

LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Winter 2018



Usdaw ULR is this year's TUC learning award winner

- ▶ *Congress in Manchester*
- ▶ *GMB ReachOut*
- ▶ *National Retraining Scheme*
- ▶ *Going green with the FBU*
- ▶ *Getting rid of gremlins*

unionlearn
from the TUC



UPPING OUR GAME ON LEARNING

THIS EDITION OF LEARNING REP is going to press at a significant moment in the evolution of union learning, since the Union Learning Fund (ULF) Assessment Panel is currently considering the bids to the 20th round of the ULF.

But beyond the two-decade anniversary, what makes this round particularly important are the two new opportunities that were opened up in the Round 20 Prospectus. For the first time, unions have been able to put together projects running for a period of up to three years that improve equality and tackle disadvantage while demonstrating sustainability, value for money and impact (these projects will make up the majority of the successful bids). Unions are also able to apply for one-year funding for innovative projects

“For the first time, unions have been able to put together projects running for a period of up to three years that improve equality and tackle disadvantage.”

that trial new approaches or address specific priorities, problems or skills needs.

As we know from the results of the University of Exeter’s recent survey of Union Learning Fund (ULF) learners (reported in this issue), union-led learning has improved people’s job prospects and their progression to further learning while providing excellent value for money over the past 20 years.

Now these two innovations to the funding framework will enable unions once more to up their game and deliver improved outcomes for working people, the organisations they partner with and the country as a whole. **LR**

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
from the TUC

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE). *Learning Rep* magazine is published four times a year by unionlearn, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS.

Editor: Yusuf Dadabhoy | Writer: Martin Moriarty | Design: TUC | © unionlearn, 2018
Cover photo: © Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

NEWS + VIEWS

UNISON hosts launch of this year’s Reading Ahead



UNISON hosted the national launch of the latest Reading Ahead challenge in September with a lunchtime event featuring award-winning author Ann Cleaves, author of not one but two sequences of detective books, one featuring Vera Stanhope, the other set on Shetland.

Guests in the Garden Room at UNISON Centre in London included several UNISON learning reps who have successfully run Reading Ahead in their branches and Usdaw’s Sean Dixon, featured in the previous edition of *Learning Rep*.

In addition, there were members of other organisations that have run the initiative, including the library services in Brent, Islington, Lewisham, Newham, Westminster, colleges such as Uxbridge and Ealing, Hammersmith and West London and staff from the prisons in Pentonville and Thameside.

In her speech and the question and answer session that followed, Ann set out the vital role libraries

had played in her evolution as a reader and her career as a writer, and the economic benefits of their work.

“Shetland tourism has gone up by 43 per cent since the television show has been on. That’s more money coming into the country – generating jobs, generating income – and there would be no *Shetland* on the television, there would be no Shetland books without libraries,” Ann said.

“That’s not just because they supported me as a writer but when I was a kid we didn’t have books in the house except library books – it was being taken to the library every Saturday that got me reading and then got me writing.”

Genevieve Clarke said that Ann had long been a hero at The Reading Agency for her consistent support for libraries and library staff and for writing a very popular Quick Read, *Too Good to be True*, in 2016.

UNISON Head of Learning and Organising Teresa Donegan said the union was delighted to be launching Reading Ahead, as the

initiative helped participants progress to other learning opportunities that benefited themselves, their employers and society as a whole.

▶ [Click here](#) to order this year's Reading Ahead print materials and incentives

▶ [Click here](#) for downloadable guidance and templates

Step up with the updated Climbing Frame

Unionlearn has updated the popular Climbing Frame learning resource, the free website designed for ULRs and other reps to help promote learning and support learners in the workplace.

The website has established itself as a valuable resource for ULRs and others that work with learners since it was first launched in 2010, and the re-branding followed consultation with ULRs and members of the unionlearn team and a full audit of the previous site.

"User needs were our primary focus, so we took on board feedback: we kept what people liked, updated content, revitalised features and made changes to improve usability for visitors," explains unionlearn Projects Officer Louisa Smith.

"We have modernised the look of the Climbing Frame using more colour, a clean design and inspiring images – we have even created a new Climbing Frame logo – and we hope ULRs and learners like it and it continues to be a useful support resource."

The Climbing Frame can

be used to:

- provide up-to-date information to help during discussions with learners
- update ULRs' knowledge about various learning opportunities
- keep records of sessions with learners
- develop individual action plans with learners
- store local information and contacts.

▶ [Click here](#) to register or log into the Climbing Frame

▶ [Click here](#) to email any questions or feedback about the Climbing Frame

ULF projects boost job prospects and progression

Union-led learning improves people's job prospects and their progression to further learning and training as well as providing excellent value for money, according to a new survey of Union Learning Fund (ULF) learners by the University of Exeter.

As a result of taking part in union learning, 90 per cent of respondents gained at least one new skill, 73 per cent became more confident in their abilities, and 63 per cent gained a new qualification.

More than three quarters (77 per cent) said that ULF courses whetted their appetite for more learning.

And the more times people engaged, the more it boosted their job prospects: people undertaking at least seven episodes were four times more likely than those who took just one

to get a new position with the same or a different employer; get a pay rise; or gain promotion or take on greater responsibilities.

The findings highlight the crucial union contribution to engagement, with 70 per cent of all learners saying that they would not have taken part in the learning or training without union support.

And when it comes to engaging those without any qualifications, the union effect is even greater, with 79 per cent of this group saying that they would not have taken part without union support.

The researchers found that each round of the ULF delivers a net contribution to the economy of £1.65bn through the boost to jobs, wages and productivity.

This means that every £1 invested in the ULF generates an economic return of £7.24 to individuals and £5.01 to employers – a total of £12.25. An analysis of tax receipts indicates that the fiscal return to the Exchequer is £3.40 for each £1 of public funding.

Union-led learning also benefits union membership and organising. Nearly one-quarter of learners did not hold union cards when they began learning but half of them signed up subsequently.

Almost half (49 per cent) of union learners became more supportive of union policies in the workplace, 39 per cent became more active in the union, and 28 per cent went on to become union representatives.



REPTECH

Subscribe today

To make sure you keep up with all the latest developments in union learning, including events such as the successful Supporting Learners programme that's been running this autumn, make sure you subscribe to unionlearn's email service.

When you subscribe, you can customise your preferences to receive news from a particular TUC region or regions and specify your interests in key issues, such as apprenticeships, health and wellbeing and supporting learners.

You can subscribe on the recently refreshed unionlearn website:

- by clicking on the orange Subscribe button in the top right corner of any page
- by entering your email address in the Subscribe box in the orange banner at the bottom of every page.

You can also sign up by clicking through the link below. You will receive the newsletter whichever way you sign up.

▶ [Click here](#) to subscribe to unionlearn's email service





MAJOR REVAMP FOR NEWMARKET CENTRE

Five years after formally opening the first IT suite run by the National Association of Racing Staff (NARS), West Suffolk MP Matthew Hancock returned to Newmarket's Racing Centre in September to do the honours for the newly refurbished facilities.

Thanks to funding from unionlearn and the Moller Trust, the extensive refurbishment includes a new fully equipped IT suite, multi-purpose classrooms, meeting rooms and small conference facilities.

"It's good for racing, good for Newmarket and, most importantly, it's good for the opportunities of everyone who works in this town and I pay tribute to that," said the MP, who is also Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

NARS provides a range of training courses at the Racing Centre, the social hub that serves both stud and stable staff in the town and also houses the union's headquarters.

"Since we opened in 2013, over 500 staff have taken part in our courses and refreshed or gained qualifications in English, maths and computer skills," says NARS Project Manager and Sports Coordinator Kevin Parsons.

"Going forward, in addition to our existing courses, we will have the new Mentoring, Leadership and Team Skills course, which will provide racing staff with an extra qualification and we are hoping that having a trained and qualified mentor in the yard will help to retain staff in the industry." **LR**

Provider praises award-winning ULR



Training provider Axia Solutions has praised Usdaw learning rep John Goodwin, winner of this year's unionlearn ULR award for Supporting Learners with Literacy Needs.

John won his award this summer in recognition of the on-site learning centre he has helped set up at the DHL/Sainsbury's distribution centre in Stoke.

"The work that Axia do with John and the workforce at DHL has a positive effect on the company performance, as well as embedding a better level of English and maths within the local community," the provider says on its website.

The ULR team works with Axia to provide classes in English, maths and IT, as well as some courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for migrant workers, who are employed by two different agencies on-site.

"The progression rates for these new staff who have started with an agency to become fully fledged employees of DHL have increased dramatically since starting this programme with the ULRs and Axia," the provider says.

"This progression figure is indicative of the results that can be achieved by a successful partnership."

ULR Two course now available online

You can now complete the Union Learning Representatives Two (ULR2) course online. The course is aimed at learning reps who have completed ULR One and have some experience of supporting learners in the workplace.

It's packed with practical tips and resources to help you become a more effective learning rep, including:

- addressing your own development needs as a ULR
- working with partners, employers and providers
- supporting a wider range of learners
- using your ULR role to recruit members and strengthen your union.

One crucial component of the course is the online discussion activities, where you can connect with other ULRs and share your ideas and experiences of projects you've all worked on – what's succeeded and what hasn't.

[Click here](#) to enrol on Union Learning Representatives Two

Tesco learners celebrate success

The latest cohort of learners at the Tesco Distribution Centre in Goole in Yorkshire celebrated gaining their English and maths qualifications at an on-site ceremony in September.

With more than 30 learners collecting their certificates at the event, the



total number of distribution workers who have benefited from the courses now stands at more than 140, thanks to Usdaw's partnership with provider Profound Services.

Usdaw learning rep Keith Springate has promoted the courses with the help of on-site ULRs Neil Hutchinson, Steve Jones, Andy Rowley and Jose Sousa.

Keith attended the ceremony alongside Profound Services Operations Manager Barry Nelson.

MPs call for higher-quality apprenticeships

Not enough apprentices get the high-quality training they deserve and too few young and disadvantaged people are being supported into apprenticeships, according to the Education Select Committee report of its recent inquiry into apprenticeships.

The committee recommends a range of measures to recruit apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the creation of more bursaries, reduced travel costs and increases to the apprenticeship minimum wage, and calls for clearer oversight of apprenticeship training and assessment and a tougher approach to poor-quality training.

"There is much to welcome in the Select Committee's report and many of the recommended

reforms would go some way to opening up high-quality apprenticeships to a much wider cohort of people, especially those facing the greatest barriers," commented unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan.

But the TUC raises concerns about the committee's proposal for greater flexibility in the amount of off-the-job training required by each apprenticeship standard, since many apprentices already receive nothing like the currently required 20 per cent off-the-job training.

The TUC also highlights how strengthening union engagement in the apprenticeship system at a strategic level would help deliver more high-quality apprenticeship training for more people – something the report fails to address.

30 per cent of firms still not training staff

One-third of employers across the UK still do not train any of their staff, according to the 2017 Employer Skills Survey (ESS) – a key economic indicator that has persisted for more than a decade.

The ESS also estimates that the proportion of UK employees who did not receive any training in the previous 12 months stood at 38 per cent, again consistent with findings from the equivalent surveys in 2013 and 2015.

Further evidence of declining employer support for skills development

appears in the latest Skills and Employment Survey (SES), in which researchers highlight that since 2006 respondents have said they are not getting enough time for learning and training to become proficient in their current jobs.

But while the SES paints a pessimistic picture overall "of a stagnating or even reversing demand for skills", it does reveal some significant changes on gender and high-level skills over the past 20 years.

While 28 per cent of male and 23 per cent of female employees were educated to at least degree level in 1997, by last year working women with degrees had outstripped men by 40 per cent to 36 per cent.

Nevertheless, the narrowing of the gender gap on training has not corresponded with improved earnings for women: "Much still needs to be done to translate greater gender equity in job skills into equal pay as evidenced by the persistence of the gender pay gap," the report argues.

■ [Click here to download the Employer Skills Survey 2017](#)

■ [Click here to download the Skills and Employment Survey 2017](#)

Helping young players score off the pitch

Exeter City FC first year professional Jack Sparkes is one of a group of young footballers who are being supported to retake GCSEs by the

Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) ULF project.

Jack started playing for the first team last season when he was half-way through his GCSEs and, although he scored his first goal on his third appearance, the step up also impacted on his studies.

"Being only 16 and half-way through my GCSE exams, I sort of struggled through that period and unfortunately failed my English GCSE," he says.

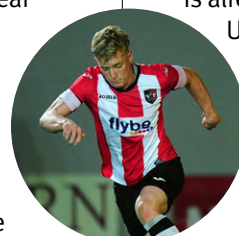
But after joining the team as a full-time apprentice, he enrolled onto a Level 3 BTEC in Sport, Exercise & Science and set about his English retake.

"The support I received from my PFA learning rep Jamie Vittles was excellent in helping to source a tutor who was willing to travel to the training ground and sit with me for three hours at a time," Jack says.

Although the retake involved long days, Jack has been inspired by the achievements of some of the older players on the team. "We have senior professionals at Exeter who either have a degree or enrolled on an Open University course via the PFA, so it was important that I excel off the pitch as well as on it," he says.

Jack isn't stopping now he has his English GCSE, according to PFA Education Adviser Riz Rehman. "Jack is already talking to his

ULR and the wider education team at the PFA to enrol onto an Open University course," Riz says.



We are the organiser-educators!

Like their union predecessors in the 19th century, today's ULRs help their co-workers learn with and from each other, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady told the unionlearn reception at the 150th TUC Congress.

➡ Martin Moriarty

The union learning reps (ULRs) of today are the successors to the educator-organisers of the late 19th century, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady told the unionlearn reception at this year's TUC Congress in Manchester.

"Even when you have access to schools and all the rest of it, we have always known that we have to educate ourselves and learn from each other as workers and – critically – at the heart of that are ULRs, who I would call organiser-educators!"

This year's TUC Congress marked the 150th anniversary of the first Congress held in Manchester in 1868, and the unionlearn reception launched the new historical booklet, *Learning Makes Us Strong*, which celebrates 150 years of union work on education, learning and skills (see sidebar).

"I'm always particularly inspired by the first wave of 'new unionism', when for the first time workers who were women, who were unskilled, who were low paid, who were young, organised themselves into unions," Frances said.

"Now of course we're facing that new industrial revolution and we have massive challenges on our hands to make sure every worker gets the opportunity for training and



education and learning and a steady, decent job and respect for the work that they do."

Paying tribute to Mary Boustead, who chairs the unionlearn board, unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan and TUC Education Manager Jackie Williams, Frances welcomed the launch of online training for union reps, including ULRs.

"What's wonderful in our 150th year is that shop stewards training is going online and we have people signing up from all over the world – how brilliant is that?" she said.

"Digital economy, digital trade unionism – whatever they do, we are going to match it and we are going to make a difference to working people's lives."

"What's wonderful in our 150th year is that shop stewards training is going online and we have people signing up from all over the world."

"I'm always particularly inspired by the first wave of 'new unionism', when workers who were women, who were unskilled, who were low paid, who were young, organised themselves into unions."

In her speech to open the reception, Mary Boustead pointed out that unionlearn engages with parts of the workforce that other training providers cannot reach, and is most effective for members and non-members who have issues with literacy, numeracy and IT.

"When you have workers with multiple problems, having the support of your union, having a ULR you can go to and say, 'I can't do this' and then say, 'We can provide a course for that' in a way that is non-judgemental and non-threatening, we know that helps," Mary said.

"We know that workers who have often missed out at school, who are under-confident and often have low self-esteem, once they do one learning episode, they often go on to do another and eventually gain qualifications that enable them to get promotion."

Graham Hastings-Evans, Managing Director of awarding organisation NOCN Group, looked forward to the challenges ahead.

"We have a really long history together – we do a lot of work with Jackie and her team on training the reps – employment law, health and safety and all those sort of things – and we have recently completed a pilot on the management of productivity and how might unions get involved in that process," he said.

Graham said that NOCN believed the government had some good ideas on education and training but not enough progress was being made.

Recalling his own training while he was a union rep, Graham said he thought some of the best training he ever got was from the union movement, and unions still had an enormous role to play.

"There's so much talent in the union movement that you've got the wherewithal to help us get through some of the massive challenges that are there," he said.

"You need to prepare yourselves for the way the world is going to change, to work out how you can support it – and we will be there with you every step of the way." **LR**



LEARNING MAKES US STRONG

To tie in with the 150th anniversary of the first TUC Congress in 1868, unionlearn has published a new booklet looking back at the union contribution to the development of education, learning and skills over the past century and a half.

Learning Makes Us Strong: celebrating 150 years of union work on education, learning and skills traces the development of the union contribution, from the discussions of training and apprenticeships at the inaugural Congress in the wake of the first industrial revolution to the latest developments unionlearn is putting into place to help workers prepare for the fourth industrial revolution.

It tracks many of the key milestones along the way, including the launch of the TUC Training College to provide steward training in 1957; statutory rights for health and safety reps in 1977; and the launch of the Union Learning Fund in 1998.

It also looks in detail at some of the trailblazing programmes and projects that laid the foundations for TUC Learning Services, the forerunner of unionlearn launched 20 years ago this year – Workbase Training, originally conceived as a basic skills project by the London Division of NUPE (now part of UNISON); Return to Learn, another NUPE initiative to help members improve their reading, writing, maths and IT skills; and the Employee Development Assistance Programme (EDAP) at Ford, launched in 1989 and still going strong in Dagenham.

The booklet also examines Bargaining for Skills, the set of initiatives organised by the regional TUCs and the (now defunct) Training and Enterprise Councils in the 1990s, and how the launch of TUC Learning Services in 1988 further developed union work on learning.

Click [here](#) to download your copy of *Learning Makes Us Strong*

Helping learners be the best they can be

Usdaw ULR Fliss Pryce-Page won this year's TUC learning award at Congress in recognition of the support she is giving to Tesco workers from Skegness to Leicester.

◆ Martin Moriarty



This year's winner of the TUC Congress learning award is Usdaw learning rep Felicity Pryce-Page (Fliss to everyone who knows her), who has already chalked up a string of successes in the two years since she took on the role.

"When I saw the vacancy for ULR, I didn't know what it entailed but it just felt right: it seemed to provide me with a way of combining being a customer assistant at Tesco (my day job at the time) with my ambition to help people get the learning opportunities they deserved, so I gave it a go!" she says.

But Fliss has done much more than give it a go: she has made a real difference to dozens of her 140-plus colleagues at the superstore and many more in her new region-wide job as a people trainer for the supermarket giant.

The first course Fliss organised in Lincoln was IT for the Terrified, an introduction to working with computers delivered at the store by tutors from nearby Lincoln College.

"One lady had never been able to do any e-learning in the past but the greatest accolade came at the end of the course when her manager said to me that he couldn't believe she'd just done an hour's e-learning on her own – that was

a golden moment that makes it all worthwhile," she says.

Fliss followed the IT sessions with a nine-week Polish for beginners course, which has not only enabled some of her colleagues to grasp the basics of the language but also helped provide a welcoming and inclusive environment to the many Polish migrants who live near the superstore.

"If you can communicate, people in the local area come into the store because they know they will be well looked after and can have that basic conversation," she says. "It's the same with sign language, which we have also run."

In addition, Fliss has helped encourage more colleagues to return to learning through informal sessions on flower arranging and profiterole baking, ran dementia awareness sessions with Dementia Friends and supported several co-workers undertaking online courses with the help of the union.

Local management have been very supportive from the beginning. "The key to success with the ULR role is that you have to get the management onboard," Fliss says.

The support has proved vital in a retail environment where the norm is shift work that

"If you can communicate, people in the local area come into the store because they know they will be well looked after and can have that basic conversation."



can end up preventing people from taking part in courses because of scheduling problems.

"If anybody couldn't make a course, we spoke to management very nicely about shift-swapping or backfilling or moving times around so that no one felt disadvantaged and no one missed out," Fliss says.

The appetite for learning that she has helped create has clearly unlocked something in her co-workers – as is evidenced in their replies to the latest colleague satisfaction survey at the store.

"This is a pretty static store where people have been a long time so under 'What matters to you', the comments are usually on this or that issue, but this time, when it came back, the comments were, 'There aren't enough courses' and 'When are the next courses?' which gave me a lot of personal satisfaction."

Fliss says the successful development of the learning culture at the Lincoln superstore is down to a combination of factors.

"It's not a solo mission: it's about the managers who have said Yes, it's about all the Usdaw people – the reps and the members and my local organiser – it's about the colleges who have said Yes: I happened to be there at the right time in the right place," she says.

After combining her ULR role with her former job as a customer assistant, Fliss successfully applied for a new role as a people trainer across 32 different Tesco Express (convenience) stores, which lie in a wide geographical range from a single site in the village of Ingoldmells near Skegness all the way down to the dozen dotted around the city of Leicester.

"When the role came up a year ago, I looked at it and thought, 'Now that I'm 54, I'd like to have a final flourish and prove what I can do!'" she laughs.

"It's a brilliant way to dovetail this work: you've got the corporate training package, which is absolutely fantastic, and the lifelong learning, which is helping people be absolutely the best they can be."

The new role has brought new challenges, since the staff demographic in Leicester is very different from that in Lincoln.

"English is a second language for a lot of our members of staff so we're bringing ESOL to them: I thought that would be a difficult wall to overcome because it's tricky when it's not the first language but they're embracing that at the moment," she reports.

Fliss is also currently one of 40 learners from her old store taking part in a Level 2 Mental Health Awareness course (there are another 100 on the waiting list).

"We've brought Level 2 accredited courses into Tesco's and that's amazing,



Frances O'Grady (centre) presented Fliss (third right) with her learning award, alongside the four other winners (from left) GMB's Teresa Farmer (health and safety), RMT's Chris Cuomo (organising), Usdaw's Shirley Dunaway (women's gold badge) and BFAWU's Lauren McCourt (youth)

"Giving people the confidence to do things they wouldn't have initially thought possible and then seeing the pride they have when they're standing with a certificate they never thought they'd get – that's number one."

changing people's perception of mental health in the workplace: the people who've been on it have said it's been magic, it's helped them at work and at home," she says.

"This is the most important area to me: people are facing all kind of issues every day and I think it's now time to hit this one big-time and get rid of the stigma within the workplace once and for all."

Ushaw Project Worker Neil Chapman was very proud that Fliss won the union learning award.

"She's got time for everybody, nothing is ever a problem and she's always there for people when they need her," Neil says.

Fliss says she loves everything about her ULR role but the big reward is seeing the change in people whose starting point is that they won't be able to learn something new.

"Giving people the confidence to do things they wouldn't have initially thought possible and then seeing the pride they have when they're standing with a certificate they never thought they'd get – that's number one," she says. **LR**

We'll be there to see you through!

The GMB's ReachOut project lives up to its name by supporting learners in workplaces and local communities across the north-west.

🔗 **Martin Moriarty**

The GMB's ReachOut project, which supports learners across the union's North West and Irish region, has expanded significantly since Senior Project Worker Dave Flanagan joined the team 11 years ago.

Initially focussed on delivering English, maths and IT courses to workplace learners, these days ReachOut has significantly expanded its offer by creating a network of seven Adult Community Training (ACT) centres in the region, as well as working closely with employers and providers to develop quality apprenticeships and support young people on traineeships.

"Over the years, we have widened the scope of the delivery to include employers, community groups, faith groups and charities that work within the communities where we have GMB membership and wherever we identify a need the Union Learning Fund (ULF) can assist us with," Dave explains.

The expansion into community settings began with the first ACT centre in Accrington in 2009, a partnership with Eaves Brook housing association, which provided the original high street premises, from where ReachOut could engage local residents.

The GMB Union Learning Fund supplied the IT equipment while voluntary sector adult learning provider St Antony's Centre provided the tutors.

Initially offering English, maths and IT courses, the Accrington centre later secured funding to provide pathways into employment



"We have widened the scope of the delivery to include employers, community groups, faith groups and charities."

programmes and also worked with Eaves Brook to help its residents develop their own budgeting skills and improve their financial planning.

Five years after it opened, demand for learning at the centre had so far outstripped supply that it moved into its current premises in a former primary school in the town, which incorporate two larger dedicated learning suites.

Now in its ninth year, the project

continues to thrive, supporting both GMB members and local people, many of them on benefits and/or long-term unemployed.

The most recent ACT centre is based in Blackpool, where ReachOut has teamed up with local homeless charity His Provision, which offers cooked meals on a regular basis to those who are economically inactive or



experiencing poverty, and partners with Blackpool Centre for the Unemployed to offer welfare rights advice and help in accessing online services like Universal Credit.

The centre is already offering courses in ICT, English, maths, stress management and informal maths and regular enrolment sessions for distance learning opportunities. It's also running a series of workshops covering mental health awareness and domestic violence and work club activities.

ReachOut has also teamed up with provider TDB Training and St Antony's Centre to offer traineeships to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

"Some youngsters were not being granted the opportunity to get onto apprenticeships because they didn't have the necessary qualifications, they didn't succeed or they weren't selected to attend," Dave says.

As well as boosting their functional skills, the trainees can learn the basics of warehousing, distribution and other business functions in the live working environment of the Manchester warehouse that services the local food bank network.

ReachOut continues to serve the union membership through learning agreements, strong partnerships with providers, open access to training centres, development of the ULF network and liaison with employers to advise and guide on training and skills for the benefit of members and workers.

The project regularly attends regional and national conferences within the union to promote the value of lifelong learning and link up with campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness and better educate members in relevant areas.

Dave himself has led by personal example. "Over the years, I've built up my own portfolio of skills and accreditation where I've missed out previously, so I've done my maths, English and IT up to Level



"The core value of the project is all about giving people opportunity where it may have been missed before."

3, completed an apprenticeship in management and am now studying towards a law degree," he says.

This is all about gaining the knowledge and skills to promote opportunities available through ReachOut, he says. "All activity is geared to supporting those we set out to serve, to try and improve the life chances of our members, community learners, the long-term unemployed and those on benefits," Dave says.

The project also enjoys the full support of the GMB regional team, led by Paul McCarthy, Dave says. "They wholeheartedly support not only the direct work with GMB members, branches and officers but also the engagement of new members in the communities where

ReachOut Project Worker Michelle Graham (top) supports apprentices; Bev Taylor (middle) specialises in functional skills; while Joanne Phillips focuses on community engagement.

we operate," he adds.

As the scope of the project has expanded, so has the team. "Originally we had a very small project team who covered all activities across the region but now we have specialisms within the team in the key areas of work required by the ULF and the priorities set by the Department for Education (DfE)," Dave says.

"This means we now have experts in specific areas, such as Michelle Graham developing support programmes for apprentices, Joanne Phillips developing community engagement opportunities, Bipin Mistry on workforce and CPD development, Bev Taylor on functional skills and Margaret Seger on ICT development – all effectively supported by an experienced, enthusiastic and dedicated administration team in Lisa, Bernadette and Harpreet."

Being able to maintain an established team is a key ingredient in ReachOut's continuing success, Dave says, thanks to its access to funding streams that complement ULF activity.

Whether ReachOut is working with young unemployed people, workplace learners or community learners, the aim is the same.

"The core value of the project is all about giving people opportunity where it may have been missed before: in the case of adults, they may have had to leave school at 14 or 15 and never had chance to achieve qualifications," he says.

"ReachOut has always been innovative and forward-thinking in responding to people's ever-changing needs, evolving and adapting in times of uncertainty but with our sights very firmly set on supporting those in most need," Dave says. **LR**



Breaking down the barriers

Design and delivery of the new National Retraining Scheme will be informed by the findings in four major new reports into adult learning.

Four important new reports from the Department for Education (DfE) have identified a range of possible interventions to combat the declining numbers of adult learners in the UK and persistent patterns of inequality in participation.

The findings from the reports are currently informing the work of the National Retraining Partnership (comprising government, CBI and TUC) as it takes forward development of the new National Retraining Scheme (NRS).

The latest Adult Participation in Learning Survey (APLS) records the lowest participation rate (current or recent learning) in the history of the survey, at 37 per cent of adults – four percentage points lower than that of the previous survey in 2015.

Work (or other time pressures) was the barrier most frequently identified by respondents (14 per cent), followed by 10 per cent who

“For every learner, there exists a complex and unique relationship between their own perceptions of the personal benefits and personal costs of learning.”

felt too old or weren't interested. Overall, 58 per cent of respondents did not expect to take part in learning in the next three years.

These findings were echoed in the 2016 Adult Education Survey (AES), also published this summer. Time and cost were the two major barriers to learning identified in the AES. ‘I don't have the time or training takes too long’ was selected by more than

half (54 per cent) of respondents and ‘the cost/too expensive’ was selected by 42 per cent.

The APLS also identifies how different groups face different barriers to learning. Current and recent learners identified cost, childcare or caring responsibilities (situational barriers) as the key obstacles to overcome. But adults who had not been learning for at least three years were more likely to say they felt too old or weren't interested (dispositional barriers).

The survey also spotlights some consistent patterns of inequality in learning, which means there is a need for a range of outreach and interventions “to target adults in lower social grades, adults who are furthest from the labour market, older adults, and those who left full-time education at their earliest opportunity,” according to the report.

The third report, *Barriers to*

Learning for Disadvantaged Groups, sets out to analyse the complex mix of motivations, dismantling of barriers and triggers behind people's decisions to take part in adult learning.

Researched by the Learning & Work Institute (LWI) for the DfE, the report concludes with six key considerations for policy and practice, all aimed at engaging more and different adults in learning, including:

- interventions that aim to engage adults in learning should seek to address the multi-layered and interrelated barriers to learning, such as cost and low confidence
- learning provision should be designed to build confidence, for example through bite-sized courses or discrete units, which can then be extended as learners progress
- awareness-raising campaigns should promote the positive outcomes and potential impact of adult learning
- provision needs to accommodate competing priorities (such as work, family and caring responsibilities)

and to be flexible (eg online and/or blended).

The fourth report, *Decisions of Adult Learners*, argues that the "trigger to participate in learning for each adult comes at a tipping point where personal benefits (or 'pros') outweigh personal costs (or 'cons')."

Compiled by Kantar Public and LWI and drawing on in-depth interviews with 70 adult learners and focus groups with 16 adults not currently learning, the report concludes that "for every learner, there exists a complex and unique relationship between their own perceptions of the personal benefits and personal costs of learning." **LR**

► [Click here](#) to download the *Adult Participation in Learning Survey 2017*

► [Click here](#) to download the *Adult Education Survey 2016*

► [Click here](#) to download *Barriers to Learning for Disadvantaged Groups*

► [Click here](#) to download *Decisions of Adult Learners*



CHANCELLOR ROUTES MORE LEVY FUNDING INTO SUPPLY CHAINS

Employers will now be able to transfer 25 per cent of their apprenticeship levy funding to companies in their supply chains, according to Chancellor Philip Hammond's speech to this year's Conservative Party conference in Birmingham.

The government will also be consulting with businesses about the future operation of the levy in response to concerns from some employers, the Chancellor promised.

Until April this year, employers large enough to pay the levy were only allowed to use their funding to invest in the development of their own apprentices.

But since the beginning of the current tax year, that restriction was lifted and employers have been able to transfer up to 10 per cent of their levy funding to companies in their supply chain so they can invest in their own apprenticeship programmes.

The increased flexibility is designed to generate an additional £90m worth of funding for apprenticeship training, according to government calculations.

The Chancellor is also investing £5m in the Institute for Apprenticeships to boost its capacity for introducing new apprenticeship standards and updating existing ones.

£100M FOR NEW RETRAINING PROGRAMME

The Chancellor has committed £100m for the first phase of the National Retraining Scheme (NRS), the partnership between government, employers and unions that will be rolled out next year.

The NRS is set to include a new careers guidance service with expert advice to help people identify work opportunities in their area and what skills they need to develop in order to

secure those jobs.

The service will be backed up with state-of-the-art courses that combine online learning with traditional classroom methods to help people develop the key transferable skills for jobs of the future.

In addition, the Chancellor also announced a new initiative to invest £20m in a programme to improve management skills

in small firms by creating a series of networks to enable small businesses to learn both from each other and from world-leading firms.

More than 100 mentors from companies such as pharmaceutical multinational GlaxoSmithKline and manufacturing conglomerate Siemens have already signed up to offer their management expertise to the new initiative.





From tiny tomatoes, major green plans grow

When he started growing a few tomatoes for the mess in his fire station seven years ago, FBU learning rep Simon Jakeman had no idea he was sowing the seeds of a green revolution in London's fire stations.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty

Like any good gardener, green-fingered union learning rep Simon Jakeman knows all about how mighty oaks grow from little acorns – although with him, it's more a case of London Fire Brigade's (LFB's) green agenda springing up from the tomatoes he was growing in a fire bucket a few years ago.

"I thought if we could start growing a bit of food for our mess (because we cook our own dinners at the stations) then it's not coming from the other side of the world – and that was the start of it," he recalls.

This was back in 2011, when Simon had been working at Surbiton Fire Station for four years, after originally joining the service (and the Fire Brigades Union) in Surrey in 1995.

The tomatoes were just the beginning: soon Simon was growing a range of fruit and vegetables on a new rooftop garden at the station, which meant many of the ingredients in his co-workers' meals were clocking up food metres rather than food miles – and thus avoiding the environmental impact of road or even air freight.

And thanks to its roof garden, improved

recycling, energy-saving campaign and support for sustainable travel, Surbiton was named the capital's greenest fire station in 2012.

It was around the same time that Simon took an environmental course at his local college sourced by the FBU, which also led him to train as a union learning rep.

But it was looking around possible secondary schools with his eldest son that prompted him to significantly step up his learning.

"Seeing all that opportunity in front of those children, I thought, 'I've got to get back into learning and studying' and that re-lit my passion for learning," Simon says.

After completing an access module with The Open University, Simon took the plunge and enrolled on a degree in environmental studies, graduating six years later.

The knowledge and skills he gained on the course he put to use by both promoting learning opportunities and encouraging greater environmental awareness with his colleagues.

"When I was at the fire station, I might have a bit of down time to do a bit of studying and firefighters would always look over your

"I put a presentation together and went off to speak to every single watch in London ... that made about 430 presentations in all."



“Learning is a bit like gardening: once that seed is planted, you nurture it and then it just takes off.”

shoulder and ask, ‘What are you up to?’ and that’s how the conversations start, trying to inspire others to get involved,” he recalls. “And it seemed to work: there are quite a few people at my old station now doing different courses.”

Three years ago, Simon was watering the fire-helmet hanging baskets in front of Surbiton station when a senior brigade officer appeared and struck up a conversation about the environmental work he’d heard Simon had been undertaking.

That encounter ultimately led to Simon being seconded to LFB headquarters to help spread the word about the impact of climate change and what firefighters could do about it.

“I put a presentation together and went off to speak to every single watch in London: there’s 103 stations and 412 watches – and with some area talks and headquarters too, that made about 430 presentations in all,” he recalls. “It took roughly 18 months of two presentations a day to get round everyone.”

Simon’s presentation covered some of the key facts about climate change, what the brigade was doing on the environment and how people could get involved.

Unsurprisingly, the presentations sparked a lot of debate. After all, as Simon himself points out, firefighters are seeing the impact of climate change in their working lives.

“The way I’ve always engaged with firefighters is that we’re the ones out there on the frontline of changing climate – when you see the floods, it’s firefighters wading down high streets in boats or we’re chasing wildfires – London’s had double the number this year, nearly 2,000 in all,” he points out.

But like anyone else, firefighters are not immune from feelings of powerlessness in the face of the global environmental challenge.

“When I was at one of the fire stations, I was talking about recycling and a firefighter at the back of the room asked, ‘What’s the point of me recycling one glass jar. It’s like turning up to an earthquake with a dustpan and brush?’ But another firefighter on the same watch said, ‘If we all turned up with a dustpan and brush, think of the difference we could make’ – and I think that’s the way: these small actions do add up but we’ve all got to do our bit.”

After completing the presentations marathon, Simon was able to secure his current job in the headquarters sustainable development team, where he coordinates the work of green champions across the brigade and lends his expertise to the new generation of fire station roof gardens.

For example, when the four watches at Brixton decided to work with a number of community organisations to create a new mindfulness garden on the roof of their station earlier this year, Simon not only shared his skills with the project but also donated the award-winning garden he created for this year’s Hampton Court Flower Show.

What marks the Brixton garden as different is that it was designed as a space where firefighters can get some respite from the everyday pressures of their stressful jobs in the tranquillity of its surroundings.

Brixton green watch manager Mat Rosendale, who is part of the blue light champions initiative to promote awareness of mental health in the emergency services, was a key part of the Brixton design team.

Learning and gardening alike both require time, support and persistence but, as Simon knows, the end result of both can be life-changing.

“Learning is a bit like gardening: once that seed is planted, you nurture it and then it just takes off: we’re always busy but you can always find time – and when you go for it, just see what happens,” he says. **LR**

Telling my story

Since joining the Unite learning programme at Southampton City Council, Simon Cotton has not only got rid of his gremlins – he's become a crucial member of the Unite workplace team.

When Unite rep Simon Cotton walked up to the podium to speak at the union's policy conference this summer, he didn't have a prepared speech about learning and skills. But inspiration struck as he headed to the microphone: he would talk about his own learning journey as if he was telling a story about somebody else.

"I didn't even write anything down but when I walked up, it all came to me and I thought I'd do it that way, something different which I'd not seen at conferences before," says Simon, who works in the waste and recycling team at Southampton City Council.

Standing in front of hundreds of delegates in the Brighton Conference Centre, Simon started at the beginning, when "a lad I know back home" (as he described himself) was diagnosed with dyslexia at primary school and went to a secondary school for children with learning differences.

"One day, this kid was travelling to his grandad's, was set upon by friends he went to school with and beaten up,

pushed off his bike, and that lowered his confidence – he went inside himself," he told the conference.

When he started work at the local authority, at first he resisted attempts by union learning reps John Early and Dave Ross and branch secretary Mark Wood to encourage him into learning with Unite.

But once he started learning, he gained the confidence to take on many union roles: "He did maths and English for two years; he became a shop steward, safety rep, branch political rep and equalities rep and he was the south-east chair for young members for three years – and that person was me," he told the conference.

The speech sparked an enormous response in the hall. "Seeing a room full of people stand up and applaud you, it was quite overwhelming: it felt like a weight off my shoulders that I'd been carrying with me all my life," Simon says.

Today, Simon is proud to be able to support his members as their union rep. "I'm there to support them whenever they need me because I

"Seeing a room full of people stand up and applaud you, it was quite overwhelming: it felt like a weight off my shoulders that I'd been carrying with me all my life."

wouldn't be in this position without them voting for me – I owe a lot of thanks to my members in waste and recycling."

There is no doubt in Simon's mind that it is union learning that has made all the difference. "If the ULRs hadn't kept coming to me, I would have carried on being inside myself and just doing my job – without them, I think I would have been the same boy that left school and college," he says. **LR**