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LEARNINGREP

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Conference 2017: Apprenticeships in the spotlight

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unionlearn
with the TUC



WE NEED TO FLEX THE LEVY

While the Taylor Review of the gig economy missed the opportunity to reform the employment models used by tech companies like Uber and Deliveroo, the final report did propose a raft of reforms to the organisation of workplace learning and development that deserve more attention than they have received in the mainstream media.

“The TUC’s Great Jobs Agenda campaign includes a number of policy proposals that chime with reforms floated by the Taylor Review.”

For example, the review suggested tweaking the Apprenticeship Levy in two significant ways: extending Levy funding to more forms of off-the-job training, which could include the National Retraining Scheme that was not part of the recent Queen’s Speech but was included in the Conservative Party election manifesto; and flexing the Levy to enable atypical workers to access apprenticeship training, so that people on the books of traditional agencies and gig economy companies can access opportunities available to their full-time counterparts.

The review also agrees with the TUC proposal to extend the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) to tackling the barriers faced by Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people, disabled people and women in accessing high-quality apprenticeships.

The TUC’s Great Jobs Agenda campaign includes a number of policy proposals that chime with reforms floated by the Taylor Review. The key difference is that we believe nothing is achievable unless the government fully funds the reforms. 

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
with the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

Get ready for another Maths Workout Week



© Ciaimage/Tom Merton/Getty Images

Unionlearn is organising another Maths Workout Week in October, packed full of activities dedicated to improving everybody’s numeracy skills.

To take part, you can:

- tweet a photograph of using maths in an everyday job situation (e.g. measuring something, using spreadsheets, handling money) with the hashtag #mathsworkout
- encourage everyone in your workplace and family to check their maths skills with the Use-IT assessment tool and tell us about it with a tweet to @unionlearn or a Facebook post
- take on the whole maths pathway (link below)
- organise a maths event (see below for links to inspiring case studies)
- write a blog about how you feel about maths.

Maths Workout Week, which runs from 9 to 13 October, will coincide with the next English and Maths Network, the new regular event that is open to ULRs/project workers and everyone interested in supporting workplace

English and maths.

The first English and Maths Network, which was held in May, featured TUC Education colleagues talking about their new online courses and eNotes, plus contributions from partner organisations including:

- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF), which offers help and online resources for literacy and numeracy learning delivery
- Natecla, which has put together a draft ESOL strategy and is looking for fresh ideas to get employers excited about supporting learning for those whose first language is not English
- National Numeracy, which presented examples of good practice on how employers and unions have embraced maths learning.

[Click here](#) or [here](#) for inspiring, real-life case studies

[Click here](#) for the pathway

[Click here](#) to access Use-IT

[Click here](#) to tell us what you’re doing for Maths Workout Week

[Click here](#) to post on the unionlearn Facebook page about what you’re doing for Maths Workout Week

Firefighters improve their mental health awareness

When not on duty, West Sussex firefighters Gary Miller and Jason Sadler have been undertaking the Fire Brigades Union's Mental Health Awareness Level 2 distance learning course.

"Completing this course has given me a greater understanding of a wide range of mental health disorders: it will assist me both personally and professionally in being aware of signs and symptoms and how it can effect people in their day-to-day living," says crew manager Gary.

Jason says the course has given him a greater understanding of mental health issues and will be of use in his job when he visits people in the community who may have a form of mental health illness.

He needed a little time to adjust to returning to learning, Jason admits. "Having been out of formal education for so long, it took me some time to get back into the swing of learning, researching and putting down on paper so it made sense to somebody else and not just me!"

Learning helps Luton HMRC staff cope with change

With the help of PCS learning rep Carol Palmer and unionlearn's Jane Warwick and Matt Pointon, Luton HMRC staff have been

coping with the change brought about by a building closure programme.

When Carol attended a transferable skills session and mid-life development review event at Watford HMRC, she immediately knew the activities on offer would be welcomed in her own workplace, where colleagues were facing moving to new premises, new jobs or retirement as a result of the closure programme.

Working with unionlearn Projects Officer Jane Warwick and PCS Learning Coordinator Fiona MacLatchie, Carol delivered mid-life development reviews for colleagues, using unionlearn's Value My Skills Cards to help everyone identify transferable skills.

In addition, unionlearn Projects Officer Matt Pointon helped members assess their English and maths skills by registering people onto the initial assessment tool, Use-IT.

New round of Supporting Learners events tours the regions



The unionlearn team is going back on the road this autumn to help union learning reps (ULRs) keep up to date with all the latest

developments in workplace learning and skills through a new series of regional Supporting Learners events.

With a mix of presentations, updates and practical workshops, the events will focus on apprenticeships, English and maths and will also examine at the regional skills challenges facing the workforce.

In particular, the events will look at the growth in apprenticeships and set out how unions and ULRs can support high-quality schemes and devise strategies that will best support apprentices.

The events will also promote a range of new and exciting materials to help ULRs and employers develop their apprenticeship programmes and also support English and maths provision at work.

"These Supporting Learners events will be a chance to network and share ideas with other union reps," says unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan.

"They are the perfect way for the busy rep to keep up to date with the latest developments in workplace learning and early booking is recommended."

The full Supporting Learners programme is:

- Wednesday 4 October – Southport Theatre & Convention Centre
- Thursday 12 October – County Hotel, Newcastle
- Tuesday 17 October – The Albemarle Centre, Taunton
- Wednesday 2 November – UNISON Centre, London
- Tuesday 21 November – CWU, Summer Lane, Birmingham
- Wednesday 29 November – Leeds City Museum.

All events run from 10am to 3.30pm and include lunch.

Click [here](#) to book a place on the event nearest you

Click [here](#) for the latest news on supporting learners

Click [here](#) to download unionlearn's guide to supporting English and maths in the workplace

REPTECH

Helping learners with dyslexia



UNISON has launched a new online training module to help union members and activists support colleagues who have, or suspect they have, dyslexia.

The new e-note, Dyslexia Awareness, is a short, informal module, designed to allow learners to work through an overview of the topic at their own pace.

Through a series of activities and video interviews with UNISON members, the interactive module explores what it's like to have dyslexia and the legal obligations and protections for people with dyslexia.

It also includes tips on making union branch communications dyslexia-friendly.

Click [here](#) to access to e-note (UNISON members only)



NIKKI SIMPSON

Nikki Simpson, who won the very first ULR of the Year award at TUC Congress 11 years ago, died earlier this year, barely 12 months after a terminal cancer diagnosis.

Nikki had been working for the Royal Bank of Scotland in Southend for close to 20 years when she signed up to become an Amicus (now Unite) learning rep in 2004.

In her first full year of activity (after the birth of her second daughter), Nikki recruited 200 new union members on the back of organising functional skills courses, language classes, first aid courses, reading initiatives and learning tasters at the bank.

Made redundant in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, Nikki became a Union Learning Fund (ULF) project worker with professionals' union Prospect, where for the next six years she trained new ULRs, organised formal and informal learning events and helped hundreds of members improve their skills.

In 2014, she became a learning and development organiser in education union ATL's Eastern Region, where she promoted continuous professional Development (CPD) opportunities to hundreds of members.

Nikki brought her infectious enthusiasm for learning everywhere she went, making a real difference for thousands of union members since she joined the world of union learning 13 years ago. Her absence will be felt for a very long time. **LR**

Metro Mayor drops in on Merseytravel



Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham met some of the new digital champions on the North West TUC/Delivering Assisted Lifestyles Living At Scale (DALLAS) Programme when he called into Merseytravel this summer.

Merseylearn Tutor Norman Hunter and North-West TUC Digital Inclusion and Health Officer Laura Robertson-Collins showed the Metro Mayor around the centre. They introduced Steve to digital champions, staff and volunteers from the third sector, unions and workplaces across Liverpool who were attending a one-day training session delivered by Merseylearn, the learning team within Merseytravel.

"I'm delighted the City Region Metro Mayor could visit the newest digital champions being trained in Merseytravel," Laura says. "The TUC is working hard in Liverpool City region with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other partners to help make sure all our citizens are online and can access health care and other resources."

The Merseylearn team has helped train more than 300 digital champions in the last four years, by working closely with the North-West TUC and unionlearn on

the DALLAS project, which aims to improve health, wellbeing and access to health information through improving digital skills and is funded through the CCG.

It's always a pleasure to meet volunteers from across the city willing to give a little of their time to make such a massive difference to other people's lives," Norman said.

The Metro Mayor was impressed with what he saw on his visit. "Great to pop into the digital champions workshop organised by the TUC this morning," he tweeted afterwards.

Teachers study new ways to engage English learners

Teaching staff went back into the classroom to find fresh ways to engage and motivate English learners at an ATL-organised conference in May.

ATL Senior Consultant/Director of Education Kevin Piper facilitated the Birmingham event, where delegates spent the afternoon learning and discussing innovative ways to engage their students with English.

The workshop allowed participants to understand English through learners' eyes and see how to get them to take up learning.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. "The trainer/speaker was exceptional," said one participant. "Great ideas to use in literacy across the curriculum," commented another.



Employers must pitch in to help boost maths skills

The poor maths skills of many UK adults will improve only if more employers pitch in to help the people on their payroll, according to a new report by the charity National Numeracy published in July.

The Essentials of Numeracy: a new approach to making the UK numerate draws on a wide range of evidence, including a recent survey carried out for National Numeracy by YouGov and new research from the Money Advice Service (MAS).

The YouGov poll revealed that 460 of the 2,000 adults the company surveyed did not know how to work out what a 5 per cent increase would mean for someone earning £9 per hour.

MAS research to be published later this year will show how poor numeracy – independent of other factors including income – makes people less likely to save money and more likely to use credit badly.

Against this background, National Numeracy has worked with maths specialists and employers to develop an alternative solution: an explicit, national focus on the Essentials of Numeracy – the practical maths skills and understanding that everyone needs in order to cope with everyday life and to function well at work.

Because the charity wants its approach embedded in workplaces, it is keen to work with businesses and other organisations to help them identify poor numeracy skills, tackle negative

attitudes to maths and support those employees and clients who need to improve.

The resources it offers are based on the National Numeracy Challenge, which is also available for individuals to use directly. So far, around 100,000 people have begun to check their numeracy online using the Challenge; and, of those who have used the resources available, three-quarters have improved their numeracy.

Having shown that it works, the charity now wants to scale up the initiative to reach many more people.

Click here to read the full report

Click here to find out more about the Essentials of Numeracy

Click here to find out more about the National Numeracy Challenge

Get ahead with new resources for Reading Ahead

From posters to mugs and bottles, there's a whole range of new promotional materials for Reading Ahead from The Reading Agency to mark the programme's tenth anniversary.

Reading Ahead has grown seven-fold over the last decade, reaching 45,000 adults and young people last year through workplaces, public libraries, colleges and prisons, changing people's perception of reading, opening up opportunities and building readers' confidence.



An estimated nine million adults of working age in England have low literacy or numeracy skills.

If you're running Reading Ahead this year, share your pictures on Twitter using the hashtag #ReadingAhead.

Click here to order your materials

Click here to visit The Reading Agency's resources page for guidance and tips on how to run Reading Ahead

Share your stories to support distance learning



Hundreds of adult learners have been sharing their stories on social media to support The Open University's (OU's) new campaign, #IWas.

Flexible learning enables people to reskill and upskill, whatever their background or personal circumstances, and the OU believes

that education and skills are fundamental to economic success now more than ever in the current economic climate.

To raise awareness of the number of students of all ages who use part-time and distance learning to upskill or reskill, learners can support the campaign by sharing a photo and the

age they were when they started studying (#IWas31...) with a sentence about their personal student story on social media.

OU offers degree apprenticeships

From high-level management skills to advanced digital and technology skills, The Open University (OU) can help people upskill, reskill and advance their careers via a range of degree apprenticeships.

Like any apprenticeship, higher and degree apprenticeships combine work and on-the-job training with studying towards a qualification. They're a real alternative to traditional university study and they're available at different levels, with some sectors even offering the opportunity to gain a master's degree.

Higher or degree apprenticeships offer the chance to gain exciting new skills and move up the ladder – employers may be looking to develop leaders and managers, so the apprenticeship could help people move to the next stage in their career. And there are no tuition fees to pay – instead apprenticeships offer people the chance to earn while they learn.

The OU offers apprenticeship programmes to train new and existing staff. As well as providing tutor-supported learning to meet needs, its flexible study can fit around learners' work schedules and home lives.

Click here to find out more

Summer learning, had us a blast

No summer is complete without a festival, and that is as true for the world of learning as it is for music. These are just a handful of the union highlights from this year's Learning at Work Week and Festival of Learning.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

This year's Festival of Learning (run by the Learning and Work Institute throughout June) and Learning at Work Week (run by the Campaign for Learning from 15 to 21 May) once again encouraged workplaces and organisations to hold free taster sessions and activities for adults to inspire them to discover the benefits of learning and developing new skills.

UNISON's Blackpool Health Branch opened Learning at Work Week (LAWW) with a special performance in the hospital reception by resident dancers from the town's famous Funny Girls showbar.

ULRs Jane Eyre and Bev Herring laid on a packed week of daily activities, including a t-shirt design competition, cake decorating, book-folding, flower arranging, art for beginners and calligraphy.

"We held 23 workshops and we recruited over 10 Numeracy Champions, who undertook the training during that week and now they are there to support the numeracy learners," says Bev.

More than 100 learners took part. Half a dozen new members joined as a result of the week and one potential new ULR came forward. "It was a fabulous success," says lead ULR Jane.

In Bristol, Unite held a free Learning For Life event at its regional offices in Tony Benn House, with workshops covering a wide range of issues, including deaf awareness/sign language, CV writing, creative bookmaking and



**Learning at
Work Week**
15th-21st May 2017

prostate cancer awareness.

The union also set up computer drop-in sessions where people could explore the opportunities available through the union's LearnwithUnite online learning platform, and offered one-to-one careers advice sessions.

"The feedback from those who attended has been really, really positive: it's great to showcase the contribution unions make in supporting the community as a whole," said Unite Union Learning Organiser Matt Gillett.



PCS Engie Section held a successful LAWW event at the Engie Mail Opening Centre in Telford (pictured right), Shropshire. Various providers and organisations were on hand to encourage employees to involve themselves in the union movement and improve their skills.

Engie management fully supported the event, releasing staff to talk to stallholders. Unionlearn Projects Officer Matt Pointon demonstrated the Use-IT app, helped signpost learners to suitable courses and encouraged them to read by distributing Quick Reads books.

UNISON Power branch ran lunchtime events promoting union learning at all seven sites of energy



company E.ON during LAWW this year.

Lifelong Learning Coordinators Natasha Mitto and Graham Thompson organised the events with the help of the UNISON learning reps dotted around the company's four sites in Nottingham and three further afield – Leicester, Coventry and Wath-on-Dearn.

The team booked tables in the canteens at the different sites on different days, staying for three hours in the middle of the day to promote learning opportunities to staff, using a Kickstart grant from UNISON's Learning and Organising Services to provide lunch for everyone.

"Apart from the courses already set up by UNISON, we heavily promoted courses from The Open University (OU) and other distance learning opportunities through Leicester College," explains Graham.

Next year, Learning at Work Week runs from 14 to 20 May. **LR**

Click [here](#) to watch Blackpool Health's LAWW extravaganza on Facebook
Click [here](#) to watch a YouTube video of last year's Festival of Learning award-winners



CELEBRATING THE FESTIVAL THAT IS 25 YEARS YOUNG

Festival of Learning, England's biggest celebration of adult education and lifelong learning, celebrated its 25th birthday with a party in June.

Originally conceived as Adult Learners' Week in 1992 to promote the achievements of adult learners and inspire others to join in, Festival of Learning has now recognised close to 2,000 learners, tutors, projects and employers through its annual awards scheme.



The festival marked its milestone with a reception at CityLit, one of London's leading adult education colleges, where inspiring adult learners and representatives from education, charities and business celebrated in the company of Learning and Work Institute Patron, HRH Princess Anne.

"Festival of Learning reminds us of the power of learning to change the way we see ourselves: one of the most common things our adult learning award winners say to us is that they never thought they would achieve what they have," said Learning and Work Institute Chief Executive Stephen Evans.

"Reaching this important milestone demonstrates the continuing



"Festival of Learning is all about providing a platform to tell those stories and inspire others to take that step back into learning."

importance of adult learning in society, but also the continuing need to make the case for investment from individuals and employers, as well as national and local governments."

Many adults who commit to learning have to overcome barriers and make personal sacrifices but the rewards were always worth it, Stephen said. "Festival of Learning is all about providing a platform to tell those stories and inspire others to take that step back into learning," he said.

The winners of this year's Festival of Learning Awards will be announced in September.

Click [here](#) to find out about Festival of Learning

Sharing the bakers' recipe for success

The bakers' union BFAWU is overcoming the obstacles facing the 21st century food industry to help people progress throughout the sector.

🔗 Martin Moriarty

John Vickers, who manages bakers' union BFAWU Learning Services, has been involved with union learning and training for more than four decades since he first joined the union as a young man.

A student of the TUC Postal Courses Centre that once made Tillicoultry in Falkirk famous (where he gained an advanced qualification in arithmetic and statistics), John had also written shop stewards' courses for the union long before he took over as project manager six years ago.

"I've always had the view that as we need to help people, we need to have a decent understanding of what their problems are and a knowledge of techniques we can use to our best advantage to help us to help them," he says.

For John's colleagues in the food industry, the problems are clear. First, many of them leave school with few or no qualifications because they don't receive the right kind of support – and that has the knock-on effect of badly denting their confidence when it comes to personal and professional development.

Second, the vast majority work for companies that have cut staffing levels to the bone, with

some firms forced to agree business on a break-even basis just to keep the production lines rolling, which creates huge obstacles to successful workplace learning.

And third, a significant proportion of food workers are migrants who don't have the kind of language skills they need to cover all aspects of their job, let alone to exercise their employment rights.

But John and his team of dedicated project workers are working hard to overcome all these obstacles, helping food workers (not only union members) update their skills and gain new qualifications, often the first they have ever achieved.

Back in the spring, for example, the BFAWU Learning Services attended a celebration day at Manor Bakeries in Stoke-on-Trent, in the company of General Secretary Ronnie Draper, a long-time supporter of the union learning agenda himself.

And in addition to congratulating learners who had completed English, maths and IT courses, the union team signed a learning agreement with the company, which is part of the giant Premier Foods operation.

"I've always had the view that as we need to help people, we need to have a decent understanding of what their problems are."



At the Fox's Biscuits factory in Batley, West Yorkshire, the union recently ran a well-attended two-day relaunch of the on-site learning centre featuring representatives from the company, including the Fox's training manager, union learning reps and full-time officers from BFAWU and tutors from Chesterfield College.

BFAWU Project Workers Lisa Greenfield and Louise Bennett have also run a series of skills awareness days, using the union's Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) app loaded on their iPads to encourage more than 50 workers to complete a short survey to identify what they were interested in learning.

Both initiatives have been fully supported by management at the company, which is part of the 2 Sisters Food Group, the Birmingham-based business that supplies the big four supermarkets Asda, Morrison's, Sainsbury's and Tesco, as well as the discounters Aldi and Lidl and the upmarket Waitrose.

At Sheffield-based Pennine Foods, which is also part of 2

"There are lots of good things happening and employers are listening to what we're saying but we want them to happen much faster."

Sisters Food Group, the union is offering English, maths and IT courses to workers through its partnership with Dearne Valley College.

To accommodate the needs of the shiftworkers at the factory, Dearne Valley College tutors run workshop sessions that people can drop into either before or after their shifts, while the HR manager on-site has played a positive role in ensuring managers understand when workers have to be released to take part in learning opportunities.

The union has also been offering English courses to colleagues at the Hovis factory in Nottinghamshire, in collaboration with tutors from Leicester College.

The Learning Services team took advantage of the union's annual conference this summer to offer more help to delegates, delivering 119 English assessments, 111 maths assessments and 104 ICT assessments, as well as helping members complete 200 learning needs analyses.

"As far as the union is concerned, we are exceptionally well thought of at every level: by conference, which is the ruling body, by both the general secretary Ronnie Draper and the president Ian Hodson, and by the national executive council (I give them quarterly reports about everything we're doing)," John explains.

In addition to all of this, there is much more in the works, including a potential series of equality and diversity courses for staff at Gregg's, the high street baker that employs 26,000 people (some Gregg's staff are already enrolling on distance learning courses through Leicester College), plus more learning opportunities thanks to a recently signed union recognition agreement with a major European food company.

"There are lots of good things happening and employers are listening to what we're saying but we want them to happen much faster,"

John says. **LR**



Helping the next generation into the spotlight

Union support for high-quality apprenticeships was the major theme of this year's unionlearn annual conference, held at Congress House in July.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty

Apprenticeships were front and centre at this year's unionlearn annual conference, with a panel discussion featuring three current or recent apprentices and the launch of new unionlearn resources to help promote high-quality inclusive programmes in the workplace.

PCS member Samantha Sayers (pictured right) is one of dozens of HMRC members in eastern England who leaped at the chance to undertake apprenticeships through a partnership between the union, their employer and Cambridgeshire Regional College (CRC).

"PCS helped us make all the arrangements with CRC and supported us throughout – it has been lovely to know that they are there if we need them," Samantha said. "And management in the office has been fantastic in giving us the time to do these qualifications."

UNISON member Lauren Foster, a current apprentice at Merseytravel,



said that apprenticeships will make a real difference to individuals and organisations only when people can progress into full-time jobs afterwards. "It's great to have the skills and qualifications, but we need to have something to do after the two years," Lauren said.

Taylor Humphris said she chose her apprenticeship at Unite head office in central London so that she could

"The role of unions to ensure high-quality apprenticeships are in place will become increasingly important."

continue to develop herself.

Her Level 4 apprenticeship has helped her progress in a wide range of ways, she said. "Unite has educated me in more ways than my job: I came to this conference four years ago and I was amazed to see a young woman taking part in the same session then that I'm doing now – the apprenticeship has boosted my confidence to a whole other level."

In her keynote speech to the conference, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady highlighted union work on promoting high-quality

apprenticeships. “Last year, nearly 15,000 apprenticeships were supported by the Union Learning Fund, ensuring employers adopt the very highest standards,” Frances pointed out.

Unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan also emphasised the important role unions play in helping young people undertake apprenticeships that genuinely make the grade.

“As more and more young people are encouraged to go down the apprentice route, the role of unions to ensure high-quality apprenticeships are in place will become increasingly important,” he pointed out.

And Institute for Apprenticeships Chief Executive Peter Lauener set out the organisation’s plans to further expand apprentice numbers in the year ahead. “I’m looking forward to working with unions and hearing about the work that they are doing to support apprenticeships,” he said.

The conference also recognised six dedicated and successful union learning reps (ULRs) during the awards section.

UNISON learning rep Carol McGrath won the literacy award for her work supporting colleagues at Leeds City Council. After setting up a lending library and then a book club at work, Carol has helped encourage more people to get involved in reading and writing in the workplace.

UNISON ULRs Jane Eyre and Bev Herring secured the numeracy award for their work embedding numeracy in Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which has now incorporated the National Numeracy Challenge into the care certificate for

Healthcare Assistants (HCAs) and training (preceptorships) for first-year nurses – and Bev and Jane are hoping this will roll out to the rest of the Trust by the end of the year.

Unite learning rep Danny Davis won the apprenticeships award in recognition of the hundreds of people he has helped enrol on apprenticeships with financial services firm Aviva in the north-east, and the company is now set to roll out the programme to its 17,000 staff across the UK.

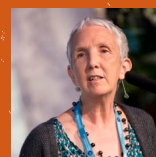
PCS learning rep Ashraj Haji (pictured below with Frances O’Grady and Kevin Rowan) took the award for supporting older workers in his Leicester workplace. He has organised successful events promoting English, maths and IT during Learning at Work Week (LAWW), with IT particularly popular among older workers.

CWU learning rep Neil Crothall won the award for supporting disadvantaged learners, both established staff and young workers, on traineeships with BT, where Neil works in Bristol. Neil has organised informal learning opportunities like

“Last year, nearly 15,000 apprenticeships were supported by the Union Learning Fund, ensuring employers adopt the very highest standards.”



SUPPORT YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY!



Novelist Ann Cleeves, author of the *Shetland* and *Vera* mysteries, made an impassioned plea for continued

support for public libraries. “Libraries supported me when I started, bought my books and had me to talk at events; there would be no *Vera* and no *Shetland* without libraries,” she said.

Inspired by the time she spent working as a school librarian, performance poet Jess Green read her satirical piece *Burning Books*, in which children are prevented from reading books that could spark their imagination while titles from the *Adrian Mole* series to *Macbeth* are put on a proscribed list for content that will let “this country go to rot.”



Comedian, presenter and songwriter Helen Arney performed her song *The Sun Has Got Its Huff On*, originally

written for the 2011 Cheltenham Science Festival and recommended as a teaching tool by The Open University. “The tools scientists use are a way of working out how the world works and working out what is true and false: weighing up the evidence is something you never leave behind at school,” she pointed out.

clay-pigeon shooting and cookery and supported learners on formal qualifications through the union’s online learning platform, Left Click.

As well as recognising the work of the award-winning ULRs, conference also marked the launch of TUC Education’s new ULR Stage 1 course (Stage 2 will be available later in the summer) with a short video, while Education Officer Martin Hegarty took the packed audience through TUC Education’s new eNote on apprenticeships – Know your rights. **LR**

New resources to support ULRs

To coincide with this year's annual conference, unionlearn produced a number of new publications to help union learning reps spread the lifelong learning message.

Making the case for high-quality apprenticeships

The government has launched the biggest overhaul of the apprenticeship system in recent years by introducing the Apprenticeship Levy, planning for three million new starts by 2020 and setting specific targets for the public sector.

But while unions have broadly welcomed the reforms, they have also continued to argue that the generation of new opportunities for young people and existing staff can deliver the skills boost they are designed to do only if all the apprenticeships are genuinely high-quality programmes.

What high-quality apprenticeships look like is comprehensively demonstrated in the latest unionlearn publication on the subject, which



Developing talent: Jaguar Land Rover, working closely with Unite, offers high-quality engineering apprenticeships

collects a wide range of new case studies from a cross-section of industries.

The subjects include one of the young women developing their talents through engineering apprenticeships at Jaguar Land Rover, where Unite works closely with the company to

ensure everyone is able to access potentially life-changing opportunities; an older black man who enrolled on a Financial Services apprenticeship in his 50s; and a young man with autism who has been brilliantly supported by his union rep in his transition from his apprenticeship into full-time work at Sellafield.

Other case studies show how road transport union URTU is helping change workplace culture through partnering with logistics firm XPO in Northamptonshire; how the FBU is delivering personal training apprenticeships that help firefighters cope with the physical demands of their jobs; and how Community has used a tailor-made apprenticeship programme to train a new generation of union organisers.



Opening doors to all

Union learning reps (ULRs), learning centre managers and union project workers know that many of the very people who might most benefit from improving their English, maths or IT skills sometimes face significant barriers to their participation.

Low self-confidence caused by negative experiences at school can create emotional barriers. Negative ideas about age and disability or stereotypical ideas about gender can erect social barriers. Course fees or domestic responsibilities create practical barriers. And lack of any paid release time puts up workplace barriers.

By systematically dismantling all these barriers, union learning projects have helped hundreds of thousands of workers gain crucial qualifications.

Their success is down to a number of factors, as this new booklet points out. Many ULRs share or have shared some of the same disadvantages as their potential learners. Because they are union activists and not part of the HR or training regime, ULRs can more easily gain the trust of colleagues who would not want to disclose their literacy problems, for example, to a manager. And because they have been well trained by their unions or unionlearn, they have the knowledge and skills to engage hard-to-reach learners who might otherwise be excluded, such as agency workers, migrant workers and shift workers.

The case studies in this new collection show how USDAW ULRs have helped workers with low confidence progress at work; how both Unite and URTU have adopted innovative approaches to engaging migrant workers; and how a UNISON branch education officer helped a hearing-impaired learner, who has now become a ULR.



Bargaining for accessible apprenticeships

Over the last decade, the number of disabled people starting apprenticeships has increased significantly, up from 19,230 in 2005/6 to 50,640 in 2015/16.

But this increase has not kept pace with the rapid growth of apprenticeships for non-disabled people, which has meant that the proportion of apprentices classified as disabled has fallen over the same period from 11 to 9.9 per cent.

There are significant barriers that continue to face disabled people who are interested in accessing apprenticeship opportunities, both on the demand side (for example, negative perceptions of apprenticeships, or stereotypical perceptions of occupations) and on the supply side (such as employers that use excluding recruitment practices or providers who fail to focus on equality and diversity).

Unions already offer support to disabled people before, during and after apprenticeships, as illustrated by the case studies in this new guide.

But we can always do more, and the collective bargaining recommendations of the booklet set out in detail many of the ways in which unions and employers can work together to open up opportunities for everyone.



Measuring the success of union learning

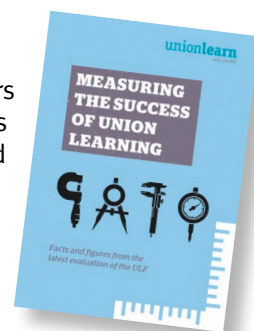
Union learning projects have clocked up a huge number of achievements since the launch of unionlearn 11 years ago – and we have the facts and figures to prove it.

Thanks to the latest evaluation of unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund by the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at the University of Leeds, it's possible to measure the difference made by union learning.

This new short booklet is packed full of easy-to-understand infographics that highlight some of the major achievements of Rounds 15 and 16 of the ULF.

For example, union learning leads to a lifetime benefit to individual learners worth £895m; it helps employers boost productivity to the tune of £558m; and every £1 of funding generates £3.57 benefit to the Exchequer.

The booklet also shows how union learning helps reluctant learners progress at work; how it helps learners of all kinds progress in their careers; and why both unions and employers can reap the benefits of union learning.



Demonstrating the value of what we do

Union members, employers, unions and society at large can all benefit from union learning in the workplace. The Union Learning Advantage eNote sets out all these advantages and includes case studies to demonstrate the value of union learning. The eNote:

- includes all the facts and figures ULRs need to make the case for union learning
- demonstrates the impact of union learning on learners, unions, employers and the UK economy
- explains how members can get involved to spread the message of union learning.

Click [here](#) to download all the publications on this spread

Click [here](#) to access the eNote

Supporting high-quality traineeships

Union, unionlearn and partner organisations came together in July to help each other deliver traineeships that genuinely meet the needs of young people.

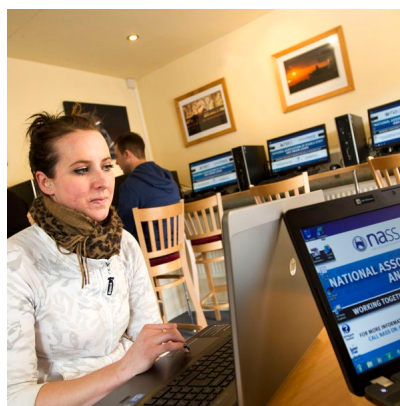
Unionlearn held a productive seminar in July, where representatives from a range of unions and other stakeholders shared best practice on supporting high-quality work placements, pre-apprenticeships and traineeships.

Three case studies examined how different Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects are working with employers, providers and young people to help deliver high-quality programmes that help young people make a smoother transition between school and the world of work.

GMB West Midlands ULF Project Manager Tom Rigby set out how the project uses its time on a work experience programme for disadvantaged young people in Stoke on which 75 per cent of participants progress onto apprenticeships.

National Association of Stable Staff (NASS) ULF Project Manager Kevin Parsons explained how the union has helped design a six-week traineeship that young people entering the industry complete before their apprenticeship.

And GMB Yorkshire & Humber ULF Project Manager Michelle Bateson set out how the project is giving young people productive work experience using the digital fabrication equipment at the Fab Lab based in Keighley College.



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“MTW has provided 62,000 high-quality work placement opportunities to young people.”

Movement To Work (MTW) Programme Director Vasi Nadarajah explained how the organisation has already provided 62,000 high-quality work placement opportunities to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) through its partnerships with 250-plus employers.

Prince's Trust National Corporate Partnerships Director Ben Marson set out how the organisation works with 30 companies to deliver high-quality work experience placements that provide young people with a route to an apprenticeship, paid employment or further study. **LR**



© Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

GIG ECONOMY REPORT FLOATS LEARNING REFORMS

The Taylor Review's failure to deliver “game-changing reforms to end insecurity and exploitation in the gig economy” (in the words of TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady) has received a lot of media coverage.

But the review’s major recommendations on how the government should support progression at work have mostly passed unnoticed.

On the Apprenticeship Levy, the review proposes the programme should be flexed to enable people working atypically, both for companies like Uber and Deliveroo and through agencies, to access apprenticeship training.

On learning accounts, the review suggests focusing initially on some key groups, including older workers and those in receipt of Universal Credit.

Finally, the review highlights the need both to improve career guidance services (with a specific focus on workers in low-paid and atypical employment) and to extend access to high-quality work experience placements at various stages of the education and work cycles.

🔴 [Click here](#) to download your copy of the Taylor Review

🔴 [Click here](#) to read Iain Murray's full analysis on the unionlearn blog

🔴 [Click here](#) to find out more about the Great Jobs Agenda

Switching on to online learning

Union reps, union learning reps and health and safety reps can now start training for their new roles as soon as they are elected via TUC Education's new online learning courses.

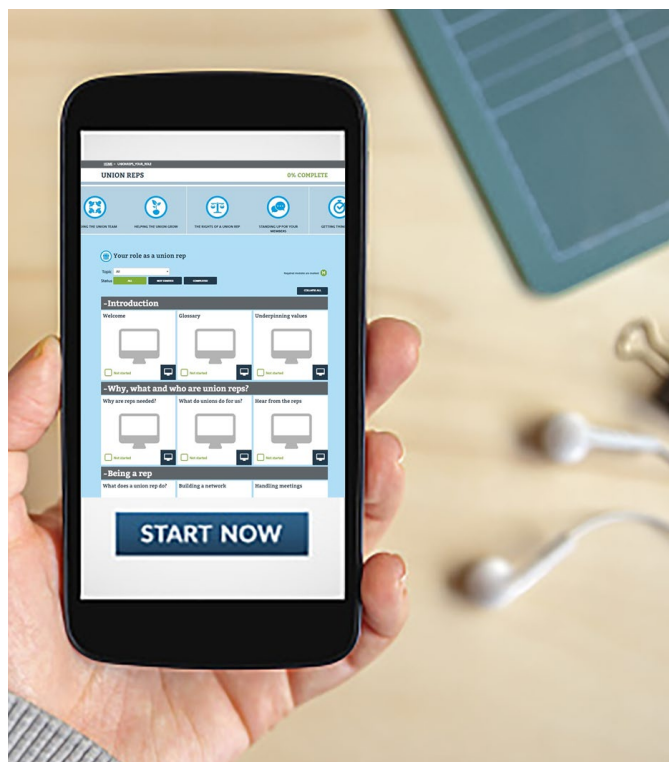
TUC Education is using new technology to introduce fresh opportunities to complement its learning offer.

The organisation has been working hard to reshape its offer for reps' training. Alongside the range of blended/classroom courses, the new offer includes recently developed online courses that bring contemporary technologies into classrooms and workplaces across the UK.

The new online TUC Union Reps Stage 1 course is now freely available online and can be accessed by reps as soon as they take office, where and when most convenient and from a mobile, tablet or desktop computer. The course is also very useful as a refresher for reps who have been in post for some time.

In addition, the Union Learning Reps Stage 1 and Health and Safety Stage 1 courses are both available now and ULR Stage 2 will be launched later in the summer.

Feedback from students has been extremely positive. "The course content is easy to navigate and the short sections might be good for someone who has never undertaken any previous online learning. It's very easy to go back to and pick up – all in all, a nice gentle introduction for a new union



© Carmen Muriel/Getty Images

"Being able to work at your own pace is great and with the tablets and smartphones it means I can work anywhere."

rep," said one learner.

"I'm making my way through the course and am enjoying it so far – I'm really impressed by how professional the whole website is," commented another.

"Being able to work at your own pace is great and with the tablets and smartphones it means I can work anywhere. The content, so far, is good: I loved the note-taking exercise – It

is good to refresh skills as well as learning new ones," said another.

The TUC Education website hosts the new online course directory and online application process, which allows reps to enter their details and apply directly for courses.

[Click here](#) to access the new courses

[Click here](#) to access all courses and TUC resources

UNION LAW ENOTE ON THE WAY

A new eNote on the Trade Union Act will be released later this summer to join the 30-plus eNotes that are already available.

From representing members to mentoring new reps or even contributing to policy working groups, eNotes are an up-to-date and invaluable resource.

[Click here](#) for the full range of eNotes

KEEP UP TO DATE WITH WEBINARS

TUC Education has added a series of webinars to the range of resources on offer to union reps.

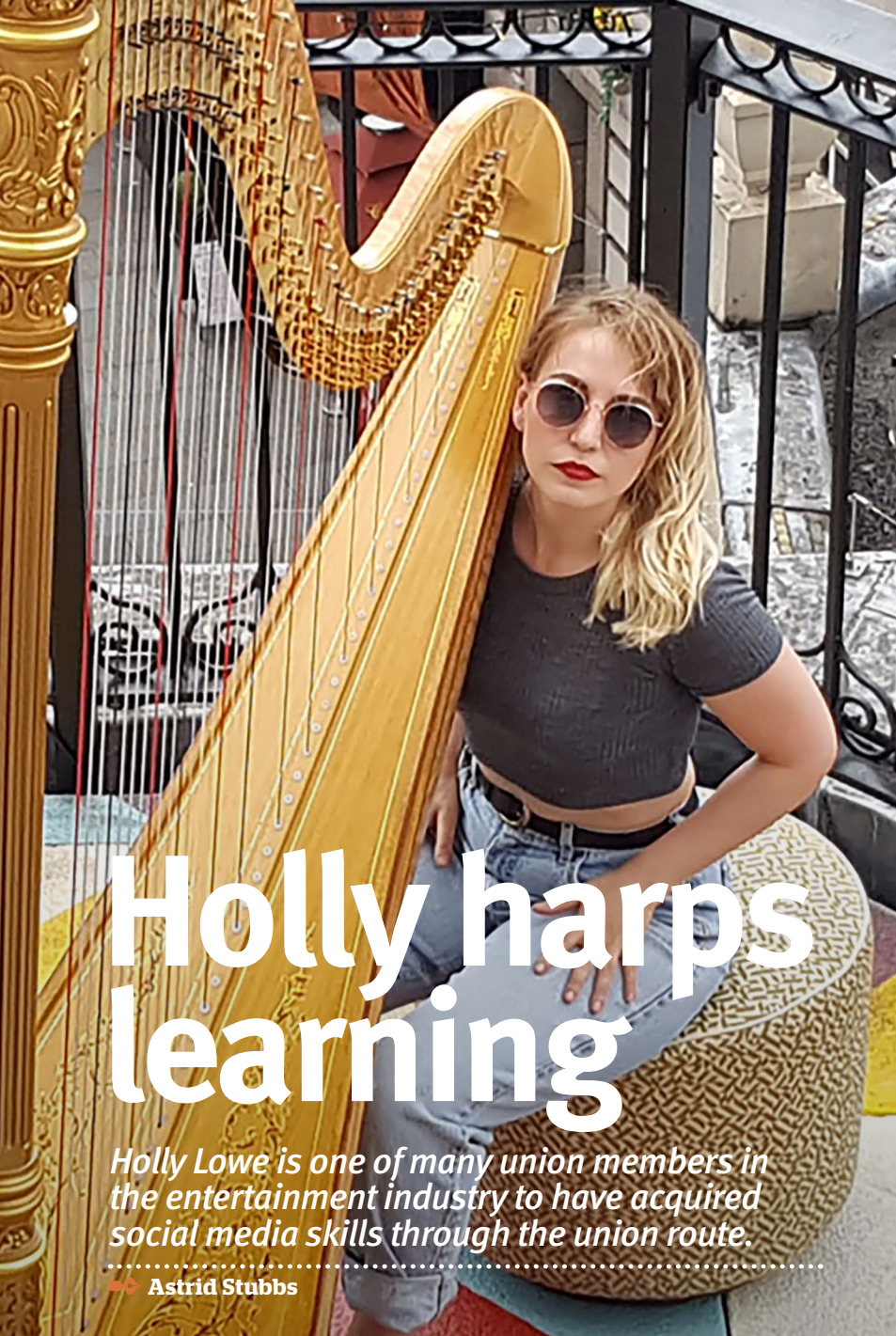
TUC Senior Policy Officer for Health and Safety Hugh Robertson hosted a Tackling Stress in the Workplace live webinar in June. The recording is now available via the link below.

Other health and safety webinars planned for this year include:

- Occupational Cancer on Thursday 14 September
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing on Thursday 16 November.

[Click here](#) to listen to the workplace stress webinar

[Click here](#) to access all webinars



Holly harps learning

Holly Lowe is one of many union members in the entertainment industry to have acquired social media skills through the union route.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

When she is not hard at work practising or on tour performing with her harp, Musicians' Union member Holly Lowe is reaching new audiences through social media, which is why she leaped at the chance to take part in a social media course this summer.

The course was organised by the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU), a partnership between the actors' union Equity, the Musicians' Union, the National Union of Journalists and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain.

"The websites and tools that the internet can offer to help you with your social media presence was a

real eye-opener during the course," says Holly.

"As a musician, I loved learning how to maximise coverage by the time of day and what social media platform you use to release your videos and photos. Since the course, I have tried to implement this and have found that my music is reaching more and more people."

Born and brought up in North Wales, Holly has played the harp since the age of eight, and studied at the Junior Department of The Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), The Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) and The Royal College of Music (RCM).

Now based in London, Holly is a member of the award-winning Lilium

"I loved learning how to maximise coverage by the time of day and what social media platform you use to release your videos and photos. Since the course, my music is reaching more and more people."

Trio and one half of the duo Tendons, in which she works with performance artist/DJ Nwando Ebizie to mix spoken word, harp and electronics. She also plays with the Southbank Sinfonia, the Royal Northern Sinfonia and the New London Orchestra.

Holly also continues the outreach work she began as a student at RCM, performing in retirement homes and hospitals in London and North Wales, and has worked with Nonclassical, the cutting-edge classical club-night and record label based in East London.

Tutor Frances Dredge says FEU Training gets an excellent response because it is specifically developed for its target audience of freelance members. They all need to be able to pitch their ideas, market their work and manage their finances if they are to maximise their career potential in highly competitive industries.

"People love the fact that they can learn from industry professionals in a peer group environment: being freelance often means long periods of working on your own so getting together to compare notes is motivating and inspires new ideas," says Frances.

"Freelancers only get this support from FEU Training, because employers are not responsible for their learning needs: demand for course places often outstrips supply by two or three to one."

The FEU is running a programme of venue-based courses and webinars throughout 2017, as well as a range of online training and information with the aim of improving accessibility. **LR**

✦ [Click here](#) to find out more about FEU Training