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Developing Workplace Learning Advocates in non-unionised workplaces Scheme set to extend the reach of Workplace Learning Advocates

Today Workbase and The Johnston Partnership announce that their Workplace Learning Advocates scheme is set to extend its reach into non-unionised workplaces in the English regions. This follows successful work carried out in Lincolnshire, Rutland and the North West region.

Workplace Learning Advocates are employees who support and encourage formal and informal learning at work to ensure that people get the most from training and development. New funding from BIS now allows local Workplace Learning Advocate networks to be set up across a number of English regions, with a particular focus on areas of urban regeneration, deprivation and low skills.

The scheme offers companies the opportunity to have a member of staff trained to operate as a Workplace Learning Advocate. Employers can also access small grants to set up informal learning groups as well as free taster courses for employees. The scheme will work closely with local business groups and Local Enterprise Partnerships to promote and guide the initiative to ensure delivery reflects needs in each area.

Skills Minister John Hayes said: "Workplace Learning Advocates play a vitally important role in helping people make full use of their knowledge and skills in the workplace, and in encouraging employers to invest in developing the skills of their staff. Their vital work gets to the heart of local economies, driving the productivity and growth that will help communities flourish."

This exciting development is using the experiences of unionlearn (the TUC's learning and skills organisation) and community learning champions to help develop an offer that meets the needs of employers in non-unionised settings.

Learning Advocates is already underway in the North West. The first training took place in Wigan on 1st December. Further training sessions are planned in the New Year in Merseyside and Millom in Cumbria. Liz Johnston from Learning Advocates said “It’s really important to bring the initiative to areas such as Millom which experience rural isolation and a decline in traditional industries. This initiative will encourage workplaces to access local and digital training which can help to support employee development and business growth.”

Six companies of various sizes and sectors are embracing Workplace Learning Advocates in Lincolnshire and Rutland. Herman Kok, Chairman of Lincolnshire and Rutland Employment and Skills Board said, “I wholeheartedly support the Learning Advocates initiative. Developing a learning culture at work is a way to drive productivity and help our local communities thrive.”

Michael Gill, HR Director at Morton’s of Horncastle said, “We found that by starting a social club at work it acted as a springboard for informal learning at work. People are now more likely to come forward to learn new skills as well as offer their own knowledge to help others.”

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About Workbase

Workbase began as a project for tackling under performance and under achievement in the workplace and has grown to become a leading not for profit organisation, pioneering and promoting employee development and workplace learning. The company specialises in developing communication skills for low skilled and low paid employees to help them get the most from development opportunities. Workbase has created a number of tried and tested models for literacy and numeracy at the workplace which have been used by providers including colleges, trade unions and private training organisations.

About The Johnston Partnership

The Johnston Partnership started to deliver their Learning Advocates Initiative in non-unionised workplaces in 2004 in Cumbria. The company now offers this initiative throughout the North West and North East regions. The company specialises in supporting non-unionised companies to upskill their workforce. W: www.learningadvocates.co.uk