

Making learning and skills work

Unionlearn annual report 2020



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Foreword

The coronavirus pandemic has, understandably, overshadowed this latest annual report of unionlearn's activities during 2019–20. While Covid-19 did not hugely impact on the substantial outcomes delivered during the operational year, it will continue to be the dominant challenge facing our economy and society for some time to come. The TUC and affiliated unions have been calling on the government to boost learning and skills opportunities as a major part of its policy response to combatting the fallout from the pandemic, with union-led learning and training at the heart of this strategy.

It is heartening to report that unionlearn responded rapidly to the pandemic and put in place a number of initiatives when the lockdown took effect in March of this year. One of the key elements was the launch of a new Learning@Home page on the unionlearn website to promote a range of learning and training for furloughed workers, those needing to work from home, and those made redundant due to the ongoing crisis. Supporting apprentices through the crisis was another priority and a range of online guidance and resources was produced at an early stage to equip union reps and apprentices to make the case for sustaining apprenticeships through the crisis.

Since the lockdown TUC Education has mobilised all its existing resources – and created new ones – to continue to provide vital support and training for union reps. This strategy has involved maximising best use of online materials, making sure reps had access to good-quality advice, guidance and resources on issues related to the pandemic, and supporting unions to retain the capacity to offer bespoke training to their own reps. TUC Education and unionlearn have also significantly expanded the delivery of webinars since the lockdown and this communication channel has proved to be of immense value.

Unionlearn has been in regular communication with the Department for Education about how the Union Learning Fund (ULF) can continue to support learning and skills in the current context and in support of the

economic recovery over the longer term. ULF project managers have also been updated regularly and supported to develop strategies to this end. Over the past year union learning supported a wide range of learning opportunities, especially to those facing the greatest barriers at work. Through the ULF unions supported 149,500 people to access some form of learning or training and this included the recruitment and training of over 2,500 new union learning reps and follow-on ULR training for 6,600 reps. When you add in the number of learners and reps benefitting from direct provision by unionlearn and TUC Education, the total numbers accessing union-led learning in 2019–20 was 189,100.

The coming year will be the most testing for the union learning agenda since the ULF was established over twenty years ago. We face economic and social challenges on a massive scale and boosting quality jobs, learning and skills is at the heart of the response that the union movement is calling for. Union-led learning and training will be a vital contribution to this mission and I am very confident that unionlearn and the ULF will support our unions to deliver on this.



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 2019–20 the Union Learning Fund supported 20 unions to deliver 20 projects at a total cost of £9.8 million. This was the first year of a three-year bid.

Overall ULF projects once again performed ahead of expectations and the total number of ULF learners was over 149,000. The recruitment and training of over 2,500 new ULRs and the follow-on ULR training of over 6,600 reps is a particularly positive achievement in the current climate. ULF projects supported over 12,000 apprenticeships. Over 24,000 learners attended informal adult and community learning (IACL) both in workplace and community locations and a further 30,000 learners took part in work-related continuous professional development (CPD).

Unions report that the uncertain economic climate has made employer engagement more difficult and learning agreements harder to negotiate. Nonetheless, 80 new agreements were signed. As we reported in previous years the changes in funding for adult learning and higher education 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 or employers to subsidise learning diminishes.

All 20 projects have been managed by the ULF team, through direct support and a variety of events and assistance and advice on implementing learner tracking, meeting General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements and achieving the payment by results (PBR) framework targets. All projects this year achieved 100 per cent funding through PBR, which is a measure of the effective management that has been developed both by the ULF team and within projects. All ULF projects were independently audited by BDO.

The team supported unions in understanding the requirements for year one of a three-year project.

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 the needs of union learners. The team has 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 learner tracking software developed by unionlearn, which will be used throughout the three-year period of ULF Round 20.

ULF performance report 2019–2020: key headline figures

	Profile	Actual	Variance (%)
New ULRs completing stage 1	966	2,500	259%
ULR follow-up training	6,376	6,618	104%
English and maths learners	25,579	37,736	148%
ICT learners	22,647	24,992	110%
Learners on CPD	28,875	30,179	105%
New employer learning agreements	247	80	32%
Total ULF learners	135,990	149,496	110%

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:

- 70 per cent of respondents said they would not have taken part in the learning or training without the support of their union.
- 73 per cent reported being more confident in their abilities and 77 per cent 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 per cent said they were able to do their job better as a result and 37 per cent 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 £974 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 per cent of all ULF participants go on to take up a role as a union rep.

In Round 20 Exeter University was commissioned to carry out impact studies on five of the ULF projects – FBU, FEU, PCS, PFA and UNITE. These studies have revealed significant economic impacts. The economic contribution of the projects was approximately £490.3m but also enabled some more detailed

understanding of the impact that the individual projects have had on learners in very different industries. The studies have also confirmed the very positive Return of Investment (ROI) that ULF makes both to the economy and the Exchequer.

Project	ROI on £1 to learners and employers	ROI on £1 to Exchequer
FBU	£6.93	£2.00
FEU	£7.70	£2.20
PCS	£8.85	£2.20
PFA	£5.35	£1.60
UNITE	£7.78	£2.20

TUC Education

TUC Education provides high-quality education and training for workplace reps. Unions representing major public and private sector employers send reps for training. Almost all unions take part in the programme, which is recognised for integrity, quality and innovation.

During 2019 the number of reps trained was 28,353, with a further 8,386 reps using webinars and e-learning. The total number of reps accessing training was 36,739.

In 2019 700 reps received TUC training on how to be a ULR – 401 on ULR1 and 299 on ULR2. Of these, 473 were trained online.

Funding

The TUC programme of training for union reps is delivered UK-wide and the same qualifications are accessed and delivered to union reps in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, or in Glasgow and Cardiff. In recognition of the wider benefits for the economy, the government has provided a 50 per cent co-funding contribution for TUC Education union training courses and this is managed nationally and administered directly by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to partner further education (FE) providers.

From August 2019, Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) are taking on responsibility for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) for their areas. This has presented challenges to the TUC as we seek to continue to fund our trade union education training programmes. Recruitment to college-based programmes is not geographically based. Union reps are often recruited through union networks or by workplace. As a result, our own internal enquiries show that between 50 to 60 per cent of reps attending a college-based course are from outside the geographic catchment of those colleges, potentially excluding them from area-based funded programmes in the future.

The TUC continues to lobby government to provide equal access for all reps to our national programmes in England with an ESFA national funding stream

alongside the devolved AEB. In the meantime, we continue to work with colleges and MCAs to produce local solutions.

Our offer to reps

Our strategy for supporting and enabling union reps to access trade union education continues. Ensuring that as many reps as possible have access to flexible training opportunities remains a focus of TUC Education work. Developing materials to support face-to-face training opportunities for reps, and further developing our online, blended and e-learning offer, is a priority. The TUC is seeking to ensure as many reps as practicable are accessing trade union education and securing appropriate paid release to do so.

Several approaches have been developed to enable union reps to access informal opportunities for education and development, both online and face to face. TUC national and regional offices continue to organise various demand-led briefings, including health and safety training days, supporting learners' events, tackling the far-right briefings, and anti-austerity campaigns.

Flexible fully online programmes sit alongside classroom courses, providing up-to-date resources for reps. Programmes and resources can be accessed by reps as soon as they take office and can be used by experienced reps to refresh their skills and knowledge.

eNotes continue to be a great resource to help reps keep up to date on key workplace issues. These self-contained e-learning modules include a mixture of text, video and quizzes, and can be accessed from PCs, tablets or smart phones as many times as and when required.

The use of webinars to reach union reps with interactive briefings remains popular. TUC Education webinars are available at www.tuceducation.org.uk

Review of support to reps, officers and organising

The Changing Workplaces Survey of Union Representatives was commissioned by the TUC in

2019 to measure the impact of TUC Education in supporting workplace representation. We also wanted to find out who our reps were and what it was they needed from unions and the TUC to be able to carry out their roles effectively.

The project was conducted by Exeter University and consisted of four stages: desk research; focus groups involving union reps; stakeholder interviews with senior officials from the TUC; and an online survey that had 3,800 respondents. Taken together, this work provided the TUC with a valuable insight into the activities, experiences and needs of workplace union representatives.

The main findings of the survey were:

- Representing individual members in disciplinarys and grievances is the single biggest activity carried out by reps. A significant number are using their own time to carry out their role.
- Respondents spent an average of 10 hours per week (paid and unpaid) on union activity. Almost one-quarter of reps spent four hours per week on disciplinarys and grievances and this area of work was regarded as the most important issue dealt with by 47 per cent of respondents.
- More than three out of four reps said that they used their own time for rep work. While 86 per cent of respondents said that they received some facility time, 43 per cent said that they didn't have enough and most of these reps said that they needed a lot more time.
- Most respondents to the survey said that they were either fairly or completely confident in their own skills and knowledge (73 per cent).
- The top five training and support activities identified by respondents were:
 - mental health
 - handling grievances and disciplinarys
 - collective bargaining
 - health and safety-related activities
 - organising.

The TUC has used the intelligence to create a workplan consisting of seven separate workstreams running over the next two years that we are confident will ensure the TUC and affiliate unions are doing all we can to both increase the number of union reps and continue to support them so that they can be as effective as possible in supporting members and working with employers.

TUC Education during the pandemic

Since the start of the lockdown on 23 March, TUC Education mobilised all its existing resources – and created new ones – to continue to provide vital support and training for union reps.

As the UK moved into lockdown, we had three objectives.

- to continue to provide formal training for union reps via TUC Education Centres by utilising our online materials
- to make sure reps had access to good-quality advice, guidance and resources on issues related to the pandemic
- that unions should, via support from the TUC, retain the capacity to offer bespoke training to their own reps.

Online learning

On 31 March we held a meeting with the majority of our TUC Education Centre course coordinators at which we made clear that we would do all we could to make sure they could offer a summer term course programme using the existing online materials for our three core courses – Union Reps 1, Health and Safety 1 and Union Learning Reps 1. Anticipating concerns about the involvement of tutors and accreditation, we guaranteed that training on online delivery would be provided for tutors and we had already made sure that these wholly online courses would be accredited by NOCN.

By the end of April, thanks to the efforts of our online team, our education officers and our course coordinators, 13 of our 19 colleges had

advertised a summer term course programme. By the end of May 28 courses had started involving over 350 reps.

Webinars

The use of webinars as a way to allow experts to deliver vital information to reps was recognised even before lockdown. The first Covid-19-related webinar was held on 16 March and had more than 900 registrations. Between then and the start of June, TUC Education ran a further 11 webinars related to the pandemic, with more than 8,000 reps participating.

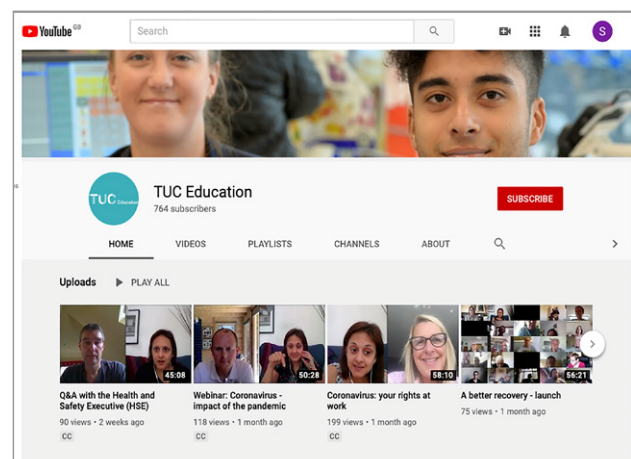
Other online learning

In addition to webinars, TUC Education developed online microlearning sites aimed at providing support to reps on specific issues related to the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic we have developed four of these, which have been accessed by over 18,000 reps.

Support for unions

During the pandemic TUC Education supported union in delivering training and other support to

reps. We developed e-learning with UCU and PCS and supported an extensive escalation in the online provision provide by UNISON. We have also worked with unions to allow them to deliver their own webinars. FDA has delivered three webinars per week for the last two months with the support of TUC Education and we have also provided webinar support to RMT and USDAW.



Strategy

Policy, research and guidance

Understandably, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic dominated discussions about skills policy towards the end of the 2019–20 operational year. Since the spring unionlearn has collaborated with other TUC departments to formulate a key number of skills policy asks designed to help combat the impact of the pandemic, including: an ‘education and training guarantee’ for young people; a new right to retrain funded by bringing forward the national skills fund; and a flexible training offer delivered through a new jobs guarantee programme that would include a kickstart for apprenticeships.

Unionlearn has continued to keep unions updated on the rapidly changing developments in skills policy and research throughout the year. To this end, the Strategy team produces a quarterly *Learning & Skills Policy Update* newsletter and a range of other policy briefings for the unionlearn website. Unionlearn also contributes analyses on skills policy for a range of key TUC publications, including submissions to government in advance of the budget and spending reviews. Over the past year the Strategy team has collaborated with the government’s Industrial Strategy Council on the development of a major new skills policy report, due to be published by the Council in summer 2020.

In July unionlearn published a new analysis of recent changes in the amount of training that workers receive – *Training Trends in Britain* – which was commissioned from Professor Francis Green of UCL. Earlier research by Professor Green had evidenced that the total volume of employer-led training declined by a half between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the current decade. The new analysis tracked trends since 2011 and the key findings were:

- The total volume of employer-led training declined by an additional 10 per cent since 2011.
- Young workers and lower-qualified workers were hit hardest, with respective declines of 16 per cent and 20 per cent in this period.

- The quality of training had not improved and fewer workers were accessing off-the-job training, longer courses, and nationally recognised qualifications.
- On a more positive note, the study showed that the union ‘mark-up’ on training was holding up well, with 37 per cent of union members saying they accessed regular training at work compared to 22 per cent of non-union members.



The devolution of adult skills funding to the Greater London Authority (GLA) and six Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) since autumn 2019 has raised a number of opportunities and challenges. Unionlearn has welcomed commitments by the GLA and some of the MCAs to use these devolved powers to boost

skills entitlements and has campaigned for all these authorities to link their low-wage skills funding programmes to the independent living wage rather than the lower salary threshold being used in the national programme. Unionlearn has also provided guidance to unions about the national low-wage skills entitlement and its devolved variations. However, there have also been some unintended consequences resulting from a postcode-based skills funding system as it has created an avoidable further barrier to participation for many learners. Unionlearn has called on the government to address any such barriers resulting from the devolution of skills funding.

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 and reviews have included the following:

- the DfE Select Committee inquiry into Lifelong Learning
- consultations by the GLA on the devolution of adult skills funding
- trade union representation in the DfE's European Qualifications Framework report
- the Labour Party's Lifelong Learning Commission consultation.

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; the DfE's Apprenticeship Equality and Diversity Advisory Group; the Skills for Londoners Business Partnership; and CEDEFOP (EU skills research body).

Apprenticeships and youth programmes

High quality of apprenticeships and youth engagement programmes is paramount for us. For young people pre-apprenticeship programmes such as traineeships are their first experience of the world of work and can deliver vital skills to set them up for developing future careers. Apprenticeships play a similar role for many young people but they also continue to be an important tool for over 25s in upgrading their skills at work or helping to progress to new careers. Unionlearn has also continued to highlight equality and diversity questions such as underrepresentation and access to apprenticeships both in general and to higher-paid ones.

Apprenticeships

Unionlearn made a rapid response to Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020 with an extra effort to provide information and guidance for union reps and apprentices using a number of digital tools. We produced guidance on furlough arrangements and temporary arrangements for end-point assessments and English and maths learning among others.

Unionlearn has been largely supportive of the government's rule that entitles apprentices to have

20 per cent of their working time for off-the-job (OTJ) training. Considering that according the latest DfE apprentice learner survey (<https://bit.ly/2YDRRpo>) almost a quarter of apprentices are still not aware they are on an apprenticeship and 18 per cent of apprentices said they did not receive any formal training as part of their apprenticeship and employers are therefore not fulfilling the OTJ requirement, the need for union guidance, briefings and website materials continues. Towards the end of the 2019–20 period the Covid-19 pandemic brought an even greater need for up-to-date information sharing.

Another issue unionlearn has explored over the last 12 months has been the need for subsidised travel for apprentices. The ***Get a Move On! Developing a national travel discount entitlement for all apprentices*** report called on the government to deliver its commitment to introduce discounted bus and train travel to apprentices and highlighted some good practice examples set up in cities such as London and Liverpool. The low level of apprenticeship minimum wage (AMW) means that for many apprentices getting to work costs more than what they actually earn.

Overall numbers of apprenticeship starts have been going downwards over the last 12 months and with the coronavirus pandemic apprenticeship recruitment has become even more precarious, according to DfE statistics.

Projects funded by the ULF recruited 4,209 apprentices (87 per cent of the target) and supported 8,217 apprentices (84 per cent of the target), while unionlearn achieved 67 per cent of its apprentice engagement target. We set up the apprenticeship project to work with regional TUC colleagues to engage apprentices in colleges to learn about their rights in apprenticeships. To support the project we updated the Apprenticeship Charter and were happy to see West Midlands Combined Authority sign one with the TUC. We also offered various helpful tools such as the Apprenticeship Essentials app and the pay calculator. The project was part of a wider TUC strategic aim to improve skills in the workplace

and connect young people to the union movement. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic lockdown interrupted this work.

We celebrated National Apprenticeship Week in March 2020 as well as the LGBT+ History Month by launching the first-ever lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT+) inclusive apprenticeship guide. ***LGBT+ inclusive apprenticeships*** explores the barriers LGBT+ people can face at work, explains workplace rights and offers practical advice on how to improve diversity.

The new guide is part of a series of resources unionlearn has produced to provide detailed guidance on apprenticeship issues:

- ***LGBT+ Inclusive Apprenticeships***
- ***Tackling Apprenticeship Gender Inequality***
- ***Supporting Black and Minority Ethnic Apprentices***
- ***Accessible Apprenticeships***

Traineeships

Over the last four years the DfE has recorded declining traineeship engagement numbers and unions have felt the challenge in the workplace too. In February 2020 the DfE announced a cut to traineeship funding to reflect the downward trend. The aim of the programme has been to prepare 16- to 24-year-olds ready to take on an apprenticeship or a job. Traineeships last between six weeks and six months and include a work experience placement.

Supported internships

Trade unions can also play a key role in helping young people benefit from a high-quality supported internship. There are examples of this especially in the health sector. Unionlearn's publication ***Helping Young People into Work and Training*** includes a case study on union engagement in supported internships in addition to

other case studies highlighting union support for high-quality traineeships.

Supported internships are a study programme targeted specifically at young people aged 16–24 who have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) who want to move into employment and need extra support to do so. ***Recent DfE research*** found that supported internships are delivered in several different ways without a predominant single model. The research identified three main elements to describe successful programmes: employer placement, off-the-job learning and job coach support.

The providers highlighted that the lack of employers willing or able to take supported interns presented a major barrier. Other issues impacting delivery were linked to funding, such as the costs related to providing one-to-one support and job coaches (and the costs of specialised training for support staff). In some cases parents can lose entitlement to welfare payments when a young person embarks on the programme, which ends up being an obstacle to successful completion. Where employers were positive, supportive and committed throughout the programme, successful delivery turned out to be much more secure.

English, ESOL, maths and digital skills

Unionlearn's ***Learning & Skills Policy Update*** regularly reports on basic skills issues. English and maths learning has justly stayed as a key part of apprenticeship programmes. We also produced specific briefing papers on functional skills reforms to help union consider how the changes impact their learners.

Literacy, numeracy and digital skills are also an integral part of the National Retraining Scheme (NRS) developed by the DfE with partnership from the TUC and CBI. In the health sector we also contributed policy views for Middlesex



University's study on *Transversal skills for person centred care*, which was commissioned by Health Education England (HEE). Following the publication HEE organised skills for life events around the country for the health sector and invited unionlearn to provide speakers. We joined the City of London Lord Mayor's UK for Digital Intelligence initiative and shared information on work done by unionlearn and unions around digital skills

Unionlearn continued to support unions by offering expertise on functional skills and by organising satisfyingly well-attended *English, maths and digital skills* network meetings. Several unions, such as UNISON, Community, NEU, PCS and Aegis, shared their own initiatives and research. The network discussed current topics such as the practical implications of the functional skills reforms and upcoming digital skills entitlement. We also supported National Numeracy Day in May 2019 on digital platforms.

Learner engagement

Trade union projects and unionlearn continued to perform strongly against the outcome targets in 2019–20.

The ULF projects' 2019–20 priority outcomes include:

- 20,964 English learners (against target of 13,924)
- 16,772 maths learners (against target of 11,655)
- 24,992 ICT learners (against target of 22,647).

However, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learner numbers have suffered, with a total of 985 against the target of 1,625. The projects have reported a lack of funded learning opportunities. There is undoubtedly also an issue with potential ESOL learners often being employed by agencies and other outsourcing organisations, which are difficult to engage to support learning.

The picture is slightly weaker in non-priority assessment numbers, especially in English where 10,517 learners took an assessment against the target of 13,589. ICT assessment numbers were also somewhat under profile at 11,079 against the target of 12,324. However, maths fared much better,

with 19,982 against the target of 11,389. Unionlearn achieved roughly 90 per cent of its total English and maths learner numbers. Unionlearn efforts with the Learning@Home campaign and online tools such as SkillCheck should help mitigate the drop in numbers going into the second project year 2020–21.

The need for provision to move online for remote learning became more acute when the Covid-19 pandemic caused the lockdown and face-to-face learning was not possible from March 2020. Since union learning is mainly based on supporting learners in the workplace it has unquestionably been difficult to engage with learners in the circumstances where workers have either been working from home, furloughed or redeployed.

Unions have also reported some issues with skills funding devolution, which has created difficulties in accessing funding for English and maths entitlement. This is because people often travel long distances to work so they are not residents in the Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding area where workplace learning happens. Likewise, there is a lack of funded and accredited English and maths learning online with a provider who could draw AEB funding for remote learners across England.

This is a concern that needs resolving while the Covid-19 social distancing measures continue and distance learning is likely to continue. The upcoming digital skills entitlement and delivery around it is likely to suffer from the same problem, which is not helpful when many people are in need of reskilling and upskilling on the road to recovery after the pandemic measures wind down. Unionlearn has been upping its digital skills support by releasing an ICT – Step Up initial assessment www.unionlearn.org.uk/skillcheck

Campaigns

Our English and maths campaigns are now well established as yearly events that promote skills development as well as the learning tools and assessments we have developed. Both campaign weeks offer plenty of digital content including daily blogs and Twitter quizzes.



Maths Workout Week took place in October 2019 and saw among others the launch of a new SkillCheck quiz called **Everyday finances**. Together with National Numeracy we organised a competition for take-up of the Numeracy Challenge. Roughly 400 people took part and the best improvers entered a prize draw. Literacy Works Week ran in March 2020 with a

launch of the **Grammar matters** SkillCheck quiz to encourage adults to brush up their grammar skills. The **Ready to Read** guide was published to help ULRs make use of Quick Reads in attracting people in the workplace to take up a reading habit.

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 and Technical Education (IfATE) 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 work of ULF projects and

to give union officials an opportunity to discuss collaborative approaches to union learning as well as policy in these sectors. These network meetings 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 (HEE). With health sector unions we're regular contributors in HEE's Trade union sub-group in its Talent for Care programme.

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 in 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, Local Enterprise Partnerships (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

The National Retraining Scheme is a government programme that was first announced in the 2017 budget in response to concerns about the changing jobs market, especially how automation will impact on jobs and skills in the future. The government also established a high-level advisory group – the National Retraining Partnership – to give the TUC and CBI a key role in setting strategic direction and overseeing implementation of the scheme. Membership of the partnership has included the TUC General Secretary, the CBI Director-General and a range of government ministers, including the Secretary of State for Education, the Exchequer Secretary, the Skills Minister and the Employment Minister.

The work of the partnership has been supported by regular meetings of senior officials from the DfE, the TUC and CBI to take forward detailed developmental operations. Over the past year the focus has been on testing and trialling a new online service – Get Help to Retrain – in various localities. In addition, the partnership has continued discussions on developing new job-specific retraining courses for workers that it is anticipated will be tested in a subsequent phase of trials.

The aim of the *Get Help to Retrain* service is to help people to: understand their current skills; explore alternative occupations and training opportunities to develop new skills; and access support from a dedicated career adviser. Users can also search for local training options and jobs as well as being able to phone an adviser to discuss their options in more detail. The service was rolled out in six parts of

England last year with the active support of the TUC and CBI. Currently eligibility is targeted on adults who don't have a degree-level qualification and who earn less than £35,000 a year.

Unionlearn and trade unions have been encouraging ULRs in the six areas where the online service is available to support individuals to access it via the portal on the gov.uk website. At the beginning of this year the government announced that the plans for delivering increased skills opportunities through a new national skills fund will build on the development to date of the National Retraining Scheme.

Service

The Service team includes 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 2020–23 has been developed through consultation with a range of unions, key partners and stakeholders. The strategy includes the successful ‘network model’ for supporting learners. The model places the work of ULRs 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 or considering their career options.

The Supporting Learners Strategy also outlines six key themes:

- promoting apprenticeships and other pre-employment opportunities
- helping disadvantaged learners
- supporting the union approach to English, ESOL, maths and digital skills
- supporting learning, progression and improved health and wellbeing for all ages
- supporting adults to prepare for the future workplace
- working with key partners and stakeholders.

In 2019–20 ULF projects carried out 77,176 learner support referrals. This highlights the substantive amount of support provided by union reps in helping learners progress on their learning journey.

Unionlearn produces a bi-monthly called *Supporting Learners News*. It is produced to keep ULRs and others up to date with news, developments and resources from unionlearn and partners that will help

inform and support learners in the workplace. www.unionlearn.org.uk/supporting-learners-news

Unionlearn continues to build a successful track record of inspiring adults to take control of their lives through engaging in a wide variety of learning activities. Six unionlearn Supporting Learners events took place in October and November 2019. They were primarily aimed at ULRs and other reps involved in learning, plus officers and ULF project staff. The programme covered a wide range of learning and skills topics including information about regional priorities, new resources from unionlearn, an update on workplace learning initiatives and mental health in the workplace.

Unionlearn has produced a number of new publications this year to help support ULRs and learners. These include the booklet *Promoting Union Learning: a handbook for union learning reps (ULRs) and reps*, which is a useful guide for new and experienced reps with topics such as working with learners, funding for learners and working with your employer. *Setting Up a Learning Centre: a practical guide* was launched in 2020 and includes top tips on setting up a learning centre and a range of case studies from different unions.

With the outbreak of Covid-19 unionlearn was quick to respond with necessary changes to provide support to workers needing to work from home, being temporarily unable to work or made redundant due to the ongoing crisis. The campaign seeks to motivate people to engage with learning so that, when the country transitions from lockdown, workers are better prepared for the future.

Unionlearn created a Learning@Home page on its website as a key resource for getting access to a range of courses, resources and information to support learners. Unionlearn created free bite-sized e-learning modules on topics such as safe video conferencing, learning at home and five ways to wellbeing.

Unionlearn also introduced a free course search function and sections of information on topics such as ‘supporting learners from home’ and ‘learning at home with your children’ along with running an

extensive range of learning-related webinars. For more information visit:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/learning-home
www.unionlearn.org.uk/supporting-learners

The union learning Climbing Frame

The union learning Climbing Frame is the free website designed for ULRs 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 reviewed and updated to provide users with the latest information and advice.

Alongside the themes is a ‘learner management’ area that enables reps to record information from sessions with learners, helping them to set goals and actions and record achievements.

Reps can also store notes, upload documents and record their own learning activities and progression. Useful links, a discussion forum and an events page also feature on the site. Along with the website there is also a Climbing Frame app, which is free to download.

In 2019–20 we introduced new learning themes on running a learning centre, mental health, and learning at home. Existing learning themes were updated, our annual user survey was launched and new information included across the site to help keep ULRs up to date with new initiatives, resources and websites. The Climbing Frame continues to be a useful resource for new and established ULRs.

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

Supporting mid-life development

There continues to be high demand for the support ULRs offer older workers. The unionlearn model is a holistic approach. It does not just focus on supporting workers to remain active in work longer but also aims to inspire older workers to live healthy and secure working lives through access to lifelong learning and in good working environments with decent pay.

The notion of working for the same organisation throughout their career is no longer an option for most people. Many workers are now expected to change career several times during their working lives and the transferable skills element of the mid-life development review supports worker to become more resilient within the labour market.

The Erasmus+ Mid-life Skills Review European project developed a new practice model for the delivery of a mid-life skills review – with the emphasis on reviewing the skills and competencies of workers with low levels of basic skills www.unionlearn.org.uk/mid-life-skills-review-project. The online version of the highly popular Value My Skills cards has been extended and is now available in 10 languages, and the new *Smart Choices: preparing for the third age* publication was launched in March 2020.

A new project with Saffron Interactive is now underway to develop the new *Create your own future career* support chatbot. The launch is scheduled for spring 2021.

Unions continue to train, support and encourage union reps to engage with the mid-life development agenda. To date this work has resulted in over 8,000 workers undertaking mid-life review activities and a wide range of materials and resources have been developed to help support this work. The infrastructure in place to support union reps has helped build union capacity and thus unions are now the largest deliverer of workplace mid-life development reviews.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/mid-life-skills-review-project

Supporting younger workers

Many young people in work have an unmet need for good-quality impartial and independent careers advice as there is often no one to help them to get advice and plan for their future. The Career Kickstart project aims to help young people begin to plan their future career, as well as assist them to progress and get on at work.

Career Kickstart reviews are designed to provide support to young people in work, to start a

conversation about career plans and give them the best possible start to their career.

In winter 2019 unionlearn delivered five Career kickstart review sessions across the country, utilising the unionlearn booklet *Career Kickstart Reviews: a guide for union learning reps*. The sessions were an opportunity to discuss ways to support younger workers, to see a Career kickstart review being carried out, to try out some new activities and to share ideas with others from a range of unions.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/youth-employment-and-skills

Digital skills

Supporting learners to gain digital skills is a union priority. These skills help workers both at work and in their home lives and are something many workers wish to learn or improve. There is growing demand for digital and online skills within people's job roles, a trend accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and developing skills in this area can aid career progression and also reduce digital exclusion.

In terms of resources our SkillCheck offer on digital skills has expanded with a Getting Started and a Step Up ICT assessment now available. A new *Staying safe online* SkillCheck, produced with Digital Skills Education, has been added too. And *Safe video conferencing* is one of the selection of bite-sized learning modules available to all through the unionlearn website.

The digital skills section of the Climbing Frame website is regularly updated, giving ULRs easy access to lots of information, resources and tips around promoting and learning digital skills. Our unionlearn digital skills campaign week ran alongside Get Online Week in October once again, and featured workplace case studies from different unions.

Personal Cyber Security Train the Trainer workshops took place at unionlearn's 2019 annual conference and digital skills activities featured at the autumn unionlearn Supporting Learners events too. The

unionlearn publication *Working to Close the Digital Divide: a guide for ULRs supporting digital skills* was supplied to all event attendees and is available from unionlearn in print and in an interactive online version. It has information and checklists of essential digital skills, examples of union successes, and signposts to support, resources and learning opportunities too.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/digital-skills

Green skills

Green skills at work has always been an important area for unionlearn. In 2020 unionlearn produced a new report that explained the issues around climate change and the trade union Just Transition agenda highlighted examples of work unions are doing to raise awareness and increase learning opportunities around environmental issues and to signpost people to resources. The *Cutting Carbon, Growing Skills: green skills for a just transition* publication launch took the form of a webinar with speakers Graham Peterson (UCU and Greener Jobs Alliance), Sarah Woolley (BFAWU general secretary) and Tim Page (TUC senior policy officer).

Other work around green skills this year included:

- producing a Green Skills and Environmental Awareness unit for SkillCheck
- totally updating and refreshing the Green Skills at Work page on the unionlearn website, with links to resources and online learning
- sourcing an increasing number of case studies around the learning side of this agenda
- promoting regional TUC Education green reps and environmental training.

This area is expected to grow next year, with the potential for new publications and learning opportunities through partners and greater cross-departmental work.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/green-skills-work

Wellbeing and mental health

Wellbeing and mental health is a key priority in the unionlearn Supporting Learner's strategy. Health and wellbeing has always been a core trade union policy and unions have helped workers learn how to stay healthy through a range of union learning initiatives, workshops and courses.

Unionlearn's mental health first aid instructors have delivered a number of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England courses over the past year for a variety of unions across the country. Unionlearn has also carried out workshops on mental health and wellbeing, as requested by unions.

In March 2020 unionlearn ran a successful Learning, Health and Wellbeing event, which included information on topics such as depression, mental health and equality, mindfulness and stress management.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/MHFA-training

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 offers a 10 per cent discount on courses to union members and this continues to prove popular. In 2019–20 557 students took up the discount across 28 unions.

Unionlearn has worked in partnership with the Open University to support the production of free online information, advice and guidance and e-learning 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 that will help to identify academic and vocational pathways through post-compulsory to higher learning.

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

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.

Over 110 case studies and over 40 blogs were produced and posted to the unionlearn website and the unionlearn social media platforms during the year. These highlighted the range of support that unions have been giving members in workplaces and focused on a number of the year's priority campaigns such as English, maths, apprenticeships, mental health at work, supporting younger workers and digital skills. They also gave a platform to provide examples of learning around health and wellbeing, community engagement 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 regularly being 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 247,000 for the year.

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

Unionlearn ran campaign weeks around priority areas of work. Some of these tied in with national

campaigns such as National Numeracy Day, Get Online Week, Mental Health Awareness Week and Younger Workers Month, while others were unionlearn's own campaigns, for example Maths Workout Week and Literacy Works Week.

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

www.unionlearn.org.uk/learning-rep-magazine

Through our email alerts service, unionlearn creates and sends 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 13th annual conference took place on Thursday 11 July 2019 with over 300 delegates attending. The event was entitled Celebrating 20 years of the Union Learning Fund and was a celebration of the significant contribution unions and ULRs have made to help workers get on at work, and focused on skills development through learning of individuals and communities, meeting the needs of a modern workforce, and supporting high-quality apprenticeships to boost social justice, productivity and the UK skills base.

Speakers included:

- Frances O'Grady, TUC general secretary
- Rt Hon Anne Milton MP, minister of state for skills and apprenticeships
- Gordon Marsden MP, shadow minister for higher education, further education and skills
- Rowan Coleman, author
- Hussain Manawer, poet

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 10 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 six elements that capture the key components of the quality improvement process. These elements are not linear in progression; they form a holistic continuous improvement cycle that 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 2020–21 are:

- further developing cross-team working, communication and innovations collaboration
- collaboration with other TUC departments
- investigating more effective strategies for recording data not captured through current tools and processes
- greater contribution to union rep development/ diversification
- evaluation planning to ensure lessons are learned and connections made to wider work and aid in developing policy.

Finance

Total funding to unionlearn in 2019–20 was £12,930,000.

This funding is comprised of £900,000 from the TUC; £12m from the Department for Education

(DfE); and £30,000 from the National Agency for Erasmus+.

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

Budget heading 2019/20	Budget £	Actual outturn £
ULF – grants to unions and innovation projects	9,978,210	9,595,785
Delivery and support of the national ULF programme	1,321,561	1,404,955
Service, quality and standards	305,209	435,120
Strategy and research	190,087	248,123
Trade Union Education	204,933	314,325
TOTAL 2019/20	12,000,000	11,998,308

Appendix 1 Publications

You can find unionlearn publications at
www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications

[20 Years of Changing the World: how the ULF transforms learners' lives](#)

[Career Kickstart Reviews: a guide for union reps](#)

[Cutting Carbon, Growing Skills: green skills for a just transition](#)

[LGBT+ Inclusive Apprenticeships](#)

[Promoting Union Learning: a handbook for ULRs and reps](#)

[Ready to Read: promoting the use of Quick Reads in the workplace](#)

[Setting up a Learning Centre: a practical guide that provides you with ideas and resources you need to set up your own centre](#)

[Smart Choices: preparing for the third age – supporting learners at mid-life](#)
[Awaiting launch](#)

[Your Rights as an Apprentice](#)

Newsletters and magazines

[Learning and Skills Policy Update newsletter](#)

[Learning Rep magazine](#)

[Supporting Learners News](#)

Website materials

[Bite-sized e-learning modules from unionlearn](#)

Webinars

[Working from home by unionlearn](#)

[TUC Education: webinars, e-modules, training](#)

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Appendix 3 **Abbreviations**

AEB	adult education budget
AMW	apprenticeship minimum wage
BIS	Department for Business Innovation and Skills
CPD	continuing professional development
DfE	Department for Education
EHCP	education, health and care plan
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
FE	further education (typically in local colleges)
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GLA	Greater London Authority
HE	higher education (typically in university)
IACL	informal adult and community learning
IAG	information, advice and guidance
ICT	information and communication technology
IfATE	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
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 4–9 (formerly A–C) at GCSE, ie expected achievement at age 16
Level 3	broadly equivalent to A Level, ie expected achievement at age 18
MCA	Mayoral Combined Authority
NRS	National Retraining Scheme
OTJ	off the job (training)
PBR	payment by result
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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