

LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Spring 2018

*Vaseem Khan: putting
his passionate pen to
paper to help people*

- ▶ *Delivering logistics learning*
- ▶ *Developing backstage staff*
- ▶ *Apprenticeship partnership*
- ▶ *National Retraining Scheme*
- ▶ *Sexual harassment resources*

unionlearn
from the TUC



READY FOR ANOTHER BUSY YEAR


WE ARE ONLY A FEW WEEKS INTO 2018 and already there is so much going on. I know that many of you are already getting ready for our first campaign of the new year, Literacy Works Week, which runs from Monday 5 February. It's a great opportunity to highlight the learning and support that union projects offer to working people in terms of the reading, writing and communication skills that are so essential to all aspects of our lives today.

Literacy Works Week is scheduled perfectly to tie in with the launch of this year's new Quick Reads, the short titles that have proved so helpful to union learning projects and their learners over the past decade. I'm looking forward to reading our cover star Vaseem Khan's contribution to the

series, *Inspector Chopra and the Million-Dollar Motor Car*, and the rest of the titles.

"It's been fantastic to start the year on the solid foundation of our two-year funding agreement."

And TUC Education is already underway with this year's webinar programme, which proved so popular with reps last year: February's webinar will be looking at the Apprenticeship Levy.

With so much going on, it's been fantastic to start the year on the solid foundation of our two-year funding agreement from the Department for Education. For the Chancellor not only to maintain our funding levels but also to guarantee them for two years is a fitting tribute to the excellent work undertaken by all union reps who support learning in the workplace. Well done to all of you. And keep up your vital work! 

Kevin Rowan is Director of unionlearn



Department
for Education

unionlearn
from the TUC

Funded by the Department for Education (DfE). *Learning Rep* magazine is published four times a year by unionlearn, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS.

Editor: Yusuf Dadabhoy | Writers: Astrid Stubbs and Martin Moriarty | Design: TUC | © unionlearn, 2018
Cover photo: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

NEWS + VIEWS

Unions showcase learning offer at Skills Show



Unionlearn and Unite staff were kept busy during the Skills Show in Birmingham's NEC when thousands of the 110,000 pupils, teachers and parents attending headed to their stall to find out how unions can support young people and apprentices.

The show is the UK's largest skills, apprenticeships and careers event, focusing on different industrial sectors, all of which offered demonstrations, have-a-go skills opportunities and the chance to talk to providers and employers.

Staff from unionlearn and Unite were on hand to speak to young people and promote the benefits of signing up for high-quality apprenticeships.

Unite also spoke to a number of teachers about their Unite in Schools programme, in which trained activists run classroom sessions about the role of unions in protecting workplace rights, a safe working environment and lifelong learning.

"Being at the Skills Show has given Unite the opportunity to reach thousands of young people

as well as their teachers and future employers," commented Unite National Co-ordinator for the Skills Sector Geoff Southern.

[Click here](#) for more information on apprentice rights

Community union helps turn round disability enterprise

Hard work by Community union has helped turn around a disability employment enterprise in Devon by setting up a new business with a learning agreement, an apprenticeship programme and now plans for a new learning centre.

The Devon Disability Collective (DDC) was set up nearly three years ago, when social enterprise Pluss announced redundancy plans for the 37 staff at the site, most of whom are disabled.

With support from Community union and financial help from Exeter City Council, the staff set up the new enterprise, in



which the staff now own and manage the business and three long-serving workers have seats on the board, alongside a city and a county councillor plus a local businessman. Local MP Ben Bradshaw is the company patron.

DDC provides a mobility showroom, mobility and healthcare services, wheelchair upholstery products and re-upholstery services that include automotive, marine, traditional and commercial uses. It also has a light engineering and assembly operation and staff carry out contract sewing, assembly and packing.

"We are hoping that some staff will take the opportunity of signing up to an apprenticeship scheme, and I'm presently discussing options with local education providers," says Community rep Steve Gallin.

"The problem for some staff is that their disability means they can struggle with the English and maths elements of any apprenticeship scheme. We hope that an onsite learning centre will allow people to access extra learning support in the areas that they need help."

It was hard work to get to this point, Steve says. "It's been a challenge and will no doubt remain so for some time but it's working and we are not only fulfilling our customers' orders, but we are growing our business and continuing to provide skilled and sustainable jobs for people with disabilities," he explains.

Click here to find out more about DDC

ULRs welcome Supporting Learners events



ULRs leaped at the chance to improve their knowledge and network with colleagues at five unionlearn-organised events aimed at supporting learners late last year.

Both experienced and new reps from a wide range of unions took part in the sessions, which were held in Southport, Newcastle, Birmingham, London and Leeds.

Unionlearn Projects Officer Louisa Smith says the events allowed unionlearn to update participants on new learning initiatives, projects and resources as well as providing a unique opportunity for ULRs to get together and hear about union learning in their regions.

"It's always great to hear union learning examples from a range of unions and workplaces across the country," Louisa says. "So much and such varied learning goes on that when shared can really inspire and encourage others to do even more."

Feedback from the events was extremely positive. "It's always great to talk to other ULRs and unions and explore and discuss learning," commented one rep, while another, who called their event brilliant, said: "I found out a lot about

online tools and websites, which gave me plenty of ideas going forward."

OECD urges union role in apprenticeships

The government should allow trade unions a bigger say in the design of apprenticeships, according to the latest skills survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

"Trade unions should ... be involved in apprenticeship standard setting, perhaps with representation on the Institute for Apprenticeships," argues the recent report *Getting Skills Right: United Kingdom*.

The recommendation is designed to reduce the risk, identified in the report, that the current employer-led UK system risks creating apprenticeships too narrowly focused on the needs of companies rather than the whole UK.

Consulting with trade unions in the design of apprenticeship standards "could improve their quality by, for example, ensuring that standards do not become too job-specific and provide apprentices with sufficient transversal skills," the report suggests.

Union involvement is not unusual in other successful European economies, the OECD notes: unions have considerable influence on vocational qualifications in Germany, Austria and (to a lesser extent) Switzerland.

Click here to find out more about the OECD report

REPTECH

New app to help ULRs

SkillCheck is a unionlearn tool to help reps deliver learning in the workplace, which provides an initial assessment and a way to encourage further learning through three themes designed to help engage learners.

The themes are English, maths and ICT and there are plans to add more in the future.

You can access the SkillCheck tool through an app or a web browser.

There is a special version of the app for ULRs and others in similar roles that can be used offline – it will upload the data into the SkillCheck database once the device is reconnected to the internet. Please contact your union to arrange access to the offline version.

Click here to access the web version of SkillCheck (you can also log-in or register from here)

Click here to access the app for Android devices

Click here to access the app for Apple devices





HELPING CREATIVES DELIVER TO DEADLINE

Writer and tutor William Gallagher has been sharing the secrets of productivity with colleagues in the entertainment industry through the courses he runs for the Federation of Entertainment Unions, which organises training for members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Musicians' Union (MU), Equity and the Writers' Guild (WGGB).

Productivity is simply about getting work done: for freelancers who never switch off, it means learning how to do everything – the mundane as well as the creative – so they can get on with their craft, explains William, who is also deputy chair of WGGB.

As well as training on productivity, William also runs a course for the FEU on blogging for freelancers.

Feedback from participants has been encouraging, with people reporting that they are better able to cope with a deadline or handle having nothing going on, as well as learning how to deal with editors and other busy professionals in their lives.

William isn't too surprised to receive another variety of positive feedback in the form of text messages from his learners when they let him know they've completed a piece of work. **LR**

► [Click here to find out about the FEU's free training opportunities, including classroom workshops and webinars, from marketing to video creation, stress busting and negotiation](#)

► [Click here to find out more about William](#)

Literacy Works Week launches skills drive



Reading, writing and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are the stars of unionlearn's Literacy Works Week, which this year runs from 5–9 February.

The week is an opportunity for unions to campaign on literacy and language skills, whether that is writing stories, reading and sharing books or encouraging colleagues to take up an initial assessment to check out their English skills.

During the week, unionlearn will post blogs from unions and partners, tweet daily brainteasers and organise events. Join in and to tell us about your activities using the #literacyworks hashtag.

As part of the week, unionlearn has organised an online communication workshop in Bristol on Thursday 8 February. It is aimed at reps with some experience of using social media, writing blogs and producing video clips to get their message across.

Here are some tips for what you could do in your workplace during the week:

- Organise a quiz on books and poems in your workplace.
- Set up a book club, choose a book and discuss. You could also try a virtual club using apps such as WhatsApp or set up a Facebook page.
- Challenge your team to write a poem or a story in 280 characters and publicise them on Twitter.
- Order Quick Reads for your team and ask each of them to write a short review to share with others.
- Invite a local writer, novelist or poet to come to talk about their work.
- Run a writing workshop – ask your provider for contacts or your union for help in finding an external facilitator.

► [Click here to contact Kirsi Kekki for more information about Literacy Works week](#)

► [Click here to register for the Bristol communications workshop](#)

UNISON renews partnerships with WEA and OU

UNISON signed renewed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with The Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) at a special event in UNISON Centre at the end of last year.

Speakers from all three organisations plus shadow education secretary (and former UNISON activist) Angela Rayner set out how



both partnerships have helped UNISON members achieve objectives they never would have thought possible before.

Angela described how the UNISON-OU partnership had helped Stockport Council home care workers like her progress their careers through learning.

"We created opportunities for women like me to become assistant practitioners by getting Foundation degrees, which transformed that group of workers and gave them a sense of purpose and a sense of wellbeing," she said.

The celebration event also featured contributions from OU Vice-Chancellor Peter Horrocks and Pro Vice-Chancellor Hazel Rymer, WEA Chief Executive Ruth Spellman, UNISON Assistant General Secretary Roger McKenzie and Head of Learning and Organising Services Teresa Donegan.

National Numeracy unveils new maths resources



National Numeracy has launched a brand-new suite of confidence-building resources, including an attitudinal assessment as well as videos hosted by TV personality Rachel Riley.

The resources follow publication of the McKinsey report *How to Improve Student Educational*

Outcomes, which reveals that mindsets such as motivation and self-belief have a greater impact on student performance than any other factor – and double the effect of socio-economic background.

"Maths is 90 per cent attitudes and 10 per cent skills, yet almost all resources are just about the skills," says National Numeracy CEO Mike Ellicock. "I firmly believe that our new tools will contribute to changing attitudes to maths, and as a result, help improve numeracy throughout the UK."

The two new tools in the Challenge are:

- The Attitudes Quiz, which provides useful feedback to the learner regarding their self-confidence, confidence with numbers and money, appetite for learning, and appreciation of the 'value, belief and effort' needed to improve their numeracy.
- Building Confidence resources, a suite of interactive modules that addresses attitudes to numeracy in order to overcome barriers to learning. The first module is available to all users, with the remaining content accessible via partner organisations.

[Click here to find out more](#)

New mid-life project kicks off two-year programme

Developing a new good practice model for the delivery of a mid-life skills review is the theme of The Rainbow Years

Project, which runs until December 2019.

December saw the first partners meeting in Bilbao, where unionlearn outlined how to develop the model with the emphasis on reviewing skills and competences and targeted at those members of the labour market with low levels of basic skills.

Unionlearn's good practice model will contain new materials specifically designed for Europe's social partners that can easily be transferred to other settings and user groups.

These materials will include an interactive online skills assessment tool and online learning modules. Learners will have the opportunity to gain a new online digital badge as well as accessing a new suite of materials.

"We are really pleased our bid was successful and we look forward to working with partners across Europe to share the good practice around mid-life skills reviews," says unionlearn Communications and Contracts Manager Ian Borkett.

[Click here to find out more about the project](#)

New resources to help English and maths learning

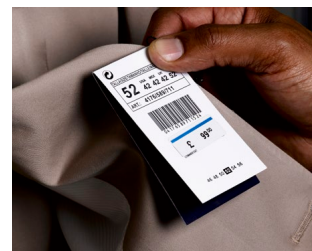
Engaging and supporting adult learners in English literacy and language and maths is a demanding but rewarding role for unions and union learning reps.

A new unionlearn guide provides a short introduction; ideas for

developing English and maths learning in the workplace; and gathers together useful resources for all reps in the workplace.

[Click here to download your copy](#)

BBC unveils Bitesize functional skills support



BBC Bitesize content for learners studying for practical maths and English qualifications is now live.

Bitesize Functional Skills supports learners in English and maths at Levels 1 and 2 in England and the equivalent levels of Core Skills in Scotland and Essential Skills in Wales and Northern Ireland.

The English Explained and Maths Explained learner guides support understanding of some of the key concepts in each subject, which in some cases means starting at Entry Level 3 and building to Level 1.

The BBC is keen to receive feedback about how learners engage with the content and what features they would like to see included. Please get in touch via the link below.

[Click here to email the Bitesize team](#)
[Click here to find out more online](#)

Delivering learning to logistics workers

As soon as XPO announced it would be closing its distribution centre at Stone, the road transport union URTU swung into action to help staff prepare to re-enter the employment market.

🔗 **Martin Moriarty**

Drivers and warehouse staff at the XPO Logistics depot in Stone, Staffordshire, are all set to start English, maths and IT courses in the onsite learning centre that will boost their job prospects when the depot closes this time next year.

Two dozen warehouse workers at the site have already restarted their learning journeys by enrolling on apprenticeships, thanks to a productive partnership between their union URTU, XPO's onsite HR team and training provider Derwentside College.

The Stone site, which services Sainsbury's, has been under threat since the supermarket giant announced a year ago that it would be moving operations to its new frozen food distribution centre in Northampton in early 2019.

US-based multinational XPO Logistics, which acquired the site when it took over Belgian firm Norbert Dentressangle in 2015, was quick to consult with URTU about working together to help the 275 staff onsite prepare for returning to the employment market.

Over the past year, union learning rep Jim Thomas, who is also the warehouse night shift rep and URTU branch secretary at Stone, has

worked closely with URTU Project Worker Judith Swift and XPO Logistics Human Resources Manager Kristy Suen.

"When I took over as the night shift rep in the warehouse and found out that quite a number of people were struggling with the basics of English and maths, I started pushing for functional skills courses even before we learned we were closing down," says Jim.

"Now the management have taken onboard what I've been saying by bringing in apprenticeships and English, maths and IT courses are following soon."

With the help and support of the ULR team onsite, 22 warehouse staff enrolled on the apprenticeships, which are delivered onsite by Durham-based provider Derwentside College, well known to the URTU ULF project team thanks to previous joint work on other sites.

Jatinder Poonian (known to everyone in the warehouse as Jat) is very glad to have had the opportunity to undertake his Level 2 Diploma in Team Leading, which he is due to complete in May.

"I want to get everybody up to date with their English, maths and IT skills before they have to go."





“By supporting colleagues we have seen many benefits to the business: we have increased skills and are seeing improved performance and a willingness to take on new challenges.”

Jat had already enrolled on an online IT course off his own bat in the wake of the closure announcement but he leaped at the chance of gaining a management qualification that would help him find a new – and potentially better – job when he has to leave Stone.

“With the site closing, I thought I’d better buck up my ideas and get some extra qualifications to better my life,” he says.

“The course has given us a great understanding of how everything fits together, why you do what you do and how to think outside the box. The tutor goes through each section thoroughly and they inter-link everything as well – it’s quite eye-opening.”

Derwentside College is delighted to be working in partnership with URTU and XPO Logistics, says Executive Director Susan Errington.

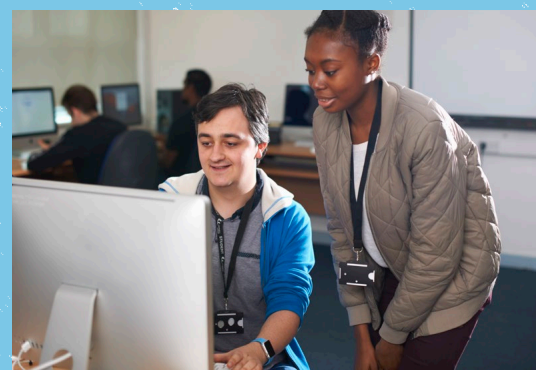
“Supporting the development of new skills and qualifications for the employees of XPO as they prepare for future roles and opportunities during this time of change is crucial.”

The apprenticeships have helped build momentum for the upcoming English, maths and IT courses, Judith says. “What Jim is keen to do is bring everyone into the English, maths and IT provision”, she says.

And once Derwentside College have finished the initial assessments onsite, Jim expects that his colleagues will seize the opportunity to equip themselves for their return to the employment market.

“There are a lot of people who have been working here for 10, 12, 15 years who have never had to go through the interview process in the modern world, which I’ve seen my kids go through, having to produce CVs on the computer and do interviews over Skype,” Jim says.

“That’s why I want to get everybody up to date with their English, maths and IT skills before they have to go out into the big wide world – and from talking to people in the warehouse, we’re looking at really good take-up for these courses.” **LR**



© Peter Muller/Getty Images

HELPING SUPER-MARKET STAFF SWITCH TO DIGITAL

Usdaw’s lifelong learning team in Staffordshire has helped union members gain the digital skills and confidence they continue to need to access development opportunities at Sainsbury’s now that the supermarket giant has moved all its training online.

And it has helped two members of staff secure paid release to take part in the Digital Champions course so they can offer further concrete help to co-workers in danger of getting left behind by the move.

Once a staff survey last February revealed that more than a third of colleagues had not accessed the Our Sainsbury’s gateway, which is now hosting staff training, mobile union learning rep (MULR) Chris Harrison got together with a group of store ULRs to develop a plan to remove barriers to participation.

Raising awareness of the digital training opportunities available through Usdaw was identified as key, so Chris and the ULRs worked with the company’s training and HR managers to run a digital awareness pilot during last year’s Adult Learners’ Week at the Sainsbury’s stores in Leek and Biddulph.

“A key message we tried to get across was that improving digital skills crossed over into colleagues’ personal lives as well as their work lives,” Chris says.

“The reps used the Use-IT app to enable colleagues to assess their digital skills. As a result, several colleagues made use of online assessments and over 60 colleagues were signposted to digital courses such as Get Online with Usdaw and Learn My Way.”

Feedback was positive from staff, store management and reps alike. “It was a brilliant day and a great way to raise digital awareness – we need to do more of this,” says ULR Ruth Murphy.

The learning show must go on

Britain's film, television, cinema, digital and theatre workers are always going to need to improve the skills they have and develop the ones they don't – which is why there is such a thriving learning and development operation at media and entertainment union BECTU.

✦ **Martin Moriarty**

After starting work in the theatre at the age of 18, Kate Elliott (pictured above) worked her way up from dresser to costumer supervisor, but it was in her late 20s that she became active in media and entertainment union BECTU (now part of Prospect).

Keen to help spread the union message throughout the industry, Kate and a couple of colleagues decided there was no better way to reach members and potential members than by knocking on the stage doors of the theatres where they worked throughout the West End.

After setting themselves up with an inexpensive plate of rigatoni at long-gone old-school Soho eaterie Centrale, the trio would spend every Tuesday afternoon talking to front-of-house staff, carpenters, costume and make-up specialists, set builders, lighting operators and all the other backstage workers about what union membership really offered.

"We all had contacts so we could easily go in and meet people and talk to them about the benefits of the union and what we could do to support them," Kate explains.

It was in 2002 that Kate took on the management of one of the union's earliest

ULF projects, Training Opportunities for Skills Confidence and Achievement (TOSCA), originally launched to help crew members at English National Opera (ENO) boost their functional skills.

Her original plan had been to return to her theatre work when the two-year contract was up, but instead she went on to manage a series of ULF projects for the union, before taking on the role of Training Officer in the wake of the sudden death four years ago of her then manager, the well-known and widely respected Brian Kelly.

Her period working for the union has coincided with some major structural changes in the sector, she points out, with a massive expansion of freelance numbers in the past 15 years with organisations like the BBC forcing people into the much more vulnerable world of self-employment through large-scale redundancy programmes.

"In the very early days of our ULF projects, we were predominantly working in employed areas but in the last eight or nine years we have focused more on the needs of freelancers because our branches were telling us their needs were considerable," she explains.

This means that these days the union

"We could easily go in and meet people and talk to them about the benefits of the union and what we could do to support them."



is increasingly concentrating on supporting members who have no employers to train them, with a programme of bespoke courses on all aspects of their working lives, from managing their own tax affairs to improving their profile through canny use of digital platforms. (On the day of this interview, there are a dozen members in the training suite in the union's south London office working their way through Maximising Your Online Presence, a new training course delivered by one of the union's own members who also runs her own digital tech company).

But equally important is the support the union can offer to creative industry workers who need to hone their skills in their chosen fields. Always alert to the ever-evolving needs of their members, Kate and her team of part-time learning organisers recently launched their latest innovation – a training course for hair and make-up professionals working with Black and minority ethnic (BME) performers.

The initiative emerged out of a joint meeting a year ago between BECTU's Hair and Make-up Committee and Equity's Minority Ethnic Members Committee, set up to examine the issue of BME performers being routinely asked to cover their heads by hair and make-up workers who had no experience of working with non-white skin.

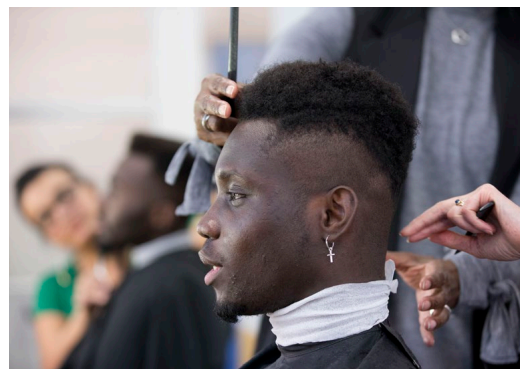
Attending the meeting with BECTU Diversity Officer Janice Turner, Learning Organiser Lezli Everitt (pictured below) promised to put together a new training programme to give professionals the skills they needed to work on hair, make-up and barbering for BME performers.

This was no small undertaking. To run the three courses, BECTU had to transform its training room into something like a professional salon for two weeks: out went the flip charts and marker pens and in came Hollywood mirrors and all the professionals' specialist kit.

Delivered by tutors Joy Daphney Djadi and Kamanza Amihya, the three modules were called Understanding Afro and Asian Hair, Barbering Skills for Afro and Asian Hair and Media Make-up for Black and Asian Skin, with a cross-section of Equity members attending as paid models for the participants to practise their skills on.

"The main thing I said to the hair and make-up delegates and to the actors was that the workshops were informal: everybody needs to be able to discuss, swap ideas and explain what's best for them. And that's what happened – it was just incredible," Lezli says.

While the hair and make-up professionals were delighted to be able to gain vital skills that will allow them to do great work with a diverse range of performers, the actors themselves were glad to take part in hair and make-up sessions



"The workshops were informal: everybody needs to be able to discuss, swap ideas and explain what's best for them."

where they were not treated as the problem for once.

"They were so pleased that they had been treated with respect and it was just an incredible experience," Lezli says.

BECTU is now looking for further funding to enable it to run the courses again. "We made it work and we kept it in-house, but it was very expensive and it has to be funded properly," Lezli says.

Kate and her team will be developing further work on BME issues as part of its new ULF project, which launches in April this year, alongside other innovations, Kate says.

"We have been working on a women's mentoring programme, which is in the new bid because we wanted to open it up more widely, and we will be working on digital skills as well, because they are big for us," Kate explains. "We've often worked like that, where something has come to fruition in one project year and been part of the structure of the bid for the next." **LR**



Investing in the workforce of the future

UNISON has successfully launched a new Apprenticeship Charter to secure a better deal for apprentices in the public services.

Apprentices at Southport & Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust are set to secure a better deal at work since their employers became the first organisation in the country to sign up to UNISON's new Apprenticeship Charter.

"It's very welcome that the Trust views apprenticeships as an investment in its future workforce, rather than a short-term source of cheap labour," says UNISON Assistant General Secretary Christina McAnea, who signed the charter in December alongside the Trust's interim Chief Executive Karen Jackson and Associate Director of HR Jane Royds alongside UNISON Branch Secretary John Flannery.

"We are delighted the Trust has decided to sign up to our charter, publicly signalling its commitment to structured learning. We hope many other employers will soon follow their lead."

The more employers sign and support the UNISON Apprenticeship Charter, the more they will gain from their apprenticeship programmes, Christine points out.

"The contribution of apprentices to the workplace is too often overlooked and unfortunately many young people find

themselves exploited, working long hours for low wages, with little support," she says.

"Yet by properly investing in the workforce of tomorrow, employers can nurture talent and help fill the skills gap – and give a boost to the local economy at the same time."

Current apprentice Simon Bunting, who works in the pharmacy at the Trust, says he has valued the opportunity to develop his career through his apprenticeship.

"It is hard work, but I have learned a great deal, which is already helping me to have a better understanding of leadership and management, enabling me to use this knowledge to become better at my job," Simon says.

"It is great that more people will have a chance to undertake a high-quality apprenticeship in the future."

The charter sets out how UNISON will actively support apprenticeships that provide apprentices with (among other things):

- the correct rate for the job they are doing
- high-quality training, on and off the job
- the offer of a job when they have completed their apprenticeship
- a safe and healthy working environment, free from discrimination and bullying.

"We are delighted the Trust has decided to sign up to our charter, publicly signalling its commitment to structured learning. We hope many other employers will soon follow their lead."

“It is great that more people will have a chance to undertake a high-quality apprenticeship in the future.”

It also specifies the key responsibilities that employers agree to, including:

- developing a high-quality apprenticeship scheme that respects apprentices’ rights through negotiating with the relevant trade unions
- choosing a high-quality training provider
- providing support and training for employees who supervise apprentices
- actively challenging job stereotyping
- conducting a skills audit, to properly determine their organisation’s needs.

Karen Jackson says that the Trust is delighted to be able to support UNISON’s charter.

“Apprenticeships help us develop our staff, opening new doors in their development so together we can best meet patient needs,” she says. **LR**

➡ [Click here](#) to download your copy of UNISON’s Apprenticeship Charter

NEW RESOURCES TO HELP GET THE BEST DEAL

Unionlearn has updated the *Your Rights as an Apprentice* leaflet and the *Know Your Rights* eNote to reflect the latest changes in regulations and policy, including the 20 per cent off-the-job-training rule that came into force last year.

You can order the handy pocket-sized leaflet from TUC Publications and access the updated *Know Your Rights* eNote using the links below.

➡ [Click here](#) to order your free copy of the updated apprentice rights leaflet

➡ [Click here](#) to access the updated apprentice rights eNote



© John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk

WORKING TO MAKE APPRENTICESHIPS MORE INCLUSIVE

An Usdaw learner with dyslexia has been able to overcome the barriers to participating in a Tesco apprenticeship programme with the help of her union learning rep (ULR) and a supportive college tutor.

Mina Fraser, who works in the Tesco store in Stroud, Gloucestershire, was keen to improve her functional skills after completing an initial assessment with the help of her ULR, Kay Timbrell.

Her original plan was to take an Usdaw English course, but she switched to the apprenticeship instead as it also included a functional skills component.

But when it came to taking the programme’s own functional skills diagnostic test, it turned out that it couldn’t run on her laptop, which had been adapted to suit her specific needs as someone with dyslexia.

Determined to help Mina undertake the apprenticeship, Kay introduced her to Shrewsbury College tutor Richard May, who delivers Usdaw’s own English courses.

Richard was able to devise a way of carrying out the diagnostic test on Mina’s laptop, which allowed her to complete the assessment and progress with the apprenticeship.

Mina is delighted to be able to continue improving her English skills on the course. “Without the support from both the ULR and the college tailoring an approach to meet my needs, then this simply wouldn’t have been possible,” Mina says. **LR**

Writing for change

Vaseem Khan wrote one of this year's new Quick Reads because he is passionate about helping people to read so they can improve their lives.

♦♦ Astrid Stubbs

There's a world of difference between Newham, east London, where author Vaseem Khan grew up, and the Mumbai home of his best-selling books about the Baby Ganesh Detective Agency.

But one thing they have in common is the large numbers of people who could improve their lives by developing their reading skills – something Vaseem knows all about first-hand, having lived in both places.

That's why he agreed to write a Quick Reads book for the 2018 list, a specially written novella featuring his famous Inspector Chopra and sidekick baby elephant.

Inspector Chopra and the Million-Dollar Motor Car is set in the bustling backstreets of Mumbai, where the detective and his four-legged friend have two days to solve the mystery of a missing car for its gangster owner.

Vaseem believes education is a fundamental human right – wherever you live in the world.

And he credits reading for giving him the opportunity to become the writer he is today. His father was illiterate and worked in a bakery for 40-plus years, while his mother was never interested in literature. But they were determined to give their son the education he wanted and he successfully studied at the London School of Economics (LSE).

Vaseem then went to India where he worked as a management consultant for 10 years,

storing up a wealth of knowledge of Mumbai, which would form the basis of his novels.

When he returned to work in the UK, he became involved in helping at schools and libraries, witnessing first-hand the issues of literacy and struggles of people, including those whose first language is not English and whose daily battles mean reading is not a priority. Vaseem also saw that the school system in his borough was struggling with a lack of resources and disengaged youngsters.

Having amassed 200 rejection letters from publishers since he started writing at the age of 17, Vaseem had no illusions about getting published when he decided to write down the story of his adventures in the form of a journey to the heart of modern India.

So no one was more shocked than himself when publishing giant Hodder signed him up to a four-book deal for the Inspector Chopra

"Some of my childhood dreams have been fulfilled for me and reading is the foundation of every good thing that happened in my life."



books, which has led to global success (the books have been translated into 11 languages) as well as numerous celebrity shoulder-rubbing appearances on news and chat shows and book panels.

Having witnessed poverty and sickness of impossible magnitude in Mumbai, Vaseem explains that his plan was to write novels with a social heart – crime mysteries with a humorous, feel-good vibe, which is how the curious partnership of Inspector Chopra and baby elephant Ganesh came about.

“Some of my childhood dreams have been fulfilled for me and reading is the foundation of every good thing that happened in my life,” says Vaseem. “My dad was illiterate, mum didn’t believe in fiction. It was rough – reading was an escape for me and the foundation to education.”

It’s something he is keen to share, explaining that, with rise of the internet, people now have access to anything so long as they can read just a little.

“Human beings have been storytellers for thousands of years but not everyone is comfortable with the written word, so if we can find a way to make those stories easier for people to read it is giving them the tools to fundamentally change their lives. It’s why I wanted to write a Quick Read.”

As well as the launch of the Quick Read novella, 2018 will mean more Inspector Chopra for Vaseem – he’s just been commissioned to write another two books in the series – and he has agreed to a tour of prisons that will see him spreading the message and encouraging some of the hardest-to-reach groups of people to read and gain the chance to improve their lives.

“I’m really passionate about doing this – reading has changed my life. If I didn’t have the background of reading I would not have been able to do the job I do. For me it’s a great privilege to be allowed to help and change people’s lives by helping them read a bit better.” **LR**



UNISON PROJECTS WIN SILVER AND GOLD

Two UNISON-led reading partnerships won silver and gold awards from The Reading Agency late last year, marking the high levels of successful completion of the Reading Ahead challenge in their workplaces, where participants read and review six books, stories, poems, magazines or online articles.

Merseytravel won the gold award for supporting more than 150 members of staff to complete the challenge last year.

UNISON learning rep Ya-Ching Darnell (above right with, from left, Merseytravel Head of HR Alastair Ramsay and Chair Councillor Liam Robinson plus Reading Agency Programme Manager Genevieve Clarke) has already enrolled Liverpool City Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham on the 2018 challenge.

Newcastle City Branch, working in partnership with City Library and City Learning, won the silver award for supporting more than 130 readers to complete the Reading Ahead challenge – with an increase of 28 per cent of participants completing on last year’s numbers.



The other five Quick Reads are: *The Beach Wedding* by Dorothy Koomson; *Clean Break* by Tammy Cohen; *Six Foot Six* by Kit de Waal; *Cut Off* by Mark Billingham; and *The Great Cornish Getaway* by Fern Britton.

► [Click here](#) to find out more and pick up helpful tips for working with Quick Reads

TUC to work with CBI on national retraining plan

The government is working with the TUC and the CBI to create a new National Retraining Scheme designed to tackle the skills challenge facing the UK.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady has welcomed Chancellor Philip Hammond's Budget announcement that the government will be creating a National Retraining Scheme with the help of the TUC and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

"We welcome the proposal that government, trade unions and business get around the table to tackle Britain's great skills challenge, and we look forward to learning more," Frances commented late last year.

In his 2017 Budget speech, Mr Hammond pledged that a new high-level advisory body called National Retraining Partnership would work with the TUC and the CBI to develop the National Retraining Scheme, which was a Conservative Party general election manifesto commitment.

Further details of the government's plans emerged in the industrial strategy white paper, Building a Britain Fit for the Future, published in November, and a Skills Summit a few days afterwards.

The government is supporting The National Retraining Scheme with £40m, which will be used "to test innovative approaches to helping adults up-skill and re-skill", according to the white paper.

Starting next year, the National Retraining Scheme will focus on targeting skills shortages in key sectors, with the first

priorities identified as digital and construction skills.

The government will invest £34m in expanding innovative construction training programmes across the country that are focused on supporting the country's housing needs and developing current good practice.

In addition, the government will also invest £30m in testing the use of artificial intelligence and innovative education technology in online digital skills courses that are set to change the face of learning.

In the medium term, working with the National Retraining Partnership, the government is set to roll out new Skills Advisory Panels across England. The first Panels will be established in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, Greater Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Leeds and the Thames Valley.

The Panels will play a key role in supporting the Local Industrial Strategies that will underpin the policy approach set out in the white paper.

After revealing the names of the first 36 major employers to have signed up to a new skills partnership at the Skills Summit, the government will be asking more employers to follow suit to demonstrate their commitment.

There will be £10m funding for a set of lifelong learning pilots in several areas (including Leeds, Devon and Somerset, Lincolnshire, Stoke-on-Trent and the West Midlands) to test the best ways of incentivising adults to train in the skills needed locally. **LR**

[Click here](#) for details of the full range of recent government skills announcements

"We welcome the proposal that government, trade unions and business get around the table to tackle Britain's great skills challenge, and we look forward to learning more."



© Peter Cade/Certify Images

Calling time on harassment

TUC Education is supporting trade unionists tackling sexual harassment in the workplace with new resources.



More than half of all women have suffered sexual harassment at work and almost two-thirds of women aged 18–24 have been targeted, according to research by the TUC and the Everyday Sexism project that was highlighted in the TUC's research paper *Still Just a Bit of Banter?*.

All of those women know how undermining, humiliating and sometimes terrifying sexual harassment can be.

TUC Education has been holding a series of one-day workshops for union officers to look at the findings of the research paper, learn about a new TUC Sexual Harassment eNote for union reps and officers and develop trade union approaches to dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace and beyond.

TUC Women's Equality Policy Officer Kathryn Mackridge hosted a live webinar in December on

sexual harassment in the workplace to discuss:

- the findings of the report
- how to support people who are harassed at work
- how unions can work with employers to put effective policies in place to create zero tolerance for harassment.

"Kathryn's webinar was very informative and inspired me to tackle the issue in my workplace," commented one participant. "I'm also going to raise the issue at my next union meeting." **LR**

▶ [Click here](#) to register or sign in to see the eNote on sexual harassment

▶ [Click here](#) to read the TUC report 'Still Just a Bit of Banter?'

▶ [Click here](#) to order copies of the workplace poster 'You're Not Alone: Speak to Your Union Rep Today'

▶ [Click here](#) to download the updated free leaflet 'Protection from Sexual Harassment'



PACKED PROGRAMME OF WEBINARS ON THE WAY

There is an exciting new series of TUC Education webinars planned for this year, building on the eight held last year that proved a big hit with reps who took part.

The webinars cover everything from young workers, how to write effective emails for organising, wellbeing in the workplace and public sector pay.

▶ [Click here](#) to find out more and stay up to date with details

MENOPAUSE SUPPORT eNOTE GOES LIVE

TUC Education has launched a new eNote, Menopause support in the workplace.

The eNote includes an interview with Diane Danzebrink, who features in a video talking about her experiences of the menopause and the support available.

▶ [Click here](#) to access the eNote



Scoring through learning

With the help of his union, the PFA, former footballer Charlie Barnett (front row, far left) completed the degree that is helping him build a new career in physiotherapy.

✚ Martin Moriarty

© University of Salford/Nick Harrison

Former footballer Charlie Barnett, who hung up his boots two years ago at the age of 27, was thinking about his post-football career as early as 2010, when he signed with Accrington Stanley at the age of 22.

Charlie had never had any illusions about how long he might have in the beautiful game: the financial rewards diminish the further you get from the Premier league and you're always only a misjudged tackle away from a life-changing injury wherever you're playing.

It was his more senior colleagues at Accrington who started him thinking about the options he might have when the time came to leave, and he was able to talk through the possibilities with Oshor Williams, the Assistant Director of Education at the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), who made regular visits to the club.

It was as a result of those conversations that Charlie decided to enrol on the four-year part-time physiotherapy degree course at the University of Salford in 2013.

For the first two years of his

studies, he was still playing for AFC Telford United, which meant time management was the major challenge.

"The course was two afternoons and two evenings a week: I was brushing up my academic skills while I was still playing so it was pretty hectic at times – and four years is a long time to keep pushing through," he says.

One thing that definitely helped was studying alongside six other professionals, the oldest being former Northampton Town goalkeeper Alex O'Reilly (38) and the youngest Wigan Athletic's Sean Myler (24).

"It was good to study with all the other players: I could help younger lads and the older lads helped me. A lot of experiences were new to all of us but we knew we could lean on each other for help and we all wanted the best for everyone on the course," Charlie says.

Like his colleagues, Charlie benefited from the placements that are a feature of the Salford course, including one with the Under-18 and Under-23 squads at Liverpool FC, where as a player he had helped the youth team win the FA Youth Cup twice (in 2006 and 2007). He also

"A lot of experiences were new to all of us but we knew we could lean on each other for help and we all wanted the best for everyone on the course."

picked up valuable experience as a physio assistant at Neurological Physiotherapy, where he worked for two years in his first post-football job.

Since graduating in the summer and now working as an NHS physiotherapist at Whiston Hospital (part of St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust), Charlie recognises exactly how valuable his degree will be for him in the years ahead.

"When you're playing, you can get dropped or get injured but doing the degree is something that no one can take away from you – it gives you that sense of pride, stability and security that you've earned and you're set up to go on to your new career," he says. **LR**