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UNISON ULEARN MAGAZINE

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Welcome to ULearn



WELCOME TO THE 2023

edition of ULearn. In this issue you'll find just a few examples from the huge range of learning that has taken place across UNISON over the last 12 months. As UNISON College marks its first year, it's clear that learning in our union is going from strength to strength.

From developing our activists through organising academies and leadership schools, to empowering our members to deal with the cost of living crisis, UNISON College has been working to help deliver the union's key objectives – and make life better for working people. It's particularly good to see how members are gaining confidence to become activists through their participation in union learning.

So many stories in this magazine show us

“So many stories in this magazine show us how UNISON members and activists have been using their own skills, concerns, and interests to help their colleagues”

how UNISON members and activists have been using their own skills, concerns, and interests to help their colleagues.

This will be my last ULearn as head of UNISON Learning and Organising Services before I retire. It's been a pleasure to work with so many enthusiastic and talented people in all parts of UNISON, and I'd like to say a huge thank you to all of you.

Teresa Donegan,
Head of Learning and Organising Services



Learning activists and staff shaped UNISON's learning strategy for the year ahead at the 2022 ULR conference.



Building UNISON College Together

UNION LEARNING REPS,

lifelong learning coordinators and learning staff from all over the country gathered at UNISON Centre in September for the 2022 ULR conference, Building UNISON College Together.

The one-day event combined presentations on key issues in the morning and discussion groups on hot topics in the afternoon.

Opening the conference, Assistant General Secretary Jon Richards reminded participants how neither the government nor the majority of employers were doing enough to develop the skills we need.

"UK employers invest half as much in skills as their

European equivalents," Jon said. "And we have an incoherent skills system created by successive governments – every industrial strategy fails because of lack of investment in the system."

The problem was most acute in the public services where UNISON members work, Jon said, as employers had slashed training budgets under pressure from austerity and privatisation.

That was why UNISON College's pledge to double the amount of training UNISON provides was so important for members.

Improving the learning offer would support the union's wider organising

"Together, we can create a learning environment that is the envy of the trade union movement"

aims, Jon said. "It's all about empowering members to speak up," he said. "When they get involved in learning, members can become more open to becoming active – the data shows that."

Jon paid tribute to everyone at the conference for actively promoting learning in their branches.

"You are our lifeblood: we depend on you, we want to help you and we want you to come with us on this



LAS Branch Education Officer Mark Belkin

journey,” he said. “Together, we can create a learning environment that is the envy of the trade union movement.”

Head of Learning Teresa Donegan said that UNISON College was building on the firm foundation of the union’s long tradition of providing learning opportunities for members.

“Last year, we recorded interactions with 25,000 members, but much learning activity goes unrecorded in branch systems, so I suspect the true figure is nearer 50,000,” she said.

The results of the 2022 members’ learning survey proved there was potential to do even more, Teresa said. “50 per cent of the members don’t know about

our amazing learning offer,” she pointed out.

The College’s new information, advice and guidance service would help members make real progress in their careers, she said.

“Improved careers and study advice has long been an aspiration for the TUC, for unionlearn and for us,” Teresa said. “So many members – especially low-paid women – get stuck in jobs and don’t know where to go or what career path to take.”

London Ambulance Service (LAS) Branch Education Officer Mark Belkin explained how he’d created a successful functional skills learning programme to help ambulance staff progress in their careers.

Learners who had gained English and maths qualifications through the courses could now access the service’s development programme to become registered paramedics.

Mark set up the first functional skills course in April 2020, with a tutor from The College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London (CONEL).

Since then, there had been four more courses with more than 70 learners and a 94 per cent pass rate, he said.

As education consultant Tom Wilson pointed out in the discussion afterwards, this meant the pass rate was three times the England average

for English and maths.

UNISON Education Officer Jon Tennison set out how government skills policy could be used to help persuade more employers to support workplace learning.

Since skills policy is devolved to the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there were variations between different parts of the UK, Jon said.

In addition, there were variations within England as a result of the devolution of skills budgets to the 10 combined authorities in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and elsewhere.

However, all the different government bodies did share some common aspirations, such as improved careers advice and expanded numbers of apprenticeships, he said.

Jon pointed out that many more people could be asking their employer for time off to train than they do currently.

Although around 1 million people had exercised their right to request time to train since it came into effect in 2010, fewer people had been taking advantage of it since 2015, he said.

The updated UNISON Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning includes full details about how to make a formal request for time to train, and the timetable within which an employer has to respond (even if only to say No). *



Listening to what you want to learn

West Midlands members will be finding answers to questions about the menopause and cancer in new online sessions that form part of the region's member learning programme this year.



THE WEST MIDLANDS

education team are launching three new courses this year in response to feedback from members.

First up is a new online workshop running in March and again in October called Managing My Menopause.

"When you talk to members, the menopause does come up a lot, so we thought it would be good to have a course that would cover looking out for symptoms and dealing with them in the workplace," explains Area Organiser Marnie Baker, who leads on member learning in the region.

"A lot of people aren't aware that their employers may have menopause policies in place that mean

they could adjust their hours or make arrangements for flexible working. And if there aren't any policies in place, we hope the courses will raise awareness and encourage people to ask their branches to negotiate a menopause policy."

Organised by Ian Cooper at the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), the online sessions will be delivered by his colleague Julia Charlton.

They've been programmed for early evening so that participants can discuss their experiences in confidence from their homes.

Julia is also delivering the other two new online courses in the region this year – one on cancer

"We hope the courses will raise awareness and encourage people to ask their branches to negotiate a menopause policy"

awareness for women in October (tying in with breast cancer awareness month) and one for men in



SCHOOLS STAFF JOIN TO LEARN

Four free workshops for all school staff in the West Midlands helped members and non-members in the autumn gain crucial knowledge and skills in the autumn.

Delivered by The Open University (OU), the half-day workshops covered autism awareness; attachment in the early years; mental health awareness; and managing behaviour.

“As soon as the flyer went out to schools, we were inundated with applications,” says Marnie.

Two follow-up workshops during the spring half-term that are open only to members looked set to be fully booked as Ulearn went to press.

The workshops cover conflict management and special education needs and will be delivered by training provider 2Resolve.

By advertising the members-only workshops at the same time as the sessions open to all schools staff, the education team prompted many non-members who attended the open sessions to join the union in order to access the members-only follow-ons.

November, coinciding with Movember’s awareness-raising around prostate and testicular cancer.

The team decided to run separate sessions partly to address the specifics of the different types of cancer and partly because many men still tend to find it difficult to talk about their health issues.

As with the menopause sessions, the cancer awareness courses will run online in the early evening so that participants can contribute in confidence, away from their work environments.

“We’re very much responding to the needs of the members,” Marnie says. “We want to create a safe

environment where people can talk about what are potentially sensitive issues.”

Julia has already delivered the cancer awareness sessions in the North West, where they’ve proved very popular with members.

“If these are equally popular in the West Midlands, we’ll ensure we create more space to put more on,” Marnie says.

“UNISON College is committed to providing learning that’s relevant to members and these courses are all free to members, who might not be able to get any of this information from elsewhere.” *



Wales TUC General Secretary Shavanah Taj addressing the cost of living rally

Helping members survive the cost of living crisis

With soaring energy bills and austerity 2.0 making life so difficult for members, the Wales learning team organised an online event to signpost people to the wide range of specialist support that's available.

THE WALES UNION

Learning Fund (WULF) team have helped hundreds of members get information and advice to weather the cost of living crisis by putting together a very successful online event in October.

The wide array of specialist speakers were able to signpost participants to services that could help them with everything from household budgets to energy efficiency to planning for retirement.

While many of the 90-plus logons on the day were by individual members, several were from groups – Wrexham Branch shared the morning session with members before moving on to local in-person activities on the same afternoon.

Many people who couldn't attend on the day

have since watched the sessions by catching up on the WULF website, which is hosting edited versions of all the presentations.

In addition, Area Learning Development Organiser Jenny Griffin used the event to launch Money Matters, a new resource produced by the WULF team to help public service workers in Wales improve their money-managing skills.

Sandy Highfield from Cambrian Credit Union in north and mid Wales and Rizwan Shams from Cardiff and Vale Credit Union discussed how joining a credit union could benefit individual members and their local communities.

Scott Portman from Lighthouse Financial Advice explained how members could take control of their



finances by identifying effective savings and making and sticking to budgets.

Peter Hughes & Dylan McLellan from Nyth / Nest explained how members could access free, impartial advice and access to about home energy efficiency improvements for those who are eligible.

Lawrence Davies from the Money & Pensions Service looked at how members can plan to fund their retirement, and the Money Guiders programme that could help train union learning reps and other union reps to discuss money matters with members.

And Luke Young, who is the assistant director of Citizens Advice Cymru, explained how Advicelink Cymru could help members in need of quality assured advice on welfare benefits, debt, employment, education, housing, immigration and discrimination.



our breakout sessions in the afternoon,” says Jenny Griffin.

“And that’s the point, because we were doing this from a Wales-wide perspective but there are often local organisations you can get in touch with for help specifically for your area.”

Richard Speight is glad that more and more members will be benefiting from the event in the months ahead with the recordings all available online.

“We’ve now got a fantastic resource that we can use with branches running their own events on the cost of living crisis,” he says.

The idea for the event emerged after an all-staff meeting shortly after Dominic MacAskill took over as Cymru / Wales regional secretary in the summer.

It followed a fortnight after a major rally in Cardiff featuring Wales TUC General Secretary Shavanah Taj and Cynon Valley MP Beth Winter speaking alongside Dominic MacAskill.

A survey of UNISON members in Wales in the autumn revealed just how sharply many of them have suffered since the cost of living crisis kicked off.

Hundreds are using food banks and pawning possessions in their bid to keep their heads above water, while more than 1,000 have skipped meals in a bid to save money. *

CHECK ONLINE

* Watch the presentations from the Cost of Living Survival event: bit.ly/3Pm5HXo

* Download Money Matters: bit.ly/3FL4jdF

* Read the cost of living survey: bit.ly/3BuOdIY



“The event was a resounding success,” says Area Learning Development Organiser Richard Speight. “We had more than 90 people logged on but many more than that were watching because some branches were logged on with a room full of people.”

The event was designed so that individuals and branches could join the livestream for the whole duration or drop in to the individual sessions that would be most useful.

“It was fantastic that Wrexham Branch had their own local organisations coming in to speak to members directly, rather than attend

“We’ve now got a fantastic resource that we can use with branches running their own events on the cost of living crisis”



Black members take the lead

Two women from the Eastern Region Black members' committee helped deliver a session on leading discussions at the regional Black members' education weekend.

MORE THAN 30 BLACK

members developed their discussion leading skills at an interactive session during the Eastern Region Black members' education weekend in November.

The three-hour session was led by regional Black members committee members Firdy Findos and Sandra Okwara and Regional Organiser Winston Dorsett.

The members themselves had asked for training to help them deliver their own sessions in their branches and at Black members' events.

But as work and home commitments would make it challenging to take the five-day lay tutors' course, a shorter interactive session at the annual education weekend seemed be

the perfect solution.

Because of the large number of participants, the facilitators divided everyone into six smaller groups that could undertake most of the activities between themselves and then report back to the main group.

The session examined what makes a good learning experience (and what makes a bad one); why icebreaker activities are effective; and how to prepare effective session outlines in advance.

The participants were very positive about the session, Winston says. "People said they found it really valuable, really positive, really good to go through how to deliver a workshop for themselves," he says.

"A lot of them said they were going to go back and deliver a session in their branch or within their workplace on the anti-racism charter that the Black members committee developed

"People said they found it really valuable, really positive, really good to go through how to deliver a workshop for themselves"



“It’s good to see Black members developing and I want to try and do everything I can to deliver that”

in this region, which we discussed on the Friday afternoon of the weekend.”

Another topic participants said they were keen to lead branch discussions on was micro-aggressions, which was the theme of a session on the Sunday morning of the weekend.

Led by two Black members, former social worker and author Dian Campbell and Carol Johnson, who chairs the Bedfordshire Police Branch, the session followed on from a talk Dian gave

HELPING BRANCHES EMBED EQUALITY

Members promoting equality in the energy, transport and water industries and the Environment Agency found out more about how UNISON College could help them at the annual Business and Environment Equalities Seminar last summer.

The 40-plus members attending the weekend event were able to expand their knowledge at workshops on challenging racism; women’s rights; the Year of Disabled Workers; and trans allyship.

For the final session, Assistant Education Officer Kathleen Jowitt set out how the learning teams at in the regions and at UNISON Centre could help branches further embed equality in their workplaces.

UNISON College was already delivering key equality training for activists, including courses on equality in branches; challenging racism; and trans allyship, Kathleen said.

And the College was now offering advanced discrimination law training for experienced reps and branch officers dealing with complex casework.

“A big part of my focus was to say, ‘Now that you’ve heard from everyone at the seminar, what are you going to do to get the rest of your branch onboard?’” Kathleen says.

“It was very good to join the dots between Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) and UNISON College and what the service groups have been doing.”



at the 2021 educational weekend about her book, *Unconscious Bias: How to positively change recruitment, retention, promotion, and career-development within your organisation.*

That session covered definitions and experience of micro-aggressions; how to interrupt and address them; and how to resolve them (including self-care).

“Between the pair of them, they did it perfectly, so much so that I want them to come and do it with our team in the UNISON office – it was that good,” Winston says.

“I was a Black member myself before I started working for UNISON, so it’s good to see Black members developing and I want to try and do everything I can to deliver that.” *



British soldiers occupying
a German trench
during the Battle of the
Somme, July 2016



Uncovering the history on your family tree

Tracing our family histories can teach us about how people lived in days gone by, says Neil Rhodes, who was a union learning rep before he retired last year.

RETIRED UNION LEARNING

Rep Neil Rhodes led a well-attended interactive family history workshop for Yorkshire & Humberside Region during Learning at Work Week in May.

Neil, who retired as an education welfare officer last summer, shared some of the knowledge and skills he's developed researching his own family tree – which currently includes 142,000 people.

“I just keep finding out

more and more!” he laughs.

As well as using online sources like Ancestry and Findmypast, Neil's also done some digging in local archives as well.

“I've been to the family history sections in the libraries in Bradford and in Leeds and they've been really helpful,” he says.

It was the microfilm records of local newspapers in one of the local libraries that helped

Neil uncover the full story of a great-uncle who was killed in World War One.

“I found a photograph of him and the announcement of when he’d been reported missing in 1917,” he says.

But it took a whole year before he was officially presumed dead, he discovered. “It makes you think of the life his wife and mother had that year, not knowing where he was,” he says. “Even now, I feel myself getting emotional about it, so how must they have felt?”

Neil is fascinated by the social history that can be uncovered by tracing your ancestors.

Take the puzzle of the great-aunt of his who was buried in a joint plot with a man who wasn’t her husband.

The answer lay in the restrictive divorce laws at the turn of the 20th century, when she and her children

left the man she’d married.

Since divorce was only realistically available to members of high society until the laws were relaxed by the Matrimonial Causes Act in 1923, she couldn’t secure a legal separation in 1900.

So she wasn’t free to marry when she met someone else. Nevertheless, the couple spent the rest of the lives together – hence the different surnames above the plot they were buried in.

At the other end of the social scale, Neil has found a family link to the 19th century Tory MP and railway financier George Hudson, a man once so powerful he was known as ‘The Railway King’ until shady business practices forced him to leave the country to escape imprisonment (“Nothing changes!” Neil laughs).

For his online Learning at Work Week session, Neil tried to keep it as simple as possible. “I started off by saying, ‘Talk to your family and try to get as

much information as you can from there’,” he says.

“And then from what you get there, draw up your family tree, as much as you can know it, and then go and find the information that’s out there on the internet.”

Subscription-based sites like Ancestry or Findmypast are invaluable for people researching family history online, Neil told the participants.

“If you’re interested, they’re brilliant, because all the records are there, and they sometimes do free introductory offers,” he says.

As well as highlighting the help you can get from local libraries and archives, Neil recommended joining a family history group (he’s a member of three that between them cover most of the area where his family has lived).

Neil was happy with how his session went. “I was a bit nervous to start off with, but I thought it went pretty well and the people chipping in with their bits really added to it,” he says. “They were quite pleased with what I demonstrated and the information I was able to give them during the session.” *

“The family history sections in the libraries in Bradford and in Leeds have been really helpful”



Neil uncovered the full story of a great-uncle (left) who was killed in World War One



Newcastle City ULR
Louise Cameron



Newcastle City Branch have identified a group of potential new learning activists by surveying members about how they looked after their wellbeing over the pandemic.

Sharing skills, boosting learning

NEWCASTLE CITY

Branch ULR Louise Cameron conducted a learning survey with a difference in the autumn.

Louise had been inspired by the UNISON ULR training course undertaken earlier in the year – five years after she first became a learning rep.

“The training was the trigger for me: it gave me permission – I just hadn’t thought about a learning survey before,” she says.

Designed with the help of a small team in the branch, the survey focused on how members had boosted their mental health and wellbeing by learning new skills over lockdown.

Of the 65 members who completed the survey, 73 per

cent revealed they’d learned something new, and 24 per cent said Yes or Maybe about leading a workshop on their new hobby.

The survey also asked members how they felt about helping people learn in general – and the results were even more positive.

More than 50 per cent said they would be up for supporting other UNISON members with learning, with 24 per cent interested in finding out more about being a ULR.

In total, that meant the survey helped identify 20 more members who were open to becoming more active in the branch either by leading a workshop or training to become a ULR.

This was exactly what Louise had hoped would happen when she pitched the idea to Branch Education Coordinator Wendy Aitman.

“I went to see Wendy and I said, ‘I want to do a survey to find out how many more people need permission – like me – to be active in UNISON,’” she says.

Once Wendy and Branch Secretary Paul Gilroy gave her the green light, Louise formed her small ‘task and finish’ group to put the survey together.

As well as Louise and Wendy, the group included Lifelong Learning Coordinator Linda Slasor and Women’s Officer Caroline Collinson.

“The four of us came together and they supported me to put it all together – they were like my sounding board,” Louise says.

The short survey comprised three sections:

- * skills, hobbies, and interests
- * access to learning (optional)

“The training was the trigger for me: it gave me permission - I just hadn’t thought about a learning survey before”

* prize draw (with a prize of tickets to a women’s football match).

The branch emailed every member on the day they launched the survey in October, with a link to the document in Microsoft Forms. They also produced paper versions that Linda used in the Learning Zones.

Louise gave a presentation about the survey to the branch committee to encourage stewards to spread the word. And the task group produced a short video for the branch’s social media channels and wrote an article promoting the survey for the city council’s internal staff newsletter.

With the results in, the prize draw winner notified and a full report on the survey compiled for the branch, Louise was organising a meet-up for everyone interested in helping members with learning as Ulearn went to press.

“You have to strike while

ULR LOUISE BECOMES BRANCH CHAIR TO SPREAD LEARNING MESSAGE

Union Learning Rep Louise Cameron has taken over as chair of Newcastle City Branch to help spread the message about learning opportunities to even more members.

“Being active as a ULR gave me insight to how local branches support members and gave me the motivation to stand for branch chair,” she says.

“As I volunteer a lot of my time to UNISON, I wanted to make sure I continued putting my energy into promoting good quality education and make sure that learning is at the top of the agenda – becoming branch chair will support me to do this.”

It’s all a very far cry from her first experience of learning at school – which she hated. “I didn’t have any confidence – I thought I was rubbish,” she says.

That began to change when she started working on one of the Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) in the 1990s. (SSLPs later evolved into Sure Start Children’s Centres.)

“It was only when I was doing the Sure Start job, which was really building my confidence, that I started thinking, ‘Actually, I’m not daft, I’m not thick’ – you know, all those stigmas that you get,” she says.

That new-found confidence led her to enrol on an Open (multi-disciplinary) degree with The Open University (OU).

It meant six years of studying at the same time as holding down a full-time job and raising three children, the youngest of whom has autism and learning disabilities.

“A lot of the learning was done at night, when my husband had gone off to work on his night shift and the kids were in bed,” she recalls. “Looking back now, I think, ‘That was commitment!’”

the iron’s hot!” she says.

Overall, Louise is delighted with the outcome of the survey. “I think it was really worthwhile, because we’ve got some really good insight into what people

have been doing and we’ve got all these people who are interested in becoming more active on learning,” she says. “So yes, I’m chuffed to bits!” *



University staff launch menopause network

Three women activists are helping to drive real change for staff experiencing menopause at the University of Lincoln.

A HUGE SUCCESSFUL

Menopause at the Workplace event at the University of Lincoln last summer has led to the creation of a menopause staff network, changes to workplace practice and a new menopause policy.

Around 130 participants packed one of the lecture theatres on site for the 90-minute session, which was organised by the UNISON branch on campus in partnership with lecturers' union UCU and the university.

"I've never been to an event at the university – not just UNISON events but any event at the university – where so many staff have attended," says Branch Equality Officer Joy Knight, who put together the session

with Union Learning Rep Michelle Delury and Branch Chair Sue Partridge.

Michelle says running a joint event proved to be the right way to go. "We were aware from conversations with colleagues just how widespread this issue is and how many people have questions – not just women but mainly women," Michelle says.

"Our willingness to work with HR and with UCU really paid off – HR would be much more inclined to look at future suggestions much more positively because this has been such a success."

University Vice Chancellor Neal Juster opened the event with a short speech spelling out how the university supported the initiative.



"HR would be much more inclined to look at future suggestions much more positively because this has been such a success"

The two main speakers both came from Balance, the organisation behind the app and website of the same name that promotes greater understanding of the menopause among women, non-binary and trans people.

GP Dr Rebecca Lewis spoke about the clinical aspects of the menopause, while Balance Chief Executive Gaelle Lalahy set out how organisations can make themselves



menopause-friendly.

In the final 30 minutes, dozens of staff were able to ask questions about their symptoms and experiences and more stayed on afterwards to talk to Dr Lewis one-to-one.

“People queued up to ask questions because they had a qualified doctor in front of them – the Q&A could have gone on for hours!” says Sue.

Every UNISON member who attended got a free copy of *Preparing for the Perimenopause and Menopause*, the bestselling book by Balance founder Dr Louise Newson, paid for by the branch.

The many dozens who took part felt overwhelmingly positive about the event afterwards, Sue says.

“One of the women came back to us and said, ‘I’ve been suffering for years with symptoms I’d no idea were menopause-related but I’ve

been to my GP, I’ve got on a course of HRT and it’s changed my life’,” she says. “How many events can you say have literally changed people’s lives like that?”

The event prompted the launch of a menopause staff support network. “We have regular meet-ups and an online forum where we put up all the information we find,” Joy says.

“We had a coffee morning recently where we had a bake sale and we raised £100 for period poverty. It’s really started something – people really want to get together and share their experiences.”

The new network is already helping to initiate change. “There wasn’t anything on our staff system where you could include menopause symptoms when recording sick leave,” Joy says.

“But that’s now been added as a direct result of discussions at the staff support network,

which goes to show how the event is having a big impact in a short space of time.”

The next event the branch is planning will be targeted at men who work on campus. “Getting men onboard is a fundamental part of widening the conversation,” says Michelle.

The speaker will be from the Scottish Women’s Development Forum, someone Michelle got to hear give an excellent presentation about their new menopause toolkit last year, thanks to a tip from another UNISON learning rep.

And later this year, the university is launching its new menopause policy, which it’s drafted with the help of UNISON’s policy template (as well as other documents), as well as a guide for managers to accompany it.

“What Balance said to us was, ‘Don’t let the university draft a policy that sits on a shelf and no-one ever looks at’,” says Sue.

“And what we’ve seen is that they’ve drafted this new policy, which is needed, but they’re also making tangible changes, like adding menopause symptoms as something you can report on the sickness absence system and preparing training for managers.

“So they’ve started to make these changes within the organisation, which is what we wanted to see, so we think this has been a real win – we’re pretty pleased with ourselves!” ✨



Empowering women in the South West

Dozens of women from across the South West boosted their skills and prepared themselves for more UNISON activism at the regional women's conference.

EIGHTY WOMEN FROM

across the service groups took part in a range of learning workshops at the South West regional women's conference at Croyde Bay in October.

Entitled 'Empowered Women, Empower Women', the event offered all sorts of different learning opportunities.

As well as workshops covering menopause in the workplace, women's confidence and women in UNISON, there was a wellbeing crafting session where participants could make their own bath bombs and pebbles of empowerment.

In addition, Beth Bickerstaffe, Director of the Executive Office at UNISON Centre, gave a presentation on improving participation by members of under-represented groups. Sharon Foster from the regional women's committee spoke about women in public life.

And Tara Thomas, another member of the regional women's committee, offered an overview of The Year of Disabled Workers.

"It's genuinely one of the biggest events we organise for women in the region," says Regional Learning & Development Organiser (RLDO) Natalie Chadwick.

The event was designed to encourage more women from the region to play a more active role in the union.

"The women's conference is about trying to encourage women to have the confidence to step forward," Natalie says.

The regional leadership is keen to see many more regional committees led by women, given that women make up more than 80 per cent of the membership

in the South West.

Development is very much the aim of the event. "You had some activists who are already pretty active in their branches and they brought along new members," Natalie says.

"We prioritised registrations from members who had never been to an event with us before or not been to regional women's events."



HELPING NORTHERN IRELAND MEMBERS PROGRESS THEIR HEALTH CAREERS

More than 100 members in Northern Ireland are currently developing their careers in health and social care, thanks to the learning agreements between UNISON and the region's health and social care trusts.

The OU's K102 course, *Introducing Health and Social Care*, is the first step to university-level qualifications in nursing and social work as well as degrees in *Health & Social Care* and *Healthcare & Health Sciences*.

UNISON's learning agreements with each of Northern Ireland's five health and social care trusts mean that members who secure a place on the programme have paid release to attend their five two-hour tutorials, as well as UNISON's six three-hour study skills sessions and the union's project preparation day ahead of their final projects.

None of the 116 members currently enrolled on the programme have to fund the £1,000-plus course fees themselves. UNISON is able to cover the costs of some learners, while others are supported by their Trusts and some are eligible for full or partial grants from Student Finance NI.

UNISON member Lucille, who has an office job in one of the Trusts, applied for the K102 last year after enjoying the work she did with patients to help ease the staffing crisis during the early part of the pandemic.

"When that was through, I wanted to do more," she says. "I'd actually looked at OU Nursing and realised I didn't have the qualifications, so when the K102 came up through the Trust, I immediately applied for it."

UNISON's partnership with the Trust has made all the difference, she says. "It's something I wouldn't have been able to afford myself – it means I can stay in my job, I can get release – the Trust even pays for your travel to and from wherever you have to go," she says.

With this year's Women's Conference scheduled to take place in the region, Natalie is hopeful that more of the participants from the regional women's conference put themselves forward as delegates from their branches or as visitors.

"We had lots of conversations about the fact that we've got Women's Conference in Bournemouth this year, so I hope a lot of women from our region will go back to their branches and discuss attending either as a delegate or as a visitor," Natalie says.

"It just shows how these kind of events represent a really big learning opportunity for people wanting to learn for themselves but also wanting to learn about the union's structures and getting more active." *





Developing our trans allies

LGBT+ and trans activists have worked with Learning and Organising Services to create a ground-breaking new course to help members support trans equality.

MORE THAN 100

are putting into action what they've learned from the new course, How To Be A Good Trans Ally.

Launched last summer as part of the union's trans equality campaign, the course is designed to help participants create more trans-inclusive workplaces.

"The course looks at the role of a trans ally, why it's

needed and what you can do to promote trans equality in your workplace and in wider society," explains Education Officer Sarah Hayes.

Designed for members as well as branch activists, the half-day course aims to equip participants with the data, case studies and arguments they need to challenge transphobia and argue for trans and non-binary rights.

It includes a powerful short film and some real-life case studies, as well as opportunities for small-group discussions.

"We're keen to make sure participants don't just attend the workshop and then that's it," says Sarah.

"We want to ensure they're linked in with the LGBT+ national self-organised group and the

Trans Caucus to help them make progress as part of the trans equality campaign.”

Participants are asked to make sure that their employers have adopted effective policies for trans and non-binary staff, using the template policies UNISON has put together.

“Tracking is really important for us, so we’re following up with participants to find out what experiences they’ve had trying to implement our inclusive policies and practices,” Sarah says.

The course has proved incredibly popular since it was originally piloted in Greater London last summer. The first national course had to be run six times to accommodate everyone who wanted to take part.

It’s also been delivered to the National Executive

Council (NEC) and on regional policy weekends and is now being rolled out across the union through the regions’ learning programmes.

The course was jointly written by Learning and Organising Services (LAOS), the LGBT+ Self-Organised Group (SOG) and the Trans Caucus.

It’s designed to be facilitated by or with a trans activist whenever it runs, since they can share their lived experience in the discussions, if they choose to.

“People have really welcomed this course,” Sarah says. “They’ve told us how powerful it is and how vital and important it is as part of our trans equality campaign and our overall equality campaigning.”

One participant called the course “informative and thought-provoking”; another said it was “Invaluable”; and a third reported it had given them the “tools and ideas to confronting transphobic comments”.

UNISON’s trans equality campaign aims to challenge the immense hostility trans and non-binary people are experiencing in the mainstream media and on social media, as well as build more inclusive workplaces.

“Over the past approximately six years, the

CHECK ONLINE

* Download the UNISON factsheet *Why Pronouns Are Important* from: bit.ly/3INjBAI

* Download the UNISON factsheet *Transgender Workers’ Rights* from: bit.ly/3XfrUK0

* Download the UNISON trans equality model policy from: bit.ly/3ZAT6nK

* For more information on the trans equality campaign, get in touch with the national LGBT+ team via: out@unison.co.uk

“We’re following up with participants to find out what experiences they’ve had trying to implement our inclusive policies and practices”

UK has become home to one of the most coordinated and well-known anti-gender mobilisations in the world,” the international trans advocacy group GATE concluded in its 2022 report, *Mapping Anti-Gender Movement in the UK*.

This mobilisation was not restricted to turning back the clock on trans and non-binary rights, GATE warned.

“Anti-trans rights attacks in the UK have also contributed to conditions that could place wider rights at risk, in the areas of: LGBTIQ+ inclusive education, conversion therapy, and reproductive rights.” *



Speaking up for private ambulance workers

Keith McLeod is getting his co-workers the pay and conditions they deserve, thanks to training as a rep with UNISON.



PRIVATE AMBULANCE

driver Keith McLeod is using what he's learned while training as a UNISON rep to get a better deal for staff where he works – even though his employers don't yet recognise the union.

London-based Keith trained as a rep in 2019, after private operator Falck took over the ambulance contract from DHL.

The new contractors were trying to impose lower pay and worse conditions on the staff – in defiance of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE).

That's when London Ambulance Service Branch

UNISON rep Keith McLeod

Education Officer Mark Belkin suggested Keith enrol on UNISON's five-day in-person Organising Steward course to help secure what staff were entitled to.

The two of them had met because Mark was working on a UNISON London Region project at the time, supporting members in private contractors campaigning for union recognition.

Because Falck don't

“The training gave us the guideline we needed for challenging the company who were trying to pay us less than we were entitled to”

recognise UNISON, they wouldn't give Keith paid time off to train – so he booked annual leave to take the course instead.

“The training gave us the guideline we needed for challenging the company who were trying to pay us less than we were entitled to,” Keith says.

“That's where I learned your payslip can be your proof of income – once you've got something in black and white, they can't deny the fact.”

Keith used what he learned on the course to write a letter to management explaining why they were entitled to their previous pay rates under the law.

“Nobody wanted to put their names on the letter to management, so I did – and in three weeks, we got a response – and for me, that's kind of quick!” he says.

Whether he's arguing for the correct pay or defending a co-worker on a disciplinary, Keith doesn't let the company use the lack of a recognition agreement as a pretext for avoiding the union point of view.

“Most companies' excuse is, ‘We don't recognise you as UNISON’ and that's how they sidetrack us,” he says. “But I'm thinking, ‘No, you can't do that to me, let's get it out on the table’.”

Last year, Keith expanded his industrial relations

“Keith has really taken to being a steward: he's seen as the UNISON rep and he's got workers a pay rise”

knowledge by completing the TUC's 10-week employment rights course – once again booking annual leave so he could take part.

“We did that course in a classroom, which was pretty cool – I got to meet other colleagues, other unions, and the course was really good,” he says.

As well as learning more that could help in his UNISON role, Keith realised that what he's had to deal with over the past three years meant that many of the other reps were looking to him for his experience.

“When we started to speak about TUPE, I'd already done that, so I used that as my presentation,” he says. “When we were talking about negotiating

skills, I could explain what I learned. I realised every learning curve I've been through has been a plus.”

Mark Belkin is full of praise for what Keith has achieved at the company despite the lack of union recognition.

“Keith has really taken to being a steward: he's seen as the UNISON rep and he's got workers a pay rise,” he says. “He's done a fantastic job on his own that he should get more recognition for – I'm really proud of him.”

Although the company has agreed in principle that Keith should be able to undertake training for his role, they recently turned down his first request for time off to attend a course on the grounds that equal rights training wouldn't benefit the company.

“Even though they're saying I've got the leeway, they're still putting on the brakes,” Keith says. “The company don't want me to learn too much because the more I learn, the more challenging I'm going to become!”

But he's completely undeterred: he'll be booking himself on more courses as soon as the new holiday years kicks off.

“I can't wait because when my holiday starts back again, I'll be back on more training and I'm going to come back twice as hard, twice as sharp and ready for the action!” Keith says. ✨



Marking the Year of Disabled Workers



A year-long programme of webinars helped South East members and activists learn more about some of the key issues facing disabled people in the region.

DOZENS OF MEMBERS

in the South East expanded their knowledge of disability through a programme of monthly webinars to mark UNISON's Year of Disabled Workers.

It was the regional disabled members' committee who suggested the webinars as part of the Year of Disabled Workers action plan they drew up in 2021 during their online training programme.

Regional Learning & Development Organiser Abbey Dunn and Area Organisers Liz Woodhouse and Vicki Gibbs then put together the webinars with the aim of reaching

“We created a nice, intimate atmosphere where people felt safe to talk about stuff if they wanted to, and the feedback was always good”

as many members and activists as possible.

“We wanted to do something that would be accessible, so people could pop in at lunchtime and listen, and do something that would really bring disability to the forefront of what we were doing every month,” Abbey says.

The team also focused on making the webinars as interactive as possible. “We pitched them so there was always plenty of discussion and encouraged people to ask questions as we went along,” Liz says.

“We created a nice, intimate atmosphere where people felt safe to talk about stuff if they wanted to, and the feedback was always good – people were always very appreciative.”

The sessions covered: support for disabled



members working from home; cancer in the workplace; Access to Work; epilepsy; autism; asthma; learning disabilities; long Covid; endometriosis; dementia; mental health; and the disability pay gap.

The team cross-referenced the topics with an equality calendar that Vicki had put together in 2021, which included all the different awareness days, weeks and months dedicated to different equality issues.

“Most of them fitted in with something that was happening nationally or internationally,” Abbey says. “We did endometriosis awareness in August, for example, because August is endometriosis awareness month.”

Making those connections helped promote engagement with the programme. “It’s

“The webinars are there for us to use again, if a branch wants a talk on any of those subjects, we can deliver it”

a talking point: people can look up what UNISON are doing for diabetes awareness and there is something – our webinar – so it ties in nicely,” Abbey says.

Abbey and Vicki wrote the webinars between them and then Abbey, Vicki and Liz shared presenting duties, while Jenny Gautier looked after tech support at the sessions.

In addition, regional disabled members’ committee chair Sarah Barwick also attended many of the webinars and

joined the discussions. “It was really good to have her there, particularly if there were wider questions she could answer about how to get involved,” Abbey says.

The presenters themselves were able to expand their own knowledge of the issues, thanks to members and reps opening up about their own experiences at the sessions.

“You learn something new by delivering a webinar and by picking things up from listening to other people’s experiences,” Liz says.

Having the portfolio of 12 webinars means that the team can now deliver presentations on any of the topics they covered in the series, Liz adds.

“The webinars are there for us to use again,” she says. “If a branch wants a talk on any of those subjects, we can deliver it,” she says.

The team also used the material from the disability pay gap webinar as the basis for a workshop session at the latest regional equality conference, while Abbey delivered an in-person workshop for a branch on long Covid that was based on one of the sessions.

This year, the regional team are putting together a similar webinar series to help mark UNISON’s Year of Black Workers. *



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Helping Black members move on up

A new course in Yorkshire & Humberside is encouraging Black members take action to develop their careers.

DOZENS OF BLACK

members in Yorkshire & Humberside have made action plans to progress their careers with the help of the popular Black Leadership courses in the region.

Delivered by independent trainer Karol Thornton, the half-day course looks at Black heroes and heroines in the region; the traits of great leaders; barriers in the workplace; alternative sources of support and development;

and imposter syndrome.

When Regional Learning and Development Organiser (RLDO) Rose Bent first advertised the online course in November, it was so over-subscribed that she immediately scheduled two more to accommodate everyone who wanted to take part.

"I'd been wanting to do a Black leadership course for a while, so with the national union running leadership courses for Black activists and for women

activists, I thought now's the time to put the feelers out and see whether this was a course Black members might be interested in – and they most definitely are," says Rose.

Rose and Karol asked all participants to complete a skills checklist before the session, to reflect on their strengths, including their transferable skills.

They also asked them to research three named high-profile members of the Black

community in the region to prepare for a discussion at the beginning of the course.

The trio included communications consultant Susan Pitter, who has played a key role in Black cultural events such as Leeds West Indian Carnival and history projects such as the Eulogy Project, which celebrated the lives, heritage and contribution of the Windrush generation in the city.

“When I was at school, Susan was a science technician,” Karol recalls. “But she’s built a career as a communications consultant and has gone on to be held in high esteem in the Black community, so I picked her out as somebody people would get some energy from and resonate with.”

Karol creates a safe space where participants can share experiences and talk about the impact of different forms at racism at work like being undervalued, missing out on support and getting overlooked

“Karol creates a safe space where participants can share experiences”

for development opportunities.

“There’s a lot of pain out there, a lot of challenges, a need to share those experiences in the group chats,” Karol says.

But his focus is on supporting people to identify what they can do to overcome the barriers they face.

“I’m passionate about developing people and I’m someone who puts that high challenge in there – it’s not about cruise control when we come to work, we need challenge to motivate us and stimulate us,” Karol says.

Karol encourages participants to think of alternative routes to professional development if they’re not getting the support they should from their line managers.

“What’s stopping you setting up a profile on LinkedIn? What’s stopping you setting up on social media? Do you know you can get training on these platforms?” he asks.

But setting up profiles has to be followed up with activity and engagement on the platforms, he says.

“You’ve got to be proactively engaging and putting up content so people can see you,” he says. “I get work contracts because managers will see a piece of work and then I’ll get a private message, so you get some traction going and start moving forwards.”



Karol leads a session with young people in Bradford

At the end of the sessions, Karol asks participants to set three goals for their development – one for the next week; one for three months’ time; and one for six months’ time.

Rose is following up with everyone to check in on their medium and long-term goals as and when the dates come round.

“I will be having that conversation with them one-to-one about them developing themselves, talking about being more involved in their branch and signposting them to the courses they can do through UNISON,” Rose says.

Follow-up like this can make all the difference, Karol says. “There’s something about having somebody chase you up like that – that somebody is taking your ideas, your aspirations, your dreams seriously, that they mean something,” he says.

Rose and Karol are looking to set up an in-person one-day course later this year, using some of the feedback they collected from participants in the sessions. *



Training the next generation

Young members in Wales asked for help with developing leadership skills. So the organisers of last year's young members' weekend organised a course for them.

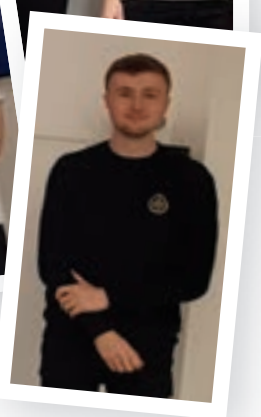
MORE THAN A DOZEN

young members in Wales learned leadership skills that will help them progress in work and in UNISON during a session at the regional young members' weekend in November.

It was young members themselves who had asked for a workshop on leadership skills in a survey before the event run by Area Organiser Tom Hemmings.

There was also a session on employment law, which was the second most popular topic in the poll.

The leadership session was delivered by development consultant Hazel Perrett, using some of the material she originally developed as part of a Wales Union



Learning Fund (WULF) project three years ago.

The original programme, called The Aspiring Manager, was designed to help staff in Ceredigion County Council prepare for team leadership roles during a significant change process at the local authority.

The course has been so successful that it's since been run at 60 per cent of county councils across Wales.

Since Hazel had just three hours with the young members, around one-third of the time she would have when delivering for local authority staff, she prioritised the topics she thought would

“I would say my input was about 40 per cent and their contribution, their discovery and their discussion was about 60 per cent”

be most useful for them.

“My approach was, ‘You’re going to be speaking for UNISON and communicating with people of all different levels, so I’m going to give you some self-awareness tools and some tips and techniques,’” she says.

Hazel focused on different leadership styles; communications preferences (using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator tool); and managing in agile working environments.

The session was very interactive, as Hazel was keen to hear from the participants about their experiences. “I would say my input was about 40 per cent and their contribution, their discovery and their discussion was about 60 per cent,” she says.

The session went down well with the participants, Hazel says. “A couple of them said, ‘I’ve got to think about this because it’s something I’ve never considered’ and one young woman said, ‘I think this will give me a bit more confidence in the future,’” she says.

And the material was equally relevant to one of the participants who is currently undertaking a professional qualification, as well. “She said, ‘This is going to help me with my assignments,’ so it worked as continuous professional development

“This is the added value that the learning agenda brings to different groups of members and the union overall”

as well,” Hazel says.

At the end of the session, the young members discussed how they could build on the new knowledge and skills they developed at the session next year.

“They were asking about a professional qualification that would give them a step up in team leading, so I suggested an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) Level 2 might work for them,” Hazel says.

They’re also looking into learning through onsite visits to places like the Big Pit National Coal Museum in Monmouthshire, which includes the trade union history of the Welsh coal industry, and the Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Festival, the trade union festival in the West Country.

Tom Hemmings, who helped put together the whole weekend, says most of the participants found the learning elements useful.

CHECK ONLINE

* For more information on learning and development: www.perrettandbrown.co.uk

“Overall, I got a really positive response from the majority of the members and the group found the leadership session really useful and really informative,” he says.

“They could see how they use the tools on everyday tasks but also how they could use them to get more involved in their branches or the self-organised groups (SOGs).”

Area Learning Development Organiser Richard Speight says that the young members’ leadership session demonstrates the wider impact of the WULF project on what UNISON can offer to members.

“This was a session adapted from a course developed for the WULF project that’s been delivered in local authority settings across the country and now to young members,” he says.

“This is the added value that the learning agenda brings to different groups of members and the union overall.” *



Recycling centre gets a restart



Members at Bristol Waste Company will be learning together again this year for the first time since the pandemic.

UNISON LEARNING REP

Andy Taylor re-launched learning activity at the Bristol Waste Company by running a learning survey in the autumn.

Although there is a learning agreement in place and a training suite on site, there had been very little learning underway since the pandemic.

So Andy decided to conduct a survey and use the results to build a new learning programme this year.

But he didn't get many paper surveys returned in the workplace and the email circular using the UNISON membership database didn't get much traction either.

That's when Regional Learning & Development Organiser (RLDO) Natalie



Andy Taylor promoting the learning survey

Chadwick suggested they give the survey a bit more of a fanfare.

They decided to set up a UNISON stall in the staff

room at the recycling centre one day in October. But they knew they would need a little something extra to drum up more interest.

Their secret weapon? A well-known brand of sausage roll. Andy knew that would be the hot snack his co-workers wouldn't ignore.

And he was right. By the end of the day, not only had they collected dozens of completed surveys – they'd also signed up several new members as well.

“Once we got talking to them about how we want to get the employer to allocate some time for them to learn, and what they would want to do, they understood perfectly why Andy was asking the questions in the learning survey and why were there as a union to talk

to them,” Natalie says.

“We did a little bit of a double act, talking to people about joining the union, which was great, and we ended up with a few new members on the day.”

Digital skills and mental health will be at the centre of a plan of learning that the union is proposing to the employer later this year, since those two topics were most popular in the survey.

Staff want to improve their digital skills so they can feel more confident with the handheld devices they use out on their routes and in accessing their pay and annual leave systems that have been moved online.

They’re also keen to improve their understanding of mental health, as the workplace culture hasn’t tended to be open and supportive about those issues up to now.

Natalie is looking forward re-launching the learning programme on site and helping members gain the skills they want and need.

“Andy is pretty determined and he’s done some fantastic learning there in the past, so we think if the employer can see the benefit – which I’m sure they will – there’s no reason why it can’t be done again,” Natalie says. ✨

HELPING MEMBERS WITH THEIR MONEY

The Money Charity has helped dozens of members in the South West better manage their money, stay on top of their finances and plan for the future by running its popular one-hour webinar run four times in the region.

“Branches have seen the webinar as a really good opportunity to show their members how the union can support them with learning,” says Regional Learning & Development Organiser (RLDO) Natalie Chadwick.

The University of Bath Branch organised a hybrid event, where some members watched the webinar as a group on campus while others dialled in from their individual homes.

And police branches that have run the webinar have opened it up to non-members and successfully used it as a recruitment tool.

The session doesn’t offer financial advice: it’s designed to help members deal with the stress caused by common financial challenges like running out of money and losing track of household budgets.

Everyone who takes part also gets a resource pack that they can use as a reference guide to help improve their money-management.

As well as learning new money-management skills from financial wellbeing specialist Justine Piercey, who presents the webinar, members have been supporting each other with tips and suggestions in the chat function in every session.

“Members are bit more open to talking about things in the Q&A at the end because we don’t record the sessions,” Natalie says.

“Whenever somebody is brave enough to say they have a particular problem, other people will say they wanted help with exactly the same thing, so the sessions are really supportive.”



Helping members organise for themselves



Nursery workers in Knowsley are campaigning to get a better deal a work with the help of a trio of activists who took part in last year's North West Organising Academy.

KNOWSLEY BRANCH

activists are helping nursery workers campaign for better pay and union recognition with the knowledge and skills they gained on the North West Organising Academy last year.

Assistant Branch Secretary Paula Carlyle, Health and Safety Officer Karen Greer and Equalities Officer Sharron Nicoll took part in the programme alongside half a dozen other activists from local government and two from police branches in the region.

The Organising Academy is built around five residential weekends spread over 12 months, with participants also undertaking a branch-based organising project over the course of the year.

"We take a step-by-step

"We considered ourselves a really well organised branch but we've still learned a lot from the Organising Academy"

approach to organising," explains Education Officer Bob Kelly, who delivers the programme himself.

"We teach people the skills they can use when they go back to their branches, and then when we come back to the next weekend, they tell us about what

they've been doing."

Each activist is also paired with a mentor they can approach for help, and everyone joined a dedicated WhatsApp group to exchange information, ideas and support while they were on the course – and beyond.

Trying to help nursery staff secure a better deal was something Knowsley Branch had been thinking about for some time, Paula says.

"We've been trying to organise in the under-fives sector for several years," she says. "What the Organising Academy has done is given us that focus to go, 'This is what we need to do'."

Even branches like Knowsley that already prioritise organising can benefit from taking part in a programme like the North West's, Paula believes.

"We considered ourselves a really well organised branch but we've still learned



CHECK ONLINE

- * Watch Jane McAlevey's speech to Skills for Strength 2016: <https://youtu.be/5FcBNwQsIX8>
- * Find out more about the Organising for Power programme: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/o4p>

a lot from the Organising Academy," she says.

Paula found the session on charting workplaces exceptionally useful for the nursery workplaces project.

"Mapping is where you draw up a list of where your members are and how many of them you've got," she explains.

"Charting is more about getting to know the individual members, finding out what makes them tick – who are the people who are sympathetic, who might be hostile, who's the person people trust."

Putting that knowledge into practice has made all the difference, Paula says. "It teaches a lot about how to help members do it for themselves – and they're always the most successful campaigns," she says.

Participants were also able to take part in the international online programme Organising for Power, designed and

delivered by US union organiser, writer and academic Jane McAlevey in conjunction with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Germany.

Jane was, in fact, part of the reason Paula enrolled on the Organising Academy in the first place. "A few years ago, I was speaking to a colleague who'd attended the North West Skills for Strength event in 2016, and they told me about a speaker they'd heard there called Jane McAlevey," Paula recalls.

"So when I came home, I googled Jane and bought a couple of her books and read them. I passed them on to our Branch Secretary James Robinson, who also read them. And it's from there that we put her organising approach into action in the branch."

Learning together with other like-minded activists is part of what made the Academy a success, Paula says.

"Another lovely thing about

meeting with other people who get the organising approach over a 12-month period is that you become a really close-knit group," she says.

"And we have the WhatsApp group where we'll ask each other questions and bounce ideas around – I think that'll be a really good resource even now we've finished the academy."

As a relatively late starter as a UNISON activist (she was 38 years old when she first became a rep), Paula relished the chance to learn more about the trade union history she didn't know.

"That was particularly good," she says. "Bob Kelly is like an encyclopaedia!"

Bob himself is pleased with the outcomes of the latest Organising Academy. "It's definitely been a success because the branch projects have worked, we've got new activists involved, and a couple of people have taken on bigger roles in their branches and one has become a UNISON Local Organiser," he says. *



Developing new women and Black leaders

Two pilot leadership skills programmes have helped women and Black members progress in the union.



“I think the key thing is creating that opportunity to bring people together”

THE FIRST COHORTS OF

women and Black members on the pilot Developing Your Leadership Skills programmes have gained the knowledge, skills and confidence to play a bigger role in the union’s regional and national decision-making bodies.

“The aim for UNISON is that we can promote and support women and Black members throughout our structures and throughout the whole of the union,” says Education Officer Sarah Hayes.

The five-month pilots ran over the autumn and winter, with four virtual modules bookended by opening and closing sessions that were held in-person at UNISON Centre.

Both programmes have had significant impact on the members who took part (roughly 10 people on each course), Sarah says.

“We asked participants initially about their confidence, whether they saw themselves as leaders, and what they were planning for themselves in terms of coming on the course,” Sarah says.

“And it didn’t take long before people were surpassing their original plans: we’ve had people getting involved in regional and national structures, people really thinking about their own roles in UNISON and people thinking about their careers.”

Both sets of participants quickly bonded with

each other and worked closely together throughout the pilots.

“Both cohorts created fantastic groups within themselves and were really supporting each other – and that’s what we want to maintain,” Sarah says.

Throughout the courses, each participant worked with their own individual supporter, who was on hand to answer questions and provide encouragement.

“By being there throughout the course and beyond, we hope the supporters will be



SUPPORTING OUR ORGANISING CULTURE

Thirty experienced activists are helping develop UNISON's organising culture after taking part in the first National Organising School last year.

"Running the course nationally allowed for sharing good practice between the different regions, seeing what they all have in common and the way they do some things differently," says Education Officer Sarah Hayes.

The course opened and closed with in-person sessions, with four virtual modules in between.

In the opening session, Assistant General Secretary, Kevan Nelson, who heads the Organising and Recruitment Strategy Development (ORSRD) project, gave an overview of the union's organising agenda.

In the second session, Online to Offline Strategy Group Deputy Director Bianka Nora and other international and UK speakers examined the most effective ways of blending digital and face-to-face organising strategies.

Later sessions examined effective integration of all union voices in organising campaigns; the new Branch Support and Organising Fund; member engagement; phone banking; maximising the potential of social media; building the union; and sustainable organising.

Many activists said afterwards that taking part had given them the tools to influence and deliver organising in their regions.

"The opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues from across the country was a real benefit of the course," one participant said. "On top of that, the opportunity to hear from and talk to leading organisers within the union movement and within UNISON itself was particularly valuable."

Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) are drawing up templates to help strengthen regional organising training.

"We're hoping that the templates and recommendations that we share with them can be incorporated into their already fantastic programmes to maximise our organising strength across the union," Sarah says.

able to make a sustained difference to the participants and hopefully get a lot out of that themselves," Sarah says.

Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) will be circulating advice about running the programme at regional level after completing the evaluation of the pilots.

"We'll evaluate what's worked and what hasn't worked so we can create templates, guidance and recommendations for the regions to run their own regional development programmes," Sarah says.

"I think the key thing is creating that opportunity to bring people together, finding fantastic speakers and creating lots of opportunities for discussion." *



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**Union learning rep
Demessew Shiferaw**

Building good workplaces

After leading a lunch and learn session looking at good workplaces, new ULR Demessew Shiferaw has drafted a learning agreement he's hoping to get adopted at his NHS Trust.

UNION LEARNING REP

Demessew Shiferaw organised and delivered a lunch and learn session for co-workers at South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust to examine what makes a good workplace.

Demessew, who is an employment specialist and qualified careers adviser at the Trust, trained as a ULR in 2021 after taking part in Lost in UNISON, the introductory course that helps members interested in becoming more active in the union.

"My job involves helping people into employment

and learning as well so I thought I had something to offer," he says.

"I found out that the branch had never had a learning rep in the past, so there was a gap there and I jumped on it."

Demessew got the idea about running a lunch and learn from one of the online Learning Cafés for activists interested in learning and education run by Learning and Organising Services (LAOS).

"I'm interested in workplace issues and employment issues in my work, so I read a parliamentary report about good work and part of

the Matthew Taylor report from 2017 about zero hours contracts and the gig economy,” he says.

“I asked my branch mentor, Simon, if we could do the session together, so I presented what good work is according to those research papers, and Simon helped me assess how the Trust is in terms of the factors they outlined – it was teamwork.”

Half a dozen colleagues took part in the session in October, which included a lively discussion about what people liked about working at the Trust and what changes could be made to further improve it.

Demessew has also drafted a learning agreement with the help of UNISON’s online resources. “That’s the next challenge for me, to get that signed and implemented,” he says.

He’s also recently completed

“I found out that the branch had never had a learning rep in the past, so there was a gap there and I jumped on it”

HIGHLANDS MEMBERS GET TO GRIPS WITH GOOGLE TOOLS

A group of older workers from across the Highlands and Islands with limited IT skills learned their way round some of Google’s key productivity tools in an online course last summer.

Participants learned how to:

- * create documents in Google Docs, the online word processor that allows different people to work together remotely on the same document
- * get started with scheduling via Google Calendar
- * use the free cloud-based storage service Google Drive
- * use Google Assistant, the company’s equivalent of Amazon’s Alexa and Apple’s Siri
- * host virtual meetings using Google Meet, which works similarly to Zoom and Microsoft Teams
- * extend Google Chrome’s functionality with Google Extensions
- * use the free, web-based email application, Gmail.

Delivered by the Trade Union Education Centre at City of Glasgow College, the Work Smarter with Google Tools course was well received by the participants.

“What I learned today was fantastic and I certainly will be using Google much more,” commented one learner. “The tutor was excellent and helpful I really enjoyed this course and would recommend it to others.”

And another participant said: “I’d certainly recommend this course to others – excellent delivery.”

his training as a UNISON steward (Simon started mentoring him as part of that course) and is also enrolled on a Level 3 Team Leading apprenticeship at the trust, so he has a lot of calls on his time, in addition to his job.

“I want to keep my goals realistic for UNISON so I don’t over-stretch myself,” he says. *

CHECK ONLINE

- * Good work: Policy and research on the quality of work in the UK: bit.ly/3jNMB0E
- * Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices: bit.ly/3WHFT19



Library staff learn BSL basics

The British Sign Language tasters that ULR Maxine Clarke organised for Derbyshire library workers are helping make their service more accessible to deaf people.

FORTY MEMBERS

across Derbyshire took part in three British Sign Language (BSL) taster sessions organised by Union Learning Rep Maxine Clarke in October.

One workshop was at Ilkeston library in the south of the county, while the other two (one morning, one afternoon) took place in Chesterfield library in the north-east of the county.

While most of the participants were library staff, members attended

“Our trainer was a really good communicator with a great sense of humour and everyone who took part really enjoyed it”

from a wide range of workplaces as the tasters were advertised to members across Derbyshire.

Maxine put together the three sessions with the help of Local Organisers Sean Kelly and Matt Dwyer and Branch Convenor John Cowings.

During Learning at Work Week (LaWW) in May, Maxine talked to her colleagues at Chesterfield library to find out what they were most interested in learning, and sign language turned out to be the most popular.

“We’d had a couple of

recent regular visitors to the library who were deaf and staff had had difficulty communicating with them,” Maxine explains.

“They felt they were not being as accessible to people in those communities and wanted to improve their communications with them.”

When the employer said there was no budget to fund a sign language course, Maxine turned to her branch to see if UNISON could cover the costs instead.

Once she’d secured funding for the taster sessions from the union, the library service director agreed the council would release staff and provide the venues.

All three tasters were delivered by a trainer from Nottinghamshire Deaf Society, who had previously delivered training for the union in the region.

“Simon our trainer was a really good communicator with a great sense of humour and everyone who took part really enjoyed it,” says Maxine. “I took part in the afternoon session in Chesterfield and I thought it was absolutely excellent.”

Maxine is now looking into Stage 1 Sign Language training, as more than half of the people who took part in the taster were interested in a formal qualification. *

EARLY YEARS STAFF GET GOING WITH MAKATON

Early years workers and other members were introduced to Makaton signing for babies and families at two pilot courses at the end of last year.

Makaton is the system that uses speaking with signing and pictures to help children and adults who have difficulty understanding and speaking.

“Of the 23 members on the courses, there was a high percentage of early years workers because we aimed it at them,” says Learning and Workforce Development Officer Stevie Milward. “But there were also some members who have interaction with children as part of other jobs.”

The online course was delivered by a trainer recommended by The Makaton Charity, the organisation Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) has worked with before.

Over the course of two-and-a-half hours, participants learned around 30 signs that are very useful for anyone working with or communicating with babies and young children, as well as some songs.

Since the pilot, Stevie’s inbox has been filling up with emails from participants who had such a positive experience that they’re keen for more.

“The feedback has been amazing – thank you for the course, the tutor was excellent, so useful,” Stevie says. “And almost every email says they’d like to learn more and could I put them on a list if we do any more training?”

Stevie’s currently looking into the costs and the logistics of offering more advanced Makaton courses, since the interest is so clear.

“We always try to look at how members’ learning needs are evolving, and Makaton has been becoming much more familiar to people in the last few years, which is why we piloted this course,” she says.



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Making your voices heard

UNISON activists are learning how to write motions that stand the best chance of reaching the conference floor.

WHEN A MEMBER WANTS

UNISON to do something, all they have to do is table a motion at a branch meeting, win the vote and then follow its progress through the union's democratic structures.

But it's not always that simple.

Some motions never reach the conference floor – not because the union isn't interested but because the way they're written means they're ruled 'out of

order' (they don't meet the criteria to get debated).

That's why UNISON College has started delivering a short interactive course on motion writing, to help members and branches avoid some of the pitfalls that prevent some motions from ever reaching the relevant conference floor.

South East Regional Education Officer (REO) Sam Raymond, who's delivered the course in the region, knows how frustrating this

“They had thought they had to have flair and emotion in their motions, when that was actually detracting from them”

can be, as she can well remember how confused she was attending her first union conference in the 1980s.

“I was dropped in the deep end – it was interesting but you didn't know what was going on!” she says. “I spent the first two hours gazing around with my mouth open thinking, ‘I don't understand this!’”

That's why Sam has been

very happy to deliver the motion-writing course to branches in the South East. “I don’t want other people to have that experience I had,” she says.

The course starts off by going back to basics, discussing what is and what isn’t a motion, and looks in-depth at the union’s structure to help people understand why, for example, a motion on local government pay wouldn’t be accepted for debate at National Delegate Conference (because it’s a service group issue, rather than a national issue relevant to all members).

The course also gives people the chance to look at why motions have or haven’t been accepted for debate in the past.

Retired members in the South East found that very helpful when Learning and Workforce Development Officer Stevie Milward delivered the course for them in October.

“What had been problematic in the past was that they’d asked for things that weren’t in the power of a particular conference, so we took all of their mistakes and talked through them,” Stevie says.

“Then we looked at exemplar motions – both positive and negative – and I asked them to tell me which ones were good and which ones were not:

we were quite forensic.”

Stevie also showed her group how their motions didn’t need the expressive and emotional language they thought they did.

“They’re very passionate about their causes and had thought they had to have flair and emotion in their motions, when that was actually detracting from them,” she says.

Sam has come across the same thing when she has delivered the course. “My advice is: keep it short,” she says. “Don’t put your argument in the motion, have the argument on the conference floor.”

Assistant Education Officer Kathleen Jowitt delivered the course at the National Private Contractor Seminar in Leeds last November.

In the 90-minute in-person session, Kathleen concentrated on how to use motions to make things happen.

“We looked at the ‘why’ (using a motion to set or change UNISON policy); we looked at the ‘how’ (what makes a good motion); and the most important thing was saying what you want to happen,” Kathleen says.

Like Stevie and Sam, Kathleen also showed her participants motions that had been ruled out of order so they could better understand the potential pitfalls.

Catharyn Richardson, who

chairs the forum, is very glad she attended the workshop.

“I found it extremely helpful, easy to understand with great resources shared for me to use when I do write motions,” she says.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive whenever the course has been run.

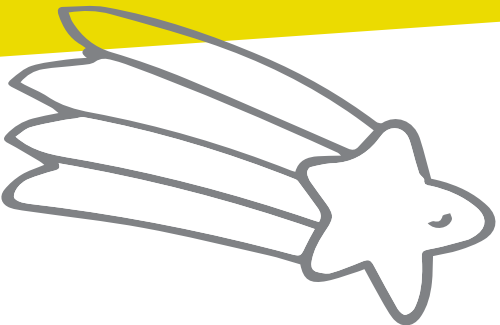


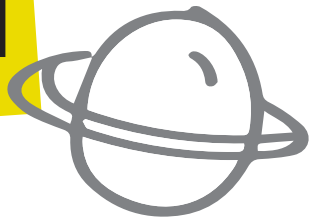
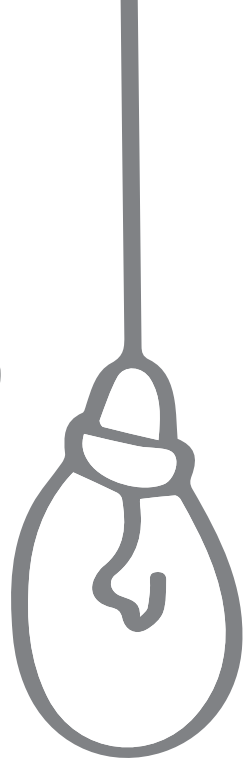
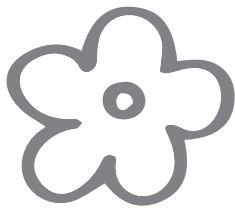


“The session I did for Surrey County Branch went really well,” Sam says. “One person who had sat on the national standing orders committee said he wished more branches had this training because then more motions would make it onto the order paper.”

The South East retired members were equally positive after their course, Stevie says.

“There were three or four people who said something had clicked so they now understood the process,” she says. “They were saying, ‘Now we understand where we’ve been going wrong, we can look forward to writing some more motions in the future.’” ✨

CHECK ONLINE

For detailed advice on motion writing, visit: bit.ly/3WjQU1U



Members in Yorkshire & Humberside have been discovering how doodling can help calm your mind and stay focussed in meetings.

Get creative, stay focussed

FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR

and arts educator Alex Abel helped a dozen Yorkshire & Humberside members explore doodling as a mindful way to relax in an online session during Learning at Work Week in May.

It was a change of role for Alex, as she'd often been a UNISON learner herself when she was working in the third sector, before she went freelance at the end of last year.

"My aim was to help people who don't necessarily consider themselves artistic see how doodling is quite

"My aim was to help people who don't necessarily consider themselves artistic see how doodling is quite relaxing and can help them concentrate"

relaxing and can help them concentrate and focus in meetings," Alex explains.

"I often doodle in meetings and I'm not being rude – it's something that keeps your hands busy, calms you and helps you take in the information more effectively."

With a degree in Educational Media Design, Alex understands the psychology of learning through visuals and memory tools.

"Being able to draw in meetings has always benefited me," she says. "I've put my notes up on noticeboards after meetings so people can see what we've talked about, and drawing is a great way to make



a meeting memorable – notes often stay up to be referred to.”

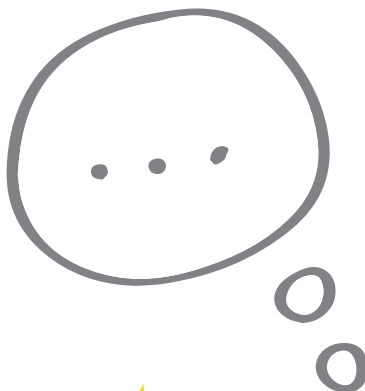
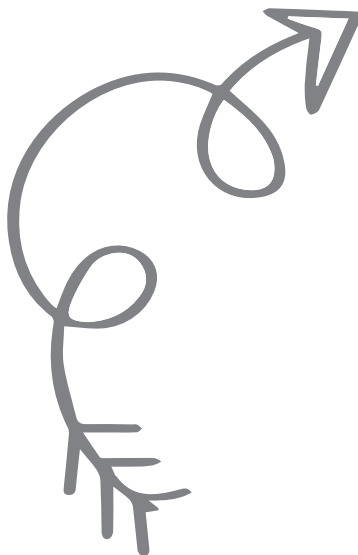
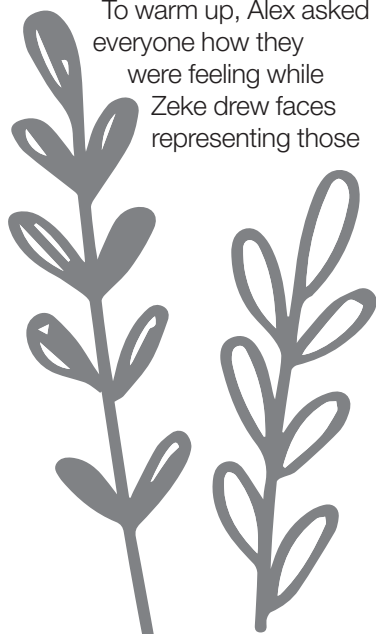
Alex co-led the session with local artist and frequent collaborator Zeke Clough, and their rapport with each other helped create a relaxed and informal environment.

“We’re good friends who can chatter on among ourselves while we’re working,” she says. “It means you don’t have an hour of silence while people are drawing by themselves.”

One key message Alex emphasised at the beginning was that participants needn’t worry about getting anything ‘wrong’.

“The big thing was there are no mistakes,” she says. “Right at the beginning, we were saying if anything feels like it ‘goes wrong’, we’ll work it into what you’re doing. There isn’t anything you can do wrong, just different – and that’s a nice message for everyone.”

To warm up, Alex asked everyone how they were feeling while Zeke drew faces representing those



“There isn’t anything you can do wrong, just different - and that’s a nice message for everyone”

emotions onscreen.

Alex divided the rest of the session into three main activities:

- * mandala drawing
- * mirroring and repeating patterns
- * working with circles.

To finish, Alex asked everyone to draw an outline of their head in profile and fill the space in the head with all the words describing everything on their minds.

She and Zeke drew all the head words on a shared screen to represent all the many things going on for participants. And then they suggested everyone prioritised the four things that were most important to them.

“That was a nice mental health activity to finish on – a nice way to work out how you can reduce the stress in your day,” Alex says.

The participants enjoyed the session, says Regional Learning and Development Organiser Rose Bent. “The feedback was very positive – I think everyone enjoyed doing something different and something that helped with stress as well,” she says.

To follow on, Alex led a second online session in September called Learn To Draw, where she showed participants how to progress from drawing a simple cat in a box to creating a face and then a face and a figure in proportion. *

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