

COMMUNITY LEARNING COMMITTEE

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MEDIA INFORMATION

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FIRST LEARNING CENTRES OPEN AS UFI SAYS *learndirect*

learndirect will be the name of Ufi's network of learning centres that are to be developed nation-wide from 24 November, Ron Dearing, Chairman of Ufi announced today.

Sixty-eight **learndirect** development centres across England, will this week start working with Ufi in developing a new approach to the delivery of flexible learning. They are in friendly, easy-access locations such as sports and shopping centres, football and rugby clubs, community centres, churches, railway stations and libraries. Some centres are based with employers.

Ufi will also be operating in Wales and Northern Ireland where the first **learndirect** development centres will be announced shortly. The Scottish Ufi will be a parallel but distinct organisation for Scotland.

Learning Direct, the national learning information help line (0800 100 900), will change its name to **learndirect** as part of Ufi's national campaign to market lifelong learning.

Learners using the development centres will be able to choose from a trial range of 24 on-line courses covering information technology, and business and management skills. These courses provide in total almost 100 'bite-sized chunks' of learning, which people can try out between now and spring 2000, at a pace and at times that suit them best. Ufi will be gathering feedback during this pilot phase in order to develop its initial range of learning materials, ready for full operations next autumn.

People using **learndirect** development centres will have access to computers and the Internet to support their **learndirect** course. Centre staff will help people get started and to use the on-line materials.

All the courses on offer will attract funding from the Further Education Funding Council, which has made £4 million available to support learners using **learndirect** centres in 1999-2000 and a further £20 million for the following year.

The marketing and operation of **learndirect** services, including the nation-wide delivery of learning materials on-line through the Internet, will be closely evaluated as Ufl develops its new approach to learning, which will help people to use ICT to learn from home and at work, as well as at **learndirect** centres.

“These first **learndirect** centres are the beginning of the revolution in learning promised by Ufl”, said Ufl chairman, Ron Dearing. “By dropping into centres and learning on-line through the Internet, people and business will realise that learning can be accessible, flexible and affordable. We aim to transform how and where people acquire new skills and qualifications and to deliver learning that fits the needs and lifestyles of individuals and employers. Our development centres will test this new approach in partnership with hundreds of education and training providers who share our vision and who have already begun to reach new learners.

“The name **learndirect** will help us and our partners in this task. It will give learning itself a powerful presence on the high street and in the consumer market place and will help drive up the demand for learning. It also builds on the excellent impact made by the Learning Direct helpline, which will soon be taking its millionth call.”

Welcoming today’s announcement, Michael Wills, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Learning and Technology said: ‘Ufl is at the heart of the government’s lifelong learning strategy. With its learning centre partners, Ufl is harnessing ICT to make learning more widely available and accessible than ever before, to both individuals and business.’”

learndirect development centres are being run by consortia of employers, trade unions, voluntary groups, colleges, universities and training providers. They are in the heart of urban and rural communities. Some are specialising in specific business sectors such as automotive components, multimedia and retail.

Three campus-based centres will be testing the delivery of **learndirect** services at FE colleges.

Lessons from the development centres will be shared with other **learndirect** consortia as Ufl rolls out its national network and moves towards its target of up to 1000 **learndirect** centres.

Ufl is planning to offer a wide portfolio of learning materials from a range of suppliers by autumn 2000, by which time it will be fully operational.

The initial courses on offer at the development centres are being provided by four of the Ufl’s qualified suppliers: NETg, Maxim Training, Xebec McGraw-Hill, and M2S.

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Notes for editors:

1. Ufl is taking forward the Government's concept of the University for Industry. It aims to provide information and advice to 2.5 million people a year by 2002, and create demand for up to one million courses and learning packages a year by 2004 – to be met by the Ufl network and existing learning providers. An independent body, Ufl will operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and establish strong working relationships with the Scottish Ufl. By stimulating lifelong learning, Ufl aims to put people in a better position to get jobs, improve their career prospects and boost business competitiveness.
2. Ufl has been set up as a limited company, Ufl Ltd, which has applied for charitable status. The Chairman, Lord Dearing; Vice Chairman, Sir Anthony Greener, and board directors, have been appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The Chief Executive, Dr Anne Wright and executive directors are responsible for the operations of the Ufl, developing its plans and implementing them. Ufl will be independent of government, although the Government will be Ufl's major stakeholder. The DfEE is committed to support Ufl during its development phases, and the first year will see funds of £44 million from the DfEE.
3. Ufl will be fully operational by autumn 2000. In the meantime many of its services are being introduced gradually. In April 1999 Ufl took over responsibility in England and Northern Ireland for the Government's Learning Direct helpline. This national learning information helpline was launched on 25 February 1998 and has been a resounding success. The freephone number is 0800 100 900. It is renamed from today as **learndirect**.
4. Ufl will use ICT and the Internet to create an innovative, flexible approach to learning which will allow people to learn on-line at times and locations which suit them best. It is also creating a network of up to 1000 **learndirect** centres which will be operated by local learning providers. The development centres announced today are working with Ufl to test delivery of **learndirect** services and learning materials.
5. A key Ufl aim is to drive up the demand for learning. Ufl will therefore be running major national promotional campaigns. These campaigns will promote learning to adults and business and will support **learndirect** services, including the national helpline. Ufl has set aside £10 million for these activities over the next two years. The first campaign is planned for the new year. Further details can be obtained from Dr. David Croisdale-Appleby, Director of Marketing and Communications.
6. Ufl will cater for a very wide range of learners, from basic skills to post-graduate level, and from general management for SMEs to specific technical skills and knowledge for designated priority areas.

7. Ufi's development plan and details of the 68 **learn**direct development centres are available on the Internet at <http://www.ufild.co.uk>. Printed copies of the development plan can be ordered from: Ufi, PO box 380, Nottingham, NG7 3JS; telephone 0141 300 4924.
8. Ufi's public enquiry line is 0114 224 2999.

For further information please contact the Ufi Press Office on 0171 255 5439, fax 0171 631 0602 (out of hours: 07979 603381) or email samy@grayling.co.uk