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LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Winter 2015

ISSN 2397-0367

Tom bids farewell after six years at the helm

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unionlearn
with the TUC



OPENING DOORS TO THE CREATIVE SECTOR

Media and entertainment union BECTU organised Find Your Future 2015, a summer event in London to help would-be apprentices and trainees in the creative sectors learn more about how to find the right career pathways.

Aimed at 16- to 18-year-olds not in Further Education, the event welcomed all new entrants wishing to pursue the Apprenticeship or Traineeship routes.

“It made me start looking for opportunities in theatre as well as TV and reminded me that there are crossovers between the industries and transferable skills,” commented one participant.

At the heart of the day was a marketplace, where a host of employers and key industry bodies were on hand with information and guidance, including highlighting upcoming Apprenticeship and trainee schemes.

“Find Your Future was truly successful in providing the right advice in an informal setting, helping future new entrants to learn more about the different sectors,” commented BECTU Learning Organiser Lezli Everitt.

“However talented you are, we know it can be tough to get on that first rung of the ladder, therefore we hope to do more both here in London and in the regions next year.” **LR**

NEWS + VIEWS

Twist of fate tale nets Pete a prize

Road transport union URTU learning rep Pete Roe is the winner of the Creative Writing Competition the union organised through its ULF project.

Pete, who works at Hovis Bakeries in Nottingham, won with his story *A Cruel Twist of Fate*, which tells the tale of one man unearthing a family history affected by war, work and social values.

“It’s a great achievement and a proud moment to be named as winner of the short story competition, especially as I come from a family that has learning difficulties,” says Pete, who was presented with a prize pack at the URTU ULR conference in October.

“Being part of a trade union and becoming a ULR shows we all have a chance to develop.”

The story has been published online and in the latest edition of URTU’s magazine *Wheels*.

[Click here](#) to read Pete’s winning story



organised a professional study day with Diane Garland, a world expert on water birth, and is now working with the union’s learning team to deliver a series of short workshops on social media with live

demonstrations of

RCM’s e-learning platform, i-learn.

“The first session was well attended and midwives, students and maternity support

workers (MSWs) were able to test the resources, and feedback from all staff was very positive,” Louise says.

“As a learning rep, I wanted to promote the RCM i-learn, and some non-members who attended the session commented that they had learned so much more about the benefits of being an RCM member.”

As midwives are required to undertake 40 hours Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as part of their three-yearly re-registration, Louise and the RCM team are using this requirement as a vital engagement and organising opportunity.

With the help of RCM Project Worker Lucy Hopley, Louise is organising a region-wide study day for MSWs in December and the branch is looking into running a study day on complementary therapies.

• See ‘Bringing new careers into the world’ on pages 8&9.



ULR Louise revamps midwives’ training

Royal College of Midwives (RCM) learning rep and consultant midwife Louise Simpson is using union learning to enhance the mandatory training programme she is revamping as part of her job at Warrington Hospital.

Louise has already

UNISON gives its ULRs the tools for skills



UNISON has published two new toolkits to help ULRs promoting Functional Skills in the workplace.

Read Anytime Anywhere is a full-colour 28-page booklet that sets out how to get the best results from running reading schemes at work such as Reading Ahead (formerly the Six Book Challenge), organising book groups and promoting Quick Reads.

The toolkit features case studies of UNISON branches that have run successful programmes, with detailed step-by-step tips on how to run Reading Ahead launches and celebration events, where to go for funding and resources, and best practice for workplace book groups.

Making Every Penny Count is a toolkit for ULRs with step-by-step instructions for running easy and enjoyable activities in the workplace to help learners improve their financial know-how, including a word search, crossword and quiz.

To make it easy for ULRs to run the activities at work, the toolkit is accompanied by activity sheets for learners to use

and a budgeting and money management workbook to complete, all downloadable from the UNISON website.

Click [here](#) to find out more about the toolkits from UNISON Learning and Organising Services

CWU members go the distance with Tribal learning

Members of the Communication Workers Union in the south-west have been gaining skills and qualifications through free Level 2 accredited distance learning courses provided by Tribal Education.

"These courses have been a great success, with more than 40 students participating," says CWU

Plymouth and East Cornwall Branch lead ULR Gavin Hardie.

"People can study at home at their own leisure: they all have a tutor on hand if they need one, for help and advice."

Jade Jones (above left) from Plymouth Mail Centre is one of several CWU members who has really taken to distance learning. "As soon as I've finished one course, I'm ready to start another!" she says.

With most members who sign up going on to finish their courses and some – like Jade – completing more than one, Gavin believes distance learning will continue to grow ever more popular.

"Students seem to really enjoy these courses because they are distance learning,"

he says. "Some people prefer to study away from the classroom and Tribal courses are ideal in this situation."

Boost maths at work with Numeracy Review



National Numeracy's new Numeracy Review is a great way for ULRs and employers to work together to identify and address the issue of low-level maths skills in the workplace.

The review is a two-stage process that analyses behaviour, average competence levels and attitudes towards numeracy among staff, helping ULRs and employers measure the scale and impact of poor numeracy and work together to develop solutions.

As well as the review, the National Numeracy Challenge has improved and streamlined its website: users can now see which questions they answered incorrectly, set their own goals and email reminders, and there is a new save and log-out button to save progress.

The upgraded site also has new, easier-to-understand badges measured against five areas of numeracy.

Click [here](#) to find out more

Learning and equality reps join forces in Wales

Learning and equality reps have been joining forces across Wales to make links, update skills, inform each other on local issues and share information.

The ULR network of excellence has been active for nearly 10 years and the equality reps network, though younger, has already made an impact by linking reps, particularly in the public sector.

This year, the reps combined forces, holding three joint meetings in Merthyr Tydfil, Brecon and Wrexham that were all well attended despite the increasing problems reps face securing facility time to take part.

"Attending the joint network meeting with equality reps was thoroughly enjoyable and being able to network with other reps was invaluable," commented PCS learning rep Laura Westwood.

Speakers included Kevin Pascoe from The Open University (OU), who shared the latest news from FutureLearn, Openlearn and the OU, and Llion Bevan from Shelter Cymru, who talked about the free and valuable advice available for employees at the Work it Out! Project.

Katie Dalton from mental health and well-being charity Gofal led a workshop on mental health and Steve Huxton from Ageing Well in Wales led a session about the ageing workforce.

AND IT'S GOODBYE FROM HIM...

Looking back over his six years as Director of unionlearn, Tom Wilson feels optimistic about the future for union learning.

➡ Martin Moriarty

When Tom Wilson moved from the TUC's Organisation and Services Department to become Director of unionlearn in 2009, the movement had trained around 23,000 union learning reps, who were encouraging 200,000 union learners onto a wide range of courses every year.

Now, as he retires after six years at the helm, there are 32,000 ULRs supporting an annual total of around 230,000 learners, many of whom would never have had the chance without the backing of their unions and the financial support of the Union Learning Fund (ULF).

At a time when government investment in the ULF has reduced from £22m a year in 2010 to £14m today, that these hugely impressive numbers have been achieved in increasingly challenging financial circumstances is down to the learning reps themselves, Tom believes.

"Looking back on the five years of the coalition government, I feel proud that the union learning agenda survived and flourished, which is a tribute to the hard work that ULRs put in up and down the country day after day," he says.

Despite the massive upheavals that have

changed the economic, political and skills landscape in recent times, unionlearn itself has proved remarkably resilient.

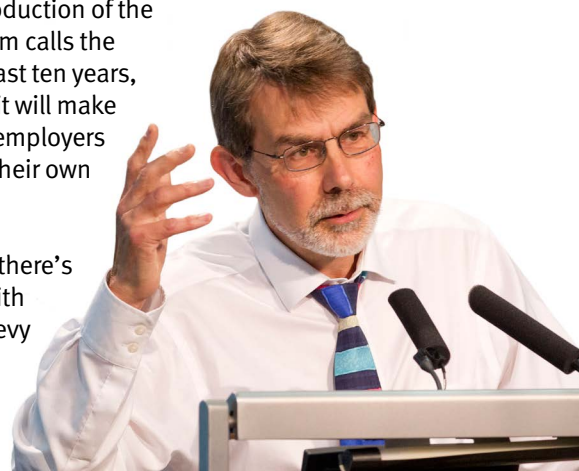
"I wrote a paper on the first 10 years of unionlearn this summer, and of all the institutions that had been set up by the time we were launched in 2006, we are the only one that has survived – every single other body has been abolished or transmogrified," Tom says.

"The question then is, does the skills landscape now look better or worse? I am not entirely sure. I think you can re-arrange the furniture as much as you like: what really matters is the culture – and the culture within employers, in particular," he argues.

The new government's introduction of the Apprenticeship levy, which Tom calls the single biggest change in the last ten years, may not be a silver bullet but it will make a massive change in the way employers act in terms of investment in their own employees.

"There are plenty of good employers in this country but there's an awful lot of getting away with as little as possible, and the levy

"Looking back on the five years of the coalition government, I feel proud that the union learning agenda survived and flourished."





Tom Wilson helps bid farewell to his unionlearn predecessor Liz Smith (centre), flanked by Frances O'Grady (far left) and Mary Boustead

“There are plenty of good employers in this country but there’s an awful lot of getting away with as little as possible.”

provides us with a real opportunity to change that mindset,” he suggests.

“We are already seeing a big change in employer behaviour, lots of employers now coming to the unions and saying, ‘Help us to implement a good Apprenticeship scheme because we don’t want to lose this money’.”

Tom is most proud of the mainstreaming of union learning in recent years, with two-thirds of all workplace reps now promoting their union learning offer according to the latest survey, which makes him optimistic about the future.

“All workers value learning and skills but there is evidence that younger workers in particular value learning, and as that generation moves up and becomes more active, they will be making sure unions keep the learning agenda right at the forefront of what unions do,” he forecasts.

He may be leaving unionlearn, but he is planning to remain on the lifelong learning scene. In addition to teaching, researching and writing at the universities where he is a Visiting Fellow (UCL and Wolverhampton), and volunteering with skills organisations and providers, he will be promoting union learning around the world through some work with the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

“This is a fairly unique British invention, and through the ILO I aim to help other union movements throughout the world pick it up as a key way of reinvigorating the entire global trade union movement,” he says. There’s a pause, followed by a self-deprecating chuckle. “It sounds ludicrously grandiose, but what’s wrong with being ambitious?” **LR**

TRIBUTES TO TOM

“Tom’s extensive knowledge of the skills agenda is deeply impressive. He has been a powerful advocate to government of the power of unions working with members to develop skills and become lifelong learners. His commitment, hard work and dogged determination has steered the unionlearn ship through many stormy waters. He will be greatly missed.”

Mary Boustead, unionlearn Board

“Tom and his team at unionlearn have played a really important advocacy role in bringing forward the employee perspective, which is often at risk of being overlooked in the development of policy and strategy. It has been a genuine pleasure to work with Tom throughout my time at UKCES: he has been insightful, thoughtful and incredibly professional at landing tough messages in the nicest possible way.”

Michael Davis, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)

“Tom is a man of great integrity and insight and he is good fun to work with: I am sure that he will continue to be a powerful voice for lifelong learning and good employment and I look forward to his involvement as we fight for lifelong learning to be properly funded.”

David Hughes, National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

“Tom has been a beacon of good sense and source of trusted counsel throughout my time at the AoC, not only on unionlearn but on wider issues: he will be missed by me and his many, many friends and allies in colleges.”

Martin Doel, Association of Colleges (AoC)

“Tom brings with him a quiet passion about the importance of education and skills, a deep commitment to social justice and fairness and a belief that high-quality professional technical Apprenticeships are fundamental to the future of the UK economy. He is a brilliant strategic thinker who has contributed much to the development of PROCAT and I hope he will continue to do so in the future.”

Neil Bates, PROCAT

“Every good wish to Tom for a busy ‘retirement’ and to unionlearn for continuing success in providing the common ground between trade unions, employers and individual working people – the passion for learning!”

David Sherlock CBE, Beyond Standards



Building a bright future

A new learning centre in Kent supported by UCATT is helping teenagers escape unemployment and prepare for Apprenticeships in the construction industry.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

Building union UCATT is helping Kent teenagers gain introductory construction skills by supporting the new Constructing Your Future Learning Centre in Margate, which has higher than average unemployment especially among young people who have left school.

After a 10-week course over the summer prepared school leavers for Apprenticeships, a second course is now underway with the centre offering a range of construction skills.

Referred from local schools and Kent County Council, learners can complete a range of accredited courses, including carpentry, maths, environmental sustainability, employment rights and issues around working on sites.

The centre's facilities include a large open workshop for 'hands-on' carpentry, painting and decorating training.

"I was glad to finish school: I didn't really like it, I didn't get along with it," explains Sean, who says that hands-on experience

in bricklaying, tiling and carpentry at the centre has really helped give him a leg up to the construction career he always wanted.

"I have enjoyed it a lot: it's given me the skills to go on to an Apprenticeship."

Centre manager Tony Elliott says the pre-Apprenticeship course offers young people who might be at risk a strong footing to progress onto an Apprenticeship, allowing them to approach employers with qualifications, experience and a safety card.

"As part of the package, we help to find them Apprenticeships and liaise with local employers to get them to pledge places when they are ready."





“As part of the package, we help to find them Apprenticeships and liaise with local employers to get them to pledge places when they are ready,” he says.

UCATT’s links with local employers are proving particularly helpful, with Cardy Construction recently agreeing to take work placements from the pre-Apprenticeship training courses.

UCATT Learning Organiser Rossina Harris says the union is keen to help young people into the construction industry.

“One of the difficulties is having work experience: people can often get qualifications but not the experience,” she explains.

“Through UCATT’s links, we can go to employers and talk to them about what trades they are looking for – one local employer has already taken seven and another wants two: it’s about getting in there at the right time.”

UCATT is also able to make an intervention with young people from the offset, explaining to them the importance of safe working and fair conditions. “It’s about introducing them to that mindset from the beginning,” she says.

Through its ULF project Reaching Out in the Workplace and the Community, UCATT is also helping apprentices from social enterprise North Liverpool Regeneration Company (NLRCo) to find work placements on major construction projects in the city.

These include the Royal Liverpool Hospital project and a Liverpool Housing Partnership scheme to build 1,500 new homes and bring back into use a further 1,000 across the city.

Many youngsters are gaining skills at the new North Liverpool Construction Training Centre, which NLRCo opened late last year to tackle deprivation and improve the employment prospects in the area.

Working with 16- to 18-year-olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) as well as people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems, the centre will train between 70 and 120 construction apprentices a year and help them find work. **LR**

HELPING STABLE STAFF CLEAR WORK HURDLES



When former stable worker Becky Rogers thought her days on horseback might be numbered, she discovered she could stay in the industry she loves by improving her Functional Skills through the National Association of Stable Staff (NASS).

“Due to a couple of nasty injuries, I knew that my days of riding could not last forever, as much as I loved it, so I thought this would be a good opportunity to add some qualifications to my CV,” says Becky, who took the NASS skills course, consisting of IT, maths and English.

After the course, newly-confident Becky found a new job as a racing assistant for Godolphin’s Charlie Appleby, where she logs farrier reports, weights and heights, inputs veterinary information and places all stable and feed orders.

Taking the NASS course was instrumental in moving on, Becky says. “Gaining the qualifications gave me the confidence to be able to apply for this sort of job, which is something I would never have considered before,” she says.

“It also demonstrated that I had taken the initiative to push myself further as, apart from my school results and NVQs in racehorse care, I have no other qualifications.”

In an industry where there is a widespread lack of transferable skills, the courses for racing staff have been a massive success, says NASS ULF Project Manager Kevin Parsons.

“Becky is a fine example of someone who has used our courses to move sideways within our industry into a different role,” he says. “ULF funding has given us this great opportunity to help give racing staff the chance to gain or improve their English, maths and IT qualifications.”

The courses have run in four different training centres across the country with plans to move to two more, one in the south-west and one in Middleham, North Yorkshire. **LR**



As a young woman, Denise Linay thought she would spend her whole life in nursing. She only started a midwifery qualification in 1981 because that was what was expected at the time, not because she wanted to switch careers. “Back then you were not considered a proper nurse unless you were also a midwife,” she recalls.

But the course changed her mind, and she never returned to nursing, instead leaving Basildon Hospital (where she had trained) for a midwifery post in Barking Maternity Hospital, and later becoming a midwifery sister and a steward for the Royal College of Midwives (RCM).

Denise left Barking in the early 1990s when she secured a job as an industrial relations officer with the union – much to her father’s chagrin.

“My father was very disappointed!” she recalls. “Even though he was a Labour supporter and very working class, he was quite old school and would have liked me to stay as a midwifery sister – trade union officer was not the path he expected for his daughter!”

After a number of different jobs at the RCM’s London headquarters, Denise became Head of Organising and Engagement three years ago, the first person to hold a post that emerged from the development of the RCM’s first organising strategy.

“Before 2010, we were very much an organisation that serviced our members – we did things for them and if they did do anything that was a huge bonus – but we were very mindful that we would not be able to continue to grow with that attitude and mindset,” she recalls.

“Myself and other people, including Jon Skewes, the director of employment relations at the time, started to develop an organising strategy that included being more overt about recruitment, higher expectations of our workplace reps, better training of our workplace reps, and more organising out in the field.”

Re-engineering itself into an organising union was rooted in the success of the RCM’s first bid to the Union Learning Fund in 2009, Denise says.

“When we started going out to deliver learning events, our branches started to reinvigorate themselves: suddenly people were becoming union learning reps (ULRs) and encouraging other people to become reps, and ULRs were becoming stewards themselves,” she explains.

“My personal view is that learning has transformed the RCM and made the move to an organising culture that much easier.”

The centrepiece of the RCM learning offer is its e-learning platform i-learn, which features more than 50 courses at all levels, from 10-minute updates through to more in-depth options, all supported by video and audio resources, diagrams and case studies.

Denise in her office at the RCM’s London headquarters today and (right) starting out as a midwife at Barking Maternity Hospital 20 years ago

Bringing new careers into the world

By working with the Union Learning Fund and, more recently, affiliating to the TUC, the Royal College of Midwives is helping its members progress in the profession, explains Head of Organising and Engagement Denise Linay.

 **Martin Moriarty**

Whenever members complete a course, the certificate can then be sent direct to the RCM’s e-portfolio system, i-folio, which keeps an online record of all their professional development.

“We get very good feedback on i-learn and i-folio, which is invaluable in terms of midwives being able to provide the evidence to their employer that they are keeping up to date,” Denise says.

“We were able to deliver i-learn as a result of getting funding through the ULF: we have showcased it to other organisations who are very envious of the provision.”

In addition to i-learn and i-folio, the union runs a comprehensive portfolio of training for

“My father was quite old school and would have liked me to stay as a midwifery sister – trade union officer was not the path he expected for his daughter!”



RCM workplace reps, very much geared to what goes on in the maternity workplace, with a regional officer always on hand to supplement the trainer's insights with professional specifics.

The RCM also offers leadership training to maternity teams. "We recognise that leadership is everyone's business, not just managers', so we encourage people to come along as a team, perhaps with a Maternity Support Worker (MSW) onboard," Denise says.

MSWs are a relatively recent addition to the union, a group of health service workers who face their own challenges as part of the NHS support workforce that are significantly different from those facing midwives.



"My personal view is that learning has transformed the RCM and made the move to an organising culture that much easier."

To help them address those challenges, the RCM runs an MSW network, which falls under Denise's responsibility, alongside a similar network for student midwives.

Helping develop career paths for MSWs is one of the key goals for the union, Denise says, especially when the broad appeal of the BBC period drama *Call the Midwife* has helped make midwifery the most popular course at many universities.

"The *Call the Midwife* effect means that there can be 1,000 applicants for 30 places on a university course: it's so challenging for anyone to get on a midwifery course now, I very much doubt I would get on one if I were trying today."

Denise was part of the RCM group that put together its recent successful case for affiliation to the TUC, a move that would have been unthinkable when she first joined 30 years ago. "Back in the 1980s, the union very much had a twinset and pearls reputation, even if many members were heavily into the New Romantics!" she recalls.

But times have changed since then, just as the fashion sense of all the union's members has moved on, and Denise is convinced that being part of the UK's union centre will now help the RCM further extend its learning offer.

"I am proud to have been part of the RCM becoming the first Royal College to join the TUC: affiliation will give RCM members more opportunities to develop their skills on a range of issues and allow them to play an increasing role in voicing the value of midwifery and the maternity service using the TUC platform," she says. **LR**

Spreading the news

You can boost the profile of your learning project, campaign or event by getting in touch with the unionlearn Learning Campaign Support Officer promoting work in your region.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Many union learning reps (ULRs) across the country are seeing the fruits of their commitment and hard work celebrated in case studies appearing with ever more regularity on the unionlearn website and in the *Learning Rep* magazine.

Much of the credit for the increased profile of their work goes to the three-strong team of Learning Campaign Support Officers unionlearn put together earlier this year – Janet Valentine, Jurgita Pranculyte and Keith Hatch.

With each of them covering union learning projects in two TUC regions, the trio has been helping unions shout louder about their learning successes in print, online and via social media.

Between them, Janet, Jurgita and Keith have more than 30 years' experience in union learning and many ULRs and project workers knew them from their previous roles with unionlearn and – in

“No success story is too small: if the union learning experience changes even one life, that is already a big story in itself.”

Janet's case – its predecessor, TUC Learning Services.

Janet, whose role covers both the North-West and the Northern regions, has been involved with adult learning and skills throughout her working life, and originally trained as a UNISON ULR while she was still working in a university in the early noughties.

After a secondment with TUC Learning Services helping learning reps support their colleagues into Higher Education (HE) through the aimhigher project, she took two different teaching qualifications and then worked for Unite's ULF project

before moving to unionlearn's North West team in 2009.

Jurgita, who covers both the Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber regions, has been working in the trade union movement since arriving in this country from Lithuania 10 years ago, supporting some of the most vulnerable people within workplaces and communities.

For her first four years here, she was part of the general union GMB's organising team in the Midlands, focusing on recruitment work in the food and drink sector, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable workers.

Since joining unionlearn in 2008, she has been working on regional learning projects and was seconded for a year to the TUC to share her expertise in organising migrant workers and help unions keen to support migrants in their workplaces.

There are many stories the project is finding to write them up and get them on the website.

“No success story is too small: if the union learning experience changes even one life, that is already a big story in itself,” she says.

“Union learning is making a positive impact on working people’s lives every day and my job is to make sure that it’s celebrated, heard and shared within wider audiences.”

Keith is also a familiar figure to many ULRs, especially around the south-west, where he was a union support officer for unionlearn for four years before taking up his current role covering both the South-West and the Southern and Eastern regions.

But in many ways he has been preparing for his role ever since he left secondary school in south London and began a four-year Apprenticeship at Imperial College, London.

He took out a union card not long after he started in the electrical engineering department, when his apprentice tutor, who was also part of the reps team for ASTMS (now part of Unite), asked if he had joined.

“The union reps tended to be the same people who would become apprentice tutors to support the apprentices – they were the sort of people who would be union learning reps now,” he reckons.

But it was his first experience of TUC Education, on a health and safety course at South Thames College, that ultimately set him on the journey that would take him to his current role.

“We had a reasonably benign management at Imperial, apart from the odd academic who went a bit scatty after returning from the United States thinking it would be great to sack everyone and re-employ them on new contracts,” he recalls.

“So it was interesting to meet all these people from different workplaces, different unions, with different experiences and learn how much more difficult it was for them to organise than it was for us.”

After the Stage One course, Keith took a diploma in health and safety, the first time the TUC course had included environmental issues, which he was particularly interested

“We need to tell people what these reps are doing because if we don’t, others who could be just as good may never come forward.”

in as he was already active in local campaigns around Lambeth.

From there, he took a part-time degree in Environmental Management at Birkbeck (too early to secure the 10 per cent discount union learners can now claim on most courses with the college). When he took redundancy from Imperial halfway through the four-year course, his studying helped him secure a new job with Groundwork West London.

And when he upped sticks for the West Country after finishing, his skills and experience helped him get new work with Friends of the Earth, before he joined the South-West TUC green workplaces project six years ago and the unionlearn team 18 months after that.

The hardest part of his new job is fitting everything in, he says. “There are so many positive stories out there, the problem is finding the time to write them all up and get them on the website.”

The upside is meeting the ULRs on the ground who are making big changes in their workplaces and communities, sometimes without huge amounts of funding or resources.

“There is a UNISON rep at Bristol University, Sarah Tauwhare, who started doing lunch ‘n’ learn sessions that are now attracting lots of people, and the branch is now starting an art class and a book club – from a little idea, they have done loads,” Keith says. “We need to tell people what these reps are doing because if we don’t, others who could be just as good may never think to come forward.” **LR**

➡ [Click here](#) to get in touch with Janet Valentine about a project in the Northern or North-West regions

➡ [Click here](#) to get in touch with Keith Hatch about a project in the Southern and Eastern or South-West regions

➡ [Click here](#) to get in touch with Jurgita Pranculyte about a project in the Midlands or Yorks and Humber regions



MEET THE LCSO TEAM

Janet Valentine (left), who covers the Northern and North-West regions, has been involved with union learning since training as a ULR in 2002.

Keith Hatch (centre), who covers the Southern and Eastern and South-West regions, trained as a health and safety rep in 1992, and joined the unionlearn South-West team in 2009.

Jurgita Pranculyte (right), who covers the Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber regions, been part of unionlearn since 2008.

Investing in the future

Both unions and employers are keen that the government's planned expansion of the Apprenticeship programme through the new levy does not sacrifice quality for quantity.

🔗 Martin Moriarty

Now that the government consultation on its plan to raise an employer levy to fund new Apprenticeships has closed, unions, employers, providers and other stakeholders are waiting to hear how ministers will put the plan into practice.

While full details are expected in the Chancellor's November spending review, a recent paper by the government's skills adviser Baroness Alison Wolf suggested that a levy of around 0.5 per cent of payroll would raise more than £2bn a year.

Both unionlearn and the TUC welcomed the government's conversion to the training levy model, which was announced alongside a new target of creating three million new Apprenticeships by 2020 as part of the post-election Budget earlier this year.

But they both underlined that the expansion in numbers, welcome as it is, should not be achieved through low-quality schemes that not only let down the individuals involved but also fail to deliver the skills the UK needs in the years ahead.

"It will be important that investment in these new places does not come at the expense of wider Further Education services and that quality is given as much focus as quantity," commented TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady.

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson agreed. "The big worry is quality," he pointed out. "We need to ensure that the new hypothecated pot of Apprenticeship money does not become a magnet for those aiming to make money by hitting the three million target for Apprenticeships as quickly and cheaply as possible."

But it's not only unions that are raising concerns about quantity versus quality: many employers'



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organisations are making very similar points.

"Moving back to a time when some on-the-job training was being badged as an Apprenticeship in a bid to boost numbers will simply fail to deliver the skills manufacturers desperately need," manufacturing employers' organisation EEF told the *Financial Times* this summer.

The British Chambers of Commerce echoed the EEF. "It's good to be ambitious but we don't want to lose focus on quality," it said.

Serious involvement of trade unions is one of the key methods for guaranteeing high-quality Apprenticeships that are genuinely worth the name.

"Unions monitor actual practice and delivery, often very different from fine words on paper. And unions negotiate over content and curriculum, ensuring apprentices receive well-rounded training," Tom Wilson says.

That is why unionlearn was reassured to hear from the

"It is very welcome that unions' contribution to the skills agenda is being recognised – unionlearn can take some credit for that."

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) that it is keen to involve unions in the design and oversight of the new scheme.

The assurances are not simply words: unions have been invited to join senior government officials and employers on two recent fact-finding trips to investigate the German skills system.

"It is very welcome that unions' contribution to the skills agenda, as in Germany and most other advanced economies, is being recognised – unionlearn can take some credit for that," Tom says. **LR**

Tracking the value of learning

By helping individuals secure higher wages and enterprises boost their productivity, the Union Learning Fund is delivering excellent value for money.

Every pound of government investment in the Union Learning Fund (ULF) generates a return of more than £9, according to analysis of the latest survey of union learners by Marchmont Observatory at the University of Exeter.

The return is split between the £5.75 that individual union learners secure through higher wages rewarding their improved skills and the £3.40 that employers gain from the improved productivity of their newly trained workers.

The evidence of the positive economic impact of the ULF comes from a survey of more than 2,500 people that the ULF helped engage in learning through its latest completed funding period, Round 15.

The Marchmont Observatory analysis estimates that the £14m awarded to 41 union learning projects in Round 15 generated a total impact of £916m.

That figure comprises £580m secured by individuals (£470m in higher wages and £110m as a result of being more likely to have a job) and £336m employers gained as a result of the greater productivity achieved by a better skilled workforce (allowing for the working time lost to learning).

To complement the return on investment analysis, analysts also examined a tax receipt model, which

points to Round 15 generating £250m, a figure that works out at an estimated return of £2.50 for every £1 of public funding (taking delivery costs into account).

The key 'hard' outcome from the survey was that union learning helps people to perform at a higher level at work, with 40 per cent of respondents reporting that their learning helped them do their jobs better, followed by 35 per cent who now felt more confident about progressing their careers.

Survey respondents who took part in ESOL courses were significantly more likely than average to report a wide range of outcomes, including that they got a new job or changed to a different kind of work; were able to do their job better; stayed in a job they might otherwise have lost; felt more confident about progressing in their career; and felt more confident about finding a job in the future. **LR**



GETTING THE 'LEARNING BUG'

The survey also showed that union learners are very likely to get the 'learning bug' that can help them dramatically improve their career and personal development:

- Nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) took part in more than one learning/training opportunity and nearly one-third (31 per cent) had taken part in four or more
- Roughly half of respondents (48 per cent) had participated in more than one type of learning/training
- Older workers, disabled workers and temporary/agency workers, groups that face particular barriers in the labour market, were more likely to have participated in multiple episodes of learning/training
- Union-led learning proves particularly effective at encouraging individuals, especially from disadvantaged groups, to maintain engagement in learning/training over a sustained period.

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

"Every pound of government investment in the ULF generates a return of more than £9."





Axed rail staff gain new job skills

Nearly 30 catering staff who lost their jobs when rail operator Thameslink took over the Southern franchise this summer have gained employability skills on a three-day course at Sussex Downs College.

The trade union studies team ran workshops in CV writing, personal evaluation, assessment techniques and interview skills for the RMT members, who had been employed by catering company Rail Gourmet before Thameslink summarily cancelled its contract with the firm.

"We have long been supportive of RMT learning and their efforts to bring learning and education to the workplace," says TUC Education course co-ordinator Vicki Gibbs.

"This particular support has been especially inspiring because you can see first-hand the difference it will make to these vulnerable workers."

Peacehaven Town Council assistant town manager Angela Read contacted the college when she spotted a story about the course in the local press to ask if any of the learners would like to interview for the position of café supervisor in the council's leisure centre.

After passing on the information directly to RMT, Vicki has her fingers crossed for a result. "We really hope that some of these members will directly benefit from the work of our wonderful TUC tutors," she says. **LR**

Sally-Ann is new REO



Sally-Ann Spring brings close to 30 years' experience of the trade union movement to her new role as TUC Regional Education Officer (REO) for the Southern and Eastern team at unionlearn.

Sally-Ann joined the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (now part of PCS) in the 1980s, where she took on various roles as a civil servant.

She began what she calls "my experience in the wonderful world of adult learning" in the 1990s, when she spent a decade as a human resources,

management and soft skills tutor.

After a short spell as an administrator for a UNISON branch, Sally-Ann joined the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL) as a trade union education tutor in 2011.

"When I got the opportunity to marry up adult learning and trade unionism, I thought I'd hit the jackpot," she recalls.

"However, I now know that I've really hit the jackpot and I'm hoping that my recent experience of delivering training across the trade union curriculum will aid my assimilation into the REO role."

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW IN AN eNOTE



TUC Education has launched a new e-learning module for union members thinking of becoming a union learning rep (ULR).

"The eNote will help you find out more about what the role involves and get a sense of how rewarding it can be by hearing from some active ULRs," explains TUC Education Manager Liz Rees.

"It is also a good way for branch officers to get an understanding of the role before recruiting a new ULR."

"It is also a good way for branch officers to get an understanding of the role before recruiting a new ULR."

Using a multimedia format, the new eNote sets out how ULRs help members' lives by supporting learning in the workplace, explaining:

- the role and key tasks of the ULR
- the benefits of union learning
- the key role of the ULRs in promoting learning to members, unions, other ULRs and employers.

The eNote includes a section concentrating on the benefits that ULRs can bring to unions, members, government and themselves. There are stories from successful ULRs describing the difference they have made in their workplaces.

[Click here to access all eNotes](#)

Helping older people into work

Unionlearn workshops in Devon are using mid-life development resources to help unemployed people aged over 50 to improve their chances of finding a job.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

© RodLeon



Unionlearn Senior Union Support Officer Rob Garrett has successfully adapted the Supporting Mid Life Development eNote to help unemployed older workers in Devon at a series of events sponsored by unionlearn and organised by Jobcentre Plus (JCP).

The workshops in Barnstaple, Exeter and Newton Abbot have included advice on job searches and training and employment opportunities in the area because more mature claimants are unemployed far longer than younger people and are struggling to find work.

The feedback has been extremely positive and the sessions have proved popular: more than 50 people took part in the Exeter workshop although it was only expected to attract a dozen participants.

“We need to engage even more with employers, and their network organisations: there is a wealth of wasted talent and enthusiasm not being utilised.”

“I learned a lot from the sessions, and they more than highlighted some of the issues I thought existed for older jobseekers,” said one person who attended. “I think more should be done to support this group. We need to engage even more with employers, and

their network organisations: there is a wealth of wasted talent and enthusiasm not being utilised.”

With some participants concerned at the stereotyping of people claiming benefits as scroungers and skivers – particularly upsetting for people who have worked for the majority of their adult lives – one person said it was refreshing to hear from someone like Rob who was truly passionate about his subject and had a real empathy for the situation older workers found themselves in.

“I think I speak for all the attendees when I say it made us feel that we weren’t just another number in the system going through the motions,” they said.

Rob has adapted unionlearn’s Supporting Mid Life Development e-Note for unemployed people by concentrating on transferable skills and using the card game *Value My Skills*.

He also helps participants use the iCould.com Buzz Quiz to work out their personality and introduces them to the National Careers Service website, where they can sign up for a Skills Health Check and Lifelong Learning Account, as well as Learn My Way via unionlearn.

“We have also looked at free, degree level, short online courses, becoming self-employed, adult Apprenticeships, and discussed adult Traineeship schemes,” Rob says.

As a result of the latest workshop in Newton Abbot, participants set up a Facebook page for regional unemployed older workers to share ideas and support one other.

“We recognise the barriers mature people face seeking employment today,” Rob says.

“By working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and its network of support agencies, our events have contributed to developing the skills and confidence of this group of people, which has enabled some of them to successfully seek meaningful new employment across Devon.” **LR**

◆ [Click here](#) to access the eNote

◆ [Click here](#) to find out more about mid-life development



Hannah was unable to collect her award in person at TUC Congress, so she is pictured with the UNISON East Midlands Branch of the Year award, which Nottingham City won earlier this year

© Nigel Tissington

“After recruiting an additional six ULRs, Hannah has helped them deliver taster sessions in Polish and conduct workplace learning surveys.”

unionlearn’s Apprentice Charter, Hannah and her colleagues have encouraged the workplace learning committee to review the document, which is now being used as a template for future joint work.

Hannah has also worked hard to support the ULR team make a fantastic success of running the Six Book Challenge (now renamed Reading Ahead), with 100 people in five council workplaces taking part in the programme.

She has also enrolled 55 members on The Skills Network’s Level 2 qualifications in subjects including dementia awareness, end-of-life care and mental health awareness and encouraged 50-plus people onto UNISON’s free courses for members.

After recruiting an additional six ULRs in the last year, Hannah has helped them deliver taster sessions, for example in Polish, and conduct workplace learning surveys. A great part of the way the ULRs have quickly built up a positive reputation with members and management is down to Hannah’s support.

Hannah has also promoted learning to other workplace reps, including stewards and health and safety reps, which has helped build an integrated workplace team where everyone understands the role learning can play.

In addition, she has built excellent relationships with her branch secretary and other officers that have helped achieve much more than could have been done if the ULRs had acted alone, since the branch secretary has been able to raise key learning issues at a senior level.

“It is because of the respect branch officers have for Hannah that this can happen, but the importance of embedding learning within the branch structure cannot be over-emphasised for taking this agenda forward,” a branch spokesperson says. **LR**

Meet the ULR of the year

UNISON activist Hannah Slade says she couldn’t have won this year’s TUC ULR of the Year award without the help of the whole team of reps in the Nottingham City branch.

— Astrid Stubbs

UNISON learning rep Hannah Slade may have been named TUC ULR of the Year at Congress in September, but she thinks the recognition applies to all the branch reps who promote learning opportunities at Nottingham City Council, where she works as a web information officer.

“It feels fantastic to win ULR of the year – although it is an individual award, I think it really shows what amazing work we have done as a team,” she says.

Recognising that more needed to be done to promote Functional Skills courses at the East Midlands local authority, Hannah arranged a meeting with the deputy leader, head

of training and development and corporate directors to discuss how to help staff overcome their reticence about their English and maths skills.

The meeting produced a strategy for sign-up that included assurances that line managers would release staff, which has led to regular sessions that form part of the council’s mainstream development programme.

Passionate about engaging younger workers, Hannah has also helped organise a session for 40 apprentices at the city council to outline their rights and responsibilities, which went down so well that several of them joined UNISON as a result.

And after taking the lead in persuading the council to endorse