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LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Spring 2017

Harnessing the power of Apprenticeships

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unionlearn
with the TUC



GETTING ON THE RIGHT TRACK

WELCOME TO THE FIRST LEARNING REP of 2017, and my first as Director of unionlearn. As someone who continued learning both through the union route and in my day job, later going on to university as a mature student, I fully appreciate how learning can have a transformative influence on people's lives.

"I have always known the enormous value of high-quality, decently paid Apprenticeships to the individuals concerned."

After starting my working life as an apprentice structural draughtsman at the VSEL shipyard in Barrow-in-Furness (now part of BAE Systems), I have always known the enormous value of high-quality, decently paid Apprenticeships to the individuals

concerned, to their employers and unions and to the economy as a whole, which is why I'm glad to be the TUC representative on the Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce (STAT).

In this edition, it's good to see further evidence of the government's support for high-prestige Apprenticeships in the interview with Robert Halfon; to read about how leading providers like WKCIC Group are delivering high-quality training; and to hear from London's Transport Commissioner about the key role Apprenticeships play in the development of the capital's transport system.

When the new Apprenticeship Levy comes into operation in April, employers are going to need the support of their unions to get the most out of the new system. We should take the chance to show what we can do. **LR**

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

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NEWS + VIEWS

Dive into learning with PEARL from the OU



Adults returning to learning, whether at college, at home or at work, now have a great way to find their route into study, thanks to the PEARL website developed by the Open University (OU) in collaboration with partners, including UNISON and unionlearn.

PEARL, which stands for Part-time Education for Adults Returning to Learn, signposts educational opportunities for adults, so that they can refresh or increase their skills and knowledge, with a view to progressing within their chosen career path, or to take a new direction.

The website contains a sophisticated diagnostic 'Advise me' tool to pinpoint learning opportunities – suited to an individual's time, level, preferred learning options and aspirations – so that learners can personalise their searches. It also includes a number of real-life case studies.

The website is accompanied by six free online courses for those looking for a new career or progression within some

specific areas of activity, including: introducing practical healthcare; supporting children's development; caring for adults; planning a better future; taking part in the voluntary sector; and starting your small business.

Click [here](#) to look at the courses, including outlines and introductory podcasts

Putting learning at the heart of union campaign week

Trade union learning centres across the country will be running events in February as part of heartunions week.

Last year's campaign was a huge success as trade union members came together to share positive stories of how unions have made a difference to the lives of workers.

The TUC is running heartunions week 2017 from Wednesday 8 February, with activities throughout England and Wales to showcase the fantastic work unions do.

Since learning makes

some of the biggest impacts on the lives of union members, unionlearn is encouraging learning centres and union learning reps (ULRs) to hold an activity or event during the week to engage with colleagues and show them the benefit of being in a union.

Activities could include:

- hosting a book club
- running initial assessments with unionlearn's Use-IT tool
- promoting a healthy activity
- trying one of TUC Education's eNotes.

Click here to email National Projects Officer Jane Warwick

ULF projects engage hard-to-reach learners



Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects have helped engage a large number of learners across a wide variety of learning opportunities, according to the latest evaluation of the Fund.

Based on interviews with 2,550 learners and 385 employers as well as union officers and non-union national stakeholders, the survey found that half of employers said that their staff were more committed as a result of unions facilitating training and development opportunities.

In addition, more than

two-thirds of employers said unions were particularly effective at inspiring reluctant learners to engage in training and development.

Unionlearn commissioned members of the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change (CERIC) to evaluate Rounds 15 and 16 of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) covering the years 2012/13 to 2014/15 and 2015/16, and assess the support role of unionlearn.

Further results include:

- The ULF supports learning that is inclusive, engaging those less likely to have formal qualifications and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- It helps break down barriers to learning by negotiating time-off, providing learning resources and building learner confidence.
- Support structures (such as learning agreements and committees) lead to better outcomes, but the proportion of employers reporting investment in these capacity-building structures has declined since 2010.
- Just under half of employers agreed that learning activities would not have taken place without external union funding.
- There are significant benefits to the economy: with every £1 invested in the ULF, there is a return to the economy of £12.30.
- Union learning also has positive benefits for unions, with almost half of those learners that were non-members joining a union.

Click here to read the full report

Basic Skills pioneer Frances Graham dies



Frances Graham, Chief Executive of Workbase Training from 1980 to 2015, has died after a long fight against cancer. Workbase pioneered English and maths training in the workplace through union and management partnerships and always worked closely with the TUC and unions.

Frances was the driving force behind Workbase, which began life as the NUPE (now UNISON) Basic Skills Project and she was its first employee. As the work expanded, other unions became involved and Workbase opened projects in the private sector, winning several National Training Awards.

"The inspirational work that Frances and Workbase did was ahead of its time," says Liz Smith, the first Director of unionlearn. "She saw what we then called Basic Skills as a collective right not an individual problem, which was the model for Basic Skills in unionlearn – and making it work so well was our proudest achievement."

Frances and her husband Bing were both active in the South Africa freedom movement and had to leave the country in the apartheid era, eventually moving to Britain. She is survived by Bing, three daughters and four grandchildren.

English skills campaign raises awareness

Unionlearn ran a literacy and English skills campaign week in January to raise awareness and promote literacy learning opportunities, through reading, writing, listening or speaking as well as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The week was aimed at engaging people to think about their English language and literacy skills and how to develop them further.

Events and digital content encouraged people to complete a check-up on their English skills with the free Use-IT online assessment.

For reps, the Language Support for Workers eNote was recommended to explore what ESOL is and why it is a union issue.

Reps were also invited to consider ESOL questions by looking at new videos designed to be used in training with migrant workers, trade unions and other organisations promoting good practice in industrial relations with migrant workers.

"The campaign showcased new resources that will increase the support and number of workers able to benefit," says new unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan.

Click here to find out more about initial assessments

Click here to watch the videos for use with migrant workers

Click here to find out about eNotes

Follow the campaign on Twitter and Facebook with the hashtag #ulliteracyworks



What a difference a year makes

When Liz Rees took on the role of unionlearn director just over a year ago, she knew the next 12 months wouldn't be easy. What she didn't suspect was quite how much she would enjoy what has been her final year at the TUC.

✎ Martin Moriarty

You only have to compare where unionlearn was a year ago and where it is today to measure the achievements of outgoing director Liz Rees and her team over the last challenging 12 months.

Last year, confirmation of the government's continued financial support for the Union Learning Fund (ULF) seemed to take forever. This year, the Department for Education signed off funding for 2017–18 a full five months earlier than for the previous round, while the 10th anniversary conference last summer is universally agreed to have been the best yet, an event that created the ideal springboard for the years ahead.

"It's been a busy year with a simultaneous focus on the current year and the year ahead, which has been a bit of a stretch, but I've got to say I've really enjoyed it – and I wouldn't have thought I'd be saying that this time last year!" Liz says, sitting in unionlearn's new home on the third floor of Congress House.

The arrival of Prospect member Robert Halfon as Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills has been a big help, Liz says. "Robert is an advocate for unionlearn: he understands how unions can

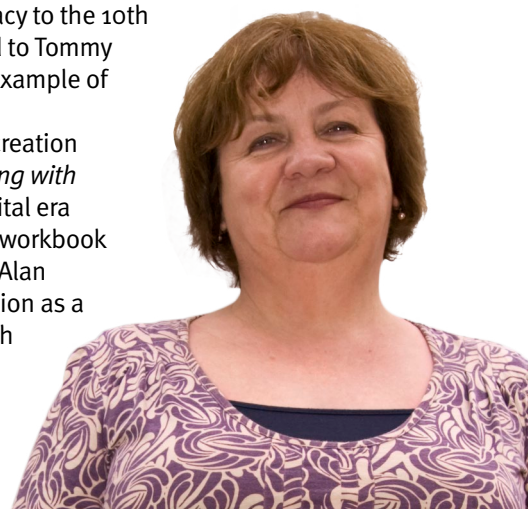
reach people other agencies can't, which is really our USP, and he gets what we are best at – in particular combating disadvantage, which is a big priority for him."

And while the past year threw up many challenges for the organisation, there also have been many successes. For Liz, one high point was her work on the panel for the 2017–18 round of the ULF. "You saw the activity unions were engaged in right across sectors, right across the economy, and most of the bids were absolutely inspirational," she says.

Another was listening to former ceramics worker Tommy Dawkins tell the story of overcoming a lifetime of poor literacy to the 10th anniversary conference. "I listened to Tommy and thought, 'This is a wonderful example of what unions are doing'," she says.

And a third was overseeing the creation of the brand new interactive *Working with Figures* eNote, updated for the digital era from the old *Working With Figures* workbook that former postal workers' leader Alan Johnson credited in his own evolution as a union activist in his keynote speech to the annual conference.

"It's been a busy year... but I've got to say I've really enjoyed it – and I wouldn't have thought I'd be saying that this time last year!"





The highlight of Liz Rees's working life was when Courtney Pine played at Congress House

"We've shown it to Alan and he's really delighted with it," Liz says.

Liz reckons the new Apprenticeship Levy could help more people see the crucial role unions play in learning these days.

"Employers are going to need support from their workforce to maximise their benefits from the Levy, and because unions are very good at getting things done, especially on learning and skills, there is a chance for the Levy to change everyone's awareness of quite how dynamic unions are in this field," she says.

While the past year has brought many highs for Liz, none has exceeded the favourite night of her Congress House career, when she persuaded Black British jazz superstar Courtney Pine to play for the re-launch of TUC Education in 2001.

As for what retirement will bring, Liz has already been thinking about how she would like to fill her time – and unsurprisingly, her plans include more learning: with a degree in Old English already under her belt, she is now actively considering an MA in Classics at Birkbeck.

"I look back and consider myself the luckiest person to have had a career here. This is the most wonderful place to work and I'm going to miss it – I'm beginning to realise that now – but I think it's the right time for me to do something else."

But she has one final message to union learning reps (ULRs) before she does move on. "Your work is absolutely inspirational not just to your members but to other trade unionists, to employers – and look at what government is saying now about the work of ULRs," she says. "There are many challenges in workplaces now and we know it's only going to get tougher; but stay confident that your work is really worthwhile." **LR**

TRIBUTES TO LIZ

"Liz is a wonderful trade unionist, educationalist and feminist – but more than that, a wonderful friend. She has made a huge difference to our work on trade union education, learning and skills – not just transforming trades unionism but transforming lives."

Frances O'Grady, General Secretary, TUC

"Liz became Director of unionlearn at the end of her long and illustrious career. She did a magnificent job, working to create new structures to support unionlearn and to make it fit for the future. Always calm, with a strong sense of purpose and a delightful sense of humour, Liz steers the ship expertly. She will be much missed."

Mary Bousted, Board Chair, unionlearn

"Liz Rees has played a blinder year after year, minister after minister, senior civil servant after senior civil servant. TUC Education and the current programmes of affiliated unions owe their continued existence to her and her teams. Liz also has a warmth and depth that complement her profoundly professional approach to her work. No matter how serious the topic, Liz will find time afterwards to have a wee chat about a book, a play or an event that you will love or find eye-opening."

Jim Mowatt, Director of Education, Unite

"Liz Rees' contribution to TUC Education and unionlearn has been immeasurable. Her dedication and commitment to the trade union movement have provided strategic and sound operational direction sometimes during very challenging times. As a leader, Liz was respected by all her staff partly because of her personal skills in helping to develop others. While the impact of her work, especially with TUC Education, is felt across the whole of the UK, personally I will be forever grateful to Liz for her encouragement, guidance, support and – above all – friendship."

Harry Cunningham, Programme Manager, Actrav-Turin (Secretary of the Trade Union Training Committee)

"With her deep and demanding view of training, Liz Rees has always offered critical and constructive attention in her dedicated collaboration with her trade union colleagues beyond the English Channel."

Ulisses Garrido, Director of the Education Department, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI)

Training London's next generation

The WKCIC Group, formed by the merger of Westminster Kingsway with City and Islington College, delivers 2,000 Apprenticeships every year across a wide range of the capital's economic sectors. Raj Kakaiya, the managing director of the organisation's training arm, sets out the secrets of its success.

✦ Martin Moriarty

Raj Kakaiya first encountered union-led learning when he spent a decade working for learndirect, where he managed the national contract to deliver employability skills training through union learning centres.

"It is fantastic, the sheer scale of the work unionlearn does, and the employer engagement is quite outstanding."

As a Londoner himself, Raj relished making the move to Westminster Kingsway College, where he took on the role of Vice-Principal in 2014, with a portfolio that included Apprenticeships, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and employer engagement.

"Two things really attracted me – the very meaningful work the college does in the community and its very progressive employer engagement, particularly with Apprenticeships, which is something I'm particularly interested in," he explains.

When the college merged with its City and Islington counterpart last year, Raj became managing director of the training division of the merged operation, now known as The WKCIC Group.

Through its partnerships with more than 500 employers, which range from micro-businesses to giants like Transport for London (TfL), the college delivers around 2,000 Apprenticeships a year across a wide range of sectors, from health and transport to retail, IT and construction – numbers that make it one of the larger Apprenticeship providers in the capital.

The apprentices themselves are a mix of new and existing staff, younger and older workers (a majority of the Group's apprentices are over 19 years of age, many are aged over 25, while the hospitality area continues to attract 16 to 18-year-olds).

"Many employers use the Apprenticeship

route as a way to recruit new staff, but many also use Apprenticeships to upskill and reskill their existing staff, which is really important as people are working longer and increasingly working in different jobs," Raj explains. "This is where union learning reps (ULRs) are really important, because they encourage the conversation that employers have with employees about progression routes."

The college is able to provide employers both with the core business offer of Apprenticeships any organisation might need (Business Administration, Customer Service, IT, Team Leading and Management, all of which can be customised to reflect an organisation's needs and values) and specialist programmes such as rail services for TfL and pharmaceutical science for Barts Health NHS Trust.

It also works with employers in the whole recruitment process, from selection to placement to workplace support. "Once we have a brief from the employers about what they're looking for, we can match them with our bank of apprentices and potential apprentices and help with the interview assessment, selection and placement," Raj explains. "And when we place apprentices, we make sure they will have a mentor in the workplace – another area where ULRs really help is in making sure that support is there for apprentices, as it's crucial not only in them succeeding and achieving their qualifications but also getting a permanent job after they complete."

The college is also very flexible in its delivery models: apprentices can travel to its numerous locations across the capital for off-site learning; tutors can deliver learning on-site if that's a better logistical solution; and the assessment service can be provided in-house when an employer (like Barts) has the specialist staff available to do that. "Our flexibility is why we



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“Many employers use the Apprenticeship route as a way to recruit new staff, but many also use Apprenticeships to upskill and reskill their existing staff, which is really important as people are living longer and increasingly working in different jobs.”

“Our flexibility is why we get a lot of repeat business from clients on a rolling basis, which is testimony to the work our teams do.”

get a lot of repeat business from clients on a rolling basis, which is testimony to the work our teams do,” Raj says.

The college is already ahead of the game when it comes to the incoming Apprenticeship Levy, helping employers get up to speed through its involvement in the beta assessment for the new Digital Apprenticeship Service (DAS), which will enable employers with DAS accounts to access funding, choose Apprenticeships to run, the number of apprentices they need and the right training provider for them.

“Being involved in the pilot enables us to explain to employers how the system will work,” Raj says. “When the Skills Funding Agency organised a demonstration of the DAS recently, we were able to invite some of our key employers, so they were able to get a heads-up in terms of its impact and how the new system will operate.”

The college is already so focused on the needs of its employers that Raj reckons the Levy should not involve a massive overhaul of its approach to provision. “With the Levy, funding will be routed through the employer, which means the employer will be calling the shots, but that’s not a big shift for us: employer relationships are really important to us so we are quite well placed to respond to that change,” he says. “Of course, the challenges around system and processes are issues that everybody will have to get used to as a sector.”

These days, Raj has less direct contact with trade unions and their learning projects than he did in the learndirect years, but he keeps in close touch with old and new colleagues at unionlearn. “At my last meeting, we talked about the mid-life career review, which I thought was a really interesting concept,” he says. “But on Apprenticeships in particular, I think it’s important to keep the dialogue going with unionlearn, especially when it comes to negotiating with employers on fair pay for apprentices and their rights to support as well as promoting Apprenticeships within organisations,” he explains. **LR**



Raising the prestige of Apprenticeships

Robert Halfon is probably the first Skills Minister to be driving the Apprenticeships agenda who has been able to bring his own experience of employing several apprentices to his government job.

✦ Martin Moriarty

Five years before he was appointed to his current job as Skills Minister, Harlow MP and Prospect member Robert Halfon made his maiden speech in the House of Commons on the subject of apprentices – and then put his money where his mouth is by hiring one to work for him in his new Westminster office.

By breaking with the tradition of using interns to help with the parliamentary workload, Robert was not only paying a decent wage but also drawing from a wider field of candidates than those who could afford to work full-time for expenses only.

“It was a genuine eureka moment,” he recalls, sitting in his ministerial office at the Department for Education. “When we were starting my parliamentary office back in 2010, I remember asking my former researcher, ‘Why on earth am I thinking of hiring an intern when I’ve just made my maiden speech on Apprenticeships?’”

Because of the limited budget that is available for casework, he spoke to his local council, Harlow College and some local businesses to raise the necessary funds, which allowed him to hire the first full-time parliamentary apprentice.

His pioneering move has since become much

more common in Westminster, which means that several other parliamentary colleagues claim the mantle of first apprentice employer – not that it bothers him that his ground-breaking move doesn’t always get the recognition it deserves.

“So many MPs say they employed the first-ever apprentice and I’m absolutely delighted by that because it shows there has been a culture change in Parliament,” he says. “Even the House of Commons authorities themselves also now have a brilliant Apprenticeship scheme, where they have apprentices who work in every different part of the Civil Service.”

His own experience as an employer of apprentices profoundly informs his belief in the power of the programme. “You can see how transformative Apprenticeships are – one of my own apprentices – who is brilliant – has gone on to work in facilities management in the House of Lords,” he explains. “He didn’t even tell me he was applying: he just turned up in my office one day and told me. He was a guy who wouldn’t say boo to a goose when he started in my office and now he’s working in the House of Lords – and that’s what an Apprenticeship can do.”

As a self-confessed political nerd, Robert

“So many MPs say they employed the first-ever apprentice and I’m absolutely delighted by that because it shows there has been a culture change in Parliament.”



admits he would have bitten someone's hand off if there had been a parliamentary Apprenticeship on offer when he was leaving school in the late 1980s: instead, he became an undergraduate at the University of Exeter, where he completed his BA in politics and then progressed to an MA in Russian and East European Politics.

As the minister with responsibility for Apprenticeships, one of his key goals will be helping deliver the new Apprenticeship Levy, which comes into operation in April. "The Levy is about changing behaviours and raising funds from those who can afford it – big business – in order to help fund apprentices throughout the nation: it's incredibly important," he says.

Robert is adamant that the expansion of the Apprenticeship programme, with the government committed to reaching three million new Apprenticeship starts by 2020, will not sacrifice quality for quantity. "We've made it a requirement that people have to do their Apprenticeship in the workplace, which wasn't always the case in the past. We've tightened the definition of the word Apprenticeship. We're changing the current system of Frameworks to employer-led Standards, to make sure it's what employers need, what the country needs, what industry needs. And we're creating the new, independent Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which is again all about quality."

Raising the prestige in which Apprenticeships are held will be vital, he says. "You can have the best policy in the world, but until we transform the prestige of Apprenticeships, we won't get the numbers that we need," he warns. "One of the ways you do that is introducing degree Apprenticeships, which we are investing millions of pounds in: I think if you boost the prestige at the top level, it translates all the way through the system."

One of his key goals is to widen access to under-represented groups. "While it's important that everybody has access to Apprenticeships, their most transformative effect can be on people from disadvantaged backgrounds," he says. "I've seen it myself in Eltham in south London, at a genuine grassroots project run by the Prince's Trust, where they've had young people from tough backgrounds for 12 weeks and then get them onto Apprenticeships and these guys stay on and get jobs, so their Apprenticeship is a way out of poverty."

He is also keen to extend the opportunity to disabled and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young people, both being groups that are both under-represented among apprentices at the moment. "There is a lot more



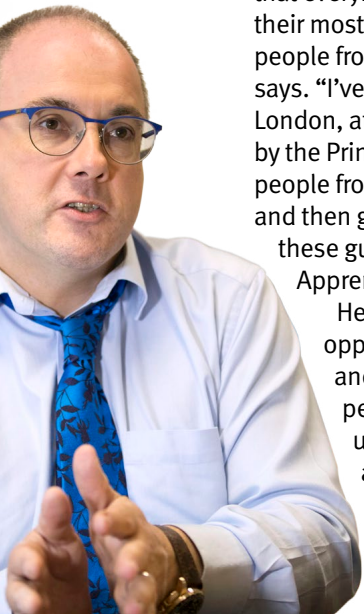
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"The Levy is about changing behaviours and raising funds from those who can afford it – big business – in order to help fund apprentices throughout the nation: it's incredibly important."

we need to do: we want to increase the number of BAME apprentices by 20 per cent by 2020. And of more than 19,400 people in 2014/15 who started a Traineeship, which is a bridge to an Apprenticeship or other job, 19.7 per cent of them declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. We have accepted the Maynard review's recommendations on disability and Apprenticeships, but there are a whole host of issues. It's not an easy one you can solve overnight with a simple policy."

It's all about what Robert calls 'the ladder of opportunity' (the graphic setting out how it should work dominates the whiteboard behind his desk). "We have to help people get on the ladder and we have to hold the ladder, not just to leave them there on the ladder by themselves – that's what governments have to do," he says.

The minister is glad that he has the support of unionlearn in promoting not only high-quality Apprenticeships but also the wider adult skills agenda. "As a backbench MP, I saw how unionlearn works transforming people's lives: I think it's incredibly important because it focuses on people from disadvantaged backgrounds and low incomes. There will always be disagreements over policy, but where we can agree on is turning Britain into an Apprenticeships and skills nation – I think there is a lot we can do together." **LR**



Bringing new talent into transport

Tackling the skills gap in the transport sector will involve creating thousands of Apprenticeships over the next few years, says Mike Brown, who has recently taken over as Commissioner of Transport for London.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

London's Transport Commissioner, Mike Brown, is so passionate about Apprenticeships that he plans to appoint two apprentices to the Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce (STAT), an employer-led group that includes the TUC on its board.

The Department for Transport set up STAT last year to enable employers to address the skills gap in the transport sector and create 30,000 new Apprenticeships by 2020, increasing diversity

and shaping quality training for new entrants and the existing workforce.

"It sounds a bit obvious but there is a board there talking about the strategic need for apprentices and I think, 'Wouldn't it be great to have apprentices on it?'. And we will have apprentices on it who represent those parts of

the population that are under-represented: I'm very keen this group is wide reaching," he stresses.

Mike, who has just taken over as chair of STAT, is well aware of the task it faces, with an anticipated shortage of 55,000 skilled transport workers predicted by 2020. Tackling this will

"I'm hugely excited about the opportunity to look across the transport industry to address the common challenges we have."



require changing perceptions of working in transport and engineering, broadening the diversity of the workforce and upskilling existing workers to equip them to deal with the new technological challenges they face, particularly as work on huge infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and High Speed Two (HS2) progresses.

“I’m hugely excited about the opportunity to look across the transport industry to address the common challenges we have with the shortfall in the stream of talent coming into the industry,” says Mike, pointing out that the average industry age is 55,



“An Apprenticeship is a great stepping stone to a fantastic career. Let’s once and for all put to bed the erroneous myth that being an apprentice is a second-rate entry position to work.”

the right thing to do from a business potential,” argues Mike, who says unions have a great opportunity to influence their communities and companies in ensuring they play a role in helping generate hunger and an initial approach from under-represented groups.

Capturing potential at all stages is also vital, Mike insists. “Funding now applies to all ages. Apprentice does not just apply to new, inexperienced people at entry level but to anyone in an organisation who wants to set out on a different path. So we all have responsibility, whether a large company like us or one of the companies we contract with or they contract with,” he says.

Mike believes unions have a role in helping cajole employers. “Union members have a fantastic opportunity to be lobbying their employer to keep on their toes and do the right thing. The trade union movement has a very impressive history of doing that and I don’t see any reason why we can’t be calling on their expertise now more than ever,” he says.

“An Apprenticeship is a great stepping stone to a fantastic career. Let’s once and for all put to bed the erroneous myth that being an apprentice is a second-rate entry position to work. These are real people with fantastic skills and talents. There can be no reason at all why unions, employers, the workforce and society can’t work together to mobilise to ensure Apprenticeships are a successful way of people succeeding at work and adding significant value to the success of themselves and the people they work for,” says Mike. **LR**

Click here to read the Transport Infrastructure Skills Strategy



made up of mostly white men, which is a challenge now and will be even more so as big infrastructure projects get underway.

The plan is to continue to build intelligence about where the skills gaps exist at all levels of the supply chain – not just Highways England, Network Rail or HS2 for example, but smaller contractors and their sub-contractors to ensure STAT is able to focus its efforts, he explains.

He sees unions as key players in this – after all, apprentices are potential union members, he says. “The trade union movement does a lot in the area of skills and skills development and as the economy changes, and types of skills change, it’s absolutely right and proper that trade unions are at the very centre of this. Unionlearn is very important to me and I’d like to see that relationship develop still further,” he adds.

Mike believes that as supporters

of the Apprenticeship Levy, unions should continue to engage in discussions with both STAT and the National Skills Academy for Rail, which he also chairs.

Work so far on appointing more apprentices includes a stipulation that for any contract with Crossrail and TfL, suppliers must have an apprentice in the organisation for every £3.5m spend. “It’s an amazing tool and weapon that is zero cost to us, to the supplier and to the public sector: it’s just the right thing to do to harness a pool of talent and make sure people are taking this agenda seriously,” he argues.

Ensuring Apprenticeships are of quality not just quantity is another key goal. Mike points out that the number of members now collaborating on Trailblazer standards is a real demonstration of where the industry is heading and the real opportunity for Level 5, 6 and 7 railway engineering Apprenticeships adds a quality threshold as apprentices emerge.

STAT also aims to address the serious under-representation of women, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and disabled workers across the transport sector. “It’s not just apprentices: generally in transport there is an under-representation. We have to re-double our efforts to ensure we deal properly at school level and access schools which don’t always give best career advice to get into Apprenticeships,” he underlines.

“We need to change – and quickly. It’s not only the right thing to do, it’s



Never too old to learn is Hazel's mantra

UNISON learning rep Hazel Kjebeek used to tell herself that approaching the age of 60 made her too old to start something new – until she undertook a mid-life career review.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

When UNISON learning rep Hazel Kjebeek sat down with unionlearn National Projects Officer Jane Warwick for her mid-life career review three years ago, she didn't think the interview would make much difference. With her sixtieth birthday on the horizon, she was pretty firmly convinced that she would still be working as a phlebotomist at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust until she retired.

She had too many reservations about her age and her skills to change direction before then.

How things can shift when you start learning. Now, Hazel has not only completed leadership and teaching qualifications, but she is also in the late stages of a yoga course that will give her the skills, strength and stamina to teach her colleagues at work, fulfilling a long-held dream she used to believe would never become reality.

Hazel's career review was

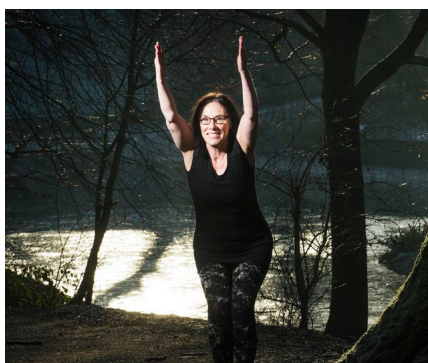
"I left school before I was 15 with no qualifications, so it was hard work."

conducted as part of unionlearn's Supporting Mid-life Development agenda, which aims to help people take stock of where they are now and plan for what they want to achieve in their working and personal lives. Reviews are designed

to support people who want to stay at work longer or change career and are tailored to an individual's life, goals, and aspirations.

As a result of examining all her options with Jane, Hazel decided to enrol on a Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management, which she completed in 18 months.

"I left school before I was 15 with no qualifications, so it was hard work, particularly referencing and critical writing," says Hazel. "But I stuck with it through blood, sweat and tears – it was a big achievement and I am really pleased."



The diploma has proved most useful to Hazel on the three days a week she spends on secondment to the Bridges to Learning project, the partnership between UNISON, the Open University (OU) and Workers' Educational Association (WEA) that helps low-paid public sector workers progress at work.

Having caught the learning bug, Hazel decided to take on further study and went on to complete the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualification – another boost to her work with colleagues.

Then, on the back of both those successes, Hazel realised that she might have been wrong when she

"Standing in front and teaching is different from doing a class... I have learned a lot: I would never have dreamed I would have done so much – I am so proud."

originally told Jane that her yoga-teaching dream was not achievable at the age she was.

She is now close to completing a blended learning course in Hatha yoga, which includes units in physical exercise as well as health and safety and safeguarding clients – all of which will set her up to start teaching her colleagues at work.

Although she is one of the older students on the course, Hazel has drawn nothing but admiration from the younger trainees, including dancers and fitness teachers, who have been inspired to meet a grandmother of six who still has a passion for learning.

When she has finished the course, Hazel plans to extend her practice with advances in other forms of yoga and will teach a basic yoga class for people to drop into after work.

"I have learned a lot: I would never have dreamed I would have done so much – I am so proud," she says.

Hazel also says the course will help her stay active and continue to earn once she retires from the NHS.

She couldn't have progressed to where she is today without that mid-life review session, she says. "Talking to Jane helped put it all together: older people have something to offer – loyalty and life experience – the value of older people is immense."

Hazel's story is a perfect example of how it's never too late to try something new, says Jane Warwick. "Mid-life Development Reviews give individuals the opportunity to talk about what's important to them as well as plan for the future. Like Hazel, if you can learn about a hobby or area of interest, it makes the learning journey that bit more enjoyable." **LR**



HOW ANGE HAS TURNED ON THE CHARM

GMB member Angela Houston, or Ange as she prefers to be known, opted to learn through her union because she wanted to gain computing and technology skills to set up her own business.

And GMB's Union Learning Fund (ULF) project ReachOut in the North West and Irish Region was more than happy to help.

Ange enrolled on an ICT training programme at the GMB Preston Learning Centre, gaining her City & Guilds ICT Diplomas at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

She has now set up her own jewellery business, The Houston Charm, which makes bespoke charms and pendants. Ange donates a fixed amount from each item sold to The Pink Ribbon Foundation, which works to support breast cancer charities.

In recognition for her work with the Foundation, Ange was recently invited to a gala dinner in London. Her story also featured in the Christmas issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

"Everyone at GMB is so proud of Ange's achievements," says GMB ReachOut Senior Project Worker Dave Flanagan. "This goes to show that from small acorns big things can be realised and with the right support and a huge amount of grit and determination, anything is possible."

[Click here to see the jewellery Ange is making](#)

Moving forward with online training

Union reps have given the thumbs-up to the new format of TUC Education's Union reps Stage One course after road-testing the material late last year.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

Fifty union reps from a broad spectrum of industries across the UK joined focus groups in London and Manchester to test TUC Education's new online Union Representatives Stage One course towards the end of 2016.

After working through some of the course, participants completed a detailed questionnaire about the material and their overall experience using it, and feedback from reps who road-tested the course was overwhelmingly positive.

"I have gained more confidence with online training today and feel more reassured moving forward: I realise online training is the way forward," commented one rep.

"This has opened many doors for future reference and support: I have never experienced union online courses before now and now I'm a convert," said another.

The development team is now working to simplify navigation of the course as a result of suggestions from participants but



"I have never tried union online courses before and now I'm a convert."

it's available for any rep who is interested in working through all or any of the topics covered.

TUC Education has secured £905,000 from the UFI charitable trust to enhance and extend its online learning offer to union representatives through unionlearn's Transforming Open Online Learning (TOOL) project.

TUC Education is using the funding to develop tailored, self-directed learning modules for union reps.

The modules use the latest learning and multi-media technologies to deliver content that supports self-directed learning and use of discussion forums to encourage collaborative learning.

Online learning will play a greater role in the TUC Education offer in future as a result of increased demand for flexible provision and the emergence of innovative learning technologies.

Some branches have already started to use the course as a refresher tool for more experienced reps as well as their newly appointed counterparts and all participants are supported during the course by the TUC Education team. **LR**

✦ [Click here](#) to find out more about what's on offer and start one of the four new self-study online courses

NEW EDITION OF THE WORKPLACE MANUAL

Following the success of the first edition TUC Workplace Manual back in 2012, the TUC has revised this highly popular manual to include recent legal changes in employment law

and employee rights. The third edition is available to order now.

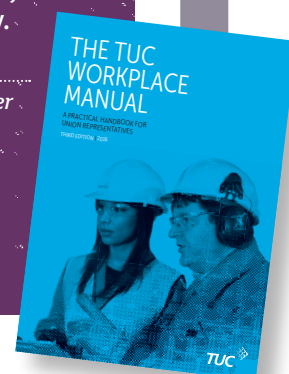
The manual is essential not only for stewards and equality, learning, green and health and safety reps, but for anyone who

represents, advises or supports members.

"Trade union reps are the unsung heroes of Britain's workplaces: organised workplaces are safer, fairer and better because of what they do," says TUC

General Secretary Frances O'Grady.

✦ [Click here](#) to order your copy



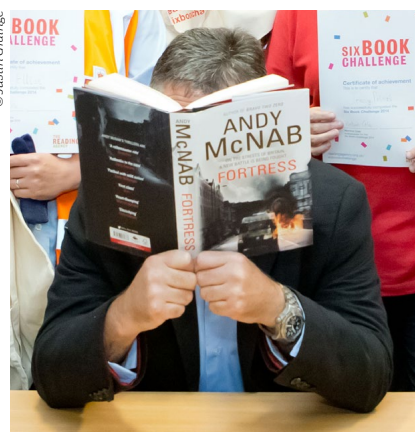
Time to start planning for World Book Night

World Book Night on 23 April will be working hard to match books with new readers through closer work with care homes, youth centres, colleges, prisons, public libraries, mental health groups and other charities. The campaign is prioritising:

- adults with low literacy levels or who don't read for pleasure
- isolated and vulnerable older people
- LGBT groups
- men and women of all ages in UK prisons
- parents and vulnerable pregnant women
- people with mental health issues
- young people who don't read for pleasure.

Titles available for distribution include Cathy Rentzenbrink's best-selling memoir *The Last Act of Love*, John Steinbeck's modern classic *Of Mice and Men*, Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*, Paul McVeigh's *The Good Son* (Polari Prize winner), Millie Marotta's best-selling colouring book *Animal Kingdom* plus novels by Lucy Diamond and Ann Cleeves, whose Quick Reads titles were included in last year's giveaway. **LR**

▶ [Click here](#) to find out how you can take part



Andy is the champion

Reading Agency Ambassador Andy McNab has won the inaugural Ruth Rendell Award from the National Literacy Trust, which celebrates the author who has done the most to champion literacy in the UK.

Andy has visited many workplaces running Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects in recent years, as well as other factories, prisons, schools, colleges and libraries, to encourage reluctant readers to pick up books and magazines. He has also written four Quick Reads titles.

▶ [Click here](#) to download UNISON's Reading Ahead toolkit

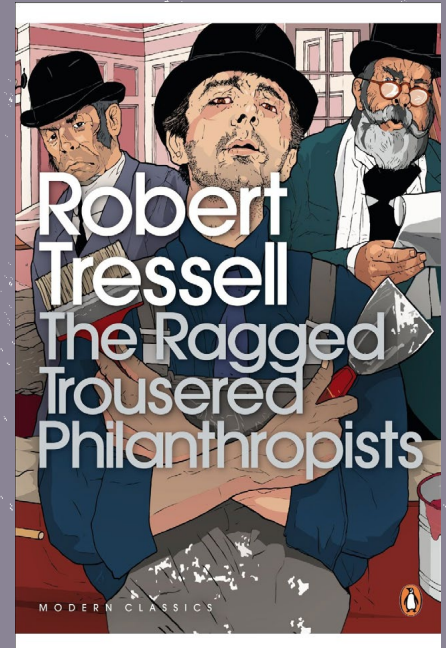


New Quick Reads for 2017

This year's six new Quick Reads include a special edition of one of the best-selling self-help books of all time: Susan Jeffers' landmark publication *Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway*.

The other five are a gritty new novel by Dreda Say Mitchell; a romantic novel following the fortunes of a Syrian refugee on a remote Scottish island by Jenny Colgan; Amanda Craig's re-imagining of the *Beauty and the Beast* fable; best-selling dyslexic writer Rowan Coleman's Poldark-themed tale; and a collection of short stories from top-drawer crime writers.

▶ [Click here](#) to find out more



TRESSELL TOPS THE POLL

Robert Tressell's classic novel of class politics, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, has topped unionlearn's poll to find the best titles for workplace reading clubs. Published after its author's death in 1914, the long-standing labour movement favourite follows the fortunes of a group of house painters struggling to survive against almost impossible odds.

The remaining top ten books are:

- 2 *Animal Farm*, George Orwell
- 3 *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck
- 4 *Billy Liar*, Keith Waterhouse
- 5 *Harry's Last Stand*, Harry Leslie Smith
- 6 *The Help*, Kathryn Stockett
- 7 *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Helen Fielding
- 8 *Love On The Dole*, Walter Greenwood
- 9 *Catch 22*, Joseph Heller and *Please Mr Postman*, Alan Johnson

The two winners of the book tokens prize draw that all voters were entered into are:

Mark Adcock and Carol Mcgrath

▶ [Click here](#) for full details of the top ten



“As a BFAWU project worker, I’m so proud we were a part of this amazing achievement.”

Friday mornings as staff didn’t work Fridays during January, February and March,” explains BFAWU Project Worker Janet Goodwin. “We had negotiated the start times and dates though our steering group committee and all courses ran throughout the company’s quiet period.”

Gaining her English Level 1 and Level 2 did wonders for Sima’s confidence, which prompted her to enrol on a full-time business studies course at Leicester College, where she gained Level 1 and Level 2 again – despite the pressures of continuing to work the 5–10pm shift at Jacob’s.

From there, Sima decided to move on to a university degree in business management, again without giving up her job at the factory. It was three years of very long days – starting at 8am in lectures or the library and finishing at 10:30pm at the factory – but it all paid off when she graduated with a 2:1, with first class honours for her dissertation on Leadership Impact on Employees Performance.

“Sometimes, I used to feel I cannot make this extra effort to go to college and university, but I pushed myself a lot and carried on,” Sima says.

“We all not the same: some people just need a starting point, which I received from the union learning course, and some people need support from the starting point to the end.”

Sima is very grateful to the BFAWU for starting Jacob’s English courses, and has thanked branch secretaries Paul McGarry and Paul Mahon and the ULRs who have helped and supported her on her learning journey. She is also very grateful to management for giving time off for revision and exams and allowing her to use the company’s business model in her studies.

Sima is now shadowing the factory manager with a view to gaining experience in management and she is also saving hard for the Masters degree she hopes to take this year. **LR**

Sima’s sweet taste of success

When Sima Jethwa first arrived in the UK from India, her English skills were just enough to secure her part-time work at Jacob’s Biscuits. But now, thanks to the support of her union BFAWU, she has recently completed a business management degree.

Sima Jethwa was just 16 years old when she moved to the UK from India, and she hadn’t learned much English in her native Gujarat, in the west of the country. So when she started a part-time job on the biscuit line at Jacob’s Leicester factory, she jumped at the chance of improving her skills through

courses organised by the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU).

After attending one of the union’s many learning services open days, where she completed a learning needs analysis, she started her learning journey with an English course in the on-site learning centre.

“The English courses were held on