

unionlearn
from the TUC



Union learning in facts and figures

Why what we're doing is working



90

of learners gained at
least one new skill

%

Does union learning work?

YES – and this booklet tells you why. It summarises some of union learning’s most important achievements for learners, their employers and the wider UK economy, thanks to the support of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) and unionlearn, the learning and skills arm of the TUC.

Over the past 20 years, the ULF has

- proved its effectiveness in helping learners improve their knowledge and skills in order to boost their job prospects
- engaged effectively with learners who have few or no prior qualifications
- supported young workers and existing staff complete a full range of apprenticeships
- helped many adult learners access higher level learning for the first time.

But union learning projects do not only help individual learners gain the vital skills they need for today’s employment market: they also help businesses improve their performance, enable unions to better represent their members and make a significant contribution to the UK economy as a whole.

This booklet celebrates the achievements of union learning and unionlearn. You can also use it as a helpful resource when negotiating with employers and making the case for maintaining support for union learning projects over the longer term.

The findings are all from independent evaluations and surveys of Union Learning Fund learners and their employers in recent years.

Helping reluctant learners progress at work

Union learning has a proven track record of successful engagement with workers with few or no qualifications.

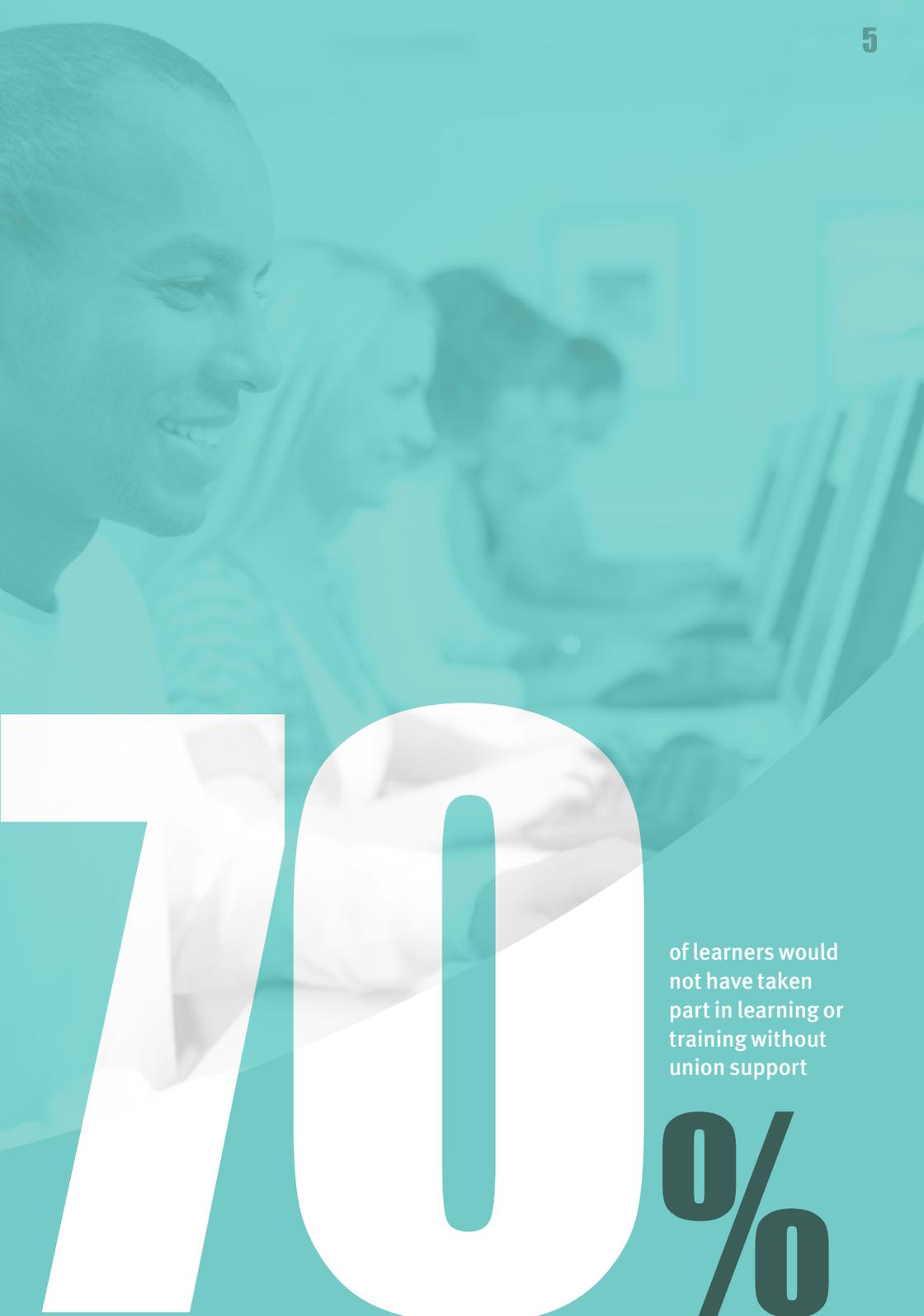
People with little or no exam success in the past are more likely to boost their qualification levels as a result of union learning.

- More than two-thirds (68 per cent) of learners with no previous qualification gained a qualification.
- Just under half (47 per cent) of those starting with Entry Level or Level 1 qualifications gained a qualification at a higher level.
- More than two-thirds (68 per cent) of employers say unions are particularly effective at inspiring reluctant learners to engage in training and development.

Trained union learning reps (ULRs) play a crucial role in successful learner engagement:

- 70 per cent of learners would not have taken part in learning or training without union support.
- 79 per cent of people with no qualifications would not have taken part in learning without the support of the union.

“I am extremely grateful for being given the opportunity to be involved in union learning. In mid-life, it is easy to turn your back on education, but the more knowledge you gain, the more your motivation grows.”



70

of learners would not have taken part in learning or training without union support

%

Gaining skills to improve job prospects

Union learning helps workers gain or improve the skills they need to progress in their career.

Thanks to union learning, nine out of ten learners (90 per cent) gained at least one new skill, almost three quarters (73 per cent) became more confident in their abilities and six out of ten (63 per cent) gained a new qualification.

37 per cent said they were able to do their job better as a result of union learning and 35 per cent were more confident in progressing their careers.

The more people learn, the more they want to learn and the impact on their employment and pay prospects is greatly boosted.

- 77 per cent said that taking part in ULF courses whetted their appetite for more learning and training.
- Compared to those who completed one episode of ULF learning or training, people undertaking at least seven episodes were four times more likely to:
 - » secure a new position with the same or a different employer
 - » gain a pay rise
 - » win promotion or take on greater responsibility.

“I was a domestic before I started learning. I am now an assistant practitioner with responsibility. I know for a fact without union learning I would not be where I am today.”

63

Six out of ten
gained a new
qualification

%

The business benefits of union learning

When companies work in partnership with their unions to promote workplace learning, they reap the rewards in terms of bottom-line business benefits.

Employers recognise the benefits of developing a workplace learning culture in partnership with their unions:

- Nearly half of employers (47 per cent) believe that their staff are more committed as a result of their engagement in union-led learning and training.
- 44 per cent say that the ULF leads to improved employment relationships in the organisation.
- In the latest employer survey, just under half (47 per cent) agreed or significantly agreed that learning activities wouldn't have taken place without external union funding – a large increase on the little over one quarter (28 per cent) who reported that union learning facilitated new training provision in the earlier employer survey.

Workplace learning helps businesses boost their performance:

- More than three in four (77 per cent) employers say that engagement in union learning has a positive effect in their workplaces.
- Around one-third (32 per cent in total) of employers report that organisational performance has either increased or significantly increased as a result of union learning initiatives.
- Just over three-quarters (77 per cent) of employers believe their organisation receives a return on their investment in union learning activity.
- Union learning boosts all-round employer investment in training: nearly one-third of employers (31 per cent) report that their expenditure on training and development has increased as a consequence of union learning – significantly higher than the 22 per cent reported in an earlier employer survey.



More than three in four employers say that engagement in union learning has a positive effect in their workplace

%

Reaping the benefits of union learning

Almost one in four (24 per cent) of learners were not union members when they embarked on a union-led learning course, but subsequently half of these non-members went on to join a union. Responses from all ULF learners showed that almost half (49 per cent) became more supportive of union policies in the workplace, 39 per cent became more active in the union, and 28 per cent went on to become union representatives.

“I left school at the age of 14 with no qualifications. I now have several Level 2 qualifications and look forward to taking part in a Level 3. I think learning should be a key part of all employer-employee relationships.”



50

Half of all
non-members
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union learning
subsequently
join a union

%

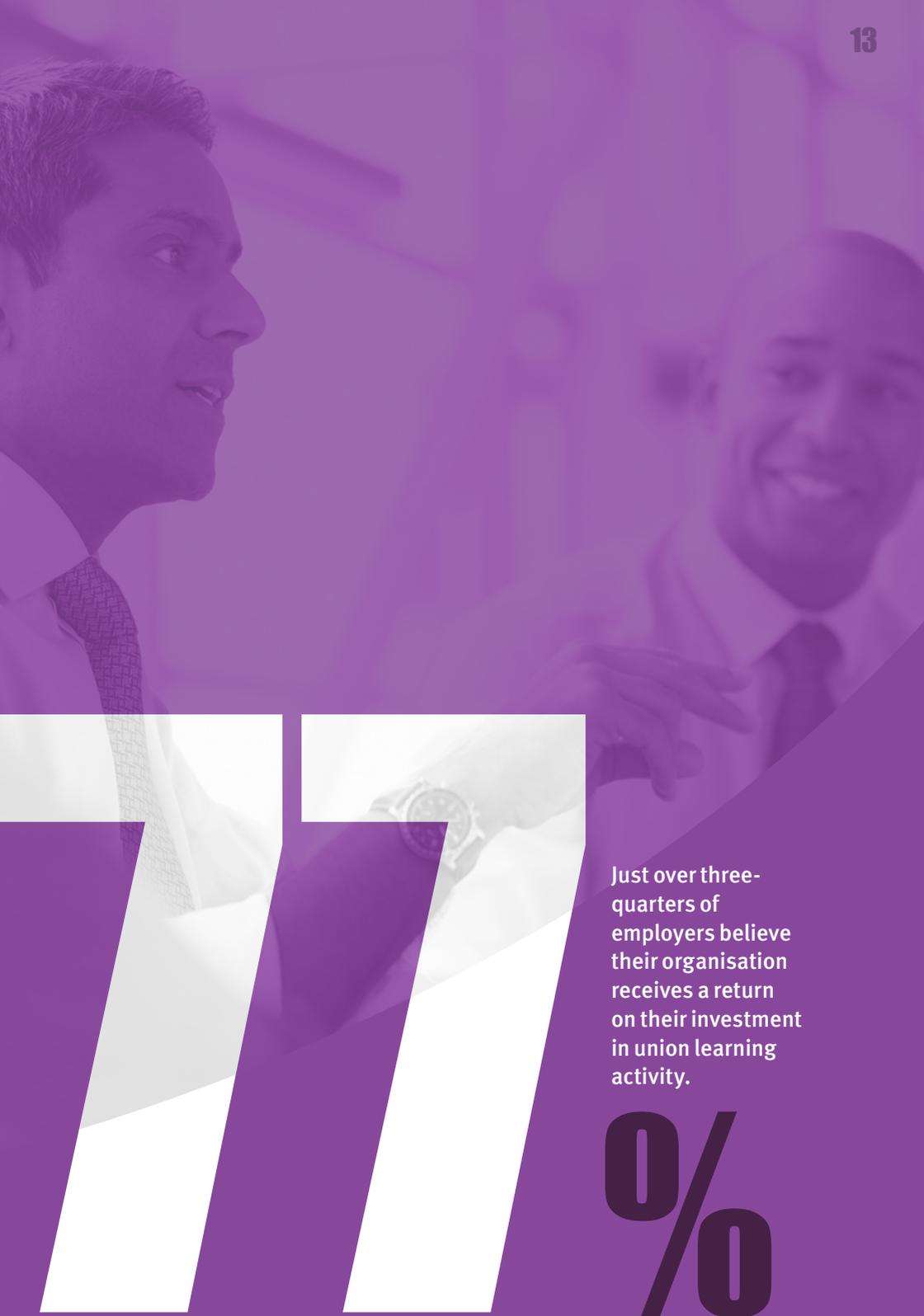
The economic impact of union learning

Not only has the delivery of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) become more cost effective, but union learning also achieves significant returns on investment for learners, employers and the Treasury.

Based on analysis of economic impact data tracking employment, wages and productivity trends:

- The overall impact of investment was £1,654m (ULF Round 17 2016–17) and £1,648m (for Round 18 2017–18).
- The total benefits to individuals are estimated to be £1,011m (Round 17) and £974m (Round 18).
- The net benefit to employers resulting from improved productivity of a more highly skilled workforce was £643m (Round 17) and £674m (Round 18).
- Every £1 invested in the Union Learning Fund in Round 18 generated a total economic return of £12.24: £7.24 to individuals and £5 to employers. This was higher than the total economic return produced for previous rounds: £10.95 (Round 17), and £9.15 (Round 15) and broadly in line with the return in Round 16 (£12.30).
- An analysis of tax receipts suggests that the fiscal return to the Exchequer of the Union Learning Fund is £3.40 for each £1 of public funding.

“Without the support and involvement of the union, I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to attend The Open University (OU), complete the course and gain the qualification I did. Attending OU has given me confidence to show I still have academic intelligence and you’re never too old to learn.”



Just over three-quarters of employers believe their organisation receives a return on their investment in union learning activity.

77%

Further information

The bulk of these statistics are derived from the latest evaluation of ULF Rounds 17 (2016-17) and 18 (2017-18) by the Marchmont Observatory at the University of Exeter, which examined the results from a survey of 2,459 union learners in 2018.

We have also included some relevant figures from the evaluation of Rounds 15 and 16 by the Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change (CERIC) at the University of Leeds, which included a survey of 385 employers as well as 2,550 learners.

The quotes are from learners who took part in the most recent survey on the benefits they have gained from union learning.

You can find the evaluation reports at:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/independent-evaluations-union-learning-fund-and-unionlearn

and the latest learner survey at:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/union-learning-fund-2018-learning-survey

This title may also be made available, on request, in accessible electronic formats or in Braille, audiotape and large print, at no extra cost.

Published by unionlearn

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April 2019
Design by Rumba
Printed by Newnorth