



LR

LEARNINGREP

unionlearn.org.uk | Summer 2015

Kenny Barron: growing through learning

- ▶ *Manchester learning project*
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unionlearn
with the TUC



LOOKING AHEAD ON LEARNING

WE HAVE JUST EMBARKED ON ROUND 16 of the Union Learning Fund, which has helped over 50 unions in more than 700 workplaces engage their members in learning and skills development that has transformed the lives of those individuals, changed the culture of their workplaces and delivered genuine benefits to the bottom line of the enterprises involved. I look forward to how our 30,000 union learning reps continue to innovate in the year ahead.

"I expect we will hear many inspiring accounts of the excellent work ULRs are developing with the support of the ULF at unionlearn's forthcoming annual conference."

make sure you do very soon as there is always more demand than we can accommodate.

With learning and skills high on the agenda of everyone working for a fairer economy and more key policy-makers and business leaders taking action to deliver more and better Apprenticeships, there are lots of positives to look forward to in the coming year. **LR**

Tom Wilson is Director of unionlearn

I expect we will hear many inspiring accounts of the excellent work ULRs are developing with the support of the ULF at unionlearn's forthcoming annual conference, which takes place this year on Monday 6 July. With the help of some interesting speakers and our always popular workshops, we will be focusing on skills development through individual and community learning, meeting the needs of a modern workforce, and the vital role of skills in a sustainable economic recovery. If you haven't signed up already,

NEWS + VIEWS

Digital project is up for top award



Unionlearn North West has been nominated for the best digital inclusion service award on the prestigious Digital Leaders 100 List in recognition of its work in setting up over 50 digital hubs in Liverpool to provide access to the internet and training for people to use it.

Hubs are located in voluntary organisations and trade union learning centres across the city.

As part of the city's Mi (More Independent) health project to promote independent living, unionlearn has trained over 300 Digital Champions in the hubs since autumn 2013, enabling 3,500 people to get online – many for the first time.

Unionlearn's expertise in engaging 'hard to reach' learners means the Digital Project has reached some of the most deprived communities in the city. Over two-thirds of beneficiaries so far are women, and one-third are from the Black and minority ethnic (BME) community. Most are not in paid work.

Retired vet Titus Fasawe is just one of the thousands to have benefited from unionlearn North West's

"Now I can do things like pay my utilities online and it's also allowed me to connect with friends and family from all over the world."

expertise and is now reconnecting with friends and family across the globe, thanks to his new-found cyberskills.

Originally from Nigeria, 78-year-old Titus accessed his IT training at Granby Toxteth Development Trust, near his home in Liverpool 8 – and his freshly acquired skills have opened up a whole new world for him.

"My son bought me a computer, but I didn't know how to use it," Titus says. "Now I can do things like pay my utilities online and it's also allowed me to connect with friends and family from all over the world."

Click here to vote for the Digital Leaders 100 awards

Unions sign up to technician charter

TSSA and Prospect have added their names to EngTechNow's charter pledging their commitment to helping technicians and apprentices to achieve professional status.

The signing took place at the launch of a report, *The Experience Gap: the unspoken skills gap*, highlighting how the UK's future economic growth will be at risk unless good practice for developing technician careers is not adopted more widely.

Unionlearn's contribution to the EngTechNow report emphasised the need to upskill the workforce. Employers must work in partnership with trade unions to ensure that technicians can access continuous professional development (CPD) and professional registration, unionlearn warned.

[Click here](#) to download the report

Skills funding vital for economic growth

Skills must be at the heart of a new plan to build a fairer and greener economy, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady told a major event hosted by City & Guilds in February.

Frances said that we would only tackle the British diseases of short-termism, low investment and poor productivity if workers and

their unions had a seat at the decision-making table.

"The TUC and unions want action across the board: we need to boost – not cut – investment in workforce skills, particularly at basic, intermediate and technical levels," she said.

Locked into learning

A Prison Officer at HMP Dartmoor is so delighted with the learning opportunities that helped him win promotion that he's now training to be a ULR.

Graham Ford serves at the Devon prison, and has been an avid supporter of the courses offered by the Prison Officers Association (POA) ever since the unionlearn-funded POA Learning Centre opened in 2010.

Graham has studied a host of courses from IT to language tasters in Spanish and German. He has made great use of the Tribal Education offer, studying for Level 2 qualifications in Mental Health Awareness, Safe Handling of Medicines and Team Leading Knowledge. Graham has also completed a Diploma in Outdoor & Physical Education Studies.

Thanks to his learning, Graham has been promoted to a supervisory role.

He's now training to be a ULR. "Becoming a ULR for POA Learning is my way of giving something back to the union learning movement

as well as supporting my colleagues along their learning path," he says

Mary's work lives on

Mary Alys, the late unionlearn Midlands manager, devoted her dying days to sharing her love of learning.

Mary finished her book *Calling Time on Women's Wasted Potential* two days before she passed away last year. The book was launched on World Book Day in March as part of TUC Midlands

Women at Work Week. The region is committed to helping promote it, using it as a resource on union equality and women's courses.

[Click here](#) to buy a copy of Mary's book

[Click here](#) to follow the *Calling Time* project on Twitter

ULR course launches online

A new online version of the union learning representative (ULR) course starts on Tuesday 26 May. The course lasts six weeks and will help newly elected ULRs get the training they need so that they can:

- understand the role of the ULR
- promote the value of training and learning to union members
- support members who want to broaden their skills
- arrange training and learning opportunities.

[Click here](#) to apply for the course

REPTECH

Dyslexie typeface

The typeface Dyslexie is a revolutionary font designed to simplify life for those with dyslexia (see below). It's free for home use but there is a charge for education or business use.

anchbull, the Headmistress. She was a gigantic ho al monster who frightened ls and teachers alike. The ce about her even at a di e up close you could almo liating from her as from a

Traditional fonts are designed solely from an aesthetic point of view, which means they often have characteristics that make characters difficult to recognise for people with dyslexia. The letters of a word are confused, turned around or jumbled up because they look too similar.

When reading a text in the Dyslexie font, people have much less trouble and fewer errors are made. Reading is faster, easier and more enjoyable because the font has a heavy baseline, alternating ascender and descender heights, larger than normal openings and a semi cursive slant, to ensure each character has a unique form.

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



POETRY PLEASES

The Reading Agency's 2015 Six Book Challenge was launched in dramatic style at De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester, with a mass public reading of the poem *Until You Try* by renowned performance poet Tony Walsh (also known as Longfella).

The poem concludes with the lines 'Try Passion, Try Living, Try Reading', and sums up the ethos of the Six Book Challenge, now in its eighth year of encouraging less confident or lapsed readers to pick any six reads of their choice – magazine, newspaper or online articles, song lyrics, poems or comics as well as books – and record their reading in a diary to receive a certificate.

The One Voice Leicester mass poetry reading was the brainchild of ULR Andrew Jennison, from DMU's post and portage department, who encouraged hundreds of staff to take up the Six Book Challenge over the years before recently stepping down as a UNISON learning rep.

His efforts have seen DMU named the top workplace in the UK for people taking up the Challenge, and in 2014 Andrew (below) was awarded a British Empire Medal for his commitment to transforming people's lives through reading. DMU already has 286 staff registered for the 2015 Six Book Challenge, with children and grandchildren of staff and members of the local community also taking part. **LR**



Isle of Wight festival



A learning festival organised by unionlearn, POA, Unite and Usdaw took place at four towns on the Isle of Wight during February.

The aim was to raise awareness of unions and give people a better understanding of what courses are available.

Union Support Officer Adrian Ryan worked closely with Dave Logan from POA Learning to organise the events, advertising across the island.

Dave Logan arranged for a wide group of community organisations to have stands at each event, including Isle of Wight College, the council adult education department, Isle of Wight Recovery College and many more.

Unite also had a stand to raise awareness of the union and to look at setting up a community branch on the island; while Usdaw ULRs arranged distribution of flyers at the front of supermarkets in each of the towns and talked to shoppers about the events.

Events were planned for half term and aimed at families with a wide range of art activities, allowing parents to talk to people on the stands while their children were having fun. A local dance club gave demonstrations.

"We chose the venues of

Freshwater and Ventnor as these are small communities that tend to get overlooked when any events take place. This also helped with raising the profile of the unions and also promoting courses that can be accessed through POA," says Adrian.

The local Equals group (pictured left), set up to promote and celebrate diversity on the Isle of Wight, attended each day, providing a range of food from different cultures, which proved very popular with the local community and stall holders.

"It was a great success, with over 400 people attending the events – a figure we thought would not be possible. The week went from strength to strength, with people asking when we would be back to do it again," says Adrian.

Get learning, get a badge

If you are helping employees who are thinking about studying for a Higher Education qualification but are not sure they can do it, The Open University (OU) could help with its range of Access modules and Badged Open Courses (BOCs) – most of them free!

An OU Access module (courses start in February and October) is the ideal way to prepare for OU study. In just 30 weeks and with personal one-to-one support from an OU Access tutor, learners will:



- build confidence and study skills
- try out the OU's style of learning
- get a taste of chosen subjects
- increase their chances of success in future study.

There are three different Access modules to choose from:

- Arts and languages (Y031)
- People, work and society (Y032)
- Science, technology and maths (Y033).

The cost of an Access module in England is £675 but learners can study for free if they meet OU eligibility criteria.

Designed to help learners build their confidence, the OU's new BOCs are free and can be accessed from the OU's OpenLearn website.

There is no tutor support but they will introduce a topic and, on completion, learners can download a digital badge that they can display on their social media banners or

download or print a free Statement of Participation. Courses are online and, with no start or end date, can be studied at any time. The OU

offers five BOCs:

- Taking your first steps into higher education
- Succeed with learning
- Succeed with maths – Part 1
- Succeed with maths – Part 2
- English: Skills for learning.

Click here to find out more

Rambling midwives



Workplace learning is up for discussion when midwife ULRs from Poole Maternity Hospital take a walk with the rambling group they have set up.

Their innovative approach to learning last year helped the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) ULRs and their Trust scoop Learning At Work Week's Best Event Award for Working in Partnership.

By delivering a range of water sports focusing on physical activity, team work and personal achievement, the union and the Trust demonstrated how working in partnership allowed them to help employees access learning that promoted their own health and well-being.

This year the ULRs have stayed on dry land to organise events. "We were admiring the beautiful Dorset coast and Poole midwife Heather Cook said she had walked a lot of the coastline and would like to do it again," says ULR Jill Ireland.

This was all fellow ULR Sara Fripp needed to start seeking out routes and resources in the local area.

Sara discovered a fairly moderate initial walk, set up an Eventbrite link and sent out emails to work colleagues along with a trail map.

"All employees, their friends, family and dogs

were invited. The online booking system worked well," says Jill.

"The feedback was very positive and there were suggestions regarding what days to schedule and a possible weekend walk every so often so that Monday to Friday staff could come along."

The walks are also an opportunity for the two ULRs who have organised them to chat about what workplace learning they offer and spark ideas off each other.

"Sometimes what starts off as a joke can turn into a really positive learning experience, which fulfils us in ways we could never have predicted," says Jill. "Our Midwives Rambling Group is one of those times."

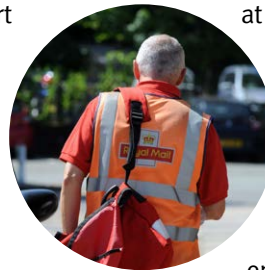
Click here to post details of your event on Eventbrite

Posties take the pedometer challenge

Postal workers in Exeter and Swindon have taken part in the British Heart Foundation's (BHF) Pedometer Challenge, set up to encourage people to become more active.

With research suggesting that walking 10,000 steps a day will significantly improve your health, workers at Royal Mail sites joined the challenge.

The Swindon team was organised by Sandra Absalom, the Lead ULR for the SW No.7 Branch, and in Devon ULR Darren Rowbotham recruited teams across Exeter.



"The average person walks between 3,000 and 4,000 steps per day, and 1,000 steps is the equivalent of around 10 minutes of brisk walking," says Darren. "So it was clear from the start that the postal staff were well above the average recommended target per day and the discussions among the staff were a great realisation of this."

Sandra adds: "When setting up the Pedometer Challenge, I never thought we would have had so many people getting involved. From the two sites we had 100 people taking part."

Click here to set-up your own Pedometer Challenge

Merseytravel goes for SBC gold

Liverpool public transport organisation Merseytravel is aiming to win gold for the number of employees it signs up for the 2015 Six Book Challenge.

At a special launch event at Merseytravel's Liverpool offices, workplace learning and ULRs announced they aimed to enrol more than 150 employees on the

Six Book Challenge. Merseytravel has been involved with the Six Book Challenge for seven years in partnership with UNISON and management.

In previous years, it has won both bronze and silver awards for enrolling 50-plus and 100-plus employees respectively on the Challenge.

Learning on the move

UNISON ULR coordinator Steve Lynch has a motto for his team at Manchester City Council: 'If you think it's impossible, it may not be!'

That's probably why learning has taken off at the authority and why innovation is the name of the game.

Just recently the team purchased a new pop-up classroom with all the equipment to go with it, which means it can take learning out to staff who would otherwise not be able to attend sessions.

"We can take the classroom wherever we need to get learning done," says Steve. "School catering staff, for instance, might have issues with childcare and other commitments and have to travel on public transport for up to three hours to get to a college after work – so we had the idea of taking a classroom to them."



The Manchester learning project is an example of how union-led initiatives can help deliver core learning and training plus lifelong learning. Steve has fostered a network of more than 60 ULRs and has 3,000 Digital Champions.

Steve's other motto for his team is, 'Don't wait for me!' "If they have

"We can take the classroom wherever we need to get learning done."

something they are planning, I tell them to go for it – and then tell me. I say, 'You organise it and if it can be done I will support you',' he says.

As a result, one of Steve's ULRs has gone ahead and just organised the authority's first Six Book Challenge for staff.

As well as running popular mental health awareness sessions and a yoga class as part of its health and well-being programme, Steve says the team is talking to senior managers about introducing British Sign Language training and language classes, particularly for customer service staff. **LR**

Write on time

URTU's ULF Learning Project has invited its members to put pen to paper and write a short story for an national competition.

"The competition will provide all those with a story to tell an opportunity to express their creativity. We all have a story in us, as the saying goes, and the project team will provide all the help people need to get their story down on paper," says Project Manager Jeff Latham.

"This links to National Storytelling Week and the Six Book Challenge to get our members, their families and friends engaged with English in different ways and support them to progress." **LR**

► [Click here](#) to find out more about National Storytelling Week

► [Click here](#) to find out more about the Six Book Challenge

RCM's LOUISE BRINGS NEW MIDWIVES INTO THE WORLD

Royal College of Midwives (RCM) learning rep Louise Garside has organised two successful study days for would-be midwives at the Calderdale Royal Hospital in Halifax.

Midwifery degree courses have never been so popular, partially through the success of TV programmes such as *One Born Every Minute* and *Call The Midwife*, so along with her Head of Midwifery, Louise arranged for speakers from the Trust, RCM and Huddersfield University to talk about becoming a midwife.

There was practical advice and information about applying for a degree course and the academic requirements and tips on how to get through the selection process.

Louise also organised 'hands-on' sessions on taking blood (via a very realistic dummy), hand washing techniques, urine analysis (actually apple juice!) and measuring blood pressure.

"We developed a packed programme for the study days to encompass as much as possible and I had great support from colleagues and RCM," says Louise, who was shortlisted for an RCM award for her work.

"Evaluations of the study days have been overwhelmingly positive. I have had to set dates for a further two study days as they are so popular."



Maths in May

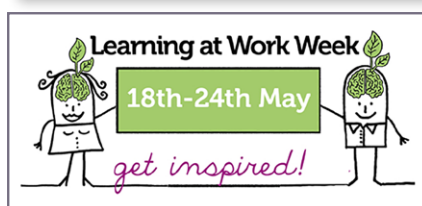
Why not use upcoming learning celebrations to help learners improve their numeracy skills?

The Festival of Learning takes place between May and June and Learning at Work Week runs from 18 to 24 May.

Numbers are everywhere in our lives, both at work and at home. Good numeracy skills and being confident with numbers are key to solving many everyday problems, whether you need to make sense of a payslip, read train or bus timetables, help children with homework or perform daily tasks at work.

Research from the government's 2011 Skills for Life survey revealed that the number of adults with poor numeracy skills has reached 17 million in England alone. With the right practice, effort and support, everyone in the UK can be more confident in handling numbers.

National Numeracy has generated a host of ideas to help you get started, from putting on numeracy clinics for your colleagues to charity cake sales. **LR**



- ▶ [Click here](#) to find out more about the Festival of Learning
- ▶ [Click here](#) to find out more about Learning at Work Week
- ▶ [Click here](#) to find out more about the National Numeracy information pack

Networking in Yorkshire

ULRs from across Yorkshire and Humberside enjoyed a successful unionlearn/ULF networking event at Rotherham United's home ground in February.

Interactive workshops included BBC Learning's Maths of the Day project, the National Numeracy Challenge, Niace: How to get active and involved in informal adult learning and the Employment and Skills Group: Looking at funding opportunities.

Sarah Champion MP spoke about the importance and value of ULRs in



Above, Sarah Champion MP, Tracy Karim (JT Development Solutions) and Mark Ball, Union Support Officer

the workplace and also presented the unionlearn Quality Award to JT Development Solutions for providing learning in ICT, retail, finance and logistics.

Free Citizen Maths webinar

A free webinar on the work of Citizen Maths takes place on Thursday 6 May.

Citizen Maths is an online course targeted at adults who have decided that they want to improve their grasp of mathematics at or around Level 2.

A first phase, comprising five to 10 hours of learning, ran last year. Unionlearn is now in the process of agreeing with the Citizen Maths team a closer involvement in Phase Two, including union involvement in the development of new content.

In the webinar, Seb Schmoller, Citizen Maths project director, will introduce the practical case for this kind of course, and the range of inspiration behind it.

- ▶ [Click here](#) for more about the webinar



WHAT ARE CITIZEN MATHS AND THE CHALLENGE ONLINE?

Citizen Maths and the Challenge Online are tools for ULRs and unions to use to engage learners with maths.

The Challenge Online is to help adults at all levels: a confidential, easy-to-use site to assess and improve everyday maths skills in bite-sized steps, while building confidence along the way. National Numeracy offers unions and/or learning centres unique web links to use with their own learners so they can anonymously monitor engagement and skill levels.

Citizen Maths is a free and open online course for adults and college students who understand the basics of numeracy, and now want to deepen their grasp of maths, for instance by working to achieve a Level 2 maths qualification, such as GCSE Grade C or above.

Unionlearn has discussed with both providers how they can better share data with unions so that follow-up work can be done and unions can report on the successful work they have done in engaging learners.

Some unions in the health sector are in discussions with National Numeracy on health-specific activities in the challenge.

- ▶ [Click here](#) for more about Citizen Maths
- ▶ [Click here](#) for more about Challenge Online

Wanted: more women engineers

Britain has the lowest percentage of women engineers in the EU, which is why Unite is launching a new drive to encourage more young women into science and engineering Apprenticeships.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Unite the union launched a new campaign in March to encourage more young women into science and engineering Apprenticeships.

“The massive number of employers involved in the Apprenticeships programme hides some important facts about the inequality of provision, particularly for young women, in accessing Apprenticeships,” Unite West Midlands Regional Secretary Gerard Coyne told The Voice of the Apprentice

event in Solihull, organised by unionlearn to mark National Apprenticeship Week.

“Just three per cent of apprentices in engineering are women and we don’t think it should be like that: we think there is a need to redress that imbalance by understanding some of the reasons why young women think it isn’t a career path for them,” he said.

Quoting from a newspaper report that day about Anna Shaw, the only female science apprentice at GlaxoSmithKline in Ulverston, Gerard pointed out how she had come across the training opportunity only by chance searching online. (It would have been a big loss if she hadn’t, since she won the 2014 Women into Science and Engineering (WISE)

“Just three per cent of apprentices in engineering are women and we don’t think it should be like that.”



Apprentice of the Year award, not least for her drive to encourage more young women to follow in her footsteps.)

Engineering was losing out on a huge pool of young talent because schools were continuing to encourage female pupils into segregated careers routes such as health and social care, Gerard said. Too many teachers and careers advisers still clung to out-dated stereotypes of engineering as a dirty, old-fashioned industry.

Unite member Meg Stanley, who is in the third year of her planning and control Higher Apprenticeship with Rolls-Royce, revealed that her



Participants in this year's Voice of the Apprentice event examined key questions in small and large groups (above) and summed up their ideas about how unions help them at work (top)

own school had tried to persuade her she was "too clever" to take the Apprenticeship route when she first talked about her post-A Level options.

"Going back to visit them since, they are very much encouraging students now into Apprenticeships, and I really hope that me being the benchmark for that has helped change their opinion of Apprenticeships in any industry," she said.

"I am very happy with the decision I made, and looking at where I am now compared with my friends that went to university, I am quite a lot ahead of

"Compared with my friends that went to university, I am quite far ahead of where I could have been had I made a different decision."

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In addition to on-the-job training from inside a world-class engineering company, Meg has been able to complete a management and leadership degree at Nottingham Trent University and a Level 5 NVQ in supply chain management as part of her programme.

Unite plays a key role at the company in making sure apprentices get the best deal in terms of pay and training. "They are a big part of why I have had such a high-quality Apprenticeship," she said.

The Unite campaign features a new booklet that the union first launched at The Voice of the Apprentice event and then later in London. *Thinking about an Apprenticeship?* features first-person testimony from several young women members of the union who are currently apprentices, plus information on how to open up science and engineering Apprenticeships to everyone.

The Voice of the Apprentice event itself was a practical, hands-on day involving 50-plus apprentices from a range of sectors and employers and from across the country. They got together to discuss the good, the bad and the ugly about their work, college and union experiences.

Working in small groups in the morning, they prioritised Apprenticeship policy and campaign issues and identified key problems and solutions to help guide forthcoming work both by unionlearn and by the National Society of Apprentices (which helped lead both morning sessions). In the afternoon, TUC National Organiser Carl Roper led a workshop on union organising. **LR**

[Click here](#) to download your copy of 'Thinking about an Apprenticeship? Women who work in Engineering and Science talk about their jobs'

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO WORK

Unionlearn's national and regional teams are working with Britain's unions up and down the country to improve the quality and quantity of Apprenticeships and Traineeships for young people, as demonstrated in the new report *Helping Young People into Work*.



Published to coincide with National Apprenticeships Week 2015, the report details how effective unionlearn and unions have been working together on the Apprenticeship agenda.

"This report showcases the vast range of great work unions are doing to support apprentices and young people in general. Unions are actively working with employers to raise the quality of Apprenticeships and doing their best to help young people into work," says unionlearn Director Tom Wilson.

Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects have performed particularly strongly on this issue: between them, the 34 projects funded in 2014/15 engaged with 115 employers on Apprenticeships, and exceeded their targets by recruiting 14,318 apprentices in the past two years.

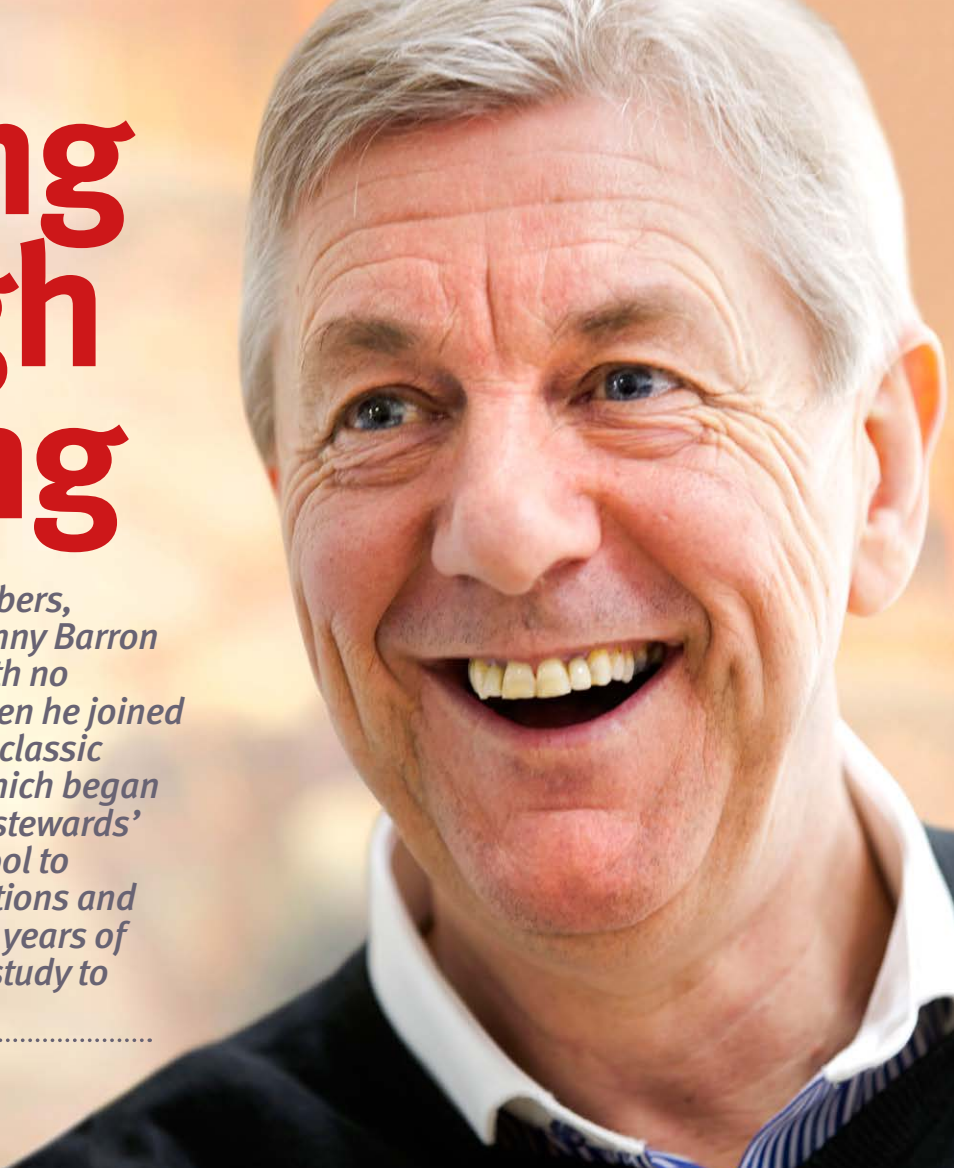
The report includes several case studies that highlight the positive impact unions have had on Apprenticeships across the private sector, including their work with household names such as Asda, EDF, and DHL, as well as in the public sector, with the NHS and many local authorities.

[Click here](#) to download 'Helping Young People into Work'

Growing through learning

Like thousands of Unite members, Head of Lifelong Learning Kenny Barron left school at the age of 15 with no qualifications. It was only when he joined the TGWU that he set off on a classic activist's learning journey, which began in the classroom of the shop stewards' movement, took in night school to gain his first formal qualifications and culminated in more than four years of juggling work and part-time study to complete his degree.

✶ Martin Moriarty



Kenny was 18 years old when he began work at the Bird's Eye factory in Great Yarmouth (the East Anglian town where he lives to this day), and quickly became part of the TGWU team, learning what it takes to be an effective union rep through a succession of stoppages, strikes, work-to-rules and even lock-ins over pay, conditions, grievances and disciplinaries.

"All my knowledge, all my understanding, all my beliefs came out of the shopfloor," he recalls from his desk in Unite's Holborn headquarters.

By the time he moved to the larger Lowestoft site when Bird's Eye closed Great Yarmouth in 1989, he had worked so effectively on behalf of his members that he was elected chief shop steward, sitting at the head of the 26-strong shop stewards' committee that looked after the interests of the frozen food plant's 1,300 workers.

He had a capacity to see the big picture, even then: as well as managing all the day-to-day and week-to-week conflicts that loom large in any shop steward's life, Kenny also successfully negotiated a ground-breaking deal on annualised hours that his national officer went

on to use as the basis for a model agreement on flexible working (not surprisingly, since it lifted some of its beneficiaries from just under £11,000 a year to close to £19,000).

It was Kenny's understanding of just how much time and effort it takes to be a really good workplace rep that drove his decision to become a trade union tutor for the TGWU in the late 1990s.

"I have always wanted to see good reps being able to do the job with the confidence that comes from education as well as experience," he says. "It's a difficult job that becomes even harder if you don't give people the tools to do it properly."

Keen to get his hands on all the tools he himself would need, he became an adult learner in his 30s, beginning with maths and English GCSEs at night school, followed by a business studies A Level and then a sociology degree at the University of East Anglia (UEA).

After spells in the TGWU head office working on the union's national Union Learning Fund (ULF) project and as an education officer and an industrial

"I have always wanted to see good reps being able to do the job with the confidence that comes from education as well as experience."





Bird's Eye's Lowestoft site, where Kenny became deputy chief shop steward in 1989

officer in the south-west, he returned to the headquarters of the now merged union as head of lifelong learning three years ago.

Kenny's brief covers learning in the workplace (much of it supported by the ULF) and learning through the pioneering Alternative Education Model that has helped hundreds of migrant workers gain knowledge, skills and qualifications.

It also takes in Learn With Unite, the union's online learning platform, where any Unite member can start improving a range of their skills within 48 hours of registration, from Entry Level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to ITQ Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Kenny, his lifelong learning team and Unite's network of union learning reps have made remarkable strides during his time at the helm. Between them, they have helped 40,000 people access learning through the union during the past 12 months and helped train 600 new ULRs and signed 67 learning agreements in the past two years.

The team enjoys the unstinting support of Unite's Director of Education Jim Mowatt (left), who believes lifelong learning is one of the most effective benefits that the union can offer its members, especially in this age of austerity.

"Education has the potential to change people's lives and it has exploded in our union since 2008: before then we were touching thousands of members every year; now we are reaching tens of thousands every year," he says. "Union learning has been a wonderful, enjoyable, enriching experience for our members and for us."

In the year ahead, with ULF support to Unite remaining at a high level, Kenny says that the top priority is to build the capacity of the union so that it can deliver an ever-improving service to its members, old and new.

"Everything we do fits in with our strategy for growth

because that is where it must be if we are going to be relevant to Unite and its members," he says.

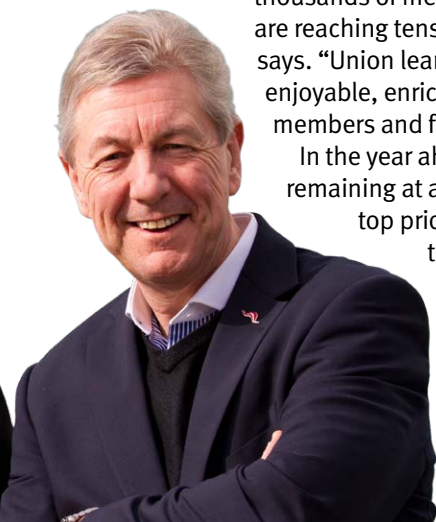
Sustainability will be vital, he stresses – which means recruiting more union learning reps and signing more learning agreements. "ULRs and learning agreements give you a solid basis for the future," he says. "That way you create support for learning from the inside, not from the outside – that is really big for us."

"Education has the potential to change people's lives and it has exploded in our union since 2008: before then we were touching thousands of members every year; now we are reaching tens of thousands every year."

By linking their work to Unite priorities such as the 100 per cent recruitment campaigns, back-to-work redundancy support and Unite's community objectives, Kenny and his team are moving lifelong learning ever closer towards the mainstream. "Everything is linked to the requirements of Unite and that's the way it should be," he says.

From his own standpoint, there is no one aspect of the work that he is proud of by itself: rather he is proud of his team and what it delivers, he's proud of Unite's ULRs and he's proud of everyone who has been able to get or keep a job because of learning through the union.

"There wouldn't be one thing that I am proud of because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," he says. "But what I can say is that I am proud of being head of lifelong learning at Unite: there are no negatives, it's a positive job that is all about helping members and potential members move on." **LR**



Print and paper join Trailblazer programme

By coordinating successful bids to overhaul Apprenticeship standards in paper and print, Unite has placed itself at the head of an industry-wide campaign to acquire the skills the sectors need in the years ahead.

◆ Martin Moriarty

Two new printing and paper Trailblazer consortia have won government backing that will enable employers and other stakeholders to work with Unite to design Apprenticeships that meet the skills needs of both sectors.

The announcement of the successful bids, both coordinated by Unite's Graphical, Paper, Media and IT (GPM&IT) sector, was part of a package of 26 new Trailblazers unveiled during this year's National Apprenticeship Week.

"While the programmes are employer-led, Unite was the only organisation that could have got all the big employers together in one room," explains Unite London and Eastern Regional Officer Louisa Bull, who drove both campaigns to win government backing with her South-East counterpart Tim Elliott.

What made it easier to persuade the major employers in both sectors to work together was that Unite had already hosted two high-level events in the UK and Europe to examine the jobs and skills needs of print and paper by 2020.

"What came out of those events was that we needed to bring back Apprenticeships both in printing and in paper," Louisa says.

But Unite knew that for the new Apprenticeships to deliver for the workers, their employers and the sectors themselves, quality would be key. To ensure the new standards translated into high-quality training with decent rates of pay, Unite persuaded all the employers who wanted to work on the Trailblazer campaign to sign



up to a set of principles covering collective bargaining, job security and apprentice rights.

In the print sector, there was also the issue of a lack of unity with the British Printing Industry Federation (BPIF), which originally chose to submit its own bid for Trailblazer funding separate from an earlier bid by the union-employer consortium last year.

But when the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) told the rival groups they would stand a better chance if they worked together, the union approached the BPIF about a new joint bid, which came together with the support of the federation's chief executive.

The now-united print consortium is chaired by Yorkshire-based printing firm Ryedale, a company with a high profile in the industry, and includes major players such as security printers De La Rue, news groups Trinity Mirror and

"Unite was the only organisation that could have got all the big employers together in one room."

the Guardian, and packaging companies Pulse Flexible and Multi Packaging Solutions. Unite itself is a supporter, alongside Proskills (the Sector Skills Council) and The Printing Charity (which is going to help apprentice members of Unite with education grants).

In the paper sector, the Trailblazer is led by ArjoWiggins, with more than 20 employers including De La Rue, Kimberley Clark and Smurfit Kappa, plus supporters in the form of Unite, the Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI) and Proskills. **LR**

Pick a card, any card...

The Value My Skills cards once again proved their versatility and effectiveness at a workshop on mid-life development at the unionlearn North West conference in February.



Mid-life development was high on the agenda at this year's unionlearn North West conference, where union learning reps discussed how unionlearn, unions, employers and providers could work together to deliver a skills rise across the region.

The Supporting Mid-life Development workshop was just one of several for the 70 participants, alongside others on Apprenticeships, maths, social media and online assessment and surveying tools.

The workshop introduced a range of new resources to help participants run one-to-one and group development sessions with people approaching mid to late working life, retirement/semi-retirement and even – following recent successes with apprentices – younger workers.

The key activity during the session was an opportunity to work with the Value My Skills cards that have already proved both popular and effective wherever they have been tried and tested.

UNISON learning rep Mandy McNally now plans to use the cards with a variety of colleagues at Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, where she is the workforce

planning support officer.

“I will use the cards to help and support others who may be facing redundancy to guide them with a career change, if that's what they are looking into,” Mandy says.

The cards definitely have the potential to reach beyond the target mid-life constituency, she believes. “I will also use them with apprentices to help them identify their own strengths and weaknesses when searching for employment,” she says.

Unite workplace rep Joan Isaacs, from the Workers' Educational Association North West Region, warns that people working with the cards can under-rate their own level of competency – not least because that was exactly what she did in the workshop.

“The card activity was a useful insight into how positive I am regarding other people's choices, and I always challenge people when they under-rate themselves about their level of competency,” she says.

“But when I was asked about my own competencies, I found that I also leaned towards the negative as well – so it was very insightful to compare how we do when we ask the questions compared to when we answer them.”

What emerged, as it usually

“I will use the cards to help and support others who may be facing redundancy.”

does, was how versatile the cards can be: not only can ULRs work with them one-on-one, in pairs and in groups, but they can also use them to achieve a variety of useful outcomes, from drilling down to identify key areas for development to pulling back to bigger picture issues such as confidence-building.

“I've seen the Value My Skills cards a few times now,” says Royal College of Midwives North of England Learning Organiser Peter Amphlett. “New ideas and new directions come up in the discussions every time.”

The workshop closed with a discussion on the importance of recognising and valuing experiential learning alongside – or instead of – qualifications: all the Supporting Mid-life resources, accessible through unionlearn's Climbing Frame, can help ULRs do this. **LR**

Click [here](#) to log in or register on the union learning Climbing Frame

Ged's legacy to learning and music

TUC Education has paid homage to one of its finest tutors, Ged Peck, who died in January from a blood illness, aged 67.

Ged was the TUC Course Coordinator in Hertfordshire for 10 years, and worked with Mushtaq Arain, the former Bedfordshire Course Coordinator at Central Bedfordshire College for many years, teaching the full TUC programme to more than 1,000 union reps every year.

When TUC Education Online launched in 2005, Ged became one of its most enthusiastic and dedicated advocates. He understood the medium instantly and gave union reps learning online the kind of support they need to make courses successful.

TUC Education considered him among the finest online tutors in the UK.

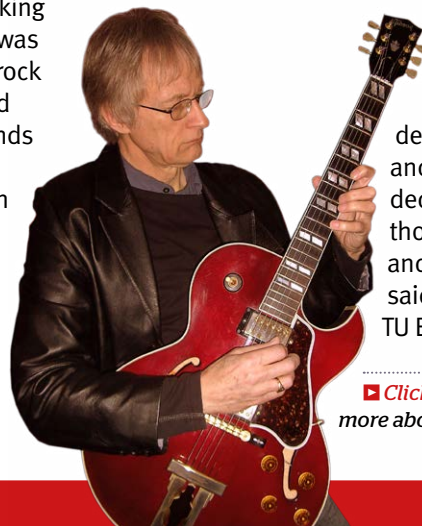
In a moving obituary in *Socialist Worker*, his friend Dave Holes wrote: "Accomplished Marxist and caring friend, with an encyclopaedic intelligence of working class history, Ged was also a formidable rock guitarist. He played with a range of bands through the 1960s and 70s and was in US singer Marsha Hunt's group at the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival.

"Once Ged was called by a member of Deep

Purple. Contemptuous of name-dropping, he refused to say who! He played delightfully complex jazz pieces seamlessly."

He leaves a partner, Lena Calvert, and two sons, Alex and Duncan.

"TUC Education will miss his huge contribution to our work over the years, his innovative and dedicated approach and his immense dedication. Our thoughts go to Lena and his two sons," said Liz Rees, Head of TU Education. **LR**



[Click here](#) to find out more about Ged's music

ULRs key to tackling disadvantage

Union learning helps those it's hardest to reach and that's proved in a new report from unionlearn.

Tackling Discrimination: the unionlearn effect in opening up learning and skills demonstrates how learning tackles complex issues of disadvantage in ways that no other organisation can do. For individuals, it transforms lives; for employers and government, it builds a sustainable economy and strong civic society, says the report.

The work of ULRs is crucial, argues report author Doug Gowan. "They are committed to breaking down barriers to learning and they have first-hand knowledge of the needs and problems of workplace learners. They have statutory backing and benefit from excellent preparatory and follow-on training through unionlearn face-to-face and online programmes," says the report.

"ULRs are well-trained through high-quality unionlearn programmes."

"Often they share learning disadvantages with learners, such as low initial qualifications, dyslexia and difficult working patterns. This means they are seen as 'one of us'. Often they lead by example by being the first to sign up to new programmes. ULRs are particularly effective in supporting disadvantaged and less confident adults in areas of learning such as English and maths, English

for speakers of other languages, digital inclusion and informal adult and community learning. They encourage, coach and support learners because they themselves have witnessed the great benefits of re-engaging

in learning. ULRs are well-trained through high-quality unionlearn programmes and continuing support."

[Click here](#) to download the report



Oh, Vienna

Colin Arthur, TUC course coordinator at Edinburgh College, along with TUC Regional Education Officer for Scotland Harry Cunningham delivered the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) course on project work for union reps in Vienna. Colin also helped with the accreditation process so that everyone produced sufficient evidence to allow them to gain a NOCN certificate.





PCS ULRs push better health

They've passed on learning opportunities in literacy, numeracy, IT and Spanish but now ULRs at HMRC in Washington are learning how to support their colleagues in all areas of well-being.

Lucy Lanaghan, pictured right, and colleague Gill Hindson, left, work for HMRC in the North East where as PCS ULRs they have been part of a drive to improve well-being through HMRC's involvement with the North East Better Health at Work Award.

The scheme has seen over 400 regional employers from every sector joining forces with the TUC to promote health and well-being in their workplaces. The duo are pictured at a flu awareness event that they helped to run.

Last year Lucy added to her skill set by taking the NCFE Level 1 Certificate in Well-being at Newcastle College and now helps colleagues with a range of health and well-being issues.

"I now have a better understanding of what people are going through when they ask for help, whether that's mental health issues or caring for someone with mental health or stress problems caused by work," she says.

Lucy, who has two children aged two and five, says the certificate's distance-learning format was ideal for her as she works long hours and was able to fit in her learning at home once her children were asleep.

Gill Hindson decided to take the certificate after talking to Lucy. She said that their team of five ULRs covering 2,500 employees had helped organise a spread of learning opportunities for colleagues, including IT and Spanish, and a greater knowledge of well-being was a further way to develop learning at the workplace.

"It's also important to be educated about yourself and well-being so we have moved into this avenue to support staff on site," she explained.

The certificate involves distance learning of a variety of modules, including alcohol awareness, mental health awareness, substance misuse, personal safety and stress awareness. New modules have been added on healthy eating, weight management and body image, dementia and diabetes awareness.

Since the introduction of the certificate, Northern TUC has been inundated with applications to participate in the learning programme. Now Sunderland College is to run the course after witnessing the success at Newcastle. **LR**

[Click here](#) to find out more about the North East Better Health At Work Award



Drivers go the distance with free courses

URTU has teamed up with Leicester College to offer a range of free Level 2 courses, many featuring well-being at the request of members.

The distance-learning courses include certificates in dementia care, mental health awareness, understanding working in mental health, nutrition and health, working with individuals with learning disabilities, the care and management of diabetes, and understanding end-of-life care.

"Our members have a lot of captive cab time as HGV drivers and are located over a wide geographical area on varied shift patterns, so this model is a really good one and has been well accepted," says Project Manager Jeff Latham. **LR**



PROMOTING WELL-BEING AT WORK IN DORSET

Dorset County Council joined forces with UNISON and unionlearn to host Well-being @ Work in January to raise awareness of health and well-being issues.

The Council's main committee room was full of stalls, and the local Rights of Way team was on hand to offer suggestions for healthy walks, while Volunteering Dorset promoted opportunities to help across the community. There was a chance to have a massage or a blood pressure test. UNISON promoted the Six Book Challenge with the county's library service, while unionlearn enrolled people on free Tribal Level 2 courses on subjects around health. Unionlearn also sponsored sessions on mindfulness, which were over-subscribed.

Everyone involved was really impressed with the turnout and keen to work together to make these events a regular occurrence.

"Dorset County Council, unionlearn and UNISON worked in great partnership and proved to Dorset county councillors, who supported and attended the event, that this sort of day should be a permanent fixture on the well-being calendar," says UNISON learning rep Roger Bell, who helped organise the event.



Helping NHS support staff move on

RCN ULR Maive Coley has been named a BME pioneer for her commitment to extending development opportunities to NHS support staff.

♦♦ Martin Moriarty

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) learning rep Maive Coley has been championing professional development for health support staff ever since she became a learning rep at Nottingham University Hospital NHS Trust five years ago.

But she does more than encourage her co-workers onto courses to improve their Functional Skills, vital though that is: she also sits on the Trust's learning and development board and takes part in the national Widening Participation initiative to extend more learning opportunities to support staff such as porters, cleaners and Health Care Assistants (HCAs).

For all these reasons, Maive was named one of 50 Black and Minority

Ethnic (BME) National Health Service (NHS) pioneers by the *Health Service Journal* at the end of last year. "It is very unusual to see Health Care Assistants working at a national committee level," the judges pointed out.

Maive herself was shocked to discover her name on the list. "I don't look at what I do as pioneering, but it's a really great honour," says the clinical support worker in Nottingham's neonatal intensive care unit.

"Being a BME worker can be very difficult even in this day and age when we have equality: it's very hard, very one-sided at times – but I don't let that bother me, I just soldier on!" she laughs.

The demand for learning is huge among the 14,500 workers at the

"It's the joy of inspiring people: I feel valued that people can come and ask me what they can do or if I can help because they don't know how to go about it."

Trust's three sites. "Numeracy is big at the moment and I am also doing a lot on literacy: the Six Book Challenge is very popular because people can read whatever they like and whatever they find educational for them and that can lead on to other things," she says.

Maive has also helped organise roadshows and trolley dashes to promote learning at the Trust and works closely with the library and learning and development teams.

The best thing about being a ULR for Maive is helping people. "It's the joy of inspiring people: I feel valued that people can come and ask me what they can do or if I can help because they don't know how to go about it," she says.

Like any good ULR, Maive is committed to developing herself as well as her co-workers, and earlier this year completed the NHS Leadership Academy's Mary Seacole programme, named after the 19th century Jamaican-born nurse who famously cared for the wounded during the Crimean War in the 1850s.

"It was difficult at first because I didn't get much support: people were wondering why an HCA wanted to do a leadership course," Maive recalls.

But she is already putting what she has learned through the programme into practice. "Now I know I can lead my team and make these little adjustments to the way we work – and that works wonders," she says.

There are still some managers who fret about taking suggestions from an HCA. "Some people are a bit resistant, they think their power is going to be taken away, but I don't let that bother me because I'm not that type of person: as long as my patients are safe and I deliver good care, I am happy when I go through the door at the end of the day." **LR**