

# update

AUTUMN 2011

## Peake practice

**Maxine Peake**  
on where her  
learning journey  
is heading next

INSIDE

Digital  
champion  
Tina Hobley



# You are the champions



Holby City star Tina Hobley has become our latest unionlearn Digital Champion, committed to spreading the message about the benefits of the online world to the 8 million-plus people in

the UK who are not yet hooked up.

As she says in our interview with her in this edition, using the internet is often the easiest and also the cheapest way to find and apply for a job, book train and plane tickets, and shop for food, clothes, books and music.

And, of course, as ULRs and learners across the region know from personal experience, the internet also offers a massive range of learning courses and resources, through partners of unionlearn such as learndirect, UK online centres and The Open University (OU).

We're really pleased that Tina has agreed to become a unionlearn Digital Champion, and take part in initiatives such as Go ON: Give An Hour, the nationwide push this autumn in which the millions of us who already use the internet will be giving up a little of our own time to show people who aren't yet using the internet what they're missing.

But you don't have to be a famous face on national television to become a Digital Champion. All you need are some basic computer skills, a working knowledge of the internet, the ability to build a good rapport with people, and the patience to support people learning something new. That sounds like pretty much every union learning rep I've ever met.

If you'd like to become a unionlearn Digital Champion, all you need do is sign on at the Race Online 2012 website: <http://raceonline2012.org>. The site includes more information, and more resources, to help you make your own personal dent in that 8 million figure.

**Barry Francis, Regional Manager**

## Book your tickets now for

# world skills London 2011



**With just a few weeks to go before London hosts the UK's biggest ever showcase for vocational skills, it's time for union learning reps (ULRs) to register for tickets (if they haven't already) and make the most of the free learning resources.**

Taking place from Wednesday 5 to Saturday 8 October, WorldSkills London 2011 will see almost 1,000 young people from across the globe compete for gold, silver and bronze medals in skills as diverse as hairdressing, hospitality, floristry and graphic design.

As many as 150,000 visitors are expected to attend the event and allocated visitor slots are fast running out so ULRs should confirm their attendance to avoid disappointment.

"WorldSkills London 2011 will provide a unique, amazing and inspiring experience to visitors," promises Chris Humphries, Chairman of WorldSkills London 2011.

"As well as seeing skills in action, visitors will actually be able to try skills they may never have considered in an exciting, dynamic environment," he says.

Alongside the competition, the event has been designed to ensure that young visitors learn about the skills on display and get the chance to 'Have a Go' at what's on offer before finding out exactly how to go about 'Making it Happen' as a career choice by talking to employers, colleges, universities and training organisations.

For further information on WorldSkills London 2011 and to register for tickets go to: [www.worldskillslondon2011.com/visit](http://www.worldskillslondon2011.com/visit)



Team UK members are hoping home advantage will help them top their medal haul at the previous WorldSkills (above) in Calgary, 2009



Photo © Rob Dunning/Solent Studios

# MPs salute Southampton learners

City College Southampton learners celebrate their achievements with local MPS Alan Whitehead (sixth left) and John Denham (ninth right)

**Southampton MPs John Denham and Dr Alan Whitehead helped learners and learning reps at City College Southampton celebrate their achievements by presenting them with their certificates at a ceremony this summer.**

City College's Trade Union Education Centre provides training for trade union reps and union learning reps (ULRs), to help them play a key role in increasing skills in the region.

"Union learning reps trained by TUC Education here at City College have changed people's lives through learning and opened up opportunities for them to develop their skills and their knowledge," commented Southampton Test MP Dr Whitehead.

Southampton Itchen MP John Denham said TUC Education courses had helped hundreds and thousands of people all over the country engage with learning at work through the innovative approach of trained learning reps.

"ULRs are such a successful and cost-effective way of promoting learning: they are everybody's best friend in the workplace," he pointed out.

Unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis took the opportunity to launch *Progression Pathways*, a new TUC Education booklet that provides advice and guidance to learners and union reps on how to recognise and develop their own skills.

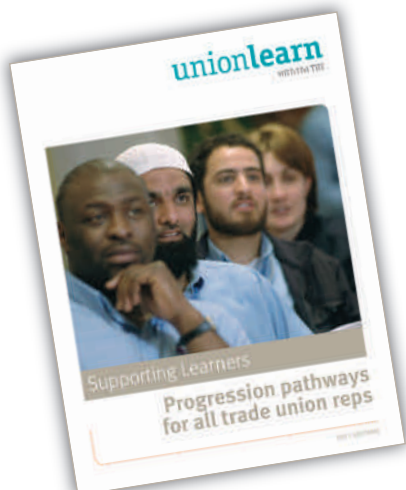
"Unionlearn is launching *Progression Pathways* to help reps and learners get

**"ULRs are such a successful and cost-effective way of promoting learning: they are everybody's best friend in the workplace."**

more out of education: it will empower people to progress, encourage them to think about using their skills to coach, mentor, or teach and furnish them with the information they need," Barry explained.

City College Vice-Principal Ivan Gregory said he was proud of the fantastic success the college had had with learners from all backgrounds and from a wide range of starting points.

"I know this booklet will be of great use not just to learners here but to people all over the UK," he added.



**She took her A Levels twice, and spent three years trying to get into drama school before winning a place at RADA. Now actress Maxine Peake reveals where she'd like to go next on her learning journey.**

## **What was your experience of learning while you were at school?**

I went to Westhoughton High School in Westhoughton, which is a little semi-rural satellite town of Bolton. The school didn't have a great reputation at the time (although it's completely pulled itself round since then). We were quite a boisterous bunch, the teachers had their work cut out: it was more crowd control with us.

I loved the social side of school: I never bunked off because I was frightened of missing out on something. For me, it was about sitting on the back row with your mates and having a good gossip. I enjoyed English and drama and art but I wasn't particularly studious at the time. I was a bit of a class clown, to be honest.

For most people, school was about getting a job at the end of it: you weren't really pushed to do anything out of the ordinary. The teacher who was really inspirational to me was Mrs Mohaccson: she encouraged me to do A Levels.

I did a Diploma in Performing Arts at Salford College of Technology (now part of the University of Salford) that had A Levels attached but I didn't do very well in them because it was all about the acting for me.

When I realised my mistake, I went to Canon Slade School in Bolton and I said: "I hear you've got a really good sixth form: can I come and do my A Levels again?" It was a bit cheeky, but they said: "We've never done that before, but okay, fair enough." And they were fantastic.

## **When and where did you go to drama school?**

When I left the sixth form I tried for drama school but I couldn't get in anywhere. My poor grandad used to drive me all round the North-West to different companies to audition and I didn't get anything.

I had a lot of people tell me that I wasn't cut out for it and I wasn't what an actress was or was expected to be, but I kept going: I knew I had to do it. I did lots of other part-time jobs: I was a lifeguard for years, I cleaned, I did all sorts of bits and pieces to keep going.

And then after three years of trying, I got into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) at the age of 21. RADA has this tradition and all these alumni: it was intimidating to see all the names of the past winners of bronze, silver and gold awards, but it was exciting to be part of that as well.

The first year was quite tough. Eight or nine of the 30 people in my year had already been to university, which meant they had a vocabulary that I didn't have, and I felt a little bit out of my depth. For the first time in my life there were teachers saying I was a bit quiet!

But then you think: "It's only big words," and you catch up. Then once it became more practical in the second year, I was fine.

## **What was it like getting your big break into TV in Victoria Wood's sitcom *Dinnerladies*?**

I did *Dinnerladies* straight out of drama school. They were very warm and embracing, although some of them thought I was some kid Victoria Wood had picked up off the street (some people still have a perception because of the accent).

## **Is there anyone you've worked with who is your mentor?**

Marjorie Yates, who played my mum Carol Fisher in *Shameless*. She's just fantastic: I can ring her about anything, she'll come and see all my shows, she'll give me really helpful notes. Marjorie's got a real theatre background and I could listen to her stories all day about the people she's worked with.

I think we all need a mentor, someone you can trust to push you in the right direction. RADA runs a buddy scheme where third-year students get in touch with people who've left. I'm mentoring two young actresses at the moment: one of them is playing the young Margaret Thatcher in the forthcoming film *The Iron Lady* with Meryl Streep – she doesn't really need my advice any more, I think I need hers!

“Actors are continually learning because you're researching different periods in time, you're forever reading – and that's been brilliant, that's been my education – but I'm beginning to think I'd like to do more.”

# Peak

## **Would you like to return to learn?**

Actors are learning continually because you're researching different periods in time, you're forever reading – and that's been brilliant, that's been my education – but I'm beginning to think I'd like to do more. Something connected to literature would give me a bit more confidence, more of a grounding: I'd really like to do an English degree, perhaps through The Open University.

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## Maxine Peake CV

Born in Bolton in 1974, actress Maxine Peake was turned down by every theatre education company she applied to, until she finally won a place at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London at the age of 21.

Since playing Twinkle in Victoria Wood's BBC sitcom *Dinnerladies*, and Veronica in Channel 4's drama series *Shameless*, Maxine has taken on a wide range of parts for television, including Myra Hindley (*See No Evil*), Tracey Temple (*Confessions of a Diary Secretary*), Miss Wade (*Little Dorrit*) and Elizabeth Liliburne (*The Devil's Whore*).

This summer, Maxine starred in *Loyalty* at Hampstead Theatre, Sarah Helm's dramatised account of her marriage to Tony Blair's chief of staff Jonathan Powell in the run-up to the Gulf War (main picture).

# A fond farewell to Tom



Tom O'Callaghan (centre) collects his special award from unionlearn Board Chair Mary Boustead and Unite Head of Lifelong Learning Tom Beattie

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**One of the longest-serving learning reps in the region, Unite activist Tom O'Callaghan picked up a special award at unionlearn's national conference this summer for all he has done to promote learning in the workplace.**

**“I'm delighted to receive this award from unionlearn with the TUC: there really isn't a better buzz than helping people,” he says.**

Born in Ireland, Tom fell in love with London when he visited the capital on holiday in the early 1960s, and later moved here with his wife Noreen, whom he'd met at a hotel in Killarney where she was working.

Tom began working in the public transport industry in 1967, starting as a conductor before switching to become a driver. He has been a member of what was then the Transport and General Workers Union (now part of Unite) throughout his working life.

Following the launch of the Union Learning Fund in 1998, Tom helped found the Learning on the Move initiative

at Metroline, which has enrolled hundreds of staff at the London bus company over the past ten years.

“We persuaded the company a learning bus would be ideal for Metroline as it is now: I think the company sold us the bus for £1,” he recalls.

A partnership between Metroline, Unite, unionlearn and the College of North East London (CONEL), Learning on the Move has been one of the biggest successes of the workplace learning movement in recent years.

“We must have more than 2,000 accreditations alone in IT and I can think of lots of people who have, as a result of going on the IT courses, gone on to become supervisors and inspectors and some of them are garage managers now,” Tom reckons.

In his role as ULR, Tom has helped encourage hundreds of his fellow workers to develop themselves at the workplace, and used his sound judgement to identify potential new learning reps, such as Cynthia Skervin.

“Tom approached me and said: ‘You'd be a good ULR because you have a good rapport with people’. I said: ‘I'll give it a try’ – although I didn't know what a learning rep was at the time,” she recalls.

The initiative has made an enormous difference not only to Metroline staff but also to the wider community, she points out.

“When Tom came in with the programme of learning it was really great because it built the drivers' confidence, and the drivers' families and children,

and people in the community: I know for sure even now some drivers who have left the company are still in education because of what Tom did,” she says.

On World Book Day 2008, Tom drove the double-decker learning centre through the gates of Downing Street so that ULRs and learners from the company could join the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown for tea, alongside Quick Reads authors Adele Parks and Colin Jackson.

And a year later, Tom was awarded an MBE for services to lifelong learning in the transport industry.

**“When Tom came in with the learning programme, it was really great because it built the drivers’ confidence, and the drivers’ families and children, and people in the community.”**

Although he has now retired, Tom still spends two days a week at the Metroline garage in Cricklewood helping people return to learning.

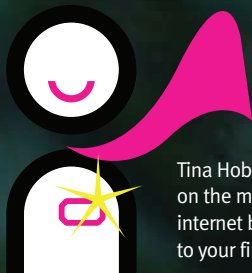
Unite Head of Lifelong Learning Tom Beattie paid warm tribute to Tom when he presented him with his award at the unionlearn conference.

“Tom O’Callaghan is an outstanding example of the trade union learning ethos: his dedication to spreading learning in his workplace, organising courses and learning activities and always going that extra mile provides a resounding example not only to Unite union learning reps, but to everyone,” Tom said.

TUC Deputy General Secretary Frances O’Grady summed up the significance of the special award on behalf of the labour movement in which Tom has played such a vital role through his working life.

“This award is merely a small token of the high esteem in which he is held by unionlearn and the TUC and I wish him all the best for his retirement,” she said.

## Holby star backs online campaign



Tina Hobley is passing on the message that the internet brings the world to your fingertips



**Actress Tina Hobley, best known for her role as no-nonsense ward sister Chrissie Williams in BBC TV hospital drama *Holby City*, has become the latest unionlearn Digital Champion to promote the benefits of getting online.**

**Through the Race Online 2012 project, supported by unionlearn, Digital Champions are helping spread the word about the internet to the 8.7 million adults in the UK who aren’t currently hooked up.**

“Everything from looking for and applying for jobs, booking train or plane tickets, banking, courses and shopping can be done online: it is often easier and cheaper to do so,” Tina says.

“But, more than that, the internet can open up a world of understanding and fun. It allows you to keep in touch by email with friends and family all over the world; you can catch up on national news, or the latest plotlines in *Holby City*; and you can use it to pursue hobbies such as tracing your family tree or learning about local history.”

Tina depends on new technology to help her run her hectic life with a family of three and a full-time job on one of the nation’s favourite soaps. She is often to be spotted on set learning her lines with the help of her iPad, and the Apple tablet also serves to distract her three children from backseat car squabbles, she says.

“There are still members of the cast and set of *Holby City* who need help: I’d say we are half high-tech and half low-tech,” she says.

Between Saturday 22 October and Tuesday 6 November, Tina will be taking part in the national initiative Go ON: Give An Hour, which will be urging the 30 million of us who already use the internet to give up some of our own time to transform other people’s lives by showing them the wonders of the web.

“If I want to think of things to do as a family, I can look up what is going on; the world is at my fingertips: I hope to pass that message on,” she says.

“If I can use my celebrity as an actress to support charities and as a unionlearn Digital Champion, I hope that I can help others.”

You don’t have to be famous to become a Digital Champion: all you need is the knowledge and enthusiasm to encourage and inspire people to try something new.

Find out more at:  
<http://champions.go-on.co.uk/>

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## Make a date

The sixth unionlearn Southern and Eastern annual conference will be held on Tuesday 1 November 2011 from 9.30am to 3.30pm at TUC headquarters in Congress House in London.

A wide range of workshops will offer participants the chance to pick up the latest information on initiatives including:

■ Skills for Life ■ Green skills ■ Health, work, and well-being ■ Working with the community ■ Equality and diversity.

To book your place, please contact Sonia Dawson by Friday 7 October 2011. Email [sdawson@tuc.org.uk](mailto:sdawson@tuc.org.uk) Tel: 020 7467 1251



## This autumn's regional events

There are a number of regional and local networks and forums taking place this autumn, and we're urging ULRs and project workers to book their places now.

All of the meetings will give you the opportunity to meet other reps, share best practice and discuss changes in policies and funding. There will also be guest speakers providing information on a wide range of issues from a variety of organisations.

The East of England Regional Network meets on Tuesday 27 September at Cambridge Professional Development Centre (10.30am–3.30pm).

The South East Regional Network meets on Thursday 29 September at Ruskin College Oxford (10.30am–3.30pm).

The Cambridgeshire and Bedford Forum meets on Monday 3 October at Perkins in Peterborough (10.30am–3pm).

The Hertfordshire and Essex Forum meets on Monday 10 October in Letchworth (venue to be confirmed) (10.30am–3pm).

The Southampton Local Network meets on Tuesday 11 October at City College Southampton (10.30am–1pm).

The Suffolk and Norfolk Forum meets on Monday 24 October at Bury St Edmunds Library (10.30am–3pm).

The Gatwick Area Local Network meets on Wednesday 26 October at Gatwick Airport (10.30am–1pm).

To find out more and book your place, please email [unionlearnsertuc@tuc.org.uk](mailto:unionlearnsertuc@tuc.org.uk)