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LEARNINGREP

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Celebrating 20 years of the ULF

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unionlearn
from the TUC



MARKING 20 YEARS OF THE ULF

WE WILL BE CELEBRATING THE 20TH anniversary of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) at this year's unionlearn conference in July. And two decades of government-backed union-led learning in the workplace have helped us chalk up many important achievements.

Back in the 1990s, the TUC was making the case for greater union involvement in learning by delivering successful workplace-based partnership projects through Bargaining for Skills in the regions.

"The ULF has survived because it has proved to be an effective, successful and flexible model for engaging and supporting workplace learning."

But the launch of the ULF at the end of the decade meant we could start to do so much more. With the pressing need to improve the country's skills base identified in landmark publications like the Moser report, the creation of the ULF enabled us to engage a high proportion of the hard-to-reach learners that had eluded other more established providers.

Yet while the ULF arguably made its name helping adult learners gain their

first English, maths or IT qualifications, it has also supported apprentices, enabled workers to access Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities and supported learners through higher education (HE).

Unlike other learning initiatives launched around the same time, the ULF has survived because it has proved to be an effective, successful and flexible model for engaging and supporting workplace learning. Here's to many more years of ULF success! 

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
from the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

ESOL courses help XPO staff progress at work



Eastern European warehouse workers who have improved their English skills with the help of the Community union have been progressing to new roles at the XPO Logistics/Adidas site in Bedford.

In total, 26 learners completed the 16-week English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme delivered by Axia Solutions in the autumn. Of them, 11 have used their new-found confidence and skills to move up the workplace ladder to a range of new roles.

In addition, three have become health and safety reps – which they could not have done without improving their English skills – while one of the trio has also put himself forward as a union rep as well.

Communitas Project Officer Mick Brightman and XPO Training Manager Matt Betts organised the course around the shift times on site, so that learners could either come in an hour early once a week to learn before their shift started or stay

an hour later when their shift ended.

"The students gave us really positive feedback and all 26 of them ended up with a qualification either at their assessment level or one above it, which was fantastic," says Mick.

The company was delighted with the results and organised a celebration event to present the learners with their certificates.

"The programme is an excellent addition to our learning and development offering here on site," says Matt.

"The success of the programme can be put down to the great collaboration between XPO, Communitas and Axia Solutions providing an outstanding learning programme that all of our colleagues can benefit from and that really drives our company ethos of 'you grow, we grow' forwards."

Thirty workers have signed up to take part in a fresh ESOL programme in Bedford that Communitas, XPO and Axia are looking to run this spring.

Learning leads to happier workforce at DHL Long Eaton

Employee satisfaction at the DHL Long Eaton site has risen since Usdaw started organising learning opportunities for staff after signing a learning agreement with the logistics company last year.

With the release time that was specified in the agreement signed last April, ULRs Janusz Sitkowski and John Stevenson were able to enrol 30 colleagues on a functional skills English course, with another 20 signing up for employability skills and ICT.

Not only was the feedback from the courses extremely positive, but when all staff on site completed their employee satisfaction survey shortly afterwards, they also recorded a 14 per cent increase in their satisfaction with the availability of improvement opportunities.

A recent Forum Steering Group meeting confirmed how learning is making a difference to attitudes on site.

The ULRs are planning more English, maths and ICT courses this year, as well as a celebration event to mark the achievements of all of last year's learners.

"We are on the way to embedding learning at the site," says Project Worker Neil Chapman. "It isn't an easy task – it takes time and discussion, good reps, good ULRs, support from the company and the buy-in from all parties – but we are getting there!"



UNISON branches pool resources

UNISON branches in Nottinghamshire have pooled their resources to create a pot of £10,000 to fund a wide range of courses to benefit all members of the union in the county. UNISON Notts Learning is designed to overcome some of the problems branches had been encountering when trying to organise courses on their own.

The costs were often beyond what individual branches could afford, and a single branch on its own could struggle to engage enough learners to make a particular course financially viable.

But by pooling branch resources and leveraging matched funding from UNISON and the Union Learning Fund (ULF), the partnership is now able to fund courses that members themselves have identified they want through a county-wide learning survey.

UNISON Notts Learning is organised by a group of learning reps from different branches across the county.

Since June 2018, the project has run 32 different courses across a huge range of subjects, including interview skills, confidence skills, mindfulness, counselling skills, stress management, assertiveness and understanding depression, plus project management, introduction to Excel, car maintenance,



flower arranging, autism, dementia, men's health, women's health and family first aid.

Unite port worker named top Northern ULR



Unite learning rep Ashley Hurst (pictured right), who works as a health and safety administrator for PD Ports at Teesport, was named ULR of the Year at the Northern TUC regional union reps' awards in March.

Since becoming a ULR two years ago – his first union role – Ashley has helped dozens of co-workers improve their English and maths through four terms of courses delivered on site by Sunderland College.

He has also enrolled several other learners onto fully funded Level 2 courses, encouraging at least eight to sign up for the Certificate in Principles of Team Leading since the autumn alone.

"When I started, there was just me but now we have three ULRs and we're meeting once a month to discuss everyone's learning and how we can further their development," Ashley says.

Demonstrating that Unite offers much more than support with grievances or disciplinaries has helped build a stronger union

structure on the ground and, in addition to the three ULRs, there are now two safety reps and nine workplace reps supporting their co-workers.

"Ashley has worked really hard to engage with his learners, listen to what they want and deliver some excellent training opportunities," says regional Union Learning Organiser Anna Lavery, who nominated Ashley for the award.

"He is now working in collaboration with PD Ports management and the learning committee to format a learning journey for every level of staff in the company, ultimately engaging non-members too and driving our recruitment agenda."

Book your place at our annual conference

Registration is now open for this year's unionlearn annual conference, which takes place on Thursday 11 July at the Congress Centre in the TUC's central London headquarters.

As the popular event always fills up long before the day, make sure you book your free place now by clicking on the link below.

The conference will be marking the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) but will also be looking ahead at the range of ways all union reps who support workplace learning can help workers prepare themselves for the challenges ahead.

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



SPREADING THE UNION MESSAGE AT STEM FAIR

Unionlearn took the message that apprenticeships are union business to this year's Big Bang UK Young Scientists & Engineers Fair, which was held in Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in March.

Project Officers Mark Rowe and Matt Pointon plus Communications Officer Keith Hatch staffed the unionlearn stall at the event, which is designed to showcase the opportunities available to young people who choose careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

The young people who attended were able to explore virtual reality, medicine, marine biology, film and TV, space exploration, explosive chemistry, crime-solving, robots, computer coding, microscopic bugs, giant trucks and more.

And they heard inspiring talks by engineers and scientists from some of the UK's biggest companies that set out many of the opportunities available in STEM careers.

With thousands of youngsters aged from seven to 19 years old packing the NEC throughout the four days of the fair, the unionlearn stall remained busy at all times.

"From the minute we set up, the unionlearn stand was inundated with school groups trying out our quiz, asking questions about apprenticeships and picking up leaflets on the rights that apprentices have at work," says Mark.

"We not only got to spread the message of union learning to thousands of young people but we also got the chance to talk to teachers and highlight the benefits of high-quality apprenticeships as one route into a career for their pupils." **LR**

National ESOL strategy makes sense, unions say



Unionlearn has welcomed government plans to develop an all-England strategy for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) this year.

The pledge is one of 70 measures to support better community integration outlined in the government's new Integrated Communities Action Plan and backed by £50 million from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The government is also promising to fund community-based English language provision and to help local authorities where need is highest to deliver better local coordination of English language support and to enhance the offer for learners.

"Many unions are doing valuable work in supporting ESOL learning and everyday English language learning, which learner surveys and union project evaluations have proved deliver significant benefits for learners," says unionlearn Policy Officer Kirsi Kekki.

Free functional skills pilot to help 30,000 learners

The Open University (OU) is working in partnership with

three FE colleges to launch a scheme to provide free functional skills courses online for up to 30,000 learners a year.

Bedford College Group, Middlesbrough College and West Herts College are all supporting the pilot, which is currently backed by the Department for Education's (DfE's) £11.4m flexible learning fund.

The pilot initially involves two courses, Everyday Maths and Everyday English, which take 48 hours of study to complete.

The OU plans to roll out Level 2 versions of the courses in the spring, before introducing sector-specific functional skills courses tailored to health and social care and science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Whatever level they are studying at, learners can access course materials for free online and can learn at home or receive support and careers guidance from their local college.

Once the pilot is completed this summer, the scheme will be reviewed and then made accessible for the foreseeable future.

Click here to find out more on the courses

Union reps welcome TUC Education webinars

TUC Education's webinar series for all workplace reps has proved a popular source of online bite-sized learning on workplace issues since it was launched two years ago.

"I have found this inspiring," said one rep

after taking part. “Hope there are more of these,” commented another. “Really informative ... I enjoyed learning something new,” said a third.

The webinars are focused on practical advice for union reps, explains Digital Projects Officer Alice Arkwright.

“The aim of the webinars is to provide reps with practical tips and advice on how to better perform their roles, to provide real-life best practice examples and to share the challenges that reps might face and celebrate their successes,” Alice says.

The webinars also communicate how changes in policy and law may impact workplaces, with the GDPR webinar one of the most popular to date.

Part of the reason for the popularity of the webinars is that learners have the flexibility to tune in live on the day or watch a recording on the TUC Education YouTube channel whenever they want – although tuning in live allows learners to ask the presenter questions and chat with other participants about their experiences.

“While primarily aimed at reps, we also have union members, activists and members of the public tuning in to find out more about topics they are interested in or that have affected them,” Alice says.

Click here to watch all of the previous webinars on the TUC Education YouTube channel

Click here to sign up to the latest webinar

Click here to get all the latest info on rep training

Seat for unionlearn on London Mayor's skills partnership

Unionlearn Policy Officer

Kirsi Kekki is representing the TUC's London, East & South East (LESE) region on The Mayor of London's new Skills for Londoners

Business Partnership, which has brought together leading figures from the business world to help shape London's skill system.

The partnership will work with Mayor Sadiq Khan to help London's employers access the skills they need today and in the future and advise him on how skills and education provision can help businesses access talent, particularly in response to challenges including Brexit and increasing automation.

The Partnership aims to:

- improve London's skills system to better meet the needs of employers and the London economy
- increase skills investment and workforce development in London to meet the demands of the global economy
- ensure the most accurate and reliable data is used to inform skills provision in London.

“Many people living and working in London face challenges in accessing learning and progressing in their careers,” says Kirsi.

“The newly established partnership is an opportunity to encourage employers in London to take a greater interest in investing in their staff and developing skills for the future too.”



Bursaries to help union students

The TUC Educational Trust has a limited number of bursaries available to students enrolling on courses this year at a number of education institutions.

The Trust can provide three bursaries of £1,000 available for students enrolling on the Ruskin College MA in Global Labour and Social Change.

In addition, there are three bursaries of £925 available for students on one-year residential courses leading to a diploma at Northern College, Coleg Harlech, Hillcroft College, Fircroft College and Newbattle Abbey College.

The Trust is also offering two bursaries of £800 each (from a trust established by Clive Jenkins) to enable union members to visit a European Union country in 2018/19 to study an aspect of trade unionism, industrial relations, training or employment first-hand and write a report for TUC Education.

Click here to find out more about all the bursaries that are currently available and download the relevant application forms

Bakers union bids farewell to ULF project manager

BFAWU Learning Services Project Manager John Vickers retired at the end of March, after nine years at the helm of the union's Union

Learning Fund (ULF) project.

His wife Dawn, a BFAWU member herself for 40 years who joined the project in 2017, also retired at the same time.

Former Project Worker Lisa Greenfield has been appointed as the ULF project manager, a role she says she would never have considered without John's backing. “I would like to thank John for all his support and encouragement – without this I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for the position of project manager,” Lisa says.

The entire BFAWU Learning Services team grew in confidence knowing that John always had their backs, says Project Worker Carol Hillaby.

“John was always just a phone call away if we needed anything and had an understanding ear if we had problems and because of this we learned to trust him,” she says. “He was always open to discussing new ideas but if he thought they were not achievable he would explain why rather than dismissing them.”

Although she was part of the project team for a shorter time than her husband, Dawn will also be very much missed by her colleagues.

“If we had problems, if we were feeling under the weather, Dawn always checked to see if we were okay: this wasn't her role, it was her nature and she became the project

‘mummy’ and our dearest friend,” Carol says.



Supporting the transformers in your workplace

A wide range of organisations is adopting new and more productive approaches to learning, development and skills through working with the National Education Union's (NEU's) Transformers Project.

✦ **Martin Moriarty**

Transformers is a Union Learning Fund (ULF) project that is breaking new ground both in the identification of its target audience and in its approach to skills development.

Instead of taking the usual ULF route of meeting the learning needs of workers in its own sector – education – Transformers is set up to work with organisations across the economy – large and small, public sector and private, unionised and non-union.

And rather than focusing on delivering workplace learning opportunities, the project's key aim is to help managers and workers in any enterprise think differently about how they can work together to harness crucial skills to boost productivity and performance.

Transformers is also innovating by focusing on an area of skills development that has rarely been placed front and centre in other ULF projects.

Rather than promoting functional skills such as English and maths, or the specialist skills we gain through vocational training or Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Transformers focuses on transversal skills like problem-solving, critical thinking and teamwork.

Alongside communication, inter-personal skills, leadership and evaluation, these skills used to be referred to as 'transferable' (because workers could take them from one job to the next).

'Transversal' is used more frequently these days because it more accurately describes the way these skills 'cut across' different work tasks and job roles at the same time – just like, in geometry, a transversal line 'cuts across' two or more other lines.

For example, a group of union learning reps (ULRs) preparing a presentation to an employer on the business benefits of a learning agreement would need to draw on a range of transversal skills, including reading, writing, research, critical thinking and teamwork.

Transformers is focusing on transversal skills because there is a growing body of evidence that they are going to be key to the way we think about supporting learning in the years ahead.

"Transversal skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes and to lead meaningful and productive lives," according to the 2014 UNESCO policy briefing, *Skills for Holistic Human Development*.

In total, Transformers has engaged with

"Transversal skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes."



20 different employers since it was launched in 2016, with 12 of them choosing to use the unique engagement tool the project has developed – a skills survey that is completed by both managers and employees.

Senior academics from London universities helped design the questionnaire, including staff from project partner King's College London (KCL), though researchers from St Mary's University Twickenham and the London School of Economics (LSE) also contributed before moving on to new institutions.

The project then analyses the data that is collected from the answers and produces a confidential report to help each organisation develop a more effective approach to learning, development and skills.

"What's significant about the engagement tool is that you get perspectives from the employer and their workers," explains Transformers Project Manager Paula Jones.

"The survey answers then feed into the customised report that each employer receives at the end of the exercise."

What the project has discovered is that the engagement tool and the report combine to change the workplace conversation about learning, development and skills and bring about real change that is valued by both sides.

That much was clear from the contributions of the employers who testified to the effectiveness of the engagement tool at a project event in March, according to unionlearn Project Worker Elaine Dobson, who sits on the project steering group.

"Three of the employers spoke eloquently about how the project had given them more focus on training and development; improved staff engagement; provided a sense of direction at a time of change; provided business growth; improved individual development of staff; and changed the way they provide training," Elaine says.

Another employer has reported that it had given a pay rise to an entire department after identifying and then making use of a whole range of skills that staff possessed that it had not known about before working with the project.

As well as working with KCL, Transformers has two more key partners. The Association of Employers and Learning Providers (AELP) is a national membership organisation that represents the interests of organisations that deliver apprenticeships, employability support and vocational learning. And the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), the government-backed professional development body for the further education (FE) and training sector, archives all the confidential data collected by the project.



"What's significant about the engagement tool is that you get perspectives from the employer and their workers."

With continued backing from the ULF in the year ahead, the project is focusing on mainstreaming its work in a range of different ways.

"Our ambition this year is to get really engaged partners who can see the benefit of this work, who can see long-term this is what they need to focus on and see this project as a springboard, a chance to partner with all kinds of organisations and not just the usual suspects," Paula says.

The project is also set to disseminate widely a new resource – a downloadable graphic resembling a London Underground map that illustrates the different transversal skills that learners (or organisations) can see they already have or need to develop.

"This resource will benefit a wider group of people because it will trigger those conversations that aren't necessarily connected with the survey, so it's a way of trying to broaden engagement with what we're trying to achieve," Paula says.

As part of the mainstreaming effort, Paula is keen to talk to any organisations that think they would benefit from taking another look at their learning and development needs.

"I can travel the country to meet anyone who is interested: we're open to any opportunity to talk to people and get things moving," she says. **LR**

■ [Click here](#) to find out more about the Transformers Project

■ [Click here](#) to contact Paula Jones

Liberation through learning

Reflecting on the 20th anniversary of the Union Learning Fund (ULF), TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady is proud of its achievements but acutely aware of how much more needs to be done.

✎ **Martin Moriarty**

Twenty years since the launch of the Union Learning Fund (ULF), how do you feel when you look at the latest figures on union learning?

The creation of the ULF made an important statement about the power of trade unions to reach workers that many other orthodox providers and employers couldn't.

You see that reflected in the figures today: it's incredible to see that 79 per cent of workers without qualifications say they simply would never have started any learning without the backing of their union.

And I feel really proud that last year unions supported 34,000 English and maths learners; 20,000 ICT learners; and 20,000 apprentices – plus 15,000 on FE courses, 23,000 Level 2 & 3 vocational training and 26,000 doing CPD courses.

We keep going great guns – we've trained nearly 4,000 new ULRs in the last year alone and helped 188,000 in total enjoy learning opportunities they wouldn't have done without their unions.



How can we persuade more employers to get on board?

I'm completely dismayed by the bigger picture of what's happening to investment in skills in the world of work.

In the latest Employer Skills Survey in 2017, one-third of UK employers admitted they had not trained any of their staff in the past year – and this statistic has remained at this level since the survey was first undertaken in 2005.

So, since the bigger picture hasn't changed, the government must step

up to the plate to create the kind of framework we would need to make that step change on investment and skills.

How can unionlearn help more low-paid, low-skilled workers gain the skills they need to progress?

This skills polarisation is one of the biggest sources of our productivity problem and it reflects what is happening in Britain today, which is that inequality is growing again – not just in terms of wealth, where we know it is enormous, but in terms of income too.

That is damaging to people and their families and their communities but it's also damaging to our economy because you end up with an enormous waste of talent and a productivity gap.

At Congress last year, I was saying it was time to start talking about a four-day week because we're seeing multi-billion pound productivity gains in the pipeline from artificial intelligence (AI) alone.

“We’ve trained nearly 4,000 new ULRs in the last year alone and helped 188,000 in total enjoy learning opportunities they wouldn’t have done without their unions.”

So let’s have a debate in society about how to share those benefits, because we shouldn’t leave it to the tech giants to grab all the gains for themselves. We should talk about how to share those gains not just in shorter working time but in more satisfying work where people feel they have a voice and can carry on learning throughout their lives – and a bit more in the pay packet wouldn’t go amiss!



You’ve been a long-term advocate for high-quality apprenticeships. What can be done to ensure women and Black and minority ethnic (BME) people can access the best opportunities?

I go back to the 2005 Equal Opportunities Commission investigation into apprenticeships where one of the questions for young women was, would they have chosen their apprenticeship if they’d known what wage they’d be on.

And around half of those young women – primarily in hairdressing

and nursery work and so on – said they’d have made a different choice if they’d known how much you would get for being a plumber or an engineer.

So there are questions about the value we attach to apprenticeships that young women are more likely to do. And there are questions about what’s going on behind the scenes of those big prestige apprenticeships that are still not taking enough BME people.

Unions can play an important role because we know that where we have a union agreement on apprenticeships, we’re much more likely to have equality and diversity, much more likely to have higher pay, much more likely to have quality built in to them.

After 20 successful years of the ULF, where do you think unionlearn should be focusing in the years ahead?

When I gave the Jimmy Reid Foundation Memorial Lecture last year, I went back to what Jimmy Reid was saying in the 1970s about the extent of alienation many working people felt then and how familiar that feels now.

Many people feel not only underpaid but under the cosh: work intensity is rising, they’re feeling sweated at work, treated like a commodity and that failure to invest in their skills is a reflection of the value given to people at work.



THE UNION LEARNING FUND IN FIGURES

- 188,000 benefited from union learning in 2017–18
- Just under 4,000 ULRs were trained in 2017
- 41,000 ULRs have been trained since 1999
- 79 per cent of learners with no prior qualifications would not have accessed learning without union support
- 68 per cent of learners with no prior qualifications gained a qualification through ULF learning
- The ULF delivers a net contribution of £1.65bn to the economy by boosting jobs, wages and productivity
- Every £1 invested in the ULF generates an economic return of £7.24 to individuals and £5.01 to employers.
- Every £1 of public funding generates a fiscal return of £3.40 to the Exchequer.

So I think learning and skills and education can be a great liberating force: yes, people can perform much better on the job through learning and training but it’s also about us being able to realise our own potential as human beings – and that’s one of the brave, bold achievements of unionlearn, that we see people in a very deep sense as human beings and not just units of labour. **LR**



Scoring goals by agreement

The learning projects at the Professional Footballers' Association and the Prison Officers' Association explain how they both use learning agreements to help their members develop their skills.

Signing learning agreements with employers, and putting in place the arrangements to implement and monitor their progress, have been underpinning the development of learning cultures in workplaces across the country for the past 20 years.

Learning agreements mean that ULRs are much more likely to have secured facility time to encourage their co-workers into learning; that access to training is more likely to be open to marginalised groups; and that organisations are genuinely able to address the skills gaps that could be holding them back.

Learning agreements are also crucial to developing sustainability for workplace learning projects since they guard against learning withering on the vine when supportive managing directors or HR personnel move on.

And at a time when unions currently have no statutory rights to collective bargaining over training, learning agreements go some way to closing that gap by establishing agreed approaches to learning, development and skills.

Learning agreements are essential for the

Union Learning Fund (ULF) project run by the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), says Project Manager Kris Irwin.

Learning agreements help preserve momentum for learning despite the turnover of staff and players that is common in most league clubs, and they help the union itself keep track of the outcomes it has agreed with the ULF, Kris says.

"The main thing about our learning agreements is that the clubs know what to expect from us and what we expect from them in return: they keep us on our toes and make sure the project workers out in the field do everything in the right way as well," he says.

Agreements between the PFA and league clubs usually identify how both sides will agree critical success factors, share information on developments, work together to develop learning programmes and jointly organise learning activities and events, including awards and presentations.

They also tend to be complemented by agreements between the clubs and their players that set out what the PFA will be delivering.

"The main thing about our learning agreements is that the clubs know what to expect from us and what we expect from them in return."

“Because our project has been going for so long, the minute students come through the club doors at 16 years of age, they know they will be doing their initial assessments through the PFA ULF project.”

“Because our project has been going for so long, the minute students come through the club doors at 16 years of age, they know they will be doing their initial assessments through the PFA ULF project, they know they will be getting an equality and diversity workshop with the PFA, and they know we will be coming in to give a union update on our welfare services and a general overview of the union,” Kris explains.

Every summer, the project visits all 15 learning centres the union is usually working with at any one time to determine their learner objectives.

“We will look at their students, we will look at their squads, we know what their exam results are and we will determine their learning needs and choose the learning resources and activities they will need and then set our completion dates,” Kris says.

In addition to the learning agreement, the project also draws up a scheme of work with the clubs that sets out dates, staffing needs and key outcomes over the whole season. “We use them for events, for courses we’re going to run, for learning centre set-ups,” Kris explains. **LR**

JUST SIGN HERE...

Learning agreements should specify:

- the aims of all signatories, including equality of access to training opportunities
- the role of ULRs and their rights
- the roles and responsibilities of management and other stakeholders (e.g. learning providers)
- learners’ rights (e.g. to learning in work time).

▶ [Click here](#) to download unionlearn’s *Delivering better learning agreements: a guide for union reps and officers*



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HOW THE POA STARTS AS IT MEANS TO GO ON

While some ULF projects build business support for a learning partnership by organising courses first and negotiating agreements later, for the Prison Officers’ Association (POA) ULF project, learning agreements mark the beginning of a relationship with a new establishment, says Learning Co-ordinator Alison Manion.

“Normally we would have an initial meeting with the local POA branch committee and the prison governor or their representative to go through our standard learning agreement,” Alison explains.

“There may be parts we need to alter – for example, if we’re not able to identify a local facility for the sole purpose of POA learning or we need to clarify issues – but the priority is the learning agreement.”

POA learning agreements specify what the union expects from the prison governor / director and what they will receive in return. In addition to access to notice boards and staff meetings, a seat on the learning and development committee and facility time for ULRs is an essential element of any agreement, Alison says.

The agreements establish joint steering groups to oversee learning at the location that aim to meet quarterly. In addition, the learning and development meetings deal with general matters in between set meetings.

With time off for learners dependant on the establishment, the union always encourages members to include individual learning needs in their annual staff reviews. “We have established that if staff want to achieve something, they are content to do this in their own time or in partnership with the employer,” Alison says.

Finding a future at the Beeb

BBC apprentice Thomas Cave is sure that playing a part in BECTU's young members' forum will help him develop his career once he completes his apprenticeship with the national broadcaster.

◆ Keith Hatch

Applying to be an apprentice for the BBC was a no-brainer for me!" says Thomas Cave, who is a BECTU member and a Broadcast Engineering Apprentice based in MediaCity, Manchester.

"Not only is the training cost fully covered but the course content, which is reviewed regularly, is crafted by a working group supported by industry leaders, who discuss if there are any skills gaps in the industry," he says.

"This means that at the end of the apprenticeship, I am trained to the specific needs of the industry and have gained hands-on knowledge working with many teams."

The hands-on approach of the programme is one of the big pluses for Thomas. "I have gained so many practical skills on my apprenticeship – it's designed to take you on a journey across many fields of the broadcast chain, all the way from source to transmission and everywhere in between!" he says.

In addition to the training scheduled through his apprenticeship, Thomas has gained additional learning opportunities through his BECTU membership card and regularly attends

the union's young members' forum, which meets several times a year.

"The forum allows young members to talk in an open and safe environment, while allowing for the committee to submit motions to National Executive Committee, giving us a voice in the union's activities."

Earlier this year, Thomas was also a speaker on one of the panels at BECTU's latest Find Your Future careers event at Westminster Kingsway College, which the union regularly organises to help 16- to 24-year-olds find out more about trainee and apprenticeship routes into the creative industries.

Thomas's apprenticeship is structured around four three-month placements that offer apprentices the chance to explore different sides of broadcasting at a time of fast-paced change throughout the industry.

Thomas's placements have enabled him to learn his way round digital 24/7 operations, production services, engineering operations and IT coordination at BBC studios.

"I have gained so many practical skills on my apprenticeship – it's designed to take you on a journey across many fields of the broadcast chain."



“One of the memories that really stands out to me is being offered the chance to work with The One Show – it was amazing to see behind the scenes, what goes on and who does what.”

“On placement, one of the memories that really stands out to me is being offered the chance to work with The One Show – it was amazing to see behind the scenes, what goes on and who does what,” he says.

The placements have not only broadened Thomas’s horizons, they have also taken him in an unexpected direction.

“I’m hoping to return to digital 24/7 operations, the team that works behind the scenes to keep the BBC’s online services up and running 24 hours a day, 365 days a year,” he says.

“It’s actually part of the industry that I’d never considered working for before, which is another great reason to do an apprenticeship – and also it’s as much about knowing what you don’t want to do as well.”

A fifth placement is conducted as a major project to complete as the apprentice’s dissertation in order to fulfil the degree’s requirements (everyone who successfully completes the programme gains a BEng Degree in Broadcast and Communication Engineering).

“I’m currently completing my project within digital 24/7 operations and a vacancy has just opened,” Thomas says. “I’ve just submitted my application to be part of the team and as I’ve already worked with them as a placement, I have a good understanding of the role they play.”

Thomas would encourage more young people to look at apprenticeships – and join a union.

“I would strongly recommend people look into apprenticeships and to try and find one which is right for you,” he says. “If you know what industry you’re interested in – great! But most people don’t, so take a step back, think about what skills you’re good at and what interests you have.”

Thomas also recommends signing up to BECTU’s student register. “It’s free to join and they send out a lot of useful information to you, keeping you updated on the industry changes, training opportunities, career fairs and networking events – everything to help support you to get started in the industry!” he says. **LR**



NEW RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUNG APPRENTICES

The government has produced a range of new resources designed to ensure young apprentices secure the support they need from their employers – resources that union reps can also use to help promote high-quality programmes in the workplace.

Supporting Young Apprentices is designed to help employers of all sizes and across all sectors provide effective support for apprentices aged 16 to 24.

Written for the Department for Education (DfE) by Learning and Work Institute (L&W), the new guide:

- outlines the steps employers can take to make their recruitment practices accessible for young people
- includes examples of on-the-job support for young apprentices in the workplace
- provides information on sources of additional funding that employers can use to support young apprentices.

The National Apprenticeship Service has also produced a new flowchart to clarify the regulations on time off for training on apprenticeships, especially what the 20 per cent off-the-job rule covers (and doesn’t cover).

While the flowchart is largely aimed at employers, the tips it includes should also prove useful for union reps to help them get to grips with the relevant rules and to use them to support high-quality apprenticeships in the workplace.

► [Click here](#) to download ‘Supporting young apprentices: guidance for employers’

► [Click here](#) to download the off-the-job training flowchart

Low-skilled workers caught by training gap

The very people who would benefit most from accessing training opportunities are least likely to access them, according to a new report.

The poorest adults with the lowest qualifications are the least likely to access adult training, according to the Social Mobility Commission's (SMC's) new report, *The Adult Skills Gap*.

By contrast, high-skilled workers tend to benefit from a virtuous circle of frequent in-work training and pay increases, the report shows.

"First, there is growing evidence to suggest that those whose parents were working class are less likely to do training than if their parents were middle class – even though they are doing the same type of job," the report points out.

"Second, employers are more likely to invest in those with higher skills while better-off individuals are also more likely to fund their own training."

Earlier research by the SMC shows that half (49 per cent) of

adults from the lowest socio-economic group receive no training at all after leaving school. This means one in four low-paid workers will never escape low pay.

The problem is that employers fund 82 per cent of all UK training and tend to prioritise senior, high-skilled employees, says the report. Most other training is paid for by individuals themselves – if they can afford it. Free courses run by government make up just 3 per cent of all accessed training courses.

This results in a system where vast numbers of low-skilled workers have little opportunity to boost their skills and escape low pay. The SMC argues that this urgently needs rebalancing – for productivity as much as social mobility. **LR**

➤ [Click here](#) to read *The Adult Skills Gap* report



EMPLOYERS MUST TAKE POSITIVE ACTION

More employers should use positive action to increase the number of female, disabled and Black and minority ethnic (BME) apprentices in Britain, according to a new report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

While the study found some examples of companies encouraging female apprentices, there were far fewer schemes or positive action measures relating to race and disability – despite the fact that almost 90 per cent of apprentices in England aged 16 to 24 are white.

The EHRC recommends that employers monitor recruitment, retention and progression by ethnicity, disability and gender to identify disadvantages faced by particular groups and then tackle them through:

- general positive action such as reserving places for a protected group on training courses or providing mentoring for a particular group
- positive action in recruitment and promotion by using the 'tie-break' provision to appoint an individual from a protected group over another individual where that group is under-represented or at a disadvantage and the candidates are equally qualified.

➤ [Click here](#) to read exploring positive action as a tool to address under-representation in apprenticeships



“I felt that you could never teach an old dog new tricks, but boy was I wrong – what a fantastic course and an excellent refresher.”

or don’t understand, I can go to the dictionary and work that way,” he says.

Now relaxed about talking about his dyslexia, Lee didn’t feel that way 10 years ago, when far fewer people understood the condition.

“When I first became a rep, I was quite embarrassed to come out and say I have dyslexia,” Lee says. “It was only when I met someone really nice through Unite Education who said ‘Never be afraid of talking about your dyslexia’ that really brought me out of my shell.”

And he hasn’t looked back since enrolling earlier this year. “It’s been a real eye-opener – absolutely fantastic.”

Lee particularly enjoys online networking through the forum with other reps from other unions on the course.

“Every hour, I’m getting a ping on my phone or my computer saying someone’s added to the forum and you look at it straight away and see what they’ve put on there: we’re all bouncing ideas off each other, answering each other’s questions and supporting each other – I’m enjoying it 100 per cent.”

Lee is learning new skills from the course content, too, whether that’s on the effectiveness of using floor plans in workplace mapping or the benefits of mapping his own team of reps, which has helped him signpost two reps to Royal Mail’s Springboard women’s development programme.

Lee is now encouraging all his reps to take the online course to refresh their knowledge and skills.

“I felt that you could never teach an old dog new tricks, but boy was I wrong – what a fantastic course and an excellent refresher,” Lee says. **LR**

[Click here](#) to enrol on Union Reps 1 online

Teaching an old rep new tricks

Lee Harvey has been refreshing his skills as a Unite CMA rep by starting Union Reps 1 online 10 years after he originally took the classroom version of the course.

With 200 cases behind him in one of the biggest branches of Unite CMA at Royal Mail, Lee Harvey thought he knew his way around the union rep role. But then a new rep showed him some different approaches to workplace mapping late last year.

“I thought, ‘Hold up – I think I’m going to need some re-education here’, so that’s why I’m doing Union Reps 1 online,” Lee says.

Lee completed the classroom version of the course when he first became active in CMA 10 years ago. But after just a couple of months of online study, he is convinced that taking the new version is paying off.

For one thing, Lee is happier with online learning since being able to work at his own pace suits his dyslexia.

“Doing courses online, I find it a lot easier to concentrate with my dyslexia and if there’s a word I don’t know



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“When they said I’d won the national award, I was totally shocked – my friend had to tap me on the shoulder and say, ‘You’ve just won it!’”

taboo subject 10 years ago but now everybody wants to understand it – we’ve signed up everyone from store managers to people on the shop floor,” Tracy says. “Unions have made a real difference by promoting it as a subject.”

Store managers have completely supported Tracy’s drive to help her colleagues boost their skills. “The buy-in from management has increased year on year,” she says.

Even after a decade of supporting her colleagues on their learning journeys, Tracy still feels the thrill of each learner’s first exam success. “When a learner comes back and says, I’ve passed, what can I learn now? – that really inspires me,” she says.

When she was named Usdaw’s ULR of the Year at the union’s annual organising awards in January, Tracy couldn’t believe it on the night and is still struggling to get her head around that recognition weeks after the ceremony.

“When they said I’d won the national award, I was totally shocked – my friend had to tap me on the shoulder and say, ‘You’ve just won it!’ she recalls. “I’m honoured to have won but I’m still shocked now: I don’t think it’s sunk in yet!”

Usdaw Project Worker Martyn Warwick says the award recognises a decade of outstanding work on Tracy’s part.

“Tracy has supported new ULRs to build the union team in the workplace and ensure members have access to training, development and support, while continually striving to develop herself as a learner so she can speak to her members from a place of empathy and understanding,” Martyn says.

“Tracy is a shining example of what learning and development can do and she puts that into practice with her members – that’s what make Tracy a great ULR.” **LR**

Tracy has the White stuff

After a decade of helping her colleagues improve their skills, Usdaw learning rep Tracy White has been named ULR of the year at the union’s organising awards.

♦ Martin Moriarty

When Usdaw started promoting an IT with English course at Tracy White’s Tesco store in York 10 years ago, only one thing was stopping her from enrolling: she wasn’t yet ready to talk about her dyslexia.

So she came up with a creative solution: she volunteered to become a union learning rep (ULR) to make it look like she was attending the course to support the learners while she was in fact improving her English skills on the quiet.

That course turned out to be the beginning of a whole new life for Tracy. It whetted her appetite for more learning and it gave her the confidence to start talking about her dyslexia as she spread the lifelong learning message to colleagues.

While English, maths and IT were most popular when Tracy first became a ULR, these days courses like mental health awareness, autism awareness and Dementia Friends attract the most interest.

“Mental health is a subject that touches most people: it was a