

LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Autumn 2018

Why saving Quick Reads matters to ULRs

- ▶ *Unionlearn annual conference*
- ▶ *Festival of Learning*
- ▶ *20 years of Usdaw learning*
- ▶ *Helping pupils plan careers*
- ▶ *Career Learning Pilots*

unionlearn
from the TUC



KEEPING ON TRACK TO TRAIN

MANY OF THE LEARNERS STARTING

Level 3 courses this autumn through the five Career Learning Pilots around the country will be studying because their unions and unionlearn originally alerted them to the opportunities this summer. We ran successful events in four out of five pilot areas in June and July and in every one of them we met learning reps who were swift to understand the potential benefit to their learners of the range of subsidy towards studying at Level 3 that the different pilots are experimenting with.

“We ran successful events in four out of five pilot areas and in every one of them we met learning reps who were swift to understand the potential benefit to their learners.”

But in addition to opening doors to union learners, the pilots will also be generating valuable data that will help inform the development of the National Retraining Scheme (NRS), which the TUC is currently working on with the CBI and the Department for Education (DfE).

The NRS is a major opportunity to set the skills agenda for a generation. As Skills Minister Ann Milton observed when she gave the keynote address to our annual conference in July, many skill initiatives have come and gone over the past few decades without resolving the fundamental underlying problems. We agree with her assessment that the NRS must not go the same way. The challenges we face are simply too significant not to do everything we can to make a success of this opportunity. 

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
from the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

Festival of Learning awards commend GMB learning rep



GMB learning rep Andy Humphries was Highly Commended in the Learning for Work category at this year's Festival of Learning Awards for making massive progress after he was diagnosed with dyslexia.

The 45-year-old gardener had always struggled with reading and writing but has worked his way up the learning ladder – and overcome some mental health issues – since attending a standard dyslexia screening at Mansfield District Council, where he works.

After completing Entry Level 1 in functional skills, Andy progressed to Level 1 English and maths and is currently undertaking a Level 3 apprenticeship in horticulture. He has also gained qualifications in horticulture, health and safety and team leading.

As a result of his learning, Andy has gained the skills and confidence to deputise for his manager and is working towards his long-term dream of becoming a supervisor, while continuing to support his colleagues in his role as a union learning

rep (ULR).

“Before diagnosis, I was frustrated, angry and sometimes depressed,” Andy says. “Now I feel on top of the world: I have new hobbies, I’m more engaged with the community but most of all I have proved that if you are positive and driven you can achieve your goals.”

New agreements with OU and Linking London

Unionlearn signed updated Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the Open University (OU) and with Linking London at this year's annual conference in July.

The MoU with Linking London aims to increase the opportunities for vocational learners to progress into all levels of higher education through closer partnership working between the organisations.

The other members of Linking London are looking into emulating Birkbeck and offering a 10 per cent discount to union members who access their courses,

according to Linking London Director Sue Betts, who signed the MoU.

The MoU with the OU aims to widen opportunities for vocational learners to progress into and through higher education and will enable unionlearn and the OU to expand their partnership working.

Apprenticeship gender targets needed to combat skills shortages



National targets to help women enter male-dominated sectors are needed to combat gender segregation in apprenticeships and boost the economy, according to a new report published by Young Women's Trust, the charity that supports young women on low or no pay.

"The growing skills shortage in sectors like construction and engineering will not be plugged unless employers help more young women into relevant apprenticeships," says Young Women's Trust Chief Executive Dr Carole Easton.

"But Young Women's Trust has found that young women across the country are shut out of these sectors due to gender stereotypes and a lack of support."

That's why the Trust is calling on the government to set time-limited national targets to boost the number

of women apprentices in sectors where they are under-represented.

"Unionlearn would encourage employers in sectors where women are under-represented to work with trade unions and take positive action to increase the number of women applying for these apprenticeships," says unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan.

More female STEM apprentices required

Failing to increase the numbers of women taking the apprenticeship route in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) disciplines will have serious impact on UK productivity, especially as the country heads towards leaving the European Union, according to a new parliamentary report.

Despite growing concerns about the supply of STEM skills in the workforce since the early 2000s, only 8 per cent of STEM apprenticeship starts are by women, according to the report, *Delivering STEM Skills for the Economy*, produced by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee.

New materials to promote Rainbow Years mid-life project

Unionlearn has produced a new poster and leaflet to promote the Erasmus+ Rainbow Years Project, which aims to develop a

digitally supported mid-life skills review that can help prepare workers to be more resilient in the face of labour market challenges they may face in the future.

The EU-funded project brings together partners from the UK (the Learning & Work Institute and The Marchmont Observatory at the University of Exeter), Spain, Germany, Finland, France and Italy.

The project will develop a new good practice model for the delivery of a mid-life skills review – with the emphasis on reviewing skills and competences and

targeted at workers who need help improving their literacy, numeracy and IT skills.

The model will include a suite of new materials, including an interactive online skills assessment tool and new online learning modules, which will all be translated into partner languages.

Online version of Value My Skills tool is coming soon

Unionlearn has begun work on an online version of the popular Value My Skills cards that will also include support and follow-up functions.

"This is a really exciting development for us as it will widen participation and encourage people to review their skills," says Projects Officer Jane Warwick.

Later this year Jane will be putting

together a small pilot group to look at the new tool: please contact her using the link below if you would like to take part.

[Click here](#) to register your interest in looking at the new tool

Supporting Learners autumn programme is revealed

ULRs can catch up with the latest updates in workplace learning and find out about new resources to help them in their role at the six regional Supporting Learners events unionlearn is running this autumn.

The events will cover issues such as mental health at work, digital skills, blogging and the National Retraining Scheme and offer ULRs the chance to share ideas and experiences with each other.

The programme kicks off in London at the beginning of October and closes in Leeds at the end of November.

- Thursday 4 October: London, Friends Meeting House, Euston
- Tuesday 16 October: Newcastle, The County Hotel
- Wednesday 24 October: Bristol, Watershed Media Centre
- Wednesday 7 November: Liverpool, The Liner
- Wednesday 14 November: Birmingham, The Studio, Cannon Street
- Tuesday 27 November: Leeds, City Museum.

[Click here](#) to reserve your place on your regional event





Skills Minister **Ann Milton** (right) and TUC General Secretary **Frances O'Grady** present Unite ULR **Sue Kinnard** with her award

Facing the future together

Hundreds of participants gathered at Congress Centre this summer to help set the unionlearn agenda for the year ahead.

✚ **Martin Moriarty**

Apprenticeships and Skills Minister Anne Milton (pictured above, right) paid a warm tribute to the achievements of unionlearn at the annual conference at Congress Centre in July, while a wide range of other speakers set out some of the key challenges for union learning in the years ahead.

“Unionlearn is one of the success stories of the education and training world and in many ways an unsung success story,” Ann said.

“It provides a vital route into education for many thousands of people each year, figures are really quite impressive – on average 220,000 learners receive help every year and 63 per cent of learners have gained a qualification as a result.

“But for me it’s how unionlearn do this and take advantage of this that sets it apart – the how is largely down to the union learning reps, volunteers who give up time and effort to encourage others and make them aware of the training opportunities open to them.”

In her keynote address, TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady focused on the central role of union learning in equipping members for the fourth industrial revolution.

“We’ve got nothing to fear from the tech revolution if it’s matched with a revolution in skills, workplace rights and social protections, if we make sure that tech-poor communities are included and if we support all workers, not just the high-flyers,” Frances said.

“As the voice of working people in every part

“Unionlearn is one of the success stories of the education and training world and in many ways an unsung success story.”

of the economy – including the scientists, engineers and academics at the forefront of change – unions have a key role to play, and our mission must be this: to ensure that the tech revolution is not something done to working people but with them and by them and for them.”

Lord Blunkett, who currently chairs the Heathrow Skills Taskforce but was Education Secretary when the Union Learning Fund (ULF) was launched 20 years ago, echoed Frances’s points about the potential of learning to empower people in changing times.

“We have a major challenge ahead: the very nature of work is changing, not just the gig economy and zero-hours and the fragmentation of the old workplaces I grew up with but the whole change to artificial intelligence and robotics,” he said.

Progression through lifelong learning offered the chance for people to gain a degree of control over their own lives, he said.

“The challenge of tomorrow is not to go into a bunker and feel that there’s no hope and go totally defensive and try and block what’s happening around us like the Luddites of the 21st century but actually to take a grip of it, to make the trade union movement the driving force for people’s understanding of what’s happening around them and then to be able to influence it and get a grip,” he said.

Quick Reads author Vaseem Khan focused on the transformative effects of reading in his speech.



Both Lord Blunkett (left) and Vaseem Khan (right) focused on how learning can empower people in changing times

“Even though I’m an author now, reading was never part of my childhood – my mother could read but was busy raising kids and my dad still can’t read,” he revealed. “Once I got going, reading became second nature to me and it became an escape from a relatively tough upbringing in East London but it also laid the foundations for an education and a career that has taken me around the world.”

Vaseem also ran a very well-received workshop that set out the key elements of moving a story idea into a completed work of fiction, one of six sessions that delegates were able to take part in after lunch.

This year’s panel discussion offered some different perspectives on the importance of lifelong learning from CWU ULR Parminder Kaur, who was awarded an MBE for her services to learning five years ago; EDF Energy Industrial Relations & Reward Director Philip Parker; Sue Betts, the director of Linking London, the partnership of 49 universities, colleges and others set up in 2006 to improve progression on the vocational learning ladder; and Dr Liz Marr, Director of Teaching, Learning and Teaching Innovation at The Open University. **LR**

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Unionlearn published a trio of useful resources at this year’s annual conference.

- *Supporting Black and Minority Ethnic Apprentices: a resource for union negotiators and reps* will help reps improve BME participation in apprenticeships.
- *Helping Young People Into Work and Training* includes five case studies of different models where unions are helping young people to get the support they need to develop their job prospects.
- *Promoting Union Learning: the reps who spread the word* is a new booklet of infographics that summarises the impact of union work on learning in the workplace, using data from the 2017 unionlearn survey of ULRs and union reps supporting learning and skills.



RECOGNISING OUR REPS

Eight union learning reps (ULRs) won awards for their dedication to helping different groups of workers access crucial workplace learning opportunities at this year’s unionlearn annual conference.

PCS learning rep Stella Perrett, who was herself an apprentice when she was younger, won the apprenticeships award for helping young people on the programme at the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol.

Usdaw learning rep Trish Baldwin won her award for supporting workers with digital needs at the Tesco store in Hull.

Unite learning reps Sue Kinnard and Danuta Smoliniec were the Supporting Disadvantaged Learners award winners for setting up a course in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for many of the Eastern European workers at a fish factory in Grimsby.

Usdaw learning rep John Goodwin won the literacy award for helping migrant workers get their literacy skills up to scratch at the DHL centre in Stoke.

UNISON ULRs Jane Eyre and Bev Herring won the numeracy award for the second year, running for their innovative and engaging work at Blackpool Victoria Hospital.

The final award for supporting older workers went to another UNISON learning rep, Donald McCombie from the Birmingham City Branch.

Developing our learning networks

Unions up and down the country engaged new and existing learners with packed programmes of tasters, workshops and fun activities during Festival of Learning and Learning at Work Week this summer.

Michelle Whitley and Kerry Dunning, who coordinate Usdaw's The Learning Curve at the Sainsburys Argos sites in Widnes and Acton Gate teamed up with the company's engagement team to put on the biggest week of open days that they have ever organised during Learning at Work Week.

As a result, they have now enrolled 45 colleagues on a variety of learning opportunities.

The week kicked off with a Mental Health Awareness Day, when mental health first aiders advised staff on how to maintain mental wellbeing in the workplace while Nic Lunt from MIND offered confidential chats to colleagues who wanted advice for themselves, friends and family.

On day two, staff were able to work on their CV writing and interview skills, learn about the opportunities and courses available and prepare themselves to progress through the business.

Day three coincided with the union's annual Supporting Parents and Carers Spotlight Day, which this year focused on the vital role working dads and partners of new mothers play in bringing up children.

In addition, staff from Halton Carers Centre visited the Widnes site for drop-in sessions and booked appointments, and Kerry and Michelle gave an extra push to the Numeracy Challenge by setting up a TV with a presentation explaining how to use the website.

Day four concentrated on the



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"It was great being able to network throughout the business and link in with lots of different departments."

recruitment and learning day in Acton Gate, where there was a fantastic response from colleagues. And on day five, Kerry and Michelle set out everything from the week for people who hadn't been able to make earlier sessions or wanted to revisit anything.

"We had a wonderful journey through the week: it was great being able to network throughout the business and link in with lots of different departments," says Michelle.

Mental health first aiders team member Jon Simons was very enthusiastic about the week-long

programme. "It was great to work alongside the communications team and Learning Curve in an aligned agenda to make the working day for our colleagues the best it can be, and empowering everyone to work on developing themselves beyond their current role and in areas outside of work too."



Railworkers get onboard with wellbeing

Around 50 railworkers from four different train operating companies took part in health and wellbeing

taster sessions and ICT drop-in sessions at Newcastle Station organised by train drivers' union ASLEF to mark Learning at Work Week and Mental Health Awareness Week in May.

"We ran some taster workshops around health and wellbeing including laughter yoga and chair yoga workshops, where those attending learned how to breathe and relax and exercise the body and mind," explains ASLEF learning rep Graham Chesters.

"We are also aware that there is a major issue with many railworkers not being 'up to speed' with their digital skills so providing some drop-in tutor support sessions was a way of engaging with potential learners."

ASLEF learning reps from Virgin Trains East Coast, Arriva Rail North, Transpennine Express and Cross Country Trains were granted paid release to support the four-day event and engage their colleagues, while the sessions themselves were



(c) Thomas Northcote/Getty Images

provided by Gateshead College.

Union learning shines at Diamond Light Source

Six hundred and fifty members of staff at Diamond Light Source, the pioneering scientific facility near Didcot, Oxfordshire, took part in the series of talks, tasters and training sessions organised by Prospect union learning rep Lloyd Collier during this year's Learning at Work

Week (LAWW).

"There was something for everyone, a mix of learning and development, wellbeing and fun activities," Lloyd explains.

The learning and development opportunities included a one-day workshop to help people improve their presentation skills, briefings on grant applications and mentoring, and a session on the value of networking.

Wellbeing activities included hatha yoga, Alexander Technique and a participatory thriving mind workshop.

The fun came in a wide variety of forms, including a board game café, a hula hoop tricks and skills workshop, an American football taster and a balancing robot knockout challenge.

"Learning at Work Week started off as a union-only event six years ago but our employer has gradually got more involved each year," Lloyd says.

Boosting learning on the buses

The North East, Yorkshire & Humberside Learn With Unite team organised a wide range of activities in the region during Learning at Work Week.

At First Bus, there were free haircuts for members and reps at the Hunslet depot; support for learning and legal advice at the Bradford depot; and at Bramley, there were hazard perception and cycle maintenance classes for the drivers, a football competition and an awareness session in the learning centre; plus an early morning breakfast event promoting the opportunities available to members via Learn with Unite at First Bus South Yorkshire.

The team also ran a successful event at Yorkshire Bank in Leeds, which generated interest in joining the union as well as taking up learning opportunities; and a joint



MAKING SMOOTHIE PROGRESS IN LEEDS

The Leeds Local Government Branch of UNISON organised an event for the 200 staff at the council's catering section in Knowsthorpe to mark both Learning at Work Week (LAWW) and Mental Health Awareness Week.

Visitors from within the building and across the council could improve their health and wellbeing with a spot of table tennis, a hand massage or a wide range of smoothies made with everything from banana to spinach.

The unionlearn table promoted stress awareness and mental health with iPads supplied by GMB using online quizzes to help people get to grips with mental health issues.

The event was organised by the Leeds City Council Joint Trade Union Learning Coordinators Donna Padget and Julie Butterfield, with support from GMB Project Worker Emma Bew and Unite Learning Organiser Chris Muscroft.

event with MIND at the Aviva site in Monks Cross promoting learning and mental health.

In addition, the team ran events promoting learning, mental health and wellbeing at Sheffield, Leeds and Hull city councils. **LR**

Riding the waves of change

Since running one of the very first Union Learning Fund pilot projects 20 years ago, Ann Murphy has helped thousands of Usdaw members prepare themselves for the challenges reshaping their sector.

🔗 Martin Moriarty

When Ann Murphy started work at Littlewoods in the late 1970s, the Liverpool-based retail, home shopping and betting giant was the largest private company in Europe.

But the relentless growth of online retail and the landgrab by US tech giants such as Amazon over the past two decades has shrunk the country's traditional home shopping sector to a shadow of its former self.

Yet throughout this painful restructuring in home shopping alongside the constant pressure on its retail counterpart, Usdaw has proved a steadfast ally for all its members.

Not only has the union continued to negotiate hard on pay, conditions and redundancy (when necessary) but it has also successfully delivered a wide range of high-quality learning opportunities for all its members that have helped them ride the waves of change.

Now national lifelong learning coordinator at Usdaw, Ann has been at the heart of the union's work on learning since the launch of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) 20 years ago.

Ann originally joined the union as soon as she started at Littlewoods, was elected as a steward shortly afterwards and rose to become senior

rep onsite before being offered the chance of a research secondment at Wirral Metropolitan College in the mid-1990s.

The project was to investigate the barriers to learning faced by part-time women workers, an issue Ann was already familiar with from her years at Littlewoods.

"An awful lot of women work part-time because they have the key caring responsibilities for the children and for elderly relatives, and an awful lot of them would say they were just doing their job until the kids went to school, so they didn't recognise or value the skills they had, so learning was something that was just not on the radar," Ann recalls.

The secondment would prove a turning point for Ann: her research caught the attention of Dave Eva, who she had met a few years earlier when he was teaching one of the TUC Education reps' courses she was a student on.

By the late 1990s, Dave was leading the North West TUC Bargaining for Skills project, probably the most successful of the regional partnerships between the TUC and the local Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) that had begun to raise awareness of skills among unions and employers.

"It started in a sector that was huge within Usdaw at the time but virtually doesn't exist now, which is home shopping."

Dave immediately saw the relevance of Ann's research and invited her to join the team part-time (she reduced her work with Wirral Met to three days a week to accommodate the change).

"Some unions were really sceptical at the time about what learning had to do with them but when you approached it from the point of view of who was getting the investment in training and development, they could see their members were getting nothing," Ann recalls.

"We went into workplaces and asked people, 'What skills do you need to be employable – not just with your current employer but what would you need to develop to move to different areas of work?'"

With the launch of the ULF in 1998, Usdaw secured funding to run two pilot projects – one in home shopping, the other in retail – and Ann relinquished her work at Wirral Met to look after both of them, under the watchful eye of the union's then Education Officer James Rees.

Ann took on the full-time role of ULF Project Manager two years later, with the increase in government funding that allowed the projects to significantly expand.

"It started in a sector that was huge within Usdaw at the time but virtually doesn't exist now, which is the home shopping sector," Ann recalls.

"That was where we developed the learning model that we still use today, where you develop a big community of learners with a learning centre in a workplace on site, which we subsequently rolled out to different workplaces and different sectors to get us to where we are today."

One of the very first onsite learning centres that the union opened was back at Ann's former employer Littlewoods, in the Shaw National Distribution Centre in Greater Manchester. It would go on to help hundreds of workers improve their skills over the following 20 years before current owners Shop Direct announced earlier this year – to near-universal local dismay – they were closing the site.

Udaw project workers and ULRs have always worked hard to remove barriers to participation, whether they are personal or financial, Ann says. "Every bit of learning is good for people's personal development and social mobility but getting some people to recognise that was quite difficult at the time," Ann says.

In addition, many hadn't done any learning since they'd left school and often had bad memories of being browbeaten in the classroom. "We would say, 'Our learning is different – it's about what you want to do, what skills would you like to have, would you like to help your kids with their homework?'"



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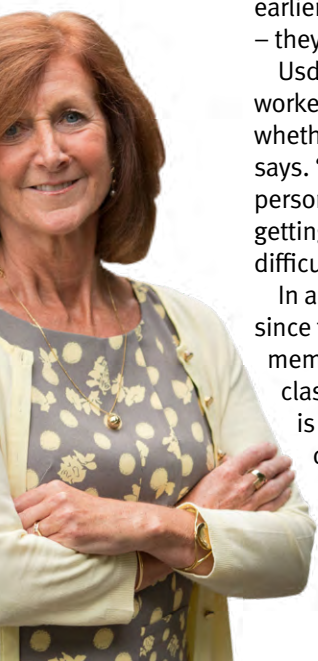
"The number of people we've been able to get involved in learning, the 750 learning reps we now have, the 70-plus learning centres – learning is now mainstream and part of the Usdaw offer."

Removing financial barriers has been equally important. "Our mantra was 'Making learning accessible and affordable to members'," says Ann.

"With English and maths being free we would have struggled to engage people because cost was and still remains a major barrier. When you're talking about people on low incomes with a lot of demands on them, affordable learning is absolutely critical – so we did what trade unions have always done and we got rid of the barriers to our members, although some of those barriers still exist and the psychological barriers still loom large."

After two decades helping members improve their lives through learning, there is a long list of Usdaw achievements that Ann could compile. "The number of people we've been able to get involved in learning, the 750 learning reps we now have, the 70-plus learning centres – learning is now mainstream and part of the Usdaw offer," Ann says.

"Everything we have done at Usdaw has linked learning to our organising agenda, whether that's recruiting members or building branches, and that has been the bedrock of our campaigning – it's not just about learning it's about union learning and organising through that union learning," Ann says. **LR**



Bringing the skills message to schools

Primary school pupils joined union reps to celebrate apprenticeships at a unique event to mark 150 years since the first TUC Congress in Manchester.

✚ Martin Moriarty

Union reps and primary school pupils celebrated apprenticeships together at a unique event in Manchester's Mechanics Institute in June, organised by the TUC to mark 150 years since the first Congress in the very same venue.

Sharing the tables with their teachers and the adult reps, the children took an active part in a multiple-choice quiz about social and political change and put some tough questions about fairness and the future of work to Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, who was the keynote speaker.

Inviting the year six pupils from Christ the King RC primary school in Salford came about after their headteacher Nichola Potts dropped by the unionlearn stall at the Big Bang UK Young Scientists & Engineers Fair in Birmingham in March.

Nichola talked to Projects Officer Mark Rowe about some of the trade union stories included in the 'Campaigning for change' topic that she had originally introduced when she taught year six, before becoming head two years ago.

"Mark mentioned that this event was coming up to mark the TUC's 150th anniversary and asked if we would be interested in sending a class and I said 'Absolutely!'." she recalls.

The quiz that kicked off the event was delivered by Unite rep Kate Lewis, who is a member of the Unite in Schools programme that delivers union awareness-raising sessions for school pupils (see sidebar).

"The children loved that they got



to sit with the reps, they loved the fact that they could do the quiz, they felt really grown-up, they felt really included, they felt equal to the adults in the sense that they could represent themselves," Nichola says.

In his keynote speech, Andy Burnham revealed – with a nod to the apprenticeship theme of the event – that his administration was currently working on a scheme to provide free bus passes to all 16- to 18-year-olds to help more young people travel to the



"The children loved that they got to sit with the reps, they loved the fact that they could do the quiz."

apprenticeships they want.

In the Q&A session that followed Andy's speech, pupils asked questions about whether there would be enough

jobs to go round in the future, whether wages would go up or down in the years ahead and what the TUC would be fighting for in 100 years' time, prompting the mayor to observe that it was the youngsters who asked the toughest questions.

After some time on their own with the mayor, the pupils left the event, armed with a package of unionlearn speech bubbles for use in an activity about their career plans when they returned to school.

For the activity, the children were asked to use the speech bubbles to spell out their career ambitions and the skills they would need to reach them.

A couple of weeks later, they presented their bubbles at an afternoon event (featuring tea and cakes) that was open to parents, grandparents and carers and dubbed 'Equaliteas'.

In keeping with the equality theme of the session, several of the girls' speech bubbles revealed how they were thinking beyond job stereotypes: one had her sights set on engineering, another on football, while a third was planning to get elected as mayor.

And all of the pupils had thought carefully about what they would need to get their dream jobs, listing not only the relevant academic qualifications for becoming nurses, vets, teachers or sportspeople, but also softer skills like problem-solving, empathy and resilience.

After presenting their speech bubbles, the pupils took part in a discussion led by unionlearn Project Officer Matt Pointon that explored the progress that has been made to achieve equality between men and women and what still needs to be done.

"The maturity of the children in the debate at the 'Equaliteas' event and back at the Mechanics Institute was unbelievable – what a credit to the school," Matt says. "And the interplay of generations with grandparents and parents and staff contributing as well as the pupils is something we need more of in this country at the moment." **LR**



TALKING TO THE TRADE UNIONISTS OF THE FUTURE

Unite in Schools is the national programme run by Britain's biggest union to teach pupils about the positive role of trade unions in the workplace and community through participatory sessions run by specially trained Unite activists.

"Our objective is not to talk at pupils but to listen to them and get them talking and participating," explains National Coordinator Mary Sayer.

"We never like to stand at the front and start talking about the Tolpuddle Martyrs, that's not our style: we place everything within their own experience and at the end of a good session, they tell us what unions should be doing! We have the greatest time: we learn as we go along, the kids never let us down and it's such a buzz when it goes well."

Mary, who has herself delivered sessions with primary school pupils in the north-west, enjoys working with children in that age group. "We have worked very successfully with year sixes in Wythenshawe – they're so receptive and so responsive and they don't have any of the hang-ups of adolescence!"

Mary is positive about the recent North West unionlearn event with Christ the King's year six pupils. "Integrating the year sixes with the adults changed everything, the quiz got everybody talking and I thought Andy Burnham handled his Q&A session really well," she says.

Unite in Schools is keen to hear from ULRs who have suggestions about schools to visit, parent-governors to approach, or youth groups to get in touch with.

[Click here](#) to get in touch with Unite in Schools

Steering training in the right direction

Results from the government's five Career Learning Pilots will help shape the development of the new National Retraining Scheme.

✚ Martin Moriarty

Unionlearn has organised awareness-raising events in four of the five Career Learning Pilot areas and is following up with unions in all the areas to help ensure the scheme generates both take-up and data.

The government is investing £10m in the pilots in order to test both what levels of subsidy achieve the greatest learner engagement and which messages attract greatest participation (and which organisations – or ‘messengers’ – are best placed to deliver them).

The schemes are running in Greater Lincolnshire, Heart of the South-West, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, West Midlands Combined Authority and West Yorkshire Combined Authority/Leeds City Region.

“Every pilot offers a suite of courses – some are 100 per cent funded, some are 75 per cent funded and some are 25 per cent funded,” says unionlearn Projects Officer Matt Pointon, who is looking after three of them.

“But the courses themselves differ across the country, because each pilot is focused on the needs of that particular area.”

Each pilot is also focusing on different groups, experimenting with different messages about what works best with each of them: in the West Midlands, one of the target groups is people on Universal Credit; while in Stoke-on-Trent one of the target groups is mothers returning to work after childcare commitments.

The results from all five will be enormously important since they will inform the future development of the National Retraining Scheme (NRS), which the TUC is currently working on with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Department for Education (DfE).

Unionlearn is in the prime position of being one of only two national ‘messenger’ organisations to be involved in all five pilots, alongside the National Careers Service (NCS).

General union GMB hosted an event in Stoke-on-Trent, which was organised in partnership with the local authority, that featured an inspiring presentation by GMB Officer Tommy Dawkins about the power of learning.

The West Midlands event followed at the CWU office in Birmingham, which featured a workshop on how the Combined Authority

“Unionlearn is in the prime position of being one of only two national ‘messenger’ organisations to be involved in all five pilots.”





could work with trade unions on their regional skills plan, which led to the establishment of a small working group to move that work forward.

The Leeds event, which was held at the City Museum, brought together more than 30 participants from local unions to find out more about the pilot, and unionlearn Projects Officer Mark Rowe has been following it up by meeting more unions to ensure the message gets out to potential learners.

The final event was held at Taunton Racecourse and Projects Officer Andy Moss has also been following up with local unions that were unable to attend on the day.

While the Greater Lincolnshire LEP didn't want an event, Matt has been following up with individual local unions, including GMB, UNISON, URTU and Usdaw, to help promote the opportunities that will be available in the part of the county where the LEP is concentrating its work. **LR**



PROMOTING NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MIDLANDS

GMB West Midlands Region has been promoting the Level 3 learning opportunities available through two Career Learning Pilots within its geographical area.

The union included a major awareness-raising session in its annual conference for the social care sector in June, when unionlearn Projects Officer Matt Pointon set out exactly what was on offer.

In addition, the region is getting the word out about the initiative by briefing 100 of its reps by October.

"The Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Career Learning Pilot is particularly good for our many members working in the private social sector in the area because it offers the possibility of some free Level 3 training," explains Regional Education Officer Tom Rigby.

"That's a development pathway not normally open to them because the employers haven't been funding a lot of places and if you're on the kind of wages they pay in the care sector it's difficult to find the money to pay the course fees."

Because of the different local characteristics of the five Career Learning Pilots, there are no free courses available in the West Midlands initiative, but there is a wide range of alternatives in other sectors available at 25 per cent of the usual cost, which makes them significantly more affordable for learners on lower incomes.

In addition, GMB members can apply for help from the union's National Lifelong Learning Fund, which offers bursaries to members, and the Paul O'Connor Bursary scheme, which could help them cover the remaining cost of the courses they choose.

"We think this is a great opportunity, we want to make it work and we are getting a lot of interest whenever we talk to people about it," Tom says.

"Plus it's an important chink in the armour that everything at Level 3 will cost you the full rate, which is not delivering in terms of skills because there has been a massive decline in adult learners doing Level 3 qualifications."

New framework for driver training

ASLEF has helped create a new Level 3 apprenticeship standard for train drivers in partnership with key players in the industry.

Train drivers' union ASLEF has played an important role as a member of the Trailblazer group that developed the new Level 3 Train Driver Apprenticeship Standard, which went live in June.

Last year, a separate Trailblazer group started work on a Level 2 Passenger Transport Driver Standard that included train drivers with bus and coach drivers.

But the standard went live before the union was able to make the case for a separate framework for train drivers, despite lobbying by ASLEF and unionlearn.

"We have always believed there are clear operational reasons why the job should be at Level 3," explains ASLEF Project Coordinator Shirley Handsley.

It was a conversation about the Apprenticeship Levy between Shirley, ASLEF Industrial Rep Andy Botham and East Midlands Trains HR Director Kirsty Derry that opened the door to the new Standard.

"Kirsty agreed that train and bus are completely different and took the issue to the employers' HR Directors Group of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which she also chairs," Shirley says.

Around the same time, Shirley was able to discuss the issue with a representative of the National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR), thanks to a meeting of the Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce (STAT).

"NSAR had been responsible for all the engineering standards, they knew a lot about apprenticeship standards and they also thought the train driver role should be at Level 3," Shirley says.



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"Train Driver Level 3 means that finally drivers entering the industry get the opportunity to be recognised at the level equivalent to the job that they carry out."

Driven by Marie Orchard from NSAR and Kirsty Derry, the new Level 3 Trailblazer group was launched last August, and has welcomed ASLEF involvement in development of the Standard.

"We genuinely feel that any point we put across has been valued and listened to," Shirley says.

As a result of ASLEF's work on the Trailblazer group, the new Level 3 standard also includes

the requirement for a Level 2 ICT qualification, in addition to English and maths.

The Level 2 Standard has also been revised to focus solely on bus and coach drivers.

Andy Botham brought his knowledge and experience as a train driver to the group, Shirley says, while Martin Reeves from the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA), provided valuable guidance on the drafting of the new standard.

"The creation of the Train Driver Level 3 means that finally drivers entering the industry get the opportunity to be recognised at the level equivalent to the job that they carry out," says ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan.

"Trailblazer groups should be encouraged to work closer with trade unions to support the creation of apprenticeship standards that are relevant to job role and ensure quality." **LR**

Boosting mental health at work

The new edition of TUC Education's ground-breaking workbook will help reps challenge mental health discrimination.

TUC Education is publishing a new and revised edition of the ground-breaking workbook, *Mental Health and the Workplace*, to help union reps, including ULRs, successfully challenge mental health discrimination

at work.

Many unions have been swift to take action to help members experiencing mental health problems as

a result of the increasing levels of austerity-related workplace stress, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady points out in her foreword.

"Unions have often taken the lead both in securing the best outcomes for individual members with mental health issues and in working with employers to develop 'mentally healthy' workplaces," Frances says.

The revised workbook aims to help reps prevent stress-related mental illness; develop their understanding of mental health; and be aware of diversity issues impacting on members with mental health problems.

It will also help reps develop their understanding



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of the law and mental health in the workplace; identify good practice as well as organising and campaigning opportunities; and explore their role supporting and representing members with mental health problems.

The three main sections

cover knowledge of mental health and the workplace; representing and supporting members with mental health issues; and organising around mental health. **LR**

[Click here](#) to download your copy of the new workbook

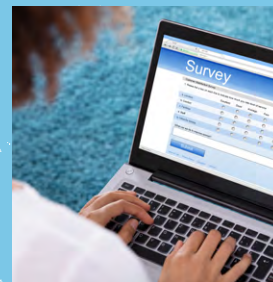
MAKE A DATE FOR ULR WEBINAR

Seasoned union learning rep Ivor Riddell will answer all your questions about being a ULR when he hosts the next TUC Education live webinar in September.

Ivor will be sharing his experiences, telling

stories and giving his first-hand account of being a ULR for the rail union RMT at 2:30 pm on Thursday 20 September.

[Click here](#) to register today



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LOOK OUT FOR NEW LEARNING CENTRES SURVEY

Unionlearn is set to publish the results of the latest survey of union-supported workplace learning centres this autumn, revealing how they are adapting to the ever-changing learning delivery and funding environment.

Conducted in April this year, the learning centre survey focused on the impact learning centres have on the ability of unions to offer skills training to members.

In one example of innovation within the report, Leeds UNISON reps Donna Padgett and Julie Butterfield reveal how reps now use the learning centre as the venue for watching the increasingly popular TUC Education webinars as a group.

"Individuals often cannot access them on their own computer so coming into the centre is a good thing. We can watch them as a group and have a discussion afterwards."

[Click here](#) to receive notification once the report is available



Little books make big news

Usdaw ULR Sean Dixon has appeared on radio and TV to explain the significance of Jojo Moyes stepping in to save the Quick Reads initiative.

♦ Martin Moriarty

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When BBC TV and radio researchers came looking for a union perspective on the saving of Quick Reads, Usdaw ULR coordinator Sean Dixon offered himself to talk about the impact of the publishing initiative.

Sean's track record in using Quick Reads at the Castleford Learning Centre made him an ideal candidate to explain why unions and unionlearn had joined the chorus of approval when best-selling author Jojo Moyes announced earlier this year that she would fund the programme for three years.

For the past three years, Sean has been using Quick Reads to run Reading Ahead book clubs for each of the six different operational teams at the Argos Castleford Distribution Centre (DC) in Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

To help participants read and review six books, poems, magazines or websites, they each get three of the latest Quick Reads and then choose the remaining three titles themselves.

The logistics mean that participants don't know which Quick Reads they will get, but that means they often

read books in genres or by authors they wouldn't pick if left to their own devices, Sean says.

"A couple of years ago, a few of the groups read *A Baby at the Beach Café* by Lucy Diamond and they said, 'This never would have been a book I picked up but I really enjoyed reading it,' and this year, I didn't think I'd like Fern Britton's Quick Read, *The Great Cornish Getaway*, but it was a really good story once you got into it!"

After being driven from his home to the BBC studios in Leeds at 6 o'clock one morning in May, Sean first spoke about the value of Quick Reads to workplace learning on Radio 4's flagship news programme *Today*, which also featured an interview with Jojo herself about her support.

"They wanted to know how we used them so I talked about the book clubs and how we really see the benefit of using the Quick Reads titles every year," Sean says.

Once the radio interview was done, Sean had a couple of hours to wait before his appearance on BBC 2's *Victoria Derbyshire* current affairs programme – time he spent reading

"I talked about the book clubs and how we really see the benefit of using the Quick Reads titles every year."

Paris for One, the Quick Read Jojo herself wrote in 2015, which he had missed out on at the time.

"On *Victoria Derbyshire*, I spoke about how finishing things boosts your confidence if you've got out of the habit of reading – because the chapters are short, they're easier to finish, and then you're completing the whole book," he says.

"As Jojo said, Quick Reads are like a gateway drug because they take people on to other things and that's what they are: I wouldn't be without them – I'm really glad she stepped in to save them." **LR**

Click [here](#) to find out more about Quick Reads and the relaunch of the programme in 2020