



UNISON – the learning union

# learn

Summer 2014

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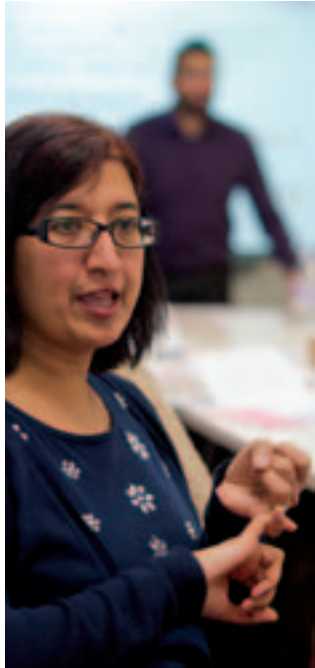
**Union Learning Fund**

with unionlearn

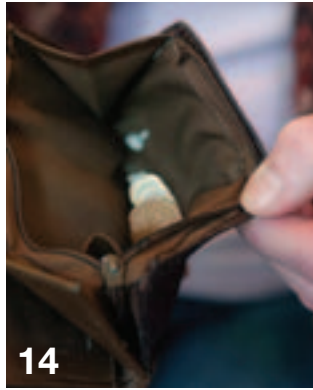
**LEARNING IS FOR LIFE**



**UNISON**  
the public service union



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## UNISON ULEARN MAGAZINE

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# Welcome

Welcome to the 2014 edition of *Ulearn*, which is full of stories we hope will inspire learning reps to continue spreading the word about the wide range of learning opportunities that we make available to members, from help with English, maths and IT to professional development and Higher Education.

Despite continuing financial pressures right across the public sector, our learning reps and education coordinators have continued to help thousands of our members up and down the country by delivering learning in the workplace or finding courses with partner providers.

Opening doors like this makes a huge difference to everyone who takes these opportunities by boosting their self-belief, helping them overcome barriers at home or at work and improving their ability to do their job or find a new one.

We should never underestimate the power of learning. I heard about a UNISON

member recently who booked an appointment with her GP after a discussion of her health on a union well-being course. And she's very glad that she did, because her doctor was able to refer her for a scan that revealed a huge tumour that needed urgent attention.

Of course, most union learning doesn't involve such dramatic developments. But it does have the potential to change members' lives in smaller but significant ways. I hope this new edition of *Ulearn* inspires you to help more UNISON members in the year ahead.

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



AMANDA KENDAL



## Kickstart your learning celebrations

It's all change in the springtime celebration of workplace learning this year, as the Campaign For Learning

(CfL) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) launch bigger and better festivals in May and June.

First up, the CfL's Learning At Work Day has become Learning At Work Week, and takes place from Monday 19 to Sunday 25 May 2014.

■ To apply for Kickstart funding for any learning activity, at any time of the year, contact Inclusive Learning Project Manager, Davinder Sandhu. Email [d.sandhu@unison.co.uk](mailto:d.sandhu@unison.co.uk)

In addition, NIACE has moved Adult Learners' Week a month later than it used to be, so that it now runs from Saturday 14 to Friday 20 June 2014, as part of the Festival Of Learning throughout May and June.

As always, you can apply to Learning and Organising Services for up to £250 to help kickstart learning activity that will engage existing and potential members during these celebrations of workplace learning. ■



■ Click here to find out more about Learning At Work Week:

[www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learningatworkweek/](http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/learningatworkweek/)

■ Click here to find out more about Adult Learners' Week:

[www.alw.org.uk](http://www.alw.org.uk)

## Now you can check your skills online



If you're feeling stuck in your current job and want to explore how to move forward, you can now access a new online UNISON guide to help you identify the skills you have and develop new ones you might need to move on.

The Online Skills Guide is based on the popular Your Skills, Your Future workshop that has already helped hundreds of UNISON members think more clearly about career and personal development.

“Just email Learning and Organising Services to say

you are interested in the Online Skills Guide and we'll send you the link through which you'll be able to access it from any computer,” explains Learning and Workforce Development Officer Emma Lipscombe.

“You can then work through it yourself at your own pace and identify the transferable skills you already have, perhaps without even realising, to help you move on.” ■

■ To access the Online Skills Guide, email [learningandorganising@unison.co.uk](mailto:learningandorganising@unison.co.uk)

### CUT YOUR ALISON COSTS WITH UNISON

In response to feedback from union learning reps, UNISON has negotiated 20 per cent off the cost of certificates from popular online provider ALISON (Advance Learning Interactive Systems Online).

It's easy to secure the discount: all you have to do is enter the site using this UNISON-only URL: [www.alison.com/?ref=2761315](http://www.alison.com/?ref=2761315)

Although ALISON offers free online courses, it charges for issuing the certificates that prove you have completed any of its qualifications, which vary in cost from course to course.

“We know that many activists are promoting ALISON courses and many members are using them, because they cover such a huge range of subjects and are free to enrol on,” says UNISON Learning and Workforce Development Officer Emma Lipscombe.

“That's why we're glad to be able to make it a little less expensive for members to certify their ALISON learning.”





Health and social care assistants shared good practice at the Bridges to Learning conference in January

## Helping members move on

UNISON is helping members across the whole country, working in every sector, develop themselves and their careers in free tailor-made workshops.

**A**round 100 health and social care assistants in the Northern region got together to discuss career development and share best practice at a Bridges To Learning conference in Newcastle in January 2014.

Participants also examined some key issues in the sector by taking part in workshops that covered mental health awareness, support for staff dealing with death and dying, stroke awareness, and dealing with challenging behaviour.

"It was a lively, informative event where health and social

**"It was a lively, informative event where health and social care workers were keen to share good practice"**

care workers were keen to share good practice and discuss a wide range of issues including how to stay safe at work and look after their mental health," says UNISON Learning and Workforce Development

Officer Lorraine Mirham.

Bridges to Learning is offering more of its very popular one-day professional development workshops for workers in the health, social care, or education sectors in the Northern Region this summer. The workshops are free to UNISON members. ■

To book your place, visit:  
[www.bridgestolearning.org.uk/workshops-conferences/](http://www.bridgestolearning.org.uk/workshops-conferences/)

### LEARNING BEGINS AT HOME

UNISON is bringing its learning expertise to staff in Four Seasons care homes, building on the success of last year's landmark recognition agreement with the UK's leading independent provider of health and social care services.

Piloting the programme in the company's Lincolnshire homes, UNISON is working closely with Four Seasons to bring the union's Staying Strong stress management workshop to staff.

"When we ran the workshop at Doulton Court in Sutton on Sea in March, the home worked very hard to finish converting one of the bedrooms into a training room for us in time," explains Learning and Workforce Development Officer Lorraine Mirham.

"Thanks to the hard work of UNISON East Midlands area organiser Nimisha Sisodia and the home Steward, Joanne Oakes, we were able to run the 90-minute workshop for two different sets of staff on the day, with the home manager taking part in one session."

The union has also helped staff to access e-learning opportunities on dementia care and mental health awareness, all designed to support quality patient care at the home.

**Right: UNISON and Four Seasons are working in partnership to promote learning at Doulton Court**

### Developing dementia care

UNISON has helped dozens of members in the West Midlands improve their dementia awareness through a series of three one-day workshops written and delivered by tutors from The Open University (OU).

"We initially thought the workshops would be for our health sector members working with people with dementia but we quickly found that people right across the public sector do come into contact with people that can be showing signs of dementia," explains Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gurdeep Singh.

"In addition, many members were signing up to learn about the issues because they had a friend or family member who was affected by dementia."

Building on the success of the workshops, UNISON is helping a group of around a dozen members work through the OU's 'Improving dementia care' online short course in the autumn.

"To help people who want to learn more than you can cover on a one-day workshop, we will be piloting a group of members through this OU course, paying their tuition fees and providing additional group learning sessions as well," Gurdeep says.

■ Dozens of staff at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn have improved their care for dementia patients, thanks to workshops provided by their local UNISON branch and tutored by an OU specialist. ■





The Raising Aspirations event gave ULRs plenty of ideas to try out in their branches

# Learning reps focus on the year ahead at Raising Aspirations event

The annual event for UNISON learning reps gave participants the chance to pick up lots of ideas to help them give more and better support to their members back at the workplace.

UNISON learning reps from all over the country gathered at UNISON Centre in March to plan the year ahead for the union's Inclusive Learning project.

After a warm welcome to the 'Raising Aspirations' event from Assistant General Secretary Roger McKenzie, participants listened to presentations on:

- priorities for the coming year
- sharing good practice
- how to talent-spot potential learning reps.

In addition, ULRs had the chance to improve their

numeracy skills during a lively and informative post-lunch session hosted by Steve Humble, the mathematician behind the Dr Maths columns in the Evening Chronicle, the North-East's biggest newspaper.

Feedback from the event was enormously positive. "I think the day went really well," commented South West Regional Education Officer Kay Mackenzie. "Our union learning reps enjoyed the whole event and came away really inspired and full of lots of different ideas." East Midlands Regional

**UNISON's Inclusive Learning Project has trained 300 union learning reps (ULRs) over the past two years.**

Education Organiser Angela Gerrard was equally enthusiastic about the whole day. "I thought it was extremely well organised and very informative and I particularly enjoyed the maths session," she said.

During the lunch break, participants were able to pick up more information and resources from the marketplace stall-holders:

## NEW COURSE FOR POTENTIAL ULRs

The pre-ULR programme is designed for UNISON members who are considering becoming UNISON learning representatives (ULRs). It can also be used as a refresher for ULRs who have not been involved in learning for some time.

It is designed as a three-hour course, but it can be adapted to run in a shorter time.

The course aims to:

- introduce the role of the ULR
- discuss what is meant by lifelong learning
- raise awareness of the type of issues ULRs deal with
- practise tasks ULRs are likely to do in their role.

To find out more, contact Inclusive Learning Project Manager Davinder Sandhu. Email:

**D.Sandhu@unison.co.uk**

- Crossbow, who supply resources for dyslexia, visual stress, literacy and language
- DnA, the enterprise led by dyslexic and disabled adults promoting learner support
- The Reading Agency, which promotes the annual Six Book Challenge. ■

# Getting Linc-ed in

Tracy Lamy-Edwards has so comprehensively developed union learning at Lincolnshire County UNISON that it's hard to believe she only became a union learning rep just two years ago.

Working in concert with the county council's well-being strategy, the branch is currently providing after-work fitness, meditation and stress management sessions.

Tracy also delivers a number of union courses herself, including sessions on cognitive behavioural therapy, dyslexia awareness and coping with change.

All of this means that Tracy is now organising so many

different courses that she has to use a colour-coded chart on the wall of the union office to help her keep track of everything.

Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gavin McCann says that it's fantastic to see how Tracy and the ULRs have developed Lincolnshire branch learning.

"The learning has been really varied, and members (and non-members) are seeing the benefit of the union and how it can support their needs," he says.

Tracy says that she enjoys being able to help people who, like her, did not get the opportunities to explore all avenues of learning when they were younger.

"I am now in my 40s and lots of women like me would like the opportunity to progress with their education as they did not get a chance when they were younger: some want career progression and some would like just to return to learn to experience something that was denied them when they were younger," she explains. ■



JOHN JONES



Aintree Hospital housekeeper Sue Garner (left) has developed her career thanks to the support she had had from UNISON

**“We were all in our 40s and 50s and we hadn’t done maths or English in a long time”**

## Older members access learning at work

UNISON Sefton Health Branch is helping low-paid NHS staff overcome their anxieties about returning to learning.

Since completing her apprenticeship later in life with the support of UNISON Sefton Health Branch, hospital domestic worker Sue Garner has won promotion to become housekeeper to three key departments at the Aintree Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in Liverpool.

Having not stepped into a

classroom in decades, Sue admits she was very reluctant to return to learning herself when the opportunity first arose.

Although she understood that the Level 2 team leading qualification would be valuable, she was worried she wouldn’t be up to writing 500-word essays or making presentations in front of her colleagues.

“When the trust introduced apprenticeships, I went round all the girls I work with and encouraged them to get on the course, because completing an apprenticeship would make it easier to get another job, and there were English and maths key skills as well,” Sue recalls.

“But a lot of us were frightened at first, including me: we were all in our 40s and 50s and we hadn’t done maths or English in a long time, and we thought we were thick because all we had been doing was going to work and bringing up the children.”

Like many of her co-workers, Sue surprised herself, and with the support of Sefton Health

Branch lead ULR Marie Reece, she completed the apprenticeship in June 2011.

“The accessibility of the tutors and the informal teaching methods inspired Sue and her colleagues to stay motivated and keep going,” Marie recalls.

“They even took packed lunches into their lessons so they would not need to take a lunch break and stop learning!”

Sue took on more responsibilities, supervising more than 40 domestic staff once she qualified and has now been promoted to housekeeper responsible for stock control and purchasing in three departments.

Thanks to her commitment to learning and development and the functional skills (English and maths) she gained as part of the apprenticeship, Sue now has a vital role in the team and the clinic would not run without her input and organisation, Marie says.

Now trained as a UNISON learning rep, Sue continues to support other learners at the Trust, and is keen to take on further qualifications herself. “I have had a ball as a union learner!” she says. ■



### HELPING THE HOSPITAL WIN TOP EMPLOYER AWARD

UNISON Sefton Health Branch has helped Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust win national recognition for its excellence as an employer of apprentices.

The branch education team joined the celebrations when the Trust was named in the prestigious Top 100 Employers List during last year’s National Apprenticeship Awards, announced in November 2013.

Lead ULR Marie Reece, education officer Dave Woodward, equalities officer Jane Downton and digital champion Alan Todd joined Regional Learning Co-ordinator Steve Swift and Regional Officer Paula Williams plus unionlearn staff Tony Saunders and Laura Robertson Collins at the celebration event.

“The hospital’s success at the National Apprenticeship Awards demonstrates an eagerness to continually improve,” commented Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson.

“This dedication to education of the workforce is impressive and a quality that should be celebrated by staff, patients and

visitors alike.”

At the event to mark the Top 100 achievement, Human Resources Director Debbie Fryer pointed out that the Trust’s partnership with UNISON and unionlearn had helped develop more than 400 apprentices at Aintree Hospital.

The success of the project is rooted in the way UNISON learning reps have successfully engaged traditionally hard-to-reach staff such as domestics, catering, laundry and porters, says Marie Reece.

By encouraging staff back into learning, the ULR team has enabled them not only to gain qualifications that recognise their contributions to the work of a top teaching hospital but also to improve their functional skills (English and maths) at the same time.

The branch is also currently running a digital inclusion project, offering people one-to-one information and advice to help them get to grips with the online world, from shopping for equipment to broadband providers.

# Youth training begins at home

UNISON is demonstrating its commitment to training the next generation by taking on our first group of apprentices at our National Centre.

Having left her native Sheffield in the quest to find work last year, Ella Ford saw the advertisement for UNISON's apprenticeship programme just a few weeks after arriving in Camden, London.

"I knew a lot about trade unions with a lot of my family being union members, and

I was attracted to the apprenticeship itself," she explains.

One of five young people taken on as part of a pilot apprenticeship programme at UNISON Centre, Ella is now undertaking a Level 3 Business administration qualification while working as part of the strategic organising unit.

**"I'm very proud of the work: a lot of people have got a lot out of it and it's shown what the union can do"**

"I'm really enjoying it: my department's really friendly and they have given me loads of work to do in the office and at seminars and conferences," she says.

Unlike Ella, Chris Palmer didn't know very much about trade unions before he came across the UNISON advert, but he liked what he saw when he did his research.

"I liked the fact that UNISON stands up for people – that really helped me decide that this was the one I wanted to do," he explains.

With the apprenticeship being his first job

since finishing his A Levels, Chris didn't know what to expect from the rest of his team in the post room. "That's probably the one thing I wasn't really sure about, how they were going to accept me, but it's been good: they've been friendly and no problems at all," he says.

Like their apprentice colleagues Dominique McIntosh, Michael Teixeira and Sophie Wilkinson, Ella and Chris are supported by a buddy in their department and a mentor elsewhere in the union.

"I can talk to my mentor whenever I need help with anything," Ella says, "and I have been out socially with my buddy as well."

The study component is delivered by a tutor from LeSoCo (the south London provider formed by the merger of Lewisham and Southwark colleges), who comes onto site for two days every three weeks to deliver a taught block on one day and run individual sessions with the apprentices on the other.

Once it came to advertising the apprenticeship vacancies last year, the decision to offer

the London Living Wage ensured the union ended up with a good field of candidates to select from.

And while the programme was originally advertised as 12 months at Level 2, General Secretary Dave Prentis was keen to raise the bar and the union decided to lift everyone onto a Level 3 qualification over 18 months from day one.

With the pilot project now well underway, the union is looking into the nuts and bolts of extending the programme out into the regional offices as well.

"There has inevitably been the odd hiccup, but it's been pretty successful and I'm very proud of the work: a lot of people have got a lot out of it and it's shown what the union can do," says Head of Staff Engagement Katherine Bassey. ■

## NHS APPRENTICES BRUSH UP THEIR HISTORY

UNISON Eastern Region brought a coachload of apprentices from James Paget University Hospitals in Great Yarmouth to London during National Apprenticeship Week to visit the House of Parliament and spend some time at UNISON Centre.

After a guided tour of the Palace of Westminster, and a meeting with their local MP Brandon Lewis, the apprentices visited UNISON Centre, where Eastern Region Apprenticeships Project Worker Craig Young delivered a presentation on the benefits of union membership.

And before they left London, they took a tour of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Gallery at union headquarters, which tells the story of women's struggle for equality in the field of medicine.



MARCUS ROSE





# Money's too tight not to mention

We're making it easier for activists and members to keep on top of their finances through our new Managing Your Money workshops.

**U**NISON is running a series of financial workshops around the country to help members get to grips with money matters and train activists to provide better support to their often hard-pressed co-workers.

"As a union, our job first and foremost is to protect our members' pay and conditions by securing the best possible deals through collective bargaining," explains Learning and Workforce Development Officer Emma Lipscombe.

"At the same time, we want to help everyone who is struggling to do more with less by offering

these practical workshops, which helps our activists and members get on top of day to day financial issues."

The workshops covers key issues such as household budgets, payday loans, credit unions and affordable lending and embeds some practical maths in the activities, such as calculating repayments to payday lenders, which union members are increasingly using despite the extortionate interest rates they charge (see sidebar).

The materials were developed with the help of experts from the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) and the

**"We want to help everyone who is struggling to do more with less by offering these practical workshops"**

workshops also point people in the direction of useful online resources, such as the budgeting tools on the Money Advice Service website.

"We recognise that our activists are not debt advisers, but we can help members get started with some of the basics and then signpost them to the right people to discuss financial solutions that will work for them," Emma says.

The feedback has been very positive says Emma, who has been delivering the sessions up and down the country.

"Many people who come on the course welcome the chance

to have some time to spend thinking about how they can best engage with members on these big issues of debt, budgeting and money-management," Emma says. "Obviously, in many cases, members who are in financial difficulties are not always going to come forward, so this is about how we can be

■ For more information about help from There for You (UNISON Welfare), contact your branch welfare officer or get in touch directly with **There for You**.  
Tel: **020 7121 5620** email: **thereforyou@unison.co.uk**

■ To find out more about Managing Your Money workshops, email: **E.Lipscombe@unison.co.uk**

■ To find out more about brushing up your maths skills, email: **D.Sandhu@unison.co.uk** or **E.Lipscombe@unison.co.uk** or tel: **020 7121 5116**. The first 100 to get in touch will receive a free calculator.

## TEST YOUR SKILLS

Try this activity from the course to see how you do. We have included a reminder about how to work out percentages plus the answer at the bottom of this sidebar.

Claire is on a tight budget and the increase in the cost of her monthly bus pass plus the price of a train ticket when she visited a family member who was ill have caused financial problems.

With six days left before payday, she has no money for food or emergencies and she doesn't know anyone she could borrow from, so she is thinking of borrowing a small sum from a payday lender.

If she borrows £100, how much would she have to re-pay with this company?

Lender	Interest rate for 28 days	Equivalent APR	Charge	Timescale	Claire will pay back
Bazonga	35%	5853%	None	Instant transfer online	

## WORK IT OUT

The interest rate for 28 days is 35%. Divide the number by 100 to work out 1%.  $100 \div 100 = 1$ . Then multiply by the percentage:  $1 \times 35 = 35$ . Then add that to the sum originally borrowed.  $£100 + £35 = £135$  to repay.

pro-active about organising courses like this and promoting the services we have for members, such as There for You (UNISON Welfare)."

Although There for You cannot guarantee to help in every single case, it does offer financial support to thousands of members and their families every year, giving more than

4,000 grants to members totalling nearly £750,000 in 2012.

Many branches have a branch welfare officer, who can help members apply for funding from There for You, and act as the first port of call for members experiencing financial (or other) difficulties. ■





KEVIN HAYES

## Moving on with Return to Learn

When her school started going through massive upheaval, Return to Learn gave Heather Williams the skills and confidence to try something new.

**F**ormer senior teaching assistant (TA) Heather Williams was in the midst of the massive shake-up that saw four schools on the Isle of Portland merge into a single academy when a Return to Learn leaflet landed on her doormat early last year. “There was a bit of uncertainty about what was going to happen now that we had become an academy, and I thought the course would be a good opportunity to gain some skills that would help me apply for other jobs,” Heather recalls.

“I had been working in the same school for 12 years in a job I absolutely loved, but changes in job roles and the uncertainty made me think it was time to try other avenues.”

For Heather, Return to Learn was the first time she had done any formal studying since completing her Level 3 NVQ and Level 2 English when she first started work as a TA.

“It was a bit daunting to begin with because I didn’t know what to expect, or how much input I would have to

make to get the outcome, but we had fantastic support from our tutors all the way through,” she says.

Heather enjoyed working in a group of UNISON members who all got along from the very first evening they spent together.

“We hit it off immediately, which really helped us stick with the course and move on,” she recalls. “We were lucky that everybody gelled on the first night: we all had things in common and it was just a fantastic learning experience for all of us.”

**Main (left): Return to Learn courses are a fantastic opportunity for UNISON members, says former student Heather Williams**

Return to Learn not only boosted Heather’s self-confidence, but also gave her the employability skills that helped her enormously when she applied for jobs both inside and outside the academy.

In the end, she secured a completely new role within the academy, as reprographics manager – a new departure she credits to Return to Learn. “The course gave me the boost I needed at that time to go for something a little bit different,” she says.

Since finishing the course last September, Heather has also become a UNISON learning rep.

Given her very positive experience, it’s no surprise that Heather would recommend Return to Learn without hesitation. “If you have been out of learning for a long time, as I had been, it helps you do something you can feel positive about: it’s a fantastic opportunity I would definitely recommend to anyone.” ■

### NOW YOU CAN LISTEN TO INSPIRING STORIES FROM RETURN TO LEARNERS

Anyone registering for Return to Learn courses this autumn will be able to listen to former learners talk about their experience on the course, thanks to an oral history project to mark last year’s 25th anniversary of the pioneering programme.

When they enrol, students will receive a link taking them to a playlist on the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) website where they can listen to the recordings (the audio files will also be available on CDs).

The recordings include top tips from former students, as well as memories of the value of learning together and reflections on what they got out of completing the award-winning courses.

“To mark the 25th anniversary of Return to Learn last year, we recorded interviews with former students about their hopes and fears before they started, the challenges they overcame and their achievements”, explains Learning and Workforce Development Officer Lorraine Mirham.

“Now we’re going to be able to use this fantastic resource to help engage more learners on the programme, who can listen to this first-hand testimony from members who have been in the same position as them and be inspired by their stories.”



**Celebrate good times (from left): Joanne Armour, Alison Storey, Margaret Allen and Lesley Gilchrist enjoy the Return to Learn 25th anniversary event at UNISON Centre last summer**

ALL PICTURES: PAUL HERMANN



# Helping schools staff improve their skills

UNISON is helping schools staff up and down the country improve their skills through a variety of professional development opportunities.

UNISON North West helped schools staff improve their communication with hearing-impaired pupils, parents and carers by delivering a one-day workshop on British Sign Language (BSL) in Manchester in March.

More than a dozen activists attended the session, which was taught by a profoundly-deaf tutor from Action on Hearing Loss (formerly the RNID).

"You could really see the progress people made over the course of the day: by the end of the workshop they were able to keep up a conversation in BSL using certain basic phrases," explains Regional Learning and Development Organiser Steve Swift.

"As well as helping our members in schools improve their communications with hearing-impaired pupils, parents and colleagues, the workshop also helped boost

**"The training was very enjoyable, informative and best of all interactive which made the day very interesting"**

their self-confidence and further rounded out their continuous professional development (CPD)."

Steve organised the workshop after discussing what Learning and Organising Services could offer schools staff at a meeting of the regional schools forum, where members specifically requested the BSL course.

Steve intends to offer sign language as part of a suite of courses to all branches in the region in the future. ■

**UNISON schools staff improve their communications with hearing-impaired pupils, parents and colleagues at the North-West sign language course**

## TRAINING FOR EVERYONE

More than 40 schools staff at the Wellington Academy in Wiltshire attended stress management and social media workshops run by Wiltshire UNISON to coincide with a teacher training day onsite.

The 75-minute workshops proved very popular, especially stress management, with many staff commenting on how practical, exciting and fun these courses were.

Led by UNISON learning rep Silke Woller-Turton, who works at the Academy and helped coordinate and organise the workshops, the branch team combined learning with organising by recruiting five new members on the day.

"Overall, it was a positive day's work for the branch team, showing learning to be a great organising tool and also a great way to interact with our TAs and schools staff," says Learning and Development Organiser Edna Warwick. "The branch now plans to roll out more of these sessions across the county."



**"I stayed in for the whole course and what we learned in just a day was fantastic"**

## Can we have some more?

UNISON South West ran a sign language course for a dozen schools staff at the regional office in Taunton in March.

A husband and wife team from Cardiff, who have delivered courses for the union in Wales, taught the course: the wife went deaf as a child and can speak but can't hear and her husband can't speak or hear.

"Every single appraisal form says 'Excellent' and we've already had an email from one

participant saying, 'It was so fantastic, can we have Stage 2?'" says Regional Learning and Development Organiser Edna Warwick.

"I stayed in for the whole course and what we learned in just a day was fantastic, and it raised awareness of many issues that deaf people have to deal with that we need to pass on to our reps so they can provide better support to our deaf members." ■

NHS PROPERTY SERVICES



UNISON Head of Health Christine McAnea (centre) signs the NHS Property Services agreement alongside (from left) Property Services Chief Executive Simon Holden, Managers in Partnership National Officer Marisa Howes, GMB National Officer Barrie Brown and Unite National Officer Andy Prendergast

# UNISON signs breakthrough deal with NHS Property Services

UNISON branches and regions can develop positive partnerships with NHS employers with the launch of the Learning for Life campaign.

UNISON signed a breakthrough agreement with NHS Property Services in September 2013, just a few months after launching the new Learning for Life campaign with health service employers.

The agreement with Property Services, which owns, manages and develops facilities and buildings for the NHS, was the very first of its kind with a

**“I’m pleased about working with the union’s education team: it’s a great opportunity to tap in to their expertise”**

national health service body in England.

“I’m pleased about working with the union’s education team: it’s a great opportunity to tap in to their expertise,” says Hesketh Emden, NHS Property Services Head of Training, Development and Leadership.

UNISON Head of Health Christina McAnea is also enthusiastic about working together to boost training

opportunities for staff in Property Services, which is still barely one year old.

“The fact that this learning agreement has been signed within six months of the formation of NHS Property Services demonstrates a real commitment from both the employer and staff side unions to learning and training,” Christine says.

“We now need to ensure that what is in the agreement is put into practice and delivers for NHS staff, particularly those in Bands 1–4.” ■

- To find out more about Learning for Life and download the range of campaign resources go to: [www.socialpartnershipforum.org/learning-for-life/](http://www.socialpartnershipforum.org/learning-for-life/)
- To find out more about how your branch could develop work as part of Learning for Life, contact UNISON Learning and Workforce Development Officer Lorraine Mirham: [L.Mirham@unison.co.uk](mailto:L.Mirham@unison.co.uk)

## BOOSTING LEARNING IN THE NHS

Learning for Life is a new campaign to increase awareness of and participation in learning at work for all NHS staff, especially those in Bands 1-4, which launched last summer under the auspices of the Social Partnership Forum (SPF).

The campaign is determined to persuade more health service chief executives and board members that investing in staff development makes sound business sense and ultimately improves the quality of patient care.

The business case for extending workplace learning is clear, according to UNISON Head of Health Christina McAnea.

“We know that when staff have access to good quality appraisal, learning and skills training, and are properly equipped to undertake their job role, this has a positive impact on the patient experience and the quality of health outcomes,” Christine argues.

“This campaign will encourage employers and trade unions to work together to promote learning for all staff, particularly those in the lower pay bands, and it will help to ensure that staff have the right skills for the job and the confidence to act in the patients’ best interests.”

At a time of enormous upheaval for health services staff as well as patients, workplace learning can play an important role in improving outcomes for everyone, argues UNISON Learning and Workforce Development Officer Lorraine Mirham.

“Learning for Life is a brilliant example of unions and employers coming together for a common purpose and a great opportunity to work in partnership with the employer on this positive agenda,” she says.



ALL PICTURES: JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



UNISON Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Branch Education Officer Jane Collier (second left) celebrates the new learning agreement with members of the learning rep team

# New opportunities for NHS staff

Staff at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust are getting new opportunities to learn at work, thanks to a new learning agreement UNISON signed with the south London Trust in February.

UNISON Branch Secretary and Staff Side Chair Dino Williams and Trust chairman Sir Hugh Taylor signed a breakthrough learning agreement in front of 300 staff and stakeholders at a special lunchtime event at St Thomas' Hospital in February.

"We want to ensure that the agreement helps all our members continuously develop at work, complementing the management contribution to workforce development," Dino explains.

To emphasise the significance

**"We want to ensure that the agreement helps all our members continuously develop at work"**

of an agreement that was two years in the making, the branch also invited local MP Kate Hoey to speak at the launch. Kate congratulated both sides for

creating a wide range of learning opportunities through the agreement and later tweeted her congratulations to Dino for his role in pulling it together.

"We invited Kate to the launch to help alert the constituents she represents that this is a project about social mobility," Dino says.

Long before the agreement was signed and sealed, the branch had been determined to reach and engage Bands 1-4 staff in learning.

"Our aim from the beginning has been to provide more of a

focus on those members of staff who traditionally aren't given as much as easy access to learning as bands higher up might be," explains branch education officer Jane Collier.

"That's why we started to organise maths taster sessions and other learning events in housekeeping and catering, so staff in those areas could have the opportunity to talk about their learning needs, as well as what the Trust and UNISON was able to offer in terms of training."

Signing the learning agreement, and training a new team of union learning reps from a wide range of departments, will enable the branch to offer even more – with the explicit endorsement of senior management, who have been supportive throughout.

"The agreement spells out how management are committed to promoting learning in the workplace and to supporting staff who want to enrol on courses that might be outside their mandatory training but can be seen to be part of their personal and professional development," Jane explains. ■

## NEW AGREEMENT AT KING'S LYNN

Staff at King's Lynn's Queen Elizabeth Hospital can now access many more workplace learning opportunities since UNISON signed a Lifelong Learning Partnership Agreement with the Trust in November 2013.

Under the agreement, union learning reps from all of the unions at the Trust will actively help their colleagues to take the steps they need to gain better qualifications, better jobs and better pay.

"We recognised that there was a need to bring something in to support staff development at the Trust," explains UNISON Branch Secretary Darren Barber, who signed the agreement alongside the hospital's Director of Resources David Stonehouse.

"Lifelong learning allows staff at all levels to engage; it helps the Trust's human resources department; and it utilises grant money in addition, following the concept of the Learning for Life campaign."

Assistant Director of Organisation Development Kay Perry Peers has also welcomed the new development. "This agreement allows us to create and embed a learning culture for all staff at the Trust," she says.



The new learning agreement at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn will help embed a learning culture for all staff



JESS HURD/REPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

## Getting to grips with neurodiversity

UNISON South West helped a 20-strong group of learning reps, education coordinators and branch secretaries get to grips with neurodiversity at a residential weekend at Croyde Bay in December.

Three tutors from Diversity and Ability (DnA) delivered the sessions, which examined different aspects of neurodiversity, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

DnA is a social enterprise designed and led by dyslexic and disabled adults that provides support and training for tutors and students in Assistive Technology (AT), specialist equipment that helps people with disabilities

overcome barriers at work.

Feedback from the course was overwhelmingly positive, according to Regional Learning and Development Officer Edna Warwick.

“It went down a storm: everyone loved it. They all said it made them think in a different way about the members they represent, which is particularly important at the moment because disabled people tend to get targeted in redundancy situations,” she says.

Already Dorset County and Southampton City branches of

“They all said it made them think in a different way about the members they represent”

UNISON have invited DnA to deliver sessions for their activists and members, and the education team is hoping to work with the regional disabled members self-organised group on a neurodiversity training day later this year. ■

To find out more about DnA delivering workshops, contact Emma Lipscombe: [e.lipscombe@unison.co.uk](mailto:e.lipscombe@unison.co.uk)

### PARTNERSHIP PROMOTES SUPPORT

UNISON East Midlands signed a partnership agreement in January with The Dyslexia Association (TDA) to help both organisations work together to provide more support for public service workers with dyslexia.

“We are supporting more and more members who are getting into trouble in their jobs just because of their dyslexia – sometimes they are too frightened to disclose their issues with their employers for fear of reprisals,” explained UNISON Regional Secretary Helen Black.

“Our partnership with The Dyslexia Association will provide support for our representatives and assist us in a greater understanding of the issues people face so we can help all sides, workers and employers, to come to a better understanding for the benefit of all.”

## Thumbs up for dyslexia pilot

Lincolnshire UNISON member Kay Hargrave, who works as a practitioner with her local authority Learning Disability Team, highly recommends the union’s online dyslexia workshop, which was piloted earlier this year.

Kay was particularly interested since she was herself diagnosed with dyslexia at the relatively late age of 38 while on a Return to Learn course through UNISON in 2011.

“I showed the pilot to several colleagues, which really helped them, as there is still this idea that dyslexia is something to do with reading and writing instead of differences in storing and retrieving memory,” she says.

“There are a huge number of people with dyslexia, and the pilot was so good that I hope it will be rolled out to more people to increase that understanding about what dyslexia is.”

Kay was coming to the end of the second year of a Higher Education (HE) course when a tutor first suggested she might have dyslexia. But the issue was handled so badly, in front of the class, so close to her exams, that it severely dented her confidence.

Now, the support Kay received from her manager and co-workers after her full dyslexia assessment during Return to Learn has renewed her self-belief, and she is currently awaiting some software and equipment that will help her at work.

Since completing Return to Learn, Kay has also trained to become a UNISON learning rep. “I wanted to do that because I felt so passionate and wanted to share my experience,” she says. ■





**Lanarkshire health service workers have improved their understanding of dyslexia through a UNISON course**

## Scottish members reap the benefits of union learning

UNISON is helping members throughout Scotland's public sector improve their skills through workplace learning.

**C**are workers have benefited from a wide range of learning opportunities to help them deliver better patient care, including courses on dyslexia, dementia awareness, IT and communications over the past year

"This is the kind of training that enhances the skills of care workers but they rarely receive from their employers, even though training like this is good for job retention and helps people progress up the career ladder," explains Lowlands &

**"We had members who had relatives with dementia who wanted to improve their knowledge of the illness"**

Uplands Regional Learning Development Organiser Kevin Duguid.

When the union ran the dementia awareness workshop in Edinburgh, it attracted a mix of members from inside and outside the sector, Kevin points out.

"As well as care workers, we had members who had relatives with dementia who wanted to improve their knowledge of the illness, and the tutors were able to signpost them to other sources of information and advice," Kevin says.

In Lanarkshire, the two local government and the two health service branches have created a pan-Lanarkshire learning forum which meets every two months to oversee member learning and activists' development opportunities.

"I have helped them develop a learning programme for the rest of the year that is being delivered locally so people don't have to travel any great distance, and we have already delivered courses on computer skills, dementia awareness and dyslexia," Kevin says.

The four branches have also all contributed money to help run some of the free UNISON workshops for members, including Your skills, your future and Making the most of the internet.

"Bringing members from local government and from health to learn together is really beneficial, because it gives them a perspective about what is happening in each other's sectors," Kevin says.

Since UNISON signed a learning agreement with Edinburgh City Council in October 2013, close to 150

### FLORENCE COLLECTS ADULT LEARNER AWARD

Florence Best, a mental health support worker with the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, topped the trade union learner category at the 2014 Essential Skills Awards, which recognise people who have returned to learning as an adult.

Department of Employment & Learning Minister Dr. Stephen Farry presented Florence with her award recently to acknowledge the learning journey she has made in partnership with UNISON and the Belfast Trust.

"I left school at 14 and a half and all I wanted to do was get a job and have money to buy clothes and records: there was no expectation that you would go on," she says.

After working in factories for more than 20 years, Florence completed a six-week programme for care work when she was made redundant and found a job in what is now the Belfast Trust.

"I didn't have much confidence back then but I was enthusiastic: when I got some information about the UNISON Return to Learn course I decided to give it a go and I loved it – that is where my learning journey started," she recalls.

Through her employer, she was then offered an NVQ which helped support her practical skills. Keen to progress, she has since completed her Essential Skills literacy, numeracy and ICT, as well as the K101 Introduction to Health & Social Care through The Open University (OU).

"Coming to learning as an adult made me wish that I had stayed on in school, but I have four children and five grandchildren, so perhaps I can encourage their learning by my example," she says.

Florence is currently planning to continue her study with the OU.

people accessed a range of learning opportunities, including courses in IT and skills for care workers and sessions on dementia awareness and dyslexia awareness, with a sign language course and autism awareness for schools staff both in the pipeline.

"We have regular meetings of the joint learning committee, there is very good employer engagement and we're planning activities for Adult Learners' Week at the authority, including the formal launch of the learning agreement," Kevin says. ■

# Putting faces to names

Members of the Inclusive Learning team around the regions talk about what they do and why they love doing it.



**DANIELLE JEFFRIES**

Area organiser, Northern region  
**How long have you been in post?** Four years.  
**What does the job involve?** I devote a lot of my time to helping the Inclusive Learning and Bridges to Learning projects achieve their targets, promoting their work, sending information out across the region and supporting the branches involved in those projects. And if a branch wants to do something in Learning At Work Week or recruit more union learning reps or source

courses in functional skills, then I can help them with that as well.  
**What's the most difficult aspect of the job?** Balancing the learning agenda with the other aspects of the AO role. During a recruitment drive, for example, other aspects of the work might have to take a back seat, so I always try to find a couple of hours to make sure I'm getting information out to ULRs.  
**What's the best aspect?** I really enjoy learning work. We're always trying to mainstream it, which is really important because ULRs can change lives, as we have had first-hand experience of in the Northern region: one of our learners at Newcastle Hospital went right through from entry-level qualifications as a health service worker to becoming a qualified nurse – and she would never have gone back to English or maths if it hadn't been for UNISON.

**“I want to be able to communicate with people regardless of language barriers”**

**If you could take any course anywhere any time what would it be?** I want to be able to communicate with people regardless of language barriers, so I would love to learn all the European languages!



JESS HUNDREPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

**KEVIN DUGUID**

Regional Learning Development Organiser, Scottish Lowlands & Uplands  
**How long have you been in post?** One year.  
**What does the job involve?** The most important priority is to build up union learning rep (ULR)

structures, and embedding learning into the union's everyday work at branch level, showing our activists how learning can make a real difference to our members' lives, financially and otherwise. And raising awareness is vital: there are some branches who don't know what UNISON can offer in terms of learning, so it's been great to have support from other organisers in Scotland and be invited to do presentations on branch development days.  
**What's most surprised you about the job?** I have been pleasantly surprised by the employers I've gone to meet. I'd say 80 per cent of them have been positive and constructive and interested in engaging with us around learning, which helps to build bridges for our other organisers to organise on the back of that.  
**What's the best aspect?** Looking at feedback forms after courses when members say things like 'That was great, I didn't realise UNISON could provide opportunities like this'. It's the impact that learning has on members' lives that keeps me driving this forward.

**If you could take any course anywhere any time what would it be?** Professional Development Award in Dyslexia. It's amazing how many workers have problems associated with undiagnosed dyslexia and it will be fantastic to learn what more we can do to help them develop themselves at home and at work.



JESS HUNDREPORT/DIGITAL.CO.UK

**SUE JARRETT**

Area organiser, Eastern region  
**How long have you been in post?** I've been working on learning for a year.  
**What does the job involve?** Mainly talking to members and potential members about what UNISON does for members in terms of lifelong learning and talking to HR departments and managers about the different

**“It's amazing how many workers have problems associated with undiagnosed dyslexia”**

sources of funding available that we can use to help them develop their staff further.  
**What's the most difficult aspect of your job?** There's nothing like face to face contact to talk to people about what we do and find out what they want to learn. But it's not always easy when everyone leads very busy lives, which is why we try to run events with lunch or tea and cakes to encourage them to come and talk to us.  
**What's the best part of your job?** Seeing people develop themselves and move out of a job where they might think they can't do better to succeed in securing something better through learning.  
**If you could take any course any time anywhere, what would it be?** I used to teach IT, but everything moves so quickly now, so I would like to take a course on social media to keep up to date. ■



Download these publications and many more resources from the UNISON website: [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

## Get active round learning

### Spread the Word

Become a ULR, help encourage co-workers back into learning and get involved in your local branch. Download or order from the UNISON Online Catalogue. Stock number 1893

### U-Train

Plan your learning journey as a member or a rep with this useful map to guide you through the development opportunities available. Visit: <http://tinyurl.com/puw3518>

### Organising for Learning

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

materials from:

<http://tinyurl.com/nhvnflq>

### ULR Handbook

This short guide sets out your rights as a ULR, how to get started and what's available for members. Download or order from the UNISON Online Catalogue. Stock number 2345

### Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning

Check out how to tackle inequality, build your members' confidence and skills and build your branch in the process! Download or order from the UNISON Online Catalogue. Stock number 2098

### ULRnet – an online resource for all ULRs

Join our online community of UNISON ULRs, hear what other ULRs are up to, share your ideas and access a range of resources including learning surveys and publications. To sign up, email [e.lipscombe@unison.co.uk](mailto:e.lipscombe@unison.co.uk)

### Learning for Everyone

ULRs can use this toolkit to engage members and organise informal learning at work. Download from [bit.ly/1m1Pzc8](http://bit.ly/1m1Pzc8) or email your order to [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

### Learning Angles

ULRs can use these briefings to promote learning around current issues in the branch. Sign up to ULRnet (see left) to access.

### Developing and Supporting Activists

Branch guide on buddying and mentoring workplace reps with ideas to encourage reps to get active. Download or order from the UNISON Online Catalogue. Stock number 2883

### Dyslexia: In Our Own Words

Helps activists understand dyslexia, support members and organise around dyslexia in the branch. Stock number ACT 185. To order copies, email [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

### Skilled for Work Report, 2011

Survey of the literacy, numeracy and IT skills of UNISON members. To order copies, email [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

### Guidance on Using the Skills for Life Research

For ULRs, Learning Co-Ordinators & Education Staff. Stock number ACT192. To order copies, email [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

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For ULRs who want to organise a reading group in their workplace. To order copies, email [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

### Change your life with UNISON Learning

Quick guide to lifelong learning opportunities for UNISON members. Download or order from the UNISON Online Catalogue. Stock number 2576

### Using Technology for Learning Toolkit

Digital toolkit for ULRs with advice on running computer sessions, using iPads and free apps for learning and using

e-readers with reading groups or loan schemes. To order copies, email [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

### Things Get Better When You Learn in UNISON

Leaflet promoting free one-day 'taster' learning workshops available as an introduction to UNISON learning. Stock number ACT 219. To order copies, email [Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk](mailto:Learning&OrganisingEnquiries@unison.co.uk)

### Return to Learn and Women's Lives

Award-winning courses to help members develop new learning skills and get back into education and training. For more details, contact your Regional Education Officer.

The UNISON Online Catalogue is at [www.unison.org.uk/for-activists/help-and-advice/online-catalogue/](http://www.unison.org.uk/for-activists/help-and-advice/online-catalogue/)  
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