

# *THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO*

## *flexible learning*

for Managers of SMEs



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# *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.

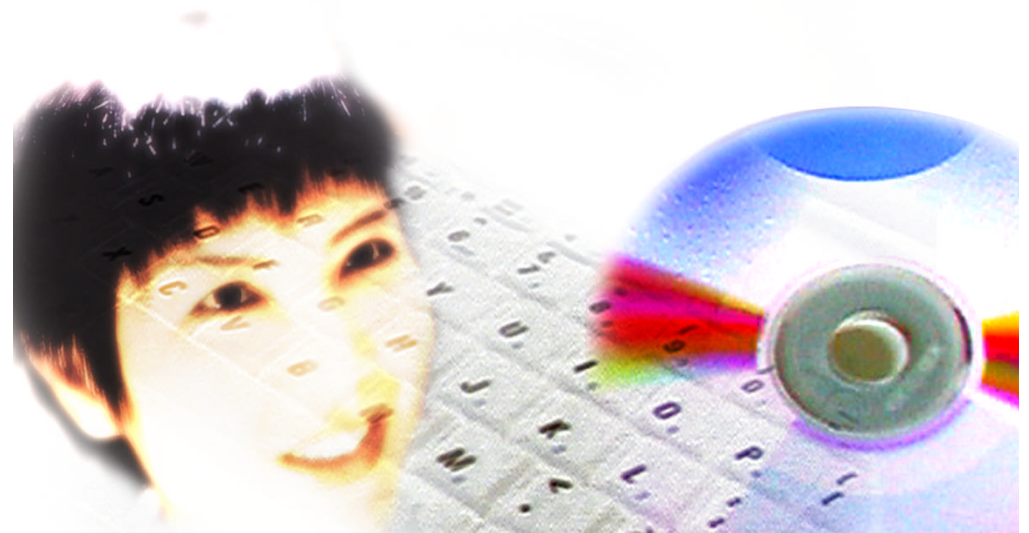
### UFI PARTICULARLY AIMS TO:

- 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.



# *Ufl - Responding to the global marketplace*

## *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 bodies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Of the many people and organisations who have contributed to the formulation of this guide, particular acknowledgements are due to:

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Solutions

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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

# *Ufl - Responding to the global marketplace*

## ***The purpose of this guide***

This Guide has been designed for use by the Managers of SMEs with particular responsibilities for training. Its core purpose is to highlight a range of issues that may need to be considered when the option of flexible (or “distance”) learning is being considered for employees within an SME. The Guide is structured as a series of questions for individuals considering involvement with flexible learning in general and via the University for Industry (Ufi) in particular.

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

### OTHER GUIDES IN THIS SERIES ARE AVAILABLE FOR:

Managers within organisations providing flexible learning to SMEs

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

SME employees of considering flexible learning/training as an option

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.

# *Ufl - Responding to the global marketplace*

## *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.  |

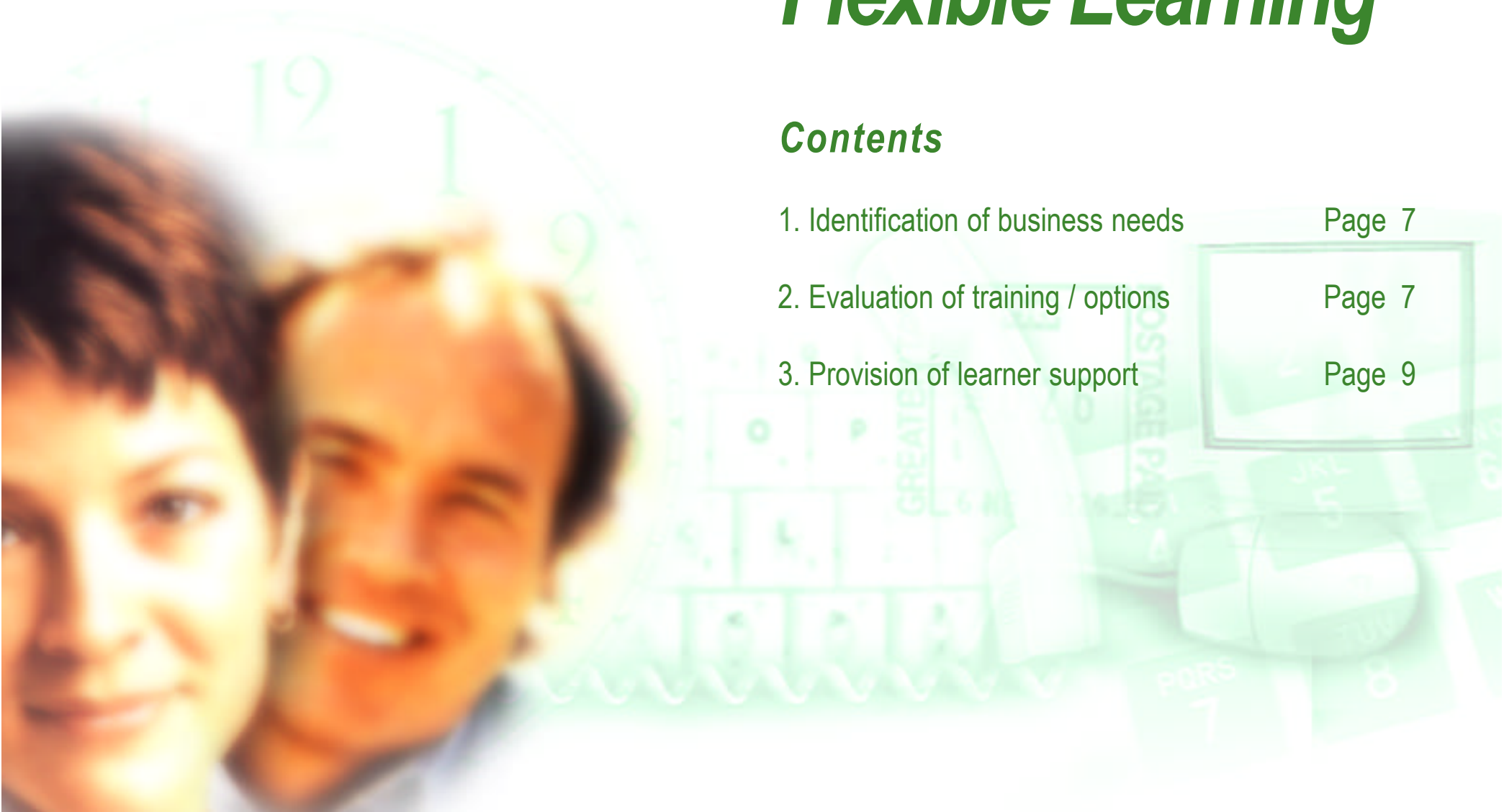




# *The SME Management guide to Flexible Learning*

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# *Identification of business needs*

1

Have you identified your business development needs?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Consider your business development needs** – what are your plans for the company; what additional resources will you need to achieve these objectives? Link these with business plans, training plans and Investors in People.

2

Can an identified business need be addressed by training? Some business needs can be addressed by other means, (eg. finance, marketing, hiring).

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Discuss the possible options with your Ufl hub, training providers, business associations and other businesses in your sector.**

3

Have you ensured that there are compelling business reasons for committing to training? Have you considered the implications of not committing to training?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Discuss with your colleagues;** ensure that the reasons for undertaking training have been fully debated, and that the business reasons have been identified and captured in writing.

# *Evaluation of Training/Options*

4

Have you identified and prioritised your training needs?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Prioritisation of training requirements will need to be undertaken;** discuss with your training provider / internal training specialist. Talk to your local TEC/equivalent.

5

Have you sought to identify the learning needs of your employees?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Consider the implications and potential benefits;** consider your role as an "Investor in People".

6

Do you recognise that your employee might become more attractive to your competitors or the wider marketplace if she/he is trained?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**At senior management level consider your options** regarding retention of employees, including: Job satisfaction, recognition of training, opportunities for promotion, remuneration, workplace climate, strategies for growth, loyalty.

7

If releasing employees to attend classroom-based training is too disruptive to your business, does flexible learning offer a solution?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Discuss with your training provider and Ufl hub.** Establish what options there are for flexible delivery and evaluate their appropriateness for your situation.



# *Evaluation of Training/Options*

8

Are you aware of flexible learning and the Ufl Learndirect options available to you and your employees?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

Ask your training provider or Ufl hub to provide a description of appropriate training courses. Evaluate the fit with your training needs. If necessary ask them to explain how these will be adapted to meet your specific training requirements.

9

Have you had discussions with the Ufl Learndirect deliverers and learners to agree training objectives?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Discuss and agree the objectives of training with your provider;** ensure that you have a shared written record of what these agreed training objectives are.

10

Have you decided how you are going to evaluate the effectiveness of the training?

Yes  
TICK ☐

No?

**Discuss with your training provider.**  
Agree on an evaluation structure, which will give you an indication of the impact of the training.  
Start the evaluation at the beginning of the programme.

# Provision of Learner Support

11	Have you discussed flexible learning with the learner?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Open discussions with learners; explain the options and potential benefits, both for them as individuals and the firm as a whole. Ensure they are willing and keen to participate. Consider the potential of arranging a partnership meeting with the learners, learning provider and management at the outset of the course.
12	Have you appointed a workplace sponsor to support the learner? (This person should ideally be a senior management figure or section head, committed to the principles of flexible learning and sufficiently empowered to support the changes required).	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss with your colleagues; make an appointment by consensus, and make this appointment known.
13	Does the workplace sponsor understand that they have a key role in maintaining the motivation of the learner?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Ensure that the training provider contacts your workplace sponsor and gives him/her a full briefing regarding his/her role.
14	Have you appointed a mentor to support the learner? (This person should be readily accessible to the learner and able to support with learning related issues and motivation).	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss with colleagues (and learner) and make an appointment by consensus, and make this appointment known. Ensure mentor is fully aware of his/her role.

# Provision of Learner Support

15	Do you have the necessary IT facilities?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Make enquiries to ensure that the learners have access to appropriate hardware and software. Discuss possible sources with your local learning centre or Ufl training provider if required.
16	If yes, are you able to make them available for learners to access a flexible learning programme?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Make appropriate arrangements to suit the working pattern of the learner, the business and the needs of other employees.
17	Are you able to provide a dedicated space for learners to access flexible learning programmes?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Consider the options available; discuss the possible options with the learner.
18	Have you agreed with the learner the conditions for accessing flexible learning training in the workplace? eg: maximum/ minimum times, appropriate times for learner access, relationship to peak work demands, ability to re-negotiate to meet work or personal demands.	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Discuss with normal operator and the flexible learner. Negotiate appropriate times for access etc. If appropriate: suggest that a brief contract be drawn up to minimise subsequent confusion or misunderstanding.

# Provision of Learner Support

19	Have you considered the implications (positive and negative) of providing time during the work day for employees to access flexible learning materials? (eg. positive – incentive for others; negative – perceptions of favouritism).	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	<b>Develop a policy on this issue and communicate to all staff.</b> Develop an information document to explain the aims, objectives and vision of Ufl and how it will benefit all within the organisation.
20	Have you considered allocating space to create a flexible learner library/facility? (may only require a small investment e.g. trade magazines)	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Consider this option; make available if possible.
21	Have you considered purchasing core text/reference material/periodicals to support learners?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Consider this option; discuss appropriate materials with the training provider.
22	Have the guidelines for confidentiality been agreed with the deliverer and the workplace sponsor?	Yes TICK <input type="checkbox"/>	No?	Ensure that this conversation takes place before the training course begins, and that if appropriate, the agreement is documented.

# Appendix C – Useful Contacts and Telephone Numbers

## Ufi Ltd Wales

Technocentre  
Beignon Close  
Ocean Way  
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