



Usdaw
Campaigning
for Lifelong
Learning

Workplace Learning Centres

One of the main barriers to Usdaw members returning to learning is that learning is inaccessible. It takes place at times and in places that make it difficult for our members to access. One solution is to bring the learning into the workplace. This often means setting up a Learning Centre in or near the workplace.

What is a Learning Centre?

A Learning Centre can be anything from a room with a couple of PCs to a suite of rooms with computers, a library, etc. They are a place where people can drop in to learn a variety of things, get advice and even be a place where courses can be run. Sometimes Workplace Learning Centres are connected to the internet, and members can learn 'online' using Learn Direct. (See leaflet on *Learn Direct* in this series.)

Workplace Learning Centres are usually just for the use of employees of the company.

However, an increasing number are now open to family and friends or the local community. They are often supported by a local college, which runs courses in the centre. Employees can usually use the Learning Centre before or after shifts, and some are open in the evenings and at weekends.

Usdaw Learning Reps have successfully helped set up Learning Centres in many workplaces with employers such as Littlewoods, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Tibbett & Britten.

Thousands of Usdaw members have used them to learn about how to use computers, to brush up on Basic Skills to learn a new language and even to attend guitar, yoga and aromatherapy classes.

This leaflet will help you decide if our members at your workplace could benefit from a Workplace Learning Centre and if your workplace would be right for one.



I started a Spanish course at night school but the course fell apart so I was absolutely delighted to hear I could study at work. Both my daughter and myself signed up straight away.

It's so convenient to study at work. The weekly course starts at 3pm and finishes at 5pm, which fits in with my shift and doesn't interfere with my home life, it's great.

Lynn Akroyd
Usdaw member
Reality, Oldham

Why do we need Workplace Learning Centres



Littlewoods at Shaw hold regular promotion days with free 'taster' sessions in subjects as varied as aromatherapy and cookery.

Often it is difficult for working people to return to learning because:

- Courses are run at times when they are working.
- Courses are run in colleges that are not easy to get to in the time available.
- Caring responsibilities can make attending a college difficult.

Deciding to go back to learning can be a huge step.

Walking through the doors of the local college and asking about learning can be so daunting that many people are put off at this point.

People are more likely to participate in learning if they can do it in familiar surroundings.

A Workplace Learning Centre is more accessible. Often tutors are available to run courses around a worker's shift patterns. Learning in the company of friends encourages people to keep at it, and is much more enjoyable than on your own. Sometimes employers agree to release people to learn in company time.

Is a Learning Centre right for your workplace?

A Learning Centre is not always the best approach to making learning accessible to our members. If your workplace does not have many staff, or does not have the space for a Learning Centre, this approach may not be for you. For a Workplace Learning Centre to be viable there should be at least 300-400 members onsite, as 10-15 learners are needed to make up each course.

If there are not enough potential learners or enough space you may be better off adopting a different approach. Many Usdaw sites have to do this.

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Benefits for members

There are many benefits for members who are able to learn in a Workplace Learning Centre.

- Onsite learning means no travelling. Travelling can put people off learning, particularly if they have no means of transport.
- Courses are usually more flexibly delivered in a Workplace Learning Centre than they are at a college.
- Often courses in a Workplace Learning Centre are free or cheaper than in a college.
- Members can learn in familiar surroundings, which makes learning easier, particularly if they learn with friends.

Employers can benefit too!

Experience shows that employers who support learning either of a vocational, career development or a personal nature will benefit from their investment through:

- Increased participation in training in the workplace.
- A better skilled and trained workforce more adaptable to change.
- More motivated employees with a positive attitude to learning and training.
- A lower turnover of staff.
- A learning culture in the workplace.



My colleague Mandy Owens and myself came back onsite between 9pm and 1am to let those on the night shift know what Learn Direct had to offer.

All except two signed up for courses! They now come into the centre after their shift on a Friday morning and stay all day!

It is so nice to see them all helping each other out and really enjoying learning.

Denise Gordon
Usdaw Development Worker
Littlewoods, Shaw

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Getting organised – setting up a **Workplace** Learning Centre



Sign language classes held in-store have proved very popular with staff from Safeway in Bellshill and Wishaw, Scotland.

**Get organised,
get trained
and get learning!**

Visit the Usdaw web site
www.usdaw.org.uk
and click on Lifelong
Learning

Usdaw
Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers

188 Wilmslow Road
Manchester M14 6LJ
Tel: 0161-224 2804

Usdaw Learning Reps have now built up a body of experience in jointly setting up Learning Centres with employers. The key lessons from this experience are:

- There needs to be a mechanism to jointly manage the initiative and the Learning Centre. Normally this takes the form of a **Site Learning Committee** made up of Union Learning Reps and management working together to make learning accessible and affordable. (See the leaflet about *Workplace Learning Committees* in this series.)
- The location of a Learning Centre is important. It needs to be in a prominent position and in an easily located spot. It will need to be **accessible to all** including any disabled members. The Learning Centre at Elida Fabergé is open 24 hours a day, so regardless of their shift all Usdaw members can use it.
- The Site Learning Committee needs to identify a **Partner College** to work with. The

college will often help equip a Learning Centre. However care is needed. Make sure you are not signing up for something you don't want or targets you can't reach.

- Sometimes colleges want to connect your Learning Centre to **Learn Direct** (who provide learning on the internet). This can be a good thing because it can mean that people learn in their own time and at their own pace. But before agreeing to any arrangement involving Learn Direct, read the leaflet in this series on *Learn Direct* and discuss this with Usdaw's Education department.
- Learning Centres are more successful if they are staffed, so that Advice and Guidance are always available.
- Ensure you have a way of recording the learning that has taken place within your centre. Ask the Usdaw Education department for a **Site Level Report Form**.