



UNISON – THE LEARNING UNION

learn

SUMMER 2012

IN THIS ISSUE

Councils sign
apprentice deal

NHS staff develop
their careers

Taking the Six
Book Challenge

Bringing the union
past to life

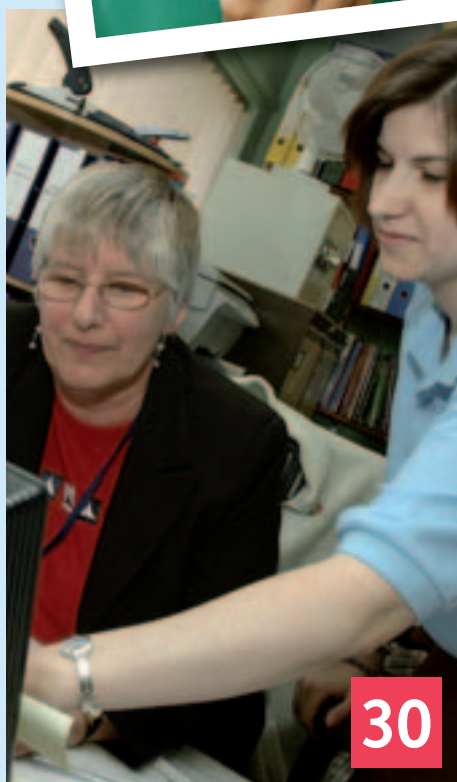
Union
Learning
Fund

with unionlearn


UNISON
the public service union



**GIVING EVERYONE THE
CHANCE TO LEARN**



UNISON ULearn magazine

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WELCOME

Contents

- 4 News
- 10 Energy staff switch on to learning
- 12 Councils sign ground-breaking apprentice deal
- 14 Reaching the staff other projects can't reach
- 16 Take your next step with the OU
- 18 Come learn with us
- 20 Opening the doors to everyone
- 22 Cleaner Nicola is top student
- 23 Tracy helps low-paid NHS staff move on
- 24 Social care workers aim higher
- 26 Bringing the past to life
- 28 How it all adds up online
- 30 Getting all the skills we need
- 32 Uni cleaners spread the (written) word
- 34 Everything you need to get active around learning

I want to start by thanking our learning reps and lifelong learning coordinators for all the time and effort you continue to invest in the development of your fellow members. Your help, support and encouragement are helping tens of thousands of UNISON members quite literally change their lives for the better through learning. You should be very proud.



Sue Highton

AMANDA KENDAL

“With the financial support of the Union Learning Fund, we have helped thousands of members banish the bad memories of their time in school””

I'm sure you know that you can count on your union's support in this vital aspect of our work. That support goes right to the very top: many of you will have seen the interview in *The Observer* last year in which our general secretary Dave Prentis described learning as “a jewel in our crown”.

He's right, of course. With the financial support of the Union Learning Fund, we have helped thousands of members banish the bad memories of their time in school and take their first steps back into learning for ten, 20 or even 30 years. And with the support of their co-workers, their learning reps and their tutors, those members have gained new computer skills, brushed up their English and got to grips with maths – things that many of them imagined they might never do.

But we haven't stopped there. We've also created the kind of pathways that have helped hundreds of members develop their careers, not least through our partnership with The Open University

(OU). We have enabled many of our members in the health and social care sectors, for example, to gain a professional qualification without losing money from their pay packets as they would have had to do in the past.

As the country continues to struggle to escape from recession, and many of us face greater job insecurity as a result, brushing up old skills or gaining new ones is a tried-and-tested way of helping our members stay ahead of the game. I hope you are inspired by the stories in this new edition of *Ulearn* to continue playing your part in this vitally important work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sue Highton'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Sue Highton, chair of the NEC Development and Organisation Committee of UNISON's National Executive Council

Nursing dreams come true for OU learners

A group of 77 UNISON Northern Ireland learners graduated from the Open University (OU) nursing programme at a ceremony in Belfast in May 2012.

The majority of the learners were home care workers and nursing auxiliaries who would not have been able to become nurses through the full-time study route because of family and financial commitments.

“These members in social care and auxiliary roles have been able to fulfil their dream of becoming registered nurses through this incredible opportunity provided by their union,” says Regional Officer (Lifelong Learning) Fidelma Carolan.

“They’re now going to be able to bring the considerable experience they’d already acquired earlier in their careers into their new roles as qualified nurses.”

The 77 began their learning journeys six years ago, successfully completing the ‘Introduction to health



FORMER NURSING AUXILIARY MAIREAD CUMMINGS HAS GRADUATED AS A NURSE THANKS TO THE UNISON/OU PARTNERSHIP

and social care’ course (K101) through the union’s partnership with the OU that enabled them to apply for the nursing programme.

As they progressed through the nursing pathway, UNISON continued to help them by providing additional study skills sessions, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops and supporting them in their training on the wards.

“The OU pathway allowed them to maintain their jobs while undertaking their study, seconded as nursing students for 26 hours a week,” Fidelma says.

“It’s a huge commitment, because they have their tutorials, their placements on wards or in the community, their homework and assignments, plus they continue with their work the rest of the time.”

Take your next step with the OU: see page 16/17

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MANCHESTER REVIVES WORKPLACE LEARNING

New branch ULR coordinator Steve Lynch has helped revive workplace learning at Manchester City Council since he was seconded to the role in September 2011.

With more than 50 new learning reps now in place – there were only five when Steve took over – dozens of learners are now undertaking qualifications in literacy, numeracy and IT skills, and Steve is setting up English courses for migrant workers at the authority as well.

“The feedback from the learners has been really positive: this is something they want to do and I’ve not yet come across a single complaint,” says Steve.

“Learning shows people how the union is not like the way we’re painted in the media – we’re here to support people and help them through their career.”

It’s certainly making a difference to people’s lives. Steve has, for example, organised adaptations in the workplace for someone with dyslexia

who had had no support since starting at the council five years ago.

She is now taking Skills for Life and conversational French courses through the union – and has joined as a result.

The branch is also reaching out beyond the workplace through a partnership with the central library, whereby when the branch runs a Skills for Life course in the library’s IT suite, it will offer two or three of the ten places to members of the community.

SOUTH-WEST

Chorus of approval for regional weekend



TOM TEEGAN

More than 30 UNISON members in the south-west enjoyed an inspirational education weekend in March that showcased the enormous variety of the union's lifelong learning programme.

The event allowed members to take part in workshops on dyslexia awareness, coping with change, the welfare state, union history, dealing with paperwork, social media, Return 2 Learn/Women's Lives, singing and cooking on a budget.

On the Saturday evening, the union ran an information, advice and guidance (IAG) session covering initiatives such as The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge and UNISON's own Skills for Life courses – with nibbles that had been prepared earlier in the cooking workshop.

"A lot of the participants were ordinary members who didn't know anything about our education offer and

they were incredibly impressed to find out about all the opportunities open to them through UNISON," said regional education officer Kay Mackenzie.

"People loved the welfare state workshop, where we explored what it was like for ordinary working people before the welfare state came into

being: they shared lots of really good stories from their own families about the difference that it made to peoples' lives."

Participants called the event 'brilliant', 'informative', 'fantastic', 'professional' and 'inspiring' – with one person declaring the time management workshop the best course they'd ever attended.

Somerset local government worker Jo Sylvester admitted she had arrived on the Friday night in low spirits as she was feeling disheartened and frustrated with her work but that had all changed by Sunday evening at the end of the event.

"I left the inspirational weekend feeling that I can go on, stay positive, and get back to being the real me!" she commented.

Jo was not alone. One member started Skyping family members in New Zealand after taking the social media course, and others were inspired to run bite-sized singing and cooking sessions in their branches during Adult Learners' Week.



TOM TEEGAN

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Sunderland centre puts on the style

The Learning Styles workplace project at Sunderland City Council opened a new onsite learning centre in September 2011.

The new centre was the logical next step in the development of the successful project, says ULR Coordinator Howard Fawcett, the UNISON activist who leads a team of more than 40 dedicated ULRs from UNISON, the GMB, UCATT and Unite.

“The Learning Styles project has been a joy to work on from the beginning and its continued expansion and integration into the workplace demonstrates the need and demand for it,” he said.

“The addition of a further learning centre was the next logical step: the ability to deliver more learning to more people is the ideal scenario – I hope everyone who can take advantage does.”

SUNDERLAND MPS BRIDGET PHILLIPSON (LEFT) AND JULIE ELLIOTT OPEN THE NEW LEARNING STYLES CENTRE



The Learning Styles project, which has already helped more than 4,800 staff and members of the community access IT courses, played a vital role in helping the authority secure £10 million in Microsoft vouchers to promote learning throughout the city two years ago.

Sunderland MPs Bridget Phillipson and Julie Elliott warmly applauded the

successful project when they formally opened the new centre.

“This impressive partnership between unions and the city council has been very successful in achieving and promoting learning opportunities which will benefit individuals, organisations and the wider community by encouraging adults of all levels of ability to consider returning to learning,” Bridget said.

POLICE AND JUSTICE

NEW PROBATION BRANCH OPENS LEARNING DOORS

UNISON members working for the probation service in the East Midlands are able to access more workplace learning opportunities since the creation of a region-wide branch in autumn 2011.

Bringing together probation staff from Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire, the new branch has made learning a top priority – and is already achieving important results.

“We have already signed a learning agreement with Nottinghamshire Probation Service, and the employers in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire

are very keen on working with us as well,” explains East Midlands regional learning & development organiser Gavin McCann.

“One of the key things we can offer, which our members really want, is the opportunity to progress through learning, and now they’re a branch in their own right they can really dictate what learning they would like for their members.”

In Nottinghamshire, UNISON learning rep Audrey Dinnall has encouraged a number of her members to take Skills for Life assessments, and they have since gone on to secure literacy and numeracy national qualifications.

Boosting Skills for Life is especially important for probation staff at the moment, with their employer encouraging offenders to undertake Level 2 qualifications themselves.

“I have now passed my maths and accomplished Level 2, which had made me feel much more confident in encouraging my clients to do the same,” one learner told Audrey.

“I really appreciate the time and effort you put in to making this possible for me: the learner support is an invaluable part of UNISON and makes me feel that it is definitely worth being part of an organisation that comes with benefits like this.”

HEALTH



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Help your health members develop their careers

UNISON and the rest of the health sector unions have launched a new online resource to help union learning reps (ULRs) in England encourage more of their colleagues to access opportunities for learning and development at work. This contains lots of information that will be useful to ULRs in Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland as well.

The new resource is a customised component of the union learning Climbing Frame, which brings together a vast amount of information aimed at ULRs into one place for the first time, organised under five separate 'learning themes':

- an overview of learning and development in the health sector;
- appraisal in the NHS;
- career development;
- apprenticeships;
- workforce development.

The resource also includes a number of case studies.

Register or log on at the Climbing Frame website:

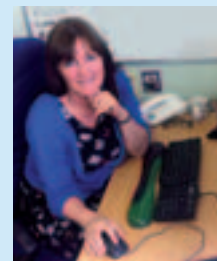
<https://climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk>

To access the new health sector resources, on the sign-up page, go to 'Employer Sector' (directly above the data protection agreement checkbox), and choose 'Health' from the pull-down menu. The customised themes will then be available on the home page under 'Themes for you'.

PATHWAYS

YVONNE TAKES THE PLUNGE

After taking the UNISON Pathways course in 2011, Stirling Council member Yvonne Dickson is planning to take more courses to further develop herself at work.



"The Pathways course gave me a great insight into how women can become involved in the union and the difference they can make," she says.

Yvonne, who is the council web services team leader, admits she was worried before taking the course.

"I didn't think I had enough knowledge about unions and about the council to enable me to become a rep, but the course and subsequent learning has given me the confidence and the knowledge I require to go forward, to advise and support members to deal with employment and policy issues."

Since taking the course Yvonne has become the branch communications officer, and now wants to learn more.

"I'm eager to do a few courses in the UNISON education programme, particularly the ones covering employment law," she says.

Yvonne would recommend the Pathways course to anyone – and does. "I've sat down with a colleague who said they didn't know enough to take the course, but I said that no-one does until they learn: we're all in the same boat at the beginning, and I've convinced her to go," she says.

To find out more about Pathways for Women or similar courses, speak to your Regional Education Officer.

ULRs discuss learning priorities

UNISON learning reps got together for the union's annual learning seminar at UNISON Centre in March to discuss their priorities for the union's new Union Learning Fund (ULF) project.

Next Steps For Learning In UNISON brought together dozens of reps from all over the country for what was very much a working event: they discussed what had worked and not worked during current learning projects; talked to a number of activists about their particular projects in a 'pop-up' marketplace; and contributed their thoughts about the new ULF project.

Welcoming everyone to the event, Head of Learning and Organising Services Joanna Cain commended learning reps on the support their learning activity was providing to branches in difficult times, and congratulated them on recruitment successes where workplace learning opportunities were prompting new members to join the union.

Membership development officer Donald Cameron explained that the new project aimed to work with all the different service groups within the union (local government, health, and so on) to target disadvantaged groups of workers with opportunities to develop themselves at work.



AMANDA KENDAL



AMANDA KENDAL

The new project aimed to place high priority both on the development of flexible learning offers and on the sustainability of union learning, he said.

To engage disadvantaged learners, the project would organise Skills for Life provision, help overcome the 'digital divide', offer informal learning and run courses to support members facing redundancy.

To tackle skills shortages and close skills gaps, the project aimed to help promote high-quality apprenticeships by urging branches to map schemes that were already in place in the workplace and to lobby employers to launch schemes where there were none at the moment.

Grants for learning Your branch can apply for a grant to support learning activity, from £250 for branch level learning activity up to larger sums for a learning co-ordinator or a cross-branch or regional project. Speak to your regional education team to find out more or contact Joanna Cain j.cain@unison.co.uk. The final round of bidding for funding will open in early September and all activity must be completed by the end of March 2013.



AMANDA KENDAL

ADDING VALUE

More branches setting up learning funds



More and more UNISON branches are adding value to the financial backing they receive from UNISON and the Union Learning Fund (ULF) by setting up branch funds to support learning at local level.

In the East Midlands, the Northamptonshire County Branch

has established a fund that enables the lifelong learning coordinator Karen Bennett to set up and run courses specifically designed for her own members.

“Five per cent of every membership subscription goes into a pot from which I can pay for informal learning for members, fun sessions that people ask for like fitness classes and wine-tasting as well as day courses on coaching, mentoring and leadership skills,” Karen explains.

“This is the kind of learning that is able to engage some of the members that Skills for Life and vocational courses don’t reach, and a couple of have become ULRs, which is really good.”

UNISON Power (which organises in energy company Eon) has topped up financial support from head office

for OU Openings courses that has enabled them to run more courses and help members defray the costs of learning resources.

And the Nottinghamshire Police Branch has set up a fund to help members with the cost of courses, which has supported a wide range of learning, from HGV driving to higher education.

Derbyshire Police branch has followed suit and Leicestershire Police Branch is looking into something similar as well.

“The Derbyshire police service used to have a small pot of money to help staff take courses, but that was stopped due to cuts in funding and the branch has stepped in and said, ‘This is a service we can provide for members’,” says regional learning and development organiser Gavin McCann.

HISTORY

THE WRITING’S ON THE WALL

UNISON has developed a series of wall charts that trace the social, economic and political history of public service issues.

The titles available include Boom, bust and fight back! – a short history of booms, crises and public spending (ACT 027) and Worth Defending – a short history of the welfare state (ACT 028).

The wall charts can be used in activities by UNISON branches, and they are also a great resource for workshops, or as a starting point for discussion about public services.

A third wall chart, looking at the history of women in trade unions and society over the last 150 years, will be available later in the year.





CHRISTOPHER BEST

Energy staff switch on to learning

UNISON is signing a national learning agreement with EDF Energy that builds on the success of the local learning project at the company's call centre in the north-east.

UNISON's popular Energy To Learn project at EDF Energy's Doxford Park call centre near Sunderland has helped pave the way for a national learning agreement with the energy supplier.

The agreement is scheduled to be signed during the 2012 Adult Learners' Week (ALW), exactly three years after the UNISON project got underway in the north-east.

"We invited different learning providers to our first event so people could have a look at what was on offer and sign up for

courses they were interested in," explains ULR Tracey Wainwright.

Around the same time, the branch gave a presentation to senior management detailing the results of its learning survey, which amply demonstrated that staff were keen to take the chance to develop themselves at work.

The ALW event confirmed the survey findings, with a 30 per cent increase in the uptake of company training immediately afterwards.

Ever since then, the project has been running Skills for Life courses in the company training rooms onsite, where workers have been able to improve their English and maths before or after their shifts.

But it hasn't all been about Skills for Life courses by any means. The project has also organised holiday language lessons, run a very popular course in forensics (it was over-subscribed several times over) and has recently launched a photography course as well, which attracted even more interest.

We invited different learning providers to our first event so people could have a look at what was on offer ”

We're putting forward a business case for releasing staff on Skills for Life courses for an hour and a half for six weeks ”

“There were 58 people who wanted to do forensics, but it's hard to get everybody in on the same day at the same time because of the shift patterns, so we ran the course on a Thursday because that was when the most people would be free,” Tracey says.

“We had about 70 sign up to do photography, but the tutor could only do it on a Tuesday, so there are 15 people doing it then, and we've already had some positive feedback.”

The project is overseen by a steering group that includes management and union representatives, and normally meets once a quarter (although it does get together more frequently as and when required).

It was the steering group that helped set up the Collective Learning Fund with the company, the unions and local learning provider Sunderland College.

“The fund is able to subsidise the non-vocational courses like the photography and the forensics, and that does make a big difference with getting people back into learning,” Tracey explains.

“Sometimes they want to do something that is a hobby to them, and by getting them in that way, they're more likely to look at vocational courses as well.”

For the first three years, all the courses have taken place in learners' own time, but Tracey and her ULR colleague Anne Woods are hoping to persuade EDF Energy's head of customer services, Kevin Gatens, to release staff taking Skills for Life courses in the near future.

“We're putting forward a business case for releasing staff on Skills for Life courses for an hour and a half for six weeks to Kevin Gatens, who has been very supportive from the beginning, and he is part of our local steering group,” Anne explains.

Organising English and maths courses in company time would pay off, she believes. “At the moment, people are choosing to do it in their own time but if we get them to do it in company time, I think we'll get more takers that way and we'll see more benefits more quickly.”

The branch has steadily grown while the project has been running. “They started with nine members and they've got several hundred now, so they're well-established in the workplace,” says UNISON Area Organiser Stephen Mead, who helped get the project off the ground in the first place and has remained involved ever since.

Energy To Learn has changed perceptions of UNISON among management and staff alike, he says. “The project has shown that UNISON is there to work in partnership with EDF in developing and improving skills in the workplace, making it a better place and experience for employees.”

Stephen hopes the new national learning agreement will help encourage other parts of EDF to follow suit (Tracey and Ann are getting email requests for more information about their project from across the UK and Europe as well).

“The national learning agreement will establish learning at the core of the business, and provide the impetus for other projects to be set up in other parts of the company in the UK,” Stephen says.

“It will provide that baseline, that threshold, to make sure that learning not only takes place but grows in emphasis across the company.” ■

UNISON HAS PROVED ITS LEARNING PARTNERSHIP CREDENTIALS THROUGH THE ENERGY TO LEARN PROJECT AT DOXFORD PARK



CHRISTOPHER BEST

FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL
LEADER JAMES WATERS SIGNS THE
APPRENTICESHIP AGREEMENT WITH
UNISON BRANCH CHAIR JANE ORTON



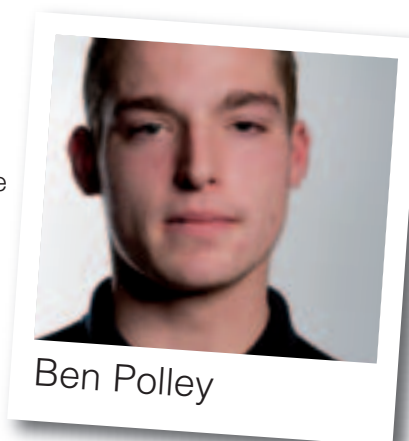
ALL PHOTOS: PETER EVERARD SMITH 2012

Councils sign ground-breaking apprentice deal

UNISON signed a pioneering apprenticeship agreement with two neighbouring Suffolk councils during National Apprenticeship Week in February 2012.

The leaders of St Edmundsbury Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council (which are both Conservative-controlled) put their names to the agreement at a ceremony in the council offices in Bury St Edmunds attended by councillors, council staff, and union representatives.

"I'm proud that UNISON has been involved with St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath Councils in developing



Ben Polley

this agreement, which can be held up as a model for other organisations to adopt," UNISON Regional Secretary Glynn Hawker told the signing ceremony.

UNISON Learning Co-ordinator Craig Young, who led the work to develop the agreement, said it would be "an essential tool in maximising the benefits to the organisation and the individuals involved."

Unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis pointed out that developing quality apprenticeships had been a key labour movement priority since the creation of the bookbinders' union, one of the very first established in the 19th century.

"Trade unions have always been concerned with the quality of the training which apprentices receive and that is no different today," he said.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council is currently training 11 apprentices; has another 25 people on the payroll who have come through the system; and has helped create more than 70 new apprenticeships in small and medium-sized enterprises in the area.

UNISON member Ben Polley who is six months into a two-year apprenticeship in the waste and recycling department, was one of a number of St Edmundsbury apprentices and former apprentices who attended the signing ceremony.

"The scheme has been really good: they look after me, they're really friendly, they have a laugh and a joke, and I've got my own mentor, which works really well," he said.

When he completes his apprenticeship, Ben will have an NVQ Level 2 in Environmental Skills but he'd like to go further. "There's an Advanced Apprenticeship that focuses on the management/supervisor role, and I'd like to go for that one," he said.

As an apprentice, Ben enjoys the reduced UNISON membership rate. "One of the best things about it is you get a discount on your union membership: I pay £10 for a whole year to UNISON, and they're really supportive," he says.

Catherine Scarfe is a trainee visitor services assistant in the tourist office who recently

“Most of my friends went to uni, but in my opinion I’m better off because many of them are going to be in a lot of debt”

completed her one-year apprenticeship with an NVQ in Customer Service.

“Most of my friends went to uni, but in my opinion I’m better off because a lot of my friends are going to be in a lot of debt and don’t have any guarantees of a job when they leave uni, whereas I’ve done training and have been paid at the same time,” she explained.

Apprentice maintenance mechanic Tom Powell is learning his trade working on the full range of council vehicles from lawnmowers to dustcarts, spending one day a week extending his knowledge at West Suffolk College.

“I love working here and I get on with everyone: I keep myself busy but it’s quite relaxed because you’re not dealing with customers all the time,” he says.

Tom will complete his two-year apprenticeship in the autumn and is also looking to move up to Level 3. “If you want to learn, an apprenticeship really is a great way of getting through and getting a good job,” he says. ■



Catherine Scarfe



Thomas Powell

BELOW: PETE WATERMAN (RIGHT) AND NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP SERVICE CHIEF EXECUTIVE SIMON WAUGH (LEFT) PRESENT GATESHEAD COUNCIL WITH THE UNIONLEARN QUALITY AWARD

GATESHEAD PROGRAMME WINS QUALITY AWARD

Gateshead UNISON branch lifelong learning officer David Smith was very pleased that the local authority won unionlearn’s prestigious Quality Award for its apprenticeship programme earlier this year.

“Gateshead trade unions are totally committed to supporting quality apprenticeship opportunities and we are extremely proud Gateshead Council has achieved the unionlearn Quality Award,” he says.

“Apprenticeships not only provide valuable opportunities for young people but they also create vitality and energy across our workplaces.”

David received the Quality Award alongside council Chief Executive Rodger Kelly from music mogul and engineering boss Pete Waterman at a unionlearn conference during National Apprenticeship Week in February.





Reaching the staff other projects can't reach

An inclusive new project is bringing the benefits of UNISON-led learning to non-unionised workplaces.

UNISON is helping health and social care workers in non-unionised workplaces benefit from the union's rich experience of supporting learning at work through its ground-breaking 'Learning Together' project.

The project is piloting the work in the Midlands, the south-west and the north-east, working with employer forums and employers to bring learning opportunities into care settings where UNISON does not have recognition agreements.

"We're building positive relationships with employers by showing them how UNISON's

This pioneering project offers immense benefits



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

ROGER MCKENZIE

learning offer can help them deliver better quality care and motivated staff," explains Lorraine Mirham, UNISON's national lead on learning in non-unionised workplaces.

The project is targeting social care providers because the union recognises that many workers in the sector would benefit from UNISON's learning offer – and then bring those benefits into the businesses they work for.

"There are large numbers of social care workers who present all those learning needs that UNISON is really good at helping to tackle, such as confidence-building, brushing up literacy and numeracy skills and overcoming the digital divide," Lorraine says.

"In addition, we know from last year's Skills for Life survey of our own members that many workers don't get as much training as they'd like when they move into supervisory roles, and UNISON learning can prove really useful to care staff who take on managerial responsibilities."

In the East Midlands, Lorraine kicked off the initiative by presenting the union's learning package to the South

Nottinghamshire Social Care Forum, an employer body run by the Sector Skills Council Skills for Care.

Forum vice-chair Simon Hodgkinson, proprietor of the Westcliffe Care Home, was so interested in the scheme that he asked one of his care staff to become a learning champion for his home and is helping to spread the message to other employers in the sector.

"I am extremely keen to be involved in this project and trust that others will share my enthusiasm: with the whole sector suffering from funding cuts, we must start to make use of resources such as this, pull together and learn from one another," Simon says.

In the north-east, Lorraine got together with UNISON community organiser Emma Lipscombe to run an event for support workers for adults with learning disabilities.

Participants were able to improve their First Aid skills, pick up stress-busting techniques and try out craft activities, while local theatre company The Lawnmowers, run by and for adults with learning disabilities, both performed and ran a workshop.

"The event brought our Newcastle branches closer to their potential members; enabled partnership working with community groups and local services; and showcased UNISON's learning offer, not least the highly successful Bridges to Learning project in the area," says Lorraine.

Now that the Learning Together project has successfully built constructive relationships with employers and employer organisations in the social care sector, it's expecting to help more and more learners over the coming 12 months.

"This pioneering approach to potential members and employer organisations in the social care field has immense benefits for the workers involved," says Assistant General Secretary (Organising and Recruitment) Roger McKenzie.

"We can see the evidence of this in the interest in the union generated among those who take up these learning opportunities." ■

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Community organiser Emma Lipscombe has been taking the UNISON learning offer to members in the health and social care and community/voluntary sectors since early 2011, through a

joint project funded by the three UNISON branches that cover the city council, the hospitals and the mental health trust in Newcastle.

The project has developed a thriving relationship with Dimensions, a not-for-profit organisation that supports people with learning disabilities, which recognises UNISON at national level.

"We didn't used to have much contact on a local level apart from when we went in to represent members, but now I have regular meetings with the regional manager and HR manager to offer learning opportunities to their staff," Emma says.

The relationship she's built up with Dimensions is helping open doors with other third sector organisations, she explains.

"When I speak to other organisations, I'm able to say what we've done with Dimensions, and how their staff have been able to access learning, and they think, 'Why are we missing out on this opportunity for our staff?'," she says.

The other big step forward has been developing a learning-focused relationship with the Dementia Care Partnership, which does not yet recognise the union.

"Getting access to staff in a lot of the health and social care sector is really difficult because they often work in people's homes, not in a central office, and many care homes have very few staff so it's not easy to organise for people to come on a course," Emma says.

Nevertheless, she's still managed to organise for a group of staff to attend a ten-week computer course at the Trade Union Education Centre in Newcastle, which they enjoyed so much that they've spread the word and many of their colleagues now want to sign up for the next one.



Emma Lipscombe

AMANDA KENDAL

To find out more about Learning Together, contact Lorraine Mirham. Email: l.mirham@unison.co.uk



Take your next step with the OU

With higher education fees tripling in England and a new generation of Access courses due to replace the popular Openings model, UNISON and the Open University (OU) are keen to promote their shared goals of widening participation in learning.

FLEXILEARN

FlexiLearn is an innovative, web-linked, high quality, new learning scheme being developed in partnership with the OU that provides short workshops, bite-sized taster sessions and podcasts linked to continuing professional development across the public sector.

UNISON and the OU jointly plan and administer the workshops, which are taught by an OU tutor to key target audiences such as healthcare assistants (HCAs) and teaching assistants (TAs).

Most UNISON regions and nations are now involved in this work, with the largest programmes in the East Midlands, Northern, West Midlands and Northern Ireland.

FlexiLearn is already going down well with UNISON members, so much so that

the very first workshop delivered by the partnership in Scotland was so popular that people had to be turned away – and this on one of the first sunny weekends of the year.

The ‘positive approaches to well-being’ workshop held at UNISON’s Inverness office aimed to help participants understand their own sense of well-being and enhance their ability to bounce back when life gets tough.

“We were surprised by the number of people interested, especially as it was planned for the Saturday,” says Khadija Patel, who ran the workshop with UNISON lifelong learning fieldworker Philippa Clark.

“We ended up having to turn people away, which was a decision that was not taken lightly, as it was clear that there was a need for this type of workshop in people’s minds.”

Using a series of personal reflection exercises and course material, the 14 participants engaged with each other’s experiences and discovered new ways of learning about themselves and practising the changes they wanted to make.

“This is the beginning of what will be a very positive and mutually beneficial

UNISON will continue to work with the OU to help develop work-based lifelong learning

THE FIRST FLEXILEARN WORKSHOP IN SCOTLAND PROVED VERY POPULAR WITH PARTICIPANTS



UNISON has also piloted bite sized taster sessions in the police”

relationship between the Open University and UNISON in Scotland,” commented education officer Nancy Kelly.

“It is especially welcome in the Highlands and Islands, where the geography and demographics mean we must be creative in delivering learning.”

See pages 24-25 for more on OU learning in the Northern Region

FLEXILEARN BITE SIZE

UNISON has also piloted bite sized taster sessions in the police and justice sector using multi-media e-books on mobile tablet devices (such as the iPad).

In May, UNISON Learning and Workforce Development Officer Paul Simpson ran some FlexiLearn bite-size sessions with members in the Nottinghamshire Probation Service, taking them through some OU course materials on the iPad.

“As the OU is making more and more learning available online, it’s important to get members confident with the latest new technology,” says East Midlands regional learning and development organiser Gavin McCann.

The bite-size sessions complemented the offer of 16 places for police and justice members on the OU Openings course ‘Starting with the law’ starting in June 2012.

“We filled the places well before the deadline for applications, which shows there is a real appetite for learning among these members,” Gavin says.

FlexiLearn bite-size is expected to develop substantially as multi-media e-books and special union applications become more common and tablet devices become increasingly available.

If delivered at scale, UNISON reps could run any number of bite-sized sessions at workplaces using mobile devices and web-based resources. ■

ALL FIRED UP FOR LEARNING

In the West Midlands fire service, where more than 130 members have already progressed through a range of OU courses, UNISON and the OU are building on the success of the partnership by running one-day development workshops.

The workshops, which are delivered by OU tutors using resources and materials from their award-winning programmes, cover issues such as work-life balance, communication/team-working and dementia awareness.

The union is also working with the OU and the Workers’ Educational Association to deliver employability skills workshops, showing members how to produce high quality CVs and helping them sharpen up their interview skills.

“With the public sector under threat, I keep getting out the message that my prime objective is that members should have the best CVs they can,” explains education officer John Routley.

“Members at risk of redundancy have asked us to help them improve their interview skills, because they many of them may have to apply for jobs and they haven’t been interviewed for many years.”

THE FUTURE

For the future, UNISON will be working with the OU to continue to create access routes for our members and learning partnerships with employers as a modern way to continuously improve members’ terms and conditions of employment.

Different programmes will develop in each of the four nations as Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland adopt different fee strategies to England.

A new generation of Access courses, which will replace Openings, will be available from September 2013 and UNISON and the OU will be working out how to build success with those, as we have with current Openings courses.

To find out what the UNISON/OU Partnership can do for you, visit our website at: www.open.ac.uk/choose/unison



ROY PETERS

Come learn with us

Thanks to a positive learning partnership with Mansfield District Council, UNISON lifelong learning co-ordinator Jacquie Clark is helping her co-workers develop their appetite for new skills.

The workplace learning partnership at Mansfield District Council is going from strength to strength, with the UNISON branch running two hugely successful credit crunch cookery courses and opening a new informal learning centre in the past six months.

Workplace learning first took off at the East Midlands local authority five years ago, when management, unions and local providers ran a very successful 'Test The Council' scheme encouraging staff to test their Skills for Life and gain English and maths qualifications.

The council and the unions signed a lifelong learning agreement a year later to support the growth of lifelong learning opportunities for all employees, with a joint union learning co-ordinator to recruit ULRs and co-ordinate learning activities.

UNISON branch secretary Diane Howarth was about to take up that role before her unexpected death in 2008, when another ULR stepped into the breach and moved the agenda forward before later leaving the council.

THE UNISON CREDIT CRUNCH COOKERY COURSE HELPS PARTICIPANTS IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS FOR LIFE AS WELL AS BROADEN THEIR KITCHEN REPERTOIRE

UNISON member Jacquie Clark took up the mantle in 2011, after finding out about the ULR role while on a UNISON course on managing stress at work.

"I wasn't sure how much time I would be able to devote to it, but the branch were really supportive and said I could do as much or as little as I liked – and after I did my training, I got bitten by the bug and now I try to do as much as I can fit in," she says.

"I'm really passionate about learning and I think it's so important that people are given opportunities and take whatever is on offer."

In the past six months, more than 70 staff have broadened their kitchen repertoire and boosted their Skills for Life through the union's 'credit crunch cookery' course.

Led by the authority's nutrition officer Sandra Alvey, the sessions have allowed

"I'm really passionate about learning and I think it's so important that people are given opportunities"

people with a wide range of cookery skills and different dietary requirements to try new foods and improve their cookery skills.

“The response has been fantastic: I can’t stress enough how great the courses have been,” says Jacquie. Within a budget that ensures meals cost no more than £1.50 per head, the sessions have also helped sharpen people’s Skills for Life.

“The course embeds numeracy skills in calculation of ingredient costs; literacy skills because we’re reading from recipes; and communication skills because we’re all working together even if we’re cooking different things,” Jacquie explains.

MDC Principal Learning and Development Adviser Lorraine Powney agrees: “The feedback has been absolutely brilliant – embedding English and maths within a fun activity has engaged more learners, increased awareness of Skills for Life and supported the wider agenda for health and well-being.”

The branch has recruited new members by running the courses, and changed people’s perceptions of UNISON at the council.

“When I did the course, someone from the finance department who’d been a member for 21 years said she’d never known us to do anything like it and she was so excited she’s gone away and told all her colleagues,” Jacquie says.

“At a time when we’re all suffering financially and counting the pennies, the course is a great way to promote UNISON

FIND OUT MORE

Jacquie found out about the credit crunch cookery course in the UNISON informal learning toolkit *Learning For Everyone*.

The toolkit, and the detailed tutors’ notes which you can download from the LAOS section of the UNISON website, give you almost everything you need to run enjoyable informal learning sessions in your workplace.

www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp



THE CREDIT CRUNCH COOKERY COURSE HAS CHANGED PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS OF UNISON

and show people that we offer much more than support for grievances.”

In April 2012, the branch opened a new informal learning space in the Civic Centre, with the council donating the room, and Jacquie arranging for it to be decorated and furnished.

“The aim is that people can drop in at lunchtimes and relax on our nice leather sofas: we’ve got a great range of fiction in our bookswap scheme and we’ve also got coffee table books you can dip in and out of,” Jacquie explains.

“I’m hoping to run courses in digital photography and deaf awareness at lunchtime and early evening as well, and set up a reading group, and we’re running the Six Book Challenge as well.”

Lorraine believes that the council has been able to develop its workforce more effectively as a result of the union learning partnership giving workers the confidence to talk about their learning needs: many of the staff who have come forward for dyslexia screenings, for example, would have been a lot more reluctant without union support, she says.

“The unions can reach those people who have had an impact on the bottom line in the past by never attending training, or going sick on training days: many of them are now asking when the next session is,” she says. ■



ROY PETERS



Opening the doors to everyone

What do outsourced Essex hospital laundry workers and migrant workers in the Scottish highlands have in common? They're all benefiting from UNISON's work to bring development opportunities to disadvantaged learners.

Disadvantaged learners are people who work part-time, have little job security and earn low pay; they often work in public services that have been outsourced;

the majority are women, and many are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities or are migrant workers.

At Sunlight Laundries in Basildon, Essex, Slovakian workers now make up the majority of staff since Basildon & Thurrock

DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS CAN USE SKILLS THEY ACQUIRE ON UNISON COURSES TO ADDRESS ISSUES THAT AFFECT THEM AT WORK

University Hospital out-sourced its laundry contract several years ago.

Terms and conditions in the laundry can vary depending on whether staff transferred from the NHS or have been taken on by Sunlight.

Language barriers often make it difficult for workers, the union and the employer to communicate on employment issues, and can make it more complicated for the union to recruit and organise members.

So things began to improve when UNISON members at Sunlight met staff members from UNISON's Hidden Workforce Project to discuss a positive plan of action.

"We talked about how we could support the migrant workers somehow, and we thought the best approach was to run UNISON's English For You course for them," explains Adam Rogalewski, who now works as a local organiser in the region but was part of the Hidden Workforce project at the time.

The course is designed to contribute to individual development and to improve communication in the workplace, union and community.

Delivered onsite by a tutor from the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the 10-week course ran for the first time last summer and then for a second time over the winter, attracting more than two dozen Slovaks each time.

On each occasion, one set of classes took place before the beginning of the evening/night shifts, and the other ran after the end of the morning shift, and the courses were open to members and non-members alike.

"Thanks to the classes, Slovaks can better communicate with the union, know their rights and know where they can go for support," says learner Darina Janakowa.

"The English classes also showed co-workers that the union is supporting and protecting their vulnerable colleagues."

As a result of the courses, the branch recruited 40 new members and three new workplace reps (two Slovak, one British). ■

Reaching out to migrant workers

UNISON is helping meet the demand for training among migrant workers in the Scottish Highlands.

In the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, where significant numbers of migrant workers have arrived in recent years, UNISON is hosting the Scottish TUC's migrant worker project.

The remote and rural communities of the Highlands and Islands require innovative approaches to reaching and engaging with migrant workers, which means the project has visited English classes, taken part in community events and organised sessions in the workplace.

“The project is seeking to help migrant workers secure employment”

“Migrant workers affected by the current economic climate can feel insecure in employment, they are highly motivated to improve their skills and therefore the demand for training is increasing significantly,” explains UNISON Learning and Organising Migrant Workers Fieldworker Marta Chaba.

The project has provided learning opportunities for more than 120 migrant workers in the past year (courses in computing, business English and management have been the most popular), and participants have gone on to become ULRs and safety reps as a result.

In addition, the project is seeking to help migrant workers secure employment matching their educational qualifications, since the majority have degree equivalents but are often in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. ■

MARTA CHABA



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Delivering learning opportunities to disadvantaged workers helps give them a voice that will empower them at work and in the community, says workforce development officer Davinder Kaur Sandhu.

Make sure you take into account some key issues that can prevent disadvantaged learners from accessing opportunities:

- Disadvantaged learners tend to work for companies that don't recognise UNISON, which means they often have very little knowledge of union-led learning opportunities.
- Large numbers of disadvantaged learners work for employers whose priority is extracting as much work as possible from their employees, and have little interest in developing their staff.
- Even when disadvantaged workers are keen to improve their skills, they can be reluctant to sign up for learning through the union route, because they worry that taking part in anything not endorsed by their employer might put their jobs at risk.
- Disadvantaged learners are more likely to work in shift patterns or unsocial hours and many are juggling more than one part-time job, which makes it even harder for them to access learning with a local provider or in the workplace.



Davinder Kaur Sandhu

JESS HURDREPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

Cleaner Nicola is top student

Liverpool hospital cleaner Nicola Johnson picked up a student of the year award after completing her apprenticeship.



EYE IMAGERY 2011

UNISON steward Nicola Johnson couldn't believe it when she found out she'd won a 'student of the year' award from the college that delivered the academic element of her Supporting Healthcare apprenticeship.

"That was a bit of a shock, to say the least – I thought it was mistake," she laughs. "I kept reading the letter over and over and then I gave it to my partner to check I was reading it right and he said: 'According to this, you've won it'."

After eight years working as a cleaner in the haematology ward at Aintree University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Nicola was encouraged to undertake the apprenticeship by her union learning rep, Marie Reece.

Marie and head of learning and development Fiona Chapman have between them encouraged 250 staff to take a variety of apprenticeships at the trust, including healthcare, ITQ, business and administration, hospitality and catering, customer service, clinical healthcare support and team leading.

NICOLA JOHNSON (SECOND RIGHT) COLLECTS HER AWARD FROM DAME KELLY HOLMES, FLANKED BY LEAD ULR MARIE REECE (LEFT) AND AINTREE HOSPITALS NVQ COORDINATOR FIONA CHAPMAN

"Marie asked if I wanted to be put forward, and I was rather nervous because I didn't feel confident enough, but I decided to have a go and see how it went," Nicola recalls.

The programme included literacy and numeracy elements delivered onsite by tutors from West Cheshire College, and that was the first formal learning Nicola had undertaken since leaving school more than 20 years earlier.

"The tutors made you feel really welcome and calmed your nerves, and I really enjoyed the numeracy and literacy element," she says.

Once she finished the literacy and numeracy qualifications, Nicola was assessed on the wards several times over a period of months by an external assessor who observed how she undertook her duties.

Apprenticeships like Supporting Healthcare are helping change out-dated attitudes about what domestic staff are capable of, Nicola believes.

"People used to have the view that 'once you've cleaned, that's it' but that couldn't be further from the truth – you have to be careful with cross-contamination and follow a lot of rules on health and safety," she points out.

"I think the apprenticeship is a way of helping overcome that view and getting your qualifications."

Since she's finished her apprenticeship, Nicola has also finished the union reps stage one course and is planning to take the stage two course later this year, as well as thinking about an NVQ Level 2.

"The tutors made you feel really welcome and calmed your nerves, and I really enjoyed the numeracy and literacy element"

Much of her renewed commitment to learning is down to the Skills for Life courses she did as part of her apprenticeship, she says: "I really surprised myself because I passed with flying colours and it boosted my confidence to go on and do other courses." ■

TRACY MCBURNIE EXPLAINS
HOW THE KSF WORKS FOR STAFF



Tracy helps low-paid NHS staff move on

ULR Tracy McBurnie has helped Lothian NHS workers progress their careers through the Knowledge and Skills Framework.

UNISON lifelong Learning Coordinator and ULR Tracy McBurnie has made a major contribution to helping hundreds of low-paid NHS staff in Lothian, Scotland, access learning and development opportunities through the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF).

By co-delivering a KSF Essentials course with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), Tracy helped show Bands 1–4 staff how they could move on at work through the appraisal process.

"I wanted to ensure that our staff knew what the KSF was about, and I wanted them to feel that it was being done with them, not to them," she explains.

The one-day interactive course helped staff get to grips with every aspect of the KSF

appraisal process and all its jargon, including the Personal Development Plan (PDP) that they draw up with their manager at their Personal Development Review (PDR).

"We took them through what a PDR is not – it's not about being told you're no good at this or that, it's not about listening to your manager and agreeing; it's a two-way conversation where you can talk about what's not working for you," Tracy explains.

"We talked about how the job description is what you do, the KSF is how you do it and your PDP is how to fill the gaps, what you don't know."

Tracey helped make sure that the courses were interactive. There were breakout sessions where they could talk among their peers; a chance to look at good questions to ask during a PDR; and exercises that gave participants a chance to role-play an appraisal.

Tracy loved seeing how people could get to grips with something they thought was beyond them. "You could see them at the beginning thinking they couldn't get their heads round PDPs, and then halfway through the morning you'd get a lightbulb moment," she says.

The courses have proved hugely successful. Now not only do a majority of staff have a PDP, but 80 per cent are also enrolled on the e-KSF web-based tool, which allows them to record evidence for their next appraisal online as they go. ■

MOVE ON WITH THE CLIMBING FRAME

UNISON ULRs in English regions can use the new customised health themes on the union learning Climbing Frame to help co-workers develop their health sector careers, and ULRs in Scotland, Cymru/Wales and Northern Ireland will also find lots of useful material there.

Log on/register
<https://climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk/Home>



SASA SEVIC

Social care workers aim higher

Low-paid health and social care workers are developing their careers through a unique three-way partnership in the Northern region.

Close to 2,000 health and social workers in the Northern region have improved their skills through Bridges To Learning (B2L), the three-way partnership between UNISON, the Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

That would be a pretty impressive achievement by itself in the three years since the project got off the ground.

But what is even more significant is that B2L is enabling low-paid, predominantly

BRIDGES TO LEARNING IS HELPING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE STAFF PROGRESS THEIR CAREERS

female, members in residential and domiciliary care to start training to become social workers with no loss of earnings.

"We've created a very exciting route through to a social work qualification that low-paid members would have had to lose earnings to undertake before," explains B2L Director Anne Hansen.

"Employers sometimes give people the chance to take this sort of qualification while remaining in employment but taking a cut in pay, whereas we're finding a route through which means that nobody is losing pay – a major achievement in terms of equality and access to learning."

In all, 1,898 members have taken part in just under 3,000 learning opportunities, thanks to the efforts of the union learning reps in eight major employers in the region, including Newcastle, Gateshead and South Tyneside councils and five separate NHS Trusts.

In addition, more than 5,600 people have accessed information, advice and guidance (IAG) through the project.

And 1,000 health and social care staff have attended around 20 different regional UNISON FlexiLearn workshops over the past 18 months, improving their understanding of some key topics for the sector, such as mental health, diabetes and death and dying, and boosting their own self-confidence through assertiveness training.

Since creating progression pathways was always the name of the game for Bridges To Learning, Anne is very happy that UNISON members are now working towards social work qualifications through the project.

"The progression routes are really important: that's what we were set up to do, and although they're embryonic in

You're looking at different staff at the end of this: they walk taller, they talk with more confidence **B2L manager**

HUNDREDS OF UNISON MEMBERS ARE TAKING THE CHANCE TO PROGRESS THROUGH BRIDGES TO LEARNING



SASA SEVIC

Sometimes you get yourself in a mindset because you've been doing the same thing for years and now I find I take a different approach ” B2L learner



SASA SEVIC

many ways and times are becoming increasingly hard in HE, the fact is that UNISON ULRs are working so well with employers that we're continuing to get staff onto these courses," Anne says.

But what makes her most proud is that 60 per cent of B2L learners who progress onto OU courses are from the most deprived sections of the community.

"What that means for them and their families is incredible: these are mainly women working in domiciliary care and their children are seeing how much it means to their mums to be learning," Anne says.

"Our learners are showing the value of learning not only to the rest of their families but also to the wider community as well, which is a wonderful legacy."

With another two years' financial backing guaranteed from the Union Learning Fund, Anne says the project will be concentrating on further developing the progression routes.

"I'd like to get more employers involved so that we create a regional way of increasing opportunities for people in lower-paid jobs to be able to improve their careers and deliver better care through accessing HE," she says. ■

'WE'VE SHOWN STAFF THEY CAN LEARN AGAIN'

UNISON ULR Maria Alberts helped persuade the Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust to join Bridges to Learning when the Queen Elizabeth Hospital laundry services were contracted out to a private company based outside the Gateshead area.

With 65 staff facing the loss of their jobs, Maria held one-to-one interviews with all of them to identify the skills they needed to improve to boost their chances of finding alternative work.

Nearly 40 staff signed up for an introduction to IT course in a new internet café set up in the laundry department, and Maria secured tutors from Newcastle College to deliver literacy and numeracy courses in the Trust's education centre.

In addition, as part of the Trust's induction programme, Maria has spoken to new staff about the learning and development opportunities open to them as UNISON members.

With the help of Bridges to Learning, Maria has helped convince dozens of staff that development is not just for other people.

"It's about talking to people and getting them engaged in education, many for the first time in many years: most of them just thought they weren't clever enough and we have shown them that they are," she says.

Bringing the past to life

A new UNISON project is giving members and activists the research skills to find their own personal connections to union campaigns of the past.



MUTINY ON THE FIRTH

UNISON Membership Development Officer Donald Cameron was intrigued when he found a newspaper article by former Times editor William Rees-Mogg re-telling the story of a Royal Navy pay strike near the place where he had spent many holidays as a child.

The Invergordon Mutiny of 1931 was sparked by the coalition government of the time attempting to slash the pay of the majority of the men in the lower decks by 25 per cent as part of a package of austerity cuts to balance the books.

“My father was brought up in a small croft which overlooked Invergordon and the Cromarty Firth, where the fleet was at anchor when the mutiny took place, and I spent many holidays by the Firth when I was young,” Donald recalls.

The 15,000 strikers refused to obey orders for two days, contributing to a run on the pound that forced the government to leave the Gold Standard – after which, according to Lord Rees-Mogg, “recovery became possible.”

Donald did most of his research online and in London public libraries. “It was fascinating and enjoyable looking at Hansard, Cabinet minutes and newspapers from the '30s: it brought the whole story to life and I learned a lot more about the historical background,” he says.

Harnessing the growing interest in family and local history to engage more members in learning activity, UNISON is developing the research skills of members and activists who want to investigate how previous generations responded to key issues of the day.

“This is another way for ULRs to encourage members into learning,” says UNISON membership development officer Donald Cameron, who is running the new History Project.

The project held its first workshop in September 2011 at Warwick University’s Modern Record Centre (MRC), which houses the archives of UNISON and its predecessor unions COHSE, NALGO and NUPE within its vast strongrooms.

The learners on the day included UNISON activists from the West Midlands and members who had recently completed Return to Learn and Women’s Lives courses.

“We wanted the first workshop to be around a history of campaigning, and the struggles that had gone on for public services that were either ongoing or meant something to people now,” explains MRC archivist Helen Ford.

The workshop focused on the period from the 1960s on, since most participants would have their own memories of that time, even if many of them would still have been very young at the beginning of it.

“I think a lot of participants were really quite surprised that this stuff had been going on 20 or 30 years ago, like The People’s March For Jobs in the 1980s,” Helen says.

“I think it went really well: there was a really good atmosphere, everyone thoroughly

“UNISON is developing the research skills of members and activists who want to investigate how previous generations responded to key issues of the day”

enjoyed themselves and they learnt a lot – considering it was a pilot and we crammed a lot in, it was a great success.”

Many participants were particularly impressed by the tour they went on with Helen – not surprising, since the MRC is biggest trade union archive in the country, with all its documents occupying a massive 13km of shelving.

“They enjoyed seeing how the MRC works behind the scenes,” Helen says.

Another workshop at the archive for East and West Midlands members is planned this autumn, where Helen will be showing participants how they can find out about what has happened in their local area in the past.

“You can pick up quite a lot of material at local libraries or local authority record offices, so they’re often a good place to start,” Helen points out.

“But they don’t tend to hold specific union records, so if people want to go into a bit more depth about what their union has done, they’re usually going to end up coming to us.”

Donald Cameron also hopes branches across the country will organise local union history workshops with their local libraries and local history archives.

“We’ll run formal courses to pass on the skills people will need, but we hope there’ll be lots of informal learning that will come out of it as well: ideally, we’d want people to be able to do this themselves locally,” he says. ■

THE HISTORY PROJECT IS ENABLING MEMBERS TO EXAMINE PAST CAMPAIGNS SUCH AS THE PEOPLE’S MARCH FOR JOBS



JOHN STURROCK/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

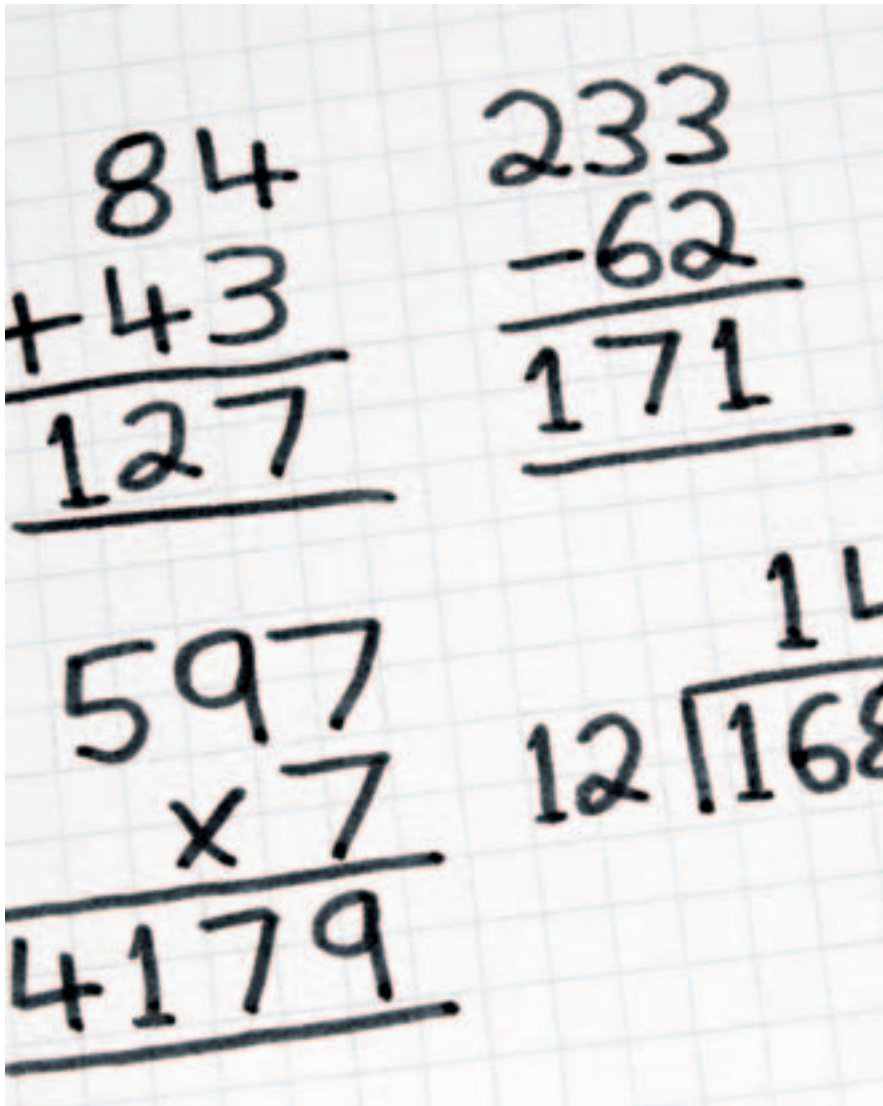
FIND OUT MORE

UNISON members are welcome to contact the Modern Record Centre by email, by phone or to arrange a visit by appointment.
Email: archives@warwick.ac.uk Tel: 024 7652 4219/

The MRC website offers a range of online resources, including a series of topical documents which offer historical perspectives on current topics such as the benefits system, public expenditure, and recession.

www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/

You can also search the MRC online catalogue to look for particular documents, people or events.

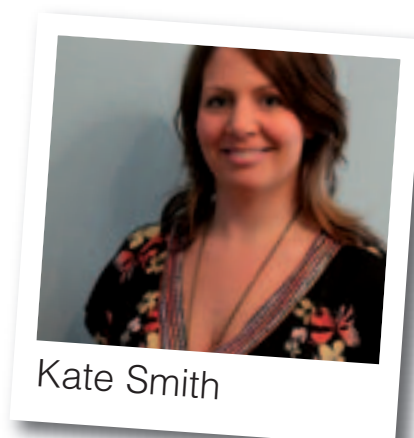


How it all adds up online

UNISON Cymru/Wales has developed a ground-breaking online resource to help raise awareness of basic skills in the workplace.

Spreading the word about basic skills through a new online resource is going to help ensure more people get the message at a time when budget cuts and time pressures are making it harder to organise courses in the workplace.

That's the aim of a new basic skills awareness module developed in a partnership between UNISON Cymru/Wales and the Learning Pool, the e-learning specialists who work with



Kate Smith

public sector organisations across the UK.

The module will help UNISON reps and learning reps, public sector workers and their colleagues identify and support individuals in the workplace who could benefit from basic skills development.

“With the public sector facing a huge battle with finances during the current economic climate, it is getting incredibly more difficult for staff to be released for any kind of training,” explains Learning To Make a Difference Project Manager Hazel Marsh, who has steered development of the web-based tool with her colleague Kate Smith.

“In addition, changes to the Employer Pledge basic skills initiative have resulted in fewer organisations signing up and therefore basic skills support has declined somewhat within the public sector.”

But the need for large-scale basic skills awareness remains vital in Wales, where 12 per cent of adults have poor literacy skills, and 51 per cent poor numeracy skills.

Going online was the obvious way forward. “It just suddenly clicked – this is a good way of getting to a lot of people with minimum outlay, since many people live in remote areas and travel can be difficult,” Hazel says.

Kate and Hazel worked with Learning Pool through most of 2011 before the site went live early in 2012.

The basic skills awareness module on the UNISON Learning Pool has been designed to help convince the target audience of UNISON reps and learning reps about why it's so important to prioritise literacy and numeracy skills in the workplace.

It's also relevant to anyone in a frontline job where they might encounter service users with basic skills needs, Kate and Hazel point out.

It's important that basic skills awareness isn't left to learning reps – it's vital that all union reps know how to spot the signs of poor literacy or numeracy, so they can support members whose basic skills issues may be the root cause of disciplinary problems.

“UNISON deals with a number of disciplinarys that can be attributed to

HAZEL MARSH PRESENTS THE NEW UNISON ONLINE RESOURCE TO LEARNING POOL'S COMMUNITY DAY IN CYMRU/WALES EARLIER THIS YEAR



LEARNING POOL

“UNISON Cymru/Wales and the Welsh government are working together via this project to support improvement of basic skills in the workplace”

poor basic skills because an individual is unable to read and understand health and safety notices and therefore follow processes and procedures,” Kate says.

And managers need to take the basic skills agenda onboard as well, Hazel argues.

“Basic skills awareness is vital in helping managers to understand what basic skills are, what impact poor basic skills can have for an individual and organisation; and why it is so important to allow staff time off to enable them to receive basic skills training,” she says.

“Without this level of understanding, managers are highly unlikely to agree staff release time for basic skills training.”

Feedback from the Welsh government has been positive, according to Kate and Hazel. “The reception so far is very good, feedback has been very positive – they’re quite excited really!” Learning providers have given an equally warm reception to the new resource.

The aim is to get as many UNISON activists as possible to log into the site and take the basic skills awareness module, and look into the possibility of developing further modules alongside it in the future.

The UNISON Learning Pool is a great example of what can be achieved through partnership working, says UNISON Cymru/Wales Secretary Margaret Thomas.

“UNISON Cymru/Wales and the Welsh government are working together via this project to support improvement of basic skills in the workplace, skills which are increasingly recognised as the building for a better society and a skilled adaptable workforce,” she says.

“With changing job roles and the introduction of new technology, demands on workers are ever shifting; this tool will help to empower workers and build their confidence in the workplace.” ■

SIGN YOURSELF UP

To access the module, follow the link and provide an email address for registration. The module then takes you through an awareness of what basic skills are; how to support individuals in the workplace; and looks at important issues such as dyslexia and health and safety.

<http://unisonwales.learningpool.com>



Getting all the skills we need

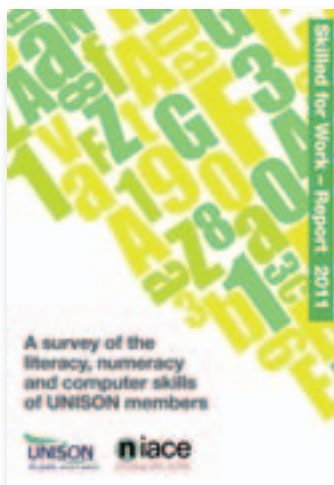
We all need good literacy, numeracy and computer skills if we are to get the most out of our work, home and union lives, according to the latest survey of UNISON members' Skills for Life needs.

UNISON must continue to help all its members develop the literacy, numeracy and computer skills that will enable them to play a full part in their work, home and union lives, according to a new report based on a survey of 27,000 members.

Based on the members' survey by adult learning organisation NIACE, 'Skilled For Work: Report 2011' revealed that:

- more than 50 per cent of respondents wanted to expand their computer skills;
- 33 per cent said they would like to be more confident with numeracy;
- 25 per cent were keen to improve their reading and writing.

In addition, 16 per cent also said lack of confidence in their literacy or numeracy had stopped them from applying for promotion



OVER HALF THE UNISON MEMBERS WHO COMPLETED THE SKILLS FOR LIFE SURVEY WANTED TO IMPROVE THEIR COMPUTER SKILLS

and 14 per cent that it prevented them from taking on extra responsibilities at work.

"I just get very nervous when I have to write anything other than general emails and notes," reported one administrator in their late 40s who responded. "I look at other roles or vacancies but always worry that I can't apply due to poor exam results in maths and English."

Unaddressed Skills for Life issues can contribute to work-based stress. A manager said: "My role requires me to be assertive and I find this very difficult: senior managers have picked up on my poor grammar."

Lack of confidence in their communication skills can prevent members from playing a bigger role in the union. 20 per cent of respondents (one in five) reported that they found speaking in groups difficult,

something which is not only likely to impact on their work but also influence their decisions about activity in UNISON.

With these results in mind, the report argues that the union should:

- develop greater awareness of Skills for Life issues among employers, members and the union as a whole;
- increase accessibility of its written communication;
- promote more learning opportunities to members;
- further develop its ULRs.

“UNISON has a key role to play with employers, regions, branches and members to raise awareness of Skills for Life and to encourage members to improve their skills,” says Skills for Life lead Davinder Kaur Sandhu.

“If a member’s skills are preventing them from challenging things at work, participating in meetings or taking a more active part in the union, UNISON can signpost them to appropriate provision.” ■

Download the full report at
www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp

“People with inadequate literacy skills earn on average 11 per cent less than their better skilled colleagues, while people with inadequate numeracy skills earn on average 6 per cent less”

BRISTOL RECYCLING STAFF BOOST SKILLS FOR LIFE

Bristol recycling workers have been improving their Skills for Life, thanks to the sterling work of their ULR Andy Taylor.

Knowing many of his colleagues at waste and recycling company SITA had Skills for Life needs, Andy



opened talks with management with the support of UNISON area organiser Doug Varney and regional education organiser Kay Mackenzie.

Since the company was looking to secure Investors In People (IIP) status as part of its commitment to staff development, it agreed the workforce could have paid time off to undertake Skills for Life and basic computer training using the onsite training room.

“This was a big commitment from the SITA management team,” Kay says.

Andy then organised a survey of his members in the recycling centre to see who would be interested in taking the opportunity to learn at work, but nobody wanted to be the first to put their name down.

So he found a room onsite where people could return their surveys to him and have a one-to-one chat in private about what they wanted and what UNISON and SITA might be able to offer them.

The new approach netted Andy more than 20 surveys, which revealed his colleagues were interested in brushing up their English and maths, taking a range of computer courses and more on-the-job training.

Further talks with the company then secured Andy paid time off so he could run a weekly surgery in which to talk to staff about their learning needs.

With financial help from the Union Learning Fund, UNISON was able to invite nearby Filton College to deliver an onsite literacy course, with seven out of the nine participants passing the Level 1 literacy test.

The college then delivered a basic computer course for some of the other staff, with tutors running two-hour sessions over five weeks using laptops they brought onsite so that learners could fit the course more easily into their schedules.

“Andy was a credit to the depot and worked tirelessly to get this training going,” says South-West learning and development organiser Edna Warwick.

“SITA were a pleasure to work with throughout this whole process and helped enable these members of staff to achieve training that they may not have ever got had it not been provided in the workplace and funded by the LEDU project.”



Uni cleaners spread the (written) word

Two different educational websites have chosen UNISON members of the De Montfort University (DMU) campus cleaning team to help promote learning in the workplace.

The Reading Agency is promoting The Six Book Challenge with the help of a case study of Yvonne Hirst, while Leicester College has profiled Ann Reeder in an attempt to encourage more adults to enrol on Skills for Life courses like the one she took.

“Yvonne and Ann both recognise that traditional education passed them by in early life, but they are now catching up on lost time,” explains proud DMU learning rep Andrew Jennison, who has supported both women on their learning journeys.

“Not only have they rediscovered the joys of learning, but they are finding real benefits at work and at home.”

Now in her early 50s, Ann moved around the country so often when she was growing up that she missed out on a solid grounding in the educational basics.

But after more than 20 years working as a cleaner at DMU, she signed up for a Skills

DMU CLEANING SUPERVISOR YVONNE HIRST (ABOVE) HAS DISCOVERED THE JOYS OF READING THROUGH UNISON



Ann Reeder

for Life course at Leicester College with Andrew’s encouragement.

Although she was apprehensive about taking her first steps back into learning, Ann says the tutors made her feel welcome and put her at her ease.

“I was worried that the topics might be over my head but the teachers at Leicester College were really helpful: they seemed to know my needs and conducted the course at a pace that was comfortable for me.”

Improving her literacy skills has helped Ann perform better at work. “Work-wise, I now understand more and do not have to keep asking questions,” she says.

After completing her course, Ann joined the Six Book Challenge at DMU, the Reading Agency scheme in which participants who commit to reading six books and recording their thoughts about them in a reading diary are entered in a national prize draw.

And now she wants to improve her numeracy, so that she can extend her repertoire in the kitchen. “I can now read recipes, but I have a problem with weighing and quantities, so I would like to go on and do maths,” she says.

Cleaning supervisor Yvonne Hirst discovered she was dyslexic when she signed up for a Skills for Life course at DMU in 2010, which meant she wasn’t sure about taking part in the Six Book Challenge when ULR Andrew suggested it the following year.

“At first, I thought I couldn’t do it because I wasn’t very good at reading,” she says. “But putting down what you read in a diary and the thought of maybe winning a prize sounded fun.”

What really helped was when Andrew introduced Yvonne to Quick Reads, with the help of one of the several sets he’d persuaded HR Training and Development to buy to help encourage more staff to take part in the Six Book Challenge.

Discovering titles written and designed with emergent adult readers in mind was just what Yvonne needed to build her confidence, and her favourite was RaW Voices, the inspirational stories of real people brought together by the BBC’s literacy campaign, Reading and Writing (RaW).

“I’ve been very fortunate that I have had the opportunity to learn and take part in the Challenge while working at DMU: I’m very proud of what I’ve achieved over the last two years,” she says.

SIX BOOK CHALLENGE

You can run the Six Book Challenge whenever you like, although many union branches plan their work to culminate around the same time as the prize draws run by The Reading Agency on Friday 29 June.

Workplaces that run the Challenge and take part in Learning At Work Day on Thursday 17 May 2012 can enter the draw for a chance to win an author visit courtesy of Transworld Publishers.

www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk

**SIX BOOK
CHALLENGE**

**UNISON ULR ANDREW
JENNISON HAS ENCOURAGED
DOZENS OF CO-WORKERS TO
JOIN THE SIX BOOK CHALLENGE**

After signing up nearly 100 colleagues last year, Andrew encouraged more than 150 to take the challenge this year – even though 25 per cent of last year’s participants had since left through voluntary severance.

One of the reasons for his success is that his job in the post and portage department means he’s in and out of nearly every building on the single-site campus all the time.

“Most of the people around the university know what I do, it’s as simple as that, and I Tweet as well – if you want to know what’s going on at DMU, you have to be on Twitter,” he says.

It also helps enormously that Vice-Chancellor Dominic Shellard also Tweets his support, and not only calls the Challenge “a superb initiative” but also takes part every year. “It’s nice to have support from the top,” Andrew says.

The arrival of a new HR Director at DMU three years ago gave a major boost to UNISON’s learning work, Andrew says.

“Three years ago, our new HR director, Ben Brown, stopped me in the street and said ‘ULRs have got a place at DMU’ and that made all the difference: from that day on, we’ve had a great relationship with HR Training and Development,” Andrew says. ■



EVERYTHING YOU NEED

to get active around learning



Organising for learning

Run a short event in your branch to plan recruitment and organising activity around the learning agenda.

Download materials from:

www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/Org4learning.pdf

10 things you need to know about UNISON and learning

Recruit and organise around learning issues with this recruitment leaflet. Stock number 2373 or download from:

www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/20155.pdf

ULR Handbook

This short guide sets out your rights as a ULR, how to get started and what's available for members. Stock number 2345 or download from:

www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17751.pdf

Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning

Check out how to tackle inequality, build your members confidence and skills, and build your branch in the process!

Stock number 2098 or download from:

www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18677.pdf

Learning for Everyone

ULRs can use this toolkit to engage members and organise informal learning at work.

www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp

Learning Angles

ULRs can use these briefings to promote learning around current issues in the branch. Download from:

www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp

Return to Learn, Women's Lives and English for You

These award-winning courses will help members develop new learning skills and get back into education and training. Contact your Regional Education Officer for more details.

Download these publications and many more resources from the LAOS website:

www.unison.org.uk/laos

Follow us on twitter @unisonlearning

Spread the Word

Become a ULR, help encourage co-workers back into learning and get involved in your local branch. Stock Number 1893 or download from:

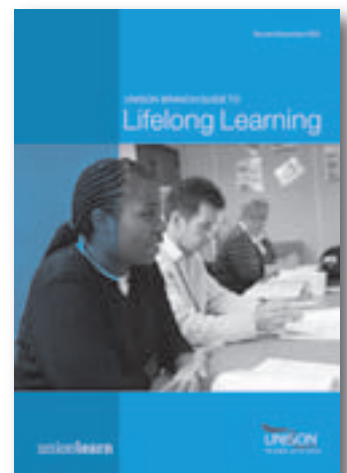
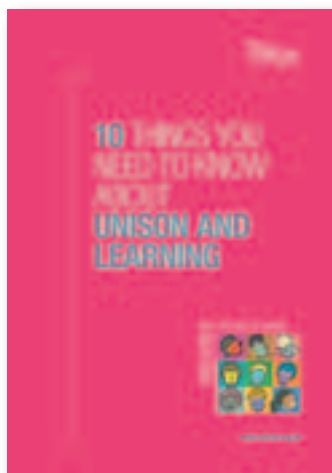
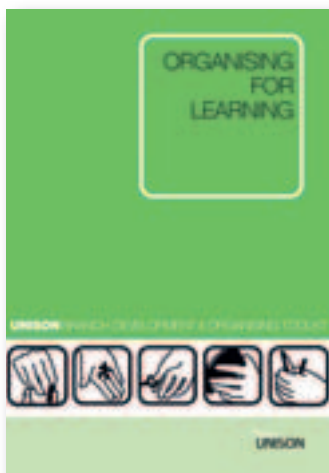
www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/Spread_the_Word_Apr09.pdf

U-Train

Plan your learning journey as a member or a rep with this useful map to guide you through the development opportunities available.

www.unison.org.uk/utrain/

Or download from: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/17837.pdf





Developing and Supporting Workplace Representatives

This branch guide on buddying and mentoring workplace reps includes ideas about encouraging reps to get active. Stock number 2883 or download from: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/19013.pdf

Dyslexia – In Our Own Words

This will help UNISON activists understand dyslexia, support members and organise around dyslexia in the branch. Download from: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/Dyslexia%20-%20In%20Our%20Own%20Words%20ACT185.pdf

Or email [Learning&Organising Enquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk) to order copies – Stock No. ACT 185.

Skilled for Work Report – 2011

A survey of the literacy, numeracy and computer skills of UNISON members. Download from: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/SkilledforWorkReport2011.pdf

Your Rights as an Apprentice

Find out what an apprenticeship is, what they offer and what apprentices are entitled to. Email Learning&OrganisingServices to order copies.

Guidance for ULRs, Learning Coordinators & Education Staff on Using the Skills for Life Research

How the Skills for Life research can be taken forward in your branches and with employers. Email Learning & Organising Enquiries to order: Stock number ACTS 192. Or download from: www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp

Hints and Tips for Getting a Job

A pocket-sized booklet with tips for job hunting, writing application forms and CVs and interview skills. Email Learning & Organising Enquiries to order: Stock number ACT 196. Or download from: www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp

UNISON Quick Reads Reading Groups Toolkit

ULRs can use this toolkit to organise reading group in their workplaces. Email Learning & Organising Enquiries to order: Stock number ACT195. Or download from: www.unison.org.uk/laos/publications.asp



To find out more and how to join contact:

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Lines open 6am – midnight Monday to Friday; 9am – 4pm Saturday

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