



LEARN

SUMMER 2020

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UNISON ULEARN MAGAZINE

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UNISON Learning and Organising Services

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MARCUS ROSE

Now more than ever, we all need the hope that we can find in learning and development.

Welcome

WHILE THE WHOLE OF the country has been dealing with the terrible impact of Covid-19, it has been so many of our members who have shouldered so much of the burden in the struggle to protect our workplaces and communities.

To keep going through lockdown and beyond, we all need our union and we all need hope – which is why the work of our union learning reps and learning project staff has become so important right now.

Learning something new, something perhaps you have been putting off because of the pressures of normal life, offers everyone that hope that we all need to put us in the best position to weather this storm.

That is why Learning and Organising Services has taken initiatives like



“Learning offers everyone that hope that we all need to put us in the best position to weather this storm”

our new partnership with the Staff Skills Academy to provide more online learning opportunities for members furloughed or working from home.

That is why our ULRs and project staff are helping learners move online, whether that's enrolling in a new distance learning course or joining an online book club.

And that is why we have produced this year's Ulearn, to celebrate all the different ways in which our learners and our learning reps make a difference, by showing how, with the right support, we can all change our lives – everyone's lives – for the better.

Chris Tansley, Chair of the Development and Organisation Committee of UNISON's National Executive Council *

Find out more



Keep in touch with all the latest developments at:
<https://learning.unison.org.uk>

To help everyone keep learning during lockdown, we've struck a new deal with the Staff Skills Academy that opens up a wide range of free, CPD-certified online courses.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Develop yourself online with the Skills Academy

HUNDREDS OF MEMBERS

have been quick to take advantage of the wealth of professional development opportunities available through UNISON's new partnership with the Staff Skills Academy.

The 550-plus free courses, all CPD-certified, are helping members improve their skills in a wide range of different ways, including classroom behaviour management, mental health awareness, leadership skills and health and safety.

To access the courses, simply email UNISON Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) to request access to the portfolio on

the dedicated platform built for UNISON by the Skills Academy.

LAOS was already in talks with the Skills Academy when the announcement of the UK lockdown swiftly intensified the need for online learning among staff working from home and furloughed from their jobs.

That's how what began as a tentative pilot, with the union initially buying 100 licences to test the water, has so quickly gathered momentum that the union has now bought 1,000 licences to help members continue learning online while classroom



"We've been able to make this situation hugely easier for them because with Skills Academy they can get most of their training in one place"

Stevie Milward, Learning and Workforce Development Officer

courses are not an option.

Already, members have taken more than 900 courses while another 500-plus are underway as well.

The offer has proved particularly popular with school staff, especially teaching assistants (TAs).

"People who love their jobs, love what they do and love working with children

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH OTHER REPS ONLINE

UNISON's Organising Space is coming into its own when it's hard to keep in touch with other activists face-to-face with so many people furloughed from their jobs or working from home, while people who are in work have to observe social distancing to stay safe.

The Organising Space features lots of ideas about the different ways of helping your learners and developing in your role and also includes some very topical resources shared by UNISON reps and organisers, including:

- * **Stress:** coping during crisis
- * **Health and safety:** principles of the coronavirus
- * **Self-isolation:** wellbeing pack
- * **Coronavirus:** your wellbeing.

There is also a dedicated discussion community for organising through learning, as well as a learning and development tile with resources to help you deliver activities.

🔗 Log on to the Organising Space (registration required):

<https://organisingspace.unison.org.uk/OS>

were all of a sudden sent home with nothing to do,” explains Learning and Workforce Development Officer Stevie Milward.

“We’ve been able to make this situation hugely easier for them because with Skills Academy they can get most of their training in one place. And as well as hopefully getting something useful out of this time, taking these CPD-certified courses means they’ll also have something when they return to work to show how they’ve been improving themselves.”

* To request a Staff Skills Academy account, please email learningandorganising@unison.co.uk, quoting ‘Skills Academy’ in the email subject line. *

DIGITAL TOOL HELPS LEARNERS IDENTIFY SKILLS

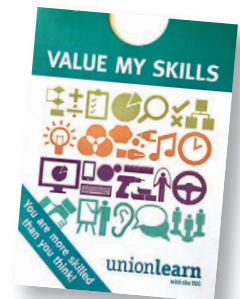
Union learning reps can help learners identify the transferable skills that will help them through lockdown and beyond using unionlearn’s new interactive online tool, Value My Skills.

You could use the online version of the popular Value My Skills cards by sharing your screen on a video call with a learner. Or you can use one of the original packs of cards by pointing your cameraphone at them during a video call.

To follow up, ULRs could then work through an activity from UNISON’s Moving On toolkit using the digital version that’s on our e-learning site.

🔗 Check out unionlearn’s Value My Skills online tool: <https://bit.ly/value-my-skills>

🔗 Access UNISON’s Moving On toolkit: <https://bit.ly/30Y7dWM>





We want to keep on learning

UNISON members are keen to develop themselves with the help of their union, according to the results of our record-breaking survey, *Skills for the Future*.

“What makes this research unique is the fact that this is the voice of the workers: staff have told us what they need”

Teresa Donegan, UNISON Head of Learning and Organising

THE RESULTS OF LAST

year's *Skills for the Future* survey of UNISON members proved once again just how committed they are to developing themselves in their personal and professional lives.

With a massive 38,000 members completing the survey online or through a paper version posted to home addresses and circulated at UNISON events, we beat our own record of 27,000 responses notched up during the 2011 *Skilled For Work* survey.

One of the largest comparable exercises in Europe, the survey paints a

detailed picture of members' skills and their aspirations and concerns. And the huge sample size means we can be confident that the results accurately reflect the wider UNISON membership.

The headline findings showed:

- * 79 per cent of respondents had taken part in some form of learning in the previous 12 months.
- * Of the remainder who hadn't, more than half thought on balance that learning would have been useful.
- * 86 per cent of learners are ready to learn new skills to stay ahead in the jobs market.

What is distinct about the data gathered from the survey is that it reflects the hopes and aspirations of workers in local government, the health service, education, energy, water, environment, community and transport organisations, says UNISON Head of Learning and Organising Teresa Donegan.

“We often hear what industries and employers want from the workforce,” Teresa said at the launch of the *Skills for the Future* report at UNISON Centre. “What makes this research unique is the fact that this is the voice of the workers: staff have told

us what they need – now it's up to the government and to employers to listen."

Hilary Stevens and Dr Andrew Dean from the University of Exeter's Marchmont Observatory analysed the results for Learning and Organising Services (LAOS).

"Those people who engage with the member learning offer really like it and that's a very positive thing to come out of the survey," Andrew pointed out.

However, they also identified widespread anxiety about job security across the public services:

* More than half of the respondents fear automation

is threatening their jobs while one-third worry they will be made redundant in the very near future.

* Workers in local government, utilities and further education (the sectors that have seen the worst cuts of the austerity era) are the most anxious about their futures.

The responses revealed significant differences from the results of the recent Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) *Workforce Of The Future* survey, which covered 10,000 workers across China, Germany, India, the UK and the USA. While 45 per cent of PWC respondents mostly felt excited or confident

about what the future of work holds for them, 57 per cent of UNISON respondents reported feeling worried.

Hilary and Andrew also found that significant numbers of UNISON members have skills that could be used much more effectively in their current roles: around one-third or more reported their literacy, numeracy, communications and organisational skills are under-utilised.

That indicates that many employers already have staff who could thrive if given greater responsibility and further opportunities to put their English, maths and communications skills to good use. *

HOW ORELEO BECAME A NUMERACY HERO

National Numeracy named our National Learning and Development Organiser Oreleo Du Cran as one of its Numeracy Day Heroes as part of the country's very first virtual festival of numbers in May.

In a video on the campaign website, Oreleo tells the story of how he eventually became a numbers person even though as a child he was told he would never be any good.

"As I've got older, I've realised how important it is for every individual to be confident with their maths," he says.

For Oreleo, the turning point was taking an Excel assessment as an adult and, in his own words, "failing gloriously."

But what made the difference was the tutor putting her arm round him and asking if he passed his driving test first time (it had, in fact, taken him several goes).

"I knew what she was asking me, and that's when I had the lightbulb moment," he recalls. "I went, 'Why wouldn't I come back and try again?'"

Which he did – and he passed. "That turned me the corner, it showed me I could do it and I feel empowered," he says.

🔗 Watch Oreleo's video on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/gFq3G552UeY>
Read about his maths journey at: <https://bit.ly/3hNmT6d>





Getting on with IT

Housekeepers at Blackpool Victoria Hospital can now access their rotas, check their payslips and complete their appraisals online, thanks to a digital skills course delivered by UNISON learning rep Jane Eyre.

JANE EYRE, WHO IS THE lead UNISON learning rep at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, has helped housekeepers gain the digital skills they need to access their rotas and payslips online.

After getting a good return on a digital skill survey she circulated to the housekeepers, Jane consulted the matrons at Blackpool Victoria Hospital about when to run the digital skills course.

They suggested the best time to run the course would

be in the autumn, before the worst of the winter pressure. And they agreed to release participants early in the afternoon, which would be least disruptive.

Jane, who delivered the course herself, kicked off by showing the housekeepers how to use the Trust's email system on their phones and tablets – which involved some of them getting an email address from the Trust for the first time.

She followed that up with an introduction to the Electronic Staff Record (ESR) system,

“All the feedback was brilliant but there were two learners in particular who were so excited”

Jane Eyre, UNISON learning rep at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals

which enabled the learners to check their rotas, access their payslips or report a fault to the estates department using their phones or tablets.

Jane also showed the housekeepers how to complete their appraisals on their phones, now that the appraisal system at the Trust has moved online.

“All the feedback was brilliant but there were two learners in particular who were so excited that they could

TOP TIPS FOR DIGITAL LEARNING

UNISON learning rep Norman Hunter, who works for Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), helps a lot of learners who are new to improving their digital skills. These are his top five tips for ULRs supporting digital learners.

- ❶ Watch your language. The language of digital skills is confusing for many people and like any foreign language, we need to learn enough to get by but don't have to master it all on the first day.
- ❷ Play games to help learners master the mouse and keyboard. Spend time supporting people to master these skills by playing games so that learners can click, drag and input.
- ❸ Read the screen. Show learners that they will not get a reaction from the computer unless they input an action. If a message appears asking them to do something, they must do it before moving on. If they see a message that they are not expecting, e.g. as a result of an accidental right click, show them how to 'click off' to make it disappear.
- ❹ Maximise the window. Whatever application or window you are working in, have it at full size. Get learners to start doing this from an early stage (you might have to show them a few times).
- ❺ Don't confuse learners by trying to impress them. If something doesn't work, press F5 (refresh) – but don't even tell the learner at this stage what you are doing. If it still doesn't work, press F5 one more time. If it doesn't work after two attempts, leave it and move on to a backup plan or website. If you try to fix the problem in front of a learner, you will lose them.

ONLINE GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE TECH

Neurodiverse learners can find a wide range of tools and technology to make work more accessible in the new online Inclusive Technology Guide, jointly produced by UNISON and the disabled-led social enterprise Diversity and Ability (DnA).

The reading tools include ColorVeil, the app that helps many people with dyslexia by placing a colour filter over their PC screen; F.lux, which adjusts your screen's brightness according to the time of day; and the text-to-speech programme Read&Write.

There are also tools to help writing, numeracy, administration, time management, presentations and mental health; and guides to getting the most out of the inbuilt accessibility features in Windows, Office 365, Mac OS, Android and Apple smartphones and tablets.

- 🔗 The web-based tool is available on the UNISON Learning website.

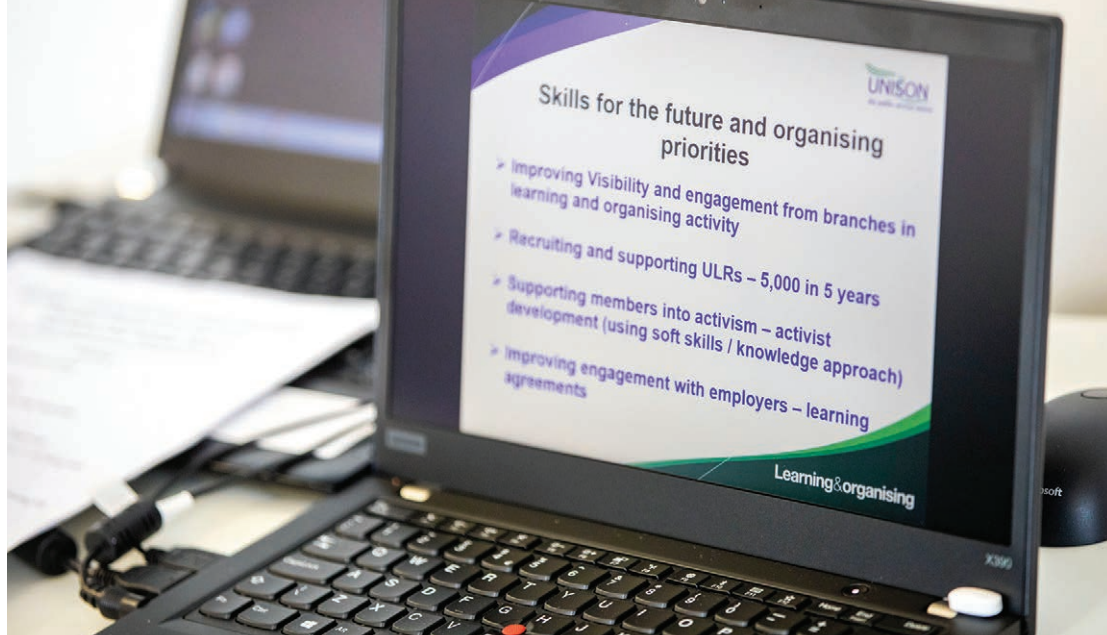
<https://learning.unison.org.uk/inclusive-technology-guide/>

actually get their emails on their phones and look at their wage slips on their phones and understand how to do

their appraisals," Jane says.

"We came across a lot of problems but we resolved them and the housekeepers

were so excited when they could do something by themselves." ✨



The Learning at Work Week show goes on!

Although learning reps were forced to change their plans for this year's Learning at Work Week, a packed online programme in the East Midlands proved that members haven't lost their appetite for developing their skills.

MORE THAN 170

members in the East Midlands signed up for a wide range of online learning courses taking place during this year's Learning at Work Week (LaWW).

"We have seen a really positive response to us moving learning online that's left me feeling very proud of how much our union learning reps and our branches have done in previous years to embed learning," says Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gavin McCann.

When the regional team

was forced to cancel its regional and county learning programmes, it decided to test the water by taking some of those courses online to coincide with this year's online-only Learning at Work Week in May.

"We advertised it to UNISON learning reps and branch secretaries and they have then been promoting the courses themselves using their own contacts lists as well as Facebook and Twitter," Gavin explains.

"What's been exciting has been seeing branches that

haven't been involved from a learning angle before tweeting about the courses because they've been keen to share something positive, which has helped them as well," Gavin says.

The combined effort resulted in 170 applications for the various LaWW courses, which meant the team had to run them all twice to meet the demand and, in the case of the Makaton course, three times in all.

In addition to Excel, staying safe online and Makaton – all courses that had proved popular in the original classroom-based programmes – five more courses were advertised during LaWW, including project management, website design, buying and selling online, mental health awareness (with The

HOW MANY CAKES MAKE FIVE?

Baking has proved popular for many people across the country who have more time on their hands than usual while they are working from home or are furloughed.

And learning reps can help the new bakers in their circle practise their maths skills by adding a little numeracy challenge.

For example, you could invite members to bake something to bring to an online coffee morning but challenge them to keep the costs below a certain threshold.

A great source of recipes on a budget is the award-winning food writer Jack Monroe's website, where you can find a cherry and white chocolate bake that works out at 21 pence a slice; gluten-free berry and buckwheat pancakes for 33 pence each; and a vegan tinned pear cake that works out at 36 pence a slice.

🔗 For more budget baking recipes, visit: <https://bit.ly/2OZG3tf>

There are more bite-sized budgeting activities in our *Making Every Penny Count* toolkit. You can download the PDF version from the Organising Space and you can invite learners to use the digital version on our e-learning site.

🔗 Visit the Organising Space (registration required):

<https://organisingspace.unison.org.uk/>

🔗 Work through the digital version of *Making Every Penny Count* at:

<https://e-learning.unison.org.uk/course/view.php?id=54>



“We have seen a really positive response to us moving learning online that’s left me feeling very proud”

Gavin McCann, Regional Learning and Development Organiser

Open University) and an Excel improvers course.

To help learners get to grips with video-conferencing software very few were familiar with before lockdown, the team has been sending the links to each course a week in advance, encouraging learners to familiarise themselves with the platform.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive – including one learner who took part on day one of LaWW and emailed Gavin on day two to say they wanted to become a UNISON learning rep.

“I’ve been going into the courses and the reactions have been great: what I love

has been seeing kids sitting down with their mums and dads so they too can learn about Excel while they’re off school,” Gavin says.

To build on the success of the online LaWW programme, Gavin and the team are now

developing a new online regional programme for the second half of 2020.

The plan is not only to move as many of the classroom courses online as possible but also to expand provision by incorporating some of the courses that have only appeared in the county programmes before.

“At a time when so many of our members are dealing with so many terrible things, this all comes back to the idea that education is hope,” he says.

“People want a positive way forward, something they can grab hold of that gives them a bit of hope in this time – and education is the best way of doing that.” ✨

English and maths courses laid on by UNISON are helping London ambulance workers progress at work.



Helping ambulance staff get on at work

LONDON AMBULANCE

Service (LAS) UNISON is organising English and maths courses to help members gain the up-to-date qualifications they need to progress at work.

The programme was so successful last year that the branch won an award from the provider that delivered the courses, the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL).

“It’s fantastic that our branch has been recognised for the work we’ve done to ensure staff can access the training they need to further their careers,” says LAS Branch Secretary Eddie Brand, who gave the courses the branch’s full support.



“It’s fantastic that our branch has been recognised for the work we’ve done to ensure staff can access the training they need to further their careers”

**Eddie Brand, Branch Secretary
London Ambulance Service**

LAS Branch is organising another English and maths programme later this year to help even more members gain the

functional skills qualifications they need to access the Paramedic Academy or apprenticeship pathways.

It was LAS Branch Education Officer Mark Belkin who put together last year’s courses, which ran in UNISON Centre once a week for 20 weeks over the summer.

“The vast range of staff who went on the course was amazing,” he says. “There were staff who were unable to find certificates for qualifications they had done long ago but also staff who wanted to gain the qualifications to better themselves.”

Each day featured two-and-a-half hours maths

in the morning and two-and-a-half hours English in the afternoon, with lunch provided in between. Learners could do either or both, depending on what they needed, and were able to take the exams whenever they were ready.

All 30 learners who took the Level 2 exams passed, thanks to the commitment of CONEL tutor Carol Ukwu, who gave some of her own time to support learners.

“Everyone passed who was on my course, which means we are all now in a position to move forward with our career within the service and start on either the Academy or the paramedic apprenticeship if and when they start up,” says West London-based Emergency Ambulance Crew (EAC) Lauren Inness.

“This is something that for me would have been unlikely to be achievable without the help of UNISON.”

LAS member Tonye Appolos, who took the course last year, has told Mark what a difference it had made to be able to brush up his skills with the help of UNISON. “You really do not know what you have given to staff who attended the course: we are all very grateful to be part of the very first one,” he said. ✨

SPEAKING UP AGAINST RACISM

Andrew Thompson gained the confidence to take on the role of Kirklees Branch Equality Officer after becoming active in the branch’s Black members self-organised group.

“One of the members of the group spoke to me about it seven or eight years ago and I thought, ‘I’ll go along as see what it’s about’,” he recalls. “They’re a good group of people that stand up for what they believe in.”

After taking part at branch level, Andrew has progressed to attending regional Black members’ training days in the past two years, learning about tabling motions at conferences and practising delivering speeches.

“I enjoyed that because I’m not a confident speaker and I hate getting up and talking in front of people,” he says.

He’s had lots of opportunities to practise his public speaking skills in recent years, visiting other branches in the area to drum up support when the refuse and recycling team he’s part of went on strike over bullying, workloads and racism.

He also gave a presentation on his experience at Stand Up To Racism’s Trade Union Conference in London last year.

Andrew gains a lot of satisfaction from his work as branch equality officer, he says.

“It was a bit daunting to start with and a bit of a learning curve but I’ve really enjoyed it and done a lot with it – although I’m still learning because there’s new stuff coming up all the time,” he says.

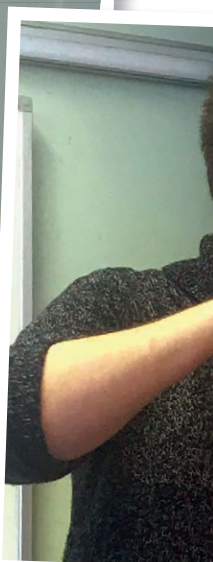
“I’m still learning because there’s new stuff coming up all the time”

Andrew Thompson, Kirklees Branch Equality Officer

Find out more

Get in touch with your regional learning and organising team to find out about self-organised group training in your area.





Getting to grips with Makaton

Funding from Learning and Organising Services has helped members in the South East start learning how to communicate using symbols, signs and speech in Makaton.

MEMBERS KEEN TO

start learning the symbols, signs and speech that make up Makaton can now enrol on video-conferencing courses in their region.

Dozens of members across the country had been planning to take part in classroom-based Makaton courses before Covid-19 made that impossible.

But one course that was able to go ahead as scheduled in the South East in February proved very popular with participants.

That day, 17 members learned more than 100 words in Makaton, thanks to tutor Jon Mack, who manages a centre that supports disabled children,

young people and adults.

“Jon was amazing: he delivered the course in such an engaging way,” says UNISON South East Team Support Worker Rosie Sammut, who took part alongside the members.

“His insight into the use of Makaton with the children in his home allowed learners to identify how they could use this skill within their own jobs and lives.”

The feedback from learners was very positive. “I was amazed at how much we learned in such a short period of time,” commented one participant.

East Midlands ran the first online course as part of its

“

“Jon was amazing, he delivered the course in such an engaging way”

Rosie Sammut,
South East Team Support Worker

virtual Learning at Work Week programme, where members were so keen that the course had to be run three times to accommodate demand.

South East was then set to follow suit, since the region already had a waiting list of interested members after its February course.

* Look out for news of online Makaton workshops on your regional UNISON Twitter and Facebook accounts or check on your regional website. *



TURNING THE SPOTLIGHT ON DISABILITY ISSUES

Birmingham UNISON members can take part in a wide variety of free learning opportunities every month, thanks to the varied programme put together by the branch's Union Learning Fund (ULF) Officer Donald McCombie.

In December, for example, more than three dozen members took part in a theatre workshop on disability, which blended short scenes examining the workplace barriers faced by disabled people with discussion of the issues by the participants.

Held in the theatre at Birmingham Library, the session was led by Hubbub Theatre Company, an integrated ensemble of learning disabled and non-disabled performers, and Face

Up Theatre, which specialises in running workshops to inspire social change.

"A creative, interactive piece of theatre was not something anybody in the room had experienced before, so that was different in a good way for people," says Donald, who organised the event in partnership with the branch's disabled members' self-organised group.

The next day, a dozen people attended a wellbeing workshop in the branch office, which included Tai Chi and mindfulness meditation delivered by branch member Mark Winter.

Later in the month, the branch marked International Human Rights Day when another dozen people attended a session on the Holocaust and its influence on post-war human rights campaigns, which was led by two branch members who had recently visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland on a trade union visit.

SCHOOL STAFF GAIN TRANS SUPPORT SKILLS

More than 30 members working in north-west schools expanded their knowledge and improved their skills supporting trans children at three workshops last year.

Delivered in the autumn half-term break by Mermaids, the charity that supports trans and non-binary children and young people, the half-day sessions helped school staff learn more about trans people's journeys and how to combat transphobic bullying.

Held in Carlisle, Liverpool and Manchester, the course included interactive elements and group activities as well as information and advice.

"This was a much-needed, really informative session, packed with sensible advice and guidance for use in schools," says Regional Learning and Development Organiser Lyndsey Marchant, who organised the workshops in response to direct requests from schools members in the region.

"It was a full and busy morning that went down really well with the members who attended: they thought it was brilliant, it got a really good reception," Lyndsey says.



Supporting care workers through the Covid-19 crisis

UNISON is helping residential care staff deal with the impact of coronavirus deaths at work through specialist support via video learning.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

workers affected by the Covid-19 death toll have been enrolling on a new video-conference course that is helping them deal with their feelings of loss and the grief of co-workers and residents' families.

"With all the news coverage of the difficulties residential care workers and their residents are facing, it's no secret that a lot of our members in the sector are suddenly facing multiple

deaths of people they have often been looking after for many years," explains Learning and Workforce Development Officer Stevie Milward.

"Because of the current restrictions in care homes, our members are sometimes the only people dealing with residents who are dying and then they are having to break the news to family members who have been unable to visit because of Covid-19 – and

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"It's no secret that a lot of our members in the sector are suddenly facing multiple deaths of people they have often been looking after for many years"

Stevie Milward, Learning and Workforce Development Officer

in some care homes, they have been facing all this over and over again."

To help workers deal with their own feelings

surrounding bereavement and support colleagues and families, Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) has developed a new partnership with national bereavement charity Cruse Bereavement Care to offer video-conference training.

Over the course of roughly two hours, a specialist tutor from Cruse helps learners:

- * examine the impact of grief and bereavement on workers and on families
- * take care of people (including themselves) experiencing loss
- * improve communication skills with bereaved people
- * understand the boundaries of their roles
- * gain awareness of sources of support and advice.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Rachel Harper, who manages a small care home group in Malvern, signed up so she could better support family, friends and staff around bereavement.

“The course was very useful for me in my work life, particularly about the models of grieving, and I have put together some training resources for my staff team and made an awareness board with links to the Cruse website,” Rachel says.

Carol, who works in adult mental health services, particularly enjoyed the space the tutor made for discussion from participants.

HELPING CARE STAFF WITH PTSD

UNISON Cymru Wales is working to support the mental health of social care and NHS workers during the Covid-19 crisis with a series of awareness-raising webinars, including one on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).


“Many care workers in the private or non-profit sectors don’t benefit from the same support and training other public service staff receive from their employers,” explains **UNISON Cymru Wales** Regional Education Organiser Gareth John.

“**UNISON** stepped into that void, providing training very quickly and to a wide network: we have been running courses for care workers on PTSD, trauma and bereavement workshops, stress, resilience and mindfulness, as well as Covid-19 e-learning.”

UNISON Cymru Wales has been able to provide the training thanks to the financial support of the **Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF)**.

Regional Secretary Tanya Palmer says Covid-19 has thrown a spotlight on the essential work thousands of care workers provide for very little pay in many cases.

To put Welsh care workers on a similar footing to their NHS co-workers and eradicate in-work poverty would require a new hourly minimum pay rate of £9.30, fair employment and training opportunities, Tanya says.

 You can watch the Understanding PTSD webinar online at: <https://bit.ly/3hFRzpO>

“I have already been able to incorporate what we learned into my working life and have used the beautiful Tonkin model that explains learning to live with loss,” she says. “I would recommend this course to all staff in the caring field.”

Now that the first batch of 10 courses has been completed, LAOS is now looking into the best and most cost-effective way to extend this support to more members affected by bereavement because of Covid-19. *

Healthcare assistant Helen Russell won an award for the way she tackled her Return to Learn course ... and picked it up at the start of the second year of her degree course.



MARCUS JAMIESON-POND

Winning with the WEA

AFTER TAKING THE

plunge to enrol on a Return to Learn course in 2018, UNISON learner Helen Russell has won the South West Outstanding Student award from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

Helen, who works as a healthcare assistant (HCA) at the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple, didn't even realise she had been nominated for an award. And she only discovered she'd won when one of her tutors emailed her in the autumn.

"It was a bit of a surprise to find out: I don't usually win anything so it was nice to be nominated and to win," she says.

Attending the celebration event to collect her award was inspirational, she says. "You get to hear about other people's stories and how doing a

"Maths wasn't my strong point but the more it was explained over the weekend, the easier it became"
Helen Russell, UNISON learner

course has helped them realise they could perhaps do more than they thought," she says.

But by the time the awards ceremony was held last November, Helen had already embarked on another stage in her learning journey. She had started the second year of a degree in health and social care at The Open University (OU).

Helen originally signed up for Return to Learn because she was interested in higher education but hadn't taken part in any studying for more than a decade.

"I was a bit nervous that my writing and my maths skills wouldn't be up to date, so when UNISON sent me an email flyer about Return to Learn, I thought I'll try this first and see how it goes," she says.

Kicking off with a maths weekend in February 2018 was a challenge. "It was scary at first, because maths wasn't my strong point. But the more it was explained over the weekend, the easier it became," Helen says.

Working her way through the course is what gave her the confidence to enrol on a degree with the OU. "Return to Learn helped me re-learn

how to write essays, taught me I quite like doing research and made me feel brave enough to attempt something at university level,” she says.

Learning alongside other UNISON members was a crucial part of what made the course a success. “Some of the people had strengths in one area that maybe you weren’t so good at and vice-versa so you could help others and they helped you – I think it was good like that,” she says.

The WEA said Helen was a great example of how Return to Learn can help people progress on their learning journeys.

“Helen is a fantastic role model for those looking to improve their career prospects: she has shown genuine heart and character by stepping into the world of learning, having not studied for a while,” the WEA commented.

“Her positive attitude and willingness to learn has not only helped inspire other students but also helped create a strong supportive environment, which has encouraged other students to progress.”

Helen has focused on mental health issues in the second year of her BA (Hons) degree in health and social care.

“Some of it has been quite a tough read but it’s been really interesting: it’s allowed you to learn more about how people are affected

KEEPING GOING WITH THE OU

Northern Ireland member Colette McComish is thriving on the health and social care course she is taking through The Open University (OU) with the help of UNISON.

In fact Colette is enjoying the course so much that she is now planning to progress to a degree course in the same subject.

After leaving school without any A Levels and going straight into work, Colette used to believe that she didn’t have what it took to tackle higher level learning.

But when she received an email from UNISON offering members a place on the fully-funded K101 Introduction to Health and Social Care, she decided to apply – and now she’s very glad she did.

While the course has been challenging, what’s made all the difference are the study skills tutorials and class tutorials with the course tutor made possible through UNISON funding.

“To say these classes have been invaluable would be an understatement: I can honestly say that without the support, encouragement and guidance of both the study skills tutor and course tutor, I most likely would have left the course,” Colette says.

Colette has now achieved good grades on her first three assignments and is planning to keep going once she completes the K101. “I hope to go further and complete a degree in health and social care, which is something I never would have dreamed was possible in the past,” she says.

“I am very grateful for the opportunity to do this course: not only has it given me a sense of achievement but it has also helped me in my current job role and has given me the confidence to pursue my career within the Trust. I believe for myself and others in my position this course undoubtedly provides the chance for people to help realise their potential and gain a third level qualification.”

Here to help



We may be able to help with the costs of studying at the OU. Find out more at: <https://bit.ly/3hlhe11>

by mental health issues and what their lives are like rather than seeing them from the outside – it lets you see the other side of the story, it’s really good,” she says. ✨

Inspired by the stories of working women from 100 years ago, Cambridge City & South Cambs Branch commissioned local artist Emma Smith to create an exhibition looking at all the issues around reproduction.



EMMA SMITH, W.A.W. REPRODUCTION, GUILDHALL CAMBRIDGE, 2020
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF IOAN DAVIES

Bringing new views of childbirth into the world

FIRST-PERSON STORIES

about pregnancy, childbirth and life with – and without – children formed the raw material of a ground-breaking exhibition by renowned Cambridge artist Emma Smith that was commissioned by Cambridge City & South Cambs Branch.

Held in the council chamber of The Guildhall in January and February this year, *Reproduction* was not a conventional exhibition.

Instead of the usual pictures on walls or sculpture on plinths, the artwork consisted of anonymous letters from Cambridge residents about the whole range of issues around not having children, trying for children, having children,

“**I came across *Maternity* as this really quite unique record of women’s histories and their experiences**”
Emma Smith, Cambridge artist

losing children and living with children – or not.

Each letter was contained in a folder and each folder housed in a box, tied with pink ribbon. The boxes were spaced around the desks in the Council Chamber where councillors would normally keep their papers during

meetings and visitors could sit on the councillors’ seats to read the contents of each one. Visitors could also listen to audio versions of the letters if they preferred.

The artwork was inspired by a book originally published more than 100 years ago – *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, a ground-breaking publication by the Women’s Co-operative Guild (WCG).

The book enabled working-class women of the era to speak about all the different ways that reproductive issues impacted on their lives, long before the NHS, free nursery places and maternity pay.

Early 20th century feminist author Virginia Woolf,

who attended the WCG Congress in 1913, read the letters in manuscript and encouraged WCG General Secretary Margaret Llewellyn Davies to publish them.

“Maternity is an extraordinary record of women’s histories, as it documents typically unheard voices and in the first person,” says Emma.

“Reading the book, I realised that, while circumstances had changed, many of the topics addressed were still pertinent today.

“I wanted to create a new collection of letters to see what had changed and what hadn’t in this time frame and to raise awareness to the topics that still need addressing in 2020.”

The branch was able to commission the W.A.W. (Women+ at Work) project after securing a public art grant from Cambridge City Council in 2018, around the 100th anniversary celebrations of some women gaining the vote.

Once Emma had hit upon the idea of a project inspired by the WCG collection, the branch issued a callout for contributions from people who felt they had a story to tell.

Emma also worked with community groups and centres across Cambridge to make callouts and collect stories.

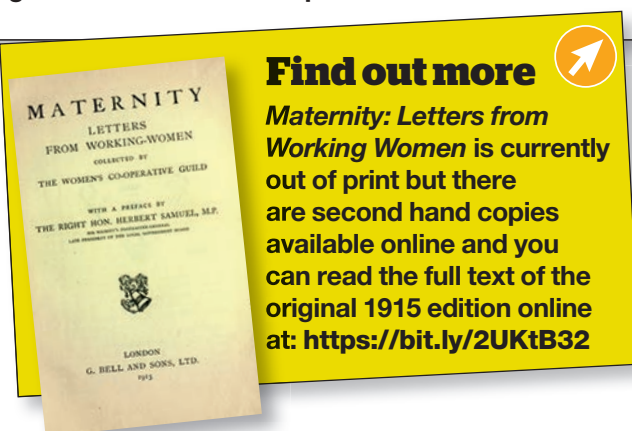
Unlike the 1915

WHAT WAS THE WCG?

Originally launched in 1883, the Women’s Cooperative Guild gave generations of working-class women the confidence and skills to campaign to improve their lives.

They ran campaigns on a huge range of issues rooted in the day-to-day experience of working women, including employment rights, equal pay, health, housing policy, divorce, abortion and birth control.

By the 1930s, the WCG had 72,000 members in 1,500 branches across the country. The organisation was wound up in 2016.



publication, this collection welcomed stories from people of any gender identity and also recognised both paid and unpaid labour.

“We broadened it out to anyone involved in reproduction because the form of the family has changed over the past 100 years,” says Cambridge City & South Cambs Branch Secretary Liz Brennan.

“There was a whole range of people represented in the exhibition, not just UNISON members, and although the letters were all anonymous,

with no identifying details, some people referenced where they work or you could identify the kind of work they do – there were a lot of stories about insecure work and short term contracts.”

Liz sat in on quite a few of the sessions when the exhibition was open and was delighted that visitors responded so positively.

“Lots of people said that it struck a chord with them – that they weren’t the only ones who had experienced the things they had experienced, so there was a sense of solidarity there.” ✨

UNISON's Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) project is delivering crucial online training in the social care sector so new entrants and returnees can look after some of the most vulnerable people during the coronavirus crisis.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Delivering the training that social care staff need

UNISON'S WALES UNION

Learning Fund (WULF) team is helping train new entrants, returnees and workers redeployed to the social care sector during the coronavirus crisis.

Working with a range of external providers and independent tutors, the team has developed an online learning package to give people the knowledge and skills they need to look after some of the most vulnerable people in the pandemic.

"The project is re-shaping its delivery to respond to the demands on the social care workforce through a combination of webinars and e-learning," explains WULF Project Manager Jenny Griffin.

The team has been able to build on the phenomenal success of the social care training programme it launched in January after a successful pilot in December.

"Up until the coronavirus crisis, those courses flew off the shelf: the demand went through the roof," says Jenny.

"Social Care Wales promoted our programme to social care providers. Many Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP) workers in local authorities contacted us. And some large private providers we've not reached before also booked on."

In total, more than 60 participants attended the seven courses that took

“

“Those courses flew off the shelf: the demand went through the roof”

Jenny Griffin,
UNISON WULF Project Manager

place before the team had to close the programme because of Covid-19. The sessions had helped them improve their knowledge and skills in some key areas, including report writing, secondary and vicarious trauma and working with compulsive hoarders.

But as soon the crisis took hold, the team set about re-engineering the project to help train the new entrants, returnees and workers redeployed to the sector.

North Wales Area Learning & Development Organiser Richard Speight has been able to bring his knowledge and skills as a digital learning specialist to help the project adapt to learning at home rather than traditional classroom learning.

Richard is a qualified digital literacy tutor with a long-term interest in digital technology – he ran an earlier WULF project called DigiSkills Cymru.

So he has been able to help the project's pool of independent tutors find their way round the new platforms and tailor their delivery to the online environment.

One of the tutors has developed a webinar series to offer new entrants, returnees and redeployed workers the equivalent of the first part of the mandatory training programme for social care staff.

And one of the providers has developed a brand new e-learning course about coronavirus, which covers everything from correct handwashing techniques to what the virus is and how it spreads and also includes specific information about how to keep staff, volunteers and residents

safe in social care settings.

"People have been very flexible and responsive and have worked really hard – both our existing partners

and the new people we're getting engaged with," Richard says. "There's a real collective effort going on, which is great to see." *

BOOSTING LEARNING AT THE CARE INSPECTORATE

More than 100 staff at Scotland's Care Inspectorate (CI) have boosted their skills through the learning programme organised by the Scottish Regulation of Care Branch – and more are set to benefit with a new learning agreement now in place.

While the learning agreement was signed off by the then Branch Secretary Clive Pegram and CI Chief Executive Peter McLeod in February, the branch had already been working in partnership with the employer to promote learning while negotiations took place.

"We devised a strategy which included developing courses that we knew our members had some interest in and making these courses available to the whole workforce, not only UNISON members," explains Branch Education Officer Howard Armstrong.

UNISON's own Your Skills, Your Future course has been the foundation of the programme, proving particularly popular with administrators at the CI who have had very few development opportunities in the past.

In addition, the branch's one-day assertiveness skills courses has also attracted a lot of participants.

With his contacts at The Open University (OU), Regional Learning and Development Organiser Kevin Duguid has also been able to broaden the programme by inviting the OU to one of the quarterly meetings with the learning and development team to talk about what they could offer.

"We are looking forward to developing learning with the OU, particularly as it can also support lower-paid employees who may be able to move to some training that might help their career development," Howard says.

Best-selling local authors Louise Jensen and Darren O'Sullivan helped members in Northamptonshire sharpen their writing skills at a half-day workshop in January.

Learning from the very best



TEN MEMBERS IN

Northamptonshire developed their creative writing skills on a half-day workshop led by local authors Louise Jensen and Darren O'Sullivan in January.

The workshop was organised by UNISON learning rep Janice Parker. As someone who writes poetry herself, Janice felt sure other members would be interested in honing their skills with the help of successful writers. And she was right.

Louise has sold more than 1 million copies of her first five books, which have been translated into 25 languages, while Darren has written three number one best-sellers.

The event was part of the programme put together by UNISON Northants Learning, through which branches pool their resources to lay

“**It was really successful: there were lots of hands-on exercises and it was all very inspiring**”
Janice Parker, Learning rep

on a wider range of learning opportunities for members.

Janice originally approached Louise about leading the workshop last year. “I knew that Louise would more than likely jump at the chance because she’s very keen to promote anything to do with reading, writing and education,” Janice says.

“She had also worked with us before when we ran the Reading Ahead challenge two years ago by launching the event with us and by handing out the certificates at the end.”

It was Louise who suggested bringing Darren on board as well, as she had worked with him at other events and knew he would have a lot to offer the workshop.

While UNISON Northants Learning paid Louise for her time, a Kickstart grant from LAOS covered the costs of hiring a room at the Corby Innovation Hub and providing tea, coffee and biscuits for participants.

The three-hour session covered a lot of ground in a relatively short space of time. “Louise and Darren covered everything from where to

TELLING OUR OWN STORIES

Ten members on Merseyside have had their stories, poems and life-writing published in a collection called *Reflections*, which gathers together work they did on a 12-week UNISON course with the Liverpool-based creative writing organisation Writing on the Wall (WoW).

Taken together, the pieces represent a rich variety of working class experience, looking at the impact of regeneration schemes of local communities, the long-term effects of the lack of parental love and the search for a biological father that ends with an unexpected discovery. There are painful contributions looking at stifling friendship and remembering a beloved father and there are comic entries like the one recalling the disastrous first day of a cycling trip.

“Reading these stories and hearing the strong voices of our members has been a privilege and has reminded me, once again, of the importance of sharing experiences of ordinary working people and what we can learn from each other,” writes North West Regional Secretary Kevan Nelson in the preface to the collection.

It was Regional Learning and Development Organiser Lyndsey Marchant who approached WoW about the possibility of organising a course when several members told her they would be interested.

“Working with WoW was a natural fit: it’s a well-known organisation in Liverpool that has the same values that UNISON does, promoting equality and promoting diversity,” Lyndsey says. “Working with them was a great opportunity to bring a vibrant and exciting course to our members.”

Everyone who took part was full of praise for the course, which was led by Jeff Young, Ginni Manning and Cheryl Martin.

“I can honestly say the pieces of writing our members created were phenomenal,” Lyndsey says. “At the launch of *Reflections*, the book that contains their work, I laughed and I cried – I was so moved by their stories and their talent.”



get your ideas from, how to develop our characters and how to keep motivated while writing your draft,” Janice explains. Louise also gave each participant a copy of her latest psychological thriller, *The Family*.

Everyone who took part got a lot out of the workshop. “It was really successful: there were lots of hands-on exercises and it was all very inspiring and Louise and Darren both said they really enjoyed leading it.” ✨

Find out more



You can read *Reflections* on a Kindle or using a Kindle app on your smartphone for just 99p. Go to: <https://amzn.to/33npq0W>



Bridges to Learning launches online hub

Members in the health, social care and education sectors across the North East are enrolling on a wide range of online opportunities with the help of the Bridges to Learning team.

BRIDGES TO LEARNING

has launched a new online learning hub to help learners continue developing their skills while social distancing requirements prevent the team from organising classroom teaching or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) seminars.

The new hub links learners with a wide range of learning opportunities from Bridges to Learning partners and enables the project to keep in touch with members about their experiences and their progress.

The hub features the

popular Learn My Way suite of IT courses; free accredited Level 2 courses with The Skills Network and Learning Curve; certificated CPD courses with the Staff Skills Academy; certificated online learning through Wranx; as well as courses from partner organisations the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and The Open University (OU).

It also includes details of brand new workshops the project is delivering via video-conferencing software, as well as online English and maths qualifications through Bridges to Learning's partnership

“We wanted to stay in touch with our learners through their learning journeys so that we could support them better and maintain their links with UNISON”

Anne Hansen,
Bridges to Learning Director

with Gateshead Council's learningSkills service.

“When the lockdown began, there was a lot of online learning available, which was great and we could see a lot of opportunities

for our members,” explains Bridges to Learning Director Anne Hansen.

“But we wanted to stay in touch with our learners through their learning journeys so that we could support them better and maintain their links with UNISON. So rather than simply send out emails with links to online providers, we decided to create the online learning hub.”

Anne and the team launched the new video-conferencing training sessions because they were the closest equivalent to the face-to-face training that has always proved popular with members.

“A lot of our learners have said over the years that they do like interaction with the tutor and the chance to have real-time discussions where they can learn from each other – for a lot of people that’s a better way to learn,” Anne says.

The first video-conference training sessions have focused on stress management, a particularly popular choice in the Covid-19 era.

“We’re keen to support members through the crisis, and whether they are extraordinarily busy in health and social care or whether they are working from home, they may well be in stressful situations in their jobs,” Anne says.

“So a short 90-minute stress management session, where they can talk to like-



“The feedback was really good: everyone who took part said they got a lot both from talking to each other and from the different techniques for managing stress”

John Wears, Project Organiser

minded people often going through the same situations, is going to be very helpful.”

Project Organiser John Wears delivered the pilot video session to the project team on obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and then co-hosted the first video workshop on stress management.

“Stress management was one of the most popular subjects requested by members, so I contacted Margaret Mordue, one of our colleagues at the WEA who delivers training on that topic, about adapting that for video-conferencing,” John explains.

The team offered IT support to everyone who needed help downloading and setting up the software on their devices. As co-host, John was then able to help learners overcome any technical issues during the first session

with minimum disruption to other participants.

The workshop helps people identify where they have been holding on to stress in their bodies and how to release it, using breathing and relaxation techniques and seated Tai Chi to quieten their minds and boost their energy levels.

“The feedback was really good: everyone who took part said they got a lot both from talking to each other and from the different techniques for managing stress,” John says.

“And one of the positives about virtual delivery is that we’re reaching people who probably wouldn’t come to a face-to-face classroom session – we had quite a wide geographical spread of members who enrolled from across the region, which is good.”

With the support of the WEA and other partners, the team is helping tutors adapt their materials and delivery for video-conferencing so that it can expand the offer in the coming period. And Gemma Smith, the Bridges to Learning project worker at Northumbria Healthcare Trust, has started talking to the education team there about working together to deliver meditation sessions to staff via video-conferencing.

“Help with health and wellbeing issues is what people have been asking for, so that’s what we will be concentrating on,” John says. ✨



Supporting learners who want to aim higher

When John Fletcher realised he'd rather study history than watch TV, he found out he could apply for a UNISON grant to help with the costs of his degree.

JOHN FLETCHER HAS

loved ancient history almost as long as he can remember. When he was growing up near Newport, South Wales, his grandfather would take him walking in the mountains, using the evidence of Iron Age hillforts and Roman occupation they encountered to bring the past to life.

Something similar happened on school trips to the nearby Caerleon Roman Legionary Fortress: John was fascinated to explore the base from which the Romans waged their campaign against a Welsh tribe that was refusing to bow the knee to the invaders.

So when he enrolled on a part-time degree with The Open University (OU), with the help of a UNISON educational grant, it wasn't difficult to work out what to study.

John opted for an open degree so he could pick and choose the history modules from different degree courses that looked the most interesting.

So far that's included the Classical world and Welsh history and – coming a bit closer to our era – early modern Europe. He has enrolled to start his final module on Roman and Greek myths in October.



“I've been fortunate with all my tutors: they've all given useful feedback”

John Fletcher, OU student

“I should have gone to university when I was younger when I had the chance but I preferred to go out and earn a wage and do all the things that a mis-spent youth entails,” he laughs.

“So now I've got a bit of wisdom, I thought I'm bored with a lot of things on television and I really am interested in history, so I said to myself, ‘Let's learn some things and see if I can actually get a degree.’”


SIX FREE COURSES TO HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR CAREER

As part of the Open University's Social Partnership Network, UNISON has helped develop the website PEARL (Part-Time Education for Adults Returning to Learn), which includes six free online courses to help you advance your career.

The courses are:

- * Planning a better future
- * Introducing practical healthcare
- * Supporting children's development
- * Caring for adults
- * Taking part in the voluntary sector
- * Starting your small business.

Each of the six free online courses will take about 15 hours to complete. Learners can collect online badges, which can be shared with employers and displayed on social media sites.

 To enrol on any of the courses, visit:

<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/forms/pearl-adultlearning>

Studying at the OU made sense to John, who has been working for British Gas for the past six years.

"By doing it this way, I didn't have to try to change my shifts or ask for a particular day off because I need to go to class," he says.

John says the OU's approach to studying is very much about helping learners reach the level they need to be working at.

"The OU paces it so that you're building up the skills you need," he says. "They're not expecting your first essay to be top marks and ticking all the right boxes: they give you an expected structure and a lot of advice about how to build an argument."

He's also learned by listening to his tutors. "I've been fortunate with all my tutors: they've all given useful feedback – you've just got to

be open-minded and listen to their advice," he says.


Having a UNISON grant towards his studies has been a massive help, he

says. "That £200 can be a godsend if you need to buy a laptop or a printer: I really appreciate what UNISON has done for me," John says. *

UNISON GRANTS AND BURSARIES

UNISON offers a range of financial support to members studying up to postgraduate level.

- * Open University grants are available to members undertaking 30 and 60-point OU courses up to and including undergraduate level at their own expense.
- * Learning grants can help members studying up to and including undergraduate level at their own expense on Trade Union and Labour Studies courses (where they have not received a bursary); non-vocational education up to and including undergraduate level; vocational education relevant to public service work up to and including undergraduate level.
- * Trade Union and Labour Movement or Women's Studies grants are designed to help members studying at certificate, diploma, bachelor or master's level.

 Find out more and download the relevant application forms: **<https://bit.ly/3jLZtjb>**

Raising awareness of menopause at work

UNISON is helping staff and managers at two key NHS organisations in Suffolk get to grips with menopause as a workplace issue.

UNISON HAS HELPED

deliver a menopause in the workplace learning programme to managers at staff at Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and West Suffolk CCG.

The union has also helped develop a new menopause handbook and menopause in the workplace policy for both CCGs.

Eastern Regional Organiser Cheryl Godber originally raised the issue at a regular partnership meeting in January 2019.

“At the time, they had no policy covering this issue to support female or transgender employees or raise awareness among male colleagues,” Cheryl explains. “We know women have been – and are – dismissed under sickness and capabilities procedures due to

misunderstandings around the menopause from managers.”

Both sides agreed to set up a project group that included UNISON, HR, the health and wellbeing team and the health and safety officer.

The group agreed a standalone policy on menopause in the workplace; developed a menopause handbook for all employees; and organised six lunch and learn sessions for a total of 70-plus staff over the summer.

After a review of the initiative in July, the group agreed the vital next step would be training managers on using the policy and the handbook in three sessions that Cheryl delivered with Director of Corporate Services and System Infrastructure Amanda Lyes.

“The goal was to get

“We know women have been - and are - dismissed under sickness and capabilities procedures due to misunderstandings around the menopause”

Cheryl Godber,
Eastern Regional Organiser

the managers to feel able to open up and discuss what they’ve experienced around the menopause with employees and it’s worked really well,” Cheryl says.

“They have told us it’s opened their eyes; it’s made them think about what they can do to enable women to stay in the workplace and in employment thereby retaining valuable skills and experience; and it’s given

PUTTING POLICIES INTO PRACTICE

More than 120 members and non-members packed out a presentation and discussion of menopause as a workplace issue organised by Leicester City Branch Women's Self-Organised Group to mark International Women's Day.

The two-hour event in Leicester's Guildhall was led by educator and coach Bev Thorogood from Henpicked – Menopause in the Workplace.

As well as looking at the workplace aspects of the issue, Bev's wide-ranging survey of the medical and practical aspects of menopause covered symptoms, effects, impacts, self-help and HRT.

It was Women's Officer Cath Lewis who invited Bev to lead the session after hearing her presentation on menopause at the 2019 National Women's Conference during an event Cath attended with ULR and Equality Officer Marlene Blake.

One of the reasons attendance was so high was that the branch made it easier to take part by securing release time for participants.

"We managed to convince the Chief Operating Officer Andy Keeling to allow staff to attend in work time: because the council had recently launched a policy on the menopause, we persuaded them the event would be a good idea that they could link to their own policy," explains Branch Secretary Janet McKenna.

The branch took the opportunity of encouraging more people to join on the back of their interest in the event, she says. "There were a number of non-members who came along and it was a way of showing them that these are some of the things the union does that you might not have realised," she points out.

"We made the point at the end that they should consider joining to be part of further events of a similar nature and get the benefits of educational opportunities more generally."

The branch is keen to follow up on the event in future. "It was an amazing success and something we're certainly looking at doing again because there was such a call for it," Janet says.

* When Learning Lincs, the county-wide learning forum, organised a menopause awareness workshop in September with a consultant gynaecologist / obstetrician from Lincoln County Hospital, the after-work session proved so popular it had to be run twice to accommodate everybody who wanted to take part. ULR Sandra Townsend, who led the organising of the sessions, is now keen to reach even more members by running a similar session in the south of the county.

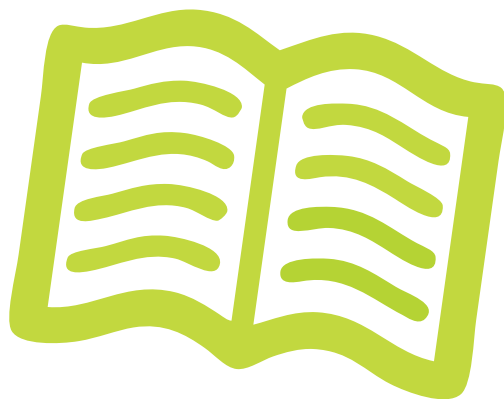


them the confidence to have conversations around the menopause, which some of them have said they would have struggled with before."

After one of the sessions, managers who took part gathered all the copies of the handbook that were available and personally

distributed copies to each member of their teams. "That really showed their commitment," Cheryl says. *

Getting through lockdown, one book at a time



More than 100 people in the south-west have joined an online book club to help members get through the Covid-19 lockdown.

WHEN REGIONAL

Education Organiser Mark Everden set up the closed Facebook group hosting the new book club shortly after the lockdown announcement, little did he suspect there would be such a huge demand from across the region.

"We thought we'd maybe get 20 people but currently we've got 107!" he says.

One of the first to join was UNISON rep Yvonne Richardson, who has had to stop work at Great Western Hospital in Swindon since her asthma and diabetes put her at high risk of infection.

"I've got a lot of respect for Mark: he engages really well with the class when he's teaching, which is how I know him because he taught us employment law when I was training to become a rep," she says.

"He's very well-read and he's one of those people you could talk to for hours about books and share

recommendations."

The group kicked off with *Circe*, by American writer Madeline Miller, which places the enchantress from Homer's *The Odyssey* at the centre of her own feminist story.

It then moved on to *Do Not Feed The Bear* by Bath-based author Rachel Elliott, in which the main character decides to face her demons and return to



South West author Rachel Elliott is thrilled to be featured in the online book club



"If I've had a particularly busy morning, I can get away from the laptop and read for an hour, which I don't think I would have done before"

Zoe Rodgers, South Somerset LG Branch Secretary

the scene of a life-changing childhood holiday in St Ives.

While Mark himself picked the first two titles, book club members themselves now choose the books they're going to read.

Mark is keen to help local authors who have been seriously affected by the enforced cancellation of promotional events that would normally have raised

their profile and boosted their income from sales.

“One of the reasons we chose Rachel’s book was that the publication of the paperback coincided with our dates and she was over the moon that a union would do this, as she has had to cancel all the author talks she had planned,” he says.

“And the great thing about her being a local author is that she’s getting involved: I’m collecting questions about the novel from book club members and she’s going to make time to answer them in breaks from writing her third book,” Mark says.

South Somerset LG Branch Secretary Zoe Rodgers joined the group because she wanted to regain the habit of reading for pleasure.

“I was an avid reader when I was younger and what I’m really grateful for is that the book club has reintroduced me to reading,” she says. “I read the first book, *Circe*, at the beginning of the month and by the time we went to discuss

it at the end of the month, I’d read another three!”

Zoe is working from home during lockdown, with twice-weekly visits to the office to support colleagues in the post room, who are part of the team she leads in her council role.

“If I’ve had a particularly busy morning, I can get away from the laptop and read for an hour, which I don’t think I would have done before: reading provides that break from work,” Zoe says.

For Yvonne, being part of the book group is a massive plus at a time when we are all very restricted in terms of real world places we can visit.

“You can’t go anywhere except your back garden (if you’re lucky enough to have one) but a book is a way of being able to travel without

packing a bag – if you’ve got a good book and a good writer, they can take you somewhere else,” she says.

While the Facebook group was only launched because face-to-face organisation was impossible due to Covid-19, moving online does have the benefit of removing some barriers to participation.

“People can join in whenever they are free, they don’t have to be at a meeting in a particular place at a particular time,” Mark says.

“People are fitting it around their lives and it’s filling a gap for them at the time they need that gap filled.”

✈️ If you’re a member in the South West, you can ask to join the online book club on Facebook: <https://bit.ly/331clqp> ✨

BORROWING E-BOOKS ONLINE

✈️ While libraries are closed, you can still borrow e-books using your library card via apps such as Libby or Borrowbox
<https://www.overdrive.com/apps/libby/>
<https://www.borrowbox.com>

✈️ Project Gutenberg has a library of over 60,000 free e-books, the majority of them classic texts that are now out of copyright.
<http://www.gutenberg.org>

✈️ The Reading Agency has produced a very helpful Covid-19 toolkit with lots of ideas about supporting reading throughout lockdown: especially useful for ULRs running the Reading Ahead challenge.
<https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/4347/>





Adding another string to your bow through study

Being able to claim the UNISON discount on her course fees at Birkbeck helped Sia Livingstone enrol on a postgraduate course.

SOCIAL WORKER SIA

Livingstone has been sharpening her skills by undertaking a full-time master's degree at Birkbeck, University of London.

"It was my work with children and families and my keen interest in children's and adolescents' mental health that inspired me to think about postgraduate research," Sia explains.

"And I realised that the best route for me was to do this master's at Birkbeck."

Sia's original plan was to keep some money coming in by working part-time during

her MSc in social research. But she had to think again once the one-year course got underway last September.

"I had thought about doing part-time agency work to help fund myself but in the end I made the decision early on that the intensity of postgraduate study on a full-time programme meant it wasn't going to be possible to juggle both," she says.

While you can study for a master's degree part-time at Birkbeck, Sia decided on the full-time route. "Doing it part-time over two years would have been the dream but

“

"It's really opened my mind about my way of thinking and it's given me a strong grounding in methodology"

Sia Livingstone,
Birkbeck student

as a mature student you're conscious of every year as you get older and that every year is valuable," she says.

Fortunately, in addition to her 10 per cent fee discount as a UNISON member, Sia has been

financially supported by her twin sister Edisa.

“Luckily, I could rely on my twin sister who has an income so I could study – ironically, I did the same for her a couple of years ago when she did her master’s!” she says.

Sia has relished the course’s mix of abstract thinking with practical, down-to-earth tools she will be able to use back in the field.

“It’s really opened my mind about my way of thinking and it’s given me a strong grounding in methodology, the ethics of being a researcher and what makes good practice,” she explains.

“And I really enjoyed the module on quantitative social research – that gave me the opportunity to learn computer programmes which I would never otherwise even thought of learning and I can then go back and use that in employment as an extra string to my bow.”

Before she returned to her studies, Sia had been able to draw on UNISON support at some crucial moments in her career.

“Speaking from the perspective of a black social worker, I’ve found that it’s not just the clients you face – you are often misunderstood within the profession and having a UNISON representative when differences of opinion put you in the hotspot has

“**Asking for support is vital. There are lot of people in academia and in work who find it difficult to say they’re struggling**”

Sia Livingstone,
Birkbeck student

been like a life-support system,” she says.

It was that support that has given her the confidence to ask for help when she’s needed it on her course – which has been vital after the long gap between her undergraduate degree and

Assisted and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE) and the MSc.

“Asking for support is vital. There are lot of people in academia and in work who find it difficult to say they’re struggling. As professionals we advise people to ask for help, but we don’t always apply it to ourselves!” she says.

And while she has loved her course, Sia is looking forward to putting it into practice when she returns to work.

“I’ve enjoyed my research but it’s really inspired me to go back to social work because I have recognised that what I have been doing is of greater worth than I thought – and I never expected that to be the outcome,” she says. *

DISCOUNTS FOR UNISON MEMBERS

As a UNISON member, you can get a 10 per cent discount on your course fees from these providers:

✈ **Birkbeck, University of London**

<https://bit.ly/3g2Cvll>

✈ **National Extension College (let them know you’re a member when you enrol)** <http://www.nec.ac.uk/>

✈ **University of Wolverhampton**

<http://www.wlv.ac.uk/>

✈ **E-Careers (use the code ‘UNISON10’)**

<https://ecareers.unison.org.uk/>

Plus 5 per cent discount on law courses (excluding legal practice course or postgraduate Diploma in Law) at CILEx Law School

<http://www.cilexlawschool.ac.uk/>

And £100 off your first course unit with the Open College of the Arts <http://www.oca.ac.uk/>



Getting training to young workers

UNISON learning is helping young members gain the skills they would not be able to acquire anywhere else.

LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY

Branch Young Members' Officer Jess McGuire knows first-hand all about the problems young workers face when they try to access the training they need to progress in their jobs.

Jess, who works as a business support assistant at Lincolnshire County Council, was keen to enrol on a team leading or management training course at the local authority.

"When I approached my manager about it, he said they didn't usually offer team leading or management

training until you're in a Grade 5 job," Jess says.

"I'm in a Grade 3 job and that doesn't seem very fair to me because you're trying to progress into a Grade 5 role or higher but how can you do that if they're not going to give you the training?"

Luckily, with the help of the East Midlands learning and organising team, Jess was able to enrol for free on Leicester College's Level 2 Principles of Team Leading Certificate.

"Someone from the team came and talked to me and my friend about the course and we really benefited from

completing it," she says.

"For me, the course made me feel a lot more confident in my job and it encouraged me to apply for things that I wouldn't have before, and it's still helping a lot because I'm still getting a lot of interviews."

Jess says that young workers can't progress without more access to training than many of them have right now.

"There are so many obstacles for young people in progressing into different roles, so having that extra training gives us so many more opportunities – I couldn't

"The course made me feel a lot more confident in my job and it encouraged me to apply for things"

Jess McGuire, young members officer

have done the training I did through UNISON in my normal job role,” she says.

Since completing the course two years ago, Jess has been spreading the message to other young workers at the council.

“When I completed the course, I mentioned what I’d been doing to another young member and she took up the course as well and I’m always encouraging young members to do any course through UNISON,” she says.

“I always make young workers aware of all the different courses they could do that are completely free as part of their membership, because a lot of the time they are not aware that the training is there.” ✱

RESPECT YOUR YOUTH CHARTER

UNISON’s young members are asking their employers to sign the Respect Your Youth Charter that they developed themselves to help improve their working lives.

The charter’s five key demands are:

- 1 Pay the real living wage regardless of age
- 2 Create and maintain quality apprenticeships
- 3 Ensure fair employment
- 4 Equality in the workplace
- 5 Promote development opportunities.

By signing the charter, employers can demonstrate they value their younger staff and are committed to providing high-quality jobs and apprenticeships with development opportunities.

Cardiff Council and Careers Wales became the first Welsh employers to endorse the charter last year, at a special ceremony that included a delegation of young members (pictured left).

➦ Download the charter and order leaflets at: <https://bit.ly/39Tkcv5>



REPEAT AFTER ME: I KNOW MY RIGHTS

Young workers can build up a complete picture of their employment rights by spending just a few minutes a day on a free bite-sized digital learning tool developed by UNISON and Wranx.

The new Young Workers Rights module enables young members to find out how the Equality Act protects them at work; learn how much annual leave they are entitled to; and identify the minimum wage rate they should be on.

The tool can be accessed on tablets and mobile phones, which means young workers can dip in every day on their journey to or from work or during a break. It’s also available via desktop computers.

Wranx compiles customised daily drills by prioritising the questions you are less confident about until all the answers come easily.

Wranx also offers a range of other modules that could help young workers, including topics such as mental health, COSHH awareness and English and maths at functional skills and GCSE levels.

➦ To sign up to the module, visit <https://unionlearn.ulp.wranx.com> and select Young Workers Rights from the dropdown menu



Southampton ULR Liz Martin has organised a successful series of craft workshops that have given people the chance to unwind while learning new skills.

Boosting your mental health through crafting

STAFF AT

SOUTHAMPTON City Council enjoyed a break from the stresses and strains of their day jobs at a series of drop-in craft sessions run by Southampton Branch ULR Liz Martin.

Liz, who is a keen crafter herself, picked a suitable theme for the time of year (Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day), bought the supplies and booked the room near the main reception at the Civic Centre.

The idea for the sessions first occurred to her when a colleague had their leaving-do at the SeaCity Museum (also in the Civic Centre), where everyone

“**I find it really valuable to spend a little time away from a busy job, relax and explore crafting**”
Dawn Morgan, participant

had the chance to try some mindfulness colouring.

“I thought it was just so nice that we had some time away from the office and a chance to chat with people we don't normally

see,” Liz recalls.

“As a new ULR at that time, I thought I could put on something similar and with my background in crafting it would be in my comfort zone and might be a good way of getting people involved.”

Liz was right to trust her instincts: most of the participants at the first two sessions in November 2018 were not members but two of them joined the branch afterwards (luckily, Liz had brought UNISON application forms to the sessions).

As well as providing materials, Liz also arranged tea, coffee and biscuits for participants but they all ended up too absorbed

GETTING ACTIVE THROUGH CRAFT

Members attending the North West Regional Women's Conference in Manchester last year took the chance to find out more about the links between craft and activism at a workshop led by Katie Shaw, while she was still one of the national learning and development organisers.

After a brief history of the radical origins of craft, including a look at the Luddites, Katie explored contemporary examples of using craft in activism – as a way of bringing people together to share their experiences of organising and as a useful tool in their campaigning work.

"We looked at examples of 'stitch-ins' where commuters embroidered train ticket designs featuring the increase in rail fares which they then turned into bunting to present to their transport minister," Katie says.

"We also looked at how a group of Black women in Ferguson, Missouri, set up The Yarn Mission, a knitting group with the purpose of creating space to talk about Black liberation within their local community."

The group also explored how to use craft as a way of uniting campaigning with member learning in their branches, including making a branch banner using recycled materials.

Some participants also designed a campaign activity to make bunting from all their menopause medication to hang in the workplace alongside handmade fans on which workers could write how they wanted their employer and the government to support them during their menopause at work.

Find out more



Find out more about
Ferguson's radical knitters
at: <https://bit.ly/2X6nqs1>

in their colouring to try the refreshments!

She also invited the lead councillor for social care to judge the colouring activities at the second session, with a prize for the winner.

Since then, Liz has organised more sessions for people to decorate hearts for Valentine's Day,

make pom-pom chicks and bunnies for Easter and felt decorations in the run-up to Christmas.

"People really appreciate the sessions and when they come they are so chuffed with what they make and always show their colleagues," Liz says.

When she started organising the drop-ins, Liz was sure that crafting would help participants boost their mental health – which is exactly what learners have

said in their feedback.

"I find it really valuable to spend a little time away from a busy job, relax and explore crafting with like-minded people," says participant Dawn Morgan.

"After an hour of crafting I feel refreshed and ready to face the challenges of the afternoon and the feeling of achievement and completion is certainly good for my mental health." *



Say hello, wave goodbye

There are new members of the team in LAOS, which also means some colleagues have moved on ...

Stevie Milward Learning and Workforce Development Officer

Stevie Milward brings her 12 years' experience as a comprehensive school teacher, where she taught English and media from Key Stage 3 to A Level, to her new role as Learning and Workforce Development Officer (LWDO).

"I have a knowledge of how people learn and the importance of education, as well as an understanding of the education sector and our members who work within it," she says. "I'm still getting a chance to impact people's lives and perhaps, in a way, reach some of those people I had not been able to reach in the school setting," she says.

Stevie is helping develop the member learning offer, leading on the union's partnership with The Open University (OU) and looking after digital inclusion, mental health and wellbeing and online training. She is the LAOS lead for schools and local government.



John Finnegan Learning and Workforce Development Officer

After developing his knowledge and skills as a UNISON member in health and social care, John Finnegan is now applying that experience as a Learning and Workforce Development Officer (LWDO).

"My passion is around lifelong learning – I started out many years ago as a humble healthcare assistant on a paediatric ward and I've always strived to build on my own professional development through learning," he says. "Now this is an opportunity to support people to get the



best opportunities they can within the public sector."

John is helping develop the member learning offer, leading on the partnership with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and is also the LAOS lead for the health care service group.

Caitlín NiCathail Regional Education Organiser, Northern Ireland

After four years working as an Area Organiser plus six months before that as a Fighting Fund Local Organiser, Caitlín NiCathail took on the role of Regional Education Organiser on a temporary basis in December before being made permanent a matter of days before the lockdown.

Caitlín manages the extensive regional education programme, which normally runs around 200 courses a year for members and activists on a huge range of topics.

"My job is to ensure the content of all our courses is relevant to our members

GOODBYE KATIE...

Katie Shaw was National Learning and Development Organiser for the past two years, where she led on digital skills, creating resources, delivering training and helping branches recruit more Digital Champions.

Katie used her background in policy work to help us present the findings of our largest learning survey last year – writing briefings, helping organise the launch with key stakeholders and summarising the results to support the value of lifelong learning for all.

She also found time to study part-time for her Masters degree in education, power and social change at Birkbeck, University of London – with the help of the 10 per cent fee discount available through unionlearn.

“Katie was an intelligent team player, who was creative and very driven and dedicated to support UNISON,” says ULF National Project Manager Martin Russo. “We all miss Katie and wish her all the best for her future.”

* We have also said farewell to Sue Carrington, who has returned to the Eastern Region, and to Fidelma Carolan, who has a new role as senior consultant at the HSC Leadership Centre in Belfast.



... AND CLAIR

Clair Hawkins has left LAOS for a new job with UNISON South East.

As a Learning and Workforce Development Officer for the past three years, Clair was the strategic lead for English, maths and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) – a subject she had taught for eight years at Lambeth College before joining the team.

She also looked after the department's partnership with The Open University (OU) and the union's learning work with private companies.

“Clair made brilliant use of all the skills she had developed in education before joining us to promote learning to our members: she will be much missed!” says Head of Learning and Organising Services Teresa Donegan.

* On a happier note, we've welcomed some new faces in the regional team: South-East Area Organiser Vicki Gibbs and Regional Learning and Development Organiser Abbey Dunn; South West RLDO Natalie Chadwick and ULF Local Organiser Carol Thyer; and Jenny Griffin and Richard Speight (Wales Union Learning Fund project).



and our activists,” she says. “Activist education is a big passion in my work, ensuring our activists have all the knowledge of the changing environment we're organising in and putting in front of them everything innovative that's coming out of other campaigns.”

To find out more and how to join contact:
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and 9am to 4pm on Saturday

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