



Functional Skills

Mental health

Activist courses

Careers advice

Boost your skills with
UNISON College



Welcome to ULearn

WELCOME TO THIS

special edition of Ulearn, celebrating the launch of UNISON College and highlighting some of the fantastic new opportunities that are now open to our members and activists. It's great to hear about exciting initiatives like leadership programmes for developing activists, mental health first aid training for reps and a dedicated careers advice service for our members.

There's a real appetite for the UNISON College, as shown by the results of the survey that ran earlier in the year.

Thank you to all our UNISON members who completed that survey, sharing your hopes for the College and helping shape the plans. You can read about the

findings on page 4.

None of this would be possible without the hard work of our UNISON learning reps, lifelong learning coordinators and staff, who have put long hours into exploring new ways to expand our existing member learning and activist training programmes.

“There's a real appetite for the UNISON College, as shown by the results of the survey that ran earlier in the year”

We would like to send a massive thank you to all for your time and dedication in shaping the programme.

But this is only the beginning. By doubling the existing learning offer, UNISON College will reach, inspire and empower more members and activists than ever before. We're looking forward to seeing the real impact the programme offers in building our movement.

The success of the programme is now in your hands. We hope it meets your expectations and as always we welcome your feedback!

Andrea Egan and John Jones, chair and vice-chair of the development and organisation committee ✨

Kick-starting our new College

I WAS IMMENSELY PROUD

to launch the new UNISON College at our National Delegate Conference in June. It was a key pledge in my manifesto and I'm delighted we could announce such positive news at our first in-person NDC in three years.

Kick-starting our college couldn't be more important, as we face many challenges ahead of us this autumn. The worst cost of living crisis in a generation is set to deepen but UNISON is taking action to support every member.

Now more than ever, it's vital to have a skilled, confident, and growing collective of activists and a membership that feels empowered by, and involved in, our union. With reinvigorated activist training and member learning programmes, the UNISON College is how we can make that a reality.

In this magazine, you'll read about some of the early



“Now more than ever, it's vital to have a skilled, confident, and growing collective of activists and a membership that feels empowered by, and involved in, our union”



success stories from the College and get a glimpse of what we've achieved so far but there are new and exciting developments happening all the time, so visit <https://learning.unison.org.uk/college> to find out the latest news.

You have my guarantee that, as your general secretary, I will make sure the College goes from strength to strength and always delivers for you, and every single UNISON member.

In solidarity,

Christina McAnea

**Christina McAnea,
General Secretary ***

We're listening to what you want

The research we conducted with members and activists earlier this year is helping us deliver what you want from UNISON College.

RESEARCH COMMISSIONED

by UNISON earlier this year to help shape the development of UNISON College revealed an enormous appetite for learning among members and activists.

85 per cent of members are interested in learning or training over the next three years – and 75 per cent want that learning to be organised through their union.

Almost half (46 per cent) of learners are interested in learning for work opportunities such as Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses over the next year, with the number rising to almost three-quarters (71 per cent) over the next three years.

Moving on at work is a key driver for members to gain new skills, with 26 per cent identifying wanting to earn more money, 24 per cent to help career progression and 17 per cent to change jobs or careers.

More than 18,000 members took part in the online survey in March, with this very large sample broadly matching the demographics of the union.

The researchers then used the survey responses to organise six online focus groups in April, which enabled them to examine the issues in more detail with



different groups of members, including mid-career women workers and members in both higher and lower income bands.

“The research has highlighted the subjects that members are interested in and also told us how they want to learn”

Focus group participants were enthusiastic when they heard about UNISON College in more detail. “Sounds brilliant”, “I think it’s a great idea” and “I can’t wait” were just some of the responses from members who took part.

“The research shows that we need to develop more learning agreements to increase employer support for workplace learning”

The survey results are already influencing the development of UNISON College, says Learning and Workforce Development Officer Kirsi Kekki.

“The research has highlighted the subjects that members are interested in and also told us how they want to learn,” Kirsi says. “Some people like online learning, some like in-person and some would prefer a mix of methods.”

The key barrier to learning that members identified was time. Many said it was hard to attend learning or training sessions if there was no one else available to cover their duties, while more than a third (43 per cent) believed more support from employers would be crucial.

“The research shows that we need to develop more learning agreements to increase employer support for workplace learning,” Kirsi says. *

SURVEY RESULTS IN BRIEF

UNISON members want to learn

- * **85 per cent** are interested in learning or training over the next three years.
- * **67 per cent** have undertaken learning or training in the past three years.
- * The top three reasons for learning are:
 - * learning something new (**92 per cent**)
 - * personal development (**91 per cent**)
 - * improving skills for work (**84 per cent**).

UNISON College will meet members' needs

- * **76 per cent** would be or may be interested in accessing learning or training through UNISON College.
- * **86 per cent** who've already learned through UNISON rate it good or excellent.

UNISON College will make it easier to learn or train

- * Time is the biggest barrier to learning for most people:
 - * **56 per cent** feel work commitments make it hard to find time
 - * **37 per cent** say personal commitments make it hard to find time
 - * **11 per cent** worry that their employer would not be supportive.
 - * **43 per cent** say help with finding the right course would help overcome barriers to learning.

UNISON College is here to help members gain the skills to move on at work and meet the needs of the union's activists as well, explains Head of Learning and Organising Teresa Donegan.



Offering the learning and training you need

WE'RE FACING A MAJOR skills crisis in this country. Most employers are systematically cutting their training budgets and around 40 per cent are providing no training at all.

To make matters worse, further education (FE) cuts have halved the number of adult learners enrolling in FE colleges.

The consequences have been terrible for all those

individuals deprived of the chance to get on at work.

And the UK economy is suffering, too. The government's own measure of the impact of the FE system on productivity tumbled by 46 per cent between 2013 and 2021.

That's why General Secretary Christina McAnea pledged to launch UNISON College when she was elected last year.

This brand new offer will help members and activists access the kind of high-quality learning and training opportunities that the government and so many employers are failing to provide.

UNISON College will also help us engage more members than ever before by doubling the numbers of people learning through the union.

“UNISON College will also help us engage more members than ever before by doubling the numbers of people learning through the union”

Members who've taken part in the pilot courses say they are getting just what they need from UNISON College.

“I've done other English courses and I've never found something as good as this one,” says one of our learners who improved their English on the functional skills course we organised at UNISON Centre this year.

And our activists are telling us the same thing. “I've done what feels like hundreds of training courses in my life and this one was without doubt the best,” says one of the health and safety reps who is now qualified as a Mental Health First Aider thanks to UNISON College.

Earlier this year, we asked members and activists what they wanted from UNISON College. The answers we collected from the online survey and the

focus groups are already shaping what's on offer.

Because 71 per cent of members are looking for work-based opportunities like Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses, we're now piloting functional skills maths courses online in two regions, to complement functional skills English.

We're also helping members build their knowledge of working with spreadsheets through new courses delivered by our new partner Civicos.

We've expanded the popular CPD courses that The Open University (OU) run for us, with new workshops available covering Caring for Adults and Attachment in the Early Years.

And Cruse Bereavement Care, who helped so many of our members in social care in the first waves of the pandemic, are now running bereavement awareness sessions open to all members.

At the same time, we've been meeting the needs of our activists as well.

We've trained our first cohort of reps as Mental Health First Aiders, helping them gain the knowledge and skills to better support members living with anxiety, depression and other conditions.

We've also expanded our programme of advanced

discrimination law courses with a package covering sexual harassment, sexual orientation discrimination and gender identity discrimination that leads to an equality passport.

We're also piloting new courses to support more women and Black members to take on decision-making roles at national level in our union.

And there's so much more. We're piloting a personalised careers advice service from Learning Curve. More new online CPD courses are on the way from Skills Academy. And the OU will be delivering workshops on imposter syndrome, working with diverse teams, and other crucial issues.

We know from the learning survey that time is the biggest barrier to learning. And the best way to fix that is for branches to negotiate learning agreements with employers that guarantee time off for learning. That's why we're running online courses to give activists the confidence and skills to negotiate learning agreements in the workplace.

Whether you are a member or an activist or a member who might become an activist, UNISON College is for you. We hope you feel inspired to join us soon and take the chance to get closer to the life and work you want. ✨

Boosting members' English skills

A diverse group of learners have been improving their English skills on a successful face-to-face course in UNISON Centre.

NEARLY 20 UNISON members have been improving their English skills on a pilot face-to-face weekly course held in UNISON Centre.

They've been learning together for two hours after work every Tuesday since February, in functional skills English sessions delivered by the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL).

Most of the members of this very diverse group are migrants from Africa, Latin America and southern or eastern Europe. Many of them signed up to help bring their English comprehension into line with their speaking skills.

National Learning & Workforce Development Organiser Oreleo Du Cran set up a WhatsApp group for them all, which helps the learners stay in touch and help each other with any learning issues between sessions.

"THIS WAS A PHENOMENALLY POSITIVE COURSE"

Daniel Garcia, Healthcare Assistant, Royal Brompton Hospital, west London

"I enrolled on the course because I needed a functional skills English qualification to apply for a nursing apprenticeship at the hospital. Emily, the tutor, fast-tracked me onto the Level 2 exam so I would have that in time.

What was different from other English courses I've done was building the knowledge gradually and the quality of the teaching and the resources. It was phenomenally positive.

The assessment at the beginning of the course was good so you can find your weaknesses and the things you have to work on to reach your goal.

Emily is an excellent teacher and full of experience – professional, warm and brilliant at passing on knowledge. Oreleo is committed, caring, organised and supportive – technically and emotionally. And the sense of solidarity among the learners really helped.

I have a maths qualification but I'm interested in refreshing my maths with UNISON for my personal improvement and I want to keep upgrading my proficiency level in English, which is important for nursing. I would happily recommend learning with UNISON to my co-workers, always."



"Emily is an excellent teacher and full of experience - professional, warm and brilliant at passing on knowledge"



“I’VE NEVER DONE A COURSE AS GOOD AS THIS”

**Sara Esparza Regalado,
transactional buyer, Whittington
Hospital, north London**

“The course has been amazing. I’ve done other English courses and I’ve never found something as good as this one. The tutor Emily is excellent. She provides simplified materials you can understand and explanations I have never considered so you can develop your skills. I love the creativity Emily uses to teach the materials to help you understand and develop your knowledge. Where we take the course at UNISON Centre is nice – we can get a glass of water or a cup of coffee which helps when you’re travelling from far away and you’re tired – it sounds silly but these little things are very helpful. It’s been very good to learn with other UNISON members because we can support each other when we’re doing the exercises – sometimes I don’t know the answer but someone else does or sometimes I know and I can help someone else. Based on my experience this time, I would love to take another course with UNISON. And I would recommend learning with UNISON to my colleagues at work, absolutely.”



Oreleo himself also stays in touch with everyone, checking in on learners if they miss sessions to see if there’s any further help they need from the union to continue on their learning journey.

“UNISON is in a unique position to support learners on their journey,” Oreleo says. “If employers do lay on anything like this, they say, ‘The course is there, off you go – win, lose or draw’, whereas we’re invested in supporting them through that process.” *

“MY MIND OPENS UP”

Neriman Yahsi, phlebotomist, North Middlesex Hospital

“I enrolled on the English course with UNISON because it’s very helpful to my work to have a chance to develop my language – language is always important for my job.

When I’m in the class, it’s like there’s a light in front of me – my mind opens up.

With English, I’m fine with talking but I’m always scared to write things down because of spelling problems and not knowing which word is correct or elegant. But the tutor is very helpful – she shows me I’m not perfect but I can do it, I just need to practise.

My writing is now better than it was before. And I have much better conversations with my colleagues and my patients now – I feel more comfortable, my patients are happy, my colleagues are happy and I’m happy too.

This is the first course I have taken with UNISON – if I had known I would have taken courses a long time ago! I would like to take more courses with UNISON and I would recommend learning with UNISON to other people at the hospital.”



“When I’m in the class, it’s like there’s a light in front of me - my mind opens up”

Look out for new careers advice service pilot

UNISON COLLEGE IS

piloting a diagnostic careers advice service with the help of national training and education specialists the Learning Curve Group.

Members working for the social care providers CareTech, Dimensions and Four Seasons and schools members in the multi-academy United Learning Trust are able to access the information, advice and guidance (IAG) service trial, which will be extended to other members soon.

They can set up a telephone discussion at a

convenient time with trained advisers from Learning Curve. All they will need to do is contact Learning and Organising Services (LAOS).

Each consultation includes recommendations for a learning pathway from where a member is now to where they would like to go next, with the specific courses and qualifications that would help them reach their goal.

The pathways include courses members could enrol on directly with UNISON; courses offered by existing providers such as the Workers’ Educational Association

(WEA) or The Open University (OU); and courses available through Learning Curve itself.

By helping to identify more about what UNISON members want to learn, the pilot is enabling the union to develop and adapt what’s available through UNISON College. For example, if there is high demand for a course not currently on offer directly, the union may be able to develop one for the future.

The pilot will also track learners who take part, so as to evaluate the advice they are given and the learning pathway created for them. ✨



Getting to grips with spreadsheets

MEMBERS HAVE BEEN SHARPENING THEIR spreadsheet skills through online courses to help them get started and make progress with Microsoft Excel.

Getting Started in MS Excel (Level 1) has already run twice this year, giving members the chance to learn how to create, edit and format spreadsheets, including data entry and simple formulas and functions.


Many have moved on to Making Progress in MS Excel (Level 2), which has also run twice this year to help learners get to grips with more complex formulas and functions as well as creating charts.

Feedback for both courses was very positive. One of the Level 1 learners said: "I've already started using some of the skills I've learned and I look forward to doing Level 2."

Another said: "The course has been invaluable and has consolidated my understanding of Excel and I appreciate having the opportunity to attend."

And a third said the training by Glasgow-based provider Civicos was first class. "It's great we have been given the opportunity to extend our learning by the union."

"It's great we have been given the opportunity to extend our learning by the union"



UNISON College is helping reps reach their full potential

Growing as an activist

EIGHT UNISON REPS

have become qualified mental health first aiders after taking an online course delivered by SpeakUp Mental Health (SUMH).

The training gives learners the skills to spot the signs of mental health issues co-workers may be facing; the confidence to step in and support colleagues in distress; and the knowledge to signpost

“The training gives learners the skills to spot the signs of mental health issues co-workers may be facing”

people to specialist support to help their recovery.

SUMH tutors Ian Borkett and Jane Warwick delivered the four half-day live sessions and participants completed interactive e-learning modules by themselves to consolidate their learning between sessions.

Everyone said the course significantly boosted their confidence in supporting people with mental health

issues, up from 38 per cent at the start to 70 per cent by the end.

All the feedback was enormously positive, with participants rating the course structure, content and delivery extremely highly.

“I’ve done what feels like hundreds of training courses in my life and this was without doubt the best one,” one said.

Before enrolling on the MHFA course, all the participants had already completed UNISON’s Mental Health at Work course, which establishes a collective approach to tackling mental health issues in the workplace.

The union recommends this pathway to help build employer buy-in, as mental health first aiders can only be fully effective in the workplace if their employers provide proper support and structures for the role.

Subject to demand, UNISON College will be running the MHFA course again this September, with SUMH delivering as before. Ian and Jane are also providing MHFA refresher training for UNISON reps to help them retain their MHFA qualifications. *

“Everyone said the course significantly boosted their confidence in supporting people with mental health issues”

SUPPORTING BLACK AND WOMEN LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

* UNISON College is launching two new programmes to help women and Black members play a greater role on the union’s decision-making bodies.

The two programmes, called *Developing Your Leadership Skills*, build on the work already underway at regional level.

“We know women and Black members have the skills to be more involved but they may not see themselves reflected in our current structures so may not think they are relevant to them,” explains Education Officer Suzanne Tipping.

The programmes have been developed by a small project group, made up of members of the Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) and equality teams, including National Women’s Officer Josie Irwin and National Race Equality Officer Margaret Greer, plus Executive Office Director Beth Bickerstaffe.

Both programmes comprise four separate sessions over five months this autumn and winter. This will give participants the chance to try out the new tools they learn about in between sessions and discuss their implementation when they come back together.

Each region will be able to send two people to both programmes, which open and close with in-person sessions at UNISON Centre bookending two virtual sessions in the middle. The final sessions will include presentation ceremonies for all participants.

* If you’re interested in applying to join either of the programmes, please contact your region – the team will be able to put you in touch with the right person.

continued overleaf ►

BUILDING OUR ORGANISING CULTURE

* UNISON College is running its first National Organising School to help further develop a culture of organising across the union.

With a mix of in-person and online sessions, the programme will help experienced activists from each region gain the skills and confidence to drive and influence the organising agenda in their branches.

The school builds on and complements similar initiatives already underway in some UNISON regions.

“The idea for the National Organising School is that we support the lay members who are responsible for the Branch Support and Organising Fund and ensuring that the funds are used to support organising,” explains Education Officer Suzanne Tipping.

The initiative has been developed in line with the motion passed at last year’s special delegate conference that called for an organising school as part of package to increase support to the union’s branches.

With this year’s theme being Organising Voices, the school is asking speakers from UNISON, the TUC and international union organisations to explore how different approaches have worked around the world and which elements could prove fruitful to adopt here.

Throughout the programme, the emphasis will be on developing a strategic approach to organising, whether branches are running digital or face-to-face campaigns.

“We’re going to explore different relevant organising methods and look at thinking critically and analytically about an organising strategy so we can develop a consistent and strategic approach to organising activity,” Suzanne says.

By running the programme over several months, the school will not only give activists the chance to try out new tools between sessions but also help the union collect feedback on organising activity in branches – what’s underway, what’s working and which direction it’s moving in.



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“Throughout the programme, the emphasis will be on developing a strategic approach to organising”

New courses to tackle discrimination at work

UNISON reps are able to gain all the knowledge and skills they need to support members who have experienced discrimination at work by completing all eight courses that make up the new Equalities Passport.

UNISON COLLEGE

is launching two new advanced employment law courses in the spring to help experienced reps support members concerned about discrimination by age or by religion.

They will complement existing courses covering the law on discrimination by race, sex, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as sexual harassment.

All eight courses aim to equip reps to better represent members who are being treated less favourably as a result of different discriminatory practices.

And reps who complete the full set will qualify for UNISON's new Equalities Passport, also due to be launched in the spring, to show they are well prepared to support members with the full range of employment discrimination concerns.

Each course is delivered by a tutor with

decades of experience in employment law practice.

"We get amazing feedback from the courses – everyone comes out of them saying, 'That was brilliant'," says Assistant Education Officer Sally Thompson.

"The subject matter really resonates with our reps and the way it's presented is very popular."

Delivered using Microsoft

COMING THIS SPRING

When the two new courses are launched in the spring, UNISON College will contact all the reps who have attended existing advanced employment law courses this year to encourage them to enrol, and full details will also be available on the Learning and Organising section of the website, learning.unison.org.uk

"All eight courses aim to equip reps to better represent members who are being treated less favourably as a result of different discriminatory practices"

Teams, the courses usually take half a day or a full day, with the disability discrimination course running over three half days.

Reps must have completed UNISON's Introduction to Employment Law course (or equivalent) before taking any of the advanced courses. But they can take the courses in any order, as and when they are run. *

To find out more and how to join contact:
UNISONdirect TELEPHONE 0800 085 7857
textphone users FREEPHONE 0800 096 7968
Lines open 6am to midnight Monday to Friday
and 9am to 4pm on Saturday

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