

Southern and Eastern Region

update

SUMMER 2010

Brighton up your learning



BIS
Department for
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unionlearn

with the Southern and
Eastern Region TUC

Opening doors to higher education



By opening doors to English, maths and computer courses in the workplace, unionlearn SERTUC has helped thousands of workers overhaul often deeply-felt beliefs about themselves over the past few years.

Convinced they were excluded from opportunities to learn by negative experiences at school, huge numbers of union members (and non-members) have since discovered they are more than capable of tackling literacy, numeracy and IT with the support and encouragement of their union learning rep.

Now, as more people recognise that learning is for life and that today's workplace requires continuous improvement in skills, increasing numbers are keen to make the step up to higher-level learning.

This is great news. It shows that all the work we've done to offer opportunities to learn at work has made a genuine difference, not least by helping build the confidence of huge numbers of union learners. More and more now know not only that they are entitled to progress themselves, but that they have the capacity to do so as well.

The problem is that they still face some very serious obstacles, top of the list being time off to study and help with course fees, with childcare, travel and study costs also making life difficult.

Unionlearn SERTUC is committed to helping workers throughout the region access the higher education they aspire to. That's why we're running the Accessing Higher Education in the Workplace project – which is helping unions spread the word at events like the one run by Unite's finance sector which you can read about on p6 of this issue of *Update*.

And that's also why we're proud of our agreement with world-famous Birkbeck that means union members can secure a 10 per cent discount on the cost of many courses at London's part-time evening university (there are full details on the back page).

Barry Francis, Regional Manager

College welcomes union learners



Open for business (from left) Southampton City College Tutor John Fitzpatrick, Centre Co-ordinator Alicja Adamczewska and Director of Corporate Services Fred Stanley help John Denham MP MP and unionlearn Director Tom Wilson open the new learning centre

Unionlearn has set up the only U-Net centre in a college in the south of England with the launch of the TUS learning centre in Southampton City College.

Union members (and close family members) can learn at the centre, which is equipped with nine computers, or they can opt to learn online from home or their workplace. Skills for Life and ICT tutors work with learners one-to-one both at the centre and in local workplaces.

"The U-Net centre is an important support service for ULRs and workplace learners," commented local MP John Denham when he formally opened the new facility earlier this year.

City College Director of Corporate Services Fred Stanley pointed out the provider had been supporting union learning for over a decade already. "We are delighted that this new centre will allow us to provide training to even more union members," he added.

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson said there were already 300 ULRs active in the Hampshire area, working with a range of local organisations. "The work here at Southampton City College will help build on what has already been achieved in the area and encourage more people into learning and education," he said.

To find out more, visit www.southampton-city.ac.uk and click on 'adult learning', send an email to unetcentre@southampton-city.ac.uk or call 02380 577 497.

Royal Pavilion managers and staff celebrate the opening of their new onsite learning centre with GMB Regional Project Worker Declan MacIntyre (far left)

© Jess Hurd



Getting the royal treatment

Staff at Brighton's Royal Pavilion are developing themselves in their new learning resource centre.

The third workplace learning centre the GMB has launched in partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council happens to be the very first to open in a royal palace anywhere in the country.

Staff at Brighton's iconic Royal Pavilion have already started improving their IT skills since the learning resource centre opened earlier this year when the union and the council's cultural services department signed a learning agreement.

And plans are in place to offer Skills for Life and courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in the autumn, while many staff are also interested in learning languages (the Pavilion is one of the city's major tourist attractions).

The Pavilion was originally built by the future George IV when the Prince Regent was looking for an exotic seaside base where he could indulge in his favourite pursuits of drinking, womanising and gambling.

"There can't be many learning centres in a former prince's bordello, but the centre will be a great asset to the Brighton staff in developing their skills and knowledge," says unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis.

Management at the Pavilion agree. "Learning in the workplace with colleagues you can open up to is a good thing: I think it's really got potential," says Head of Museums and Royal Pavilion Janita Bagshawe

"When you work in the frontline, trying to use your job as a stepping stone can be pretty difficult – when do you make space when you're tied up the whole week? – so I think the learning centre could help enormously."



GMB Regional Secretary Richard Ascough (left) and Brighton & Hove City Council Director of Cultural Services Scott Marshall shake on the learning agreement

Spice up your learning life

Unions across the region seized the chance to promote personal and professional development on Learning At Work Day and throughout Adult Learners' Week, many of them with the help of unionlearn SERTUC's Learning At Work Day Funds.

Chef Kevin Muhammed cooks up a storm for Reading Borough Council staff

Reading Borough UNISON Branch ran lunchtime demonstrations and tasting sessions featuring both Caribbean and classic Italian cuisine during Adult Learners' Week.

Led by Kevin Muhammed, a chef who has appeared on Channel's Iron Chef UK programme, the lunchtime demonstration attracted 30 people and another nine took part in a family cooking session one evening.

The cookery event was part of the branch's week-long Adult Learners' Week programme (which also included digital photography, bike maintenance, yoga, tai chi, British Sign Language, French and Spanish) which the UNISON branch put together with teachers'

union NUT and the New Directions learning and employment service.

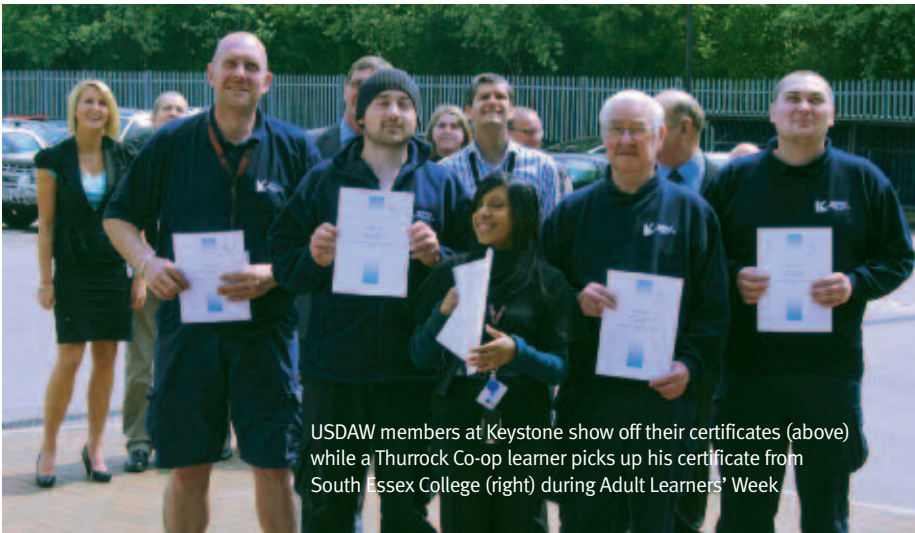
"It's really raised our profile – I'm receiving emails from people every day now asking when we're going to be putting on new courses," says Reading UNISON Assistant Branch Secretary Pat Kenny.

"We've got to take it forward now – we want to get other unions in Reading involved, so we can organise learning across the unions."

Earlier this year, Kevin helped the branch pilot the union's new six-week Credit Crunch Cookery course which aims to show members how to cook healthy meals to a budget and encourage them onto other UNISON courses, including Skills for Life.

The course embeds discussions on organic food, food packaging and recycling alongside numeracy issues such as converting between imperial and metric measurements, calculating cost per head and managing portion control.

"We decided to run cookery classes when we surveyed our members asking what sort of courses they'd be interested in and cookery was the most popular," Pat says.



USDAW members at Keystone show off their certificates (above) while a Thurrock Co-op learner picks up his certificate from South Essex College (right) during Adult Learners' Week



Shopworkers check out learning

With the help of Learning At Work Day (LAWD) funding from unionlearn SERTUC, shopworkers' union USDAW ran successful events during Adult Learners' Week at two of their newer learning centres – at Co-operative Retail in Thurrock and Keystone Distribution in Hemel Hempstead.

At Thurrock, in addition to a presentation ceremony for learners who had completed qualifications in the canteen, the union launched a camera club with the help of two of the drivers onsite who are excellent photographers

(and exhibited their work in the canteen and learning centre).

"We'd had a lot of interest in forming a camera club: in a lot of cases, informal adult learning is the ice-breaker that gets people involved in the learning centre, and shows that learning isn't only about doing courses with qualifications – although many do go on to further studies," says USDAW Lifelong Learning Project Worker Phil Gander.

At Keystone Distribution, the union also organised a presentation ceremony, as well as Skill for Life

assessments for new learners, while one of the ULR team who is a good artist gave advice to beginners about painting with watercolours.

"Without a doubt, the funding from unionlearn SERTUC helped us put on higher-profile events at both sites," says Phil.

"The funding we managed to secure does make a difference – without the funding, you can still run an event during Adult Learners' Week but it's going to be much more successful with the unionlearn financial support."

Lola issues six-book challenge

Quick Reads author Lola Jaye visited the learning centre at Royal Mail's Mount Pleasant sorting office during Adult Learners' Week in May to celebrate The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge, the annual project to support less confident adult readers.

The Reading Agency has published a new booklet, Six Book Challenge at Work, which highlights the way ULRs have helped promote the initiative in workplaces as diverse

as Transport for London, NHS Trusts and local authorities.

For more information, visit www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk or contact mail@davidkendall.co.uk or tel 07814 060572. You can order free copies of Six Book Challenge At Work from www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/



Quick Reads author Lola Jaye (centre) encouraged Royal Mail workers to take the Six Book Challenge during Adult Learners' Week

How we helped

Unionlearn SERTUC agreed to help hundreds of unions run events promoting workplace learning across the region during Adult Learners' Week. We agreed to support 101 applications in London, 65 in the South East and 46 in the East of England – many of them covering more than one event at more than one workplace.

Unite Project Development Officer Eileen Francis (main pic) and The Open University Business Development Manager Akin Shoetan (below) explain how higher-level learning pays off for union members at the Unite seminar (right)

All photos: ©Mark Thomas

Finance workers aim higher

Unite's finance sector United in Learning project briefed ULRs about encouraging members into higher level learning at a London event put together with the help of SERTUC unionlearn's Accessing Higher Education (HE) in the Workplace project earlier this year.



Heathrow mailworkers reach for the skies

Over 50 CWU learners at Heathrow World Distribution Centre (HWDC) in Langley celebrated passing the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) Level 1 course at a special event involving the union, management and local provider West Thames College earlier this year.

CWU South East Regional Secretary Terry Jackson and Royal Mail International Operations Director Dave Cunnington presented the students with their certificates and goody bags which included £10 vouchers from the company and the union plus a memory stick from the college.

Many of the Level 1 learners have progressed onto ECDL Level 2, and a second Level 1 course is already underway to satisfy the appetite for learning at Langley.

The learning project onsite has flourished ever since the CWU's Parminder Kaur took on the lead ULR role, and breathed new life into the initiative with the help of fellow learning rep Jerry Hatherall.

"Parminder is very passionate about learning and has been extremely effective and dedicated in her approach: she has broken down so many barriers to achieve something

very wonderful here," says CWU South East Learning Project Worker Joe Showler.

"Parminder is a great example of how a ULR can change perceptions about union learning and address the skills needs and aspirations of our members."

Unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis says that the transformation at HWDC shows the CWU's strength in depth when it comes to learning reps.

"It also highlights what can be achieved through a genuine partnership sharing the same goals: full credit should be given to all those involved, especially the learners who put in so much effort," he says.



Heathrow CWU members celebrate success in the HWDC learning centre

Speakers from Birkbeck, Kingston, Anglia Ruskin and The Open University gave presentations about their courses, their commitment to adult learning and their joint work with trade unions.

A detailed question and answer session with the HE speakers covered everything from the cost of HE and financial support available to union learners to accreditation of prior learning and employer engagement.

In addition, participants had the chance to learn about the Financial Sector Skills Council Directions website, a specialist source of careers information for those working, or aiming to work, in the finance sector.

“This was a great opportunity for Unite reps, learning organisers and officers to meet key people from four

universities each offering flexible HE courses that can benefit our members,” said Unite Project Development Officer Eileen Francis, who initiated and chaired the event.

Feedback about the day was positive. “I knew very little about these possibilities before, but now I can confidently pass on reliable information to our members who want to make progress in their career,” commented one ULR.

The HE participants were equally positive. “We need more events like this that bring Higher Education institutions, trade unions and even employers together if we are to achieve the Leitch target of 40 per cent of the UK workforce being educated at HE level by 2020,” said The OU’s Akin Soetan.



If you would like to hold a HE awareness session and/or find out more information about the Accessing Higher Education in the Workplace project, please contact Project Worker Sean Ruddy Tel: 020 7467 1368 Email: sruddy@tuc.org.uk

- OU financial services Foundation degree: www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/g16.htm
- Directions website: www.fssc.org.uk/directions

Regional reps score at learndirect awards



London award-winning FBU ULR Stephen Fay (second left and below) with UFI Regional Performance Director Jonathan Hind, Olympic Village Unite Convenor Ken Stevens and unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis

Fire Brigades Union ULR Stephen Fay won the unionlearn award at the London learndirect Achievement Awards, while Public and Commercial Services Union learning rep Kenneth Stevens was highly commended.

“I felt very honoured to be up there representing the Fire Brigades Union – to tell you the truth, I didn’t think I’d done anything special,” Stephen says.

The judges disagreed: they were full of admiration for Stephen’s work at Stratford fire station: in the two years since he trained as a learning rep (his first union role), he’s supported dozens of colleagues onto courses.

During Adult Learners’ Week this year, with financial backing from unionlearn SERTUC’s Learning At Work Day Fund, Stephen encouraged nearly 90 Stratford co-workers to attend eight Polish awareness sessions over four days, with a language tutor and Polish food.

“Adult Learners’ Week definitely helped raise the profile of learning, and showed people what it was all about,” he says.



PCS ULRs Winston Resalsingh and Joe Stevens won the unionlearn award at the South-East learndirect Achievement Awards.

Winston and Joe work in the Child Support Office in Hastings, and won the award (along with other ULRS in the office) for supporting learners through numeracy and literacy courses.

South-East award-winning ULRs Winston Resalsingh (left) and Joe Stevens



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Get 10 per cent off at Birkbeck

Union members in the Southern and Eastern region can now get 10 per cent off the cost of courses at the world-famous Birkbeck, thanks to a new agreement between unionlearn SERTUC and London's part-time evening university.

Birkbeck prides itself on offering students the chance to fit university study around their busy lives for both career development and personal interest, running the majority of classes from 6 to 9pm, so you can earn while you learn and graduate debt-free.

Students can sign up for a wide range of learning at Birkbeck, from short courses to postgraduate qualifications. You don't need previous academic qualifications for entry if you are over 21 and may be eligible for financial support.

"The agreement for trade union members to receive a 10 per cent discount on course fees at Birkbeck, a recognised leader around the globe in part-time learning, will increase opportunities for workers to develop to their full potential," says unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis.

"Unionlearn SERTUC looks forward to developing a close working relationship with this prestigious partner."

Master of Birkbeck Professor David Latchman CBE is delighted to be working in partnership with unionlearn SERTUC. "Improving access for union members is central to our mission of enhancing learning opportunities for working people," he says.

Visit www.bbk.ac.uk/unions or call **0845 601 0174** for more information. The 10 per cent discount is available to union members intending to study for a qualification at a higher level than any they have previously achieved.



It's a date

Unionlearn SERTUC is holding its annual conference on Tuesday 2 November at Congress House.

GMB Regional Secretary Richard Ascough and Janita Bagshawe (Head of Museums and Royal Pavilion at Brighton & Hove Council) will be speaking about the workplace learning agreement at the Royal Pavilion.

Other speakers include TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber, unionlearn Board chair Mary Boustead, Brendan Loughran (Group Director of Learning and Skills at the London Development Agency) and Quick Reads author Lola Jaye.

You can register to attend on the unionlearn SERTUC website.

Cover photo of GMB Regional Project Worker Declan MacIntyre outside the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, by Jess Hurd