

GMB

UNION

CEC Statement: The Future of Trade Union Education

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GMB Congress

Bournemouth 2024

CEC STATEMENT on The Future of Trade Union Education

Education is, as often has been said, power. The GMB is committed to delivering effective, first-class training and education for both our workplace representatives and for our lay members.

In terms of training for our lay office holders, we will continue to combine direct delivery by REO's (Regional Education Officers) and other staff with the use of GMB trained and inducted tutors from partner education providers.

In order to pursue this option, we will campaign for the restoration of full funding for the training of all types of GMB workplace representatives and post-holders.

We will also campaign for the restoration of full funding for trade union and adult education courses at Level 3, across all our constituent nations.

We also wish to expand the scope and purpose of our lay activist training. We recognise that the way to sustain the democracy of our union and root it effectively in the workplace is to develop a network of activists who are fully equipped with leadership, people, and campaigning skills, and with a broad and deep understanding of the GMB's values, aims and purpose, rooted in political economy.

To that end we will be developing an accredited GMB trade union studies diploma that will equip our lay activists with a broader understanding of our union, our movement, and our ambitions for the future. An education programme that will develop critical thinking and study skills and place the GMB's fight to make work better in the wider political and economic context.

As agreed by the National Lifelong Learning Committee we will use the resources from our National Lifelong Learning Fund to support this initiative.

We welcome the continued commitment of the Welsh government to the Welsh Union Learning Fund and will continue to work with it for the benefit of our members.

Similarly, we understand that the Union Learning Fund had different impacts across our Regions and that it did provide gains for some individual members.

We support the idea of funding being provided directly to the trade union movement to deliver learning that benefits our members, in accordance with the principles outlined above.

However, we do not believe that the ULF (Union Learning Fund) as it functioned in England is the best model for this. The English ULF was an agency of the government working to delivering government targets. It did not provide funding for any courses for members. It only ever funded project workers, project managers and operational costs.

Though some £12 million was received by the GMB from 2009 onwards, £8 million went directly to administrators and managers. Course fees, disbursements to members, and the gaining of professional and academic qualifications were negligible and appeared so marginal to the purpose of the Fund that they were not separately accounted for. Moreover, a substantial part of ULF funding was devoted to supporting roles at the TUC connected with monitoring and managing the delivery of government directed targets.

In effect, the GMB was being treated as an arm of the state, subordinated to its priorities as opposed to our own. It is notable that the TUC, itself, is now distancing itself from this model and is unlikely to push for the restoration of the ULF, as it previously functioned.

The GMB, certainly, does not believe that such a model fits with the basic principles of the union or represents a responsible way to spend our members money. We need to think clearly and purposefully about what trade union education and our reps training looks like, restoring our industrial focus, pride in the history and values of the Labour Movement, and raising levels of political consciousness among activist base, folding questions of the ongoing fight for equality and social justice into all that we do. Within this context, we note the groundbreaking success of the GRASP programme in all of these areas and seek to extend its principles throughout the union.

'Educate – Agitate – and Organise' have been the watch words of the Movement at its points of maximum influence and success. They need to be restated, today, as part of a well-financed, disciplined, intellectually rigorous

and exciting developmental journey for all of our members. As ever, the way is forward.