

LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Winter 2017

Daphne Robins is ULR of the Year

- ▶ *Preparing for change at HMRC*
- ▶ *Supporting older workers*
- ▶ *Investing in the future*
- ▶ *Switching to online learning*
- ▶ *Making maths add up*

unionlearn
with the TUC



GROWING THE SKILLS WE NEED

AS THIS YEAR HAS UNFOLDED, THERE has been a steady stream of reports confirming the scale of the skills gaps that have opened up across many key sectors and throughout the regions. Research by The Open University (OU) has confirmed skills shortages are costing businesses more than £2bn a year in higher salaries, recruitment costs and temporary staffing bills. And no-one is expecting this to get better overnight. In fact, the Local Government Association has forecast that if current employment and skills trends continue, by 2024 we could have 6 million more low-skilled workers than we will have jobs for them to do while we may have developed only 12 million of the 16 million high-skilled workers we will need.

“We are doing everything we can to help employers, unions and individual workers develop the skills we need now.”

Here at unionlearn, we are doing everything we can to help employers, unions and individual workers develop the skills we need now, next week, next year and in the next decade.

We are running Supporting Learners events across the country this autumn to help ULRs plan how they can help more learners in the future. Our Maths Workout Week in October has

helped more people gain the everyday numeracy skills they need. And our Erasmus-funded two-year mid-life project will help unions offer ever-improving support to older workers so they can prepare for the challenges of the years ahead. All these initiatives will help the country plug the skills gaps we need to close. 

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



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NEWS + VIEWS

You could be a character in best-selling author's next book!

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There is an extra incentive for learners to complete the Reading Ahead challenge this year: everyone who reads, rates and reviews six pieces of writing as part of the programme will be in with a chance of having a character named after them in the next book by best-selling author Ann Cleaves.

The Reading Agency is running the prize draw to mark the tenth anniversary of the initiative, which was launched in 2008 as the Six Book Challenge.

“To share the gift of reading and of stories is a brilliant thing, so I am delighted to support this fantastic programme, which helps people gain the confidence to read for pleasure,” says Ann, who was one of the keynote speakers at this year’s unionlearn conference.

“Please do get your organisation involved; one of the people you support may find themselves in my next novel.”

Ann is author of the *Shetland* and *Vera* series of crime novels, both of which have been successfully adapted for television, and

also wrote *Too Good to be True* for Quick Reads in 2016.

Everyone who completes the programme will receive a certificate featuring Ann’s name alongside those of bestselling authors Martina Cole, Dreda Say Mitchell, Bali Rai, Adele Parks and Andy McNab, who have also pledged their support.

Over the past decade, 275,000 less-confident readers have taken part in the programme at workplaces, public libraries, adult learning organisations, colleges and prisons.

 [Click here](#) to find out more about Reading Ahead

UNISON branches create new Learning Lincs fund



UNISON branches across Lincolnshire have pooled their resources to create a

new fund called Learning Lincs to help public services workers in the county improve their skills.

The branch contributions plus regional and national match funding mean Learning Lincs has £10,000 to help pay for courses to benefit local government workers, NHS staff, police staff and other public sector workers.

Lincoln MP Karen Lee, who was a UNISON learning rep before she was elected this summer, helped launch the new initiative in September alongside UNISON Assistant General Secretary Roger McKenzie.

"Before becoming MP for Lincoln I'd been a nurse for 14 years: during that time I came to recognise how vital education is in order to provide excellent public services," Karen explained.

"I became a UNISON learning rep and am proud of the courses we ran across the county and am delighted to launch this project, which is a great benefit to the people of Lincolnshire."

The launch event also featured contributions from current ULR Nigel Wass, who is a police and community support officer, and UNISON member Tracii Edwards, an emergency medical dispatcher who has benefited from the union's lifelong learning programme.

The launch took place at the most recent meeting of Greater Lincolnshire Public Service Compact, which brings together public sector employers, partners and suppliers to share

best practice and develop effective approaches to key challenges.

Turns out laughter really is best medicine

Robin Green from the Laughter Association UK spoke about the health benefits of therapeutic laughter at learning events for ULRs and other activists hosted by the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and unionlearn in Salford and London this summer.

Laughter yoga and similar therapeutic practices can lower people's stress levels, boost their health, build resilience and resourcefulness and encourage greater creativity in the workplace, according to Laughter Association UK.

Delivered by unionlearn's Mark Rowe and Matt Pointon and RCM Senior Organiser Rae Trotter, the event also explored collaborative working, planning a learning event and new ways of delivering learning.

Drop and gimme 10: it's the return of MathsWorkout Week

Unionlearn ran a full week of activities in October devoted to improving maths and English.

Building on the success of the inaugural campaign last year, this year's #MathsWorkout Week included a maths support training day for ULRs and project staff, when they were

able to try out some practical activities for engaging and motivating adults to make maths more inspiring, interesting and fun.

We all use maths every day, says unionlearn Policy Officer Kirsi Kekki. "Everybody has to make the best use of their skills in their daily lives – so let's talk about noticing where and when we use maths," she adds.

The week coincided with a network event that was open to union learning reps, project workers, officials and anyone who supports functional skills learning in unions.

The forum discussed policy updates, showcased union literacy and numeracy learning offers and shared good practice and union innovations. It also included an update on functional skills reform consultation; research and recent changes in GCSE grading; the new-look Use-IT assessment tool; and non-directive coaching in supporting English and maths learning.

Housing ALMO staff win learning rights

A new learning agreement at Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) means nearly 900 staff at the arm's length organisation are now guaranteed the same rights to learning opportunities as their colleagues at Newcastle City Council.

YHN has managed the local authority's council housing stock since it was set up in 2004. It now looks after more than 26,000 council homes as well as another 400-plus on behalf

of social housing provider Leazes Homes.

"Staff at YHN are notified about all the learning opportunities the branch organises and sign up to all the different courses in the same way that city council staff do," explains YHN convenor and union learning rep (ULR) Derek Muse. "The agreement simply brings that into line with the city council."

REPTECH

Getting to grips with social media

Midlands TUC is running a series of social media masterclasses across the region this autumn, with the first in Birmingham this November.

CWU member Ashley Riley will deliver a union-focused workshop looking at social media as a campaigning tool to promote activities, courses and events and how it can be more effective than other forms of digital and print media.

The session will cover video postings and practical support on delivering social media through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram, with practical and easy-to-use tips and advice on what works on the different platforms.





UNITE LEARNER WINS FESTIVAL AWARD

Unite learner Ashley Pickering, who is a school bus driver at one of the First Group depots in Leeds, was named Northern regional winner in the Learning for Work category at this year's Festival of Learning awards.

Ashley didn't get the support he needed when he was diagnosed with dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at school and left full-time education with no qualifications to his name.

But thanks to the support of Unite learning rep Barry Young and First NVQ Assessor Amanda Harmer since he joined the company two years ago, Ashley has completed his Passenger Carrying Vehicle apprenticeship, along with English, maths and IT qualifications.

"It took a great deal of courage for Ashley to return to education but with the support and camaraderie of his colleagues, he has not looked back," says Unite Learning Organiser Dominic Goldrick, who nominated him for the award.

Ashley was formally presented with his certificate by Unite Head of Lifelong Learning Kenny Barron and First Group Leeds Managing Director Paul Matthews at a special ceremony in the Bramley depot learning centre in September.

"I feel more confident and assertive and I am enjoying the challenges learning brings," Ashley says. **LR**

Six cracking new Quick Reads unveiled for next year



Union learning reps will be able to order next year's batch of six new Quick Reads from unionlearn before the end of the year. The new titles are:

- *Inspector Chopra and the Million-Dollar Motor Car* by Vaseem Khan (Hodder & Stoughton): an enchanting Baby Ganesh Agency novella set in the bustling backstreets of Mumbai.
- *Clean Break* by Tammy Cohen (Transworld): a dark and twisty portrait of a marriage coming to its bitter end, from the mistress of domestic noir.
- *The Beach Wedding* by Dorothy Koomson (Arrow): a gripping short read featuring a wedding, family drama and old secrets.
- *The Great Cornish Getaway* by Fern Britton (HarperCollins): a new story full of the former *This Morning* presenter's warmth and wit.
- *Six Foot Six* by Kit de Waal (Viking): a charming novella about finding friendship in the most unlikely of places.
- *Cut Off* by Mark Billingham (Little, Brown): a punchy, taut urban thriller about the dangers of losing your phone from the award-winning crime novelist.

UNISON helps uni cleaners gain ESOL skills

Cleaners at Middlesex University have been improving their language skills thanks to their local UNISON branch and a partnership with employers, the university and tutors from The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL).

University Branch Secretary Claire Mitham spoke to contractors ISS about getting time off for the staff and to the university about using equipment before setting up the classes.

As a result of the classes, cleaners have boosted their confidence by gaining the skills to speak to management about any problems they have, Claire says, and UNISON membership has also increased.

Click here to find out more about the UNISON project

ESOL courses benefit workers and employers

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teaching can empower some of the most vulnerable working people, unionlearn Project Officer Matt Pointon told a parliamentary meeting in October.

Since ESOL interventions have myriad benefits, including increased productivity and better understanding of health and safety, workplace courses were in employers' interests, he told the event.

It was vital that everyone understood ESOL was different from literacy and that the two should not be lumped together as that greatly disadvantaged ESOL learners, whose learning needs were fundamentally different to those of native speakers, Matt said.

The National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) organised the meeting to apply more pressure on the government to implement a national strategy on ESOL.

Counselling course proves big draw for POA centre

Counselling skills proved a major draw when POA Learning in Eastchurch held an event to raise awareness of learning opportunities via the union route available to members of the Queenborough community in Sheppey.

Centre Manager Gareth Williams (pictured above, signing up Sheerness learner Richard Broom on the counselling course) was on hand throughout the day with other members of the POA learning team to provide information, advice and guidance to members of the community about distance learning and classroom-based courses in the area.

"There was plenty of interest in the Level 2 certificates being promoted, particularly the counselling qualification," Gareth says.



Numeracy learners pass million question milestone

Since National Numeracy launched its new online assessment tool this summer, it has proved so popular that more than one million questions have been completed by learners looking to improve their everyday maths skills.

The new version of the online tool now features a clear pathway to getting the Essentials of Numeracy – the everyday number skills that help people make good decisions at home and at work.

The overhaul includes multiple choice questions and a new, mobile-friendly site that can be accessed anywhere and in bite-sized chunks. In addition, learners who complete the assessment can claim a digital badge or certificate.

"We want to get the message out there that everyone can improve – but only if you have a go," says National Numeracy Chief Executive Mike Ellicock. "Thanks to the fantastic work of our partner organisations we're taking steps in the right direction."

European funding will help boost mid-life resources

Unionlearn has secured Erasmus+ funding from the European Commission for a two-year project that



will compare international best practice on mid-life skills reviews in order to help develop a new suite of materials, including digital badges, online materials and diagnostic tools.

"We are delighted our bid has been successful," says unionlearn Communications and Contracts Manager Ian Borkett.

"It provides us with a fantastic opportunity to provide some new online courses and diagnostic tools to support mid-life career reviews and also build on the unique role reps undertake in reaching disadvantaged and vulnerable workers. These new online materials will be a valuable asset for unions, who are the largest deliverer of workplace mid-life career reviews."

Look out for a new webpage on the unionlearn website by the end of this year that will explain more about the project, which runs until December 2019.

Get ready to go the distance with the OU

The Open University (OU) has produced a new, free short course designed to help people become confident distance learners.

Am I ready to be a distance learner? explores some of the key elements of successful distance learning including: study skills; time management; becoming digitally ready; how to effectively engage with course materials; and assessment.

Each of the interactive

steps is linked to free additional learning resources, so by working through each step, the learner discovers more resources to help with their study. These helpful links are well received and often bookmarked for later use, the OU says.

Taking part enables learners to become part of an online community where they can discuss their goals and study intentions.

The whole course also has its own hashtag, #ready4distancelearning, plus there is an optional Twitter activity in the section on developing digital skills.

The course takes about three hours to complete and the final step is a personalised takeaway document where students self-assess their readiness for study. The takeaway document links to the resources explored in the course, providing a useful summary for future reference.

Dartmoor centre reaches out to over-50s

Staff at the POA Learning Centre at HMP Dartmoor held an IT training session aimed at over-50s in the area during the summer.

Learning was focused on introductory IT skills, including email, word processing and generally getting to grips with computer basics.

The well-attended event demonstrated the value of both the unionlearn project and joined-up working to the local west Devon community.



Helping older workers face a brighter future

Union learning rep Sam Sayers is helping Revenue & Customs staff gain the skills they need to help them ride the wave of organisational change at work.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

Staff at the Revenue & Customs (HMRC) debt management office in Watford know that they can rely on PCS union learning rep Sam Sayers when it comes to learning and development.

With her ULR role complementing her HMRC learning job, Sam has been particularly busy since news reached the office that a major reorganisation in the next year or so would involve staff moving to large hubs and facing job changes.

“HMRC will be expecting multi-skilled people and technology is changing anyway,” she says. “A lot of people are ‘the wrong age’ because they did not learn IT at school and adding attachments to an email can be daunting when you don’t know how.”

Many staff have been with HMRC

“It’s been very positive and people are now much more confident: those who did the course were on the ceiling – they were so pleased with their sense of achievement.”

since leaving school and some will not be in a position to move to regional offices, Sam explains.

“I didn’t want it to be really scary for them, so I have been trying to help people who find change difficult, having worked in the same office for



many years, to look at what they are going to find,” she says.

“I’m getting them properly ready by showing them that this is what things will really look like and that their jobs are very likely going to be very different from what they are currently doing.”

“People realised that they have other skills, that they could maybe even be a carpenter or a gardener, that they don’t have to be pigeon-holed.”

With the help of PCS and her colleague Jay Patel, Sam has organised Level 2 and 3 courses to help staff gain confidence to deal with changes to come.

Every one of the 16 people who took the qualification passed, which has made a big difference not only to all of them but also to other people in the office since Sam ensures that the learners pass on their knowledge at every learning event she organises.

“It’s been very positive and people are now much more confident: those who did the course were on the ceiling – they were so pleased with their sense of achievement,” adds Sam, who includes herself as one of the learners.

It was after that course that Sam decided she would be able to help staff even more by becoming a ULR herself. “It meant I could offer more to people because as a ULR I had the union at my fingertips to help me and it kept me in the loop regarding opportunities when they arose,” she says.

Sam has also involved unionlearn Project Officer Jane Warwick to run mid-life development reviews, which gave staff a big boost when they discovered they could do more than they thought beforehand. Now some who were originally thinking about retirement are reconsidering.

“People realised that they have other skills, that they could maybe even be a carpenter or a gardener, that they don’t have to be pigeon-holed,” Sam says.

“It’s about encouraging people to keep their minds open to new possibilities, to keep up to date with skills and to keep their brains active so they will be in a better position to look at what’s available and what they need to do to make themselves better,” adds Sam. **LR**



New resources to help ULRs support mid-life development

Shaping our digital future

New report from the TUC that explores how the next technological revolution will impact on jobs and wages. It argues that the economic gains from digitisation, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) should be used to benefit working people, for example, by reversing policies to raise the state pension age.

“Giving everyone the right to a mid-life career review, stepping up the investment in workplace training and introducing new lifelong learning accounts supporting people through their entire working lives will mean working people will be prepared for the jobs of tomorrow,” says unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan.

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

Changing places: mid-career review and internal mobility

New report from EuroFound that examines how mid-career reviews can play a key role by clarifying workers’ options for remaining in work until a later retirement age.

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

Photos © Pali Rao/Getty Images

Supporting Mid-Life Development Survey Evaluation Report 2017

New unionlearn report of the survey it commissioned into mid-life development reviews and older workers to assess how unions are continuing to develop this agenda.

“The role of unions in this process has never been more important,” the report concludes. “Unionlearn will continue to support trade unions to embed mid-life development reviews into their learning and skills work within the context of all-age, intergenerational approaches to supporting learners.”

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

Supporting Mid-Life Development Update

Unionlearn’s mid-life specialist Jane Warwick leads a TUC Education webinar on the mid-life agenda.

▶ [Click here](#) to watch the webinar on YouTube

Supporting Mid-Life Development eNote

Short online module with a mix of text, video and quizzes explaining how ULRs and workplace reps can conduct mid-life development reviews with their colleagues.

▶ [Click here](#) to access the eNote

Unionlearn Climbing Frame

Free online resource for ULRs that includes a dedicated learning theme (topic of interest) called Supporting Mid-life Development.

▶ [Click here](#) to login or register to use the Climbing Frame





Developing a culture of learning in Hull

As Hull City of Culture draws to a close, it's a learning rep from the city council who has won the TUC ULR of the Year award. Meet Daphne Robins, the Unite rep who hasn't let cuts get in the way of supporting public service workers.

➡ **Martin Moriarty**

Just three years ago, Daphne Robins opened a letter from Unite's lifelong learning team encouraging members to think about becoming union learning reps (ULRs). Then and there, she decided she would put herself forward for the role at Hull City Council, where she has worked as a technical adviser on European funding for the past 15 years.

"My husband was already a workplace, health and safety and equalities rep for Unite, so I was aware of the good work the union was doing and its positive benefits for members," she recalls. "I felt the learning role would align very well with my own interests in sharing enrichment and learning opportunities with others."

Fast forward three years and Daphne was opening another union-related letter, this time informing her that she had been chosen as this year's TUC ULR of the Year, and inviting her to TUC Congress in September to collect the award.

"I was absolutely delighted and at the same time very humbled when I found out about the award," Daphne says.

"Any kind of achievement takes place in a

partnership and without the support of the Learn With Unite team in Leeds, without the support of the branch, of other reps and colleagues, and without the support from the council – right up to the council leader, chief executive and elected members – I wouldn't have achieved a fraction of what has taken place. It's a credit to everybody."

The 36 months between volunteering for the role and collecting her award have been very busy. As soon as she was elected ULR at the council's Unite branch, Daphne sat down with Unite Learning Organiser Chris Muscoft and the two of them began to develop a plan of campaign.

They set up a steering group with colleagues from the council's Learning and Development team. They met the ULR team at nearby Kirklees Council to find out more about good practice in a local authority setting. And they launched a programme of awareness-raising events and workplace assessments right across the council in Hull.

They also set about persuading senior and middle managers of the benefits of workplace

"I felt the learning role would align very well with my own interests in sharing enrichment and learning opportunities with others."



Absolutely delighted: Daphne receives the ULR of the Year award from TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady (© Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk)

learning by sharing examples from other workplaces of the benefits of adding union-led learning to the development mix, which helped the branch negotiate a learning agreement with the council in 2015.

“We had an open conversation right from the beginning to show what the union was bringing was no kind of competition but was meant as an additional benefit, adding value to what was already in place – and that was very positively received,” Daphne recalls.

The package of national qualifications that Daphne was able to put in place was wide-ranging, including 16-week Level 2 short courses to help learners refresh their skills or branch out in new directions plus a range of adult apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 5 that are relevant to staff in a number of different departments.

Daphne has also established a successful relationship with Hull Training and Adult Education Department, which is the third key partner in the project, alongside the union and the Learning and Development team, and provides functional skills English, maths and IT training.

While Unite remains the only union on the steering group at the council, Daphne makes every opportunity available to all council staff, whether they hold a union card or not. “I have made all the information available to all staff and we have had really good take-up across the spectrum,” she says.

Putting together the programme involved a lot of contact with people – face-to-face, on the

“I was absolutely delighted and at the same time very humbled when I found out about the award.”

phone and over email – but it has all paid off. “One way or another, I spoke to over a thousand people before these enrolments were completed – I can’t believe that figure but I know it’s true!” Daphne says.

For Daphne, as for so many ULRs, the best part of the job is witnessing the way people develop themselves thanks to her support. “To see the change in people through the process is really exhilarating,” she says.

Attending Congress in the company of Unite Regional Learning Manager Gill Pearson was fantastic, she says. “I’m very grateful that Gill came along to give me some moral support because the venue is very large and the amount of information is so enormous it could be quite overwhelming,” Daphne says.

“I was very pleased to have someone there who understood things and we could have a very healthy chat all the way through that I also learned a lot from,” she says.

Gill says she was happy to help, as Daphne has been a pleasure to support since she took on the ULR role.

“Daphne constantly shows unwavering determination and tenacity to bring learning opportunities to her Unite members and fellow colleagues,” Gill says. “She takes a personal interest in all, to help them achieve their best when faced with obstacles and austerity cuts, which are so prevalent in the public sector she works in.”

As well as collecting her award from TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady, Daphne was able to soak up the atmosphere and see the broader horizon against which she – and thousands of ULRs like her – carry out their duties day to day.

“Attending Congress was a really exhilarating experience – I found it fascinating to see the way the whole process was conducted and how fantastically representative all the different sectors are,” Daphne says.

“It was said at the Congress that unions are the largest voluntary organisation over and above any other grouping and it shows that when people unite for a cause they can really make a difference.” **LR**



Gaining the skills to move on at work

Allan Sharp knows what's it like to reach mid-life and have to find a new job when you don't have any formal qualifications. Having been there, done that and lived to tell the tale, he is passing on the know-how to members of Community through the union's learning operation.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty

When Delta Cables announced it was closing its Enfield operation in 1998, Community Branch Secretary Allan Sharp had one thing on his mind: sorting out the best possible redundancy package for his members.

But his union's education department was looking beyond the immediate crisis to how it was going to help its members face the challenge of the 1990s employment market, which was such a massive culture shock for the generation that started on the shopfloor in the late '70s and early '80s.

Suddenly, everyone needed a CV, everyone needed relevant qualifications, everyone needed to be able to show the extent of their transferable skills. And very few people knew how to do any of that.

To give Delta its due, as Allan does, the company paid handsomely for outplacement

support. But the provider it hired was not able to deliver the high-quality, customised employability support he and his colleagues needed.

"Everybody sat in a room, you wrote down your name and address and date of birth and then somebody would type up your CV," Allan recalls. "It was rubbish!"

Suddenly, the union's far-sighted insistence on retraining began to make sense. And when Community formed a partnership that successfully secured £370,000 from the European Social Fund (ESF) to finance a major upskilling project in the local community, the union put Allan in charge.

"The project was about giving new opportunities to people who didn't have any qualifications on leaving school, so they took on somebody as project manager who had that experience themselves," he recalls.

"The thing I learned then was to keep knocking on doors, keep bashing away and breaking down the barriers that existed with employers."

Working with the London Borough of Enfield and the local Training and Enterprise Council (as was), the project found a home in the local business centre, which also housed the Enfield Business Initiatives Team (EBIT), the local authority team bringing new business to the area.

The two organisations worked closely together over the next five years to create and maintain a database of people looking for work in and around north London who could be placed with new companies moving into the area.

When the funding eventually ran out, Allan moved into his current role as operations manager at Communitas, the union's wholly owned learning subsidiary, which Community's forerunner ISTC originally set up as Steel Partnership Training in the late 1990s.

The main aims of the current Union Learning Fund (ULF) project are to improve the skills of the most disadvantaged learners in English, maths and IT and to create and support apprenticeships, Allan explains.

With the union's deep connections to the steel industry and other sectors that have borne the brunt of the post-crash global downturn, Communitas has also invested considerable resources in redundancy support, often in the challenging circumstances of companies being placed in administration.

"At the steel company SSI in the north-east and the textiles company Cortaulds near Derby, they've turned up for work on Monday morning to find the gates are locked and they're unable to access the site or find out any information from the administrators," Allan says.

"So we've developed a programme that helps people through that process of claiming everything they are due through The Insolvency Service – their redundancy pay, unpaid wages, holiday pay and anything else in terms of money from their former employer."

The programme has worked so well that the union has had only a handful of its claims rejected by The Insolvency Service and the feedback from members is understandably extremely positive as a result. Communitas has shared the details of its successful model with other unions through unionlearn.

While re-skilling of its steel industry members has taken considerable resources with the chaos in the steel industry, Communitas has continued to support the union's members in all its major sectors. The union has wide representation in the clothing and footwear industries and is now the largest union in the private justice and custodial sector.

"There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach with anything that Communitas has to offer: every workplace is different," Allan explains.

The delivery model varies according to the



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needs of the learners, Allan explains. "With the redundancy support work, it's classroom-based because the taskforce groups have the funding to work with local providers, so our role is to signpost and support people to ensure they get what they want from it," he says.

With English, maths and IT learning, there are growing problems with securing paid release for learners, as there are in many sectors and not only where Community organises. It's not that managers don't understand the business benefits or recognise the provisions of learning agreements, Allan says: more often it's that capacity has been slashed to the bone and they fear releasing staff for learning may compromise reaching production targets.

However frustrating that can be, Allan isn't one to give up. He learned the value of persistence back when he was running the reskilling project in Enfield, he says. "The thing I learned then was to keep knocking on doors, keep bashing away and breaking down the barriers that existed with employers," he recalls. "That hasn't changed today: you just have to keep plugging away." **LR**

Developing the workforce of the future

Union learning projects across the country are helping employers develop high-quality traineeships and apprenticeships that meet the needs both of the people who enrol on them and the organisations they work for.

Unilever has set up an apprenticeships working party at its Port Sunlight UK research and development site, thanks to Usdaw ULR Coordinator Dave Randles taking the initiative and sharing his ideas with management and union colleagues.

Dave was inspired to make a presentation at a recent meeting of the National Joint Coordinating Committee (NJCC) by what he discovered at a unionlearn apprenticeship briefing in Liverpool earlier this year.

"I learned so much I just had to share the information with management and Usdaw colleagues," Dave explains. "The best way to do this was at the NJCC meeting, as it is attended by key union officials and management."

Keen to ensure that apprenticeships are at the heart of the onsite learning programme, Dave set out what he had learned about the Apprenticeship Levy



at the Liverpool briefing, alongside some of his own ideas about how the company and the union could work together to develop the agenda.

"Dave did a great job in delivering an overview of the levy and what would be the proposed next steps and areas for the company to consider," explains Usdaw National Officer Daniel Adams, who was at the NJCC meeting.

"The company agreed to set up a working party, with joint union involvement allowing for apprenticeships to continue as union business."

"As a result, the company agreed to set up a working party, with joint union involvement allowing for apprenticeships to continue as union business."

Dave and Daniel are both members of the new working party, which has a remit to plan and develop an apprenticeship strategy with the company and all the recognised unions on site at Port Sunlight.

It will ensure that all recognised unions can work collaboratively

with the company to ensure that apprenticeships are equal and accessible, of a high standard and regularly monitored and evaluated.

“Apprenticeships continue to be a key negotiating item, even more so now the Apprenticeship Levy has been introduced,” says Daniel. “Unilever – supported by the union team at Port Sunlight – has been active in delivering vocation-led learning, which is a good basis for moving forward on apprenticeships.”

Usdaw Project Worker Julia Baldwin says that the joint work at Unilever showcases what can be achieved by reps at a local level and the impact it can have on national negotiations. “By having a good idea of the national picture, Dave has the knowledge needed to raise issues locally through Unilever’s own negotiation structures to the benefit of the company and our members,” Julia says.

Networking in local government

Apprentices at Poole Borough Council are getting more out of their work and training programme through the new Apprentice Learning Network (ALN) that UNISON and the HR department have set up at the local authority.

Poole Local Government Branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator Pete Stratford helped launch the ALN with a lunchtime event this spring, when lunch was provided with the help of a Kickstart grant from UNISON.



Three of the 20-plus apprentices who attended the launch took on the work of organising future network meetings, and they invited Pete to the latest meeting in September to talk about the learning opportunities the union could provide that the employer wouldn’t be able to.

“They’re keen to set up job shadowing to get experience of working alongside other apprentices in different parts of the organisation and see what other careers are out there, so we’re taking that forward,” Pete explains.

Teaming up on traineeships

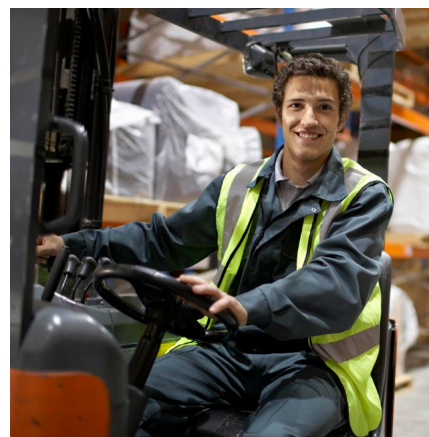
General union GMB’s Union Learning Fund (ULF) project has teamed up with provider TDB Training and the St Antony’s Centre for Church and Industry to develop high-quality traineeship opportunities for young people in Manchester.

Earlier this year, TDB secured funding to deliver traineeship and apprenticeship programmes for young people in the city who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). But the company needed to link with a local provider that could deliver the English and maths qualifications that are an essential part of the programmes.

It was GMB Senior Project Worker Dave Flanagan who was able to organise for the provider to meet staff at St Antony’s Centre, which the union had used before to successfully deliver English, maths and IT courses in the workplace.

Just one month later, the partners were able to launch their pilot

“They’re keen to set up job shadowing to get experience of working alongside other apprentices in different parts of the organisation.”



“I’ve really enjoyed the experience: my next step is to find work and then complete a Level 3 supervisory course so I can build my career.”

traineeship programme with local youngsters David Travis and Anthony Byrne, who had both left school without any qualifications.

The GMB team worked with the providers to help put in place a bespoke traineeship that involved one-to-one support to build David and Anthony’s confidence and daily opportunities to develop and practice their skills in the real work environment of TDB’s Trafford Park warehouse.

They both completed the six-week programme and gained English and maths qualifications alongside their Level 1 NVQs in Warehousing.

“I’ve really enjoyed the experience: my next step is to find work and then complete a Level 3 supervisory course so I can build my career,” David says.

With the help of the GMB project workers and TDB staff, David and Anthony are now planning their progression into Level 2 apprenticeships and onward into full-time employment.

The project partners have recently engaged a group of four young men to start on a similar programme to equip them with the training, skills and experience to find work. **LR**

Meet the new members of the team

Matt Pointon and Holly Anderson are looking after key parts of unionlearn's work – English, maths and apprenticeships (Matt) and digital learning (Holly).

Project Officer Matt Pointon brings a wealth of experience to his new role working on English, maths and apprenticeship support as part of the unionlearn strategy team. Although he's based in the Birmingham office most of the time, Matt is helping support union learning projects across the country.

His new role is not the first time Matt has been involved with union learning. He has been a union rep for UCU and Community in the past and last year he worked for the financial sector union BSU, helping learners in the Co-operative Bank and Capita engage in new learning opportunities to upskill themselves.

"The learners were mostly adults working in the bank but we also did some really valuable work with local community groups like the U3A and ASHA, a refugee and asylum-seeker charity," Matt says.

"Going from visiting a bank branch one day to teaching IT skills to the over-55s the next to helping new immigrants to the UK understand issues of sexual consent and exploitation certainly made for an interesting life and one which truly reflected the positive and holistic message that trade unionism is all about."

Matt's experience with lifelong learning doesn't end there though. In his early twenties, he taught English overseas in Japan, Vietnam



and Bulgaria, and later gained nine years' experience teaching citizenship and functional skills to adults and young people in prisons and young offender institutions back in the UK.

"Seeing how education can impact so positively on disadvantaged groups in society is one of my main passions in life: it always gives me a buzz when I see learning opening a door for someone who had always presumed that it was locked to them," he says.

As a firm believer in the old adage that you shouldn't expect anyone to undertake something you wouldn't be willing to do yourself, Matt is himself in the middle of the latest chapter in his own learning journey, completing an MA in Creative Writing through The Open University (OU). **LR**



OVERSEEING THE LAUNCH OF THE LATEST DIGITAL LEARNING

Digital Learning Projects Officer Holly Anderson has brought a great combination of project management and marketing skills to her new role at TUC Education, where she is overseeing the launch of the new online learning courses this summer, including Union Learning Reps Stage 1, Union Reps Stage 1 and Health and Safety Reps Stage 1.

"I'm excited to bring my skills to the TUC Education team at this crucial time," Holly says. "I'm delighted to join the team and contribute to delivering essential skills and knowledge to union representatives."

Before joining TUC Education, Holly worked in the projects development team of an economic think-tank, where she delivered coordinated research projects on a range of issues including labour economics, economic equality and poverty education.

She also co-managed a joint research initiative funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) that explored private-sector development in 'low-income countries' and worked in the marketing department of an events company, where she created imaginative digital marketing campaigns.

Online training for union reps

TUC Education is making it easier for ULRs and their activist colleagues to access training through the online courses you can login to on your PC, tablet or mobile.

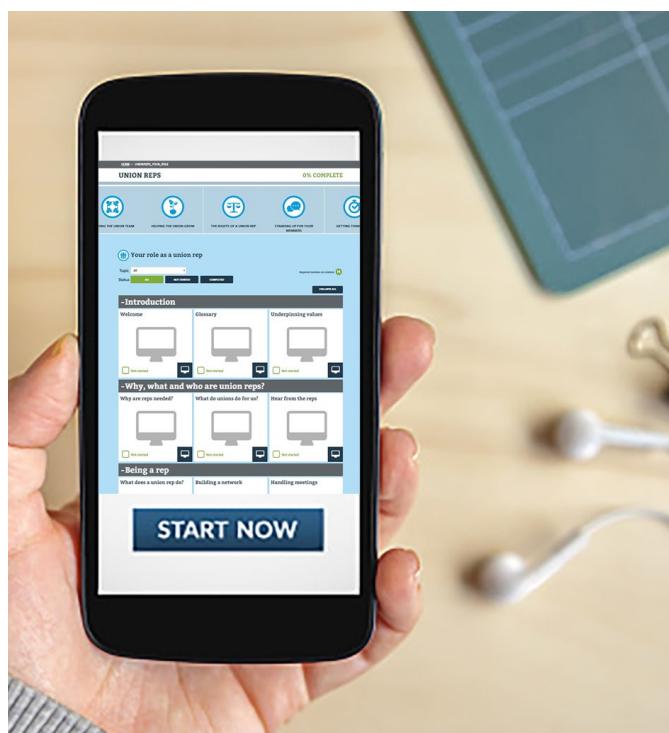
TUC Education's training offer for reps this autumn is made up of classroom, blended and online courses that bring contemporary technologies into classrooms and workplaces across the UK.

Three online core courses were launched this year – all of which can be accessed by reps as soon as they take office, where and when most convenient and from a mobile, tablet or PC.

All the new courses include supporting documents, templates and additional information that are built into the resources, so everything is available to reps even when they are on the go.

For anyone already involved or interested in the union learning rep role, the new Union Learning Reps 1 course covers all the skills and basic knowledge needed to begin or revive the role and raise the profile of learning in the workplace, as well as how to help members and colleagues by identifying their learning needs. The Union Learning Reps 2 course will be launched later this year.

The online Health and Safety Reps 1 course covers everything from the legal rights of a safety rep to how to involve colleagues in the health and safety agenda in the workplace. It also includes the Safety Representatives and Safety



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“Courses can be accessed by reps as soon as they take office, where and when most convenient and from a mobile, tablet or PC.”

Committee Regulations (Brown Book), with advice on the best way to use it.

The Union Reps 1 online course will help new and experienced reps gain or improve the skills and confidence they need to organise and recruit in order to achieve fairness in the workplace.

The TUC Education website hosts the online course directory and online application process, which allows reps to enter their

details and apply directly for classroom, blended or online courses (follow the second link below).

All these innovations will help TUC Education to continue to provide its comprehensive programme of courses for the 200,000 union representatives who currently help make working life better for almost 6 million working people in the UK. **LR**

[Click here to find all the new online courses](#)

NEW eNOTES GO ONLINE

The TUC Education website is home to eNotes, the online resources that help reps stay up to date on key workplace issues. Each of the 30-plus eNotes is a self-contained e-learning module with a mix of text, video and quizzes that takes between 15 and 30 minutes to complete.

The latest eNotes cover the Trade Union Act and combatting sexual harassment at work.

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

LOGIN TO LEARNING

Union reps are bagging the best learning seats in the house with a series of highly successful TUC Education webinars.

With around 400 views each week, the webinars are proving a highly popular way to stay ahead in a variety of subject areas.

Hugh Robertson will be leading the next webinar on Well-being in the Workplace, which will be broadcast live on Thursday 16 November 2017 at 2.30 pm.

[Click here to access all webinars](#)



How unions subtract bad memories of maths

When adults have bad memories of maths from school, what motivates them to get to grips with the subject as adults? UCU member Beth Kelly has been finding out.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

When maths teacher Beth Kelly decided to explore maths motivations in her PhD, the University and College Union (UCU) member knew unions and unionlearn would be able to help because of their track records with helping adults succeed through the union learning route.

After interviewing 20 manual workers who ranged in age from their 20s to their 60s, all of whom were maths learners at Level 1 or 2 and union members, Dr Kelly found that motivation came from a range of factors.

Despite poor experiences with maths at school, learners took up the subject as adults because of its potential to boost their earnings, to help them hold onto a job, to help their children and, in the case of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners, their desire to help their children integrate into the UK education system and ensure they succeeded.

She also discovered that her learners all had one very important thing in common – they knew and trusted their union learning reps

(ULRs) and knew they would not be left floundering if they ran into difficulties.

Another key factor for learners was that their improved experience was down to learning in a collaborative and supportive way through the union route rather than the competitive way that had marked much of their school days.

One union member who worked in local government told Dr Kelly that she was dyslexic and had been so turned off by maths at school that the subject had become a black hole for her. But after tackling maths through the union route as an adult, she had decided to become a ULR in order to encourage more of her colleagues to confront their numeracy demons.

Dr Kelly says that some of her interviewees have gone on to be teachers of maths in prisons with other trade unionists, or are using their new-found skills in negotiations with employers and in understanding their own finances such as mortgages.

“My research showed the important contribution that trade unions play in motivating adults to learn mathematics and the significant benefits for the trade unions, and

“My research showed the important contribution that trade unions play in motivating adults to learn mathematics.”

others, from that learning,” says Dr Kelly.

“My data analysis also shows that adults in my sample who achieve in a subject that has high social value, such as mathematics, develop positive feelings towards the subject that can have an influence on their identities.”

Dr Kelly also underlines how people’s confidence can be boosted through success in maths as adults. “The effect can result in them being motivated to act more confidently outside as well as inside the classroom,” she says.

“I also found that members feeling more confident in themselves felt more positive towards the trade union that had helped them develop their skills.” **LR**