

Aimhigher...

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Supporting union learners into higher learning

A toolkit for union learning reps

Contents

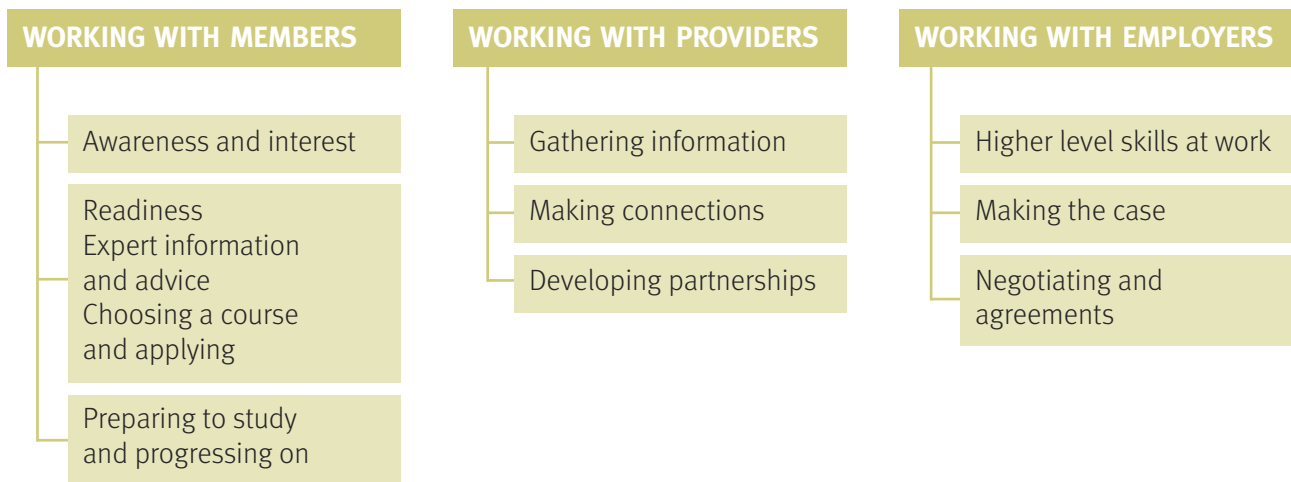
Introduction	1
Unions and higher learning	2
Working with members 3.1 Awareness 3.2 Interest 3.3 Readiness 3.4 Getting expert information and advice 3.5 Choosing a course and applying 3.6 Getting ready and preparing to study 3.7 Getting started and progressing	3
Working with providers 4.1 Gathering information 4.2 Making connections 4.3 Developing partnerships	4
Working with employers 5.1 Higher level skills at work 5.2 Making the case 5.3 Learning agreements	5
Jargon buster	6
Sources of further information	7



Section 1

Introduction

Introduction



Higher education is generally considered to be learning that is above A-level. It can be academic study such as philosophy or maths. Or it can be vocational learning such as engineering or nursing. Reasons for choosing higher education vary. Some people may simply enjoy learning and the personal challenge of stretching themselves and achieving higher level qualifications. For others, motivation may come from the need to keep up with the increasingly high levels of qualifications of those around them and may be very work-focused. As a union learning rep (ULR) you can help by understanding the different reasons that bring people to the decision to enter higher education and support them in finding the right course. You will play an important part supporting them in achieving their goals and getting the most from their studies.

“I found the course hard work and it was a challenge, but I got a buzz from doing it.”

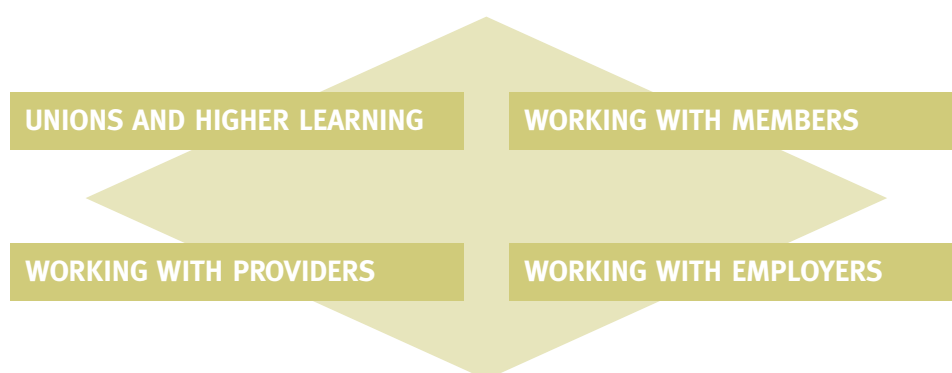
You have a key role to play in supporting learners, negotiating with providers to work flexibly with union learners and negotiating with employers to support their staff into higher education. Getting people into higher education is vital for the UK economy. In response to the national report on skills by Lord Leitch, the Government has committed to some challenging skills targets. This includes action to help ensure that 40 per cent of the workforce are qualified to NVQ level 4 or equivalent by 2020. Seventy per cent of the people that will be in the workforce in 2020 are already working, so a key focus is to support those already in work to develop their higher level skills.

“I left school 15 years ago with some GCSEs, but not very many. I had done lots of short courses at work and I thought: ‘it’s time to go on and do something higher’.”

In 2006/07 there were more than 1.5m higher education learners and the Government is committed to increasing the diversity of learners so they reflect society. Higher education should not be seen as something that is for the privileged few or young people alone. It is for anyone who wants to further their learning or open new possibilities at any stage of their life, particularly if they:

- left school at 16 but are now looking to get new qualifications
- want to further their career
- want to make a complete career change
- want to pursue a specialist interest, for example in photography or writing fiction
- have had children, and want to return to studying.

Using the toolkit



This toolkit is a flexible resource designed for unions and ULRs to support members in higher learning. This includes engaging and supporting members and working with providers and employers to increase opportunities into higher learning. The landscape of higher learning is complex, particularly for mature students taking non-traditional routes. These materials are designed for reps to dip in and out of as they wish. The checklists and tools are useful resources that are linked to a training module for ULRs. This training is designed to support the use of these materials and is highly recommended.

The good practice tips, activities, case studies and information in this toolkit have been developed from the experiences of ULRs, union project workers and learners supported into higher learning by their ULR or union.

Specialist information has been provided from the higher education sector, including the Open University and Aimhigher Greater Manchester.

The jargon buster at the back of this toolkit will help you with words or phrases that may be unfamiliar.



Section 2

Unions and higher learning

Unions and higher learning

The trade union movement has always supported access to education. Education helps improve democracy and the fight for social justice. The aim of trade unions and unionlearn is to open up learning opportunities for all, whether this is to help people access higher learning for the first time or to support members with their continuing education and professional development. Unions are working to support members into learning that is appropriate to their needs and starting point. Unions also encourage learners to fulfil their potential and help them overcome barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their aspirations.

Over the past 10 years unions have become increasingly focused on supporting members to access learning. This work has been hugely successful: more than 20,000 ULRs have been trained and over 200,000 learners accessed learning opportunities via their union in 2007–08, many for the first time since leaving school.

Recent figures indicate that around 30 per cent of the 6.5m union members in the UK have a degree or equivalent, 15 per cent some other higher level qualification and 21 per cent have A-levels or equivalent Level 3 qualifications.

Unions recognise that the benefits of achieving a higher education qualification can include:

- increased employability
- financial reward
- personal benefits
- job mobility
- improved job-related skills.

Adults with no formal qualifications are more likely to be unemployed and those with qualifications and skills are much more likely to be in work. Higher learning also develops important transferable skills such as numeracy, communication and information technology, all of which are needed in the fast-changing world of employment.

A vocational programme of study can lead to employment in particular work areas, such as accountancy, business administration, library studies, sports science and teaching. Some occupations require a higher education qualification such as medicine, chartered engineering and architecture.

“The belief of trade unions is that learners who have started their learning journey have every right to continue it.”

“Over the course of their working life, the holder of a degree can expect to earn, on average, comfortably over £100,000 more than a similar person with two or more A levels.”

“I was really pleased to hear about the OU courses from my union. It made sense that they should be linking up with the OU and I think that helped give me confidence to find out more.”

Unions have a unique role to play in understanding the learning needs of members and working with employers and learning providers to help meet those learning needs, overcome barriers to learning and support learner progression. Unions and unionlearn are already working with the higher education sector in a number of ways, including:

- joint work between union education services and universities on courses for union officers and reps at Level 4 and beyond
- support for professional development for members: e.g. Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists supporting women returners to enable them to access continuous professional development
- the National Union of Journalists is working to improve professional learning opportunities for freelance and rurally located members
- the Professional Footballers’ Association has supported footballers into professional jobs to follow their playing careers
- unionlearn has a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Open University; this includes a 10 per cent discount on courses for union members
- a MoU has been signed between unionlearn and Foundation Degree Forward.

But there is more to do...

We need to:

- ensure higher level learning is on the workplace agenda
- understand what members want and need
- get employer support for higher learning
- work more closely with providers.

Activity

This activity will help you find out what else is happening in your union in relation to higher learning.

Ask other ULRs, your education and learning officers or project workers the following questions:

- What higher education (HE) learning has the union already helped members with?
- Do other learning reps have contact with HE providers?
- What experiences have they had?
- What HE learning are members in other workplaces interested in?
- How can information on the higher learning needs of members be shared and acted upon in your union?
- Where does HE sit with your union’s policy on learning and skills?
- What issues are there around supporting members to access HE learning (such as time for study or help with fees) or the benefits for members?
- What learning agreements already exist with your employer(s) and do these include any reference to higher learning?



Section 3

Working with members

Working with members

To help support your members it is useful to think about their needs and where they are on their learning journey.



STEP 1 AWARENESS

People will be at different starting points in terms of their understanding of higher learning. Some learners will only need support to find information and advice about courses. Others might want to know more about what higher education has to offer and help to think about whether they are ready for higher learning.

“A case management officer heard about the offer of OU courses at a ULR open day. I had heard of the OU but was not really sure what they offered. I had been thinking about going back to further study, so this helped me to get a feel for what is involved.”

You can help learners explore their reasons for considering higher learning using a checklist:

Awareness checklist

I am interested in higher learning because: (please tick)

- ☐ I want to pursue an area of personal interest
- ☐ I am looking to develop new skills and experiences
- ☐ I want to progress from the previous learning
- ☐ I want to make myself more employable
- ☐ I want to have more career choices
- ☐ It will help me to face new challenges at work
- ☐ I am at a place in my life where I need a new direction or challenge
- ☐ I am motivated by the experiences of colleagues, family or friends
- ☐ Other: _____

This checklist can help to clarify thinking and will help you to explore a member's motivation to study. Keep a copy of it on file as it may come in useful if their motivation wanes at a later date.

Activity – Higher Education quiz

This quiz will help you raise awareness of higher learning in the workplace. Use this with your members and add in your own questions.

1. A Foundation Degree is ideal for people who:

- ☐ a) want to continue learning and improve their knowledge and skills?
- ☐ b) want to train for a specific job or profession?
- ☐ c) are looking for promotion or for a new career?

2. Which of these subjects was not in the four most popular in 2003/4?

- ☐ a) Business and Administrative studies
- ☐ b) Languages
- ☐ c) Social studies

3. What percentage of students in HE are male/female?

- ☐ a) 58% women, 42% men
- ☐ b) 42% women, 58% men
- ☐ c) 50% women, 50% men

4. Foundation Degrees are available as:

- ☐ a) full-time courses?
- ☐ b) part-time courses?
- ☐ c) online/distance learning courses?

5. What percentage of HE students are mature students?

- ☐ a) 32%
- ☐ b) 42%
- ☐ c) 52%

6. How many of the UK's 17 to 30-year-olds went into HE for the first time in 2005/6?

- ☐ a) 43%
- ☐ b) 53%
- ☐ c) 63%

7. Students on Foundation Degree courses usually study:

- ☐ a) in the workplace?
- ☐ b) at home?
- ☐ c) at a university or college campus?

Answers

Q1: **Answer: a, b and c.** The blend of academic rigour, work-related learning and workplace experience mean that Foundation Degrees suit people who want to continue their learning, test a career idea, start a new career, change direction or develop their existing career.

Q2: **Answer: b.** In 2003/04 students studied in the following subject areas:

Business and administrative studies	13.4%
Subjects allied to medicine	12.8%
Education	8.6%
Social studies	8.5%
Biological sciences	6.6%
Creative arts and design	6.2%
Computer science	6.1%
Engineering and technology	6.0%
Languages	6.0%
Combined	5.5%
Historical and philosophical studies	4.5%
Law	3.7%
Physical sciences	3.3%
Medicine and dentistry	2.4%
Architecture, building and planning	2.1%
Mass communications and documentation	2.0%
Mathematical sciences	1.4%
Agriculture and related subjects	0.7%
Veterinary science	0.2%

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2005): Students in Higher Education Institutions 2003/04, tables 2a-d

Q3: **Answer: a.** In 2003/04, approximately 58 per cent of undergraduate students were women and 42 per cent were men.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2005): Students in Higher Education Institutions 2003/04.

Q4: **Answer: a, b and c.** Degrees are accessible and responsive to employer and student needs. Flexibilities in time and place of study allow students to select courses that fit their personal and work commitments.

Q5: **Answer: c.** Fifty-two per cent of first year undergraduate students are mature students.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2005): Students in Higher Education Institutions 2003/04.

Q6: **Answer: a.** The provisional figure for the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) for 17 to 30-year-olds entering higher education in 2005/06 was 43 per cent.

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Q7: **Answer: a, b and c.** Work-based learning is part of all Foundation Degree courses. Home study features in all Foundation Degree courses, although it is more significant for those doing online/distance learning courses. Most students also spend some time studying at a university or college campus (e.g. teaching sessions, workshops and summer schools).

Here are some things you can do to support learners:

- recognise that for some members higher learning is a step into the unknown
- promote the benefits of higher learning to all colleagues
- publicise higher learning opportunities
- provide learners with support in the workplace
- help members to understand the different routes to learning at Level 3 and above.

“The University of Bolton, in partnership with a number of other organisations, has held events for ULRs and others. These were designed to dispel any myths around the accessibility, affordability and achievability of higher education for those in work. Topics included entry and progression routes, the role of accreditation of prior experience and learning, academic and vocational qualification frameworks, vocationally-focussed higher learning opportunities such as Foundation Degrees, part-time opportunities, and student finance and funding.”

STEP 2

INTEREST

Moving on from initial discussions about higher learning, the next step is to know more about what learners are interested in, their motivations and barriers and what support they need to get started.

The union learning Climbing Frame

The union learning Climbing Frame is an easy-to-use electronic tool that allows learning reps to create pathways of learning and action plans for individuals that can be reviewed and updated as they progress on their learning journey. The Climbing Frame recognises that union learners have aspirations, skills and experiences that relate to all aspects of their lives: their current jobs, possible career routes and their personal situation.

At the moment there is a generic Climbing Frame, but some unions are also developing customised ones for their members.



“Learners will love the Climbing Frame because they can see how they’re getting on. As a ULR I can use it to demonstrate to the company that workplace learning really makes a difference.”

The Climbing Frame offers a wealth of information on learning, with a specific section on higher learning. It is a useful tool to help you keep an ongoing record of who you have worked with, when and how often you have met and actions that you have agreed and implemented. You can print sections for yourself or for your learners. Use it to construct a personal Climbing Frame and action plan with learners that can be regularly reviewed and updated.

Activity

To register to use the Climbing Frame go to www.unionlearn.org.uk/climbingframe

Before using the Climbing Frame with your members it is recommended that you attend the Climbing Frame training course. It’s also worth visiting the Climbing Frame pages of the unionlearn website where you will find useful information about how the Climbing Frame can be used to support members who are considering higher learning.

These activities can assist you in getting members to think through possible barriers and help them to find solutions.

“I felt nervous at first, asking myself: ‘Can I cope?’, ‘What will be expected of me?’ and ‘What is an assignment?’. I had no idea. Although I think I am quite a confident person, I was frightened by the idea of learning.”

Activity

Talk to a member and find out about any reservations they may have about higher level studying. Use the prompts below to frame your discussions and help them find solutions.

- Time to study
- Cost of the course
- Caring commitments
- Not being sure how a course can meet work or personal goals
- The range of courses available
- A lack of confidence that a member is capable of studying at a higher level
- Concerns about getting the right support for additional needs, such as dyslexia
- Encouragement to start or complete the course.

Activity

Use the Climbing Frame with learners to discuss higher level learning needs. You can help members to prepare for and succeed on higher learning programmes and understand the commitment that will be required by getting them to complete a self-assessment tool such as the one below.

Learner self-assessment tool

FIRST THOUGHTS

Why do I want to study? What are my learning goals? (Work now, work future, pleasure?)

What subject and or qualification am I interested in?

What level should I study at?

How much time could I study in an average week?

What do I need to do to get started? (Credit for experience and skills I already have, Level 3 qualifications?)

NARROWING IT DOWN

What courses are out there for me?

When and where do I want to study? (Home, at work, at a college/university, a mix of these?)

How much will it cost and can I afford it?

What financial help is available?

Which course shall I go for?

How do I apply?

GETTING STARTED AND KEEPING GOING

What do I need to do to prepare for my course?

What do I need to do ensure I complete my course?

If I have done a taster/short course, what next?

OTHER THINGS

What additional support can I get?

(to help me with childcare, to help with my disability, to help with my dyslexia)

How can I get credit for qualifications gained in other countries?

STEP 4

GETTING EXPERT INFORMATION AND ADVICE

The unionlearn Learning and Careers Advice Service will provide you with free information and personalised careers advice and guidance for your members. It is a free, impartial, confidential service to help members develop new skills, improve their job prospects or change jobs. It includes a CV Builder, Skills and Interests Assessment and an Adult Decision Making Readiness Tool.

The service is for all unionlearn and union staff, TU Education tutors, union representatives and union members. You can contact the advice line on 08000 92 91 90 (8am to 10pm) or visit the unionlearn website at **www.unionlearn.org.uk/uladvice**

Activity

To raise awareness of unionlearn's advice service, you can download leaflets from the unionlearn learning and careers advice service website (www.unionlearn.org.uk/uladvice) to give to members. You can also download the posters to decorate your workplace or learning centre.

Activity

This activity will help you to store all your HE contacts in one place for easy reference. It may also be helpful to keep a note of your contacts so that you have a record in the future. You can use the template below.

You can also find out detailed information about your local colleges and universities by visiting them. Look on an institution's website for details of open days – most hold several a year for prospective students. Arrange to go along: it will help you get a real feel for the institution and what it has to offer mature students.

Date of contact	Provider	Contact person	Comments
01.01.09	Open University	Edith O'Brien eb@ou.org.uk	Details of study skills support. Full range available as soon as learners register with OU. Includes help with essay writing.
02.01.09	Foundation Degree Forward	n.khan@fdf.org.uk (Naz)	Information on support for mature students in post.

There are a number of places you can go to for a general understanding of higher learning opportunities and for members to get specific advice and guidance about careers, courses, entry requirements, finance and applying to higher education, including:

Admissions and widening participation departments

Most universities and colleges have a central admissions or student recruitment department that takes initial enquiries from interested applicants and provides general information about entrance requirements. An Admissions Tutor is responsible for setting entrance requirements, looking at application forms and organising other parts of the selection process, including interviews.

Connexions

Provides general careers advice to those aged under 19 (or older, if you have a disability).

www.connexions-direct.com/index.cfm?go=localservices

Commercial Careers Advisers

The Institute of Careers Guidance has a list of members that provide advice. Advisers charge a fee for their services.

www.icg-uk.org/findacareersadviser.html

FE Careers Advisers

Learners studying at further education colleges or adult education centres are likely to have a college-based Careers Adviser who will be able to offer advice about gaining the right entrance qualifications for HE and on applying for the right course.

Nextstep

The nextstep information and advice service can help members improve their career prospects by learning new skills, retraining or gaining new qualifications. It offers free information on learning and work to anyone aged 20 and over.

www.nextstep.org.uk

Prospectus

Universities and colleges produce prospectuses that provide details of their courses. This information usually covers course content and entry requirements, as well as more general information related to finances, student life etc. For a free copy of a prospectus you need to call the institution directly or look at its website, as most prospectuses are also available online. **www.hero.ac.uk** provides a link to individual university and college websites. These individual sites are likely to contain full online prospectuses.

The Open University

Offers free advice for those interested in the Open University.

www.open.ac.uk/careers

University Careers Services

Usually only offers advice to existing students, but some will offer pre-entry support to those interested in applying.

www.prospects.ac.uk

Support for learners

Learners may need to take advice on how an institution will be able to support their needs. If so, contacting the university or college early on is important, especially if the learner is applying for the Disabled Student Allowance. Most universities and colleges have a learning support team and disability support officers who will advise potential applicants. Their contact details will be on the institution's website or in the prospectus. They would usually support learners with a physical disability, those with mental health problems or individuals with a learning difference such as dyslexia. The Open University has a 'Dyslexia Toolkit' for students and tutors that provides a wealth of helpful information and tips to support learners with dyslexia on OU courses.

“A clerical officer working in the courts service was made aware of Open University courses through her ULR. She discussed the course information provided by the ULR with her line manager who agreed to pay half the course cost.”

These activities can help you support learners who need additional support.

Activity

A useful book for learners with dyslexia returning to study is *Making Dyslexia Work for You* by Goodwin & Thomson. It is printed on cream paper to make reading easier and is accompanied by a CD so that readers with dyslexia can use a 'read aloud' package on their PC to access the text. Find out the details of where to buy or borrow this book so that you can show it to learners with dyslexia – do an internet search or try your local library.

Learners with a disability can also contact Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. It has a free telephone helpline (0800 328 5050 or 0300 068 2422 – Minicom). It is online at www.skill.org.uk. Call the helpline and see if there is support available for intermediaries such as ULRs to help learners with disabilities. Find out the common problems and solutions. Take a look at the website and familiarise yourself with it.

You can help learners explore options from different providers and consider what might be best for them. Higher learning is not just about full-time degree courses. There are thousands of different courses, qualifications and subjects on offer. Learners can study full-time, part-time and in a range of ways including distance learning. This flexibility means that learners can fit higher level studies around their existing commitments, such as work and childcare. However, higher learning can be demanding for busy workplace learners and the support of the union may make all the difference. For some members choosing the right course is easy – they know the subject and qualification they want and they find them on offer at their local university or college. Other members may need more help in selecting a course and qualification that is right for them.

You can help learners choose an appropriate course using the questions below:

Choosing a course

What types of higher level courses are there?

Who provides higher level courses?

What types of qualifications are there?

Where can I get more information and advice?

What routes are there into higher learning?

What are the course entry requirements?

Will the course delivery and assessment methods suit me?

What are the costs and is financial help available?

Where can I get expert advice on costs and finance?

How can I choose between different courses and providers?

How do I apply?

Members who have dyslexia or other learning differences may also need to think about the kind of support that is available for them at an institution, as well as how a course is delivered and assessed. If a member finds writing under time pressure difficult, for example, they may benefit from finding a course that is assessed in a range of ways, rather than one that is assessed using only examinations. Some dyslexic learners may find that courses delivered mainly through lectures cause them difficulties because taking notes and retaining oral information can be problematic. Courses that are delivered in a range of ways, using ICT, practical activities, and so on, may be more suited to these learners' needs.

Study options

The first thing to think about is the learner's study options, as this will affect the type of course they choose. A blended approach is best as this gives learners the opportunity to experience a variety of methods, including face-to-face, group sessions and home study. Encourage learners to think about what is likely to help them succeed rather than simply what method fits best with a busy life.

Full-time or part-time study? A full-time course involves regular attendance – probably around 21 hours study a week. A part-time course requires fewer hours a week. Many work-related courses are designed to fit in with the needs of people in employment. In some cases these are delivered flexibly or in the workplace.

Number of hours: 'Guided learning hours' refers to the number of hours per week a student has tutorial support. This support can be online. For all types of courses learners will be expected to study independently.

Distance learning: Members learn from home or work as and when they can, with support on offer through email, telephone and residential schools. Learners are sent the materials, both through the post but also via the web and email.

Some institutions offer flexible forms of learning that blend distance learning, online learning and support, and short residential courses.

Types of courses

The table below will help you understand the various levels of higher education qualifications.

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

Postgraduate	Doctural – <i>Doctorates</i>
	Master – <i>Masters Degrees, Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas</i>
Undergraduate	Honours – <i>Bachelor Degrees with Honours, Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas</i>
	Intermediate – <i>Foundation Degrees, ordinary (Bachelor) Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education and other diplomas</i>
	Certificate – <i>Certificates of Higher Education</i>

Access courses: Many members may want to consider taking an Access course. These are offered by local FE colleges and Adult Education Centres. Some full-time courses are free, with fees varying for part-time courses. Access courses are designed specifically for adults aged 21 or over who wish to gain entry to higher education courses. They provide the relevant knowledge and skills for mature students to succeed in higher learning and can provide the Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications needed. Courses are usually one year full-time or two years part-time, although some providers offer more flexible provision. The course usually includes subject studies as well as key skills (e.g. IT, numeracy and

“An admin assistant's ULR encouraged her to take up the Open University opening module. She says the deciding factor in returning to learn was the support of her ULR, who she knew very well. He helped her plan assignments around her other responsibilities and gave her helpful tips and support.”

communication), study skills and tutorial support. Access courses are available in broad subject areas such as humanities, social science and law.

When choosing an Access course a member needs to select one that is Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) recognised, as these are acceptable to universities and colleges. It is important to check with the chosen HE institution whether the course they are applying to will accept an Access course, and whether they have any preference over which course is taken. Occasionally HE courses may not accept an Access course or may want a learner to have additional Level 2 and 3 qualifications. Full-time courses may still have flexible options that are appealing to learners in the workplace. For information and a searchable database of all full-time higher education courses on QAA-recognised Access courses go to:

www.ucas.com/search/index.html

Lancaster University offers a wide range of Continuing Education courses and many are accessible for workplace learners. Currently, there are 24 'Learning from Home' courses offered in formats to suit different learning styles, including online, video, audio-tape or using study packs. Each course carries CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme) points that may be used to gain access or count towards higher education study programmes at Lancaster and other educational institutions.

The University of Bolton offers three Foundation Degrees (Clothing, Footwear and Textiles) that are delivered entirely through distance learning.

The University of Liverpool's Continuing Education courses are offered across a wide range of regional venues. In certain circumstances delivery can be offered at workplace venues; for example, some courses have been made available to staff at Ford's Halewood plant – with tuition provided as staff come off shift.

In partnership with Laureate Online Education, the University of Liverpool offers fully online Masters programmes in Business Administration, Public Health, Information Technology and Information Systems Management.

The main types of qualifications available are summarised below:

Certificate/Diploma of Higher Education: Some universities offer a Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education. These can be full- or part-time, taking around two or three years. Those taking a certificate or diploma course can continue their studies to achieve an Honours Degree.

Foundation Degree: Foundation Degrees (FDs) combine academic and work-based learning and are designed for people who want to develop work-related skills. Courses can be taken full-time over two years but many are available part-time over three years. Courses are often available at local Further Education Colleges and are run in conjunction with a university. Once a student completes a FD they can continue their studies to complete a related Honours Degree. Every FD should have at least one linked Honours Degree to which a student can progress after completion of the FD. For a national listing of FDs go to:

www.fdf.ac.uk/courses For a list of full-time FDs go to:
www.ucas.com/search/index.html

Higher National Diploma/Higher National Certificate: A Higher National Diploma (HND) and a Higher National Certificate (HNC) are vocational qualifications in a broad range of work-related subjects. HNCs are generally offered part-time to those already in employment. They usually take two years. HNDs are more likely to be full-time, but part-time options are available. For a list of all Higher National courses and a student guide for each course see: www.edexcel.org.uk/quals/hn/

Honours Degree: Honours Degrees are the most common HE qualifications and they are usually offered by universities or colleges of Higher Education. Part-time courses are listed on individual institutions' websites. For information on all higher education courses, including professional courses, see www.hero.ac.uk

Modular degrees: An Honours Degree may also be offered as a modular degree, which is a course that gives students as much flexibility as possible to design their own programme of study. Modular degrees allow combinations of subjects.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs): NVQs go from Level 1 to Level 5, with Levels 4 and 5 considered equivalent to HE qualifications. The Management NVQ which is available at Levels 3-5, for example, offers various levels of qualification. Level 3 is aimed at line managers such as supervisors, Level 4 at middle managers and Level 5 is for those in senior management positions.

Postgraduate qualifications: The term postgraduate refers to a qualification taken by those who already hold a degree or other HE qualification. Some courses also provide a professional qualification while others are more general. Learners are usually awarded a Masters (MA or MSc) or postgraduate certificate/diploma (PGCert/PGDip), although other awards exist, such as MEd (Education) or MMus (Music).

Encourage your members to use this simple checklist to find a course:

Course checklist

Course title

Compare courses with the same title, look at content and optional units

Qualification type

Check the level you need for your chosen career

Study mode

Patterns of attendance will vary; check the study hours expected

Length of course

This needs to match level of commitment; you may want to try one module as a taster

Assessment and study methods

Check the focus on practical work or studying independently, coursework, projects or presentations

Entrance requirements

These can vary, especially for mature students

Compare costs

Check course fees

Types of providers

Universities and **Colleges of Higher Education** provide the majority of higher education courses. Some are single subject institutions, for example agricultural colleges and medical schools. However, **Further Education Colleges** also offer some higher level courses and are particularly aimed at people who want to study locally on a part-time basis. Many Further Education colleges offer courses such as HNC/D and foundation degrees. Higher education provision in further education colleges may be 'franchised' from a university. There may be agreements in place to allow students to transfer or progress to particular programmes taught at the university itself.

The biggest provider of higher education courses by distance learning is **The Open University** (OU). The OU has around 150,000 learners taking degree courses, nearly all studying part-time and around 70 per cent in full-time employment. All members of unions affiliated to the TUC who are new to studying with the OU can obtain a 10 per cent discount on Level 1 courses that carry 30 and 60 credit points (120 points is the equivalent to the first year of a degree course). They can also get a 10 per cent discount on all OU products such as workbooks and software. For details see www.open.ac.uk/union/p3.shtml

learndirect Learning through Work offers individuals or organisations the chance to gain higher level work-related qualifications. Learning takes place at work and online, and programmes are customised to build on a learner's existing skills and knowledge. See www.learningthroughwork.org or call learndirect on 0800 100 900.

Private training providers offer a range of work-related and professional qualifications in a number of job related areas. Encourage your members to use this simple checklist to find a suitable provider:

Provider checklist

Location

Think about travel, personal safety, parking and public transport to learning centre or campus

Quality of courses and institutions

For information on the quality of courses, see www.unistats.com

Childcare facilities

Check location and availability

Size and type of institution

Benefits and drawbacks of large and small institutions

Student facilities

Sports and social clubs, IT, libraries – the social side of learning

Support for learners

Additional support for learners with disabilities, learning difficulties or those new to higher education

unionlearn Quality Award

Indicates union-friendly provision. For more information go to www.unionlearn.org.uk/qualityaward

Entry requirements

You can encourage all workers to consider routes into higher learning, whatever their starting point, but it is important that they explore entry requirements early in their research so they can develop any new skills and experiences before they make an application.

Mature entrants with substantial relevant experience may be offered some exemption from entry requirements and/or from parts of the course. There are two systems in place for accrediting prior learning:

APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning)

APL gives you credit for any previous learning you may have done, even if it is not at the right level or in the right subject. For example, short courses in the workplace may well be accredited.

APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning)

APEL gives you credit for any learning that you have acquired through work experience, such as in your paid employment or in voluntary work.

Both systems not only allow adults to gain entry to higher education courses but may also count towards the actual course, meaning the amount of study a learner needs to complete to get their qualification is reduced. If a member is interested in finding out more they need to speak to the admissions tutor for their intended course.

Explore the qualifications your members may already have. More traditional routes into higher education include:

- AS/A-levels and Applied A-levels
- BTEC National Diploma/National Certificate
- GNVQ
- National Vocational Qualifications.

The national qualifications framework (NQF) is a classification for qualifications that helps to facilitate transfer and progression. Further details and a downloadable leaflet on the NQF is available at:

www.qca.org.uk/qca_5968.aspx.

Members with qualifications gained overseas can go to **www.naric.co.uk** for advice and guidance. **Naric** is the national agency for information on international qualifications. Universities will have an International Officer who can advise.

The **Refugee Assessment and Guidance Unit** (RAGU) was set up in 1995 to improve the employment prospects of refugees and asylum-seekers with higher level education or professional qualifications from their own countries. For more information see **www.londonmet.ac.uk/ragu**

Entry requirements for Foundation Degree Forward (e.g. formal qualifications, relevant experience, and employment or voluntary work in a specific role) recognise peoples' existing experience and achievements and focus on their desire to learn and potential to succeed.

Within the university sector, qualifications are more commonly understood in terms of CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme) points. These require the achievement of 120 credits at each of higher education Levels 1, 2 and 3 for the award of an honours degree.

- Higher Education Certificates require at least 120 points at HE level 1.
- Higher Education Diplomas require at least 240 points at HE levels 1 and 2, with a minimum of 120 at level 2.
- An honours degree requires 360 points at levels 1, 2 and 3, with a minimum of 120 at level 3 and 120 and level 2.

Some courses may also require applicants to meet other entrance requirements such as:

- **Relevant work experience** (paid or unpaid) – this is especially the case with vocational courses and those that provide job-related training e.g. social work, management, teaching.
- **Portfolio of work** – this is usually the case for art and design related courses.
- **Specific skills** – for example, a course related to music may require applicants to play instruments at a certain level, or a course in outdoor pursuits could require skills such as climbing, hill walking or camping.
- **Entrance test** – for some courses applicants may be asked to sit an entrance test as well as gain relevant qualifications. These are most common in full-time courses related to law, medicine and dentistry.

Activity

This activity will give you an idea of what is expected from an entrance test. Go to the following link: www.bbk.ac.uk/manop/management/forstudents/docs/Foundation%20degree%20maths%20PRACTICE%20test.pdf and take the Foundation Degree in Management practice test from Birkbeck College.

Postgraduate study

The usual entrance requirement for postgraduate study is a degree in a relevant subject. However, there are exceptions. For some postgraduate qualifications applicants without a degree will be accepted, but only when an applicant has substantial, relevant professional experience and can demonstrate that they can cope with the course content. It is usually only taught postgraduate courses, rather than research-based courses, that accept non-graduates.

Costs and sources of funding

Members wanting to undertake higher level study need to have a good idea of the costs involved and any financial support available to help pay for studies. Funding and financing for higher level courses depends on the type of course and on a member's circumstances. Some information is provided here.

Part-time HE students – costs

Most part-time students will need to pay a course fee. The amount will vary enormously depending on the institution and course they have chosen but anything up to £1,500 per year would not be unusual. However, short courses are more affordable. These range in price from around £100 to £450. As well as tuition fees a learner may also need to purchase course materials, such as books and equipment. When working out the cost of a part-time course a learner should also think about other expenses such as travel and childcare.

Part-time HE students – financial help

Learners may be eligible for financial help. Eligible students entering HE in England in 2006 could apply for a tuition fee grant of up to £1,150 per year and a course grant of up to £250 per year to help pay for additional costs.

Further detailed information is available in *A guide to financial support for part time students in higher education* at www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/DG_066544. You can also get a copy by ringing the DIUS information line on 0800 731 9133. Updated information is also available on the Aimhigher website at www.direct.gov.uk/uni

The amount of financial help an individual can get usually depends on their income and that of their partner, as well as how many children they have. As an example, if a learner is single and has no children they will get the full, part-time grant if their income is below around £15,000.

There are other possible sources of financial help to consider:

- Career development loans
- Adult Learning Grant
- Teacher training, NHS funded courses, nursing and social work
- Open University union discounts
- Access to learning fund
- Support for disabled students
- Support for parents
- The Train to Gain initiative
- City & Guilds Bursaries
- LEA/Student Loans Company
- FE college welfare rights advisers
- Citizen's Advice Bureaux
- Student union advisers
- High street banks
- Employers
- Charities
- Trade union bursaries.

The Open University offers a 10 per cent discount to union learners taking their first 30 or 60 point higher education course.

Citizen's Advice Bureaux: A potential HE learner who receives any form of benefit may wish to seek advice on how becoming a HE student will affect them. For details of local CAB services see: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

FE college welfare rights advisers: If a learner is currently studying at an FE college or adult education centre they may have a college-based welfare rights officer/student finance adviser.

High street banks: Most large high street banks have a student adviser who can provide up-to-date information and advice on student finances. If a learner is considering applying to HE, contacting their usual bank to see if there is a service available can be a good starting point.

LEA/Student Loans Company: It is usually a learner's Local Education Authority that is able to offer advice to potential HE students. However, some areas of the country are running a pilot scheme where all enquiries and applications for funding go directly to the Student Loans Company. For more information on where to make initial enquiries about student grants and loans see: www.studentsupportdirect.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=1647,467622&_dad=portal&_schema=PROTOCOL

Student union advisers: Some university and college student union centres employ advisers that provide information to students on financial issues. For more information about student union services see: www.nus.org.uk

Edge Hill University offers an online Access option supported by skills and subject tutors and online discussion forums. It is completely free and is delivered online over 30 weeks. The course runs any time and learners meet for an introductory meeting and then once a month for the duration of the course. Such meetings are generally in the evening and can be arranged within a workplace. Completion of the course (30 credits at level 3 – accredited both by Edge Hill and the Open College Network) allows progression to a part-time/full-time Degree and Foundation Degree. For further details, see: http://info.edgehill.ac.uk/EHU_eprospectus/leaflet/ACC001.asp

Activity

To get an idea of the costs of studying, choose three different types of courses and find out their fees. Compare them and make a note of them. You can use these as examples for members when discussing approximate costs of learning.

Making an application

Once the learner has chosen a course and is confident that they meet the entry requirements then they will need to apply for a place. Application procedures and timescales vary depending on the course and institution.

For part-time courses:

Choose a provider



Complete the application



Send to university or college

For full-time courses:

Apply to five institutions through UCAS at **www.ucas.com**

For Open University courses:

Call an adviser on

0870 333 4340



Complete the registration form online at **www.open.ac.uk**

STEP 6

GETTING READY TO STUDY

Getting ready can also include developing study skills. HE tutors are usually very willing to answer questions – but new students do not always know what questions to ask. Some of the jargon that is familiar in HE will not be familiar to a new learner. For learners with no family history of higher learning there may be limited practical help at home and conversations with colleagues who have experience in studying at this level can be a big help.

OpenLearn provides free online learning materials taken from OU courses. It does not require you to become an OU student and does not award credits or grant degrees. Courses range from three to 50 hours in length and aim to support learners in all areas of study. They are designed to be studied flexibly, away from any formal teaching environment, by people who have many demands on their time, and who have a range of needs and experience. A Learning Journal allows learners to keep their own personal notes and reflections that can be kept privately or shared with other learners.

LabSpace is a community-led environment that is part of OpenLearn. It fosters the concept of sharing and re-using educational resources and is intended for educational and other professional practitioners and more adventurous learners.

You can find Open University Learning Space Study Skills materials at **<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk>**

Activity

This activity will provide you with an overview of how the OpenLearn site works. Log on and register as a user – it's free. Click on **Frequently Asked Questions** and then **Basics**.

Another useful source of study skills is *The Study Skills Handbook* by Stella Cottrell. Many colleges and universities keep copies in their libraries. You might find it useful to have a reference copy for members to borrow or look at.

Activity

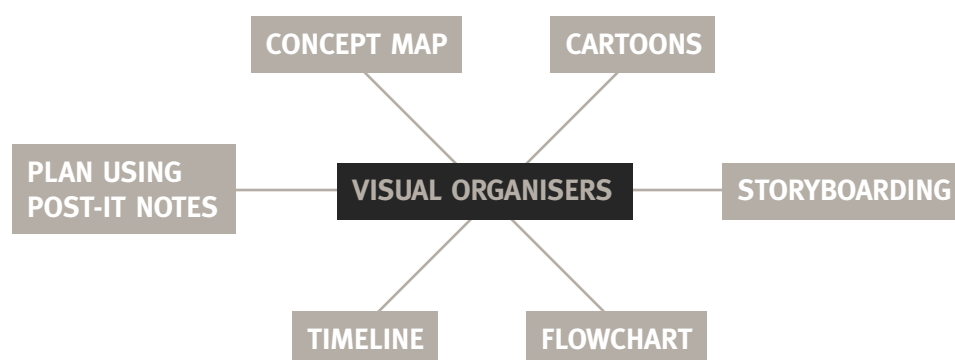
You can help members prepare for study by helping them think about making time for it, planning key dates and considering how it will fit with work and family commitments. Help a learner to put together an Action Plan using the template at the end of Step Seven (see page 3.37).

Learning preferences and strategies

When we learn, each of us uses a range of approaches. These are usually linked to the subject we are studying and there is often no substitute for ‘hands-on’ practical learning. Successful learners are able to adapt their approach to suit the learning situation.

Some providers use a ‘learning styles’ approach to ensure they provide a range of different learning activities so that everyone in a group has an opportunity to learn in a way that suits them. The main categories are ‘visual’, ‘auditory’ and ‘kinaesthetic’. Learners are assessed to find out what type of learning they prefer and this information can be used to determine the teaching approaches that best suit them.

You can help learners identify their learning preferences and think about how they learn best. Many learners prefer information that is represented graphically – using tables, cartoons, post-it notes, pictures, photos and other ways of organising, comparing or displaying information. Learners who prefer this style can use these methods in their note taking and to plan assignments. They may find it helpful to use different coloured pens for different topics to help them separate information into manageable chunks.



Similarly, some learners prefer auditory learning activities and will concentrate better when they have music in the background. Some may retain new information better when they talk it through. Learners who prefer this style will benefit from collaborative work with peers, perhaps talking things through via online discussions or by recording lectures and listening to them again later.

Many young adults prefer kinaesthetic and tactile learning that has a practical 'hands-on' element. When studying, learners may like to give themselves regular short breaks where they get up and move around, perhaps reflecting on what they've just done while making a cup of tea or coffee. Older learners may feel that not sitting at a desk is somehow 'cheating' and you can help them to see there may be other methods of working that may not seem traditional.

Activity

Thinking about how you like to learn can help you empathise with others. Think of an example where you have learned effectively and where you struggled to learn. You can use these examples with your learners.

My preferred way of learning is:

An example of a positive learning experience was:

This was positive because:

An example of a negative learning experience was:

This was negative because:

You can encourage members to keep a learning journal at the beginning of their studies. This can help them to reflect on what works well for them and what doesn't. They can use the tool flexibly, recording sessions over a week or two and then reflecting on how they learn best.

Learning Journal	Rating 1–10*	Comments:
The timing of each study session		
The place of each study session		
What you were learning		
How you were learning		
What did and what didn't go well		
Changes you might make in the future:		

*Rate each session on a scale of 1-10 (a rating of 1 if you feel it was a waste of time, 10 if you feel it was very beneficial)

Adapted from *Learning how to learn student toolkit*, The Open University

Working with members who have dyslexia or other learning differences

Members who have dyslexia or other learning differences, such as dyspraxia, may have additional needs to think about when they are considering study at higher levels. As a ULR you have an important role in helping them find the right course and succeed on it. The following issues may need to be considered by members who have dyslexia:

1. **Disclosure** – whether, and when, to tell the university or college that they have dyslexia. Potential students with disabilities, including dyslexia, are covered by disability discrimination legislation when they apply for a course. However, some institutions may be concerned that a student with dyslexia might not be able to cope with a particular course of study. It is important for members with dyslexia to think through a decision about whether or not to tell the university about their dyslexia, or whether to wait until they have started a course.
2. **Support available at the institution** – Most institutions have a team of specialist staff to support students with dyslexia, including carrying out dyslexia assessments. Members may wish to find out about the support available and meet up with a member of the dyslexia team to make sure they will be able to access the support easily. For example, they may wish to check

that support will be available outside working hours or at a convenient location. Members may also want to check that support for study skills, such as essay writing, will be appropriate for their needs. The advice on study skills that will help most students won't necessarily suit those with additional needs. It may also be important to find out about awareness of dyslexia among lecturers and tutors at an institution.

3. **Paying for support** – the Disabled Student Allowance can help to cover the cost of support for members with dyslexia, but not everyone is eligible. Further information may be found in the Jargon buster (Section 6), from a member's local authority, or from **www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898**

The ULR's role

As well as helping members with dyslexia to explore these topics, you may be able to help them in other ways. A common issue that HE students with dyslexia find difficult is their workload and the management and organisation of information. ULRs could help members to:

- organise course files and notes
- plan their time
- plan their workload
- access support to help them deal with stress; university and college counselling services may be particularly useful.

Many adults first find out that they have dyslexia when they return to study. This can often be an emotional time and ULRs can offer support to members in this situation. Information about assessments for dyslexia and advice about screening tools can be found in the unionlearn *Skills for Life – Six Pack* publication on dyslexia (see **www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/index.cfm?frmPubID=79**)

Dyslexia resources

The following websites contain useful information and links for members with dyslexia and other learning differences:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/skills/learn-1278-f0.cfm – unionlearn has produced six new publications for ULRs. The six booklets come in a handy folder and are free. They include:

- General guide
- Reading and writing
- Numeracy
- ESOL
- Dyslexia
- Speaking and listening.

www.dyslexic.com – run by a company selling technology that can support students, but has a range of freely available information too.

<http://ddig.lboro.ac.uk> – has a focus on supporting maths and learners with dyscalculia.

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/hestudentsp.html – printable information sheet about funding support at university.

www.brainhe.com – covers neurodiversity, which includes dyslexia. There is a lot of interesting information, including video and audio recordings of students with dyslexia and dyspraxia speaking about their experiences.

Working with members who have mental health difficulties

You can help provide practical and emotional support for learners with mental health difficulties by talking about what helps them to learn and what works for them.

You can:

- help the learner to think about what they want to get out of the learning experience and encourage them to set their own targets
- agree a plan to keep in regular contact with the learner
- break large tasks into smaller steps
- provide support for organising work and time management
- help to organise special arrangements for examinations
- provide information on sources of financial support
- challenge and deal with any negative or discriminatory actions of other staff or learners
- think about the social aspects of the learning experience and how they may affect the individual
- listen to learners and take into account their views and preferences
- give plenty of honest but encouraging feedback
- show where progress is being made
- encourage learners to recognise their own achievements
- be friendly and relaxed.

Taken from *Supporting learners with mental health difficulties* by Kathryn James, LSDA 2006

Written assignments

Members may be concerned that their English isn't good enough to produce written assignments like essays. Different subjects will require different levels of written language skills. **www.learnenglish.org.uk** offers lively quizzes and activities to improve written and spoken English and **www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise** has a range of factsheets, games and worksheets.

The Open University has an *Essay and Report Writing Skills Toolkit* to support learners. It covers:

- types of assignment
- the stages of planning an assignment
- understanding the question
- introduction and conclusions
- writing paragraphs
- paraphrasing, quoting and referencing
- choosing a writing style
- improving your written English.

Writing a good essay – checklist

Background reading

It is important to read around the subject. Scan possible sources and only pursue the ones that will really help you. Make sure you have enough evidence and examples to answer the question before you start. Keep a note of all the material you research for your bibliography and references.

When taking notes, make sure it's clear when you have used your own words or direct quotes so that you don't use other peoples' work as your own. Organise your notes before you start. Use different coloured highlighter pens for different topics.

Make a plan

Plan your ideas using a mind map like the one on page 3.28.

Introduction

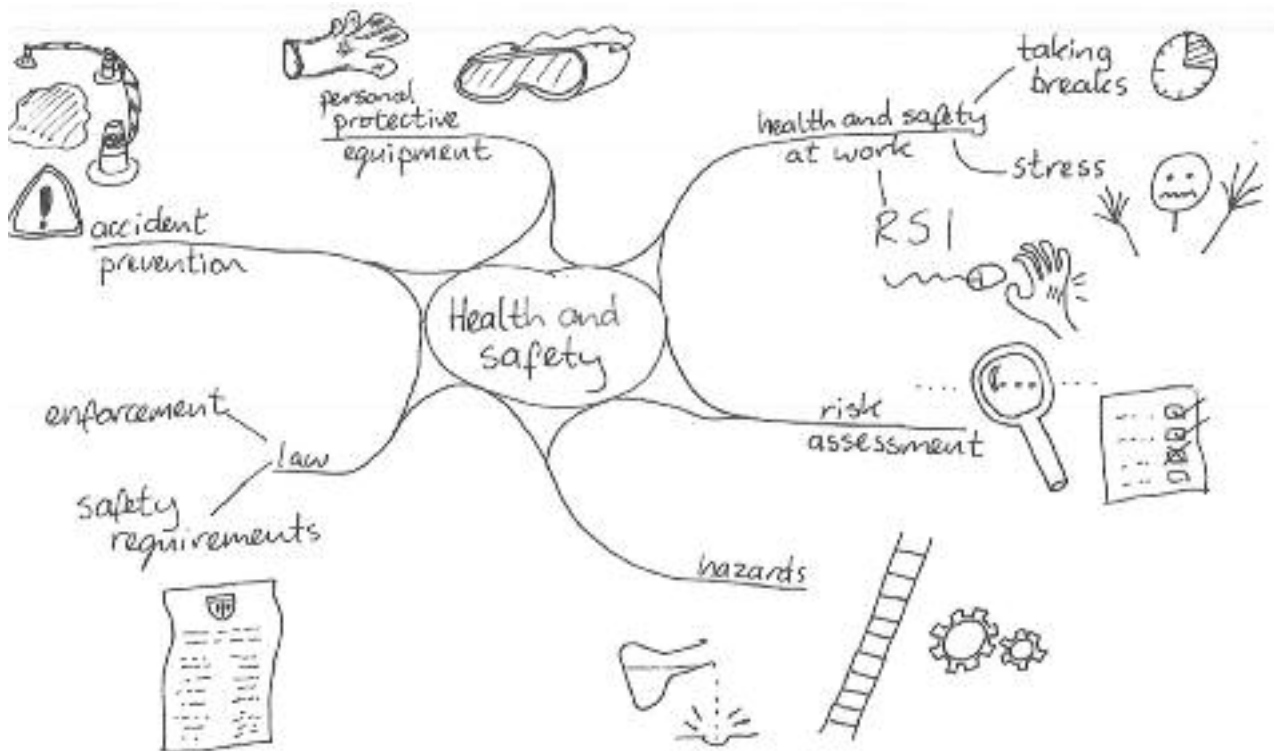
Think about your opening sentence. Make it interesting, controversial or slightly unexpected rather than: "This essay is about..." Always introduce the topic and aims of your essay. Address the central issue, claim or question. Relate your introduction to the title. Analyse the title carefully and check you have the information to answer the question. You may want to write or re-write your introduction when you have finished your essay.

Main body

Keep to one topic or key idea for each paragraph. Use words such as 'however', 'similarly' or 'in contrast' to link paragraphs. Vary the length of your paragraphs to keep the essay interesting. Keep to the suggested word length. Use a thesaurus if you find yourself repeating the same words.

Conclusion

The conclusion summarises your points and brings them together in a closing argument. Try to end with a punchy sentence. Your conclusion should be roughly the same length as your introduction.



References and bibliography

Ensure you reference everything in line with your provider's guidelines.

Proofreading

Take a break from your writing before returning to proofread it for grammar, punctuation and spelling. Concentrate on how it's written rather than the content. Read aloud and breathe when you come to a full stop and pause at each comma. Check any spellings you're unsure of. As an initial check, you can use the PC spell/grammar check but be confident to reject its suggestions if you think they may be American.

It's worth noting that learners whose first language is not English may need particular help with grammar. There are many resources on the net to help them, including www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise. You may be able to help learners see grammatical errors in their essays and offer informal but specific feedback.

Activity

This activity will help you get learners to reflect on their essay writing skills. Work with a learner who has used the 'Writing a good essay checklist' and help them to reflect on how they managed to follow the advice under each heading. Ask them what they found difficult and help them to plan strategies to improve next time. Ask questions such as: "What exactly did you find difficult with...?" or "How could you have done this better?"

Activity

This activity will show you how you can get help with particular grammar problems using an online tool.

The Aston University Study Skills for ESOL tool can help learners who have particular problems with grammar.

1. Visit: www.aston.ac.uk/current-students/welfareservices/studyskills/
2. Visit <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>
This site provides online tutorials for most areas of spelling, punctuation and grammar that students find problematic.
3. Click on 'English as a second language'
4. Click 'How to Use Articles' (a/an/the) for a handout that discusses the differences between indefinite articles (a/an) and definite articles (the).

The following tip sheet can help you get to grips with what's required from an essay question:

Essay writing tips

Analyse = Break something down into its parts and show how the parts relate to each other to make the whole.

E.g. *Analyse* the factors that contribute to a healthy workplace.

Compare = Demonstrate how two or more things are both similar and different.

E.g. *Compare* the forms of management structure in your organisation.

Contrast = Demonstrate how two or more things are different.

E.g. *Contrast* the styles of management in two departments.

Define = Explain the meaning of something in a brief, specific manner.

E.g. *Define* what is meant by union learning.

Describe = Present a full and detailed picture of something in words to include important characteristics and qualities.

E.g. *Describe* what it is like to study as a mature student.

Evaluate = Present both the positive and negative characteristics of an issue.

E.g. *Evaluate* the impact of trade unionism in the UK.

Explain = Provide facts and reasons to make something clear and understandable.

E.g. *Explain* the concept of work/life balance.

Justify = Provide reasons and facts in support of something.

E.g. *Justify* the need for trade unionism.

Outline = Present the most important information about something in a carefully organised manner.

E.g. *Outline* what it takes to be a successful union branch.

Improving spelling

Spelling can hold writers back. It may be helpful to remember that:

- spelling is a specific skill that most people can practise and improve
- lack of confidence plays an important part in spelling problems
- it makes sense to learn to spell words the person uses regularly
- it is helpful to use memory aids (rhymes and patterns).

Learners can sometimes find the task of ‘improving spelling’ overwhelming given the sheer number of words in the English language. You can help by getting them to concentrate on gradually increasing the number of words they can spell independently.

Activity

This activity can be used with learners to improve their spelling. You can help learners draw up lists of words they use regularly. Start small and build up in a structured way by spending the first five minutes of each session on spelling to build confidence. You can use the ‘look, say, cover, write, check method’ outlined below.

Look, say, cover, write and check

Using ‘Look, say, cover, write and check’ can help you remember how to spell words that you find difficult.

Look at the shape of the word. Can you see any patterns or groups of letters that go together? Are there any words within words?

Say the words carefully and slowly to yourself. Try to listen for the sounds in the words.

Cover the word. Try to picture the word in your mind, closing your eyes might help you to do this. Say the word to yourself again and then...

Write the word down.

Check to see if it is correct. If the word isn’t quite right don’t worry; just try again. It can often take a few attempts to get it right.

Learners can keep a list of words they use regularly. Encourage them to use this technique daily or weekly to learn to spell the words on their list.

Reading and note-taking

You can help learners gain confidence in their reading and note-taking skills. Discuss what they find difficult and help them to research different techniques to improve. You can help learners practise active reading strategies or suggest this as a topic for a union learning club meeting (for more information on union learning clubs, see Step 7, page 3.36).



Adapted from The Open University's *Student Toolkit: Reading and note taking*

Tips for planning a presentation

Oral communication is different to written communication.

- **Keep it simple** – the audience only has one chance to hear your talk.
- **Focus on getting between one and three key points over** – people won't remember much more.
- **Repeat key points** – tell the audience what you're going to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you've just told them!

Your audience

- Think about your audience. Perhaps some are experts in your specific area, some are experienced in the general area and some have little or no experience of your subject area. Who is most important? It all depends on the purpose of your presentation.
- Try aiming the body of the presentation at those with a higher level of expertise – i.e. your assessor – but ensure that the introduction and summary are accessible for all.

Your goals

- You should always try to leave the audience with a clear idea of what your work is about.
- Your presentation is likely to make use of an accompanying report. Try to whet the audience's appetite for the report; make them want to read it and don't necessarily use the presentation as a visual/oral version of your report.

Adapted from: www.aston.ac.uk/current-students/welfareservices/studyskills/presentation_skills.jsp

Activity

This activity will support your learners in giving better presentations. Offer to listen to your member's presentation before they deliver it and give them some constructive feedback using the following headings:

- content (amount and type of information)
- style (body language, voice, confidence in delivery)
- pace (too slow, too fast, about right)
- use of slides (too many, too few, clarity of text)

Using computers and online learning

Computers can help learners to research information, produce assignments, graphs and charts, and connect with other people to support their studies. Some members may need basic help to get started or feel confident about participating in online learning.

The Open University has a variety of learning tools suitable for workplace learners, including:

- **Flashmeeting** – a video conferencing tool.
- **Learning Journal** – registered users of OpenLearn can keep an online journal of their learning experiences. It is stored on the OpenLearn site and can be private or open for others to see.
- **OpenLearn Forum** – an online message board where learners can leave messages and read others.
- **MSG** – a service that allows users to see who is online and send instant messages to them.
- **Knowledge Mapping** – Using Compendium, a software tool for visual thinking, learners can design 'maps' of linked concepts, documents, ideas, websites etc. Maps can be used as private study tools or shared with other learners.

Tips for using computers to help you study

- Use folders to organise your files. Click on **My Computer**. On a PC click on **File → New Folder**. Choose a suitable name e.g. *Module 1 Assignments*. Make sure every file is saved logically.
- Make sure all your work is saved and you have back-up copies.
- **www.bbc.co.uk/webwise** can help you find your way around the internet, learn to touch type and find out about high speed 'broadband' internet connections.
- Bookmark your favourite websites so you can easily return to them. Click on **Favourites → Add to favourites** in Internet Explorer. A small window will show with the name of the page. Click **OK** and the page is added to your list.
- To go to a site on your Favourites list click on **Favourites**, then click on the name of the page you want and the page will load.
- Set your homepage to a website you use often such as a search engine, university home page or news page. In Internet Explorer click on **Tools → Internet options**. In the window that opens, click the **Use current** button, then click **OK** at the bottom of the window. Whenever you use your browser in future it will open to that page.



Understanding and using search engines

Search engines offer a useful way to look for information on the internet by using a keyword or combination of keywords. After searching, you are displayed a series of entries found in order of relevance. Well known search programs include Google, Excite, Ilse, GO/Infoseek, Lycos, Magellan, WebCrawler and Yahoo!

Activity

Spend some time playing with a search engine to give you a greater understanding of how it works.

Go to **www.google.co.uk**

Type in a key phrase such as 'map of the UK' and click on 'images', 'news', 'maps' etc. to see the different types of responses.

'I'm feeling lucky' may take you directly to the page you're looking for. Type in 'unionlearn' and click 'I'm feeling lucky' – does it take you to the right homepage?



Revision and examinations

If learners have a disability or temporary medical condition you can help them research alternative support that may be available through either the Higher Education Institution (HEI) or the examination board. You can provide important emotional and practical support for your learners who may feel a great deal of stress at this stage of their learning.

Many providers, such as Aston University (www.aston.ac.uk/current-students/welfareservices/studyskills/) provide helpful websites that outline useful revision techniques.



The Open University has a *Revising for Examinations* booklet for its students that covers:

- Managing exam stress
- How to revise
- How to take written exams
- How to prepare for oral exams.

All these are relevant topics for union learning clubs to cover. Encourage learners to get as much information as possible, to think about how they learn and digest information, and to devise a revision timetable that is realistic according to their particular commitments.

Tips for revision

- Plan a revision timetable that includes when, how and what you are going to revise.
- Revise little and often, taking plenty of breaks.
- Be active. Memorise things out loud while walking around or washing up – don't just sit at a desk.
- Write practise essays and do lots of practice papers.
- Make sure you fill in any gaps in your knowledge.
- Re-format information on cards or use visual organisers and coloured pens.
- Try to stay calm – the more prepared you feel, the less nervous you will be.

Tips for exams

- Work out how much time you have for each answer in line with the time allowed and the marks allocated for each question.
- Read the question carefully two or three times.
- Underline key words and phrases in each question.
- Spend five minutes noting down relevant points.
- Link these to the key words and phrases.
- Order the points in terms of importance and relevance to the question.
- Go back over what you've written to proofread and add in extra points.

Activity

Help a learner to draw up a revision timetable and ask if you can keep a copy to use as a practical example for others. Use this one to help you.

	9–11am	1–2pm	6–8pm
Monday	Statistics	Free	Graphs and charts
Tuesday	Free	Case study 1	Free
Wednesday	Essay writing techniques	Free	General reading
Thursday	Free	Case study 2	Statistics
Friday	Graphs and charts	Free	Revise cue cards
Saturday	Free	Free	Free
Sunday	Statistics	General reading	Revise cue cards

“I thought the tutors would not want to answer daft questions like ‘What is an assignment?’ At the time I just thought I should know... It was only when I met with my union learning club group that I realised everyone felt the same.”

Union learning clubs (ULCs) have been established in some workplaces to facilitate the development of independent learning skills, to provide mutual support and to address issues relating to time management and the juggling of work and learning. This combination of practical support and encouragement is likely to be something that all higher level learners can benefit from.

Your role can be to organise events and liaise with the HE support team, negotiate with the employer for time off for the ULC for learners or get access to venues/equipment.

Clubs vary in what they cover and how they operate. Broadly, they are work-based HE study groups where learners receive support from other learners in their workplace taking similar courses, encouragement from their ULR/union project worker and specialist support from a course or study skills tutor from an HE provider.

Most ULCs are started after activities to raise awareness in the workplace. This includes posters advertising the ULCs and briefing events for ULRs and learners.

Activity

This activity will help you collect information and examples to share with members who are considering higher learning. Put together an information pack containing the details of the courses and what local providers can offer. Use case studies and examples from your own workplace or another one. Distribute to interested potential learners or brief employers to get their support for ULC activity.

In some cases the ULC meets about once a month. They often focus on learners who have not studied at HE level before or do not feel so confident about taking an HE course. Examples of activities include:

- **Help with applying and registration on courses:** This process can be complex and registration dates are usually fixed, so the ULC can also support members by running activities that help members apply for and register on courses.
- **Study skills support:** For learners new to higher education the ULC can offer an opportunity for learners to build their study skills. As a ULR, you can run these sessions if you have the right skills or you can facilitate the provider to run them. There are activities in this toolkit to help you. The Skills for OU Study website: www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy has lots of useful information.

Possible topics for a ULC are:

- preparing your assignment
 - study strategies
 - mind mapping
 - using charts and graphs
 - copyright and plagiarism
 - preparing to revise
 - exam techniques
- **Supporting post-course progression:** The ULC often focuses on supporting learners to access introductory courses but can run activities for members as they near the end of their course to think about next steps. All OU students are entitled to free careers information, advice and guidance.
 - **Review and evaluation:** An effective ULC sets up good channels of communication between the learners, ULC support workers, course tutors and the ULRs/project workers. This includes sharing data (as long as learners agree to this) on who and how many learners have registered, key course dates and progress. In addition, the ULC can get feedback from learners about their experiences to help shape any future work with the ULC and HE provider.

Some learners will be happy to think about whether they want to continue with their higher learning and the options open to them. But others, particularly those who have tried taster/ introductory courses, might want help and advice to reflect on their experience and think about next steps. You can help members consider their readiness for higher learning or their next steps by using the Action Plan below.

“I got a buzz out of doing the course, but at the start I did not really know what I was doing. The tips and information available from the OU were good, but I still found it a bit confusing knowing which way to go with assignments. The OU support worker who came to the union learning club at work really helped with that.”

Action Plan

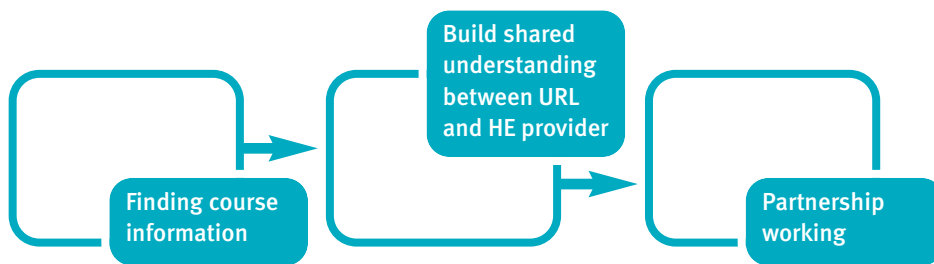
Area for consideration	Comments
What do you want to achieve in relation to higher learning?	
What are the key stages in achieving this goal?	
Who can help?	
What information do you need?	
What resources do you need? (Time, learning needs survey, Climbing Frame)?	
What other support will be helpful? (Further training, advice from unionlearn)?	



Section 4

Working with providers

Working with higher education providers



As part of its wider skills strategy the Government is encouraging the higher education sector to:

- be more flexible and offer more options to workplace learners
- give more encouragement for people that do not come from backgrounds/communities that normally access HE
- improve the vocational routes into HE
- encourage employers to work in partnership to encourage staff into higher education.

Unions, through ULRs, have a role to play and can support higher education providers by helping them to:

- improve their understanding of industry, sectors and workplace issues
- identify how, when and where workplace learners can learn
- identify the pre-course and on-course support needs of learners
- work jointly with ULRs from other unions to support workplace learners

There are plenty of examples of how providers can make higher learning more accessible to mature students.

- Taster or introductory courses to help learners test out higher learning.
- Access courses to help learners achieve Level 3 qualifications, develop study skills and prepare for higher level study.
- Some universities have special student services officers, admissions staff or induction programmes for mature entrants.
- Many short courses attract points or credits. In some cases, learners can take a number of short courses and build credits towards a degree.
- Grants are sometimes available and loans are available for all higher education students. Some universities offer discounts or financial support. Where learning is work-related, employers may pay (some) costs.

“Foundation Degree Forward provides employers with a cost-effective way to motivate and retain staff, build workforce skills and train people to train others.”

Gathering information

You can either approach individual organisations directly or via one of the higher education institutions (HEI) network organisations. The following organisations can help you:

HERO is the official online gateway to Higher Education and Research in the UK. The HERO website has a university and college finder at: www.hero.ac.uk

UCAS is the central applications body for all full-time higher education courses. Its website includes an easily searchable database by subject and institution and a host of other information, learner profiles, and advice on gaining entry to higher education. It does not include part-time courses, which are listed through universities' own websites, but it does give a clear idea about which courses can be found where and of the kind of students an institution is likely to attract. www.ucas.ac.uk

If you are making direct contact there are a number of options for finding out more about what the HEI has to offer:

- Search the relevant HEI's website for details of courses and information about support for learners. Look out for information for part-time learners and information on work-based learning and for employers.
- Request a prospectus. This sets out details of courses – there are usually separate ones for full- and part-time study.
- Find people to contact within the college or university who can tell you more. Depending on what your members are interested in, you may need to speak with different people, including staff from the:
 - life-long learning department
 - pre-entry guidance service (PEGs)
 - short course or Continuing Professional Development programmes team
 - work-based learning programmes team.

The following organisations work with or are networks made up of higher education providers that offer information and resources on a wide range of higher level learning.

Aimhigher is a national initiative that seeks to raise levels of participation in higher education. Aimhigher partnerships work to build relationships that break down the barriers which HE institutions and systems can unwittingly create for learners. Much of the work of Aimhigher is aimed at young people up to the age of about 19 and their parents. However, Aimhigher partnerships also target groups “aged 19+, with particular emphasis on those from lower socio-economic groups or with no higher education heritage [...including those] in the workplace”.

The Aimhigher website provides a wide range of resources for new HE learners, plus a range of other resources and links to national and regional networks. www.aimhigher.ac.uk/home/index.cfm

The **Action on Access** website gives a national overview of strategies and activities aimed at widening participation in higher education.

www.actiononaccess.org

Lifelong Learning Networks have been set up across English regions to promote progression into HE for vocational and workplace learners. The networks bring together several HE and FE providers in a region with additional partners such as Aimhigher, regional development agencies, regional skills partnerships, sector skills councils, The Learning and Skills Council, and Connexions. The networks work towards matching what HEIs have to offer and what union learners might want. **www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk**

Foundation Degree Forward is a national body that supports the development and validation of high quality Foundation Degrees. It works regionally in partnership with relevant agencies, institutions, organisations and interest groups to ensure that the development of Foundation Degrees is driven by the needs of employers and students. Foundation Degrees combine academic and work-based learning and are specifically designed for people who want to develop work-related skills.

FDF is also supporting the development of a project currently called “Employment-Based Training Accreditation”. Under this scheme employees would gain HE accreditation for training already happening in the workplace. Foundation Degree Forward has produced an easy to read ***Guide to Foundation Degrees*** and their website provides online information for learners and employers.

For a national listing of Foundation Degrees go to: **www.fdf.ac.uk/courses/**

Sector skills councils (SSCs) are employer-led, independent organisations that cover a specific industry sector across the UK. There are 25 SSCs and they all have at least one senior union officer who is a member of the board. A core role of the SSC is to review the learning and skills needs of its sector and develop an action plan to address them in partnership with employers, unions and learning providers. This is mapped out in their Sector Skills Agreement. Each SSC has an ‘HE champion’ taking forward the actions relating to higher learning needs in their sector.

Details of the ways unions are working with SSCs can be found at **www.unionlearn.org.uk/initiatives/**

When gathering information, you can use the suggested agenda overleaf for your discussions with providers.

A suggested agenda for unions/ULR discussions with HEI providers

Part 1: What do union learners want?

Union learning rep roles: Provide brief details to the provider about the roles, responsibilities and activities of your union/ULRs about learning and skills. If appropriate, give examples of the types of union learning activities that you have already supported.

Painting the picture of the union learner: Use the findings from your research with members to give the HE provider some insight into what union learners want from the HE provider, for example, in terms of:

- courses/learning modules (taster courses, CPD, modular qualifications, etc.)
- accreditation
- entry requirements
- flexibility of delivery
- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)
- on-course support
- progression pathways.

Provider criteria: Outline what you're looking for in the 'ideal' HE provider. Is it some or all of the following:

- courses accessible to work-focused and work-based learners (including shift workers)
- nationally recognised accreditation offered for most courses
- flexible/customised delivery to meet the needs of unions/union learners
- good quality IAG for learners so that courses match learner needs and interests in terms of the curriculum and accreditation offered
- regular reviews of learner progress and support needs
- progression routes discussed with learners upon completion
- experience of teaching in workplace settings
- understanding of trade unions and union learning reps
- a named point-of-contact within the college or university – with responsibility for promoting/developing work with unions
- transparent course costs (including cost of providing any additional learning support)
- a tracking system for recording attendance, retention and achievement with data shared with unions and systems for getting agreement for this and sharing data
- systems to consult with learners (including union learners and reps) regarding planning and provision
- recognition of/working with unions within the HE provider workplace.

Part 2: What does the HE provider offer?

Ask the HE provider to provide some details/examples of what they have to offer union learners. It may help to give them some headings in advance as to what you'd be interested in hearing about, for example:

- understanding of/experience with trade unions and union learning reps
- experience of delivering learning to workplace learners
- courses/learning modules which might be of interest to union learners
- delivery methods employed
- accreditation offered
- costs
- entry requirements
- IAG
- on-course support
- progression pathways
- possibilities of customising/developing courses geared to the needs of unions/union learners
- who to contact.

Part 3: Achieving a match

Have a discussion to review the extent to which a match exists between supply and demand.

Having identified gaps, discuss whether/if gaps might be addressed and consider 'where we go from here' to draw out what needs to be done, by whom and when, and what else needs further consideration, possibly at a further meeting with additional/different union/HE provider representatives.

Making connections

Building a dialogue with providers will help you support your learners. This section covers:

- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)
- Access courses
- Entry requirements
- Part-time provision and flexibility of delivery
- Distance learning provision
- Bite-sized accredited provision
- Modular provision
- Bespoke provision
- Cost
- Learner support

It is important to find out details of the IAG offered by the HEI as this will vary. Good IAG ensures a better fit between learner and course, which leads to better retention and achievement.

The following checklist will help you.

Information, Advice and Guidance checklist

- What kind of pre-entry IAG and support do you offer and how appropriate is it for union learners?
- What kinds of information is available to union learning reps and union learners? (e.g. prospectuses, introductory guides, web-based information etc.)
- What type of help is available? (e.g. careers guidance, help in choosing/selecting between courses, help with application forms and procedures or identifying and accessing sources of funding).
- Are qualified IAG staff accessible to union learning reps and union learners?
- Is there a dedicated mature student or workplace learner adviser (available via telephone, email or face-to-face)?
- How well do advisers understand 'where workplace learners are coming from'. (e.g. their educational backgrounds, their concerns about returning to learning, the competing demands on their time and so on).
- Do you have any ambassadors/mentors (workplace learners who are currently studying or who have had recent experience of studying) available to be contacted by union learners?

Access courses can provide a bridge into higher level learning for mature students. Ensure access provision is suitable for your members by asking the following questions:

- To what extent is Access provision suitable for workplace learners (part-time, evening-based, distance learning)? Give examples of workplace learners who have completed such provision.
- Do tutors have experience of working with workplace/union learners?
- What time commitment is required?
- How much does it cost?
- What qualification does it give?
- What progression opportunities are available – with you and with other HE providers?
- Who is the main contact for Access provision?
- Do you offer other ‘bridging’ provision to help learners ‘take the leap’ from Level 3 to Level 4 studies or to help with ‘returning to learning’ after a long break from formal education?
- Are there introduction to HE courses/booklets/handbooks/study skills tutorials/guides?
- Is there a mentoring scheme?

St Helens College offers a number of Access courses. Some of these involve around three hours study a week at the College over three terms. Others are aimed specifically at people in employment and offer open or distance learning routes, sometimes requiring evening attendance at the college.

Blackburn College offers an Access programme, successful completion of which results in the award of a kite-marked Access certificate that is accepted nationwide for entry to higher education. The full-time programme entails about 15 hours a week of study and is free of tuition fees. Part-time routes are also available. For further details, see: <http://he4me-inlancashire.org.uk>

Entry requirements

In your dialogue with providers find out about the various entry requirements in relation to the types of courses available to workplace learners by asking the following questions:

- What are your entry requirements for taster courses, other short courses, longer or more involved courses?
- How flexible are you about entry requirements? For example, in lieu of traditional academic entry qualifications, to what extent do you accept:
 - non-standard qualifications
 - professional/work experience
 - skills and knowledge gained through life experience?
- Do you offer Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and/or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)? If so, what would the process involve for union learners?
- What kind of help do you give in putting together an APEL/APL claim? (e.g. telephone, email, face-to-face, workshop support? Printed guide?)

Part-time provision and flexibility of delivery

Part-time requirements differ according to the individual circumstances of different workplace learners. You can check the institution's prospectus and web pages for information specific to workplace learners.

Union learners need flexibility of delivery. Check to what extent learners can 'go at their own pace' and work towards a qualification in their own time. Ask:

- When are programmes delivered? (e.g. evening and weekend sessions, e-learning and distance learning provision, block teaching to fit in with business demands, day-release study, work-based learning).
- Where are programmes delivered? (e.g. delivery within a workplace, joint delivery with a partner college, delivery in 'satellite' locations such as a local school or college, use of a 'virtual' classroom).

Distance learning provision

Check that distance learning provision is appropriate to the needs of union learners.

- What kinds of support are provided for distance learners? (e.g. tutor support, phone, email, post, face-to-face or virtual forms of support, like electronic bulletin boards, discussion groups, e-mentoring)
- What study skills support is there? (e.g. workshops, booklets, self-study modules, occasional face-to-face workshops/meetings)
- How would workplace learners find out about what you have available via distance-learning?
- Is there a distance learning directory of opportunities?

Bite-sized accredited provision

Find out what providers offer union learners in terms of Bite-sized accredited provision. Explore how the academic credits can be accumulated to achieve higher level qualifications such as Certificates and Diplomas and find out if the credit points can be taken across to another HE provider.

Modular provision

In terms of slightly larger 'chunks' of learning, find out if the provider offers a modular approach to learning so that programmes may be taken a module at a time. Ask the following questions:

- Can learners sign up to a programme one module at a time without needing to make a commitment to a full programme of study?
- After completing one or more modules, can learners decide to discontinue their studies but still come away with a qualification?
- Is there a time limit on the completion of a module or a programme of study?

Bespoke provision

In general, HE providers are open to developing bespoke provision to respond to an identified higher learning need from union learners – providing a case can be made for financial viability deriving from a strong likelihood of a reasonable throughput of learners.

For some courses, 10 or so learners may be enough to achieve viability. Higher numbers may be needed for provision involving extensive development work or requiring customised delivery and support. Through initial discussion, you may get a feeling about a particular HE provider's willingness to develop and deliver bespoke provision. However, the more specific you can be about requirements, the more focused and informative the response of the provider will be.

Arranging bespoke provision – checklist

When arranging bespoke provision, you may want to consider the following:

- the topic/focus of the required provision
- the need for it to be accredited
- the likely number of learners (monthly, yearly, etc.)
- the background/previous education of learners
- the required mode and timing of delivery
- the required place of delivery
- any specific requirements for learner support (e.g. provider support for a union learning club or workplace centre)?
- what kind of 'guarantee' on numbers would you need to begin development and what would be the minimum number of learners needed to make a course viable?
- what kind of costs would be involved – for development; for delivery?
- what would be the lead-in time – for development and validation to take place?

The University of Liverpool has an accredited Continuing Education programme offering nationally-recognised credit points which are awarded for satisfactory completion of assignments and regular course attendance. Credits may be accumulated towards a University award or as evidence of achievement for vocational or personal development purposes.

Cost

You may be able to negotiate discounts for your learners or you can research bursaries available to union learners.

The Open University has a particularly good understanding of workplace learner queries and concerns and has a specialist advisory team to deal with telephone enquiries.

Manchester Metropolitan University has a dedicated Educational Adviser, available for mature students who would like to talk over the opportunities available at MMU and elsewhere.

Learner support

Learner support checklist

When a learner is interested in a particular HEI they may wish to consider the following:

- Do they provide support with applications and registration?
- Is there a 'Returning to learning' support?
- Is there study skills support?
- Are there 'virtual' forms of support – electronic bulletin boards, discussion groups, etc?
- Is there a mentoring scheme?
- Are there specific forms of support for mature/workplace learners?
- Is there support for dispersed learners?
- Is there support for disability/dyslexia/additional needs?
- Is there support with progression?
- What forms of support could you provide for union learners?

Activity

This activity will help you get a feel for how costs vary between institutions. Choose a course and compare the differences between two providers.

E.g. BA in Business Studies	Local provider	Open University
Information, Advice and Guidance		
Access courses		
Entry requirements		
Part-time provision and flexibility of delivery		
Distance learning provision		
Bite-sized accredited provision		
Modular provision		
Bespoke provision		
Cost		
Learner support		

Developing partnerships

Once you have developed a shared understanding with a provider and you feel there is value in working with them to support members with higher learning you will need to agree how this partnership activity will work.

You can use the tools on the following pages to help you.

Practical partnerships – Agreed provider and ULR/union roles and actions

HEI provider details:

Employer/workplace details:

Stage of the learner journey	Union, ULR role/action	Provider role/action	Others role/action
Awareness			
Finding out more			
Expert advice			
Application/registration			
Learner support Pre-course, on course, progression			
Other			

Preparing to support members into higher learning – Action plan

Working with members: next steps

What

Who

When

Working with your union and unionlearn: next steps

What

Who

When

Working with employer(s): next steps

What

Who

When

Working with providers and HEI network organisations: next steps

What

Who

When



Section 5

Working with employers

Working with employers

You can work with employers in a number of ways to support higher learning to:

- promote the benefits to employers of supporting higher learning
- develop Learning Agreements to include higher learning
- extend the offer in Learning Centres to offer support to higher level learners.

Higher level skills at work

Benefits to business

Employers that have developed links with the higher education sector report a wide range of business benefits from investing time and resource in this activity. Businesses benefit in a number of ways, with employees learning new technologies and upgrading skill-sets. Higher level learners also train others, helping to spread and extend benefits across the organisation. The business benefits of higher learning reported by employers include increased productivity and improved efficiency through:

- motivating and retaining existing staff
- reduced recruitment and training costs
- less shortfall caused by skills gaps
- better knowledge to make good decisions
- introducing new approaches and ideas.

Benefits to the UK economy

“For adults, better skills and economically valuable qualifications are a route to achieving better jobs, career progression and higher incomes to support their families. Better skills are the key to greater social mobility, ensuring that individuals get on because of their talent and hard work, and not just because of their background. For employers, a more highly-skilled workforce is a route to achieving higher productivity and, in the private sector, greater competitiveness and profitability.” World Class Skills, Leitch Review 2007

Over the past 20 years, the proportion of jobs requiring high skills has increased substantially and the Leitch Review expressed concern about shortages at intermediate and higher skill levels. Skilled workers are better able to adapt quickly and effectively to change and absorb new technology. Projections of the shape of the workforce in 2020 suggest a 50 per cent increase in highly skilled occupations and a decrease in low skilled occupations.

“The aim is to provide more effective higher level skills development in the workplace. The learner benefits from significant personal development as well as contributing more effectively to business solutions.”

Professor David Eastwood,
Chief Executive, HEFCE

This means:

- increasing skills within occupations
- fewer jobs with low-level or no skills needed
- an increased importance placed on high skills.

Better skills bring flexibility and security for individuals, workforces and organisations.

Flexibility of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Employers may hold the view that higher education institutions do not meet the learning needs of a modern workplace. Although this may have been the case in the past, the higher education sector has made considerable changes to the way in which it works with business. For example, in 2001 less than two thirds of HEIs provided short courses in workplaces. This has risen to almost 90 per cent. And around 70 per cent of HEIs provide some courses via distance learning.

Examples include negotiating tailor-made programmes of study related to individual and organisational workplace needs and offering work-related routes to higher education qualifications.

Manchester Solutions, a training provider franchised to deliver training on the Learning Through Work programme for the University of Derby offers a 30 credit Leadership and Management module to people already in work. A blended approach consists of online study, tutor support in the workplace and a work-based element. As the work-based element requires the support and commitment of the employer, tutors spend time discussing the requirements with both the learner and employer. Where there are a number of learners doing the course in the same company, Manchester Solutions has used the company's training rooms for occasional group workshops. They also maintain the interest and commitment of learners with frequent contact from personal tutors.

St Helens College's Foundation Degree in Educational Administration requires attendance at just six college-based study days. The remainder of the course is delivered through work-based projects and online learning. The course is supported through online tutorials and discussions in 'virtual classrooms'.

The University of Bolton's Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care is designed for students to 'work, earn and learn' completely within the workplace setting. Some of Macclesfield College's Foundation Degrees offer considerable flexibility for work-based learners. The Foundation Degree in Business and Management, for example, involves three work-based projects and college study over two evening sessions or one afternoon and evening session a week.

The University of Bolton has developed bespoke provision for the Fire Service and the Police. Given sufficient learner numbers, the University can develop bespoke modules. Initially, set-up and validation costs are normally absorbed by the university. Customising existing provision is a possibility; examples could include 20-credit Business Studies modules to help support day-to-day activities in the workplace and Personal Development Planning and Study Skills modules to support career development.

Making the case

Surveys and questionnaires offer a good opportunity to raise the profile and build awareness of higher learning, as well as finding out the different needs of learners in your organisation. In addition to, or following on from, a general learning needs analysis, you might want to:

- see how well existing surveys pick up higher learning and develop a supplementary survey with a specific focus on this
- find out what kinds of support members will need through targeted questions.

Higher learning needs survey¹ – suggested questions

- 1) Would you like to take part in any type of course or study in the near future/next couple of years?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
- 2) If 'Yes' or 'Not sure' what type of learning might you be interested in?
☐ Learning for pleasure ☐ Learning for work
Please give details _____
- 3) If you are interested in studying higher education qualifications, what course or subject would you like to study?
_____ ☐ Not sure
- 4) What might stop you taking part in higher education courses?
☐ Current qualifications ☐ Lack of confidence that I could do it
☐ Workload/time ☐ Money – concerns about debt
☐ Not sure that I can study while working
☐ Other: please give details _____
- 5) If you are interested in higher education study, advice and support, in which areas would you find it useful?
☐ The qualifications available ☐ Part-time study options
☐ Work-based learning courses ☐ Entry requirements
☐ Financial support available ☐ Learning support
☐ Childcare available ☐ Careers advice
☐ Disability support
☐ Other: please give details _____
- 6) Please indicate what type of qualification you have currently, or have recently completed studying, by ticking one of the following:
☐ I do not have any formal qualifications
☐ Level 1 (e.g. NVQ level 1)
☐ Level 2 (e.g. CSEs, O levels, GCSEs)
☐ Level 3 (e.g. Apprenticeship, A-levels)
☐ Level 4 (e.g. degree)
☐ Have some qualification but do not know the level
☐ Other qualifications: please give details _____

“A healthcare scientist with considerable experience of higher learning and a post-graduate qualification chose to study a Start Writing Fiction course as he was motivated by personal goals and an interest in returning to study. This short course offered a chance to explore a completely new area of learning for this union member.”

¹Adapted from a members survey developed by unionlearn in the South West and the University of Bath at Swindon for their project 'Level 2 and beyond'.

Activity

You can use this presentation to help start discussion and raise awareness of higher learning in your workplace. You may want to include further slides with the results of your survey. You can download a copy of this presentation at: unionlearn.org.uk/he



This presentation can be adapted for a group meeting or to use with potential learners. The aim of the presentation is to give a quick overview of the sector and ask some initial questions about higher learning.

Even if members are confident and experienced in the higher education sector it is still useful to raise awareness of different routes and options, especially as the sector has changed a lot in the last 10 years, with the development of new courses, delivery methods and qualifications. At present, it is hard to understand all the different types of qualification that learners hold – what level they are, how long they take to complete, what content they cover, and how they compare to other qualifications. The new Qualifications Curriculum Framework will help present qualifications in a way that is easy to understand and measure. For more information, see: www.qca.org.uk/qca_8150.aspx

In order to extend the existing offer to include higher learning you can carry out an audit to review the learning in your organisation using the template below:

Initial checklist for your union

- Who else in the union is active in supporting members into HE? What information/ideas can you share with them?
- Where does HE learning sit with your union's policy on learning and skills?
- What issues are there (or might there be) around supporting members to access HE learning (such as time for study or help with fees) or the benefits for members?
- What learning agreements already exist with your employer(s)? Do they include any reference to higher level learning?

Initial checklist for members

Before undertaking any large-scale activity such as a survey, ask a few members some initial questions to get a feel for the issues.

- Are members aware of the HE-level skills that they already have or want to develop?
- Are members interested in knowing more about higher learning opportunities?
- How would members benefit from taking part in higher learning? What would they gain from learning at HE-level or from being qualified at HE-level?
- What HE education or training have they taken part in/been offered?
- What issues and barriers do they face in accessing HE?
- How do they think ULRs can help them to access higher learning?

Activity

Use the questions below to raise awareness of higher learning with your employer.

- How many members already have a Level 3 qualification but no Level 4 or HE qualification?
- What opportunities might be opened up for them if they were to gain a higher level qualification?
- Does the employer already support higher learning for some staff? If so, which staff, what type of courses, how and why does the employer support them, and which HE providers do they know about and work with?
- If the employer does not support higher learning for staff, why not? What prevents them from doing this?
- What jobs in the workplace require higher skills and might need higher level skills in the future? Do staff in these jobs have the level of skills needed or access to the education and training that they will need to develop them?
- How can the union and employer work together on higher level learning and skills?

Employers say the skills gaps in the workplace are in technical and practical skills, customer handling skills, literacy and numeracy, communication, problem-solving skills and team working. In addition, over a quarter of employers say their workforce needs to have better IT and/or management skills. Many unions and ULRs are already working to support members to improve these skills, such as literacy, communication and vocational skills, mainly at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Work with your employer to ensure they are doing everything they can to support staff into higher learning. Use the checklist below to help you.

What can employers do to support their staff into higher education?

- Encourage all staff to consider routes into higher learning.
- Offer advice and expertise to help ULRs engage employees to identify their higher learning needs.
- Promote higher learning opportunities linked to workforce development needs.
- Demonstrate commitment to higher learning and the union role in supporting this through a learning agreement.
- Link the offer of higher education to continuing professional development and career progression.
- Provide help with brokering the 'right' programmes to meet staff needs.
- Allow time for staff to apply for courses.
- Provide support for studying and access to ICT and other resources needed.
- Identify and plan appropriate mentor support.
- Allow time for course attendance.
- Recognise achievement.
- Provide support with future options.

Learning agreements

The theme of higher learning needs to be built into any learning agreement or other approaches that you/your union uses to develop dialogue with the employer on learning and skills. You can discuss this with your union branch.

If you do not have a learning agreement, unionlearn provides support and resources to develop one. Check with your regional officer or regional learning organiser if there is a learning agreement in place. If not, they can support you to develop one and have a model agreement. Alternatively, go to:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/agreements/index.cfm for further guidance or contact your regional unionlearn team. This web page provides a model learning agreement and data that makes a strong case for why employers benefit from working with unions on learning and development.

If there is already a learning agreement in place review it to identify opportunities to support higher learning. If there are any gaps, use the information from your higher learning needs survey to help raise awareness and start a dialogue about what is needed in your workplace with members and your employer.

Use this sheet to help you prepare for negotiations with your employer on developing an agreement about higher learning opportunities for members.

Planning sheet: developing the learning agreement

Current agreement – key gaps

Union aims for integrating higher learning

Management – aims for learning agreement re higher learning

Areas of agreement and next steps



Section 6

Jargon buster

Jargon buster

ADD/ADHD: Attention-Deficit Disorder or Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurobehavioral disorder that typically presents itself during childhood and is characterised by a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity.

Asperger's Syndrome: is a form of autism that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people. The condition affects people in many different ways and to varying degrees.

Blend or Blended learning: a programme of study that includes a mix of distance learning and learning that takes place 'on site' at the learning institution (the college or university).

CATS: Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme – a credit system that many higher education institutions signed up to a number of years ago. It means that there is broad agreement across the higher education sector about the number of credits required to complete a recognised higher education programme (like an honours degree, for example) and about the number of notional study hours required. The agreed pattern, for a full-time programme of study leading to an honours degree, would require a student passing 120 credits at level 1 in their first year, 120 credits at level 2 in their second year and 120 credits at level 3 in their third year.

Disabled Students Allowance: a grant available from local authorities to help HE students with disabilities pay for the costs of support related to their disability. It can be used to pay for specialist equipment, tuition, and so on. Learners need to apply to their local authority for the grant and their needs will be assessed at an approved Access Centre. The application process can take time so it is important that prospective HE students with disabilities apply as soon as possible, to ensure that their support is in place at the start of their course.

Distance learning: the delivery of teaching and learning to students who are studying off-campus (i.e. away from the college or university). Typically, distance learning will involve either written or web-based course materials plus online, telephone or face-to-face tutorial support. Assessments usually take the form of written assignments and, in some cases, formal examinations. Most universities offer some courses by distance learning, usually specifically designed to meet the needs of people who are working and unable to attend the campus on a regular basis. The Open University is a distance learning specialist institution. It works to a model of part-time study by Supported Open Learning.

Dyslexia: is a specific learning difficulty or a learning difference. Characteristically, learners have difficulty with reading, spelling, organising or sequencing information. They may also be intuitive, good at visualisation and creative. Dyslexia affects people in many different ways and to varying degrees.

Dyspraxia: is a co-ordination disorder associated with problems of language, perception and thought. It can cause difficulties with handwriting but affects people in different ways and to varying degrees.

Dyscalculia: is a collection of symptoms involving numeracy skills such as telling the time, calculating prices and handling change, and measuring and estimating things such as temperature and speed. Individuals have difficulty in conceptualising numbers, number relationships and outcomes of numerical operations. Dyscalculia affects people in many different ways and to varying degrees.

Graduate: generally refers to a person that has been awarded a university degree.

HE Higher Education.

HEI Higher Education Institution – either a university or college.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE): HEFCE is the body that is appointed by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to manage the disbursement of funds for higher education. HEFCE only funds higher education provision. HEFCE is not a planning body. Universities are autonomous institutions and draw funding for teaching and some research from HEFCE, but also draw funds from a range of other sources including student fees and corporate and business research commissions. Broad policy is established by DIUS.

Higher national diploma (HND): HNDs are work-related (vocational) higher education qualifications. HNDs are at level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework.

Honours degree: An honours degree is a classified (i.e. awarded a grade descriptor from First Class to Third Class) degree awarded for the successful completion of at least 360 credits including 120 credits at level 3 (HE level 3) or above. In addition to honours degrees, students can also study for Foundation Degrees, which are awarded on successful completion of 240 credits, including 120 at HE level 2, or for an 'ordinary' or 'pass' degree which has fewer requirements at the highest levels and which is awarded without classification. There are also postgraduate degrees that can generally only be studied after a student has achieved a degree-level qualification.

Mature students: a generic term used in higher education to refer to learners aged 21 and over.

Module: a self-contained part of a higher education study programme, the successful completion of which leads to the learner gaining higher education credits. In most cases, 120 credits are required at each level, variously known as NVQ levels 4, 5 and 6 or HE levels 1, 2 and 3, to achieve an honours degree. Modules will usually be clustered in credit groupings of 10 or 12, or multiples of 10 or 12 at a stated level, to ensure that the learner can build the required number of credits for the full programme. Modules do not usually carry a qualification.

National Qualifications Framework (NQF): sets out

the levels against which any qualification can be recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Neurodiversity: a term that is used increasingly within HE. It refers to a range of learning differences such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADD, ADHD and Aspergers Syndrome. More information about neurodiversity can be found at www.brainhe.com

Registering/registration: a term used by universities/FE colleges for the final part of the process of applying to university when a student confirms their acceptance of the offered place and signs an agreement to pay the requisite fees.

Storyboards are a series of illustrations or images displayed in sequence to show information in a pictorial form.

Student Services/Student Support: Within FE and HE providers there is a dedicated team of advisors that support students with student life and study.

Widening participation: A term used to refer to schemes that try to encourage individuals from non-traditional backgrounds to apply to higher level learning. For example, older learners, learners from socially-deprived areas or from ethnic minority groups who are under-represented in learning.

Year 0 provision: These are courses that last one year full-time (or the equivalent part-time), and which lead directly to a university degree programme. Students who are registered on a Year 0 course are actually registered on the whole degree programme but progression onto the first year of the degree programme depends on the student passing the Year 0 course. Through Year 0 provision (often called Foundation Year), students who do not have the required entry qualifications may be able to access the degree course of their choice. Not all universities offer this provision.



Section 7

Sources of further information

Further sources of information

Aimhigher Partnerships

www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Commission for Employment & Skills

www.ukces.org.uk

The Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)

Tel: 020 7383 7667

www.cihe-uk.com

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)

www.dius.gov.uk

Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE)

www.f-a-c-e.org.uk

Foundation Degree Forward

Tel: 01543 301150

www.fdf.ac.uk

Higher Education Academy (subject specialists and HE networks)

Tel: 01904 717500

www.heacademy.ac.uk

Higher Education Careers Services Unit

Tel: 0161 277 5248

www.hecsu.ac.uk

Higher Education Funding Council Education (HEFCE)

Tel: 0117 931 7317

www.hefce.ac.uk

Lifelong Learning Networks

www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Tel: 01452 557000

www.qaa.ac.uk

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Tel: 020 7509 5555

www.qca.org.uk

Universities UK

Tel: 020 7419 4111

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

University Vocational Awards Council

Tel: 01204 903351

www.uvac.ac.uk

For further information on higher learning contact:
Ian Borkett, Unionlearn Standards and Quality Manager

For further information on the TUC Education ULR module
Supporting Union Learners into Higher Learning contact:
Liz Rees, TUC Education Manager

To find out more about what unionlearn is doing in relation to
higher higher level learning go to the unionlearn website:
www.unionlearn.org.uk/HE

Published by unionlearn
Congress House
London WCB LS

Tel 020 7079 6920
Fax 020 7079 6921
www.unionlearn.org.uk

November 2007
Designed by wave.coop
Printed by Newnorth

