



unionlearn
with the TUC



Unionlearn Annual Report **2016**

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Foreword

It is a real pleasure to be able to celebrate the tenth birthday milestone with another highly successful year for unionlearn. Supporting unions to promote access to learning and skills in the workplace and to sustain the role of workplace reps is at the heart of what unionlearn is about. It is therefore gratifying to report that over the past 12 months nearly 220,000 individuals accessed union-led learning or training and in many cases this will have proved to have been a life-changing step.

Many of these learners engaged with unions on this agenda through the innovative activities of Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects, which surpassed their overall targets by around 25 per cent. In total 180,000 employees engaged in some form of learning or training facilitated through ULF projects in the past 12 months compared with 162,000 in the previous year.

The population of union learners remains very diverse and includes many of the most disadvantaged who are re-engaging with learning for the first time since leaving school, often by brushing up on their English, maths and ICT skills. In total 55,000 learners embarked on this form of union-led learning over the last 12 months. It is also worth noting that in the same period many people accessed ULF learning and training to support their career development at various stages of their working lives. For example, over 7,000 apprentices were directly supported by unions whilst 30,000 employees engaged in continuing professional development courses.

Despite the challenging employment relations climate, the number of union reps trained through TUC Education remains substantial. TUC Education still trains over 30,000 union reps every year, a half million over the last ten years, and the innovative new e-learning programme for union reps is in development, due to be launched in 2017. In 2015, 2,804 private sector employers sent reps to be trained through this route, a considerable contribution to employment relations and to the economy.

Against the backdrop of these impressive numbers, there does lurk the perennial challenge of “so what?” This involves a great deal of hard work and investment for unions and the TUC in a difficult economic and industrial relations climate. With justification, union leaders, the government and other stakeholders ask what the long-term impact and the added value of union-led learning and training is for both employees and employers? To answer these questions unionlearn periodically commissions independent evaluations of the ULF and unionlearn and one of the largest evaluations to date has been undertaken over the last 12 months.

Whilst the full report has yet to be published, the early key findings from the research undertaken jointly by Leeds and Exeter universities are telling. They highlight a number of key themes, including that union learning is highly valued by individuals, stimulates a demand for further learning, and helps individuals to get on at work. For example, the analysis shows that employees regularly engaging in union learning are more likely to receive a pay rise or promotion. Union learning also provides a direct boost to union membership, evidenced by the finding that 43 per cent of non-union members that undertook union learning through ULF subsequently joined a union.

Employers too reported major benefits from union-led learning and training, including increased take-up of learning and training, more employees attaining qualifications, and better equality of access to learning. They also noted a wider boost to organisational performance, including nearly a half reporting that union-led learning in the workplace led to improved employee commitment across the piece and more than four in ten citing a positive impact on employment relations in the workplace.

The policy backdrop to our work over the last 12 months has been dominated by the government’s decision to introduce an Apprenticeship levy in April 2017. This will undoubtedly be a game-changer. Unionlearn will be dedicating even greater efforts to supporting unions and employers to increase the

number of Apprenticeships but with a categorical commitment to quality and sustainable employment. Helping employees already in work to upskill and develop will remain another key priority, with a continued focus on building on our acknowledged expertise in reaching out to adults facing the greatest barriers to learning.

Last year posed a number of challenges for union learning, but I am glad to report that unionlearn and the trade unions more than rose to these challenges. I anticipate that the coming 12 months will again test our resolve, but I am highly confident that unionlearn and union learning will continue to thrive.



Mary Bousted

Chair, unionlearn Board

The Union Learning Fund

The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established in 1998 to promote activity by trade unions in support of creating a learning society. Its primary aim is to develop the capacity of trade unions and Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to work with employers, employees and learning providers to encourage greater take-up of learning in the workplace. It is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). In 2015–2016 the Union Learning Fund supported 30 unions to deliver 33 projects at a total cost of just over £12m.

ULF projects once again performed ahead of expectations and the total ULF learners via the union route was over 180,000, which is 124 per cent of the annual profile. In addition, 179 new learning centres were opened and 155 new learning agreements were signed with employers. Over 41,000 learners attended informal adult and community learning (IACL) both in workplace and community locations and over 30,000 learners took part in work related CPD. In line with the previous year, the number of ULRs trained was under profile and this is explained by a number of factors (see the following TUC Education section for an analysis).

All 33 projects have been managed by the ULF team, through direct support and a variety of support events.

The whole process of both bid assessment and project monitoring was thoroughly reviewed this year and a number of major changes made. The reporting process has been moved to a monthly cycle, enabling much tighter support and management of projects. The bid development and assessment process is now much more rigorous with a transparent scoring system agreed with BIS and an enhanced programme of bid-writing support. In addition much work has been done on assisting projects to demonstrate their value for money and impact.

A survey was undertaken to review the support provided to unions by the unionlearn team and although overwhelmingly positive (80 per cent of respondents saying overall support was excellent or good) a number of areas for development were identified and are being actioned. Ninety-seven per cent of those responding were very happy or happy with the support provided to the ULF bidding process and 75 per cent thought the support on reporting and management information was excellent or good.

Over the past year an evaluation of ULF Rounds 15 and 16 and the support role of unionlearn was commissioned from an independent academic team. The preliminary findings from this evaluation paints a very positive picture of the added value of union learning and the benefits accrued by employees and employers.

ULF Performance Report 2015–2016: Key headline figures

	Profile	Actual	Variance (%)
New ULRs completing stage 1, via ULF	1,580	1,036	65.6
Total number of reps trained to support workplace learning	1,385	942	68.0
English and maths learners, via ULF	21,155	23,218	109.8
IACL learners, via ULF	31,265	41,750	133.5
Learners on CPD, via ULF	26,914	30,136	112.0
New Employer Learning Agreements, via ULF	230	155	67.4
Total ULF learners	144,861	180,194	124.4

Union Learning Fund projects – highlights

ULF projects have been very keen to share a wide range of stories, showing how their efforts have supported learning and skills in the workplace over the last year. Many of these stories have been posted onto the unionlearn website, and shared via its social media platforms.

- They include evidence of how union learning reps (ULRs) can boost the support that they give learners when there is a union learning centre in the workplace. One example of this is the hard work of Usdaw ULRs at the DHL flagship warehouse in Stoke. John Goodwin, an Usdaw ULR who has worked at the site since it opened in 2002, is proud of the difference the learning centre has made. He said: “We’ve had members brush up on their English, maths, and study towards City & Guilds and Apprenticeships. It’s been a great success. We have 12 PCs here, and we work closely with the local college to offer as many courses and opportunities to learn as we can. It’s very popular.”
- ULF projects have also advanced union support for apprentices, for example, BECTU’s Find Your Future initiative. This has helped 16- to 18-year-olds to embark on careers in the arts and media sector. The union recently held an event at Westminster Kingsway College to help all would-be apprentices and trainees in the creative sectors learn more about how to find the right career pathway.
- Other initiatives, such as the PFA’s work at Burton Albion FC, have focused on supporting career progression by enabling young people to take up Level 3 qualifications. At HMP Dartmoor ULRs from POA Learning have been supporting individuals to access Level 2 distance learning courses. This has resulted in a number of people gaining promotions or starting new jobs.
- Health and well-being has always been a core trade union priority, and helping workers learn how to stay healthy through union learning initiatives reflects the growing importance of this agenda. In Cumbria unionlearn has been supporting ULF projects by running Mental Health 1st Aid events to raise awareness of issues such as stress in the workplace.
- In recent years unions have done much to support migrant workers, including by giving them the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to work efficiently and safely with colleagues. ESOL is an important part of this learning agenda and a number of ULF projects are doing pioneering work. For example, the GMB ULF Project in the Southern region has enabled ULRs to negotiate with managers at Airsprung Beds in Trowbridge to source ESOL courses for Polish workers at the factory.
- Partnership working between ULF projects is important and yields good results. For example, the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists and a ULF project team has worked closely with the GMB to maximise use of a learning centre to deliver digital skills training to members and older workers. In Kent the POA and Usdaw have been running a number of joint events including community learning days.
- Jane, a 77-year-old retired union member from Eastchurch, won support from POA’s ULF project and its Learning Centre, learned to go online and can now keep in touch with family members from across the world.
- Laura, a young mum working with Hovis, used to struggle with English. But thanks to the ULF-funded BFAWU project she has passed her Level 1 English and is working towards her Level 2. Laura said; “My reading and writing have improved a lot and I am now confident in helping my daughter with her homework.”

As described above there were significant changes to the ULF process this year with the introduction of a new bidding and scoring system and the team has worked hard to support unions in making their applications. Forty-five unions submitted bids and thirty-two of these were successful.

More information on all the Round 17 projects that commenced in April 2016 are available on the unionlearn website www.unionlearn.org.uk/ulf-projects-round-17-2016.

Unionlearn performance 2015–2016

Unionlearn was completely restructured in 2014 and again in 2015 and the staff have worked hard to ensure that regions were supported and that common approaches and reporting systems were developed to ensure consistent and comparable data while recognising the diverse nature of the different regions. The teams continue to assist ULF projects and to link with regional providers and LEPs and other partnerships to promote learning opportunities and improve the responsiveness of the learning system to union learners' needs.

In addition to supporting Union Learning Fund projects throughout the year, unionlearn directly supported over 12,000 learners, over 4,500 with functional skills and digital skills. The Use-IT platform which has been developed by unionlearn to assist unions in engaging learners enabled over 3,000 initial assessments to be undertaken.

Unionlearn continues to support Festival of Learning and Learning at Work Week. Informal adult and community learning (IACL) is an important way of engaging new and hard-to-reach learners and over 5,800 adults were supported into making those first steps into learning. In addition more than 700 learners were supported in achieving qualifications at Levels 1, 2 or 3 and over 1,300 adults were supported with Information Advice and Guidance.

TUC Education

TUC Education has an unrivalled reach into Britain's workplaces to provide high quality education and training for workplace representatives.

Unions representing major public and private sector employers from across the economy send reps for training which, taken together, represents a huge segment of the UK economy. In 2015, for example, reps from 2,804 private sector employers were trained by TUC Education. Almost all unions participate in the programme, which is recognised for integrity, quality and innovation.

In 2015 there was a dip in numbers to 30,368, down 4,363 on the 2014 figure. This remains a considerable programme of training, especially as paid release is under great pressure in both the public and private sectors. In the last ten years almost 500,000 reps have been trained through TUC Education on 40,000 courses, including 35,411 union learning representatives.

This year 667 trade union professional officers were trained, combining more flexible learning options with traditional classroom-based events. Programmes include *Employment Law*, *Project Management*, *Using Social Media* and *Mental Health at Work*.

Funding the programme

TUC Education is charged with providing a programme for all union reps with the remit of building and supporting workplace organisation. It has been widely recognised by successive governments that it is in the interests of the economy, employers, workers and their unions that union representatives are properly trained to carry out their increasingly complex and sophisticated role. Since 2001, fees have been remitted direct to colleges, providing for a cost-effective formula which enables course fees to be met without the administrative burden of a grant. This has been a real success, ensuring that thousands of workplace reps could access quality training close to their workplaces without additional costs to unions or employers outside of the costs of paid release. During the period 2001–15 when fee remission was applied,

over 677,000 union reps completed TUC courses, an outstanding contribution to UK employment relations and to building stronger unions.

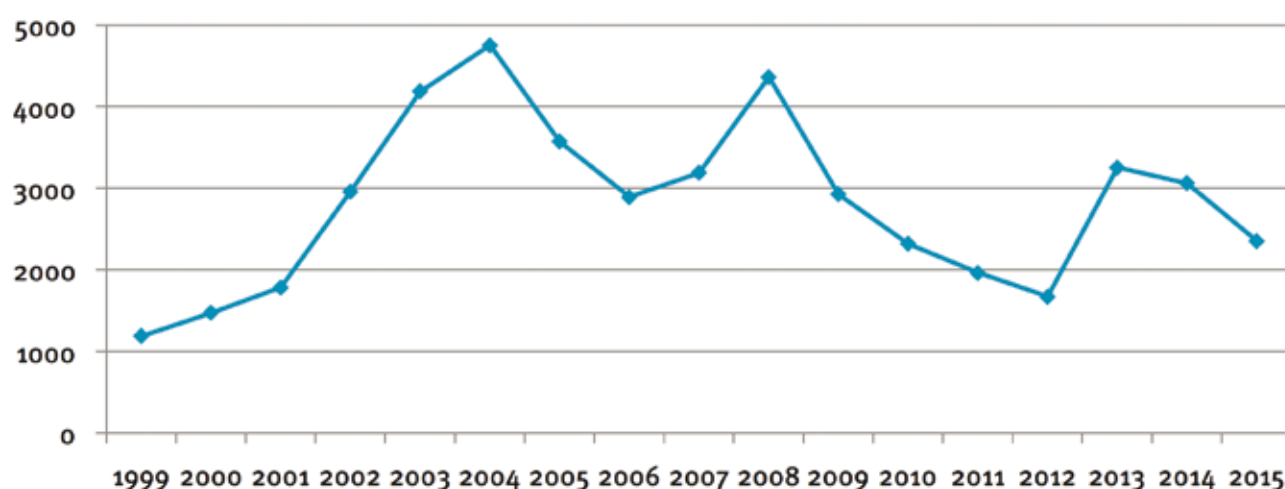
Despite the success of the programme, the Coalition government took the decision to remove fee remission arrangements in 2016, leaving the provision without support. The funding crisis in FE compounds these difficulties, with six years of cumulative cuts that saw the adult skills budget fall by 40 per cent. Area reviews and college mergers further compound uncertainties in the sector and continued pressure on paid release and union activities make for major challenges to maintaining and delivering a core education service to affiliates.

The TUC General Council was charged with developing alternative models and a new TUC Education strategy is being implemented. Maintaining a network of TUC Education centres across the UK will remain a priority but in light of the precarious funding environment, it is also critical that alternative modes of delivery, including online and blended approaches be maximised in order to reach out to the next cohort of union reps.

TUC Education online

Key to implementing the TUC Education strategy during 2016/17 is the unionlearn Transforming Open Online Learn project, funded with the support of the UFI Charitable Trust, which is developing innovative approaches to learning delivery. The key objective is to provide representatives with an accessible and flexible online learning programme that supports them in performing their role effectively. The design and development of an open, online, web-hosted version of core training programmes for union representatives will be available for wholly online self-paced study, for tutor-led blended courses and to enhance the delivery of traditional classroom programmes. Maximising the online offer in this way will mean that TUC Education can deliver to potentially tens of thousands of union representatives who will be able to access courses via computers, tablets or mobile phones, getting to workforces we don't currently reach and to the next generation of union reps.

ULRs accessing training through TUC Education



The Union Reps Stage 1 course is piloting in autumn 2016 and will be supported through a national campaign to drive up usage of the new materials. TUC Education staff will be trained in developing the courses to ensure sustainability of the offer and support for FE tutors is included within the project and will result in their greater use of elearning. Courses will be accessed through the enhanced TUC Education learner management system website and virtual learning environment. The website also hosts eNotes, web-based updates on issues such as supporting learners, bargaining for skills, mentoring, pregnancy and maternity discrimination, migration, supporting apprentices, domestic violence and Universal Credit www.tuceducation.org.uk.

The eNote *Union Learning Reps – an introduction*, introduces the role of the union learning representative (ULR) and details how union members' lives have been changed through learning. The eNote:

- explains the role and key tasks of the ULR
- identifies the benefits of union learning
- details the key role of the ULRs in promoting them to members, unions, other ULRs and employers.

Union learning rep training

The numbers of ULRs trained over the past few years reflect the continuing difficulties particular to the ULR role, which have been exacerbated by the economic

and employment relations climate and the need for unions to prioritise pressing industrial problems at the expense of this agenda. Release for training is difficult to obtain, despite the underpinning rights, and courses fail to recruit.

The unionlearn board decided in 2013 to take the learning agenda to the heart of union and employer workplace activity by mainstreaming it within the Stage 1 Union Representatives' Course (the shop stewards programme) to avoid marginalisation of this work during times very different to those in which the role was conceived and developed. In 2015 this meant that an additional 1,402 ULRs were trained in addition to 624 ULRs trained on the five-day dedicated programme, (making a total of 2,026 new ULRs trained) and 326 progressed to the Stage 2 programme making a total of 2,352 ULRs accessing training in 2015 through TUC Education.

With the approaching Apprenticeship levy and the ambitious targets set for Apprenticeship numbers, TUC Education will be crucial in delivering the union contribution to this important agenda. An eNote for all apprentices based on the Apprenticeship toolkit is in development.

English and maths is a core activity for unionlearn. TUC Education core course materials are being reviewed to demonstrate how Level 1 and 2 English and maths functional skills standards are mapped against them.

A *Working with Figures* eNote is in development to support maths learners, along with an eNote in partnership with Citizen Maths.

Cancer in the workplace

TUC Education continues to work in partnership with Macmillan to produce resources and guides for trade union reps. The latest guide for reps is the *Cancer in the Workplace*. An eNote has also been developed in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. It is 22 minutes long, has an extensive resource section and covers:

- what cancer is
- what the law says
- the role of the rep
- next steps.

Getting on at work

These work-based qualifications are for adults who wish to progress in the workplace or are seeking new employment. The Getting On at Work qualifications can support the needs of a range of learners including:

- workers accessing union learning
- workers who want to develop skills for progressing at work
- workers facing change at work, including redeployment
- learners looking to enter or re-enter employment.

Getting on at Work is able to support learners who are progressing towards a range of qualifications. The programme has two levels of qualification, Entry Level and Level 1. There are a number of pathways with credits attached that are suitable for learners' needs.

There are four mandatory units totalling six credits:

- approaches to learning
- managing study
- getting the most out of training
- planning for progression.

These are followed by seven credits from units in one of the following pathways:

- adapting to change
- equality and diversity
- financial capability at work
- working with others
- writing at work
- progressing at work.

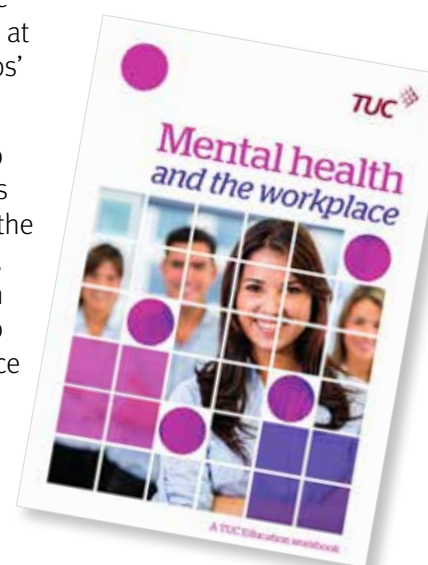
To date Ofqual has recorded a total of 10,805 learners achieving a qualification in Getting on at Work: 3,745 at Entry Level and 7,060 at Level 1. Current funding for providers for the two qualifications is through the adult skills budget. Materials for the qualifications are available from www.unionlearn.org.uk.

New developments

With the impact of austerity contributing to ever-increasing levels of workplace stress, there has been an increase in the prevalence of mental ill health. In response, unions have often taken the lead both in securing the best outcomes for individual members with mental health issues, and in working with employers to develop 'mentally healthy' workplaces. TUC Education has developed a new workbook to take forward issues and to integrate the union role in mental health at the workplace firmly within reps' training.

It has a mixed format – easy to read information, a mix of facts and workers stories based on the experience of union members, and activities for groups. It can be used either as a resource to stimulate discussion or a source of information on issues you are not sure of.

Order it or download a copy now from TUC publications www.tuc.org.uk/publications.



Strategy

Policy and research

Unionlearn's research programme over the past year has been dominated by a major evaluation of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) and unionlearn's role in supporting ULF-funded projects.

Following a tendering exercise the research commission was awarded to the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC), University of Leeds, and the Marchmont Observatory, University of Exeter in July 2015. The evaluation has focused on Rounds 15 and 16 of the ULF and the main objectives have been: to assess the impact of union learning activity through extensive surveying of learners and employers; to explore the challenges and barriers that ULF projects and unionlearn face when trying to achieve their objectives; and, to use the analysis and findings to draw up recommendations to help ULF projects and unionlearn maximise their impact and value for money in the future.

The academic team undertaking the evaluation has reported regularly to a Steering Group comprising a number of ULF Project Managers, unionlearn staff leading on the evaluation, and a representative from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The final report will be published this summer and will be available on the unionlearn website at www.unionlearn.org.uk/independent-evaluations-union-learning-fund-and-unionlearn.

Some of the key findings highlighted by the evaluation include very positive indications that union learning is highly valued by individuals, stimulates a demand for further learning, and helps individuals to get on at work. For example, the analysis shows that those that had undertaken multiple episodes of learning through ULF provision were more likely to have received a pay rise or promotion as a result of their engagement in union learning. Union learning also provides a direct boost to union membership – the researchers found that that over four in ten (43 per cent) of non-union members that undertook union learning through ULF subsequently joined a union.

The findings also shows that employers benefit greatly from union-led learning and training in a number

of different ways. A majority of employers reported that, as a result of the ULF, there were observable increases in the take-up of learning and training, the number of employees attaining qualifications, and equality of access to learning. In addition, employers reported other positive outcomes of union learning for their organisations at large, including around a third linking it with improved organisational performance, more than four in ten citing a positive impact on employment relations in the workplace and nearly a half saying it improved employee commitment.

The evaluation also includes a calculation of the “added value” of ULF provision by estimating the long-term financial benefits for employees through the achievement of higher wages and better employment prospects and the economic returns for employers through improved productivity. The analysis estimates that once other costs are taken into account (e.g. the cost of delivering learning and training), every £1 invested in the Union Learning Fund generates a total economic return of £10.60 of which £6.70 accrues to individuals and £3.90 to employers.

There are also benefits for the public purse with a boost to tax and NI payments from boosted earnings and the researchers estimate that the return for the Exchequer is £3.14 for each £1 spent on the ULF.

Over the past 12 months unionlearn has submitted a number of responses to consultations and calls for evidence by government departments, parliamentary select committees and other agencies. These consultations have largely focused on the ongoing policy reforms affecting Apprenticeships and English and maths. The strategy team produces a quarterly *Learning and Skills Policy Update* newsletter to keep unions and other stakeholders abreast of policy developments in learning and skills and also produces other policy briefings for the unionlearn website.

Apprenticeships and other youth programmes

Unionlearn continues to support union engagement in Apprenticeships, Traineeships and other youth skills initiatives, including where access to an

Apprenticeship is either not readily available or not appropriate to the individual's immediate circumstances.

Pre-Apprenticeship programmes

A number of ULF projects have successfully negotiated high quality Traineeships. A union-tailored Traineeship model comprises short duration work experience placements, where the trainee is supernumerary and rotated between work placements. Financial support is negotiated for the trainee which helps them to participate and complete their Traineeship and to progress into employment. The completion and progression rates for trainees participating in union-negotiated Traineeships far exceeds the national average.

Unions also negotiate pre-employment training which does not draw down Traineeship funding, but in essence serves the same purpose as a Traineeship, as it combines college-based provision and work experience to help young people get into work. Community, the union, has developed pre-employment/employability training for young people which has seen at least 45 young people undertake training, with a substantial number moving into employment.

The Director of unionlearn is also a board member of Movement to Work, which works with large employers to offer a bespoke, high quality work experience programme for young unemployed people.

This high profile work helps to highlight trade union support for high quality work experience programmes.

Apprenticeships

Over the last year 7,292 Apprenticeships were supported by ULF funded projects, well up

on the 6,561 reported in the previous year. This work has ranged across a number of employers and ULF projects continue to do well in this area, adding value to Apprenticeship programmes already in progress through strong union support for apprentices in the workplace and also negotiating with employers for the recruitment of more high-quality Apprenticeships.

Over the past year unionlearn has delivered a number of significant outcomes on Apprenticeships and Traineeships:

- We promoted TUC Charters on Apprenticeships and Traineeships. These charters contain best practice principles and help unions who are negotiating good quality training for young people. Both providers and employers have used the charters to ensure that their schemes are in line with best practice.
- We hosted the annual Voice of Apprentices event during national Apprenticeship week. Unionlearn's unique event offers apprentices the opportunity to give their thoughts on the Apprenticeship system. It is a useful way of determining unionlearn's future priorities and helps in campaigning for improvements to raise the quality of Apprenticeships.
- We responded to a number of major government consultations including: the BIS consultation on the Apprenticeship levy; the BIS consultation on preventing the misuse of the term Apprenticeship; and, the BIS consultation on the public sector Apprenticeship targets. Unionlearn also submitted evidence to the inquiry into Apprenticeships undertaken by the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy.
- We coordinated the hosting of a joint exhibition stand with several affiliated unions at the annual Skills Show and Big Bang events in order to promote Apprenticeships as a high quality option for young people considering their career options.
- We participated in the BIS Apprenticeships Advisory Group which is focusing on improving equality and diversity and putting forward a number of practical



proposals to take this agenda forward. Unionlearn is also a member of the BIS Apprenticeship Stakeholder Board which is the main consultative mechanism that the government is using to engage with stakeholders about the introduction of the levy and associated reforms.

- We provided numerous briefings to union reps to disseminate information relating to the levy and other Apprenticeship policy developments.
- We updated unionlearn's Apprenticeship Toolkit. This is an invaluable resource for union reps, building on the TUC Apprenticeship Charter to give union reps guidance on how to negotiate with employers to help put in place the key components of a high quality Apprenticeship.
- We developed a *Youth Employment Guide* for union reps to help them negotiate high quality Traineeships. The guide contains examples of union good practice and highlights the key components of a good quality Traineeship.
- We hosted a training day for unionlearn's senior union support staff and ULF project managers focusing on how ULF projects can best promote and negotiate high quality Apprenticeships and Traineeships. Tailored briefing sessions were also provided to unions in different sectors (e.g. health and finance). A large number of briefing and support sessions have also been provided to individual unions to support their strategies to increase the numbers accessing high quality Apprenticeships and Traineeships through ULF projects.
- Unionlearn's annual conference included an Apprenticeship Panel involving a group of apprentices giving their perspectives on the Apprenticeship system and the crucial importance of union support for them as individuals.
- We developed an online learning module to help union reps who wish to support apprentices in the workplace via mentoring or coaching programmes. The online learning module highlights the key elements of mentoring and coaching and signposts union reps to further information.

English and maths

Providing support for employees to improve their literacy and numeracy skills continues to be one of unionlearn's key priorities. Trade unions have a strong track record in supporting English and maths learners in the workplace. This is evidenced by the latest ULF data showing that over 23,000 individuals took up an opportunity to improve their English and maths skills with the help of their union (up from 17,000 in the previous year). ULF projects also exceeded their delivery targets for English and maths learners by 10 per cent. It is also significant that whilst Skills Funding Agency data show the number of adults participating on English and maths courses declining since 2012, ULF projects have managed to maintain this provision at a high level during this period.

Unionlearn has been supporting unions in a number of ways regarding English and maths learners, including by developing a new online resource guide at www.unionlearn.org.uk/english-and-maths-learning-resources-and-tools. The purpose of this new resource guide for unions was to utilise focus groups, interviews and surveys in order to build a website platform where unions can share their experience on what they have found useful in delivering literacy and numeracy learning support. Case studies developed alongside the resource guide have further highlighted innovative approaches by individual unions.

Over the past year the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) has been commissioned by the government to review functional skills courses and qualifications, including recommendations on making their content more relevant and raising their profile. Unionlearn has played a key role in this review, including participating in a number of research interviews and responding to consultations. A key theme of unionlearn's response to the ETF review has been to emphasise the need for contextualised maths and English learning with flexible delivery and assessment that benefits individuals accessing this provision in the workplace.

Last year the OECD published a report, *Building Skills for All: a review of England*, that drew attention to the

very large number of adults – approximately nine million – with low attainment levels in literacy and numeracy. The OECD report also pointed out that five million of these adults are currently in employment, which reinforces the importance of the work by unions to engage adults in improving their English and maths skills. Another OECD report from last year, *Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy Skills: a literature review on policy intervention*, did make reference to the important role played by unions and unionlearn in supporting English and maths learners.

Unionlearn has also provided updated guidance to unions over the past year about the latest requirements for apprentices as regards attainment in English and maths or functional skills. For example, a specific section on English and maths was incorporated into the newly revised Apprenticeship toolkit to help union reps to consider how best to support apprentices in this specific area.

Unionlearn has also collaborated with a number of partners in relation to initiatives designed to support English and maths learners. For instance, a set of maths activities was produced and disseminated to help union learning reps stimulate learning opportunities during Learning at Work Week. Support was also provided for unions engaging in the Learning and Work Institute's Citizens Curriculum pilot which produced maths materials in the context of health, wellbeing and nutrition. Unionlearn has also continued to disseminate information about the latest research and policy developments around English and maths provision through a range of media such as the regular policy update newsletters and briefings and blogs on the unionlearn website.

Supporting the technician workforce

Unionlearn initiated the first phase of Technician Pathways project in October 2012 and the second phase began in September 2014. The project has been funded by the Gatsby Foundation since its inception. The main focus of the unionlearn project has been to increase opportunities for technicians to achieve professional registration and to access other

support services that will help to enhance their career development and raise their status. The second phase of the project aimed for more targeted work with unions, including identifying how registration could be incorporated into the wider work that unions do in promoting learning and skills by supporting improved access to high-quality continuing professional development (CPD).

Over the last year unionlearn has worked closely with a number of key unions on the Technician Pathways projects, including RMT, Unite, UNISON, TSSA, CWU and Prospect. There has also been a range of collaborative work with the Science Council and EngTechNow, two of the leading organisations supporting the professional registration of the technician workforce. Unionlearn signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Science Council and also agreed a Technician Charter with the EngTechNow campaign.

The project has also continued to disseminate updated guidance for union reps about technician registration and CPD. For example, the *Technician Registration Toolkit* produced by the project was topped up with a number of subject specific handouts, such as bargaining with employers and redundancy situations. To make the toolkit more accessible for union reps and officers the content was converted and made available on the union learning Climbing Frame website, as a dedicated Learning Theme. The promotional activity undertaken has also included blog pieces, website material and a bi-monthly email update to stakeholders.

UKCES and other skills bodies

Unionlearn has continued to support union engagement in a wide range of skills bodies including those with a national remit and others with a remit at a sector/industrial level or at a local/regional level. In recent years the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) has been the leading national body with a remit for skills and during this time there have been four trade union commissioners: Frances O'Grady, General Secretary of the TUC; Grahame Smith, General

Secretary of the STUC; Gail Cartmail, Assistant General Secretary of Unite; and Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON. Over the past year unionlearn has continued to coordinate regular briefings for the trade union Commissioners and also worked closely with the UKCES on a range of learning and skills initiatives.

At the end of last year the government announced that it would be withdrawing funding for the UKCES and it has since been confirmed that the bulk of its operational activities will cease by August 2016. A focus of UKCES's work programme over the past year has been development of a Productivity Leadership Group (PLG) to develop a business-led approach to promote innovative practices to improve workplace productivity. This initiative was highlighted by the government in the Productivity Plan that it published last summer. Since last autumn the work of the PLG has focused around seven working groups which have been looking at innovative means of addressing different aspects of the productivity challenge. Unionlearn has been a member of the working group looking at the means of harnessing best practice in employee engagement and best working practice, especially with regard to learning and skills. It is anticipated that the overall findings and recommendations of the PLG will report in summer 2016.

Government funding for the main sector skills bodies – Sector Skills Councils and Industrial Partnerships – has been in decline for a number of years and this has led to a large degree of rationalisation, including a number of mergers and closures. However, many of these bodies have continued to play a significant role through alternative funding arrangements and retained union representation in their governance arrangements. Unionlearn continues to support a network of union representatives, including board members and trustees, on these sector bodies. Two meetings of this network were convened over the past year and the priority discussion areas were the introduction of the Apprenticeship levy and ongoing rationalisation of sector bodies.

Unionlearn also supports joint union meetings for the health sector and the finance sector to support the work of ULF projects and to give union officials an opportunity to discuss collaborative approaches to union learning in these sectors. These network meetings also support union engagement with key skills bodies and in the health sector this has facilitated union engagement with Skills for Health, the National Skills Academy for Health and Health Education England.

Unionlearn and the TUC are also supporting union engagement in sector skills through other avenues, including major infrastructure initiatives being taken forward by the government. One key initiative is the Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce that has been established to support the government's ambition to create 30,000 Apprenticeships in the transport sector by 2020 and to increase the diversity of the workforce. Kevin Rowan, Head of Organisation and Services at the TUC, has been appointed to this new body and unionlearn is supporting his role on the taskforce and also facilitating the engagement of all affiliated trade unions in the transport sector.

Service

The Service Team include core unionlearn support work such as financial management, collecting information on learning activity, supporting learners and communications including the unionlearn website. This section outlines the main work of the team.

Supporting Learners

The term 'supporting learners' is used by unionlearn to describe the activities of union learning representatives (ULRs) and union reps. It is used when they are working with members to help them make choices about learning, to take up learning opportunities that are right for them and help them to progress in their jobs and careers. Whilst these activities involve some elements of information and advice they also include mentoring, coaching and signposting.

Unionlearn has been working to a three-year Strategy for Supporting Learners which includes information on the background to that area of work, a description of the unionlearn Supporting Learners Model and key achievements to date. The strategy outlines the main Supporting Learners themes and priorities for unionlearn up to March 2017. The work of union learning representatives is vital to the success of this strategy. The ULRs are ideally placed to play a key role in supporting learners because they speak the same language as their members and have their trust. This in turn results in learners feeling fully supported in accessing the right courses for them or thinking about their career.

ULF project figures for the period from April 2015 to March 2016 for learner support referrals was 136,773 well above the profiled 78,475, highlighting the huge amount of support provided by union reps.

Unionlearn produce a bi-monthly e-newsletter *Supporting Learners News*, designed to keep ULRs and reps up to date with news, developments and resources that will help support learners in the workplace. This popular publication is distributed widely and is a great opportunity to ensure reps are informed about up-coming campaigns, events, learning activity ideas and resources.

Unionlearn with TUC Education has developed a number of eNotes (electronic briefings for reps) to help keep reps up to date on key workplace issues. Each eNote is a self-contained module that includes a mixture of text, video and quizzes. The suite of Supporting Learners eNotes includes: Supporting Learners, Supporting Mid-Life Development, the Union Learning Climbing Frame, Apprenticeships and Supporting Learners into Higher Learning. In 2015 a new eNote, Introduction to the ULR Role, was introduced and in 2016 an eNote for apprentices was introduced, called Mentoring.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/supportinglearners

The union learning Climbing Frame

The union learning Climbing Frame is the website developed for union learning reps to help support learners and promote learning in the workplace.

The website was launched in 2010 and there are now over 6,800 registered users. Unionlearn has developed 20 Learning Themes with information on topics including Personal Development and Career Planning, Supporting Mid-Life Development, ICT and Functional Skills. 2016 saw the introduction of a Youth Employment Learning Theme. The Learning Themes provide up-to-date information, downloadable resources and links to a variety of internal and external websites.

ULRs are also able to record information from the sessions that they have with learners, helping them to set goals and actions and record achievements. The Climbing Frame website also includes a discussions forum, links to videos, a ULR events section and case studies. ULRs are able to store their own notes, upload documents and record their own learning activities and progression. There is also a free Climbing Frame app making the information accessible to reps wherever they are.

Each year unionlearn carry out a Climbing Frame Survey to obtain feedback from users. Results are recorded and updates and improvements are made to the website, to help make the website even more useful for reps.

<https://climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk>

Supporting Mid-Life Development

Supporting Mid-Life Development has continued to prove a popular agenda. As unions support working people at all stages of their lives it is not surprising that the resources and events delivered as part of this agenda have proved popular with people of all ages. The flexibility of the union mid-life development offer has made a valuable contribution to helping people plan for their future life and career.

During 2015/16 unionlearn played a pivotal role in supporting mid-life development work by engaging 24 unions and more than 2,500 workers in mid-life review activities. The reviews generated significant interest in planning for retirement, pensions, qualifications, employability skills, health and well-being and much more. There continues to be a large appetite from workers for this type of workplace intervention.

A number of high-quality resources have been developed to help support reps with their supporting mid-life development activities. These include the *Supporting Mid-Life Development* learning theme and resource section on the Climbing Frame website, the TUC Education *Supporting Mid-Life Development* online eNote and the Value My Skills card game that helps users identify their transferable skills. The new *Valuing the Skills of Older Workers: how to do a mid-life development review* booklet was published in March. This resource provides reps with some practical activities and materials to use in their workplace to increase learner engagement and awareness of mid-life issues.

Four new mini-guides were published to help reps signpost workers to sources of useful information and advice for: financial planning and pensions; health and well-being; mental health; and helping carers. These signposting mini-guides are designed to support reps to carry out their information and advice role in the workplace.

The new Getting Active publication was launched in 2016. The activities found in this resources pack have been tried and tested at unionlearn events and in a range of informal settings. The publication is full of activities that ULRs and other reps can run in the

workplace and community to help engage learners and promote the union learning agenda.

There has been strong demand for mid-life review dissemination events highlighting the need for this kind of work. ULRs are uniquely placed to provide workplace support for older workers in a way that other organisations are unable to replicate.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/supporting-midlife-development

Higher learning

Unionlearn has a strategy for developing pathways to higher learning (higher education, whether at university or elsewhere and whether or not leading to a degree) for union learners, and has strategic agreements to take this forward. Some of these agreements include offers for union members. Birkbeck University offers a discount to union members on courses which continues to prove popular and 2016 saw the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Wolverhampton and the opportunity for union members to receive a 10 per cent fee discount.

For the period April 2015 to March 2016, ULF projects reported that the total number of higher education (HE) learners via the union route was 1,033, which is below the 1,287 profiled. This fall in part-time HE learners is in line with the overall trend in the HE sector which has seen an overall downturn in students enrolling for part-time undergraduate courses.

Unionlearn is a partner in The Open University's National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) Project, which aims to extend outreach to adult learners through the production of free online information, advice and guidance and learning materials. Unionlearn has had involvement in a new Open University website PEARL, which stands for Part time Education for Adults Returning to Learn and which will be launched summer 2016. The website will include information about study options, details about levels and types of study, advice and support, case studies and lots more. Unionlearn has also been involved in the development of a new Badged

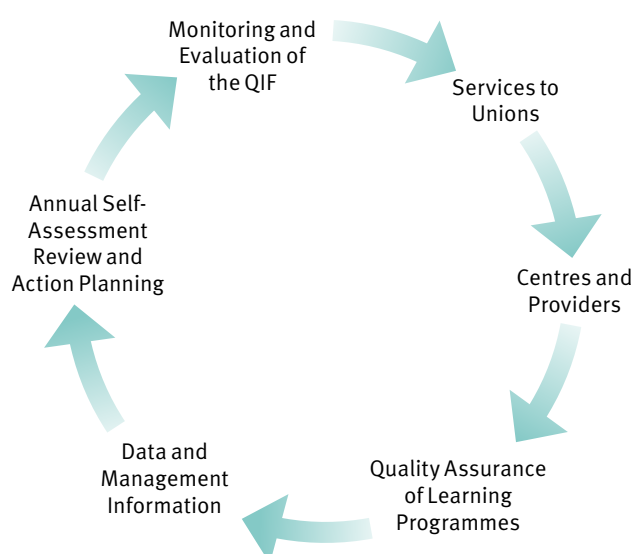
Open Course (BOC) entitled 'Planning a better future' which is an informal introductory course for anyone considering changing jobs, wondering how to move up the ladder or return to work after a break, and those who might be looking to aspire to better things.

The unionlearn website has a specific section entitled Higher Learning at Work, which is useful for members, representatives and working adults interested in progression to higher learning, including Apprenticeships. It includes information about types of qualifications available, providers and workplace support. It also contains a number of case studies and links to other useful websites and resources.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/higher-learning-work

Quality improvement

The unionlearn Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) has been in place for over five years as a tool to meet strategic priorities to support unions and learners in all aspects of learning, maintain and drive up our professional standards, and provide for reflection on work practice through self-assessment leading to continuous quality improvement. The framework has six stages:



Within these stages there are mechanisms and processes in place that evidence quality assurance and quality delivery. Unionlearn has embedded the following processes:

- streamlined financial and performance reporting
- a monthly ULF project reporting schedule
- annual ULF project self-assessment
- a cohesive, independent auditing schedule of both ULF projects and internal business processes and management
- quarterly organisation and team operational plan reviews
- a user-friendly and active risk register
- an internal communications strategy.

Unionlearn continues to hold an annual self-assessment review (SAR) to which all staff contribute. The SAR results have shown a steady improvement, despite considerable restructuring and continuing reductions in funding. The key identified areas for improvement in 2016 are:

- cross team working – further developing closer links and integration across all teams
- learner tracking – continue to build the evidence base on unionlearn's impact and added value, as well as learner progression and completions
- staff support and development – more support and training to meet changing needs and to develop and enhance the services offered to unions
- a systematic review of plans – ensure operational and team plans are reviewed on a regular and systematic basis.

As part of unionlearn's commitment to continuous improvement, the framework has been reviewed during 2015, and will be in 2016 to ensure it remains current and effective.

Quality Awards

The unionlearn Quality Award is available to learning providers, careers information and advice support

services and Apprenticeship programmes; the focus of the latter has evolved towards employers for their Apprenticeship programmes. The Award is made based on our good practice criteria and helps signpost union learning reps (ULRs) and learners to providers that are working successfully and flexibly with unions. The Award celebrates the commitment and diligence of ULRs across the country who promote training and learning in the workplace on behalf of union members. Just under 100 Awards have been made in England, Wales and Scotland.

The Award criteria and assessment process were reviewed during 2015 to make the assessment process and evidence provision more user-friendly and to ensure the criteria are geared towards current workplace learning agendas. In 2016/17 our priority will be to target a select number of employer Apprenticeship programmes to showcase best practice.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/quality-award.

Communications

Spreading the word about the benefits of union and workplace learning and giving positive examples of union work on learning and skills is a core task for unionlearn. Unionlearn staff are always keeping an eye out for good stories that demonstrate trade union success in the workplace and highlight the work that unions and Union Learning Reps do on behalf of members to support learning. These stories are shared and disseminated to our key audiences via the unionlearn website, social media and other channels.

The communication strategy developed for 2015–16 has been key in identifying the messages and channels that would help engage with learners, unions, employers and enablers, encourage two-way dialogue and understanding, increase profile, and build continued support for the union learning agenda.

From April 2015 three unionlearn learning and campaign support officers covered the regions and supported unions to produce a wide range of case studies, news stories and guest blogs. These

highlighted the range of support that unions had been giving members in workplaces and focused on a number of the year's priority campaigns such as English, maths and Apprenticeships, whilst also giving a platform to examples of learning around health and well-being, community engagement, digital inclusion and more.

The unionlearn website www.unionlearn.org.uk is our most accessible public face and is at the centre of our communication strategy. The website is an important channel for introducing people to unionlearn's work, persuading them to get involved, promoting specific activities and publicising the value and impact of unionlearn's work.

The website is the first place to go for news, case studies, blogs and resources and this year has seen a huge rise in the amount of content being regularly posted up. The constant flow of new material keeps the site fresh and interesting and has resulted in registrations continuing to rise.

The increase in accessibility to the internet through smart phones, tablets, computers, and other mobile devices has made engaging with social media even more invaluable for promoting and improving unionlearn's work and events. Unionlearn's social media presence continues to grow, with the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/tucunionlearn), Twitter account @unionlearn and page on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/company/tuc-unionlearn) all gaining an increase in followers over the year.

With social media and case studies becoming such an important platform for getting the message across about the benefits of union learning this year the unionlearn team ran a series of workshops. These were held at national and regional unionlearn conferences and at trade union events for union learning reps and learning organisers. These workshops proved popular, and a very useful source of information, and will be running again this year upon request.

The Learning Rep magazine is continuing to be popular with our thousands of subscribers and is continuing

to be produced as an e-magazine. Due to the positive feedback from union reps, learners and other stakeholders, we are now publishing the magazine four times a year. Producing the magazine in an online format allows us to use more of the latest technology (e.g. embedded links) to improve communication with ULRs. The e-magazine consists of inspirational stories, features on specific unions and Union Learning Fund projects, events, partner information for ULRs and discussion on adult skills.

Through our email alerts service, we create and send email alerts that highlight and promote the work that unionlearn and our partners are conducting. This service has over 7,000 registered subscribers. Users register through the unionlearn website, selecting individual subject areas of interest. Improvements have been made to unionlearn's online mailing services, such as the launch of a weekly news digest, in order that users continue to receive high quality information and advice on union-led learning initiatives.

The unionlearn annual conference took place on 6 July with over 400 delegates registered. The theme of the 2015 conference was 'The Union Skills Advantage', focusing on the positive impact and value of union-led learning and also how

young people can have access to high quality Apprenticeships to give them fair pay and enable them to progress to sustainable employment.

Speakers included:

- Frances O'Grady, TUC General Secretary
- Peter Horrocks, Vice Chancellor of The Open University
- Rhona Cameron, Comedian
- Fanny Blake, Quick Reads Author
- Neil Darwin, Chief Executive of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP

Finance

Total funding to unionlearn in 2015–16 was £15,310,000.

This funding is comprised of £1,000,000 from the TUC; £14,000,000 from the Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS); and £310,000 from other sources, including the Gatsby Foundation, the Cornwall Learning Partnership and the European Commission.

Funding from BIS is the largest component and is detailed below:

Budget heading 2015/16	Budget £	Actual Outturn £
ULF – Grants to unions	11,163,000	11,111,463
Delivery and support of the National ULF Programme	1,648,157	1,619,909
Service, quality and standards	675,766	695,682
Strategy and research	285,698	293,279
Trade Union Education	227,379	227,986
TOTAL 2015/16	14,000,000	13,948,319

Appendix 1 Publications

The Learning Rep magazine (various issues)
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications

Supporting Learners News (various issues)
www.unionlearn.org.uk/supporting-learners-news

Learning and Skills Policy Update newsletter (various issues)
www.unionlearn.org.uk/policy-briefings

Union Learning Fund Prospectus Round 17 (2016/2017)
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/union-learning-fund-prospectus-round-17-20162017

Mental Health in the Workplace: a TUC Education workbook
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/mental-health-and-workplace

Apprenticeships Toolkit
www.unionlearn.org.uk/Apprenticeships

Youth Employment Guide for union representatives
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/youth-employment-guide-union-representatives

Making the Case for Learning: a guide for union reps
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/making-case-learning-guide-union-reps

Developing Workplace Learning: a toolkit for trade unions
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/developing-workplace-learning-toolkit-trade-unions

Supporting Learners at Mid-Life: a signposting guide to mental health
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/supporting-learners-midlife-mini-guides

Supporting Learners at Mid-Life: a signposting guide to health and well-being
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/supporting-learners-midlife-mini-guides

Supporting Learners at Mid-Life: a signposting guide to helping carers
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/supporting-learners-midlife-mini-guides

Supporting Learners at Mid-Life: a signposting guide to financial planning and pensions
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/supporting-learners-midlife-mini-guides

Getting Active: a resource pack for union reps to support mid-life development
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/getting-active-resource-pack-union-reps-support-midlife-development

Valuing the Skills of Older Workers: How to do a mid-life development review
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/valuing-skills-older-workers-how-do-midlife-development-review

English and maths learning – resources and tools (a new online resource guide)
www.unionlearn.org.uk/english-and-maths-learning-resources-and-tools

Employers supporting the technician workforce and working with unions
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/employers-supporting-technician-workforce-and-working-unions

Technician registration and unions
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/technician-registration-and-unions-flyer

Technician registration action planning for union reps
www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/Technician%20registration%20action%20planning%20for%20union%20reps%20flyer%20April2016.pdf

Supporting technicians in redundancy and restructuring
www.unionlearn.org.uk/sites/default/files/Supporting%20technicians%20in%20redundancy%20situations%20final.pdf

Union Learning Survey

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/union-learning-survey

Skills and Training: The Union Advantage – unionlearn Research Paper 21

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/skills-and-training-union-advantage

Survey of ULRs and union reps supporting learning and skills, 2014

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/survey-ulrs-and-union-reps-supporting-learning-and-skills-2014

Changing Lives Through Learning unionlearn annual report 2015

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/changing-lives-through-learning-unionlearn-annual-report-2015

Various submissions to government consultations on learning and skills

www.tuc.org.uk/industrial-issues/skills-policy

Appendix 2 Contacts

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Appendix 3 Glossary

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CPD	Continuing professional development
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Fund (previously the ESF)
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
FE	Further education (typically in local colleges)
HE	Higher education (typically in university)
IACL	Informal Adult and Community Learning
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICT	Information and communication technology
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
Level 1	Also known as ‘foundation level’ or ‘basic skills’; equal to standard of a primary school leaver; subdivided into Entry Level 1, 2 or 3
Level 2	Broadly equivalent to grades A–C at GCSE, i.e. expected achievement at age 16
Level 3	Broadly equivalent to A Level, i.e. expected achievement at age 18
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QIF	Quality Improvement Framework
SAR	Self-Assessment Review
SERTUC	Southern and Eastern Region of the TUC
UKCES	United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills
ULF	Union Learning Fund
ULR	Union learning representative

This title may also be made available, on request, in accessible electronic formats or in Braille, audiotape and large print, at no extra cost.

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