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LEARN

SUMMER 2019

In this issue...

Reading for everyone

Moving on with maths

Delivering digital skills

Supporting apprentices

Union
Learning
Fund

with unionlearn

UNISON
the public service union

36



4



22



30



12



10



24



UNISON ULEARN MAGAZINE

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MARCUS ROSE

It's inspiring to read about how our members have been progressing on their learning journeys, with the support of our network of dedicated ULRs, lifelong learning coordinators and regional and national staff.

Welcome

***** Every year, more and more UNISON members discover that they can develop their skills for work and home lives with the help of their union, and in particular our network of trained union learning reps (ULRs).

This year's edition of Ulearn once again celebrates some of the many achievements of UNISON learners over the past 12 months. It's inspiring to see how members have been able to move on, especially when some of them used to imagine they would never be able to progress.

The magazine also includes profiles of some of the ULRs who play such a crucial role in the lives of their learners

– encouraging them to take the plunge and offering them a helping hand when they need it to keep going.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Union Learning Fund (ULF), which has provided much of the financial support for all this work. We have put that money to good use over the past 20 years, particularly by reaching learners who would not have had the confidence to improve their skills with any other organisation.

Congratulations to everyone who has learned something new through UNISON this year, from the members who have gained their first English or maths qualification right the way up to those

who have graduated from university. We're proud of every one of you.

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

LOTS OF TOP TIPS FOR YOU

- 4 Reading Ahead
- 12 Member learning
- 14 Young workers
- 22 Menopause
- 28 E-learning
- 34 Digital Champions



Getting ahead with Reading Ahead

“I really believe that learning at work transforms people’s lives”
 Teresa Donegan, Head of Learning and Organising

Reading for pleasure not only helps people unwind – it boosts our self-confidence, improves our health and wellbeing and leads to learning opportunities that can really help us change our lives for the better.

***** UNISON hosted the national launch of the 2019 Reading Ahead challenge last September with a lunchtime event featuring award-winning author Ann Cleeves, author of the two successful sequences of detective books, Shetland and Vera.

Guests in the Garden Room at UNISON Centre in London included several ULRs who have successfully run Reading Ahead in their branches, including Jane Eyre from Blackpool Health Branch.

In addition, there were members of other

organisations that have run the initiative, including the library services in Brent, Islington, Lewisham, Newham, Westminster, colleges such as Uxbridge and Ealing, Hammersmith & West London and the prisons in Pentonville

and Thameside.

Head of Learning and Organising Teresa Donegan said UNISON was delighted to be hosting the launch as the initiative helped participants progress to other learning opportunities.

“Reading Ahead not only benefits the individuals to gain the confidence to read, it leads them on to other learning opportunities, which does lead to them improving

Find out more



YOU COULD RUN READING AHEAD IN YOUR WORKPLACE!

Reading Ahead encourages participants to read and review six different titles (books, poems, articles, magazines, online resources).

If you’re interested in running the challenge in your workplace, please contact Clair Hawkins. Email: C.Hawkins@unison.co.uk

their overall wellbeing and does lead to promotion at work,” Teresa said.

“And any of you who have seen the unionlearn report about union learning activity, you’ll see the benefit it brings not just to the individuals but to the employer and the society and the economy as a whole – I really believe that learning at work transforms people’s lives.”

Reading Agency Chief Executive Sue Wilkinson said the organisation was committed to breaking cycles of illiteracy to help the adults it works with to lead happier, better, healthier and more fulfilled lives

“We want to do it by working with the people we are trying to reach, which is why our partnership with UNISON is so important to us,” Sue said.

Ann highlighted the ways libraries make a difference in her speech and the question and answer session that followed.

“When I was a kid we didn’t have books in the house except library books – it was being taken to the library every Saturday that got me reading and then writing,” Ann said.

“Shetland tourism has gone up by 43 per cent since the television show has been on – that’s more money coming into the country generating jobs, generating income – and there would be no Shetland on the television, there would be no Shetland books, without libraries.” *

MERSEYTRAVEL WRITERS PUBLISH THEIR REFLECTIONS

Building on their successes with Reading Ahead, UNISON learning reps at Merseytravel have launched a creative writing course, which is delivered by PD North, the network of professional exchanges across the North of England created by and for FE practitioners.



The group has published a new booklet, Reflections, to show how creative writing can have a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. It includes writing exercises, writing tips, recipes, inspirational quotes and work by members of the group, plus advice on activities to improve physical and mental health such as walking, cycling and yoga. You can download Reflections from: <https://bit.ly/2GgWL2p>

Last summer, Merseytravel celebrated helping more than 100 participants from a range of Liverpool-based organisations to complete the Reading Ahead challenge.

... AND 100-PLUS COMPLETE IN NEWCASTLE, TOO

More than 100 participants completed the Reading Ahead challenge organised by Newcastle City Branch, in partnership with Newcastle Libraries and City Learning, with many of them attending a successful celebration event at City Library.

Newcastle UNISON Assistant Branch Secretary Nicki Ramanandi, City Council Chief Operational Officer Christine Herriot and Library and Information Officer Barbara Bravey from City Library all made speeches to welcome the 80-plus people who attended.

Certificates were presented to participants who had completed the challenge, while the library’s resident guitar and ukulele groups helped create a celebratory atmosphere at the event, which also featured a buffet lunch.



Stepping up, stepping out, stepping forward

UNISON learning is helping Katharine Friedmann gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications she needs to pursue a new career in adult education.

“Stepping Up seemed to be a good step in the right direction”
 Katharine Friedmann,
 Lifelong Learning Coordinator

***** Katharine Friedmann was one of 16 reps who took part in the Stepping Up Another Level course in the autumn, which was aimed at ULRs and other activists interested in running learning activities in the workplace, with a focus on language, literacy and numeracy.

As Lifelong Learning Coordinator (LLC) for Leicestershire County Branch, Katharine was keen to find out more about supporting English and maths in her workplace.

Becoming familiar with the range of learning resources

available to ULRs and LLCs, picking up tips on how to present it and gaining the confidence to lead people through learning activities were Katharine’s main takeaways from the two-day workshop at UNISON Centre.

When each participant had the chance to facilitate an activity involving the rest of the group on day two, Katharine ran a reading exercise on the history of hip-hop.

“That practice session was really brilliant,” says Learning and Workforce Development Officer Clair Hawkins, who organised the course.

“The group delivered really creative and enjoyable activities designed to break down barriers and engage people in reading, creative writing, and numbers: we were treated to music, art, mindfulness, games and even a hand-made dodecahedron with numbers on each face.”

Katharine will be putting into action what she learned on Stepping Up when she delivers her first sessions during this year’s Learning at Work Week (LAWW) in May.

PARTNERSHIP PAYS OFF IN STEVENAGE

UNISON and Unite are both working with Stevenage Borough Council on an adult learning partnership that is all set to help workers improve their English, maths and IT skills.

“This is a fantastic initiative, which has been supported at all levels within the council: by recognising the importance of functional skills and investing in their workforce, the council can be sure their staff have the skills they need now and in the future,” says Stevenage Local Government Branch ULR Helen Powell.

During an open day at the Cavendish Road depot last autumn, dozens of staff expressed their interest in functional skills courses, with more than 50 later completing initial assessments to determine the appropriate course for them.

Tutors from The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL) will deliver the courses on site, with learners eligible for paid release to attend.

“The course was definitely something along the same career path I’m trying to follow”

**Katharine Friedmann,
Lifelong Learning Coordinator**

But Katharine also got a great deal out of Stepping Up Another Level in terms of her own future development plans.

While she currently works as a senior business support assistant, Katharine is contemplating focusing more on the music tuition she offers outside work, where she specialises in one-to-one lessons in saxophone, piano, composition and music theory for people of all ages.

Gaining all the skills she would need to make that move was another reason that the workshop appealed to her. “I had been thinking tutoring would be a career I’d like to pursue, so Stepping Up seemed to be a good step in the right direction for that,” Katharine says.

And that’s how it turned out: taking part gave her the confidence that she

would be able to deliver a range of learning opportunities in future.

Since the workshop, Katharine has taken a further step towards her new career by taking part in UNISON’s coaching course earlier this year.

“The coaching course was definitely something along the same career path I’m trying to follow,” she says.

“There was lots of useful information about how to identify different personality types and how to encourage people to get the best out of themselves and value all their characteristics, which was really helpful,” she says.

“I think that will also help with my LLC role because now we have quite a few new learning reps, I will be leading a group of ULRs for the first time and it will help build relationships with them and

get the best out of them.”

Katharine has also enrolled on a Level 3 Award in Education and Training through Voluntary Action Leicester, with the help of a UNISON bursary towards the cost of the course fees.

“Taking part in the Stepping Up course re-affirmed that I would like to pursue a career in adult education but it’s difficult to get employed unless you have at least a Level 3 Award in Education and Training,” she says.

“So I enrolled on the course for professional reasons but I thought I would probably learn something useful as well!” *

Turning dreams into reality



“I learned so many things about women’s role in the trade union movement”
Elizabeth Cameron

All the learning and training she’d taken as a UNISON activist helped Elizabeth Cameron successfully overcome the challenges she faced during her degree at Ruskin College.

* Elizabeth Cameron was looking through a magazine she’d picked up at a conference when she spotted an advertisement for Ruskin College, founded 120 years ago this year to help working people gain a university education.

“My dream had always been to do a degree,” she recalls. “But there was a blip in my studies in the last year of high school, which made me lose confidence in my ability to achieve a degree and financially I hadn’t had the opportunity, so when I became a teenage parent I felt that avenue had completely closed for me.”

Elizabeth recognised that

turning her lifelong dream into reality was not going to be easy. This was 2013 and she was planning to stand for re-election as the female Black members’ rep to the National Executive Council (NEC) – so her union workload was already significant.

In addition, she had just become a single parent, with four children at school or college all needing their mother’s support and encouragement on their own learning journeys.

Then there were the financial barriers. Although Elizabeth was able to secure a UNISON bursary towards the course fees for her BA in International Trade Union and Labour Studies, her mother

had to pitch in as well in her first year. And that was before she was made redundant from Salford City Council, where she had been working for the previous 16 years, and had to take on zero-hours social care work to keep her family financially afloat.

Once Elizabeth started studying, it wasn’t long before the ghosts of her high school experience began to haunt her, whispering she was an academic failure even though she had gained workplace qualifications throughout her career since then.

What really helped, though, was all the learning and education she had

undertaken through UNISON since joining in 1995.

“When I first joined, I started taking part in the regional Black members’ self-organised group, which was fantastic and it just opened my world to UNISON,” Elizabeth says.

“And then once I got established in Salford, I started getting involved in the local branch as equalities officer and I went on any training that was going: I was so happy that this wonderful organisation I’d become a part of gave me such empowerment in the workplace – it’s incredible,” she says.

That confidence was crucial to making it through the five-and-half years of her degree, enabling Elizabeth to overcome the academic challenges, the organisational conundrums and all the obstacles that face every adult learner – life events, financial issues, family priorities, childcare.

Elizabeth is in no doubt that her university study has paid off in her UNISON life. “I learned so many things about women’s role in the trade union movement, Black people’s role in the trade union movement, the formation of the Labour Party, the exploitation of people at work nationally and internationally, the process of collective bargaining and employment law,” she says.

“That meant that in a political arena like the Labour Party conference I was on a different footing, I was engaging in debate at a completely different level because of what I was learning.”

And many of the papers Elizabeth took as part of her degree had a direct link to her work on the NEC, including her dissertation on Black self-organisation, she says.

“I remember one of my highest marks was on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and at the time I was on the NEC’s policy development and campaigns committee (PDCC) and did a presentation on CETA – so I was applying what we were learning academically and seeing what it means for 1.3 million public service workers, which is phenomenal,” she says.

Elizabeth graduated



with a 2:1 last October – and although she was disappointed when she first found out her final mark, she has since re-assessed her achievement with the help of her children.

“My kids persuaded me that if they’d got a 2:1, I’d be very happy with them, so I decided to be happy with me!” she says.

“All the opportunities UNISON afforded me definitely helped build my confidence and helped me believe I could do things and be a success: that’s why our learning is the jewel in the crown.” *

Find out more



HELP WITH YOUR STUDY COSTS

UNISON offers financial support to members taking part in various educational and learning opportunities, as well as a limited number of grants to members studying on trade union and labour movement or women’s studies courses, which are awarded on a first come, first served, basis.

*** To find out more and complete the relevant application form: <https://bit.ly/2HH10Va>**



Survey results will help us get you the learning you need

We have started analysing the record-breaking number of responses to our Skills for the Future survey, which reveals the importance of learning in the ever-changing world of work.



Thanks to all the ULRs, Lifelong Learning

Coordinators and other reps and staff who have helped promote our Skills for the Future survey, we have received a record-breaking 38,000 responses.

That makes our latest questionnaire one of the biggest non-government surveys ever undertaken, beating our own previous record of 27,000 responses that we achieved with the Skilled

for Work survey in 2011.

What that means is that UNISON members have helped us gather together a rich collection of data that will help us to ensure that the learning we offer in future remains useful, relevant, and of high quality.

The responses will also help generate the evidence we need to make the case for high-quality training for the entire workforce to the government, employers and other stakeholder organisations.

“Member learning is UNISON’s best-kept secret”

**Davinder Sandhu,
Education Officer**

“Member learning is UNISON’s best-kept secret: so many people tell me that they just don’t know about the learning opportunities that we offer,” says Education Officer Davinder Sandhu.

“We hope that the survey and the data we release from it will help spread the message about all the different ways in which you can improve such a wide range of



HUNDREDS SIGN UP FOR NUMERACY CHALLENGE

Hundreds of members in Yorkshire & Humberside signed up to take the National Numeracy Challenge within days of the launch of a new campaign by the regional learning team in the autumn.

Within 24 hours of the email alert, 360 members had pledged to take the Challenge, the free online tool that helps learners check their numeracy skills – and the figure later rose to more than 480.

The National Numeracy Challenge is an online assessment tool that helps you check your number skills and learn the maths you need both inside and outside work.

To coincide with unionlearn’s Maths Workout Week in October, Regional Learning and Development Organiser Rose Bent also organised Power Up Your Numbers, a successful one-day workshop at Northern College in Barnsley.

Eight learners took part in a wide range of fun and interactive number-based activities in pairs and groups.

“The workshop surpassed my expectations: people were engaged with the course and said they felt a lot more confident at the end of the day, with more tools to help them with their maths and with the National Numeracy Challenge,” Rose says.

* To test your number skills, visit

<https://www.nnchallenge.org.uk/unmemb>

Find out more



Visit the Organising Space to download our Making Every Penny Count toolkit to find fun informal activities for running lunch and learn sessions on understanding payslips, payday loans and budgeting (and other issues).

* <https://organisingpace.unison.org.uk/>

skills through our member learning programme.”

Analysis based on the first 17,000 returns (50 per cent of the responses) reveals that:

- * 80 per cent of members believe learning is important for their self-esteem
- * 70 per cent of members have undertaken learning for their work or career development, and 28 per cent for personal reasons
- * 55 per cent have accessed online training while just 16 per cent have taken part in classes at colleges or adult education centres.

The preliminary analysis also highlights there are some important issues that members are facing:

- * 62 per cent fear they could be made redundant within the next three years
- * 57 per cent believe automation is putting public service jobs at risk
- * 46 per cent recorded a reduction in the number of people doing the same work they do
- * 46 per cent reveal IT equipment and/or automation had been introduced in their workplace.

We will be launching the full report by Hilary Stevens and Andrew Dean from the University of Exeter at this year’s ULR Conference in UNISON Centre on Wednesday 25 September.

Before then, Hilary and Andrew will be presenting some headline findings at the Learning and Organising Services fringe meeting at National Delegate Conference in Liverpool on Tuesday 18 June. *

You can boost your confidence, improve your job prospects and gain professional skills through our popular and successful member learning programme.

Here to help you on your learning journey



ANDY PARASKOS



Ann McKelvey is one of thousands of members who have

started to get where they want to go through Return to Learn or Women's Lives, our ever-popular courses designed for adults who may have been away from learning for some time.

"I met some fantastic people and found a new desire for what I want to do in life from Return to Learn," says Ann, who works in an academy school in Leeds.

Ann was inspired by the 10-week course to think about her longer-term career prospects.

"Our tutor had recently trained as a teacher at university, which is what I had always wanted to do but thought I was too old and

YOU'VE GOT THE POWER!

Daniel Sturgess decided to enrol on a Power To Be You course in March so he could learn how to feel more confident and assertive in work meetings.

As health and safety officer for NHS South Warwickshire Foundation Trust UNISON Branch, Daniel has to attend regular meetings but sometimes feels nervous about speaking up in front of senior management.

"It was really good to get a real perspective of other's people's views on confidence and work together in groups to come up with solutions for yourself," says Daniel, who was one of 15 participants from a range of branches across the West Midlands region.

Daniel now feels more confident about attending future meetings for the branch. "I'm going to fully prepare to make sure I have all the right information to go forward," he says.

Find out more



HELPING SCHOOL STAFF IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS

More than 100 school support staff in five of the six counties that make up the Eastern region improved their skills at a series of UNISON/Open University (OU) workshops last year.

The staff came from 10 different branches and work for more than 50 different employers in Essex, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Nearly 50 members in all took part in the three workshops on challenging difficult behaviour that were held in Essex, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire.

In Hertfordshire, the focus was on practical measures to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds maximise their attainment at the Closing the gap workshop in May, which attracted 10 members over a bank holiday weekend.

And in Norfolk, 30 members attended a workshop covering both autism awareness and managing workplace stress – a particularly hot topic for many members in schools right now.

“The feedback was very positive: the members who attended got a lot out of the workshops,” says Eastern Regional Organiser Tracey Sparkes, who put together the summer term programme with the help of Fighting Fund Organisers Josh Cooper, Dionne Eade, Natasha Gales and David Yates.

Tracey is also pleased that the workshops led to several members volunteering to become stewards and workplace contacts to help spread the UNISON message to their colleagues.

“We wanted to encourage the members who attended to learn more about what we do as a union and why it’s important to have more activists in each school or multi-academy trust, so it was about trying to help people become more active and realise that they can make a real difference in their schools,” Tracey says.



Find out more



To find out when any courses and workshops in our member learning programme are running near you, or to get help organising a workshop in your branch, contact your regional education team.

*** <https://bit.ly/2IAZbwy>**

under-qualified. But on the course I thought, If he can do it at 40 then so can I! So after I finished, I proceeded to enquire about university courses,” Ann says.

“I am currently on the part-time Learning and Teaching (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Foundation Degree at the University of Leeds and plan to move on to the BA when I finish by the end of next year.”

Ann has also become an

active union learning rep (ULR) to encourage her co-workers to progress their own learning and has run the Reading Ahead challenge at her school and a health and wellbeing event.

Ann is so committed

to spreading the learning message that when she was in hospital for some minor surgery earlier this year, she encouraged the UNISON members looking after her to take up learning opportunities that they hadn’t heard about from anyone else. *

Speaking up for young workers

Kendal Bromley-Bewes wouldn't have become the chair of UNISON's young members' forum without developing herself through learning with UNISON.



It was attending her first young members'

weekend in Nottingham that changed everything for Kendal Bromley-Bewes four years ago.

"I can remember the exact place where I was sitting in this room in Nottingham thinking, I don't want to talk to all these people," Kendal recalls.

"But someone came up and said, I've been told to keep an eye on you, and from there it was just one of those things: the camaraderie in the room was just incredible and the street campaigning we did was really exciting – I'd never done anything

like that before."

Kendal has continued to develop herself throughout her Nursing (Children's) BSc (Hons) at the University of the West of England (she's due to graduate this summer).

She has taken part in UNISON courses on speech-writing, collective bargaining, CV-writing, British Sign Language, confidence for women, mindfulness, mental health awareness, sexual harassment and domestic abuse and she is clear that all of them have made a massive difference to her.

"UNISON provides you with these amazing learning opportunities that it would be ridiculous not to get

involved," Kendal says.

Connecting with the other UNISON members on courses has been another benefit of learning collectively, Kendal says.

"I really enjoy the friendships and camaraderie that is developed within these training sessions. Some of the best trade unionists that I have met, I met on these courses and I have stayed friends with: they have supported me and helped me when needed," she says.

But what's most important for Kendal is that UNISON's approach to learning is focused on empowering members to make change.

"That's something I'd never

“I really enjoy the friendships and camaraderie that is developed within these training sessions”

Kendal Bromley-Bewes, chair of UNISON's young members' forum

seen anywhere else. It's not like signing an online petition and nothing happens. Or asking for ATMs at the student council at uni but never getting them. It's about believing in yourself and making the change together with the collective,” she says.

Kendal's second year as chair of the young members' forum coincides with the Year of the Young Worker and she is hoping the forum can encourage more young people to join and get active throughout 2019.

“It's so exciting when you meet a young member who doesn't know what they're doing or feels too reserved to do anything and you have a chat and then six months later they're running workshops, they're the young members officer or they're the branch secretary and you think, Yes – this is what it's all about,” she says. *

YOUNG MEMBERS HAVE LEARNING NEEDS, TOO

Young members need to learn just as much as their older colleagues, says ULR Matthew Hodgson, who is also young members' officer for United Utilities in the North-West.

“As a ULR and a young member, I do find nearly 80 per cent of all learning channels are not targeted at the youth – I always find I have to go looking for the learning opportunity,” Matthew says.

As both a learning rep and Lifelong Learning Coordinator, Matthew is a firm believer in trying every learning opportunity before promoting it to his members.

“For every activity or course I have promoted or run, I have completed it myself initially to understand if the content meets the requirements of our local UNISON members and that allows me to promote the benefits of the course or activity to the right audience,” he says.

That meant that Matthew himself was one of nearly 50 branch members to take part in a Quick Reads holiday challenge to encourage people back into reading – something that helped him discover his own taste in books.

“Despite some of the Quick Reads stories not being my cup of tea, I found them a very good way to get me back into reading and now I am looking at reading the collection of Stuart MacBride books,” he says.

Find out more



IT'S THE YEAR OF YOUNG WORKERS

*** UNISON is making 2019 the year of young workers. You can download a new suite of resources to help your branch engage young workers and order printed materials from the online catalogue at: <https://bit.ly/2OkSkHI>**



Keeping busy in Orkney

Linda Halford keeps on delivering the goods when it comes to learning through UNISON on Orkney.

“In the long run, learning makes for a happier and more productive workforce”

Linda Halford, ULR

***** Orkney Local Services Branch ULR Linda Halford had her busiest year yet last year, organising a wide range of workshops attended by more than 90 learners in all.

The subjects covered included menopause awareness; mental health first aid; dealing with difficult situations; and an Agewise workshop on the transition from work to retirement, run by the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA).

Linda first became active in the branch five years

ago, when she was elected as a workplace steward at the March 2014 AGM.

It was the then Branch Secretary Karen Kent who suggested Linda would enjoy the annual conference of Scottish Union Learning (SUL, the Scottish counterpart to unionlearn) that was taking place in Dundee later that same year.

“I was just so amazed and in awe of everything at that conference,” Linda says. “We had nothing going on in Orkney at the time and I was so inspired

by the whole setup that I thought, I’ve got to take it home and get on with it!”

As soon as she returned to the island, Linda started planning her first two courses: one covering basic IT, the other a Chartered Management Institute (CMI) course through the local college that was funded by SUL.

“Those were the first two that set the ball rolling and it just snowballed from there,” Linda says.

Since then, there have

been three more basic IT courses for council staff, with 28 out of 30 learners passing their exams; two more CMI courses, both fully subscribed, with everyone gaining their qualifications at the end; as well as a successful Your Skills, Your Future one-day workshop for 12 people.

“One learner on Your Skills Your Future said she’d felt nervous about attending as she felt very low down on the ladder as a home carer,” Linda says.

“But by the end of the day, she’d identified many skills she didn’t know she had, which gave her a big boost and she left elated at having learned so much – comments like that make organising courses worthwhile.”

Now a fully qualified lay tutor for UNISON, after completing the equalities component of the training earlier this year, Linda has been putting her skills to good use by training branch activists.

“I love being able to share knowledge with people in a way they can pass on to others and take action themselves,” she says.

In the first four months of this year alone, Linda has re-started drop-in lunchtime sessions for branch activists; organised half-day workshops on menopause awareness and prostate awareness in

HELPING LONDON NHS STAFF PLAN THEIR FUTURES

The ULR team in West London Mental Health Branch is using this year’s Learning at Work Week (LaWW) as a platform to promote skills development and opportunities to staff at the NHS Trust.

At Lakeside Mental Health Unit, one of 30 locations covered by the branch, learning reps will be encouraging co-workers to identify the skills they already have by using the unionlearn Value My Skills cards and develop the skills they need through the free bite-sized English and maths courses on the Wranx platform and the Numeracy Challenge online tool.

“We’re going to focus on helping people plan for their future and try to dispel people’s fears about automation and identify the skills they will need moving forward,” explains Branch Secretary Khal Kiswani.

the workplace; ran a one-day workshop on dealing with difficult situations and conflicts at work; and marked International Workers’ Memorial Day once again in collaboration with the local UNISON health branch.

Later this spring, Linda will be organising UNISON’s one-day mental health awareness course for the second time in partnership with The Open University (OU) – and this time with council support. This summer, she is arranging a course on planning for retirement delivered by Affinity Financial Advisors. And later in the year, she

will be organising training around a Code of Conduct on workplace bullying as part of the branch’s campaign to negotiate an anti-bullying Charter with the council.

She is also currently closely involved in drawing up a new lifelong learning partnership agreement with the council, alongside the three other unions at the authority.

“I hope promoting learning helps people tackle problems and that will help them with their own development – and in the long run, learning makes for a happier and more productive workforce,” Linda says. ✨

“We wanted to raise awareness about how to talk about LGBT issues”

Izzy Pochin

Dorset UNISON has organised successful learning workshops to raise awareness of LGBT and disability issues and encourage members to join new self-organised groups for LGBT and disabled members in the branch.



Helping LGBT and disabled members raise their voice



As part of their drive to develop self-organisation for both disabled and LGBT members, Dorset UNISON ran learning workshops to mark both Disability History Month in December and LGBT History Month in February.

The successful taster session from UNISON's disability rights one-day workshop attracted 17 participants on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December.

Area Organiser Georgina Knight focused on definitions of equality and diversity, common stereotypes and

assumptions about different conditions, the challenges that people with disabilities face in the workplace and disabled people's employment rights.

Thanks to a Kickstart grant from Learning and Organising Services (LAOS), the branch was able to provide lunch for the participants.

“If people come away feeling

like they've had a good chat with their colleagues, picked up some good promotional material and had a good lunch, you're creating a culture where staff are invested in these sort of training opportunities, so you get buy-in for the future,” explains Joint Branch Disabled Members Officer Izzy Pochin.

More than a quarter of

Find out more



*** To help you support members in your branch who have dyslexia, check out our Dyslexia Awareness e-note <https://bit.ly/2tYHwFw> on the e-learning site.**



STEFANO CASNONI/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

GETTING THE LOWDOWN ON DYSLEXIA

UNISON learning reps, health and safety reps and stewards from across the South East region learned what dyslexia is, how it affects people and why it's an issue for UNISON branches on a two-day dyslexia awareness course in November.

Expert trainer Daniel Ahern from Adjust Services explained the causes, symptoms and effects of dyslexia, while Education Officer Davinder Sandhu explored what the condition can mean for day-to-day life at work.

One participant reported: "I know that the knowledge you gave me will influence how I deal with dyslexia in the future."

Davinder said the group was really enthusiastic. "Everyone engaged with the activities and came up with some great ideas about how they could support colleagues and challenge discrimination in the workplace," she said.



participants said they would be interested in starting a self-organised group (SOG) in the branch, which was one of the branch's key goals when setting up the event.

Only a few weeks later, the branch organised a half-day LGBT awareness training workshop, which was attended by 70 participants, as part of LGBT History Month in February.

"We wanted to create an education opportunity to raise awareness about how should we be talking about LGBT issues to help promote a culture of openness in the workplace," says Izzy, who is also the branch's LGBT officer.

Andy Hunt, the chief executive of advocacy and rights group Intercom Trust, led the three-hour session, which

included half an hour for lunch – again provided with the help of a Kickstart grant from LAOS.

"It was the largest session Intercom Trust have ever delivered: Andy did a fabulous job, the vast majority of people were really well engaged and we got some really good feedback about how positive, open and interactive the training was," Izzy says.

Since the event, several members have expressed an interest in forming an LGBT SOG – another key outcome for the branch.

Now, Izzy is keen to make

learning and training an ongoing part of progressing both the LGBT and disability agendas in the branch.

"Learning and training are absolutely vital because they are ways of reaching members and non-members to get those messages out, start those conversations and get people interested," Izzy says.

"And the more that we get that feedback into branch, the more we can start pressuring the employer and say, 'These are the issues affecting our communities, what are we going to do about them?'" *



Celebrating your creativity

**“We gave them
every reason to
despair and give
up and walk away”**

This is the winning entry in our writing competition, held to mark UNISON’s 25th anniversary last year. In ‘Conservative Party Conference 2050’, West Berkshire Branch Joint Secretary James Gore peers into his crystal ball and sees a positive future for the trade union movement.

* *Cough.*
Is this on?
Boris? Sajid?

Tap tap tap.
Feedback whine.
Sorry.

Delegates. Friends.
We face a crisis.

We tried to stop them, we really did. We made it harder, in so many ways. We withdrew funding, gave them so many pointless hoops to jump through. We whispered that it was a waste of time

... that we didn’t need them. That their era had ended and ours had begun.

We got our friends in the press to paint them as greedy, lazy, stupid, as wreckers. We told them to account for every second of their facility time. Squeezed their rights to strike, held them to standards we wouldn’t dream of holding ourselves to.

We gave them every reason to despair and give up and

walk away. Somehow, though, it redoubled their efforts. People who we’d denied the chance to gain confidence, a sense of self-worth ... somehow found it without us. And now look.

The vulnerable, the sensitive, the put-upon, the exploited, the minorities, the unfairly-treated – they’re the thorns in our side. The people it should have been easiest to marginalise have the

strongest, loudest voices.

They're at the front, not incidental to the conversation, but at its very centre, a core of gravity that gathers speed and force and draws others to it, and now won't be defied or ignored. They've flourished on the barren ground where we've neglected and tried to forget them, and the more we've pushed them aside the harder they now push back.

Rather than demolish their movement, we've created an army; an army of fluent, dynamic opponents, who fight for everything, who won't give us a moment's peace.

Rather than a slumbering machine dreaming of past glories, we're facing a fusillade of criticism, we're being held to account by a million activists with righteous anger at their backs. Where we poisoned the media, they organised using new ways and new technology. Where we squeezed them with legislation, they got better organised, more angry, more focussed.

Where we tried to extinguish them, they lit new beacons and others flocked to them, inspired. And the propulsion, the fuel, was that never-ending learning. Somehow, it turned into a power of its own. As the genie escaped the bottle, and with every step we tried to recapture it, it

grew and it transformed.

We tried to crack down further, in desperation. We made some stuff up about them. We tried to paint them as wasteful, as bullies, as anti-business – even as bigots. We froze their wages while we spent money on unfathomable follies. But they kept coming. They kept learning, adapting. They kept pushing forward, challenging,

finding voices, standing up. They kept learning.

Now we're the minority. Now our future is threatened.

Delegates, I never dreamed we'd be holding our conference here, in this church hall ...

Door at the back of the room creaks open, a man's head pokes in.

"Sorry, is this the metal detecting club?" *

MARKING 25 YEARS OF LEARNING

James Gore's story was the winning entry in the writing competition Learning and Organising Services ran to mark the union's 25th anniversary last year.

You can read all six shortlisted entries in the celebratory booklet we published, with a foreword by Assistant General Secretary Roger McKenzie. While the collection featured six very different pieces, they all demonstrated the power of learning, Roger wrote.

"Learning changes lives," Roger said. "The work of our UNISON learning representatives is crucial in giving a second chance to people who have missed out on learning, and helping to develop our members' skills and confidence."



Order your resources



ULRs and other branch officers or activists can order the special booklet featuring all the shortlisted entries, as well as Quick Reads and Reading Ahead materials, by completing the order form available from LAOS.

*** Email C.Hawkins@unison.co.uk to find out more.**

UNISON is helping women – and men – talk about the menopause at work in order to persuade more employers to adopt and implement policies to support people experiencing the symptoms.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Breaking taboos about the menopause



UNISON Cymru / Wales has been raising awareness

about the impact of the menopause on workers and negotiating with employers to support women experiencing the symptoms since an extremely successful development weekend in Swansea last September.

Nineteen members from a mix of branches took part in the course, which was delivered by Adult Learning Wales and featured guest speaker Karen Wright, the assistant director of workforce at Velindre University NHS Trust.

Karen has been instrumental in developing menopause guidance for the Trust's managers and introducing a range of

initiatives to support their employees, as well as sharing this good practice work with public and private sector employers across Wales.

The successful weekend gave members the knowledge and the power to challenge the silence and the lack of action on the menopause in their workplaces, says Area Organiser Jenny Griffin.

"It's no longer a taboo subject – women want to be able to talk about this issue – and employers are really keen to take this on board: we're pushing at an open door," she says.

Cwm Taf Local Government Branch organised a menopause conference attended by 50 people with a range of

"It's no longer a taboo subject – women want to be able to talk about this"
Jenny Griffin, Area Organiser

good speakers and an open dialogue that combined awareness-raising with action points for managers.

In Neath Port Talbot, Regional Women's Group Chair Jane Gebbie has run training sessions for women, for managers and one specifically for men, and the employer has agreed a new menopause in the workplace policy.

And Velindre University NHS Trust has run a series of menopause cafés – informal sessions where women can come together to talk about their symptoms, experiences and strategies that have helped them –

STARTING TALKING IN THE SOUTH EAST

UNISON South East has run a menopause awareness lunchtime workshop in 10 branches and at National Women's Conference, where it was one of the best attended sessions at the February event.

Delivered either by Regional Women's Officer Fiona Roberts or Area Organiser Suzanne Tipping, the workshop examines the results of the 2016 Wales TUC survey (which attracted 4,000 responses) and recent case law, as well as offering people going through the menopause the chance to talk about their symptoms and treatments or strategies they have found effective.

"Employers have been really positive about us running these courses: quite a few employers hadn't considered menopause a workplace issue and didn't know what resources are available, so they are very interested in what we have to offer," Suzanne says.

"Now we're starting to talk to employers about developing policy around the menopause so they can support women in their workplaces so they can talk more openly about the issues and reduce the stigma."

Medway Health Branch became one of the latest in the region to host the workshop in March, when it was able to provide lunch for participants with the help of a Kickstart grant from Learning and Organising Services (LAOS).

The workshop followed on from two successful menopause cafés on site in December and in February, where the participants got a great deal out of being able to talk with other people going through the experience.

"At the last menopause café, people were talking about B12 deficiency and migraines – things that I would not have linked to the menopause – so you're learning new things all the time through people's personal experiences," says steward Miranda Crawford, who organised the cafés at the Trust.

including one at the major UNISON Cymru / Wales partnership event with the Trust to mark International Women's Day in March.

While some branches have agreed policies and others (such as Torfaen and Caerphilly) are in the process of negotiation, the union's focus is on implementation, Jenny says.

"It's all fine and well having a policy or guidance for managers, but if it's only

going to sit up on a shelf then it doesn't mean anything.

We want to make sure that whatever is put in place – whether that's policy, procedure, guidance, training – is meaningful: it's only as good as what you do with it, that's our emphasis at the moment." *

Find out more



- * Download the South East's presentation **Menopause and work: why the menopause is a workplace issue:** <https://bit.ly/2SHS7yv>
- * Complete the **WRANX Menopause and the workplace course** by signing up at: <https://bit.ly/2T5r0h0>
- * Download the **Wales TUC Menopause Toolkit:** <https://bit.ly/2HwjnOH>
- * **TUC eNote Menopause Support in the Workplace:** <https://bit.ly/2JdBBpB>



Looking back to move forward

Ruth Davies has been able to apply some of the insights she gained on her Masters degree in Industrial Relations to building the Environment Agency (NW) Branch.

***** Ruth Davies was looking for a challenge 10 years ago when she came across some publicity material for Keele University's Masters degree in Industrial Relations.

"I thought, The history of industrial relations is something I'd like to know more about – the bigger

picture rather than the day-to-day slog of dealing with cases and negotiations with management," Ruth recalls.

Ruth knows all about the day-to-day pressures on union reps since she first became a steward in her early 20s. "I had just moved to another team in the National Rivers Authority office in Warrington and I

"The sense of personal achievement in terms of completing it was the best thing"

Ruth Davies

asked if there was a steward in the department and the answer was, No – would you be interested? So I was taken to meet the branch secretary and that was it!" she says.

Secretary of the Environment Agency (NW) Branch for the past decade and now chair of the Water, Environment and Transport service group as well, Ruth had already juggled work, union and personal commitments with studying for the seven years it took to complete

her undergraduate degree in environmental science with The Open University (OU).

The postgraduate diploma – the first part of the course – was built around three residential weekends a year for two years. “You’d leave the tutorials with a massive block of reading material – and I mean a massive block of historical documents – to plough through at home before writing your next essay,” Ruth says.

“Keeping up with the reading was the biggest challenge: it was really good stuff but some of it was at least 100 years old, quite heavy stuff about unions in the 19th century mills – very academic literature, which I don’t normally read!”

The second part of the course was the dissertation, which Ruth chose to write about how and why union members engage with their branches.

As well as interviewing a range of members from across the whole of her branch (which stretches from Cumbria down to Cheshire) and studying activist trends in the branch, Ruth was able to access some of the national union’s statistics on this subject.

“Teresa Donegan, head of learning and organising, was able to direct me to the sources of information I was looking for. But not only that: every so often, in the period when I was writing the dissertation, I’d get a couple of lines from Teresa asking how I was getting on,

RUTH’S TIP FOR PART-TIME STUDENTS

“You have to be strict with yourself. If you say you’re going to do something on a Sunday, you’ve really got to do it that Sunday because if you don’t set that time aside, you’ve missed it. And make sure you know when you’re starting and when you’re finishing, because if you don’t set an end time, you won’t get much personal time either!”

Find out more



HELP WITH YOUR STUDY COSTS

UNISON offers financial support to members taking part in various educational and learning opportunities, as well as a limited number of grants to members studying on trade union and labour movement or women’s studies courses that are awarded on a first come, first served, basis.

✳ To find out more and complete the relevant application form: <https://bit.ly/2HH10Va>

which really kept me going – a bit of encouragement along the line is much appreciated,” Ruth says.

Ruth also successfully applied for a UNISON bursary to help with the costs of her course. “It’s a substantial help when you’re taking on something of that nature that costs several thousand pounds per year – the UNISON bursary made a massive contribution,” she says.

And the dissertation has proved very useful in Ruth’s role as branch secretary, she says. “We did identify where we had to take some action in the branch and we have had two stewards put their names

forward this year,” she says.

The Masters also helped Ruth gain perspective on all her union work. “Looking back at how workers’ rights have developed and been influenced by politics since the advent of the TUC, which was as far back as we went – that was the big one, seeing the broader picture that our rights have come about as a result of politics, which shapes everything we do,” Ruth says.

Ruth graduated last year.

“The sense of personal achievement in terms of completing it was the best thing: I felt, Yes, I’ve done it – finally, I’ve done it!” Ruth says. ✳



Writing his way to recovery

James Keenan has recovered from a serious mental health crisis through creative writing and UNISON learning.

***** When James Keenan experienced a serious mental health crisis in autumn 2017, studying through UNISON and The Open University (OU) and a re-discovery of creative writing became central to his recovery.

James, who was then working as an emergency department practitioner at the Ulster Hospital, was himself admitted to hospital for four months when the crisis was at its most severe.

But as soon he started to recover, James was

determined to return to the OU's K101 Introduction to Health & Social Care programme that he had embarked on shortly before the crisis hit.

"I was in hospital so I wasn't able to attend classes but with the email support from tutors and UNISON, I was able to complete the course with the extension I got through UNISON and the OU – they supported me absolutely incredibly," he says.

"If I'd been doing the course anywhere else, I

"Being stuck in the ward in mental health recovery, I was introduced to paper and pen again and just started writing"

don't think I would have received the support and wouldn't have been able to complete it – and completing the course really helped my recovery," he says.

It was also while he was hospitalised that James started to write again, something he hadn't done since secondary school, when a careers officer dismissed his educational aspirations because of her old-fashioned views of his dyslexia.

"That set me back hugely: I disposed of all my

journals and never wanted to write again. I started disbelieving in myself and didn't recognise my own worth," James recalls.

"But being stuck in the ward in mental health recovery, I was introduced to paper and pen again and just started writing."

James then entered one of his poems to UNISON's 25th anniversary writing competition in spring 2018. While he was disappointed not to be shortlisted, he gained helpful advice and encouragement by asking for feedback from Assistant Education Officer Kathleen Jowitt, who was one of the competition judges.

"I got to hear Kathleen's background story of being an author who self-published her book and she gave me a lot of inspiration and a lot of advice on how to write more," he says.

Putting Kathleen's feedback to good use, James went on in summer 2018 to compose *The Untold Heroes*, a poem marking the 70th anniversary of the National Health Service that was partly inspired by the support he enjoyed from hospital staff during his mental health crisis.

"Initially I sent the poem off to the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust to put on their Facebook page. I thought nothing more of it until I received a call from the

Head of Communications, who said the Chief Executive was absolutely pleased with it and wanted to invite me to the Trust's 70th anniversary event," he says.

"Unfortunately at the time I was still in the recovery process so I couldn't attend. But the Trust shared the video with me and hearing my poem being read out brought me a great sense of achievement and helped me hugely – it was really another turning point in my life."

As a result of the Trust also presenting a framed copy of James's poem to Ards and North Down Borough Council at the ceremony, James was then invited to visit Mayor Richard Smart to see where his words were on display in the Mayor's Parlour in Bangor Castle – and this time he could attend.

"I never thought anything like that would happen in a million years. I was blown away, touched and overwhelmed: it brought me

a great sense of pride when I was able to go and see it and have my photo taken – it was absolutely fantastic," he says.

The poem is also on display in the emergency department where James used to work.

James now works full-time at the Trust's Recovery College, which is where he gained the knowledge and skills to manage his own journey back onto an even keel last year.

"I am dedicating myself to help others overcome their own mental health issues: being a peer support and advocate (having been trained in the appropriate areas) gives me a purpose not only to continue educating myself but drives me to seek more qualifications to be able to help others," he says.

And he also continues to blog and to write. "I'm very focused on learning at the minute and then one day – fingers crossed – I'll be able to publish a book of more poetry," he says. *

Find out more



You can improve your own mental health awareness on one of the one-day workshops delivered by The Open University (OU).

There are also one-day OU workshops that look at dementia awareness; autism awareness; and behaviour management in schools.

To find out more about the OU workshops, contact your regional education team.



JESS HUNJ/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

We've made our e-learning site bigger and better for you

We're adding new learning pathways and resources to the already existing e-notes on important issues to help you in your role supporting learning.



We've made it easier to access all the resources

on our new expanded e-learning site so now all you need to sign in is your UNISON membership number and password.

To access the site, simply register first with 'My UNISON', the area on the main UNISON website that allows you to manage and update your personal details with the union.

To register, all you need is your UNISON membership number, which is in the welcome pack you received when you joined or on your

membership card. (If you don't have either of them, please phone UNISONdirect on 0800 0 857 857.)

Once you have registered with My UNISON, you can use the same login details to access e-learning.unison.org.uk, the Organising Space and our online conference system.

To coincide with the switch to the single sign-on system, we're also launching a new e-note, *Activate!*, which helps UNISON members explore their values, skills, and qualities, and find out about the various roles that are

"We are adding some new learning pathways to help ULRs"

open to them in the union.

In addition, we are adding some new learning pathways to help ULRs improve their knowledge and skills in particular areas by bringing together existing resources in one place.

For example, the English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) pathway opens with a YouTube video that explains how Middlesex University Branch organised ESOL learning for a group of cleaners employed by ISS.

Find out more



IMPROVE YOUR PROSPECTS WITH E-CAREERS

UNISON's partnership with e-Careers is helping members improve their knowledge and skills across a vast range of subjects – with the help of a 10 per cent discount on course fees.

The courses are grouped together in 10 different sections, including business and work, employability skills, lifestyle and interests, Microsoft Office and teaching, childcare and education.

You can learn assertiveness skills, improve your communication skills, get to grips with time management and raise your game when it comes to public speaking – all courses you can find in the 'leadership and management' sub-section of 'business and work'.

The Microsoft Office section includes courses to help you find your way round all the key components of the software suite, including Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

There is a wide range of language courses on offer in the lifestyle and interests section, including Arabic, Turkish and Thai as well Spanish, French and German and several more.

Plus there's even a diploma in crime-writing for everyone who's ever thought they might have a thriller in them – which you can find in the same section.

To claim your 10 per cent discount, simply enter the code **UNISON10** when you reach the checkout.

* Find out more:
<https://bit.ly/2vPSlea>

Find out more



RISING THROUGH THE WRANX

We're working with online learning and development platform Wranx to help members access free bite-sized English and maths learning that uses the tried and tested technique of 'spaced repetition' to help you retain information.

When you enrol on a course with Wranx, an email alert reminds you to log back in to the site every day to work your way through your daily drill – a changing set of 10 different questions on your chosen subject.

What makes the Wranx approach unique is that once you answer each question, you then get shown the answer so that you can honestly log how confident (or not) you were in your response.

When you're sure about a question, Wranx waits longer before including it again in your daily drill; if you're on shakier ground, the question will re-appear sooner. It's a method that can help to accelerate the learning process.

Wranx offers functional skills English and maths and GCSE English and maths revision as well as other opportunities to help you improve your knowledge of a range of subjects, including menopause in the workplace.

* Sign up for Wranx at:
<https://unionlearn.ulp.wranx.com>

The pathway also includes the TUC's eNote Language Support for Workers; the ESOL workbook UNISON produced with the British Council; and an eight-minute webcast on supporting ESOL learning by our ESOL lead Clair Hawkins, as well as the PDF of UNISON's full guide to supporting ESOL learning. *



ROBIN JONES

Teamwork drives learning in Southampton

UNISON learning reps Helen Capstick, Liz Martin, Emma Nand and Olga O'Flynn explain how they have been helping their co-workers at Southampton City Council, Southampton Solent University and local libraries improve their skills and make positive changes in their lives.

"If people know who we are and where to find us, we can then help and support them"

***** "We were not active in the union before our training took place: however, when we were offered the opportunity to train as ULRs, we all knew we had made the correct

decision once we started! Our team now consists of five ULRs and we have made a real impression, reaching out to a broad range of people in different workplaces, including

Southampton City Council departments, local libraries and Southampton Solent University.

Having a strong presence is half the battle, because if people know who we are

and where to find us, then we can then help and support them.

We have completed many training sessions where we have learned new skills that we have been able to take back into our working environment to share information with others.

Recently, two of us attended a dyslexia training course, which was run by our branch. It gave all the attendees the skills to be aware of what dyslexia is, and how reasonable adjustments can be made in the workplace to assist the employee with their role.

Being involved in member learning has led to many success stories across the district. Last year, we supported two colleagues who were looking at returning to further education (FE). One of us went along with them to an open evening at a local FE college to find out about courses in maths and English.

It would have been unlikely that they would have taken the plunge and attended any interviews without our support – in fact, they might not have even had the confidence to set foot inside the college!

Last autumn, we launched a series of six Reading Ahead challenge lunch and learn workshops,

“Focusing on the skills of the person and not the disability, we learned that living with dyslexia isn’t a barrier”

each session focusing on a different Quick Read title, with activities and games and lunch supplied for all eight participants.

The books were a range of fiction and non-fiction and covered many genres so there was a good variety with plenty of topics of conversation as a result!

This spring, we have launched our lunch and learn craft sessions, with two in February and another two in April.

Staff members can lose themselves in a sea of crafting materials, getting sticky with Sellotape, messy with glue and creative with crayons to complete a present to take away for a loved one.

This session has sparked much positive conversation from all who have attended: people relished relaxing with materials, while meeting and chatting with other colleagues in a quiet and stress-free space.

We have also organised a lunch and learn drop-in at a local library where participants could get advice and support on improving their spelling and grammar. We all played light-hearted games to explain what grammar is and how we can all get it wrong sometimes.

In addition, we have run a menopause in the workplace lunch and learn event that 14 people attended, which ran in tandem with Solent University’s recent wellbeing drive. It sparked some honest and constructive points of conversation for the benefit of all those who attended and we received some lovely, positive feedback.

Our current challenge that we are hoping to roll out is to supply red feminine hygiene boxes to all toilets across the Southampton district branch. We have raised this within our UNISON learning team and we are working on getting this implemented as soon as we are able.

As a group, we are proud of what we have achieved. We offer friendly faces, welcoming smiles and outstretched hands to support people with their goals. We help decrease anxieties, open doors and support colleagues throughout their learning and we are proud to play a small part with this journey.” *



Helping health workers boost key skills

Health workers across the country are gaining the skills they need to progress at work with the help of learning through UNISON.

***** The four-week lunch and learn festival that Concorde Health Branch organised last spring proved so popular that it led to a successful functional skills residential weekend for NHS staff at Croyde Bay in the autumn.

Around 150 people in all attended the four sessions at Southmead Hospital, Bristol, which covered employment rights, health and safety at work, health and wellbeing and the 70th anniversary of the NHS.

One factor behind the high turnout was the recent success of the NHS union campaign against the creation of a subsidiary company (subco) at the Trust, which had protected the pay, sick pay and pensions of the hundreds

of support staff who had been threatened with outsourcing.

“We were getting between 40 and 50 people at each session, which showed there was a real appetite for learning, so we put a survey out at the last session and people were really keen to do more,” says Branch Secretary Shawn Fleming.

Shawn had been keen to promote new learning opportunities as soon as he took on the role of branch secretary last year (after acting up for the previous 12 months).

“I’ve been fortunate with having a good education but not everybody has had the opportunity, so when I got involved as branch secretary I wanted the branch to be known for learning and not just for where you go if



you find yourself in trouble at work,” Shawn says.

“Coming from the facilities directorate myself, I’ve always recognised that there are many low-paid, low-skilled staff who have had little or no opportunity for self-development, but I’ve always believed in giving opportunities to staff who haven’t had those chances.”

As a result of the high turnout to the learning festival and the positive feedback to the survey, the branch organised a residential learning weekend last November at Croyde Bay.

In all, 16 members from across the hospital workforce attended the three half-day sessions delivered by a tutor from the Workers’

“I’ve always believed in giving opportunities to staff who haven’t had those chances”
Shawn Fleming, Branch Secretary

Educational Association (WEA), covering functional skills English, maths and IT.

“The feedback was fantastic, people really loved it: when I walk round today people still ask me when there will be another learning weekend,” says Shawn.

From the feedback collected at the weekend and from the learning festival survey, Shawn says that it was clear there was a real desire among staff (especially low-paid women workers) to update their IT skills.

As a result, the branch has secured the agreement of the Trust to use its IT suite to deliver early evening computer courses on site that are due to start later this year.

In recognition of the culture of learning that the branch is building at the Trust, Shawn won the Learning Initiative Award at the UNISON South West Get Active awards earlier this year.

“The award is nice but I felt happier at Croyde Bay when the staff came out of the first session saying they absolutely loved it and they’d learned something new – that was enough recognition, that’s what I wanted to achieve,” Shawn says. *

MOVING ON WITH MATHS

Suffolk Area Health Branch Education Officer Laura Wilkes has organised a functional skills maths course to help colleagues at West Suffolk Hospital gain the qualifications they need to enrol on apprenticeships or seek promotion at the Trust.

“I was aware that we have a lot of staff who are on Band 2 and haven’t got their basic gateway qualifications, and there are so many apprenticeships coming through now, I wanted to do something about getting them English and maths qualifications,” explains Laura, who is Library & Knowledge Services Manager at the Trust.

“The Co-Medical Education Team, who cover nursing and allied health professions, had also told us that the calibre of applicants for the new nursing apprenticeship was great in terms of potential nurses but quite a few of them lacked formal qualifications, particularly maths and English.”

With the support of Regional Organiser Cheryl Godber, Laura secured approval from the then HR Director Jan Bloomfield last autumn for Suffolk Area Health Branch to organise a functional skills maths course on site, delivered by the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA).

Jan then encouraged managers not to roster staff who wanted to take the course on the days it would be taking place this spring.

The seven staff who are undertaking the course are all enjoying getting to grips with maths for three hours once a week, usually on a Monday morning.

“I am very proud to have got this off the ground: it helps the Trust to fill staffing gaps but, more importantly, it helps our staff to fulfil their potential,” Laura says.


“Learners commented how much their confidence had improved in just one session and that makes me very proud indeed.”



DOUGLAS ROBERTSON

Getting to grips with digital

As digital technology expands into ever more areas of work and home life, UNISON is creating a network of Digital Champions to help colleagues stay ahead of the digital curve.

 Blackpool Health Branch is helping contracted-out catering staff at Blackpool Victoria Hospital gain vital IT skills on a six-week Computers for Beginners course running at lunchtime and in the evenings.

It is the first course to be organised since the branch signed a learning agreement with Compass, which runs the catering operation on site, at the beginning of this year.

Lead ULR Jane Eyre put together the course

using resources provided by the Digital Champions Network, the independent organisation that supports people helping others get to grips with IT.

Jane was able to access the resources as she is one of 18 Digital Champions at the Trust. Digital Champions are trained volunteers who help colleagues gain the confidence and skills they need to become digitally active.

"The training enabled the new Digital Champions to learn about digital exclusion in the workplace"

Find out more



* To find out more about becoming a Digital Champion, please email admin@unison.co.uk or visit us at: www.digitalchampionsnetwork.com/unison

TAKING IT LEARNING TO STAFF WHO NEED IT

Newcastle City Branch ULR and Digital Champion Linda Slasor is helping staff across the council acquire and improve their digital skills, using the network of Learning Zones the city council has set up in partnership with UNISON.

The five Learning Zones are IT-equipped spaces where UNISON learning reps are on hand to provide support and guidance to learners. They are all located in council sites such as residential care homes and refuse and recycling depots where staff have traditionally not had access to computers.

Since the local authority is moving many of its services online, Linda is keen to help workers gain the IT skills they need to access online payslips, book annual leave and keep up with UNISON and council electronic updates for staff.

To help her assess the type of learning her colleagues need, Linda uses a paper-based digital learning survey with staff.

“Since becoming a Digital Champion, I have been able to support my colleagues and customers with confidence,” Linda says.

“Supporting learners gives me great satisfaction, especially when learners do not think they can use digital and I watch them grow with confidence and eagerness to learn more.”

All the Digital Champions volunteered for the role in response to an all-staff email from Jane explaining what Digital Champions are and inviting anyone interested to a half day’s training session.

The volunteers included support staff, clinical staff and people working for facilities management company Atlas.

The training enabled the new Digital Champions to learn about digital exclusion in the workplace; assess their own skills in supporting people to learn; and create an NHS-specific learning survey that they could use in their new role. They also all joined the Digital Champions Network. *

POWER TO BE YOU COURSE BUILDS APPETITE FOR LEARNING

Fifteen members of Wakefield MDC Branch have enrolled on an assertiveness course after a successful Power To Be You one-day course one Saturday in March.

Half a dozen women members boosted their confidence and picked up helpful tips on the course, which was tutored by Branch Convenor Carol Dewrow and Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Learning & Development Organiser Rose Bent.

The branch used a Kickstart grant from Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) to pay for lunch for participants and to cover the cost of hiring a room in Wakefield’s Unity Hall.

Feedback was very positive from members who took part. “People said they felt they’d made friends, that there was no pressure and that they were more confident than they realised,” Carol says. “Some people said they hadn’t realised before that something as simple as breathing could set you off in the right direction.”



Derbyshire Branch takes regional learning prize



Derbyshire County UNISON won the East Midlands regional award for best learning branch in January 2019.

The award celebrated the vast range of learning work the branch has been undertaking in the last year.

Jayne Barry and her team of reps have been working with the 100-plus apprentices that are now directly employed by Derbyshire County Council: as well as talking to them about UNISON learning at induction days, they also attend the regular forums where apprentices discuss their experiences of their apprenticeships and offer further support with development opportunities.

Over the past year, the branch has particularly focused on health and wellbeing, with taster sessions during HeartUnions week in February, several stalls and visits in workplaces, monthly craft sessions, 'body MoT' sessions to check people's health plus a members' draw with the top prize of a bike.

In addition, it has also worked with the authority during Black History Month in October and Learning at Work Week (LaWW) in May and took part in Chesterfield Pride in July, making contact with hundreds of people at the event celebrating LGBT equality.

"It makes you feel valued when you get recognition like this: it gives you a boost and you know you're heading in the right direction with your branch," says Jayne, who is a UNISON learning rep as well as CJC secretary and lead convenor for the corporate resources department.

Promoting learning and maintaining high visibility is also paying off in organising terms: after another busy HeartUnions week in February 2019, the branch gained more than 100 new members through both online and paper-based applications.

"Just by being there and showing what courses are out there does make a difference because people see what they're getting for their money: it's not just about representation, there's lots of other things the union could do for them to help them progress in their career – I think we recruit more off the back of learning than we do anything else," Jayne says.



THREE WIN UNIONLEARN AWARDS

Three UNISON learning reps won awards at last year's unionlearn annual conference for their exceptional work promoting different aspects of workplace learning.

Birmingham Branch ULR and Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator Donald McCombie won the Supporting Older Workers award for helping older workers face the challenge of redundancy and redeployment.

"So many of our older workers are being threatened with redundancy and redeployment and change: that's a great worry to them so we reassure them with a set of courses and workshops," Donald says.

Donald says he took on the ULR role to show all members – whatever their age or circumstances – that adult learning in the workplace could work for them.

"As a ULR, you have a significant part to play in changing the lives of individual members and the organisations that they work for, plus the chance to develop yourself and add to your personal skills and knowledge: it's a very important and responsible role," he says.

For the second year in a row, Blackpool Wyre & Fylde Health Branch ULRs Jane Eyre and Bev Herring won the Numeracy award for their innovative work engaging learners.

"We're really pleased that we've won it again – it's brilliant. The recognition helps us spread the word more widely within the Trust and get out to the community staff as well as those in hospital settings," Jane says.



JESS HUDN/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Watch the videos



- * https://youtu.be/3q0aNFN_c9g and
- * <https://youtu.be/YE67ZBrozSA>



JANE HONOURED FOR TUC150 ANNIVERSARY

UNISON learning rep Jane Yugire, who is a Bridges to Learning project worker at Newcastle City Council, was recognised by the Northern Region TUC as part of its celebration of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the TUC last year.

Jane has helped promote learning to a large number of her colleagues in the council's care at home Reablement Service and across the council as a whole to ensure that some of the most under-represented women gain the skills and confidence to speak up at work and in their communities.



Meet the new members of the team...

Three new members of staff have joined Learning and Organising Services in the past year ... and a much-loved colleague has moved on.

Katie Shaw National Learning & Development Organiser

Before joining the Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) team last autumn, Katie Shaw had spent eight years working for the National Union of Students (NUS), where she had risen to become policy and campaigns manager by the time she left. (She moved on to a temporary role as national campaigns manager for National Autistic Society between NUS and LAOS.)

Katie is currently focusing on the Digital Champions project – creating resources, delivering training and working with branches. She is also working with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) on a government-funded project using behavioural insights to help adults access learning later in life.

Katie is always glad when she gets a chance to work with staff in the regions. "I



"I really enjoy working with the regional teams and seeing the work they do"

Katie Shaw

really enjoy working with the regional teams and seeing the work they do and the impact they have working with branches," she says.

Katie is currently studying for a Masters in education,



"The best thing about the role is face-to-face contact with members"

Lyndsey Marchant

power and social change at Birkbeck, University of London. "It's great, I'm really enjoying it – and I utilised the unionlearn 10 per cent discount off my fees!" she says.

Lyndsey Marchant North West Learning Organiser

Lyndsey Marchant is bringing all her experience of learning and the skills she developed as a UNISON organiser to her new role as North West Learning Organiser.



JESS HURDREPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

FAREWELL, HAZEL

When Hazel Marsh joined the LAOS team in January 2017, she brought a wealth of learning and organising experience to her role as Learning & Workforce Development Officer, after 12 years working on Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) projects and 16 months on UNISON’s Schools Fighting Fund project.

“Hazel brought a freshness and creative approach to the member learning team: her bubbly personality meant work was always fun when she was around and she always had valuable ideas to contribute,” says Education Officer Davinder Sandhu.

“Hazel has amazing will power: she is the only person we’ve come across who could make a piece of cake last a whole week! She will be sorely missed but we hope one day she will find a position in UNISON that doesn’t involve the long commute that this one did.”

Before joining the LAOS team last year, Lyndsey had worked as a Fighting Fund Organiser, a Local Organiser and as part of the Merseylearn Union Learning Fund (ULF) project.

She has also been a teacher, supported young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and helped unemployed people gain functional skills qualifications.

“This job is an opportunity for me to use all the learning experience I have gained,” Lyndsey says.

“The best thing about the role is face-to-face contact with members about what we can do to help them and working with branches to organise around learning in the workplace.”

Louise Barter Regional Learning and Development Organiser

Louise Barter is helping to develop a structured and systematic approach to learning and organising in the South East in her new role as Regional Learning and Development Organiser (RLDO) in the region.

Louise saw first-hand how learning effectively engages members, non-members and employers while she was working as a local organiser with branches in the private sector and in local government for four years before joining the LAOS team last year.

“Everyone gets something out of learning: members see the union in a positive light, non-members join because



“Everyone gets something out of learning”

Louise Barter

they didn’t know we do this and employers like it because we’re offering their staff training,” Louise says. *

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