

# skills for life

Whole Organisation Approach



A Draft Strategy for the Fire Brigade's Union  
and the UK Fire and Rescue Service

**Executive Summary**

**Ulf** Union  
learning  
fund





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# Forewords



## **Skills for Life in the Fire Brigades Union and Fire and Rescue Service.**

**On behalf of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) I welcome the partnership working within the Union Learning Fund (ULF) that has enabled this draft 'Skills for Life, Whole Organisation Approach' to be used as the basis to deal with Skills for Life (SfL) in the Fire and Rescue Service. Partnership working is a new concept for many of us – the ULF has successfully demonstrated how it can benefit both employers and FBU members.**

The FBU believes that all individuals should have every opportunity to fully develop their true potential, both at work and in their personal lives. The FBU rule-book supports this in its aim: “to serve the community by encouraging its members to be skilled at their craft”.

Partnership working in Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects has contributed greatly to a better understanding of learning and development both within the Fire and Rescue Service and in the FBU itself.

During the life of the projects, SfL has been identified on a number of occasions, being recognised as an area of learning that has, perhaps, been overlooked. It is of course the underpinning foundation for all learning and development regardless of any final achievement.

The National Fire and Rescue Service Learning and Development Strategy and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Services Strategy have been agreed by all the main Fire and Rescue Service organisations.

Within both strategies is an acknowledgement of the role the ULF projects can play, particularly in improving numeracy, literacy and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills. The FBU is a committed partner to achieving these aims, which can only enhance the skills and development of its members and all employees of the Fire and Rescue Service.

This draft strategy is a 'Whole Organisation Approach', it is and will be challenging to all eventual signatures on its completion and final agreement.

The FBU looks forward to working with the Fire and Rescue Community to ensure that we use it to realise the full potential of all UK Fire and Rescue employees.

**Mick Shaw**

**President – Fire Brigades Union**



## **Skills for Life and the Fire and Rescue Service: A comment from the Chief Fire Officers' Association.**

**A partnership approach toward learning and development within Fire and Rescue Services.**

**The Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) support the principle encapsulated within the aims and objectives of the Fire Brigades Union's (FBU) Union Learning Fund (ULF) "Whole Organisation Approach" to life long learning and the development of skills for life (SfL) designed to benefit all our staff within our Fire and Rescue Services.**

By working together, we believe that we can better contribute towards the development of Fire and Rescue Service staff, promoting safety and effectiveness in the performance of our duties whilst enhancing the quality and scope of service we provide to our communities.

The Workforce Development element of the National Framework challenges us all to think outside of our traditional training structures and fire and rescue institutions. This includes reconsidering our approach to further education, management colleges and other partners, and to e-learning.

In support of the Workforce Development agenda, CFOA is a co-signatory, along with CLG (formerly ODPM), the LGA, the Fire Service College and other stakeholders, including, the FBU, to the National Fire and Rescue Service Learning and Development Strategy. This provides us with the framework for FRS learning and development over the next ten years. It applies to all our employees and will ensure that the Service operates within the Government's wider skills development framework, particularly in recognising the value of partnership working to achieve joint aims.

Significantly, Key Element 04 of the Learning and Development Strategy acknowledges the contribution that the Union Learning Fund can make in supporting FRS's broader learning and development programmes, through the targeted improvement of basic skills, particularly in adult literacy, numeracy and ICT.

The Union Learning Fund has been created to support organisational learning and development strategies by providing a link between the development of such strategies and our staff, particularly through encouraging and supporting the attainment of those skills that underpin enhanced levels of staff competence, performance and future development.

CFOA believe that in a modernised Fire and Rescue Service, the Union Learning Fund Skills for Life initiative complements those strategies, policies and procedures which support the development of a diverse and high-performance workforce within our Fire and Rescue Services, and are pleased to continue our engagement with this National Strategy.

**Des Williamson**  
**CFOA Representative for ULF**

**1st May 2007**



# Introduction

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has been proactive over the last three years in promoting and delivering an ethos that Lifelong Learning should be an integral arm of the FBU and Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) training and development delivery for all staff.

## Skills for Life.....?

Literacy and numeracy learning which caters for the literacy, language and numeracy needs of all post-16 learners, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, from pre-entry level up to and including level 2. This includes all forms of provision, whether delivered as stand alone, or as part of a vocational programme or bolt on course, and whether delivered full time, part time or through self study or ICT.

*Learning and Skills Council*

This ethos has been led by the FBU's Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects with Skills for Life (SfL) – Numeracy, Literacy and Information Communication Technology (ICT), being recognised as underpinning all learning and development. This has resulted in the promotion and delivery of SfL leading to staff successfully gaining qualifications at level 1 and 2 in numeracy and literacy.

It is fair to say that a number of FRS employers and senior managers have not embraced the philosophy that there is a SfL need in the FRS, neither, it has to be said, has the FBU fully recognised its importance. There are, therefore, a number of barriers and challenges that exist in developing and implementing a Whole Organisation Approach (WOA) to Skills for Life.

This strategy is therefore, setting out a number of principles and ideals that will help recognise that SfL impinges on all aspects of FRS work and importantly touches all members of staff both uniformed and support. Just as important, in improving SfL in the workplace is the impact of helping individuals to achieve social justice, improving their lives not just as employees but at home and in their social lives.

This is a 'draft' strategy and the proposals contained within it are open for the FBU, managers and employers to discuss, develop and deliver them therefore, conveying an agreed united approach to the learning and development of all staff.

# Executive Summary

## The case for a Skills for Life Strategy

“In a Fire and Rescue Service context improved SfL are an essential element in delivering all aspects of the services objectives and for enhancing personal development. Learning opportunities should be made available to all staff and the organisational aspiration should be the attainment of numeracy, literacy and ICT skills at level 2 for all staff. From recruitment to retirement SfL improvement should be encouraged, supported and developed.”

FBU ULF Project Staff and Project Partners

- To meet and support the aims contained within the 2005 National Learning and Development Strategy in England as agreed by Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), Fire Service College (FSC) and other stakeholders. (**Key Element 04 – Union Learning Fund**).
- To meet and support the aims contained within the 2007 Scottish Fire and Rescue Services Learning and Development Strategy as agreed by the Scottish Executive, CFOA, Scottish Fire Services College (SFSC) and other stakeholders. (**Section 2.6 Securing effective collaborative arrangements – Scottish Union Learning Fund**).
- The Government’s drive for a modern FRS to move away from being a reactive to a proactive service has placed further demands on learning and development increasing the SfL need across the service. Without addressing this need even the basic community fire safety messages will not be communicated correctly.
- Commitment to delivering a SfL and Lifelong Learning culture in the FRS will help meet the Diversity and Equality policies of individual brigades and those standards set by the CLG.
- The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA) makes it illegal to discriminate against people with dyslexia. The promotion of SfL can highlight learners who may suffer from dyslexic tendencies (dyspraxia / dyscalculia) and ensure that the proper support can be given to them.
- SfL funding is free for any learner who does not hold a level 2 qualification or for any learner who has a SfL need. Additional funding is also available to support learners gain their first ICT qualification and in some cases level 3 qualification. This partnership strategy will help brigades source and apply for funding that they are currently unaware of and not using.
- Engaging in SfL will help meet the aims and objectives of the Government’s strategies and endorse the FRS as a skilled and learning organisation.
- The Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) involves all uniformed staff regardless of their shift pattern while supporting the safe person concept. The foundation stone for IPDS and National Occupation Standards NOS) are SfL. Ensuring staff have good SfL will ensure that they have the ability to learn at their current position while helping them to develop for the future.

- The introduction of Assessment Development Centres (ADCs) for promotion has challenged staff to prove they have the ability to work at higher and more demanding levels. SfL improves the ability of individuals to prove they have the skills needed to meet the ADC process in aspects such as; communication (oral and written), report writing and basic ICT.
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- There are still no academic qualifications required to join the FRS; pre SfL application testing, with appropriate support, will help applicants and meet equality and diversity aims in recruitment.
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- Understanding the application of Numeracy, Literacy and ICT skills underpins all aspects of learning and development in the FRS. Ensuring staff have the requisite SfL will enable them to carry out their roles safely and more effectively.
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- The FRS needs its staff to continually develop and improve their skills thereby providing an effective and valuable public service. Without effective SfL, staff will take longer to learn and develop their core skills in what can be a demanding and dangerous environment. SfL will contribute to enhancing the safety and performance of staff in all their duties.
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- ICT is becoming an increasingly essential key skill for Firefighters, Emergency Control Staff and Support Staff within the FRS, for example personal development records, reports and documents, spreadsheets holding statistical information and financial budgets. Good ICT skills are inherent within the correct application and use of hardware and software. New technology on the fireground, in emergency fire control rooms and on fire stations is on the increase. SfL are essential for ensuring that all these applications are correctly used, thereby reducing errors, hardware problems and pressure on the staff using them.
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- Support staff carry out a range of vital functions including administration, budgets, statistical information, catering and cleaning etc. Ensuring the staff have good literacy, numeracy and ICT skills will help to reduce errors, ensure staff can follow health and safety instructions, increase productivity and help them further their own potential.
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- SfL is now an integral part of the Investors in People (IIP) award. Employers aiming to maintain or those looking to attain the award for the first time will need to show evidence that they are supporting SfL with their staff.
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- Local Government has recognised that to provide excellence in providing its public services then it needs staff to have a good level of SfL. In many local authorities a lifelong learning committee is in place with representation from management and recognised trade unions.
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- The LGA through initiatives such as; 'Champions of Local Learning' and 'Community Well – Being' have recognised the importance of SfL and its links to the promotion of access and inclusion, social cohesion and social justice. Given the increasing work with communities, the FRS can advocate SfL with young adults through its many community based initiatives.
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- All individuals deserve the opportunity to learn and develop in the workplace, at home and in their social lives. Skills for Life are the foundation; good Employers and Managers recognise this and by supporting their staff will gain an improved and confident workforce.
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- Union Learning Representatives can help provide a valuable link between brigade's learning and development strategies and the staff who would benefit directly from support in the delivery of a SfL strategy; this would underpin the level of staff competence and support their future development.



## High Priority Action Points

Recommendation	Responsibility	Support / Organisation	Links
The agreed National Learning & Development Strategies that encompass the ULF projects should be utilised further to promote a WOA to SfL	CFOA, FSC, SFSC, FBU General Secretary, FBU National Officer	ULF project manager, SULF regional project manager, NIULF regional project manager, WULF regional project manager	CLG, LGA, Local Government Organisations
Assess how a WOA SfL strategy meets the Governments modernisation agenda, Local Government SfL strategies & the Leitch Report	CFOA, NJC Employer Organisations, FRS Training & Development Managers, FBU National Officer	ULF project manager, ULF project co-ordinators, brigade joint learning forums, ULRs	CLG
Work with ULF projects to access external funding for SfL and ICT Learning and the Government's Train 2 Gain funding initiative	CFOA, Individual FRSS, FRS Training & Development Managers	ULF project manager, FBU learning centres, ULF co-ordinators, Brigade joint learning forums, ULRs	Unionlearn, DfES
Employers / Managers to build SfL in Equality & Diversity Policies and HR strategies that give encouragement and entitlement to learning opportunities for all staff	NJC Employer Organisations, CFOA, Individual FRSSs, HR Managers	ULF co-ordinators, SULF regional project manager, NIULF regional project manager. Brigade joint learning forums, ULRs,	CLG, Elected Member learning champions
IRMP's should be evaluated to ensure staff have the requisite skills to meet the needs of the plan	CFOA, Individual FRSSs	IRMP practitioner groups, FBU officials, brigade joint learning forums, brigade lifelong learning committees	
Support to be available for staff going through IPDS & ADC process with access to prior skills check	FSC, SFSC, IPDS Team, Individual FRSSs, FBU National Officer	ULF project manager, FBU learning centres, ULF co-ordinators, Brigade joint learning forums, ULRs	FE providers
Promote the link between SfL and access to a pre-enrolment skills check	FSC, SFSC, Individual FRSSs, FBU National Officer	ULF project manager, learning centre manager, VQ practioner, SfL tutor	Accreditation Bodies
Ensure that all FRS colleges & brigade training departments can support learners with Dyslexic Tendencies meeting the DDA 2005.	FSC, SFSC, CFOA, Individual FRSSs.	ULF co-ordinators, FRS training & development managers, brigade joint learning forums, FBU learning centre, SfL tutor	Supporting Dyslexic Learners in Different Contexts - CfBT Education Trust
FRS to undertake a review of how SfL can be embedded in Community Fire Safety work with young adults projects	CFOA, FBU, Individual FRS	ULF co-ordinators, brigade joint learning forums, FBU brigade lifelong learning committee, SfL tutor, FBU learning centres	All relevant organisations i.e. Princes Trust, Duke of Edinburgh, Young Offenders, etc
Carry out assessment of current ICT training in the FRS and confirm links to SfL	CFOA, FSC, SFSC, Individual FRSSs, FRS Training & Development Managers	ULF co-ordinators, brigade joint learning forums, FBU brigade lifelong learning committee, SfL tutor, FBU learning centres	FSC & SFSC e-learning group
FSC & SFSC to investigate methods for SfL to be embedded in core training courses	FSC, SFSC, IPDS Team	CFOA, IPDS, FBU, ULF project manager, ULF co-ordinators, SfL tutor	FE providers
Review and assess how SfL can be embedded in the delivery of local training	Individual FRSSs, FRS Training & Development Managers	ULF project co-ordinators, brigade joint learning forums, brigade lifelong learning committee, ULR	



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