along the membership dimension, according to Behrens *et al.* (2004), can be measured by three quantitative factors: an increase in membership numbers, an increase in union density and a change in the composition of membership. Increased membership can lead to an increase in financial resources, for example through subscription fees, and represents increased support for trade union activity. Density is an indicator of union representativeness. Where unions represent a significant proportion of workers in workplaces, industries, and sectors, the legitimacy of union demands will be greater, increasing the necessity for employers and governments to engage in negotiations with trade unions (p. 20). The final factor, a change in composition of membership, is also concerned with representativeness but along demographic or worker characteristics such as age, gender, or employment contract. Again, this factor is thought to increase legitimacy of unions in representing workers' concerns, compared to singular or limited constituencies which favour certain groups (p.21). In addition to these quantitative measurements, the membership dimension also concerns the ability of trade unions to gain support and commitment from workers, developing relationships that will increase union power at the workplace. A union's ability to engage members will be closely linked to the institutional strength of trade unions at workplace level.

The institutional dimension of the revitalisation model concerns 'unions' organizational structures and governance' (Behrens *et al.* 2004:22). The internal systems and capacity of unions to change internally, either in reaction to or pre-empting external changes are central considerations. Therefore, trade union structures, goals and strategies, which are strongly influenced by union leadership, are assessed. Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of trade union capacities is introduced as a useful framework that can be employed to examine institutional revitalisation as it is concerned with internal union strength.

In short, the four dimensions of revitalisation reflect the different spheres of union activity with regard to the political sphere, relationships with employers, engagement with members, and internal union structures and activities. In using the Behrens *et al.*'s framework to explore the ULA, this thesis follows a path taken by earlier researchers. Findlay and Warhurst (2011) used Behrens *et al.*'s framework to explore the impact of ULF projects, and Mustchin (2009) employed it to explore the ULA through case study analysis of ULR activity in the North of England. Similar typologies also reflect the dimensions identified by this model; for example, the policy, employer, union and member-facing areas of union activity identified by Darlington (1994) which has also been used to assess the ULA in the work of Moore *et al.* (2008) and Rainbird and Stuart (2011).

Having outlined the central concepts of the revitalisation model, the following sections consider each dimension of revitalisation in turn, discussing the key debates in the industrial relations literature. Research evidence relating to the ULA is explored highlighting significant findings and contested areas and the potential for further research.

### Political revitalisation: social partnership and devolution

This section identifies debates on social partnership and incorporation at the political level in IR research, and consider the potential for political revitalisation. The following section highlights the importance of political relationships in enabling union organisation, for example through inclusive policy making. It is proposed that the strength of trade unionism and the Labour Party in Wales, supported by devolution of political powers to the WG, provide unions with the potential to increase political involvement and lobbying power.

Lévesque and Murray (2010) state that 'the institutional arrangements in which the actors operate' and 'particular opportunity structures in a given circumstance (be they economic, political, organizational, ecological)' (p. 336) are of importance when trying to understand the potential for union growth and capacity development. Government policy and approach are considered important indicators of trade union position in industrial and political relations.

The work of social movement theorists and comparative IR studies gives prominence to the political structures, or political processes, in determining the potential of trade union actors to impact upon political conditions and institutions within a given country (Hall and Soskice 2001, Tarrow 1998). Political opportunities, in relation to social movements, are said to be most valid when governments are weak or vulnerable. Weak governments will be more easily lobbied in order to gain favour with voters and retain power. However, political opportunities may also be created when changes in governance structures lead to increased pluralism or corporatism in government decision-making (Tarrow 1998, McAdam *et al.* 2001, Meyer 2004). Increased pluralism may provide opportunities to increase cultural solidarity and shared values via institutionalised networks that enable greater interactions, opportunities to create cooperative working relationships, and greater influence in policymaking. The relationship between unions and government is therefore an important consideration for political revitalisation.

UK debates on political revitalisation have focused on union potential to impact upon government policy. Two themes are apparent. Firstly, trade union ability to influence policy and practice is said to be limited by the political leanings of the elected government. Whilst parties on the political right of the spectrum are in government, the ability of trade unions to act for the benefit of members are significantly restrained. Secondly, varieties of capitalism literature suggests that tri-partite organisation, where employers, trade unions and government collaborate, particularly found within a coordinated market economy, can provide unions with access to policy making arenas and lead to increased influence (Green *et al.* 2002). Others argue that social partnership approaches can increase political engagement and benefits trade unions and a partnership approach 'for all its vagueness and ambiguity, provides an opportunity for British unions to return from political and economic exile' (Ackers and Payne 1998: 533).

However, the ability of trade unions to influence government policy under a discourse of social partnership has been questioned. Incorporation arguments emphasise concerns that unions will be undermined by partnership approaches at a government level, revealed through weak structural arrangements and weak lobbying power (Kelly 1998, McIlroy 2008). This thesis therefore asks whether the engagement with government under a discourse of partnership is detrimental to or

beneficial for trade union revitalisation. This issue is explored by assessing whether political parties adopt a partnership approach to union-government relations and whether this enables the creation of inclusive policy bodies, and increased union involvement in policy development and implementation. Has partnership enabled trade unions to increase engagement with government? Furthermore, is there evidence of union influence on policy design and implementation?

### *Political revitalisation and the ULA*

As governments target skill as an economic policy and form multi-agency social partnerships, they are further institutionalising relations between states, markets and civil society. It has been argued that across Europe there has been a move towards social partnership and devolution of power (Taylor *et al.* 2012). The role of the state in constructing VET systems and VET policy, and its role as an employer are important aspects of the industrial and employment relations policy and decision-making. A partnership approach indicates that businesses, trade unions and the third sector (voluntary and charity organisations) are included as partners at state, industry and workplace levels (Fuller, Munro and Rainbird 2004: 5). Further, Fennessey, Billet and Ovens (2006) believe 'social partnerships can also encourage collective, cultural learning...developing attitudes, values and skills that can build social capital and democratic citizenry' (p.13), linking political and economic revitalisation.

In the introductory chapter the UK approach to VET and the ULA was discussed as comprising a voluntarist, business-led approach with minimal statutory support. Yet statutory backing for ULRs, the formalisation of the role within trade unions and the provision of government funding have created 'opportunity structures' (Keating 2003, Lévesque and Murray 2010) under a social partnership discourse. In the UK, trade union representation on employer-led agencies, namely SSCs, and UKCES, allow a trade union presence in national level policy-making. Financially, the TUC receive government funding to support two significant aspects of the ULA, ULF and Unionlearn. Organisationally, unions were conferred with new statutory rights for the ULR role. These advances aimed to increase union influence in VET decision-making at a political level via a more inclusive approach to union-government relations. The TUC argued that the development of the ULA was of benefit trade

unions and could be used to union advantage (Clough 2004, 2008, Nowak 2009). Indeed there is evidence that government funded projects that are delivered in partnership with employers (under mutual gains frameworks) can support the activity of ULRs in the workplace (Cassell and Lee 2007, Wallis and Stuart 2007, Stuart *et al.* 2010, Rainbird and Stuart 2011).

Despite these changes, critiques of the ULA have questioned the significance of these developments for trade unions on a number of grounds, including financial fragility, the restricted nature of gains (in terms of improved regulation and bargaining stance) and the potential of political partnership over VET to secure economic and membership revitalisation. The ability of trade unions to gain political influence through a partnership approach has been hotly contested within the revitalisation and ULA literature (McIlroy 2008, Stuart 1996, Stuart and Martinez 2002, Forrester and Payne 2000). The sustainability of the ULA has also been questioned due to dependence on government funding as well as a lack of employer investment in training for which there are few institutional levers (Gold 2003, Lee and Cassell, 2008, Lloyd and Payne 2002, 2006, Forrester and Payne 2000).

McIlroy (2008) critiqued the ULA as performing a 'public administration function', where integrative bargaining and a close, partnership relationship with government leads to reduced influence and capacity to organise (Rainbird and Stuart 2011). A public administration function of trade unions 'involves the implementation of public policy that the union have played a part in creating' and is distinguished from service, workplace representation, regulatory and government functions. Ewing (2005) argues that a push towards a public administration function is a symptom of a changing regulatory function, which has been through the decline in collective bargaining activity. Trade unions have also increased focus on the service function, particularly legal representation. These changes led to diminished government function (Ewing 2005). For example, the failure of unions to gain statutory *negotiating* rights for ULRs in the ERA 1999 and rights to employee time off for training have been presented as indicators of trade unions' limited influence at the political level.

For McIlroy (2008), and McIlroy and Croucher (2013), the adoption of the ULA represents the diminishing influence of trade unions on government policy. McIlroy



criticises the adoption of the ULA by the TUC under social partnership as a move which relegates unions to deliverers of government policy particularly given the voluntary nature of VET arrangements (see also Dundon and Eva 1998).

These arguments, labelled the 'incorporation thesis' (Rainbird and Stuart 2011) claim that the ULA is not proven to contribute to revitalisation and represents concerns that unions will be subsumed into systems of control, that union leaders will adopt conservative doctrines and support capitalist authority, and that incorporation may be a strategy employed by governments and employers to reduce union militancy (Kelly 1996). There are therefore two opposing positions, those who support partnership at a political level in order to generate shared values and increase union influence, and on the other hand those who fear partnership as a process that devalues union independence and can weaken the union movement. In the following section we consider the impact of devolution for the potential to pursue partnership as a political ULA strategy.

### *The Role of Devolution*

When considering the political structures through which unions may influence government and employer policy in the UK, the devolution of VET powers to the home nations creates another layer of governance. Devolution may provide additional opportunities for unions in Wales to shape the ULA, in terms of its machinery and resources, and influence policy formation.

In 2006 the Government of Wales Act established the Welsh Government (WG), made up of twelve Ministers, including the leading First Minister for Wales, and Deputy Ministers who are responsible for the development and implementation of policy. The National Assembly for Wales (NAW) consists of sixty elected members (AMs) who represent their constituencies and scrutinise government policy. The WG holds powers to govern over 20 'subjects', including economic development and education and training. This represents a substantial increase in responsibility compared to the power held by the Welsh Office before devolution (England 2004: 104).

Reform of the devolution settlement is currently being considered under the Wales Bill, and seeks to address the devolution arrangement. This will involve developing a framework to establish clarity over which issues are and aren't devolved, working on the preposition that some powers are reserved by Westminster, rather than the current situation which confers defined powers on the WG. This situation has been created as a result of the further devolution of some tax powers expected in the next parliamentary term (as specified in the Wales Act 2014), as well as three Supreme Court cases that questioned whether the WG could act on particular issues. For example, the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board in England was challenged by the WG, who aimed to, and succeeded in, retaining a Welsh Agricultural Board.

Devolution has allowed the WG to develop policy in a number of areas, including VET, and has enabled an inclusive approach to policy development (Adams and Schmuecker 2006, Chaney 2004, Chaney and Rees 2011). As a result of the Government of Wales Act 1998, the WG has a 'duty' to consult with the business sector and the voluntary sector, including trade unions. The WG is therefore statutorily required to consult with a wide range of actors and organisations as well as being required to promote equality. The Government of Wales Act 2006 (c.32.s.7) specifies the "inclusive" approach to exercise of functions' which impose directives on Welsh government to set up two key consultative policy bodies, and have laid the way for increased social partnership in Welsh governance. In sections 74, 75 and 76 of the Act, it is stated that:

*The Welsh Ministers must make a scheme ("the voluntary sector scheme") setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations... The voluntary sector scheme must specify... how the Welsh Ministers propose to consult relevant voluntary organisations about the exercise of such of their functions as relate to matters affecting, or of concern to, such organisations...*

*The Welsh Ministers must make a scheme ("the business scheme") setting out how they propose, in the exercise of their functions, to take account of the interests of business ...[which] must specify how the Welsh Ministers propose to carry out consultation about the exercise of such of their functions as relate to matters affecting the interests of business...*

*The Welsh Ministers must make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that their functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.*

These sections promote two of the key democratic elements of devolution that impact upon policymaking: inclusivity and equality of opportunity (Day 2006: 643, Wyn Jones and Scully 2003: 125). Chaney notes that the 'legal definition of equality in the devolved polities is broader in scope than Great Britain-wide statutes' (2011: 432). The creation of a devolved state therefore puts a legal requirement on the WG and NAW to promote equality of opportunity as well as to include employers, trade unions, and the voluntary sector in policy debates as interested parties.

Wales is considered to have a social democratic approach to union involvement that has been strengthened as a result of Welsh devolution (Beynon *et al.* 2012).

England states that,

*The fact that Wales is a small country where networks are easy to forge and the members of the political class know practically everyone else in the arena reinforced a move to social partnership (2004: 77).*

This is supported by others who identify the relations between unions and government in Wales as 'state-sponsored social partnership' (Bacon and Samuel 2009: 238) and commentary that suggests devolution 'transformed the role of the WTUC in this area' (England 2004: 93).

Across the UK, relationships between unions, government and employers are not homogenous, as is demonstrated by research into the variation of union strength by region (Beynon *et al.* 2012, Martin *et al.* 1993). Union strength and relations with government and employers are important to the success of the ULA, and devolution may provide greater scope for influencing policy innovation in Wales. Indeed, Beynon *et al.* (2012) claim that devolved authority enables the continued relative strength of union membership. Union density, presence and bargaining figures for Wales are also above those of England (see Table 2.2). Of the nations, Wales continued to have the largest percentage of employees where a trade union was present in the workplace, at 54 per cent (DfBIS 2013).

Table 2.2: Union density, workplace presence and collective bargaining across the UK 2013 (percentage)

	Union density	Trade unions present in workplace	Employee's pay affected by collective agreement
Nation:			
England	24.1	42.9	27.7
Wales	35.4	54.6	37.8
Scotland	32.0	50.5	37.2
Northern Ireland	35.4	46.6	44.9

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Variations in devolved policy across the UK may reveal the extent to which unions are influencing policy development and implementation. Policy convergence or divergence across the constituent nations of the UK can be understood through Keating's formation of policy types, which denote the extent to which policy may diverge. Keating (2003) identifies five approaches to policy development. The first approach, non-comparable policy will occur where issues exist only in certain parts of UK; for example Welsh language interests. The second approach, policy autonomy, represents areas such as educational and social services, where devolved administrations have rights to develop autonomous policies. Thirdly, concurrent policies reflect broadly similar policy developments, and may be a result of external stimuli including, for example, EU legislation. The fourth type of policy approach is policy uniformity which represents a single line of policy for both devolved and central government. Finally, policy competition (which is linked to policy autonomy) captures innovative policy development in one authority that may then be lobbied for by interest groups in other authorities (Keating 2003).

Policy divergence in a devolved government is limited by the powers retained by Westminster (Mooney *et al.* 2006: 488) which 'imposes limits on the ability of devolved administrations to establish their own model of industrial relations, even within the limits of their competences' (Keating 2005). Nevertheless, Laffin *et al.* (2004) identify policy divergence as a potential outcome of devolution in Wales.

Political revitalisation is assessed by examining the structure of Welsh policy groups and the VET policies generated with regard trade union inclusion and influence.

At a political level the devolved legislative powers that the Welsh Government (WG) holds on VET, and the position of the Labour Party (Wyn Jones 2011) may provide 'opportunity structures' for significant impacts resulting from the ULA. Further, the responsibility of the WTUC in dealing with the ULA may provide access and influence to government policy-making circles in Wales. Other potentially significant factors include the pattern of inclusive government decision-making that operates within Wales (Adams and Schmuecker 2006, Chaney 2004, Chaney and Rees 2011) and the continued resilience of collectivism and trade union membership (Beynon *et al.* 2012).

It is therefore important to gain further understanding of the relationship between unions and government within devolved nations. This thesis contributes to debates on political revitalisation by exploring the organisation of the ULA in Wales, political relationships and VET policies and assesses whether devolution has resulted in increased union inclusion in VET policy formulation and the implications for trade union revitalisation through the ULA.

#### Economic revitalisation: bargaining, workplace systems, and employer relationships

The economic dimension of the revitalisation model concerns the effectiveness of trade unions in developing substantive gains and representing workers through national, regional and local bargaining agreements. Bargaining refers to the formal negotiation of agreements between unions and employers that creates contractual obligations on pay, benefits and employment conditions. However, bargaining can take a variety of forms and may result in formal agreements but may also involve negotiations through committees. Procedural bargaining mechanisms are considered to be indicative of a reduction in employers' unilateral power over the employment relationship. The greater incidence of bargaining arrangements indicates a stronger position for trade unions nationally. In order for union activity to influence the economic dimension unions can establish or strengthen procedural bargaining with employers and make substantive gains for workers, such as higher pay or access to training.

Bargaining is a central trade union activity and provides access to decision-making spaces and embeds union involvement within the workplace (Clough 2004, Payne 2001). However, the increasing role of consultation and workplace committees, influenced by European Directives are also thought to be significant for trade unions in modern workplaces (Hall and Purcell 2007). Establishing agreements or committees can increase the procedural inclusion of unions at the workplace. Furthermore, the quality of negotiating mechanisms may be judged by the ability of trade unions to secure positive outcomes for workers. Substantive gains that result from bargaining, such as increases in employer-funded training, changes to working practices such as appraisals or the availability of training are further measures of union influence. Economic revitalisation will depend upon the ability of ULRs and their unions to create procedural and substantive gains.

As with political revitalisation, the notion of partnership is a point of contention in developing positive economic outcomes for trade unions and their members. The nature of employer-union relations as labour-management partnership is framed in the language of mutual interest and collaboration that provides support for union organisation and involvement in business decisions (Kochan and Osterman 1994, Walton and McKersie 1965). Peetz (2009) and Towers (1997) argue that partnership arrangements present another avenue of engagement with employers that promotes positive attitudes towards union instrumentality amongst employers and employees. Partnership working is thought to lead to greater involvement in decision-making and improved conditions for workers, and such arrangements are not believed to reduce the potential for industrial action against employers on terms and conditions of employment, but support union revitalisation efforts (Ackers and Payne 1998). Research has indicated that where employers are supportive of trade union activity, 'union organising is conducted around a broader, not a narrower agenda' (Heery and Simms 2009:15). An adversarial approach to campaigning and negotiating is considered less desirable, particularly where union representatives are inexperienced, and have limited union or management support (Perrons 2004, Harrison *et al.* 2009, Findlay and McKinlay 2003). However, partnership as an integrative agenda where union and employer needs can both be satisfied has been questioned for a number of reasons.

Critiques of a partnership approach highlight a lack of positive outcomes for workers and for unions in partnership workplaces (Kelly 2004, Upchurch *et al.* 2008, Martinez Lucio and Stuart 2005, Stuart and Martinez 2002), questioning the integrative and 'mutual gains' assertions of partnership agreements. Evidence also suggests that management often retain control over narrowly defined agendas and restrict union involvement using consultation as a union substitution or displacement tactic (Kelly and Badigannavar 2004, 2011). In assessing partnership agreements, in terms of the nature of labour-management relations as cooperative and the extent to which unions are represented in workplace structures, Oxenbridge and Brown (2002) found evidence to support arguments that are = critical of, as well as for partnership working. Within a context of poor management-union relations, partnership may be used to reduce or weaken union influence, but where both parties are committed to cooperation partnership can nurture trade union workplace organisation. The ability of the ULA to create significant training outcomes for workers has also been questioned where a voluntary partnership approach to training provides no obligation for employers to invest in workers, linking the political and economic dimensions of revitalisation (Sutherland and Rainbird 2000).

The attitude and behaviour of management (as well as of union representatives and officers) is therefore likely to be an influencing factor in successfully affecting economic revitalisation within a weakly regulated VET arena. In the following section we shall consider research to date on the ULA in relation to the role of employer-union relations and workplace bargaining.

### *Economic revitalisation and the ULA*

A bargaining approach to union involvement in VET aims to develop the representation of employee interests in training and development at the workplace and in procedural policy, to promote worker development. Within ULA research bargaining is often discussed in integrative terms, where unions work in partnership or collaboration with employers for the mutual benefit of labour and capital, however, a number of studies question the role of the ULA as an integrative bargaining agenda (Heyes 2000, 2007, Rainbird *et al.* 2003, Stuart 1996). A key concern is that managers are unlikely to relinquish power of decision-making, and may feel that union involvement in training is challenging to the managerial prerogative. Scholars

have cautioned that managerial dominance and prerogative inhibit positive VET outcomes of ULA activity, particularly where investment in training is seen as a cost rather than an investment (Rainbird 1990). Secondly, the interests of the employer and workers may not be complementary and can conflict on a number of issues, particularly the relevance and necessity of training, the subject, aim and duration of training, as well as funding, time off and potential rewards for completion (Heyes and Rainbird 2011). The nature of worker and employer interests as conflicting, where worker interests centre on learning for personal development and transferable skills that can improve employment rewards and opportunities and employer interests focus upon job-specific skill development driven by financial and productivity gains (Keep and Rainbird 1995, 2003), lead to questions on the potential to develop mutual gains for employer and workers, and unions as partners in VET strategies.

Employer dominance over training decision-making in the workplace is linked to limited union influence on workplace training and a focus on job-specific skill training rather than broader learning. The types of learning unions and employees are interested in pursuing are often highlighted as different (rather than conflicting) to the interests of management and employers. Differential interests between unions and employers are significant. Employers favour firm-specific skills aimed at business needs, whilst union representatives favour transferable skills aimed at development and 'liberal education' (Alexandrou *et al.* 2005, Keep and Rainbird 2003). Keep and Rainbird (2003) identified differing skills agendas for unions and employers, where employers' agendas were restricted to organizational and job related learning.

The involvement of trade unions is therefore needed to alter management and employer activity to benefit members, particularly as research suggests a focus 'on firm-specific [skill is] more likely to lead to lower mobility when it is less transferable to other firms, is sponsored by firms, and where its objectives include increasing the identification of employees with corporate objective' (Green *et al.* 2000: 261). This suggests that a broader conception of learning is likely to support greater substantive benefits for members in terms of job mobility and employment opportunities.

Whether bargaining is an integrative, cooperative issue or a distributive conflict-based issue, a key aim of the ULA is to engage with employers over training activity and influence workplace decision-making for economic revitalisation. The nature of



bargaining, as formal or informal, and the methods used to negotiate and engage with employers are important considerations in evaluating the ability of the ULA to create access to workplace bargaining and consultation. Research evidence suggests that negotiation, formal and informal, is being undertaken by ULRs. Survey evidence suggests negotiating over learning is an activity which the majority of ULRs perform (over 60 per cent) (Saundry *et al.* 2010). However, impacts are generally judged to be limited due to a lack of statutory support that would enable ULRs to bargain with employers by right. This is a key concern of many ULA commentators.

A number of mechanisms through which ULRs can negotiate with employers have been highlighted as influential for improving training and union involvement. Unions can create access to decision-making processes, through learning agreements (LAs) or learning committees, which are important for developing union influence on the provision of work-related training (Wallis 2008, Wallis and Stuart 2007). The role of trade unions and ULRs is likely to be formalised through LAs (Wood and Moore 2005, Hollinrake *et al.* 2008). The nature and context of LAs are said to be of greater benefit to workers and ULRs where they are framed in mutual gains terms and analyses of outcomes revealed that LAs were linked to reported increases in membership and activism where employer support and strong union organisation are present (Wray 2007, Shelley 2007, 2008, Shelley and Calveley 2007). Where LAs are in place unions are more likely to have access to a workplace committee on training enabling unions to increase their access to workplace decision making, benefiting unions through greater union involvement in processes and procedures (Saundry *et al.* 2010, Haunch and Bennett 2002). However, it has been shown elsewhere that securing LAs can be difficult due to lack of employer willingness to engage (Lee and Cassell 2009a, 2009b, Mustchin 2009, Wallis *et al.* 2005). It is therefore important to assess whether union-management relations are positive, whether management are supportive of the ULA as well as considering the extent to which procedural mechanism such as bargaining agreements, LAs and workplace committees are developed through the ULA.

With regard to substantive outcomes, research has shown that ULRs are encouraging learning activity among their colleagues (Calveley *et al.* 2003, Ross *et al.* 2011), limiting the individual, structural and organisational barriers to learning engagement (CIPD 2004) and improving pay and job prospects as a result (Findley

*et al.* 2007). However, qualitative studies also show that workplace practices limit the potential for workers to take time off to learn and that attempts to promote the ULA can be inhibited by adversarial relationships and negative relationships with managers (Stroud and Fairbrother 2008a, 2008b) and that a lack of time off to perform the role and a lack of management support produced significant barriers to ULR activity (Cowen *et al.* 2000, Rainbird and Stuart 2011). Further evidence also suggests that attempts to collaborate over learning are hampered by adversarial relationships where a partnership approach is alien or atypical and employers are unsympathetic or antagonistic towards union organisation (Davies 2008, Forrester 2001, 2004, Shelly 2007). The potential gains made through integrative or distributive approaches may therefore face barriers to union involvement in VET that result from employer behaviour.

Research into ULR substantive impacts on workplace training provides inconsistent evidence on the relationship between ULR presence in the workplace and availability of employer-funded training. Hoque and Bacon (2008) reported that ULR presence did not impact significantly on the incidence of employer provided training, but Stuart and Robinson (2007) report that union recognition and ULR presence increased the likelihood of workers receiving training, and increased the duration of training provided. Both of these studies utilise the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2004 (WERS04), and whilst impacts upon training provided by the employer are important considerations for the success of the ULA in influencing employer behaviour, the suitability of WERS04 data can be questioned for a number of reasons. Statutory rights to time off and facilities for ULRs only come into effect in April 2003, only one year before the survey was undertaken, giving a limited amount of time for unions to petition employers with statutory backing for the ULR role. Furthermore, training impacts were assessed on the basis of provision for the largest occupational group within a workplace only and solely focuses on employer provided training.

Hoque and Bacon (2009, and Bacon and Hoque 2011) further tested the impact of ULRs on training provision at the workplace, drawing on managerial and ULR surveys. This research indicated that, generally speaking, ULRs and managers perceived ULR activity to impact positively on employer training practices. However,

as we saw above, management often pursue job and work specific training that can benefit productivity and efficiency.

Given the findings discussed above this thesis asks, how and to what extent has the ULA impacted upon economic revitalisation in Wales? To assess this question the type of mechanisms introduced by ULRs, reported workplace relationships, and workplace outcomes are considered important areas through which to explore the relationship between trade union regulatory functions and service functions at the workplace.

### Membership revitalisation: attracting activists and encouraging participation

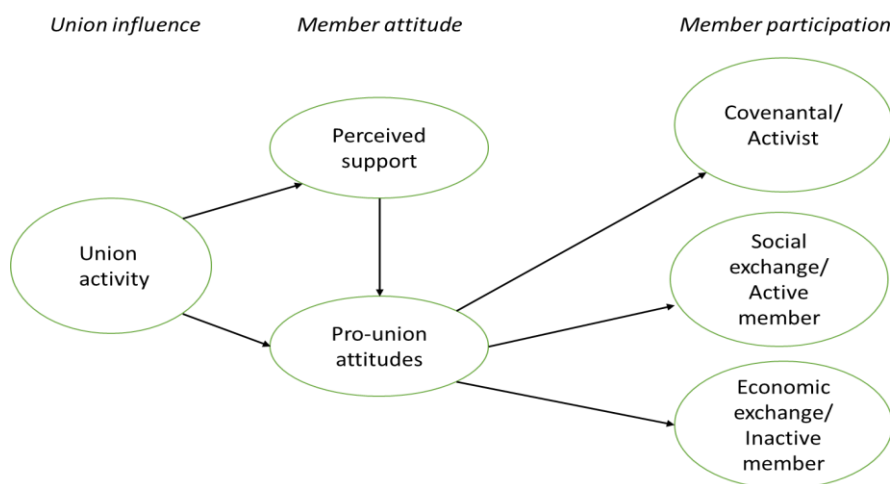
The membership dimension of revitalisation captures not only the number of members, demographic membership composition and union density measurements but also the ability of trade unions to recruit members and encourage participation in trade union activity. The central concerns in evaluating membership revitalisation therefore assess how unions can increase membership recruitment and density and how union representatives interact with members and potential members.

In reaction to declining membership levels, research has shown that unions in Britain are acting more strategically, particularly around recruitment activity (Heery *et al.* 2003b). Though there has been an increase in the use of specialist recruitment officers, policy development, and increased use and size of budgets, workplace representatives remain important union actors for the recruitment of new members. Approximately three quarters of specialist and generalist union officers surveyed by Heery *et al.* found workplace representatives to be 'very important' in terms of recruitment (p. 69). A central question related to the membership dimension is therefore concerned with how local representatives and officers recruit members.

A threefold classification of the relationship between unions and members has been identified by Snape and Redman (2004) which distinguishes between economic exchange, social exchange and covenantal relationships for the attraction of new union members and the initiation of participation and activism (see Figure 2.1). The model identifies union activity as influential for member attitudes and that pro-union attitudes rather than instrumentality perceptions are important in developing active memberships.

Firstly, economic exchange represents a service agenda and aims to positively impact union instrumentality perceptions. In economic exchange relationships members pay dues in order to see positive impacts upon their pay and conditions, where only instrumentality perception is an antecedent of membership. So, members will be retained or attracted where unions impact upon substantive outcomes, such as increased wages or better conditions of employment. However, members are unlikely to become active members as a result of receiving this service. The second type of relationship, social exchange, denotes reciprocity between members and union activists where unions support member needs and concerns and can call for reciprocal support as a result. This support might be shown in attendance at union meetings or voting in ballots. In social exchange relationships members pay dues to receive support in the employment relationship and support union bargaining and activity as a result. Social exchange is more likely to reduce intentions to quit the union and is preferred to an economic, servicing relationship. The third type of union-member relations is described as covenantal exchange where members share the values and goals of trade unions and are active within their union. In a covenantal relationship members value and participate in union activity, for example by taking on a union role or by supporting calls for action against employers.

Figure 2.1: Snape and Redman's model of union commitment behaviour



Source: Adapted from Snape and Redman 2004: 867

According to Snape and Redman (2004),

*Economic exchange emphasizes the achievement of instrumental gains or benefits for members, social exchange also emphasizes the provision of support and concern by the union, whereas the covenantal view goes further still in recognizing the value-based social-movement aspects of unions.*

Social exchange is more likely to develop pro-union attitudes than economic exchange. The potential to boost commitment, participation and activism could occur through social exchange relationships (servicing and support), and could enhance the development of covenantal relationships. As Bamberger *et al.* (1999) found 'pro-union attitudes had an effect on union commitment equal to, if not stronger than, that of union instrumentality'. Therefore, a service or economic exchange is deemed less effective in generating union activism and unions should aim to develop covenantal relationships, raising support for and commitment to union action that aims to increase union power resources and bargaining position. Other commitment research also suggests that the development of shared social values is important for increasing activism and that increased connections between members and union representatives and active representative networks can foster pro-union attitudes (Hyman 2007, Peetz 2006, Jarley 2005, Fiorito *et al.* 2011, Buttigieg *et al.* 2009, Cockfield *et al.* 2009, Darlington 2012, Gall 2012, Gall and Fiorito 2011, Passy 2001, Passy 2003). Social and covenantal exchanges are therefore central to developing activism, which in turn is crucial to strengthening the membership dimension of the revitalisation model.

Another aspect of revitalisation activity has been a concern of commentators and activists to increase the representative nature of union membership. A lack of diversity in membership composition, and falling density and membership levels led to a concern within the trade union movement to proactively engage with non-traditional workers, and groups previously marginalised by trade union organisation (Colgan and Ledwith 2002, Heyes 2009). Union strategies here have included the development of all-women groups, BME and equality representative roles (Fitzgerald and Stirling 2004, Holgate and McKay 2007). However, this strategy has been criticised for neglecting the complexity of identity and for accepting essentialist notions of 'like-to-like' recruitment. Rather than organising on issues specific to particular groups that have the potential to create tensions between union members,

it is argued that broader and inclusive organising strategies are needed that embrace the multiplicity of identity (Kurtz 2002, Kelly and Breinlinger 1996, Wright 1999).

Questions then are raised about the methods through which unions engage members. Partnership and organising unionism are often proffered as potential strategies to develop trade union workplace presence, which may positively impact membership revitalisation. However, as we discussed above, the potential of partnership to increase activism has been questioned as a tactic that is less desirable or effective than organising using adversarial tactics.

The organising agenda seeks to reduce the burden of servicing unionism, where members rely on union officers to represent their interests, by increasing workplace activism. The central priority of the organising agenda was the development of a culture of organising and campaigning. In 1998, the Organising Academy was established by the TUC, inspired by approaches in Australia and the USA under the label the label 'organising unionism' (Bronfenbrenner *et al.* 1998). This initiative was also influenced by the notion of social movement unionism with its foci on member mobilization and the pursuit of social justice (Heery *et al.* 2000a, 2000b). The aim of the Organising Academy was to develop trade union activists who could be utilised to develop strong, self-reliant trade union organisation at the workplace as well as support greater participation amongst young, ethnic and women workers and expand unionism to unrecognised workplaces and poorly organised industrial sectors (Holgate and Simms 2008). These activists would be developed over a 12 month period and receive training in order to develop effective campaigning and recruitment skills.

Early studies have revealed that union organising activity and impacts have been limited in the UK beyond membership consolidation (Heery *et al.* 2000b), and that greenfield organising activity can be a prolonged process (Gall 2003), and possibly as a result, organising activists may become focused on less grandiose goals (Heery 2006). Organising is considered to be distinct from partnership or integrative approaches to union organisation, where cooperation between workers and managers aims to foster mutual gains, benefiting both parties. Organising is often associated with an adversarial and distributional bargaining approach where conflicting or opposing interests of employers and workers are central to union

recruitment and dealings with management (Walton and McKersie 1965). The desirability of each approach as revitalisation strategies has been debated and the claim that organising and partnership are incompatible has been questioned (Heery 2002, Nowak 2009).

A more recent development is the notion of 'relational organising' where social interactions built over time between unionists and potential union members are not necessarily based upon raising awareness of conflict with, or challenging the employer. A case study of organising within a healthcare setting has suggested that the development of relationships over a significant period of time can enable engagement with workers and develop shared social values and greater workplace activism (Saundry and McKeown 2013). Where workers are engaged on non-conflictual issues and develop positive friendly relationships with union representatives, they can increase their understanding of and support for, union activity. Notably, learning is a route through which workers can develop such relationships with trade union activists. By developing relationships that are not based upon adversarial organising, union representatives are able to influence worker perceptions. This concept of 'relational organising' puts forward arguments that the development of membership and activism may occur through socialisation with trade union actors rather than any definition of the relationship between workers and employers.

The potential to impact upon the membership dimension rests on a number of factors: the provision of services, the provision of support and representation, increased contact between union representatives and workers, development of shared values with members and colleagues and effective networks as well as effective recruitment strategies.

#### *Membership revitalisation and the ULA*

Proponents of the ULA believe that the provision of learning opportunities allows trade unions to offer a service that will be of benefit to members and encourage workers to maintain their membership or to become members (TUC 1998b, Heyes and Stuart 1998). ULA advocates believe that union involvement in learning activity offers an alternative method of engagement with workers which is likely to be a more positive experience than core areas such as pay bargaining and grievance and

discipline that are often associated with conflictual or distributive bargaining (Clough 2004, Healy and Engel 2003, Healy *et al.* 2004).

However, a key criticism of the ULA is that the potential to attract new membership through learning activity is negligible. McIlroy (2008) suggests that training/learning is not often cited as the primary reasons for joining a trade union and is not attractive to potential members, primarily citing Waddington and Whitson's (1997) survey of 10,000 new union recruits between 1991 and 1993. These authors 'asked respondents to specify the one or two reasons why they joined a union' and found that collective reasons, which included 'support if I had a problem at work' (rated important by 72 per cent), 'improved pay and conditions' (36 per cent) and a belief 'in trade unions' (16 per cent) were more highly 'ranked' than 'individual membership services' including free legal advice (15 per cent) financial services (3.5 per cent), and training and education (5 per cent). A number of criticisms can be raised in relation to this research and its use to judge the importance of training. In terms of context, the survey was conducted at a time when apprenticeships were less significant aspects of UK VET practice, and the development of the ULA was still in early stages with no government backing. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 1, the role of union activity in VET altered substantially in the late 1990s. Furthermore, the fact that only 'one or two reasons' could be cited as reasons for joining may have undervalued the role that training and education played. The greatest criticism of this research is the definition of collective reasons for joining that are accepted to contain individual elements by the authors:

*It is acknowledged that some of the reasons for joining traditionally treated as collective include an individual element. For example, 'support if I have a problem at work' is clearly individual in so far as it represents an individual's need for advice or representation. (p. 520)*

This is the most frequently cited reason for joining and is arguably a more individualist than collectivist reason, as the authors themselves accept. Again, with 'improved pay and conditions' can be interpreted as in individual gains and it is not a given that respondents understood the question to mean collective gains resulting from collective bargaining agreements. A 'belief in trade unions', a more accurate reflection of shared collectivist values was ranked only ten per cent higher than



education and training. Despite this, whilst conducting a scathing review on the research evidence reporting positive outcomes for trade unions from the ULA, McIlroy and Croucher (2013) continue to suggest that the ULA should not be the focus of union resources and effort because evidence on the effect of individual services on membership interest is weak, despite more recent evidence to the contrary.

Where learning activity has taken place there is evidence to suggest that learner members encourage non-members to become members and as such the ULA cannot be interpreted as indicative of a shift away from a collectivist approach towards individual service provision (Munro and Rainbird 2000). Learning experiences are often collective in nature and can develop one's sense of self and collective identities (Hodkinson *et al.* 2008, Kilgore 1999, Melucci 1995, Raelin 1997, Ross *et al.* 2011, Rogers and Spitzmueller 2009, Walby *et al.* 2012). Furthermore, union-led learning can enhance the 'collective nature of learning' (Cassell and Lee 2007) as well as enhance understanding of union activity. There are therefore reasons to believe that a greater sense of community and collectivism can be engendered through learning experiences. Studies have also indicated that ULRs are acting as recruiters for trade unions. One study indicated that almost 50 per cent of workers who had contact with ULRs enquired about or joined a trade union (Wallis *et al.* 2005), whilst others suggest that the ULA is increasing membership and workplace activism (Warhurst *et al.* 2007, Moore and Wood 2004, 2005, 2007, Moore and Ross 2008, Thompson *et al.* 2007). Inferences as to the efficacy of union involvement in training to attract members may therefore be understated.

Research that focuses on organising migrant workers has also noted the importance of the role of the ULR in engaging migrant workers through English language provision, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses (Fitzgerald 2007, Perrett and Martinez Lucio 2008, Heyes 2009, Mustchin 2009). ULRs can play a role as 'intercultural advisers' (Martinez Lucio *et al.* 2007:18) offering information, advice and guidance on a range of training and employment-related issues, and engaging with employers, training providers and community groups on behalf of migrant workers (Martinez Lucio *et al.* 2007, Fitzgerald and Hardy 2010). An interesting feature of research into migrant worker organising are the connections that can be made with community groups that allow for engagement

with potential members beyond the confines of the workplace, and again highlights the importance of social exchange relationships and networks.

Further research suggests that the ULA has developed internal union capacity by providing space for members to become active representatives as ULRs and become involved in workplace and branch activity (Findlay *et al.* 2006, 2007, Cassell and Lee 2007, Stuart *et al.* 2010, Hollinrake *et al.* 2008, Moore and Ross 2008, Moore 2009, Warhurst *et al.* 2006). Rather than providing a service that relies only on economic exchange, with limited increased commitment or participation in union activity, the evidence that learners are taking on the ULR role and that non-members are joining unions suggests the ULA can develop more active participants in workplace trade unionism.

The ULA has the potential to impact upon economic exchange by providing access to workplace training that could result in economic gains. Social exchange can occur through perceived union support for learning. These two processes can in turn, and of themselves, impact upon union support and covenantal relationships, which are desired to promote and develop activist behaviour. However, we suggest that where ULRs focus on workplace or job-specific training (discussed above in relation to economic revitalisation) as part of an adversarial economic exchange, rather than broader learning for personal development or interest that is valued by workers, the ability to increase union member participation and commitment may be reduced. The development of union-member relations as economic, social or covenantal relationships may therefore impact on the ability of the ULA to influence the membership dimension of revitalisation.

The success of the ULA in developing membership revitalisation rests on the ability of trade unions to engage with members and non-members in a way that increases membership and develops covenantal relationships. . In terms of assessing membership revitalisation then, we must consider how ULRs are engaging with members at workplace and whether are ULRs providing a narrow service, focused on needs that are compatible with those of the employer or do they embrace broader concepts of learning which motivate workers, and whether this differentiation significant for membership revitalisation outcomes.

This is particularly important given the decline in membership among workers in the UK, as well as the decline in workplace representatives (Charlwood and Forth 2009, Darlington 2010). It is also imperative to understand what ULRs consider to be the responsibilities of the role what type of training and or learning is promoted by ULRs and whether ULRs are recruiting members and encouraging activism. Where ULRs are simply providing access to workplace job-specific training and do not engage in recruitment activity (that develops social and covenantal exchange) the contribution to membership revitalisation may be weak. Union experience will also be considered in relation to the three areas of recruitment, training and learning activity, and methods of engagement as questions have been raised as to the effectiveness of new ULRs in contributing to revitalisation (Donnelly and Kiely 2007, see the section on infrastructural resources below). These issues are particularly important given the decline in membership among workers in the UK, as well as the decline in workplace representatives (Charlwood and Forth 2009, Darlington 2010) who have been identified as significant for recruitment (Heery *et al.* 2003b).

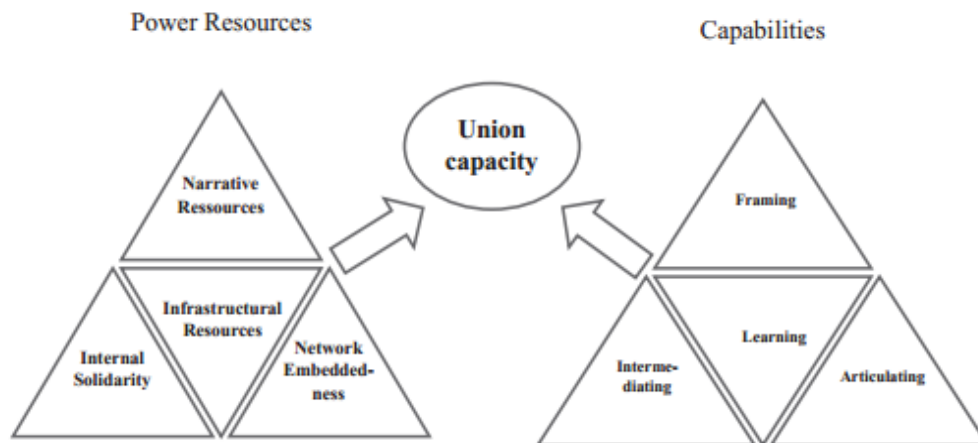
#### Institutional revitalisation: the capabilities model

Institutional revitalisation refers to the potential of unions to change structures, agendas and activities internally and is also concerned with the activity of trade union representatives, officers and leaders. The institutional dimension comprises the internal systems, resources and capabilities of trade unions to operate effectively as organisations representing worker interests. Within the bounds of national settings, unions have strategic choice in deciding whether to focus their efforts on mobilizing members, increasing political and/or economic power, and the methods by which to do so within the limits of their institutional capacity.

Lévesque and Murray (2010) developed a complex model of 'power resources' and 'union capabilities' to explore important factors related to the internal competency of trade unions (see Figure 2.2). Their discussion focuses upon internal 'union renewal' and they state that the capacity model is important 'because it is these dimensions of union power, over which unions themselves have some degree of control' (p. 345). Whilst Lévesque and Murray do not explicitly reference Behrens' *et al.*'s work, this 'union capacity' model is clearly linked to the internal organisation and ability of trade

unions to influence the institutional dimension of revitalisation. Therefore, the model can be appropriately employed to explore institutional revitalisation. Below, this model is outlined and important debates and evidence are discussed. The discussion focuses on power resources, with reference to more abstract conceptions of capabilities where appropriate.

Figure 2.2: Lévesque and Murray’s Model of Union Capacity



Source: Lévesque and Murray 2010, p. 346.

The power resources identified as enabling institutional revitalisation (or union capability) are internal solidarity, network embeddedness, narrative resources and infrastructural resources.

### *Internal solidarity*

Internal solidarity consists of three factors: cohesive collective identities, deliberative vitality, and participation in union business. Cohesive collective identities refer to a ‘perception of a shared status or relation, either imagined or experienced directly...providing operational definitions of commonality’ (Lévesque and Murray 2010: 337). The development of shared social values has also been noted as important in relation to internal solidarity and may be an important antecedent of union activism (Fiorito *et al.* 2010, 2011, Gall and Fiorito 2011, Nissen 1998, Upchurch *et al.* 2009). The second factor, deliberative vitality is concerned with the inclusion of members and ‘the basic internal mechanisms of union representation: the presence and density of a network of union delegates or stewards or

representatives in the workplace' (Lévesque and Murray 2010: 338). Deliberative vitality also refers to the procedures, policies and communication that bind the union together to determine quality engagement. The final factor comprising internal solidarity is participation in union business, this includes attendance at union meetings, reading union materials, and voting in elections. Each of these aspects may be supported by greater network embeddedness.

### *Network embeddedness*

Network embeddedness, the second power resource relevant to institutional revitalisation, encompasses different levels of union organisation as well as relationships with external organisations. Consideration must be given to the degree of connectivity within the union, between unions, as well as with external community groups and organisations (Lévesque and Murray 2010: 339).

Networks have been identified as important sites to build interpersonal connections, for identity formation, and are key sources of information (Passy 2001, Diani and McAdam 2003). Klamer (2004: 149) highlights the importance of interaction and group membership in defining social values:

*Social values operate in the context of interpersonal relationship, groups, communities, and societies. People appeal to them in negotiating relationships with other people and groups of people. Social values have a broad range and comprise the values of belonging, being a member of a group (Walzer 1983), identity, social distinction, freedom, solidarity, trust, tolerance, responsibility, love, friendship and so on. In everyday conversations, these values preoccupy people far more than economic values.*

Social and cultural capital or capabilities are generated through social interaction (Saundry *et al.* 2006, Putnam 2000, Putnam *et al.* 1993, Sen 2004, Berger and Luckman 1966). Social and cultural capabilities may be beneficial to trade unions in terms of developing greater commitment to trade union distributive goals (Jarley 2005), and may be generated through network involvement.

Networks have also been identified as sites that enable the generation of collective resources (Antcliff *et al.* 2007). Networks are considered important, as an active involvement in networks can increase knowledge and social capital, information flows and thereby facilitate collaborative action (Grix 2002). They can also aid the

development of 'political capital', which refers to the ability of groups to act together against opposition (Warren 2003). Participation in networks may therefore help to generate activism through 'relational organising' which focuses on the development of relationships of a more social nature and a gradual introduction to union goals which can lead to support for trade union campaigns and propensity to join a union (Kitts 2000, Saundry and McKeown 2013).

Proponents of community-based unionism promote the development of links with organisations within and beyond the trade union movement to increase lobbying power (Wills 2001, 2007). For example, Wills (2003) argues for an approach beyond that of workplace or branch organisation, aimed at reducing unhelpful inter-union competitiveness, and supporting the development of network embeddedness. Heery *et al.* (2011, 2012) have also explored the potential of unions to work with civil society organisations (CSOs), such as charities, which are concerned with employment law, regulation and the well-being of workers, to lobby government. Involvement with such organisations may increase knowledge sharing and increase lobbying power.

Union networks can be categorised as either homogenous (union based) or heterogeneous (union and community based) and by the density of relations (defined by the frequency of interactions, the duration and intensity of relationships). These factors are also considered to be relevant to the 'success' of a network; for example studies have found that workplace networks were less effective in generating shared understandings and collective resources than professional or issue based networks (Martinez Lucio *et al.* 2009: 129, Antcliff *et al.* 2007). The use of electronic networks was also considered as a positive way to create dialogue and emancipatory organising spaces (Saundry *et al.* 2006, 2007, 2011), enabling the development of collective resources (Antcliff *et al.* 2007). External, or heterogeneous, networks may increase union lobbying power in terms of cultivating activism to increase union resources through coalition building (Diamond and Freeman 2002, Lee 2004). Whilst homogeneous networks were useful for developing strong workplace organisation and cohesion within an individual workplace or unions (Batstone *et al.* 1977, Fiorito *et al.* 2011), where networks were not workplace based this may increase the potential to further develop social values, social capital, and increase collective resources. Networks that were issue-based and heterogeneous were therefore

considered to be significant factors of institutional revitalisation as the development of increased ties to union activists was an important aspect in developing shared values and collectivism (Fiorito *et al.* 2011). It was therefore important to consider the nature and content of ULA networks and the potential of networks to aid institutional revitalisation.

#### *Narrative resources*

Narrative resources, such as tales of successful campaigning, improved gains at the workplace and individual success, are potential resources unions can utilise to engage and mobilise members and build union capability. Narrative resources may be utilised to impact upon the other dimensions of revitalisation by demonstrating positive outcomes for members, employers and to influence government policy. Narrative resources may relate to the 'relational organising' approach, put forward by Keown and Saundry (2013) which suggests developing social relationships and promoting union instrumentalism can enable recruitment and support for union campaigns. Narrative resources may therefore impact upon a union's ability to engage with new members and new employers and must be considered in relation to the framing of activity by union leaders as partnership or adversarial strategies, as we have discussed in the political and economic areas of ULA activity.

#### *Infrastructural resources*

Infrastructural resources consist of three dimensions: material resources (for example finance, office space and facility time); human resources, which refers not only to the number of activists but also 'the way the talents of activists and staff are mobilized to pursue union objectives' (Lévesque and Murray 2010: 340); and organisational practices, policies, procedures, and programmes. Infrastructural resources highlight the need for actors to have the 'aptitudes, competencies, abilities, social skills and know-how' (p.336) to utilise other power resources effectively and four key strategic capabilities that aid the building of union capacity are identified as collaborative action; active networks; framing of issues; and organisational learning. These capabilities highlight the need for unionists to work for each other, with clear goals, and for unions to have the potential to evolve and change. Therefore, in order to increase infrastructural resources, trained and

capable activists need financial support, facilities and facility time, organised under clear union strategies and inclusive union structures.

The institutional dimension, and Lévesque and Murray's model of union capacity, allows us to consider internal features of trade union organisation, and has indicated that activities, attitudes, resources, networks and relationships developed by union representatives may support capacity building.

### *Institutional revitalisation and the ULA*

Above a number of factors have been identified which are used to assess institutional revitalisation. Here, we discuss these concepts in relation to ULA activity.

### *Infrastructural resources*

Three factors are important in considering the potential of the ULA to impact upon infrastructural resources: material resources, human resources, and programme development. The ULA aims to provide learning opportunities to members for the purpose of enhancing skills but also promoting personal development and increasing member-union engagement. There has been a clear development in the allocation of material resources, particularly through government funding of ULF, Unionlearn, and in Wales, WULF and the WTUC-LS (Welsh arrangements are explored in Chapter 5). The financial dependency on government funding has been noted as a possible barrier to the sustainability of the ULA and critical commentators may be concerned that any allocation of material resources towards ULA activity rather than on grassroots organising will have negative impacts for union work in other areas (McIlroy and Croucher 2013). Yet, the development of a new type of workplace representative indicates a change in union human resources and the inclusion of ULRs in union structures and the expansion of learning activity represents a significant union agenda that has altered infrastructural resources.

As an infrastructural resource, the ULA has the potential to boost human resources by increasing the number of workplace representatives. Within Wales, over 2000 ULRs have been trained. However, a central question will be whether the role is being taken up by 'new' activists, who do not hold other union positions and whether these ULRs are active in their role. In considering whether the ULR role has provided greater resources a survey of ULRs in England found that six out of ten ULRs held



other union posts (Saundry *et al.* 2010). This indicates that the role is having some impact upon the number of new workplace representatives. Further research has identified 'hybrid reps', who take on more than one union role, and 'dedicated' ULRs, who focus on learning and education activity (Hoque and Bacon 2009) but the significance of this classification for revitalisation activity is unclear. Other research suggests that ULRs act as recruiters (Moore and Ross 2008, Munro and Rainbird 2000, 2004, Saundry *et al.* 2010) and ULRs are considered to be potential recruiters by union officers (Moore and Wood 2007), but whether this differs by ULR type (prior or new) has not been explored. With regard to infrastructure, we focused on human resources and asked who ULRs are (in terms of demographic and employment characteristics), whether they have previously held or currently hold other union roles. Internal solidarity

Integration within the union is a significant aspect of internal solidarity which is necessary for institutional revitalisation (Lévesque and Murray 2010), and therefore ULR participation in union activity and processes are an important consideration. Assessment of this factor is concerned with ULR integration into wider union activities, the role of education and learning officers, and the role of members in union activity. Member activity includes presence at union meetings, contact with representatives and the assimilation of the ULA with other union business. Some studies have questioned whether the ULA and ULRs are operating in separate circles to other unionists (Healy and Engel 2003, Donnelly and Kiely 2007), where ULRs operate outside existing union structures and do not increase their involvement in other union business (Alexandrou and O'Brien 2008, Moore and Wood 2007). The networks and relationships between ULRs and their union were not seen to be supporting the development of the ULA. As Healy and Engel found, a lack of integration and union support may be an obstacle to positive union outcomes:

*Too often there is still too little support for Union Learning Reps, too little redeployment of central union resources to advance their work and too little use of learning to recruit new members and bargain with employers.*

*(Healy and Engel 2003: 25)*

However, more recent evidence has also shown that engagement with learning activities can increase participation in union activity and lead to 'role escalation',

where new ULRs train to take on other union roles (Warhurst *et al.* 2007, Hollinrake *et al.* 2008). Case study research suggests that unions are making attempts to integrate the ULA into organising agendas, and many have developed national, regional and branch roles to support this integration (Moore and Wood 2004, Wallis *et al.* 2005, Moore 2009).

With reference to the ULA, cohesive collective identities may be forged through participation in learning activity that increases contact and socialisation between members and union activists and provides a basis of common experience. With regard to shared values, case study research of a Scottish teaching union indicated that ULRs were attracted to the role for 'collegiate' rather than individual motivations (Alexandrou and Davies 2006) that reflected social justice arguments for the development of member skill. Further, union learning centres (see section 2.2.2) can enhance the 'collective nature of learning' (Cassell and Lee 2007) and greater interactions between union members may develop 'shared values' and cohesive collective identities, contributing to internal solidarity.

With regard to the ULA we can ask whether internal solidarity is generating shared social values that result in role escalation, or whether ULRs are individually motivated, operating outside union structures.

#### *Network resources*

We noted above the importance of networks, internally within the union, at the workplace and with external organisations. With respect to the ULA, the development of networks based on learning may aid the development of shared social values, collaboration and solidarity and impact upon capacity building.

Whilst networks are understood to be central to the development of institutional revitalisation, they have not been the focus of ULA research. Some evidence suggests that ULRs are not integrated within their unions, whilst other work indicates that ULRs are successfully experiencing 'role escalation' (see above).

The ULA may also be relevant in promoting improved relationships with VET organisations, such as colleges and SSCs. The development of relationships around learning activity may increase union involvement in 'expert systems' (Wynne 1996, Payne 2001) which encourage the development of 'elite associations' (Blyton and

Jenkins 2012) that can increase political lobbying power. For example, where unions develop shared values with important actors, such as educational organisations, they may be better able to influence government and employer policies. The development of relationships through the ULA could lead to increased heterogeneity and greater external network embeddedness. As such consideration should be given to the potential to develop mutual links between organisations and CSOs involved in VET and education. The development of networks is considered to be an important feature of revitalisation and will be a central concern of the study at hand. What kind of networks are ULRs involved in? How embedded within unions are ULRs? What is the content and process of network interactions? We will therefore examine whether ULRs are involved in homogenous and heterogeneous networks and whether network activity contributes to institutional union revitalization.

### *Narratives and framing*

The development of narrative resources through the ULA is apparent in TUC and WTUC literature and research. Case studies indicate that positive accounts of individual learning outcomes (Unionlearn 2012) and employer engagement (Stuart *et al.* 2012) may increase the ability of unions to engage new member and new employers. The issue of narrative resources has been neglected in much of the earlier work on the ULA, but is linked to the framing of the ULA as an integrative, partnership-based agenda. The thesis contributes to the understanding of union narrative resources, examining narratives developed to legitimate the ULA and narratives developed as a result of ULA activity, and exploring the consequences of narrative approach for union engagement with government, employers and members.

### 2.3 Prospects for revitalisation

This chapter has used Behrens *et al.*'s (2004) framework of revitalisation to assess the development of the ULA, an important union policy initiative that has received considerable funding and resources. Additionally, Snape and Redman's (2004) model of union commitment behaviours has been utilised to explore the membership dimension of revitalisation and Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of union capacity has been utilised to explore the institutional dimension of revitalisation. The chapter has sought to consider what constitutes revitalisation and how this can be

assessed. Table 2.3 summarises the central arguments for and against revitalisation through the ULA that have been discussed within this chapter.

Striking critiques of the ULA from McIlroy (2008) and McIlroy and Croucher (2013) question the impact the ULA has had on all dimensions of the revitalisation model. The impact upon policymaking without strong collective frameworks and the TUC's acquiescence to perform an administrative role (particularly in relation to the ULF) reflect concerns related to political revitalisation. The potential of learning to attract new members and representatives is questioned, and the use of institutional resources (union time and funds) are thought to be best spent on socialist education programmes and organising campaigns. Further questions have also been raised about the benefits of integrative bargaining and a partnership approach (Stuart 1996), particularly within a regulatory environment that places few demands on employers to engage in VET activity (Lloyd and Payne 2006). Added to this are concerns that the ULA is operating in isolation from other union activity (Healy and Engel 2003, Alexandrou and O'Brien 2008, Moore and Wood 2007).

Consideration of the revitalisation and political governance literature has raised a number of questions and identified areas of activity that require further investigation. Firstly, the studies discussed above often focus on qualitative case studies of a particular workplace, union, region or industry. A number of surveys of ULRs have also been conducted. Bar a few studies on ULR work in Scotland, all of these studies have been exclusively focused on England, which may be a result of many studies being commissioned by the TUC and Unionlearn who are responsible for the ULA in England. However, the devolution of VET and arguments that a social democratic approach to governance exist in Wales means that the prospects for developing ULA activity should be assessed to further evaluate the relationship between ULA governance arrangements and trade union revitalisation.

In absolute terms the question is whether supportive political relations and union involvement in policy have been secured and whether the extraction of resources are occurring to support the ULA. In relative terms, is there evidence of divergence in VET policy design and implementation or extraction of ULA resources between Wales and England?

Table 2.3: Key arguments and indicators of revitalisation

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Endorsement</b>	<b>Critique</b>	<b>Revitalisation indicators</b>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership approach for greater policy involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of government agenda</li> <li>• Undermining union challenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to decision making processes</li> <li>• Increased influence in policy making</li> <li>• Extraction of government resources</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influencing employer behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing employer obligations</li> <li>• Integrative not distributive bargaining focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of bargaining arrangements</li> <li>• Development of workplace structures and resources</li> <li>• Substantive gains for workers</li> <li>• Union-employer relations</li> </ul>
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive to members</li> <li>• Develop opportunities for members to become active</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unattractive to members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased membership</li> <li>• Increased participation in workplace activity</li> <li>• Recruitment activity and methods of engagement</li> </ul>
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadening interests</li> <li>• Developing activists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverted resources away from organising and socialist education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal solidarity</li> <li>• Infrastructural resources</li> <li>• Narrative resources</li> <li>• Network embeddedness</li> </ul>

Secondly, research to date has only briefly considered ULR network engagement. Network engagement and embeddedness are important features of the revitalisation dimensions, and are particularly relevant to conceptions of institutional union capacity. Empirical evidence suggests that in order to have an impact on training practices and membership recruitment, ULRs should be incorporated in union structures, and should participate in workplace and branch trade union activity. Considerations of the relationship *between* unions have been marginal in ULR research. Whilst some studies have acknowledged multiple-unionism as a feature of union workplace organisation little is known about the nature of relationships between unions regarding learning activity.

Thirdly, the potential importance of learning activity for union and community engagement has largely been ignored. Notable exceptions focus particularly on the organisation and recruitment of ethnic minority or migrant workers through engagement with community groups (Fitzgerald 2007, Heyes 2009, Mustchin 2009). This thesis therefore explores whether the ULA can enable greater network embeddedness by assessing the groups and organisations that engage with the ULA. This may include educational providers and agencies, community centres such as libraries, or CSOs, which are highlighted by commentators supporting the development of community unionism through network embeddedness.

The aim of this thesis was to undertake an analysis of the ULA in Wales and consider the relationship between the ULA and trade union revitalisation, asking has the ULA contributed to revitalisation efforts? This involved an assessment of the political, membership, economic and institutional aspects of union activity and led to the following sub-questions. At the political level, has the ULA created structures and gained resources to support activity? Has devolution in Wales increased union involvement and capacity in policymaking arenas and enabled the extraction of resources supporting political revitalisation? At the institutional level, is activity generating human resources and is activity occurring beyond the workplace that allows the development of networks, narrative resources, and community engagement? Further, are unions collaborating or competing to deliver learning activity? At the membership level, is the ULA promoting economic exchange relationships or more fruitful social and covenantal relationships? At the economic level, are formal negotiations occurring and are procedural and substantive

workplace outcomes created? The methods used to explore these research questions are considered in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three: Research Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter considered the concept of trade union revitalisation and considered arguments on the potential of ULA to contribute to this process. This chapter details the research questions addressed and methodology used within this thesis. The choice of a mixed-methods strategy and the research approach is discussed. Survey, interview, observation and documentary analysis were chosen as the four key methods to evaluate the complex processes of revitalisation in relation to the ULA. The methodology is discussed, detailing the construction of research tools, sampling methods and the techniques of analysis, beginning with the quantitative survey before considering the qualitative elements. To conclude, ethical considerations, questions of quality, authenticity and reliability, and the limitations of the research approach used are all addressed.

### 3.2 Research Questions

The central question of this thesis was as follows: How and to what extent is the ULA supporting the revitalisation of the trade union movement in Wales?

The aim of this study was to evaluate the relationship between the ULA and union revitalisation within Wales. Research has shown that ULRs and unions are impacting upon the provision of training at the workplace and engaging workers in further learning activity across the UK (for example, Haunch and Bennet 2002, McBride and Mustchin 2007, Bacon and Hoque, 2008, 2009). There is also evidence of benefits to employers, workers, and some evidence of benefits to unions (for example, Moore and Ross 2008, Cassell and Lee 2007, Findlay *et al.* 2007, Warhurst *et al.* 2007, Rainbird and Stuart 2011). Yet the potential of the ULA to contribute to revitalisation has been questioned (McIlroy 2008, McIlroy and Croucher 2013, Rainbird and Stuart 2011, Forrester and Payne 2006, Stroud 2008, Davies 2008). The thesis intervenes in this debate by examining outcomes of the ULA in relation to political, economic, membership and institutional revitalisation in Wales.



An evaluation of trade union revitalisation involves an assessment of the four dimensions of union strength. This research therefore evaluated ULA impacts on political engagement and influence, workplace union activity, membership engagement and internal resources and capabilities. In assessing whether the ULA has impacted upon political revitalisation, prior literature and research discussed in the preceding chapters indicates that consideration must be paid to the structures, relationships, policy and practice through which unions and governments interact. Key indicators of ULA political revitalisation included access to policy making, the ability to extract resources from government and the ability to influence government policy making. With regard to economic or workplace arrangements, the ULA may be deemed successful where substantive and procedural outcomes benefit workers as a result of interaction between unions and employers. Whether the ULA is contested through bargaining or consultative mechanisms was also of interest, as was the perception of management attitudes to trade unions. Key indicators of economic revitalisation included management support for the ULA, and the development of collective agreements, procedural mechanisms and substantive gains for workers.

To assess membership engagement, the practices of ULRs, their recruitment activity and their activism were identified as significant areas for membership revitalisation (Snape and Redman 2004). It was therefore important to consider how ULRs interact with members around learning and training and whether or not ULRs were recruiting new members and new activists. Internal resources and capabilities were used to assess institutional revitalisation, guided by Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of trade union capacity. This involved assessing the make-up and content of ULR networks not only within unions but between unions and between unions and other organisations.

The methods used to make these assessments and explore the research questions are described below.

### 3.3 Research Design and Methodology

The research methodology employed within this thesis is mixed-method. In this section, the benefits of a mixed-method approach are discussed before considering the reasons why specific quantitative and qualitative methods were used to explore the research questions in this study. The methods are discussed in relation to the

research questions, highlighting the purpose of employing each method to evaluate various aspects of union activity and revitalisation.

Mixed method research involves the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research instrument within a single research project (Bergmann 2008, Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003, Creswell and Plano Clark 2008). Mixed method research aims to integrate and combine different kinds of data and analysis in an attempt to increase the degree of sophistication of both research and evaluation. Mixed methods research involves utilising different methods or different sources in order to provide greater understanding of data that is enhanced beyond information generated from only one source (Blaikie 2000, Hammersley 2008). A number of reasons may be given for utilising mixed-methods, including 'complementarity' of quantitative and qualitative approaches, guided by positivist and interpretivist paradigms respectively, which can be used to explore different aspects of a social question (Irwin 2006). This position supports the distinction of qualitative and quantitative enquiry as able to inform parallel, yet inherently distinct questions and can be used to elaborate, or illustrate any explanation of a given phenomenon despite the approaches having different theoretical and philosophical foundations (Bryman and Bell 2011, Fielding and Schreier 2001, Kelle 2001, Mason 2006).

Another approach to the use of mixed-methods rejects assertions that quantitative and qualitative methods are necessarily tied to theoretical paradigms or positions (Halfpenny 1997, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, Olsen 2004). Here, combining different data and analytic strategies involves rejecting assertions that 'conflicting epistemological and ontological assumptions are *necessarily* built into the use of specific methods' (Hammersley 2008:29). Whilst qualitative and quantitative research methods are often associated with interpretivist or positivist approaches to investigation, it is recognised that much qualitative work goes into the formation of quantitative tools, and similarly quantitative work often informs qualitative research (Brady *et al.* 2004).

Utilising a mixture of methods in evaluating social phenomena is also supported by pragmatists, who argue that theoretical positions may be forsaken for practical reasons within the research process, and therefore the choice of research methods should be guided by the research question(s) rather than by philosophical understandings of the social world. This approach to using mixed-methods was

employed within this study to explore revitalisation and the ULA. It is accepted that there are strengths and weaknesses in adopting quantitative and qualitative approaches (Brady *et al.* 2004, Bergman 2008), and research methodology should be based upon the research questions and context (Brannen 2005:10). As Mason states, the 'logic for choosing which methods to select from the palette [of research tools] should ... be governed by the questions that drive the research' (2006: 14).

Therefore, the strength and weaknesses in using different methods to answer the research questions must be considered. Using multiple methods may aim to reduce the limitations associated with a particular single approach. For example, survey and interview data may be used to explore the same issues, providing wide-ranging quantitative data to make generalisations, and utilising interview data to illustrate particular issues by exploring individual experience and beliefs. In this way different sources of data are used to corroborate evidence and allow generalisations to be made, maximising the strengths of each method in order to increase the confidence in and the credibility of conclusions. Mixed-methods may be used to increase the validity of findings. Qualitative research can be more developmental and flexible in nature with concepts and areas of investigation emerging throughout the research process. Qualitative methods can tell us much about personal experiences which can be utilised to generate understandings of social processes beyond an individual level (Lawler 2002, Mason 2006). Quantitative research is more deductive by nature, with research questions fixed then analysed with little flexibility permitted after construction and delivery of a survey. Though qualitative research may also be systematic, there is greater rigidity associated with quantitative examination. However, quantitative methods such as large-scale survey research can target large populations beyond the practical bounds of qualitative analysis and produce more generalisable results due to the number of participants that can be included in the research. Quantitative data may also be used as a point of comparison, for example to consider the differences between groups, or contexts, thereby providing scope for enhanced generalisation. The combination of quantitative survey method and a range of qualitative methods are employed in this study to explore the ULA and the processes associated with revitalisation. Below, the methods, the reasons for employing them, and the issues they are used to consider are discussed, beginning with the development of a quantitative survey. The four key methods are utilised with

reference to each dimension of revitalisation, indicating where methods explore similar and/or different issues.

### *Quantitative methods*

Firstly, in order to understand the broad picture of ULA activity across Wales, a quantitative survey method was deemed appropriate to gather information from a large population. A survey is an efficient resource, which allows for generalisations to be made on the basis of representativeness (Bryman and Bell 2011). The survey method allowed for a wide population to be reached that allowed for the identification or confirmation of patterns of association. A primary survey was constructed and distributed to all ULRs registered with the WTUC. The decision to focus on ULRs was taken as they possess key knowledge about their activity and experiences and are key actors for institutional, economic and membership revitalisation. The survey evidence provided the basis for an assessment of ULR activity and ULR impacts and allowed us to explore associations between actions and union building processes (see Table 3.1). The survey also allowed for the consideration of the demographic characteristics of ULRs and their workplaces. However, survey methods alone are not sufficient to provide a full understanding of the processes of revitalisation.

Factors deemed important in explaining the success of ULRs in developing workplace learning and training activity were identified through a survey of the literature. These factors included: union experience; workplace characteristics; industry characteristics; support from management and trade unions; workplace facilities; time spent on the role and integration within networks. ULRs were also asked whether they performed a number of activities in relation to communication and bargaining with management, types of training they organised for employees, recruitment activity, community activity, union involvement (before and after taking on the ULR role) and satisfaction with union and management support. These items were established as important aspects of the union representative roles and the success of the ULA in the literature, as well as being confirmed as important issues through the observation of training and network meetings that occurred prior to the development of the survey. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 50 questions that relate to the ULR role, workplace characteristics, learning and training activity, bargaining mechanisms and impacts, union integration and network involvement

(See Table 3.1, and Appendix A), which relate to the institutional, economic and membership dimensions of revitalisation.

Within the survey instrument membership revitalisation is measured by successful recruitment of new members by ULRs, representing economic and social exchange identified by Snape and Redman (2004). Institutional revitalisation is measured by successful recruitment of new representatives by ULRs (which represents covenantal exchange), improved branch organisation and attendance at union meetings. Economic revitalisation is measured by collective bargaining on learning, negotiation activity and relationships with management. These variables only partially capture elements of the complex multi-factor revitalisation dimensions and relationships. However, they are important indicators of the strength of trade union organisation within each area. Political revitalisation of trade unions was considered an inappropriate area to research through the survey method as this type of activity is unlikely to occur at the level of workplace representative and is likely to remain in the domain of central union business.

#### *Questionnaire delivery*

The questionnaire was sent out by post to 1,218 ULRs on the WTUC database in June 2011. Details for all ULRs trained in Wales are held on the database and therefore the total population of ULRs in Wales was sampled. Despite concern over low response rates from postal surveys (Bryman and Bell 2011), the nature of the information held by the WTUC meant that more ULRs could be reached by this form of delivery than by electronic delivery, as email addresses held on the WTUC database were incomplete. Concerns were also raised surrounding lack of computer skills and/or access to emails as a potential barrier to inclusion by WTUC workers that could reduce response rates. There was the potential for emails to be blocked, particularly in some public sector workplaces. The physical nature of the questionnaire also meant that it was easy to distribute at ULA events.

Table 3.1: Questionnaire data

	Issue	Coding
ULR role:	Performance of activities as part of the role: including dealing with management, learning activity, recruitment, promoting the union.	Yes = 1, No = 0
Workplace impacts:	Perceived impact on workplace training practices and funding, learning agreement, training and appraisal systems.	Positive impact = 1, Negative impact=-1.
Union impacts:	Perceived impact on branch organisation, meeting attendance, membership levels	Positive impact = 1, Negative impact=-1.
Dealing with management	Formal meetings with management; negotiation with management; learning committee; extension of collective bargaining	Yes = 1, No = 0
Communicating with employees	Types of communication methods: email, noticeboards and so on.	Yes = 1, No = 0
Workplace activity	Training organised at the workplace Learning organised at the workplace Learning centre established	Yes = 1, No = 0 Yes = 1, No = 0 Yes = 1, No = 0
Recruitment activity	Recruited members Recruited representatives	Yes = 1, No = 0 Yes = 1, No = 0
Community activity	Extended learning activity	Yes = 1, No = 0
Union involvement	Length of time as member Length of time as ULR Activism level Willingness to organise Participation in union networks: branch, regional, and union. Participation in NoE	Years Years Very active = 4, to inactive = 0 Very willing = 4, to not interested = 0 Yes = 1, No = 0 Yes = 1, No = 0

Table 3.1 continued.

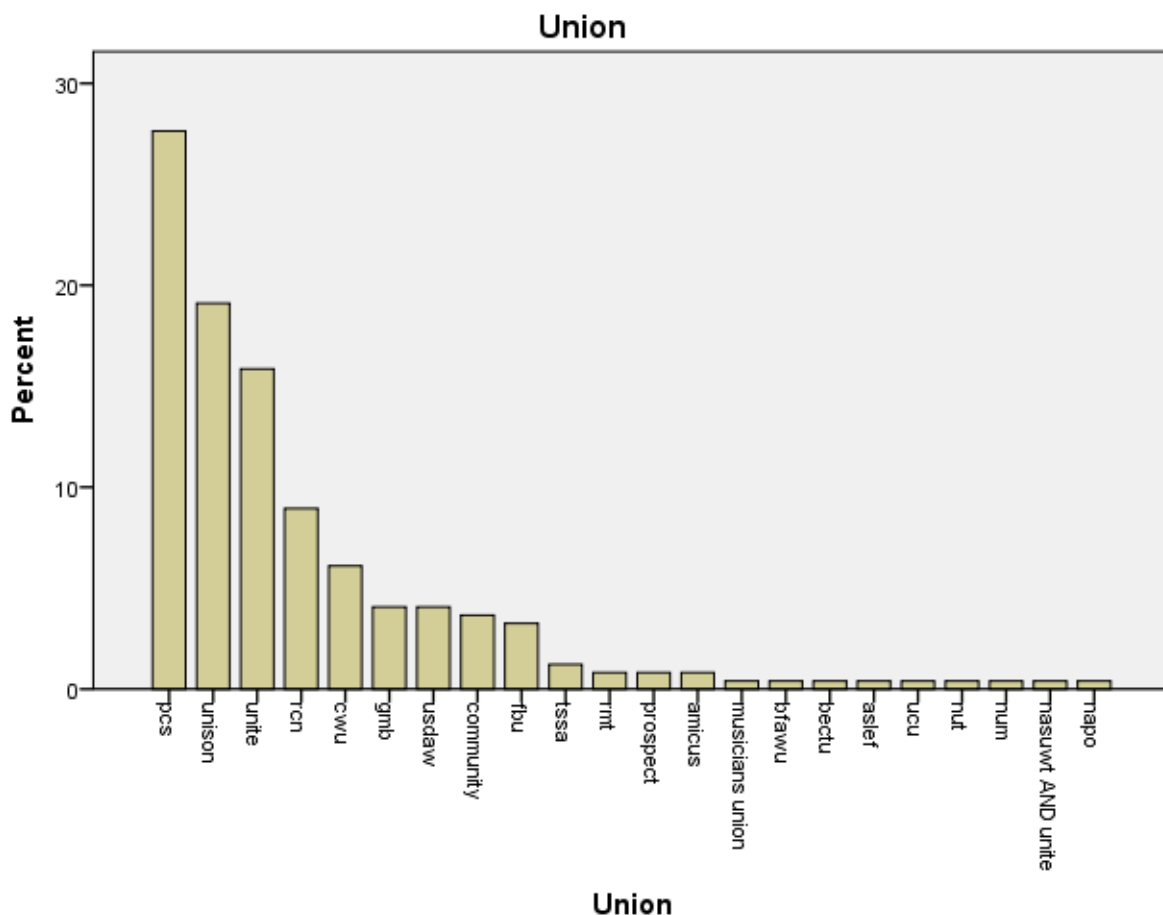
Satisfaction with union and management support	Level of satisfaction with management, branch union, regional union, WTUC.	Very satisfied = 4, to very dissatisfied = 0
Demographics	Age Gender Full-time, part-time, fixed term or permanent contract Ethnicity	Years Female = 1, Male =0 Yes= 1, No=0 White=1, Other=0
Workplace context	Number of employees Union recognition Sector Union density Union stability Partnership agreement	N Yes = 1, No = 0 Public = 1, Private = 0 Scale, 1=0-20% to 5=100% Scale, 1= unstable, 5=very stable Yes = 1, No = 0

A number of steps were taken to maximise participation that have been identified as appropriate strategies (Edwards *et al.* 2002). These included posting a second batch of questionnaires in September 2011, passing questionnaires to ULRs at network meetings and other events, advertising the survey in the NoE newsletter, and snowballing. Snowballing was deemed appropriate as the characteristics for participation were well-defined (ULRs working in Wales) and ULRs could increase response rates by including only ULRs not on the WTUC database, known as hidden populations (Morgan 2008). Hidden populations may include ULRs who are performing the role but have not yet had the opportunity to train or ULRs who were trained outside Wales. A prize draw was also arranged shortly after both rounds of postal deliveries, with an incentive of book tokens offered in an attempt to raise response rates.

By December 2011, 258 questionnaires had been received. However, 12 surveys were returned uncompleted because of retirement or incorrect contact information. Excluding these returns, the response rate was 20 per cent. Whilst this may seem

low, other recent surveys of ULRs undertaken in England received 12 and 14 per cent response rates (Bacon and Hoque 2009, Saundry *et al.* 2010). Other surveys, generally on a smaller scale, have obtained higher response rates, one gaining 37 per cent (Hollinrake *et al.* 2008). In all, 22 unions were represented in the survey returns. Figure 3.1 indicates that PCS, Unison and UNITE dominated, accounting for 63 per cent of the sample.

Figure 3.1: Trade unions represented in survey returns



Source: Question 14, ULR Survey.

### Data management

The questionnaire responses were inputted into SPSS, a statistical analysis software package. Returned surveys were marked with identification numbers and corresponding identification numbers used to label the dataset cases. This enabled a review of the data entered that ensured the accurate transfer of responses. Non-



responses (where participants did not answer questions) were coded as missing data items.

The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics are used in the following chapters to identify demographics, activities and reported experiences. Inferential methods, namely chi<sup>2</sup> tests, provide information on relationships between constructs and whether there are significant patterns of association. The significance value chosen to indicate a statistically significant relationship was if the probability value was below  $p < .01$  (Pallant 1998, Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Significance was also reported where the probability value was below  $p < .05$  and  $p < .1$ , indicating a weak relationship between variables.

### *Qualitative methods*

Much of the qualitative literature on the ULA has focused particularly on one union, one region, or one workplace. Whilst some case study research into the Scottish ULF and professional development has been undertaken (Alexandrou 2008), the majority of ULA research has focused on England, and we indicated in Chapter 2, there has been a lack of analysis of activity in Wales. This is deemed to be important due to the distinct governance arrangements in place within the UK as a result of the devolution of VET responsibility to the Welsh Government.

A number of qualitative methods were deemed useful to further elaborate on the issues covered by the survey, as well as to gain understanding of political revitalisation and network content that were not covered within the survey. These methods included observation, interview and documentary research. The sites of observation included ULR training courses, network meetings, WTUC conferences and events, and workplace learning events. Interviews, with ULRs and senior trade union actors, and documentary analysis on network archives were also used. The methods and the analysis of this qualitative data is described below.

### *Observation*

Observation formed a key element in this project and was chosen in order to provide greater understanding of the activities and concerns of ULA actors in Wales within organic settings. Observation provided access into the world of ULRs and provided

insight into systems of argument. A number of sites of observation were chosen including observation of ULR training, ULA networks meetings, conferences and events, in order to explore understandings and processes involved in the ULA, focusing particularly on ULRs, but including external actors, WTUC workers and union officers. These sites of observation are events at which union activists interact with one another and can form the basis of meaning-making and identity-construction, providing access to 'real life' processes and actions (Bryman and Bell 2011). Observation has the further advantage of potentially being unstructured. Whilst our other four research methods are guided by structured decisions on the part of the researcher, observation has 'the potential to yield unique sources of insight and introspection' (Axinn and Pearce 2006: 8). Therefore, unstructured observation was chosen as a research strategy, which unlike structured observation does not follow systematic rules for recording behaviour but aims to record as much detail as possible regarding the content of observation.

Rather than selecting a case study approach within a single workplace or specific union setting, as other projects have done, observation aimed to gather data across a breadth of unions, workplaces and issues, as well as to assess the nature of ULA networks. Assessment of union network activity was considered important in understanding the wider networks that the ULA has generated or supported, which workplace-based research has neglected, and is identified as an important area for consideration in all dimensions of revitalisation, particularly the institutional dimension.

Details of the observation fieldwork are listed in Table 3.2. Approximately 180 hours of ULA activity was observed in a number of different settings. The samples for the observation sessions were defined by attendance at training, network meetings, events and conferences. My presence was acknowledged in each setting but my participation in the process of the fieldwork was consciously limited and I excluded myself from interactions to allow formal sessions to flow as organically as possible. I took detailed minutes of the sessions, aiming to capture as much of the dialogue, content and interactions as possible. Breaks between sessions were used to interact with participants and gain further information. This process also included discussions after sessions and occasionally during journeys to or from venues. These interactions allowed insight into the experiences of ULRs, officers, WTUC staff and

learning providers. Any information of note would be recorded as soon as possible after conversations in order to maintain the integrity of the data (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Table 3.2: Observation data

	Number of sessions	Number of hours	Participants
WTUC ULR Training Course	10	60	Trainee ULRs, education provider, WTUC staff
WTUC ULR Conferences and other WTUC events	5	52	ULRs, union officer, education providers, WTUC staff, external speakers, employers, WG officials.
Networks of Excellence meetings	11	55	ULRs, education providers, WTUC staff, external speakers
PCS ULR Conference	1	6	PCS ULRs and officers, WTUC staff, education providers
Learning at Work days	2	8	ULRs, workers, education providers
Total	28	179	-

In almost all scenarios I was introduced to the groups and the intention of my presence was stated. This included informing participants that I would be keeping a record of the activities and conversations and that if they required information to be kept confidential then they should request that conversations remained off the record. Providing reassurance in this manner was done in order to ensure that ULRs felt comfortable in speaking freely. Exceptions included large conferences, to which I had been granted access by the WTUC, where this sort of notification was deemed impractical. In these situations I made clear the purpose of my presence with those whom I interacted. In all cases, detailed notes were taken during the sessions. In addition, further notes were made after any observation session to ensure any items missed were recorded, or for which further detail had been obtained in conversations during the day.

Due to the numbers involved in many of the observed events, it was felt that tape-recording would be unmanageable and that video recording would be intrusive and complex to undertake. Therefore, notes were handwritten and recorded my own impressions and interpretations of the occurrences as well as verbatim quotes.

ULR training courses were observed to provide understanding of the content of training, as well as developing an understanding of the motivations and goals of ULRs. Observation was carried out to pursue three main aims: assessing the content of the training, gaining a perspective on experiences of ULRs and motivations of ULRs. Two WTUC organised ULR training courses were observed at two different colleges in South Wales. The courses consisted of five of days classroom based teaching, over a period of five weeks. Completion of the training certifies participants to act as ULRs within workplaces with union recognition. Observation of training was deemed important to understand the experiences of ULRs, the expectations developed during training, and the content of the training. Direct observation was employed for the first ULR training group in order to allow understanding of the content of training. Within the second training group, full participant observation was employed and I took part as a trainee ULR. However, I was conscious that the main purpose was to observe. I therefore limited my interactions during the teaching sessions to allow the teacher and group to lead the discussions and reduced any influence my presence had on the content of the sessions, in line with 'simple observation' practices (Bryman and Bell 2011). During breaks and after sessions I freely communicated with the trainees to garner a greater understanding of the nature of their workplaces, motivations for undergoing training, and expectations of the role. I also used breaks to explore issues that were raised during the sessions, for example, when a trainee mentioned that the training of a colleague had gained re-employment, or a significant meeting with management had occurred, this could be followed up with queries about these situations.

Secondly, WTUC conferences and events were observed in order to explore the content and aims of such events. WTUC ULR conferences are held annually, and are attended by approximately 250 individuals, including ULRs, union officers and education providers. It runs over two days, with many workshops and sessions aimed to develop ULR knowledge and skills. Conferences have keynote speakers, including WG ministers, as well as more social aspects, such as the conference

dinner. Events included a stakeholder event held annually at which the ULR of the Year Award is presented and the delegation is addressed by WTUC staff and a number of other speakers, including managers engaged in the ULA. Another included the promotion of the new round of WULF projects and was hosted by Cardiff Bus.

Thirdly, a substantial number of ULA network meetings were attended. The Networks of Excellence is run by a dedicated WTUC project officer, and meets quarterly in venues in North, South, West and Mid Wales. It is open to unions, education providers and interested parties and aims to support ULR activities, create links to employers and develop ULR skills through face-to face meetings. NoE activity is described more fully in Chapters 4 and 11. Finally, I was invited to attend a PCS ULR conference, and two 'Learning at work' day events. Much like the WTUC conferences, the PCS one-day conference involved speakers and workshop sessions. The 'Learning at work' day events took place in a large public sector organisation and training 'taster' sessions were attended, discussions held with the ULRs, and the learning centre was visited. (The learning centre at Cardiff Bus was also visited as part of a stakeholder event).

### *Documentary research*

Documentary materials were collected primarily to evaluate the nature of the information that ULRs receive and the activities they undertake. Documentary material was collected from two sources NoE meeting minutes and the NoE newsletter, NetNews, as underexplored ULA resources.

The WTUC-LS produced an electronic newsletter, NetNews, which was explored as a key source of information exchange. Network meeting minutes were also utilised to explore the content of network meetings, and to verify information from observed NoE meetings (Plowright 2011).

The primary source of documentary material was the NoE newsletter, NetNews, which is distributed at least once monthly by email by the NoE project officer at the WTUC. NetNews contains information and material sent to the NoE project officer by ULRs, learning and education providers, trade unions and other organisations. NetNews is sent to over 600 recipients. During the period of analysis (December

2009 to March 2011), 33 NetNews documents were collected. The content of NetNews was explored primarily in relation to training types, though a number of themes arose through the analysis process.

Agendas and minutes of NoE meetings were the second type of documentary material that were collected. These records of NoE meetings show the participants in attendance, and provide a summary of the content of the meetings. They were used to supplement information gathered from observation and to identify the content of meetings that could not be attended by the researcher.

### *Interviews*

Interview methods allow the drawing out of information that can be directed towards the researcher's particular needs (Bryman and Bell 2011). Interviews were used in order to gather information on union officer activities, experiences, perceptions and opinions. Interviews were held with key respondents to explore the patterns of activity and association that had been identified throughout the research process, gaining understanding of the experiences of significant actors in the ULA.

Selection of interview participants for the project was purposive (Bryman and Bell 2011). It was decided to focus on senior union officers. Officers are key actors in developing the ULA within unions, are key to supporting ULR activity, and thus are central to, and have a deep understanding of, the ULA.

Four interviews were conducted between September and November 2012 with union officers. Six further interviews were conducted with ULRs and TUC staff in August and September 2014. These supplementary interviews particularly allowed further exploration of the relationship between unions and government in relation to political revitalisation as well as issues related to economic, membership and institutional revitalisation.

The Officers, three of whom were women, represented large and medium sized unions operating in the public and/or private sectors with regional offices in Wales. Two ULRs had been trainees within the observed ULR training sessions and two were active members of the ULA community. One member of senior staff at the TUC and WTUC were each interviewed to explore differences in the political settings. The

research ethics process meant that interviewees were asked to sign confidentiality consent forms. There is a high potential for disclosure of identity due to the relatively small size of the officer population in Wales and the small number of TUC/WTUC staff working on the ULA, therefore the details revealed about these participants are necessarily scant to avoid their identification.

All interviews were semi-structured, using questioning techniques that allowed the participants to convey their own perspectives. Interviews were structured using themes to guide the researcher that focused on the four main elements of revitalisation: membership; institutional; economic and political. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were conducted in a setting of the interviewee's choice. The aim of this was to encourage participants to feel comfortable and empowered during the interview process, allowing them to freely express themselves (Bryman and Bell 2011). Two interviews were conducted by telephone due to limited time and geographical location. All interviews were recorded and electronically transcribed. The iterative themes that were used to guide the interviews can be found in the Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Interview schedule

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Membership</i></b></p> <p>Impact on membership, recruitment, and participation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Economic</i></b></p> <p>Relationship with managers Bargaining with employers</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Institutional</i></b></p> <p>Impact on internal capacity Union support and networks</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Political</i></b></p> <p>Relationship with WG Relationship with Westminster Policy involvement and development</p>

### *Qualitative analysis*

Observation notes were taken free hand and were electronically transcribed as close to the time of observation as possible. Due to the number of participants involved in sessions, using recording equipment and the transcription of data would have been unmanageable and intrusive. All material from interviews, observation and newsletters were transferred to QSR Nvivo8, a qualitative software package.

Table 3.3: Qualitative data thematic codes

Revitalisation dimension	Code	Types of information
Economic	Training, learning and development	Training and learning activity; apprenticeships; job opportunities; trade union courses
	Workplace issues	Opinion of management; management support; bargaining mechanisms; facilities; barriers
Political	Political issues	References to political arrangements; comparisons between UK/England and Wales; WG initiatives
Membership	Member relations	Recruitment activity, learner narratives, participation and commitment.
Institutional	Union relations	Union support and activity, joint working, union competition.
	Campaigning	Union, economic, community, environmental campaigning activity
	Community	Community activities, links to other organisations, external relations

Thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the qualitative data because this allowed structured and guided exploration (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Thematic analysis



involves a number of stages. Firstly, the data were read and re-read to generate familiarity with the contents. This was important as a significant period of time might have passed since the collection of the data before analysis began. Codes were then developed, driven by the data itself and prior research evidence and theory. Codes were then arranged into themes, and the content of these themes assessed, noting patterns and variations within the themes. This approach enabled themes of political, economic, membership and institutional revitalisation to be explored. A summary of coda can be found in Table 3.3.

The data were thoroughly coded in Nvivo and once this was completed, thematic analysis began. Each thematic group was considered and important issues were identified, and are discussed in the analytic chapters that follow.

#### *Using a mixed-methods approach*

The aim of this study was to explore ULA activity and revitalisation processes and outcomes and it was felt the best way to achieve this was through a mixed-method study that can provide a picture of ULA activity and experiences that allow judgements to be made on the relevance of activity and the processes to revitalisation. Above, the methods employed, the construction of the survey and qualitative processes and the types of data that were generated in relation to our four areas of revitalisation were discussed. A summary of the information provided to analyse the research questions is presented below.

To examine the political dimension, quantitative methods were considered less important, as assessment here was evaluated through influencing policy, providing access to decision making circles and the nature of relationships between unions and government, which were not easily measured or captured through quantitative investigation. A survey instrument was deemed unlikely to reveal ULA impacts on influences in policymaking or the relationship with Welsh government. Senior union actors involved in the VET governance structures were identified and union officers and WTUC and TUC staff were the most appropriate actors. Interviews were therefore the central means by which to develop an understanding of the political dimension of revitalisation. Interviewees provided information on the relationship

between trade unions and governing political parties, information on policy development and inclusion, and policy outcomes.

To explore the economic dimension survey, interview and observation methods and observation inform the analysis. Much of the research work on the ULA to date has focused on economic impacts, assessing whether programmes such as ULF, or the presence of ULRs are leading to substantive outcomes for workers or changes in employer behaviour (e.g Wood and Moore 2005, Hoque and Bacon 2008). Research has also considered the nature of learning agreements as bargaining tools (Wallis and Stuart 2007), often expressing a concern over partnership discourses through which employer needs dominate. Three key areas of workplace environment, procedures and outcomes were explored. Survey data enabled a broad assessment of the workplace location of ULRs, the spread and type of ULA bargaining and the nature of employer relations. Qualitative data from observation and interviews also provided information about workplace procedures, outcomes and management relations. Therefore qualitative and quantitative data are used to complement and enhance each other by providing information on the same issues.

To explore the membership dimension, we assessed recruitment activity through the ULA which required numeric data, and also considered the processes by which ULRs recruit members and participate in union activity. Membership revitalisation was therefore explored through the survey in terms of quantifying membership recruitment, but the survey also examined the activities that ULRs use to engage with employees. The qualitative data again develops our understanding of the processes of membership revitalisation by providing supplementary accounts of engagement and recruitment activity. Observation and interview evidence was also used to explore issues around engagement and recruitment.

Institutional revitalisation entails a complex assessment of infrastructural resources, internal solidarity, network embeddedness and narrative resources. We explored network activity and inter-union relationships as important aspects of institutional revitalisation through both quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Survey methods were primarily used to explore infrastructural resources, and network embeddedness by examining the types of networks that ULRs were accessing. Qualitative investigation was valued to provide insights into the nature of relationships between ULRs, unions and other actors, as well as the content and experiences of ULR training and the

NoE. Observation and documentary analysis were felt to be the most effective ways to explore network content and the development of external (i.e. not workplace or union specific) activities and relationships, particularly as this had not been a significant aspect of ULA research to date. Narrative resources were explored through observation and interview, which provide understandings of the framing of the ULA, for example as a partnership or adversarial agenda.

Therefore, mixed methods were used both separately and in combination to explore different aspects of the ULA impact on revitalization. The combination of methods allowed different questions to be explored as well as the same questions. The use of mixed-methods is therefore pragmatic, seeking to evaluate revitalisation and the ULA as specified by the research questions, rather than seeking complementarity between quantitative and qualitative methods as inherently different practices (Hammersley 2008).

### 3.5 Considerations of credibility, validity, reliability and ethics

Qualitative and quantitative methods are often judged according to different criteria, in line with the positivist and interpretivist ontological positions with which they are associated. Judgements of the quality of quantitative research include generalizability, content (or internal) validity and external validity. Judgements on the quality of qualitative research are less preoccupied with the generalizability of findings and are more concerned with notions of credibility and authenticity (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

The survey, observation and interview data yielded evidence that was representative of the activities and experiences of active ULRs working within Wales. The snowballing technique and promotion of the questionnaire at WTUC events means that the data is likely to over-sample ULRs that are active within the trade union movement. This is not considered to be a barrier to the use of the data as we wish to explore connections between the ULA and activism.

Conducting the interviews at the end of the data collection process enabled me to establish a reputation and relationship with the union officers involved. This meant that the interviews could be conducted in a manner which allowed them to be open and honest as I believe we had developed mutual trust. By developing relationships

over an extended period of time the understanding of processes and experiences can have greater depth than information that is gathered from one source, at one particular moment. This also increases the explanatory power of the findings of qualitative analysis. Furthermore, as many of the participants would return to conferences or network meetings it was often possible to develop a picture of relationships in a workplace over time, in particular situations and of ULR experiences. Some of the ULRs involved in the initial training were also involved in later observation sessions. This further developed the credibility and authenticity of the accounts given within the thesis.

In order to maintain ethical standards in research, the well-being of research participants and their voluntary participation must be assured. It is important when conducting research that participants contribute freely and willingly, and that any conditions of participation are maintained. To comply with ethical standards, the information accompanying the questionnaire informed the recipients that data collected would remain confidential and anonymity was assured. This was also done to encourage participation. Names and contact details given for the prize draws were removed from the questionnaires, stored securely, and destroyed after a specified date. The respondents were under no obligation to participate and did so freely. Further, in order to ensure that the confidentiality of WTUC databases was maintained the questionnaires were delivered to the WTUC and addressed and posted by WTUC staff.

Steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of observation and interview participants. Interviewees signed an interview consent form, explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and the expectations of them as participants (for example, the amount of time needed), as well as assuring confidentiality. Any names given herein are pseudonyms, and details that may disclose an individual's identity have been excluded.

The WTUC granted access to conferences, network meetings and events for the purposes of observation. To ensure information could be shared freely, in order to minimise any effect of my presence, NoE members were informed that information gathered would remain confidential and were able to ask that I exclude information from my notes. This occurred on one occasion. I was asked by a delegate to stop

taking notes for a short period of time. The content of the discussion will not be reported or disclosed.

### 3.6 Reflection and Limitations

The project is limited practically by the time restraints placed on investigation defined by the term of PhD study. It is also limited by funding.

The use of methods such as postal surveys is costly, as is travel involved in case study or interview work. Qualitative and quantitative methods are time intensive, and involve careful construction of research tools, delivery, collection and analysis of data. Whilst these issues were taken into consideration when constructing the research design it was felt that mixed methods would provide greater evidence of the experiences of ULRs and were necessary to explore different aspects of revitalisation. It was felt that mixed methods would aid explanation of the issues identified in existing research as well as allow any emergent themes to develop.

Criticisms of qualitative research include the validity or generalizability of findings. In order to diminish the strength of these criticisms qualitative research must be critically reflexive. Qualitative researchers must be systematic and rigorous to ensure valid and reliable conclusions are made. Evaluations of qualitative research involve consideration of several processes including definition of the research question, research methods, transparency of procedures and analysis, presentation of results, values and ethics. It was therefore important to be systematic in the collection and analysis of data, which was aided by the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic coding of the qualitative data collected. It was also important to ensure that examples and illustrations used from the data were accurate representations of occurrences.

The response rate for the survey is acceptable for quantitative analysis, in terms of mathematical assumptions/criteria that must be met in order to perform correlation analysis and in terms of the ability to project dominant findings identified in the analysis as generalisable (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). The data are considered representative of the total population of ULR activity in Wales. Whilst a large proportion of respondents were from three unions, this reflects the size of the unions as well as the importance attributed to the ULA within these unions. However, the findings may not be generalizable beyond Wales due to the perceived importance of

political relationships and institutional supports for revitalisation. However, themes, processes and relationships identified may be useful in guiding future research and understanding different contexts.

### 3.7 Summary

In this chapter we have identified the primary research question: Is the ULA supporting the revitalisation of the trade union movement in Wales? The methodology of the project has been introduced as following a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative instruments that are deemed necessary to gain understanding of the complex processes associated with revitalisation. The use of survey data has been acknowledged as a useful tool that can generate generalizable data and explore a broad array of ULR activity. Observation and documentary analyses have been identified as particularly important for understanding network activity and institutional revitalisation, whilst interview methods supplemented the analysis of economic, membership and institutional revitalisation and were used to explore political revitalisation directly.

Finally, the ethical considerations associated with the project, and the limitations of the research have been discussed. In the four analytic chapters that follow, each aspect of revitalisation are considered in turn, beginning with political revitalisation.

## Chapter Four: Union learning and political revitalisation

### 4.1 Introduction

Evidence provided in Chapters 1 and 2 suggests that the political and industrial relations environment in Wales is relatively supportive of trade union activity. The WG has been identified as having a social partnership approach to union engagement and is bound by the Government of Wales Act to allow stakeholder access to policy making. This chapter shall further consider the political environment and institutions in Wales in relation to trade union access to policy making to assess whether political revitalisation is occurring through the ULA. Union and government relations on VET are explored by firstly, considering the impact of political devolution on IR systems, before assessing the institutional policy arrangements in Wales, and how these compare to, or are divergent from, English structures or policies. Therefore absolute and relative standards are adopted in evaluating the political effects of ULA.

Critics have suggested that the adoption of the ULA represents a turn towards unions serving as an 'administrative function' (Ewing 2005), with limited potential to influence policy making, and an inability to challenge or influence government policy (McIlroy 2008, McIlroy and Croucher 2013,). Partnership, here, is questioned as an appropriate strategy, particularly under a Conservative-led UK government. However, others have argued that partnership can positively impact upon trade union political revitalisation through participation in policy making processes (Ackers and Payne 1998), though the identity of the governing party may be significant in allowing unions to pursue a successful partnership agenda (Hamann and Kelly 2011).

### 4.2 Devolution and Social Partnership

In this section, the political environment in Wales and the opportunity structures created through devolution are assessed. In Wales, VET is the responsibility of the WG as a result of devolution, meaning that in Wales there is decision-making

capacity with regard to policy making which entails curriculum development, policy development and implementation, and funding.

The provisions made for education and training and economic development through devolution have afforded trade unions in Wales with an opportunity to engage with ministers over the economic and skill agenda. Specific provisions within the Government of Wales Act 2006 on education provided opportunities for trade union engagement with the WG and other organizations. Relevant provisions are noted in Table 4.1. Access to education and training, collaboration and inclusion of actors concerned with VET, and funding are stipulated in Matters 5.8, 5.13 and 5.14. These matters allow the WG to develop inclusive arrangements on policy making that furnish trade unions with a strategic opportunity.

Table 4.1: Provisions relating to governance of education and training

	<b>Nature of Provisions</b>
<b>Matter 5.8</b>	Provision about the provision of services that are intended to encourage, enable or assist people -
	(a) to participate effectively in education or training,
	(b) to take advantage of opportunities for employment, or
	(c) to participate effectively in the life of their communities.
<b>Matter 5.13</b>	Provision for and in connection with securing collaboration -
	(a) between bodies that conduct institutions concerned with the provision of further education, or
	(b) between one or more such bodies and other persons or bodies that have functions relating to education or training in Wales, including, in particular, provision for and in connection with the establishment of bodies for the purpose of discharging functions on behalf of one or more persons or bodies that are party to arrangements for collaboration.
<b>Matter 5.14</b>	The provision of financial resources for and in connection with -
	(a) education or training provided by institutions concerned with the provision of further education;
	(b) post-16 education or training provided otherwise than by such institutions;
	(c) the carrying out of research relating to education or training falling within paragraph (a) or (b).

Source: <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-third-assembly/bus-guide-docs-pub/bus-business-documents/bus-business-documents-doc-laid.htm?act=dis&id=72538&ds=1/2008>



Of particular note are the provisions relating to 'securing collaboration' between bodies that 'have functions relating to education or training in Wales', which provides the WTUC with the opportunity to assist the WG in promoting collaboration between unions and education providers, and to deliver 'functions' to this end. Furthermore, unions are provided with opportunity for engagement with workers under Matter 5.8 as collaborators to 'encourage, enable or assist' participation in training. Links to 'employment opportunity' provide further enhancement of trade union relevance to cooperative relations over training with government and employers.

The constitutional arrangements described above were thought to be a key factor in supporting union involvement in policy making by those working within the trade union movement in Wales.

*The political context is different. The Conservative coalition was going to be ideologically hostile to the trade union movement from the outset. The context in Wales is very different, we have a Labour Government and in the past we have had a Labour-Plaid coalition, they are not ideologically opposed, and in the constitution of the Welsh government social partnership and social engagement is part of the constitution, which means they have to talk to us, and they have to talk to business.*

*(WTUC interview)*

In absolute terms then, the devolution of political powers has ensured that trade unions are consulted on VET and business matters. In relative terms, there is no such constitutional obligation within English legislation, for example, within the Education Act 2011, or within the Employment Relations Act 2004.

Trade unions and particularly the WTUC have been offered an opportunity to engage with government and employers, through state initiatives and representation on Welsh bodies. The WG plays an important role in supporting the relationship and the governance environment can be classified as one of partnership.

### Policy Structures and Political Relations

The business strategy of the WG is one of consultation and co-investment (Welsh Government 2014). The political system in Wales is set up constitutionally to support tri-partite arrangements in which social actors such as trade unions, business and the third sector are included in the political policy development and implementation,

as we described above. In what follows, the systems of engagement that are open to trade unions in Wales are assessed.

### *Forums*

A key indicator of political revitalisation is trade union participation in policy networks. Therefore this section considers union access to decision-making bodies.

Partnership forums in Wales include the Employment and Skills Board (ESB) which advises the WG on skills, employment and business support. The ESB meets quarterly and produces an annual report for UKCES. The ESB focuses on the demand and supply of skills and promotes economic development through integration of employment and skills policy. It also monitors the work of the Sector Skills Councils. The board comprises the Deputy Minister for Skills, the Wales Commissioner from UKCES, Director of CBI Wales, WTUC General Secretary, the Director of Working Links Wales, the Head of External Affairs for the FSB, Chief Executive of Wales and West Utilities, and the Directors of two companies. These forums, which are also present in England, are of a tri-partite nature, with government, business and W/TUC representation on these decision-making bodies and committees which advise and inform government policy. Through this forum the ULA has provided for union access to policy development and provided the opportunity to shape government policy.

A second key forum is the Council for Economic Renewal (CfER) (formerly the Business Partnership Council and Economic Summits). The CfER was formed due to the obligation to provide a 'Business Scheme' stipulated by the Government of Wales Act 2006, which 'was drafted after extensive consultation with Business Wales and the Wales TUC' (CfER 2011). The members of the CfER include Welsh Government (including the First Minister as Chair), Commerce Cymru, the Wales TUC and the Wales Co-operative Centre. The CfER meets tri-annually and provides a direct form of engagement with the WG.

Another key national policy forum is the Wales Social Partners Unit (WSPU), which consists of representatives from the CBI, FSB, Chamber Wales, EEF Cymru, FPB and the Wales TUC. The WSPU was formed in 2001 to 'provide services that improve the engagement of the business representative bodies in Wales and the Wales TUC (the Social Partners) with the Welsh Government and the National

Assembly for Wales' and is funded by the WG (Arad, 2013). This service involved monitoring, and disseminating information on WG activity as well as providing advice to government. There was no equivalent body operating in England.

There was WTUC representation on all three of these boards, which were the main forums for social partnership engagement with Welsh government on economic matters. The representation on these boards is deemed to be similar to the provisions in England, with limited worker representation compared to employer representation. However, the development of the WSPU provided further input into policy development, and the CfER provides direct, regular access to Welsh Government ministers.

### *Political relations*

There is some variation in the structures that guide Welsh economic and skill policy, and trade unions in Wales are represented by the WTUC within these structures. Further to this variation, the relationship with ministers in Wales was found to be more positive, and this was seen to be caused by the different political parties in power.

*Obviously the relationship with the National Assembly is much closer and warmer. We certainly have a lot of dealings with, and are very close to, the civil servants.... But below that level it gets more difficult, we've still got members on the UKCES, a good consensus between the TUC, CBI and the commission, which is actually something that government is quite uncomfortable with. I mean they would much prefer it if they could divide and rule. The TUC and CBI share a common concern for example about the quality of apprenticeships let's say, or the ludicrous fiasco of the introduction of FE loans, we're not afraid to say so jointly which of course makes it difficult for government. (TUC interview)*

The relationship between the WTUC and the WG is thought to make a difference to the potential for unions to impact upon policy. It was also observed that the relationship between unions and employers associations was more positive. In relative terms, the inclusive relationship between the WG and unions in Wales was reported to be more positive than the relationship between the TUC and Westminster Government in England.

*I think where it is different is the Learning Services at the WTUC have got a much closer relationship I think with the Welsh Assembly... The relationship with the national assembly is much closer and warmer ... In terms of the messages and*

*political mood we're kind of, frankly, fighting an uphill struggle to maintain relationships with a deeply sceptical government [in England]. Although it is supportive to be fair about union learning, even though they don't like unions. In Wales it's quite different. It is a much stronger relationship... The political aspect does make a difference, particularly for the public sector, but also more broadly for the private sector as well. (TUC interview)*

In England, the political context was understood to be problematic in comparison to the positive relationship in Wales, which supported union activity in policy development across both public and private sectors.

The Welsh Conservatives have attacked the funding provided to the WTUC-LS and unions through WULF, claiming it was 'handing money to organisations which supported Labour...feather[ing] their own nest' (Withers, 2011). However, a WG spokesman is reported to have commented that there is: 'a long standing commitment to work with key stakeholders in Wales to raise the skill levels of the employed workforce. The trade union movement in Wales plays a vital role in this process by raising awareness and arranging flexible learning opportunities that meet the needs of employers and individuals alike.' (Withers, 2011). This further supports identification of the WG as adopting the social partnership approach, based on trade union involvement in skill development (Upchurch *et al.* 2008).

To conclude, trade unions, and particularly the WTUC, have been offered an opportunity to engage with government and employers through state initiatives and representation on Welsh bodies. The WG plays an important role in supporting the relationship and the governance environment can be classified as one of partnership.

#### 4.3 The role of the WTUC

Above, we have described the social partnership approach of the WG, guided by constitutional arrangements and supported by tripartite structures. We shall now explore the impact of devolution on the role of the WTUC.

The VET powers that came with political devolution in 1999 served to support WTUC calls for devolvement of responsibility for education and training from the centralised system operated by the TUC to the WTUC. The delegation of union education and training activity has 'transformed the role of the WTUC in this area' (England 2004: 93). By 2000 the learning agenda occupied much of the WTUC workers' time as the

TUC integrated education services into the WTUC structure. Three members of staff were located in the new WTUC education services department and were responsible, in the main, for the education of trade union activists. As the significance of the ULA grew, UK governments backed union involvement through government sponsored organisations: Unionlearn and, in Wales, the WTUC Learning Services (WTUC-LS) department.

With funding from the WG, the WTUC-LS department was established in 2000 with the aim of promoting workplace skill and lifelong learning. Funding arrangements between Unionlearn and WTUC-LS are provided by the UK Government and Welsh Government, respectively. The establishment of the WTUC-LS reduced the burden of education and training services from the WTUC, developing a dedicated part of the organisation to deal with VET and freeing the WTUC to focus on other matters. The WTUC-LS team was funded wholly by the WG, whilst funding from Congress House (gained through affiliate fees) provided for the WTUC General Secretary, staff with a remit for policy development, as well as office space and equipment that was also used by the WTUC-LS team. In England, BIS provides funding for Unionlearn and as a result WG negotiations with the WTUC-LS are completely separate as officially the WTUC-LS is not part of Unionlearn (WTUC interview).

The external funding arrangements and negotiations were therefore different in England and Wales. Further, the internal governance arrangements for the WTUC-LS were also distinct compared to operations in regions of England, where coordination of the ULA remains centrally controlled by the TUC body, Unionlearn. Given the differences in governance and funding arrangements we therefore asked whether the WTUC-LS had secured gains to support its activity, but we shall first consider the structure and activities of the WTUC-LS.

At its inception, the WTUC contained three members of staff. Currently, the Head of WTUC-LS is supported by five regional officers, five project workers, a national officer for education services, and two administrators. The regional officers provide support for unions and ULRs in developing and instilling learning at the workplace. This support involves aiding negotiation over collective agreements between unions and employers, recruiting ULRs, and assisting unions in making WULF applications. WTUC-LS workers run formal events and engage with ULRs and union officers in order to promote skill development. For example, a WTUC officer attended a session

during ULR training courses and offered support to those ULRs engaging with management over learning issues. Project workers had differing remits, including WULF, basic skills, and acting as a network organiser.

The WTUC-LS conducts a number of key activities that support the ULA in Wales. These can be classified into four areas: 1) information and advice for unions around workplace learning, including the development of learning agreements; 2) recruitment, training and support for ULRs; 3) organising events and documentation, such as conferences, and newsletters; and 4) liaising with WG, BSA, SSCs, learning providers, employers and other organisations. The WTUC-LS aims to promote the ULA and provide support to unions and ULRs in dealing with employers. These activities are in line with the work undertaken by Unionlearn in England.

The WTUC also coordinated a number of activities aimed at supporting unions and ULRs in promoting the skills agenda. The WTUC coordinated ULR training, an annual ULR conference, seminars, and stakeholder events. The WTUC-LS also ran events, such as Learning at Work Days (in partnership with NIACE-DC), specialised sessions on basic/essential skills and equality, and an annual 'stakeholder' conference to which interested parties are invited to attend. At these events, like the annual ULR conference, there was often the presence of Welsh AMs, Labour Party officials, and representatives of other government agencies, which can be understood to promote 'elite associations' (Blyton and Jenkins 2012). At the stakeholder conference WTUC staff report on activities and employers are invited to speak about their experiences of engaging in the ULA. Quality awards and ULR of the Year awards are also presented. These activities are concurrent with the activities of Unionlearn in England.

In summary, the WTUC-LS has a central role in the coordination of learning activity in Wales and is considered key to the delivery of programmes. Importantly it works under a partnership approach to represent workers in government decision-making. WTUC-LS receives financial support to employ dedicated workers and run events, and helps to support the development of social values that promote the benefits of trade unionism to employers, workers and government.

In 2003 further funds were negotiated between the WTUC-LS and the WG to support employment of five regionally-based development officers, two projects workers, and

an equality officer, adding to the staff resources already in place. The project workers were responsible for promoting the Essential Skills Programme which promoted workplace partnership agreements and action plans to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Evidence provided by the WTUC-LS to the WG regarding the effectiveness of the project workers enabled re-negotiation that extended the duration of their contracts from one to three years, putting them on a level footing with other WTUC-LS employees.

*We've been extremely successful over the Essential Skills programme. Project workers were on one year contracts and are now employed on same basis as rest of WTUC-LS. Civil servants had [queries about the role], we had a meeting about it, and it was sorted out...I would argue again that our political context here in Wales makes it much easier for us to make the arguments with Welsh Government about our success. (WTUC interview)*

The WTUC-LS has therefore negotiated for significant human and financial resources from the WG. Its arrangements were more favourable than those in England, where negotiations on funding were conducted annually and staff were on twelve-month contracts. These more benign arrangements allow the WTUC to develop more strategic, long-term plans. Further, the WTUC-LS has been successful in maintaining WG investment. In England, Unionlearn has been less successful in this regard and, whilst the Conservative coalition Government supported activity that delivered in the workplace, recent negotiations saw a substantial reduction in Unionlearn funding:

*We argued as strongly as we could that whilst our work wasn't directly in the workplace (because that's the union job), that it was immensely important to the unions themselves as we provide support to them, which they value enormously and [the government] just didn't get it. (TUC interview)*

The reduction in funds resulted in Unionlearn bearing the brunt of the cuts, through a programme of voluntary severance. This difference in funding and staffing contracts underlines the importance of having supportive government in place. The WTUC had a set of organizational arrangements and positive relationships that allowed them to develop union capacity on the ULA and represented a strong position in the IR and VET systems in Wales.

There is further evidence of the ability of the WTUC-LS to influence government policy through the acquisition of funds to support the Networks of Excellence (the NoE). The NoE was argued for by the WTUC-LS, on the basis of information that ULRs required greater support and that there was also a need to link ULRs with training and education providers. Funding was secured in 2007, through the WTUC-LS budget, for the provision of a face-to-face network and an electronic newsletter, NetNews, distributed by email at least twice a month. Over 600 individuals and organisations received the newsletter, a growth from only 80 recipients in 2007 (Simpson, 2012: 12). The newsletter contains information about courses and other activity and is built up by contributions from learning providers, ULRs, union staff and others. (The activity of the NoE is discussed in more detail in later Chapters).

The NoE network meetings were proposed in order to share information and experiences and provide a forum in which VET stakeholders could come together. The Network meetings are held tri-annually in the four regions of Wales (North, South, Mid and West) constituting 12 meetings per year across Wales. The meeting venue changes location in most instances, depending on availability of suitable venues in a number of towns in each region. Variation in meeting locations was deemed necessary in order to enable participation for those in different areas, with the aim of minimising barriers associated with time off and travel, and increasing opportunities to access the network.

The aims of the NoE included the development and support of ULRs, as well as information and guidance on learning provision and bargaining tools, such as learning agreements (LAs). It also provided unions and ULRs with the opportunity to engage with WTUC staff, providing a channel of communication - a voice mechanism. Simpson (2012) reported that English support networks, such as Unionlearn and the Careers Advice Service, whilst providing useful information, lack a 'face-to-face' element (p.6). The funding of the NoE by the WG therefore represents a divergence from the provisions in England. The NoE was judged to be a significant aspect of support for ULRs:

*Probably the most useful tool that we have in Wales, that they don't have in the English regions, and we can only in a way do it because it's Wales. It provides a network of support, but more than that it gives [ULRs] a sense of a value and forum which is theirs, backs up the support that unions give them because it is multi-union and they get to speak to each other. Also because we draw in so*



*many providers. (WTUC interview)*

In absolute and relative terms then, the WTUC-LS has utilised the ULA to negotiate further valuable organisational support for ULRs.

Whilst a partnership approach had secured gains in terms of funding and institutional supports (staff and structures), it does not entail the delivery of government programmes in an uncritical way, as critics have claimed. The claim that the TUC/WTUC are acting as a public administration function suggests that these organisations blindly accept the policy of government. This is not the case. For example, the WG asked the WTUC-LS to link their activity to the Investor in People (IIP) awards. The IIP involves an assessment of workplace provisions surrounding worker development and can result in achieving certificates based on these assessments. However, as shown in the statement below, the WTUC-LS successfully resisted calls for their involvement.

*The WG wanted [Investors in People] incorporated into our programme of work. We don't have the levers for compliance to do that. We're not going to set ourselves up for failure and say we are going to deliver something that is undeliverable. (WTUC interview)*

Criticisms that the ULA is a guise under which the WTUC and TUC are becoming administrators of government policy were strongly rejected by those who were interviewed. The following statements express this view.

*It's not just a kind of oily rag thing that the government decides what it wants and so we meekly and obediently go and do it, you know. We want to be able to be critical friends with the emphasis on critical. (TUC interview)*

*Partnership, social partnership when it works, when it delivers for working people, which union learning does, then great. I don't think it compromises us as an organisation, and I don't think it compromises trades unions. At the moment there is a period of quite considerable unrest (in local government, schools, nurses etc.). So no, we are not compromised. Unions will continue to fight for their members, and that as I say, peoples' livelihoods and terms and conditions are absolutely key for what trade unions deliver. This is additional to that, not a belt on...The social partnership model is here in Wales, but if Welsh Government were to move in a direction we felt was compromising for the workforce in Wales in anyway, we would withdraw. (WTUC interview)*

Whilst partnership with the Welsh Government was espoused, evidence suggested that partnership with government does not preclude action against employers and challenge government decisions, particularly over public sector austerity. Strike action indicates union strength as it signposts a unions ability to organise members into action. Over 140,000 workers in Wales went on strike in 2011. Pension campaigns in the education sector resulted in 81,700 workers taking action. Cuts and changes to public administration, defence, health and social work saw 30,500 and 25,300 go on strike respectively. Only 500 workers in the manufacturing sector went on strike. In 2011, 127,600 days were lost to strike action in Wales, equivalent to 109 days per 1,000 employees. This has increased from seventeen days per 1,000 employees in 2010. In 2011, the UK average number of days lost was 52 per 1,000 employees, less than half the figure for Wales. Only the north east of England reached similar figures to Wales with 103 days lost per 1,000 employees. The south east of England reported the lowest figures of twenty-seven days per 1,000 employees (Evans, 2012). Strikes were often a result of public sector changes, over pensions, pay, or job cuts.

The WTUC general secretary, Martin Mansfield blamed the 'reckless austerity programme' of the UK government, and despite operating under a 'positive model of partnership with the Welsh government', he stated that relations with the UK government were not the same as relations with the WG. Though partnership was central to the WTUC agenda it would call for unions to 'take action if necessary' (Evans, 2012).

Whether the WTUC would withdraw from its partnership arrangement remains to be seen, but what was clear was that the WTUC, devolution and a partnership approach with the WG have provided unions with a strong position from which they can promote worker development but this position has not diminished power to support trade union action. We shall now explore VET policy development in Wales.

#### 4.4 Policy divergence

It has been argued elsewhere that the decentralisation of policy-making allowed by political devolution can provide scope for divergence between Central Government and Welsh Government policy (Keating 2003). In this section, Welsh and English

VET policy are examined, and are considered in terms of policy divergence or policy uniformity.

VET policy documentation highlights the multiplicity of actors that are involved in developing a strong skills base for the Welsh economy and the WG aims to work with:

*All bodies concerned with post-19 education and training in Wales, including employers and their representative bodies; further education colleges; work-based learning providers; higher education institutions; trade unions; Jobcentre Plus; Careers Wales and Awarding Organisations. (Welsh Government 2014)*

Similar statements have also been made by UKCES, the non-departmental public body responsible for driving VET policy in England:

*As a social partnership, our strength and influence comes from the partnerships we form across business, trade unions, government, industry bodies, and education and training organisations. We work with government to push forward effective policy, and with industry to change business behaviour. (UKCES 2014)*

State attempts to improve skill and to encourage employers to provide training opportunities for workers were exemplified in the English Train to Gain (T2G) programme and the Workforce Development Programme (WDP) in Wales. T2G, introduced in 2006 supported employer-led skill development, and aimed to increase business performance, particularly for SMEs (Keep 2008). Three key elements of the WDP were the Essential Skills Employer Pledge programme and WULF which was supported by WTUC-LS workers, as well as ReAct, a programme developed during the 2008 recession to support training for workers facing redundancy. We shall discuss these three programmes before considering whether they differ from programmes in England.

Initially set up in 2007, like its counterpart in England, the 'Skill Pledge', the Employer Pledge (EP) was introduced in response to the Leitch review (2006). The government initiative was aimed at employers, and promoted voluntary declarations of commitment to the development of basic/essential literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace. Accession to the EP represents a will on behalf of employers to develop the basic literacy and numeracy skills of the workforce. This involves an

assessment of training needs, an action plan, and a public statement committing businesses to the development of basic skills. The ESF funded project was supported by the CBI Wales, WTUC and the SSCs. The WG, as mentioned above, funded two permanent positions within the WTUC-LS department, for work specifically on engaging private sector employers to develop pledges. These workers, along with their colleagues and other partners, such as NIACE DC, succeeded in lobbying the WG to extend the remit beyond a single Level 1 (GCSE D-G or NVQ level 1) course within private sector businesses, to include both numeracy and literacy up to Level 2 (GCSE grade A-C). The restrictions had resulted in the availability of only either literacy or numeracy to Level 1, with no opportunity for those who wanted to develop skills in both areas, or beyond this level. Central union actors therefore have impacted upon the availability of courses and the level at which these can be studied.

The WTUC keenly promoted the EP scheme. Specific seminars and days were run by the EP project workers and they often attended NoE sessions to provide up to date information on developments with the EP, and to offer support to ULRs who were key in providing access to workplaces and gaining more pledge signatories. We found that this scheme was utilised by unions to encourage employer engagement in skill development (see next chapter).

Both T2G and WDP provided advice and guidance in accessing funding and providers, which could help to achieve lIP awards. The WG approach to skills and economic development and adult learning has been praised in comparison to T2G by Keep (2008), and the WTUC been clear that did not support employer-led learning: “employer ownership particularly, we don’t want it” (WTUC interview). With regard to the EP, the WG was targeting all business organisations in Wales, but has enrolled the WTUC-LS to provide support in gaining access to private sector organisations. This was the primary goal of the two WTUC-LS workers. In 2009 the project workers had secured 600 signatories to the EP. Such positive impacts were crucial in lobbying government to improve the basis of these workers’ contracts (see above).

In England, the T2G scheme provided subsidised blanket training for workplaces and was employer-led. Under the WDP individuals were able to access funding for training, whereas under T2G employers instigate any brokering. Assessments of

T2G have claimed it lacks strategic direction concerning the training needs of different workers in relation to economic development (Keep 2003). The strategy for skills development in Wales was more selective and aimed to develop skill in key areas of economic activity. Rather than providing universal entitlements to training, as under T2G, funding and support in Wales was more likely to be granted where skills gained are transferable (rather than job or company specific) and where they could support business development in Wales.

The WDP represented a divergent approach to encouraging access to training, with the WDP more closely linked to economic priorities and a greater element of individual rather than employer control.

*There have been policy differences between England and Wales, and Scotland too. On the whole I would say the direction of travel is frankly better and more positive [in Wales] than it is in England...There is a greater willingness and interest to look at skill utilisation, so it's not just training, it can be re-designing the job to make use of the training. I think the longer term horizons, so it's not so hand to mouth or devilled by 'how will this look in the Daily Mail' or something. They are prepared to be a bit more confident about trying to come up with creative and interesting ways of encouraging young people to get GCSE equivalents, to get employers to take them on, run trainee schemes. There is the ReAct scheme in Wales, where they get given a small subsidy schemes to carry on employing people, tide them over and that has been used to provide training for people. Those things are happening in Wales, very largely thanks to unions sitting down and negotiating with employers in a way that they are not in England. (TUC interview)*

This statement revealed the importance of structures such as the WSPU. The statement also highlights the ReAct scheme, which represents a clear divergence in policy. The scheme was developed in order to help individuals and businesses to continue to support employee training when the economic recession hit in 2008, representing a co-investment model, rather than a purely employer-led approach. ReAct was launched in 2008, and had two functions: providing funding for individual training and supporting employers to develop workforce skills. ReAct was financed through European funds and the WG and WTUC were significant in securing access to funding for individuals (WG 2010, WTUC interview).

Under ReAct, individuals applied to have a training needs assessment, gain advice on training and jobs available, gain funding up to £1,500 (reduced from £2,500 after

a review in 2010) to pay for 50 per cent of training costs (reduced from 70 per cent) as well as costs for travel, materials, and possibly accommodation and childcare. Eligibility is dependent upon experiencing unemployment or redundancy. Employers can gain funding for wage costs up to £3,000 (increased from £2,500) if they recruit individuals who have recently been made redundant. They can then gain funding for up to 50 per cent of training costs (reduced from 70 per cent), up to £1,000. Again conditions apply: the post must be new or (justifiably) vacant, and the contract must be for at least 25 hours a week (increased from sixteen hours) and be for a period of at least 12 months. Applications to ReAct must also be approved before a position is filled. This prevents the abuse of ReAct by employers who may otherwise use the funding to train employees for which they are already responsible. To the end of September 2011, over £30million was committed to ReAct funding (O'Toole, 2011).

The fieldwork identified other significant developments in VET systems in England which differ from those in Wales.

*There are all sorts of issues that apply in England that don't apply in Wales. For example, schools and academy stuff, ludicrous SFA funding rules and there is far more willingness in Wales to plan things jointly. (TUC interview).*

Differences between England and Wales were often noted in NoE meetings, where ULRs were often told to be cautious when reading material produced in England as access to some services may not be available in Wales. ULRs were further advised to mention that they are based in Wales when contacting organisations in England.

#### *The Wales Union Learning Fund*

As with the ULF in England, developed as part of the 'new unionism' agenda, WULF is part of WG strategy. The WG engages with the WTUC in providing funding for workplace learning through WULF. In each round of bids for funding, unions were encouraged to apply for project funding, targeting specific skill development. From 1999 WULF provided £250,000 of funding per year for union-led learning. By 2003 this increased to £900,000. However, a report by Estyn (2005) highlighted the need for longer term WULF bids, and Simpson and Huxley (2009) questioned the

sustainability of WULF projects, with some employers failing to support learning activity after WULF funding had ceased.

The WTUC played an important role in lobbying government for greater provision which succeeded in increasing funding and project duration in negotiations in 2011. The last round of WULF funding was provided over three years rather than one year, and the projects bidden for in 2012 and funded between 2013 and 2016 will receive £3.7 million. This was an important outcome and points to effectiveness in the political negotiation. The WTUC was successful in negotiating a longer time frame for projects arguing that the time taken to initiate learning activity could be over a year, leaving only one year to undertake the training and learning activity. The WTUC argued that longer termed projects were deemed important in order to effectively supporting learners' needs. The importance of these negotiations was acknowledged by the TUC.

*[The WTUC-LS] got a very good funding deal out of the Assembly, credit to them, so that they are able to plan ahead a bit longer than us [in England]...which makes a hell of a difference in terms of planning and so on. (TUC interview)*

Whilst recent ULF negotiations in England have resulted in a number of job losses within Unionlearn, the WTUC-LS has not seen any such job cuts. In terms of scale, the number of Unionlearn staff far exceed that of the WTUC-LS, with 80 staff serving an employed population of over 26 million, with a budget in 2015 of £15.3 million, reduced from £18.9million in 2014, from £20.2 million in 2013 (Unionlearn 2013). However, when this was broken down to consider the amount of funding and support provided for the working population, analysis indicated that each member of Unionlearn staff represented 328,275 workers, and received 70pence per employed worker in ULF funding. In Wales the WTUC-LS secured only 12 staff, however, these staff each represent approximately two-thirds of the employed population compared to staff in England (115,166 workers to 1 member of staff) and 90pence of WULF funding has been secured per employed worker. These figures show that whilst in absolute terms the funding and staffing for Wales was lower, when we consider the population they were serving WTUC-LS staff have greater resource. Furthermore, ULF in England has been secured until 2017 but its future beyond this remains

uncertain. Within Wales, WULF has been secured until 2018 and will receive £1.25 million of further funding per year (WG 2015).

The WTUC has been successful in lobbying for changes to the WULF and also to the EP programme, expanding the number and level of numeracy and literacy courses that can be taken. The programmes developed with the WG were also felt to be supported by government ministers in Wales,

*There have been a number of deputy ministers for skills and we've had an excellent relationship with each of them, a very cordial relationship. They are always available for us to come to our events that we put on through the WULF programme (WTUC interview)*

In speeches made at ULR conferences WG ministers asserted their belief in the success of WULF and revealed an understanding of the importance of union involvement in VET policy delivery. At the 2009 ULR conference John Griffiths AM spoke to delegates, professing the importance of “upskilling” the workforce, confirmed WG commitment and support for WULF and stated that: “WULF is working, and we must continue to drive it forward”. The AM also stated that “There is growing recognition of what unions can offer, particularly in regard to learning”. This suggested that union involvement in VET, as well as wider issues, was valued by government, highlighting the impact that union involvement was having at a political level. The AM also highlighted the continuing relevance of trade unions as industrial and political actors:

*Union learning is a success story. We want to ensure that partnership with the Wales union movement is built upon. The partnership approach has delivered a lot during the downturn; we need to build on this relationship in the future, putting unions and government at the centre.*

Accounts of this kind again indicated the support for the ULA from government, an important factor for political revitalisation.

#### 4.5 Discussion

In assessing the political dimension of trade union revitalisation we have assessed three key areas of activity: the development of institutions; the role of the WTUC and its resources; and policy divergence.



McIlroy (2008) questions the TUC's acquiescence in government partnership rhetoric and believes it has adopted a 'public administration function'. However, counter to this argument it is suggested that devolved governance has enabled union involvement in VET policy development.

The evidence presented above supported assertions that union engagement within the political dimension of revitalisation was more fruitful where there was ideological political support for trade unions (Tarrow 1998, Hamann and Kelly 2011). The strength of union and Labour Party relations in Wales provided a conducive environment for cooperative relations as Labour are the dominant party within Welsh politics, indicated by their success in Welsh Government elections. Union involvement in VET under the devolved government was providing access to decision-making bodies with a business and state presence. Though often this will be via the WTUC as union representatives, contact with employers and government ministers proved to be advantageous in securing union voice in policy-making circles, such as the WSPU and the CfER.

Hoeckel *et al.* (2009) found that 'whilst there are some similarities between VET arrangements in England and Wales there are also important institutional differences and scope for different policy objectives' (p.9), and this conclusion was supported by the evidence provided above. Policy framing is broadly similar, targeting workforce skill development for economic gain and promoting links between skill and business performance. The importance placed upon skill development for economic prosperity represented convergence in policy, but the relationship between the state and labour provided an example of divergence as unions in England did not share the close partnership relationship found in Wales.

Furthermore, the social partnership approach enabled unions to lobby for changes to significant programmes, such as ReAct which represented a co-investment model where individuals and employers can receive funding, and to lobby for increased investment and extended time-periods for WULF projects. The WG therefore developed policy that was divergent from England and the WTUC lobbied government on these developments and secured changes in favour of workers, particularly within ReAct.

In addition, the development of the ULA involved a widening of the agenda of the WTUC and the development of the WTUC-LS under devolution. The WTUC-LS negotiated longer contracts than were available in Unionlearn in England, both in terms of the human resources available in the WTUC and contractual gains for WTUC-LS staff and support for trade union activity. Further funding of the Networks of Excellence (NoE) also represents a significant infrastructural resource for the WTUC and ULRs and the WG also encourages employer engagement with trade unions through the delivery of VET programmes. (We shall explore the development of the ULA in workplaces in the next chapter). The development of divergent policy, as Keating (2003) has argued, occurred as a result of devolution. These positive arrangements represent a reciprocal relationship, through which the union movement was increasing its credibility as an important actor in economic educational policy development. The notion that the adoption of the ULA confined unions to a purely administrative function may be rebuffed. The WTUC was clear of its role and was unafraid to reject government requests when it felt they are contrary to workers interests (such as a more developed role in relation to liP). The ULA has therefore enabled engagement and impact on policy, and the extraction of resources, supporting political revitalisation rather than being undermined as a movement by the adoption of the ULA as suggested by McIlroy (2008).

The evidence presented within this chapter indicates the strength of relations between the Welsh Labour government, employers and unions in the provision of VET. This set of relations, moreover, supported the continued importance of the union movement and the centrality of the WTUC in delivering a skills development agenda. It indicated the progress that has been made for union involvement in learning and skills, consolidating the political dimension of union strength. WG engagement was understood to be positive from the perspective of the WTUC and is coveted by the TUC. Partnership was judged to be working for the benefit of trade unions by the WTUC and unions officers. Political support for the ULA in Wales, backed up by the Government of Wales Act 2006 duties, enabled unions and the WTUC to provide evidence-based arguments for increased funding and resources. Whilst these resources appear to be substantially less than those gained in England, English funding has receded whilst Welsh funding has been maintained.

## Chapter Five: Union Learning and Economic Revitalisation

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores trade union ULA workplace activities as indicators of economic revitalisation. Bargaining and the ability to create procedural and substantive outcomes for workers are key aspects of economic revitalisation. The ability to bargain with employers on VET, and whether this is pursued through a partnership (or integrative) agenda has been a key feature of the ULA debate. McIlroy's (2008) critique suggests that ULA bargaining activity is minimal, and that pursuing an integrative agenda, does not support the development of collective agreements. Whilst, Stuart (1996) has questioned the nature of the ULA as purely integrative, and has questioned whether mutual gains are of equivalent benefit for union actors, particularly where learning agreements are not in place (Stuart *et al.* 2013), others suggest that consultative and partnership arrangements can be beneficial for union workplace organisation (Ackers and Payne 1998, Clough 2004, 2008, 2012). Therefore, the nature of ULR engagement with management as consultative or negotiated bargaining is considered within this chapter.

In exploring the impact of the ULA on economic revitalisation, we first inspect the distribution of ULRs by workplace size, sector, density, and partnership arrangements, as important indicators of the strength or weakness of the ULA to develop union activity. We then examine three key areas of economic workplace revitalisation: the development of bargaining and procedural workplace practices, the development of substantive outcomes, and the relationship between trade unions and employers. In terms of procedural mechanisms we consider the extent of bargaining, negotiation, learning agreements, workplace committees, union-employer communication, and the ability of the ULA to develop new recognition agreements. We assess substantive outcomes including funding, training practices and provision, worker demand for learning, and the development of learning centres. In terms of employer relations, we consider ULR access to training, time off to perform the role and the facilities that are provided by employers as stipulated in the ACAS code of practice (ACAS 2004), as well as perceptions of employer support and barriers to activity.

The analysis explores the variation in employer support, procedural and substantive outcomes in relation to four contextual factors, namely, sector, size of workplace, union density and partnership (explored through the presence of partnership agreements). There are a two main reasons for considering differences across the private and public sectors. Firstly, union strength and organisation is said to be weaker within the private sector (Heery and Nash 2005). Secondly, public sector employment is often thought of as superior, in access to better terms and conditions of employment and training opportunities compared to the private sector (Claydon and Green 1992, Green *et al.* 1996, Murphy *et al.* 2008). We can then assess the extent of ULA activity in developing economic revitalisation beyond areas of union strength. We will also explore the influence of workplace size as small organisations are less likely to be unionised and have fewer formal HR procedures (Moore and Read 2006, Storey *et al.* 2010, Kersley *et al.* 2006, van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013). Whilst small firms could be targeted for new membership and recognition campaigns, these exercises are costly and therefore may be of less relevance to trade union organisers. Surveys to date have indicated that ULRs are most likely to be located in places of traditional union strength, in the private sector, large organisations, where union density is high (Stuart and Robinson 2007, Hollinrake *et al.* 2008). These three factors are therefore important indicators of union expansion by workplace type, where strong union organisation is represented by high membership density.

Another factor in considering economic revitalisation is the presence of a partnership agreement. Partnership debates centre on questions of integration and notions of mutual gains (Badigannavar and Kelly 2004, Stuart and Martinez Lucio 2002, 2005), as well as considering the impact of developing consultative rather than bargaining arrangements for developing strong workplace-based union organisation (Ackers and Payne 1998, Wilkinson *et al.* 2008). Bacon and Samuel's (2009: 231) longitudinal study of partnership agreements indicate that there are beneficial outcomes for public sector workers in terms of 'collective bargaining, job security and *higher employer spending on training*' (my emphasis). We therefore assessed whether the presence of partnership arrangements was associated with the ability of trade unions to embed learning and gain procedural and substantive outcomes that support economic revitalisation in relation to VET.

## 5.2 ULR Workplaces

In this section, we shall consider the distribution of ULRs by workplace as an indicator of revitalisation. Where ULRs are located in high density, large or public sector organisations the ability of the ULA to increase union activity at the workplace may be limited. However, where significant numbers of ULRs are found in small, private or low density workplaces, the ULA can be seen to be contributing to economic revitalisation. The prevalence of partnership agreements were considered in order to assess the extent of integrative (or mutual gains) union-employer relations.

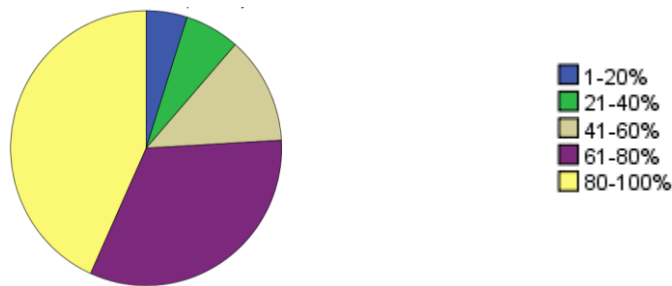
Our survey found that two-thirds of ULRs (67.5 per cent) worked in the public sector; just over one per cent worked in the voluntary sector and the remaining 30 per cent were employed in the private sector. Analysis of WERS11 suggests that 24 per cent of workplace union representatives are in the private sector, and 76 per cent are in the public sector. This indicates that ULRs in Wales are more likely to be present in private sector workplaces than union representatives generally across the UK.

It has been claimed that since the introduction of ULRs there has been a notable rise in their presence in small and medium sized enterprises (Saundry *et al.* 2010). The majority of ULRs in Wales were located in medium and large workplaces (more than 50 employees), and just under 14 per cent were in small workplaces (less than fifty employees). Analysis of WERS11 shows that nine per cent of union representatives are in small workplaces. Given these statistics, we see that ULRs are relatively well represented in small workplaces.

With regard to workplace density, as an indicator of a strong workplace presence, Figure 5.1 shows that over three quarters of ULRs were based in workplace with high density (over 60 per cent membership).

Taking these three measures together, ULRs were relatively better placed than union representatives in general, though ULRs were often located in high density workplaces. Whilst ULRs were often located in areas of union strength, there was representation in small, private, and low density workplaces.

Figure 5.1: Percentage of ULRs by workplace union density



Source: Question 16, ULR Survey, N=246

We then considered whether ULRs are located in workplaces that operate under a partnership agenda. The majority of ULRs reported that a partnership agreement was in place at their workplace (68 per cent). No significant differences were identified between partnership and non-partnership workplaces by union density, nor by sector. Approximately a third of respondents from each sector were in non-partnership workplaces. However, ULRs in large workplaces were more likely to report the presence of a partnership agreement ( $\text{Chi}^2=8.28, p<.002$ ). ULR partnership workplaces are therefore not associated with union density, or sector, but are significantly associated with workplace size.

### 5.3 Provisions, Support and Barriers

In the following section, we explore employer provisions, support and barriers to developing strong workplace organisation through the ULA. Through this data we considered whether a partnership approach to integrating union learning is inhibiting or supporting the revitalisation of workplace organisation.

#### Training, time off and facilities

Under the statutory rights for ULRs, employers are required to provide both paid time off for ULRs to undertake training and to perform the role, and facilities, such as

equipment and office space, to enable them to perform the role effectively. The ability of ULRs to gain support from employers is a key indicator of the ability of the ULA to aid revitalisation. Where ULRs are not afforded these rights, the effectiveness of legislation and the potential impact of a partnership approach may be questioned. A particular criticism of union representative time off is that the legislation terminology 'reasonable' which leaves managers and employers in a position of advantage to argue against union time for business reasons. A consideration of whether ULRs perceive their time off to be reasonable is important in evaluating the power of current legislation in providing supportive workplace environments.

#### *Time-off for Training and Duties*

Time off for training had been provided to most ULRs included in the survey, with only eight per cent reporting they did not get paid time-off and a further 11 per cent reporting that some time was unpaid. Evidence from observation indicates that non-provision can arise from shift patterns and organisation of work at the workplace, which meant that courses must be attended outside normal working hours. For one of the trainee ULRs, one day of the training was attended during a period of annual leave which was unlikely to be recompensed. In all other cases, trainee ULRs in the observed sessions had been given paid time off to attend. These results indicate that in the majority of cases employers are providing the statutory minimum of time off for training and adhering to their legal obligation to allow ULRs time to train.

Further to time off for training, employers must provide 'reasonable' time off for ULRs to perform their duties under the ACAS code (ACAS 2004). Table 5.1 shows that almost 70 per cent of ULRs felt that employers allowed them enough time to perform the role. Comparing this to the 87 per cent of ULRs that reported they undertook ULR training in paid time, it appears that employers have greater levels of discretion in limiting ULR time in work, though broadly employer support for time off for both training and performance of duties was high. Whilst there are many concerns that conflict between unions and employers on the definition of reasonable the majority of ULRs are satisfied with time off for the role.

Only a minority (13 per cent) of ULRs reported that they were not given enough facility time to adequately perform their role. A further 15 per cent felt they did not

have enough time of to perform their role from time to time. There was no evidence of differences between public and private sector ULRs judgements of facility time or of time off for training but partnership agreements were associated with better access to time off, with ULRs in partnership workplaces reporting more paid time for training. This finding supported assertions that a partnership approach can benefit ULRs. However, ULRs were no more likely to report better facilities in partnership workplaces.

ULRs in small workplaces, whilst they make up a small proportion of the sample, were slightly more likely to feel that they were not given sufficient time off to perform their ULR duties, and ULRs in large workplace were significantly more likely to receive paid time off to train. Where ULRs are in small workplaces, their time may be more critical to the smooth running of the workplace and management may be less willing to allow time off for operational reasons.

In large workplaces there are more demands to be met for learning provision, more people for ULRs to deal with, and therefore greater demands on their time. However, ULRs were more likely to be part of a ULR team in large workplaces (95 per cent compared to 50 per cent in small workplaces) and were therefore able to spread the workload. In terms of paid time to train, ULRs in large workplaces were more likely to be supported by a partnership agreement.

Whilst there is little to differentiate access to time off between public and private sector ULRs, size of workplace and the presence of partnership agreements were important factors. This finding may have an impact upon the impact of revitalisation outcomes in small organisations. Employers appear to be more willing to allow time off for ULRs in large workplaces and partnership workplaces.

The relative strength of the union also has some association with the ability of ULRs to take paid time to train. Statistical analysis shows that when ULRs were in low density workplaces, they were less likely to report paid training time than ULRs in high density workplaces (see Table 5.1).

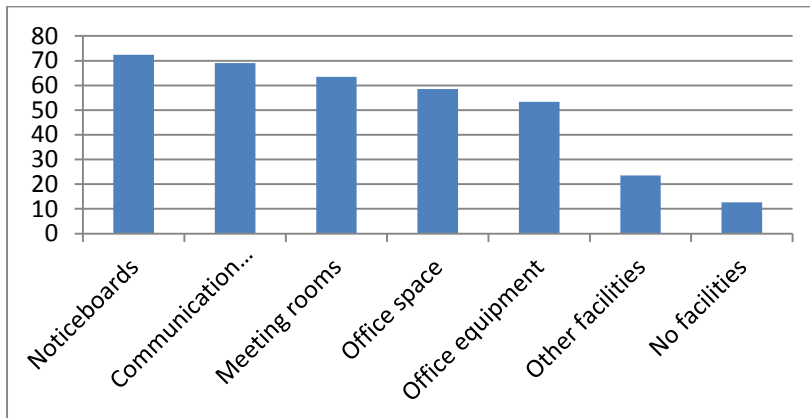
### *Facilities*

Within the survey, ULRs were questioned about the facilities that the employer provided for them to undertake their role (see Figure 5.2). No facilities were provided for only 12 per cent of surveyed ULRs. The majority of ULRs were provided with



facilities to undertake their role, and ULRs had, on average, access to at least four facilities. These figures indicate that ULRs are not facing barriers as a result of limited facilities. It therefore appears that employers are supplying adequate facilities and supporting ULR activity that aids economic revitalisation.

Figure 5.2: Facilities provided by the employer



Source: Question 27, ULR Survey, N=244.

Cross tabulation indicates that ULR access to facilities is associated with the four contextual factors. In large workplaces, in the public sector, in partnership workplaces and where union density was high ULRs were significantly more likely to report that they had access to facilities (See Table 5.1 above). The strongest association was between partnership agreements and facilities. The ability of ULRs to establish access to the provisions stipulated in the ACAS Code of Conduct (ACAS 2004) was therefore affected by workplace type, with traditionally strong union workplaces likely to grant better provision.

Within one ULR training group, a debate ensued surrounding the facilities time and provisions that were available in the public and private sectors. Trainees from manufacturing were concerned that a lack of management support seriously impacted upon the ability of the union to perform its functions. This constraint may impede the success of the ULA in these workplaces as it was expected that employers would not provide access to necessary facilities (or time off) needed to perform the role. A lack of support was evident to the manufacturing trainees and

Table 5.1: Percentage of ULRs reporting employer support, by workplace type

	ULRs	Workplace size		Sector		Density		Partnership	
		Small	Medium-large	Public	Private	Low	High	Agreement	No agreement
Time off for training	87	80 15.398**	95	78 2.439	78	75 13.354**	85	97 19.269***	81
Time off for the role	70	77 8.648*	89	88 2.303	77	82 4.469	88	90 7.770	88
Facilities (count)	83	75 13.354*	86	82 14.985*	76	68 15.014**	89	85 24.841***	80
High Management support	66	70 11.319	70	72 14.082	77	77 14.069	72	74 9.554	61

Source: ULR Survey, Base N=232. Significance values : p<.001\*\*\*, p<.005\*\*, p<.01\*

this differentiated the private sector from the public sector, particularly in relation to access to facilities, such as computers, that could enable them to perform their role effectively, as well as the amount of time off they would have to perform their role.

One public sector trainee commented that he felt quite embarrassed that his workplace appeared to offer manifestly better conditions, including time off, a learning centre, funding for training and opportunities to engage with colleagues about training needs. The manufacturers joked that they 'may as well get [their] coats' as they felt they were unlikely to achieve access to facilities, or have the facilities time, to continue with the role (Cardiff ULR training).

The analysis in this section indicates that whilst there were concerns about the ability to gain provisions, the statutory rights for ULRs and the obligations for employers were being upheld for the majority of ULRs who gain adequate time off and facilities. Legislation was therefore seen to be supporting the development of economic revitalisation. However, there was also evidence that a partnership approach supports ULA organising, as access to paid time off to train and the provision of facilities are greater where a partnership agreement had been signed.

### *Employer support*

We have intimated that management attitudes can be both a hindrance and an aid to the development and effectiveness of ULRs (see Chapter 2). A lack of employer support has been shown to be detrimental to ULR activity in case study research (Findlay *et al.* 2006) and upon employer funding of training in survey research (Hoque and Bacon 2008). We may suppose that managers who are positive about union learning activities may be less of a hindrance to organising activity than managers that view the ULA negatively. Evidence from the employer survey in WERS11 indicates that management attitudes towards trade unions and management opinion of trade union impacts are more positive in Wales than in England, where management are more likely to report negative opinions of trade union activity (see Table 5.2)

Table 5.2: Management attitudes to unionism

	Wales	UK
Management attitude towards union membership		
Positive	53%	31%
Neutral	6%	12%
Negative	41%	537%
Management perception of improved performance <sup>1</sup>		
Agree	31%	22%
Neutral	39%	39%
Disagree	30%	39%

Source: WERS2011, Management Questionnaire. <sup>1</sup>WERS04 data, question not asked in 2011.

ULR perceptions of management attitude toward trade union membership among employees, and towards union involvement in learning, were largely positive. A substantial minority believed that management was in favour of both membership generally and learning activity specifically (30 per cent). Perceived negative attitudes were limited to a very small number of cases. Only 14 per cent felt management did not support trade union membership, and a smaller minority (10 per cent) felt management did not support union learning activity. Almost half of the ULR respondents defined management attitudes as neutral for both activities, supporting findings of largely indifferent management attitudes seen in other studies (Bryson 2001, 2004, Wallis *et al.* 2005).

Crosstabulation indicates that where management were deemed to view membership negatively they were also likely to view learning negatively, and similarly if they were deemed to view membership positively, they were likely to be judged to have positive attitudes towards learning activity. In only two cases were management thought to have divergent views to membership and to learning (see table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Perceived management attitudes to learning and membership (percentage)

Management attitude to union membership	Management attitude to learning		
	Not in favour	Neutral	In favour
Not in favour	7	7	<1
Neutral	<1	29	16
In favour	<1	10	30

Source: Questions 20 and 21, ULR survey Note: Pearson Chi-square = 128.770, df 6,  $p < .01$ .

Cooperation between managers and ULRs in Wales was evidenced at the workplace level, with over 70 per cent of ULRs reporting positive or neutral management attitudes to the ULA. However, as reports have suggested that ULRs identified line managers as barriers to activity (Simpson and Huxley 2009, Saundry *et al.* 2010), we therefore explored variation in support by management level. ULRs were asked whether they felt satisfied with the level of support from higher and lower levels of management (See Table 5.4). The results indicated that there was little variation in perceived support by management level.

Table 5.4: Perceived management support

	Lower management	Higher management
Negative	25	28
Neutral	36	30
Positive	35	38

Source: Question 25, ULR Survey, N=231.

Correlation analysis indicates no significant differences in management support by density, sector, size, or partnership (see Table 5.1). However, when we consider the impact of management support in relation to paid time off for training, facilities time and facilities provision, significant differences emerge not by management level but by level of perceived support.

Table 5.5: Management support and employer provisions

	Higher management positive	Higher management negative	Lower management positive	Lower management negative
Time off for training	99 17.947**	84	96 24.938***	67
Time off for duties	96 31.108***	67	98 15.722*	85
Facilities provision	94 47.600***	71	98 32.395***	70

Source: ULR Survey, N=231\*, \*\*, \*\*\* - indicates significance at 10%, 5%, 1%,

We can see in Table 5.5, that where management (higher or lower) are supportive of ULR activity, the likelihood that ULRs would be provided with access to time off for training and duties was significantly higher. A supportive workplace environment is therefore key to establishing ULR rights at the workplace, regardless of workplace type, union strength (as measured by density) or the declaration of partnership in the form of an agreement. It is therefore essential that unions seek and develop positive employer support for the ULA.

### Employer advocates

A particularly interesting finding of this study was the use of ‘employer advocates’. Unions are strategically utilising employers who were engaged with the ULA to advocate within employers’ networks, with the aim of expanding trade union representation to new areas and workplaces.

For one union the use of ‘employer advocates’ had aided the expansion of learning activity to other sites:

*We’ve built up a very tight circle of what we call employer advocates so at [4 organisations] all the managing directors there are prepared to be advocates for our [unions’] WULF projects so when they go into their sector specific meetings, forums, groups, they’ll talk about our projects in a very positive way and also if we have a new employer coming on board that’s perhaps not sure and says this is all too good to be true and it’s the union and I don’t really want to hear it from the union, the advocates have given us their permission to use their contact details. So, say you’ve got a printing company and you don’t want*

*us to come in I can say well why don't you ring Mr X at this company who has agreed to give us contact details to be shared. So, they can speak to each other directly as employers about the benefits, how they set it up. So we've now got employers, key good employers, being advocates for our project which saves us a lot of having to convince new employers because we can refer them to respected employers to chat to outside of the union which takes a lot off our shoulders actually (Union officer, interview)*

This union then had begun to strategically use their employer contacts, with which they had developed a reciprocal relationship. The union had developed learning as an integral part of the benefits of employment within these firms, and in return the managers were supporting the expansion of union involvement in learning by promoting union involvement to other employers. The advocates also promoted union involvement in their own management networks. Here then, partnership was not only present within the worksites but beyond them, with employers supporting the unions externally. This is the most advanced case of mutual gains partnership that was found within the present study.

Indeed, a large bus company, one of the employer advocates, also worked with the WTUC-LS to promote 'learning at work day', a NIACE DC annual event, during the period of study. Employers, unionists, learning providers and Assembly Members were invited to attend. Talks were given by the WG Minister for Skills, the HR manager and the head of the WTUC-LS. The learning centre was opened to the public for the day, and information on the types of courses available was promoted by stalls manned by learning providers and ULRs. The company was also willing to provide access to the learning centre for ULRs from other companies to show other employers the benefits of the learning centre and to aid ULR and union negotiations with employers. (At least one of the ULRs from the ULR training courses took this opportunity). This showcasing again promotes the benefits of learning to other employers as well as the benefits of employer-union partnerships.

*That's evolved, we've got a system with new employers where we send out a joint circular across the workplace so its signed by the union and the employer to say we're looking for a union learning rep and you'll be supported if you stand forward, management want you to come forward, [the union] want you to come forward so it's a very positive role now for our union learning reps... (Union Learning Officer, interview)*

Here, union calls for ULRs to come forward were supported jointly by employers. Further to the direct promotion of the ULR role, the links between organisations, through supply chains and contracted work, also allowed for the promotion of the ULA, with employers becoming aware of the positive activities in connected organisations. During interview, one union officer commented that the development of learning activity in workplaces had resulted in unions being contacted by other employers wanting to develop learning activity:

*A subcontractor for Tata heard what was happening at Tata and wanted the same kind of training for their employees and [the Community union officer] was able to persuade them to accept unions into the workplace. But that is not an example from my project that was one that I know about from another but it has happened (Union officer, interview).*

Learning activity then is generating interest in other workplaces, and creating new lines of contact and enabling union organisation – which significantly was not instigated by the union but by the employer. The ULA is providing access to workplaces and ULRs. So, whilst most ULRs did not report expansion activity within the survey (see Section 5.4 below), qualitative evidence suggests that the ULA is providing access to new workplaces and enabling unions to promote the ULR role and unionisation to workers, managers and other organisations.

Whilst examples such as those above may be limited, it does show that employers are willing to work not only with recognised unions at their workplace but to promote union-led learning in other organisations. The ‘good’ employers are aiding the expansion of union involvement in learning to other workplaces, a sign that partnership approaches can aid the revitalisation of unions through involvement in the ULA.

### *Conflict and Barriers*

Whilst we have discussed positive aspects of relationships with employers and workplace impacts, experiences are not always encouraging. In this section we shall consider some of the potential avenues of conflict and barriers to organising learning in the workplace. Gall (2003b) suggests that there are three approaches to union exclusion that are used by employers: suppression, substitution and avoidance. There was evidence of barriers to ULR activity in most cases (see Table 5.6). ULRs



were asked about potential strategies that management could deploy against ULR activity. Fifty per cent ULRs reported at least one employer activity which inhibited their ability to perform their role. The most frequently encountered suppression tactics included refusal of time off, both for learners (20 per cent) and for ULRs to perform the role (30 per cent). Few ULRs reported substitution tactics or intense suppression (such as bullying).

Analysis of variation in the use of suppression and substitution tactics revealed little difference by workplace size, sector, union density or partnership. The largest differences reported by partnership orientation included greater employer conflict and greater prevention of time off for ULRs and shift work, alternative voice and work intensification in non-partnership workplaces. We can therefore suggest that suppression tactics may be more prevalent in non-partnership workplaces, whilst avoidance and organisational barriers are more significant in partnership workplaces. With regard to density the biggest differences were in employer conflict (five per cent higher in high density workplaces) and refusal for employee time off to train (12 per cent higher in low density workplaces). ULRs in large workplaces reported higher levels of all barriers, except for the organisational measures and preventing ULR time off. In terms of sector, public sector ULRs were more likely to report barriers, except for bullying, shift work and avoidance. What is clear from Table 5.6 is that a lack of management support is a significant factor in the development of workplace barriers to ULR activity.

Further examples of difficulties experienced as a result of management behaviour or decision-making were also found in the observation sessions. We can classify particular issues as either, operational and organisational barriers, or as problems with management buy-in. The first quote below indicates the impact of operational issues or commitments which meant that during busy periods learning activity could be side-lined.

*We had 'Learning at Work' week, with not much support from management. We had an extra day in June because some people were not allowed time off in March. (PCS ULR, NoE7)*

Despite the operational constraints, the ULRs in question had successfully negotiated a further day on which to promote their activity. So whilst employer

behaviour had limited the impact of the first event, the ULRs had persisted in negotiations to provide equality of opportunity for workers to engage.

The problems associated with a lack of employer buy-in, are highlighted in the following statement.

*We've had problems where employees have been involved for the first year of a course and then management have pulled out so no-one is funding it and they have no more time off, then people have to drop out. (PCS ULR, PCS conference)*

This represents management suppression as a barrier to continued activity. The impact of negative responses from management was also acknowledged by a UNISON ULR who claimed that two ULRs had retired from their positions as “the negative [management] responses have deflated them”. In this case ULRs had become so dissatisfied with management apathy that they saw no point in continuing with the role.

The importance of management buy-in was also highlighted by a WTUC worker, and by a learning provider:

*It's not about the individual most of the time for me, it's about the employer. (Male WTUC-LS worker)*

*If the employer isn't interested, it's not going to happen, in terms of foundation degrees. I can give examples where people will do the theory parts to show the commitment and then afterwards go to the employer and try to get support by saying 'I've done 75 per cent, just help me with the rest'. (Learning provider, NoE3)*

We found further evidence from interviews that managers can impact upon the success of ULR organising learning activity:

*I agree that branches face challenges, barriers - particularly at middle management; they're fearful of taking decisions themselves which leads to a time lag. Learning to organise as a union is important. (ULR interview)*

Table 5.6: Conflict and barriers by workplace type

Barriers	ULRs	Workplace size		Sector		Density		Partnership		Management support	
		Small	Medium-large	Public	Private	Low	High	Agreement	No agreement	High	Low
Suppression											
Employer conflict	21	20	22	23	18	18	23	19	27	7 67.615***	58
Bullying	6	5	6	5	9	5	6	6	7	1 27.599***	20
Threat of redundancy	4	2	5	5	0	2	5	4	6	2	7
Preventing ULR time off	20	21	18	20	20	19	21	19	25	8 50.712***	50
Preventing member time off	30	23	33	35 4.776*	20	39	27	31	30	21 21.420***	53
Substitution											
Alternative voice	9	2 4.665*	12	8	9	17 4.250*	7	11	6	6 5.790**	17
Organisational											
Work intensification	23	25	23	25	19	19	24	25	20	15 19.298***	43
Shift work	42	42	42	33	64	38	44	46	33	44	43
Count											
At least one barrier	51	37	56	56	41	53	51	54	49	40	84

Source: ULR Survey, N=232. \*, \*\*, \*\*\* - indicates significance at 10%, 5%, 1%,

This indicates that management hierarchies can inhibit activity as decisions must go through a chain of command which can delay negotiations and activity.

During observation of training, further evidence of operational constraints were identified, particularly with manufacturing, where shift patterns meant that access to learning opportunities may be inhibited by the timing of courses, or heavy production targets. However, with one trainee case, the development of the ULA was more positive than initially thought. For this male ULR working in the steel industry, who had previous experience as a shop steward, the potential of the ULA to impact upon training activity appeared to be negligible. However, following conversations with his manager he was more optimistic about the potential to develop the ULA at his workplace. Initial perceptions developed through adversarial roles in this case had led to a presumed negative attitude from management. It appears therefore that the development of cooperative relations with management can occur in tandem with adversarial bargaining relations. This has been noted in previous research (Heery 2002, Nowak 2009). It appears then that whilst many ULRs feel supported by their employers, they also faced significant barriers. These barriers are likely to be in the form of suppression due to lack of employer support or operational conflicts. What was clear was that the impact of management can be vital, whether this was in terms of generating partnership working, supporting ULRs, or allowing time off for employees to train.

Whilst partnership, or collaboration, was evident from earlier analysis, there was also evidence that employers and managers can create barriers to union progress in relation to learning. However, ULRs and unions were conscious of this. We would conclude that the 'incorporation thesis' is overstated in relation to the ULA, but so too may be the partnership thesis, as barriers to activity were created by management behaviour and the organisation of work, and ULRs were not blindly trusting. This evidence confirms that managers have power to block not only union organising or individual learning activity, but also have power to support ULA activity that can aid economic revitalisation.

## 5.4 Bargaining and Procedural mechanisms

The establishment of collective bargaining and associated procedural mechanisms are key indicators of trade union economic revitalisation. We shall now consider these mechanisms and processes, through which unions can embed themselves within decision-making procedures and negotiate over training. In the following section we explore workplace practices as indicators of procedural revitalisation.

### *Gaining recognition*

A key aspect of economic revitalisation is the development of collective bargaining agreements. As we noted in our introductory and literature chapters, the number of bargaining agreements and the percentage of workers covered have declined in the UK (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013). We must therefore ask, to what extent is the ULA generating new collective bargaining agreements?

Our survey data suggests that the ULA appears to have limited impact on expanding union recognition, with only 4.5 per cent of ULRs reporting expansion of union recognition to new workplaces. This suggests there is limited potential of the ULA to promote unionisation in workplaces without union recognition. However, we found qualitative evidence that in some cases ULRs were strategically targeting employers to expand recognition and establish a workplace union presence where it was previously lacking.

Examples of strategic targeting of employers were found. A ULR commented that “new sites have been visited” (NoE 2, Unison ULR) and this union was acting to expand recognition:

*Our new project started ... and there is a sister project in the north with [another union]. [A WTUC worker] is attending our steering group meetings. We're trying to get recognition in one organisation and are pushing positive benefits. We're mapping workplaces and looking at targets (NoE5, UNISON ULR)*

In another union, officers supported the proposition that learning can aid union organising and reported being contacted by employers as a result of successful learning projects:

*If we have a ULR that's done a particularly good project ... then that is promoted internally within [the union] but also to other employers. So we put out*

*newsletters, we make sure we're in the local press and higher press if possible and sometimes even the TV channels and that the work of that ULR is out there and very public. And then what we find is employers will say, well how come we're not involved in this, and I'll say well I can't work with you as an employer you'll need a union learning rep ... (Union officer, interview)*

When asked if there were any examples of expansion and new recognition agreements, one officer replied:

*I can't give you examples from my particular project I have far too many unionised workplaces to deal with. We're all-Wales, all sector with this project and [the union] cover 17 sectors and we've got 170,000 members in Wales so non-unionised workplaces don't really come into it, not for me. (Union officer, interview)*

This indicates that there were issues with the capacity of unions to deal with the needs of the members that they already have, and as such establishing learning within recognised workplaces was currently of greater importance than using learning activity to expand recognition to new sites. However, it is important to note that unions were acting strategically to target specific employers or organisations to develop the ULA (also see discussion on learning centres in next section), and that in a minority of cases new recognition agreements were being created as a result of ULA activity.

These cases indicate the ability of the ULA to develop engagement with employers, as we saw above in relation to employer advocates. The ULA seemingly is attracting some employer interest. Despite these cases, evidence of the securing of new recognition agreements was limited. However, ULRs were largely in workplace with collective agreement in place (88 per cent) and extension of collective bargaining to include training was reported by 20 per cent of ULRs. Bargaining, as a central aspect of the ULA was encapsulated by a ULR who stated that,

*Apprenticeships need to be bargained for, learning agreements need to be bargained for, facility time needs to be bargained for, and learning has to be part of the bargaining agenda for it to be meaningful to the union as much as anything else. (ULR interview)*

Therefore, we can suggest that ULRs were working to develop training as a collective bargaining agenda though this was not through statutory requirements to bargain but through voluntary and informal negotiation. Economic revitalisation may be developed and supported through other procedural developments within unionised workplaces, beyond collective bargaining agreements, though there is potential to develop the ULA as a strategic tool for economic revitalisation through a growth in recognition agreements. The extent of collective bargaining outcomes and procedural mechanisms are shown in Table 5.7.

### *Negotiating with management*

A key indicator of revitalisation is employer willingness to negotiate. Over 50 per cent of ULR felt that the ULR role entailed negotiating with employers (see Table 5.7 below). The only significant pattern of variation identified was in relation to management support. Where ULRs felt that they were supported by management, they were almost twice as likely to report negotiating on training. ULRs were also asked in the survey about the depth of their relationship with management and whether the employer negotiated, consulted or informed them when taking decisions on training. They were also asked whether these processes occurred all of the time, some of the time, or not at all. The data shows that ULR and employer negotiation over training 'always' takes place for 12 per cent of ULRs in Wales, and that negotiation 'sometimes' takes place for a further 50 per cent of ULRs. Involvement through consultation or information disclosure was reported by 66 per cent of ULRs. These figures indicate that in the majority of cases unions are successfully engaging employers over training and learning decision-making at the workplace level but that the frequency and depth of engagement varies. It is not the case that negotiation will always take place, or is always understood to take place through collective bargaining arrangements, rather there is a pattern of variable engagement, which may be issue dependent. What is clear is that employers frequently negotiate, consult and inform ULRs on VET at the workplace.

Separate learning agreements (LAs) are promoted as the key mechanism for bargaining with employers. Due to the lack of bargaining rights over learning, learning agreements have often been pursued in isolation from pay and conditions.

This is one way in which the lack of negotiating rights for learning and training have impacted upon the development of union-employer agreements. Beyond this regulatory explanation, another reason for the separation of pay bargaining and VET bargaining includes caution on the part of unions not to overload representatives that already bargain over other terms and conditions of employment. Furthermore, within the public sector, is that negotiation over pay and conditions will often occur at a national not at a local level (ULR training and union officer interviews).

We shall now explore learning agreements as negotiation and consultative mechanisms.

### *Learning Agreements*

ULRs are encouraged to pursue learning agreements that are separate to other bargaining and negotiation arrangements. By providing a separate channel for ULR negotiation and consultation this could result in a disjuncture between the activities of ULRs, other union representatives, and union officers. However, unions are used to operating under issue-based or sectional representation, for example, Health and Safety reps will often deal with issues without involvement of other union reps.

Learning agreements are negotiated agreements between unions and employers. They typically include provisions for time off for ULRs, and other facilities, such as those discussed in Section 5.1. A feature that was promoted during ULR training courses and through NoE sessions was the inclusion of 'matched time', in which employers agree to giving an hour of work time for one hour of employee learning time. The WTUC have produced advice on LAs, giving examples of three levels of agreement, which represent a relatively light agreement, essentially accepting the ULR role and the ACAS code of conduct, a moderate agreement that specifies some further detail, for example, the running of a learning centre, and a complex agreement, in which the rights and responsibilities of ULR and employer are laid out in great detail. Through LAs, unions and employers formalise a cooperative relationship over training and learning.



Table 5.7: Procedural outcomes by workplace context

Revitalisation measures	ULRs	Workplace Size		Sector		Density		Partnership		Management support	
		Small	Large	Public	Private	Low	High	Agreement	No agreement	High	Low
Collective bargaining extended	18	13	19	14 4.506*	26	10	20	21 3.934*	10	19	14
Negotiation	63	61	63	61	65	55	65	66	57	76 27.808***	39
Learning agreement	63	52	67	67	57	43 12.672***	70	71 14.663***	44	66	63
Workplace Committees	36	30	38	29 11.104***	50	20 7.708**	41	40	28	37	37
Formal meetings	45	31 5.333**	49	41	53	37	47	49	38	47	46
Employer Pledge	48	61	75	72	74	82	70	81 13.571***	48	76	66
Improved union-management communication	94	84 10.972***	97	96	90	87 4.961*	96	95	90	96	96

Source: ULR Survey, Base=232, \*, \*\*, \*\*\* - indicates significance at 10%, 5%, 1%,

LAs had been established by 63 per cent of ULRs, and were judged to be effective in 61 per cent of cases where agreements had been negotiated. This indicates that for a majority of ULRs learning agreements are productive mechanisms through which they can bargain with employers. In terms of patterns of variation, LAs are more likely to be in place in high density and partnership workplaces (see Table 5.7 above).

Research evidence suggests that where LAs are in place unions are more likely to have access to a workplace committee on training (Saundry *et al.* 2010, Hoque and Bacon 2008). Analysis of our survey data also supports these findings, with significant associations found between having LAs and workplaces committees ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 7.168, p < .007$ ). By establishing LAs, unions can increase their access to workplace decision making. It has been shown elsewhere that securing LAs can be difficult due to a lack of employer engagement (Lee and Cassell 2009, Mustchin 2009, Wallis *et al.* 2005) but in Wales a significant proportion of ULRs had succeeded in negotiating LAs.

ULR involvement in drafting and negotiating LAs was evidenced in the observation of ULR training and NoE meetings:

*[We have a] draft learning agreement for 'all-Wales' that has gone to management, which then returned with a query and we're in on-going negotiations. (NoE 1, female PCS ULR)*

*[We've had] meetings with Job Centre Plus, and managed to secure an agreement to allow learning to go on in offices. (NoE 1, male PCS ULR)*

*The learning agreement was submitted to HR and agreed. (NoE 1, male UNITE ULR.)*

*I'm going to [private sector manufacturing company] on Thursday for a learning event and talk with managers [about the agreement]. (NoE 1, union officer)*

Learning agreements are a core element of the ULR training course, and the WTUC has produced guidance for ULRs which contains a number of LA templates. Whilst the rhetoric of partnership is often a central aspect of the negotiation over learning

agreements, trainee ULRs expressed caution over using simplistic agreements. When considering model agreements, two private sector trainee ULRs argued that pursuing a detailed agreement would be necessary in order to avoid management discretion and domination that some studies have identified. During a discussion around agreements, one trainee commented:

*We have to dot all the i's and cross all the t's so they can't pull out, but the full agreement is too repetitive and boring, too detailed (Male, manufacturing private sector trainee ULR).*

As noted above, ULRs, like union officers, indicated that management were not wholly trusted despite partnership discourse. The importance of embedding LAs was also judged to be important for continuity reasons. This was exemplified in a discussion during training in which one trainee ULR discussed the informal relationship he had with his employers, who he could 'pull aside for a chat on the stairs' (ULR training 1). The reaction from other trainees, and the instructor, was one of caution. These individuals argued that whilst the informal relationship worked for him, they questioned what would happen when he retired, or moved on, would the relationship for his successor be the same? Further, if management changed and had a less positive attitude towards union activity, this could damage the good work he had done. They encouraged him to formalise any negotiations within an agreement, as we see in the excerpt below:

*...but what if you crashed on the way home and the next guy might not get on with the managers then it can work against them, they'd say 'it worked for [him] but it won't work for me' and they'd have to start negotiating again. (Male, private sector manufacturing trainee ULR)*

The formalisation of negotiation was supported by ULRs and the union officers interviewed who promoted their use amongst ULRs:

*Yes, we advocate that all of our departments utilise the learning agreements that they've got, there's a basic learning agreement that we consider should be the minimum standards for reps to, you know, work to and aspire to as their learning agreement and hopefully then to enhance that and get additional benefits from it but we will definitely say that you have got to have a learning agreement to substantiate the ULR role. (Public sector union officer, interview).*

Within the public sector, learning agreements have been negotiated at a UK rather than at workplace level and model agreements are in place. During interviews all learning officers advocated securing agreements, and in the public sector that ULRs should engage with local managers. Whilst national agreements were in place in the public sector there was potential to negotiate arrangements in Wales that go beyond the provision of UK wide agreements. This was also acknowledged by the TUC:

*[There is] more sympathy certainly amongst public sector employers in Wales on facility time for reps, reps doing learning, than there would be in England where we are getting exactly the opposite messages. So, the national civil service are basically being told by the Conservative led government to crack down on facility time, reduced check off and all the rest of it, which is making it extremely difficult for reps. It's not so bad with private sector employers, they are far more pragmatic and sensible and much less hostile and again it's interesting... Those things are happening in Wales, very largely thanks to unions sitting down and negotiating with employers [in the public sector] in a way that they are not in England. (TUC interview)*

Local LAs therefore built upon the national agreements that were made, and these negotiations enabled ULRs to have greater access to time off. LAs were a significant negotiating tool. They were developed on a partnership basis, yet we have seen that management were not wholly trusted and learning agreements enable ULRs to hold management to account and were used to prevent managerial dominance over VET decisions.

Whilst we have considered negotiated agreements above, indicating that this was a significant ULR activity, supporting procedural revitalisation, employment relations research suggests that bargaining or formal negotiations are increasingly giving way to softer forms of union involvement. Researchers have identified a drift away from collective bargaining towards joint consultation, often conducted through works councils or other representative committees (van Wanrooy *et al.* 2013, Brown 1993, Brown *et al.* 2009, Bogg 2012).

#### *Workplace committees*

One consultative mechanism that can contribute to procedural revitalisation was for ULRs to attend workplace committees at which decisions are made over training. Involvement in committees will increase access to information and provide space with which to consult with management. Whilst consultation has been proffered as

an acceptable form of union involvement in modern workplaces (Hall and Purcell 2007, Oxenbridge and Brown 2002), others question consultation and the development of workplace committees as having limited impacts for trade union influence on substantive outcomes, retaining employer prerogative (Kelly 2004).

The development of learning committees was reported by over a third of ULRs (see Table 5.7). This represents a significant minority of ULRs who were embedding themselves within workplace mechanisms; however, a majority were excluded from such decision-making spaces. Analysis shows that ULRs in private sector workplaces were more likely to attend committees and ULRs in high density workplaces were twice as likely to report attending committees. The strength of the unions' membership base was therefore associated with union ability to represent members on workplace committees.

With regard to partnership working, no significant correlations were found between attending a learning committee and having a partnership agreement. Therefore, the evidence does not indicate that formal partnership arrangements were likely to increase this form of union involvement. This evidence then does not support partnership as a reciprocal arrangement as ULRs have limited access to decision-making bodies within workplaces, giving support to concerns that a lack of employer engagement will prohibit development of the economic revitalisation through partnership (Kelly 2004). However, partnership is not considered to negatively impact upon the ability of ULRs to establish a strong workplace presence, and is associated with the development of LAs and EPs.

The use of committees was not particularly widespread, especially when compared to the number of ULRs reporting the use of LAs and negotiation. Evidence from observation suggested that relationships between managers and ULRs were likely to be a factor in attending or creating committees. The potential impact of positive relations was most clearly indicated during a PCS workshop:

***ULR 1:** Learning committees, in the civil service, management are certainly used to going to those. Each of our divisions has someone in charge of learning development for in-house training, and ULRs are invited to attend. Good relationships mean we can push the agenda. We work with them.*

***ULR 2:** It's not like that everywhere, you're lucky*

*(Discussion between ULRs at PCS Wales ULR Conference)*

The quote above indicates that good relations with management can be helpful in pursuing a learning agenda at the workplace, and can aid consultation. However, it also highlights limited opportunities for engagement in different workplaces and organisations where there were adversarial union-management relations.

Whilst a partnership approach has been criticised from a fear that unions will become incorporated into management systems, or at least be less successful in securing procedural and substantive gains, there was evidence that workplace committees were not always management instigated or management driven:

*... We try to establish workplace learning committees that is a joint partnership between the managers and the ULRs and some of the union reps as well that deal with more of the negotiating side of it. So that the managers are working in conjunction with [the union] and the learning agenda. And we try and get it embedded then but still keep it as a union led organisation ... the committee places great emphasis that it is union led and not a management tool. (Public sector union officer, interview)*

Union officers were keen to promote the union as instigators and drivers of learning activity. This was also emphasised within the ULR training, as ULRs were encouraged to engage with management and members but to highlight their involvement in training and learning as a union representative rather than as an employee. This was particularly pertinent when discussing training needs analysis (TNAs) to engage with workers, (see Chapter 6) as well as in the negotiation of learning agreements (LAs).

Whether ULRs engaged in consultation or negotiation, the acceptance of a partnership agenda was utilised to gain employer support and promote the union in the workplace reflecting a pragmatic rather than ideological approach. The development of the ULA was also seen to have improved communication with management for the vast majority of ULRs, whilst analysis indicates that this has been less successful in small workplaces, improved communication is a clear outcome of the ULA.

### *Employer Pledge*

Another mechanism that may be used to support ULR activity is the development of an Employer Pledge. The EP programme (discussed in Chapter 4) focuses on securing agreements between the state and employers that obligates them to provide access to basic skills (level 2 literacy and numeracy). Unions may trigger the making of a pledge and may be involved in discussing its details and implementation. It may provide them with leverage to secure subsequent negotiation or lead to joint consultation.

Indeed, ULRs had a substantial role to play in pursuing action plans under the EP as they were able to promote the scheme to employers and promote engagement to their colleagues, as the quotes below indicate:

*For us, it's ULRs who make the contact with the manager. They are gold, diamonds in the workplace. (NoE7, WTUC-LS worker)*

*[ULRs] are part of an essential part of the pledge [which] wouldn't be in 80% I would say of the workplaces they are in without the ULRs because the ULRs sell it for them on the shop floor. (Union officer, interview)*

The EP appears to be a significant programme as 48 per cent of ULRs reported that a pledge had been signed at their workplace. The respondents to the survey were likely to report that their employer had signed a pledge regardless of sector, workplace size, or union density. However, EPs were more likely to be reported where there was a partnership agreement in place.

*The EP provides an opportunity for unions to engage with employers; and ULRs can use the EP to promote their role and to initiate learning activity. As one ULR noted, "our authority has signed the employer pledge so now we're trying to make links to that training" (NoE4, PCS ULR).*

The link between the EP and ULR activity provides ULRs with a way to embed learning at the workplace and the ULR role within organisations. The EP involves setting up specifically developed and tailored action plans and as such ULRs can use this documentation to consult with employers and hold them to account. The EP is therefore understood to be a useful tool to involve and engage employers, providing legitimisation for the ULR role.

## 5.5 Substantive outcomes

Substantive impacts are also important when considering the economic dimension of trade union revitalisation as unions must aim to embed learning within organisations and to establish VET as an area in which unions can make positive changes for their members. In the section that follows, changes that have occurred as a result of the ULA in relation to four substantive revitalisation areas are considered. We assess the impact of ULR activity on: 1) workplace systems, such as changes to training practices and appraisals; 2) increased provisions, such as funding and the creation of learning centres; 3) member interest in training, and finally, 4) the provision of training that ULRs had instigated.

The ability of unions to develop these substantive outcomes is again judged across our four workplace context variable: size, sector, density and partnership.

Additionally we shall consider the variation in substantive outcomes in relation to Learning Agreements, Employer Pledges, workplace committees and negotiation. By performing this analysis we gain further understanding of the influence of procedural arrangements on substantive outcomes.

The ability of trade unions to secure substantive training outcomes, it is often claimed, is most likely when learning agreements are in place and management support is forthcoming (Cassell and Lee 2000, 2007, Saundry *et al.* 2010, Stuart *et al.* 2010). Our analysis below seeks to confirm these findings for the specific case of Wales.

Before we assess the impact of the ULA on substantive outcomes, we begin with an assessment of ULRs' perceptions of management training activity. The need to improve employer provision has largely been assumed in prior work, yet an evaluation of the perception of employer training may have significant consequences for the ability of ULRs to have any impact on substantive outcomes at the workplace. Where employers have good practices and processes, there will be little potential for union impact in terms of substantive outcomes.

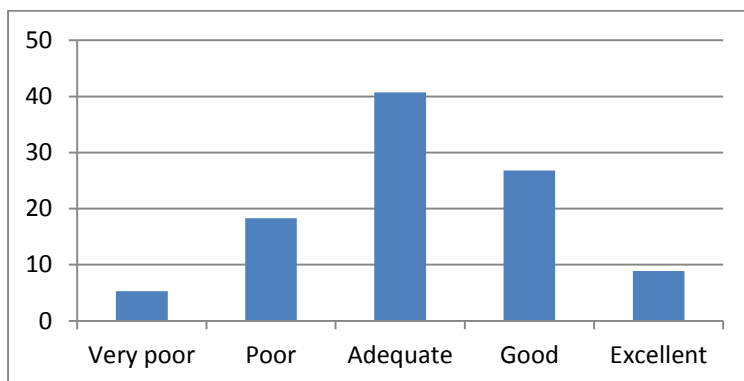
### *Training provision*



An assessment of whether employer training provision is considered inadequate is important as it may have consequences for the potential of unions to impact on employer practices. ULRs were therefore asked to evaluate employer training provision.

On the whole the perception of training provision at workplaces was seen as adequate, with more ULRs rating provision as good or excellent, than poor or very poor (see Figure 5.3). These findings may be interpreted in two ways. The high ratings may reflect the good work of ULRs, who have developed workplace agreements and practices, creating better training and learning cultures at the workplace. However, it may also represent the tendency of employers with good practices to be more willing to accept the ULR role. It is probably the case that both situations occur, good employers are more likely to accept ULRs, and ULRs are likely to impact upon the learning culture of an organisation. In any case, the fact that negative perceptions account for less than 25 per cent of ULRs responses may reduce the potential for ULRs to establish positive workplace outcomes.

Figure 5.3: Perception of employer training provision



Source: Question 39, ULR Survey, N= 246.

Cross tabulation indicated that there is no significant difference between public sector and private sector respondents' perceptions of employer provision, nor by density. Small organisations were less likely to report poor provision ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 9.470$ ,  $p < .050$ ), as were partnership workplaces ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 9.904$ ,  $p < .042$ ). These factors

therefore appear to have little bearing on the perception of employer training provision.

### *Training practices, systems, and types of learning*

To examine these issues, ULRs were asked to reflect on a number of potential workplace outcomes from ULA activity. Six specific outcomes related to workplace training were the subject of questions in the survey, namely: 1) funding for training provision; 2) increased demand for training; 3) introduction of a learning centre; 4) changes to training systems; 5) increased employee demand for training; and 6) changes to appraisal processes. We also considered the type of training opportunities that have been created, considering the extent of the provision of basic skills training, employer- or job-focused training, transferable or generic skills training, and hobby and interest learning.

The percentage of ULRs reporting impact upon our indicators of substantive outcomes indicates that changes in practices, demand for learning, and the provision of generic skill training (including IT, employment skills, Welsh and languages), were the most successful areas of ULR activity (see Table 5.8 below). Generic skill provision was reported by more ULRs than job-specific, basic skills, or hobby and interest courses. This indicates that ULR support for learning was aligned with member interests, which it has been suggested is focused on transferable skills (Keep 2003), and is not driven by employer needs. One fifth of ULRs reported increased funding and changes to training systems, whilst a third reported the creation of learning centres. The lowest rated substantive outcome was changes to appraisals.

Cross tabulation indicated that workplace type (sector and size) had very little association with the ability of ULRs to increase substantive outcomes. Only learning centres were slightly more likely to be reported in the private sector. In terms of union strength, high density was likely to be associated with generic skills, changes in practices (as well as less significant associations with learning centres and appraisals). Partnership agreements were only associated with basic skills provisions, and management support revealed only a slight association with changes to appraisals. This supports concerns that a partnership approach may not establish

mutual gains. Whilst partnership was strongly linked to provisions for ULRs and to the development of learning agreements, and management support was an indicator of the likelihood that ULRs would face barriers to activity, both partnership and support had little impact on the generation of substantive outcomes.

There was some evidence that the potential to utilise state initiatives to increase employer funding for training and impact upon training practices, as the EP was strongly associated with these measures. Unsurprisingly, the EP scheme was also associated with greater basic skill provision.

In terms of negotiation and consultation, each of the procedural mechanisms were associated with changes in practices, increased demand for training, and the provision of generic skills. This indicated that each of these mechanisms were likely to generate benefits for workers by altering practices and increasing learning activity. LAs were also associated with increased employer funding and the presence of a learning centre. Committees were also associated with improved training systems, basic skill provision and also had some association with learning centres (though this was impact was less than that identified with LAs).

Managers engaged in WTUC stakeholder conferences and events suggested that union driven learning had a number of substantive outcomes for companies. One of the employer advocates stated that:

*We have a ULR who now sits on the board as an 'Employee Director', who after engaging in learning, becoming a rep, gained confidence to take on the role: and the managers! ULRs have introduced a library, and we helped to get the Quickreads selection. We also have a donation scheme as part of our company charity. So far we've had 26,000 hours of learning, and it has made a difference, there's no doubt about that. There's better confidence, coaching from learning reps and encouraging them to go on courses, but that doesn't work for everyone. There has to be support at all levels. Another area of improvement has been communication – we can now email everyone at home, that's what they want, they give us their details, it's not forced. They can get internet access now at work on their breaks too. ... We've got a very good relationship with our reps, they're always bringing ideas forward. I'd recommend it to anyone.*

*(HR Manager, Cardiff Bus)*

The development of positive union-management relations in this case secured learning activity as a substantive outcome. Here, the ULA was supported by a LA

(that stipulated time off for ULRs and 'matched time' for learners), a workplace committee, a learning centre with literacy resources, notice boards (located within the canteen for high visibility and access) and internet access. It was not therefore the case that bargaining and consultation were either/or choices, but may be used alongside each other to get the best for workers as has always been the case.

Outcomes for business were understood to be positive, and ULRs argued that the business case had been evidenced, and when employers engaged with unions they could see the benefits:

*Once they connect, they connect. They see what it can do, to their bottom line and they value it. We know the very positive impacts of learning on things like morale, sickness absence, and there is a relationship of trust that builds up with management (ULR interview).*

There are therefore benefits for both employers and unions in engaging with each other over VET. Benefits for workers are greater where learning agreements or workplace learning committees are established.

## 5.6 Discussion

With regard to economic revitalisation and the development of the ULA in workplaces, three questions have been explored in this chapter. Are managers providing support for the ULR role? Are ULRs pursuing formal collective bargaining, and does this vary by workplace type? To what extent do partnership agreements, employer support, state initiatives, learning agreements, negotiation and consultation arrangements impact on substantive outcomes for workers?

Firstly, the provision of facilities and time off for duties are identified as important elements of partnership working. Qualitative evidence has also found that management were often indifferent, rather than hostile, to the ULR role (Wallis *et al.* 2005). Employer support was understood to be positive by the majority of ULRs, with problems surfacing as a result of work organisation rather than an inherent ideological stance against trade unionism.

Management were, in the main, perceived as supportive of ULR activity, providing access to time off and facilities. However, partnership arrangements and the size of workplace were important determinants. Considering legislative intervention, the results regarding time off for ULR training and facility provision are generally positive with only a small number denied paid time-off to train, indicating that unions were supported on these two factors. Where legislation is open to greater levels of interpretation; for example where 'reasonable time' comes into play, the results are less positive but a majority of ULRs have sufficient time to perform the role. The relationship between management and ULRs is a factor in the promotion of union involvement in learning activity at work, as well as being a factor in developing revitalisation along economic dimensions.

Poor relationships with management can result in a lack of activity, frustration and ultimately the forsaking of the ULR role. In terms of instrumentality, or perceived instrumentality of the union, this could have damaging effects. Where the workers have expressed an interest in learning activity and the union attempted to make this happen, the power of the union could be questioned if learning opportunities are not created.

A significant, and perhaps surprising, finding of this study in relation to economic revitalisation was the development of employer advocate networks. Employer advocates were promoting the ULA and government schemes within employer networks, and were engaging with employers to encourage union involvement. As a result of ULR activity, employers had contacted unions to see how they could initiate the types of activities found at other workplaces. Whilst evidence of links to the development of new recognition agreements was limited, there was evidence that the ULA was attracting employer interest and aiding the development of positive IR relationships. So whilst union officers were not investing time in pursuing VET as an agenda to create new recognition agreements, ULA activity was alerting employers to the benefits of engaging with trade unions.

Supporters of the ULA have emphasised the creation of structures of representation as important for developing trade union strength (Clough, 2004, 2012, Dundon and Eva 1998, Winterton and Winterton 1994), though McIlroy has questioned whether ULRs undertake bargaining to a significant degree, and whether this activity supports

economic revitalisation. We have shown that the majority of ULRs were involved in negotiation and consultation on workplace training. With regard to the development of bargaining processes, the development of arrangements was usually through separate mechanisms rather than being integrated into existing collective recognition agreements. However, engagement with management was clearly an activity which ULRs undertake, whether this was through formal bargaining arrangements, learning agreements or other more consultative means.

Within the public sector national agreements had been secured, yet there was also evidence of negotiation at a local level. Learning, in the main, was seen as a separate issue for ULRs, with other union representatives maintaining bargaining relations for terms and conditions. The main avenue for interaction was the development of a learning agreement, and these were promoted in the ULR training and at NoE sessions. Bargaining and consultation were promoted in integrative terms, as a 'win-win' arrangement for both employers and workers. Whilst VET, as a purely integrative arrangement, has been questioned, the majority of ULRs found that LAs were effective tools to engage with management, and felt a greater security in having formalised arrangements. There was an acceptance of a collaborative partnership agenda that could benefit all parties, but also a sense of caution that activity should be union driven and formalised in order to minimise manipulation by employers. In terms of establishing agreements, union strength at the workplace is relevant. Where union density is high the potential to develop bargaining and consultative arrangements is increased.

The provision of facilities, the impact of state initiatives like the EP, and the development of LAs, were aiding ULRs in becoming a central part of VET activity at the workplace. Whilst this may be under the auspices of partnership, many ULRs and union officers were not unconscious of the potential for employers and managers to rescind on agreements or manipulate situations to their advantage. Despite most ULRs feeling they had positive relationships with management, they understood the need to provide certainty of arrangements should management change or ULRs move on to another workplace or another union position.

Furthermore, arrangements such as LAs, or the expansion of existing collective agreements, were not the only methods of employer engagement. Workplace

committees were used by approximately a third of ULRs, and can positively impact on a number of substantive outcomes, including training provision and workplace practices. The development of procedural mechanisms impacts on the ability of trade unions to establish substantive gains for workers.

The EP had also enabled ULRs to establish themselves within workplaces. The WTUC-LS and union staff were in positions to promote the pledge but ULRs were necessary to ensure its continued activity beyond initial phase of negotiating and writing the pledges. As ULRs appear to be integral to the initiation of pledges and to attracting employees to courses, the EP was a significant route to developing relationships with managers. Whilst EPs were strongly linked to basic skill training, they also appeared to increase employer funding provision and lead to beneficial changes in workplace practices.

The analysis contained within this chapter indicates that partnership agreements were influential in developing access to time off to train, and were a significant indicator of learning agreements, but were largely insignificant for the development of the substantive revitalisation outcomes. However, individual management attitude and support was a significant factor in developing support for ULRs in terms of facilities and time off, the reduction of barriers to activity and the ability of ULRs to negotiate. This suggests that positive engagement, within a partnership discourse is a worthwhile approach to the development of the ULA. Where ULRs can establish learning agreements, they were more likely to develop procedural mechanisms and substantive outcomes for workers, thereby contributing to the economic revitalisation of trade unions. These findings support suggestions that the ULA activity is supported by agreements and consultation which can have significant outcomes for employees (Cassell and Lee 2000; Saundry *et al.* 2010, Stuart *et al.* 2010). Whilst gains from a partnership, or integrative approach have been questioned (Stuart 1996), the evidence presented in this chapter does not support assertions that partnership is detrimental to substantive outcomes.

## Chapter Six: Union learning and membership revitalisation

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the potential of the ULA to contribute to membership revitalisation is assessed. Increasing membership and increasing activism amongst members are important indicators of membership revitalisation (Behrens *et al.* 2004). Case study evaluations of ULR activity suggests that ULRs are recruiting and that learning activity is also utilised as an organising tool for membership revitalisation (Findlay *et al.* 2000, Rainbird and Stuart 2011, Heyes 2012, Healy and Engel 2003, Warhurst *et al.* 2007). Yet the potential of the ULA to impact upon membership recruitment has been questioned as training and education are not ranked highly as reasons for joining a union (McIlroy 2008, Waddington and Whitson 1997).

Whilst the ULA has often been considered in terms of the distinction between servicing and organising, engaging with members is an important element of 'relational organising' (Saundry and McKeown 2013) and could be key to developing covenantal exchange described by Snape and Redman (2004).

The extent of recruitment activity, the nature of training and learning activity, and methods used to engage with workers were assessed in order to shed further light on the relationship between ULR activity and membership revitalisation. Firstly, whether ULRs believe recruitment activity is a central part of their role was an important consideration in the potential of ULRs to act for the benefit of membership revitalisation. Furthermore, whether ULRs were recruiting members (representing economic or social exchange) and recruiting other union representatives (representing covenantal relationships) is explored. Membership recruitment, on the one hand, is important for increasing density levels which can in turn maintain recognition agreements and increase the strength of union leverage in the workplace. On the other hand, recruiting union representatives can enable the growth or maintenance of workplace organisation affecting institutional strength (which is considered in the next chapter).

Secondly, the types of training and learning activities which ULRs are involved in, relating to discussions of narrow or broad learning agendas that reflect worker or employer interests are examined. Workplace training orientations amongst ULRs



may have negative consequences for instrumentality perceptions that are important for developing membership activity (Kelly and Heery 1994, Snape and Redman 2004) as members may perceive limited union impact (Davies 2008). There may also be fewer opportunities for members to engage and interact with ULRs.

Thirdly, we shall identify the methods which ULRs use to engage employees. As contact with union representatives is an important determinant of likelihood to join a union, the level of interaction with employees that is created by ULR activity may be significant to membership revitalisation outcomes. We therefore consider methods of communication with workers and methods used to engage with members.

In the final section, Donnelly and Kiely's (2007) assertion that union learning as an organising tool is determined by previous union activism (where ULRs that are new to trade union representative roles are less concerned with revitalisation outcomes) is explored. Union experience is considered in relation to the three areas of recruitment, training and learning activity, and methods of engagement. Practical and theoretical implications are then discussed.

## 6.2 Recruitment activity

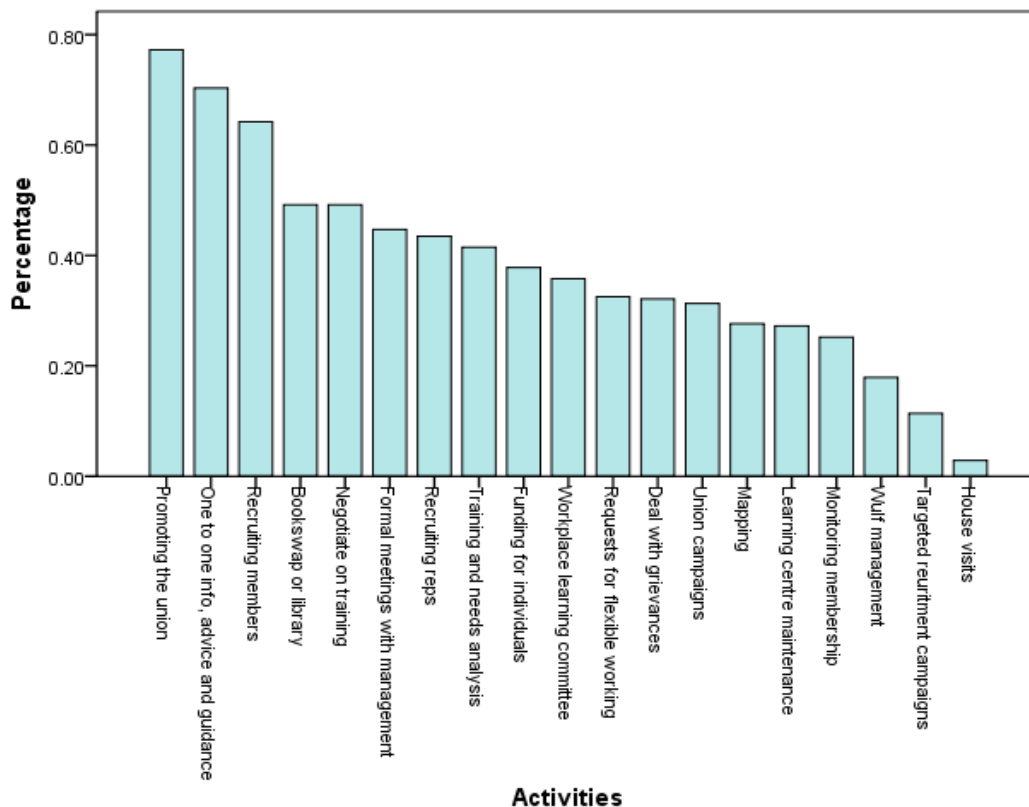
Supporters of the ULA argue that raising the profile of union work in training and learning, and the creation of the ULR role, can improve institutional and membership strength (Clough 2004, 2008, 2012), whilst critics argue that any impacts are negligible (McIlroy 2008). Evidence from England suggests that ULRs do act as union recruiters (Wood *et al.* 2005, Moore and Ross 2008, Munro and Rainbird 2000, 2003, 2004, Saundry *et al.* 2010) and that learning projects provide space for engagement and have helped to develop internal union capacity by increasing membership and 'activism' (Findlay *et al.* 2006, 2008).

So, were ULRs in Wales recruiting? Primarily ULR perceptions of the recruitment role of ULRs were considered and the potential for ULR activity to contribute to member revitalisation through reported recruitment of members and representatives were assessed.

Figure 6.1 shows the percentage of ULRs reporting a variety of activities. The most commonly cited ULR activity was the promotion of the union (77%) followed by one to one information, advice and guidance (72%), and the recruitment of members

(64%). ULRs were not only likely to consider recruitment of members as part of their role, almost half (48%) reported that they consider recruiting other union representatives to be part of their role as well. Thirty-one per cent of ULRs also reported that trade union courses had been attended by other union members as a result of their activity.

Figure 6.1: ULR Activities



Source: Question 3, ULR Survey

It was clear therefore that ULRs consider the recruitment of members and (to a lesser extent) the recruitment of union representatives as an integral part of the role. Importantly, ULRs were most likely to cite promotion of the union as an activity they undertake as part of their role. These figures indicate that ULRs have the will to promote the value of trade union membership and contribute to recruitment aims of membership. ULRs were asked whether they had recruited members and new representatives through their learning activity and where they held other union roles,

how many were recruited through other activities (see Table 6.1). Data indicates that both learning activity and other union activity were impacting upon recruitment.

Table 6.1: Recruitment through learning or other union activity

	Frequency	Per cent
Learning activity		
Recruited members	169	68.7
Recruited reps	122	49.6
Other union activity		
Recruited members	134	54.5
Recruited reps	99	40.2

Source: Questions 31 and 32, ULR Survey

With regard to membership levels, over 40 per cent of ULRs reported increased union membership levels which had resulted from ULA activity. Whilst monitoring reasons for joining is difficult for unions, as a wide range of factors may influence the decision to join, UNITE had recently undertaken an evaluation exercise:

*They've done a really interesting rigorous exercise quantifying precisely the number of members who are brought in through learning, and it's several, several thousand, and what we would say is that it is actually a very conservative estimate because when we are recruiting new members there are of course a hundred and one different issues which are floating around, learning is certainly one of them (ULR, interview)*

The evidence above indicates that ULRs consider recruitment to be part of their role, and that the majority are successful in doing so. However, ULRs observed in WTUC ULR training courses indicated concerns about providing support to non-members, whilst other ULRs were open to provide training to all. The commitment to looking

after members, rather than non-union colleagues, was epitomised during a discussion in ULR training:

**Instructor** - *Would you let them do the course if they weren't members?*

**Liam** - *No. I'd make them sign up first.*

**Gordon** - *It's difficult. I do.*

**Martin** - *Yes, to get them involved*

**Liam** - *I see what you're saying. I grit my teeth when we're negotiating for pay and bonuses and they don't pay union dues. They're my mates at the end of the day, but it still gets up my nose... and you are using union resources and time.*

**Brian** - *we're wearing two hats [as shop stewards], we're taught to recruit.*

**Gordon** - *that's why we do our road shows, show them what's on offer...*

**Tom** - *I offer help to members of other unions [who don't have a representative onsite], but I'll make non-members sign that piece of paper.*

*(Cardiff ULR training).*

This passage indicates that ULRs were concerned about the use of union resources in dealing with learning activity for non-members. However, the usefulness of learning engagement as a tool to initiate interest in trade union activity was also acknowledged. The strength of feeling was that any learners should become members, or at least be provided with information and experiences that are likely to persuade them to join. The division acknowledged here however, does not mean that ULRs who were not encouraging membership at the earliest opportunity were not interested in developing learner interest in union activity. Concerns may be raised that restricted access to learning provision could impact on the potential effect on instrumentality perceptions. However, in a large number of cases denying access to non-members learners was not possible due to the obligations of WG funding. For example, WULF funded courses must be open to all workers, not just union members.

The use of learning as a tool for recruitment and retention was highlighted by union officers. When asked if learning was attracting members, one officer responded:

*Absolutely, [learning activity] does three things: it gives people who are already members a new reason to stay members because they really didn't really realise unions were into learning in such a way. People who are non-members - we do ask for feedback from our courses we ask our learners were you a union*

*member ... has it changed your perception of trade unions?...Have you become a union member? So we do ask these questions, and we find people are becoming members ...And thirdly in redundancy situations because we work very closely with the Wales TUC and the ReAct funding what we are able to do, up until the point of notice we're able to work with employees to provide CV writing, job search, ...they see that as a very positive side of being in the union and when they are made redundant they are quite happy to stay as members when they're redundant so when they're reemployed they are still [union] members. They can still access all our services [for a reduced fee]. It's worked really, really positively and we've had written feedback to say that is why they've stayed members. (Union officer)*

ULRs supported this stance, often reiterating that learning activity that “not only is it a recruitment tool, it’s also a retention tool” (ULR). Indeed, many of the ULRs became active as a result of taking part in learning activity. For example, two female trainee ULRs from manufacturing had taken part in training courses organised by the union but the ULR for their worksite moved to a full-time union position. This left the role vacant and both women were passionate about the opportunities they had gained from taking part in learning activity, understood the benefits to workers, and wanted to continue with the good work done by the previous ULR. Both women were members before taking on the ULR role. Similarly, many other ULRs had developed a keen interest in the role through their participation in learning. The development of the ULA can instigate the development of members to take on union roles, developing covenantal relations.

During periods of industrial unrest differing attitudes to the role of learning activity were identified. For some, the provision of learning and training acted as a positive tool to continue to engage membership. For others the relationship was less clear-cut, with industrial action acting as a barrier to engagement or worse as a reason to leave the union despite continued learning activity. The statement below indicates that learning activity was helpful:

*It's been a really big and important factor in maintaining and increasing the membership, when a lot of local authorities have been taking a massive hit in terms of funding and jobs. (ULR, interview)*

However, union officers were concerned that austerity measures implemented by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government and the union opposition to

cuts were having a negative impact on membership levels. It was deemed difficult to determine whether learning was encouraging workers to join or remain members in public sector workplaces. The following quote indicates this view:

*[The union] at the moment is seeing a large drop in membership because of the public sector cuts so we've got no way of knowing whether those individuals that are leaving are doing so because the jobs are going or because of the dissatisfaction with the level of industrial action and working to rule that's been going on at the moment. So I don't think they actually do a survey of leavers or they definitely don't do a survey of those who stay within [the union] to see why they are staying. (Public sector union officer)*

There were mixed feelings about the potential to retain members, particularly because of austerity measures and any resulting union action. On the one hand, learning activity may continue and be a positive engagement in hard times, maintaining positive relations with members and with management. On the other hand, learning activity may cease due to poor relations, or the benefits may be negated by adversarial organising. But ULRs and learning officers were adamant that learning is attracting members, contrary to McIlroy's claims (2008). Further quotes indicate that the ULA is recognised as contributing to union strength:

*I would say the perception of union learning is changing. .. I think, and I do know actually, that senior officers are beginning to think, 'hold on this is helping with membership', it's helping in what they called growing the union, outside of the community, it's growing it in the workplace and people are seeing the union as encompassing much more of their needs than perhaps they used to. (Union officer)*

Another officer commented that the ULA was helping to grow membership as an indirect outcome of WG funding of learning activity:

*We've made such a play of the fact that our WULF project is Assembly money, is Welsh Government money it's available to everyone. It's not used as a catalyst to get new members but we have seen that new membership of [the union] has been a by-product of the WULF opportunities that we've been able to put out there and the reason we can quantify that is that we have a quarterly draw for our ULRs. The ULRs that actually recruit members will send me a copy of the membership form and then we sort of reward them with a set of Quick Reads books so it's an incentive for ULRs to actually look for membership as well. (Public sector union officer)*

These comments indicate that ULR recruitment activity was also being acknowledged and incentivised within some unions (see Chapter 8 for more). Importantly, government funding was seen to be beneficial not only as a driver of learning activity and workplace training but also as having an indirect benefit for unions. With the decline of steward numbers and the division that has been seen to occur between the union and its members, the role of the ULR provides unions with representatives that can provide 'relational' organising through their contact with members. Contact with union activists can be key in a decision to join a union, and learning was a method through which to promote engagement with the union, and was having an impact on recruitment. In Chapter 2 we discussed learning as a servicing tool, but servicing has developed into organising with unions strategically monitoring how learning activity is impacting upon recruitment, and with ULRs utilising learning to recruit new members and develop new activists. By providing a service individuals were engaged with union activists and by developing relationships participation and activism were advanced, which can in turn aid organising and membership revitalisation through the development of social and covenantal relations.

### 6.3 Training or Learning

The types of activity that ULRs conduct may have important implications for membership revitalisation outcomes. Researchers have raised concerns about the focus of union learning activity, suggesting that low-skills and employer objectives are dominant (Davies 2008). Where learning is focused on workplace skill, or where employers dominate agendas, the likelihood of the union being seen as instrumental in providing access to training opportunities could be reduced. As research into union commitment has shown, instrumentality is an important determinant of trade union membership and activity (Snape and Redman 2004) and a reduced instrumentality perception may impact negatively on membership retention and recruitment. A narrow agenda that does not highlight union involvement and limits potential contact with members and with workers, could therefore be a cause for concern in developing an engaged membership. We shall consider whether ULRs and unions are focusing only on workplace learning and training or employing broader concepts of learning to engage with employees before considering methods of engagement in the next section.

The survey results show that over 80 per cent of ULRs in Wales organised some type of learning activity, and almost 50 per cent of ULRs reported that they were involved with book swap or library facilities at the workplace. These figures were similar to those reported in England (Saundry *et al.* 2010, Hollinrake *et al.* 2008). Fifty-five per cent of ULRs reported organising on-site learning, and 40 per cent reported organising off-site learning. Over 30 per cent reported organising both on-site and off-site learning activity.

This data indicates that learning activity was being instigated by ULRs. The development of learning opportunities, often supported by union and government funding, was occurring. What was interesting was that a large proportion of learning activity was not occurring at the workplace. Organising learning activity outside the workplace may be an indication that there was a lack of facilities at the workplace, or a lack of employer support (see Chapter 5). An alternative explanation is that learning activity occurs off-site in colleges or was provided in community settings and may not result from employer behaviour.

The nature of learning, as worker oriented (focusing on personal development and interest, and transferable skills) or employer focused (job specific skills) is explored in the following section.

### Types of learning

ULRs were asked whether colleagues enquired about different types of training and learning activity and which types of training the ULRs has organised. This allows for consideration of the ability of ULRs to increase access and opportunity to learn.

Eight types of learning were identified, capturing notions of job-specific, skill development and personal interest learning. The results are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 indicates that a wide variety of training and learning activities were organised by ULRs. Worker contact with ULRs was often related to employability skills, with the three highest ranked activities being IT, basic skills, and Welsh. General employment skills were ranked low in terms of both supply and demand. This suggests that training such as CV development was not at the forefront of training activity and engagement with ULRs. An interesting finding was the relatively high rank of 'hobby and interest' learning, which suggests that many ULRs are



approached for information about learning activity beyond skill development for work purposes.

Table 6.2: Types of training and learning (percentage of ULRs responding positively)

	Workers enquired about: (demand)	ULRs had organised: (supply)
IT skills	78.5	55.3
Basic skills	59.3	39.4
Welsh	54.9	33.7
Hobby and interest	54.1	35.0
Job specific skills	46.7	32.5
Trade union courses	41.1	31.3
Language skills	37.4	26.4
Other	30.1	23.6
Employment skills	29.7	28.5

Source: Questions 6 and 7, ULR Survey, N=246.

Hobby and interest learning and trade union courses represented a substantial proportion of ULR activities. Fifty-four per cent of ULRs reported that workers inquired about learning for hobbies and non-work interests, showing that ULR-initiated learning activity is underestimated by assessments that focus solely on employer provided or worksite training (Hoque and Bacon 2008). This finding was also supported by qualitative reports of activity, which indicate a wide range of learning being facilitated that cannot be deemed to relate to employability or job development.

Observation of a 'Learning at Work' event in the public sector entailed a number of sessions that were based on hobbies and interests, such as Spanish, drumming, and belly dancing. Further evidence of the breadth of learning activity was also identified in interviews, observation and analysis of NetNews:

*We had a road safety talk, cookery, healthy eating, knitting and crochet, which is likely to progress to lunch time regular sessions, a quiz, Zumba, loads of things.  
(PCS ULR, NoE 7)*

ULRs revealed that activities such as painting, jewellery making, holistic therapy, sign language, genealogy, mental health first aid, flower arranging, French and more, were being organised by ULRs (Interviews; PCS conference; NoE1; NoE2; NoE4; NoE7). ULRs were organising activities which go beyond conceptions of learning as job-related training. ULRs were also creative in promoting learning and using and sharing knowledge and skills of union reps and workers:

*We've got people providing recipes and cooking the dish so if you like it you can take the recipe and cook it yourself. We've also got the driving theory test on the computers – I've never done anything like that before and I've been driving for ages, it's really an eye-opener. (PCS ULR, NoE3)*

The breadth of activity reveals the wide conception of learning that ULRs have adopted, and this may be important in terms of strengthening instrumentality perceptions. ULRs, union reps and TUC workers agreed that the activity of ULRs was not just about encouraging learning that can aid employers (through business case arguments for learning that include greater motivation, commitment or reductions in errors, absence and turnover), but that learning affects all aspects of members' lives. For example, ULRs often promote learning activity as a way to help engage with children and family:

*We're using LearnDirect. We've got online storybooks, books for families, encouraging adults to read with their kids (UNITE ULR NoE2)*

Utilising QuickReads, a project focused on encouraging adult reading, was also found to be promoted as a tool for family engagement. Advertising basic maths skills was often done under the guise of helping children with homework, dealing with household finances or as a method by which to understand work-related issues, such as understanding your payslip.

Further analysis of NetNews supported the proposition that many activities can be classified as learning rather than training. Thematic content analysis revealed 88 references to training activity, such as basic skills courses, whilst over 100 references were more broadly categorised as learning. Examples of broad learning

activity include many of the activities already mentioned above as well as other examples such as pond conservation and photography courses.

Therefore, activity beyond employer training provision was a central part of the ULR role, and it was not confined to concerns of workplace training. ULRs were providing access to, and encouraging engagement in, the development of skills beyond workplace and job roles. Whilst basic skills, IT skills and Welsh were high on the list of organised training for ULRs, these were skills that will not only improve quality of life at work, and aid business efficiency, but will also improve the quality of life for members outside work.

Accusations that learning activity is employer-dominated have suggested that union representatives are being incorporated as an HR function (McIlroy 2008), and this may be detrimental to instrumentality perceptions (Snape and Redman 2004). However, in terms of incorporation into employer functions, ULRs were maintaining independence from employer needs and were focusing on individual needs because ULRs were not focused upon workplace training practices alone.

This is not to say that work skills were not valued. ULRs were shown to be supporting continued employment through learning activity, as evidenced in the quote below:

*... ULRs are helping to support people who want to learn. We had someone who was successfully redeployed recently. We got the guy doing ECDL and now he can work for us again. He'd had a work related injury, he may have gone to capabilities welfare because redeployment is poorly organised, and doesn't really look at training that could help. He wasn't shortlisted for one post due to lack of computer skills. We got him trained in ECDL, he had a one month trial and then got the job... (Interview, ULR)*

Job related skills that would increase employability were also valued for workers facing redundancy. Union officers revealed the relationship to be important when considering re-employment after redundancy notice, or when members express an interest in changing jobs.

*We work very closely with Sector Skills and we provide information on that to our union learning reps in a redundancy situation and we'll find out from sector skills... we'll see where the vacancies are and we'll let the union learning rep have that information to pass on. We don't tell people they can't do plastering*

*but we would ask them to reconsider if they want re-employment just to think about skills gaps and it works quite well. (Union officer)*

*If we have an application of ten redundant people to do bricklaying we'll go back to the union learning rep and say we've been told by the construction skills that they are really short of carpenters and if they're looking to get re-employed, here's the evidence, why don't they think about doing carpentry instead or plastering because it will give them a better chance. (Union officer, interview)*

This shows the strategic targeting of training that is linked to the economic skill structure of the Welsh economy, and this aids learners in identifying skills that will provide greater opportunities for employment. WULF funding was also used to support learners and was seen as a useful tool in redundancy situations, as we can see in the quote below:

*We've had a lot of entrepreneurs come through union learning which is great because, you know, we get involved with people who are being made redundant. ... We can give them tasters so we've had learners who've done pub management, food hygiene then gone on to run their own pubs. (Union officer, interview)*

Unions were using the different funding initiatives strategically to support the decision-making of individuals, particularly those in redundancy situations. The use of taster sessions at learning day events, or using WULF funding, can test interest and commitment and was deemed to be a successful way to then utilise further funding at an educationally higher level, such as ReAct. The examples above indicate how training provision organised by ULRs can impact upon the job prospects of people facing redundancy, which in turn generates positive experiences of union engagement.

To test whether different types of learning activity are generating different outcomes, we can assess the relationship between recruitment and types of learning. Chi square results are reported in Table 6.3. The results show that the proportion of ULRs who are recruiting members are providing greater access to training opportunities compared to those who do not recruit.

Table 6.3: Training and learning activity by recruitment

Training activity	No members recruited	Members recruited	Chi <sup>2</sup>	No reps recruited	Reps recruited	Chi <sup>2</sup>
Basic Skills	22.1%	47.3%	13.09 ***	32.3%	46.7%	ND
Job specific skills	24.0%	36.2%	ND	29%	36%	ND
IT skills	42.9%	60.9%	ND	44.4%	66.4%	11.207 ***
Employment skills	13.0%	35.5%	12.090 ***	18.5%	38.5%	11.093 ***
Language skills	20.8%	29.0%	ND	15.3%	37.7%	14.716 ***
Welsh	19.5%	40.2%	9.287 ***	25.1%	42.6%	7.773 ***
Hobby and interest	26.0%	39.1%	ND	24.2%	45.9%	11.808 ***

Source: ULR Survey, questions 7, 31, 32. N=246 \* , \*\* , \*\*\* - indicates significance at 10%, 5%, 1%.

So, for example, 47% ULRs who recruited members provided access to basic skills compare to 22% of ULRs who did not recruit. Results were statistically significant for three of the training types. Greater significance was found in the associations between recruiting representatives and types of training. Here, only job-specific skills and basic skills are not affecting recruitment activity.

Further analysis considering the variety of training provided shows that, the greater the breadth of activity, the more likely ULRs were to recruit both members and representatives (see Table 6.4).

The figures in Table 6.4 show that the greater the breadth of training activity, the greater the likelihood of recruiting members, as well as the greater likelihood of increasing the number of representatives. Chi square tests indicate that these differences are statistically significant. These findings support our proposition that a

wider conception of training than one limited to management discourses is likely to provide greater impact for revitalisation outcomes.

Table 6.4: Number of training courses organised, by recruitment

Number of training types organised	No members recruited	Members Recruited	No rep recruited	Reps recruited
No training	33.8%	11.8%	25.8%	11.5%
1	19.5%	13.0%	20.2%	9.8%
2	11.7%	11.8%	15.3%	8.2%
3	9.1%	15.4%	10.5%	16.4%
4	13.0%	10.1%	10.5%	11.5%
5	6.5%	16.6%	11.3%	15.6%
6 plus	6.5%	21.3%	6.5%	27.0%
Chi <sup>2</sup>	28.015 ***		31.913 ***	

Source: ULR Survey, questions 7, 31, 32. N=246 \*, \*\*, \*\*\* - indicates significance at 10%, 5%, 1%.

Learning beyond workplace training is a significant aspect of the ULR role. Whilst ULRs were aiding engagement in work-related training, a large proportion of activity was not related to work activities. The evidence provided also showed that a wider base of learning was associated with higher levels of recruitment of both members and representatives.

#### 6.4 Engaging Employees

There are a number of different ways in which ULRs and unions may engage with workers over learning. In this section we shall discuss the methods promoted by unions and utilised by ULRs. Methods of engagement are important to relational organising (Saundry and McKeown 2013), which is thought to increase the potential to recruit members, and thereby impact upon revitalisation. The provision of one-to-one information and guidance is an important feature of the ULR role and may support the development of relational organising through increased contact. As the number of shop stewards has been declining (Charwood and Forth 2009, Darlington 2010) so has the amount of contact that workers are likely to have with union

representatives. The relational aspect of the ULR role is considered to be important as evidence that suggests contact with union representatives is a strong indicator of likelihood to join (Heery *et al.* 2003).

The information, advice and guidance that the majority of ULRs provide presents an opportunity for workers to develop relationships with the union, yet there were a number of routes through which ULRs communicate with potential learners or potential members. Notice boards and email were the most commonly cited methods used to engage members, advertise courses and promote the ULR role, with 86 per cent and 77 per cent respectively. These methods were followed by newsletters and intranet (38 and 37 per cent). A smaller proportion used union websites, social networking sites, and online forums (24, 15, and 10 per cent respectively). The majority of ULRs used a variety of methods of communication (84 per cent used more than two methods).

These communication methods were often one way, where ULRs distribute information about courses. What are more important are the physical interactions and conversations between ULRs and members or potential members. How ULRs engage with workers is evaluated below, firstly by considering the importance of training needs analyses as a method of engagement, before considering learning events and other methods.

### Training needs analyses

A key method for engaging workers are training needs analyses (TNAs), which are conducted by ULRs in order to understand the training and learning needs of workers. TNAs may be performed on a face-to-face basis through 'learner interviews'. Learner interviews allow ULRs to get an understanding of the needs and wishes of the individual. By undertaking needs analysis in this way, ULRs are conversing with individuals on a one-to-one basis, and can focus on individual, not management, needs. Discussions may include broader learning opportunities than feature in management-driven assessments, such as appraisals which tend to focus on workplace training. Learner interviews were a popular way to examine learner needs, but were found to be more difficult to sustain in workplaces with a low ULR to member ratio or where time off to speak with members was problematic.

Whilst learner interviews provide space to discuss a number of issues which may concern the learner and develop relationships, TNAs may also be survey based. Survey based assessments will often involve less interaction and contact between ULRs and workers at the point of survey, but contact may be developed as a result of this activity. Further, TNA surveys again promote the ULR role and activity to a wide audience. Forty-one per cent of ULRs reported conducting TNAs which were understood by ULRs to promote learning at the individual level, fulfilling needs, and providing greater directed and targeted learning that is of benefit to the member – rather than the employer.

*From the ULR perspective, when you do a TNA, it's about preparation, like portfolio development, evidence of reflexive working, interviewing skills and so on. (RCN ULR, NoE3)*

*We've done questionnaires on learning preferences, so you know what they want and when so you can deliver what's best for them. (PCS ULR, PCS conference)*

Another key element of TNAs beyond identifying learning needs is identifying any inhibitors to learning activity, such as the timing of training where personal commitments and family responsibilities may restrict access. The quotation below demonstrates how TNAs may be performed by ULRs with member needs in mind:

*The shop floor has mandatory training (truck, food hygiene and others) and then appraisals are used to identify training needs. [The lead ULR] does the training needs analysis and highlights basic skills and other learning outside the workplace, which includes Spanish and Welsh. They may be signposted to external courses but if there is enough interest they will be held in-house. (ULR, interview)*

The use of TNAs as a membership engagement tool again enables us to question assertions that ULRs may be subsumed by management prerogative. TNAs are not uniformly being utilised to fulfil management obligations to train employers to a standard that enables them to perform a job, but were often focused on member needs.



## Learning events

Further to promoting learning activity through one-way communications such as noticeboards or newsletters, and assessing what workers want to learn through TNAs and one-to-one advice, ULRs were also organising and conducting Learning at Work Days or Adult Learners Week (ALW) activities. Events often involved the provision of taster sessions and were attended by local colleges and learning providers to advertise courses. Workplace events enabled the promotion of learning, the ULR role and the union, to the workplace as a whole and these activities were important for engaging potential members.

For UNITE, the number of workplaces that held events was considered to be positive: “There are 35 sites active for ALW, which is very encouraging”. (UNITE ULR, NoE5). Other unions also supported these events as a method to engage workers:

*We did learning at work week too, 90 per cent of staff took part. The best thing I think was the driving simulator, which was all about smarter driving and ecological driving habits. We got it through WAG... it was choc-a-block from start to finish. We had loads of things. (PCS ULR, NoE7)*

ALW events not only provided access to taster sessions but were also considered important in promoting union involvement in learning activity and promoting activism. In many cases branches were involved in the organisation of events and supported ULRs in these activities. Events can target large numbers of workers, as well as link to other union business and may be used as an organising activity. Learning events often involved other branch reps, highlighting the broader work of the union, and this aspect was particularly evident within UNITE, UNISON, PCS and the GMB. The quotation below highlights the connections that can be made to issues beyond workplace training or to workplace campaigns:

*The local branch is joining with the ULRs to have a Union Learning event, promoting new membership, new ULRs, climate change as well as other issues...We hope to take things forward with a newsletter and webpages. (UNISON ULR, NoE3)*

A novel innovation within UNISON was the creation of ‘roadshows’. Roadshows enabled ULRs to set up a stall in a prominent area within a workplace, such as a

reception area or canteen, and promote learning activity. Unlike learning events, no taster courses were provided. Instead, roadshows allowed ULRs to gain contacts beyond their normal working groups, but also significantly to travel to workplaces where no ULRs had yet been recruited. Roadshows were seen to be key to the engagement of workers:

*We want to advertise the union and encourage membership but also promote learning. We promote what we do as [union] ULRs, take leaflets, but we do it so that the union comes first, that's the first question. It's vital that ULRs are there for members. Roadshows are the main ways to get out and about, and meet managers at other workplaces too. (ULR)*

The significance of learning events for membership revitalisation was highlighted by a ULR who stated that “Community recruited 39 ULRs through a learning open day” (NoE 1). Such events allowed ULRs to interact with potential members and put forward arguments for both joining the union and undertaking training. ULRs felt that there were clear benefits in terms of recruitment as these events allowed unions to put forward arguments that, for example, linked union pay bargaining and learning activity:

*It's like being paid the correct rate for the job and that also means paid for the skill. So if you feel you're not being properly paid for the qualifications that you've got, then join. (ULR, interview)*

The development of learning events and roadshows enable ULRs to have greater contacts outside their workgroup or office, to engage with members and to offer members a service. However, this servicing element does not negate the need for organising but rather supports it. Many ULRs reported that learning events offered ULRs opportunities to advertise the role and the work of the union.

*As people see that [learning is] happening they're more inclined to help you. We use emails and things but you have to talk about it, be direct, then people start to know who you are and will come and talk to you. You need to be in their face. (ULR, NoE1)*

The quotation above highlights the need for workers to be aware of the ULR position and that ULRs must promote themselves in order to effectively engage with learners.

ULRs were not only reacting to interest from colleagues but also actively promoting learning, the ULR role and trade unionism.

### Roving ULRs

A particularly interesting development in BECTU was the creation of 'roving ULRs', who were not based within one workplace but travel to a number of different work sites. ULRs travel to different locations, promoting and assessing needs for learning amongst workers, and provide a point of contact with the union they may not otherwise experience. In this way ULRs were able to develop relationships and engage with workers who have little opportunity for contact with their unions.

Within media unions, the ULR role developed in this way in order to engage with as many workers as possible. The nature of self-employment and freelancing, working for different organisations and being based at temporary sites, has meant that the ULR role had not developed around the workplace as a single site. Unions here were demonstrating an ability to provide innovative answers to hurdles of organising workers in temporary work locations and the self-employed, which overcome some of the difficulties of organising dislocated workforces. There is evidence that other unions have also adopted roving ULRs roles, for example in UNITE to engage employers of migrant workers (Clough 2012), and within other unions in order to promote the use of learning centres as organising and capacity building sites (Rainbird and Stuart 2011).

The development of the roving ULR provided workers with exposure to and contact with union activists. This was considered important given the strain on the declining number of union representatives, and the complicated nature of employment and work within particular sectors. Through the inclusion of the roving ULR, trade unions were able to provide support to workers. In the case of BECTU, training was identified as a key concern for workers as technological developments meant that training was necessary in order to find continued employment but with few workers employed directly, funding for training was often at the expense of the individual worker. By integrating the ULR role into their structures, BECTU developed a significant strategy through which they could engage workers and reduce the burden of sourcing funding for professional development.

## Organising unionism

As was indicated above, roadshows and ALW are used as learning campaign tools which can enable the engagement and recruitment of non-members. ULRs can therefore increase workers' personal contact with unions. But to what extent are ULRs engaging with the specific methods stipulated in the organising unionism literature and are they impacting upon union organisation at the workplace?

Moore (2009) suggests that union learning is becoming central to union organising strategies and that more unions are promoting the relationship between union learning and union organising at a national level. This is evidenced through the creation of roles such as 'branch learning co-ordinators' in PCS, 'lifelong learning co-ordinators' in UNISON (p.7), and UNITE's 'Learning Officer' role (p.10). Within the 'Organising Model', a number of tactics are suggested that can increase the strength of organisation at workplace or branch level. These include mapping, house calls and targeted recruitment campaigns (Heery and Simms 2008). Positive union results are said to be best achieved through personal contact, rank-and-file participation, commitment of staff and financial resources, and training and utilisation of members in organized workplaces (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998: 21-24). This section shall consider the extent to which ULRs engage with specific organising methods.

ULRs were asked whether they use mapping, house calls or targeted campaigns. Twenty-eight per cent of ULRs reported that they undertook mapping exercises. Observation of the WTUC ULR training course revealed that there is an element of the training itself which encourages the use of mapping. Mapping was given as a homework exercise during ULR training in order to identify potential learners, as well as to assess the workplace membership of the union. This was well received by trainees.

*Mapping was a good exercise, you may realise that areas you thought were strong may not be, and the other way round. It's good to identify those who may become active. (Trainee ULR, observation)*

Further, mapping was an activity that allowed ULRs to engage with workers who they would not normally come into contact with and provided an understanding of the nature of unionism within their workplace. The ULR training exercise also provided ULRs, and their branch, with important information. Three examples are given below:

*ULR 1 - We've done ours per floor, whether they are members or not. It's easy for me to find out about them...[our density is] about 92%.*

*ULR 2 - We've got about five non-union members, one UNITE member, and we've got 106 members. I've made a start on the map.*

*ULR 3 - We had a go through the floorplan [of the production area]. We've got how many are in each section. We noticed there's lots of temporary and agency staff. (ULR training course)*

Further, in one case the exercise also instigated branch members to review their own records, promoting effective branch organisation:

*He gave me a list and he's starting to revise it and will give it to me when he's done. (Trainee ULR, observation)*

Whilst mapping was understood to be a valuable exercise, the survey findings indicate that the use of mapping among ULRs in Wales was not widespread. The use of mapping by ULRs is a tool that can encourage a review of information held by the branch, as well as being a tool that can identify issues that can be targeted by branch activists. However, only in a minority of cases had mapping been implemented.

The use of house visits and targeted recruitment campaigns only occurred in a minority of cases, eight and three per cent respectively. This indicates that there is limited engagement with these organising tactics within the ULA. Targeted recruitment campaigns however bear some resemblance to learning events, and whilst these events do not target particular types of employee, they do provide a concentrated opportunity to recruit in a single workplace.

### 6.5 Union experience and membership revitalisation

Above ULR recruitment, learning and engagement activities were evaluated in relation to membership revitalisation. The recruitment aims of ULRs were identified as significant and learning events which contribute to the engagement of members in trade union activity were linked to aspects of relational organising. Donnelly and Kiely (2007) have suggested that ULRs are either 'learning focused' or 'union focused'; and that these orientations are determined by prior union experience. Learning focused ULRs are not concerned with recruitment and do not engage fully

with workplace union organisation, whilst union focused ULRs are engaging with union organising. This section considers whether 'new ULRs' (those who have not held a union role before) and 'prior reps' (those who have held a union role prior to taking on the ULR role) perform the role differently. This is an important issue for the institutional and membership revitalisation of trade unions as ULRs who are not promoting unionism, the ULR role, other union roles, or activism to learners, will be of less value to revitalisation efforts.

Cross tabulation found prior union experience had little association with the ability of ULRs to instigate learning activity as they were no more likely to have organised learning activity than ULRs who had no previous representative experience (see Table 6.5). When training activity is further disaggregated analysis indicates that prior reps were slightly more likely to arrange for workers to attend trade union courses: under a quarter of new ULRs reported arranging trade union courses, compared to over 36.8 per cent of prior representatives. However, chi-square tests further indicate that this difference is not significant. Further analysis revealed no differences between whether learning took place on or off-site. New ULRs were more likely to report using community inclusion strategies, but this finding was not statistically significant. The methods employed to communicate and engage with members differed only on the use of social media, and these differences were not highly significant, or extensively used.

Analysis of difference in recruitment revealed that the prior and new representatives were equally likely to report that recruitment was part of their role, and that they had recruited members. However, recruitment of representatives was less likely to be reported by new representatives, as were mapping techniques. The use of mapping techniques may be less common for new ULRs as other representatives undertake this activity, and prior ULRs may be more aware of this.

The evidence indicates that there is little difference in indicators of membership revitalisation by union. In terms of generating economic or social exchange relationships. ULRs were creating union-member relations that increase support and providing similar access to training. However, ULRs with prior union experience were more likely to develop covenantal relationships that result in highly rated union commitment behaviours.

Table 6.5: Percentage of prior and new representative and membership activities

	New ULR	Prior rep	Chi <sup>2</sup> (significance)
Recruitment of members part of role	62.7%	72.9%	2.419 (ND)
Actual recruitment of members	79.7%	81.8%	.016 (ND)
Recruitment of representatives part of role	43.1%	54.2%	2.481 (ND)
Actual recruitment of representatives	32.4%	51.4%	8.046**
Training and learning organised	82.4%	80.6%	.036 (ND)
Trade union courses organised	23.5%	36.8%	0.36 (ND)
TNAs	51.0%	34.7%	5.85 (.ND)
Community inclusion	42.4%	36.8%	.511 (ND)
Mapping	15.6%	33.1%	7.294 *

Source: ULR Survey, questions 3, 6, 7, 31, 32. \*, \*\*, \*\*\* - indicates significance at 10%, 5%, 1%.

Therefore, there was little difference in the recruitment aims of ULRs, though prior representatives were more likely to recruit new representatives they were no more likely to consider this recruitment to be part of the ULR role. New ULRs and prior ULRs should not be distinguished as learning or organising focused as Donnelly and Kiely (2007) suggest, but rather prior ULRs may be more adept as creating covenantal relationships.

## 6.6 Discussion

In order to explore ULR involvement in membership engagement and recruitment, three areas were identified: the recruitment intentions and actual recruitment behaviour of ULRs, the breadth of training and learning activity, and the methods of engagement employed by ULRs that enables interaction with members and potential members.

Central to the ULR role, over and above the provision of training and learning, was promotion of the union. In terms of membership revitalisation the recruitment of members, whether directly or indirectly, was clearly the business of ULRs. The development of the ULR role had developed avenues for contact with trade unions, and had filled a space left by dwindling shop steward numbers and the resultant decline in contact with union representatives. Evidence suggests that involvement in learning activity can enable the identification of potential representatives and those willing to support union activity at the workplace. This was clear in ULR training courses, where new ULRs had been engaged through partaking in learning activity at the workplace. The value of the engagement with unions therefore developed an exchange relationship. Furthermore, the development of the ULA is generally perceived as having a positive impact not only on the recruitment of new union members and new representatives but also on the retention and activism of current members. As learners interact with ULRs they begin to see the benefits of such a role, and as positive relations are built, workers can be developed from member learners to active ULRs who recruit and promote the union. The ULA was therefore developing pro-union attitudes and perceived support that resulted in the creation of economic, social, and covenantal relationships.

In this regard, the instrumentality of ULR activity may be positively received as exchange relationships (Snape and Redman 2004) are developed with the union. This means that union members, by undertaking learning activity can develop into members that are more active and take on union representative roles. Whilst this was operating through a service function, the results of service provision can lead to greater organising through the development of positive relations (Saundry and McKeown 2013).

This chapter has highlighted the range of learning activity, as opposed to training activity, that ULRs organise for members. The analysis above indicates that the nature of ULR instigated activity is not confined to the development of work based skills, but encapsulates a much broader understanding of learning. ULR activity encompasses much more than provision of training at the workplace, which has been the focus of a large proportion of research into ULR activity (Hoque and Bacon 2008, 2009, Saundry *et al.* 2010, Hollinrake *et al.* 2008). As such, membership



revitalisation impacts beyond employer training provision and work-related training have been underexplored and underestimated.

A broad conception of learning negates claims that ULRs and the ULA focus on basic or workplace skill allowing us to challenge claims that ULRs are inhibited by, or incorporated, into management functions. The wide remit of learning activity and figures indicating that members are requesting a broad range of learning opportunities demonstrates that ULRs are responding to worker needs. ULRs are not operating under a 'managerialist' orientation and are not neglecting the demands of colleagues (Kelly and Heery 1994). This perspective on the ULR is further justified by statistical analysis which demonstrates that recruitment of members and representatives is strengthened by broad and varied learning activity.

ULRs were not only providing learning opportunities to engage workers, but they were using novel and innovative methods to promote union participation. The use of roving ULRs and roadshows are novel ways of engaging with members that may be otherwise hard to reach (Simpson and Huxley 2010). These methods allowed ULRs to contact members and workers beyond their usual work settings, or in disparate workforces, and increased the visibility and awareness of union activity. Learning events were useful tools in promoting trade union membership to workers and were highly valued by ULRs. Additionally, TNAs were also seen as valuable tools for engaging with members in terms of identifying learning needs but also as a method to develop relationships with learners, and gain an understanding of any issues they may be having within work.

With regards to the understanding of impact of union experience that is proffered by Donnelly and Kiely (2007), no significant differences were found in approach to communication, engagement or recruitment between ULRs with and without prior experience of union activism. These findings lessen the concerns voiced by Donnelly and Kiely that ULRs without prior union experience, who are engaged through the learning agenda, are less likely to contribute to membership revitalisation. Rather the distinction is based upon the ability (and not the inclination) to develop covenantal relationships.

Whilst the organising model is proffered in IR literature as a way forward for unions, there was little engagement with organising methods amongst ULRs beyond

mapping. Community unionism on the other hand was linked to learning activity as ULRs engage with community providers and centres and people beyond the boundaries of a workplace. Yet these two strategies were having limited impact upon the recruitment of members. We would argue instead, that in order to develop reciprocal covenantal relationships, a relational organising approach is a significant tactic for membership revitalisation.

Overall, the ULR was acting as an organiser for the union and impacting upon membership revitalisation in three ways. Firstly, ULRs were promoting the benefits of trade unionism, saw this as key to their role, and engaged in recruitment activity. Secondly, ULRs deliver learning activity around individual learner needs, as indicated by the breadth of learning activities taking place. Thirdly, the methods used by ULRs to promote learning activity act as an advertising tool for unions providing additional points of contact and help to develop covenantal relationships. So, by understanding recruitment to be part of the ULR role, providing a breadth of training and learning activity, and engaging with members face-to-face, ULRs are contributing to the maintenance and progression of membership strength.

## Chapter Seven: Union Learning and Institutional Revitalisation

### 7.1 Introduction

Institutional revitalisation is concerned with internal union strength and renewal, which may be determined by the interior workings and organisation of trade unions (Behrens *et al.* 2004). Union strategies and activity, the commitment of activists, and relationships within and between unions are important elements in developing a strong union movement. The revitalisation of trade unions through institutional, or internal, means is dependent upon the ability of trade unions to function as relevant and significant organisations that have the capacity to represent worker interests in social, political and economic arenas. In the chapter that follows we explore the institutional dimension of revitalisation using Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of trade union capacity and ask whether the ULA supports the development of union capacity, thereby contributing to institutional union revitalisation.

Lévesque and Murray (2010) identify four key power resources and four key union capabilities as important internal determinants of union capacity. To recap, the four power resources are narrative resources, internal solidarity, infrastructural resources, and network embeddedness. Strategic capabilities also combine four elements: framing, intermediating, learning and articulating. The ability of trade unions to utilise the resources will be dependent upon capabilities, and vice versa, in a complex set of relationships. In assessing union capacity we focus on an assessment of each power resource, with reference to capabilities where appropriate, highlighting significant areas of union activity that generate power resources and capabilities.

In the first section, infrastructural resources are evaluated, considering the extent to which the ULA is strengthening this power resource. This section is also concerned with learning as a capability and explores the range of unions involved in ULA activity and representative recruitment, as important aspects of learning and infrastructural resource development. We saw in the previous chapter that ULRs recruit not only members but also new representatives, impacting upon the human resources of trade unions. In further assessing ULA impacts on infrastructural resources, beneficial outcomes for unions, namely, increased membership levels,

and improvements in participation at union meetings, branch organisation, and the information held on members are considered.

Following this, infrastructural resources are further evaluated by asking whether the ULA is developing activists, and whether these activists are integrated into trade union networks and structures. The development of new activists has been an important element of identity-based organising strategies, as well as a focus of union commitment and participation literature. The demographic characteristics of ULRs, self-reported levels of activism, and role escalation are considered as important aspects in the development of infrastructural resources.

Secondly, we evaluate the narrative construction of the ULA and the ULR role, in order to explore the framing of the ULA and development of narrative resources. The framing of the ULA under the partnership or integrative approach has been a significant aspect of ULA debates in relation to both political and economic and workplace engagement (Stuart 1996, McIlroy 2008). We shall consider whether this framing is detrimental to union organising.

The final section of the chapter evaluates internal solidarity, asking whether unions are supporting the development of the ULA, and how unions are interact to provide learning opportunities for members. This assessment is linked to intermediating capabilities identified by Lévesque and Murray (2010). The impact of intermediating capabilities on institutional revitalisation is linked both to inter-union relations, and network embeddedness. We must consider 'first, the ability of the union to mediate between contending interests; second, the ability to foster collaborative action...; third, the ability to access, create and activate salient social networks by managing the interface between intra- and inter-union channels, by fostering social relationships between networks of individuals or groups (or organizations) and by giving them a human face' (Lévesque and Murray 2010: 342). Therefore, whether ULRs are acting in multi-union settings and the nature of inter-union interaction over training and learning activity are explored. Furthermore, are unions acting together, developing intermediating capabilities, and collaborating to develop deliberative vitality? Or, are trade unions competing over the learning agenda, disrupting the potential to impact upon internal solidarity?

To explore the effect of the ULA in creating active social union networks, we shall evaluate network embeddedness in terms of the range of ULR contacts and the content and activity of the WTUC-led networks, Networks of Excellence, and NetNews, which represents a significant infrastructural resource.

## 7.2 Infrastructural resources: learning, articulating and deliberative vitality

In the following section a number of outcomes related to infrastructural resources. Infrastructural resources include human resources and organisational policies and programmes. In order to assess whether the ULA is developing infrastructural resources, we explore the adoption of the ULA by unions, and assess workplace and branch union outcomes, before moving on to consider the characteristics of ULRs. We ask whether the ULA is attracting a diverse cadre of ULRs overcoming challenges associated with fragmented workplace identities, linked to identity based organising strategies. ULR characteristics are considered, beginning with an evaluation of the demographic features and employment status of ULRs in Wales, assessing the ability of the ULA to connect with multifaceted workforces.

Secondly, ULR activism is considered, looking at the relationship between membership length and self-activism ratings as important aspects of commitment, collectivism and organising behaviours which can contribute to internal solidarity and renewal. We also evaluate support for ULRs and integration of ULRs into trade union structures and activities as an important aspect of building cohesive collective identities and deliberative vitality.

### Developing Unions: Union involvement and infrastructural resources

We have seen in the previous chapters that the ULA is a significant development within trade unionism, and as such has received government and European funding and secured a measure of statutory support in the Employment Act 2003. This governmental support impacts specifically upon infrastructural resources through the development of the ULR role and the provision of economic resources to unions. Union representatives have long been seen as significant actors within UK industrial relations, yet an estimated decline in the number of union representatives of 50 per cent, from a high of over 300,000 to less than 150,000 since the mid-1980s (Charlwood and Forth 2009) indicates the need of trade unions to redevelop workplace representatives as a key aspect of their infrastructural resource. Within

Wales, over 2,000 ULRs have been trained (WTUC interview), representing a substantial infrastructural resource in terms of the presence of representatives at workplaces and within the union movement in general. Below, we shall consider the union and personal characteristics of these ULRs.

The fact that a substantial number of unions have adopted the ULA reveals the learning capability of unions which have not only developed the new union representative role but have also altered union rulebooks and structures to include ULRs and appointed union learning officers. Large unions, such as PCS and UNITE, have developed roles related to learning at branch level and have incorporated the learning agenda into the responsibilities of regional education officers, as have a number of smaller unions such as BAFWU. The development of the ULA as an important aspect of union activity is captured in the following statement:

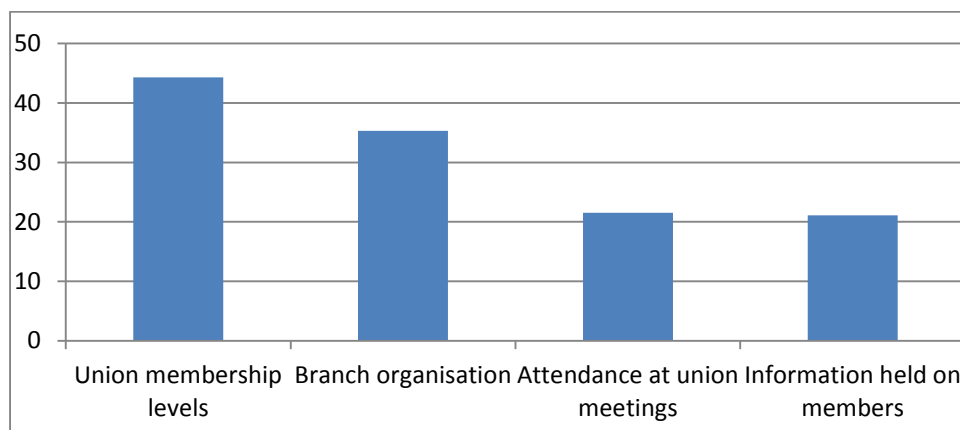
*I think that the individuals and the recognition of ULRs has changed and they are more of a strategic part of what we do with the learning and I think we're able to embed it better within the structures that we've already got. At branch level yes [there have been changes] because we've seen the creation of the ULR roles themselves and then further than that a branch learning coordinator; where if there are a nucleus of ULRs in one branch, that one individual takes on a pivotal role for that branch and then they form part of the [branch committee]. I do think learning is forming more of an integral part of an agenda within a branch, um because of the inroads into the membership and the hard to reach people. (Union officer, interview).*

Here then, the ULR role itself and the introduction of lead ULRs on branch committees was felt to have embedded learning into branch business, incorporating ULRs at the workplace and branch level rather than providing separate structures for them. There was also a form of upward communication, with lead ULRs taking a role on branch, providing links between members, ULRs and branch or workplace committees. Where internal networks or conferences have not been created, ULRs and officers in Wales have access to the WTUC-LS led Networks of Excellence, and the annual ULR conference.

In order to assess whether the development of the ULA as an infrastructural development had impacted upon a number of union activities ULRs were asked whether they felt that the ULA had influenced four union workplace and branch outcomes (see Figure 7.2). Over 40 per cent of ULRs believed ULR activity had

positive outcomes for union membership levels, 35 per cent felt branch organisation had improved, and improved attendance at union meetings and information held on members were reported by just over 20 per cent of ULRs. This suggests that involvement of members and non-members in learning and training activity can provide ULRs with an opportunity to increase membership density, generate awareness of union activity, and improve union information held on members. The positive impact on membership levels supports our conclusions in Chapter 6 that the ULA is providing a key avenue through which to encourage membership engagement. Membership engagement is possible regardless of the personal characteristics or union experience of ULRs. No significant patterns of variation were identified in relation to workplace type (public or private sector) or by gender, ethnicity, time spent as a ULR or prior union experience in relation to any of the infrastructural outcomes.

Figure 7.1: Positive union impacts (percentage)



Source: Question 33, ULR survey

Whilst a rise in membership attendance at meetings is only reported in a fifth of cases this represents increased participation in union business represents the development of social exchange identified by Snape and Redman (2004). There are a number of reasons why the impact on these indicators may be limited High density is a factor in limiting gains in membership numbers, union organisation may be regarded as efficient. Limited impacts on union meetings may represent a decline in the use of ‘the mass meeting’ within trade unions which could be supplanted by an increasing reliance upon electronic communication, particularly outside periods of industrial conflict.

Another consideration of the contribution of ULRs to developing internal capacity is the potential to assist branches in day-to-day business such as keeping records up to date. Figure 7.2 indicates that only a minority of ULRs felt that branch organisation had improved as a result of ULR activity. Activities such as mapping, which were encouraged during ULR training, nevertheless could have beneficial impacts. Mapping can enable the identification of areas of weak union organisation which may then be targeted by the union for recruitment (see Chapter 6). However, no significant associations were found between mapping and improved union outcomes. Of course, union records and branch organisation may already be efficient and effective, thereby reducing any potential impacts of ULRs.

The evidence suggests that unions have adopted the ULA, integrating learning roles into their structures, and increasing human resources as a result. Furthermore, ULRs report that activity was encouraging workers to join the union and was bolstering branch organisation in a number of cases.

#### ULR demographics, employment characteristics and activism

The diversification of union representatives has been called for in relation to a number of group identities and personal characteristics. Both academics and trade unionists have called for a greater focus upon, and engagement with black and minority ethnic workers (Holgate and McKay 2007), women (Healy and Kirton 1999, Kirton 2006, Parker 2006, 2009), and migrant workers (Anderson *et al.* 2007, Heyes 2009). An ageing trade union population, alongside a rise in 'never' members, has generated arguments that unions must connect to, and be more relevant to, younger generations of workers (Bryson and Gomez 2005, Waddington and Kerr 2002).

There has also been a call for unions to engage with those on non-standard employment contracts (Wills 2005, 2010, Cobble 1997, 2010), such as part-timers, agency staff, and freelancers, and those in small workplaces (Heery *et al.* 2004).

ULR demographics are compared to WERS411 data to evaluate whether ULR characteristics are similar to the characteristics of union representatives generally. Table 7.1 shows that the ULR role is engaging men and women equally, with women making up 51 per cent of the sample and men making up 49 per cent. These figures represent a greater parity than is found in WERS11 which indicates that the vast



majority of union representatives are male. Analysis of the survey returns suggests that identity distributions for ULRs in Wales are broadly similar to those identified in some surveys in England (Hollinrake *et al.* 2008, Saundry *et al.* 2010) although our results reveal greater gender parity than Hoque and Bacon's (2009) findings in which indicated that 58 per cent of English ULRs were male with the remaining 42 per cent being female. The ULR role has equal attraction for men and women in Wales, and as such may help in reducing the over-representation of men in union positions.

Table 7.1: Characteristics of Union Representatives and ULRs in Wales

	% Union representatives <sup>1</sup>	% ULRs
Female	34	51
Male	66	49
White ethnicity	96	97
Non-white ethnicity	3	3
Young (under 35 years old)	7	6
Part-time	-	20
Non-permanent contracts	-	10

Source: Questions 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, ULR survey, and <sup>1</sup>WERS11 representative questionnaire, unweighted.

Concerns that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the ranks of union representatives (Heyes, 2009) were assessed in relation to other union representatives across the UK, using WERS11 (see Table 7.1). Three per cent of our survey sample reported that they were of non-white ethnicity. However, Wales' minority ethnic workers represent just four per cent of the working population, compared to 13 per cent in England (ONS, 2011). Wales appears to be attracting a proportional number of ethnic activists.

Within WERS11, seven per cent of union representatives are under the age of 35. ULRs under the age of 35 made up only six per cent of the survey sample. The average age of ULR survey respondents was 49 years old, ranging from 23 years to 73 years. This result mimics findings from other surveys conducted in England which found that only a small proportion of ULRs were from younger age groups (Hollinrake *et al.* 2008, Hoque and Bacon 2009, Saundry *et al.* 2010). The mean age of union representatives in the WERS11 sample was 50 years old.

With regard to occupational status, the survey revealed that 20 per cent of ULRs worked part-time and 90 per cent were on permanent contracts. Analysis of LFS figures indicates that in 2012, 27 per cent of workers were employed on part-time contracts and five per cent were employed on temporary contracts. Again, ULRs appear to be representative of the population with non-standard employment contracts and in part-time employment. We saw in Chapter 6 that unions were innovating in the way they engage with these types of workers; for example through the 'roving' ULR role.

Targeting workers based on migrant status is another area of identity-based organising and learning activity based on English language provision has been shown to promote engagement amongst migrant workers (Heyes 2000). Whilst this question was not explored in the survey, qualitative evidence of recruitment of, and engagement with, migrant workers through the ULA suggested this was a significant strategy where migrant workforces formed a large group within a workplace. Engagement of migrant workers was evident in WTUC ULR training, where two of the 16 trainees were migrant workers. In one case, a bakery located in South Wales, the union and employer promoted learning activity, particularly ESOL courses as a large proportion of the workforce were migrant workers. The HR manager believed that the activity of ULRs was helping to reduce problems associated with poor English language skills that affected production levels and which were believed to be related to high employee turnover (WTUC Stakeholder event). ULRs in this case were specifically targeting migrant workers, not only to develop their English language skills, but also to develop relations between migrant workers and the trade union.

The analysis above suggests that ULRs represent various identity and work groups, and that women in particular are becoming active within the union movement through the ULA.

### Union activism

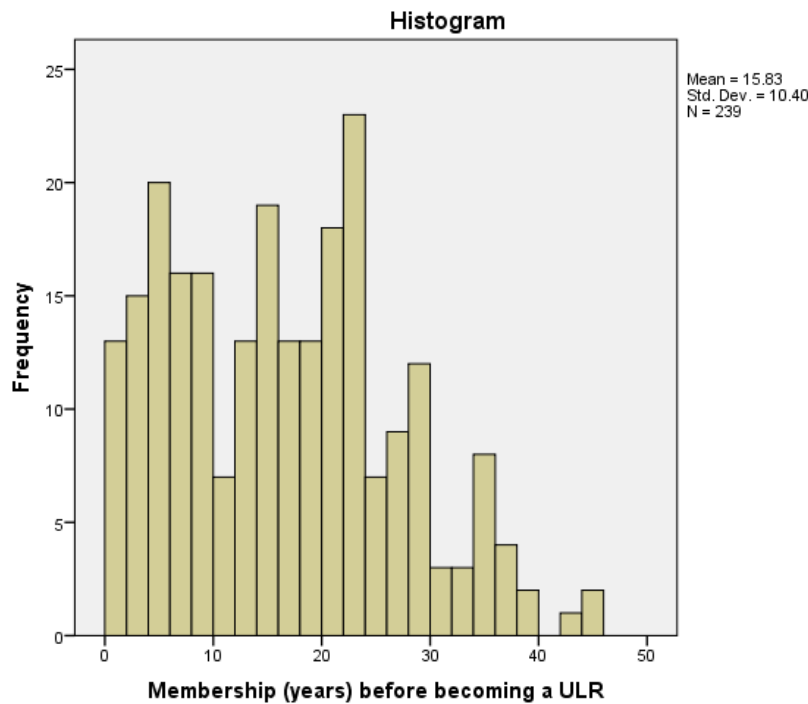
The development of workplace activists is a key factor in membership revitalisation. We shall therefore consider whether the ULR role is developing opportunities for activism in four ways, namely engagement of new representatives, self-reported activism levels, role escalation and community roles. Engagement of new

representatives can add to the infrastructural resources of trade unions by increasing the density of workplace union organisation. Self-reported levels of activism and commitment are indicative of the likelihood of supporting organising goals (Fiorito *et al.* 2010). Role escalation, where new ULRs become more involved in union business and take on another union role, such as shop steward or another branch position, has been identified as a potential outcome for new ULRs. Community roles are also relevant as Gall (2009) suggests that active union representatives are likely to hold other community or voluntary roles; for example being involved in trades council or other activist networks, or involved in community sports groups or school boards.

Whether ULRs are new to trade union activism or have a prior history of union work (called prior representatives herein) taking on more work is a significant consideration of the ability to develop infrastructural human resources. The average length of union membership of ULRs surveyed was 20 years, ranging from two years to 51 years. The average time that ULRs had held the role was four years, ranging from one year to ten years. Figure 7.3 shows the number of years that ULRs had been members before they took on the role. ULRs who had been members for longer than 30 years were less likely to take on the role. Twenty five per cent of ULRs take on the role within six years of being a union member and 50 per cent of ULRs had been members for over 15 years before taking on the role. We can also see from Figure 7.3 that a number of ULRs became members in the same year that they became ULRs. The ULR role is attracting both new and old members to participate in this form of union representation.

The ULA was not only attracting prior representatives but was attracting new members and creating activism amongst these new members. Analysis indicates that whilst almost 60 per cent of ULRs can be classed as 'prior representatives' (holding other union roles before becoming a ULR), 40 per cent were new to trade union activism beyond membership participation, which was slightly higher than some early survey findings from England (Hollinrake *et al.* 2008, Wallis *et al.*, 2005, Wood and Moore, 2005) but in line with the findings of Saundry *et al.* (2010).

Figure 7.3: Membership and activism



Source: ULR Survey, questions 41, 42.

Over 70 per cent of male ULRs were prior reps, compared to almost 50 per cent of female ULRs. This finding was statistically significant (Chi-square = 14,  $p < .000$ ,  $\phi = .240$ ) and indicated that the ULR role was more likely to attract women who have not previously been active, compared to men. Again, this supports previous research findings (Saundry *et al.* 2010, Hoque and Bacon 2009: 9). No statistical evidence was found to support propositions that new ULRs were more likely to be young workers or to work in the private sector.

Research has indicated that self-perceptions of commitment and activism are important indicators of organising behaviour amongst union representatives. Commitment to trade unionism is also likely to increase covenantal exchange, where union members participate in union activity and action (Fiorito *et al.* 2011, Snape and Redman 2004). In order to understand ULRs' activism a number of questions were asked in the survey. Firstly, we asked whether ULRs felt they were active at the workplace. The majority of ULRs reported high levels of activism, with only 22 per cent reporting low levels of activism. ULRs were more likely to report low activity levels when they were in small workplaces (36 per cent compared to 61 per cent in

workplaces with more than 250 employees,  $\text{Chi}^2 = 14.773$ ,  $p < .000$ ), but no significant associations were found between sector, gender or age and activism ratings.

Significant associations between new representatives and activism level were found, indicating that new representatives were less likely to rate themselves as highly active ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 24$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $\phi = .315$ ). However, correlation analysis also indicates that the longer a ULR has spent in the role, the higher their self-rated activity level ( $r = .182$ ,  $n = 238$ ,  $p < .005$ ).

Our survey evidence also indicated that 'role escalation', where ULRs take on other union roles, occurred for 37 per cent of new ULRs. Whilst the majority of ULRs have held union roles before, the ULA can contribute to institutional revitalisation through engagement with the ULR role, which can lead to increasing the participation and activism levels of new ULRs in other union business. Those ULRs who had experienced role escalation were more likely to report high activism levels (98 per cent). Even where ULRs did not take on other roles, and remained 'sole' ULRs, high levels of activism were reported in 74 per cent of cases.

In terms of the composition of ULRs and the development of active and committed trade unionists, the ULA was contributing to these aspects of infrastructural institutional revitalisation.

Firstly, unions have developed 'learning' capability, identified as an important aspect of the capabilities model by adopting the ULA as an organisational policy, and by altering structures and positions to support its development. Secondly, we have seen that the ULA was developing an activist base, which was representative of the working population, and was particularly attracting new female activists. Finally, we have seen that the majority of ULRs consider themselves to be committed trade union activists and that activism can increase over time. This was a particularly pertinent finding which suggests that ULRs can become more embedded in trade union activism through engagement with the ULA the longer ULRs perform the role.

### 7.3 Narrative resources and framing: The construction of the ULR

Narrative resources are stories of projects and action that are utilised and evoked by union actors, during interactions, to gain support for trade union activity (Peetz 2006,

Martinez and Fiorito 2009, Jarley 2005). Within the capabilities model, narrative resources are linked to the framing and articulation of trade union activity. In this section, we shall consider the ULA as a narrative resource, beginning with an assessment of the framing and articulation of the ULR role.

Union officers and leaders described the ULR role as different to other trade union roles. The quotation below is indicative of this narrative:

*Most union roles are confrontational and reactive. The ULR is uniquely different, they try to solve issues before they become a problem. (Union officer, PCS ULR conference)*

The ULR role is qualitatively different to other union roles. Whilst the relationship between unions and employers is often said to be defined as a conflictual relationship, based upon differing interests, the ULR role, throughout the period of investigation, was often referred to as being a non-confrontational role, or at least less confrontational than other union roles. Rather than adversarial, or conflict-based relationships (where one party loses out to the advantage of the other) (Walton and McKersie 1965), the ULR role is proffered as cooperative and integrative, providing voice for employees and benefiting the employer as a result (Freeman and Medoff 1984). As such the ULR is promoted as the 'friendly face' of trade unionism. The non-conflictual narrative was identified as positively supporting union activity in three areas: engaging members; engaging new representatives; and aiding the development of positive relations with managers.

The ULR role can provide a new avenue for unions to promote trade unionism to employees, in a way that is distinct from the negotiation and defence of pay and conditions for shop stewards:

*The ULRs are seen as a non-confrontational role and they are able to sort of get in and speak to others where a branch sec or branch organiser can't (Public sector union officer)*

Union representatives were understood to have a less significant role in interacting with members on a day-to-day basis, due to changes to subscription payment and union organisation which had altered contact with members. Problems associated

with 'servicing unionism', including already pressurised and limited facilities time that was encumbered by case work on individual members grievance and disciplinary issues, and conceptions of bureaucratisation where a tendency of officers and stewards to become distanced from the experiences and needs of the rest of the workforce, have led to a reduction in the amount of time that union representatives can spend talking to workers. This was understood to have left a gap in the development of relationships between workers and unions, which the ULR role could fill, creating contacts with members that are not possible for other union representatives who are preoccupied with servicing current members.

*When I was a kid the steward used to come round once a week to collect your subs and have a chat with you, was there any problems. Now the union shop floor tend to be quite removed they've got their own office space they very rarely talk one to one with members, they have big meetings and have letters or newsletters that go out. The union learning rep will talk on a one-to-one basis with learners very regularly and can pick up on lots of other things that they can then report back to the committee (Union officer, interview)*

The presence of ULRs and learning activity provides space in which to develop further understandings of the needs of workers and role of the union in the workplace. ULRs create a line of communication from members to branch, and to union officers, providing contact through which issues can be identified and fed back through committees. The ULR position, as a 'friendly' role, is a route to engagement with members that enables quality interaction and provides members with a union contact that may otherwise be absent.

The nature of the ULR role as non-conflictual was also proffered as a reason that members would take up the role, "I do think with learning they feel more comfortable because it is non-confrontational" (WTUC worker). Whilst traditional shop steward or new organising roles were discussed in adversarial terms, the supportive and developmental role of the ULR was less intimidating for new representatives. ULRs within the WTUC training sessions indicated a variety of reasons for taking on the role. These included replacing ULRs who had moved to other union positions, leaving the ULR free for other activities. A small minority had been encouraged to take the role by their managers. One commented that he was going to become a 'super rep' (ULR, ULR training), and intended to take further courses, such as equality rep training.

Where role escalation occurred (moving to another union role having trained as a ULR), the development of positive relationships with managers was also believed to impact upon the effectiveness of ULRs in dealing with managers:

*Because they are well respected by management by that stage, so if they move on to a shop steward role for instance, management who've worked with them over learning agendas for the last few years are far more prepared to listen to them in their shop steward role because they've already got the respect, and management understand that they are only thinking about their colleagues. (Union officer, interview)*

This represents another source of narrative power. The creation of positive relations over a period of time allowed ULRs to successfully engage with managers over other workplace issues. Again the ULR is framed as cooperative rather than challenging. Engagement of members, employers and government is not just the responsibility of ULRs, and union officers can also play a key role in promoting the ULA. As one officer described:

*So part of my job, and certainly with the ULR support, is to show, completely showcase good practice and case studies and prove it really... You have to show people it makes a difference and that's a large part of our job here in the office to keep showing the value that it adds to the union...it is now I know being recognised, especially with [the new General Secretary] coming in he's very keen. (Union officer, interview)*

The WTUC also provides case study documents to further influence employers and the WG through non-conflictual, mutual gains narrative resources. The promotion of positive employer experience with the ULA can help to build economic revitalisation; for example, as we saw in chapter 5, through the development of 'business advocates', who articulate these narrative resources within the business community and provide further legitimacy for union involvement in VET.

WTUC events also provide spaces in which narrative resources can be developed and promoted and enabled the development of 'elite associations' (Blyton and Jenkins 2010) where unions engage with prominent individuals to increase credibility and generate interest in their activity. We saw in Chapter 4 that Welsh ministers are involved in WTUC events, but interestingly prominent Welsh celebrities were also featured as key speakers. For example, during the periods of observation at WTUC



events international rugby referee Nigel Owens spoke about his childhood and the importance of education within professional sports; international rugby player Scott Quinell spoke of his and his sons experiences of dyslexia; and Olympic athlete Jamie Baulch identified reading as an important skill and an important part of his life, despite his dislike of school as a child. These stories allow those who struggle with learning to identify with people who are significant and successful figures in Wales, helping to reduce stigma associated with poor educational attainment during school years. Narrative resources such as these can be used to motivate ULRs, and can in turn be utilised to motivate learners.

Narrative resources and the framing of the ULR promote the cooperative and positive relationship between unions and members, as well as between union representatives and managers. Narratives of positive engagement are utilised by unions to promote productive relations with managers and in this way the ULA is contributing to institutional revitalisation.

#### 7.4 Internal Solidarity, Intermediating Capabilities and Union Collaboration

Two concepts combine to create internal solidarity: deliberative vitality and cohesive collective identity. Deliberative vitality refers to the functioning of workplace representation in terms of the presence and number of representatives, the quality of engagement and interaction with members, communication within the union, and the integration of activists. Cohesive collective identity, where unions are able to unify workers, branches and unions to create solidarity, is also related to the development of intermediating capabilities where unions seek to reduce tensions and work collaboratively rather than in competition. We have already seen that the ULA is attracting representatives, providing opportunities to develop quality engagement and avenues of communication with members. In this section we shall firstly consider the integration of ULRs and support within unions, before considering inter-union activity, as important aspects of developing shared solidarity within and between unions.

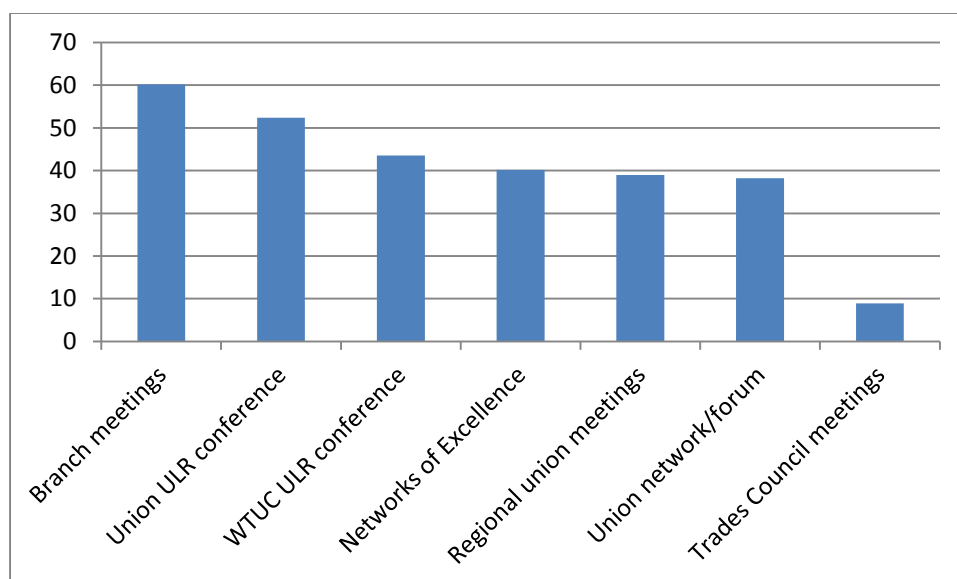
## ULR support and integration

Integration of representatives within union networks, structures and processes has been identified as a crucial aspect of representative or shop steward ‘success’ (Batstone *et al.* 1977, 1978, Batstone 1988, Kelly and Heery 1994), and activists are deemed to be more effective where they engage with union committees and where there is union support for their work (Simms 2003, 2005, Bronfenbrenner *et al.* 1998). To examine notions of internal integration we shall explore whether ULRs are involved in union forums. Union forums include branch meetings, union conferences, and ULR meetings.

Almost 90 per cent of ULRs regularly attend at least one union forum (See Figure 7.4). Thirty-seven per cent of ULRs regularly attend four or more forums. Over half of the ULR respondents regularly attend branch meetings and ULR conferences. A significant minority of ULRs attend Networks of Excellence (NoE) sessions, as well as single union networks, and regional union meetings.

The finding that over sixty per cent of ULRs attend union branch meetings is contrary to evidence found in earlier studies of ULRs in England that identified ULRs as existing separately to other aspects of union organisation and business and to be opting out of union engagement (Donnelly and Kiely 2007).

Figure 7.4: Meetings and forums attended regularly



Source: Question 5, ULR survey

In our sample, chi-square statistics reveal no significant relationship between holding other union roles and attendance at branch meetings ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 5.74$ ,  $p = .449$ ).

Similarly, no significant associations were found between union experience and attending any of the union forums named above. It appears then that a significant proportion of ULRs in Wales, whether they have previous experience within the union movement or not, are likely to be in contact with other union representatives within their branch, as well as with their regional union.

By integrating into branch structures greater connections can be made within the union, and the benefits of the ULA can be promoted internally. The statements below indicate that ULRs understand learning to be central to all union business and can link different areas of union work.

*We've got to be part of the union structure, we're not autonomous, we can get involved with health and safety, embed learning into the branch agenda. (PCS ULR, PCS conference)*

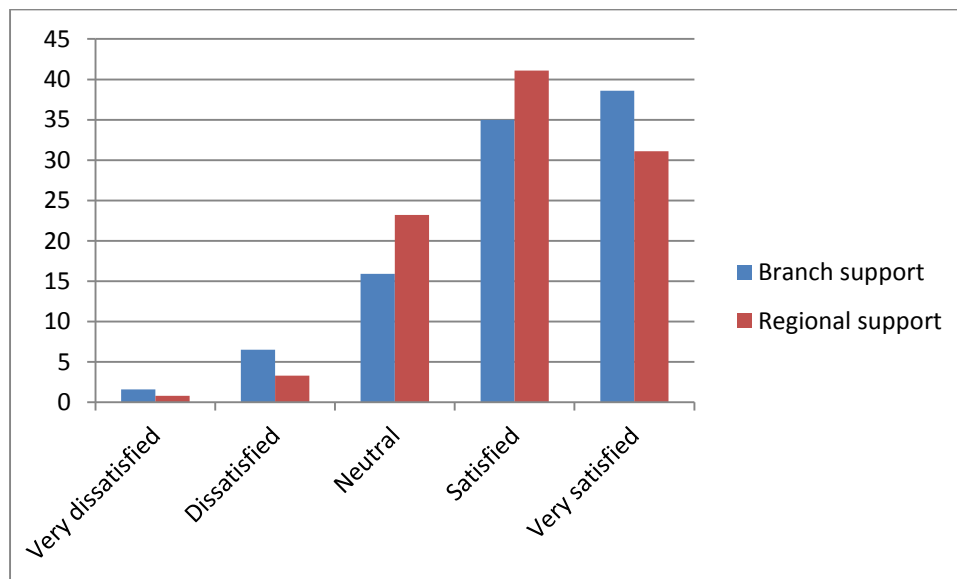
*We need to embed it, and bring learning into other aspects of union work. Campaigning so that we are organising, like fair-trade fortnight, learning comes into this as well. There's loads of points at which we can cross over. Learning events can pull everything together. (Male ULR, interview)*

There was a belief that ULRs should become involved in branch matters in order to promote learning, have a greater understanding of the work of other union reps, and for learning to be central to all union work. Further evidence from observation indicated that ULRs in Wales acknowledged the importance of being involved in union forums. This may be instilled during ULR training. Indeed, a ULR trainer noted the need to be engaged with other union reps and to be involved in union forums: "You also need to be committed in your union branch; you need to be on committees and go to meetings" (Training provider, PCS conference).

We have indicated above that ULRs are engaging in forums which can support and enable their activity, and that dedicated union officers aim to support and promote ULR work. A third key factor in examining internal solidarity is ULR perceptions of the support offered to them by their union. Saundry *et al.* (2010) reported that 80 per cent of ULRs felt supported by their union. We considered this in more detail and asked whether ULRs were satisfied with branch support and regional support in order to identify support from different levels of union activity. The majority of ULRs

feel well supported by their union at both branch and regional levels. Over 70 per cent of ULRs surveyed reported that they were satisfied with branch support, with only 8 per cent dissatisfied and almost 70 per cent were satisfied with regional union support, and only 4 per cent were dissatisfied (see Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: ULR satisfaction with branch and regional union support



Source: Question 25, ULR survey

Nine of the respondents reporting dissatisfaction with branch support were from one union, and a further three reporting dissatisfaction with the regional union were from the same union. Discussions with a lead ULR from the union in question revealed that a large number of ULRs had left this union due to dissatisfaction with support from the officer responsible for trade union education and learning activity and as a result of this dissatisfaction the ULRs had joined a rival union. He felt that the new regional education officer did not value their work and had side-lined the ULR role in favour of other trade union roles. The relationship with, and attitude of, the new officer was perceived to be less supportive compared to the previous regional officer who was seen to be more supportive of ULRs. This indicates the importance of supporting ULRs internally at a regional level. Dissatisfaction arose from perceived lack of interest of the officer in question. ULRs here chose to move to a union that

would support their activity rather than challenge union officers. This indicates the importance of the attitudes and actions of union officers in supporting ULRs to fulfil their duties and to promote the work of ULRs as primary union business, particularly in multi-union settings where ULRs (and members) may choose to exit if they feel dissatisfied.

Whilst this rather negative example cautions against complacency, most ULRs clearly were involved within union forums and were largely satisfied with support from branch and regional union actors, indicating high levels of integration and cohesion, two key aspects of internal solidarity.

### Multi-unionism and the ULA

Whilst unions often represent different workforces (by industry or occupation, for example), they are often not the only union within a workplace, and as we have shown, workers or representatives may switch membership to another union if they are dissatisfied. Multi-unionism is a distinctive feature of workplace trade unionism within the UK and key debates on multi-unionism include multi-union effects on bargaining and strike action, as well as business efficiency (Dobson 1997). The nature of ULR workplaces as single or multi-union sites and the relationship between unions delivering the ULA is a significant aspect of internal solidarity. In order to develop internal solidarity, it has been argued that a collaborative rather than competitive relationship between unions is important for creating collective cohesion and deliberative vitality (Wills 2001, 2003).

Multi-unionism was common within our survey sample, and 68 per cent of ULRs reported that other unions were present at their workplace; a quarter of ULRs were located in workplaces with ULRs from other unions. Responses to the survey also show that many ULRs were working with other unions to provide learning activity, with almost half reporting collaborative working. WTUC workers also promoted working in partnership with other unions, as evidenced by support offered within multi-union network settings (see below).

ULRs collaborate to promote learning activity, and learning centres are often set up cooperatively. For example, a learning centre had been set up between Amicus, UNITE and PCS at a large worksite in North Wales (PCS ULR, NoE 1), and one union officer reported:

*We have USDAW, Unison and UNITE who co-founded the learning centre and we co-fund the courses, it's a very, very positive role (Union officer, interview).*

Furthermore, workplaces that were in close proximity to each other were working collaboratively to provide learning where access to learning centres had been established: "We linked with DWP and the Job Centre to run things". (PCS ULR, NoE5).

The nature of collaborative working was identified as context-dependent by one union officer. Where historical inter-union relationships were positive rather than competitive, multi-union cooperation over learning was seen to be more likely.

*[Collaboration] depends on the site and the history, there are some sites where there is bad history. I'm reasonably assertive, I think that it helps that I'm not known to them...so I don't have any historical issues with anybody and I'll go in and say you know I appreciate there have been issues in the past but can we start afresh and that is quite good and useful tool actually. With some people it's slowly, slowly, slowly. But again this is where the case study work comes in cos if you can show examples to them, if we're doing it at [Company X] and we've got four unions there, surely we can do it here with two because it's about our members, we should be able to put behind us these other problems because learning doesn't impact on those other issues, it's purely about learning... (Union officer interview)*

The passage above also indicates that as a relatively new agenda, the ULA is capable of developing intermediating capabilities, where other inter-union disputes may be set aside. Positive, collaborative relationships established over learning are a key feature of the ULA, and aid intermediating capabilities through the creation of inter-union channels and networks that can generate cohesive identities necessary to develop internal solidarity. Many ULRs were keen to cooperate with ULRs from other unions and felt that competition and conflict were not an issue between ULRs:

*[In a multi-union site] there's no confrontation between the different unions. The learning role is a very positive proactive role that the management welcome, that the employees welcome, it's not about poaching members off each other or trying to be a better union than another union in the learning centre. (ULR, interview)*

The survey indicated that only 13 per cent of ULRs felt relationships with representatives from other unions were poor, whilst 75 per cent rated relationships as good or excellent. We can therefore conclude that the ULA is enabling the development of multi-union cooperation and the development of positive inter-union relationships. The cooperation that is occurring over learning activity can aid the development of capacity by creating greater understanding and solidarity within and between unions. Greater collaboration between unions is an important aspect of the ULA that has largely been neglected in other research yet generates intermediating capabilities and internal solidarity.

### 7.5 Network embeddedness: ULR networks and the Network of Excellence

Network embeddedness, defined as the extent to which unions interact with others within a union, with other unions and with other organisations, indicates the capability of unions to maintain relations with different actors, develop solidarity, and balance conflict and cooperation between unions. The successful development of positive inter union relations around learning is a measure of the ability of the ULA to create 'intermediating capabilities', by reducing conflict between unions. We explore these processes and ask whether there is opportunity for union activists to create relationships with other local activists, utilising the ULA as an intermediating tool. Further we assess whether networks support building relationship beyond unions and the workplace, reaching other organisations and the wider community.

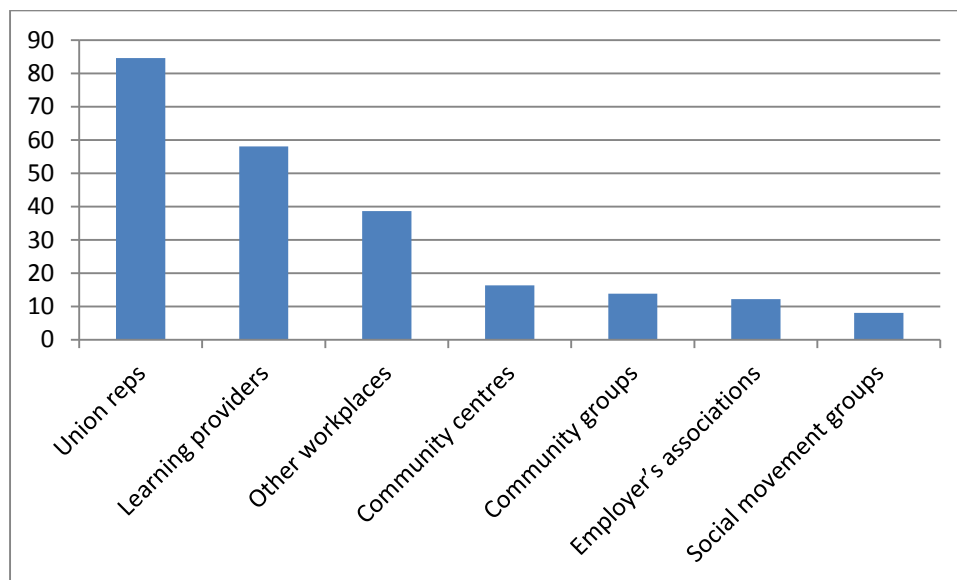
Network embeddedness is important for sustaining solidarity within and between unions, and with social, political and economic communities, and can be assessed by the diversity and the density of a network (Lévesque and Murray 2010).

Regarding diversity, homogeneous single union networks are thought to be less effective than heterogeneous networks (involving unions and other actors or organisations) in developing collaborative action and social capital through interactions that build personal connections. Where network contact is regular and sustained (indicating high density of a network) heterogeneous networks may be a significant resource in sustaining institutional capacity. The use of internet technology and online networking can also be a valuable resource (Freeman 2005).

Both electronic and face-to-face networking are therefore considered as central aspects of building network power resources and capabilities.

The development of union representative networks is a significant element of union organising and the development of union resources. As such, ULRs were asked who they regularly kept in contact with regarding the provision of learning. The majority of ULRs reported that they were regularly in contact with other union representatives, learning providers and almost 40 per cent were regularly in contact with other workplaces (Figure 7.6). ULRs reported an average of three contacts, with less than a quarter reporting only one regular type of contact, and only eight per cent of ULRs reported no regular contacts

Figure 7.6: Regular ULR contacts



Source: Question 4, ULR Survey

Further to networks within the trade union movement, Gall (2009) suggests that union representatives are likely to be active within their local community. Donnelly and Kiely (2007) also identified a connection between community work and ULA involvement, and stated that a strong identification with lifelong learning in the workplace was related to involvement in community learning. Forty-six per cent of ULRs in Wales reported holding another community role. These included sport coaching roles, activity in the organisations such as the Co-Operative, and union networks such as local trades councils. A minority of ULRs also reported regular contact with community organisations. ULRs are therefore likely to be active



members of their communities, and these networks and links may be useful in developing coalitions and union organising beyond the confines of workplace and industry.

ULRs were in regular contact with a range of actors, and ULR networks were therefore heterogeneous. Whilst other union representatives were the most common contact, interactions with learning providers, other workplaces and other organisations were also significant aspects of the ULR role. The development of relations with other workplaces indicated that ULRs were not confined to activity within their own workplace but worked with other ULRs and union representatives to perform their role. By interacting in networks beyond the workplace, ULRs were potentially creating greater solidarity between workplaces. As we saw in relation to ULR integration, ULRs were acting within networks that were not just union-focused, and whilst there was a significant amount of activity within individual unions, ULRs were acting beyond these bounds.

Both face-to-face networks and internet networks were supported by the WTUC-LS under the NoE initiative. In the following sections we shall consider three major themes identified in this study regarding multi-union, heterogeneous networks. Firstly, we shall consider networks as a source of information. Secondly, networks are identified as a source of support for ULRs; thirdly as relationship building spaces. Finally we consider evidence that the ULA can develop links with other unions in Europe.

### Networks for information

Analysis of the NoE newsletter, NetNews, indicated that the newsletter provided a vast array of information. This included information on courses, and the content of this learning was varied and included literacy and numeracy skills; health and safety; personal development; foreign languages; union representative training and more (as we saw in Chapter 6).

The inclusion of ULA event information, such as WTUC conferences and NoE meetings, and information on funding and courses were always included. The information about courses is not only provided by colleges and training providers promoting their services but also from ULRs, unions and employers. A surprising inclusion in NetNews was information on job vacancies. A number of jobs were

advertised within NetNews. These were varied and included apprenticeships and project management jobs, for example:

*Community food co-operative project*

*We need a good communicator from a food, nutrition or community development background, to bring together communities, volunteers, farmers, wholesalers and agencies.*

*The RRU is a young and expanding company with excellent opportunities for all involved. Closing date Monday 26th July 2010.*

*(NetNews, July 2010)*

As we can further see in the following passage submitted by a ULR, the network is being used to explore employment opportunities for members:

*Four Mechanical ex-Apprentices have just been told that their contracts ... will be terminated in August. The Four are time served and have been on temporary contracts ranging from 1 - 4 years waiting for full time opportunities, which the company have now said will not arise due to the current climate. The four of them are good fitters with excellent records and are being released purely due to the climate. This is just a clutching at straws request, that if any companies are looking for Mechanical Fitters who have served a multi-skilled apprenticeship and are qualified to at least HNC standard then they won't go far wrong by looking at these lads. If anyone has any leads, then could they please let me know? Many thanks, XXXX, Union Learning Rep, Wrexham (NetNews, May 2010)*

NetNews is therefore being utilised to promote and gain knowledge of employment opportunities, as well as information on training and WTUC events. Furthermore, the newsletter promotes engagement with community events, projects and organisations. Local information included, for example, information regarding Wrexham Communities Festival. This family-friendly event was organised by a range of groups and organisations as a response to a potential English Defence League march. Another example includes the promotion of 'Fair-trade Fortnight', Co-Op trips, International Women's Day events, and conservation projects.

Whilst the involvement of CSOs with employment issues is said to have grown, so too has the potential to develop links with these organisations (Heery *et al.* 2011, 2012). This may be further developed as learning activity is clearly providing links not

only to education providers but to CSOs concerned with a range of issues, including housing, the environment and fair-trade.

In addition to NetNews, the NoE meetings also provided a vast array of information. The meetings are primarily aimed at supporting ULR work on learning activity and creating links to education providers. Learning providers were present at all 11 meetings, briefing ULRs on courses available, as well as providing pamphlets and information about their organisations. Many of the education and vocational training providers attended more than one session during the period of observation, with the OU and WEA being the most prominent organisations involved. The network enabled them to target potential learners and allowed ULRs to gain knowledge of what these providers have to offer. The OU and the WEA also emphasised their links to the union movement and highlighted the benefits of discounts that are on offer to union members who study with them. Where workers are engaged with ULRs over WEA or OU courses, there may be an increased likelihood of joining the union because of these discounts.

Other providers such as ADT (a basic skills and vocational training organisation) were recognised providers of EP training but do not have pre-existing links with the trade union movement. The relationship with providers may be key to developing learning activity, but it may also result in mutual gains where providers were openly promoting the ULR role. After a presentation made on behalf of ADT, the meeting discussed EP promotional material supplied by ADT:

**CWU ULR** – *ULRs seem to be missing?*

**ADT** – *no, you are key. We need you to help promote courses to workers. You're a great 'tool' to get people involved. Some of the businesses we are working with we've gained contact through [WTUC-LS workers]... At [a primary school], ULRs were important in establishing links to another school where we brought two people over to take part in the course...*

**PCS ULR** – *In your leaflet, it says "contact your manager", would it be possible to get that changed? It might not be conducive to people signing up, a key to the ULR role is that we're not management.*

**ADT** – *and ULRs often get involved in the development and negotiation [of EPs] you're right. I'll take it back and see what we can do.*

*(NoE session)*

At this meeting ULRs were keen to highlight the role of the ULR in developing contact with potential learners, and this was endorsed by learning providers present. The content of ADT promotional material was questioned due to the lack of attention given to the role of the union, and ULRs were keen to see the promotional material altered. In this way, the ULRs were raising the profile of the ULA and highlighting the importance of ULRs in dealing with learning providers. The passage cited above also highlights an acknowledgement by the ADT staff that ULR networks can be significant in supporting the successful running of courses.

Networks, whilst providing space for learning and training information and resource sharing, also allowed activity that promotes involvement in trade union campaigns. Within NetNews, recent statements released by the TUC were included, highlighting major campaigns and important business, providing information about central operations. Examples of these include information concerning TUC publications, for example a guide to family friendly working, a booklet on climate change, and one on tackling racism. Other examples include research publications, such as case study material from 'Reps in Action' research. Further to information on TUC publications, there was also the provision of reactions to economic policy, such as the 'Robin Hood Tax'. Announcements concerning 'Work Your Proper Hours Day'; NHS UNITE campaigns, WTUC political protest marches and rallies and UK-wide demonstrations were also included in NetNews.

Within the face-to-face network, NoE, there were less overt references to union campaigns beyond learning. However, during periods of industrial action there were references to days of strike, protest and calls for support. These were often discussed at the end of meetings, as 'matters arising', when participants were able to discuss concerns that are not covered by the agenda for the day. Two examples of the use of the forum to publicise union campaigns are below:

***PCS ULR - HMRC** are also organising a walk to London to protest the cuts, they'll be walking all the way from Cardiff to London arriving in London for the Alternative March for Jobs on March 26<sup>th</sup>....*

***WTUC-LS staff** - ...and if anyone can join them anywhere along the way, please do. Contact [the Lead ULR] and he'll give you more information. And I'll be there in London on the 26<sup>th</sup>, I hope I see some of you there too! (NoE6)*

*I'd like to say 30th June is a very big day of industrial action, PCS, UCU and AUT taking part. Whilst we recognise some unions can't take part, we would encourage you to get involved if you can, particularly if your kids are off school! There's a rally in Cardiff, meeting at Sophia Gardens at 11am, there's others in Newport, Swansea, Wrexham, Aberystwyth, Bridgend. Look on social networking sites and online forums, for obvious reasons it's not sensible to use your work emails. Those not involved directly, please encourage your other friends, colleagues and family to take part in marches, rallies and events. (NoE7, PCS ULR)*

Knowledge sharing included information about a new resource about the history and value of trade unions:

**Male WTUC-LS worker** - *Another thing on a more personal note, we've worked with colleagues in England to produce information about trade unions, history, benefits. A lot of info in the resource pack, you can download it off the website "A better way to work"...*

**Female WTUC-LS worker** - *It's available in English and Welsh, aimed at 16-18 year olds, basically people just entering the workforce. It was launched at UCU and NUT conference. Great for ULRs to have copies and to promote it. Also, there are bits for teachers in schools. They were very happy with the equality unit.*

**Female UNITE ULR** - *We've got close links with schools as well, it could get round all the schools in Powys.*

*(NoE4)*

So, whilst the majority of NetNews items and NoE agendas were focused on learning activity, it is important to note that these networks provide information that supported activist behaviour and provided ULRs with knowledge of major TUC campaigns and WTUC rallies as well as calls to support union action. Whilst the development of ULRs as union activists was less overt in the face-to-face networks, socialisation and networking provided ULRs with greater knowledge of campaigns and organising within their own union and the wider trade union movement. Networks are also providing ULRs with information and guidance on actions within the labour movement, and resources that can promote the development of shared values. As such, ULR multi-agency networks can develop individual and collective resources for the benefit of trade unions.

The NoE and NetNews were providing space in which unions are presented with information about government initiatives such as the EP, information from learning

providers, information from the wider trade union movement, and are also used to support members in finding job opportunities. Information sharing is providing ULRs with a breadth of information that can support them in their role, but also provides wider perspectives on the activity of trade unions. The networks have created spaces and structures through which ULRs can develop ideas and activity, which will benefit union members.

### Networks as support

As well as providing information to aid ULRs, we also found that the NoE provides support in a number of ways. Firstly, the coordinator was there to ensure the events go smoothly but also provides support to ULRs, and often has one-to-one discussions with them during break periods and after events during which individual needs can be considered. WTUC-LS project officers can be notified of concerns, problems, and successes through this contact. Similarly, union officers may also connect with ULRs at meetings. Secondly, ULRs are made more aware of what is available, have contact with education providers, other ULRs and as such gain support for their work. Thirdly, those attending meetings were often well informed about current sources of funding and provision and can offer support to ULRs, particularly in helping to develop the social capital of new ULRs

Attendance at NoE meetings provided members with access to expertise beyond their own union in the form of WTUC-LS staff and other active ULRs. The passage below indicates how information and support were offered to two newly trained ULRs based at the same company:

**Female WTUC-LS staff** - *does [your company] do any events for Adult Learners Week?*

**ULR 1** – *not a lot, we need to get the company to give us the time to organise it. We're still trying to get our own phone at the moment, all our work is really done in our own time, we don't really get breaks.*

**Male WTUC-LS staff** – *it won't happen overnight, now I've met you I'll come over and speak to you two and speak to your bosses. [A Union] have got some projects running, ... which would be the most relevant for yourselves.*

**WEA instructor** - *There are classes in Oswestry in the library that might be useful.*

**ULR 2** – *another problem is we're a Welsh union in an English company, you end up getting bandied from one to the other.*

*Male WTUC-LS staff – CWU is the same, there are some based in Shrewsbury, they've overcome the England/Wales problem. Their WULF project has helped them. Have you spoken to anyone at Llandudno Junction? They're very active, I'll pass you their details.*

*(NoE4)*

The support offered to two ULRs (based within the same company) resulted from enquiries about current activity. The response indicated that barriers were significant to organising learning activity, particularly a lack of time-off, and problems of geographic location and company ownership. The WTUC-LS offered support to the ULRs, offering to speak with the employer and providing information about other potential sources of support and funding. Further information was supplied by a representative of a learning provider, indicating the range of support that can be drawn upon. The excerpt shows how knowledge is shared within the meetings and how support can be offered. Without the forum, the ULRs may not have contacted the WTUC-LS for support or advice, but through attendance at the meeting they gained knowledge of learning activity, and access to resources and support in negotiating with management. They were also reassured that some of the potential barriers that they face can be overcome.

At one NoE meeting collaboration between Unison and UNITE was encouraged by a WTUC-LS worker, "there are some significant things you can do with UNITE, we'll talk more at lunch" (WTUC worker, NoE5). The presence of WTUC staff, and experienced ULRs and officers at network meetings provided links to be made between workplaces, and between unions, and these supportive relationships would then be continued beyond the bounds of the network.

Further to sharing information on learning activity between ULRs, the NoE is a source of contact and knowledge sharing between ULRs and FTOs, and is providing FTOS without ULA forums with space to meet ULRs. As one FTO commented, "Networks are proving useful to circulate information to ULRs" (Union officer, NoE5). The WTUC NoE meetings were therefore also providing space for union officers to meet with ULRs where there was a gap in support structures internally, as well as for ULRs to make connections with each other, WTUC staff, learning providers.

A further benefit of the NoE is the creation of knowledge about, and links to, other organisations, as we have indicated above. A summary of organisations involved in the observed NoE meetings is listed in table 7.2.

Table 7.2: Organisations present at observed NoE meetings

Type of Organisation	Organisations	Issue
CSO	Crossroads Care; Shelter Cymru; MIND Cymru;	Supporting carers Housing Issues Mental health
Media	BBC	Learning projects and activities
Education providers	Open University; Workers Educational Association; ADT; University of Wales, Newport	Learning provision Learning provision and trade union courses Essential skills and the employer pledge Learning provision
Government funded agencies and programmes	Equality and Human Rights Commission, Wales; Agile Nation/Chwarae Teg; Alliance of Sector Skills Councils; Six Book Challenge; NIACE-DC	Equality and Human Rights Act Women leadership training and network Skills shortages Reading activities Funding and Adult Learners Week

Source: NoE Observation



Organisations with historical links to trade union education, such as the WEA, were significant actors, and often hosted events in their buildings. In many cases organisations were invited to attend by WTUC-LS organisers, and made presentations on a specific issue. Other organisations, such as Chwarae Teg, were invited to attend the meeting without a formal place on the day's agenda. Chwarae Teg is a publicly funded organisation responsible for project work aimed at developing women in business. This group is part of the Voluntary Sector Scheme group, the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC), which is the voluntary sector body developed through the Government of Wales Act 2006. The TSPC is the equivalent of the economic social partners group the WSPU, discussed in Chapter 4. One of the key reasons for other organisations to be involved is to promote the work that they do and share information. They are also creating interaction through supportive networks that are significant at a political level.

An example of information sharing with training providers that can promote further interaction is detailed in the passage below:

**Male WTUC-LS worker** – *tell them about your network as well.*

**Agile Cymru** – *oh yes, we do run a training, work-life balance and education network which is open to individuals. Basically, we invite speakers and guests, similar to this event, making contacts. Bernice, could you advertise it for us?*

**Female WTUC-LS worker** – *certainly*

**Agile Cymru** – *[WTUC worker] is speaking at our next event. It's all about sharing information.*

**Female WTUC-LS worker** – *would you be happy to go to branch meetings as well?*

**Agile Cymru** – *yes, definitely. If I can't make it I'm sure we'd be able to send someone else. We've got [another worker] covering South Wales. (NoE3)*

An example of learning activity within the networks themselves includes a briefing by lawyers on the Equalities and Human Rights Act which highlighted changes in equality law. The inclusion of external civil society organisations generated knowledge that ULRs could feed back to members and branches, and aided the development of ULR skills in supporting members.

ULA networks were providing spaces within which links and relationships could be developed, which served to support union relations and union lobbying at the political

level. Greater engagement with a variety of organisations, particularly those with access to policy groups, could increase the capacity of unions to lobby at a local, regional and national level.

A further network resource is the provision of conferences, which develop ULRs skills and provide further opportunities for interaction. A particularly interesting finding was that at a European level, there was some evidence that the ULA was encouraging collaboration with trade unions beyond the UK. The WTUC worked with the European TUC (ETUC) to organise a visit to Wales for a group of union representatives from across Europe. These union representatives attended the 2011 WTUC ULR conference, participating in debates and engaging with the delegates. Further evidence of articulation of the ULA at a European level were found in North Wales where ULRs within the engineering sector were involved in setting up visits, apprenticeships and secondments with firms in Germany. The development of these relationships indicates that the ULA is not only significant at a local and national level, but also at the European level. However, these instances were limited and cannot be said to be a significant aspect of ULA activity.

## 7.6 Discussion

In assessing institutional revitalisation we have focused on Lévesque and Murray's model of trade union capacity. Our central conclusion is that the ULA is aiding institutional revitalisation by developing activity related to each of the four key power resources: infrastructural resources, narrative resources, internal solidarity and network embeddedness. The ULA also represents union learning capacity, and has developed the framing of union activity as partnership both at the political and workplace level. Furthermore, the potential of the ULA to deliver intermediating capabilities for the benefit trade unions cannot be dismissed as unimportant.

With regard to infrastructural resources, unions have learnt that ULA activity can develop relationships with members, activists and employers. Unions have adopted the agenda, and frame activity as non-confrontational, in a way that differentiates it from other trade union positions. The development of the ULA as a partnership agenda is not seen to be decreasing the importance of adversarial organising but rather supporting it through the development of the ULR role which is providing

avenues of contact with workers that may otherwise be absent. The value of the ULR is significant in establishing relationships with members and improving participation in branch and workplace activity.

We asked whether the ULA is aiding the diversification of union representative characteristics. Whilst the ULR role is attracting women, it is having limited impact on diversifying representative characteristics by ethnicity or age. This implies that there is some potential for the ULA to contribute to an identity-based organising agenda. Yet, the development of the ULR role allows members to become more active. Whilst many ULRs are prior representatives the ULA has increased the 'human resource' capabilities of Lévesque and Murray's model by creating a new position, and attracting new activists.

In terms of activism, ULRs did consider themselves to be active, and approximately half were willing to organise for their union beyond the workplace. Whilst we have shown that only a minority of ULRs proceed to take other roles within the union, this may be because role escalation is not possible where unions are well organised and positions at branch and on committees are filled. Many ULRs were committed to promoting trade unionism and were active and integrated into trade union activity. Notably, self-reported activism increased the longer that ULRs were in the role, suggesting that cohesion and deliberative vitality can be generated through sustained contact with trade unions.

In the majority of cases ULRs were embedding themselves within branch structures, and a substantial minority are using forums and conferences to gain support in their role. ULRs were working together, within their unions, to promote learning and trade unionism, and they were using the resources available to them to promote joint working and campaigning. Yet, not only were ULRs working with their own unions to provide opportunities for learners, they were also working co-operatively with other unions.

Significantly, a large proportion of ULRs were in multi-union worksites. This has significant implications for building union capacity through internal solidarity and network embeddedness. One mechanism through which multi-union cooperation can be strengthened and negative effects of competition may be restricted or negated is through involvement in multi-union networks. The development of the ULA has

provided intermediating capabilities, enabling the development of internal solidarity by developing positive relationships between unions.

ULR involvement in WTUC-LS led networks was a significant aspect of network embeddedness. We have identified the NoE and NetNews as valuable networks that generate knowledge of training and learning activity and provision as well as funding, but the networks also act as spaces in which shared values and beneficial relationships can be developed. The networks offered support to ULRs, in developing the learning agenda and creating links with learning providers. They also provided narrative resources which can aid in recruitment, and increase the connectivity between ULRs.

ULR participation in the NoE is impacting upon internal solidarity and network embeddedness as ULRs become more familiar with each other, with union officers, WTUC-LS staff and other community organisations and individuals. The network was increasing the degree of connectivity within and between unions, and with community groups and organisations. What is most interesting is the development of links to organisations which were concerned with equality and social justice in a number of areas, such as housing and gender. The generation of these links are creating networks beyond the confines of workplace or industry. These connections can be understood as 'expert systems' which can generate 'elite associations' to influence economic and political decision-making.

The networks were therefore considered to be a valuable asset, not only for the development of knowledge on training and learning provisions, and funding, but also for the development of power resources and capabilities development. These power resources and capabilities are understood to be an important aspect of institutional capacity (Lévesque and Murray 2010), and network embeddedness are not only important for the development of institutional revitalisation but may also have impacts for membership, economic and political revitalisation, through the development of narrative resources, network embeddedness and internal solidarity.

It is therefore argued that the ULA has provided support for the development of infrastructural resources, created narrative resources that are useful for engagement with employers and members, established positive relations between unions, and enhanced network embeddedness through multi-organisation meetings and

information sharing. The ULA is therefore seen as a significant aspect of institutional revitalisation that should not be subordinate to organising efforts as McIlroy suggests, but rather must work in tandem with organising strategies as a valuable asset for trade unions.

## Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

This thesis has assessed the contribution of the union learning agenda (ULA) to trade union revitalisation in Wales. How and the extent to which this activity has increased union strength was the central concern of this study. Four key aspects of revitalisation were identified: the political, the economic, the membership and the institutional. In this chapter, the key findings of this multi-method study are summarised and discussed. The evidence indicated that revitalisation processes were occurring within each dimension of union activity and scathing claims that the ULA is not a positive trade union strategy (McIlroy 2008, McIlroy and Croucher 2013) were not supported within the Welsh context.

The chapter is arranged into four sections. Firstly, the central research questions and methods are summarised. Secondly, the key findings in relation to each dimension of revitalisation are briefly presented. Thirdly, each dimension is discussed with reference to relevant debates on trade union revitalisation in industrial relations scholarship and it is argued that a pragmatic approach to partnership at economic and political levels is a significant strategy in strengthening trade union involvement in VET. With regard to membership and institutional revitalisation it is argued that the ULA has supported the generation of covenantal exchange relationships and significant infrastructural resources, networks and union collaboration. The final section proffers directions for future research and provides concluding remarks on this study.

### 8.2 Exploring trade union revitalisation and the Union Learning Agenda

The purpose of this research was to explore the ULA in Wales and assess how ULA activity could contribute to trade union revitalisation. The key research question focused upon the approach to, and the effectiveness of, union learning activity as a revitalisation strategy with regards to each aspect of revitalisation identified by Behrens *et al.* (2004).

In terms of the impact on political revitalisation, three assessments were made regarding access to government policy-making, policy influence and the extraction of resources from government. In order to assess whether the ULA was impacting upon economic revitalisation, firstly we asked, are employers supporting or hindering the development of the ULA, and secondly is the ULA developing collective agreements, procedural mechanisms and substantive gains? Membership revitalisation was explored using Snape and Redman's (2004) model of union commitment behaviours, asking how ULRs are engaging with members, and whether the ULA was encouraging workers to join and become more active within trade unions. Finally, institutional revitalisation was explored using Lévesque and Murray's (2010) model of trade union capacity, where consideration was given to the development of infrastructural resources, internal solidarity, narrative resources and networks as a result of the ULA.

These questions were explored using a mixed-method study. The methods employed included the first survey of ULRs in Wales, observation of ULR training courses, Network of Excellence (NoE) meetings, WTUC conferences and workplace events, as well as interviews with ULRs, union officers and W/TUC staff.

Documentary research also contributed to the understanding of information sharing through ULA networks. The use of these multiple methods allowed for an encompassing exploration of the various aspects of trade union revitalisation and an assessment of the contribution that the ULA can make to trade union revitalisation in Wales.

### 8.3 Key findings

The examination of the ULA and trade union revitalisation indicated that the ULA has promoted revitalisation in the four key areas of trade union activity. In terms of political revitalisation, devolution presented trade unions in Wales with an opportunity to influence the policy decisions of the Welsh Government (WG). The Government of Wales Act 2006 was identified as a significant piece of legislation for the inclusion of trade unions, as it places an obligation on the WG to develop inclusive and collaborative systems in policy-making. The WTUC has developed as a significant partner in policy-making circles, respected by government and employers for their role in developing workforce skills. Whilst the institutional set-up is similar to that in

the UK, the WTUC also had access to the Wales Social Partners Unit (WSPU) and the Council for Economic Renewal (CfER). Outcomes of ULA activity included funding for staff, for WULF and the EP, and provisions for individual learning in the ReAct scheme. Furthermore, Welsh Government also provided funding for the Network of Excellence (NoE) which supported ULR activity. In relative terms, Welsh negotiations secured better conditions in the form of longer staff contracts, longer terms for WULF projects than were available in England and a lower ratio of staff to the working population. This thesis therefore highlighted the importance of political relations in developing access to institutions and policy-making. Within a supportive national context, unions had extracted resources that supported the embedding of, and support for, workplace representatives via a partnership approach.

The evaluation of economic revitalisation indicated that negotiation with employers was a significant aspect of the ULA. Whilst new collective bargaining arrangements and the extension of existing collective bargaining agreements were limited, the development of learning agreements that were informally negotiated with management were common practice. Workplace committees were also established as procedural mechanisms, though to a lesser extent than learning agreements or regular formal meetings with management. Learning agreements and committees were associated with greater substantive outcomes for workers. The vast majority of employers were supportive of the ULA and were adhering to the ACAS Code of Practice in terms of facilities and time off for ULRs. Organisational rather than ideological factors were shown to be the greatest barrier to developing the ULA. Indeed, the development of employer advocate networks were deemed effective in gaining support from employers that were not engaged with the ULA or lacked union recognition agreements. The notion of partnership was present in relation to economic revitalisation, particularly employer advocate networks which were used to promote engagement other employers that either did not recognise a trade union or who had not yet been engaged in the learning agenda.

With regard to membership revitalisation ULRs considered promotion of the union and recruitment as key aspects of their role, and were recruiting both members and representatives. Furthermore, the ULA was judged to be a significant factor for membership retention. Economic, social and covenantal relationships identified by Snape and Redman (2004) were generated by ULR activity as members were not



engaged with union activity through learning but also took on ULR and other representative roles. Prior representatives were identified as more able, though not necessarily more willing, to develop the desired covenantal relationships with workers. The development of broad rather than narrowly defined learning agendas were deemed significant in increasing the impact on membership revitalisation. Learning activity was also accessible to people outside of employing organisations and indicated that community strategies were relevant to the ULA beyond engagement with educational providers, though the impact on recruitment was less clear.

Institutional revitalisation was also shown to be supported by the development of the ULA. The ULA, in terms of infrastructural resources, developed a new cadre of activists and increased the diversity of representatives, particularly with regard to gender. Narratives on the ULA were based upon partnership and the cooperative nature of the ULR role. These narratives were used to encourage members to take on the ULR role as a less daunting task compared to other union roles. Internal solidarity was also apparent as ULRs felt supported by their unions and were engaged in internal and external union networks, contributing to the deliberative vitality of the union movement. Inter-union relationships were again promoted around a partnership discourse and the ULA provided intermediating capabilities that reduced inter-union tensions. Collaboration over the ULA therefore contributed to the development of cohesive collective identities rather than competitive ones. Arguably, the most significant aspect of institutional revitalisation was the development of network embeddedness. This was occurring both internally within unions and between unions and externally by developing interaction and understanding between a wide range of organisations.

### 8.3 Discussion: The importance of political context and the potential of partnership

#### *Political partnership and the importance of context*

Whilst McIlroy (2008) has criticised the ULA at a political level, suggesting that inclusion in VET under a partnership agenda constrains union influence, others have highlighted the lack of negotiating rights and statutory legislation as primary barriers to developing the ULA as a revitalisation strategy (Lloyd and Payne 2007). The

evidence here suggests that this was not the case in Wales. Instead of merely providing a 'public administration function' via the delivery of government schemes such as ULF, the ULA offered trade unions an opportunity to increase their significance in policy arenas, not diminish it. As critical actors in VET, unions have used the ULA to promote their relevance and have used their position to influence government policy. At the same time they have continued to support strike action and campaigning activity. The ability of trade unions to act as government partners has created institutions, gained resources (human, financial and organisational), and increased trade union ability to influence VET policy. Furthermore, state funding has been increased as a result of WTUC lobbying. Suggestions that the acceptance of the delivery of schemes such as WULF or the EP result in constrained union voice (Lloyd and Payne 2007) were not supported. A partnership approach between unions and government, which has delivered results for workers and garnered support from employers, has maintained the trade union position in VET at a political level in the face of a hostile UK government.

As Hamann and Kelly (2011) and others have argued, trade union ability to influence policy is affected by the political support for union involvement. Indeed, the evidence from interviews and discussions with TUC and WTUC staff suggested that in recent times, the ULA in England faced an "uphill struggle" because the Conservative-led coalition government was less willing to listen to union voice. However, McIlroy and Croucher (2013) claim that a Conservative government would result in the abolition of Unionlearn or ULF has not yet materialised. Whilst this may have been tempered by coalition partners, the fragility of the ULA in the UK appears to have been overstated as the ULA remains a significant strategy across the UK and continues to receive substantial amounts of state funding. What may be key to the future of the ULA in Wales is the ability of the WG to act independently from Westminster. The ULA should continue to be pursued at a political level as an important trade union agenda. The 2015 General Election results may have a significant part to play in the continuing and future success of the ULA in England but given the devolution of VET powers to the WG, the support for the ULA, WULF and trade union involvement in VET policy development in Wales could continue. Whilst a Conservative UK government will remain hostile to trade unions and are likely to remove or further reduce funding for the ULA in England, the Welsh government will have the

opportunity to continue support for the ULA and create further policy divergence on VET and IR issues.

The existing ULA literature had failed to consider the distinct governance arrangements on VET in Wales that resulted from the devolution of powers to the Welsh Government. This examination supported claims that political context matters (Hamann and Kelly 2011), and that devolution has enabled policy divergence (Adams and Schmuecker 2006, Keating 2003). The examination of UK national patterns, or sub-national patterns of IR will be increasingly significant within Britain as the increasing fragmentation of governance in the UK nations, resulting from the devolution of powers, will lead to divergence in patterns of IR if support for the Labour Party in Wales is maintained. Divergence is already apparent beyond VET, for example in Wales the Agricultural Wage Board remains after its abolishment in England. The abolition was legally challenged by Welsh government and Welsh trade unionists which led to the successful rejection of UK government policy. The relationship between unions and governments as a partnership must therefore be questioned in relation to the context of the separate home nations. The importance of difference within the UK nations in terms of institutions and policy approach should receive greater attention from IR scholars in the future.

### *Economic partnership*

The key criticisms of the ULA in relation to economic revitalisation include the lack of a right to bargain with employers over training, and concerns of employer dominance that result in unions performing employer responsibilities, particularly where a partnership approach is espoused (McIlroy 2008, Forrester 2004). Whilst it is accepted that a right to bargain would place trade unions, and specifically ULRs, in a stronger position with regard to economic revitalisation, despite this the ULA was enabling the development of collective bargaining over learning though this was relatively limited compared to the development of procedural and consultative arrangements in the form of committees and learning agreements that allowed for informal negotiation with employers. Whilst these mechanisms may not be as desirable as comprehensive collective agreements that are formally bargained for, the development of workplace structures through the ULA are enabling gains for

workers. It is therefore argued that within a weak regulatory environment the creation and maintenance of workplace procedures and policies through a collaborative approach to union-management relations are significant in sustaining union strength at the workplace.

Debates over workplace partnership have focused on collaborative arrangements that supporters believe can extend union influence (Roche and Geary 2002), whilst critics argue that partnership may weaken unions by supporting managerialist oriented union representatives rather than promoting activism against poor employment practices (Kelly 1999, 2004). Criticisms of a ULA partnership approach to engagement with employers have suggested that there are little gains to be made by pursuing this strategy, particularly where union representatives were inexperienced or union organisation was weak (Lloyd and Payne 2007, Davies 2008). However, it has also been argued that a partnership approach can lead to mutually beneficial impacts from engaging through a more collaborative or partnership approach (Ackers and Payne 1998, Hyman 2002, Kochan and Osterman 1994). There is evidence to support both arguments, with studies indicating work intensification has occurred in partnership workplaces (Marks *et al.* 1998). Badigannavar and Kelly (2004) suggested that there are few gains to be made by pursuing partnership, particularly in terms of working time, union density or representative numbers. This conclusion was reached despite better access to information and training within private sector firms. Other evidence suggests that partnership can support trade union workplace organisation (Roche and Geary 2006) but also that the 'signing of a partnership agreement need not mean a union is less committed to organizing' (Towers 2003: 189).

Our evidence showed that partnership was not deemed detrimental to ULA activity, and indeed was associated with facilities provision for ULRs, and management support was linked to a greater prevalence of procedural mechanisms. This supported evidence that suggests that engagement over learning was become institutionalised at the workplace (Bacon and Hoque 2010, Hollinrake *et al* 2008). Partnership whether formal or informal was deemed more important for generating procedural mechanisms than substantive training outcomes, but procedural mechanisms were important for making substantive gains. Procedural mechanisms, within cooperative workplaces, may provide the best opportunity to increase

economic strength and substantive outcomes for workers given the lack of regulation on employer-union engagement on learning activity. Pursuing formal arrangements, either through consultative committees or specific learning agreements that can develop substantive gains should continue to be a focus of the ULA, particularly as our evidence suggested that a general partnership agreement alone may not be enough to increase positive outcomes for employees. It is therefore argued that a partnership approach, rather than a formal partnership agreement, can be successfully used by unions to engage with employers, but as Regini (1995) states, partnership must be a pragmatic rather than an ideological stance in order to maintain trade union independence. As, Wallis and Stuart (2007) argued, a partnership approach can be more significant than a formal partnership agreement. A partnership approach that recognises differences in employer and union aims and targets particular workplace practices can be a fruitful path to access workplace decision making. A wider acceptance of partnership in relation to union goals must entail consideration of the aims any such agreements or relationships, the attitude of managers in specific workplaces and the potential for managerial dominance in order to assess the feasibility of such an approach. The national political context must also be considered, as we suggested above, as devolution is supporting divergent political attitudes towards trade unions in the home nations.

### *Revitalising membership*

Key criticisms of the ULA in relation to membership revitalisation include concerns that learning provision is dominated by employer not member needs (Lloyd and Payne 2007), and that learning activity does not provide an adequate incentive to join a trade union (McIlroy 2008). However, the development of the ULA in Wales has been led by worker and not employer needs and ULA activity is contributing to membership revitalisation. The ULA has provided greater human resources for trade unions and enabled increased contact between workers and union representatives that is judged to be severely lacking. Evidence from existing research indicated that contact with union representatives in the workplace was a significant resource for increasing membership numbers (Heery *et al.* 2003b) and that union participation and commitment may be strengthened where union activity increased contact with

union activists (Hyman 2007, Peetz, 2006, Jarley 2005, Fiorito *et al.* 2011). The development of specialised roles within unions has increased, not just with the ULR role, but with growing interest in 'green' representatives and equality representatives. The development of workplace representatives can help to fill the void left by declining numbers of shop stewards (Charlwood and Forth 2004). Furthermore, increased contact with members and representatives is important as union representatives involved in bargaining collectively and dealing with grievance and discipline are removed from the shop floor. A key aspect of the ULR role is the importance attributed to developing membership participation via the contact that was generated with members through learning activity and the visibility of ULRs in the workplace. This contact aided development of economic or social exchange relationships or covenantal relationships (Snape and Redman 2004, Bamberger *et al.* 1999). ULRs have developed relationships with workers and by encouraging learning activity and attracting new members as well as new workplace activists.

With regard to the types of training provided through the ULA, it was posited in Chapter 6 that ULRs were more effective in establishing membership gains where the training agenda was broad and reflected worker interests above employer interests. Broad transferable skills and personal development were high on ULR agendas, and this was associated with greater recruitment outcomes. Where the ULA pursued a broader learning agenda this also developed the scope to engage a wide pool of members and non-members. This argument may be extended to union revitalisation more generally. Where unions pursue a broad agenda they may be able to attract more members. The greater number of issues the trade unions pursue, the more relevant they will be to potential members. What can also aid the development of positive union-member relations is the linking of learning activity to wider trade union aims. The development of strategic campaigning that targets issues such as zero hours contracts, the living wage, or the environment and fair trade, can be aligned with union learning activity to promote cohesive strategies that engage the widest possible audience.

Key to the development of a strong 'rank-and-file' unionism, it has been argued, is the ability of trade unions to mobilise against employers by adversarial means (Kelly 1996). This is in contrast to the development of a partnership approach that we have seen in relation to political and economic revitalisation. The ULA was pursued in

collaborative terms and did not target workers on the basis of discontent over employer training practices, yet we have seen that engagement with learning was promoting the development of membership bases.

In opposition to adversarial tactics to encourage membership, we argue that, relational tactics, where ULRs interact with learners and develop relationships over time by providing a service and by providing support for learning, is significant strategy for membership revitalisation to develop pro-union attitudes. In order to develop covenantal relationships that support institutional revitalisation, relational organising tactics as well as the use of techniques such as mapping, plus a wider experience and understanding of trade union recruitment may be significant. In this regard, representative training courses encourage the use of mapping to understand workforce needs, but additional training for recruitment provided by individual unions could support new ULRs in developing covenantal relationships with members. Further attention should be paid to the differentiation between economic, social and covenantal relationships and explore how covenantal relationships are developed as the most favourable form of union commitment behaviour. Future research may consider the development of membership revitalisation through 'relational organising' (Saundry and McKeown 2012) as a potential avenue to develop covenantal relationships, not just through the ULA but amongst union representatives generally.

In addition to the development of research into relational organising and commitment behaviours, the use of community strategies is worthy of more attention. Research into migrant worker engagement (Heyes, 2009, Mustchin 2009) notes the development of connections to community organisations. Our research also identified the widening of access to learning beyond the workplace and the engagement of multiple organisations in ULA networks. Whilst we found little evidence that community strategies bolstered recruitment, it is important to understand how and why learning access is widened, and the benefits that may accrue from engaging with external organisations.

### *The importance of networks*

What became apparent throughout this investigation was the importance of networks in generating deliberative vitality. Salient issue based networks were present within

some unions, but further support was provided by the multi-union WTUC-led Networks of Excellence. The development of networks has been neglected by the workplace and single union focus of many ULA studies to date, yet networks have been identified as important in generating 'expert systems' (Wynne, 1996, Payne 2001), as key for the generation of collective resources (Antcliff *et al.* 2007) and for information sharing (Passy 2001, Diani and McAdam 2003, Grix 2002). Furthermore, the potential to engage with the increasing number of CSOs that are concerned with workplace issues has been noted (Heery *et al.* 2011, 2012). The establishment of ULA networks has generated space in which union activists can interact, learn from each other and develop shared values.

Networks represent a significant infrastructural resource and are significant in developing institutional revitalisation (Lévesque and Murray 2010). Not only can networks generate knowledge and interaction between representatives within a union or across unions, they can also establish relationships between external organisations. These relationships in turn may increase lobbying power by providing a clear and coherent message to government from different organisations (Wills 2001). The continued support for the NoE must be lobbied for and investigation into the use of ULA networks in England should be assessed. The development of these networks enhances union capacity as a coalition and lobbying tool.

Whilst the ULA is often discussed as a service and partnership agenda, its development as a core union function that receives considerable time and resources has enabled the ULA to develop as a significant organising strategy, supporting workplace, political and membership revitalisation. Whilst partnership critics suggest that factionalism and conflict will arise within and between unions, as employers create 'sweetheart' deals (Gall 2003) or representatives become incorporated into management systems and adopt managerialist tendencies, the evidence from our study suggests that a partnership approach to learning was creating cohesive inter- and intra-networks that can contribute to the deliberatively vitality of trade unions. Rather than competing with each other to gain membership or recognition, unions were acting together develop institutional strength and to provide learning opportunities for members.



Another consideration in terms of the relationship between union representatives and union officers is the harmony of approach. Taylor and Bain (2003) suggested that parsimony between national and local union strategies is detrimental to union organising whether this is adversarial or partnership based. Within one union from our study, the lack of support for union learning from a union officer had negative consequences for the union as a number of active ULRs were so negatively affected by the lack of support they chose to move to a rival union. Where factions occurred disquiet arose from the central union approach rather than relations between unions or unions and management. In order to develop and sustain institutional deliberative vitality and collective cohesion union officers must accept the union learning is a significant interest for ULRs and members.

With regard to institutional revitalisation, the development of a cohesive strategy, the development of networks of support, and the generation of narratives have maintained the ULA as a significant strategy in Wales. Furthermore, the development of these aspects of institutional vitality have enabled greater inter-union collaboration and workplace vitality.

#### 8.4 Concluding remarks

The findings of this research project show that the ULA is a significant tool in strengthening trade unions. It is not suggested that the ULA is a one-stop ticket to success, but given the evidence presented herein, claims made that the ULA is of limited use in revitalisation efforts and a waste of limited union resources are rejected. Whilst the discourse on the ULA is presented as integrative or partnership-based, the ULA should be used in combination with union organising strategies that aim to engage members, target employer practices and lobby government policy-making. Political partnership in Wales is possible due to supportive Labour administration, and generally positive employer-union relations encourage economic/workplace-based partnership on the subject of learning and training. The development of the ULA has created workplace activism, supported community engagement, promoted inter-union relations and generated active networks. The pragmatic partnership approach to the ULA cannot therefore be seen as an insignificant strategy to support that development or strengthening of trade union

activity. Unions have utilised the opportunities that arose under the last Labour Government to galvanise a strong trade union movement, and has continued to receive support from Welsh Government. As was stated in chapter 2, revitalisation is a process, and the evidence in this thesis indicates that the ULA, as a pragmatic partnership agenda, is a significant resource along political, economic, membership and institutional dimensions. The development of specific officer roles provide support to workplace activists and enables the development of workplace structures as well as greater coordination between union and worksites. In this way, the ULA is contributing to the internal and external strength of union movement. Whilst this strength is in some ways reliant upon funding from government, the generation of human and institutional resources through partnership have developed deliberative vitality and cohesive collective identities.

Whilst the development of the ULA, under a partnership approach, is deemed to be a significant resource for revitalisation, it is important not to understate the need to maintain independence from employers and government, or understate the need to maintain organising frames of reference that promote expansion to new worksites and grow the trade union movement. It is not the case that partnership will be an appropriate strategy in all workplaces or for all issues. Many challenges remain for trade unions but it is important to create and maintain a supportive membership base, and the ULA is significant in this regard.

A number of avenues for future research can be proffered. Firstly, the importance of the relationships generated with external organisations within ULA networks may be further explored in terms of political lobbying and union campaigns. Whilst our research found that links were developed, the significance of these links at a political level remains unclear. Secondly, the importance of national, and sub-national, governance structures must be included in any assessment of UK IR developments. Given that different political parties are in power within each home nation, the significance of the political environment must be considered. Finally, there must be greater exploration of the nuances in approach to the ULA within individual unions in Wales and beyond. Whilst this research has identified the ULA as a partnership strategy, and was discussed in these terms by union officers and activists, comparative case study evidence may further reveal how different practices amongst

different workforces in different geographical locations bears relation to ULA outcomes.

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Dear union member,

Please could you take some time to **help** with this research project, if you have already completed the survey, I'd like to thank you and ask you please pass this copy on to another ULR.

The project is examining Union Learning Representatives in Wales and it would be greatly appreciated if you fill in this questionnaire, which asks about your experiences as a ULR. Even if you are no longer active it would be helpful to have a completed return.

Every returned questionnaire will count towards more representative and accurate conclusions. The questionnaire will take approximately **20 minutes** to complete. Instructions are given in italics. Please try to answer all questions as fully as possible. Although the original prize draw has already taken place for those who completed the survey in the first instance, a second smaller prize draw has been arranged. You have a chance to win **£10 in book tokens**.

Everything you say in this questionnaire will remain **confidential**. Contact details given for the prize draw will be removed from the questionnaire and destroyed once the draw is made. Completed forms will only be seen by the researcher and data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. The project supervisor, Ed Heery, can be contacted if you have any concerns by email at: [heery@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:heery@cardiff.ac.uk). Any questions or further comments, or if you would like a copy of the survey in Welsh please contact, Katy Huxley, by email at: [huxleykl@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:huxleykl@cardiff.ac.uk). Please post your questionnaire using the free, **pre-paid return envelope provided**, addressed to Katy Huxley.

*Thank you for your help*

ACTIVITIES

1. On average, how many hours a week do you spend on ULR activities:

(Circle one choice for a and one for b)

a. During work time?	0	Less than 1	1-2	3-5	6-9	10+
b. Outside work time?	0	Less than 1	1-2	3-5	6-9	10+

2. On average, how many hours a week do you spend on other union activities:

(Circle one choice for a and one for b)

a. During work time?	0	Less than 1	1-2	3-5	6-9	10+
b. Outside work time?	0	Less than 1	1-2	3-5	6-9	10+

3. Which of the following activities do you carry out as part of your ULR role?

(Tick all that apply)

- Organising on-site learning
- Organising off-site learning
- Conduct training needs analysis
- Manage WULF project activity
- Access funding for individuals
- Book swap / library
- Maintain learning centre at work
- Organise union campaigns
- House visits
- 'Mapping the workforce'  (\*systematic identification of members and potential members)
- Recruit members
- Recruit union reps
- Promote the union
- Monitor union membership levels
- Targeted union recruitment campaigns\*\*  (\*\* e.g. by occupation, gender)
- One-to-one information and advice on learning
- Negotiate with your employer over training
- Represent members at a workplace learning committee
- Deal with grievances concerned with training or learning
- Formal meetings with management to discuss learning and training
- Assisting employees in making requests for flexible working

4. Do you maintain regular contact with any of the following regarding union learning?

(Tick all that apply)

- Regular contact with learning providers
- Regular contact with other union reps
- Regular contact with other workplaces
- Regular contact with employer's associations
- Regular contact with community centres (e.g. church, library)
- Regular contact with youth groups, migrant groups
- Regular contact with social movement groups (e.g. anti-racism groups)

Other  - (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which of the following networks/forums do you attend in your ULR role?

(Tick all that apply)

- Branch meetings
- Regional union meetings
- Union network/forum
- Networks of Excellence
- Other  - (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- WTUC ULR conference
- Union ULR conference
- Community group meetings
- Local Trade Council meetings

6. Which of the following learning activities have you been asked about by colleagues?

(Tick all that apply)

- Basic/essential skills
- Job-specific skills
- IT skills
- Employment skills
- Foreign language
- Welsh
- Trade union courses
- Hobby/interest
- Other learning

7. Which of the following learning activities have you organised?

(Tick all that apply)

- Basic/essential skills
- Job-specific skills
- IT skills
- Employment skills
- Foreign language
- Welsh
- Trade union courses
- Hobby/interest
- Other learning

8. Have you extended access to union organised learning beyond members and colleagues from your workplace?

(Circle one)

Yes  No

9. Do you use any of the following methods to communicate around union learning?

(Tick all that apply)

- E-mail
- Notice boards
- Newsletters
- Workplace Intranet
- Union website
- Social networking sites
- Online forums

10. Do you receive the WTUC Network of Excellence Newsletter, 'Net News' by email?

(Circle one)

Yes  No

11. Have you worked with any of the following groups to provide learning?

(Tick all that apply)

- |                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | Intend to <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Other unions                | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Other workplaces            | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Other union branches        | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Sector Skills Councils      | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Community centres           | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Local Trades Council        | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Trade union networks/forums | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Community groups            | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Faith-based groups          | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Other organisations         | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |

12. In the last 2 years, have you worked with any of the following to gain support for a union campaign?

(Tick all that apply)

- |                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | Intend to <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Other unions                | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Other workplaces            | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Other union branches        | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Learning providers          | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Sector Skills Councils      | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Community centres           | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Local Trades Council        | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Trade union networks/forums | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Community groups            | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Faith-based groups          | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |
| Other organisations         | <input type="checkbox"/>     | <input type="checkbox"/>           | <input type="checkbox"/>    |



13. In the last 2 years, have you worked with any of the following through your ULR role to gain support for a community campaign? *(e.g., anti-racism rally, school closure)*  
*(Tick all that apply)*
- |                             | Yes                      | Intend to                | No                       |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Other unions                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other workplaces            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other union branches        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Learning providers          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sector Skills Councils      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community centres           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local Trades Council        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trade union networks/forums | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community groups            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Faith-based groups          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other organisations         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If yes, were these campaigns aimed at any of the following areas? *(Tick all that apply)*

- Workplace issues, e.g. Pay, contracts, closure
- Community issues, e.g. Unemployment
- Identity issues, e.g. Disability, gender, migrant workers
- International/Global issues, e.g. Poverty, Anti-war, Environment
- Other – *(please specify)* \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR UNION AT WORK**

14. Which trade union are you a member of? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Are there other trade unions present at your workplace?  
*(Circle one)* Yes  No
16. Approximately, what percentage of the employees at your workplace are members of a trade union?  
*(Circle one)* 1 - 20 %  21 - 40 %  41 - 60 %  61 - 80 %  81 - 100 %
17. Is your union recognised for collective bargaining at your workplace? *(Negotiating collective agreements with the employer on pay and other terms and conditions of employment)*  
*(Circle one)* Yes  No  Don't know
18. Has your union and employer signed a partnership agreement? *(A declaration of consultation and involvement for mutual benefit)*  
*(Circle one)* Yes  No  Don't know
19. How would you describe union membership levels at your workplace?  
*(Circle one)* Decreasing  Stable  Increasing

20. How would you describe management's general attitude towards trade union membership?  
*(Circle one)* In favour of membership  Neutral  Not in favour of membership
21. How would you describe management's general attitude towards trade union organised learning?  
*(Circle one)* In favour of union learning  Neutral  Not in favour of union learning

**SUPPORT**

22. How many other ULRs are there at your workplace from your union?
23. Are there any other ULRs at your workplace from other unions?  
*(Circle one)* Yes  No   
 If yes, how would you rate your relationship with the representatives of the other unions?  
*(Circle one)* Excellent  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor
24. Was the time to attend the ULR training course paid for by your employer?  
*(Circle one)* No  Yes, all of the time  Yes, some of the time  I haven't trained
25. As a ULR, how satisfied are you with the support you receive from the following?  
*(Tick all that apply)*

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Union branch	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Union region	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
WTUC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Higher management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. Do you receive 'reasonable' time off to undertake your ULR duties?  
*(Circle one)* Always  Usually  Sometimes  Never
27. Does your employer provide any of the following facilities for you as a ULR?  
*(Tick all that apply)*
- |                  |                          |                                   |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Meeting rooms    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Communication equipment           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Office space     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>(e.g. telephone, internet)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Office equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other facilities                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Notice board     | <input type="checkbox"/> | No facilities                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**YOUR WORKPLACE**

36. How many employees are there at your workplace? (Tick one)
- 1-9  10-24  25-49  50-99  100-249  250-499  500-999  1,000+
37. What sector is your work in? (Circle one)
- |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Public sector            | Private sector           | Voluntary sector         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
38. Which category best describes the business of your workplace? (Tick one)
- Agriculture, hunting, and forestry
  - Fishing
  - Mining and quarrying
  - Manufacturing
  - Electricity, gas and water supply
  - Construction
  - Wholesale and retail trade
  - Hotels and restaurants
  - Transport, storage and communications
  - Banking and finance
  - Real estate, renting and business activities
  - Public administration and defence
  - Education
  - Health and social work
  - Other community, social and personal services and activities
- Other - (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

39. How would you describe employer training provision at your workplace? (Circle one)
- Excellent  Good  Adequate  Poor  Very poor
40. Has your workplace signed the Basic Skills Employer Pledge? (Circle one)
- Yes  No  Don't know

**ABOUT YOU**

41. How long have you been a trade union member? \_\_\_\_\_ (Years/months)
42. How long have you been a ULR? \_\_\_\_\_ (Years/months)

43. Have you been on any TUC Organising Academy courses? (Circle one)
- Yes  No

44. What attracted you to the ULR role? (Tick all that apply)
- To help others gain skills and confidence
  - To gain more experience and knowledge of learning and development
  - Opportunity to become active in the union
  - Opportunity to improve business outcomes
  - Develop work related skills
  - Develop union negotiation and organising skills
  - Personal development
  - Nobody in ULR position
  - Other  - (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

45. Which, if any, of the following union roles did you perform before you became a ULR and which have you performed since you became a ULR? (Tick all that apply)
- |   |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Before ULR role          | After ULR role           |
| Workplace rep                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Branch rep                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Regional rep                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Specialist rep (e.g. health and safety) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other function (e.g. recruitment)       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

46. How active and involved are in your union? (e.g. take part in meetings, represent workers, engage with other union reps)
- (Circle one) Very active  Fairly active  Not very active  Inactive

47. Are you active in any other community roles, groups or civil society organisations? (Tick all that apply)
- |                        |   |                         |                          |
|------------------------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| School board/committee | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Charity volunteer       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Residents committee    | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Human rights group      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Youth activities       | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Sexuality group         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Faith-based group      | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Religious group         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Environmental group    | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Mentoring               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community councils     | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Disability/health group | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sporting activities    | <input type="checkbox"/>                          | Local paper or magazine | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other                  | <input type="checkbox"/> - (Please specify) _____ |                         |                          |

28. How does management normally engage with ULRs over decisions concerning learning and training of employees? Always Sometimes Never

No engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inform on management decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consult on management decision. ( <i>ie ask for ULR input but they take decision</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negotiate and come to a joint agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

29. Which of the following inhibit your ability to fulfil your role as ULR?

(Tick all that apply)

Lack of worker interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of computer access	<input type="checkbox"/>
No learning agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of funding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conflict with management	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack of branch support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of learning space	<input type="checkbox"/>	Workplace location	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulties with shift work	<input type="checkbox"/>	Problems with learning providers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of administrative support	<input type="checkbox"/>		

30. Has your employer used any of the following tactics to disrupt union organising around learning? (Tick all that apply)

Bullying ULRs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refusing time off for workers to train	<input type="checkbox"/>
Redundancies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refusing time off for ULR duties	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threats of redundancies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bypass the union by using non-union reps	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work intensification	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - Please specify _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

**IMPACTS**

31. How many new union members have you recruited:

a) <u>through</u> learning activity in the last 12 months?	(Circle one) 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-70	71-99	100+
b) <u>through</u> learning activity in total?	(Circle one) 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-70	71-99	100+
c) <u>through</u> other union activity in the last 12 months?	(Circle one) 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-70	71-99	100+

32. Approximately how many any new union reps have you recruited:

a) <u>through</u> learning activity in the last 12 months?	(Circle one) 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-70	71-99	100+
b) <u>through</u> learning activity in total?	(Circle one) 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-70	71-99	100+
c) <u>through</u> other union activity in the last 12 months?	(Circle one) 0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-70	71-99	100+

33. What impact have your ULR activities had on the following?

	Improved a lot	Improved somewhat	No change	Worsened
Training practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Worker demand for learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employer funded training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-employer funded training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication with employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Branch organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Union membership levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turnover/work absence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disputes with employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information held on workers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Numbers at union meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

34. Have any of the following been achieved at your workplace as a result of the union learning agenda? (Tick all that apply)

	Yes	No
Introduced a learning agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduced a learning centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in training systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in appraisal systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incorporated training into collective bargaining agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gained collective bargaining recognition at your workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gained recognition at another (non-unionised) organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

35. If you have a learning agreement, how effective is it?

(Circle one) Very effective Effective Not very effective Ineffective No agreement

48. How interested are you in working with your union to help non-unionised workplaces organise and gain union recognition?

(Circle one) Very interested Fairly interested Somewhat interested Not interested

49. What is your gender? (Circle one) Male Female

50. What is your age?  (Years)

51. Do you have any children under 18? (Circle one) Yes No

52. To which of these groups do you consider you belong? (Tick one)

- White (British, Irish, other white background)
- Mixed (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, other mixed background)
- Black (Caribbean, African, Other Black background)
- Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian background)
- Chinese or other ethnic group

53. Do you work: (Circle one) Full-time Part-time Retired Unemployed

54. What type of employment contract are you on? (Circle one)

- Permanent Fixed-term Temporary Self-employed Other

*Thank you for taking time to complete this survey*

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This section will be detached and destroyed after the prize draw.

To enter into the second prize draw please leave some contact details below. The winner will be contacted before December 1<sup>st</sup> 2011.

Name:

Email address/Phone number: