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LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Spring 2016

Time to celebrate ten years of unionlearn

- ▶ *This year's new Quick Reads*
- ▶ *Learning on and off the pitch*
- ▶ *Creating youth opportunities*
- ▶ *Tackling mental health issues*
- ▶ *Delivering for postal workers*

unionlearn
with the TUC



MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

I'M DELIGHTED TO INTRODUCE YOU TO my first edition of *Learning Rep* since I took over as Director, especially as 2016 marks the tenth anniversary of the launch of unionlearn. But as I say in the interview in this issue, this year will be both exciting and challenging.

Our work is vital. Look at our project with Macmillan Cancer Support to help deal with workplace issues faced by people with cancer. What is so effective about what we do is that our reps are not only able to act as friends and colleagues to people with cancer, but they are also in a unique position to get things done because they have direct access to managers to discuss how best to help their co-workers.

"They are in a unique position to get things done because they have direct access to managers to discuss how best to help their co-workers."

TUC Education itself is facing a challenge of its own – the end of public funding for our work. Fortunately, we have secured the money to help us keep the TUC centres in place until August 2017. And we are developing what I believe will be a leading-edge e-learning offer with the capacity to revolutionise our reach and scope for trade union education.

So there is no doubt that 2016 – and 2017 – will be challenging years. But I feel confident that we will successfully face the future together, because what we do is so important for working people.

My very best wishes for a great 2016! 

Liz Rees is Director of unionlearn



unionlearn
with the TUC

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NEWS + VIEWS

Apprenticeship Levy to generate £3bn

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The government estimates its new Apprenticeship Levy will raise around £3bn per annum to fund Apprenticeships, once it comes into effect in April 2017.

According to the Chancellor's announcement of the details of the scheme in his Autumn Statement, all UK employers will have to contribute the equivalent of 0.5 per cent of their total payroll cost.

But since every employer will receive an allowance of £15,000 to offset against their levy payment, only those organisations with total payroll exceeding £3m will be liable.

In addition, the government is setting up the Institute for Apprenticeships, a new employer-led body that will set standards and ensure quality. Once the Institute is operational, it will have the power to accept or reject draft Apprenticeship standards drawn up by Trailblazer development groups.

In the wake of the Autumn Statement and the government's response to the levy consultation, TUC Apprenticeships Officer Matt Creagh has identified

"We would like to know what formal role there will be for unions in ensuring quality."

a number of key questions that remain unanswered, including the union contribution to maintaining quality.

"We would like to know what formal role there will be for unions in ensuring the quality of Apprenticeship programmes," Matt says. "Unions represent young apprentices in the workplace and have a vital role to play in ensuring young people are represented in the Apprenticeship system."

In addition, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) need clarification about their funding arrangements. "It is still unclear whether SMEs can access levy-funded Apprenticeship funding or if there will still be a pot of Skills Funding Agency (SFA) Apprenticeship funding for them," Matt says.

Rail learning reps celebrate diversity



RMT union learning reps (ULRs) joined forces with local industrial reps at London's Euston station to stage a celebration of Black history late last year, inviting railworkers to sample the wide variety of cultures around them every day.

The day included world music and short films, food from every continent and a chance to meet and talk with people about their family and cultural background in a way they might not normally do in the workplace.

"This has been an amazing success and, if possible, we would like to make it even bigger and better next year: the atmosphere and sense of community is just amazing," said RMT ULR Paulette Ford.

Unionlearn Senior Union Support Officer Adrian Ryan reckoned it was a great event that showed the diversity of cultures and backgrounds at work. "Black History Month is an ideal way for ULRs to engage with the whole workforce and we'd love to hear from reps if they are planning future events," he said.

Update yourself on health and well-being

Since health and well-being is an integral part of union campaign work, unionlearn is providing

reps with a policy update and an introduction to new resources at the Learning, Health and Well-being conference on Friday 26 February in London.

The event will introduce and update priority areas and resources available to support reps in their role, including mental health and the workplace, Macmillan Cancer Support and building dementia-friendly workplaces, and will also feature a variety of workshops.

▶ [Click here](#) to email Jane Warwick for further details or to raise a topic for discussion
▶ [Click here](#) to register for the conference

Union stall draws Skills Show crowds

Unionlearn and Unite successfully ran a joint stall at the Skills Show 2015 in Birmingham in November as they have before.

Demand was even stronger than in 2014, when unionlearn and Unite first joined forces for the annual event. Visitors flocked to the stall to find out about union support for learning and skills and to try out the Word Wall activity, which gathers insights into the aspirations and skills needs of those taking part.

"As well as the youngsters visiting us, we also had careers advisers and teachers asking how we can support kids in school with information," explained unionlearn Apprenticeships Project Officer Mark Rowe.



OU targets groups with new resources

The Open University (OU) is developing a new website and free online courses to help more people identify key learning opportunities linked to improving their life and career prospects. The site and courses will be available this summer.

The six free online courses will be aimed at improving the study confidence of specific learner groups, including healthcare workers, health sector support staff and adult social workers.

Each course will contain approximately 15 hours of learning, including a variety of activities and multimedia materials that will give learners the chance to engage with subject-specific content.

Learners will be able to collect online badges that can be shared with employers and displayed on social media sites in recognition of their achievement.

Unionlearn, which is a partner in the project, is actively involved in the development of the 'Planning a better future' course.

The new website will provide clear and simple information about the wealth of learning opportunities available to adult learners looking for flexible, part-time study options, with the emphasis on career progression, or even the start of a new career.

The project is backed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

REPTECH

Tolpuddle learners get faster broadband

Tolpuddle is one of the first communities in Dorset to use a new type of all-in-one fibre broadband cabinet, housed outside the Martyrs Museum in the village that holds a special place in labour movement history.

"Online courses and learning platforms have proved very popular in rural areas but for this to be of real benefit to learners there needs to be fast and reliable broadband," says unionlearn Learning Campaign Support Officer Keith Hatch.

The 19th century mass campaign to free the Tolpuddle Martyrs (the agricultural workers transported to Australia for forming a trade union) changed the country forever, points out Martyrs Museum Manager Tom de Wit.

"So it is fitting that Tolpuddle is once again at the leading edge of a new revolution, this time in communications technology," he says.

▶ [Click here](#) to find out more about Tolpuddle's superfast broadband





CHESTER CWU MEMBERS BOOST CAMERA SKILLS

CWU member and keen photographer Dave Probert, who produced these stunning images, is now helping some of his colleagues improve their camera skills through a photography club at Chester Mail Centre, where he works. The club runs at the onsite learning centre, which now has a smart board, eight laptops, and 13 webcams to help with its training.

Lead ULR Ady Prins is organising the club as part of a package of new training on offer, including a gardening course with Royal Mail backing.

"We will use recycled materials such as pallets for the raised beds, old plastic for a greenhouse and some more pallets to make a compost bin, which we aim to fill with the kitchen waste from the canteen," Ady explains. "We aim to make the area both scenic and productive." **LR**

Prospect recognition for RegTech advisers

Prospect union has awarded certificates to its first ever RegTech advisers for helping build awareness of technician registration and status in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).

The six advisers, who work at Diamond Light Source on the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in Oxfordshire, have been trained to help technicians apply for professional registration and mentor both apprentices and the existing technical workforce.

"It was fantastic to see our first six RegTech advisers receive their training certificates from Diamond CEO Professor Andrew Harrison," says Prospect RegTech Project Leader Lloyd Collier.

Unlike some employers who pay the professional fees only of their higher graded staff, Diamond has agreed to pay the membership and registration fees of the relevant professional bodies for technicians too.

"With RegTech advisers' help, there's excitement in the air and hope that a lot more technicians will take up the opportunity to get recognition for their skills, letters after their name (EngTech or RSciTech) and find opportunities for further professional and personal development," Lloyd says.

To support the union's advisers, Prospect's Careersmart website offers the training materials the

union has used as well as a very useful list of professional bodies offering technician registration.

Unionlearn support includes the Technician Registration Toolkit and the guidebook, *Employers supporting the technician workforce and working with unions.*



Click [here](#) to find out more about the union role in technician registration
Click [here](#) to visit the Careersmart website

UNISON learning rep wins Midlands award

UNISON Northamptonshire Police Lifelong Learning Coordinator Jenny Brown (pictured below) has won the 2015 Midlands TUC Union Learning Rep of the Year award for expanding learning opportunities and boosting staff morale at a time of unprecedented cuts.

Thanks to Jenny's hard work, more than 150 UNISON members who work in staff positions for the force have undertaken learning in the past year, gaining the European Computer Driving Licence, completing a wide range of courses through The Skills Network, and gaining careers advice and employability skills.

In addition, 56 staff took part in taster sessions in British Sign Language, maths homework help, Indian head massage and yoga. And



others joined lunch and learn sessions on topics that included supporting older women workers.

“While our members were going through these really worrying times, we wanted to offer them something that their union could help them with,” says Jenny.

“Members are feeling very positive and constantly looking to update their skills: learning is one of the things they really see as a positive aspect of their union membership.”

Jenny has also successfully negotiated a learning agreement between UNISON and Northamptonshire Police, which formally recognises the importance of learning as a development and retention tool.

Have you made your numeracy resolution?

Since good numeracy skills are linked to increased earnings, greater confidence about personal finance and even better health, what better way to start the New Year right than by signing up for the National Numeracy Challenge?

The Challenge, which helps people focus on improving their everyday maths by giving them the resources to learn in their own time, has been updated for 2016 to include a host of new features, including an improved dashboard and scoring system, and the ability to see which questions you answer incorrectly to help you improve.

Click here to take the Challenge

UNIONS

Telling the world why you heart your union

Under the banner #heartunions, the TUC is running a campaign from 8 to 12 February to showcase the amazing work unions do, tell positive union stories to the wider public and celebrate the contribution unions and their members make to the world of work.

The #heartunions campaign is an opportunity for ordinary working people to shout loud and proud about the brilliant work they do as union members to support colleagues, workplaces and ultimately the UK economy.

Click here to contact unionlearn's Yusuf Dadabhoy about highlighting learning and skills work at your workplace as part of the campaign

Click here to find out more about #heartunions in general

Think tank floats adult HE loan plan

The think tank Bright Blue is floating the idea that all UK adults should be able to access a government loan account to cover tuition fees for any higher education (HE) course – full-time or part-time – they take in England during their lifetime.

The report *Going Part-time* also proposes a new ‘graduate levy’ on all large UK employers (private and public) where a significantly large proportion of their total workforce in the UK is graduate-level.

The proposals follow polling that revealed that

37 per cent of people with no experience of part-time HE have considered it at some point in the past five years, which Bright Blue says demonstrates there is a major pool of potential upskillers and reskillers that we need to support.

The survey identified three key sets of barriers to HE participation:

- people couldn’t afford (or were unwilling to pay) the tuition fees or living costs associated with part-time study – the most common reason given
- the time or location of courses prevented people from accessing part-time HE
- insufficient information about the potential benefits of part-time HE study or the financial support available.

While the number of full-time UK and other EU HE entrants has reached record highs and continues to rise, the number of UK and other EU part-time undergraduate entrants fell by 46 per cent between 2010/11 and 2013/14, according to the report.

Click here to download the report

Get 10 per cent off at Wolverhampton Uni

Wolverhampton University has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with unionlearn that offers union members 10 per cent off all its full and part-time courses.

The provider is also offering free information, advice and guidance to union members about what

qualifications would suit them best.

The MoU provides an extremely valuable opportunity for people to follow their aspirations and engage with higher learning and skills and also adds value to their union membership, says unionlearn Senior Union Support Officer Mick Brightman.

Click here to find out more about the discount

Get to grips with migration and HE with new eNotes

Unionlearn has produced two new eNotes to help reps support members: one on higher education, the other on migration issues.

The Supporting Learners into Higher Learning eNote identifies:

- the benefits of higher learning for individuals
- what higher learning opportunities are available and how to prepare for them
- how to work effectively with providers and get employer support.

The Migration eNote helps identify:

- common misconceptions regarding migration
- the benefits migrants bring to the workforce/UK
- how employers exploit migrant and vulnerable workers
- the need for solidarity between migrant and local workers.

Click here to register and find out more

Improving literacy, one Quick Read at a time

Anything that helps more people read more is a big deal, says crime writer Ann Cleeves, one of the latest authors to write a Quick Read.

🔗 Astrid Stubbs

Ann has just published her first Quick Read; (right) Ann meets actors Julie Graham and Douglas Henshall on the set of the BBC adaptation of Shetland



Award-winning crime writer Ann Cleeves is a firm believer in the vital importance of adult literacy, so she was very happy to write a Quick Read for this year's campaign, and even happier when *Too Good To Be True* was also picked to be one of 15 books to be given away, free, on World Book Night later this year.

"Literacy is incredibly important: there was a report stating that reading for pleasure is a higher indicator of academic success than parental income or status," she points out. (That was the 2002 publication *Reading For Change* by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD).

"Literacy also gives you emotional intelligence: if you see the world through other people's eyes, it increases understanding of different cultures and societies."

Ann argues that we should be open-minded about the kind of stories that different people are drawn to: whether it's novels or comics, what's important is that people are enjoying

reading and learning the benefits of losing themselves in a story.

Ann's readers know all about that, and her stories are not only massively popular with crime readers but have also gained enviable followings on TV. The sixth series of ITV's *Vera* (featuring Brenda Blethyn as sleuth Vera Stanhope) and the third series of the BBC's *Shetland* (starring Douglas Henshall as detective Jimmy Perez) are both screening at the moment.

With a background working as a probation officer and in libraries, Ann was a natural choice to be asked to pen a Quick Read.

"It was such fun to do and I really enjoyed writing it," she says of the book, in which Jimmy Perez travels to the Scottish Borders to investigate a death that proves to be close to home.

Ann had a great time writing her classic murder mystery, her 30th published title, because there was no room for waffle or fluff. "It had to be clear and sharp in the way a good short story is," she says.

"Literacy is incredibly important: there was a report stating that reading for pleasure is a higher indicator of academic success than parental income or status."



"I take so much pleasure out of reading and anything that might give that to other people is a big deal."

Ann has a busy year in store: her latest Vera Stanhope novel, *The Moth Catcher*, was published in the autumn, she is currently finishing a new Jimmy Perez novel, and is about to start work on a new Vera Stanhope. But she will always continue to find time for reading.

"I read other stuff but my default comfort reading is usually crime," she explains. "I love translated crime fiction because I really enjoy travelling and there's something about another culture's popular fiction which makes you understand their preoccupations."

She particularly loves the Sicilian-set Inspector Montalbano series by Andrea Camilleri (the Italian TV series based on the books has been shown on BBC). "They are very witty: they talk about the Mafia but just as much about food, wine and making love – it's a great escape, especially in the middle of winter, to read about the sun."

Ann has always loved reading, using stories as an escape, a joy and a way of making sense of the world as a child. "We never had bought books in the house but we were taken to the library from an early age," she says.

She can still recall "seeing the joy in the storytelling and the fun you can have from a good story" from her days working in libraries, and sees the very same qualities in Quick Reads, which she thinks is a brilliant scheme.

"People get into the story very quickly and lose themselves very fast," she says. "I take so much pleasure out of reading and anything that might give that to other people is a big deal." **LR**

Click [here](#) to download *Reading For Change: Performance and Engagement Across Countries*



SIX NEW QUICK READS FOR 2016

Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai and former SAS soldier Andy McNab head the list of new Quick Reads for 2016.

Launched 10 years ago, Quick Reads has now distributed over 4.7 million books to workplaces, hospitals, schools, libraries, parents, family groups and even prisons to help the one in six adults who struggles with reading.

This year's set of new titles is:

- *I Am Malala*, by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb
- *On The Rock*, by Andy McNab
- *Too Good To Be True*, by Ann Cleeves
- *A Baby At The Beach Café*, by Lucy Diamond
- *The Anniversary: Ten Tempting Stories From Ten Bestselling Authors*, edited by Veronica Henry
- *The Double Clue And Other Hercule Poirot Short Stories*, by Agatha Christie

Click [here](#) to find out more about how to use Quick Reads to promote reading at work

THIS WILL BE A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

Union learning reps across the country will be giving away free books to people who don't read regularly or who have lost the love of reading on World Book Night this April.

The Reading Agency's annual celebration provides volunteers with sets of 15 popular titles to give away to help encourage people to read more.

This year's books include Quick Reads by Ann Cleeves and Lucy Diamond, plus titles such as *The Rotters' Club*, Jonathan Coe's acclaimed comic novel about growing up under Thatcherism.

Click [here](#) to find out more

When the last Saturday comes

Since the average football career lasts just eight years, most players will need to develop new skills once they hang up their boots for the final time. That's where the Professional Footballers' Association comes in.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty



There are always a few footballers whose long and successful careers set them up for life when they retire. But they are the exception, not the rule. With the average career lasting only around eight years, most footballers spend most of their working lives doing something else.

"The only certainty on becoming a footballer is that at some point in the future you will become a former footballer," says Paul Raven, the ULF Project Manager for the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA).

As a retired professional himself, Paul knows all about that. After breaking into the first team at Doncaster Rovers while he was still at school, Paul went on to clock up 300-plus appearances over 11 years at West Bromwich Albion. He finally called time on his 18-year career in 2006, after spells at Grimsby Town, Carlisle United and Barrow AFC.

Paul recognises that he was lucky to get – and take – the chance to make a name for himself as a youngster: he was playing for Doncaster and England schoolboys while he was studying for his A Levels. But he also had a wise head on his teenage shoulders and knuckled down to

revision like everyone else, so that along with that early success he also left school with four A Levels to his name. "I must have been fairly driven at that age!" he laughs.

And he didn't stop there. He spent six years in his early 20s studying for a degree at The Open University (OU), even though this was in the 1990s, when adult learning had nothing like the profile it has now. However, he is the first to admit that he didn't talk much about his studies in the dressing room.

"I look back and smile now because I used to keep quiet about it in the environment of the dressing room," he recalls. "If I had my time again, I would be more open about my learning because I have found out since that people who played with me at the time actually admired what I was doing – and wished they had had the wherewithal to follow a similar course of action."

He also thinks that the injuries he began to collect in his mid-20s helped start him thinking about life after football. "As footballers, we all tend to wait for when things go wrong to participate in some form of learning, education or training," he says. "In my role as ULF Project Manager at the PFA, I now try to encourage

"If I had my time again, I would be more open about my learning because I have found out since that people who played with me at the time actually admired what I was doing."



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players to do something when times are good, when you have just won promotion or got in the first team: use that as a springboard to start your own transition process.”

Going out to clubs and talking to members face-to-face about their learning options is the most rewarding part of his job, he reckons. He favours a softly-softly approach, setting up in the canteen and allowing players to come to him.

“You don’t have to make a grand announcement: it’s amazing how, one by one, players will come and ask if they can have a word,” he says. “They want to talk about their transition: you just have to give them the opportunity to talk to someone from the PFA to help plan it. Footballers also benefit from a far greater choice of online provision and flexible learning opportunities,” he points out. (His own OU course was one of a handful he could have done at the time and still been available for pre-season training in July.)

The PFA’s small education department services players from 92 football clubs as well as 50,000 former players, so having the relationship with the ULF has been integral to increasing the scope of support it can offer. “The ULF has allowed us to extend our provision, to get more bodies on the ground, to visit more clubs, visit more players and provide more information, advice and guidance to players,” he says.

For Paul, one of the most pleasing aspects of the PFA’s ULF project has been the initiative to bring local communities into football club learning centres. The project uses the way communities still identify with their local clubs to encourage people to take their first steps back into learning. “For many people, young and old, and from diverse faiths and ethnicities, learning centres within football clubs provide a terrific atmosphere and venue for learning and therefore both achievement and retention rates tend to be very positive,” Paul says. **LR**



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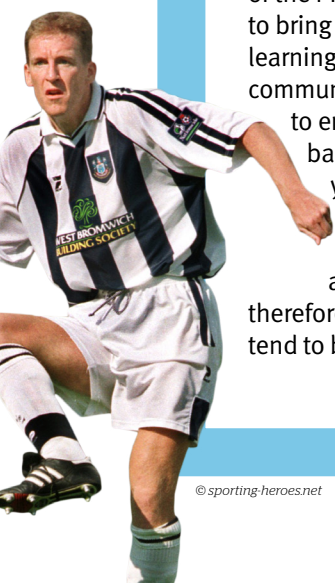
LOVE YOUR LEARNING AND YOUR FOOTBALL

Sixteen teams and a significant amount of support celebrated diversity through learning and football at a collaborative and innovative event in January organised by the PFA, Unite’s ULF project and Barnsley Football Club Community Trust.

Representation came from Manchester, Leicester, Sheffield, Middlesbrough, Doncaster and London to play football. Teams included Yorkshire St Pauli and FC Kolektivó Victoria from Leicester, which both promote anti-discrimination; and two teams from the Manchester Refugee Support Network.

Other teams connected to the refugee communities in Doncaster and Barnsley included a cohort who were very happy to receive certificates following the recent completion of their qualifications in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

“We were delighted to be involved,” says PFA Project Manager Paul Raven. “Our membership includes over 90 different nationalities and the message was clear: love your football and the diversity it promotes but also love to learn and engage in education.” **LR**





We're not going anywhere!

Challenging times are not going to interfere with unionlearn shouting from the rooftops about our achievements in our tenth anniversary year, says new Director Liz Rees.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Liz Rees, the new director of unionlearn, knows first hand how we are all influenced by the levels of educational achievement around us. She vividly remembers, as a child, being fascinated by all the degree certificates proudly displayed on the walls of her grandmother's house.

"My grandfather worked on Cardiff docks all his life, yet he and my grandmother put all six of their children through university. As a kid, I was always very impressed with all these bedecked scrolls with crests from all the different places where my father and aunts and uncles had studied," Liz recalls. "My grandparents took education very seriously because they saw how

learning gave you some element of control over your life and your choices."

Sharing that family outlook, Liz decided that she, too, wanted to study at university, and her choice of Old English for her degree was early evidence of her love of a challenge. But if her pathway into higher education was carefully planned and worked for, her entry into trade unionism was much more accidental.

It was 1979 and Liz had taken a job in tele-sales at an Essex newspaper group just at the time when the National Graphical Association (NGA, now part of Unite) was running an organising drive to expand membership throughout the print industry.

"My grandparents took education very seriously because they saw how learning gave you some element of control over your life and your choices."

Impressed with her hard work and campaign skills, her co-workers elected Liz as mother of the chapel (MoC, the print equivalent of branch secretary), and their belief paid off when she led a successful strike for union recognition. After working for NGA in the region for a couple of years, Liz then moved to London with her new job for the Civil Service Union (CSU, now part of PCS), where she stayed for the next eight years.

From there, Liz took a job at the TUC's former national training college in Crouch End in 1990, eventually becoming Head of TUC Education at Congress House – a role she found enormously fulfilling. "You would go home feeling satisfied with your day knowing you had made a difference because thousands of reps had got what they needed to help them make wonderful things happen – and we have amassed tons of evidence of them doing that over the years," she says.

Liz can recall attending a health and safety event where she fell into conversation with an activist next to her. "When it came to the awards part of the evening, this man I had been chatting to stood up to collect an award for saving the life of one of his colleagues in his role as safety rep – these are very special people you are working with every day," Liz says. "I read some of the assumptions behind the Trade Union Bill with disbelief because I don't recognise trade unionism in that way: trade unionism is the most incredibly positive force in the workplace."

Liz is looking forward to meeting many more union learning reps (ULRs) now that she has taken over as director of unionlearn, following the retirement of her predecessor Tom Wilson at the end of last year. She is well aware that she has taken over at the beginning of what may well be the most challenging year in unionlearn's first decade of existence. But Liz has always remained steadfast in the face of professional adversity.

"We know that this will be a year like no other in unionlearn's life: funding is tighter than it has ever been and we are looking at a bigger cut than we expected as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in November," she points out. "What I would like to do is restructure unionlearn around the new realities, when belts are being tightened and money is hard to come by."

To help unionlearn adapt, Liz and the senior management team are looking hard not just at the next financial year but the one after that, to make sure that what they put in place will be fit for purpose not just in the next few months but in the next few years. "That's one of my key aims, to think about what unionlearn needs to look like over the next period and to make that happen," she explains.



Liz (right) helps launch the TUC Education workbook Out At Work, with the then TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber and MP Angela Eagle

"We want to keep as much of the classroom offer as we can, but we are also developing a really leading edge e-learning offer as well, so over the next period we will be putting trade union education on a new footing."

The other is the changing shape of trade union education, with the withdrawal of public funding that has helped support rep development and education in an almost unbroken line since the 1970s. "We want to keep as much of the classroom offer as we can, but we are also developing a really leading edge e-learning offer as well, so over the next period we will be putting trade union education on a new footing as well," she says.

No one underestimates the scale of what lies ahead, least of all Liz herself. But overcoming obstacles is not only one of her trademarks – Liz says it's what trade unions in general are all about. "We in unionlearn have a great story to tell and in our tenth birthday year, we are going to sing the song of ULRs who have done a wonderful job for the movement – and my message would be that we are still here and we are not going anywhere!" **LR**



Opening new pathways into training and work

Young people from Yorkshire all the way down to the East Midlands and East Anglia are getting more opportunities to join quality Traineeships and Apprenticeships thanks to a new GMB project.

🔗 **Martin Moriarty**

The new Young Workers Engagement Project, launched last year by the general union GMB's Midland & East Coast Region with the financial support of the Union Learning Fund, is opening doors to training and employment for young people in the unemployment-hit region.

The project is targeting workplaces where the union has existing agreements, to help support both the employers and the GMB reps to set up, revive or enhance high-quality Traineeship and Apprenticeship programmes.

It's all about establishing a wide range of pathways into training and employment, explains Project Manager Graham Randle.

"If young people are ready to do a high-quality Apprenticeship, that's what they should be able to do," he says. "If young people and their employers want to see if they are ready, they should be able to undertake a high-quality

"If young people are ready to do a high-quality Apprenticeship, that's what they should be able to do."

Traineeship programme that could lead on to an Apprenticeship or the firm offer of a job."

This is what makes the project unique, according to GMB Regional Secretary Andy Worth. "It means that we can focus on providing a real opportunity to get onto a meaningful career path – particularly for young people from disadvantaged groups – that is not currently available," he says.

Already, the project has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Humberside Engineering Training Association (HETA) that will promote high-quality training

at decent rates of pay in the region's engineering sector.

The agreement is the first to be signed between a union-led project and one of England's 40 Group Training Associations (GTAs), private-public partnerships that deliver training by industry for industry.

The partnership helps everyone involved reach their goals: while HETA's high-quality Traineeships are exactly the kind of programme that the GMB project recognises will help young workers gain the skills they need to become work-ready, the support of the GMB will help HETA better spread the message about the benefits of training.

"We will encourage any kind of initiative that gets more people into Apprenticeships and gives them the skills to get into sustainable employment, and this is a win-win-win for the union, the employees and the employers," commented HETA Chief Executive Iain Elliott when the MoU was signed in the autumn.

In addition, the project has signed a new learning agreement with Lincs Inspire, the organisation that looks after former local authority facilities in the north-east Lincolnshire area, which underpins the employment of six new apprentices.

"As well as gaining practical experience in our centres, these apprentices will have the opportunity to develop their supervisory skills and it is hoped that following their apprenticeship, they will go on to secure permanent employment within the organisation," explained Lincs Inspire Chief Executive Sue Wells at the launch of the agreement late last year.

All staff could benefit from the agreement, said GMB Midlands and East Coast Region Organiser Colin Todd. "While this initiative is aimed mainly at apprentices, we will also look to develop

"We will encourage any kind of initiative that gets more people into Apprenticeships and gives them the skills to get into sustainable employment."

the skills of existing employees through the union learning reps," he said.

As well as formalising partnerships with providers and employers, the project is also working with businesses to help expand training and employment opportunities, explains Project Worker Elliot Dean, himself a former youth activist with the GMB who used to chair the young members' network in the Southern and Eastern region of the TUC.

"What's important about this project is that we do not have one single approach: every employer is different, every situation is different and it's about seeing what works for each employer and each situation," he says.

For example, the project began developing its work at the DHL Scunthorpe site (where the company provides support for the Nisa supermarket chain), by staging a successful open day in the autumn.

As well as making connections with employers and providers, Elliot has also invested time speaking to GMB reps about the project.

"In the first two or three months, I spent a lot of time talking to our members and reps on the ground so they could understand what we are trying to achieve with this multi-rep agenda, as it only works when members and reps buy into it, as well as employers," he explains.

"One of the primary reasons our members have bought in is that in an area with very high youth unemployment, they can see potential jobs and training in the local community for their sons and daughters and nephews and nieces."

Since the GMB had been delivering little workplace learning in the region before the project started last year and few employers were familiar with the learning agenda, this was never going to be a project for the faint-hearted. "But to be honest, if you keep going for easy targets in life, why bother?" Graham asks. "Let's do something a little more ambitious!" **LR**



MANY HAPPY RETURNS FOR USDAW LEARNING

Shopworkers' union Usdaw has celebrated the 15th birthday of its lifelong learning campaign, through which it has helped more than 100,000 members improve their skills by returning to learning.

"Usdaw is proud to have been at the vanguard of developing the learning agenda: we were instrumental in getting statutory rights for learning reps and we will continue to fight to make sure our members don't miss out," says National Co-ordinator Ann Murphy.

The union's ULRs have been central to its lifelong learning successes over the past decade and a half, with their training enabling them to help members overcome obstacles.

When Leicester member Ramilla Mistry was struggling with the Usdaw equality course, Midlands mobile ULR Betty Wigston persuaded her to talk about what was really going on.

"After further investigation, we found out she was dyslexic, a common problem but often an issue many people are unaware of," Betty says.

"Now Ramilla understands the condition, it has helped her to start and move forward with what she wants to do."



Colin Todd from the GMB (fourth left) and Sue Wells from Lincs Inspire are committed to working in partnership



UNISON
Blackpool Health
Branch Secretary
Steve Holmes
(seated left) signs
the learning
agreement
with Jane Meek
from Blackpool
Teaching
Hospitals

Bringing better illumination to Blackpool

A new learning agreement at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals will help staff access more opportunities for development at work.

✦ Astrid Stubbs

UNISON learning rep Jane Eyre is the new lifelong learning officer at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, a role created to provide staff with access to more learning resources as part of a learning agreement between UNISON and the Trust.

Health unions at the Trust are working in partnership with the employer and the charity Blue Skies to provide this innovative opportunity, with a focus on developing NHS support staff (those in pay bands 1–4).

“I am looking forward to the new challenges ahead and working closely with the Trust’s learning and development department to raise awareness of the learning

opportunities available for all staff,” Jane says.

“It is also a great opportunity for partnership working between staff side and the Trust, which will have a benefit for all.”

Jane’s role is to support the Trust’s Great Place to Work agenda and enhance the health and well-being of all staff by encouraging and supporting them in their learning.

She is already signposting staff to external learning resources such as unionlearn and now that the Trust has become a learning centre with LearnMyWay, the online learning platform, staff can also access courses such as IT skills, staying safe on the internet, guides to online banking and further advanced courses. **LR**



CUMBRIA NHS PARTNERSHIP SIGNS EXPANDED AGREEMENT

Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and its unions have expanded and improved their learning agreement, which now covers members of the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists (SCP) and general union GMB.

The Trust has also recently signed the Talent for Care pledge, demonstrating its commitment to providing development opportunities for all staff, especially support staff (bands 1–4).

“The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists is delighted to have been one of the signatories to the learning agreement,” says SCP Project Worker Sandra Edwards.

“It demonstrates the commitment of the Trust and unions in taking learning and development forward within the organisation and helping staff at all levels realise their potential.”

The Trust has included the learning agreement in the education team’s current business plan, further evidence of the higher value it has placed on staff development since Claire Motloy joined as chief executive in 2013.

Helping to break the silence

TUC Education's new workbook is set to help reps improve how we all engage with mental health issues.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

With many people experiencing mental health issues at some point in their lives, most reps will know somebody who is struggling. According to the 2013 survey, *Time to Change*, 64 per cent of people know someone with a mental health issue.

So it's no wonder that the four Mental Health First Aid Lite sessions delivered by Midlands unionlearn in Birmingham and Leicester late last year were over-subscribed.

Aimed at improving the understanding of the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues, the sessions succeeded in helping participants feel more confident about supporting people with mental health problems.

"The course was very helpful and effective, with very valuable information about an undervalued subject that all employees and employers should be aware of in helping break down the barriers and stigma attached to mental health issues in the workplace," commented one rep who took part.

Now the new TUC workbook *Mental Health and the Workplace* aims to help reps to:

- develop an



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understanding of mental health and common mental health problems

- be aware of diversity issues impacting on members with mental health problems
- develop an understanding of the law and mental health in the workplace
- identify good practice around workplace policies on mental health
- explore the role of union reps in supporting and representing members with mental health

problems

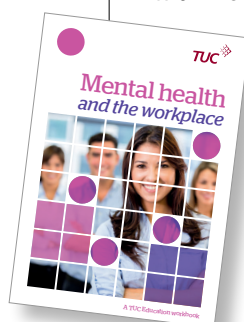
- identify organising and campaigning opportunities for trade unions around mental health.

The book is intended to be used on courses, at branch meetings and in informal discussions. As well as being an information resource, it seeks to ask questions to stimulate discussion and debate so that individuals and groups can challenge mental health discrimination and promote equality at work.

- Arts & Minds is a joint initiative from theatre union Equity, actors' directory *Spotlight* and industry newspaper *The Stage* to raise awareness of mental health issues and support performers in the sector. **LR**

Click here to download the new workbook

Click here to visit the Arts & Minds website



CANCER ISN'T FAIR BUT YOUR BOSS HAS TO BE

Working with cancer

Although more than 750,000 people of working age are living with cancer in the UK, only 44 per cent of people diagnosed with the disease in the last two years are aware of their rights at work, according to a 2014 YouGov survey for Macmillan Cancer Support.

Since cancer is a condition covered by the 2010 Equality Act, anyone diagnosed with the disease is not only protected from unfair treatment at work but also has the right to secure reasonable adjustments from their employer to help them do their job both during and after treatment.

Macmillan's online campaign, *Cancer Isn't Fair, But Your Boss Has To Be*, aims to raise awareness among people with cancer about how employers are legally obliged to help them continue to do their job. It is supported by Macmillan's booklet, *Your Rights At Work*.

The Macmillan campaign website includes a new resource explaining reasonable adjustments and case studies illustrating how adjustments can help someone with cancer to remain in work.

Click here to access the new online resources

Click here to access the unionlearn/Macmillan blog



Darren delivers for the CWU

After improving his own skills through union learning, Darren Rowbotham became a ULR to spread the news about development opportunities to more members of his CWU branch.

◆ Astrid Stubbs

Communication Workers Union (CWU) learning rep Darren Rowbotham has won a union award for supporting his colleagues in the Western Counties branch by encouraging them to follow in his footsteps and develop themselves through the union.

Postman Darren, who is now a full-time rep with the branch, received the Ken McKenzie ULR award for exceptional achievements and contributions to lifelong learning at the union's annual national ULR networking event in Nottingham in November, where CWU President Jane Loftus also thanked all the union's ULRs for their hard work supporting CWU members.

"Winning the award has made me very proud not only for the results of all the hard work I've put in to set up union learning via the CWU Western Counties branch, but for the amount of support from the CWU membership, branch officials, the CWU education department and South West unionlearn," says Darren.

The Western Counties branch has done much work to raise the profile of union learning thanks to Darren, who delivered the mail in Exeter for 14 years before becoming a rep and gaining ULR and health and safety qualifications up to diploma level via the CWU education centre.

"I was inspired to get into learning as a postman to further my opportunities

"I wanted to share this with the membership, get them involved in the local branch and get inspired to learn new skills and meet new people."

and gain new skills or knowledge," says Darren. "The variety of courses available was very good, especially the chance to learn new IT skills."

Realising that members were missing out on great opportunities because no one else in the branch was promoting learning at the time, Darren then decided to take on the ULR role himself.

"After getting back into learning myself and recognising the confidence boost it can give, I wanted to share this with the membership, get them involved in the local branch and get inspired to learn new skills and meet new people," he says.

Since then, Darren has set up two learning centres and delivered a variety of opportunities, including a successful survival challenge in local woods – a family event where members working with their children had to earn the famous Blue Peter badge.

The branch also offers photography lessons, Functional Skills, IT training and recognised online courses with qualifications.

"CWU is a great example of putting the skills and learning agenda at the centre of a union's support for their members, by fully integrating the skills needs of their members into the union's overall industrial strategy," comments unionlearn Campaigns Support Officer Jurgita Pranculyte.

Darren says that the best part of his role is seeing members working together and making new friends and contacts. "It's a great feeling," he says.

"When a course is completed and a qualification is awarded, I take pride in knowing that the member has achieved their goal. Before I took over the role, this was not possible but now the membership and the company both gain something from a confident, upskilled workforce." **LR**