

# LR

## LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Spring 2019

### *Getting fighting fit with the FBU*

- ▶ *Innovating with the ULF*
- ▶ *Learning behind the wheels*
- ▶ *Boosting migrant wellbeing*
- ▶ *Pay check for apprentices*
- ▶ *Value My Skills goes digital*

**unionlearn**  
from the TUC





## MAKING YOUR MOVE ONLINE

**HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE** in the trade union movement who is supporting learning in the workplace. As you can see from this edition's Reptech column opposite, we're expanding the popular SkillCheck tool with a new basic maths assessment.

We've added this new component in response to feedback from you and we think it should help encourage more learners to begin to tackle their numeracy issues. And we'll be further expanding SkillCheck with a new assessment for apprentices shortly: keep your eye on the unionlearn website – or, better still, subscribe to our email updates via the orange button on the top right and along the bottom of every page on the site.

***"We've added this new component in response to feedback from you and we think it should help encourage more learners to begin to tackle their numeracy issues."***

More and more new ULRs are training via the Stage 1 and Stage 2 online courses that we have made available via TUC Education. The online option, which complements our classroom offer, is proving useful to all sorts of union reps for a wide range of reasons: some live in remote locations that would involve too much travel time to access classroom courses; some are unable to secure the time off from their employer; and some have found that online learning simply suits them better.

So if you've been considering the online route, why not enrol now?

Good luck with all the learning you undertake and support this year!

**Kevin Rowan** is Director of unionlearn



Department  
for Education

**unionlearn**  
from the TUC

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## NEWS + VIEWS

### Unite celebrates migrant workers' new skills



Dozens of migrant workers who have learned crucial language skills through Unite's pioneering United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP) celebrated their latest achievements at a one-day event at the union's London headquarters in the run-up to Christmas.

The annual celebration, which is always held as close as possible to International Migrants Day, included a detailed workshop on the key issues about Brexit for migrant workers, a participatory theatre workshop about negotiation and power plus songs by the Latin American Community Choir, dance by Expresion Inka and Moroccan music.

Unite's Director of Education Jim Mowatt presented certificates of achievement to the latest cohort of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners.

"UMWEP is a big programme for Unite that illustrates the union at its very best," said Jim, who has helped support the programme's development

since it originally launched 11 years ago.

London & Eastern Regional Learning Organiser Carlos Cruz-Garcia said he felt proud of all the learners who have taken part in the programme for the way they confront the barriers that face them every day.

"UMWEP is a remarkable community institution where vulnerable workers can get education – one of the most important things for human beings," Carlos said. "We feel proud of Unite because they are fighting with us to get dignity and respect in the workplace."

### FBU learner shares fitness tips with community

North Yorkshire firefighter Neil Garner is sharing the knowledge and skills he gained on his personal training Level 3 apprenticeship with colleagues and members of the local community.

Neil is one of 14 members of the Fire Brigades



Union (FBU) in North Yorkshire to have completed the apprenticeship.

Since completing his qualification, Neil has launched his own bootcamps for members of the public, where he combines his experience as a firefighter with the knowledge he acquired on the apprenticeship.

Gaining the qualification has also made him a go-to person for colleagues looking for advice about improving their fitness levels and meeting the fitness standards required in the annual tests the brigade now conducts.

Completing the course has also helped Neil with his own fitness regime. "My increased knowledge has also enabled me to push through my own limitations and make gains in my own training regime," he says.

"I have been training for almost 20 years but, since beginning the course, I have progressed past anything I have previously achieved."

### Checking out learning at the supermarket

Since taking on the learning rep role just over a year ago, Usdaw ULR Sue Burnett has started building a new culture of lifelong learning at the Morrisons food manufacturing site in Colne, Lancashire.

Striking up a strong working relationship with the new HR manager, who had recently arrived on site, Sue was able to persuade them to sign a learning

agreement that recognises the ULR role and secures company support for workplace learning.

With a large number of migrant workers on site, Sue then started promoting English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) learning. She helped staff complete initial assessments so they could be signposted to courses at the right level and has enrolled learners on ESOL courses at the local Adult Learning Service through the council.

Determined to open a learning centre on site, Sue has secured £2,000 from Usdaw to cover setup costs and a pledge to more than match that from the company.

"Sue has made a real difference to learning at the site: if she continues at this pace, there's no limit to what she can achieve," says Usdaw Project Worker Julia Baldwin.

### Supporting Learners events are a hit in the regions

Hundreds of union learning reps caught up with the latest developments in the world of workplace learning during last autumn's programme of Supporting Learners events in each of the TUC's English regions.

"Regional Supporting Learners events are always a highlight of the unionlearn year," commented unionlearn Service Team Manager Ian Borkett.

"They are not only a

chance to get out and about and tell reps about the latest resources we can offer them but a great opportunity for unionlearn staff to hear about what is happening in the regions and get ideas from ULRs about how we can support workplace learning in the future."

All six events used a broadly similar approach, including regional updates (usually from the TUC regional secretary); an overview of the latest publications and developments from unionlearn; and workshops on mental health in the workplace.

They also included activities in which participants examined how they could better support young workers or older workers or promote digital skills in their own workplaces plus sessions on blogging by GMB Project Worker Michelle Graham.

In three of the six events, civil servants from the Department for Education ran workshops on the National Retraining Scheme, while unionlearn Strategy Manager Iain Murray discussed new learning and skills initiatives (including the NRS) at the other three.

Feedback was very positive. "I found that all aspects of the event will be of importance in my daily role as a ULR," commented one London participant. "I found the event very interesting and it has given me greater insight into the vital link between unions and learning," said a ULR who attended the Newcastle event. "A professional, well-organised day," commented a Bristol participant.

To make sure you are the first to find out about next year's Supporting Learners events, as well as new resources and more, make sure you subscribe on the unionlearn website.

## REPTECH

### SkillCheck adds basic maths

Unionlearn has added a new basic maths assessment to SkillCheck, the multi-platform tool to help ULRs encourage learning in the workplace.

The latest assessment was added to the tool as part of Maths Workout Week, unionlearn's annual autumn campaign to help more ULRs promote numeracy in their workplaces.

The new basic maths assessment contains 20 questions for learners to work through on their desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone.

Look out for a new apprentice skills assessment tool coming soon to SkillCheck.

Search for 'SkillCheck' in the Apple App Store or find the Android version in the Google Play store.

[Click here to access SkillCheck on the web](#)







## MAKING MATHS ADD UP FOR LEARNERS

Union learning reps from all over the country helped colleagues overcome their anxieties about day-to-day numeracy during unionlearn's annual Maths Workout Week in October.

"Union learning projects have a great track record on engaging learners with maths – I don't think anyone does that more effectively than the unions – but it's always good to raise awareness of new ideas and new tools," explains unionlearn Policy Office Kirsi Kekki.

This year, UNISON's Yorkshire & Humberside Region organised a successful one-day workshop for eight learners at Northern College in Barnsley as part of Maths Workout Week.

"The workshop surpassed my expectations: people were engaged with the course and said they felt a lot more confident at the end of the day with more tools to help them with their maths and with the National Numeracy Challenge," said Regional Learning and Development Organiser Rose Bent.

Rose also used the week to launch a new drive to encourage UNISON members in the region to sign up to the National Numeracy Challenge. Within 24 hours of the email alert, 360 members had pledged to check their numeracy skills using the free online tool – with the number of enrolments eventually rising to more than 480. **LR**

## Boots staff sign up for mental health courses



More than two dozen staff at Boots Logistics in Nottingham signed up for mental health awareness and dementia care courses when the ULR team ran a learning event to mark World Mental Health Day in October.

"It was extremely successful with over 40 people wanting to do a course, either mental health awareness or dementia care," says Project Worker Neil Chapman.

The event was part of a broader joint campaign with the union and the company working together to tackle mental health issues in the workplace.

The learning centre currently offers a range of distance learning courses to help staff improve their knowledge of the issues, including Understanding Mental Health, Understanding Autism, Dementia Care and Understanding the Care and Management of Diabetes.

In addition, ULRs have organised pumpkin picking events and set up a rambling group for exercise and outdoor walks, as part of mental health charity MIND's ecotherapy programme, which helps people improve their mental and physical wellbeing through outdoor activities in nature.

## Change-of-heart council worker becomes ULR

A Southampton City Council worker has changed her mind about trade unions and become an active ULR over the past year after a life-changing conversation with UNISON Branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator Martin Merritt.



Julie Harris had a low opinion of trade unions when she started work at the local authority 16 years ago. The ideas she'd inherited from her parents had been confirmed by the negativity of TV news coverage of union issues.

But after discussing work-related issues with Martin just over a year ago, Julie decided first to join the UNISON branch and then become active as a ULR.

Julie has worked with the other learning reps to deliver lunch and learn sessions and also is a member of a forum with HR to improve support in the workplace for women experiencing the menopause. She has also attended many of the women's courses that UNISON puts on for its female members.

Taking on the new role has brought Julie out of her shell, Martin says. "Julie was always shy about mentioning things in and around the workplace – she has come on in leaps and bounds and has finally found her voice with becoming a ULR for the branch," he says.

## Follow London's lead on low-wage training offer, says TUC

The TUC is calling on all mayors of combined authorities to extend the government's offer of fully funded education and training to more low-waged workers by increasing the eligibility limit to those earning the Living Wage.

When the government launched its pilot programme to fully fund courses up to Level 2 for low-paid workers last August, it set the upper wage limit at £15,736.50.



But London Mayor Sadiq Khan has broadened the offer by setting the eligibility limit in line with the London Living Wage, which equates to £20,572.50 a year, in addition to extending the trial for another year.

If all the mayors in the seven Combined Authorities emulated the London Mayor by extending the trial and linking entitlement to the Living Wage rate outside London (£9.00 per hour), residents in these areas could be eligible for fully funded learning if they earn below £17,550 a year.

## Career Learning Pilots evaluation gets underway

The government has already started to evaluate the Career Learning Pilots that are trying to identify the best levels of subsidy and most effective messaging for generating adult learner engagement.

With the support of unionlearn and individual unions, adult learners are already on courses testing the different funding frameworks and communication strategies in five areas of the country – Greater Lincolnshire, Heart of the South-West, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, West Midlands Combined Authority and West Yorkshire Combined Authority/Leeds City Region.

"We have given very detailed feedback to the Department for Education (DfE), and they were pleased with our input and impressed with what we did," says unionlearn Projects Officer Matt Pointon, who has been supporting union involvement in three of the five pilots.

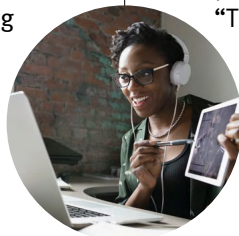
## OECD salutes unionlearn success

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recognises the effectiveness of union learning in its new report, *Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work*.

The report recognises how unions and employers can work together in "shaping education and training to make them more relevant to the current needs of the labour market" in an era when the digital revolution, globalisation and demographic changes are transforming the world of work.

"Unionlearn ... assists its members in the delivery

of learning opportunities and the management of the Union Learning Fund," the report points out.



"This initiative has been particularly successful in recruiting low-skilled workers into training courses." Unionlearn

Director Kevin Rowan welcomed the OECD report for its recognition of the importance of collective bargaining to support workplace skills and learning and its acknowledgment of the important work unionlearn does to support workers.

"As unionlearn begins the 20th year of the Union Learning Fund, it's increasingly clear that trade unions, employers and government working together provides the best route to lifelong learning for working people," Kevin said.

## Literacy Works Week is on the way

Look out for news about support for reading, writing and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learning in the workplace during unionlearn's annual Literacy Works Week, which kicks off on Monday 4 February this year.

Whether you invite a local author to give a reading at your workplace, run a book-themed quiz to encourage reading for pleasure or hold a special meeting of your book group to mark the occasion, tweet about your activities using the hashtag #literacyworks.

You could encourage

colleagues to try TUC eNotes Write Now! to boost their writing skills and Read Now! to learn new reading techniques – or promote initial assessments in English with SkillCheck.

If you want to write a blog post about your favourite books of all time or another suitable theme, please get in touch with unionlearn Policy Officer Kirsi Kekki using the link below.

Click [here](#) to email Kirsi Kekki about reading, writing and ESOL in your workplace

## HELP US IMPROVE THE REP

We want to hear what you think of the *Learning Rep* to help us improve the magazine and fill it with more of what you find useful in promoting leaning at work.

So it would be brilliant if you could complete our short online survey, which we have designed to help shape the development of the magazine this year.

To thank you for your time, we will be giving £25 book tokens to four people who complete the survey, drawn at random from the names of everyone who takes part.

Click [here](#) to give us your views





# Innovate, educate, organise!

*Six unions have won backing from the Union Learning Fund to explore new approaches to workplace learning.*

**F**or the first time this year, the Union Learning Fund (ULF) is helping six unions develop innovative learning projects, in addition to the longer-term bids the fund is supporting.

“For many years, it has been difficult to encourage innovation because of the annual bidding process,” explains ULF Coordinator Julia Jones.

“However, we have really welcomed the three-year bidding cycle and funds for innovation, which have given the unions the opportunity to develop new areas of work. This is a really exciting time for everybody involved and we’re looking forward to seeing the results of these projects.”

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) project is called ‘Reducing the risk of firefighter fatalities and heat-related illness in the Fire Service and other sectors through learning’.

Recent research has shown how working in high temperatures increases the risk of heart

attack, while coroners’ reports into firefighter fatalities have called for greater awareness of the importance of remaining properly hydrated.

To help deliver a consistent approach across the country, the project will create a fully interactive digital e-learning tool, with infographics, animations and

videos underlining key points for learners as they work their way through the material.

Using research-led content developed by the University of Brighton, the training and learning package on rehydration will then be offered to firefighters using the FBU’s existing networks and to other workers in hot environments.



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The Prison Officers Association (POA) project, 'The apprenticeship network', aims to develop a multi-union apprenticeship hub on the Isle of Wight to educate the estimated 1,500 apprentices on the island about their rights at work and protect them from exploitation by unscrupulous employers.

The union chose the Isle of Wight as the pilot area because of the evidence of unimpressive completion rates – just 54 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds were gaining their intermediate apprenticeship qualifications in 2015.

The Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, supported by UCU, is running a project called 'Achieving safe and quality apprenticeships and training', which aims to develop new ways of engaging young people and supporting them on their learning journeys.

The project will work with employers, unions, training providers, apprentices and trainees to raise awareness of the dangers young people face at work: young apprentices aged 16 to 18 are 73 per cent more likely to be injured at work than their older colleagues.

As well as developing age-specific training materials and delivering training through trade union education units, the project will also develop a social media platform to support union reps, providers, employers and the apprentices and trainees themselves, as well as developing an interactive app.

Community's project, 'Developing self-employment opportunities for the disabled', is researching barriers faced by disabled people who go into self-employment.

Working in collaboration with the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE), the project will examine some of the key barriers to self-employment for disabled workers, including low pay, low skills, interaction with the benefits system, accessing start-up capital and training and career progression.

The aim of the research is to identify the key barriers disabled workers face in

***"Recent research has shown how working in high temperatures increases the risk of heart attack, while coroners' reports into firefighter fatalities have called for greater awareness of the importance of remaining properly hydrated."***

self-employment in order to tackle them in the years ahead.

The College of Podiatry project, 'Workforce wellbeing and diversity', aims to provide union reps with training and support to foster their own resilience and also to help their co-workers better deal with the challenges of working in today's health sector.

The project in part addresses the increase in cases of workplace bullying in the health sector demonstrated by the results of the 2017 NHS Staff Survey, which revealed that 30 per cent of all NHS staff had suffered psychological stress due to bullying behaviours in the workplace.

In addition, it will enable the union to develop its own work tackling discrimination as part and parcel of the union's drive to improve its members' wellbeing at work.

Finally, the University and College Union has designed its 'Future of the profession' project to encourage greater continuous professional development (CPD) among its membership.

The project will target low-paid, casualised and fixed-term contract workers in further and higher education who have found it hard to access CPD through traditional routes and are unable to fund their own learning portfolios. **LR**



© Tom Werner/Getty Images

## **YOUNG WORKERS TEST TUC'S NEW CAREER COACHING APP**

The TUC is piloting a new career coach app for young people in work with financial support from the Union Learning Fund (ULF).

The aim of the app is to help young workers identify where they want to go next in their careers, plan how to get there and undertake any learning they need to reach their goal.

The TUC started developing the app in response to feedback from young workers themselves, according to TUC Senior Campaigner Clare Coatman.

"A lot of them said to us that if you're in employment and you want to do well and get ahead, there's no one to help you," says Clare.

Since there is more help than many young workers believe, the feedback indicated the support was not reaching its target audience. So it was to reach those young workers that the TUC began developing the new app.

"In everything we do, we're always really careful to use the language that resonates with this group and offer them something in a way that's easy to access, so everything we're doing is bite-size, it's available on the go and it's ready when they are," Clare says.

"It's still very much in its testing phase but we have 2,000 young workers signed up on an email list to help us during the pilot and beta versions for both Apple and Android users."

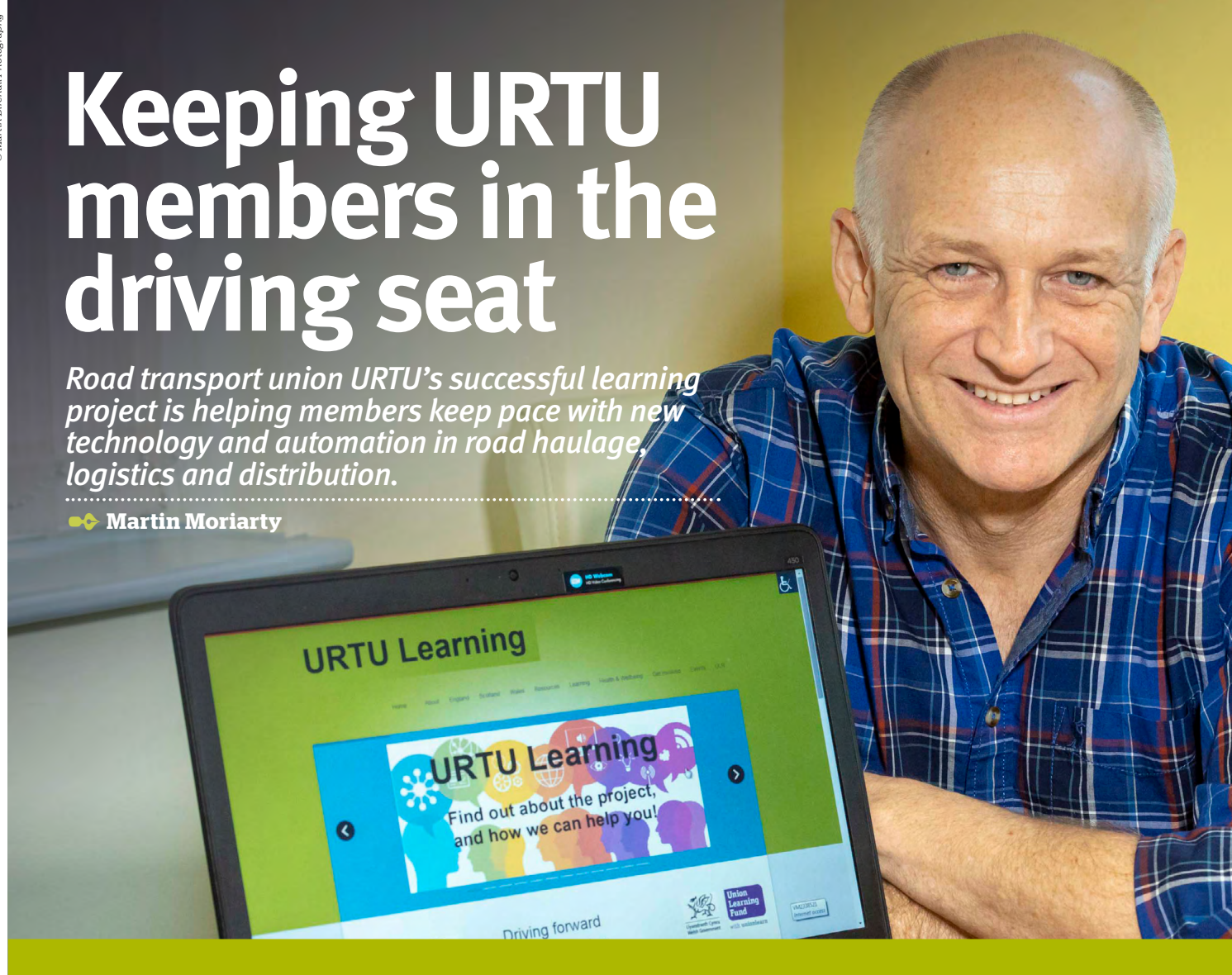
The pilot is scheduled to finish at the end of this financial year, when the evaluation will determine the next steps towards a full-scale rollout.



# Keeping URTU members in the driving seat

*Road transport union URTU's successful learning project is helping members keep pace with new technology and automation in road haulage, logistics and distribution.*

✦ Martin Moriarty



**N**ew technology is transforming the three key sectors organised by the United Road Transport Union (URTU), explains England and Wales Project Manager Jeff Latham, and the increasing use of automation is all set to bring further changes in the years ahead.

“HGV drivers, warehousing staff and fork lift truck drivers have seen massive changes creeping into those industries but traditionally they have never had the opportunity to engage with ICT so we are chipping away at the digital divide,” Jeff says.

“We want to make sure that the membership and all the staff in those workplaces are able to move with the changes, rather than be displaced or replaced by them.”

With the help of the union, learners new to IT can use the popular Learn My Way package to catch up on exploring the internet, using email and accessing online public services safely and securely. Once they have got to grips with the basics, they can then move on to advanced qualifications such as ECDL, CLAIT and ITQ, with signposting help from their ULR.

And in addition to offering English and maths assessments and free courses through

its network of ULRs, the URTU Learning Project also promotes Quick Reads, the annual set of short books aimed at emergent adult readers, and Reading Ahead, the challenge to read and review six books, magazines or poems.

The project also continues to set up book-swap schemes and bookshelf initiatives in workplaces, to create informal opportunities for learners to read more and more widely in a relaxed atmosphere, with none of the pressures of formal learning.

One of the most popular and effective options for members is the wide range of distance learning courses that is available through URTU's long-standing partnership with Leicester College.

These short eight to 12-week courses are available in paper-based and online versions, whichever best suits the individual learner.

“Many courses are vocationally based but they can be in an area where someone would like to develop rather than their current role,”

***“The URTU Learning Project also promotes Quick Reads, the annual set of short books aimed at emergent adult readers.”***





Jeff explains. "Where we have people who aspire to be team leaders, they can do an accredited Level 2 course that gives them a stepping stone to where they want to go."

And there are also options to help learners better deal with issues in their home lives, such as nutrition and health, mental health awareness, dementia care, understanding autism and end-of-life care.

In addition to its network of ULRs, the project also has a small team of project workers to support learning in the workplace. Judith Swift covers the north of England; Simon Walker looks after the Midlands and the south-east; while Agnieszka Zamonski covers the south-west and Wales.

Completing the team is project administrator Claire O'Brien, a fully trained ULR who also provides remote support for the members in Scotland from her base at URTU headquarters in Cheadle Hume, Cheshire.

To promote the opportunities available through the project, Jeff and his team have developed the dedicated website [urtuulr.com](http://urtuulr.com), which is maintained by Claire. Traffic levels to the site have continued to climb as it has evolved and improved in the five years since it was originally launched.

The site is designed to make it easy for members not only to find out about learning opportunities but also to sign up for any that interest them. "If somebody identifies something they want to enrol on, they just click a button and it takes them to the enrolment process with the provider," Jeff explains.

The project also circulates a monthly newsletter that updates members about project news and adult learning in general.

And the team also has the benefit of extensive regular coverage in the bi-monthly members' magazine, *Wheels*.

"They are very supportive," Jeff says. "At our monthly team meetings, we discuss possible articles for future editions because we know we can get them in," says Jeff. "It's a good resource to get our message out and the membership do like the coverage – we get a good response from putting pieces in there."

Like many other ULF project managers, Jeff is very much a product of trade union education himself – although in his case it wasn't as a member of URTU but as part of one of the predecessor unions to Unite.

After leaving school aged 16, he went straight into paid work and, following the engineering route, spent all of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s in manufacturing, becoming first a rep and then a senior rep himself.

"We were very lucky at the time with the culture we had in the workplace: our team of



*Dozens of workers at the XPO Logistics / Weetabix site in Burton Latimer, Northamptonshire, have completed apprenticeships with the support of URTU*

*"We were very lucky at the time with the culture we had in the workplace: our team of reps saw the value of education and learning and we were able to put through as many courses as we could with the union."*

reps saw the value of education and learning and we were able to put through as many courses as we could with the union," Jeff recalls.

When the US-based multinational owner closed that UK workplace, Jeff made the switch from attending courses to teaching them for a short time, before spending the next 10 years as a project worker for the North-West TUC. After spending his last two years with the TUC seconded to the URTU Learning Project, Jeff switched to working for the union six years ago.

"It's been interesting learning a new industry," he says. "Whatever sector you work in, the issues are the same – even though each sector will tell you they are unique, there are always the same issues: I don't see any difference whatsoever!"

Jeff credits his own experience of trade union education with his progress to managing the URTU project today. "After I left school the only opportunity for education was through the union – and unfortunately we still see that an awful lot now," Jeff says.

"But what became very obvious was that the only difference between the people who had ended up in manual labour because of the way the education system was and the people who could progress independently and take control of their own lives was this second opportunity of education through the union." **LR**





# Looking after migrant workers' mental health

*The ULR team at the Castleford Learning Centre is helping migrant workers deal with anxiety and depression and access vital services in the UK.*

**A**fter learning about the mental health issues facing asylum seekers and refugees at the Northern College Festival of Mental Wealth in 2017, ULR Coordinator Sean Dixon recognised migrant workers at the Argos Castleford Distribution Centre (DC) in Wakefield, West Yorkshire could be experiencing similar issues.

So ULRs James Pearson Rayner and Luksaz Slowinski (who look after health and wellbeing on the learning team) set up some focus group sessions in the learning centre last year where migrant workers could discuss the obstacles they faced.

"I have been on the receiving end of problems and I am happy to talk about my experiences and help other people with theirs," James says.

The team then shared the focus group findings with Talking Point, an organisation that has delivered mental health workshops on site in the past.

Talking Point then tailored a bespoke session for migrant workers to address some of the

issues that had been raised in the focus groups.

The session explored the importance of support networks when far from home; the language barriers at work and in accessing services; and guilt about the higher quality of life in the UK compared to what family members might still experience at home.

"There was one lad who had been off work with an injury but couldn't communicate with his doctor about a sick note and returning to work and it really played on his mind a lot – getting a sick note seems so normal to us but if you can't get the information you're trying to find out it's really stressful," Sean says.

The session showed the ULRs that they needed to raise the profile of the learning centre on site among migrant workers, Sean says.

"We found out that people wanted to discuss their issues and were glad that the centre was running things to help them talk about them. However, they didn't really know enough about the range of assistance through the learning centre so that's something we needed to tackle."

*"I am happy to talk about my experiences and help other people with theirs."*

As a result, the ULR team is translating its promotional posters into more languages to highlight the range of support available from ULRs and in the learning centre itself.

In addition, the ULRs are working with Justyna Orłowska from the systems department to set up regular informal drop-in sessions scheduled around the shift changeover for any workers to discuss mental health issues they might be experiencing.

"This shows real commitment from the ULR team and site management: having different offers in place in the learning centre but constantly looking to improve them is typical of the high standards they set for everything they do," says Usdaw Project Worker Martyn Warwick.



# Food factory ULR gets the taste for success

BFAWU learning rep Rachel Vine (pictured below) had no idea she would get so much out of promoting learning and supporting her co-workers before she took on the role at Pennine Foods in Sheffield, where she has worked for 19 years.

“What I enjoy is that you’re seeing things through from start to finish,” she says. “You start by going down on the shop floor to get your list of who wants to learn and then it finishes when they get a certificate and they’re really proud and you’ve seen them all the way through.”

Over the last year or so, Rachel has helped dozens of her co-workers access functional skills English classes on site, with two classes on Thursdays and another two on Fridays currently running to meet the demand.

Rachel has proved herself a match for every curveball thrown

*“Because we are a multicultural workforce, the functional skills English classes help them at work and in the community.”*

her way since becoming a ULR – she even stepped in to run one class herself last winter when severe weather prevented the tutor from reaching the factory.

Last summer, Rachel was named BFAWU’s ULR of the Year and was presented with her award by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn at the union’s annual conference in Southport last summer.

Supporting the kind of diverse workforce typical of many food factories, the English courses not only help the site to run more smoothly but also help the learners in their lives outside work.

“Because we are a multicultural workforce, the functional skills English classes help them at work and in the community,” Rachel says.

One of Rachel’s favourite success stories is that of Thirumeni Thambirasan, known universally as John Cena to his co-workers.

“He struggled with basic English in terms of talking, reading and writing and so he struggled to get on because his English skills were so low,” Rachel recalls.

“However, we organised an assessment through the college and got him enrolled on classes and now he’s in charge of his own chill unit at work.” **LR**



## NHS WORKER KEEPS WINNING THROUGH LEARNING

Northumbrian healthcare assistant (HCA) Sharon Proud has won the personal development award at her Trust’s annual Building a Caring Future Staff Awards.

As soon as she started her first healthcare job as a care assistant in a residential home, Sharon seized the opportunity to learn and completed the NVQ Level 2 and 3 in Health and Social Care.

And after moving on to Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust 14 years ago, Sharon achieved her Level 3 Diploma in Health and completed the Foundation degree in NHS Service Improvement – all while holding down a full-time job and raising two children with her husband.

Recognising that she needed to update her English and maths qualifications to progress to studying at Teesside University, Sharon enrolled on functional skills English and maths courses through Bridges to Learning, UNISON’s partnership with the Open University (OU) and the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA).

“My long term goal is to take the Assistant Practitioner course at Teesside University but if the Trust are not employing these, then I would like to do the nursing secondment at Northumbria University,” Sharon says. “At present there is no funding for this so I will continue with my job until one of my dream posts arises.”





# Helping apprentices get what they deserve

*South West TUC has come up with a quick and easy way for apprentices to check if their employers are paying them what they should with a new web-based tool.*

**S**outh West TUC launched its campaign to spread the word about apprentice rights at work with a successful event at City of Bristol College in December entitled ‘Great apprenticeships: trained well – treated right.’

“It’s unfair to put the burden on young apprentices to fight bad bosses when they’re just starting out and at the bottom rung of the organisation,” South West TUC Regional Secretary Nigel Costley told the launch.

“We want employers, colleges and training providers to take a more active part in protecting the apprentices they employ and teach. But we also want apprentices to know their rights from day one.”

At the heart of the campaign is a new web-based tool, the TUC Apprentice PayCheck Calculator, which helps apprentices find out what they should be getting paid from day one.

“It’s fantastic,” commented Dr Hilary

Drew, associate head of department for partnerships and lecturer in HR management at the University of the West of England (UWE), who has been conducting research into minimum wage non-compliance.

“The challenge, though, is getting it to the right audience. We did research in 2013 and 2015 and when we asked young workers how much they were paid, how many hours they worked, most of them didn’t know.”

Many employers do not even pay the minimum wage for apprentices, revealed Professor Felix Ritchie, Head of Research at UWE’s accounting, economics and finance department.

“There is a real problem with underpayment in apprentice pay,” he said. “Apprentices are more likely to be paid less than the minimum wage than other groups in the country, which is a concern because apprentice pay is already the lowest of the minimum wages.”

***“We want employers, colleges and training providers to take a more active part in protecting the apprentices they employ and teach.”***

The SWTUC is also training young trade unionists to advise apprentices on their pay rates and is working with training providers to make sure employers meet minimum pay levels.

The campaign already has the support of Bristol City cabinet member for skills Anna Keen.

“Apprenticeships allow you to earn money, they give you a different route through to higher education and they strengthen our workforce because we’re able to train people into

the job they're doing," she told the December event.

"By paying people correctly, it underlines how valuable people are who do those jobs and strengthens our workforce by having good-quality jobs that people are paid for."

Lee Probert, the then head of City of Bristol College, agreed. "Apprentices make up a significant part of the workforce in Bristol so we should all get behind any campaign that promotes the value and power of apprenticeships as a route to securing high-level skills and properly reflects what they deserve in terms of their pay and conditions," he said.

## Liverpool Mayor signs Apprenticeship Charter

Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region Steve Rotherham has become the first mayor of a combined authority to sign the unionlearn



Apprenticeship Charter, which helps employers develop quality training programmes to meet the needs of their staff and their business.

The charter aims to ensure that apprentices:

- are paid a fair rate in a job with a productive purpose
- receive quality training and clear individual development
- have regular access to, and support from, trade unions
- are part of, and contribute to, a healthy and safe environment.

*"Signing the charter demonstrates this joint commitment, and builds on the work we are doing on skills in the city region."*

The charter also sets out how apprenticeships should be accessible to all, involve trade unions at every level and only be used to complement, not supplement, the workforce.

"As Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor, I am committed – with the TUC and unionlearn – to high quality apprenticeships across the city region," Steve said at the packed Supporting Learners event in Liverpool last November.

"Signing the charter demonstrates this joint commitment, and builds on the work we are doing on skills in the city region."

Unionlearn Director Kevin Rowan said that unionlearn was already working to encourage the six other mayors of combined authorities (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Sheffield, Tees Valley, West of England and West Midlands plus the London Mayor) to follow suit.

"We will be calling on all the Combined Authorities to emulate Liverpool City Region by signing up to the principles of our Apprenticeship Charter, especially quality and equality of access," Kevin said.

TUC Education Officer Tony Saunders, who signed the charter on behalf of the TUC at the event, was delighted that the Mayor was demonstrating his commitment to work with the TUC and unionlearn to support the development of the apprenticeship agenda.

"The devolution of the Adult Skills Budget creates many challenges and opportunities and it was reassuring to hear Steve's full support for union learning and TUC Education," Tony added. **LR**

## Taking action for equality

Unionlearn has published the third booklet in its series addressing equality issues in apprenticeships, *Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality*.

The 20-page colour booklet examines why union reps should negotiate for gender equality in

apprenticeship programmes.

It also offers practical advice on issues for women starting apprenticeships, including:

- improving women's participation in male-dominated industries
- addressing the quality and flexibility of apprenticeship programmes
- health and safety and pay.

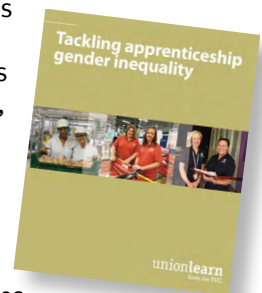
Research reveals that male apprentices in 2017 earned an average £7.25 per hour, while female apprentices earned £6.67 – the pay gap largely reflecting gender segregation in apprenticeships and the corresponding significant variations in wage levels.

Average weekly rates of basic pay for apprentices in the female-dominated programmes of hairdressing and childcare were £161 and £206 respectively in 2016, compared to £289 in engineering and £290 for electro-technical apprentices, both heavily male-dominated sectors.

In addition, there are 50 men for every one woman entering the construction industry on an apprenticeship and 25 male apprentices starting in engineering for every female apprentice.

The booklet breaks down what trade unions can do to combat gender inequality in the apprenticeships in their own workplaces, including how to make the case to employers reluctant to make changes.

The gender inequality booklet is the latest in a series supporting under-represented groups in apprenticeships, following publications on Black and minority ethnic apprentices and disabled apprentices.



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# Laying your cards on the laptop

*Unionlearn has developed an online version of the popular Value My Skills cards that help mid-life learners plan their next steps.*

**M**id-life and older workers can now take stock of the valuable skills they have already accrued and identify areas to develop through the new Value My Skills online tool, based on unionlearn's popular and effective Value My Skills cards.

The new tool has been developed through the Rainbow Years Project, the international consortium led by unionlearn and supported by funding from Erasmus+, the European Union (EU) programme for education, training, youth and sport.

"The new tool does everything the cards version does but it goes much deeper with the help of the interactive elements that allow users to, for example, flip a card so they can make notes about how it relates to them and their work and to pin a card, so they can return to it later," explains unionlearn National Projects Officer Jane Warwick.

"Another benefit of the online version is that users can set themselves an action plan which includes gentle reminders about action points after a week or a month or three months, and there is a support function called Anya, who pops up every so often to give you little hints and tips."

Developed by Saffron Interactive, the tool was unveiled for the first time at the November meeting of the project partners in London, which included representatives from Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Spain, as well as Learning & Work Institute (LWI), the University of Exeter and unionlearn from the UK.



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***"The new tool does everything the cards version does but it goes much deeper with the help of the interactive elements."***

"The new Value My Skills tool is exactly what we were looking for – easy to use, accessible, helpful and insightful – a really exciting addition to unionlearn's offer that, thanks to Erasmus+ support, can be shared and used all across Europe," commented Dr. Andrew Dean, senior impact and partnership development manager at The Marchmont Observatory, University of Exeter.

Each of the non-UK partners have since started the process of translating the tool into their

native languages.

The November meeting also included a visit to the Houses of Parliament, where the partners were able to talk about the new tool with Enfield Southgate MP Bambos Charalambous.

"Presenting our project to Bambos helped us to understand better the most interesting aspects for politicians and policy-makers and what things are better to stress during the dissemination process," commented Silvia Dusi, who works at the Interuniversity Research Centre on Public Services (CRISP) based at the University of Milan Bicocca.

The new tool will be formally launched later this year but is already available to use via the link below. [\*\*LR\*\*](#)

[\*\*Click here\*\*](#) to access the new Value My Skills online tool (registration required on TUC Education)

# Taking the online route to training

*With ULR Stage 1 and Stage 2 now available online, more and more ULRs are discovering the benefits of developing their skills at times that suit them.*

**U**NISON learning rep Jacquie Olpin is looking forward to putting into practice everything she's learning while working her way through the new ULR Stage 2 course online.

Jacquie completed her Stage 1 training on a five-day UNISON course back in 2010, when she first took on the ULR role at Mansfield District Council, where she works as a property surveyor.

But the problem with progressing to Stage 2 was finding the time. Her workload expanded enormously as austerity restricted public sector budgets. And with release time increasingly hard to come by, Jacquie prioritised supporting her members over developing herself.

That's why doing ULR 2 online made so much sense. "It's been great being able to dip in and out: the course is divided into individual modules and within each module there are a number of activities so, because it's broken down into those bite-sized pieces, it's very accessible," she says.

"I can do an activity if I can find some time on my lunch break and I can log on again in the evening while the tea is cooking or there's a lull in the TV so whether it's nine in the morning, lunchtime or 10 o'clock at night, it's just perfect to work in those small chunks."

As an experienced ULR, Jacquie is often familiar with many of the ideas that emerge from the course content or on the discussion forum but she is also coming across good ideas both from the course itself and from other ULRs who are also on the course.

"For example, I've just done a section on the importance of making sure learning providers have union values and that's something I've never really thought about in all these years – you make the assumption that a big provider like a college is going to be

*"I can do an activity if I can find some time on my lunch break and I can log on again in the evening while the tea is cooking."*

unionised, so that's something to check in the future," she says.

Something else that she's going to put into action as a result of the course is a pensions awareness session.

Now that she has two-thirds of the course under her belt, Jacquie would encourage any other ULR to do Stage 1 or Stage 2 online.

"There are so many positives: you're able to fit it around your day-to-day commitments, the course content is just what you would learn in a classroom, you can still interact with other ULRs online and with the tutor and you're able to re-read or screenshot anything you find useful – I'm thoroughly enjoying it!" she says. **LR**



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# Helping women get 'firefit'

FBU member Laura Wilton is helping women prepare for the physical demands of the fire service.

**N**ottinghamshire firefighter Laura Wilton (pictured far right) has used the knowledge and skills she gained on a Level 3 Personal Training apprenticeship through the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to help local women prepare for the strength and fitness demands of applying for a job in the fire service.

When Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) launched a 'Yes You Can' recruitment initiative in autumn 2017 that aimed to attract people who might not have thought of applying before, Laura approached her equality and diversity manager about doing something to engage more women.

As a result, she started a weekly 'firefit' session to help potential female applicants prepare for the physical aspect of the recruitment process.

Since the job-related tests (JRTs) include key components like a ladder lift, applicants could be tempted solely to concentrate on their upper body strength, particularly the ladder lift/shoulder press motion, Laura says – but for those who may never have done strength training before this would be a mistake.

"You do need upper body strength for the ladder lift but if you only train in one area of your body, you're likely to get injuries elsewhere, so what I did was develop a whole body strength and fitness programme to give the women the best chance at success when the JRTs came round," Laura says.

The two-hour weekly sessions were held at the Jawaid Khaliq Boxing Academy in St Ann's Nottingham, away from the fire station gym where participants wouldn't feel any possible pressure as though they were under the spotlight.

"It's so rewarding to see everyone's results improving and how excited they all were reaching their different goals – being able to witness that happening is the best feeling you can imagine," Laura says.

As a result of the recruitment process, a total of 10 of the regular 'firefit' participants were offered jobs as Wholetime firefighters, which meant that the majority of women who started as apprentice firefighters at NFRS last year had benefited from Laura's training.

Laura's contribution to building

*"It's so rewarding to see everyone's results improving and how excited they all were reaching their different goals – being able to witness that happening is the best feeling you can imagine."*

a more inclusive fire service was recognised last October at the NFRS annual awards and she has recently taken on another role supporting people, this time as the FBU's Region 6 Regional Education and Learning Organiser (RELO).

"Laura is one of the most inspirational women I have ever met and I know she will continue to learn new skills through the ULF and will become even more awesome than she currently is!" says FBU Region 6 Women's Rep Clare Hudson. **LR**