CWU North West Regional Conference

Discussion Group Document

The Future of Trade Union Education within the CWU

The withdrawal of trade union education funding by central government is a double edged sword, while placing the burden of cost for the courses on the Union it does remove the restrictions on what we can be taught, instead of just teaching people how to be representatives we can teach them how to be trade unionists.

Is the current form of education sustainable after July 2017, week long residential or regional courses or do we look at compressing the courses over a three day period with the option of weekend courses Friday through to Sunday where we cannot get release from the business, or two or three day short sharp regional courses over a number of weeks.

Do we believe there is still a need for the Alvescot Lodge or the Elstead hotel, this would depend on the profitability of each building, a short term gain by selling off the assets may be a short sighted option, given the rising cost of housing in both areas, and the low interest rates available?

Some unions and the TUC are moving the training online, while this may be the cheapest option some current thinking is that it does not provide the right support for new trade unionists, or anyone who is not proficient with IT and that the best approach is blended learning, as with the current essential skills courses which utilise the experience of Union Learning Representatives in facilitating the pre course work, providing IT support where needed.

The two big questions we have to answer for the future of our education program is

1. What courses should we be running and should they be accredited?
2. How can we fund the training for our representatives?

In answering these questions it’s important to understand that the standard of our current training of reps is high, and it should be one of our priorities that this standard is maintained if not increased. It is also important to think about who is going to teach the courses, do we have tutors employed by colleges as is the case at the moment, or do we have industrial officers at branch, area and regional level who have experience in the field, but have little or no teaching experience running the courses. I believe that if it is financially viable a mixed approach could be implemented, with tutors and industrial reps working together in the classroom, to achieve the best education and training for the people who are going to represent our members.

These are just my thoughts on the subject, not being privy to all the pertinent information it is just speculation as to what we can do.

What are your thoughts on this, it would be good if we could have a view from the Regional Learning committee that we could contribute to the discussion if asked.

Duncan Healey

NW Regional Education Secretary