



UNISON – the learning union
Summer 2016

learn

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Gaining confidence, delivering skills

Union Learning Fund

with unionlearn

UNISON
the public service union





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UNISON ULEARN MAGAZINE

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Welcome

Welcome to the 2016 edition of Ulearn. I hope you will find it as inspiring to read as I have, because by organising opportunities for learning and development that simply are not available elsewhere, union learning reps (ULRs) and lifelong learning coordinators are helping UNISON members throughout the country change their lives for the better.

“This year’s magazine should give you an idea of the range of fantastic opportunities”

As you will see, ULRs are working on a whole variety of fronts: helping members improve their English and maths skills, supporting apprentices by securing them the best deal at work, organising training for particular groups of members who too often miss out (schools staff, for example), and raising awareness of vitally important issues such as dementia and mental health.

You can read what our members have been getting out of our free one-day workshops Your skills, your future, Making the most of the internet and Facing change together, which have enabled thousands to develop their careers and improve their lives outside work. And now our newest

one-day workshop, Power to be you, is beginning to help many more members gain the confidence to play a more active role in their job or in the union.

No single edition of Ulearn can reflect everything that we are involved with at any one time. But this year’s magazine should give you an idea of the range of fantastic opportunities ULRs are organising for members, which I hope will encourage you to continue with your vital work.

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

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“As around 78 per cent of our members are women, it will be interesting to see what impact this has”

NATIONAL WOMEN'S OFFICER
SHARON GREENE

WOMEN HEART UNISON LEARNING

UNISON's national women's committee organised all the seminars at this year's UNISON National Women's Conference on a learning and organising theme when delegates gathered at Brighton Conference Centre in February.

“We covered a wide range of issues, from internal work around involving members in learning and women's progression in our union to external work around becoming politically active,” explains National Women's Officer Sharon Greene.

“The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many members reporting that this was the best conference – not just best women's conference! – they had attended.”

Many of the seminars were taster sessions for longer courses, from the Power to be you confidence-building workshop to the longer Women's Lives course, and

many delegates who took part will be getting involved in the union by taking part in the full-length versions.

“As around 78 per cent of our members are women, it will be interesting to see what impact this has in increasing women's participation in the leadership of UNISON in the future,” Sharon says. ■

THIS ONE'S FOR YOU

General Secretary Dave Prentis dedicated the honorary degree he was awarded by The Open University (OU) in September 2015 to the union's network of learning reps.

“I am proud to accept this degree on behalf of all our thousands of UNISON learning reps who give their time, their commitment and their passion to helping other people experience

“I am proud to accept this degree on behalf of all our thousands of UNISON learning reps”

GENERAL SECRETARY
DAVE PRENTIS

LEARNING IN NUMBERS

This year we have:

- supported **680** apprentices
- recruited **209** apprentices
- conducted **841** initial English and maths assessments
- helped **187** members complete ICT courses
- supported **451** FE learners
- helped members complete **661** CPD programmes
- engaged **2,000**-plus informal learners
- trained **88** ULRs
- supported **260** ULRs onto further training



“ULRs are the unsung heroes who help to change people's lives for the better”

GENERAL SECRETARY
DAVE PRENTIS

the transforming power of learning,” he said. “They are the unsung heroes who help to change people's lives for the better.”

UNISON's partnership with the OU, established while Dave has been at the helm of the union, has helped more than 6,500 members study accredited OU courses, while thousands more are developing themselves through workshops and seminars on subjects including end-of-life care to dementia awareness. ■



HOSPITAL CELEBRATES LEARNING SUCCESS

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn Branch signed up three potential UNISON learning reps and two new IT tutors at



PETER SMITH

an event to celebrate the successful lifelong learning partnership at the Trust in March.

Another two people volunteered to be stewards, 15 new members joined the branch and more than 300 staff visited the stalls that were set up in The Hub (the hospital canteen) on the day.

Local MP Sir Henry Bellingham, who spoke at the celebration, afterwards thanked UNISON Branch Secretary Darren Barber for inviting him to the event, which he said was “incredibly worthwhile and inspiring” and added, “You and your colleagues in UNISON deserve every possible amount of praise.”

To date, close to 1,000 staff have taken part in a huge range of learning opportunities through the programme over the past three years, improving patient care via dementia awareness, developing new skills such as sewing and keeping fit with Pilates and ballroom dancing.

● The UNISON branch signed a new Apprenticeship agreement with Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn during National Apprenticeship Week in March, with the aim of helping apprentices progress into permanent roles at the Trust or the wider health sector.

“From a UNISON point of view, this is a great way of us showing how we look after our apprentices,” says Darren. “Having the unions and the Trust working together can make this the first choice for school and college leavers.” ■



SASHA SEVIC

LEFT: Reading helps us see the world through other people's eyes, best-selling author Ann Cleeves told the Reading Ahead launch at South Tyneside District Hospital. **BELOW:** ULR Nicola Larkin is running Reading Ahead at Glasgow Caledonian University

Reading for everyone

Encouraging your members to commit to reading and reviewing six titles in six months as part of the Reading Ahead challenge is a great way of boosting everyone's confidence with the written word.

Local author Ann Cleeves helped launch the Reading Ahead challenge at a special event organised by Bridges to Learning and UNISON South Tyneside Health Branch at South Tyneside District Hospital in January.

UNISON and Jarrow Library have joined forces to provide books for staff at the Trust who wish to take part in Reading Ahead, which involves reading and reviewing six titles in six months – books, magazines, poetry, or online articles.

"This is a brilliant project and I'm delighted to be involved," Ann said. "Reading

is an escape and a challenge and helps us see the world through other people's eyes."

Ann is the author of two very popular series of novels, one based in Northumberland featuring unconventional sleuth Vera Stanhope, the other set on Shetland featuring detective Jimmy Perez.



"I'm sure Ann's enthusiasm for the written word will inspire more people to read for pleasure"
ULR HAZEL KJEBEKK

Hazel Kjebekk, who is also the Trust's Bridges to Learning project worker, "I'm sure her enthusiasm for the written word will inspire more people to read for pleasure, which is a gateway to opportunities in many areas of life."

UNISON learning rep Nicola Larkin has enrolled 35 colleagues from across a range of departments at Glasgow Caledonian University on Reading Ahead.

After launching the challenge with a lunchtime event at the end of November 2015, Nicola has kept in touch with participants through a monthly email, which includes book recommendations and news of book deals on the high street.

After celebrating the end of the challenge in May, Nicola is planning to capitalise on the momentum from the scheme by launching a workplace book group in September.

READ ANYTIME ANYWHERE

Read Anytime Anywhere is a new full-colour 28-page toolkit to help ULRs get the best results from running workplace schemes such as Reading Ahead (formerly the Six Book Challenge), organising book groups and promoting Quick Reads.



The toolkit features case studies of UNISON branches that have run successful programmes, with detailed step-by-step tips on how to run Reading Ahead launch and celebration events, where to go for funding and resources, and best practice for workplace book groups.

Regularly reading for pleasure boosts our self-esteem and our inner resilience, according to the latest research for Quick Reads, which is now part of The Reading Agency, alongside Reading Ahead.

Just half an hour with a book every week means adults are 52 per cent more likely to feel socially included, 57 per cent more likely to have a greater awareness of other cultures and 72 per cent more likely to possess greater community spirit.

By contrast, adults with lower literacy, language and numeracy skills are most likely to end up in low-paid, low grade work; twice as likely to have been made redundant or sacked from their first job; and four times more likely to have known long-term unemployment first-hand.

Wirral Local Government Branch launched the Reading Ahead challenge with a successful event at Birkenhead Library in November 2015 headlined by best-selling author Andy McNab.

Run in conjunction with

Wirral Libraries and Wirral Lifelong Learning Service, the event not only provided a springboard for the challenge but also encouraged three new people to take on the learning rep role, says ULR Diane Moore. ■

LEARNING IN NUMBERS
We conducted **841** English and maths initial assessments in 2015/16





Helping health workers move on with maths

UNISON's Bridges to Learning project is helping healthcare assistants gain the maths skills they need to progress in their careers.

Bridges to Learning has successfully piloted a Functional Skills maths course geared towards the numeracy needs of healthcare assistants (HCAs) interested in progressing into Assistant Practitioner roles at The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS

Foundation Trust.

Written by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the pilot was put together with input from Functional Skills tutors and registered nurses. It was tailored to the maths aspects of the HCA role specifically to help the students apply

“People could have one-to-one discussions with the tutor about areas they were struggling with”

PROJECT COORDINATOR
JOHN WEARS

to become Assistant Practitioners once they had successfully completed.

In addition to generic Functional Skills maths, the course also covered fluid balance charts, which measure a patient's intake and output of fluids – vital information that must be accurately recorded

as part of patient care.

Launched in September 2015, the pilot was run with six HCAs at the Trust. “Because it was a pilot, we wanted to keep the numbers low,” explains the Trust's Bridges to Learning Project Coordinator John Wears.

“If there were any areas of the course people were struggling with, they could have one-to-one discussions with the tutor, and one of the benefits of having a smaller group was that they could have these discussions more often.”

The pilot was originally scheduled to finish in December, but extended into January 2016 with the agreement of everyone involved.

Since completing the course, all six HCAs have applied to become Assistant Practitioner trainees, which involves a two-year training programme at pay band 3, which on successful completion would lift them to pay band 4.

With the agreement of the Trust and the WEA, the project is open to running the course again in future, John says. “There are aspects that might change after evaluating the feedback we have had but I definitely think there is a place for it.” ■

WHEN PAYDAY LOANS DON'T PAY

UNISON Gateshead Health branch ran a successful event for apprentices and nursing cadets at the Trust in January with a guest speaker from the local credit union explaining the pitfalls of payday loans.

The lunchtime event also featured speakers from the Trust's payroll department and Northumbria University's Work Based Learning team, and lunch was laid on for everyone attending with the help of a Kickstart grant from the Inclusive Learning Project.

“We invited the credit union because when I spoke to the apprentices who started a year ago, they were saying they would have found it a great help, as some of them were getting into trouble with payday loans,” explains branch Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator Maria Alberts. While Maria had been expecting a couple of dozen participants, in fact 50 attended on the day, with around three dozen of them being apprentices or cadets.

● *Making Every Penny Count* is a new full-colour 28-page toolkit to equip ULRs with the knowledge and skills to raise awareness of budgeting and debt management in the workplace, highlight the importance of maths to financial know-how and signpost members to help and support with financial issues where needed.

The toolkit comes with step-by-step instructions for running easy and enjoyable activities in the workplace to help learners improve their financial know-how, including a word search, crossword and an ‘ABC of money’ quiz.

It also includes an activity on the perils of payday lending and another on the benefits of local credit unions as low-cost alternatives.

To make it easy for ULRs to run the activities at work, the toolkit is accompanied by activity sheets for learners to use and a budgeting and money management workbook to complete, all downloadable from the Learning.UNISON website.



Your skills, your future is helping UNISON members throughout the country identify skills they didn't know they had and develop plans to acquire skills they need.



I didn't know I could do that!

A dozen UNISON members identified the skills they need to move on at work by taking part in a Your skills, your future one-day workshop in Orkney, the archipelago just off the north coast of Scotland, in February 2016.

Organised by local ULR Linda Halford and Highlands and Islands Project Worker Marta Chaba, the course brought together members in local government, adult social care and schools staff.

"Organising a longer course like Return to Learn would be a big challenge in terms of obtaining time off and travel for many

members in Orkney, so we put on this one-day workshop to give them another way of getting back into learning," Linda says.

The day was very successful, with positive feedback from participants. "One of our members said she had been very nervous about coming as she felt very low down on the ladder as a home-carer," Linda recalls.

"But by the end of the day she had identified many skills she didn't know she had, and she left elated at having learned so much and gaining a new perspective on her job and her role in the workplace," Linda says.

"I hope we can push training forward in Orkney and get the employers onboard to convince them that learning and development makes for a happier and more productive workforce"

ULR LINDA HALFORD

A part-time independent trainer herself who has delivered a wide range of training to the Orkney Islands Council workforce, Linda became a ULR in 2014 and is also lifelong learning coordinator for the branch.

Linda attended a digital skills 'Train the Trainer' course organised by the Scottish Union Learning (SUL) team in Inverness.

"Once back home,

I designed a leaflet to advertise the course and trained 15 people who had little or no knowledge of the digital world on sending emails, applying for jobs online and safely using social media," she says.

Linda has also coordinated two basic computer courses at the council, and a First Line Management course, all with the support of the council's Learning & Development Manager Alison Skea and SUL Development Officer Pam Urquhart.

Linda is hoping that the branch will be able to organise further learning opportunities later this year.

"As a branch, I hope we can get the employers onboard to convince them that learning and development makes for a happier and more productive workforce," Linda says. ■

UNISON members on Mainland Orkney enjoying their one-day workshop



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

BLACKPOOL HEALTH SIGNS LEARNING AGREEMENT

The Blackpool Health Branch ULR team of Jane Eyre, Bev Herring and Danielle

Perrett has negotiated a learning agreement with Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which was signed in September 2015.

The trio has also successfully persuaded the Trust to become one of the very few NHS employers to commit to the National Numeracy Challenge (NNC) to help staff improve their everyday maths skills.

Being confident with numbers not only helps health workers with aspects of their work at the Trust (such as drug calculation and administration), but also helps prepare them for formal qualifications, further training or Apprenticeships.

As well as launching a reading group at the Trust, Jane, Bev and Danielle have also organised:

- 10-week courses in holiday Spanish and British Sign Language (both of them free to UNISON members and both fully booked);
- monthly sets of one-hour Learn My Way sessions to help staff learn their way round tablets and computers;
- six two-hour sessions on the dos and don'ts of using social media.

The branch and the Trust also organised a five-minute flashmob in the hospital's main entrance to launch this year's Learning At Work Week in May. The five-minute dance routine rapidly clocked up 3,700 views when it was posted on Facebook.

Under the terms of the agreement, the Trust has agreed to a full-time 12-month secondment for Jane to work with managers and staff to encourage learning in the workplace as lifelong learning officer.

Both Blackpool Health and Bury Council branches won awards from unionlearn North-West in February 2016 in recognition of the successful learning partnerships they have built with their employers.

After signing a new learning agreement with Bristol Waste Company, UNISON has kicked off a new learning programme at the refuse and recycling operation with a bicycle maintenance workshop.

It's all about the bikes

UNISON and Unite members at Bristol Waste Company (BWC) learned the basics of bicycle maintenance at the first learning session after a new learning agreement with the company was signed during #heartunions week in February.

Delivered by a mechanic from the Dr Bike programme run by The Bristol Bike Project, the hands-on workshop gave a dozen participants the chance to tune-up the bicycles they use to get to and from work every day.

"The people who took part in the workshop are really

pleased with the results, getting a real service on their bikes," says UNISON learning rep Andy Taylor. "Everyone says they have noticed the difference just through cycling into work."

Regional Learning and Development Organiser Siobhan Brown, who helped Andy organise the workshop, said the participants enjoyed the chance to improve their bike knowledge and skills. "A couple of them shook my hand at the end and said, 'People don't normally do this kind of stuff for us' – it was amazing," she says.

BWC, which is wholly-

"Everyone says they noticed the difference just through cycling to work"

ULR ANDY TAYLOR

owned by Bristol City Council, took over the city's refuse, recycling and street cleansing contract last year, when the previous contract was wound up three years ahead of schedule.

While the previous contractor had dragged its feet about a learning agreement, the new management team was quick to see the potential of a workplace learning

partnership. It took just three months to negotiate the deal, which includes provision for the company to match time invested in learning by individual workers.

"Improving Functional Skills will help our employees with current roles as well as developing them for future roles within BWC," says Human Resources Manager Karen Stephens, who signed the agreement alongside Managing Director Tracey Morgan.

Since Andy became a ULR three years ago, he has wanted to improve his own IT skills, so he was pleased that the first piece of computer work he completed was the bid for Kickstart funding from UNISON to run the bike workshop – and the flyer for the event was the second.

Andy is currently collecting responses from his colleagues to the learning survey he circulated shortly after the workshop to identify which courses people are interested in accessing.

In the meantime, Andy and Siobhan are planning to organise some break-time pop-up IT sessions using the regional UNISON education team's half a dozen iPads. "People can have a play on the tablets when they come back to the yard and see what they can do," Andy says. ■

CAPITA SIGNS SUSSEX DEAL

West Sussex Branch signed a learning agreement last summer with Capita, which has been running the county council's back office functions since 2012, when hundreds of former local authority staff were TUPE-transferred to the outsourcing giant.

"I managed to convince the managers of the Capita West Sussex contract that learning would be a good investment, because otherwise the only opportunities were for people coming through an Apprenticeship scheme or were online," explains Branch Education Officer Mervyn Sams (above, who was TUPE-transferred himself).

With the agreement in place, Mervyn organised a successful series of lunch 'n' learn sessions last September, which helped people identify and develop skills they can use in their professional and personal lives.

Close to 100 participants took part, coming from West Sussex County Council, Capita, Chichester District Council and Hyde Housing Association, which is also based in Chichester.

"We went into partnership with Chichester District Council and Hyde Housing UNISON branches because the need for learning is not unique to one employer and when you join forces the funding goes further," Mervyn explains.

Tutors from Sussex Downs College in Newhaven delivered sessions on identifying your skills, improving your confidence, managing your money and tackling stress (the one that attracted the most participants). Feedback about all the sessions was hugely positive.

"I feel the union is filling a big gap regarding training," one participant said; another called the session they attended "interesting and thought-provoking"; while a third reported that it was "helpful to identify skills and hear other people's feedback" in the skills session.





Delivering the support apprentices need

Derbyshire County UNISON is working with the local authority to give its apprentices a good deal now that they have been brought back into direct employment.

Apprentices at Derbyshire County Council stand to get a better deal now that the local authority has decided to stop using a local Apprentice Training Agency (ATA) that has been responsible for their employment and training for the past four years.

The council decided it made sense to bring the its apprentices back in-house now that public sector bodies have to create

Apprenticeship opportunities for 2.3 per cent of their workforce and organisations with a £3m-plus annual wage bill are liable to pay the new Apprenticeship levy.

Under the terms of the contract the authority signed in 2011 with Learning Unlimited, the ATA employed the apprentices on the National Minimum Wage for Apprentices, a rate so low it didn't even cover their travel expenses.

"We want to make sure the Derbyshire County Council apprentices are properly valued"

ULR JAYNE BARRY

"The way it was running, the apprentices couldn't afford to get themselves to work and back as the money they were earning wasn't even paying for their bus fares," explains UNISON learning rep Jayne Barry.

In addition to the problems of low pay, some apprentices were finding it difficult to find out who would assess their work for the NVQ component of their training, and when and where that

LEFT: Derbyshire County Council's decision to bring its apprentices back in-house will make it easier for UNISON to secure them the support they need

would happen, while others reported they were not being provided with the correct protective equipment.

UNISON successfully negotiated to bring apprentice pay in line with the National Minimum Wage (age specific), which was implemented in 2013, and the branch will continue to work to improve their pay and conditions now they are directly employed, Jayne says.

"UNISON will continue to negotiate for the apprentices to get a living wage, which we know will be an uphill trek but it is one we need to do to make sure that they can financially afford to continue their Apprenticeships," Jayne says.

Bringing the apprentices back in-house means they will be employed on the same terms and conditions as the colleagues they work alongside and they will be eligible to join the branch and take on active roles, which was not possible under the old ATA regime.

The branch is hoping to secure council agreement to a new Apprenticeship charter by the time the apprentices who have not yet completed their studies with Learning Unlimited are brought back into direct employment this summer. ■

EASTERN REGION PROJECT SUCCESS

UNISON Eastern Regional Learning and Development Organiser Emily Sole has delivered 13 workshops for apprentices in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk as part of the region's innovative Apprenticeship project, jointly funded by the Inclusive Learning Project and Health Education East of England.

The sessions have covered stress management, employability skills, sickness absence, employee rights and responsibilities, social media, bullying and harassment, as well as UNISON's Your skills, your future members' workshop.

"The workshops have all been very well attended: apprentices have not been directed to show up, they have been volunteering to come and, as someone who has organised staff development for many years, getting people to turn up is often half the battle!" Emily says.

Employers have been very positive and feedback from participants has been excellent, with apprentices glad of the chance to improve their answers to employers' questions and increase awareness of their body language during mock interviews in the job application sessions.

The region has produced a new guide, Supporting and Developing Apprentices, to help branches develop the best policies and procedures to support apprentices, who will be making up an increasing significant part of the public sector workforce as a result of the government raising its targets for new starts.

UNISON branches in the region are supporting apprentice members by paying their £10 membership fees on their behalf to help welcome them into the union.



UNISON's Bridges to Learning project is helping schools staff gain the skills they need to develop at work.



"The feedback on Jan's input was fantastic: it was great that we could get to work with her"

BRIDGES TO LEARNING DIRECTOR
ANNE HANSEN

ALL PHOTOS: SASA SEVIC

Tackling crucial classroom issues

More than 100 schools staff from the Middlesbrough area gained new skills for dealing with children with dyslexia, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at a half-day Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshop last October.

The session was organised by Bridges to Learning, the pioneering partnership between UNISON, The Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) that supports workers in the health, social care and education sectors to develop in their jobs.

OU Associate Lecturer Jan Mather gave the keynote address on understanding the autism spectrum, drawing on her professional expertise as a specialist in cognitive neuroscience and her personal experience of raising a son

who happens to have autism. "Jan is a professional in the field and able to relate well to the teaching assistants and other schools staff about how autism affects children in the classroom both at an academic level and a personal level," recalls Bridges to Learning Director Anne Hansen.

"The feedback on Jan's input was fantastic: it was great



that we could get to work with her through the Bridges to Learning partnership with the OU." Since the conference, Jan has delivered workshops in several schools to UNISON members.

After Jan's keynote speech, participants attended workshops on working with children with autism, ADHD awareness, dyslexia awareness, time management and using iPads in the classroom – all issues that staff are dealing with during the school day.

Sunnyside Academy, a

Middlesbrough school known for successfully integrating special educational needs children with mainstream pupils, sent six support staff to the conference: one each from foundation/early years, Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, the visually impaired department, the hearing impaired department and one dinner supervisor.

Specialist Teaching Assistant Jayne King collated all her notes from the conference to produce information booklets that she shared with colleagues at a Sunnyside staff meeting and then uploaded for everyone's reference on the school intranet.

"These are all issues we deal with in the classroom, so the conference was fantastically useful for us and it's great to have these working documents available for all

GAINING SKILLS THAT HELP AT WORK

A professional development one-day workshop for staff from 20 schools in Southampton and the wider Hampshire area drew close to 50 participants, with another 20 on the waiting list for the next.

The workshop was built around two key workshops, managing pupil behaviour in the classroom and developing self-confidence and assertiveness. The majority of attendees were Teaching Assistants (TAs), although a range of other staff joined in.

"We weren't sure we would get 50 people because we ran the workshop on a school day and it was up to the schools to release their staff, but we had to turn down about 20 people, so there is definitely a demand for this training," says Fighting Fund Organiser Jamie Morris.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. "A very informative and encouraging day: I have been able to take away some valuable practice, tools and skills," one said, while another commented, "It was a great discovery that UNISON was offering training courses like this."

SAVE THE DATE
Stars in our Schools takes place later this year on **Friday 25 November**. What will you be doing to celebrate the indispensable work of support staff in your school?



the staff, for the trainees who come in to shadow staff and for teaching students from the University of York who have their placements with us," says Sunnyside UNISON steward Pam Richards.

Organising paid release for a group of staff to attend the CPD event shows how Sunnyside's senior management supports development of all staff at the school, Pam says. "We believe that the more qualified, the

more experienced and the better trained support staff are, the more they can help the teaching staff," Pam says.

Feedback was hugely positive about the entire event, says Area Organiser Dawn Nicholson. "I was absolutely overwhelmed that schools staff were so thankful that we had organised something for them: even though it was just a half-day course, everyone thought they had learned a lot," she says. ■



LEFT: Charlie Logan (right) celebrates completing Women's Lives last year with Great Grimsby MP Melanie Onn

I've come a long way with UNISON

After finishing the Women's Lives course last year, Charlie Logan immediately signed up to Return to Learn. And now she's thinking about where next to go on her learning journey.

When York-based nurse Charlie Logan found out UNISON was running its popular members' course Women's Lives where she lives, she reckoned it would be a great way to pick up where she had left off on her learning journey since qualifying as a nurse in 1986.

"I thought it would be good to get my brain into thinking mode again, and I was interested in women's lives and the way they have changed over the years," she recalls.

A natural mixer, Charlie wasn't put off when she

found out the course had already started by the time she applied, and quickly caught herself up with the other participants.

Learning in a group worked much better for Charlie than studying on her own, she says. "It's encouraging to be in a classroom situation with others: if I had started that course on my own, I wouldn't have finished it," she says.

Almost as soon as she finished Women's Lives, Charlie decided to enrol on Return to Learn. "I wanted to improve my written work, because that's what I found

"Charlie has been an inspirational character in the group: she has a real can-do attitude"

WEA TUTOR DIANE QUINNEY

hardest about doing Women's Lives: when we got our assignments back, there were a lot of notes where I could improve my grammar and punctuation," she recalls.

"And I knew Return to Learn involved computers and I was a bit of a technophobe: we don't use computers much at work so I was quite scared of them – I was worried that

FROM LEARNERS TO LEARNING REPS

Two North-West members who completed the Return to Learn course that finished in March have signed up to become UNISON learning reps.

Oldham ambulance driver Linda Brown and Rochdale local government worker June Roddison have already completed their training and begun promoting lifelong learning opportunities to their members.

"I enjoyed the Return to Learn course from start to finish: all the women in the group bonded and were supportive of each other, particularly early on during a personal descriptive writing session," says June.

Members of the Manchester and Liverpool branches who had been undertaking Return to Learn at the same time joined forces for a combined residential weekend at the end of the course.

"The weekend away gave a further chance to network with the group from Liverpool: we were given the opportunity for further maths and IT classes and to give a PowerPoint presentation on our chosen assignment topics," June says.

Five of the women from the Manchester Return to Learn course have also enrolled on the Women's Lives course that started in April, alongside another four women members.



if I pressed a button it would delete everything I'd been working on for hours!"

Completing the course has changed all that. Charlie's written work improved from Level 2 to Level 3 over the duration of the course and she now has the skills and the confidence to send and receive emails, add attachments and upload documents to websites.

"Charlie has been an amazing student: I think she has developed even further

with such a variety of skills on Return to Learn than she did on Women's Lives," says Workers' Educational Association (WEA) tutor Diane Quinney, who taught the group Charlie was part of.

"And she has been an inspirational character in the group: she has a real can-do attitude and always eggs people on when they think they can't do something on the course."

Studying through UNISON has helped Charlie take on a

new challenge in her career, as she was looking for a change after working for many years at White Cross Rehabilitation Hospital, which is part of York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Using the skills she gained and improved through Return to Learn, Charlie secured a new job working part-time in a nursing home, where she finished her first shift in late April. "It's been a nice change: I feel I've come a long way on this course," she says. ■



JANINA STRUK/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Exploring mental health

UNISON's new one-day workshop is helping members better understand many of the mental health issues we encounter in our work and home lives.

UNISON's new mental health awareness workshop, one of the free one-day workshops that make up the member learning offer, is helping people better understand a wide range of mental health issues and combat stigma and workplace discrimination.

The course, delivered by Open University tutors, was originally piloted in the Northern Region and has now been run in Yorkshire & Humberside and the West Midlands. Through a mix of informative and

interactive sessions, it helps participants both learn about the issues and experience what some conditions might be like to live with.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive from people who have taken part in the workshop already, whether or not they have had prior knowledge or experience of the issues.

"A very useful intro to a complex subject," said one participant from Yorkshire & Humberside. "Excellent and informative," commented another. "Because my

"One of our key goals was to break down some of the myths and preconceptions people have about mental health"
TUTOR VINCE MITCHELL

knowledge was limited before the course, I feel I have learned just enough to assist me in my role at work," said a third.

Vince Mitchell, the OU Associate Lecturer and mental health nurse who wrote the course and delivered it in the Northern and Yorkshire & Humberside regions, says the day is designed both to be informative and enjoyable.

"One of our key goals was to break down some of the myths and preconceptions people have about mental health and present it in a more positive way, as well as looking

at reducing discrimination in the workplace and improving access for people with mental health problems," he explains.

"Because some participants will have limited experience and some may know quite a bit about mental health, we designed the course so that if people want to explore any of the issues, there is a bit of depth there and the OU tutors who deliver it are people who have specialist knowledge they can draw on."

Vince's colleague Walter

Pisarski, who delivered the workshop in the West Midlands, says the course shows how mental health is best viewed as a continuum we can all move up and down on, rather than a set of problems that affect other people.

"Mental health can mean a lot of things, from depression to psychosis, and it's good to make people aware of mental health not in a negative way as an illness but as something positive we can deal with

in various ways," he says.

Like Vince, Walter enjoyed delivering the workshop to a group of interested UNISON members who had taken the opportunity to engage with what can feel like a difficult topic.

"When people come back to me and say 'I have learned something,' that is the best outcome I can hope for – if someone says they have learned something they didn't know before, then I am happy!" Walter says. ■

LAUGHING AWAY THE BLUES

UNISON learning reps at Merseytravel have been encouraging more men to talk about anxiety, depression and panic attacks by running a comedy course with a mental health focus.

Tutor and stand-up comedian Sam Avery (second left, with learners) taught the 12 male participants the skills and techniques they would need to perform a short routine in front of an invited audience at one of the city's comedy clubs at the end of the six-week course.

The Comedy Trust was able to deliver the course free of charge thanks to a grant from the Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group's Healthy Liverpool programme, which looks at non-medical approaches to improving health and well-being in the city.

The Feeling Funny course was targeted at men because they are much less likely to be diagnosed with mental health issues but much more likely to commit suicide, which is now the biggest killer of UK males aged 25-45.

Earlier this year, Merseytravel ULRs brought in The Comedy Trust to host Well Funny, a well-being event open to everyone that explored how humour can help people deal with everyday stress.



Jane Parkes was one of the first learning reps UNISON trained to promote development opportunities to her co-workers in schools on Tyneside.

Gaining confidence, delivering skills

Jane Parkes felt so nervous on the way to her first Return to Learn residential weekend that every time she passed a public phone box, she rang her mum for a bit of reassurance (this was back in the 1990s, when only City traders lugged their enormous mobiles around with them).

But fast forward 15 years to 2008 and Jane was preparing to deliver Return to Learn for the union on Tyneside, having trained both as a ULR and a lay tutor during the intervening years.

“Because I have been not very confident in myself, I had more of an understanding of how the learners were feeling, so it definitely helped me connect with them,” she says.



“The teaching assistants were over the moon that they had been offered a course that had been funded by the union”

ULR JANE PARKES

With the support of the then Regional Education Officer Keith Hodgson and the help of a team of Volunteer Education Advisers, Jane delivered a successful course, and is currently waiting to hear about

another she is scheduled to lead, which will be her fourth.

A Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) at a Jarrow Primary School, Jane was seconded to the South Tyneside Local Government Branch office two days a week for two years to put together learning opportunities for schools staff, including a Level 3 autism awareness course for 20 Teaching Assistants (herself included).

“The TAs loved the course and they were over the moon that they had been offered something that had been funded by the union, which put UNISON in a really good light,” Jane says.

The woman who had been anxious about spending one

night away from home on her first residential is much more relaxed about travelling these days – and not just around the UK, but internationally as well. Jane delivered a session on her work as a ULR to a conference organised by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in Washington DC eight years ago.

Her presentation and activities went down so well that the ATF delegates gave

her a standing ovation when she finished, and quizzed her at an informal dinner afterwards about Return to Learn and her work as a learning rep, a role she has now had more than 15 years.

“Washington was absolutely amazing, but if I hadn’t done Return to Learn and all the other courses, I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to do that and I wouldn’t have had the confidence to travel that

far on my own,” she says.

Jane reckons UNISON learning has played a huge part in her life. “I have been on courses where people have said, ‘I’m glad you asked about that because I wasn’t sure but I wouldn’t have asked’,” she says. “And I think I wouldn’t have asked if I hadn’t gained the confidence I have through UNISON: it’s had an absolutely massive effect on my life.” ■

SPREADING THE MESSAGE

Carol McGrath became a UNISON learning rep last year and is already delivering workshops for her colleagues in adult social care at Leeds City Council.

With the help of Kickstart funding from the Inclusive Learning project, Carol delivered the Staying strong free members’ workshop, which went down very well with participants.

“There was a good mix of learners in the room, everyone was really engaged with the workshop and people said it was interesting and they enjoyed it,” she says.

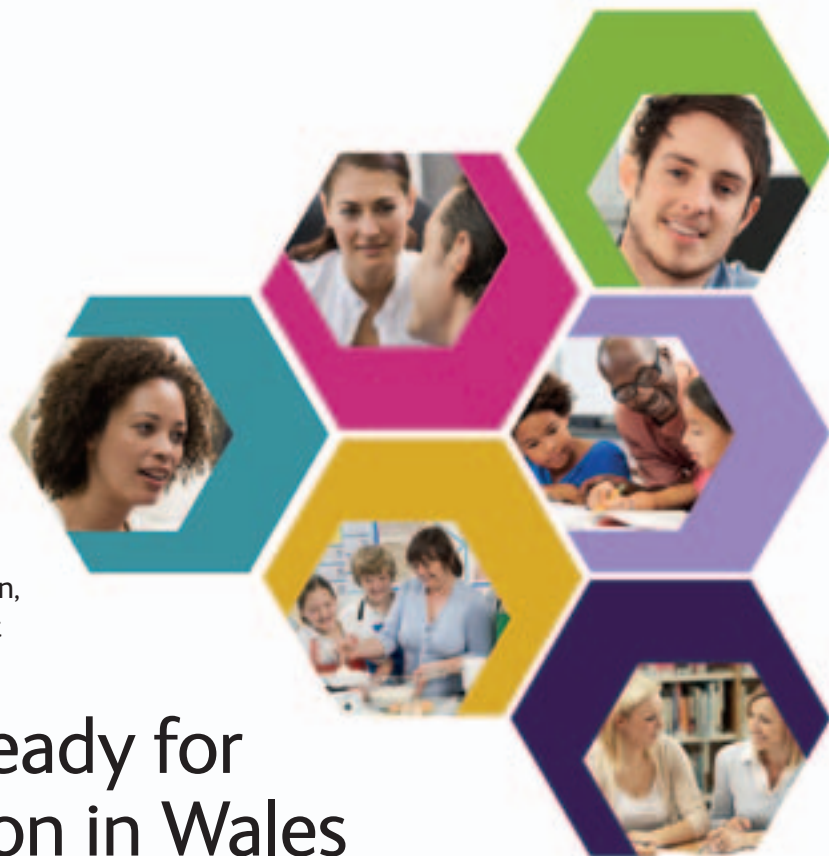
As a result, Carol is set to deliver the workshop for members in another department at the local authority. “That’s really positive in terms of my development as a ULR, I’m getting extra experience through the training as well,” she says.

The first session Carol delivered after she trained as a ULR was to raise awareness among colleagues of all the opportunities available through UNISON learning, which prompted several people to enrol on distance learning qualifications to develop their careers.

Carol has also launched a reading group in the department, and has set up a bookswap bookcase funded through another Kickstart grant. “People may find it hard to switch off during the working day so it’s good to be able to sit down with their colleagues at lunchtime and discuss a book they have all read,” she says.



Hundreds of schools staff in Wales have seized the opportunity to develop their skills through a massively successful training programme launched by UNISON to help members with professional registration, which came into effect in April 2016.



Getting ready for registration in Wales

When the Education Workforce Council (EWC) introduced professional registration for all learning support workers in schools in Wales, UNISON put together a campaign that combined getting the message out to everyone affected with a training offer to help develop their skills.

The project put a team of Fighting Fund Organisers (FFOs) into the field to go into schools and talk to staff about registration and the benefits of joining UNISON. But it also featured a training programme tailor-made for learning support workers, who still tend to get far fewer development opportunities

than their teaching colleagues.

“The programme was put together for us by the Open University (OU), the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), YMCA Cymru Wales and the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) Digi Skills project,” explains Area Organiser Jenny Griffin.

“The courses covered digital literacy in school, making literacy fun, maximising pupil attainment and behaviour management: we planned to do one topic a month, one in South Wales, one in North Wales and one in West Wales.”

The response was overwhelming. “With the FFOs actually out on the ground talking to people about

registration, the minute we sent out the email, we were absolutely inundated with applications,” Jenny recalls. “We quickly added three or four dates in each area – and we still had waiting lists.”

Feedback from learners has been enormously enthusiastic. Jan Rhodes from Y Pant Comprehensive School called Closing The Gap “the best course I have ever been on.” Nadine Lewis from Abertillery Comprehensive said that “sharing and discussing the good practice with everyone has made a huge difference to my confidence and will help a great deal in my job role.” And Luke Phillips from Crynallt Primary School



said the course gave him “a better understanding and a list of strategies to implement in my school.”

And the organising payoff has been significant, with the schools membership up by 300 in April 2016 compared to the previous 12 months, and the project successfully identifying a UNISON contact in every school FFOs have visited.

“There is a direct link between the learning offer, our visibility in schools and our membership figures,” says Regional Organiser (Schools Staff Lead) Jess Turner.

“As the leading, and largest, school support staff union, we offer more value for membership than other unions. The learning offer has given us another opportunity to go into schools and the courses are of such high quality that word is spreading and it’s really improved our reputation.”

In addition, UNISON has put together a new reps course specifically for learning support workers in schools, which was successfully piloted with 17 new reps in January.

And the FFOs have helped launch four new schools forums, which bring together learning support workers from all the schools

FILLING THE TRAINING GAP

Schools staff from some of the 50 academies in the Nottingham area have been improving their skills through a programme of workshops and training days.

Held at the University of Nottingham one Saturday in June 2015, the first one-day workshop attracted almost 40 members, with workshops on behaviour management and assertiveness run by The Open University (OU) and the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA).

“It seemed to hit the spot as there was very high praise in the feedback we collected on the day: everyone felt it was really good quality training and they went away with something to raise with their headteachers and colleagues,” explains UNISON East Midlands Area Organiser Brian Crosby.

As a result, Brian helped secure additional funding to run three training days for academy and local education authority staff: the first on workplace rights, the second on autism awareness and the third on employability skills.

Thanks to the programme, two participants have volunteered to become UNISON learning reps, another is training to become a steward and a fourth is reactivating her accreditation as a steward in her school.

Academy staff have also launched the Forum for ACademy Teaching Assistants and Support staff (FACTS), which currently meets once every three months to debate and discuss workplace issues.

in particular local authority areas to develop action plans on issues of concern.

Jenny and Jess are hoping to launch a new organising initiative when the current professional registration project closes in September.

“In addition to taking the enhanced learning offer to a bigger audience, we want to develop the work around registration and use it as a campaign platform to get schools staff better pay and conditions,” Jess says. ■



JESS HURD/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

Getting to grips with IT

UNISON's workshop Making the most of the internet is helping members across the country learn their way round computers, tablets and smartphones.

Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Branch Education Officer Jane Collier is helping her members improve their skills by running a series of UNISON's own workshops at the south London NHS Foundation Trust.

Jane ran the popular workshop Making the most of the internet twice in spring 2016, helping members improve the IT skills we all need to be confident on computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

"The seven women who took part in the April workshop left some good feedback and picked out the different parts they found useful," says UNISON Learning and

Workforce Development Officer Emma Lipscombe, who delivered both sessions.

"A lot of people were really excited about moving pictures off their cameras and smartphones. Once they have had a bit of training, they can see how they can do it, which is great because photos are such an important part of our lives and our memories, so it's nice when people get that light bulb moment."

Prior to the two internet workshops, Jane had successfully organised UNISON's Your skills, your future workshop twice during 2016. The 30 members who attended were able to identify all the skills they already had and new ones that would help them move on in their professional or personal lives.

"It was good to have opportunities for discussion and I enjoyed the tips to increase confidence the most," commented one member afterwards. "The pace was very good, the tutor was excellent and the case studies group work was particularly good," said another. "It was a good start to help me plan my

LEARNING IN NUMBERS
We ran **187** ICT courses over 2015/16



"A lot of people were really excited about moving pictures off their cameras and smartphones"

EMMA LIPSCOMBE, LAOS

future," commented a third. Jane is happy to have had such positive feedback from members. "From the feedback we received, I think this is clearly something that people found really useful," she says.

As the branch is keen to work with management at the Trust, Jane was glad to have a member of the Trust's education training and development team attend the autumn 2015 session.

"This was somebody who could go back to our education and training department and feed back to them about the course, and it's no bad thing for them to be aware of what we are doing in a union capacity," she says.

To help her promote the one-day workshops, Jane was able to enlist the support of a couple of ULRs who trained around the time the branch signed a learning agreement with the Trust in early 2014. ■

IMPROVING DEMENTIA CARE THROUGH THE UNION

More than two dozen staff at the Kingfisher House care home in Newmarket, Suffolk, took part in UNISON's one-day dementia awareness workshop, which was free for members of the union.

The course, delivered by a tutor from The Open University (OU), has given staff the skills to improve their communication with care home residents with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. It has also helped them improve the care they offer these residents.

"People say they are finding it easier to understand why someone with dementia is arguing with them or why they are confused and what they can do to overcome that," explains UNISON Eastern Region Local Organiser Heather Cripps, who organised the course.

"It's also helping them with their own families, because a number of people who have a grandfather or father or family member with dementia can relate more to them and why they are behaving like they are."

The care home is also pleased with the results of the course, and has asked Heather if the union would run it again so that its newer members of staff can also benefit.

In addition, UNISON Assistant National Officer Kalvinder Tiwana attended the Newmarket course and has since circulated details to regional contacts working on the national Four Seasons project to see if they would like to host the workshop in any of their homes across the country.

Kingfisher House is part of the Four Seasons Health Care, the independent provider of health and social care services that signed a ground-breaking recognition agreement with UNISON three years ago.

The agreement covers more than 500 care homes, hospitals and specialised care centres employing more than 30,000 staff caring for more than 20,000 residents.



“Winning the award really shows what amazing work we have done as a team”
 ULR HANNAH SLADE

WINNING FOR THE TEAM

When Nottingham City branch learning rep Hannah Slade won the TUC’s ULR of the Year award last September, she said the recognition really belonged to the entire team of reps.

“It feels fantastic to win ULR of the year – although it is an individual award, I think it really shows what amazing work we have done as a team,” she said.

Hannah made herself a worthy winner by helping the branch put learning at the heart of everything it does, according to Regional Learning and Development Organiser (RLDO) Gavin McCann.

“Because of Hannah, all the reps are aware of the learning offered, management have been engaged in a meaningful process to support literacy and numeracy and apprentices, hundreds of members have attended other courses and a great team of ULRs are active all with her support,” Gavin said. ■

HELPING MEMBERS FACE CHANGE

Northants Police Lifelong Learning Coordinator Jenny Brown won the 2015 Midlands TUC Union Learning Rep of the Year award for helping her members improve their skills at a time of significant staffing cuts.

“While our members were going through these really worrying times, we wanted to offer them something that their union could help them with,” says Jenny.

With Jenny’s support, more than 150 UNISON members have completed a wide range of distance learning courses through The Skills Network, and gained valuable careers advice and employability skills.

Many members have also gained European Computer Driving Licence qualifications and dozens have taken part in taster sessions in British Sign Language, maths homework help, Indian head massage and yoga, dealing with sickness absence, supporting disabled workers and supporting older women workers.

● The branch also won the national Learning at Work Week Award (LAWW) for Supporting Maths, English and Digital Skills for encouraging nearly two dozen staff at regional police headquarters to undertake skills checks during LAWW last May. ■



DEBORAH WINS WALES AWARD

Neath Port Talbot branch Lifelong Learning Officer Deborah John has won this year’s Wales UNISON ULR of the year award.

Deborah, who works in the training and development team at Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, has been engaging with hard-to-reach groups

and the wider community since first becoming a ULR 15 months ago.

She has enrolled more than 60 staff from environmental-technical services, a group that usually has limited office contact, on Essential Skills courses. She has also organised dyslexia support, and awareness training on issues such as hate crime and human trafficking.

Deborah says that the ULR award is recognition not only of her work but also that of UNISON and the whole Learning, Training and Development team at the council.

“I feel inspired by the adult learners I work with as I see the

“I feel inspired by the adult learners I work with as I see the progression in their lives and the increase in their self-esteem”
 LIFELONG LEARNING OFFICER DEBORAH JOHN

progression in their lives and the increase in their self-esteem,” she says.

“To feel that you can make a difference to someone is rewarding and encouraging.” ■

ACCESS FOR EVERYONE

UNISON’s Inclusive Learning Project won the Business Liaison Award at last year’s Sign Language Studies Centre (SLSC) awards in Cwmbran, in recognition of the team’s commitment to making learning fully accessible.

All the regional and national Inclusive Learning project staff who took part in last year’s two-day course on deaf/deafblind awareness and sign language achieved a Level 1 in Deaf Awareness and Communication and an Introduction to British Sign Language (BSL) national certificate.

“SLSC said they are very proud to work in partnership with us as we have similar values to them and



believe in making learning accessible to all,” recalls UNISON Learning and Workforce Development Officer Edna Warwick, who collected the award on behalf of the team.

“They said that we were a great learner-centred organisation and hope that they can work with us again in the future – something we are very keen to do.” ■



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

“It was really good that the ULRs got together to talk about ways to engage with members through activities they could easily set up”

RLDO ROSE BENT

Sharing good ideas, engaging more members

ULR forums throughout the country are helping local learning reps get together to network, share resources and work effectively in teams.

UNISON learning reps in the various different regions are getting together to share good practice, pool resources and support each other, thanks to the ULR forums that are regularly running across the country.

While the forums are giving learning reps from different branches the chance to network with each other, they are definitely not talking shops: they are action-oriented meetings that enable ULRs to offer concrete and practical help to each other and get support from regional and national members of the Learning and Organising

Services (LAOS) team.

At the Yorkshire & Humberside ULR forum in March, for example, National Learning and Development Organiser Jon Tennison and Regional Learning and Development Organiser Rose Bent helped learning reps look at the full spectrum of

the UNISON learning offer.

Throughout the day, Jon and Rose emphasised how the 15 learning reps, education coordinators and lifelong learning coordinators who attended could use Kickstart funding from LAOS to help launch learning activities at local level.

“It was really good that they all got together to talk about ways to engage with members through activities they could easily set up,” Rose says.

Feedback from participants was very positive. “Very useful, particularly for sharing ideas and good practice,” said one. “It was good to know that ULRs are important to UNISON,”

LEARNING IN NUMBERS

This year we have trained **88** new ULRs and **260** ULRs on follow-on courses

commented another. “I will endeavour to provide a multi-branch workshop with Kickstart funding,” pledged a third.

Rose is currently looking to organise a follow-up forum in the autumn to help maintain the momentum.

In the East Midlands, RLDO Gavin McCann has set up a Lincolnshire ULR forum to bring learning reps together from the various different branches that are scattered over what it a very large and very rural area.

“We have two or three ULRs in the Spalding area in different branches, and we have two new ULRs in the Grantham area, again in different branches,” Gavin explains.

“The point of the forum is to bring together all the ULRs in a very geographically dispersed county to start working together as a team.”

The first forum, which met in Lincoln in February, put together a plan to run the LAOS one-day member workshops by area rather than by branch, with one learning rep volunteering to coordinate each workshop.

So Jeanette Ray, ULR at Johnson Community Hospital, organised the Power to be you confidence-building course for June, and has invited all UNISON members in the area, regardless of what branch they belong to.

And Christine Radford-

SPREADING AUTISM AWARENESS

At April’s Lincolnshire ULR Forum, Lincolnshire Police Branch Learning Officer Nigel Wass offered to help other learning reps organise autism awareness workshops along the lines of the successful sessions he has run for police officers and staff.

The workshops proved so popular, with 100 staff and officers signing up in advance, that they had to be run all over again just two weeks later.

Senior officers joined their junior colleagues and police staff at the sessions, which were delivered by the largest specialist charity in the region, Autism East Midlands.

“This is something that police staff and officers are desperate to know about,” says Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gavin McCann. An academic study published in February 2016 showed that 69 per cent of autistic adults were unhappy about how police officers had treated them, and 58 per cent of officers were dissatisfied by their work with people with autism.

Nigel used the forum to offer to help other branches run similar sessions – and the UNISON branches at Leicestershire Police and Nottinghamshire Police are both organising similar sessions for Learning At Work Week this year.

“The other ULRs were able to hear exactly how Nigel organised very successful workshops and will be getting in touch to get more tips,” Gavin says.

Coleman, who is Lifelong Learning Coordinator at South Kesteven Local Government Branch, has organised the Facing change together course in Grantham, which has been advertised to all the members in the area.

In addition, Lincolnshire

County UNISON, which has built up a significant number of books through its popular book-swap scheme, has donated many titles to the police branch to distribute to police stations across the county to support reading at work. ■



ALL PHOTOS: JESS HURD/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

You've got the power!

UNISON members up and down the country can learn useful techniques for building their self-confidence at the new Power to be you workshop.

Do you avoid going to meetings if you can help it? Do you keep quiet at work even though you have something to say? Do you do anything to avoid giving a presentation in the office?

If the answer to any of those questions is Yes, then you stand to gain a huge amount from UNISON's brand new one-day workshop Power to be you, which is free to members and running in various places across the country (ask your ULR or check your branch/regional website to find out when it's on near you).

"I feel a weight has been totally lifted now and it's bringing back that confidence"

Using proven techniques to help members boost their self-confidence, the workshop:

- improves participants' self-esteem;
- addresses confidence and assertiveness issues;
- helps participants to speak up with confidence.

The day opens with a short quiz to find out how confident everyone is feeling, and then spends the rest of the morning looking at what confidence is and what you can do with it, with lots of information on handouts to take away and use afterwards.



Delegates to this year's National Women's Conference review the new Power to be you workshop in this 90-second YouTube video:
<http://bit.ly/25ci8uv>

The afternoon concentrates on how to speak up in any kind of meeting at your workplace, with lots of room for everyone to practise their new skills, and finishes with participants making a very short presentation on public speaking.

Put together by National Learning and Workforce Development Officer Edna Warwick, the course was unveiled to ULRs and tutors from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in February 2016.

"The briefing was absolutely fantastic: we had really positive feedback from the tutors who will be delivering the course, the ULRs loved it and everyone went away saying, 'This should really take off'," Edna says.

A taster session for the full workshop delivered by Education Officer Davinder Sandhu went down very well at National Women's Conference in Brighton 2016.

"Doing this confidence building workshop has really inspired me – it's learning how to use your confidence in a positive way to get the best results out of it," said one participant, while another commented, "I like to think we've gone away feeling empowered."

The taster made a real difference to another



TAKE A DEEP BREATH ...

A dozen staff at Hillingdon Borough Council learned useful ways of identifying and combatting stress at a Staying strong members' workshop delivered by Education Officer Davinder Sandhu in the autumn.

"A lot of people working for the council have been affected by restructuring, and having to apply for your own job without knowing if you would keep it has caused a huge amount of stress," Davinder explains.

"So we spent some time thinking about strategies in terms of rest and relaxation and people shared their ideas about what worked for them: when one person said they found cooking relaxing but never had time, we were able to discuss time management to help them."

The participants said the session had helped them recognise the symptoms of stress, and they would be taking away several useful solutions from sharing ideas between themselves such as eating lunch away from the desk or taking a short walk outside the office.

Following on from the session, 10 people enrolled on a six-week guided meditation course delivered by qualified tutor Giancarlo Serra, who happens to be a former Hillingdon UNISON member.

"The classes introduced techniques on how to relax that could be practised first thing in the morning to give that well-being feeling for the day or at the end of the day before bedtime to aid a restful sleep," explains Assistant Branch Secretary Sharon Benjamin.

participant in the session.

"I feel a weight has been totally lifted now and it's bringing back that confidence that I had to begin with," she

said. "I really enjoyed it and I'd like to do the full session to build on that confidence now because it was a really good experience." ■

You could complete an Open University course sooner than you think if you have any university-level study or qualifications to your name.

Take your learning to the next level

If you left university before completing your degree, or have taken university-level qualifications such as HNCs and HNDs, you can cash in that previous study towards a new qualification with The Open University (OU).

That means you can save yourself time and money and potentially change your life by achieving a qualification you may have thought was beyond your reach.

Recognition of prior learning like this was what helped Estelle when she decided to finish the degree she had left unfinished a few years earlier.

Having chosen the OU as she was working full-time, needing to study flexibly around work and family commitments, Estelle was able to skip the first year and start in

the second year. And she was also able to put her studies on hold for another three years when she discovered she was pregnant with her first child.

"The OU fitted around me, so despite a hard slog, working, having a family and studying, I have achieved the degree I was hoping for!" Estelle says.

Benefiting from a personalised learning experience, which has been designed to fit around jobs

and personal lifestyles, OU students can also continue to make a living and develop their careers by working and studying at the same time.

That's what Darren was able to do when he enrolled on an OU degree so he could take his computing knowledge to the next level – and because he already had an HNC, he didn't have to take all the OU modules as his HNC counted towards his final degree.

"Even while studying, my career was progressing faster. I was picking things up on the course I could use at work," Darren says. "The OU has been one of the best experiences of my life."

Like Darren, Philip was able to use his HND in business to go straight into the final stage of OU study, which he

More information for learners is available at www.openuniversity.co.uk/ulearn



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

FREE ONLINE RESOURCES FROM THE OU

The Open University (OU) has been developing free online resources that will help more people identify key learning opportunities linked to improving their life and career prospects. This will include a new website and six free online courses, which will all be available from September 2016.

The new website PEARL (part-time education for adults returning to learn) will provide clear and simple information about the wide variety of learning opportunities available to adult learners looking for flexible, part-time options.

It will include both academic and vocational routes with signposts to relevant resources and sources of support.

The website will link the world of work and education and include support for those looking for progression opportunities that may lead to studying at a higher level.

The six free online courses will particularly appeal to those looking to improve their career prospects or wishing to start a new career within a specific sector:

- introducing practical healthcare
- supporting children's development
- caring for adults
- setting up a small business
- taking part in the voluntary sector
- planning a better future.

Each course will contain approximately 15 hours of learning. Learners will be able to collect online badges that can be shared with employers and displayed on social media sites.

● **For more information please email spn-nnco-enquiries@open.ac.uk**

in a huge range of subjects from arts and psychology to business and science. There's also the unique Open degree

which enables students to combine subjects according to their own interests and career aspirations. ■

Meet some new faces in LAOS

The Learning and Organising Services team is changing, as new people arrive and long-established staff prepare to retire.

Teresa Donegan, Head of Learning and Organising

After cutting her teeth as branch secretary of a large local government branch, Teresa started working as a union organiser for UNISON in 2002, and was the South-East regional manager before taking on her current role last summer. Her priority is ensuring members and activists get the best possible access to learning and development that can support them in their work and personal lives. "I really enjoy working with such a fantastic, committed team in LAOS: together we can all make a difference for our members," she says.



Martin Russo, Inclusive Learning Project Manager

As someone who completed a part-time MA in journalism four years ago while he was working in UNISON's finance department, Martin knows first-hand how learning has the potential to change people's lives. He is currently acting Inclusive Learning Project Manager while Davinder Sandhu covers a maternity absence in the education department. "It's so fantastic to see people learning new skills and empowering themselves to develop in a positive way," he says.

Jon Tennison, National Learning and Development Organiser

After working in the unionlearn SERTUC team for 14 years in



Congress House, Jon is using that wealth of experience to help UNISON learning reps organise learning activity on the ground, focussing on health projects and private care homes. "It's a great opportunity to support the fantastic work being done by ULRs in branches and regions to help members access learning and skills development opportunities," Jon says.

Tom Jenkins, North-West Learning Organiser

A former maths teacher with ten years' experience as a local teachers' union activist, Tom is helping branches across the region develop new and existing activists to improve and extend the learning opportunities on offer to members. "It's all about supporting the branches, whether that's helping them put on a launch event for Reading Ahead or identifying their own training needs and seeing if one of our partners could provide that," he says. ■

Rose Bent, Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Learning & Development Organiser

Rose has been working for Yorkshire & Humberside Region for close to 20 years, first in the membership department and more recently in education and the ULF project. In her new role, Rose



WE'RE GOING TO MISS YOU TWO ...

Terry Wickenden

It was 1977 when Terry began working for NUPE, one of the three unions that would later go on to form UNISON in the early 1990s. After starting as a secretary to future UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe, Terry moved through various departments before finding her natural home in learning and organising. As part of her brief to look after all aspects of marketing for LAOS, Terry has edited the last five editions of Ulearn with her characteristically keen eye for detail. And she has also coordinated the mentoring programme for NEC members. "If you give a task to Terry, you know it will get done and get done to a very high standard," says Education Officer Davinder Sandhu.

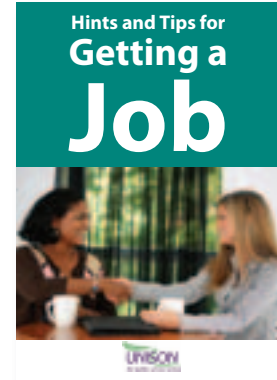
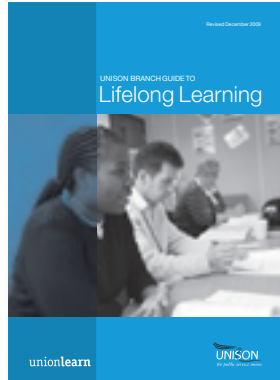
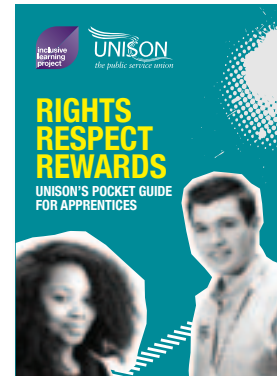


Donald Cameron

Throughout his nearly three decades of work for UNISON and its predecessor NUPE, Donald has helped put member development at the heart of learning and organising. From his pioneering role developing the ground-breaking Return to Learn and Women's Lives courses to his more recent work on the new members' learning offer, Donald has been a staunch advocate of changing members' lives through learning. With his encyclopaedic knowledge of the field and strategic approach to any issue, he has made a massive contribution to the success of Learning and Organising Services. "You can go to Donald with any question and he will always point you in the right direction," says Davinder.



PHOTOS OF MARTIN, JON, TOM AND DONALD BY JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



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Read Anytime Anywhere Toolkit to help ULRs encourage reading in the workplace. Ref ACT248. To order, email LearningAndOrganising@unison.co.uk

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