

LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Autumn 2015

*It's full steam
ahead for
RMT learners*

▶ *Unionlearn conference*

▶ *Festival of Learning*

▶ *ULR survey*

▶ *Union skills advantage*

▶ *Mid-life review*

unionlearn
with the TUC



THE ONLY WAY IS QUALITY

THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION to launch a training levy to fund Apprenticeships is welcome news for unions and unionlearn, as for many other lifelong learning stakeholders. After all, unions have been arguing for a levy solution to our training problems for decades.

The new levy could raise up to £2bn, which will be used to fund government support for training apprentices. If employers do have apprentices, they won't have to pay the levy. For those that don't, either they pay the levy or start hiring apprentices themselves. The levy will mean every large employer pays something, sharing the cost equally among themselves.

We are also happy to have received assurances that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is keen to involve unions in the new scheme, as unions are in Germany and most other advanced economies. Unionlearn can take some credit for that.

"We are happy that BIS is keen to involve unions in the new scheme, as unions are in Germany and most other advanced economies."

The big issue now is quality; better training, pay and the chance of a job are essential for apprentices. Poor-quality schemes serve no-one – not the young people who lose out on a real chance to get a good start in the world of work; not the businesses that exploit them (because they too lose out in the long term); and certainly not our economy, which needs the skills only high-quality Apprenticeships can deliver to grow in the years ahead. 

Tom Wilson is Director of unionlearn



unionlearn
with the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

Unite ULR helps gardening apprentices blossom



Unite ULR Sam Quigley has been helping apprentices at Plymouth City Council grow their skills and gain full-time jobs with the local authority.

The council has an Apprenticeship scheme covering various roles across the city, which normally last for 12 months.

But with Sam's support, some apprentices have managed to extend their programmes for an additional 12 months, to give them more skills and therefore boost their chances of gaining a job when they complete their training.

Former apprentices such as Josh Coomber and Jamie Lock (pictured above with Sam centre), who have both moved into jobs as assistant gardeners, have found the scheme a great way to gain skills and training, while earning a living.

"Sam and the union have been very supportive, helping explain some of the paperwork and helping with work issues if they come up," says Josh. "He also arranged for apprentices to have an extension and made sure we got extra training while on it – so

"It's been good to help apprentices from across the council gain the skills they need to get a job."

both myself and Jamie now have a qualification to carry out health and safety inspections in playgrounds."

Sam says that it's important that unions support apprentices when they start, which is when they need the most help.

"It's been good to help apprentices from across the council gain the skills they need to get a job, and it also helps raise the union's profile at the council and recruit new members in the process – so it's a win-win situation," he says.

New apprentice target enshrined in law

The government is to enshrine in law its commitment to create three million new Apprenticeships by 2020, and legally protect

the term 'Apprenticeship' so it can take action when the term is misused to promote low-quality courses.

The government has announced that public bodies will now be set targets to take on more apprentices. Schools, hospitals, prisons and police forces will all be creating opportunities for young people to get on.

The commitments are contained in the Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill announced in the Queen's Speech. The legislation will also put in place a new Youth Allowance for 18- to 21-year-olds with stronger work-related conditions, including that after six months they will be required to go on an Apprenticeship, training or community work placement.

Unionlearn will be monitoring these developments closely, having successfully lobbied for BIS/DWP to publish guidance highlighting that Traineeships should be a voluntary learning experience.

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson warned that, while increased Apprenticeship opportunities were a welcome development, the three million target should not be achieved at the expense of high-quality training.

"There is a risk that Apprenticeship funding will be misused to fund accreditation of existing skills via workplace training or by unscrupulous providers looking to draw down funding, without providing proper quality Apprenticeships," he said.

South-west women plan STEM shake-up

It's Not Rocket Science was a summer conference organised by the South West TUC Women's Committee that brought together academics, trade unionists, politicians and other organisations dedicated to promoting and celebrating women in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

Many of the speakers emphasised that in the UK only about six to eight per cent of working engineers are women.

MEP Clare Moody (below), who was keen to engage with interested organisations, stressed that this is the worst performance in the EU, and pointed out that young women would be vital in making up the predicted seven million shortfall of STEM workers across the EU in the years ahead.

Kirsi Kekki of unionlearn spoke about a registration scheme being developed for Technician Engineers.

And Roxanne Suerre, an apprentice pipe-fitter at Babcock International, Appledore, North Devon, impressed delegates with her story of determination to pursue an engineering career, despite plenty of advice to the contrary and general discouragement from everyone except her mother.

➡ [Click here](#) to contact Clare Moody MEP

➡ [Click here](#) for more about Prospect's RegTech project



Unite learning rep wins Scottish award



© Louis Flood

Unite ULR Billy McKay (centre) picked up the 10th Annual Scottish TUC Helen Dowie Award for Lifelong Learning earlier this year.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon presented him with the award at this year's STUC Congress to mark his success in delivering hundreds of learning opportunities for members at BAE Systems at the aerospace firm's Govan yard and elsewhere.

Billy has led a cross-union learning committee within the Clyde Shipyards under the banner of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU), where he has facilitated and organised courses for hundreds of non-traditional learners who have been out of learning for decades. He has ensured the courses are delivered at shift-friendly times, including night shifts.

"Billy utilised the Learning Fund from Scottish Union Learning to orchestrate progression paths and help prepare many of his co-workers for alternate work outwith BAE Systems by organising accredited courses that resulted in qualifications," explained STUC General Secretary Grahame Smith.

REPTECH

NHS resource is revised

Unionlearn has updated the Health Sector Learning Themes on the union learning Climbing Frame to take account of all the changes that have occurred in the NHS since 2012, when the Learning Themes were originally published.

In particular, the Apprenticeships section is now comprehensively updated and revised, with new material on Traineeships, including a new case study from North Bristol Trust.

The new material on Health Education England concentrates on two of its key programmes:

- Talent for Care, the first national strategic framework for the development of the healthcare support workforce
- Widening Participation, the diversity initiative that aims to develop a nationwide approach to recruitment so the NHS workforce is more representative of the communities it seeks to serve, and to dismantle barriers to development and progression.

➡ [Click here](#) to access the revised Learning Themes



© Roy Peters



WALES TUC HONOURS USDW LEARNING REP

Usdaw ULR Vanessa Francis has been recognised for her key role in organising learning for her colleagues at a Tesco office in Cardiff.

Tesco House is a busy administrative office that carries out financial and call handling functions for the retailer in the north of the Welsh city. There are up to 1,200 employees on site and a mixture of directly employed, agency and external staff, many of whom work varying shifts from 6 in the morning until 11 at night.

After helping almost 100 of her colleagues access accredited Functional Skills training, Vanessa has now been recognised with a highly commended award from the Wales Trades Union Congress.

When Vanessa, who manages a large finance team at the company, first volunteered to become a learning rep in 2013, she realised it could be a challenge.

"I knew it would be difficult, but I wanted to make sure that training opportunities were accessible and open to everyone," she says.

"There are also a wide range of backgrounds, from older people who have had no learning opportunities since leaving school, to young people with basic school-leaver qualifications, through to people with degree-level qualifications – but I wanted to make sure there were learning opportunities for all." **LR**

Sukhvinder collects digital award



Sukhvinder Landa, a Digital Champion from Granby Sure Start in Liverpool, picked up a certificate of her own when unionlearn and the More Independence (Mi) project in Liverpool celebrated champions' achievements at an Adult Learning Week event in Liverpool in June.

Sukhvinder was among 20 champions to be presented with a certificate from Paul Clitheroe of the Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

The champions work across Liverpool helping to get people online as part of a TUC unionlearn project funded by the CCG.

Over the last two years, unionlearn has trained more than 300 champions in 50-plus different union and community organisations, who have in turn helped over 3,000 learners improve their digital skills, with many getting online for the first time.

"We wanted to show our digital champions how much they are appreciated for their work on digital inclusion in Liverpool," explains North West unionlearn senior union support officer Laura Robertson-Collins.

"Presenting the awards to those nominated by their organisations at our high-profile ALW event gave

us a chance to show our appreciation: they are a vital part of the Mi project, improving health and well-being in the city."

Migrant food workers gain ESOL skills

Tomato producers and the ULF project Community are growing a top crop of English speaking learners in the north east.

Based at Tees Valley Nursery in County Durham, North Bank Growers faced a challenge to meet the significant need for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning on site with 100 migrant workers.

This is especially so in roles where duties rely heavily on language skills for staff in packing, warehousing and goods in/out.

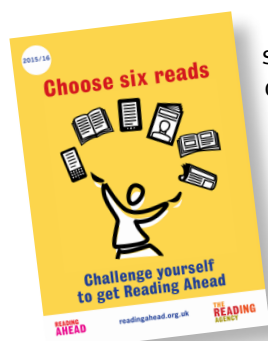
Following changes in ESOL funding and extensive discussions, the company agreed to fund the cost of a tutor and now 20 Polish and Lithuanian workers are part of a 10-week pilot group.

Talks with the union are also underway to secure ESOL for other groups as well as vocational qualifications for established employees.

Reading Ahead replaces Six Book Challenge

The Reading Agency has launched new promotional materials for its Reading Ahead programme, which replaces the Six Book Challenge.

"The new name reflects the fact that people can take part with other types of reading such as poems,



short articles or websites if books feel too daunting,” says Genevieve Clarke, The Reading Agency’s

adult literacy specialist.

“We want it to be a personal challenge whether they’re just starting out or broadening their reading horizons.”

Usdaw North East Division Lifelong Learning Project Worker Martyn Warwick, who has helped many workplaces run the scheme, welcomes the new name.

“Reading Ahead makes it clear to people that it’s not just books, that people can read anything; and it’s the act of reading that encourages people to grow and develop in their choice of material.”

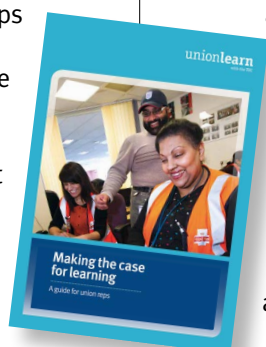
Join the chat about Reading Ahead on Twitter using the hashtag #ReadingAhead and the handle @readingagency

Click here to download the new promotional materials

Making a stronger case for learning

Making the Case for Learning is a new unionlearn guide that will help more ULRs and other reps bring the benefits of learning to more workplaces.

The first section of the new booklet sets out how members who learn at work improve their



job security and future employability, often gain higher pay, improve their well-being and overcome inequality, while branches that promote learning gain new members, raise their profile, develop new activists and build better relationships with employers.

The ‘Getting started’ section outlines the role of the ULR and your rights to time off, facilities and training; details the arguments to ensure you get the time off for training and facilities you need from your employer; and sets out the support you can get from your union.

‘Building support’ outlines four key components of a sustainable infrastructure for learning: a negotiated joint learning agreement with your employer; a joint learning committee (with or without a learning agreement behind it); a learning centre on site, or access to learning via a computer; and positive partnerships with learning providers, from your local colleges to The Open University.

The ‘Moving on’ section outlines how you can:

- use promotion and communication about learning to build your project
- use specific campaigns on Functional Skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- use the unionlearn Quality Award, the union learning Climbing Frame and the Investors

In People (IIP) award to help embed and improve learning in the workplace.

Click here to download the new guide

New mid-life reviews guide to help union reps

ULRs and other union reps helping colleagues with their mid-life development reviews can pick up plenty of practical tips from a new unionlearn guide, *Valuing the skills of older workers: How to do a mid-life development review – a practical guide for union reps*.

Training as a ULR or union rep gives activists a head start in carrying out a mid-life review, according to the guide, because that means they already listen and help colleagues in the workplace and set up learning opportunities.

“Like dental or health check-ups, mid-life development reviews for workers should become a natural and routine process,” says TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady.

“Unions who are delivering reviews in the workplace are finding that personal interactions, made face-to-face not just via a computer or even a telephone, are very important to build confidence and motivate people.”

Click here to download the new guide



OU launches OpenLearn Learner Guide

OpenLearn provides free online courses from The Open University (OU) and, with more than 800 spread across a variety of subject areas, there should be something for everyone.

The OU launched a new OpenLearn Learner Guide in June intended

for learning facilitators, such as ULRs, providing them with the skills to navigate OpenLearn and direct and advise other learners on specific, relevant topics related to

their own needs.

Everyone who completes the 10-hour course can gain a digital badge that can be displayed on social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

As well as guiding facilitators through the simple process of creating a profile on OpenLearn, the course will provide:

- an understanding of how to navigate OpenLearn
- an introduction to OpenLearn and its main features
- the opportunity to experience learning in an online environment
- the skills to inspire other learners and evaluate the impact of OpenLearn
- information on further studying opportunities.

Click here to find the course online

Staying shipshape with RMT

Seafarers throughout the country are improving their skills thanks to their union and its learning partners.

•• Martin Moriarty

Paul Shaw (left) and Dan Hutchinson are helping RMT members at sea access union learning

Getting lifelong learning to the UK's maritime workers is nothing if not challenging: they tend to work long shifts (12 hours is standard), they are often at sea for weeks at a time without an internet connection, and many do not live close to the boats they work on. All this makes them pretty much the dictionary definition of hard-to-reach learners.

But RMT Learning is working hard to overcome all these obstacles so that the union's seafaring members can improve their skills and their life chances in the same way as their colleagues on the country's rail and bus networks.

"Seafarers work long hours, 12-hour shifts are common and the job is national, so you don't have to live locally to work on a ferry except in ports like Liverpool, Dover and Portsmouth," explains RMT Learning Organiser Paul Shaw.

Paul knows the challenges first-hand and inside-out, having spent seven years as a union learning rep (ULR) when he worked for CalMac, the ferry company that connects the west coast of Scotland to a network of 22 islands, from Arran in the south to Lewis in the north.

Originally a catering worker, Paul took a

two-year postgraduate distance learning course in leadership and management at the University of the Highlands and Islands after becoming a ULR.

With no internet connection while he was onboard his ship, the *Caledonian Isles*, he would have to use the wi-fi at a nearby hotel when he docked to email assignments – the kind of dedication that led to him winning a Highlands and Islands Union Learning Award in 2013 before he joined the RMT Learning team last autumn.

Proactive ULRs can make all the difference, Paul says. "Good ULRs in an area can boost people's motivation to learn on board, and from that they can create learning opportunities especially where there are big congregations of workers," he says.

Harnessing new technology is also essential to engage members of the union's 17 shipping branches.

That's why the RMT Southampton Shipping Branch, for example, organised a successful free one-day course in June at the union's Wessex Regional Office to help seafaring members explore all the capacities of their smartphones and tablets.

"Good ULRs in an area can boost people's motivation to learn on board, and from that they can create learning opportunities especially where there are big congregations of workers"



“The programme has been so successful that it was used as a good working example at a recent navy training summit in London that RMT helped organise.”

Helping the members learn without needing a permanent internet connection are the pioneering smartphone/tablet apps created by training company Coracle, which enable users to work through courses on their Android and iOS devices even when offline, while the apps update everything on Coracle’s Learning Line platform once their device is back online.

Coracle developed the Functional Skills apps Maths@Sea, Maths@Sea+ and Writing@Sea in partnership with The Marine Society & Sea Cadets (MSSC), the charity that provides personal and professional development opportunities for seafarers (and nautical adventure for young people).

Earlier this year, RMT Learning organised a two-day learning fair on board three Dover ferries with Coracle and The Marine Society (with which it has a partnership agreement).

The two-day event in April enabled the union to speak to apprentices, catering staff, engineers, deck ratings and officers on the *MS Dover*, *MS Dunkerque* and *MS Delft*, all part of Danish-headquartered shipping and logistics company DFDS, about learning opportunities through RMT and its partners.

“It was a pleasure to work closely with the RMT and DFDS and to see just how the RMT works in the promotion of education and welfare for its members,” commented Marine Society Business Development Manager Captain Charles Woodward afterwards.

Left, Paul Shaw (second right) and RMT ULR Mark Stannard (centre, back) spreading the word about learning aboard three DFDS ships in April

Nicola Steer from the DFDS Training Department, who facilitated the travel and onboard support, was equally enthusiastic. “The whole two-day event was a massive success and we would be happy to repeat the whole thing again later in the year. I would like to thank RMT and work in partnership with them on this in the future,” she said.

Up in the Highland and Islands, RMT Learning Organiser Dan Henderson continues to develop a wide range of learning opportunities for CalMac’s 1,400 employees, including employability skills, Apprenticeships, health and well-being and women into management courses.

“Three years ago, we were instrumental in getting CalMac to take 10 young people a year: the first year we advertised six deck and four engine room Apprenticeships, we got 1,200 applications,” Dan recalls.

“The programme has been so successful that it was used as a good working example at a recent navy training summit in London that RMT helped organise.”

Since seafaring work patterns make group learning harder to organise than in most workplaces on land, distance learning is an essential component of the RMT offer for members.

And because accredited courses don’t come cheap for individuals, the union has now set up the RMT Learning Seafarers Bursary Scheme, thanks to a grant from Seafarers UK, the charity that helps UK seafarers and their families.

Launched on 25 June this year, the International Day of the Seafarer, the new scheme allows individual members up to £400 towards the cost of GCSE and A Level qualifications, among others, and branches can apply to cover the cost of tutors for their own group courses (which is how the Southampton Branch funded its smartphone course).

“We hope our members will use the summer to look at courses and with the help of the bursary they will then be ready to enrol when the new academic year begins in the autumn,” Paul says. **LR**

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➤ [Click here](#) to follow RMT Learning Highlands and Islands on Twitter

➤ [Click here](#) to follow RMT Learning Highlands and Islands on Facebook

Apprentices take centre stage

To help put Apprenticeships on an equal footing with university courses, we need to teach our teachers about the benefits of vocational education. That was the message from the apprentices who spoke at this year's unionlearn annual conference.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Six young workers showcased the value of high-quality Apprenticeships during their panel discussion that was one of the highlights of this year's annual unionlearn conference at Congress House in July.

Unite members Kamran Miah (who works at Jaguar Land-Rover), Cameron Sharpe (Rolls-Royce) and Ella Ford (UNISON Centre) shared their experiences and ideas alongside Ucat's Chelsea McAndrew (who works at B4Box), UNISON's Mohammed Hussein (Health Education England) and childcare trainee and GMB member Ellie Roach.

"We need a paradigm shift in the way teachers think about the development of pupils," Mohamed argued. "We must break down the stigma about vocational training and university, and make both routes equally valued."

Ellie agreed. "Apprenticeships need to be valued more – I was



told, 'You're too bright to do an Apprenticeship'," she recalled. Teachers should be able to explain the benefits of on-the-job experience as opposed to classroom training.

"The really important point is that university is fine for lots of people but it's not fine for everybody: we have really got to make high-quality vocational qualifications on a parity with the academic route, which we

"I am very proud of the role we played in helping to forge a consensus about the importance of Apprenticeships."

don't do well in the UK," commented conference chair and ATL General Secretary Mary Bousted (pictured top), who called the Apprenticeships session the highlight of the conference.

Earlier in the day, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady (pictured left) set out three key priorities for the next five years, which she forecast would test the mettle of the movement.

The first priority would be to fight the false economy of cuts to the Further Education (FE) budget. "Cuts will have disastrous implications for learners,

for our skills base and our economy,” Frances argued. “Denmark, Holland and Germany all show it is possible to build world-class vocational systems that underpin economic success.”

The second was to embed learning in trade union work, with special reference to young people.

“I am delighted to report that over 6,500 Apprenticeships and nearly 2,000 Traineeships were supported by ULF projects last year – a big increase on the previous year and evidence of the difference we can make for young people in the workplace,” she said.

The third priority would be to persuade employers to take their training responsibilities seriously.

“Since the 1990s, the volume of workplace training has fallen by 85 per cent and that is a national scandal,” she said.

“We need change, whether it’s bringing back training levies, spreading collective bargaining, promoting procurement incentives, we have got to find new ways to get employers investing: the old fashioned voluntary approach has quite simply failed.”

Open University Vice-Chancellor Peter Horrocks (pictured below) said that a combination of public policy and broader economic factors had reduced

participation in part-time Higher Education (HE), with a 41 per cent drop in numbers in the past five years in the UK as a whole.

“We hope that the new government will see investing in part-time education even in the face of substantial cuts required across Whitehall is an investment that will reap dividends, both now and in years to come,” he argued.

“Part-time students are more likely to start repaying their student loans earlier than full-time students; will contribute more through increased earnings; and that will help some of the most disadvantaged people become more financially secure and lead more fulfilling lives: what government wouldn’t want that as a legacy?”

Neil Darwin, chief executive of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), argued that improving the UK record on skills required businesses, schools, unions and other stakeholders working together at local level.

“The reality is that, around our patch and others that I talk to, the skills agenda is not being talked about: we are talking economic growth but we are not underpinning it by skills and what that looks like in a positive sense rather than trying to save money,” he argued.

“For me it’s about practising what we preach and embedding this far stronger in our communities.”

Other speakers included Ben Nield, who led the team that put together the 2015 Union Learning Survey (see page 12), and Professor Mark Stuart, one of the authors of the new unionlearn report, *Skills and training: the union advantage* (see page 13).

Author Fanny Blake revealed that she had received the best messages she had ever got as a writer from people who had read her Quick Read, *Red For Revenge*.

And comedian, broadcaster and writer Rhona Cameron, who revealed she had published two novels despite only having two O Levels, congratulated everyone in the hall for helping other people at a challenging time to be a human being. “Your work is amazing,” she said.

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson, who retires in the autumn, wound up



Top, unionlearn Director Tom Wilson signed the EngTechNow campaign promoting and supporting professional registration for technicians with EngTechNow Chief Executive Blane Judd

Middle, POA Learning Coordinator Alison Manion (second right) and tutor Alan Cook collect the unionlearn Quality Award from Frances O'Grady (left) and Peter Horrocks. The Unite learning centre at Veolia Environmental Services in north London won the other award.

Bottom, Show Racism The Red Card examined how to raise hate crime awareness in the workplace and the wider community

“We hope that the new government will see investing in part-time education as an investment that will reap dividends.”



the event by thanking everyone who had supported unionlearn since the organisation was launched.

“We have achieved a fantastic amount: we have trained over two million learners, opened hundreds of learning centres and signed thousands of learning agreements. Good luck to everyone in this hall in making sure the next 10 years are just as successful!” he said. **LR**

Sugar bears build appetite for learning

UNISON's Bridges to Learning partnership supported more than 1,000 learners across the union's Northern region during this year's Festival of Learning.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

At Lanchester Road Hospital in Durham, ULR Janice Featherstone helped organise classes in making sugar craft fondant teddy bears and designer jewellery.

"These were a fun, novel and informal way of attracting learners where I was then able to promote CPD workshops and more formal learning events to attendees," says Janice (pictured right).

UNISON's Newcastle City Branch organised a lunch, learn and fitness event at the Civic Centre with free activities including a boot camp with a light circuit workout, power hoop exercises, massage and making the most of the internet through online learning.

ULRs also ran information and advice events at the Freeman Hospital, Royal Victoria Infirmary and community sites across Newcastle.



"These were a fun, novel and informal way of attracting learners."

Other courses across the region to mark the festival included IT skills, counselling skills, diabetes

awareness and a demonstration on how to make bunting.

Over 200 people helped celebrate UNISON members' achievements over the past six months at an event at which Bridges to Learning Director Anne Hansen presented the learners with their certificates.

"During this festival, UNISON's Bridges to Learning partnership project has supported more than 1,000 learners and many of them will go on to realise their lifelong learning ambitions," Anne says.

"Through Bridges to Learning, UNISON members are able to help themselves find the tools to a more fulfilling work life and greater job satisfaction." **LR**



READING ON THE MOVE

Liverpool City Council, Merseytravel and Liverpool City of Readers joined together during Adult Learners' Week to launch a new drive to encourage people to read on public transport throughout Merseyside.

The Moved to Read partnership will place 3,000 Quick Reads



on buses, in taxis, on Mersey Ferries and Merseyrail trains this

summer to encourage commuters to use their journeys as quality reading time.

The launch at the Museum of Liverpool in June showcased some 40 providers and offered everyone attending the a chance to sign up to become a reading champion, learn about the internet, healthy foods

and cooking, arts and crafts and much more.

Twenty digital champions who have helped people get online through the TUC's digital hubs were presented with certificates to recognise their work.

[Click here to find out more about Moved to Read](#)



Ucat learning organisers Rossina Harris (far left), Yosra Khalaf (second left) and Karen King (right) with Gravesend Skills Centre administrator Shazia Khawar

Sisters are learning it for themselves

Ucat's Women into Construction celebrated the Festival of Learning with an event at which the team presented certificates to women in a huge variety of jobs in the construction sector, from plasterers, plumbers, surveyors and construction managers to electricians, painters and decorators and carpenters.

Over 200 people attended, including representatives of those who have provided training, work placements and jobs. **LR**

Electronics staff get switched on

Unite teamed up with management at the Diodes semiconductor factory in Oldham to deliver a Learning At Work Day with a range of sport, leisure, hobby, well-being and work-related themes.

The company won an award for its Learning At Work Day in 2013, acknowledging the role of Unite ULRs in supporting learning events and activities that have included everything from teacher training to learning to play the ukulele.

This year, there was a strong financial theme to the union's contribution to the event, with tax refunds advice and union solicitors advising on wills.

Gale Stevenson, Unite services coordinator, was on hand to advise and inform on the benefits and discounts the union can offer, while Steve Hewitt from the regional ULF team advised on learning opportunities available through the union.



Busting stress in Blackpool

Stress-busting was the theme at Blackpool Teaching Hospital and Blackpool UNISON Health Branch's joint learning event.

People had the chance to try some knit 'n' natter, colouring, dot-to-dot and mazes. Stress-busting apps for tablets were also available along with a photography taster session.

The event also included the launch of Reading Ahead, the new name for the Six Book Challenge, as well as maths and English sessions.

Following the taster, a photography for beginners course has now been organised with a knit 'n' natter lunch-time session starting in September.

ULRs also carried out a survey of courses people would like to see, with languages, IT and photography coming out as firm favourites.

NOTCHING UP NUMBERS IN NOTTS



Nottinghamshire UNISON engaged more than 120 members of staff and recruited new members during its very successful learning week.

Lifelong learning co-ordinator Tina Carnahan organised promotional stands at two of the council's four main offices, County Hall in West Bridgford and Meadow House in Mansfield to spread the word about the wide range of courses available through the branch.

Steward Gael Ellis and ULR Everton Lewis-Gordon helped Tina staff the stall at Meadow House, where they gained six new members and talked to 68 people about learning opportunities. Regional learning and development organiser Gavin McCann joined Tina at County Hall, where they talked to 70 people about the courses they could take.

Council leader Alan Rhodes and new chief executive Anthony May added their support by signing the Skills Pledge during the week, to show their commitment to helping all staff reach at least Level 2.

"Learning at Work Week is a timely reminder to employers, unions and employees to get together and think about ways of sustaining or building a sustainable learning culture at work."

TUC General Secretary
Frances O'Grady



Investing in skills is key to reform

Adult vocational education shake-up must create new investment in skills, says the TUC.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Boosting investment in skills is the key challenge that must be addressed in the government's reform of adult vocational education, the TUC argued in its response to the consultation document issued before the general election, *A dual mandate for adult vocational education*.

According to the consultation, adult education has two major functions (its dual mandate): vocational education for the workplace and helping adults who have not succeeded in the school system.

However, the consultation argues that excellence in one function does not imply excellence in the other; and Further Education (FE) colleges have lost sight of their original vocational mission by taking on more responsibility for adult learners.

"The TUC is very supportive of the overriding aim set out in the consultation aimed at expanding

the number of opportunities for individuals to access higher level vocational education," the TUC said in its response to the consultation.

"We also agree with many of the findings about the need for reforms to incentivise and enable many more individuals to access high-quality higher-level vocational education."

However, the TUC response to the consultation highlights that declining investment in skills is the key challenge.

While government spending on FE has dropped in recent years, this has not been offset by a corresponding increase in employer investment in skills, and now the new FE Loan system will place greater responsibility on individuals to fund the cost of their development.

It is also concerned about potential pitfalls in the dual mandate approach: increased

specialisation could lead to a focus on higher level vocational education at the expense of second-chance learners, and fragmentation could remove clear progression pathways from lower-level learners who can more easily move up the academic ladder under the current system.

To address the investment challenge, the TUC wants the government to:

- commit to no more FE funding cuts over the current Parliament
- leave 19- to 23-year-olds and lower-level qualifications out of the FE Loan system
- review and implement effective regulatory measures to drive up employer investment in training and skills
- introduce tax relief for training. **LR**

MORE REPS JOIN LEARNING REVOLUTION

Unions are effectively mainstreaming their work promoting learning and skills by involving more of their reps in workplace learning, according to unionlearn's latest survey of ULRs and union reps.

The survey shows that the combined efforts of ULRs and union reps are largely sustaining the level of activity and impact on learning and skills recorded in previous surveys:

- 92 per cent of the reps said they had raised awareness of learning among colleagues
- 81 per cent had directly helped colleagues who had no/little experience of learning.

Click here to download the union learning survey

Have union card, will get training

The more you can keep your skills up to date, the better chance you have in today's jobs market. And your union card can unlock more opportunities, according to a new report.

➡ Martin Moriarty

In troubled times like these, securing workplace training can mean the difference between keeping and losing your job, so it's reassuring to discover that your union card makes you more likely to get on that course you need, according to a new report.

Not only that but, since the global financial meltdown, when it comes to training opportunities, being a union member has put you in an increasingly better position than your non-union colleagues.

Skills and training: the union advantage, the report by Mark Stuart, Danat Valizade and Dr Ioulia Bessa from the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at Leeds University Business School, uses data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS).

"What makes this new study of particular interest is that it provides a picture of trends over time," explains unionlearn Strategy Manager Iain Murray.

The research shows that union members were a third more likely to have received training than non-unionised

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employees (2001 to 2013) and that union advantage has increased since the recession.

Between 2008 and 2013, the proportion of union members accessing regular training rose from 36.8 per cent to 38.9 per

cent, while non-unionised employees saw their training opportunities dip in the opposite direction, down from 23.4 per cent to 22.9 per cent.

But this union advantage has not only paid off for those individual union members: the businesses

and enterprises they work for have also felt the benefits, according to Iain.

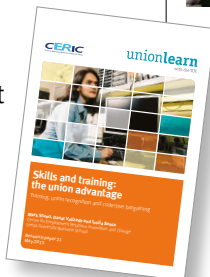
"In workplaces where unions are making a difference on training, there is evidence of a positive impact on overall organisational performance, which clearly demonstrates that the union learning agenda is a win-win situation for both employers and employees," he says.

"But one could also argue that where unions take the lead on learning and skills, the evidence of higher pay, better job security and improved organisational performance suggest a productivity boost in those workplaces where a proactive union learning agenda is in place."

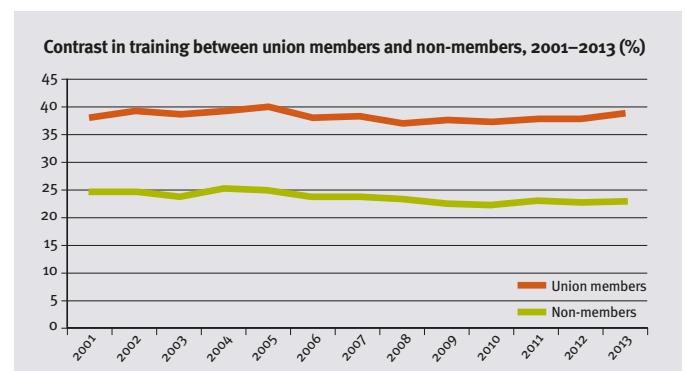
The report also found that in those workplaces where a union advantage on training could be identified there were the additional benefits of a boost to wage levels and job security.

Union members were more likely to have received higher levels of training, which was associated with higher wages than those workers that were not union members.

In addition, the union advantage also seemed to have led to positive gains for employees (especially in terms of higher reported levels of job security) and for employers (particularly in terms of improvements to overall organisational performance). **LR**



"Research shows that union members were a third more likely to have received training than non-unionised employees."



Top marks for training

Ofsted inspector Keith Riley rates union learning top of the class when it comes to his own training.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

Keith Riley has been highly impressed with all the training he has received since he became active in UNISON last year.

Keith Riley joined the union five years ago when he started work at the Social Care Inspectorate, which visits children's homes, residential special schools and boarding schools to ensure children's welfare.

But he decided he needed learning back-up when he became a UNISON steward last year. "I have seen others have difficulty in the workplace and the union has been most helpful to me," says Keith.

He has already taken a number of TUC Education courses to help in his new role. "Just because I've become a rep doesn't mean I know everything," says Keith, who adds that he has been highly impressed by the training he has received.

"It was outstanding: fun, easy to



After a visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories last year, UNISON steward Keith Riley plans to take members of his youth group to a blind school and an orphanage on the West Bank next year.

learn, I couldn't fault the content and equality and respect and dignity were paramount. And I put the learning into practice straight away because I was representing someone a week after that as a rep." **LR**



MENTORS FOR NUCLEAR APPRENTICES

Apprentices at the Westinghouse Springfields nuclear fuel manufacturing facility can now lean on the experienced shoulder of a trained mentor thanks to a scheme developed by The Manchester College Trade Union Education Unit in partnership with Unite convenor Damian Holohan.

With the backing of their employer, there is now a growing band of Unite mentors completing the three-day bespoke course, which leads to an NOCN award at Level 2, with the scheme now extended to include Prospect-trained mentors too.

"Pairing up apprentices with trained welfare mentors has helped to create trusting relationships and we are seeing the benefit after only 12 months."

"While all the areas apprentices work in have a shop steward, it takes time to create a trusting relationship," Damian explains.

"Pairing up apprentices with trained welfare mentors has helped to create trusting relationships and we are seeing the benefit after only 12 months."

The Unite team has attended further Manchester College events to discuss and develop its strategy with other unions and share best practice.

Radical roots

The Radical History Club (RHC) in Manchester is a new forum for learning about any aspect of working class history, especially in the Greater Manchester area.

Launching in September, the forum is free and open to anyone interested in social and political history, in particular working class and labour movement history.



■ [Click here](#) to find out more from Kevin Duffy at The Manchester College

Migration myths

A new eNote from TUC Education identifies common misconceptions about migration; outlines the benefits that migrants bring to the workforce; and shows why it's important to tackle employers who might exploit migrant and vulnerable workers.

The eNote also provides information about the role unions play in promoting fair working conditions for all.

■ [Click here](#) to access all TUC Education eNotes

Putting digital skills in our hands

As a podiatrist as well as a ULF project worker, Karen Reed is helping her members look after their IT skills the same way she helps her clients look after their feet.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

As part of a campaign by the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists (SCP) to support older workers, ULF Project Worker Karen Reed helped organise a digital champions course this summer with newly trained volunteer members who are going on to help colleagues upskill.

The focus is on older workers because, on the whole, they have most need of help with digital skills, says Karen, who understands the need to maintain technology skills as a professional podiatrist herself.

In podiatry, 30 per cent of members are aged 50 or over and the number of university podiatry training places has declined since 2011, with the numbers next year remaining static.

The fact that there are fewer podiatry places, a number of which are taken up by people starting a second career, adds to the ageing podiatry workforce, many of whom will need to work into their late 60s.

"It states in our standards of practice that people need to be confident in ICT," explains Karen, who also worked in health service management where she improved her own IT skills.

As healthcare professionals, her members need to be able to access information on the internet, to research evidence, to communicate with colleagues and log into government websites, she explains.



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"The focus is on older workers because, on the whole, they have most need of help with digital skills."

"For those who work in the NHS, most booking systems are now online, people communicate by email and a lot of training is online, so people need to be confident in using computers," she says. "And for those in private practice, digital skills can help with their business."

As part of its package to support older members, the SCP also plans mid-life development review workshops in three NHS

Trusts this year using the Value My Skills app and other tools.

The Society's ULF project team was party to the development of the app, which enables members to identify and think about their transferable skills – especially relevant if they are interested in a new job, a course, a promotion or some voluntary work.

The app can be used to start a discussion, plan for the future or provide the right words to describe skills in a CV, application form or covering letter. **LR**

Click [here](#) for further information on mid-life development reviews and resources

Click [here](#) to access the full range of resources on the union learning Climbing Frame

Click [here](#) to read Karen's blog on delivering digital skills to members

Mel is on the move

Mel Heitkamp is getting ever closer to her dream of studying to be a midwife after taking part in UNISON's Return to Learn programme.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty

When mature student Melanie Heitkamp originally enrolled on one of UNISON's pioneering Return to Learn courses in South Wales last year, she wasn't sure it was right for her – and she wasn't even a member of the union.

But after a couple of weeks in the group (who all happened to be women), Mel discovered that not only was the course going to be great, but also that she could join the union, and she hasn't looked back since.

Keen to train to become a midwife, Mel was already enrolled on The Open University's K101 Introduction to Health and Social Care last year when a friend suggested she join the Return

to Learn course that was just starting in Newport, where she has lived for many years since leaving her native South Africa.

"When I first joined, I wasn't sure if it was actually going to give me anything because I was already studying," she says. "But it was such a fantastic group, with such a fantastic tutor, I found my interest was piqued after two or three weeks."

Determined to complete the course, she asked UNISON Area Organiser Jenny Griffin if there was any chance she could join the union even though she didn't have a job. "When she told me I could join as a student, I joined immediately!" Mel says.

"We all brought different skills to the

"It was such a fantastic group, with such a fantastic tutor, I found my interest was piqued after two or three weeks."

group so we were able to help each other," she says.

Two components of the course have proved particularly useful to Mel. Her tutor Marilyn Thomas was able to put her in touch with one of the first direct-entry midwifery students on the degree course she wanted to take, and their conversation helped Mel adjust her study plans.

"Her advice was not to go through the direct-entry route but rather to do the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) undergraduate degree and then specialise in midwifery – and thanks to that, I have changed my development plan," Mel says.

The other element of Return to Learn that has paid dividends was the numeracy work, which came in very handy when Mel decided to start another OU course while waiting to apply for entry to the BN in September 2016.

"Before we started, students were advised to complete an online test to ascertain whether we had the required mathematical skills to complete the course," Mel explains.

"Thanks to the numbers and percentages work we did within our Return to Learn course, I received 100 per cent in the mathematical component of the test, which I was surprised and delighted about."

Mel regularly studies on the University of South Wales Caerleon campus, and whenever she gets chatting to other students about problems they might be having, she always recommends the UNISON union route.

"When I have spoken to people and they have been down about something I ask if they have spoken to UNISON or if they are a member of UNISON, so I have been doing quite a lot of advocacy on campus!" she says. **LR**