

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO

flexible learning

for Managers of Organisations

Providing Training to SMEs



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www.learndirect.co.uk



PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS

Ufl - Responding to the global marketplace

As a nation, the UK faces major challenges in ensuring that industry is able to continue to compete with the best in the world. The University for Industry (Ufl) aims to address a number of these challenges.

Ufl's role

Under the brand name Learndirect, Ufl is introducing a new approach to training. Using the best of on-line delivery, they will provide a growing range of highly targeted training products. Ufl will be particularly important for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that face particular problems in ensuring that their employees have access to the skills and knowledge they need. Difficulties involved in accessing appropriate training can mean that there is little or no effective skills or management development in SMEs, thus making it difficult to improve performance and meet business objectives.

Ufl's mission is to promote employability for individuals and competitiveness for companies. Strategic objectives are to stimulate the demand for lifelong learning by businesses and individuals and to broker the provision of learning opportunities to meet skills needs.

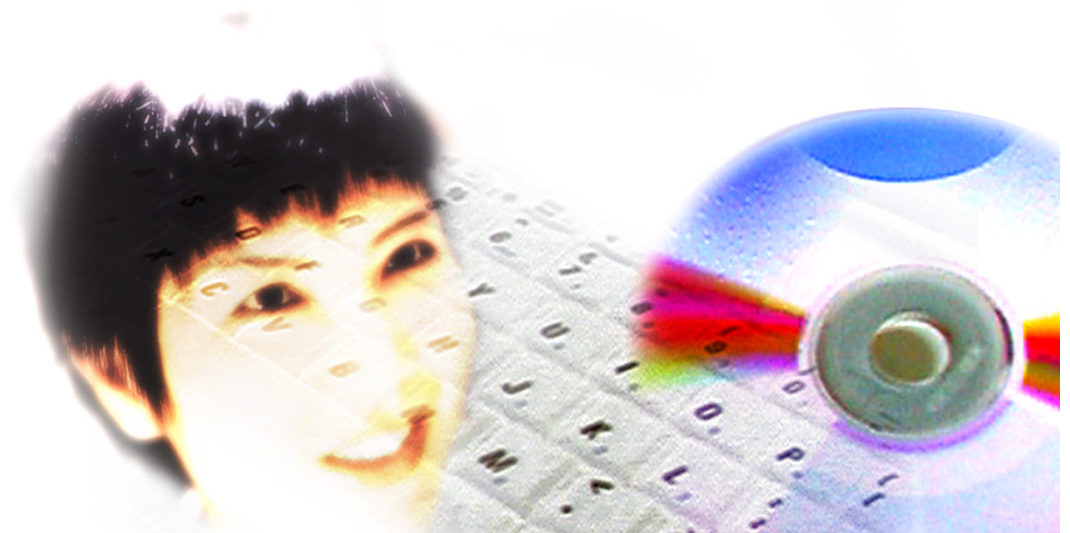
UFI PARTICULARLY AIMS TO:

- Encourage new learners including those for whom there are currently barriers to learning, thus expanding demand for learning;
- Ensure that the skills and training needs of SMEs are met more effectively;
- Foster the use of new learning technologies including digital technologies.

A learner-centred approach

Ufl aims to put the learner first with a customer approach to learning, both in the design and content of learning and its delivery. Its customers will be businesses, including the smallest companies, and individuals.

For SMEs, Ufl will allow employees, and indeed employers, easy access to learning in the workplace with complete flexibility in timing.



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Working in partnership with training providers

Ufl's objective is to help people improve their knowledge and skills in a way that best suits their lifestyles and the needs of their businesses. However, Ufl is not a provider or educational institution in the traditional sense, and does not have its own students or lecturers. Instead, Ufl's products and services are delivered through partners in a range of areas, encompassing the education and training sectors, employers, trade unions and local, regional and national government

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Centre for Learning and Training at the University of Wales, Bangor

European Business and Management School, University of Wales, Swansea

SWEFIC (South Wales Education for Industry Consortium)

Anchor Computer Systems Ltd

Gyrus Medical Ltd

Riverside Plastics Ltd

Chandler KBS

North Wales Housing Association

FSB

Bangor University

Llandrillo FE College

UWCN

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The purpose of this guide

This guide has been designed for use by Managers of organisations providing training to SMEs. Its core purpose is to highlight a range of issues which may need to be considered when the option of preparing and offering flexible learning courses is being contemplated. The Guide is structured as a series of questions for individuals considering involvement with flexible learning in general and via the University for Industry (Ufl) in particular.

There are four separate versions of this Guide, of which this version is one.

OTHER GUIDES IN THIS SERIES ARE AVAILABLE FOR:

Deliverers of flexible training to SMEs (tutors, teachers, trainers and support specialists)

Managers of SMEs

Employees of SMEs considering training which includes elements of flexible learning.

For brevity and consistency, the Guide uses the term “flexible learning” to describe training delivered by means other than face to face, classroom-based instruction. This includes paper, CD Rom, Internet, radio and television-based training materials, or any combination of these. There is, however, a deliberate focus in the guide on preparing users for electronic delivery mechanisms.

The Guide comprises a series of closed questions which ask for a yes or no response. If the response is “No,” an action is suggested. These actions should assist the user to more effectively support, or engage with, flexible learning.

Note:

The recommended actions may not be appropriate in all circumstances. Discretion is required to evaluate the likely effectiveness of the suggested actions. In many cases, the recommended actions include discussions with others. Users of the Guide are encouraged to consider and assess the appropriateness of these actions in their particular situation.

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Glossary of Terminology

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Deliverers | Those responsible for delivering, or supporting the delivery of training. |
| 2. Flexible Learning | Training delivered by means other than face-to-face classroom-based instruction. |
| 3. Hardware | Computer and accompanying information technology required to deliver/ receive flexible learning. |
| 4. Hub | Organisation or consortium appointed by Ufl to manage flexible learning for a sector or geographic area. |
| 5. Learndirect | National learning network being developed by Ufl. Free information and advice via the helpline and allows on-line learning at Learndirect centres. |
| 6. Learning Centre | Local centres established by Ufl hubs to support flexible learning (eg by providing access to hardware). |
| 7. Learner | Employees considering or already involved in training. |
| 8. Materials | Electronic, physical or paper-based resources used as a basis for the delivery of flexible learning. |
| Materials Developer | Someone who authors/ constructs/ creates design materials for flexible learning. |
| 9. Provider | An organisation that develops and/ or delivers training. |
| Managers | All senior managers and/ or department heads in organisations delivering training. |
| 10. SME | Small to Medium sized Enterprise. |
| 11. Software | Computer applications or programs. |
| 12. Sponsor | (See "Workplace Sponsor" below). |
| 13. Subject specialist | Person recognised nationally for excellence in designing and/ or delivering specific subject training. |
| 14. Ufl | An independent body aiming to stimulate lifelong learning via the Learndirect network and existing learning providers |
| 15. Ufl Champion | Training organisation manager empowered to establish and support development of Ufl/ Flexible Delivery. |
| 16. Workplace Sponsor | A nominated senior staff member within an SME who has specific responsibility for assisting learners. |



The Provider Managers Guide to Flexible Learning

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Strategic Issues

1

Does your organisation know about Ufl and Leamdirect?

Yes

TICK ☐

No?

For information regarding Ufl, contact 029 2049 4540 or visit the www.ufild.co.uk website

2

Have you ensured that there are good business reasons for committing to involvement in Ufl and Leamdirect?

Yes

TICK ☐

No?

Review the Ufl proposition as a business proposition, and determine the key commercial benefits to your organisation. Document these benefits and circulate to appropriate personnel within your organisation.

3

Have you developed an outline strategic approach to Ufl for your organisation? (See below for some strategic considerations – options could include: A watching brief; A token involvement; A provider of selected courses; A provider of many courses; A developer of courses to meet specific SME or sector needs).

Yes

TICK ☐

No?

Initiate internal discussion. Determine nature and level of involvement and overall approach to Ufl for your organisation. If appropriate, document and circulate to relevant staff.

Strategic Issues

4

Have you decided if you are going to be: Authors/ developers of learning or teaching materials? Deliverers of established and recognised Ufl teaching materials and programmes?, Deliverers of a combination of Ufl courses and your own learning or teaching materials?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Initiate discussion and agree your preferred position.

5

Have you identified and appointed an empowered Ufl champion in your organisation?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Identify and brief a high-status individual; ensure that he/she have a full understanding and enthusiasm for the role, and is willing to commit to the resulting demands.

6

Have you established a relationship with local / national / sector Ufl hubs?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Contact Ufl head office on 029 2049 4540 to obtain an introduction to your local Ufl hub.

Supply Issues

7

Is your organisation a qualified supplier of Ufl materials?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Do you wish to become a qualified supplier of Ufl materials? If so, contact Ufl on 029 2049 4540 for guidance and details towards gaining Ufl accreditation.

8

Do you already have quality materials suitable for the SME market?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Contact Ufl on 029 2049 4540 for advice and guidance regarding the production / modification of materials to make them suitable for the SME market.

9

Is there anything in the Ufl portfolio that would be suitable for the SME market?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Contact your local hub for a list of the courses available through Ufl. Make available to your staff in document and / or electronic format. If nothing is suitable, continue to Q10.

10

Is your organisation in a position to develop materials specifically for SMEs?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Audit your staff's skills and review your current resources; make a realistic assessment of your organisation's current capacity to develop flexible learning materials. Refer to Ufl hub for reference to existing/ available courses.

Supply Issues

11

Is your staff committed to developing flexible learning courses for Ufl?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Discuss with your staff; address concerns; attempt to find solutions.

12

Have you discussed with your staff the implications of releasing materials through Ufl? (The material is available to all Ufl providers).

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Open discussion with staff and obtain their input. Agree a policy for use / release of materials.

Course Development for Specific SMEs

13

Have you considered ways in which you can take a proactive approach?
SMEs are most unlikely to come to you.

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

If your organisation has staff with prior experience of delivering training to SMEs, contact them. Review the success of any previous SME initiatives and marketing arrangements. Implement a structured marketing programme designed to open dialogue with SMEs. Identify examples* of training delivering business benefits to SMEs. If appropriate, introduce these examples into discussions with SME managers. *Refer to DTI web site.

14

Do your staff have the motivation and interpersonal skills needed to build personal relationships with SME management and staff, and are you prepared to invest the time and money for them to do this?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Evaluate any existing relationships with SMEs to determine factors contributing towards the development of successful relationships. Ensure your staff are able to: Engage with SMEs, Understand individual, SME business drivers, Identify areas for improvement, Evaluate training needs, Tailor courses to meet their requirements.

15

Have you decided if and how you are going to segment the market and target prospective SMEs?
Eg: By industry sector, by geographic location, by size of business, by product type.

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Undertake market research to identify potential target groups. Map against the expertise of your resources. Discuss and agree how the potential opportunities can be tested and resources deployed. Document your agreements and communicate them to your organisation.

Course Development for Specific SMEs

16

Have you considered employing a broker to undertake relationship building with SMEs?

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Nevertheless, undertake an assessment of the potential benefits vs. negatives a broker may offer; compare with your assessment of your organisation's internal capabilities.

17

Have you considered offering a free "introduction to Ufi" primer to SME management? This could include an introduction to specific courses and to the technology that is available to deliver and support learning as well as providing the opportunity for informal discussion.

Yes
TICK ☐

No?

Consider the benefits which may ensue – a greater understanding for both organisations and the establishment of a basis for building relationships. Discuss concept with local hub and your staff. Allocate resources. Develop marketing plan.

Resource Issues

18	Have you identified and confirmed the required capital and recurrent funding required for the development of Ufl / flexible learning courses / materials?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Ensure that the required funding has been agreed and is in place prior to commencing delivery of flexible training.
19	Have you provided appropriate hardware for deliverers to construct and deliver programmes?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Determine the specific nature of the necessary hardware; take appropriate action to secure the required resources.
20	Have you negotiated provision (time and resources) for deliverers to construct and deliver programmes and to provide ongoing support to learners?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss the issue of time and resource with all relevant parties. Document and circulate as appropriate to ensure potential misunderstandings are minimised.
21	Have you established an e-mail system that is capable of handling queries from learners, sorting and providing defaults if e-mails are not accessed? In addition, have you ensured that data protection / legal protection policies are in place for the handling of e-mail?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Ensure that the e-mail system is in place, and that technical back up has been sourced and agreed. Document and circulate. Seek advice from your legal resource regarding your position / policies for data protection.
22	Have you considered the full implications of e-mail in the Ufl context? Research has shown that flexible learners are far less reticent about using e-mail than in responding to face-to-face teaching. Tutors need to be aware that e-mail can generate time-consuming replies.	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Ensure that training staff are fully aware of the significant time that will need to be provisioned for dealing with e-mails.

Human Resources Issues

23	Have you agreed on terms and conditions for staff involvement in Ufl delivery? (Are there union issues?)	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss and agree terms and conditions, job descriptions etc. with appropriate staff (inform / involve union representatives if appropriate). Document and circulate as necessary.
24	Have you discussed with your staff the implications of delivering Ufl developed courses/materials? Eg. Maintaining motivation for courses/materials that deliverers don't have a personal investment in, Lack of familiarity with courses/materials, Development of pre-agreed competencies of standards for providers.	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss these issues with your flexible training deliverers. Encourage them to develop internal co-operation and support mechanisms. Consider: Regular meetings to monitor the programme, Demonstrating support for the programme eg. Via positive communication to the wider organisation and the community.
25	Have you considered the potential implications of a change in the support role for deliverers of Ufl courses/materials? eg. Changing role in terms of presentation / lecturing skills, Potential changes in status, Development of new skills, Little face to face interaction, Little/no group interaction, Any employment law implications (eg: Discrimination).	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss the issue of flexible learning with all staff; seek feedback and address negative issues/perceptions arising. Identify the new skills required, eg: Awareness of potential isolation of learners, Awareness of the need to compose sensitive e-mails, Implement training programme if necessary.
26	Have you considered the need to have proper formative and summative evaluation in place; regular, two-way feedback mechanisms and the means to supply rapid reaction to the feedback?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss these issues with staff; formulate relevant, practical mechanisms (see Appendix B).

Additional issues to consider

27	Are you offering courses that are not formally accredited? If so, do you have a process for furnishing appropriate certifications?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Accreditation is a key requirement for distance learners. Implement processes for furnishing appropriate certification (see Appendix A).
28	Have you taken on responsibility for copyright and other issues of intellectual property (eg trade marks) and the management of this material?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Review your copyright arrangements. Contact Ufl for information about copyright related to materials developed for Ufl. Take steps to secure appropriate permissions if required.
29	Have you considered means through which to introduce relevant quality assurance standards and how to check that these standards are being maintained on an ongoing basis? (Quality assurance will be an imperative element to the ongoing success of your flexible learning provision).	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Appoint an appropriately qualified person to be responsible for the development of your Quality Assurance (QA) standards for Ufl delivery. Ensure this person engages all your staff involved in Ufl in the development of the QAprocess. Document the process, in a clear and concise format, and make widely available
30	Have you considered how you will subsequently review Ufl and make an evaluation of the success of flexible learning to your organisation? (eg. growth in numbers of students and / or cash-flow targets over 3 years and / or the successful completion of training courses).	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss this issue with your colleagues; evaluate your expectations – ensure that these are realistic, and that they fit with your organisation's overall strategy and business plan.
31	Have you identified specific evaluation methods?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Review the available literature on evaluation (see Appendix B).

APPENDIX A – Flexible Learning

*The following web sites
may be of interest/ assistance:*

<http://www.lifelonglearning.ac.uk>
(The Marchmont Project website)

<http://www.eds.napier.ac.uk/distance/index.htm>
(Napier College – includes a guide to writing flexible learning materials)

<http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/distance/>
(A Teacher's guide to Distance Learning)

<http://www.westga.edu/~distance/jmain//.html>
(Journal of Distance Learning Administration)

<http://www.mailbase.ac.uk/lists/flexible-learning/>
(Provides a UK discussion network for staff in Higher Education)

<http://www.cfl.mq.edu.au/cfl/flexible/cflflex3.html>
(General guide to the development of flexible learning resources)

<http://www.shu.ac.uk/schools/hcs/fldc/index.html>
(Provides comment / guidance on Accreditation)

<http://www.ufi.com>
(Ufi website)

<http://dti2info1.dti.gov.uk/guide/index.html>
(dti website)

APPENDIX B – Evaluation

***The following web sites may
be of help and assistance in formulating
evaluation mechanisms:***

<http://tortie.me.uiuc.edu/~m-lester/Evaluation/Index.html>

General Introduction

<http://www.megataq.mcg.gla.ac.uk/information.html>

<http://artsnet.heinz.cmu.edu/systems/marketing/evalfeed.html>

General



Appendix C – Useful Contacts and Telephone Numbers

Ufi Ltd Wales

Technocentre
Beignon Close
Ocean Way
Cardiff, CF24 5PB
Tel: 029 2049 4540
www.ufi.com

Ufi Ltd England

Sheffield (Head) Office
Dearing House
1 Young Street
Sheffield, S1 4UP
Tel: (0114) 291 5000
Fax: (0114) 291 5001
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