



## **PATHWAYS TO SKILLS ACCREDITATION FOR HARD TO REACH WORKERS**

### **PROJECT REPORT**

**Project Dates:**

March 2017- March 2020

**Project Partner:**

Scottish Union Learning

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## **1. Background to Project**

The project bid was originally submitted by the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT) in 2016. At the time UCATT represented over 50,000 members in the UK including local authority, shipbuilding, offsite fabrication and private sector workers.

UCATT's membership was predominantly joiners, painters & decorators, plasterers and bricklayers. In addition, UCATT had members who were stonemasons, labourers, plant operators, scaffolders and steeplejacks.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017, UCATT transferred over to Unite the Union which consolidated all construction trades under one union banner including electricians, plumbers, gas & heating engineers and ventilation workers.

Unite the Union is the largest trade union in the UK and Ireland with over 1.2 million members across all sectors of the economy.

### **1.1 Reason for Project**

Prior to submission of the bid, UCATT and the Scottish Trades Union Centre (STUC) were engaging with the Scottish Government around the Working Together Review (WTR).

The WTR brought together trade unions, employers and Government. The main objective of the WTR was to examine what constitutes progressive workplace policies and practices, what opportunities are there to be innovative to enhance productivity, workplace development and labour market security and what opportunities are there to promote collective bargaining, workplace democracy and the participation of marginalised groups. The WTR was the precursor to the now established Fair Work Convention (FWC) and Fair Work Framework.

At the same time, the union was increasingly inundated with one specific sectoral problem – experienced/ skilled workers with no or limited formal qualifications holding the wrong level of Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card being kicked off sites. The problem was raising its head as some of the large main contractors were refusing site access to workers who held the wrong CSCS card per their occupation.

Linking this to the work of the WTR this issue was having a direct impact on workers job security, current and future earning capacity and some

experienced highly skilled workers were thinking of leaving the sector altogether due to previous issues with the CSCS card scheme.

The main reason the union got involved was it had substantial anecdotal evidence, that the burden of responsibility and cost when it came to construction training, tended to fall disproportionately on the individual. Often, these individuals were employed via precarious employment practices such as agencies or umbrella companies, worked short term contracts, worked for small/micro subcontractors and the majority lived month to month with little or no disposable income to put aside for personal or professional development.

Ultimately, the union believed a small innovative project that simply '*took the hassle*' out of the CSCS card scheme from start to finish and removed the main barriers of cost and organisation of assessment would benefit the wider sector especially against the backdrop of skills shortages and a reduction in apprenticeship registrations (in Scotland) since the global recession of 2009.

## **2. Pilot – Union Modernisation Fund**

Prior to the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) Structured Fund project, Unite were successful in a bid to the Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) which was administered by the STUC. In this instance, Unites' UMF project lay the foundation for the much larger CITB project.

The UMF funding directly supported the union in increasing its capacity to engage with small and medium contractors within the private sector. The union with two roaming reps visited two sites every Monday-Thursday and one site every Friday morning for one month. This sustained activity helped the union to identify how big the issue was for workers, identify main contractors and supply chains and find out their attitude towards the CSCS card scheme and establish a communication system whereby private sector workers could register CSCS issues with the union.

Furthermore, the UMF funding facilitated the union to organise a trial run of onsite assessment for 5 participants which helped the union greater understand what was required to obtain a vocational qualification, for example, the evidence requirements and methods used to gather evidence.

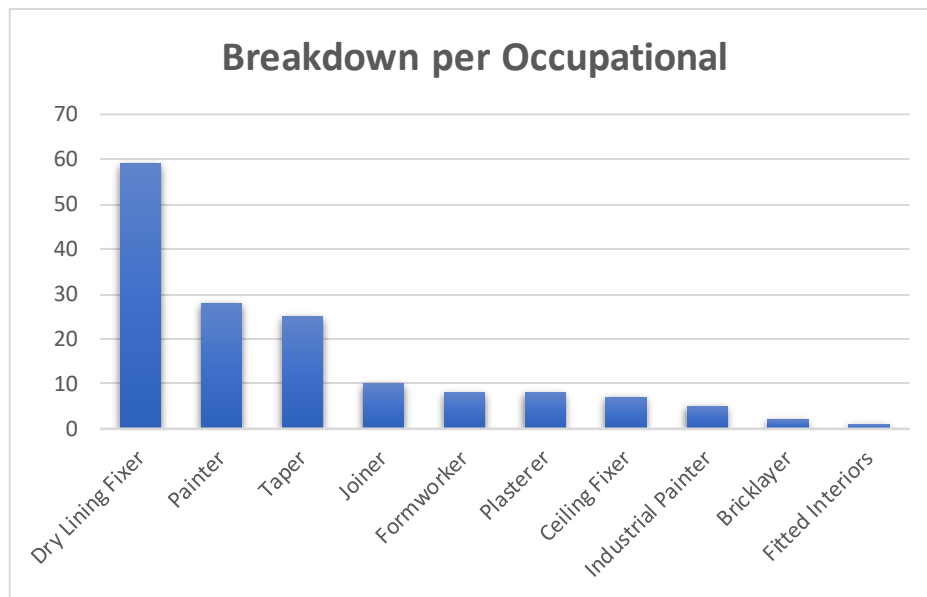
### **3. What We Said We Would Do**

In our original bid, the union said over a 3 year period, we would engage with a minimum of 12 construction employers, identify 144 hard to reach workers who required their existing skills recognised, increase capacity of construction providers to deliver fast and effective training and assessment, train 6 new assessors and provide a significant match fund from Scottish Union Learning (SUL) to deliver further development opportunities to the sector out with the CSCS card scheme.

We also said we would engage with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to establish Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for construction frameworks and we said we would organise a bespoke learning programme for workers to be supported around the Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) test and the CSCS card application process.

## 4. What We Organised and Delivered

The union fully committed its CITB budget which ensured the organisation and delivery of onsite assessment at SVQ/ NVQ level 2 to 153 hard to reach workers. This included the following occupations; dry lining fixing, painting, taping, joinery, formwork, plastering, ceiling fixing, industrial painting (fire protection), bricklaying and fitted interiors. Dry lining fixing being the most popular pathway (36%).



Out of 153 learners, the project supported 24 foreign nationals (16%) including workers from Poland and Italy. In terms of demographics the most popular age range for participants was 40 and under (44%), followed by 50 and under (27%), 60 and under (24%) and lastly 60 and over (5%).

The union encouraged participants to apply for a skilled worker CSCS card immediately when they received their certificate. Currently 84/153 have done this: those who have not will most likely be running down the duration of their existing CSCS card.

Onsite assessment was delivered across the length and breadth of Scotland as far north as Inverness and as far south as Galashiels and included flagship projects such as the Queensferry Crossing, the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR), the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh, the A9 Dualling Perth to Inverness and the V&A Museum in Dundee. The project engaged with over 10 main contractors and over 14 sub-contractors.

The project engaged with 2 private sector providers and with the wider college sector including 5 construction-focused colleges. The union was able to establish a working relationship with one particular college who was willing to put together the resource, time and effort to deliver onsite assessment as well as provide assurances to train our 6 assessors. It is without doubt that if this college did not participate in this project, many outcomes would not have been realised.

In year 2 of the project, the union identified 6 assessors. The assessor candidates were enrolled in the L&D9DI award and this took 3 months to complete. This was a huge commitment as there were many evening and weekend meetings, all unpaid. The assessor candidates also had to assess 2 candidates as part of their training - this meant time away from the day job and again unpaid.

As part of their CPD, Unite was successful in obtaining funding from another STUC fund, in this instance the Fair Work Leadership and Equality Programme to organise a two day workshop to support assessor candidates in their new role. This included activity around leadership skills, building relationships with precarious workers & private sector employers, reflective practice and standardisation. Assessors completed the L&D9DI training in June 2018 and completed their leadership training in October 2018.

In total, during the project, assessors delivered onsite assessment to 39 participants. Portfolios internally verified by the college and externally verified by SQA – all resulted.

Through the SUL Learning Fund the union organised additional support around the CSCS card scheme including HSE test support and additional onsite assessment to meet high demand.

The union also organised a plethora of short courses out with the CSCS card scheme including slinger/ signaller, telescopic material handler, SSSTS, repair care (course on dry and wet rot repairs), traditional signwriting and a STCW95 qualification for deck hands on the Queensferry Crossing. Over a three year period the match funding supported over 420 new learners and included a financial commitment of over £144,000.



**Telescopic Material Handler course, 2018**

Lastly, the union engaged with one private sector provider who had obtained funding from Skills Development Scotland with a similar focus on upskilling construction workers who didn't hold a formal qualification. The union was able to secure funding at SVQ level 2 for 15 glaziers & 7 groundworkers and at SVQ level 3 for 2 supervisors.

## **4.2 Methodology**

To deliver the outcomes for the project the union used a targeted approach by prioritising 3 key sectors; health (hospitals/ health centres), education (new schools/ community learning campuses/ colleges/ universities) and infrastructure (bridges, roads, overpasses, drainage, railway depots).

The union focused its efforts on 8 main contractors and their supply chains, including Robertson, Morrison Construction, Balfour Beatty, BAM, Kier, Multiplex, Carillion and Morgan Sindall.

For non-members and workers with no/ limited experience of trade unions, the union visited site welfare facilities two times a day for four days during the working week. The union distributed flyers and posters with tear off slips at the bottom so interested workers could rip off the slip and put it in their wallet (as opposed to pulling the full poster down). The union set up a dedicated help line for non-member enquiries around the CSCS card



scheme and the union attended inductions and distributed employer specific flyers to main contractors and subcontractors. Lastly, the union was active on trade community pages on Facebook.

For existing members, the union used the construction sector magazine - the building worker - to promote the opportunities available to members. This was posted out each quarter to home addresses. In addition, the union used its own social media pages and on a yearly basis, emailed all construction members (who allow email) information on the project including past successes, how many spaces were available, and what trade pathways we could deliver.

In terms of our assessors, the union identified a mix of candidates to undertake the L&D9DI training. This included some who were time served and some who completed the OSAT process in year 1. It was also vital to the union to have a mix of workplace experience - we had assessor candidates from local authorities, the private sector and an assessor candidate who had experience in both. The union believed a strong mix of work experience and training would ultimately be beneficial to new learners going through the process but would also stimulate a broad support network for the assessor candidates. The college also provided a strong network of support and guidance for assessor candidates.

In this instance, the unions' selection of assessor candidates was influenced by the trade backgrounds where the union was experiencing greatest demand, for example dry lining fixing, painting and taping.

With regard to construction workers who were not sure if they had full papers or who had lost their qualifications the union signposted them to the Scottish Building Apprenticeship Training Council (SBATC) whose records go back to 1934 or to awarding bodies such as City and Guilds (C&G) or SQA and their respective replacement certificate services. If these routes were exhausted and the candidate was unable to obtain any formal records, onsite assessment would be a potential option.

### **4.3 Impact**

After project end, the union invited all participants to complete a short survey on what they thought of the project, how they found the onsite assessment process and what impact this has had on their working lives.

The union received 27 returns (18% response rate) with all respondents agreeing the project and funding was worthwhile. The majority of respondents were still working within the sector, with 1 recently retired and all respondents reported obtaining a SVQ/ NVQ had a significant impact on the following; more job security, consistent work, better employment prospects, better earning capacity, less worry about CSCS card, greater volume of work and in some instances wage rises and obtaining direct employment.

Some comments from participants included;

*“the impact on my life has been massive. This project, if possible should be rolled out again”*

*“I think it was a great experience and gave me confidence to achieve my goal of full time employment and made me feel there’s no limits to my career prospects”*

*“I hope this funding can continue to help all workers who need it upgrade their skills leading to a better stable wage”*

## 5. Challenges

In the original bid we said we would organise a bespoke learning programme to support workers around the HSE test and the CSCS card application process. This included organising an awareness event for 48 candidates each year.

Initially, it was clear there was no specific demand from workers on a collective basis for support around the HSE test or applying for a CSCS card. Most identified participants had previously passed the test and applied for their card with no or little problems. In addition, learners who completed a SVQ/ NVQ were exempt from sitting the HSE test for the majority of this project (this has now changed). The union did deliver 1 to 1 support where required, for example, some participants who wanted a 1 year experienced worker temporary card had to re-sit their HSE test as their previous test pass had expired.

In terms of the awareness event, it was effectively impossible to bring all participants together in a one off occasion due to the fragmented nature of the sector, shift patterns and workers being spread all over the country. The union was able to communicate with workers through WhatsApp and video conferencing apps such as Skype.

In our original bid we said we would engage with SCQF around RPL within construction frameworks – we did, however, this had already been done.

The union underestimated the complexity of recruiting and training 6 assessors within the original timescales. In terms of the individual assessor candidates the training was long included a lot of academic jargon and there was a mountain of paperwork. All assessor candidates had not been in education since they left school so it was a huge commitment and a steep learning curve, all unpaid.

The second challenge was identifying a provider who was willing to put together the resource, time and effort and who had the capacity to deliver onsite assessment while simultaneously training 6 assessor candidates. This issue was compounded by the fact that the assessor candidates had to assess 2 candidates as part of their training so the union had to organise 2 candidates per trade per assessor all within short timescales while managing the expectations of learners who were awaiting assessment.

The major challenge which caused large levels of distress to members and non-members alike was a long delay in the release of certificates (sometimes up to 6 months) from an awarding body during year 2 of the project. The issue was so bad it began slowly diminishing the social capital the project had built up with construction workers and match funders and was ultimately effecting the reputation of the union as the go to place for a fast hassle free response model.

The delay was for a variety of reasons but in order to avoid this situation in the final year of the project the union asked the provider to change awarding bodies. Thereafter, there were no more delays with the certification process.

## **6. Conclusion**

This project has been high quality/ high impact. In a small direct way the funding has changed the lives of 153 construction workers and their families. The aim of the project was to provide an umbrella of support to precarious workers often at the roughest end of the labour market and it has achieved this. It has also supported over 400 learners in other accredited learning through the match funding.

As the survey results indicated the project has provided workers with a greater sense of job security, better wages, greater volume of work, more secure work, greater rights in the workplace and the propensity to progress within the sector should workers choose to do so.

The project was not without its issues but these pale into insignificance when you look back on the commitment of assessors, the work that went into organising site visits at extremely short notice, the workplaces/ sites visited and the amount of workers the project engaged with – whether time served or not – it improved the profile of the union and the CITB across the sector in a wholly positive way.

### **6.1 Next steps**

This project scratched the surface of this particularly issue. From our experience, the issue is still very much prevalent and with main contractors regulating CSCS cards more, coupled with the changes to the white CRO card route, workers with the wrong card will be the first to go in a downturn and ultimately will still require help at some stage.

For the union, we will look to establish new assessors in the trades we do not already have, support assessors to become verifiers and potentially become an approved training centre. This will hopefully improve the capacity but also the quality of delivery for this specialist area.

## **Abbreviations**

AWPR – Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route  
CITB – Construction Industry Training Board  
CPD – Continuous Personal Development  
CRO – Construction Related Occupation (CSCS card)  
CSCS – Construction Skills Certification Scheme  
C&G – City and Guilds  
FWC – Fair Work Convention  
HSE – Health, Safety and Environment (test)  
L&D9DI – Learning and Development Standard 9 (Assess Workplace Competence using Direct and Indirect Methods)  
NVQ – National Vocational Qualification  
OSAT – Onsite Assessment and Training  
RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning  
SBATC – Scottish Building Apprenticeship Training Council  
SCQF – Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework  
SQA – Scottish Qualifications Authority  
SSSTS – Site Supervisor Safety Training Scheme  
STCW95 – Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping  
STUC – Scottish Trades Union Centre  
SUL – Scottish Union Learning  
SVQ – Scottish Vocational Qualification  
UCATT – Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians  
V&A – Victoria and Albert UMF – Union Modernisation Fund  
WTR – Working Together Review