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LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Winter 2019

Sue Mann is ULR of the Year

- ▶ *Public service partnerships*
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unionlearn
from the TUC



GET SET FOR A NEW DECADE

I'D LIKE TO WISH ALL OUR READERS AND learners a happy and successful new year from the whole unionlearn team. We hope every one of you starts 2020 by taking part in a taster, a workshop or a course that gets this new decade off to a really positive start.

Here at unionlearn, we have a wide range of resources to help you move on throughout 2020, whether that's professionally or personally or both.

There's SkillCheck, the smartphone app and web-based tool we created to help potential learners assess what level they are currently working at in English, maths and digital.

"We hope every one of you starts 2020 by taking part in a taster, a workshop or a course that gets this new decade off to a really positive start."

There are all the new resources we have developed with the help of the Erasmus+ Mid-Life Skills Review Project to help workers identify the skills they have and work out where they want to go next, not least the new Value My Skills digital tool.

And for anyone considering a change of work scene in the new year, we have collated a massive amount of useful data about a wide range of roles in our Careerzone, which includes

everything from future employment projections to a bank of careers advice videos.

Finally, I'd like to thank all our ULRs for everything you do week in, week out throughout the year, on behalf of your learners. Here's to us all making a difference in 2020! 

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
from the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

Bus drivers take a walk on the wellbeing side



Unite bus drivers in Weston-super-Mare took a lunchtime stroll along the seafront to improve their physical and mental health as part of a busy health and wellbeing day this autumn.

The group of drivers, who all work for First Somerset and Avon bus company, stretched their legs as part of a new partnership between the union and Strollers, a local walking group set up by community volunteer Mike Jones.

"I had already started one walk working with the council, so it's great to be involved with Unite and set up a second one to help their drivers and other members enjoy the benefits of walking," Mike says.

"I do this as a volunteer and get a lot of satisfaction talking to people and seeing them improve their health and confidence – I'm really looking forward to seeing how this new group develops."

The health and wellbeing day was run from a meeting room onsite that is used once a week as a union

learning centre by new Unite learning rep Kath Williams, who also took part in the seafront stroll.

"I drive everywhere, so when this idea came up, I thought it was great," Kath says.

"I think the group will grow among drivers, particularly in the spring and summer."

Unite Learning Organiser Tazim Ladhu, who initiated the partnership with Strollers, brought reusable water bottles to help walkers stay hydrated and encouraged two of the participants to train as walk leaders.

The day included 20-minute massage tasters provided by bus driver and qualified masseur David McDowell, who also discussed with colleagues how to reduce the adverse effects of long days being seated in their stressful jobs.

In addition, North Somerset Health Trainers offered healthy living advice, while trained Diabetes Peer Advisers provided information on living with the condition.

New partnership provides 30-plus free courses

Union members and their friends and colleagues can now access a wealth of free, fully accredited distance learning courses as a result of unionlearn's new training partnership with The Skills Network.

More than 30 fully funded courses cover subjects that include IT user skills, awareness of mental health problems, understanding retail operations and event planning.

"Our new learning partnership with The Skills Network is a fantastic opportunity for workplace learners to access a range of courses," says unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan.

"The courses are fully accredited at Level 2 and can be studied at the learner's own pace – allowing working people to build up skills they need to help with both professional and personal development."

The Skills Network is one of the most successful providers of online courses and qualifications in the UK, and their distance learning platform is a way of learning remotely without needing to attend classroom lessons.

Learners can study at their own pace, in their own home or workplace learning centre, at a time that suits their busy lives. There is also full support from tutors via email.

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Click here to find out more and sign up for courses on the microsite

Somerset apprentices get better deal



Somerset County Council apprentices will receive the correct rate for the job they are doing, high-quality training and a safe and healthy working environment thanks to the apprenticeship agreement UNISON South West signed with the authority late this summer.

"We are delighted the council has decided to sign a local apprenticeship agreement with us, publicly signalling its commitment to structured learning," commented UNISON South West Regional Secretary Joanne Kaye.

"It's very welcome that the council views apprenticeships as an investment in its future workforce, rather than a short-term source of cheap labour and we hope many other employers in the south west will soon follow their lead."

Employers who invest in the workforce of tomorrow not only nurture talent and close their skills gaps but also help boost the local economy, Joanne said.

Somerset County Council Director of HR & Organisational Development Chris Squire said he was

delighted to sign the charter with UNISON.

"We've done great things with apprenticeships and this shows a real commitment to work in partnership to develop this further – it's been great to work with UNISON on this," he said.

Phil Kelly

POA Learning Project Manager Phil Kelly, whose advocacy for digital skills and commitment to

data tracking both significantly influenced the development of union learning, has died after two years of living with cancer.

Born and bred in Liverpool, Phil originally trained as a chef after leaving school, working across the city and in South Africa for a period before making the switch to learning around the turn of the new century.

It was while he was managing a learning centre in Crosby that he was recruited in 2004 to be part of the team that set up Merseylearn, the hugely influential project at Merseytravel (now part of Liverpool City Region Combined Authority).

"Phil was really innovative and we worked on some ground-breaking approaches to engage people in e-learning and digital skills at the time," recalls UNISON learning rep Norman Hunter, who was also part of the original Merseylearn team.

When Phil moved on to

manage the Prison Officers' Association (POA) Union Learning Fund (ULF) project in 2010, he took with him not only his fluency in the digital arena but also his people skills.

"Phil was a very relaxed manager, very easy-going: he had faith in his staff and trusted everyone to get on with the job," recalls POA Learning National Coordinator Alison Manion. "He will be very much missed."

Meat firm workers get taste for learning

Fourteen workers at the Leicester site of meat firm Tulip Foods celebrated gaining their English qualifications through the learning partnership between the company and food workers' union BFAWU this summer.

BFAWU General Secretary Ronnie Draper and factory manager Paul Smith presented the learners with certificates to mark them achieving their Entry Level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications.

HR Manager Paula Oldham, Chesterfield College's Work Skills Tutor Sally Lowndes and BFAWU Learning Services team members Lisa Greenfield and Karen Plasom also attended the lunchtime event in the company board room to show their support.

Since the ceremony, the majority of the learners have progressed to the next level of their English studies, and BFAWU has recently been promoting the next round of courses that will start in the new year.



LOGISTICS FIRM SHARES AWARD GLORY WITH URTU

When Clipper Logistics was named New Employer of the Year at Stafford College's Celebration Awards this summer, the company insisted URTU Learning equally enjoyed the recognition at the ceremony.

The logistics firm wanted to share the glory since the learning programme at the logistics firm's Ollerton site in Nottinghamshire is a genuine partnership between the company, the union and provider Axia Solutions.

"This award demonstrates what can be achieved when the employer works in partnership with our union and a skills provider, such as Axia Solutions," says URTU Learning Project Manager Jeff Latham.

"We look forward to continuing our working partnership at Ollerton and, hopefully, at other Clipper Logistics sites in the future."

URTU Learning and onsite union learning rep (ULR) Damien Gill held their first meeting with Clipper Logistics' HR Manager Stacey Slater last October to discuss working together to help staff develop their skills.

With the union identifying the need for English and maths learning among the workforce, the two sides invited provider Axia Solutions to deliver courses on site.

"The commitment of the learners has been outstanding and, with the expertise of Axia Solutions and the full support of the company, there has been an incredible 94 per cent success rate," says Project Worker Simon Walker. **LR**

UNISON members love learning, new survey reveals



More than 85 per cent of UNISON members are ready to learn new skills to stay ahead in the jobs market, according to the University of Exeter's analysis of the union's massive Skills for the Future survey.

The results also confirmed the popularity of the union's learning offer, with the vast majority of members (79 per cent) having recently taken part in learning. And of those who hadn't, more than 50 per cent believed that it would have been useful.

These headline findings were revealed by Hilary Stevens and Dr Andrew Dean, the academics who analysed the survey results, when they helped launch the Skills for the Future report at UNISON Centre in November.

They also found that significant numbers of members have skills that are under-utilised in their current roles – around one-third or more in literacy, numeracy, communications and organisation – which indicates considerable potential for greater responsibility and career development.

However, their analysis also identified widespread anxiety about job security across the public services.

More than half of the respondents fear

automation is threatening their jobs while one-third worry they will be made redundant in the very near future. Workers in the sectors that have seen the most cuts in recent years (local government, utilities and further education) are the most anxious about their futures.

"What makes this research unique is the fact that this is the voice of the workers: staff have told us what they need – now it's up to the government and to employers to listen," commented UNISON Head of Learning and Organising Teresa Donegan.

More than 38,000 members completed the survey earlier this year, making it one of the largest of its kind in Europe, with the sample accurately reflecting the union's overall demographics.

[Click here](#) to download the report and the PowerPoint presentation from the launch

Union members still enjoy training premium

The total volume of employer-led training fell by another 10 per cent over the last seven years, according to new research for unionlearn by respected academic Professor Francis Green of University College, London (UCL).

But union members are significantly more likely to secure development opportunities than their non-union counterparts.

"We urgently need better and more effective policy levers to stop the

decline in skills in the UK, including a right to time off to learn; access to good-quality advice and guidance; and a learning account for all workers,” unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan writes in the foreword to the report.

According to Professor’s Green’s analysis of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the volume of workplace training has declined by 10 per cent since 2011, having already halved between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the current decade.

And it is workers with the lowest-level qualifications (below GCSE or vocational equivalent) who have been hit hardest, as they have suffered a 20 per cent cut over this period.

However, the professor’s analysis of the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) revealed that union members are significantly more likely to get training, with 37 per cent saying they accessed training in the three months prior to interview in 2017, compared to 22 per cent of non-union members.

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

Union stall proves a hit at Blackpool jobs fair

Blackpool residents keen to find work, escape their zero-hours contracts or change careers flocked to the



joint unionlearn and Unite stand at an employability roadshow at Blackpool Central Library in September.

Raising Aspirations in the Fylde Coast was organised by Lancashire Adult Learning in partnership with Blackpool Council and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to help people find out about learning and employment opportunities in the local area.

Around half of the almost 200 participants queued up at the joint stand to discover what sort of local apprenticeship opportunities were available and what rights protected apprentices in the workplace, with many of them very interested in unionlearn’s new Apprenticeship Essentials app.

“The stand proved very popular, with a queue of people waiting to find out more and pick up resources and information,” says unionlearn Project Worker Matt Pointon.

“It was also a good opportunity to share the message that ‘Apprenticeships are a union business’ with partners and providers on the day and explore ways to work together in the future.”

Unite North West Learning Organiser Steve Turner was pleased with the success of the event. “Working with unionlearn, Unite has been able to push on in Blackpool to boost the trade union presence in



the town and wider region,” Steve said.

“We have developed new ideas on how to support apprentices and learners and this event was a great opportunity to once again engage directly with the community.”

Unionlearn National Apprenticeship Project Worker Mark Rowe said that the roadshow gave both organisations the chance to talk to around 100 people and network with partners old and new.

“We discussed with individuals how trade unions can support skills and learning and in particular we dealt with a number of misconceptions about apprenticeships, particularly from older people,” Mark said.

Only lifelong learning will deliver 2030 skills

The UK must urgently adopt a lifelong learning model if we are to successfully re-skill and upskill the workforce over the next decade, according to a new report by the Industrial Strategy Council (ISC).

Published in October, *UK Skills Mismatch in 2030* explores how the changing nature of work will shape which qualifications, knowledge and workplace skills we will need more of in 10 years’ time – and which we’ll need less.

Using analysis by management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, the paper predicts that

the aggregate UK skills mismatch will significantly worsen over the coming decade without a radical re-think of education and training policy.

The most widespread under-skilling is set to be in basic digital skills, which are likely to look a lot more advanced than what we consider ‘basic’ today.

“The scale and type of skills shortfall anticipated cannot be addressed through formal education outside of the workplace alone: an urgent shift to a new norm of lifelong learning in the UK workforce is required,” argues the report.

Community General Secretary Roy Rickhuss, who is a member of the ISC, pointed out that the forecasts in the report suggest the UK needs large-scale education and training reform.

“With employees’ participation in training remaining stagnant at best in recent times, it is no surprise workers are even more likely to be over-skilled or under-skilled by 2030,” Roy said on the launch of the report.

“Businesses have a social responsibility to upskill individuals and they should be leading the way in this field. Through government, unions and businesses working together, we can support more people to learn and help shift the mindsets of the population on skills and training.”

[Click here](#) to download a copy of the report



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Driving development in public services

Unions, employers and third-sector organisations are working together in the East Midlands to expand and improve workplace learning across the public services.

Two public service compacts (PSCs) in the East Midlands are helping unions, employers and third-sector organisations work together to develop learning and skills in the region's local authorities, NHS trusts and other public service organisations.

Greater Lincolnshire PSC was originally set up 12 years ago when it was directly funded by the Learning and Skills Council, before the LSC was replaced by what is now the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in 2010.

D2N2 PSC is a more recent creation, established by the merger of the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire PSCs three years ago. It took its name (a reference to its key components of Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire) from the area's Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which had been set up shortly before (and is also a member of the compact).

“Both PSCs allow organisations to work together on a range of workforce development issues, including apprenticeships.”

“At the time of the merger – and this is still very much the case – we were keen to align ourselves with their skills agenda, so we are the public sector compact that supports the skills agenda of D2N2,” explains Chris Donkin, who has facilitated both compacts in recent years.

Both PSCs allow organisations to work together on a range of workforce development issues, including apprenticeships, explains Chris, who is also a familiar figure to regional union learning reps and project workers from both the GMB and UNISON, having worked closely

with both unions on the learning agenda in recent years.

“They act as forums for public sector organisations, some voluntary organisations who provide some public services as well as trade unions, of course, and enable them to get together on a regular basis to address issues around workforce development that are of common concern and interest,” explains Chris.

The D2N2 PSC includes members from most of the major public service employers, with the exception of the universities and the police.

“We have the big four local authorities (Derby City Council, Derbyshire County Council, Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council); all the big further education (FE) colleges; virtually every NHS Trust in both counties; a couple of schools; some of the smaller district and borough councils; and a handful of private sector organisations and

voluntary organisations that provide some public services – and of course we have UNISON and the TUC as members as well,” Chris says.

Both compacts are committed to promoting the apprenticeship agenda in their local areas as well as organising events where stakeholders can share information and best practice.

This September, Greater Lincolnshire PSC organised a successful event at Lincoln College, called Apprenticeships: Where Are We Now?

It featured a keynote address by Professor Sharon Green of the University of Lincoln; a presentation by Bev Moxon from the Department for Education (DfE) on industry placements; and a guide to transfer of Apprenticeship Levy funds to non-levy paying organisations by Mark Coulson from ESFA that was particularly well received by attendees.

It also included a presentation from two of the winners of the Lincolnshire Public Service Apprentice of the Year Awards 2018, which examined effective ways of attracting young people to apprenticeships in the public sector.

Lincoln MP Karen Lee, herself a former UNISON learning rep, had presented the winners with their apprenticeship awards at last year’s celebration event.

D2N2 PSC organised its own apprenticeships event last year that included a panel discussion by apprentices from Derby Homes, Rushcliffe Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council about how their apprenticeships had changed their lives, as well as the presentation of the D2N2 public service apprentice of the year awards.

The PSC followed that up with a good practice event on the theme of celebrating apprenticeships in public service in November 2019 that included this year’s apprentice of the year awards.

The compacts benefit significantly from working closely with their trade union members, says Chris.

THE UNION VIEW: Gavin McCann, Regional Learning and Development Organiser, UNISON

Being a member of the Public Service Compacts in the East Midlands means we can ensure UNISON is represented in discussions on training and development across the region – and have an input into those discussions. Because some employers aren’t aware of what we offer on learning, Compact meetings are a good opportunity to spread the message. We launched our Learning Lincs project (where UNISON branches across the county pool their resources to deliver learning to members) at a meeting of the Greater Lincolnshire compact to show employers that this is what UNISON stands for, this is how we are putting our money where our mouth is. In addition, we have made contacts about functional skills courses through the compacts: we have recently run assessments at Chesterfield Royal Hospital and Nottingham University Hospitals and we’ll be running them at Kingsway Hospital in Derby and Derbyshire Community Health Trust and that’s largely through links we have made at the compact.



“We get professional input on how workplace issues look to the workers involved and because we’re in dialogue with UNISON, the GMB and the TUC, we usually know where member organisations can find the answers to questions about, for example, what rights young workers are entitled to,” he explains.

“I also think it’s valuable for the member organisations to see the trade unions there because some of the more traditional professionals might only think of them as people

THE EMPLOYER VIEW: Jo Beckwith, People Transformation Manager, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust

What’s useful about being a member of the D2N2 Public Sector Compact are all the opportunities to share information and best practice. I’ve attended networking events and in March, I gave a presentation about career progression in the NHS that highlighted all the different training routes we use at the Trust, including employability programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships.

The compact also gives members the opportunity to lobby together: because we’re all facing similar problems, for example, promoting apprenticeships in schools that are keen to keep their 16-year-olds, we have been able to lobby the council as a collective on that issue. All the trusts work well together on the Widening Participation agenda: at the recent careers event in Newark, I shared a stand with Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust and Sherwood Forests Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – we pooled our resources and staffed it between us.



they meet when they’re sitting over the other side of the table from them at a disciplinary meeting,” Chris adds.

“But working with them on the compact, they get a very clear message that on this occasion we’re very much on the same side, we’re all supporting workforce development for people in the public sector.” **LR**

► [Click here](#) to find out more about the compacts

On the road to somewhere

Unite learning rep Sue Mann has been named TUC ULR of the Year for her work promoting learning opportunities to colleagues at Blackpool Transport.

✦ Martin Moriarty

Sue Mann didn't have a happy experience of secondary school in the Yorkshire pit village where she grew up. Whenever her older brother got into trouble with teachers (a regular occurrence), Sue would be pulled out of lessons and punished as well. Plus she was a redhead, and the headteacher at the time publicly victimised all children with ginger hair.

No surprise, then, that Sue left school at the age of 15 with no qualifications to her name and took a job in a local shop.

She moved across the Pennines to Blackpool three years later. "It wasn't a planned thing," Sue recalls. "There were four or five of us and we had a bit of money so we decided to have a weekend in Blackpool. I saw an advertisement for a job in a hotel and I stayed!"

After leaving the hospitality industry, Sue took her first transport job driving minibuses for Ribble Motor Services after the deregulation of the bus industry outside London in 1986. She then moved to the capital for a couple of years, where she gained her double-decker licence with London Buses, which had not yet been split into privatised regional businesses.

After her spell down south, Sue headed

back to Blackpool one winter only to find there were no vacancies for drivers. That's when she started her own bed and breakfast business, took a catering course and then bought a café where she worked until her wife died in 2008, which prompted her to sell up and get back on the buses (she'd always renewed her bus driving licence).

It was a ULR who encouraged Sue to try the role herself. "My friend Tracey here at work said, 'You'd be great at this'," Sue recalls. "I thought, 'How can I do that when I don't have a single qualification?' But she said you can qualify yourself as you go along, so I had a look and decided to go for it."

Once elected as a ULR seven years ago, Sue enrolled on the learning rep training course that would change her life. "I went on the course, which was lovely, and I thought, 'I like learning!'" she says.

Sue decided that the best approach to the role would be to enrol herself on every course on offer in The Learning Curve, the onsite learning centre at the bus depot.

"I do every course that comes here, because how can I help somebody if I don't know myself?" Sue says.

"I do every course that comes here, because how can I help somebody if I don't know myself?"



“Trying to keep everybody together for the length of a six-week course when someone says they’re on earlies next week and someone else is on lates – that’s the biggest challenge.”

She started with functional skills English and maths, scoring 92 per cent on the first and 100 per cent on the second. “That gave me the bug then,” she says. “I thought, I can do this – I’m not stupid like they used to tell me at school.”

It helped that one of the tutors from Bispham College (the local provider that delivers the functional skills courses onsite) encouraged all the learners to ask about anything they didn’t understand, instead of keeping quiet because they thought they had a stupid question.

“She said, ‘There is no such thing as a stupid question – if you don’t understand something, just ask’,” Sue remembers.

She offers the same advice to all her learners. “People learn in different ways, which I never knew before – I thought somebody stood in front of you and you had to learn what they said to you,” Sue says.

“Myself, I’ve learned that I can pick things up a lot quicker if somebody explains something and shows me at the same time. That’s why I always ask people, ‘Which way do you want to learn?’ to make sure they feel comfortable.”

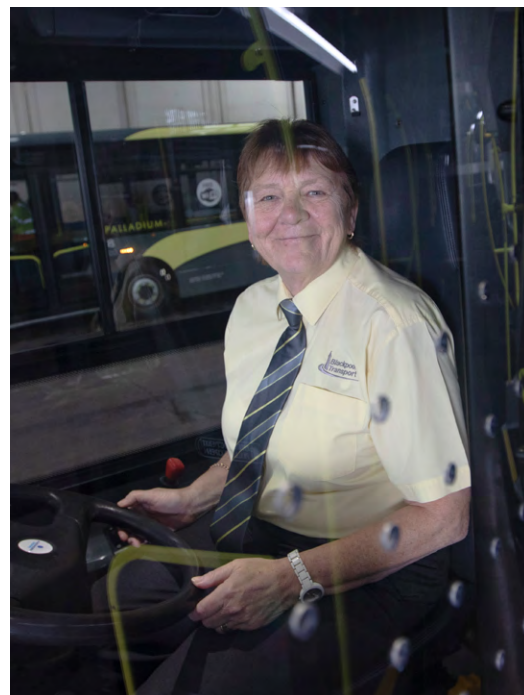
In addition to classroom courses, Sue has also used her union’s LearnWithUnite (LWU) portal to complete courses in mental health awareness and mental health first aid, and she’s also qualified as a first aid instructor.

The portal is popular with learners, who can also use LWU to access the Litmos Heroes e-learning portfolio. “We’ve got one lad who’s got a big handful of certificates because he’s done 75-plus of those courses!” Sue says.

Sue is currently enrolled on a Level 3 Award in Education and Training, the course that is designed to give people the knowledge and confidence to teach in the post-16 education sector.

At the moment, Sue spends three days a fortnight in The Learning Curve, alternating with another ULR. The biggest headache they have is working around the shift patterns common to any bus garage.

“Trying to keep everybody together for the length of a six-week course when someone



says they’re on earlies next week and someone else is on lates – that’s the biggest challenge.”

But the learning centre continues to thrive because of Sue’s commitment, says Unite North West Regional Manager Jane Broome, who regularly teaches IT and genealogy courses on site.

“Sue believes passionately that everyone should have the opportunity to learn: she also leads by example and has completed many courses herself,” Jane says.

“Sue never looks for praise but she truly deserves it for everything she does and continues to do to upskill her fellow workers.”

Undaunted by learning in a way she could never have imagined as a teenager, Sue was not so relaxed when it came to collecting her ULR of the Year award at TUC Congress in Brighton in September.

“I’ve never been so frightened in my life: I was shaking! But it was a good day, definitely, and I was very pleased with myself – quite elated,” she says.

Sue is not the first ULR from Blackpool Transport to win the TUC’s highest accolade for learning reps. Back in 2016, Paul McGovern was named ULR of the Year, having helped union learning get off the ground when the learning centre first opened on site in 2008.

What gives Sue most satisfaction is seeing the progress her learners can make, achieving whatever they set out to achieve.

“We had one lad who is dyslexic so everything was twice as hard for him,” she says. “But we put him in for workplace learner of the year and he won it and I was over the moon: it was fantastic, it made everything worthwhile!” **LR**





Helping disabled freelancers to thrive through learning

More and more disabled people are finding self-employment is the best route for them. But a new report by Community shows there is much more to be done to help them make a success of working for themselves.

Too few disabled people working for themselves know about learning and training opportunities that would help them make a success of self-employment, according to a new report drawn up through Community's one-year innovation project funded by the Union Learning Fund (ULF).

And too many disabled freelancers are priced out of the training opportunities they do find out about, reveals the report, *Making Self-Employment Work For Disabled People: An agenda to make it happen*.

Published by Community and the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE) earlier this year, the report breaks new ground in its detailed analysis of a fast-growing group that now accounts for 14 per cent of the self-employed workforce.

And it has drawn up a set of detailed recommendations for

policy reform to help more disabled people thrive as freelancers.

These include redesigning the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to reduce the chances of wrong decisions in the assessment process; extending New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) mentor and benefit support to two years; and increasing awareness of Access to Work (ATW), widely considered one of the best kept secrets in welfare support.

With the National League of the Blind and Disabled having been part of the union for nearly 20 years, Community was well aware of the increasing numbers of disabled people leaving payroll jobs to start their own businesses.

What the union was keen to shed light on was what was behind the trend towards self-employment; what were disabled people's experiences of working for themselves; and what could unions and other organisations do

to improve self-employment for disabled people.

As well as teaming up with IPSE, the representative body for the UK's self-employed community, Community also collected expert evidence from organisations it was already working with on other campaigns, including Mind and the Mental Health Foundation, and from new connections with other leaders in their fields, such as Blind Ambition, Disability Rights UK, Mutually Inclusive and Scope.

Crucially, the union made sure that it reached out to disabled freelancers themselves. "We wouldn't have published the report without the views and experiences of disabled people in self-employment: they're the ones with the best recommendations about what would make their working lives better," says Research and Campaigns Officer Kate Dearden.

Being able to access affordable, high-quality training is vital for all

“Unions have a critical role to play in making sure the disabled self-employed in particular can have access to training and upskill and retrain in ways that will help them make a success of their working lives.”

self-employed people but that goes double for disabled freelancers since disabled adults are nearly three times more likely to have no formal qualifications than their non-disabled counterparts.

But according to the project's analysis of Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, while 27 per cent of disabled people with a payroll job have recently taken advantage of job-related training, that figure drops to 13 per cent for their self-employed counterparts.

And what the report revealed was that the main reason disabled people are not taking up training is because they don't know what's out there. Even when training opportunities do come across their radar, the cost can often prevent them signing up (disabled full-time self-employed people earn 23 per cent less than their non-disabled



counterparts and 42 per cent less than disabled employees).

Another major obstacle is inaccessible provision.

“Widening accessibility is very important because of what education does for people, giving them confidence to succeed in our ever-changing world,” says Community’s National Organiser Sidra Nisa.

That’s why the union’s new online learning platforms and partnerships with The Skills Network, Wranx and Litmos Heroes have the potential to help the union’s disabled freelancers, Sidra says.

“When people are self-employed, taking time out to invest in training may mean passing up the next paid opportunity; and when they have unpredictable work schedules, that makes finding a regular time to take training very challenging,” she points out.

“But with The Skills Network, they do not need to take time away from work or be at a specific location as it is distance learning that’s complemented by tutor support. And as tutor support is available through email, telephone or meeting face-to-face at a preferred location, that removes barriers for the disabled self-employed.”

Community is already disseminating the findings of the report through the wider trade union movement, starting with a presentation to ULF project managers in the autumn.

“Unions have changed working people’s lives for years through the ULF offering training and reaching out to those people who need it the most,” Kate points out.

“So unions have a critical role to play in making sure the disabled self-employed in particular can have access to training and upskill and retrain in ways that will help them make a success of their working lives.” **LR**

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

INNOVATING THROUGH THE ULF

In addition to Community’s project, the ULF has been supporting five more innovation projects in the current financial year.

- The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is developing a fully interactive digital e-learning tool to help users reduce the risk of fatality and heat-related illness in the Fire Service and other sectors.
- The Prison Officers Association (POA) has launched an apprenticeship hub on the Isle of Wight to support the estimated 1,500 apprentices on the island.
- Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, supported by the University and College Union (UCU), is developing new ways of engaging young people and supporting them on their learning journeys through its apprenticeships project.
- The College of Podiatry is providing union reps with training and support to foster their own resilience and also to help their co-workers better deal with the challenges of working in the health sector.
- UCU has designed its ‘Future of the profession’ project to encourage greater continuous professional development (CPD) among its membership.



Helping apprentices be the best they can be

UNISON learning rep Vilpa Lillie has used her mentoring skills to help two apprentices in her department at energy provider E.ON stay the distance, complete their qualifications and move on in their careers.

When E.ON customer service apprentices Anneta Johnson and Joshua Proctor joined Vilpa Lillie's complaints team in January, it didn't take long for the UNISON learning rep to see that they both needed more support.

"I sit near to them both, so when I noticed they were struggling with their confidence, I took it upon myself to mentor them," Vilpa says. "I also noticed they were struggling with their mental health, so I encouraged them to get some support through the Wellbeing Hub."

Falling behind with her coursework and trying to find time to catch up was one of the major issues Anneta was facing. Vilpa showed her how to clear her backlog and helped to secure her some additional time to study.

While all apprentices must be given 20 per cent time off-the-job to learn throughout the duration of their programme, E.ON apprentices are recording around 25 per cent on average. How they use this time depends on the type of apprenticeship they are on and the business area in which they work.

"To allow Anneta to keep on top of her apprenticeship studies, I arranged for her to take

a regular one and a half hours per week where she could just concentrate on her coursework: we both felt that this would help to alleviate the stress and anxiety," Vilpa says.

With Anneta anxious about having to make a presentation as part of her end-point assessment, Vilpa encouraged her to enrol on a UNISON Build Your Confidence course in September to gain the skills she would need.

"The course helped me to understand how to view myself in a positive light: I'm now looking forward to doing my presentation with peace in my heart," Anneta says.

"I would not have reached this far in my apprenticeship without Vilpa's support and guidance. She has supported me by facilitating a move into a different team, where I have been able to further develop my skills and knowledge, while working with a great team manager who gives me every opportunity to grow."

Like Anneta, Joshua also credits Vilpa's support with helping him stay the distance on the apprenticeship.

"Vilpa has been the reason I've stayed: she persuaded me to continue my apprenticeship and without her motivation and support I'm sure I would have left the business," he says.

"The course helped me to understand how to view myself in a positive light: I'm now looking forward to doing my presentation with peace in my heart."

“Vilpa has been the reason I’ve stayed. Her initiative to help out apprentices here at E.ON has really impacted myself and made my journey way more comfortable and maintainable.”

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Joshua has also taken on the UNISON branch roles of young members’ officer and LGBT members’ officer, which he would not have done without Vilpa’s support.

“Vilpa has brought out a whole new level of confidence within myself: she is so inspiring both as a representative and as a person,” he says.

“I genuinely wanted to be a point of contact as a young person. At the age of 18 and being gay, this role allows me to offer support and advice to those who need it most: I’ve always enjoyed helping others but Vilpa really put the role into perspective for me.”

While Anneta is pursuing other career options after completing her apprenticeship this autumn, Joshua is keen to stay with E.ON and has looked into the possibility of a Level 3 apprenticeship.

“I want to grow and to develop within E.ON but it’s really all about me taking each day as it comes and seeing where this apprenticeship journey takes me,” he says.

Since starting an apprenticeship can be very daunting, having the support of someone like Vilpa can be crucial, says E.ON Apprenticeship Lead Tammy Bristow. “It’s so important that our apprentices have colleagues like Vilpa who genuinely care: I’m really grateful for everything she does to help them feel supported on their journey,” she says.

As for Vilpa herself, she is keen to further develop her mentoring skills. “I would love to do a mentoring course: I have mentored our new starters before and always got great feedback – I love to help people and see them progress.” **LR**

Click [here](#) to work through the TUC Education e-Note on mentoring apprentices



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NEW RULES ON TIME OFF FOR TRAINING

To help ensure all apprentices secure the 20 per cent off-the-job training they are entitled to, employers and providers must now set out how they will deliver it before the start of every apprenticeship, under new government guidance published in September.

“The big change in the latest guidelines is that there now needs to be evidence on how the off-the-job training is delivered, which is good news for apprentices,” says unionlearn Policy Officer Kirsi Kekki.

Under the new system, three key documents must now all include the quantity and content of planned off-the-job training to be delivered (adjusted for any prior learning and annual leave):

- the apprenticeship agreement
- the commitment statement
- the individualised learning record (ILR).

While the apprenticeship agreement is between the employer and the apprentice, the commitment statement involves employer, apprentice and provider.

“The training provider is ultimately responsible for driving the commitment statement as this is mainly about the content of the programme,” the guidance says. “However, the employer and the apprentice should play active roles in agreeing the commitment statement content.”

In addition, the planned off-the-job training hours must now be recorded on the ILR, which will also have to include the actual hours delivered from the start of the new financial year.

Click [here](#) to for government guidance, including a commitment statement template

Click [here](#) to access unionlearn’s resources about off-the-job training and other rights and entitlement, including the Apprenticeships Essentials app

New skills tool is a hit

The Erasmus+ Mid-life Skills Review Project showcased the new resources it has developed over the past two years at a successful dissemination event this autumn.

The new online Value My Skills transferable skills assessment tool is easy to use, helps people identify the skills they already have and encourages learners to draw up action plans to make changes, according to an initial evaluation by the University of Exeter.

The positive findings were revealed by Dr Andrew Dean at unionlearn's National Mid-life Skills Review dissemination event in London in November, which showcased the new resources that have been developed and shared the lessons learned during the two-year Erasmus+ project.

More than 75 per cent of reviewees surveyed would recommend the tool to other people – a particularly high endorsement for a brand-new product, Andrew pointed out.

"After the session, I realised my job wasn't right for me and my hopes for the future: six months on, I'm in an amazing new role

that is allowing me to grow in a new direction," commented one reviewee.

People conducting mid-life skills reviews were also positive about the new tool. All reviewers agreed the tool was either easy or very easy to use, with just under 85 per cent finding no problems using it.

"The tool is a good excuse or pretext to sit down with a person and see what worries them in the near future, what is it that they feel that they are falling behind at," commented one reviewer. "The tool itself is the best part of the review," said another.

More than 60 per cent of employers, policymakers and unions surveyed believe union support for mid-life and older workers will become more important in the years ahead, while 100 per cent think unions already play an important role in helping older workers remain in the labour market. **LR**



RESOURCES FOR ULRs

Value My Skills cards: designed to help workers think about the skills they already have and identify the skills they need to apply for a new job, enrol on a course or undertake some voluntary work.

[Click here to find out more](#)

Value My Skills online tool: helps learners reflect on their levels of competence in a range of different areas and identify two or three they want to develop. Short registration required.

[Click here to access the tool](#)

Climbing Frame Supporting Mid-life Development learning theme: shows ULRs and other reps how to deliver a mid-life development review to colleagues to help them make informed choices about their next steps at mid-life or at any age. Will be updated during 2020. Short registration required.

[Click here to enrol on/log in to the Climbing Frame](#)

Supporting Mid-life Development eNote and webinar: explain the challenges faced by mid-life workers and how ULRs and other reps can conduct mid-life development reviews to help them meet those challenges.

[Click here to access the eNote and webinar](#)

Supporting Mid-life Development Mini Guides: set of four unionlearn signposting mini-guides covering health and wellbeing; mental health; pensions and financial matters; and support for carers.

[Click here for your mini-guides](#)



“While the service is delivered digitally, users can also access phone support from dedicated career advisers.”

inclusion through their role, alongside government, on the National Retraining Partnership, which oversees the development and implementation of the NRS.

Get Help to Retrain is currently running in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Area; Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area; Leeds City Region LEP area; Liverpool City Region Combined Authority; the North East LEP area; and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The government has pledged to roll out the service across the whole of England at some point next year, when unionlearn is planning a series of regional briefings to coincide with the national rollout.

To target some of those who need skills and employment support the most, the service is only available to learners who are:

- employed
- aged 24 or over
- don't have a degree
- are earning below £35,000 a year.

Unionlearn is keen for ULRs in the six areas where Get Help to Retrain is available to support individuals accessing the service (link below).

This means that not only is the service more likely to reach more people who could benefit but that ULR and individual user feedback via the website will support its further development and incorporation of additional features. **LR**

▶ [Click here](#) to access Get Help to Retrain (your postcode must correspond with the six areas where it's available)

▶ [Click here](#) for a demonstration of Get Help to Retrain in a TUC webinar

Help shape new training service

ULRs and learners can contribute to the development of Get Help to Retrain by using the service in the areas where it's already available.

If you're a union learning rep (ULR) in one of the six areas where the government's Get Help to Retrain service is available, you can influence its future development by helping eligible learners access what's on offer.

Get Help to Retrain is the government's new jobs and skills service to help people understand their current skills, find opportunities to develop new ones and explore alternative occupations. It's the first

element of the new National Retraining Scheme (NRS) to go live.

While the service is delivered digitally, users can also access phone support from dedicated career advisers.

User research during the development phase helped persuade government that including phone support would make the new service more effective and engage more people who could benefit. In addition, the TUC and CBI both backed its

Making maths add up for learners

The team of Usdaw learning reps at DHL Castleford have run a National Numeracy pilot that helped one of their less confident learners.

When Usdaw learning rep Sean Dixon heard that National Numeracy wanted to investigate how learners develop in a union-supported work environment, he jumped at the chance to bring the pilot to the DHL Castleford learning centre, where he is ULR coordinator.

“National Numeracy had developed a unique attitudinal approach to numeracy, which focused on helping people to feel more confident with everyday maths and overcome their anxieties,” says Sean.

“I was trained in this approach and then returned to the workplace to support colleagues, through learning online with the National Numeracy Challenge.”

There was one union member at Castleford that Sean was particularly keen to convince to join in – Amy Westmoreland, someone he knew felt anxious in large groups of learners.

“I really wanted Amy to take part: it would be a good test for the National Numeracy Challenge (NNC) approach and could help Amy get all the benefits of our centre – a setting

where she had felt uncomfortable,” Sean says.

Amy traces her discomfort all the way back to school. “I was never good in a school environment: I found learning with a lot of people around very difficult – still do,” she says.

Convinced by Sean to take part in the pilot project, Amy wasn’t happy with her initial assessment, which she didn’t enjoy taking in the learning centre at the same time as other people. So she tried again by herself at home, where she fared 20 points better.

Boosted by that, Amy gritted her teeth and continued with the pilot in the learning centre. She could feel her confidence grow as she persisted to successfully complete the course. “It’s not just about the maths itself – it’s about being able to achieve something for yourself,” she says.

Not long after, the ULR team heard about another pilot they thought Amy might enjoy more – the online functional skills project UpSkill Me.

“Amy had spoken to me before about getting anxious in a classroom setting, so I knew when an online

“I was never good in a school environment: I found learning with a lot of people around very difficult – still do.”

or distance learning course became available, she would be comfortable taking it on,” Sean says.

Completing the maths course, which was delivered on a tablet in seven online units, was a challenge for Amy’s anxiety levels. Unable to relax on the day of the final assessment, she had to leave 20 minutes before the end of her allotted time – but she still passed and gained her Maths Level 2.

“I honestly didn’t think I’d picked up as much information as I did, so was really surprised to pass,” she says.

“I now feel I have improved my confidence with doing the learning,” she says. “It’s given me a chance to carry on improving and I would be interested in further courses, still preferring distance learning or courses I can do on my own.” **LR**