



Opening up learning
opportunities

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Foreword

Union learning continues to go from strength to strength and this is a boost to the prospects of individual union members and the collective strength of all our trade unions.

This is the key message that one can draw from unionlearn's latest annual report. The numbers are impressive – over the past year unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund (ULF) supported unions to help 141,000 people access some form of learning or training facilitated through ULF projects. When you add in the number of learners and reps accessing learning and training direct from unionlearn and TUC Education, the total number benefitting from union learning was 188,000 in 2017-18.

There were significantly greater demands placed on ULF projects in the last year as a result of the introduction of a new payment by results regime and the mandatory tracking of learners. It is therefore of great credit to unionlearn and the unions concerned that ULF projects still performed above expectations by delivering 11,000 more learning outcomes than the target profile. However, in isolation these statistics fail to highlight the true impact of union learning, in particular its power to literally change the lives of thousands of working people. Unionlearn regularly commissions surveys of ULF learners to identify these impacts and the latest one of these was conducted by the University of Exeter earlier this year, drawing on responses from 2,500 learners.

One of the key findings from the survey is that two thirds of respondents said they would not have taken part in the learning or training without the support of their union. Using an economic model, the researchers also conclude that ULF learning and training delivered an estimated net contribution to the economy of £3.3 billion over a 2-year period as a result of a boost to jobs, wages and productivity. There is also a boost to union membership – 1 in 2 of non-union members engaging in union learning go on to join a union. Calling it a win-win scenario hardly does it justice!

Trade union education continues to be of high importance to trade unions and their reps and this is

especially so in a climate where access to paid release continues to be under great pressure in both the public and private sectors. A range of innovative approaches have been utilised over the past year to boost participation through online and blended provision and new developments in digital learning are at the heart of this strategy.

I am especially encouraged by the turnaround in the number of union learning reps (ULRs) being trained through this new approach and the fact that over 40,000 ULRs have now been trained since 1999. These reps remain the cornerstone of the unique power of union learning in reaching out to, engaging, and motivating people on a learning journey that can transform their lives. Unionlearn has developed a comprehensive Supporting Learners strategy for the coming years and this will do much to extend the reach and capacity of ULRs going forward.

Unions are also reaching out to younger people in the labour market and this is reflected in the increasing number of initiatives aimed at supporting apprenticeships and other training routes leading to sustainable employment. While the introduction of the apprenticeship levy has certainly not been a smooth ride, unionlearn has delivered well-received guides and briefings to support unions to negotiate more high quality and accessible apprenticeships under the new funding regime. It has also called for policy reforms to accelerate progress on quality and equality & diversity, including the unionlearn Director giving evidence to the Education Select Committee inquiry on the quality of apprenticeships.

In recent years the TUC has called on government to give greater priority to adult skills and retraining to address a potential skills crunch resulting from Brexit, the impact of automation, and other significant trends. The forthcoming National Retraining Scheme is a welcome initiative and in recent months unionlearn has supported the detailed negotiations that the TUC, CBI and government have been engaged in to develop an operational model.

In the TUC's 150th year there remain huge challenges for unions and workers on a number of fronts, but I

am glad to report that unionlearn continues to thrive and that the union learning agenda is more pertinent than ever. Learning and development will become an increasingly important aspect of union membership going forward and this poses challenges for unions. I am sure that, with the support of unionlearn, they are up to this task.



Mary Bousted
Chair, unionlearn Board

Delivery

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 was transferred from BIS to DfE in 2016. In 2017-18 the Union Learning Fund supported 20 unions to deliver 25 projects at a total cost of £9.7 million.

This year has seen the introduction of two new elements to ULF – the mandatory tracking of learners and a Payment by Results framework (PBR) that encourages the delivery of DfE priorities (English, maths and apprenticeships). This has required extra work by projects to collect and input learner data and also focused projects on achieving DfE priority targets rather than delivering workplace briefings, IACL and ICT training.

Overall ULF projects once again performed ahead of expectations and the total of ULF learners via the union route was 141,019 which is 108.3% of the annual target profile. The recruitment and training of over 1,000 new ULRs (90.8% of profile) and the follow on ULR training of over 7,200 reps (127.6% of profile) is an achievement in the current climate. These targets have been underachieved for several years and although the new ULR numbers are below profile they

represent a consolidation of ULR training. Projects recruited over 5,000 and supported over 13,000 apprenticeships. Over 21,000 learners attended informal adult and community learning (IACL) both in workplace and community locations and over 26,000 learners took part in work related CPD. The IACL learner figure is almost half that achieved in 2016-7 and is the unintended consequence of the PBR focus on priority learning targets as projects have been aware that underachievement of these will result in a funding reduction.

The economic climate has made employer engagement more difficult and learning agreements harder to negotiate. Nonetheless, 96 new agreements were signed. As we have previously reported the changes in funding for adult learning and HE continue to make it difficult to attract learners into these areas and unions have reported difficulties in obtaining learning (especially for smaller groups or at the workplace) as the cost of provision grows and the willingness of providers to subsidise learning diminishes.

All 25 projects have been managed by the ULF team, through direct support and a variety of events and assistance and advice on implementing tracking and achieving the PBR targets. All projects achieved 100% funding through PBR which is a measure of the effective management that has been developed both in the ULF team and projects.

ULF Performance Report 2017-2018: Key headline figures

	Profile	Actual	Variance (%)
New ULRs completing stage 1, via ULF	1,189	1,080	90.8
ULR Follow-up training	5,655	7,215	127.6
English and maths learners, via ULF	26,119	27,733	106.2
Learners on CPD, via ULF	24,620	26,154	106.2
FE learners, via ULF	14,184	14,956	105.4
HE learners, via ULF	1,845	2,292	124.2
Total ULF learners	130,132	141,019	108.3

The team supported unions in understanding the changes to the Round 19 Prospectus – a key one being the inclusion of ICT as a priority learning target. 29 bids were submitted and 23 of these were successful. More information on all the Round 19 projects are available on the unionlearn website: www.unionlearn.org.uk.

The team continues to assist ULF projects and to work with national and regional TUC staff to promote learning opportunities and improve the responsiveness of the learning system to union learners' needs. The team have held regular meetings

with ULF project managers and provided training sessions on audit and equality and diversity. Discussion and lessons on tracking have resulted in an updating of the tracking software developed by unionlearn which will be used in Round 19.

In early 2018 a major survey of learners from ULF Rounds 17 and 18 was conducted by the University of Exeter and the findings paint a very positive picture of the added value of union learning and the benefits accrued by employees and employers. Some of the key findings are as follows:

- two thirds of respondents said they would not have taken part in the learning or training without the support of their union
- 73% reported being more confident in their abilities and 77% were keen to undertake further learning and training
- progression is an intrinsic feature of ULF provision, with two thirds of people taking part in more than one episode of learning and a third engaging four times or more
- 9 out of 10 participants gained at least one new skill, nearly two thirds gained a qualification, and 1 in 4 gained promotion or greater responsibility in their current job
- 36% said they were able to do their job better as a result and 37% were more confident in progressing their career
- ULF learning and training delivered an estimated net contribution to the economy of £3.3 billion over a 2-year period as a result of a boost to jobs, wages and productivity
- on an annual basis, the boost to employers is estimated at £674 million through improved productivity and employees gain £874 million from a long-term boost to wages and job prospects
- participation in ULF boosts union membership - 1 in 2 of non-union members engaging in union learning go on to join a union and 28% of all ULF participants go on to take up a role as a union rep.

TUC Education

TUC Education has an unrivalled reach into Britain's workplaces to provide high quality education and training for workplace reps. Unions representing major public and private sector employers from across the economy send reps for training. Almost all unions take part in the programme, which is recognised for integrity, quality and innovation.

In 2017 there was a further dip in numbers of reps trained to 23,250, down 1,622 (6.5 per cent) on the 2016 figure. Reps making use of our new online learning offer of e-learning courses, eNotes and webinars during 2017 was 5,384, bringing the total for reps accessing training to 28,634. This remains a considerable programme of training, especially as paid release is under great pressure in both the public and private sectors. New developments in the use of digital learning, coupled with a firm commitment to reach out to reps with a flexible offer has meant that real progress is being made.

Our offer for reps

A new strategy for supporting and enabling union reps to access TUC Education is well under way. Several approaches have been developed to increase participation in online and blended provision alongside continuing developments to support ongoing face-to-face training opportunities for union reps. We are seeking to ensure as many reps as practicable are accessing trade union education and securing appropriate paid release to do so.

eNotes are a great resource to help union reps keep up-to-date on key workplace issues. Each eNote is a self-contained e-learning module that includes a mixture of text, video and quizzes. They last between 20 and 45 minutes and can be returned to as many times as you want. There are currently over 30 eNotes on the TUC Education website covering health, safety and wellbeing, equalities, building unions, employment rights at work and union learning. There are around 10,000 reps registered using eNotes.

The use of webinars to reach out to union reps with interactive briefings is popular. To date 5,517 reps have taken part in webinars. Webinars held to date include:

- Wellbeing in the workplace
- What is the apprenticeship Levy?
- Menopause support
- Supporting mid-life and older workers.

New online programmes have been developed for reps for fully online study, as a resource for classroom-based provision, or for blended learning. Union Reps 1, Health and Safety 1 and Union Learning Reps 1 and 2 are all now available. The online programmes developed can be independent of public funding and can accommodate thousands of learners. They can be accessed by reps as soon as they take office and are not dependent on class sizes or college timetables.

Demand for our fully online courses continues to increase and 3,319 reps have taken part in these new courses. Users include a mixture of potential reps, new reps, and reps wanting to refresh their skills. Twenty per cent of reps taking part in the online courses are under 35, compared to a rate of 20 per cent of all union reps in that age bracket; 45 per cent are women, compared to 33 per cent of women union reps taking part in classroom courses.

Exeter University were commissioned to assess the impact of the Ufl funded project online, resources for union reps. The principal objective of the impact study was to assess the effectiveness of the methods and content used to deliver the knowledge and skills necessary for union reps to perform their role. Some key messages from the report:

- Attitudes to online learning are extremely positive with flexibility seen as a key benefit.
- The courses are popular and effective with the vast majority of learners reporting that studying the new courses had improved their ability to carry out their union role, 'somewhat', or to 'a great extent'. And more than half of learners felt that their understanding of the role had improved to 'a great extent'. Those with the lowest levels of prior

ability were more likely than average to report improvements in their knowledge and skills.

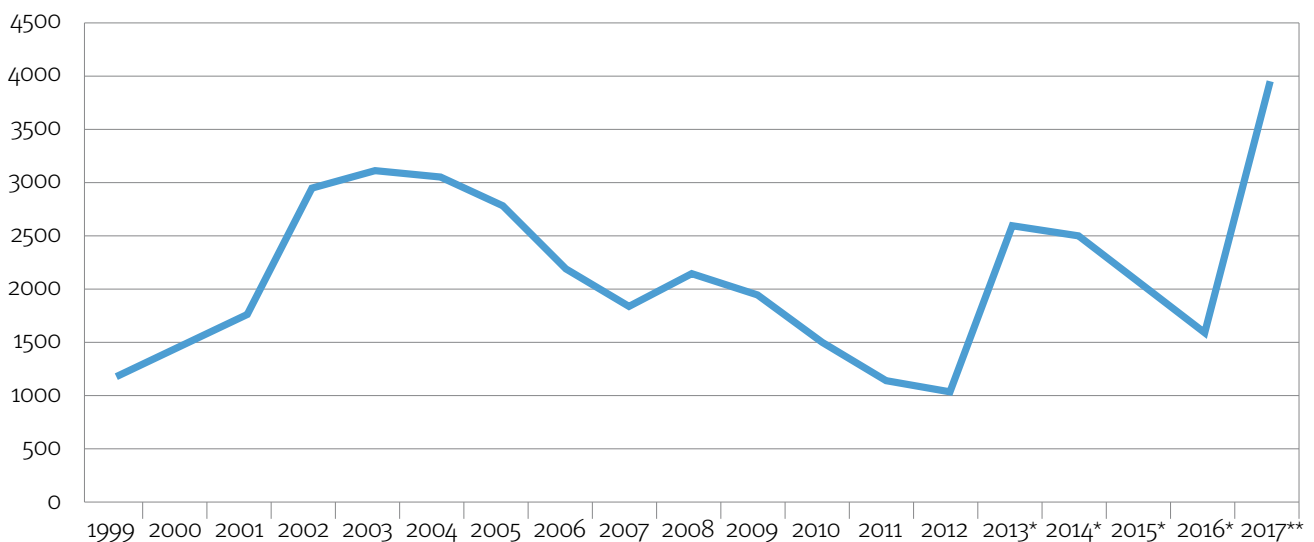
- Almost two-thirds of learners had applied what they had learned in the workplace and stated that the courses had improved their confidence and ability.
- More union support needed for reps taking part in online courses e.g. help with negotiating facility time.
- Need to link to face-to-face events/courses, lack of interaction with peers and tutors was the most frequently mentioned disadvantage.

Union learning rep training

In 2013 the unionlearn board decided to mainstream the learning agenda within the Union reps stage 1 course. This was to help address the continuing difficulties of unions needing to prioritise pressing industrial problems; release for training, despite the underpinning rights; and courses failing to recruit.

In 2017 the total number of new ULRs trained was 3,942. 451 ULRs were trained on the dedicated classroom-based programme and an additional 1,393 were trained on the Union Reps Stage 1 classroom-based programme. Reps taking part in the new online Union learning reps 1 totalled 308, with 1,790 reps taking part in the new online Union reps 1. Since 1999 a total of 40,884 new ULRs have been trained.

New ULRs trained 1999 – 2017



* includes reps trained on Union reps stage 1 course containing mainstreamed learning agenda

** includes reps trained on Union reps stage 1 course containing mainstreamed learning agenda and reps trained on new online Union learning reps 1 and Union reps 1 course

Strategy

Policy and research

In 2017 unionlearn commissioned the University of Exeter to undertake a comprehensive survey of learners who engaged with ULF provision in Rounds 17 and 18. This largely replicated the learner survey that was a key part of the last major independent evaluation that looked at Rounds 15 and 16, which was published in 2016. The latest learner survey has highlighted very similar positive findings to those evidenced by the last evaluation, showing a range of benefits for both learners and employers. See page 5 for the key findings from this latest learner survey. In 2017 unionlearn also published an infographics booklet of the 2016 evaluation to promote the key findings to a wider audience.

In 2017 unionlearn conducted a survey of union learning reps and other union reps engaged in supporting learning at work. This provided an up-to-date picture of their activities in the workplace, including the main opportunities and challenges that they identified in promoting the union learning agenda. A detailed survey report and an infographics booklet summarising the key findings were produced.

Over the past 12 months unionlearn has submitted a number of responses on behalf of the TUC to consultations and calls for evidence by government departments, parliamentary select committees and other agencies. These consultations have largely focused on the ongoing government reforms relating to apprenticeships, technical education, and English and maths provision, including the following:

- Government consultation on the implementation of T levels
- Inquiry by the NUS Poverty Commission into access to post-16 education and training
- DfE Select Committee inquiry into the Quality of Apprenticeships and Skills Training
- Government review of education and funding

In addition to producing written submissions, the unionlearn Director gave oral evidence to the

DfE Select Committee inquiry into the Quality of Apprenticeships and Skills Training and the unionlearn Strategy Manager was a member of the NUS Poverty Commission. Unionlearn staff also represent the TUC on various skills bodies, including: the Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce; the Institute for Apprenticeship's Stakeholder Panel; Movement to Work; the DfE's Apprenticeship

Stakeholder Board; and, CEDEFOP (EU skills research body).

The Strategy team produces a quarterly *Learning & Skills Policy Update* newsletter to keep unions and other stakeholders abreast of policy developments in learning and skills and also produces a range of other policy briefings for the unionlearn website.



Apprenticeships and other youth programmes

Unionlearn continues to support union engagement in high quality 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. During the last 12 months the Strategy team has prioritised delivery of a range of initiatives to support unions to engage with apprenticeships in the context of the new funding and regulatory arrangements following the introduction of the levy last April. At the heart of this work has been a commitment to build union capacity to negotiate and support more high-quality apprenticeships and to widen participation to groups who face barriers.

Pre-apprenticeship programmes

A number of unions have successfully negotiated high quality traineeships and other pre-apprenticeship programmes. These include a union tailored

traineeship model with a commitment to high quality work experience placements, financial support from the employer, and a route into an apprenticeship or further training. 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.

Last summer unionlearn organised a seminar to highlight best practice examples of innovative union partnerships with employer and providers

focused on delivering a range of pre-apprenticeship programmes. This was followed up by the production of a new case study booklet *Helping young people into work and training*. The Director of unionlearn is 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.

Apprenticeships

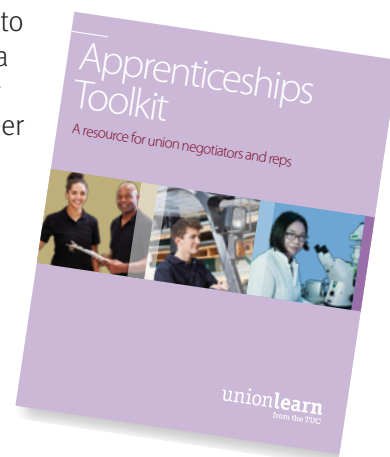
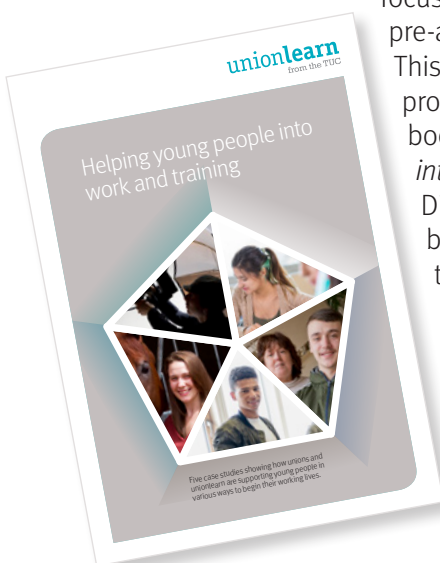
Over the last year nearly 20,000 apprenticeships

were supported and recruited by ULF projects and unionlearn. This work on apprenticeships 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, including:

- Provided a large number of bespoke capacity-building initiatives for individual unions, employers and providers focused on supporting the

apprenticeship programme during implementation of the levy, with a priority on promoting quality and equality & diversity. Unionlearn also delivered a series of regional events in the autumn and winter months that included a major focus on apprenticeships.

- This capacity-building strategy was greatly assisted by new resources for union reps produced by unionlearn to reflect the new apprenticeship funding regime and regulations introduced alongside the levy. This included a major revision of unionlearn's *Apprenticeships Toolkit* and six affiliated unions also took up the opportunity to have their own branded versions of the toolkit produced. Unionlearn also produced a webinar on the apprenticeship levy.
- In Apprenticeships Week 2018 unionlearn launched a new edition of its rights leaflet aimed directly at apprentices, *Your Rights as an Apprentice*. Unionlearn also produced a new version of the apprenticeship rights eNote, a digital guide that provides an accessible introduction.
- Unionlearn also produced a new guide – *Accessible Apprenticeships* – aimed at boosting the support that union reps can provide to help more disabled people access high quality apprenticeships.
- A case studies booklet – *Unions Supporting High-quality Apprenticeships* – was produced to highlight a range of innovative strategies being delivered by unions in a wide range of sectors.
- Coordinated the hosting of a joint exhibition stand with 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.
- Supported ULF projects to develop their capacity to deliver more high-quality apprenticeships and also helped with the planning of new ULF bids in this regard.



English, maths and digital skills

Unions have consistently been one of the strongest advocates of adult learning and a key strength of union learning is its role in empowering adults to update their English and maths skills. This was recently acknowledged in a Department for Education (DfE) research report, *Improving engagement and attainment in maths and English courses: insights from behavioural research*. The Behavioural Insights Team's research centre for Adult Skills and Knowledge (BIT ASK) were commissioned by the DfE to develop and test behavioural interventions to improve participation in, and completion of, English and maths courses. The researchers acknowledge "union-supported learning, through learning centres and union learning representatives (ULRs) as one of the few effective existing models of work-based support for maths and English".

The report features a case study about a union-led learning centre, as described below:

"Before the learning centre was established, nobody had thought that low maths and English skills were impacting the running of the organisation. However, over five or so years, the offer of maths and English was taken up by many of the drivers: only one or two at first, who then went back into their units and told their colleagues, who then went and did the training, and over time the skill-level of the entire workforce was raised, and this changed the entire way the depot ran."

Over the year Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects helped 27,733 learners to improve their English and maths skills, which was above the annual profile target of 26,119. In addition to this, the ULF projects engaged 25,723 learners to take up initial English and maths assessments. Unionlearn support delivered an additional 6,114 English and maths learner outcomes. Unionlearn has developed various initiatives to help unions build their capacity in this area, including the following:

- Unionlearn's English and maths network for ULRs and union project staff has been a popular platform to discuss both policy issues and hands-on activity

in workplaces. The network met three times over 2017-2018 as planned with unions and external stakeholders showcasing innovative projects in support of adult literacy and numeracy skills.

- English and maths skills support was a regular feature in unionlearn's Learning and Skills Policy update newsletter and keen union bloggers shared practical and useful views of their personal learning journeys on the unionlearn website.
- Maths Workout (#mathsworkout) and Literacy Works (#literacyworks) campaign weeks were run for the second year running and even more unions and workplaces collaborated this year. The campaigns' awareness raising digital content included publicising a daily blog and a daily Twitted quiz with questions fitting each campaign week's theme. Workshops and network meetings were also arranged.

The Literacy Works campaign week coincided with publication of the *Write Now!* eNote. This online learning module helps people to tackle everyday writing tasks and provides guidance on clarity, structure, grammar and spelling. Another eNote, *Read Now!*, was produced and this provided guidance on understanding the difference between fact, opinion and bias, practicing different speed-reading techniques and reading with purpose. Unionlearn's digital initial assessment tool, SkillCheck, was improved in 2017 by incorporating new sets of literacy and numeracy questions and was heavily promoted.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning keeps being in demand despite the perennial funding issues and unions are constantly seeking opportunities to work with employers to support ESOL learners. Unionlearn collaborated with unions, such as UNISON and URTU, to produce a new leaflet, *Are we all speaking the same language?*. This was specifically aimed at engaging employers and makes a clear case for the importance of good communication in the workplace and the significance of employer support. The leaflet also provides practical examples of what unions and employers can do together to help people brush up their language skills in the workplace.

Unionlearn has also made efforts to broker funding for ESOL and share information about positive local initiatives, such as the *London Mayor's ESOL Plus Employer Partnership*.

Digital skills were added this year as a new member to the basic skills family. The government announcement that it would be introducing a digital skills entitlement up to level 2 was welcomed by unionlearn. In

preparation for the new digital skills

standards and subject content, DfE commissioned a consultation exercise and unionlearn responded to this. We also supplied the DfE with additional information on initial assessments currently used in workplaces and learning centres to assist the government to scope good practice. The ULF projects are already well on track having delivered 7,649 ICT initial assessments and supported 19,613 ICT learners in 2017-18.



Union engagement with skills bodies

Unionlearn has continued to support union engagement in a range of skills bodies, including those with a national remit and others with a role at a sector/industrial level or at a local/regional level. The TUC welcomed the establishment of the Institute for Apprenticeships in 2017 but has continued to express concerns that appointments to the Institute's board have not yet included anyone with a union background and that this was very different to the "social partnership" arrangements governing apprenticeship and technical education systems in most other European countries.

Government funding for the main sector skills bodies, including Sector Skills Councils, 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 unionlearn continues to support union representatives on these sector bodies.

Unionlearn also supports joint union meetings for the health 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 is also supporting union engagement in sector skills through other avenues, including major infrastructure initiatives being taken forward by the government. One key programme of this kind is the Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce which 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. The Director of unionlearn is a member of the taskforce and the transport unions have also been engaged various aspects of the work programme.

Devolution of the adult skills budget in England is currently being taken forward by government and this will increasingly give Combined Authorities, LEPs and other bodies a much greater influence over adult FE and skills funding. Unionlearn is supporting union engagement in this agenda, including facilitating union representation on a range of partnerships that are being put in place to support a strategic approach to addressing skills funding priorities at a more localised level.

National Retraining Scheme

In the Autumn 2017 Budget the Chancellor announced that the government would be launching a National Retraining Scheme (NRS) and more detail about the new skills programme was set out in the Industrial Strategy White Paper. The government also confirmed that a high level advisory group – the National Retraining Partnership (NRP) – would bring together

the government, businesses and workers through the CBI and TUC to “set the strategic direction and oversee implementation of the scheme.”

The initial announcement confirmed that the government’s intention was to introduce the NRS by the end of the current Parliament. During the intervening period there will be a range of pilots to test out various aspects of the programme once the parameters of the NRS model are agreed by the NRP in the coming months. However, the NRS has two early priorities that will be taken forward before the full programme will be up and running. These priorities will initially target skills shortages in key sectors by developing much-needed digital and construction skills.

Membership of the National Retraining Partnership comprises: TUC General Secretary, Frances O’Grady; CBI Director-General, Carolyn Fairbairn; the Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds MP; and, the Exchequer Secretary, Robert Jenrick MP. The first

meeting of the NRP in March 2017 was also attended by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and in his Spring Statement speech he said that there “was a clear and shared commitment to training, to prepare the British people for a better future ahead.”

The NRP meetings are considering the findings and recommendations coming out of regular meetings of senior officials from DfE, TUC and CBI who are looking at developing the conceptual NRS model and building on this in order to arrive at more detailed operational delivery models that can be tested out through further piloting. The officials’ group is also spending a lot of time discussing other key operational priorities, such as defining who would be eligible for different elements of the NRS programme, including targeting those workers who are at greatest risk of automation, digitalisation and other features of major industrial change. The Director of unionlearn is leading these negotiations from the TUC side.

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

A key strand of work for unionlearn is about Supporting Learners in the workplace. A Supporting Learners Strategy for 2017-2020 has been developed which includes the successful 'Network Model' for Supporting Learners. The model places work of union reps at the heart of the strategy. ULRs are ideally placed to support learners as they speak the same language as their members and have their trust. Learners then feel supported in accessing the right learning and courses for them or to consider their career options.

The Supporting Learners Strategy also outlines six key themes:

1. Promoting apprenticeships
2. Supporting the union approach to English, maths and digital skills
3. Helping disadvantaged learners
4. Supporting learning and progression for all ages by facilitating access to quality, impartial information and advice about learning and work
5. Supporting older workers
6. Working with key partners and stakeholders

In 2017/18 ULF projects supported almost 84,000 adults with information, advice and guidance and learner support referrals. This highlights the substantive amount of support provided by union reps in helping learners progress on their learner journey.

Many working people are particularly in need of high quality free careers advice, including the development of career management skills so that

they can take charge of their own working lives and overcome barriers to progression. Unions and unionlearn have been successful in working with traditionally hard-to-reach groups in the workplace, and in engaging with employers.

The Department for Education's Careers strategy was published in December 2017 entitled *Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents*.

The strategy is based around four key priorities: ensuring every school and college has a high-quality careers programme; providing opportunities for work experience; offering tailored support to students; and utilising appropriate sources of information about jobs and careers.

Unionlearn produces a bi-monthly publication entitled *Supporting Learners News*. This electronic newsletter is produced to keep ULRs and others up to date with news, developments and resources from unionlearn and partners that will help support learners in the workplace.

Five Supporting Learners events took place across England between October and November 2017. The events were well attended and the audience comprised of ULRs, union reps, officers and ULF project staff. The programme covered a wide range of learning and skills topics including mentoring learners, the TUC Education online offer, apprenticeships question time and a new approach to maths.

Unionlearn with TUC Education have developed and updated a number of eNotes (bitesize online learning modules) 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 include; Supporting Learners, Supporting Mid-life Development, Apprenticeships, Supporting Learners into Higher Learning and Introduction to the ULR role. New unionlearn eNotes for 2018 include Read Now! and Write Now!, developed to support people to improve their reading and writing skills.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/supportinglearners

The union learning Climbing Frame

The union learning Climbing Frame is the free website designed for union learning reps and others to help support learners and promote learning in the workplace. Unionlearn has developed a number of useful 'Learning Themes' on topics such as Personal Development and Career Planning, Supporting Mid-life Development and Health and Wellbeing in the workplace. The Learning Themes are regularly updated with new content added to provide users with the latest information and advice.

Alongside the Themes is a 'Learner Management' area which enables reps to record information from sessions with learners, helping them set goals and actions and record achievements. Reps can store notes, upload documents and record their own learning activities and progression. Useful links, a discussion forum and an events section also feature. Along with the website there is also a Climbing Frame App which is free to download.

The Climbing Frame has over 7,500 registered users and our latest survey gave a strong endorsement from users across unions and sectors.

2018 will see the Climbing Frame get a new modern look, refreshed Learning Themes and some improved features to help ensure the website stays a unique and useful resource to help support learners.

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

Supporting Mid-life Development

This continues to be a popular agenda as unions contribute to support working people at all stages of their lives. As more and more people have to work longer due to shifting pension regulations and the changing jobs market this results in people needing to change jobs and retrain more often. The concept of a 'job for life' and working for the same organisation throughout life is no longer relevant to many people. It is believed that individuals on average will change jobs six times during their working life.

Unionlearn continues to train, support and encourage union reps to engage with the mid-life development

agenda. To date this work has resulted in over 5,000 people undertaking mid-life and older workers' activities and a wide range of materials and resources have been developed to help support this work. The infrastructure available to support union reps has resulted in unions becoming the biggest deliverer of workplace mid-life career reviews.

In 2017 unionlearn was successful in obtaining an Erasmus+ project. The 'Rainbow Years' Project commenced on the 1st November 2017 and will run until 31st December 2019. The project will develop a new good practice model for the delivery of a Mid-life Skills Review – with the emphasis on reviewing skills and competencies and targeted at workers in the labour market with low levels of basic skills.

The good practice model will contain new materials specifically designed for use by Europe's social partners but which could readily be transferred to other settings and user groups. These materials will include an interactive online skills assessment tool and new online learning modules. A dedicated platform for these materials will be created and the materials themselves translated into partner languages.

We will also explore with our partners in Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Finland and the UK how these new resources can be combined with the kind of holistic offer needed for a full Mid-life Skills Review.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/rainbow-years-project

Higher Learning

Unionlearn is committed to supporting and developing pathways to higher learning for union learners and has secured agreements with some higher education institutions to support this agenda. Birkbeck University and the University of Wolverhampton offer a 10% discount on courses to union members and this continues to prove popular.

For the period April 2017 to March 2018, ULF projects reported that the total number of higher education (HE) learners via the union route was 2,292 which is ahead of the 1,845 profiled. This is a positive position

particularly in light of the decline in part time HE learners as a consequence of the changes to HE funding.

Unionlearn has worked in partnership with the Open University to support the production of free online information, advice and guidance and eLearning materials. The Part-Time Education for Adults Returning to Learn (PEARL) website is aimed at adults who are looking for part-time and flexible learning opportunities primarily across England. It provides a comprehensive range of information and signposts sources of support and resources which will help to identify academic and vocational pathways through post-compulsory to higher learning.

The website contains case studies to inspire adults to return to education, letting them know that they are capable of achieving their goals through education. There is also an 'Advise Me' tool on the website, which gives personalised learning options to suit learner's individual circumstances.

Unionlearn was also a key partner in the development of the six free online courses that take about 15 hours to complete. Learners can collect online badges, which can be shared with employers, displayed on social media sites and kept in their TUC Education backpack. The six courses are:

1. Planning a better future
2. Introducing practical healthcare
3. Supporting children's development
4. Caring for adults
5. Taking part in the voluntary sector
6. Starting your small business

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

www.unionlearn.org.uk/forms/pearl-adultlearning

Communications

Unionlearn's communications activity is focused on working with affiliates, employers, partners and others to promote, the impact and value of union-led learning.

During the year almost 100 case studies and 40 blogs were produced and posted to the unionlearn website and the unionlearn social media platforms. These highlighted the range of support that unions had been giving members in workplaces and focused on a number of the years priority campaigns such as English, maths and apprenticeships, whilst also giving a platform to examples of learning around health and wellbeing, community engagement, digital inclusion and more. There were also a large number of news stories produced to highlight activities, new resources and promote union learning events throughout the year.

The unionlearn website www.unionlearn.org.uk continues to be 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 plus an increase in visitors to the unionlearn website with over 215,000 for the year.

Unionlearn's social media presence continues to grow, with the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/tucunionlearn) and Twitter account [@unionlearn](https://twitter.com/unionlearn) gaining an increase in followers over the year and the introduction of an Instagram page has helped to get our message out to a wider and diverse audience.

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 material, and will be running again this year.

The Learning Rep magazine continues to be popular with our thousands of subscribers, the e-magazine is published four times a year. Producing the magazine in an online format means the latest technology can be used to improve communication with ULRs. The magazine continues to provide a range of information on unionlearn's resources and activities, information from Union Learning Fund projects, inspirational stories, partner information for ULRs and discussion on adult skills.

Through our email alerts service, unionlearn create and send email alerts that highlight and promote the work that unions and our partners are conducting. 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.

Unionlearn's 11th Annual Conference took place on Monday 3rd July 2017 with over 260 delegates attending. The event was entitled 'Apprenticeships are Union Business' and was an opportunity to showcase achievements over the year. The agenda focused on skills development through learning of individuals and communities, meeting the needs of a modern workforce, and supporting high quality apprenticeships.

Speakers included:

- Frances O'Grady TUC General Secretary
- Ann Cleeves, award winning crime writer
- Jess Green, performance poet
- Peter Lauener, Chief Executive Institute for Apprenticeships

Over the coming year unionlearn will continue to expand its communications methods and ensure strong engagement with partners and decision-makers.

Quality Improvement

The unionlearn Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) has been in place for over seven 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 was reviewed and extensive changes made during 2017 to reflect the changing face of unionlearn:



The context and main drivers for quality across unionlearn are various and complex. However, for the sake of simplicity the QIF has been streamlined to 6 elements which capture the key components of the quality improvement process. These elements are not in any order nor are they linear in progression; they form a holistic continuous improvement cycle which can be entered and exited at any point. In some cases, each element can be considered as stand-alone if necessary.

Each stage has processes and mechanisms in place that evidence quality assurance and quality delivery. Unionlearn has embedded the following processes:

- monthly ULF project finance and performance outcome reporting
- 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
- a communications strategy.

Unionlearn continues to hold an annual self-assessment review (SAR) that all staff contribute to. The key identified areas for improvement in 2018-2019 are:

- Build on strategic cross-team working and collaboration within unionlearn and with other TUC departments
- Enhance solid internal communication
- Ensure unionlearn is GDPR compliant
- Review and streamline unionlearn's website structure
- Improve unionlearn's learner tracking system

Finance

Total funding to unionlearn in 2017-2018 was £13,350,000.

This funding is comprised of £900,000 from the TUC; £11,900,000 from the Department for Education (DfE); and £550,000 from other sources, including the UFI Charitable Trust and the National Agency.

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

Budget Heading 2017/18	Budget £	Actual Outturn £
ULF – Grants to unions	9,742,406	9,735,008
Delivery and support of the national ULF programme	1,301,200	1,258,604
Service, quality and standards	354,655	390,055
Strategy and research	244,925	237,891
Trade Union Education	263,117	277,066
TOTAL 2017-18	11,906,303	11,898,626

Appendix 1 Publications

Accessible Apprenticeships (updated)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/accessible-apprenticeships

Apprenticeship levy – 15 useful negotiating tips (updated)

<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeship-levy-15-useful-negotiating-tips>

Apprenticeships Toolkit (updated)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit

Are we speaking the same language?

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/are-we-all-speaking-same-language

Helping young people into work and training

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications

Learning and Skills Policy Update newsletter (various issues)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/policy-briefings

Learning Rep magazine (various issues)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications

Match Up! Cards (2018 edition)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/match-cards

Measuring the success of union learning

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/measuring-success-union-learning

Opening doors to all: How union learning tackles disadvantage

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/opening-doors-all-how-union-learning-tackles-disadvantage

Promoting union learning: the reps who spread the word

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications

Supporting Learners News (various issues)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/supporting-learnersnews

Supporting maths and English learning in the workplace – a guide for union learning reps (updated)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/supporting-maths-and-english-learning-workplace-guide-union-learning-reps

Survey of ULRs and union reps supporting learning and skills

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

Unionlearn annual report 2017

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/unionlearn-annual-report-2017

Union Learning Fund Prospectus Round 19 – 2017/2018

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/union-learning-fund-prospectus-round-19-20172018

TUC Education courses for all union reps

www.tuceducation.org.uk/findacourse

TUC Education eNotes on over 30 subject areas

<https://tuceducation.org.uk/eNotes>

Unions supporting high-quality apprenticeships

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/unions-supporting-highquality-apprenticeships

Various submissions to government consultation on learning and skills

www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/industrial-strategy/skills-policy

Your rights as an apprentice (updated)

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/your-rights-apprentice

Appendix 2 Contacts

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Appendix 3 Glossary

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CPD	Continuing professional development
DfE	Department for Education
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
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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