

## Dates for your diary...

**Mental Health Awareness Week.** Monday 10 – Sunday 16 May 2021. This year's theme is Nature, examining the barriers in the way of everyone being able to enjoy the mental health benefits of the natural world. **Click here.**

**Learning at Work Week.** Monday 17 – Sunday 23 May 2021. This year's theme is Made For Learning, with three strands: learning, curiosity and connecting. **Click here.**

**National Numeracy Day.** Wednesday 19 May. Sign up to become a Champion and help your colleagues get more confident with numbers. **Click here.**

## Opening a new chapter in UNISON learning

General Secretary Christina McAnea set out how her plans for a new UNISON College would be central to the UNISON learning offer to members in the wake of the closure of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) last month.

“The learning offer has to be central to the future of UNISON,” Christina told the 100-plus learning activists who took part in the online event, The Next Chapter of UNISON Learning.

Modelled on the template that has already been developed in Northern Ireland, the College will offer members free and subsidised education and training opportunities and help regions and union learning reps (ULRs) negotiate the courses members need.

“We’ve got a great base to work from: and just as trade unions provided education and training before the Union Learning Fund existed, I give you this commitment – we will continue to provide it after it’s gone,” Christina said.

Assistant General Secretary Roger McKenzie reminded participants how ULRs played a crucial role in the union’s organising drive. “There are many workplaces we simply wouldn’t get into as a union without the learning opportunities that you are offering to people,” he said.

“It enables us to bring some social justice – frankly – to many of those workplaces where some of those employers are treating our members like they’re something they scraped off the bottom of their shoe – they are treating our members with total disdain.”

Despite the massive setback of the closure



of the ULF, there are some opportunities for union learners in the current climate, explained TUC Senior Policy Officer Iain Murray.

From this month, all adults over the age of 24 studying for their first Level 3 qualification can access fully funded courses for the first time. The Mayoral Combined Authorities, which control devolved skills budgets, are already working in partnership with the TUC and individual unions on the union learning agenda. And many large public sector employers continue to work with UNISON to support workplace learning.

With the closure of the ULF, the TUC is now re-focusing its support for ULRs on digital tools and resources, Iain said.

But he welcomed UNISON’s positive response to the changing times. “It’s really heartening to hear what Christina and Roger said about UNISON’s commitment to build on union learning in spite of the cuts by the current government,” Iain said.

● Download the digital conference pack from **here**.