

LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Winter 2016

ULR Kirsty makes the first division

▶ *Apprenticeships partnership*

▶ *Learning Rep of the Year*

▶ *Building a learning legacy*

▶ *Maths Workout Week*

▶ *Growing through learning*

unionlearn
with the TUC



LET'S ENJOY A MATHS WORKOUT

WITH MATHS AS ONE OF OUR KEY LEARNING PRIORITIES this year and confidence with maths vital for an ever-increasing range of jobs out there, we were very excited to launch the unionlearn Maths Workout campaign at our Learning and Skills events in the autumn.

As part of the campaign, we showcased two excellent new resources, our initial assessment tool Use-IT and the new eNote on Working With Figures, which we have produced to help ULRs show even more learners that maths is something to have fun with, not be frightened of.

"It will help reps feel more confident about using basic calculations for union work and hone their skills with figures for their home lives too"

Use-IT will enable ULRs to conduct more initial assessments that will enable learners not only to identify the level they are currently working at but also to look at the route they could take to improve their maths skills. The same goes for the other nine themes in Use-IT, including English, ICT and equalities.

The Working With Figures eNote from TUC Education (created with the help of

the food workers' union.BFAWU) should prove equally useful, as it will help reps feel more confident about using basic calculations for union work and hone their skills with figures for their home lives too.

With further support available from our partners at National Numeracy and Citizen Maths as well, I hope you all enjoy your next Maths Workout! 

Liz Rees is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
with the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

Shining a spotlight on technicians



© Gashy Foundation

Whether you're enjoying a night at the opera, watching a space mission or taking medicine, there's a technician like Tommy at the Royal Opera House (above) behind just about every aspect of your life.

Now the campaign to highlight the work of technicians and encourage more people to think about a career in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) is on a UK tour.

You could win £1,000 and career mentorship next year by entering the campaign's new photo competition. All you have to do is take a picture with Technicians Make it Happen somewhere in the image and post it on social media using the hashtag #techniciansmakeithappen. Use the clickthroughs below to follow the campaign online so it can see your snaps. And on Facebook, make your post setting public.

Every month, a winner will receive £25 in Amazon vouchers, while an overall winner will win £1,000 and career mentorship in 2017.

- [Click here](#) to follow the campaign on Twitter
- [Click here](#) to follow the campaign on Instagram
- [Click here](#) to like the campaign on Facebook
- [Click here](#) for details of the tour

Prison governor wins award for POA partnership

Dartmoor Governor Bridie Oakes-Richards has picked up a top accolade in the Festival of Learning Awards for consistently backing the Prison Officers' Association (POA) union learning agenda.

Bridie's unstinting support of learning since becoming prison governor in January 2015 earned her the award in the South West Regional Employer Category.

"For me to support the POA Learning project locally makes so much sense on so many fronts: I am both delighted and humbled to have been recognised," Bridie says.

The governor provides the building in which the



learning centre is based and funds the facilities. POA Learning provides the IT equipment and its workers support and guide HMP Dartmoor staff and local community learners.

“The positive and supportive relationship between the employer and POA Learning generates a win-win situation,” says POA Learning South West Regional Manager Andy Harding, who nominated Bridie for the award.

“Staff have positive development opportunities and CPD that feed into the business needs of the organisation, and all at minimal cost to the establishment,” he adds.

“The opportunities provided by POA Learning ensure that prison staff, both operational and non-operational, receive effective, up-to-date learning to deal with the most challenging offenders and their associated needs.”

For example, because 33 per cent of offenders within the prison have declared learning needs, the governor asked POA Learning to provide Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) awareness training and autism training to employees. To date, 70 staff have received ADHD training and all operational staff were due to receive an online autism awareness session during 2016.

In addition, because around one-third of all offenders have some hearing impairment, the governor requested POA Learning to source British Sign Language (BSL) training paid for by the employer. To date, 45 staff have completed

the training and can now constructively engage with hard-of-hearing offenders.

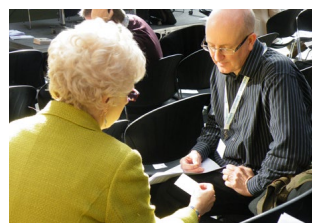
Manufacturing firms call for more and better skills

Manufacturers’ plans to drive productivity improvements and capitalise on the digital industrial revolution could be derailed because the UK is struggling to provide the right quantity and quality of skills to meet the sector’s needs, warns a new report from the EEF manufacturers’ organisation.

With demand for skills set to rocket, the report forecasts that the situation will only get worse, since the challenges of finding, funding, retaining and retraining skilled workers are all likely to increase from 2016 onwards.

❑ [Click here](#) to read the full report, *An Up-Skill Battle*

Mid-life reviews get thumbs-up from first evaluation



Unionlearn has been carrying out research on mid-life development reviews and older workers’ activities after an initial evaluation of the project revealed that the reviews can make an enormous difference to people’s lives.

Now the plan is to gather

further useful information to help people reflect on their transferable skills, plan for their future and enhance the union support offer from the new survey, which closed in October.

The research concentrated on what resources people found useful, the difficulties they faced and how best to improve the union offer and support now and in the future.

The results, to be released in the new year, will make an important contribution to unionlearn’s mid-life and older workers’ support agenda.

❑ [Click here](#) to find out more

Book your place on a new year learning event

Unionlearn is organising six Supporting Learners events across England between January and March 2017 featuring guest speakers, updates from unionlearn on workplace learning and examples from ULRs and unions on their work on learning and skills.

The events will provide ULRs, officers and reps with the opportunity to get together and exchange their experiences and ideas. Activities will cover: supporting learners, initial learner assessments, social media, online learning, health and well-being and more.

❑ [Click here](#) for more details and to book your free place

❑ [Click here](#) to receive updates direct from unionlearn

❑ [Click here](#) to register on the Climbing Frame website

REPTECH

Counting on success

National Numeracy has designed a new, free, smartphone game to help players see the benefit of having good everyday maths in workplace settings.

Star Dash Studios immerses players in the aspirational glamour of a film studio lot. Starting out as a runner in their first job, participants must accomplish a series of missions: travelling as far as they can, while ducking and jumping obstacles, collecting coins and film props and taking part in multi-levelled mini-games involving numeracy.

The app was funded by Ufi Charitable Trust, which aims to help improve vocational skills in the UK’s workforce by funding digital solutions for vocational learning. It was developed by Plug-in Media, a BAFTA-winning digital production company that focuses on creating engaging games and animation for young people.

The game is available on Android, iOS and Kindle.

❑ [Click here](#) to find out more about the game





LAUGHTER REALLY IS THE BEST MEDICINE

UNISON learning reps at Merseytravel have been testing the old adage that laughter is the best medicine by hosting a Well Funny lunchtime workshop in partnership with The Comedy Trust.

Local stand-up comedian Sam Avery helped the group explore how humour can be a great way to look after yourself, build resilience and find out just what makes people laugh.

UNISON officers from Liverpool City Council and members from the Liverpool Military Veterans joined in the fun.

“This is the second short workshop the Trust has delivered: earlier this year we hosted a six-week Feeling Funny stand-up comedy course, with the participants performing the material they developed in front of an invited audience at one of Liverpool’s comedy clubs,” explains UNISON learning rep Norman Hunter.

“Merseytravel do a lot of awareness-raising on health and well-being, which we see as an integral part of the learning agenda.”

The Comedy Trust’s Liverpool Well Funny courses are funded through the Healthy Liverpool Community Grants scheme delivered by Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Healthy Liverpool aims to provide a new health and social care system to transform the health of everyone in the city. **LR**

► [Click here to find out more about The Comedy Trust](#)

New Use-IT tool goes down well with ULRs



Use-IT, unionlearn’s new tool to help unions deliver learning in the workplace, proved popular at all of unionlearn’s learning and skills events this autumn, after it was launched by Unite apprentices from Jaguar Land-Rover at the Midlands event in Birmingham.

Use-IT contains 10 learning themes designed to help engage with learners, providing both an initial assessment and a way to encourage further learning. The topics are: English, Maths, ICT, Green Skills, Equalities, Diet, Alcohol, Safeguarding, Resilience and Food Hygiene.

► [Click here to contact Yusuf Dadabhoy about Use-IT](#)

► [Click here to access through the unionlearn website](#)

UNISON women get together to boost IT skills

UNISON’s North-West, Northern and Yorkshire and Humberside regions held a pilot IT skills for women conference in Liverpool in October.

The one-day event featured guest speakers, interactive workshops and ULR talks to celebrate, develop and boost women’s IT skills, aiming to help more

women get their digital voice heard by becoming more confident in using social media and the internet.

Writer and feminist Cath Elliott talked about how she learned to use IT and develop her digital skills.

Other speakers included UNISON officers and Dr Laurence Piercy from the Tinder Foundation, the charity that helps digitally and socially excluded people through digital technology and community action.

Don’t forget to vote in our work-themed book poll



© Tim Whithy/Stranger/Getty Images

There’s still time to vote for your favourite work-related book to help unionlearn find titles with a workplace connection that will engage readers and start a good discussion in a book group.

You can find a list of all the books and their descriptions on the unionlearn website (details below) and vote for your favourites or make a suggestion for a book that you feel is missing from the list.

One title not on the list dramatically opens with a death at work. Fabrice Muamba’s book *I’m Still Standing* tells the amazing story of the Bolton Wanderers player who

collapsed during a televised FA Cup match against Tottenham Hotspur.

After receiving emergency treatment on the pitch, he was rushed to the London Chest Hospital. Fabrice's heart stopped beating for 78 minutes but he survived. He made a remarkable recovery that has engrossed both the footballing and the wider world.

Fabrice now works for the PFA to encourage young footballers to think about life beyond the game.

- ▶ [Click here for the full list](#)
- ▶ [Click here to vote for your work-related favourites](#)
- ▶ [Click here to find out more about reading groups](#)

New OU courses can help re-route your career

The new website and free badged online courses developed by The Open University (OU) are ideal for people looking to progress their career or considering a new direction, says unionlearn Service Team Manager Ian Borkett.

"These courses are a useful and practical opportunity for people to develop their skills and knowledge: they explore the skills needed to work in different careers such as healthcare, child development or adult care, the voluntary sector or even starting up your own business," Ian says.

"All the courses explain what the various careers involve, the skills needed and the responsibilities that come with the role, and as they are free can be ideal for

people exploring options or looking for a change."

The Part-time Education for Adults Returning to Learn (PEARL) website offers information, advice and support to guide learners through a range of educational opportunities from short, free online courses through to higher-level learning.

Learners can use the Advise Me tool to receive personalised advice on the best options for them, browse through a bank of inspirational case studies to see what they too could achieve and get all the information they need to get started.

The six free courses are fun, interactive and informative and each one takes about 15 hours to complete but can be studied in shorter chunks of time.

The courses are Planning a Better Future, Introducing Practical Healthcare, Supporting Children's Development, Caring for Adults, Taking Part in the Voluntary Sector and Starting Your Small Business.

The courses are not accredited but do give the opportunity for learners to receive a digital badge, recognising skills and achievements acquired through online courses. Badges demonstrate learners' achievement on a course and can be stored in the TUC Education back pack as part of a portfolio, shared with employers and displayed on social media sites.

- ▶ [Click here to find out more](#)



London firefighters gain health qualifications

John Carpenter and Chris Slaney from the FBU's Leytonstone Branch in London have both completed their Level 2 understanding nutrition and health certificate.

Chris was delighted to be awarded his qualification. "The course was presented in such a structured way, I found it thoroughly enjoyable to complete," he says.

And John agrees. "The FBU Learning Centre presented this course in structured manageable sections that made completing it feel easy and enjoyable," he says. "I can't recommend these courses enough."

John and Chris are now both keen to use their new skills and knowledge towards the popular Level 3 Personal Trainer Apprenticeship.

NEC offers free tasters to union members

The National Extension College (NEC) is offering free self-study taster courses exclusively to union members to mark our 10th anniversary.

There's a range of subjects to choose from, including critical thinking, children's growth and development, climate change, crime, electricity, globalisation, managing your work, personal development planning, and spelling, punctuation and grammar.

If you like what you see and want to enrol on a full course, don't forget to ask for your 10 per cent discount as a union member.

- ▶ [Click here to visit NEC's dedicated unionlearn website](#)

Boost workplace learning with European toolkit

A European project coordinated by unionlearn has produced a new toolkit to help union reps better support learning at work: *Developing Workplace Learning: a toolkit for trade unions*.

Union reps, shop stewards, ULRs and works council members from the UK, Bulgarian, German, Italian, Romanian and Spanish trade union confederations took part in study visits to plants in Germany and the United Kingdom through the project.

They exchanged information and experience about ways in which unions provide practical support for the development of workplace learning, and the new toolkit collects the results.

It will enable reps to support union members and non-members alike and start a dialogue – and negotiate – with employers on workplace learning.

- ▶ [Click here to download the new toolkit](#)



Collecting his ULR of the Year award from TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady was one of the highlights of his life, says Unite learning rep and Blackpool bus driver Paul McGovern. "I was as proud as punch, over the moon," he says. "While we don't do things to get a pat on the back, it's nice to get that recognition at the end of the day – it's the cherry on the cake."

Paul, who has been working at Blackpool Transport for 20 years, first got involved with workplace learning many years ago. Already a Unite branch officer at the time, he heard that the union learning centre onsite was looking for volunteers to help out.

Having left school with no qualifications at the age of 15, he decided to give it a go. "They said the volunteers needed to be willing to take literacy and numeracy exams and since I hadn't done any exams since I left school, I saw it as a second chance to gain qualifications," he recalls.

He knew those qualifications could only stand him in good stead. "There are so many people of my age group who got a job after leaving school but who have gone for interviews and have been unable to get the job because they are missing basic skills," he says.

He took his studies one week at a time, and went on to gain his first qualifications at the learning centre. "That gave me such confidence," he recalls. "I knew I could meet any challenge now, and I couldn't wait to get into the learning centre to show other people what I had gone through and how easy it could be once you get past your personal barriers."

Since gaining those first English and maths qualifications, Paul has continued to lead by example, taking all the courses he can. One of his proudest moments was when he completed his Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) course – something he would never have dreamed possible when he left school. But that was before he was named ULR of the Year at TUC Congress this year. "The award encapsulates everything that I've worked for, going back to all those years ago when I first set out to gain my qualifications," he says.

Paul and ULR colleague Sue Mann try to cater for whatever their learners are interested in. "If we can get at least 10 people together interested in a course, we will basically offer any course you can think of," he says. Their inclusive approach means that the centre has been able to run hundreds of courses covering a range of skills over the past decade, including English, maths, ICT, genealogy, sign language, holiday Spanish and equality and diversity.

The centre itself was re-launched as the



Showing bus staff the route to learning

Unite learning rep Paul McGovern has been named ULR of the Year, after helping dozens of colleagues at Blackpool Transport change their lives through learning.

✦ **Astrid Stubbs**

Learning Curve in September with a celebration event attended by learners, managers and Unite officers. "We're very proud of our learning centre and we've put a lot of work into it – and now that work has become fruitful, we're absolutely overjoyed by it," Paul says.

It's Paul's easy-going manner that helps him engage so effectively with his colleagues, says Unite Regional Learning Manager Jane Broome. "Nothing is too much trouble for him and he gets great satisfaction from others' achievements," she says. "Paul and Sue are a dream team in my opinion: they are the reason that the learning centre has sustained the level of success it has, year on year."

"While we don't do things to get a pat on the back, it's nice to get that recognition at the end of the day – it's the cherry on the cake."



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“The wide range of courses meet the needs of the individuals and support the company’s goals for a motivated and skilled workforce.”

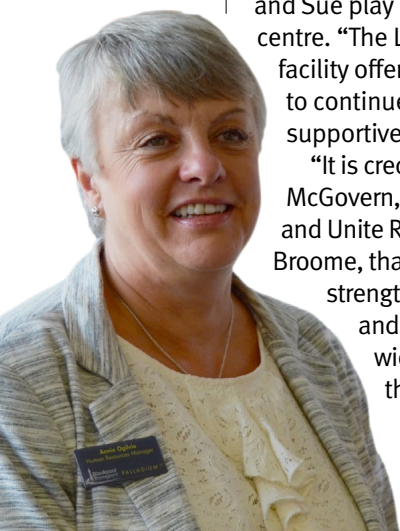
support the company’s goals for a motivated and skilled workforce.”

Paul’s learning journey has changed his home life as well, he says. “My kids think I’m ace: now I have no problem helping them and can answer most things they ask for help with,” he says. “The only problem I have now is that I don’t do their homework for them!”

Back in the learning centre, Paul says it’s the small moments that make his role worthwhile, such as when he hears first hand how his co-workers are changing their lives through learning. “The biggest reward is when, for example, a colleague comes up to me and says, ‘Thank you so much, I was finally able to help my son or daughter with their homework last night.’ When people come out with statements like that – it’s a testament to what we do,” he says. **LR**

Blackpool Transport Human Resources Manager Annie Ogilvie (below) agrees Paul and Sue play a vital role in the success of the centre. “The Learning Curve is a tremendous facility offering all employees the opportunity to continue their learning in a friendly, supportive environment,” she says.

“It is credit to Sue Mann and Paul McGovern, the Unite learning representatives, and Unite Regional Learning Manager Jane Broome, that the centre goes from strength to strength. They have been enthusiastic and supportive in introducing a wide range of courses, which meet the needs of the individuals and





Putting apprentices in the driving seat

Unite has been working closely with Vauxhall Motors to help support the new cohort of production apprentices now training at the car giant's factory on Merseyside.

◆◆ **Martin Moriarty**

When management at the Vauxhall Motors plant at Ellesmere Port on Merseyside decided to recruit a new cohort of 16 to 24-year-old production apprentices last year, Unite was swift to give the initiative its full support.

"Vauxhall Motors plays an integral role in the economy, and with the recruitment of more apprentices, continues to invest in the future of the plant, the local community and gives employment opportunities to young people," commented convenor John Cooper at the time.

John and his team of senior reps were able to make a significant contribution to the new programme, thanks to the excellent working relationships between the union and company management, on learning in particular (there are now, for example, two Unite learning centres onsite).

"The production Apprenticeships we put in place were the first for our organisation in a long time, and they were going into permanent positions when they finished, which was a big bonus," explains Plant Personnel Manager Val Thomas.

"While the process was very much management-led, the union reps did have an active role to play in terms of helping us make

sure the learning we were putting in place for the apprentices would be relevant to the organisation: they helped put together the learning framework in terms of delivering the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for the production staff and they helped us with the door-build exercise, which was part of the recruitment process," she explains.

"And although the company makes the final decision on recruitment through our assessment centre and processes, Unite were very much engaged with us in making sure they were happy with the calibre and the quality of the training, because the apprentices were potential members as well: there was a lot of pride for us to work in partnership with Unite, recognising that this is our workforce of the future."

The majority of the 60 production apprentices the company engaged last year continue to make their way through their Level 2 NVQs, all of them enjoying a permanent contract from day one, as well as a guarantee of a full-time job when they finish, so long as they make the grade. After taking up roles in general assembly, paint unit and body unit manufacturing, they have been working on production of the new generation Astras – both the five-door hatchback and the Sports Tourer family estate.

"The production Apprenticeships we put in place were the first for our organisation in a long time, and they were going into permanent positions when they finished."





“The close links the plant has fostered with local schools means that teachers and pupils get to see first-hand the realities of working in the 21st century car industry.”

While the production Apprenticeships are new, the company already had a maintenance Apprenticeship programme in place, which takes on 10 young people every year. It's Unite senior rep Chris Weatherstone who actively supports and mentors the maintenance apprentices, regularly meeting with their managers and their provider, West Cheshire College, to make sure they are all progressing with their studies and staying on the right track. “Chris does a great job for the maintenance apprentices,” Val says.

The maintenance and production apprentices are not the only young people learning the ropes on the factory floor: every year, Vauxhall takes on 17 undergraduates for the placement year of their degree courses, who not only work closely with the apprentices but also act as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Ambassadors by going into local schools and talking to pupils about today's car industry.

Close links with local schools enable teachers and pupils to see first-hand the realities of working in the 21st century car industry: every year the company invites schools to its Inside Manufacturing events and also welcomes a number of GCSE pupils on work experience placements.

Both the union and the company are keen to break down the gender stereotypes throughout UK engineering and manufacturing that have discouraged so many young women from pursuing production and maintenance careers in the past.

“People are quietly surprised when they come on plant visits about the number of routes available to females in terms of the different professions – you've got logistics, IT, HR, finance, quality, manufacturing and engineering,” Val points out. “We have female apprentices that fit in very well and we have female production workers that fit in very well, although we would like more, quite honestly!” **LR**



APPRENTICESHIP REFORM IS ON THE WAY

Trade unions have a perfect opportunity to step in to negotiate new high-quality Apprenticeship programmes when more come onstream as a result of the government's new Apprenticeship Levy, which launches next April.

The Apprenticeship Levy is a monthly, mandatory financial contribution made by employers to the Treasury if their payroll exceeds £3m. This levy payment will then be placed in a designated account (Direct Apprenticeship Service) that can then be accessed by that employer to fund Apprenticeships. If that employer chooses not to spend the levy on Apprenticeships, their levy contribution will not be returned to them.

Trade unions have welcomed the introduction of the levy as a way of driving up employer investment in skills. Unions should be involved in setting up the Apprenticeships to make sure they are high quality. Unions play a key role negotiating with employers and supporting apprentices in the workplace.

Unionlearn has also developed a new negotiating guide for reps wanting to use the levy to create high-quality Apprenticeships, *The Apprenticeship Levy – how to plan for good quality apprenticeships – 15 useful negotiating tips*. **LR**

▣ [Click here](#) for unionlearn's detailed FAQ about the new Apprenticeship Levy

▣ [Click here](#) for the new negotiating guide

Learning from the front

Reading FC Women captain Kirsty McGee has become the first female learning rep in the Professional Footballers' Association.

➡ Astrid Stubbs



After leading Reading FC Women to promotion to the highest level of women's football in England in 2015, captain Kirsty McGee is determined her squad remains with the rest of the top-flight teams at the end of this season.

And as the first female union learning representative (ULR) in the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), Kirsty is equally determined to help her team-mates plan ahead for the lives they will lead once they hang up their boots for the final time.

"I became a ULR as I'm a great admirer of the union's work and, as captain, I also felt it was part of my role to help the girls in the right direction and make them aware that football is not going to last and that it's important to get an education," Kirsty reveals.

For Kirsty herself, that means putting in the work now to train as a coach, since that's the road she'd like to travel when she finishes her playing career: "I've always been a massive believer in education and that football will not be there for ever, so it's important for me to do my coaching badges alongside the football," she says.

Football is notoriously insecure, with an average professional career lasting just eight years, so preparation for transition into secondary careers is vital, which is why the PFA continually develops programmes to include employability training, well-being support, careers advice and educational information, advice and guidance.

Kirsty is already talking to colleagues about future careers away from football and has facilitated a PFA Education workshop where PFA staff will offer advice, guidance and support on the different courses available, such as sports journalism and physiotherapy, which are popular among members.

She's taken up her ULR role within the PFA's Achievement Through Sport programme, which aims to promote, facilitate and broker flexible learning opportunities for PFA members using the growing network of PFA/unionlearn supported learning centres across a number of clubs, including Brentford, Portsmouth, Reading, Bristol City, Exeter, Plymouth, Peterborough, Millwall and Stevenage Borough FC.

The PFA held a learning centres best practice day at the new state-of-the-art learning centre

"I've always been a massive believer in education and that football will not be there for ever, so it's important for me to do my coaching badges alongside the football."



“We work closely with all our ULRs and learning centres to ensure they look to identify learning opportunities that fit the PFA and unionlearn project criteria.”

at Portsmouth FC in October, bringing a cluster of clubs together to network and share areas of positive practice.

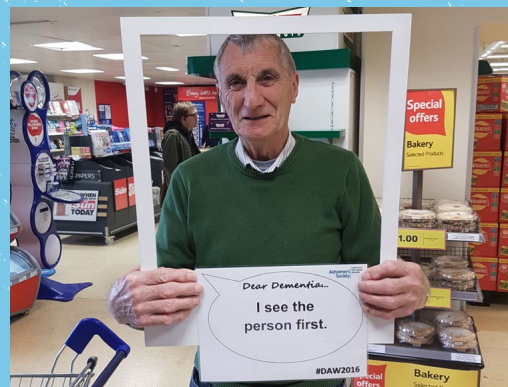
PFA and Union Learning Fund Project Worker Riz Rehman is delighted Kirsty has joined the union’s ULR network. “It’s a breakthrough for us: having Kirsty on board will hopefully attract more Reading FC women players to get involved within the union in some capacity, such as enrolling on an education course we offer,” he says.

“We work closely with all our ULRs and learning centres to ensure they look to identify learning opportunities that fit the PFA and unionlearn project criteria.”

While Kirsty had always been interested in football, it wasn’t until she left school aged 16 and started studying sport that she joined a local team and started taking the beautiful game seriously.

Initially signed to Portsmouth FC Ladies for 10 years, Kirsty got her big break three seasons ago when she turned pro with Reading FC Women, and while she’s the first female ULR in her union, she fully expects to be followed by many more.

“It would be beneficial to have someone in every club to make players aware of what can be offered to them as courses are flexible and can also be completed online to fit around the busy football schedule,” she says. **LR**



SPREADING THE MESSAGE ABOUT DEMENTIA

Usdaw learning rep Brenda Wardle has helped more than 50 of her colleagues at the Tadcaster Tesco in Yorkshire become dementia friends, as part of the Alzheimer’s Society programme to change people’s perceptions of the condition.

And she’s not stopping there: Brenda plans to reach all 500 staff at the supermarket and persuade many more of them to become dementia friends, too.

Brenda decided to become a ULR after seeing what a little learning could do for people when the Community Champion in her store put in a lot of work around the issue of dementia four years ago.

“Our Community Champion raised awareness about the condition and really helped people to understand what it was, because at that time it was a new thing to lots of people,” explains Brenda. “Attitudes to dementia have really changed over the last few years: it’s not a taboo word anymore.”

As part of her ULR role, Brenda has already arranged numerous sessions to give staff the skills and knowledge to become a dementia friend, and plans to continue to do so until she has made the whole store dementia-friendly. **LR**

➡ [Click here](#) to find out more about becoming a Dementia Friend Champion in your workplace



Building a learning legacy

Construction union UCATT is helping thousands of building workers gain the safety qualifications and the skills they need, explains National Officer Steve Craig.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Union learning reps in the construction sector (often called On Site Learning Organisers, OSLOs) have to be creative, flexible and determined enough to surmount obstacles that are unknown to many of their counterparts elsewhere.

There's the digital divide created by the absence of desktop computers and the standard prohibition on smartphone use on building sites. There are the high levels of staff turnover in an industry that relies on a nomadic workforce travelling where the building projects arise. And there is the complex web of employment relationships between contractors, sub-contractors and workers, including the abiding problem of bogus self-employment (where companies try to wriggle out of their responsibilities by persuading workers to sign away their employment rights).

Despite all of this, construction union UCATT has helped thousands of building workers not only gain vital vocational qualifications but also secure their all-important Construction Safety Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards, which demonstrate they have the knowledge, skills and experience to work safely onsite and play their part in reducing accidents and improving occupational health and safety.

UCATT's learning and skills activity has literally transformed the lives of thousands of disadvantaged and hard-to-reach learners: without the union's support, many of them would never have been able to access education and training, let alone the career development it supports, explains UCATT National Officer for Strategy, Education and Organisation Steve Craig, who oversees the union's ULF projects.

Anna Matthews (pictured right) in Liverpool is a perfect example. Two years ago, she was living in a hostel on Merseyside and hadn't worked for 10 years when the charity Business in the Community (BitC) arrived to talk to residents about voluntary work placements with construction giant Carillion on the £335m project building the new Royal Liverpool University Hospital.

Anna jumped at the chance and hasn't looked back since. With the help of the UCATT learning centre onsite, she gained an NVQ Level 2 in Controlled Lifting that enabled her to work as a hoist driver (she's also upgraded her CSCS card from trainee to skilled worker and is now working towards advanced craft/supervisory level).

"Anna herself would admit she is someone who had a troubled past, and had been unemployed for 10 years," Steve explains. "We got her trained

"UCATT has helped thousands of building workers gain vital vocational qualifications and secure their all-important Construction Safety Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards."

and now she's been fast-tracked by Carillion, who brought her in doing one job, and then switched her to logistics, where she's now quality assurance manager – if that isn't a good news story, I don't know what is!"

Anna herself is keen to find out how far she can go with the help of the union. "I would like to achieve a higher level qualification and progress within the company and I would like to know more about UCATT and what the union can offer women in construction," she says.

Steve himself knows all about the opportunities opened up by union learning, since he'd been both a union learner and a union tutor before becoming the union strategist he is today.

Arriving in London from his native Liverpool as a young man in the early 1980s, Steve signed up for all the education he could get through his membership of the TGWU (now part of Unite).

From there, he first became a schools and youth tutor for the union and later a regional and then national tutor, before spells as a full-time official with teaching union NATFHE and shipping union Nautilus International (then called NUMAST).

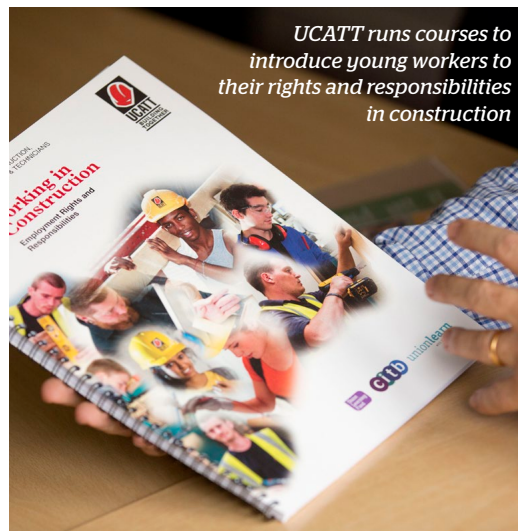
It was while he was working for Wigan and Leigh College Trade Union Studies Unit that he was first seconded to work for UCATT, before becoming a full-time member of staff three years ago.

Throughout all this, Steve has continued to progress on his own learning journey, most recently taking a Mental Health First Aid course and achieving his UEFA 'C' Licence as a football coach.

As well as helping construction workers improve their English and maths skills, Steve says UCATT is keen to continue doing all it can to maintain and develop long-term, high-quality Apprenticeships in the sector, despite the pressure to cut corners in an industry where time really is money (just look at the hefty penalty payments companies risk when projects overrun).

"We are very keen to establish and maintain good, high-quality Apprenticeships but some training providers look to shorten the time element and undermine the quality of schemes because then people can transition faster into work: many employers don't want to wait three or four years for an apprentice to complete their training when their whole project may only last three or four years," Steve points out.

While many major construction projects last four



"One of the key things for us is to try and get the employer to work with us and the community to secure a legacy."

or five years, not a very long time in the life of the communities around them, high-quality Apprenticeships can play a part in leaving a lasting learning legacy for local people.

"One of the key things for us is to try and get the employer to work with us and the community to secure a legacy, which includes trained and qualified apprentices who are ready to move on to the next project while building their own lives in the community," Steve says.

Apprenticeships will also be key as the Hinkley Point C nuclear reactor construction project in Somerset finally gets underway – the EDF board has given its final investment decision (FID) and the government has announced its conditional approval. The project will deliver an agreed minimum of 1,000 new Apprenticeships, while creating a total of 25,000 new jobs across the lifetime of the project.

For Steve, the way UCATT plans to extend new opportunities through Hinkley is a perfect example of the way lifelong learning works everywhere: what may begin with an individual gaining qualifications they never thought possible through the support of their union expands like ripples on a pond, changing the lives of people around them – and far beyond.

"Learning, training and skills benefit the individual, they benefit the local community, they benefit the company, they benefit the union and they benefit wider society and the economic development of UK plc," Steve says. **LR**

Ian joins TUC Education team

New instructional designer Ian Sheeler is already working on expanding the eNotes series, while the latest additions will help reps get to grips with ESOL, numeracy and cancer in the workplace.



Ian Sheeler brings more than 14 years' experience in e-learning design and development for academic, corporate and adult learners to his new job as an instructional designer within the TUC Education team.

"I'm thrilled to be working for TUC Education now as I can continue to promote equality and diversity by helping reps develop the skills they need to make our workplaces fairer for all," he says.

For the past five years, Ian was a partner at Wideaware, an e-learning and training company specialising in disability equality, accessibility and diversity.

"Although a small business, we worked with big clients, including Ofcom, Network Rail, Southwark Council and the Houses of Parliament to help them become more inclusive as employers and as service providers," he explains.

"I led the design of e-learning to help senior managers and customer-facing staff deliver an equal service to disabled people and to avoid discrimination: we

didn't push it as compliance – equality and inclusion is just good business for any company."

Ian is already busy working on upcoming additions to the successful eNotes e-learning series, as well as contributing to the new union reps courses funded by the Ufi Charitable Trust.

"It's great to be involved in the union reps courses as they represent the next generation of mobile-friendly e-learning that reps can access anywhere – and show that the TUC is forward thinking and responding to the ever-changing needs of learners," he adds.

The three latest eNotes, produced before Ian joined the team, cover English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Working with Figures and Cancer in the Workplace.

Produced by TUC Education and shopworkers' union USDAW, the ESOL eNote is designed to help equip users with the skills to plan, arrange and promote ESOL activities in the workplace.

The eNote takes around 25 minutes to complete and provides

"It's great to be involved in the next generation of mobile-friendly e-learning that reps can access anywhere."

case studies and ideas for how ESOL learning can be delivered to bring the greatest benefit to workplaces.

Created in partnership with food workers' union BFAWU, Working with Figures aims to help reps deal with common calculations that crop up, such as working out a percentage pay increase or overtime rate or budgeting for union accounts.

Cancer in the Workplace is designed in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to help reps support colleagues faced with the range of decisions that they will need to make about work following a diagnosis. **LR**

TUC EDUCATION WEBSITE GETS A MAKEOVER

TUC Education has created a new-look website, a one-stop-shop for all types of union reps to access courses, information and learning materials.

The fantastic new site, partly funded by the Ufi Charitable trust, is fully optimised for mobile users, making learning on the go much easier and more accessible.

Register or login to book onto courses, view a whole host of eNotes and keep up-to-date on new developments, conferences and webinars.



[Click here](#) to visit the new-look website

Creating a buzz about numbers

Reps across the country used our new initial assessment tool Use-IT and Working with Figures eNote during Maths Workout Week.

Unionlearn ran a very successful Maths Workout Week in October to promote greater awareness of maths, which is one of the key learning priorities this year.

“Maths is a vital skill for so many jobs today, and through the Maths Workout campaign, unionlearn is working with unions to help their members make the most of the new Use-IT tool and the Working with Figures eNote,” explains unionlearn Director Liz Rees.

“By supporting learners with maths, unions can help build personal confidence and career opportunities, which is good for the individual and the employer.”

At the Usdaw learning centre on the DHL /Argos site in Castleford, ULR Coordinator Sean Dixon organised information sessions during work breaks to showcase the wide range of maths learning on offer, as well as some fun activities, including maths crosswords, wordsearches and quizzes.

Sean says his members rated

the new Use-IT tool: they liked the look of it and were happy with the way the assessment kicked off with some easier questions before moving on to some trickier problems later.

For Sean himself, the best thing about Use-IT is its accessibility. “It is easy to navigate around, so it won’t alienate learners with low IT skills, and being web-based means you can access it anywhere and on any equipment,” he says.

Maths Workout Week also promoted two long-standing campaign partners to improve people’s confidence and skills with numbers – Citizen Maths, the free online Level 2 maths course based on everyday numeracy problems, and the National Numeracy Challenge, the drive to tackle the major issue of low adult numeracy in the UK.

To help unions track their learners’ progress, National Numeracy has launched the Challenge Tracker, which provides in-depth, individual, reporting on learners’ progress.



“By supporting learners with maths, unions can help build personal confidence and career opportunities, which is good for the individual and the employer.”

The Challenge Online helps individuals assess their current numeracy levels and then provides a bespoke bank of learning resources to help them improve their skills and confidence in maths. **LR**

▶ [Click here](#) to access the Use-IT tool

▶ [Click here](#) to use the Working with Figures eNote

▶ [Click here](#) to follow the Maths Workout campaign on Twitter

▶ [Click here](#) to keep up to date with the National Numeracy Campaign

▶ [Click here](#) to use the Challenge Tracker

▶ [Click here](#) to keep up to date with Citizen Maths

Building a branch through learning

Darren Barber has been recognised by the TUC for his enormous successes in organising through learning at Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty



Promoting lifelong learning has been “absolutely immense” for union organising at Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn, according to UNISON Branch Secretary and Union Learning Rep Darren Barber, who collected the Organising Rep of the Year award at this year's TUC Congress.

When Darren won the election for branch secretary in 2011, UNISON membership at the East Anglian hospital was just over the 350 mark, and there were only two active stewards looking after them.

But by launching what has become a model lifelong learning programme onsite, and recruiting a dozen new stewards and a seven-strong ULR team at the hospital, Darren has helped

membership grow to more than 800 today.

“You always have to have somewhere to start from, and to me I felt our branch needed to invest in our members for our members to give us what we need as an active, member-led union,” Darren explains.

“More than anything, lifelong learning helps you hold conversations that you've never been able to have before, and then get to know people on the courses who start doing things afterwards because they can see they're not by themselves – I think that's been very influential in what I've done.”

Two years after he became branch secretary, Darren was able to help formalise the constructive partnership

“More than anything, lifelong learning helps you hold conversations that you've never been able to have before, and then get to know people.”

work with the Trust's workforce development and education team in a lifelong learning agreement, which was signed in autumn 2013.

The agreement led to a huge variety of informal leaning at the Trust, from lunchtime sewing sessions to Pilates and ballroom dancing after work, all of which were recognised as making a tangible difference to staff at the hospital.

“We received an email from a manager congratulating us for boosting people's confidence and their morale through the sewing class and putting on record what a positive effect it was having on the workplace at a difficult time for the NHS,” Darren says.

The agreement was renewed earlier this year, with a celebration event that drew warm congratulations from the local MP who attended on the day.

Perhaps even more important have been the dementia awareness workshops UNISON has been running, which have helped close to 600 staff improve their understanding of the condition and how to engage with patients with dementia – one of the key issues when the hospital was placed in special measures three years ago, and one of the successful changes put in place that played a vital role in helping it exit special measures last year.

Building on that firm foundation, Darren has helped the union run its new mental health awareness course, developed in partnership with The Open University, run twice in October after a successful pilot at QEHLK earlier this year.

“By delivering courses like this, we are showing that we are offering training to support nurses and doctors in their role, which makes us hugely attractive to join,” Darren says. **LR**