

Southern and Eastern Region

update

SUMMER 2009



That's the ticket!

Rail ULR Zoi wins union learning award

Department for
Innovation,
Universities &
Skills

unionlearn

with the Southern and
Eastern Region TUC

Upskilling for the upturn



These are hard times we're living through and with Britain now deep in recession, it's even more vital that people upskill and re-skill to give themselves the edge. But on their own, many people don't know where to start looking for

courses, many aren't clear about what their options are, and very few have much idea about the best route forward for them.

That's why union learning reps can play an even more important role in the workplace during economic downturn.

Because they're trained to deal with all the issues workplace learners are going to come across, ULRs can help their co-workers in everything from a Skills for Life assessment that might help identify a numeracy issue to finding the best provider for higher level learning.

Continuous professional development is becoming an ever-more important theme in the work of unionlearn.

That's why we've got together again with Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) to launch a pilot project in the Southern and Eastern region to support employee and employer engagement in higher skills development. The project is particularly concentrating on raising awareness of the opportunities and benefits to workers and the workplace offered by Foundation Degrees, which combine academic study with workplace learning to equip people with the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills to improve their performance and productivity.

Research shows that 6 million could benefit from higher education, but they don't go down that route either because they believe higher education means full-time campus-based courses which don't attract them or because they assume that higher education simply isn't for them – challenging that notion is what this new joint project is all about.

Barry Francis, Regional Manager

Tabi raises union voice on national panel



Tabi Mpala is sharing experiences with other learners on the National Learner Panel

Unite ULR Sitahbile Mpala is currently serving on the National Learner Panel, which aims to ensure the voice of learners is placed at the heart of emerging further education policies and initiatives.

Tabi is one of 20 volunteers from across England who went through a rigorous selection process before being appointed to the panel for a year.

"I've gained so much from continuing the learning and development in my own life, I'm now in a position to support and encourage others to do the same in their lives," says Tabi, who works for Jewish Care, the largest health and social care organisation serving the Jewish community in the south east.

"I believe learning never ends and can improve one's chances to become employable, support one's family, boost morale at work and improve quality of life for everyone."

In May, the panel met Further Education Minister Siôn Simon, worked with Ofsted on the development of their inspection development project in February, and met policy leads from the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills last autumn to discuss how adult learners could get the most out of the new Skills Funding Agency (which takes over the adult learning work of the Learning and Skills Council from next year).

"My experience on the panel has been one of promoting the learning agenda and sharing valuable experiences with other learners across further education," says Tabi.

London's burning to learn



Shake on it (from left): UNISON Branch Secretary Tony Phillips, GMB Branch Secretary Charles Adje, FBU Regional Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator Tim Davis, Assistant Commissioner Head of Training and Development Gary Reason, FBU London National Executive Council Member Ian Leahair and FBU National ULF Manager Trevor Shanahan

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“Working in partnership with the brigade will enable us to progress the work we have already commenced which will provide learning opportunities for our members and all personnel which can only benefit everybody,” says FBU Regional Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator Tim Davis.

“I’m very confident that new qualifications will shortly become available for all staff to access, and for staff to be able to learn new skills and to have any existing skills recognised with a national qualification.”

After lengthy consultations, the learning agreement between the London Fire Brigade and the three trade unions FBU, GMB and UNISON, was finally signed at Southwark Training centre at the end of March.

It aims to:

- build a partnership between ULRs and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA);
- encourage staff to participate in lifelong learning;
- promote fair access to learning for all staff;
- help staff gain skills and qualifications to support their career development and future employability;
- establish learning centres for staff where possible.

“The signing of this agreement confirms the London Fire Brigade’s commitment to the development of all its staff,” commented Head of Training and Development Gary Reason.

The London Fire Brigade management and union Learning Forum set up by the learning agreement signed earlier this year met for the first time in June to look at taking forward workplace learning in the service.

“This agreement will allow the brigade to work in partnership with the unions to identify and utilise the learning opportunities available to support all staff to realise their potential and make a real difference in shaping society and the brigade.”

With equal representation from all partners, the Learning Forum will (among other things) prioritise learning needs and produce a realistic Learning Plan, setting goals and targets for learning-related activities.

FBU London Executive Council Member Ian Leahair says that becoming involved in lifelong learning can only enhance the lives of FBU members inside and outside the service.

“The signing of this agreement is a huge step forward and shows a commitment towards developing a learning culture within LFEPA by all partners which will benefit everybody equally,” he says.

“Anything that can improve the quality of life for workers and increase their chances of better employment opportunities is not something to be ignored: I would encourage any member to become involved either as a union learning rep or as a learner.”

Water way to learn: p6

MPs meet local ULRs



Sarah McCarthy-Fry (second left) and John Denham (second right) meet local ULRs

© Rod Leon

Southampton Itchen MP John Denham (now Communities Secretary, then at the helm of DIUS) and his Portsmouth colleague Sarah McCarthy-Fry met learning reps from their constituencies in April to find out more about how local people are benefiting from union-led learning.

Organised by unionlearn and sponsored by Thompsons Solicitors, the meeting brought together the MPs with learning reps from ATL, CWU, FBU, Prospect, PCS, the Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists, UNISON and Unite working for Eaton Aerospace, Hampshire Fire and Rescue, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and Southampton City Council.

“I’m delighted to find out what ULRs are doing here in my own constituency: in Southampton and Portsmouth, as in the rest of the country, they are doing a fantastic job,” John Denham commented.



How Zoi got her ticket to learn

ASLEF ULR Zoi Kakouris is determined to help Southern Railways workers overcome barriers to learning and improve their lives.

Park-keeper looks to rosy future

After learning to read and write in his 50s, Brighton park-keeper Barrie Hughes won the National Senior Learner of the Year Award during Adult Learners' Week.



Barrie Hughes collects his ALW award from NIACE patron Princess Anne

When Brighton train driver Zoi Kakouris became an ASLEF union learning rep seven years ago she'd already been an active member of the union's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) consultative committee.

"I decided to become a ULR because I've always liked helping people and working on the LGBT side of things meant I'd already been involved in a bit of education of small-minded people!" she laughs.

Her own schooling had hardly been the happiest days of her life. One day while she was still in the infants she was locked in the teacher's cupboard for refusing to read in front of the rest of the class.

Life didn't improve at secondary school. She was bullied by fellow-pupils and did so little during her CSEs that the school forced her to take the English exam twice because she didn't even put her name on the paper first time around.

"I had no motivation, there was no one at school you could talk to, and I didn't get a lot of support from home," she recalls.

The next time she had to take a test was the guard's exam when she started working on the railways: although she failed first time, she didn't give up, passing at the second attempt despite all her difficulties with studying from books.

When she went on to take the driver's exam, she adopted a new learning strategy: she got a good friend at work to fire questions at her until the answers stuck – and passed first time.

After becoming the lead ULR on Southern Railways in September 2005 (for which she got two days' paid release to carry out her duties), Zoi was seconded full-time to the Passport To Learning project between the company and the three rail unions in July 2007.

When she's not in her office in Lewes, setting up courses, looking for funding or writing reports, she's in one of the project's learning centres in Brighton and Croydon (a third opened in Victoria during Adult Learners' Week), catching up with learners throughout the network, meeting providers, attending steering committee meetings or even talking to government ministers.

What's made all the difference is training as a ULR, and following that up with Skills for Life and advice and guidance courses (she's just got her IAG Level 4).

"I think I've always had a lack of confidence with learning,

didn't think I could do it, but in the last few years I've been doing all sorts of courses," she explains.

She's most recently passed her National Test for Adult Literacy Level 2 and completed her Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) course which qualifies her to teach English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

"It was hard going, it felt like I was on the computer all day and all night, but I thought 'If I'm going to do it, I want to get the top grade.' I worked really hard and when I got my confirmation letter a couple of weeks ago, they'd given me an A grade, so I'm really pleased," she says.

To cap it all, Zoi won the Learning through the Unions Award (sponsored by unionlearn SERTUC) at the Adult Learners' Week South-East Awards in May.


"We are extremely proud of her and the work that she does for us," commented ASLEF Project Worker Declan MacIntyre, who nominated her for the award. "She's a beacon of hope who has earned the respect of all who know and work with her."

Perhaps still just as reluctant to occupy the spotlight as she was at primary school, Zoi can't quite decide how she feels about the recognition. "It's quite funny really: I was kind of pleased and excited but I'm one of those people who gets embarrassed if someone compliments me," she says.

The best thing about being a ULR is helping her co-workers, she says. "It really pleases me when people tell me they've passed their course, or got promotion, or are happier in themselves – that's something that makes a difference, not just to them and their career but to their whole life and to their families as well," she says.

And she hasn't finished with her own development, either. She's now looking into an IT teaching qualification, and after recently setting up a Makaton sign language course is now thinking about that as well. "I just want to teach everyone everything!" she says.

"I didn't have a great experience at school and there's thousands of people out there who had worse than I had, but after the way I've developed over the past couple of years, I just want to encourage as many people as I can: there is something everyone can do – if you can get the motivation and a bit of courage."



Barrie, who's worked for the local authority parks department for the past 14 years, had always successfully covered up his Skills for Life issues.

But when he had to resort to faking an injury and bandaging his hand to get out of going on a training course at work, he realised the game was finally up.

Luckily for Barrie, his union, the GMB, has been helping staff get to grips with literacy and numeracy at its learning

centre at the council's refuse and recycling operation, Brighton Cityclean.

Found to be severely dyslexic and assessed at below entry-level, Barrie began with one-to-one literacy classes which went so well he signed up for another course at the start of this year.

"It's like having a different person at work since Barrie's taken these courses," says his manager Brian Mann. "He's more confident and much more willing to have a go at anything now; he's much more involved

with the organisation and wants to develop."

Barrie's so enjoyed returning to learning that he's trained as a union learning rep, and has worked closely with the GMB to open a new learning centre for City Parks staff.

"I love being able to write poetry and to read things, and at work I have even drawn up some plans for developing the seafront: I would not have had the confidence or ability to do this before I started learning again," Barrie says.



Adrian Ryan (right) presents Gabi and Dave with their ULR award, with Sky News presenter Charlotte Hawkins (left)

UNISON ULR Gabi Upton from Croydon and Unite learning rep Southampton-based Dave Ross shared the South-East Union Learning Representative Award (sponsored by unionlearn SERTUC) during Adult Learners' Week.

Gabi and Dave share ULR award

The UNISON activist was nominated for the award for the blistering start she made in the role at Crawley Borough Council where she worked before joining unionlearn SERTUC in June.

As soon as she completed her training last year, she persuaded Central Sussex College to organise a Learning At Work Day in October for members and potential members at Crawley Borough Council.

The event offered staff Skills for Life assessments as well as taster sessions on massage, beauty and First Aid, guitar and dance lessons; Gabi invited the Open University, nextstep, Sussex Learning Network and BBC Skillswise to run stalls; and the council's training department joined in as well.

The learning needs survey Gabi ran on the day led to her organising classes in holiday Spanish and digital

photography funded by UNISON and she's also promoted the union's Open University access courses, as well as other e-learning opportunities.

Gabi also became a key member of the local Gatwick ULR forum where she has provided great support to ULRs from other unions and opened up learning opportunities to their members.

"Gabi was only trained a year ago and the commitment she has shown has been fantastic," says unionlearn SERTUC Regional Development Worker Adrian Ryan.

Painter and decorator Dave Ross has made a major impact at Southampton Council, where he produces all the posters and certificates for the learning centre and has played a key role in organising Learning At Work Day events for the past two years.

"Dave would always say that it is a

team effort from the ULRs but he has led by example and he has helped change lives through learning – and much of his work has been carried out in his own time," says Adrian.

Barbara Smith, Director of Employment and Skills at the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), the main sponsors of ALW in the South East, is delighted that Gabi and Dave shared the award.

"Over the last three years, we have worked with unionlearn to deliver Adult Learners' Week activities in workplaces across the region. Gabi and Dave are just two of the ULRs in the South East who have been responsible for encouraging many thousands of people to return to learning and we are delighted their contribution and effort has been recognised," she says.



FBU members from fire stations in Greenwich, Eltham and Erith learnt how to scuba dive during Adult Learner's Week, thanks to a free taster session organised by Greenwich ULR Tony Purnell.

"I wanted to demonstrate to members that learning needn't be dull and doesn't have to take place in a classroom," Tony says.

"We all met up at a local swimming pool and I was surprised that within six minutes I had a set on my back and was whizzing around the pool like Flipper – okay, more like Orca! – but at least I was doing it!"

The whole group picked up PADI certificates which will get them money off their next course anywhere in the world, two are taking further lessons and one is interested in becoming a ULR.

Fire Service staff across the capital are taking the Six Book Challenge this summer after listening to Quick Reads author Lola Jaye speaking at the Southwark training centre during Adult Learners' Week.

The FBU and UNISON members can register as reluctant readers, holiday readers or bookworms: they then submit a diary including their opinion of each title they read and the best entrant in each category will win an Apple iPod Nano.

Lola says she enjoyed meeting the cooks and other staff who came to the session. "In the current climate (which seems to be surrounded by a thick air of gloom), it was so refreshing to hear about a range of aspirations that included re-training as a medical secretary and publishing a book of poetry," she says.

Skip cooking, start studying

Look up “lifelong learning” in the dictionary and you might just find a picture of Harlow ULR Maria Gough, because the 51-year-old UNISON activist really has been studying through her entire career.

Ever since doing O and A Levels at night school while working as a nursing auxiliary, Maria has never stopped learning, and now has a Certificate in Counselling, a Diploma in Psychodynamic Counselling, a Diploma in Higher Education, a BSc and a Master’s in law to her name.

A union member throughout her working life, Maria became a steward and a ULR in 2005 shortly after her new branch was formed and makes a point of trying to help staff with any learning issues at the NHS walk-in centre where she’s a Senior Nurse Practitioner.

She’s also continued her own union education. “The UNISON Employment Law course I did recently was absolutely excellent because it was an employment lawyer who was delivering the course, which makes a huge difference,” she says.

And she’s not done with learning yet. “I got interested in philosophy in the first year of my Master’s, and it struck me how few philosophers are women, so I have been looking into the possibility of doing a doctorate in philosophy but I’ll probably have to wait until I retire in nine years’ time!”

Maria was surprised to win a National Learning Works Award during Adult Learners’ Week. “I was a bit taken aback when I got the award, because being nominated for something doesn’t actually mean you’re going to get it, but when I did



Maria receives her National Learning Works Award from QCA Strategic Manager Stakeholder Engagement – Adult Skills Jill Matthews

get it I was overjoyed,” she says.

She hopes her story will encourage more union members to take up learning. “I hope I can inspire other people because if I can do it, you can do it – you just have to be determined, because sometimes instead of cooking the dinner you have to write an essay!”

Plant researchers sow the seeds of learning

Over 190 Prospect and PCS members at the John Innes Centre in Norwich took part in a union-organised Spring Into Learning event at the independent plant science and microbiology research institute in April.

Prospect & PCS members Gill Ashby, Tom Betteridge, Sarah Tolland and Fiona Alderson worked tirelessly to bring lifelong learning opportunities to colleagues on the site, with 23 taster sessions covering Skills for Life and IT as well as well-being, craft, archaeology and credit crunch tips for managing your finances.

In addition, St John Ambulance demonstrated resuscitation techniques, while Open Air Laboratories Project (OPAL) issued worm survey packs and gave people the chance to study various organisms under the microscope.

Demand for learning was high: while just under 200 staff took part, almost 330 learning interventions were recorded because many of them attended more than one taster session.

There has already been interest in running some of the subjects on a regular basis at the centre. “From the feedback I have been receiving, I think some of the tasters may well turn into full meals!” one organiser commented.

The event was supported by management at the John Innes Centre and part-funded by unionlearn SERTUC’s Learning At Work Day Fund.

ATL investigates autistic spectrum

Teaching union ATL invited Alice Stobart of the National Autistic Society to deliver a workshop to help staff at The Priory School in Orpington, Kent, learn more about the autistic spectrum during Adult Learners’ Week.

“We’ve got a track record in ATL London-wide of trying to address topics that don’t come people’s way in other ways, and a session on autism seemed tailor-made because there’s quite a large learning support department at the school and autism is a major concern,” explains Bromley ATL Branch Secretary Diana Manville.

“I organised with the school that they’d give us the premises for free and their staff could come and we’d pay for the speaker with the help of the unionlearn SERTUC Learning At Work Day Fund.”

As well as 30 people attending what the Special Educational Needs Coordinator at The Priory called a very good session, an ATL member has come forward as a contact at the school for the future.

Funding the future The unionlearn SERTUC Learning At Work Day Funds supported 141 events in London; 80 events in the South-East; and 44 events (covering 247 workplaces) in the East of England.

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More Quality Awards for top regional providers

Comedian and Equity member Jo Brand, who chaired the national unionlearn conference in June, presented prestigious Quality Awards to four providers from the southern and eastern region.



Woolwich TUC Study Centre Steering Group Chair Anne Price (left) and Councillor Denise Hyland collect their award from Jo Brand

- The Communication Workers Union won its award for its information, advice and guidance (IAG) to workers in the postal, telecoms and financial services industries.
 - The Financial Services Skills Council (FSSC) won for its online careers information service Directions.
 - TUC Study Centre, Woolwich, won for its U-Net course programmes.
 - West Thames College won for its ITQ2 Delivery Programme.
- “Unionlearn and trade unions are ensuring that the education members receive is of the highest standard and the unionlearn Quality Award guarantees this,” commented unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis.
- “Our work with all the award-winners is benefiting learners throughout the southern and eastern region and I was delighted to see them all receive their awards from Jo Brand.”

Getting to grips with money

Unionlearn SERTUC has been running training sessions for union learning reps and project workers in the East of England to help them organise and run RaW Money workshops in their workplaces and learning centres.

The first took place in Pitsea, near Basildon in Essex, and the second at Huntingdonshire Regional College (as part of a meeting of the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Union Learning Forum), both of them in June.

A facilitator from the BBC RaW project ran the Essex workshop, taking participants through the RaW Money website and outlined workshops that would be relevant to people at work, including planning for retirement and identifying people’s “money type” (spendaholic, saver, etc).

“They were very well-received and everyone’s made a commitment to go away and run at least one workshop themselves,” explains Regional Development Worker Mick Hadgraft, who facilitated the Huntingdon session himself.

Mick points out that RaW Money workshops would make suitable sessions to run during Adult Learner’s Week 2010.

To find out more, email Mick Hadgraft mhadgraft@tuc.org.uk

Website: www.bbc.co.uk/raw/money