



UNISON – the learning union

learn

Summer 2013

IN THIS ISSUE

**25 years of
Return to Learn**

Overcome the
maths fear factor

**Take learning
into your hands**

Engaging the
next generation

**Union
Learning
Fund**

with **unionlearn**

UNISON
the public service union



SWING INTO

LEARNING



32



34



40

8



20

UNISON ULEARN MAGAZINE

Editor

Martin Moriarty

Design

www.design-mill.co.uk

Cover photo

Paul Carter

Published by

UNISON Learning and Organising Services

Printed by

UNISON, 130 Euston Road, London, NW1 2AY

To find out more about UNISON and how to join contact UNISONDirect on 0845 355 0845

Textphone users FREEPHONE call 0800 0 967 968

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

Or visit our website www.unison.org.uk

CONTENTS

- 4 Going for gold
- 6 Helping university cleaners gain English skills
- 8 Count us in
- 10 New members learning offer
- 12 Put your learning in your own hands
- 14 School's in!
- 16 Injecting new skills into the NHS
- 18 Reaching out to the next generation
- 20 Let's make a deal
- 22 Celebrating 25 years of Return to Learn
- 24 Building the union
- 26 Sharpen your ULR skills
- 28 Include us in!
- 30 Pleased to meet you
- 32 Taking care of the carers
- 34 Helping care workers develop their skills
- 36 And... relax!
- 38 That's entertainment!
- 40 Fill in our survey and win a £30 voucher for your favourite high street store
- 42 Get active around learning

Welcome

Welcome to your new-look edition of Ulearn, which we hope will inspire you to find new ways of encouraging ever more UNISON members to develop their potential through learning with the union.

As you know, this is Year Two of our Inclusive Learning project, established with the help of the Union Learning Fund (ULF) to engage disadvantaged learners, tackle skills gaps, support Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and reach out to non-unionised workplaces.

Year One was a big success, with 60 live projects up and running that aim to engage more than 4,500 learners and train 350-plus union learning reps.

Between them, those projects cover a massive amount of new ground, from developing apprenticeship agreements and programmes to promoting learning to non-teaching staff in schools and engaging hard-to-reach workers in the health and social care sector.

With Year Two now underway, we're helping even more projects get up and running. We were in the process of evaluating the 27 applications we received for Year Two funding as Ulearn

went to press, but judging by the paperwork, there are some exciting and imaginative ideas for developing workplace learning on the way.

The financial support of the ULF has been crucial, of course. But we would not have been able to deliver on it without the hard work and dedication of all our union learning reps and lifelong learning coordinators: thank you all for making such an enormous difference to the lives of so many UNISON members week in, week out.

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



AMANDA KENDAL

TOM PARKES



UNISON learning reps Ya Ching Darnell (centre) and Julie Mooney (left) collect their Six Book Challenge bronze award from author Adele Parks

Going for gold

After winning the Six Book Challenge bronze award last year, UNISON's learning reps at Merseytravel want to reach the top step on the podium this time round.

After winning the Six Book Challenge bronze award for helping nearly 90 Merseytravel staff complete the reading scheme last year, UNISON learning reps Ya Ching Darnell and Julie Mooney are going for gold this year.

Taking part in the Challenge, which is run by The Reading Agency, involves reading six books of your choice and keeping a diary of your responses.

Organisations which help 50 or more people complete win the bronze award, while 100 takes silver and 150 wins gold.

With 140-plus already underway by the time Ulearn went to press, the learning reps look set fair to claim the top prize later this year.

"It was very encouraging to get the bronze award last year, a real boost to help us continue with the initiative," Julie says.

"A lot of the credit has to go to Ya Ching Darnell, as the Six Book Challenge is really her baby, she has been working on it for the last few years."

In addition to the bronze award, Merseytravel also won the overall workplace award, which meant best-selling

“It was very encouraging to get the award”

author Andy McNab visited the public transport organisation to celebrate in the autumn.

"The feedback from his visit was inspiring, because he shared his story about being a late developer in terms of reading and education, which everybody commented on afterwards," says Julie.

The ULRs have changed their approach this year. Instead of organising lots of little events to promote the Challenge, they have focused on an official launch in January, a World Book Day event in

March, an author visit in May and a celebration event in July.

They have also divided Merseytravel into three sections, each one looked after by a different ULR to spread the workload.

Julie says that making a success of the Challenge involves keeping in touch with everyone who is taking part. "It's not just about signing people up: you do need to make contact with people," she says.

That's why they encourage people to give their reading diaries to the relevant ULR, who sticks a Merseytravel Six Book Challenge sticker in the diary every time they finish a book.

Julie says that running the Challenge complements the

You can order resource packs and incentive packs for this year's Six Book Challenge through The Reading Agency's online shop. Visit: shop.readingagency.org.uk

“It's not just about signing people up: you do need to make contact with people”

other learning opportunities available through Merseylearn, the transport operation's learning and skills arm.

"Last year, none of our cleaning staff took part in the Challenge. After they took a course to improve their communication skills through IT this year, they all signed up," Julie says. ■

FREE RESOURCES FOR ENGLISH AND MATHS TASTERS

UNISON learning reps can use a range of resources to help them put on English and maths taster sessions that could lead on to functional skills courses in the workplace.

On the English side, the Reading Groups Toolkit for Union Learning Representatives takes you through how to set up a reading group in your workplace using the latest titles from Quick Reads.

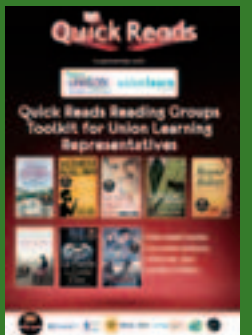
The toolkit includes lots of useful hints and tips to help you get started, run the sessions and evaluate how you're getting on.

On the maths side, unionlearn is helping more ULRs promote maths in the workplace through the website Maths4us.

The site's free resources section includes lots of helpful guides, including Facing Up To Maths, to help ULRs make maths exciting and accessible to more people, and an easy-to-follow numeracy workshop plan to help ULRs run a fun 60-minute maths session.

There are more maths activities on pp 8&9.

- Maths4us: maths4us.org
- Reading Groups Toolkit: bit.ly/11cGFvM



PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Offering ESOL classes to migrant workers shows them there is more to UNISON than hackneyed media images of conflict

“Learners didn’t have to be members to take the course: we hoped they would join as a result”

Helping university cleaners gain English skills

Dozens of University of London cleaners have improved their English and communications skills thanks to the Senate House Branch providing free courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

UNISON learning rep Allison Franklin first started organising informal lunchtime English language classes for cleaners in 2011, with the teaching originally delivered by a post-graduate student from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

“After a while it struck me that we needed something more structured, a course with a recognised qualification where we could measure the progress people were making,” Allison says.

That’s why the branch began organising formal ESOL

classes later in 2011, scheduling them around shift times to make attending as easy as possible for the out-sourced cleaners, who work for Balfour Beatty.

With the help of Greater London Region, where officers Les Perkins and Ruth Levin

identified ULF funding for administrative costs, the branch paid for teaching space in Senate House, course tutors and exam fees – which meant learners didn’t have to pay a penny.

The branch also decided to promote the learning opportunity to all the out-sourced cleaners, not only those already in the union.

“Learners didn’t have to be members to take the course: we hoped they would join as a result, but regardless of possible outcomes in terms of developing the branch, we opened the course to everyone because we thought that would be the right thing to do,” Allison says.

“We also thought it would be a good opportunity to show people who might not have much knowledge of unions that there was more to us than media coverage of aggravation and confrontation.”

Since there weren’t enough learners to run separate courses for learners at different levels, the courses included people with a range of different English language skills, which represented a challenge for the tutors.

“The same class could have people who were at entry level

and others who were becoming quite comfortable with holding conversations in English, so it was a real testament to the tutors that they were able to make the sessions relevant and lively for everyone and get so many of them through the exams,” Allison says.

In all, the classes taught by the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) helped 36 learners pass literacy and ESOL courses between 2011 and 2012 (some gained both qualifications), while several more succeeded in the course delivered by university staff.

When the branch started running the courses, Balfour Beatty management was not interested in investing in its staff’s language skills, even though the company was expecting people with poor English to be able to understand working safely with hazardous cleaning products, Allison says.

However, the company has since signed a recognition agreement with UNISON and separately agreed it will make a contribution towards the cost of future ESOL courses and provide the branch with classroom space. ■

WIN £30 VOUCHER FOR YOUR FAVOURITE HIGH STREET STORE!

It is time for the annual UNISON ULR survey again and completing it could win you a £30 voucher for your favourite high street store!

All you have to do is complete our annual ULR survey on p 41 and pop it in an envelope to send back to us using our freepost address.

The information you supply about the way you are helping your colleagues access learning in the workplace helps us continue to make the case for union learning and improve the support we offer branches.

And completing the survey helps you have your say in the way we run learning projects in the future.

For your chance to win, don’t forget to fill in the form on p 41.



Fun activities like knitting numbers (left) help people overcome their resistance to doing maths



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Count us in

Think you can't 'do maths'? Think again. Here are three fun activities that help people overcome the fear factor and start enjoying numbers.

Adding styles

For: any number of people.

Aim: to identify everyone's different adding style.

Before you start: Place a sheet of paper on the table with the sum: $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 =$

How it works: Ask everyone to work out the answer in their own way. When everyone has finished, go round the group

to find out which method people used. (For example, some people go 3, 6, 10 etc; while others go $1 + 2$ is 3, $3 + 3$ is 6.)

Numeracy loop

For: any number of people.

Aim: to improve participants' quickfire number skills.

Before you start: Show the numeracy loop cards to the group, pointing out how each

“Overcome the fear factor and start enjoying numbers”

card is divided in two: at the top is a sum without the answer; at the bottom is an answer to a different sum. Then shuffle the cards before dealing.

How it works: Find and keep the beginner's card and then deal the rest of the cards so that everyone has one, two or three cards (depending on the number of players). Start by reading out the sum on the

beginner's card. Whoever holds the card with the right answer calls it out, and then reads out the sum on that card. Continue until you reach the final answer on the card you began with. Contact Emma Lipscombe to obtain the numeracy loop cards, e.lipscombe@unison.co.uk

Knitting numbers

For: 10 people, standing in a circle, one with a ball of wool.

Aim: to reveal underlying patterns in times tables.

Before you start: The person with the ball of wool is assigned the number zero,

and everyone else is given 1 to 9 inclusive by moving clockwise round the circle from zero. Your number comes up whenever it is the last digit in an answer. For example, whoever is 3 is also 23, 43, 53 etc.

How it works: Choose a times table eg, 6. The person with the wool ties the loose end around their wrist, unravels enough wool to cover the diameter of the circle, says the first line of the times table ($1 \times 6 = 6$) and then throws the ball of wool to the person who is number 6. Number 6 then loops the wool round their wrist, says the second line ($2 \times 6 = 12$), unravels another length and throws the ball to the person who is number 2 (12). Continue up to 12×6 . Or go further! See the photo above for how it works. ■

Why not take a look at www.maths4us.org for more ideas on activities around building confidence with numbers?

YOU ARE THE CHAMPION!

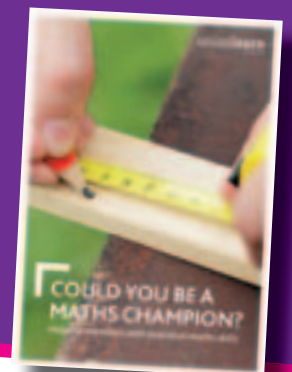
If you enjoy helping people understand their payslips, compare different borrowing rates or draw up a weekly budget, then you are already a bit of a Maths Champion.

So why not join thousands of other union members and sign up to actually become one?

You don't have to be a whizz with numbers. But you do have to be good at helping people feel less anxious and more confident when it comes to tackling everyday maths problems.

Sign up to become a Maths Champion with unionlearn and you will be eligible for a range of short training courses to help you spread the word that maths doesn't have to be frightening and can even be fun.

www.unionlearn.org.uk/forms/maths-champion-registration or contact Emma Lipscombe: e.lipscombe@unison.co.uk





SASA SEVIC

New members learning offer

If you joined UNISON on or after Monday 11 March 2013, you can learn new skills or improve existing ones at one of our four free workshops for new members later this year.

Beginning in the autumn, our regions will be running free one-day 'taster' workshops to help new members get to grips with some of the key challenges that we all face in our day-to-day lives: change at work, developing your skills

and using the internet.

In addition, we'll also be offering you the chance to get the most out of your UNISON membership by guiding you through how your branch can help you at work and how you can access our various

support services.

"We pride ourselves on our extensive learning and training programme, which helps thousands of UNISON members develop themselves every year," says Head of Learning

The free learning offer for new members is yet another good reason for people to join UNISON

Tasters in Nottingham

If you are a new member in the East Midlands since March 2013 and would like to come to our pilot version of the four workshops in June, all you have to do is email us with your name, address, postcode, UNISON membership number (if known) and the name of the workshop you'd like to take part in.

The workshops are free and take place in Nottingham on Saturday 29 June. We will let you have all the details of time and venue closer to the date.

Email your details to learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

“The new member learning offer will provide new members with genuinely useful skills”

at home, and a chance to find out more about how they can play a part in the union.”

The four free 'taster' workshops featured in this special new introductory offer are (see 'Take your pick' on the right for details):

- Welcome to UNISON
- Facing change together
- Your skills, your future
- Making the most of the internet.

There is a new leaflet available to support the recruitment of new members around the learning opportunities the union offers – 'Things get better when you Learn in UNISON'. This explains the new member taster workshops. Contact your regional education officer or order copies by emailing learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

and Organising Services Joanna Cain.

"And now the new member learning offer is yet another incentive to join UNISON. It will provide new members with genuinely useful skills to improve their lives at work and

TAKE YOUR PICK

New members can take part in one of these four workshops, which we will be running in our regions beginning in the autumn.

Welcome to UNISON

Come and meet other new members for an introduction to UNISON, what membership involves, the way we work together, and how you can get involved.

Facing change together

Meet other new members to discuss practical ways to help with change or uncertainty at work and where to go in the union for further support and advice.

Your skills, your future

If you're feeling stuck in a rut at work, this is the workshop for you. Come and join other new members to share ideas about how to develop new skills and make the most of the ones of you've got.

Making the most of the internet

Three sessions to get you confident with using the internet, email and social media. Includes tips on which websites are safe, security settings and using the internet to save money.



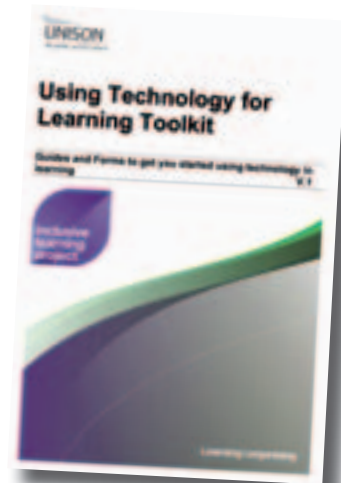
Put your learning in your own hands

More and more branches are discovering the benefits of using the latest tablet technology to help more members access a wide range of learning.

Many learning projects are already using laptops to help members learn in the workplace, but the arrival of e-readers like the Kindle and tablets such as the iPad can make learning even more fun and accessible.

To help branches get the most out of the latest technology, UNISON has put together a new digital toolkit, Using Technology For Learning.

The toolkit includes practical help with running a computer



session, a guide to the iPad (including a selection of free apps for learning) and suggestions about how to use e-readers to set up reading groups or loan schemes.

“What is particularly useful about tablets is that they allow members to learn what they want, where they want and at the pace they want,” says Learning and Workforce Development Officer Emma Lipscombe.

“Tablets allow people to put their learning in their own hands: whatever they are interested in, they can find an interactive app to download and work through what it has to offer at their own pace.”

Because they are still quite new, tablets are good for

engaging potential learners because most people want to have a go on them when they appear at learning tasters, workshops and events.

“If someone has never used a computer before, getting used to the mouse is a skill in itself, whereas an iPad is much easier to control and once people get used to the finger movements, they quickly become confident,” Emma says.

They also allow branches to make learning much more mobile, since a tablet with a 3G connection doesn't need to be physically plugged in to a computer system or even within range of a wi-fi signal to access the internet.

What next?

- Run a survey of digital skills in your branch: find out what members want (use the template in the digital toolkit)
- Use ULRnet to discuss how your branch can help members improve their digital skills
- Consider setting up a mobile learning centre with support from the ULF

- For your copy of the toolkit 'Using Technology For Learning', log on to ULRnet, or email Learning and Workforce Development Officer Emma Lipscombe E.Lipscombe@unison.co.uk ■

THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

Maths Trainer

Lets you select the area you would like to improve on from multiplication, division, addition and subtraction – or choose any combination of them you want.



Doodle Hangman Free

Increase your vocabulary and improve your spelling with this entertaining version of hangman, featuring 11 different word categories and the option to play in one or two-person mode.



Take A Break!

Enjoy the benefits of stress relief through short guided meditations, with or without music or nature sounds.



POLICE, IPAD, ACTION!

Lincolnshire Police Branch is loaning iPads to members in the police and G4S who want to improve their skills using one of the huge number of learning apps available on the tablet.

In a branch that covers such a wide geographical area, with members spread over a number of locations, it's much easier to get members learning on a portable device at home than having to organise a single location for support from the ULF.

“One of the great benefits of using iPads is that they're very portable, and it's much easier for members to access learning on them at home, instead of having to come into an office to learn online,” explains branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator Nigel Wass.

Most members are using the iPads to improve their foreign languages, although people are also using the tablet's enormous capacity to improve a range of different skills, including learning piano.

“The great thing about most learning apps is that they allow people to learn at their own pace: with the iPad, you can do five or ten minutes when you get home every day,” Nigel says.

At the moment, the branch has 15 iPads for members to borrow, although it is keen to increase the number to 20 or 25 to allow it to do even more, including more group-based learning sessions.



SASA SEVIC

School staff were able to gain new skills to help them in their jobs at the Bridges To Learning CPD event in February

School's in!

UNISON is helping schools staff develop themselves at work by organising professional development events such as the one in Durham earlier this year.

More than 200 school staff from all over the north-east packed a UNISON-led Continuous Professional Development (CPD) event in Durham earlier this year.

"It was a very full event: in fact, more people applied to come than we had places at the hotel where we held it," says Regional Education officer Keith Hodgson.

The conference was organised to show staff how CPD could help them improve in their current job and progress into new roles, while at the

same time boosting their own school's capacity to deal with challenging issues in the classroom.

"The employers bought into the event, partly because it was professional development, and partly because it was free for UNISON members, so all the employers had to do was cover the staff time," Keith says.

"For the staff, it was an opportunity to network that they don't normally get: people from different local authorities, local education authorities and different schools were able to

Feel the benefits of FE
Taking part in further education (FE) can improve your pay, help you get a better job and boost your self-confidence, according to new research by Ipsos MORI and London Economics. Their survey of 4,000 FE learners revealed that, after taking an FE course:

- 35 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women found a better job
- 18 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women were promoted
- 22 per cent increased their salary
- 58 per cent increased job satisfaction
- 80 per cent gained self-confidence or self-esteem.

Full report: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-benefits-of-further-education-learning

discuss the enormous differences in what they are asked to do and what they are paid – they are pretty exploited, and getting more so, not less."

After listening to a scene-setting presentation from UNISON National Officer for Further Education Chris Fabby, participants were able to take part in two taster workshops of about an hour each covering issues including understanding autism, speed reading, dyslexia awareness, English and maths and dealing with challenging behaviour.

"This was a really good example of connecting learning and organising by linking into the professional development agenda but with the content and the event managed by the union," says Keith.

The conference was sponsored by Bridges To Learning, the partnership between UNISON, The Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) that is creating learning progression pathways for members in education, health and social care.

A similar Bridges To Learning event for schools staff in Middlesborough last year helped launch a network of teaching assistants and other

“This was a really good example of connecting learning and organising”

staff, which has been able to lobby the local education authority on pay issues and asbestos in schools.

The regional office is putting together a similar network of school staff who attended the Durham event. ■

BREAKING NEW GROUND

UNISON Northern Ireland is recruiting new members and working with new employers, thanks to its comprehensive Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme, which is free for anyone who holds a UNISON card.

"We have gained huge numbers of new members who have joined so they can gain access to our programme, which has been designed to help members deal with many of the difficult things that are thrown at them in work," Fidelma says.

The programme includes almost 70 workshops with sessions on dementia, autism, infant mental health, interview skills, pressure ulcer prevention, music therapy, reflective practice, suicide awareness and mental health first aid.

Since stress was identified as a major concern for members on all grades, the union has developed three courses aimed at equipping members with new skills for dealing with pressure at work: Mindfulness, the Power of Positive Thinking and Life Skills – Stress Management.

The programme has also enabled the union to engage with health and social care employers, a growth sector since the privatisation of domiciliary care and the registration of all care workers in Northern Ireland.

"It enables us to get through the door of employers such as private nursing homes, by allowing us to talk to them about the positive contribution the union can make to helping their staff through learning," Fidelma says.

"We're also working with the regulatory body for domiciliary care so we can support our members more effectively by making sure they understand what they need to do to protect their registration and how they can improve their practice."



The then CUH Chief Executive Officer Gareth Goodyer (below) signs the learning agreement at the ceremony that also featured (facing page, from left) HR Advisor (Work Opportunities Team) Kate Gilhooly, Employee Development Manager Linda Hering, Work Opportunities Manager Ben Scratcher (now in a different post), UNISON's Carole Proctor and HR Advisor (Work Opportunities Team) Sam Ladipo

Injecting new skills into the NHS

UNISON support has helped Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust develop an apprenticeship programme to offer a wide range of health sector career opportunities to local youngsters.

More than 200 young people have undertaken apprenticeships at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (CUH) over the past four years, while another 250-plus staff in Bands 1-4 have also developed their skills through the apprenticeship programme.

Initially launched in 2009 with the full support of UNISON, the programme is so successful that it regularly accounts for around 50 per cent of the region's target for new apprentice places as set by the Cambridgeshire County Workforce Group.

And in May 2012,

management and unions at the trust signed an apprenticeship agreement (only the second in the sector), after crucial input from Phil Kemp, UNISON's regional learning and development organiser at the time who died just a few weeks later.

"The agreement puts everything on a much more formal footing and means that the apprentices know where they stand on issues such as pay and training," explains Cambridge Health Branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator Carole Proctor.

CUH Employee Development Manager

"We have a very good close working relationship with our unions here at the hospital: they have been very supportive"

Linda Hering agrees. "The agreement has helped us make sure everybody is happy with the contract and understands the terms and conditions," she says.

"It means we can show that we are not exploiting anybody and that the programme is not putting at risk any full-time jobs in areas where apprenticeships are introduced."

Apprentice roles include business and administration, customer service, healthcare support services, management, IT and maintenance, and almost

all the training is delivered onsite by local provider Cambridgeshire Regional College (CRC).

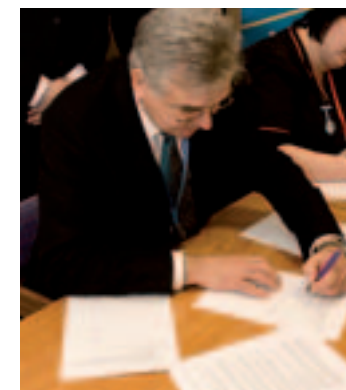
Union input to the overall programme has been wholly positive, Linda explains.

"We have a very good close working relationship with our unions here at the hospital: they have been very supportive of the scheme and helped us promote the programme – having them on board has been really beneficial," she says.

UNISON is involved with the apprentices from day one, Carole says. "They get information about us at their induction, they know where to come for support if they need it and they are aware they can join for just £10 a year," she says.

Carole is currently putting together a fuller induction presentation for new apprentices, and working with newly-elected branch youth officer Sophie Branch, a former apprentice herself, on the most effective ways of encouraging apprentices to get more involved with the union.

The CUH apprenticeship programme secured the Macro Employer of the Year award in the regional round of last year's



National Apprenticeship and Training Awards.

"We are delighted that CUH won this prestigious award, thanks to our partnership and hard work over recent years," Carole says.

"Since the expertise of the late Phil Kemp was instrumental in formulating the successful bid, the award is a fitting tribute to his memory."

MENTORING WORKSHOP

UNISON's Eastern Region is helping branches set up structures for mentoring apprentices, in the wake of a successful one-day workshop delivered by Education Officer Sarah Hayes in autumn 2012.

"We need a strategic approach to setting up mentoring systems: branches need to discuss whether they want to mentor apprentices, how they are going to do that, who would be the best people and how to approach their employers," Sarah says.

"Because of their knowledge and expertise, union learning reps and other branch activists would naturally be the best placed to carry out the mentoring role."

In addition to briefings and activities, the Cambridge workshop included a Q&A session with a current apprentice, when participants were able to ask him questions about what he would have found useful about having a mentor, as well as his aspirations for the future in terms of his career and his union activity.

Feedback from the dozen or so participants was excellent, and LAOS is keen to offer all regions the chance to run similar activity-based workshops to help branches make the most of mentoring opportunities in workplaces with active apprenticeship programmes.

To find out more about the apprentice mentoring workshop, contact your regional learning team or email Education Officer Sarah Hayes. S.Hayes@unison.co.uk



Left: Skills Minister Matthew Hancock (right) and former schools minister Lord Adonis (left) met apprentices at St Edmundsbury Borough Council in December, while (below) more apprentices from the authority toured the Houses of Parliament in February, thanks to UNISON

Reaching out to the next generation

UNISON is helping East Anglian local authorities set up successful apprenticeship programmes that play their part in reducing youth unemployment in the area.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council's apprenticeship agreement with UNISON has enabled the Suffolk local authority to improve succession planning, make the most of its financial resources and introduce new skills by attracting a new generation into local government.

The partnership drew warm praise from local MP and Skills Minister Matthew Hancock and former schools minister Lord Adonis at a showcase event at the authority in December 2012.

They heard detailed presentations by UNISON

Apprenticeships Project Worker Craig Young and Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development Karen Points about the scheme, and listened to short speeches by two of the apprentices themselves.

As well as tweeting positively about the event on the day, Lord Adonis also shared what he had learned three months later at a unionlearn event during National Apprenticeships Week in March 2013.

"It was a fantastic case of the unions working with a

“It was a fantastic case of the unions working with a public sector employer to create apprenticeships”

public sector employer to create apprenticeships in ground maintenance, refuse collection, areas where they had had (astonishingly) no apprentices before," he said.

He also emphasised UNISON's vital contribution to the success of the scheme. "I was very struck at how important UNISON was, not only having negotiated the scheme but in supporting the apprentices themselves, which is very important for young people, having support networks," he said.

At the authority itself, Karen Points says UNISON has

played a vital role in helping to establish the apprenticeship programme in non-traditional areas such as planning, heritage, revenue and benefits, street cleansing and fleet mechanics.

"Craig was able to talk to supervisors who did not believe they would get a young person interested in an area of work like street cleansing and would not have seen the value of spending the time in developing and mentoring an apprentice," Karen says.

"He was also able to talk to men who didn't necessarily want a youngster coming in, who might have seen apprentices taking on what should have been 'proper jobs' – and this wasn't management going in and telling them something, this was their UNISON rep who has worked alongside them persuading them of the value of giving it a go."

Karen says that positive outcomes for the council include:

- more effective succession planning
- making the most of money available and increasing taxpayer value for money
- bringing in new skills, new ideas and new approaches
- attracting young people into local government.

UNISON has also helped the council involve a wide cross-section of its workforce in English and maths programmes by reaching people who would have shied away from traditional approaches.

"We've tried numeracy and literacy programmes before, but they have been led by a learning and development officer going in and talking to the guys, which has not worked to the same degree as our partnership approach with UNISON," Karen explains. ■



NORSE OFFERS NEET SOLUTION

UNISON is helping Norfolk-based local authority services provider Norse Group deliver an apprenticeship programme that is reaching out to young people who face serious problems in finding work.

Committed to training 80-plus young people in the financial year just finished, the company exceeded its target of finding 40 per cent of apprentices from those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs), care leavers and youngsters with learning difficulties.

Norse is paying its apprentices an annual salary of £11,000 and the training for participants means that they should complete their 12-month programme by achieving an NVQ Level 2 or equivalent qualification.

In addition, it is committed to trying to find a job for everyone who successfully completes the programme, which includes care work, finance and ICT, as well as building maintenance, facilities management and vehicle workshops.

"If Norse can't provide them with a job at the end of the year they have had in the company, the learning opportunities along the way will put them in good stead at the start of their career ladder," explains Norse Group UNISON convener Kelly Freeman.



ROY PETERS

Left: The East Midlands Ambulance Service learning agreement, signed by Branch Secretary Paul Brown (left) and Chief Executive Phil Milligan, aims to encourage staff development across all grades. Bottom right: UNISON's Judy Close (centre) signs the learning agreement with Chief Executive Ray Harding and Personnel Service Manager Becky Box.

Let's make a deal

UNISON's East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) Branch signed what could be the first of many learning agreements in the sector at EMAS headquarters in Nottingham in January.

Under the terms of the groundbreaking scheme, ambulance service staff from the lowest to the highest grades can develop themselves at work and are entitled to apply for reasonable time off to pursue their studies.

"The biggest breakthrough is the Trust agreeing reasonable time off, which gives staff the incentive to put in some time of their own to learn, and UNISON is providing laptops they can take away and use at home," said Branch Secretary Paul Brown.

"At the end of the day, we're an emergency service, which means there will be times

when the Trust won't be able to grant people time off to learn when they apply. But we will plan the courses to avoid busier times like the summer holidays when we tend to be short-staffed."

Chief Executive Phil Milligan said that the agreement ensured management and unions were able to address all of the staff's learning needs through a partnership approach.

"The key thing now is making sure we use our resources in line with the agreement, which is very much about development across the board," he said.

"The key thing now is making sure we use our resources in line with the agreement"

"That means spotting the needs of individuals and groups and making sure resources are used wisely to support their needs, and not just those few who go for higher education or specialised clinical education."

Phil, who leads on human resources issues for the Association of Ambulance

Chief Executives, said he hoped the agreement would be the first of many for ambulance staff across the country.

"It makes me feel very good that EMAS is leading the way in this area and I'll be looking to see how we can take this nationally and encourage its promotion in other ambulance services as well," he said.

Around 50 staff will have taken British Sign Language courses with embedded literacy qualifications by the middle of 2013 as a result of groundwork undertaken by UNISON learning rep Lee Goddard.

Since training as a ULR in 2012, Lee has found that the biggest barrier to overcome with colleagues is their memories of school.

"You mention learning and people visualise being in a classroom again, just as I did before I took the ULR course," he says.

"But once you explain how it's done, you overcome the fear factor and then people are very forthcoming: the people I have signed up for the courses have been asking about the content and are more than happy with what it entails." ■

SPREADING THE BENEFITS

UNISON's West Norfolk Branch signed a new learning agreement with King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council in January to help a wider cross-section of the workforce access development opportunities.

The branch first approached the council two years ago to ask for a fairer distribution of the training budget, explains Branch Secretary Judy Close.

"We felt the professionals were getting all the training, and the lower grades weren't getting anything," she recalls.

After Judy set up English, maths and IT courses that were open to everybody, the branch began working towards the learning agreement, which enables learners to take paid release for work-related learning.

"Anything that is relevant to work, such as English and maths, comes with time off with pay, while learning that's not connected with work we organise in lunchtimes and after work," Judy says.

Ever since the agreement was signed, a management and union learning steering group has been meeting regularly to oversee the future development of learning at the authority.

The branch is also running an informal learning programme, based on the results of a questionnaire it recently circulated to members, which has included taster sessions on crochet and family First Aid.



MATTHEW USHER



KEVIN HAYES

West Midlands members (above and below right) get to grips with activities on a Return to Learn weekend in January

Celebrating 25 years of Return to Learn

Thousands of UNISON members have transformed their lives by taking the union's life-changing Return to Learn programme.

South Tyneside nursery nurse Jane Parkes had to take a very deep breath before she enrolled on Return To Learn 20 years ago.

Just 23 years old at the time, she had so little belief in herself that she spent most of her days trying to blend into the background as much as possible.

Her low self-esteem meant she spent the whole of the programme's opening weekend residential school in Durham University worrying that it had all been a big mistake.

"Every time I passed the public phone-box, I would ring my mam to ask her what I was doing there," she says.

But once the fortnightly sessions at the Mortimer Community Centre got going, the support of tutor Joy Carmichael and the rest of her 10-strong group showed her that she really did belong on the course.

"At school, I felt too shy to ask when I didn't understand something, but on Return to Learn nobody rushed ahead, nobody was left flagging behind and we all supported

each other: it was very powerful," she says.

Proud of herself when she finished the course nine months later, Jane was determined to help other UNISON members build their confidence as she had done, so she trained to become a Voluntary Education Adviser (VEA) and began helping tutors and students on later editions of the course.

And then three years ago, with the support of Regional Education Officer Keith Hodgson and WEA tutor Dave Alton, Jane took the step up

from VEA to Return to Learn tutor herself.

"Even though I was more confident, I still didn't feel I had the ability to become a tutor, but Keith and Dave believed in me and eventually I thought, 'I have nothing to lose, I can give it a try, if I'm not good at it, at least I'll know myself'," she says.

Of course, it turned out that Keith and Dave were right: Jane has built excellent relationships with her students for the past three years and has maintained very high completion rates, a sure sign of a good tutor.

"I say to my students, 'I can see in you what I was like – very nervous, not confident,

no self-esteem – and you might look at the course book and think you can't do an assignment but everybody will help – and you will'," she says.

Jane credits Return to Learn with giving her the confidence at work to become a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) and to take on union tasks such as talking to American teachers in 2008 about her role as a ULR or telling her story at the union's school staff CPD event in Durham earlier this year.

"Return to Learn has made a massive difference to me: it's the power of the union's education and training that has made me the person I am today." ■



KEVIN HAYES

IT'S THE BEST THING SINCE SLICED BREAD

Former miner Pete Gibson was working in the laundry at Doncaster Royal Infirmary when the work was contracted out and everyone had to apply for a job with the new provider.

"Before they closed the laundry down I had started Return to Learn: the people interviewing me were impressed that I'd got off my backside to do some learning," he recalls.

"The others all got jobs around the hospital but not one of them got one of the standard I got."

Now working as a clerical coding officer at the hospital, he credits his new career to Return to Learn.

"I think it's fantastic – best thing since sliced bread. It's free education. I've never looked back. People should give it a try."



JIM VARNEY

Isle of Wight Local Government Branch Women's Officer Julia O'Connell (second left) with three of the Women's Lives participants (from left): Branch Education Officer Kathryn Hayward, Branch Chair Joyce Milford and Branch Equality Officer Yve White

“You found out more about women's issues, but you also found out about academic work”

“Although a few people had to leave the course because of other commitments, everyone enjoyed it and nine women completed in the end,” Julia says.

“You found out more about women's issues, but you also found out about academic work, such as researching topics, interviewing people and writing up assignments, so it was also a good way for women to get back into learning.”

In fact, many of them returned to learning very quickly after the course finished. “At the residential weekend, the women said they would be interested in assertiveness training, and we were able to bring down a tutor from the Eastern Region to run that course for us,” Julia says.

Being able to put that feedback into action quickly was one of the many benefits of running the course, Julia says. “We wouldn't have been able to do that without running Women's Lives, because we wouldn't have known what our members wanted.”

Despite all the obstacles with elusive tutors and blazing hotels, Julia is very happy to have organised such a successful course. “The

participants got a lot out of it, and it helped them become more active in the union, so it was definitely worth doing!” she says. ■

RETURNING THE FAVOUR

South West Regional Learning and Development Organiser Edna Warwick is often meeting UNISON members on Return to Learn courses who remind her of how far she has come since taking the course herself more than 10 years ago.

When she enrolled on Return to Learn in 1999, Edna was in her early 40s and working as a housekeeper in an Exeter hospital, a job she didn't want to do any more.

But within a couple of years of finishing of the course and gaining the equivalent of an A Level pass, she had the confidence to apply for a job in the South-West regional education team – where she remains to this day in a job she can't get enough of.

“It's great to meet people who are in the same position I was all those years ago before I took the course,” she says. “It's great to know that I'm helping people do what I did myself.”

After leaving school at 16 with seven CSEs, Edna originally re-started her learning journey by taking UNISON's confidence-building and assertiveness course for women, before organising and taking part in Return to Learn.

“Taking that course was definitely when I started thinking I could do more,” she recalls.

Edna knows she wouldn't be in the job she does today without Return to Learn. “Definitely not, 100 per cent No: I would never have thought I was capable until I got involved,” she says.



Building the union

Isle of Wight activist Julia O'Connell has helped build her branch by organising the first Women's Lives course to take place on the island.

Isle of Wight Local Government Branch Women's Officer Julia O'Connell has helped more women become active in the union by bringing UNISON's Women's Lives course to the island.

“I wanted to get more women active and I thought that might be a good way to get them more involved with the union,” she says.

And she was right. Since finishing the course last year, one of the participants who had not been active before has become the branch education

officer; another has taken on the equalities officer role and joined the regional women's committee; and several more have signed up for further UNISON learning.

When she first started thinking about organising the course, Julia knew that more women would take part if the course came to them for once (the vast majority of activist courses involve travelling to the mainland).

But the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) had trouble finding a tutor who could

make the regular trips to the island, which held everything up for several months until a branch member who had recently become a WEA tutor offered to run the course instead.

Women's Lives finally ran last spring, with fortnightly sessions between April and June in a community centre in Newport and a residential weekend in Brighton (where a hotel fire the night before the women arrived meant a last-minute transfer being arranged while the group was en route).



Taking a ULR training course equips you to spread the lifelong learning message to co-workers and managers

Sharpen your ULR skills

Hundreds of union learning reps and branch learning coordinators are picking up the knowledge and the skills they need to promote workplace learning more effectively. Why not join them on a course near you?

After volunteering to join the ULR team in UNISON's West Norfolk Branch, Louise Gayton has recently completed her five-day ULR training with half a dozen colleagues from other branches in the Eastern Region.

It was helpful to take the course with activists from outside her own workplace, she says. "It's always useful to listen other people's experiences of learning in the workplace, and share what you have done and what you want to do," she says.

Now that the course has finished, Louise and the rest of the learning rep team at the

authority are following up on a learning survey of staff to organise more courses that people have requested, such as money management and working with iPads.

The team will be promoting its learning programme during Adult Learners' Week with a stand in the town hall, and ULRs will be giving away free books to help spread the message about all the courses that are available through the branch.

"Often people see the union as someone to hold your hand when you're in trouble at work and they don't realise that we're also able to help with

“ULRs will be giving away free books to help spread the message”

learning, which is such a positive thing the union can do for people," she says.

In the East Midlands, the region has run several ULR training courses in the last few months to equip its expanding

“Every year people say it's one of the best courses they have done because of the knowledge it has given them”

network of learning reps with the skills they need.

"What we have noticed is that where a learning agreement has led to increased activity around learning, such as at Leicester City Council, more people are volunteering to become union learning reps," explains Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gavin McCann.

"We have also had more training department staff coming to do the course because they get it – they are seeing what we're doing and they want to be part of it."

The region has also recently finished the latest edition of its

popular branch learning coordinators course, which aims to equip lead learning reps and learning coordinators with the knowledge they need to successfully negotiate with training managers and HR departments.

The first half of the six-day course, delivered by Derby College, covers topics such as the union role in training plans, workforce development and appraisal systems, while the second deals with how branches can access different funding streams.

"We've been running the course for three or four years now and every year people say it's one of the best they have done because of the knowledge it has given them," Gavin says.

Following the latest ULR training course in the Northern region, Newcastle City Council branch is set to work in partnership with the employer to jointly promote the work of union learning reps.

"The ULRs who come on our training courses are already enthusiastic about learning because they have usually done some themselves, so the course is about giving them a focus and a structure so they can take it forward for other

people," says Regional Education Officer Keith Hodgson.

"The course gives them the confidence to talk to their colleagues back at work and to their the employers about what UNISON can offer them by accessing resources and working in partnership to promote learning through initiatives such as Adult Learners' Week." ■

ARE YOU ON ULRNET?

ULRnet is a space for UNISON union learning reps that is designed to encourage an online community of ULRs across all the UNISON regions and to offer information and resources to support you in your role.

You can use the resources section to find sample learning surveys, newsletters and useful websites; the forum to keep up to date with specialist subjects such as Adult Learners' Week and functional skills; or introduce yourself in the 'new ULR' area.

ULRnet was revamped in 2012 and we would love to hear what you think of it and any improvements that can be made.

If you would like to register for ULRnet, please email: learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

UNISON's Inclusive Learning project is supporting more than 60 learning initiatives across the country

SASA SEVIC

Include us in!

Our Inclusive Learning project is backing dozens of learning initiatives all over the country, helping thousands of members develop themselves at work.

More than 60 different learning projects are up and running across the country thanks to UNISON's Inclusive Learning for Changing Workplaces & Communities Project, which is supported by the Union Learning Fund (ULF).

Year One of the two-year national programme has already helped thousands of UNISON members and potential members access a huge range of learning opportunities.

In the south-west, the project supported an inspirational education weekend that gave people the chance to improve their speed reading, learn more

about dyslexia and cook on a budget (among many other things).

In the north-west and the eastern region, the project has invested in project workers to develop systematic support for apprentices and a number of new apprenticeship agreements, such as the one at Cambridge University Hospital covered on p16.

And in the East Midlands, the project has helped establish mobile learning centres that enable union learning reps to take learning out to far-flung members using the new capabilities of the iPad (see p12).

Try out your ideas
If you have an idea for a small-scale learning activity, such as running some taster sessions, your branch can apply for up to £250 to help make it happen simply by emailing the Inclusive Learning project with the details of what you want to do.

Tasters have proved extremely effective in reaching out to members and potential members who might not yet feel ready to embark on a formal course. Trying something interesting and fun in the company of colleagues is sometimes all people need to overcome the fear factor about learning.

To apply for anything up to £250 to support learning activities, simply email ULF Administrator Norma Clarke: n.clarke@unison.co.uk.

“In this era of public sector wage freezes, most employers welcome union initiatives to promote learning in the workplace”

range of what UNISON can offer.

In addition, taster sessions can help members get the learning bug – and we want to encourage many more members to make the move from informal to formal learning during Year Two of the project (see ‘Helping members take their next step’ below). ■

“Taster sessions can help members get the learning bug”

With Year Two of the project now underway, we should be funding between 20 and 30 new projects (we were evaluating applications as Ulearn went to press).

In this era of public sector wage freezes, most employers welcome union initiatives to promote learning in the workplace, because they recognise that allowing staff an hour or two off to learn proven techniques to combat stress, for example, makes them feel more valued and therefore more motivated and productive.

And branches benefit too. Taster sessions are an opportunity for someone from the branch committee to talk to people who might not have seen the point of joining before about the full

HELPING MEMBERS TAKE THEIR NEXT STEP

One of the key goals we want to achieve in Year Two of Inclusive Learning is to help more members make the move from taster activities and other informal learning to formal learning that leads to a qualification.

Newcastle City Council Branch Community Organiser Caroline Simblett is always looking for opportunities to do just that.

“Whenever we run informal courses, I always try to signpost people to the other courses that are coming up, both informal and formal, and encourage them to sign up to our email list so they can find out about more opportunities in the future,” she says.

Caroline also helps people relax about moving on to formal learning by taking them to meet their new tutor beforehand if they want, or accompanying them to their first session to put them at their ease.

“When I ran a dyslexia awareness course in the autumn, I met Dawn, who was an unemployed member who had taken part in lots of informal training through UNISON,” Caroline says.

“She was keen to move on to formal learning to help get a job, so I had a chat with her about NCFE courses, which she decided to go ahead and do,” she continues.

“To put her mind at rest, I introduced her to the course tutor before she started – and now she has gone on to do two more NCFE Level 1 courses since then.”

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



“I enjoy listening to other people’s ideas and working out how they could fit in the context of the project”

“It’s good to know that all the hard work is worthwhile”

Pleased to meet you

How three key people spend their time behind the scenes to keep our Inclusive Learning project running smoothly.

Davinder Sandhu
ULF Project Manager
How long have you been in post? One year

What does the job involve day to day? No two days are the same. The job involves talking to existing or potential projects about the kind of learning they want to offer; discussing how to fund the learning; inducting new members of staff; discussing and agreeing decisions with Norma Clarke; planning training for project needs; speaking to the ULF team about our performance; attending team meetings; answering phone calls and emails.

What do you enjoy most about your job? Speaking to ULRs and learning leads about what they are doing and planning to do – the love of learning is a common language. I enjoy listening to other people’s ideas and working out how they could fit in the context of the project.

What’s the most difficult aspect? Informing a branch that their application for funding hasn’t been successful or closing a project that hasn’t met its outcomes.
If you could take any course anywhere, what would you do? Learn how to be a spy at a secret location.

Norma Clarke
ULF Administrator

How long have you been in post? Six years.

What does the job involve day to day? Around 50 per cent of my day is spent on dealing with queries on email. I look after all the general administration of the project, including maintenance of all the ULF databases; processing invoices; preparation and submission of the unionlearn monthly claim as well as all the backup information that goes with it; liaising with finance staff in unionlearn and UNISON; collating all the reports of

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



“The real bonus with this job is being able to make learning happen”

outcomes from regions and branches and submitting them to unionlearn on a quarterly basis.

What do you enjoy most about your job? Helping regions, branches and project workers establish their projects; putting names to faces when we meet people at various events; and receiving positive feedback: it’s good to know that all the hard work behind the scenes is worthwhile.

What’s the most difficult aspect? Making sure everybody understands that we have a contractual obligation to unionlearn, which means we have to comply with the rules about what we can and cannot do with the funding.

If you could take any course anywhere, what would you do? Study American history in the USA.

Steve Swift
North West Regional Learning and Development Organiser

How long have you been in post? Nine months.

What does the job involve day to day? Meeting Lifelong Learning and ULR coordinators; discussing and implementing learning programmes; linking with employers to work together for learning; steering ULF projects around activity, funding, where they want to go and any issues; advising on ULF bids; delivering training sessions and presentations; organising events and helping out at those events; badgering people for figures constantly.
What do you enjoy most about your job? I love visiting branches, meeting members and seeing new places. The

real bonus with this job is being able to help make learning happen, seeing how that changes things for people. Yep: corny, but true. I also love showing people what union learning can provide: I never get tired of those surprised faces!

What’s the most difficult aspect? The most challenging aspect is my wish to visit every branch in the region, a bit like trying to see every football ground; my diary is full to bursting, with all the travelling done by train. My own fault of course – and at least there’s usually a cup of tea waiting and sometimes even a Hobnob.

If you could take any course anywhere, what would you do? “Crisis, what crisis?” Of course, Jim Callaghan never said that; but those years 1976-79 really interest me, so a three-term course about that period would be great. In Honolulu. ■



Taking care of the carers

UNISON's Learning With Care project is opening up new learning opportunities for home care staff in the West Country that they wouldn't be able to afford without the union's support.

The initiative means that the low-paid, mostly female workforce can now improve their English and maths through functional skills courses; boost their job skills by taking professional qualifications; and explore non-vocational interests through informal learning.

Learning With Care is open to domiciliary staff at the nine companies that provide home care on behalf of Dorset County Council.

"These workers are predominately women working on pretty low wages, which usually means there is not always extra money in the

family purse to extend to evening courses or other areas of training to enhance their own lives and that of their work," explains UNISON Project Leader Amanda Brown, who is set to collect a regional unionlearn award for her work later this spring.

"This is where the project has come into its own and has benefitted both the worker and the employer."

The company that UNISON has worked with most closely so far is SureCare Dorset, the Ferndown-based firm that provides care services to elderly people within their own homes.

When Amanda first visited the firm last October, only two of its 28 staff were UNISON members.

Now that figure has more than quadrupled and Amanda has also recruited two union learning reps and a learning champion, who are spreading the word about the range of courses colleagues can access with their help and support.

Both personal and professional development courses help learners provide a better service, explains Surecare Dorset Training Manager Bob Wade.

"No matter what it is, in care

Learning With Care Project Leader Amanda Brown (above right) and Dorset County Branch Women's Officer Stella Crew get into the swing of things at the project's International Women's Day event

"This is where the project has come into its own and has benefitted both the worker and the employer"

you are likely to use it somewhere. If it's classical music, then you're likely to meet someone who shares that passion at some time and you can start a conversation and help your relationship with a client," he says.

To further promote the development opportunities available through the project, Amanda and her team got together with SureCare to run a range of fun informal learning activities in the Barrington Centre in Ferndown on International Women's Day in March.

"We organised the event for women who don't tend to earn a lot to give them opportunities that they might not have been able to experience before," Amanda explains.

"There was belly dancing, zumba and samba, all activities with a flavour of international learning; we laid on food from different countries; and we draped 30 or 40 national flags from the Olympics inside the

community centre and outside in the shopping parade."

Participants also had the chance to make a Mothers' Day bouquet, using the suffragette colours of purple, green and white.

"That was probably what got the most interest and it gave participants the chance to be a bit creative and do something they wouldn't normally do," Amanda says.

The event spilled over from the Barrington Centre when Amanda and the team took the samba band into the day centre next door, where older people enjoyed some Latin American dancing and tried out some of the instruments.

From there, they moved on into a nearby supermarket, where the music drew shoppers' attention to the event, which was open to the community as well as home care workers.

SureCare has signed a learning agreement with UNISON and Amanda is hoping to build on that success by persuading the company to put its name to a full recognition agreement later this year.

The local authority agrees that Learning With Care is a

win-win for everyone involved, according to Dorset County Council Acting Director for Adult and Community Services Harry Capron.

"The learning champions are generating very innovative and much-needed opportunities for themselves, other staff and service users to participate in," he says.

"These will enhance their morale, self-confidence and motivation and will inevitably have a beneficial effect on staff retention." ■



Social care workers who improve their functional skills can offer better support to the people they look after



PAUL BOX/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

Helping care workers develop their skills

UNISON is helping home care workers in Lincolnshire improve their English, maths and computer skills.

UNISON learning rep Marcin Hajdecki and HR Manager Marie Lavelle are two of the 20-plus staff at Heritage Care in Lincolnshire who are improving their English, maths or computer skills thanks to a union learning scheme.

Heritage Care helps more than 100 people across South Lincolnshire through its package of supported living, domiciliary and short break services.

The learning programme launched last November with

open days at the company's Bourne and Grantham offices, where staff could find out what was on offer, assess their skills levels and enrol on a course there and then with learning provider SkillsLinc.

"There was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere at the open days: we wanted to show that learning is a nice way for people to take part in some meaningful activity without worrying that they might get into trouble with their manager," says Lincolnshire Health

"We wanted to show that learning is a nice way for people to take part in meaningful activity"

UNISON rep Blazej Popowicz, who organised the open days with the help of the HR team.

It definitely paid off, because almost everyone who attended enrolled on one of the courses.

ULR Marcin Hajdecki, who has been working for Heritage Care since he arrived from Poland in 2004, signed up to take the literacy course.

"The course has been very beneficial for me, because my English skills were very random: I never went through a proper course before, so I

knew some things from different sources but there were big gaps as well," he says.

"Having meetings with my tutor every three or four weeks was good, because she could check exactly what I needed and move from one topic to another without repeating things I already knew."

His co-workers are equally pleased with the chance to study at work. "Most people work full-time and then have family commitments as well, so going to a college which might be 20 miles away would be very hard to organise," he says.

"People are very pleased that this way they can go to an office near where they work to meet their tutor, which is a great solution."

HR Manager Marie Lavelle, who enrolled on the maths course herself to brush up some of her numeracy skills, says that the company and the union have kept the focus on the personal advantages of the learning scheme.

"We market the learning offer very much on the benefits to the individual: we really want them to feel that we support it because we want them to get something out

of it, not because it's something we think they should do," she says.

"Of course, since our staff have to accurately document information and handle the

finances of the people they support, the more competent they are in those areas the better." ■

HELPING PAs LOOK AFTER EACH OTHER

Yorkshire & Humberside UNISON is developing a learning offer for personal assistants (PAs) who support people with social care needs as part of a pilot project to create virtual network of PAs who can share experiences and support each other.

"The aim of the project is to develop an online community of personal assistants, as the role can be very isolating and PAs often do not have other peers to talk to," says Project Worker Natalie Ratcliffe.

Uniquely, the project is working both with PAs and the people who employ them, and encouraging local authorities to develop a register of PAs who are qualified to a particular level and CRB-checked, similar to their registers of child-minders.

The project is currently organising meetings with PAs to find out what kind of learning and support they want, and is keen to develop a learning offer that would help raise the profile of PAs in employment terms.

"We are talking to PAs about how we could help with functional skills, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and employment rights and how we can bring them together and start building a network through learning as well," explains Education Officer Sarah Hayes.

Sarah believes the union will be better able to reach out to PAs by developing the learning offer. "Helping PAs understand their employment rights and giving them the career benefit of our learning offer will be crucial to recruitment and organising," she says.

● UNISON is supporting a similar project in Scotland where our partner, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), has been funded by the Scottish Government to develop a learning pathway for PAs. UNISON Scotland Project Worker Lynne Rankin is working with branches and the WEA to make sure the programme reflects the needs of members and their clients.

Mindfulness practices help people combat stress more effectively



“The health and well-being workshops were thought-provoking and very helpful for participants”

And... relax!

Two different initiatives in the south-west show how promoting the well-being agenda can help members deal more effectively with stress in the workplace.

After running a successful series of health and well-being workshops with 'back office' services provider Southwest One over the past nine months, UNISON is all set to sign a learning agreement with the IBM-owned operation during this year's Adult Learners' Week.

"It's quite an achievement to have got this far with a joint venture where the controlling partner is IBM," explains Somerset County UNISON Welfare Officer Diana Fraser.

"We didn't anticipate having

this level of success, and I think Southwest One HR have worked very hard to work with us because we have achieved quite a lot in a short space of time."

Southwest One manages 1,000 staff from Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Avon and Somerset Police, who deliver shared 'back office' services to the three authorities.

Working together to promote health and well-being first emerged as a proposal from the Southwest

One Joint Consultative Committee over a year ago.

At the suggestion of UNISON Regional Education Officer Kay MacKenzie, the company and the union then organised a joint survey to find out what aspects of the agenda staff would be most interested in.

Kay then sent the headline findings from the 500-plus responses to The Open University (OU), where staff tutor Ruth Beretta commissioned two of her colleagues to design a workshop covering issues such as well-being, stress-management, healthy eating and meditation.

The four half-day workshops across the company's two main locations, in Taunton and Portishead (near Bristol), proved a big hit with the 60 staff who were given paid release to take part last September.

"The workshops were thought-provoking and very helpful for participants," says Diana, who attended the first session in Taunton herself.

"Everyone who attended then went back and told their colleagues that they had missed something that was very worthwhile."

Thanks to the positive word-of-mouth and a revised format taking into account feedback from the first round, a second set of workshops in January attracted even more staff.

Further workshops are set

to follow later this year, as both sides have agreed that the first year of activity that is set to be ushered in with the learning agreement should continue to focus on health and well-being at work. ■

IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

Bristol Branch Secretary Steve Mills learnt the most effective set of practices he has ever come across for combatting workplace stress on an eight-week mindfulness course in the south-west last autumn.

"I learnt how to stop, re-evaluate and proceed mindfully and, most importantly for me, I learnt the benefits of meditation – I will be using these techniques in my everyday life, and encouraging others as well," he says.

Delivered in the union's regional office in Taunton, the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programme was structured around weekly two-hour classes for the 17 members who took part, supplemented by daily sessions at home using guided practice CDs.

Mindfulness training teaches people how to pay attention to what is going on in the present moment, without judgment, and how to identify unhelpful habitual behaviour patterns and choose more effective responses and solutions.

"Mindfulness works at a much deeper level than stress management techniques," explains practitioner Dr Maya Spencer, the retired NHS psychiatrist who co-led the course with qualified nurse Karen Atkinson.

"It is an actual practice that changes how our brain operates and that changes how we respond to stressful situations."

● The Mindfulness UK website contains some useful tips and resources for brain training in the workplace, and the organisation produces the brochure 'Bringing Mindfulness into Businesses and Organisations', which is available on request.

www.mindfulnessuk.com

Find out more

● Unionlearn SERTUC has published the **Health And Well-being At Work Toolkit**.

Download your copy at: www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/health-work-and-well-being-toolkit

● The TUC has published **Work And Well-being: A Trade Union Resource**.

Download from www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/532/TUC_WORK_AND_WELL-BEING.pdf

● **Taking Care Of Business: Mental Health At Work is Mind's campaign to promote mental well-being in the workplace.** www.mind.org.uk/employment

Tracy Lamy-Edwards (centre) took the Lincolnshire County Branch learning message to the Boston Community Showcase in September 2012 with the help of Mick Bell (left) and Stephen Lockwood



That's entertainment!

By making learning relevant and fun, Lincolnshire County UNISON is boosting skills and morale at the authority.

Lincolnshire County UNISON Lifelong Learning Coordinator Tracy Lamy-Edwards is succeeding in her aim of making workplace learning fun, accessible and relevant since taking on the role a year ago.

After a taster day that included craft sessions, Tai Chi and British Sign Language (BSL), the branch has run packed-out courses in craft, meditation and family history, while the first BSL class was

taking its Level 1 assessment as Ulearn went to press.

Tracy's connections from a lifetime's volunteering in the Guiding movement meant four or five trainers who ran sessions at the taster day did not charge a fee.

"The taster day didn't cost us much because a lot of the trainers said, 'What you're doing sounds really good, we'll come and do our bits for free'," Tracy says.

She is also using the skills

and talents of UNISON members at the authority to deliver a lot of the learning: a qualified craft teacher employed as a youth worker is helping out with craft sessions, one retired member is teaching meditation and another who used to be a history teacher is covering family history.

"We're saying to people, 'What skills have you got?' And if you have an idea of what we can offer people,

"The other day I taught somebody that she never dreamed of doing: the thrill of that was really exciting"

let's try it – and it's never been done like that before," Tracy says.

During National Apprenticeships Week in March, Tracy helped 20 learners take part in a road safety course, which was funded and delivered by the Lincolnshire Road Safety Partnership (LRSP).

With the help of one of the apprentices at the county council and the LRSP, Tracy designed the activity to promote safe road use for drivers, motorbike riders, cyclists and pedestrians.

The branch has opened up the learning opportunities to all the branches in the surrounding area.

"Some smaller branches

don't get facility time for their ULRs and so struggle to put things on, so if I have the time to organise something I can open it up to them as well," Tracy explains.

The fun-filled approach is definitely paying off for members of the branch, Tracy says.

"The other day I taught somebody something that she never dreamed of doing: the thrill of that was really exciting and she has now taken that up as a hobby, which is brilliant," she says.

"But more to the point is that she'd not been in a classroom for 11 years – and that's a real success." ■

Since the county council included personal development in its appraisal system (re-launched with UNISON's help in autumn 2012), the branch has started looking into links with The Open University and local colleges to help staff access new opportunities.

INFORMAL LEARNING

BY THE BOOK

Joining the UNISON reading group at Norwich City College has helped Student Employer Partnership Co-Ordinator Joan Girling improve her communications skills and given her the confidence to train as a union learning rep.

Talking in the relaxed environment of the group of 10 regulars has been a boon for Joan, as her dyslexia and hearing impairment have contributed to communication problems in the past.

"Being in the reading group has improved my confidence in being able to express myself and convert the visual images in my head into words," she says.

After winning a pack of 48 Quick Reads, posters and a display stand in the Quick Reads prize draw in February 2013, Joan set it all up in the staff lounge, where many of her colleagues have been taking the opportunity to borrow the books.

She has also set up an online survey where people can post their feedback on the books to share with others at the book group meetings, and was planning a number of lunchtime learning sessions and a book swap for Adult Learners' Week as Ulearn went to press.

On the back of her positive reading group experience, Joan is training as a UNISON learning rep later this spring.

"I like organising things and I thought it would be really good to be able to expand that into the other things people might be interested in," she says.



You can help us plan how to run future UNISON learning projects by giving us some details about your activity as a union learning rep or branch education activist.

“Your answers will help Learning And Organising Services improve the support we offer to branches”

Fill in our survey and win a £30 voucher for your favourite high street store

The short survey should only take a few minutes to complete, but the information you provide is invaluable in helping us build up an accurate picture of all the work that ULRs and education activists are involved in at branch level.

Your answers give us the data we need to continue to

make the case for the value of the work you do, both to encourage learning in the workplace and to play a part in helping to build UNISON branches.

Your answers will also help Learning and Organising Services improve the help and support we can offer

branches, based on the feedback we receive from the survey about what works and what doesn't work at branch level.

By having your say on current projects, you will help us shape the way we run learning projects in the future. ■

1 How many people have you had a one-to-one conversation with about possible learning opportunities since 1 January 2013?

2 How many people have definitely taken up learning opportunities following your discussions?

3 Have you had the opportunity to encourage anyone to join UNISON?

Yes

No

If yes, how many? _____

4 Do you have any feedback about issues around learning in your branch?

5 Have you had contact with employers? Please provide contact names and addresses.

6 Tell us about a successful learning achievement in your branch (e.g. Adult Learners' Week events, negotiating a learning agreement, signposting members to courses).

Name _____

Branch _____

Address (for correspondence) _____

Email address _____

Daytime phone number (in case you win) _____



Please return by freepost (no stamp needed) by: Norma Clarke, FREEPOST RSKU-RRCA-HHSJ, UNISON, UNISON Centre, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY.

Closing date: Friday 27 September 2013



Get active around learning

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

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

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, boost 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

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

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

DYSLEXIA – IN OUR OWN WORDS

This will help UNISON activists understand dyslexia, support members and organise around dyslexia in the branch. Stock number ACT 185 or download from: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/Dyslexia%20-%20In%20Our%20Own%20Words%20ACT185.pdf

YOUR RIGHTS AS AN APPRENTICE

Find out what an apprenticeship is, what they offer and what apprentices are entitled to. To order copies, email: learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

GUIDANCE FOR ULRs, LEARNING COORDINATORS AND EDUCATION STAFF ON USING THE SKILLS FOR LIFE RESEARCH

To order copies, email learningandorganising@unison.co.uk Stock number ACT192 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. www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/GETJOB_FINALweb.pdf

QUICK READS READING GROUP TOOLKIT

For ULRs who want to organise a reading group in their workplace www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/QR%20Reading%20Groups%20Toolkit%20Unison%20Print_Layout%201.pdf

CHANGE YOUR LIFE WITH UNISON LEARNING

A quick guide to lifelong learning opportunities for UNISON members. Stock number 2576 or download from: www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/16486.pdf

USING TECHNOLOGY FOR LEARNING TOOLKIT

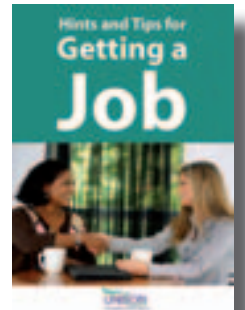
A digital toolkit for ULRs which gives advice on running computer sessions, using iPads and free apps for learning, and using e-readers with reading groups or loan schemes. Email: learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

THINGS GET BETTER WHEN YOU LEARN IN UNISON

A leaflet promoting the free learning workshops available to all new members recruited in May and June 2013. To order copies, email: learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

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.



To find out more and how to join contact:
UNISONdirect TELEPHONE 0845 355 0845
textphone users FREEPHONE 0800 0 967 968
Lines open 6am – midnight Monday to Friday: 9am – 4pm Saturday

Or visit our website www.unison.org.uk

Stock No: ACT209 UNP Print ref: 93467

**Union
Learning
Fund**

with **unionlearn**

**UNISON**
the public service union