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LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Summer 2018

Bridging the learning gap in the north-east

▶ *FBU dad helps SEN kids*

▶ *Trailblazing with BECTU*

▶ *National Apprenticeship Week*

▶ *Thumbs-up for e-learning*

▶ *Confidence skills pay off*

unionlearn
from the TUC



WE NEED TO KEEP IN TOUCH

BY NOW, MOST IF NOT ALL READERS of *Learning Rep* will have heard of the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the EU directive that takes effect on Friday 25 May this year. And many of you will already have been involved with its implementation in your union or community organisations.

The GDPR, which replaces the 1998 Data Protection Act in the UK, is designed to give us more control over how organisations use our data and introduces serious penalties in the form of fines of up to £17m for organisations that do not comply with the new rules.

“Unionlearn needs your active consent to continue sending you the emails about skills and learning news.”

about skills and learning news and case studies; new tools for helping learners; our conferences and events; this magazine and the Supporting Learners eNewsletter.

So please check your inbox for our email with the subject ‘Please re-join our list’ and follow the clickthrough to update your preferences to opt in to future emails. That’s the only way to avoid missing out. **LR**

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



And while the government has triggered Article 50 to begin the process of leaving the EU, the GDPR is taking effect more or less in the middle of the specified two-year period, which is why the UK must still adhere to the regulation.

The upshot of all this is that unionlearn needs your active consent to continue sending you the emails

NEWS + VIEWS

Network Rail apprentices celebrate in York ceremony



Dozens of the 40-plus RMT members at Network Rail who have recently completed a range of apprenticeships collected their certificates at a graduation ceremony in York in March.

“This shows the benefit of the partnership between RMT and Network Rail, which is evidence of the better working relationship between the union and the company that everybody is benefitting from,” commented RMT Learning Organiser John Holmes.

John enrolled more than 120 colleagues on apprenticeships in his role as a ULR before he was seconded as a learning organiser a year ago (Network Rail has recently agreed to fund his secondment for a second year).

The RMT team (which includes ULRs Chris Brown, Phil Heaton, Sam McLeod and John Richards) has been central to the success of the apprenticeship programme.

“This success story is down to the regional team of ULRs promoting these opportunities to staff,” commented The Skills Partnership (TSP) Managing

Director James Bishop, who steered the ceremony.

Mobile Operations Manager Sheila Gale was named London North Eastern (LNE) learner of the year for not only making the time to complete her own management apprenticeship but also supporting colleagues who needed help with their own studies.

And Rail Technician Jason Hallsworth was named London North Western (LNW) learner of the year for persisting with his Level 2 Business & Administration apprenticeship while looking after three children, one of whom is disabled, and overcoming a close family bereavement.

Cheshire health staff move on in mid-life

Hundreds of health workers at the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust have been exploring their later life options in a successful series of workshops.

The workshops built on the content of the mid-life development reviews run with unionlearn and the

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) three years ago, says Joanne Cormack, who is the Workforce Wellbeing Project Manager/Business Manager at the Trust.

Following the RCN pilot, the Trust partnered with the UK branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) to look at older workers, later life transitions, resilience and staying employed longer. It was this research that helped develop the new two-day workshop.

Over the last two years, 250 staff across the Trust have taken part in the workshops, which look at transferable skills and include goal-setting exercises that help staff think about possibly changing careers.

"The workshops have been extremely successful, with staff enrolling on a waiting list to attend. We have a further 10 workshops set to run between now and the end of September 2018, offering 140 places," says Joanne.

A report evaluating seven pilot projects funded by CGF supporting people with transitions in later life, including the NHS Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Foundation Trust workshop, demonstrates the positive effect of mid-life reviews.

Participation led to a more balanced understanding of what it means to age, with increased optimism and a desire to make the most of this stage of life, the report reveals.

Click here to download the Gulbenkian report

Committee chair congratulates unionlearn

The chair of the House of Commons Education Committee, Robert Halfon MP, acknowledged the important role unionlearn continues to play, when the committee met in February to hear evidence about the quality of apprenticeships and skills training.

"Unionlearn, in my own view, has been a great success, and I am glad that, as I understand it, it is still being funded properly," Robert said.

"It is in essence a very good-quality provider and is trusted by its members for how it helps those from disadvantaged backgrounds."

New leaflet sets out case for ESOL



Unionlearn has launched a new leaflet encouraging unions and employers to work together to help workers who would benefit from English language support.

Are we all Speaking the Same Language? highlights the need for good communication in workplaces and the benefits of having workers who are confident in English.

The leaflet highlights the reasons why supporting courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is good for the employer and the workplace. It also provides suggestions for activities unions can take up with employers.

Improving English language skills in a workplace helps individuals and makes good business sense: ESOL learning can not only make the workplace feel more integrated, but also help staff feel more confident, gain a better understanding of specific instructions and policies and offer improved customer service.

"Good communication makes all workplaces better and is also a joint interest for both unions and employers," says unionlearn Policy Officer Kirsi Kekki.

"Besides language skills, ESOL learners develop confidence and that benefits both the employer and the individual, so we hope the new leaflet opens more doors and helps employers think of ESOL as business as usual."

Click here to download the new leaflet

ULRs make the most of Literacy Works week

Union learning projects promoted reading and writing skills in February during Literacy Works week, unionlearn's annual campaign to support reading, writing and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in

the workplace.

Unionlearn also launched new resources during the week, while TUC Education unveiled the eNote *Write Now!*, which aims to help improve writing skills, whether for work or personal life.

The eNote offers guidance on writing clarity, structure, grammar and spelling; includes short quizzes; and signposts learners to further resources about writing skills.

Click here to access Write Now! and all TUC Education eNotes

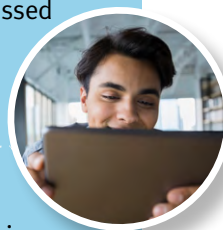
REPTECH

Catch up with webinars

If you have missed the webinars supporting reps on a wide range of topics, you can catch up when it suits via the TUC Education site.

Webinars include *Preparing for the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*, *Bargaining for the Real Living Wage*, *Organising at Work*, *Where is our NHS Headed?*, *The Importance of Regular Hours*, *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*, *How to Write Effective Emails for Organising and Young Workers and Unions*.

Click here to access the webinar archive





UNISON LEARNING REPS MARK 25 YEARS OF LEARNING

More than 70 UNISON learning activists and national and regional learning staff joined together to celebrate the power of the ULR at this year's learning conference at UNISON Centre last month.

In their keynote addresses, both General Secretary Dave Prentis and Assistant General Secretary Roger McKenzie highlighted the huge changes in the world of work since the formation of the union.

Poole Local Government Branch apprentices Freya Kendall and Nick Hillman discussed how they run the Apprentice Learning Network that UNISON helped set up at the council. And Exeter apprentice Chris Garlick and his UNISON Branch Service Conditions Officer Godfrey Sutcliffe examined the legal services apprenticeship programme Chris is currently undertaking.

Other key speakers included TUC Senior Policy Officer Tim Page, who set out the opportunities of the fourth industrial revolution; Genevieve Clarke from The Reading Agency; and Sally Hilton from National Numeracy.

Unionlearn project officers staffed a stall throughout the day and were on hand to help ULRs with relevant resources and materials.

Ahead of the 25th anniversary of the formation of UNISON in July, the one-day event finished with the presentation of commemorative certificates to 25 ULRs who have made a difference to their members. 

[Click here to watch a short video about the day](#)

Behavioural researchers rate union learning



A new government report has recognised the positive contribution union-led learning makes to the development of workplace skills.

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was commissioned to examine what works best to improve engagement and attainment in education from the perspective of behavioural science.

"We saw union-supported learning, through learning centres and union learning representatives (ULRs), as one of the few effective models of work-based support for maths and English," says the report, *Improving Engagement and Attainment in Maths and English Courses: insights from behavioural research*.

"The ULRs emphasised that in their view this was because of the peer element: ULRs are colleagues and friends, rather than managers, and therefore employees were more willing to come to them about this type of training."

The report quotes the example of a waste collection centre in the south-east, where a union learning centre had made significant difference to the running of the operation.

The report underlines

how upskilling the workforce at the depot has had a measurable effect on productivity: "As the drivers became more skilled, they were able to undertake multiple routes and complete their own paperwork, making the entire depot more productive and freeing up managers for other tasks," it says.

Unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan says that it is heartening to see the hard work of unions and ULRs recognised in this report.

"The report highlights how effective ULRs and learning centres are in supporting staff to improve maths and English skills," Kevin says.

"Unionlearn is pleased to be able to offer support and training to ensure reps are highly trained and perfectly placed to support workers to maximise their skills and employers to develop their workforce."

[Click here to download the full report](#)

Book your place at our annual conference

Quick Reads author Vaseem Khan and Skills and Apprenticeship Minister Anne Milton MP are among the guest speakers at unionlearn's annual conference at TUC Congress House in London on Thursday 12 July.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady will open this year's annual celebration of workplace skills and learning.

[Click here to book your free place now](#)



Rights resource is updated for apprenticeship week

Unionlearn published an updated *Your Rights as an Apprentice* leaflet to coincide with National Apprenticeship Week in March.

As well as showing apprentices what to expect from their apprenticeship, what they are entitled to and what they can gain from the experience, the leaflet highlights the new requirement that they spend 20 per cent of their time in off-job-training.

The leaflet also examines pay, terms and conditions – issues that are equally important for new entrants or existing members of staff undertaking apprenticeships.

Unionlearn has also updated the *Apprenticeships – Know Your Rights* eNote, the interactive online guide aimed at helping young people secure the high-quality apprenticeship they deserve.

▶ [Click here](#) to download the updated leaflet from the unionlearn website

▶ [Click here](#) to request hard copies of the new leaflet

▶ [Click here](#) to access the updated eNote

New OU module supports access to HE

The Open University (OU) is offering potential students the chance to study using its new, innovative and flexible module, *Making Your Learning Count*.



The module is a low-cost way to count study from a range of specified open educational resources (OERs), including the OU's own free learning

website, OpenLearn, towards a BA/BSc (Honours) Open (QD) degree, a Diploma of Higher Education (Open) or Certificate of Higher Education (Open).

This includes six free badged courses from the Social Partnerships Network:

- Planning a better future
- Introducing practical healthcare
- Supporting children's development
- Caring for adults
- Starting your small business
- Taking part in the voluntary sector.

Learners are not required to have completed any OER study before registering for the module, making it an ideal opportunity to take the first steps towards a Higher Education (HE) qualification.

The *Making Your Learning Count* module starts in October 2018 and is now open for registration.

If you want to refresh your learning skills and build your self-confidence before starting online study, you might prefer to start with one of the OU's Access modules, which can be studied in preparation for an OU qualification or on a standalone basis.

▶ [Click here](#) to register your interest and find out more about *Making your learning count*

▶ [Click here](#) to find out more about Access modules

Make a date for Numeracy Day

Unionlearn is the official partner of the National Numeracy campaign, which this year celebrates the first ever National Numeracy Day on Wednesday 16 May, in the middle of Learning at Work Week (LAWW).

National Numeracy Day 2018 is all about recognising the important part numbers play in everyday life and helping people sharpen their skills and build their confidence so they can use numbers to help them save money, progress at work – or just manage everyday situations more easily.

Add your learning event to Have a Go Month

Union learning projects that organise events during the Festival of Learning's Have a Go Month in June can access a wide range of resources by adding details to the campaign calendar.

Have a Go Month invites organisations to hold learning events and activities, such as taster sessions, open days and lectures, to inspire people of all ages to 'have a go' at learning something new.

Unions hosting learning events during June can access free promotional resources through the online partner hub, such as brand assets, posters, a planning kit and much more.

And if you promote your event on social media using the campaign

hashtag #lovetolearn, you can benefit from the extra publicity of being retweeted or shared by the Festival of Learning.

Organised by the Learning & Work Institute, with campaign partner Hotcourses,

Festival of Learning

celebrates the outstanding achievements of adults who have used learning to transform their lives and the lives of others.

With one million fewer adults learning today than five years ago, the festival also aims to raise awareness of the vast benefits of learning for individuals, communities, society and the economy.

▶ [Click here](#) to find out more and/or add your event to the Festival of Learning calendar

We're counting down towards maths week



Unionlearn's Maths Workout Week takes place from 8 to 12 October and unions and reps are urged to join in with workplace events.

Because we will be posting daily blogs, we would love to hear from anyone who is keen to blog about their experiences of learning maths (link below).

▶ [Click here](#) to contact Kirsī Kekki about blogging during Maths Workout Week

The FBU learners scoring with the Foxes

Dave Naudesevics and his wife Leanne have used the skills they gained through union learning to set up a football team for children with special educational needs.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

A Leicester couple used the skills and the confidence gained by learning through the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to help set up and coach an inclusive football team for boys and girls with special educational needs.

Firefighter Dave Naudesevics and his wife Leanne have both progressed thanks to the FBU's Union Learning Fund (ULF) project.

Dave has recently completed his Level 3 advanced apprenticeship in personal training, while Leanne is currently studying for a BSc Hons in Health and Social Care at The Open University (OU), having taken both autism awareness and mental health awareness courses through the FBU.

One of 20 learners to have recently completed the apprenticeship, Dave enrolled on the course to benefit himself, his colleagues and his family by gaining important knowledge about health and nutrition – vital subjects to help firefighters cope with the heavy physical and mental demands of their jobs.

"The apprenticeship was a fantastic opportunity to get a qualification in a subject I have always been interested in," says Dave, who



works at Wigston Fire Station in Leicester.

Leanne and four of her friends took advantage of the FBU's extension of its learning offer to family and friends of union members to take the Level 2 autism awareness course, since the couple's middle child Charlie is on the spectrum.

"The course gave me a really good understanding of the condition and has really helped us as a family," Leanne says.

"With this qualification, I have found that I can now discuss with teachers on equal terms the specific needs for my son, possessing a full and proper understanding of the condition."

And Leanne's learning has been central to

"With this qualification, I have found that I can now discuss with teachers on equal terms the specific needs for my son."

“No harm can come from learning – there is always something new to find out and the more knowledge people have, the better it will be for Charlie’s future.”

the role she has played in helping to set up The Wigston Foxes, a football team for boys and girls aged 6 to 12 who can’t join mainstream teams.

The only club in Leicestershire to offer fully inclusive football, the team is affiliated to Leicestershire and Rutland Inclusive Football League and the Football Association (FA) and plays in monthly FA tournaments.

“The founding of the football team makes all the study worthwhile,” Leanne says.

It has also massively contributed to the children’s development, she points out. For example, one boy used to need to be helped on the pitch during games by his dad but as his confidence grew through taking part, he stopped needing that support, Leanne says.

“Much to his dad’s relief, he can now enjoy the game from the touchline along with the other mums and dads,” she says.

And in another sign of the progress he has made since playing with the team, the same boy is now ready to go to school for the first time.

Leanne and Dave have also encouraged more of the parents involved in the team to undertake the autism awareness course through the FBU and shared the learning opportunities available through the FBU with other league committee members and members of the FA itself.

Dave is applying the knowledge he gained on his personal training apprenticeship to help the children improve their game. “Now that I have qualified as a fitness instructor, I will use my knowledge to help coach the team,” he says.

“I am furthering my learning by enrolling onto the Level 2 Working with People with Learning Disabilities course and am active within the Fire Service working with children who have special needs.”

Dave and Leanne agree that learning through the FBU has helped them both develop themselves in ways they wouldn’t have expected. “The opportunities provided by the ULF have really proved a catalyst for both Leanne and myself,” Dave says.

Leanne agrees. “No harm can come from learning – there is always something new to find out and the more knowledge people have, the better it will be for Charlie’s future,” she says. **LR**



GMB PROJECT HELPS TA GAIN IT SKILLS FOR WORK

The GMB ReachOut Project has helped a supply teaching assistant (TA) who had been working for an agency gain the IT qualification she needed to secure a full-time job in a specialist arts college.

Single parent Rebecca Blezard had been looking for an IT course as she knew her lack of a relevant IT qualification was an obstacle to getting a permanent post with the increasing use of technology in the classroom.

But she had had no luck in finding a course that would not get in the way of her existing work and family commitments until a friend referred her to ReachOut.

The project put her in touch with a local training provider that was able to organise a flexible learning programme so Rebecca could attend sessions between leaving work and collecting her children.

In addition, the project provided Rebecca with advice and guidance throughout her course and showed her how to apply what she had learned in the workplace, which gave her the confidence to take on additional responsibilities.

After completing her Level 1 ITQ, Rebecca was able to land her dream job as a full-time special educational needs teaching assistant at a nearby specialist arts college.

Rebecca says that the personal support and warmth of welcome she received from all the ReachOut team were vital in helping her return to learning and achieve her qualification.

Building bridges for north-east learners

UNISON's unique partnership project Bridges to Learning is helping some of the lowest-paid public service workers in the country access life-changing learning opportunities.

✦ Martin Moriarty

Thousands of public service workers in the north-east have gained professional qualifications and developed their careers over the last decade thanks to Bridges to Learning, the unique partnership between UNISON, The Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

Launched in 2008, Bridges to Learning originally aimed to help its learners – many of them among the lowest-paid public services workers in the country – access higher education (HE) opportunities.

But with the significant changes to the HE funding regime in recent years, Bridges has evolved to help people develop along a wider range of pathways, although it continues to help learners prepare themselves for studying at HE level, should they be able to find a way of supporting themselves.

Steering the ship for the past nine years has been Director Anne Hansen (pictured, right), a UNISON member herself who had previously worked for the regional TUC, NIACE (now the Learning & Work Institute) and the OU before taking up the role.

Shazia Shahid and Erin Parker-Leonard are the

other members of the core team at the project, which is based in the WEA offices in Newcastle.

"What the three of us in the core team do is manage a team of project workers, who are union learning reps (ULRs) seconded to work with their members and their employers to encourage them to pick up learning opportunities in their workplaces," Anne explains.

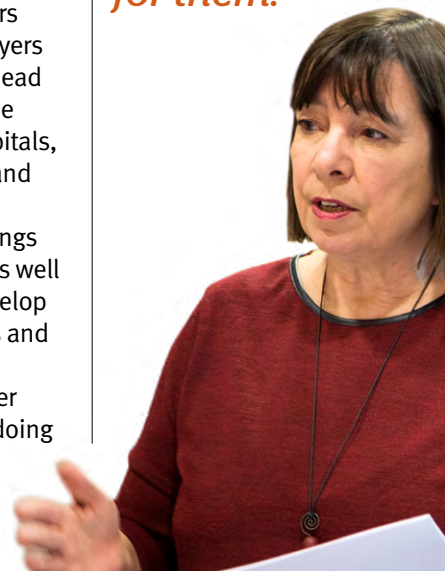
With the help of the financial backing of the Union Learning Fund (ULF), the project funds the part-time or full-time release of the project workers to enable them to effectively undertake their role on behalf of their learners.

The current team of seven project workers covers a range of key public service employers in the region, including Newcastle, Gateshead and Middlesbrough councils, alongside the NHS Foundation Trusts for Newcastle Hospitals, South Tyneside, Northumbria Healthcare and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys.

Anne and her team hold quarterly meetings for the project workers to plan their work as well as organising training that helps them develop their skills and adapt as the project's aims and objectives evolve year on year.

"It's very useful to catch up with the other project workers, to find out what they are doing

"It's always moving to see people achieving, becoming more confident and realising that there is a wider horizon for them."



and share good practice: we learn from each other all the time,” explains Jane Yugire, who won a unionlearn award for her work promoting apprenticeships at Newcastle City Council two years ago.

Hazel Kjebekk, who has won a regional equality award for her work promoting learning to low-paid support staff at South Tyneside NHS Trust, agrees about the benefits of the planning meetings. “It’s good to hear what’s happening in other workplaces and it’s good to catch up with Anne and the team to find out our priority and non-priority outcomes for the year ahead, for example,” she says.

John Wears, who has won several awards for his effective work promoting a wide range of learning over the years, shares a similar perspective.

“The meetings help me see where we are with the targets for the project, where we need to be, maybe some of the shortfalls on the priority outcomes, which informs me on how I deliver the project at a local level.” (By mid-March, the project had already hit all of its non-priority targets for the year and was very well set to achieve its priority targets too.)

For a relative newcomer such as Helen England, who has been a member of the team for just six months, the networking is hugely beneficial. “I’m quite new to this, so it’s good to see how other people have approached the work so I can develop similar ideas where I work in Middlesbrough Council,” she explains.

Helen helped organise the most recent Bridges to Learning continuous professional development (CPD) event for schools staff in Middlesbrough, which attracted just under 100 participants, most of them teaching assistants (TAs).

The event was a real success, with very positive feedback from participants about the CPD sessions on dyslexia awareness, autism awareness, dealing with challenging behaviour and emotional intelligence in the classroom.

But it also had an impact on the UNISON schools forum in Middlesbrough the following day, where attendance was twice what it usually was and four members signed up to become UNISON stewards in schools as well. “UNISON is continuing to recruit new members off the back of that conference,” Helen says.

This kind of organising payoff isn’t unusual, Anne points out. A member of staff at Newcastle City Council, who didn’t carry a UNISON card at the time, joined after attending a Bridges to Learning workshop last year and is now one of 11 new ULRs (from a range of regional employers, not only those where there are seconded project workers) currently training for their new role.



“I’m quite new to this, so it’s good to see how other people have approached the work so I can develop similar ideas where I work in Middlesbrough Council.”

The project’s impact extends far beyond the public service workers it supports. Mary Titley, the Bridges to Learning project worker at Gateshead Council, says that Chief Executive Sheena Ramsey has recently initiated a new workstream to upskill the frontline workforce at the council, as a direct result of attending the whole of a recent lunch and learn session.

Anne is immensely proud of the development of all the project workers who have been part of Bridges to Learning over the past decade. “When you consider some of the jobs they are seconded from to do this work, they have really developed massively – and that can only be a benefit to the people they are engaged with to take up learning,” she says.

The real impact of that benefit can be witnessed regularly at celebration events where learners who have been supported by the project collect their certificates.

“When you see learners that our project workers have supported and encouraged to complete a course they themselves perhaps never thought they could do – you get a lump in your throat to see them standing there holding their certificates,” Anne says.

“It happens quite a lot but it’s always moving to see people achieving, becoming more confident and realising that there is a wider horizon for them: that’s when I have to pinch myself to realise how lucky I am to be working here!” **LR**

BECTU backs new deal for tech trainees

A brand new apprenticeship for theatre technicians has been launched by an industry-wide partnership including media and entertainment union BECTU.

➡ Martin Moriarty

Media and entertainment union BECTU (now part of Prospect) has played a key role in the development of the brand new Creative Venue Technician apprenticeship standard for the theatre and arts centre technicians of the future.

Since its launch in June 2015, the Trailblazer consortium has been steered by John Young, the then Head of Technical Services at the Ambassador Theatre Group (ATG) who now runs his own project management and training company.

But the consortium reached far beyond the international big guns such as John's former employer, which owns and operates almost 50 venues in the UK, USA and Australia, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group.

The Trailblazer extended its reach to leading arts organisations such as the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House, and also involved regional venues including Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, the Albany arts centre in south London and the big three commercial equipment hire and purchase companies.

Representing BECTU on the consortium were Training Officer Kate Elliott and Sebastian Barnes (pictured, right), a member of the union's training committee with 40-plus years experience in the business as a technician, trainer and assessor. Sebastian also chairs the training committee of the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT).

BECTU was keen to help draw up the new standard to ensure that it was more fit for purpose than the frameworks it was designed to replace.

"Having spent eight years as a freelance assessor for six different pathways in the creative sector, I had direct experience of these one-year models with continuous assessment throughout that didn't really fit a lot of the industry," Sebastian says.

"The old assessment process and the funding arrangements drove a need for progression in the first few months when someone completely new to the arts industry was still learning what everything was called, which created an unnatural level of stress for both the assessors and the learners themselves."



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"I had direct experience of these one-year models with continuous assessment throughout that didn't really fit a lot of the industry."

“By ensuring we represented the breadth of the industry, we have helped develop a durable standard that should work not only for larger organisations but throughout the sector.”

In addition, while most venues need multi-skilled technicians to be able to work confidently in lighting, staging and sound, the previous framework made it difficult for apprentices to demonstrate their all-round skills.

“At the beginning, in the first month, the employer and the training provider would need to choose either stage or electrics or sound for the candidate to produce their evidence in,” Sebastian explains.

“This was a little frustrating because a lot of the job roles are multi-skilled, so candidates I was dealing with were saying, ‘I’m on the lighting pathway but I’m doing all this work in sound – is none of it valid as evidence?’ and I would have to say ‘no’.”

The new two-year Level 3 apprenticeship has come up with a much better solution, Sebastian believes.

Continuous assessment has been replaced by a two-part end-stage assessment, where apprentices can use the first observation part to showcase their skills in a particular discipline and then cover their other areas of expertise in the second part, which is a structured discussion with their assessor.

“The new standard allows each organisation and each apprentice to focus more on one area such as lighting or sound while retaining learning and evidence across the full breadth of skills that our industry now requires of a multi-skilled technician,” Sebastian explains.

The new standard is now graded with three levels of success – pass, merit and distinction.

With only a small minority of theatre organisations large enough to be paying the full Apprenticeship Levy, Kate Elliott made sure that smaller companies were able to feed their perspectives into the development of the new standard, Sebastian says.

“By ensuring we represented the breadth of the industry, we have helped develop a durable standard that should work not only for larger organisations but throughout the sector,” he says. **LR**



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FIRST RAIL COMPANY SIGNS ASLEF CHARTER FOR APPRENTICES

MTR Crossrail, the train operating company that runs services between London Liverpool Street and Shenfield in Essex, has become the first company to sign ASLEF’s Charter for Apprentices.

The company put its name to the union charter at an event in February that also celebrated the arrival of the 200th person to join the company’s Train Driver Apprenticeship Programme and presented certificates to some of the first cohort of apprentices to qualify since the scheme was launched in February 2016.

“We are very pleased to have had the opportunity to work with MTR Crossrail in delivering Driver Apprenticeships and we believe that the ASLEF Charter for Apprentices provides a platform from which all train operators can move forward,” says ASLEF District Organiser Nigel Gibson.

“The fact that MTR Crossrail is the first in the industry to sign up to this charter is indication that working collaboratively can have positive benefits and deliver for our members and company employees alike.”

MTR Crossrail is the first train operating company to be included on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP) and approved to deliver apprenticeship training to employees through the ‘employer provider’ route.

MTR Crossrail Managing Director Steve Murphy thanked ASLEF for its support for the programme, alongside provider Train’d Up (which provides assessors and functional skills tutors and undertakes quality assurance) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Working for inclusion across the spectrum

The best way to ensure apprenticeships are fully inclusive is to involve trade unions. That was the key message from unionlearn's recent seminar during National Apprenticeship Week in March.

✦ **Martin Moriarty**

Unions are central to delivering quality and inclusiveness in apprenticeships, according to the key contributors at unionlearn's seminar during this year's National Apprenticeship Week.

Presentations by ASLEF ULF Project Coordinator Shirley Handsley, PCS Learning Organiser Steven Warwick and GMB National Disability Lead Carl Lewthwaite set out how their unions had all made key contributions to quality and inclusion in apprenticeship programmes.

Shirley revealed that Virgin Trains was currently recruiting three new entrants for the next intake to the driver apprenticeship that the union helped the company create two years ago. ASLEF was also part of a new Trailblazer consortium (with MTR Crossrail) that was developing a Level 3 train driver apprenticeship, she added.

Steven reported that since the new agreement between Civil Service unions and the Cabinet Office last year, PCS now received quarterly breakdowns of where new apprentices are based, what work they are doing and who their ULR is – which has helped the union intervene more effectively on behalf of new entrants.

And Carl detailed how women currently make up 35 per cent of apprentices at Sellafield,

where he has worked as disability and equality adviser for the last decade. Using many of the skills he first gained on TUC Education's Disability Champions course, Carl continues to work on increasing accessibility. He is also helping apprentices to look after their mental health.

Unionlearn Strategy Manager Iain Murray said unions were key to expanding high-quality and accessible apprenticeships through collective bargaining and coordinated workplace action involving all reps, especially union learning reps.

"Now this needs to be reflected in wider social partnership arrangements as it is in most other European countries: for example, there is no union representation on the Board of the Institute for Apprenticeships," he pointed out.

Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) Chief Executive Jeremy Crook, who also chairs the Department for Education Apprenticeships Equality and Diversity Advisory Group, underlined how fully inclusive access to the best apprenticeships remained a work in progress.

While people from BME groups make up almost 15 per cent of the population as a whole, they accounted for fewer than 10 per cent of apprenticeship starts in 2016/17, Jeremy pointed out. And although 16 per cent

“We need everyone to drive improvements through leadership, commitment and appropriate resources.”

of working-age UK adults are disabled, people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) comprised less than 10 per cent of new apprentices in the same year.

Creation of the Diversity Champions Network should enable employers to improve access to apprenticeships for members of under-represented groups, Jeremy said, while a targeted local area strategy should enable working groups of local partners to develop strategies for improving BME representation.

“We need everyone to drive improvements through leadership, commitment and appropriate resources, and involve BME individuals in finding practical solutions, making sure they are not invisible,” he said.

Dr Fiona Aldridge, who is assistant director for research and development at the Learning & Work Institute, pointed out that the proportion of BME applicants for apprenticeships is roughly in line with the overall population but white applicants are twice as likely to be successful.

The DfE’s new 5 Cities project, which is a pilot programme that aims to match BME representation on apprenticeships with the local population in Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester, Bristol and London, represented a major opportunity for improvement, she said.

“There should be good union involvement in the 5 Cities programmes over the next year or so,” Fiona said. **LR**



Speakers at unionlearn’s seminar included (clockwise from top) Shirley Handley, Jeremy Crook, Dr Fiona Aldridge and Iain Murray



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REMOVING BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN ENGINEERING

Greater encouragement to women and girls from all backgrounds to apply for engineering apprenticeships would both help tackle skills shortages in the sector and begin to close the gender pay gap, according to a new report by the Gatsby Foundation and Learning & Work Institute.

Published on International Women’s Day, in the middle of National Apprenticeship Week, the report drilled down into the data for 2015 and early 2016 to reveal the depth of gender segregation in the sector.

Gatsby Programme Manager Jenni French pointed out that while women are under-represented in many Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) areas, the gap is particularly stark in engineering apprenticeships.

“Not only does this lead to inequalities in pay but this gender imbalance has significant implications for the supply of skills into the economy,” she said.

The new report highlights several key issues:

- Women are much less likely to apply for apprenticeships in the sector: nearly 35 per cent of male applicants for apprenticeships choose

engineering, compared to less than 4 per cent of women.

- Women are in a tiny minority of engineering apprentices, comprising under 7 per cent of successful applicants to the sector overall.
- Women are much less likely to concentrate on exclusive applications to the sector: just under 40 per cent of female applicants to the sector apply nowhere else, compared to 56 per cent of men.
- Women applicants tend to be less persistent than their male counterparts: only 25 per cent of unsuccessful female applicants for engineering apprenticeships try again, compared to 43 per cent of unsuccessful male applicants.
- Women from a Black and minority ethnic (BME) background are significantly less likely to apply to the sector than their white counterparts (2.5 per cent compared to 3.6 per cent).

To achieve gender parity in engineering, the report recommends greater encouragement of applications from women and more support after they have applied.

Click here to download the report

Apprentices need routes into careers

Genuine apprenticeships should finish with the offer of a job, unionlearn argued at an Education Committee investigation into skills training.

Quality apprenticeships should include the promise of a job on completion, unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan told a recent meeting of the House of Commons Education Committee examining quality apprenticeships and skills training.

“The end destination ought not to be just completing apprenticeships but moving into sustainable employment: it is meant to be a route into a career, not a training programme,” Kevin told MPs at the meeting in February.

Hiring so-called apprentices on precarious zero-hours contracts worked against the best outcomes, he added, since pay and training were both key components of a genuinely high-quality programme.

“Also, off-the-job training is an important part of an apprenticeship: apprentices need to learn not just competencies for the job but transferable skills as



@ Jess Hurd/Portlandia.co.uk

well,” Kevin argued.

Kevin pointed out that there were problems with enforcement of minimum wage rates for apprentices in some sectors: while 25 per cent of employers have breached apprentice minimum wage regulations, just 3 per cent of them have been prosecuted.

The key was to improve social partnership arrangements across the economy, he said. “If we can learn some lessons from

where we have good institutional arrangements with social partners, with trade unions and employers working together to maintain quality and maintain levels of apprenticeship engagement, then outcomes are pretty good,” he said.

Ensuring young workers knew their rights was important, but knowledge alone was little guarantee of justice without an effective union presence in a workplace, he said.

“If you are a young apprentice and feeling quite vulnerable in a new workplace ... with no trade union recognition, who are you going to go to to enforce those rights?” he asked.

“Where we see the least abuse is where we have good employers working with good trade unions.” **LR**

▶ [Click here](#) to watch the session or read the transcript

▶ [Click here](#) to read the TUC evidence to the select committee

Partnership approach will deliver retraining success

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady attended the first meeting of the National Retraining Partnership in March alongside CBI Director-General Carolyn Fairbairn, Chancellor Philip Hammond, Education Secretary Damian Hinds and the

Exchequer Secretary Robert Jenrick.

After the meeting, the Chancellor announced that the promised £29m construction skills fund, which will support up to 20 construction skills villages around the country, would open

for bids in April.

Unions, government and business must work together to make sure that the National Retraining Scheme is a success, TUC Deputy General Secretary Paul Nowak told a Campaign for Learning seminar on the scheme in March.

“Trade unions have a unique role to play, making sure workers whose needs are most acute receive the right support and training opportunities, which can safeguard their livelihoods and enable them to take on the jobs of the future,” Paul said.

E-learning gets the thumbs-up

New survey reveals union reps feel positive about their experiences of online learning.

Learners' experiences of e-learning have been hugely positive, according to a new survey of the use of digital support environments and open learning materials by union learning reps (ULRs).

The evaluation of the unionlearn tool was undertaken by Hilary Stevens of the University of Exeter.

More than two-thirds of the learners surveyed testified that they had applied what they had learned in the workplace by:

- having a better understanding of employment law and workplace issues
- being more confident in presenting information to management and challenging workplace practices
- providing advice and support to colleagues
- negotiating with management
- carrying out health and safety inspections and risk assessments
- arranging courses and training for other representatives.

"The Health and Safety Stage 1 was a real eye-opener for me: I thought it would be second best to doing face-to-face but in fact I found it really fitted my learning style and my lifestyle – I am a convert," said one rep.

"The content is great and pitched at the right level: the



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"The content is great and pitched at the right level: the more training that can be done online the better."

more training that can be done online the better – it gives the learner flexibility and standardises training."

Another rep was similarly positive about the ease of online access: "Living in a

remote location, travelling distances are normally long and difficult; having access when I was free at work to continue on the course was brilliant," they commented. **LR**

Two new eNotes launched to help reps

The new eNote *Supporting Exploited Workers* looks at the different issues faced by workers who are exploited and helps reps recognise how these issues can best be dealt with positively.

Read Now! aims to help learners improve their reading skills,

whether for work or personal life.

Learners can use the eNote to find out what kind of reader they are, learn how to read effectively and gain the confidence to tackle longer texts.

[Click here](#) to access all eNotes

Discussing the future of digital badging



Digital credentials can help employees show the evidence of their skills in order to access progression opportunities in the modern workplace, according to See Every Skill, a joint event organised by TUC Education and Digitalme in February.

The invite-only event explored the use of digital badges in various workplaces and also included an 'ask the expert' session, a Q&A, workshops, roundtable discussions and case study presentations from Clarion Housing and Golley Slater.

Unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan took part in an interview, while other speakers included Anna Sheard and Matt Roger from Digitalme and Mikki Dragoo from City & Guilds Group.

Participants took the chance to study the evolution of skills recognition and how to help employees to evidence their skills and pursue progression opportunities.



UNISON course helps Shipha win the day

When you're a first-time speaker at a conference of 650 delegates, it helps that you've taken a confidence course through your union, as Shipha Begum discovered earlier this year.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty

UNISON activist Shipha Begum says it was the confidence skills she gained on a union course that gave her the courage to move a motion at this year's National Black Members' Conference (NBMC).

Shipha enrolled on the young women's confidence course shortly after joining the UNISON branch at Luton & Dunstable University Hospital, where she works as a biomedical support worker.

"This was to help me approach other people in my workplace and help with recruitment as I am the young members' officer in my branch – never

had I thought I'd be on stage in front of hundreds of people speaking at conference," she says.

What Shipha learned on the course proved to be incredibly useful when she was elected to move the young members committee motion at NBMC, especially when it turned out that the motion was the first item of business at the conference, which was held at Liverpool's BT Convention Centre in January.

"Just my luck it was the first motion to be put forward to conference – and I was on just after the Mayor of Liverpool and UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis, who I'm sure

"When I got up to the podium and introduced myself, I did say I was a first-time speaker, which got a round of applause and helped calm my nerves a little."

have both had enough experience of speaking in front of a large volume of people!" Shipha says.

As Shipha hadn't been able to attend the Young Members Conference AGM that submitted the motion to NBMC, she used a draft speech prepared for her by UNISON's Young Members Officer Gary Williams.

"From the confidence course, I had learned it was important to read and understand what you are presenting, so when the draft speech was given to me I made sure to read it aloud at least 15 times so I understood what I was going to say as well as focus on my pitch, volume and speed," she says.

Shipha admits she felt nervous as she reached the platform to deliver her speech. "When I got up to the podium and introduced myself, I did say I was a first-time speaker, which got a round of applause and helped calm my nerves a little," she says.

"I took a pause and read through my speech like I had practised: I had learned to take pauses when speaking, not to speak too fast and not rush through it (which I tend to do when I'm nervous), to think about my tone and volume so I can be heard clearly but most of all to have fun!"

All her preparation, using the skills she gained on her confidence course, definitely paid off. Not only was the motion passed, but many delegates came to find Shipha afterwards to offer their congratulations.

Shipha believes that it was the confidence course that made all the difference.

"Had I not gone on the confidence skills course, I wouldn't have had the courage in the first place to even think about speaking in front of a crowd," she says. **LR**