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The Union Role in Negotiating Continuing Vocational Training in the UK: a Partnership Model

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Historical Overview

- **1960s - 1970s:** neo-corporatist system underpinned by formal tripartite social partnership structures such as the Manpower Services Commission and industry training boards with training levies at sector level.
- **1980s - late1990s:** employer-dominated voluntary system through local Training and Enterprise Councils with unions marginalised
- **late 1990s - present:** increasingly centralised government system with employer-demand driven agencies but enhanced union capacity



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New Labour and the Third Way

- devolution to Scotland and Wales
- policy centralisation of CVT in England
- delivery of CVT employer demand led
- institutions employer dominated
- state intervention where market failure
- no legal obligations on employers to train
- individual entitlements to learning
- little collective bargaining over CVT
- enhanced union capacity – union learning reps/Union Learning Fund

CVT Framework

- **Department for Universities, Innovation and Skills – target 3.4 m adults in the workforce to get a Level 2 qualification by 2010**
- **Learning and Skills Council in England – planning /funding £12bn public supported programmes including further education colleges**
- **Sector Skills Councils – UK-strategic – not funding bodies- labour market intelligence – design apprenticeships – employer led**
- **UK Commission for Employment and Skills - strategic**

The UK Skills Deficit

- 11 m adults lack a level 2 qualification - 4 m have literacy skill needs and 6 m numeracy needs
- only 12% of employees without any qualifications compared with 41% of graduate employees participated in job-related training in past 3 months
- 35% of employers covering over a quarter of the workforce do not offer any training at all

Employer Subsidies/Individual Entitlements

“Putting power and choice in hands of employers and learners”

- **subsidies to help employers train workforce –Train to Gain programme – 420,000 employees**
- **Support for apprenticeships – 184,000 in 2007**
- **individual entitlements to free tuition for adults to train to level 2 and 18-25 year olds to train to level 3**

Collective bargaining over CVT

- unions negotiated CVT in 9.2% workplaces (2004)
- where unions are recognised and negotiate over training, employees are 24% more likely to having received some training
- higher levels of negotiation and consultation in workplaces with ULRs (31%/61%) compared with workplaces with union reps as a whole (9%/30%)
- govt will not give unions statutory rights to negotiate on training but instead introducing a statutory right for individuals to request training from their employer



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Union Learning Fund

- established by TUC in 1998 – funded by Govt (£15.5m 2008) – to set up union-led pilots to increase union capacity over CVT
- involved 50 unions in over 700 workplaces
- training and supporting ULRs
- establishing union learning centres
- facilitating learning agreements with employers
- supported 112,000 union members into learning (2007/08)

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Union Learning Representatives

- TUC has trained and accredited 22,000 ULRs
- In 2002 ULRs given statutory recognition like union reps in general— paid time off to train and carry out their duties





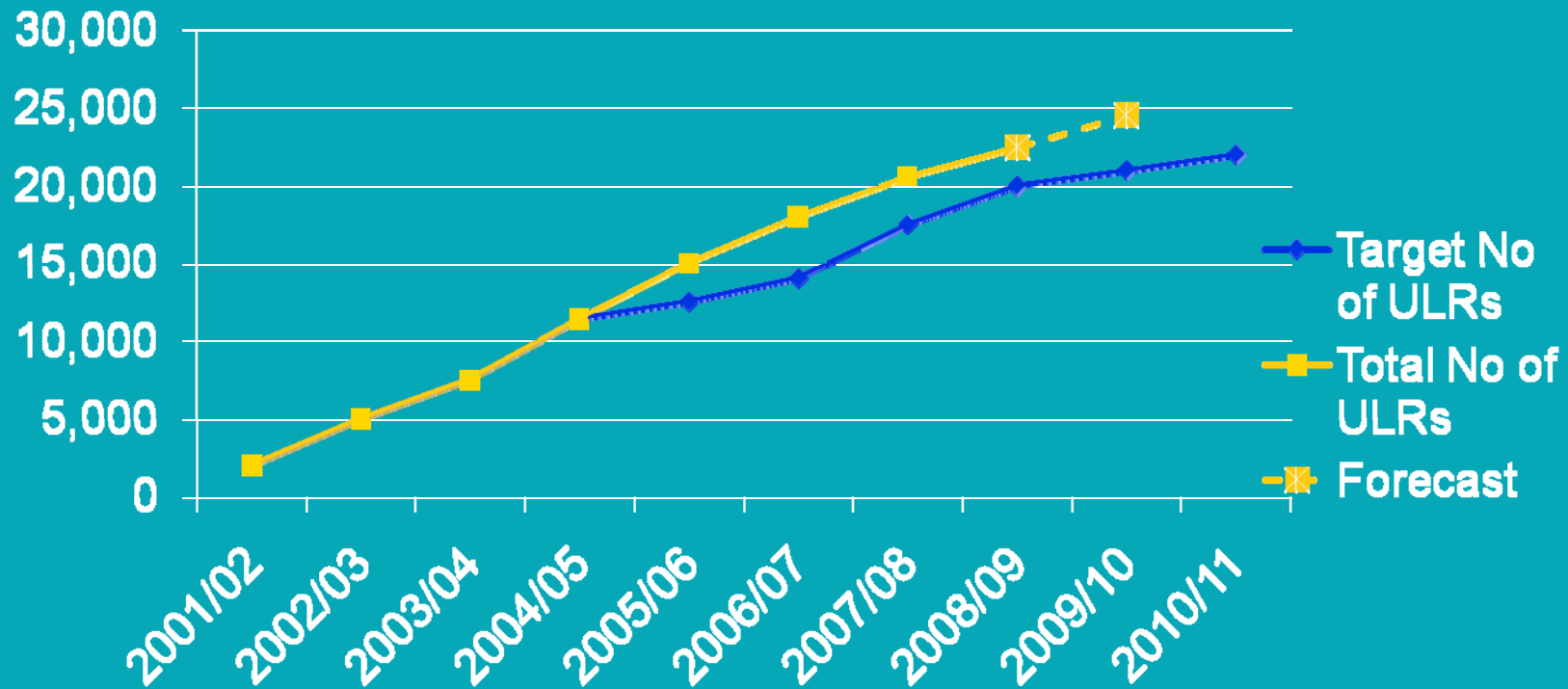
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Growth of ULRs

ULRs recruited





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What ULRs do

Percentage of ULRs





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- established by the TUC in 2006 as a framework for union supported learning – supported by govt – 145 staff
- administers Union Learning Fund and about 100 union learning centres
- trains over 50,000 union reps each year – including ULRs
- develops innovations –e.g. learner support
- research on union supported learning

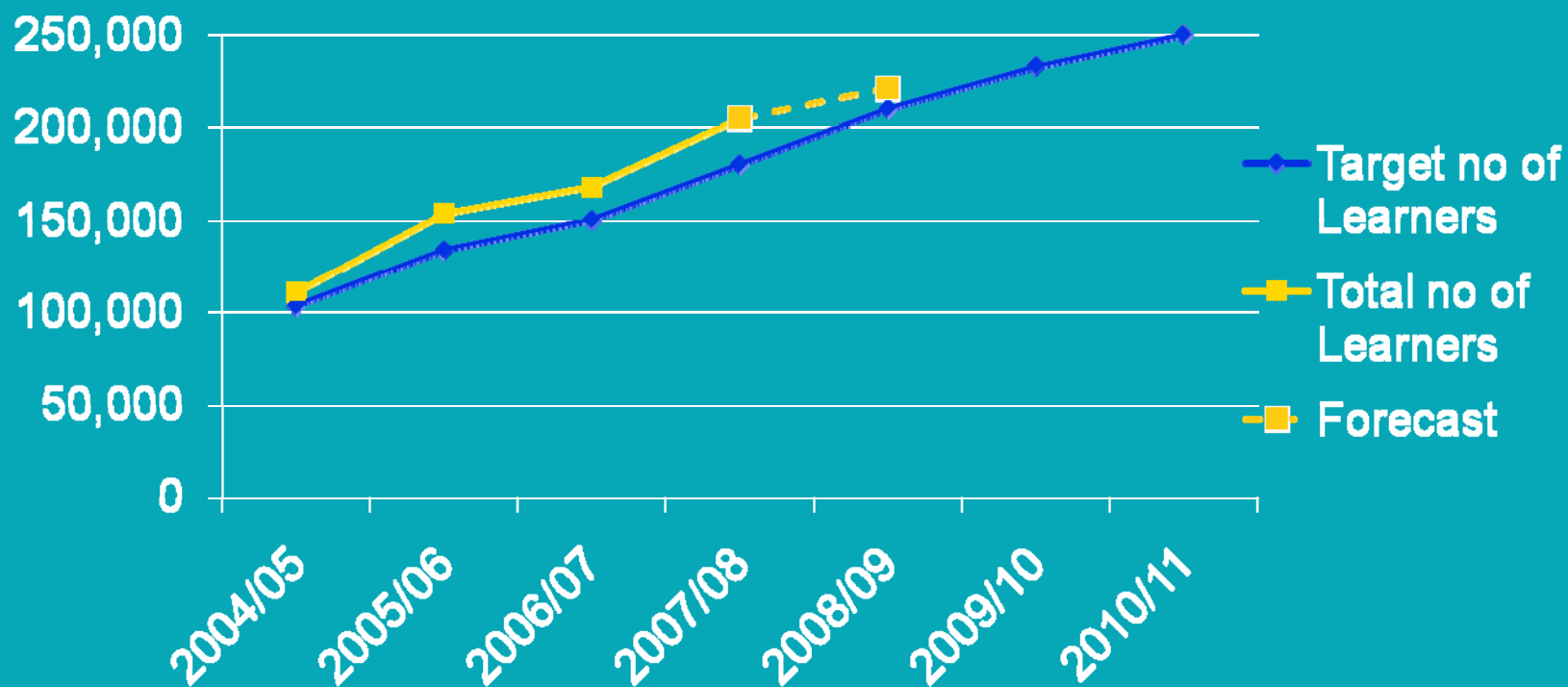


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Union-supported learners





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Conclusions

- little collective bargaining over CVT although strong correlation between the incidence of training and union dialogue with employers over CVT at workplace level
- employer prerogative over CVT, work organisation, utilisation of skills
- govt has significantly enhanced union capacity to help learners access learning but given no legal right to collective bargaining over CVT



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Conclusions cont'd...

- increasing learning partnerships between unions and employers within the voluntary system
- unions are increasingly developing learning and organisation strategies as a way of union renewal
- increasing both supply and demand for skills to increase productivity and personal development can only be achieved within a legal framework which devolves decision making to social partnership institutions
- it also requires more collective bargaining at workplace level not just on the distribution and content of CVT but on how the skills are utilised