

Kier North Tyneside Learning Centre Opens

National, regional and local representatives of UCATT and Kier gathered in North Tyneside in February to mark the beginning of their latest joint venture – the opening of a new union learning centre.

Kier North Tyneside Learning Centre will initially offer Skills for Life (SfL) learning opportunities in ICT, maths and literacy for the 460-strong workforce. But both UCATT's union learning representatives (ULRs) and the company are keen to see its learning offer extended to tenants and residents in the local community, as well as the workforces of small and medium-sized companies in Kier's supply chain.

And with around 77,000 Ministry of Defence (MoD) armed forces personnel facing redundancy, they hope the centre can offer retraining opportunities in order to increase their employability and help them to reintegrate into civilian life.

Partnership working

The opening of the centre was made possible by partnership working and joint financing by union organisations and Kier. UCATT provided ten desktop computers. Kier providing the room, its IT experts installed the internet-connected and networked desktops and it will provide facility time for ULRs and learners – on a 'give an hour, take an hour basis'. And the TUC education and skills arm, unionlearn, provided a range of online learning resources and publications.

"At the moment this is a UCATT learning centre but we hope that the three other unions [GMB, Unison and Unite] will come on board so that it becomes a joint trade union learning centre," said Joint Trade Union Convenor and UCATT ULR Alan Stansfield. *"I have been trying to develop this kind of initiative with employers for a long time, so I'm really proud to have achieved this with Kier. Also, a massive, massive thank you to UCATT National Project Worker Steve Craig, without whom this would not have happened."*

"It is a symptom of the quality of the relationship Kier has with its trade unions that we are able to engage in producing something like this," said Head of HR Martin Rooney. *"It emphasises what we should be about as a business, particularly for our apprentices. As they develop, our business develops. As we develop talent so we secure our future as a sustainable business. The learning centre will complement our own training centre and we have something we can all be very proud of."*

UCATT General Secretary Steve Murphy explained how the idea of the learning centre had been initiated at

the UCATT-Kier National Convenor Forum which contributes to consultative and collective bargaining arrangements.

"This is a good example of an employer engaging with the trade unions and the trade unions engaging with the employer," he said. *"Education and skills training is an issue that both myself and UCATT are passionate about."*

Reaching out to the community

And he added: *"We have taken a further step forward here in North Tyneside as not only will this centre meet the learning needs of the workforce. It will also be community facing, involving tenants and residents and providing learning opportunities for them. And it is not just construction skills and qualifications that we hope to provide here. UCATT ULRs will have a vital role to play in assessing the training needs and aspirations of workers and the local community."*

Kier Corporate Responsibility Co-ordinator Terry Hanlon set out how the learning centre



Unionlearn director Tom Wilson (left) with Joint Trade Union Convenor and UCATT ULR Alan Stansfield



Kier Head of HR Martin Rooney, UCATT General Secretary Steve Murphy and Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson



Kier Corporate Responsibility Co-ordinator Terry Hanlon

planned to engage with the local community: *"The plan is to provide IT training to local unemployed people, so that they can apply for jobs advertised online, and offer training to ex-offenders as part of their rehabilitation. In future, we also want to offer environmental awareness and 'cut the carbon' training. The centre fits in very well with our aims and targets and we hope it will be very well used."*

A space for union-led learning

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson explained the importance of having learning centres that are owned, controlled and run by unions.

"Unions run learning centres because unions want to run the learning. We want our own space where union members can feel comfortable and confident. UCATT members want to learn in their own way, when they want and how they want. And what they want," he said.

And he congratulated Kier on its approach to learning and working with the trade unions. *"If there were more companies like Kier we would have fewer problems in the construction industry. They*

know the value of learning and they know the value of building a strong relationship with a strong union. And the single most important aspect of that relationship is a joint commitment to learning, a joint commitment to investing in employees and growing their skills," he said.

Closing the digital divide

Alan will be now handing over to UCATT's newest ULR at Kier North Tyneside, Iain Lapsley. One of his first tasks will be to set up basic IT training for craft workers. The learning centre will help to address the 'digital divide' that exists in many parts of the construction industry, and in communities, and ensure that with the massive transformation in the use of information technology, no one is left behind.

UCATT Regional Secretary John Scott believes that the national level commitment the learning centre has received from both Kier and UCATT is important in ensuring its success. *"Such an input will secure the support it deserves and should stand the test of time,"* he said.

UCATT Convenor at Newcastle City Council Steve Colwell (left) with unionlearn Northern Region Union Support Officer Joe McGuigan

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson (left) with Kier North Tyneside Head of Finance David Straw

Some of Kier's ten new apprentices

Kier Interim Training Manager Alison Craggs (second from left)

Ambassadors for Learning – the role of Kier North Tyneside Apprentices

Kier's ten new apprentices are benefiting from the new learning centre from day one. They are helping to promote the learning opportunities it offers to the workforce and the local community.

Interim Training Manager Alison Craggs set them an assignment to produce a staff newsletter on the launch event, including a questionnaire survey asking workers about the courses they would like it to see running. A newsletter aimed at promoting the learning centre to local tenants and residents will build on their role as Apprentice Ambassadors. They already visit local schools to raise the profile of apprenticeships and promote careers in construction.

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