



PRESS RELEASE
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WORKERS LEARN MORE IN THE WORKPLACE THAN ON TRAINING COURSES, RESEARCH FINDS

Despite the emphasis placed on training and qualifications by government, newly published research by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) suggests that these forms of study are not rated so highly as on-the-job learning by employees wanting to improve their performance at work.

The research, *Better Learning, Better Performance*, was carried out by NIACE in association with researchers from the University of Leicester. It discusses how activities more closely associated with the workplace - such as doing the job, being shown techniques by colleagues, engaging in self-reflection and active observation - can be of more help to employees in raising their performance than attending training courses or acquiring qualifications.

One in four employees reported that training courses were of little or no value in improving work performance and around one in three thought that studying for qualifications had not helped them at work. By comparison, over half thought that learning by doing was the most effective means of improving work performance, with 90% agreeing that they had picked up most of their skills through on-the-job experience. Crucially, advice, understanding, coaching and counselling from line managers emerge as keys to the development of effective and productive staff.

Professor Alan Felstead, co-author of the report said, "The results suggest that the workplace - and its everyday activities - provides the most highly prized sources of learning for employees. Going on training courses and getting qualifications lay the foundations for initial competence at work, but improved performance is more reliant on doing the job and learning from others".

He continued, "The government has put a great deal of investment in raising training and increasing the qualifications stock of the UK workforce in a bid to close the productivity gap with competitor nations. While this is necessary, the results of the NIACE survey suggest that the most effective route to enhanced performance lies in improved relations within the workplace."

Anne Hansen, Development Officer for Workplace Learning at NIACE, said, "Government intervention in training appears to be going along the right lines

according to this survey. The emphasis now is on workplace demand for relevant learning and this is supported by employees as a means of helping them do their jobs better. However what is really useful about this report is the importance workers attach to their relationship with their managers. It shows that supportive managers who spend time advising and coaching their staff ensure that their employees are more effective than when management is more directive and controlling.”

Media Contacts

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Notes for Editors

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is the leading non-government organisation for lifelong learning and exists to encourage more and different adults to engage in learning of all kinds and campaigns for, and celebrates the achievements of, all adult learners.
2. The Learning at Work Survey was launched as a collaborative venture between a team of researchers at the Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, and NIACE as part of NIACE’s annual survey on Adult Participation in Learning 2004.
3. *Better Learning, Better Performance* is written by Professor Alan Felstead, Dr Alison Fuller, Professor Lorna Unwin, Professor David Ashton, Dr Peter Butler and Dr Tracey Lee, and is published by NIACE - Priced at £12.95 - ISBN 1 86201 230 X
4. Review copies of *Better Learning, Better Performance* are available to journalists on approval from Elisabeth Prince, NIACE Publications Marketing Assistant, Tel: 0116 204 2832 Email: elisabeth.prince@niace.org.uk
5. The University of Leicester team based at the Centre for Labour Market Studies and their collaboration with NIACE forms part of an Economic and Social Research Council grant funded under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme to investigate learning at work (more details on www.tlrp.org).
6. More details on the Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester can be found on www.clms.le.ac.uk
7. The University of Leicester team are undertaking a major ESRC funded research project, which aims to identify the organisational factors most conducive to enhancing business performance.