

Edition 2

LEARN

with Unite



Gaining new skills,
growing our union



Union
Learning
Fund

with unionlearn

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Our lifelong learning vision

Unite's lifelong learning vision and our strategy for growth

- increase the life chances of its members in the workplace and the community using lifelong learning
- guarantee the high standard and quality of all its flexible learning opportunities
- use lifelong learning to develop its members so that they will be able to reach their full potential within the Unite organisation
- bring flexible learning opportunities into the heart of communities
- be the most progressive trade union organisation that will be able to create sustainable and innovative alternative education models
- use lifelong learning to enhance ongoing employment opportunities to its members through the member retention strategy
- measure the success of lifelong learning through its activities delivered within its strategy for growth.

Unite would like to take this opportunity to make the unionlearn team aware of our appreciation for the continued support of the Union Learning Fund, without which we could not have undertaken the projects presented in this publication. Once again special thanks to our brothers in London & Eastern Region stores for their work producing drafts for proofreading.

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Back cover photographs: Colin McPherson except Heathrow learning centre opening (second row) and Cable Street learners (third row) by Brian Davis

Foreword

Jim Mowatt

Since we published the first edition of *Learn with Unite* in the summer of 2013, our Union Learning Reps (ULRs) have chalked up another year of outstanding achievement with the help of their branch structures. This eagerly-awaited Edition 2 clearly demonstrates the breadth of activity and the diverse range of industrial sectors within which the learning agenda has prospered and added significant value to the constant task of building our union.

It is perhaps even more significant that we have been able to incrementally increase our lifelong learning outcomes during such an economic downturn when learning-related activities can easily fall prey to cost-cutting initiatives within workplaces. It is a clear barometer measure of the ongoing poor economic climate that this edition reports on four very significant pre-redundancy intervention packages taken into workplaces. However we are very proud to have been there for our members when needed most: the positive outcomes and feedback are here to read!

Our community learning initiatives introduced in our first edition have substantially grown and also become more numerous around the country. These reports on the following pages are truly inspiring in what has been achieved from often modest beginnings in a very short space of time.

Nearly 650 ULRs within the English regions alone completed ULR Stage 1 courses between April 2012 and March 2014, training which has been the catalyst for so much of the activity reported in this booklet. Alongside their more experienced brothers and sisters,



they negotiated 45 new learning agreements with employers, many securing clearly defined paid time off to learn arrangements and/or learning centres at their workplaces.

During these same two years, we enrolled almost 95,000 learners on programmes at Unite offices, in workplaces and in the new community learning centres, which is remarkable, while our Union Learning Organisers (ULOs) gave presentations to over 23,000 individuals that continued to profile our growing learning offer, including our unique blended ESOL package (see page 24).

Although the above facts and figures hold their own educational merits, such a broad programme of learning is also providing the confidence and pathway for a new generation of activists to progress within our union and it is hardly surprising that such an effective organising tool has helped recruit 2,800 new members to Unite since April 2012.

Jim Mowatt
Director of Education



The new community centre in Durham is helping Unite take union learning into the community

Reaching back into our industrial heartlands

Unite is helping community members and activists across the North-East, Yorkshire and Humberside acquire new skills through an innovative community learning programme that has included opening two new community learning centres in Barnsley and in Durham.

Two new community centres in Barnsley and Durham are helping Unite engage local people with adult learning and build thriving community branches.

“When we set up an industrial branch, we recognise that the stewards, safety reps, learning reps and equality reps will all need particular skills to help them win in the workplace,” explains David Condliffe.

“We sat down and looked at what practical skills the community activists would need to run their community branches successfully, such as graphic design, new media, IT, public speaking and organising – and that’s what we set about doing.”

The courses have proved both popular and successful wherever they have been run. “People who attended the public speaking course, for example, a week later they might be speaking inside a council chamber or at a public meeting because we had given them the confidence to do that,” David says.

“It has been exactly the same with the new media course: by the end of it people are writing blogs, setting up Facebook groups or Tweeting because it’s not a course for a course’s sake – it’s a course that gives people practical skills to help them win campaigns.”

The union has been careful to extend the offer of public speaking and new media courses to workplace reps as well as community activists. “We’ve integrated the reps from the community and the workplace so they all know what’s going on,” David says.

Opening the community learning centres in Barnsley and in Durham has further helped the union engage more community members with the learning agenda.

Working in partnership with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), Unite opened the Barnsley centre in June 2013 and the Durham centre in November 2013. In both cases, the NUM provides the facilities while Unite trains community members to staff the

Celebrating new beginnings (from left): Unite Community Coordinator Joe Rollin and Regional Secretary Karen Reay, Durham Miners' Association General Secretary David Hopper and National Community Coordinator Liane Groves



centres and in many cases teach the courses.

The centres are organised by Unite Community Co-ordinator Joe Rollin, with the full support of North East, Yorkshire & Humber Regional Secretary Karen Reay.

"I am really pleased that we are opening this centre in Durham where the local community is in great need of support and this centre will go some way to providing that assistance," commented Joe Rollin when the Durham centre opened.

"Our experience of working with local groups and individuals ensures that issues which matter to people are campaigned for. This centre will become a focal point for making those changes."

Both centres offer 'benefit buddying,' peer-to-peer support for vulnerable people who are suffering as a result of welfare spending cuts to help them claim all the benefits they are entitled to.

"People come in for advice on a wide range of issues, including benefits, talk to our advisers who have all been Citizens Advice Bureau trained, and our advisers can, for example, signpost them to our IT courses, which are run by our own community activists.

"We are empowering people in these local communities, who might arrive at one of our centres looking for benefits advice because they are out of work, decide to join the union, take an IT course and develop from there – supporting or teaching on courses, or participating in local campaigns, or using new media for the first time," David says.

While the union promotes all its community learning courses through its Facebook pages, the

Barnsley and Durham Wordpress sites and branch communications, the learners themselves also spread the word about their positive experiences – and close to 100 community members have taken courses in the last six months.

"When people join as community members, the best way to retain them is by empowering them. When you ask if they would like to support on our IT courses, or take qualifications such as Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), they see you are investing in them, and are more likely to stay with the organisation.

"Education increases participation – when you organise education courses you attract people who are members but have not participated in any way shape or form before, because that is what lights their fire."

Like many in the union, David has high hopes for the future of community learning. "The sky's the limit: if we want to bridge that gap between the workplace and the community, then the community learning centres will help us do that." ■



Unite is returning to its industrial heartlands through community learning



Unite workshops are helping Barclays Bank staff who are taking voluntary redundancy find the jobs they want

Helping members prepare for new horizons

When redundancy looms on the horizon, Unite steps in to ensure members get the best start when they re-enter the jobs market.

With the spectre of redundancy threatening workplaces across the North-West, Unite has put together a package to help members, regardless of whether they work in a large or small workplace.

“We want to support all our members the best way we can: and if they are facing redundancy, we believe they all deserve support, whether they work in a workplace of five or 500,” argues Unite Learning Organiser Brian Whitehill.

The response to redundancy programme includes a free one-day workshop and support with developing employability skills, such as CV writing, job searches and interview skills.

Brian has gone into workplaces to run the workshop with the help of Unite learning reps on the ground, working in a range of sectors including engineering, distribution and the finance sector, in the wake of the Barclays Bank announcement that it was looking for 300 voluntary redundancies across the region.

In addition, to make it easier for members across the

region to access the one-day workshop, Brian has run sessions in Salford aimed at members in Manchester, Blackpool and Lancaster, and in Liverpool, targeting members between Merseyside and Wales.

The workshop features presentations from specialists who can offer invaluable support on a number of different issues.

“I bring in Jobcentre Plus staff from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to explain the different benefits that are available, what they are and how to claim them – and these are the people who deal with these claims so they can answer the questions,” Brian explains.

“I also bring in independent financial advisers to discuss money matters and learning providers who talk about employability or training opportunities.”

Participants can also ask for one-to-one sessions in private on issues such as pensions or personal finance.

“We try to give people all the information they need to make the best choices,” Brian says.

One of the central themes of the workshop is the

Taking IT skills out into the community

Since joining Unite two years ago, Oldham Community member Dave Sykes has not only transformed his life by acquiring crucial new skills but is now also sharing those skills with more people throughout the local community and spreading the word about the union.

It was after listening to a presentation on digital inclusion and benefit reforms by Union Learning Organiser Steve Hewett that Dave decided to join Unite.

Keen to set up a job club at Failsworth in Oldham, Dave asked Steve for help with some of the practicalities.

“I helped to identify a venue with internet access at the local library, helped recruit volunteers from the community and arranged for the Oldham council leader to open the job club,” Steve explains. “The job club is a success and has now become self-sustaining.”

After that, Dave trained as a Union Learning Rep, completed a couple of computer courses, and then moved on to take a Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualification, which he completed one day a week over 10 weeks in the union’s Salford office.

After shadowing Steve while he delivered community computer classes, Dave is now using his new IT and teaching skills to run his own computer classes throughout Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside on behalf of Unite.

“The best part of my membership has by far been the welcoming and supportive atmosphere there is whenever I am among fellow members,” Dave says.

Unite’s Response to Redundancy workshops help retain existing members and recruit new ones, says Learning Organiser Brian Whitehill (seated at end of desk)



enormous benefit of remaining a member of Unite.

“If we can’t get our members back into employment by the time they leave their current job, we encourage them to take out ‘Return to Work’ membership, which works really well,” he points out.

“As a result of these workshops, we not only retain members but we also have gained new members who are impressed with the support they can see is on offer.”

After the workshop, Brian can signpost members to support on key employability skills to help them in their search for new jobs.

“We aim to give people the confidence to get back into employment by focusing on things like CV writing, job searching and interview skills,” Brian says.

“If somebody wants employability support, that remains with them until either they find a new job or feel that they have exhausted all the options – the provider doesn’t leave them, they leave the provider if and when they’re ready.”

Although the programme has only been in place for a short time in the region, the feedback is positive both from the reps who have helped organise the workshops and the members who have taken part.

“We are always looking to build on what we are doing, and the programme is still very much a work-in-progress, but at the moment people are telling us that it’s working,” Brian says. ■

Helping bakery staff find new jobs

Unite helped hundreds of mostly low-skilled minority ethnic bakery workers find new jobs and build new careers when retail giant Premier Foods closed the Hovis Bakery in Birmingham last year.

News of the planned closure of the Hovis factory at Garretts Green in Birmingham in February 2013 came as a massive blow to its 500-plus workers, many of whom had worked at the bakery alongside family members and close friends for many years.

It took a long time for people to adjust – and a significant proportion clung on to the hope that the UK's largest food company might even reprieve the factory before it shut the gates for the very last time at the end of April 2013.

Much as it condemned the closure, Unite was quick to recognise that the soon-to-be redundant workers would face a number of obstacles to finding new jobs.

For most of the workers, there would be no chance of transferring to similar jobs in the city, which meant they would need to improve their Functional Skills and look into alternative employment.

But before they could do that, huge numbers of them would need to significantly improve their English skills since English was not their first language.

So Unite got together with bakers' union BFAWU, Birmingham City Council and South & City College Birmingham, plus the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and the National Careers Service (NCS) to form a taskforce to oversee the redundancy support programme.

Using the canteen and a pair of training rooms, the union set up a weekly support session at the workplace every Wednesday, when workers could talk about their future employment plans and skills needs with specialists from Unite, JCP, NCS and the college.

“Unite was quick to recognise that the soon-to-be redundant workers would face obstacles to finding new jobs”



“We would look at what skills people had – and a high percentage had few transferable skills because baking bread or packing it was the only job they had ever had,” explains Union Learning Organiser Michelle Abbotts.

“One of the biggest hurdles for most of them was that English wasn’t their first language: that hadn’t been an issue all the time they had been working at Hovis but many companies who let us know about vacancies required people to sit an assessment even to get an interview.”

When the bakery closed two months after the initial announcement, Michelle recognised that the redundancy support programme had only just scratched the surface.

“Many people were not in the mindset that they were losing their jobs until the factory actually closed, so there was a lot more work to be done afterwards,” she recalls.

That’s why the Wednesday sessions transferred to South & City College for the rest of the year, giving people the chance to take advantage of the opportunities that many of them had hoped they would not need to pursue.

“When we moved the sessions to the college, people realised we were prepared to sit and listen to their concerns and to help as much as we possibly could – which we did,” Michelle says.

“We started at 8am and finished at 10pm – but if someone was unable to come and see us between those times on a Wednesday we would go and meet them at a Unite office or a community centre at a time that was more convenient.”

The successful programme of redundancy support helped more than 50 per cent of the 500-plus workers find new work or set up their own businesses once the factory closed in April 2013.

Mohammed Imran was one of the workers who attended an open day at the college a month after the bakery closed, where the National Careers Service put together an action plan that included an ITQ course, HGV training through the Jobcentre’s Rapid Response Service and security guard and forklift truck (FLT) qualifications through the college.

When high demand for the college’s FLT course delayed his enrolment, Michelle advised Imran to switch his Rapid Response training from HGV to FLT, as that would open up opportunities for work at Jaguar Land Rover (JLR).

After securing both his Counterbalance and Reach licences in July 2013, Imran began agency work for JLR before being offered a permanent contract in January 2014.

“All in all, we saw more than 200 workers at the Wednesday sessions, and despite the situation they were in, they remained upbeat and positive and many of them have kept in touch about what they are doing and how their new jobs are going,” Michelle says. ■



Working together (from left): Raja Hussain, Michelle Abbotts, Stewart Campbell and Haroon Rashid helped bakery staff deal with redundancy



JOANNE O'BRIEN

Engaging learners with the equality agenda

Unite's equality reps at energy company E.ON are using the union's new equality and diversity course to help build a genuinely inclusive workplace through an increasingly effective branch.

Equality Diversity & Community Co-ordinator Lesley Stevenson adapted and developed the Certificate in Equality & Diversity (Level 2) to equip members to tackle stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination and promote Unite's equality strategy in the workplace.

Delivered in partnership with Leicester College, the distance learning course means learners can work at their own pace using a set of workbooks that introduce them to the key issues and guide them through an assessment of their own workplaces.

"We have piloted the course in different ways throughout the regions to promote Unite's position on equality and explain what everyone's rights and responsibilities are under the 2010 Equality Act," Lesley explains.

It's proved enormously popular in the 18 months since Lesley launched the first pilot. "We had more than 175 complete the course by June 2013, and we have enrolled another 200 since September 2013, very many of whom have already completed," she says.

One of the early adopters was the Legal & General

“As members were completing their assessments, they were identifying issues to take up with the company”

**Lesley Stevenson,
Equality Diversity & Community
Co-ordinator**

branch based in the finance company's Birmingham office, where workplace rep Beth Wells invited Lesley to deliver the opening induction session to all the reps together as a team.

"We completed the whole course in a day, and the bonus was that as they were completing their assessments of their workplace, they were identifying issues to take up with the company, and they are currently rolling out to the course to members and using it as a recruitment tool as well," Lesley says.

When Lesley ran a one-day seminar for all the

Lesley Stevenson is helping Unite members get to grips with the equality and diversity agenda through the new certificate course

union's equality committees in the East Midlands in December 2013, E.ON Branch Equality Officer Paul Connolly invited her to the first meeting of E.ON's equality committee in February 2014 to introduce the course to his team.

"Lesley gave us an outline of what the course involved and ran some activities to find out where everyone was at with the issues and then we signed up all eight of the equality reps then and there," Paul explains.

Once the equality reps have completed the course, Paul is keen to offer it to the main in-house diversity groups – the LGBT network, the disabled network and the black members' network.

"Most of the people who are running the in-house networks are union people, but the company has not offered them any training to carry out their roles, so the union could fill that gap in provision by enrolling them on this course," Paul says.

Disseminating knowledge and skills about everyone's rights and responsibilities under the 2010 Equality Act would pay off for both sides of the negotiating table.

"At the moment, there are workplace reps in sickness capability hearings who come to me for guidance about what is defined as a long-term illness and what is a disability under the Equality Act," Paul explains.

"It would really help if they were all able to take this course, because you have to investigate your own company's policies and procedures which would give them the tools to step in if staff are being put on disciplinarys when they shouldn't be."

Paul is also keen to run the course for more members and potential members when Unite and E.ON sign off their revised learning agreement later this year.

"One of the biggest barriers with learning can be getting people time off to attend college, but the Equality & Diversity course is something you could complete by spending half an hour or so for a few evenings at home after work, so it would be ideal to help us revive the learning agenda once the agreement is signed off," he says. ■

Retired members boost their IT skills

Retired members East Midlands can improve their IT skills with the help of Unite, thanks to a new programme that kicked off with a pilot course delivered recently in the union's Leicester district office.

"The initial task was to get branch secretaries trained up on the Learn with Unite portal but after further talks with Regional Retired Members Secretary Mike McLoughlin, we developed the idea of running a basic computer course," explains Unite Union Learning Organiser Stewart Campbell.

Mike McLoughlin, who found the course particularly useful, has put his new-found knowledge to good use both on his blog for retired members (available at <http://systonmike.blogspot.co.uk>) and also for organising purposes.

"In all, the pilot course was a success and we are now planning on moving forward with a follow-up course and even planning a retired members' seminar in the East Midlands to incorporate health and safety in the home as well as other events," says Stewart.

"By engaging our retired members with the learning agenda, we can become a vital link to keep our colleagues up to speed with the fast-moving technology that helps them communicate with family abroad, safe internet shopping and confident computer skills."



STEWART CAMPBELL



Winning new battles in Cable Street

Bengali and Somali women make up the majority of IT learners at the Cable Street community centre (above), where the 1930s battle against racism is commemorated on the outside of the building (below)

Unite is running a new community centre in London's East End that offers learning opportunities to the predominantly minority ethnic local residents in one of the most deprived parts of the UK.

Open five days a week, the new centre is in the basement of St George's Town Hall on Cable Street, where a host of working class organisations took their famous stand against Oswald Mosley's fascist march against the Jewish community in 1936 (a mural commemorating the Battle Of Cable Street was painted to the side of the building during the 1980s).

With the second highest unemployment rate in the capital (more than 3,000 16 to 24-year-olds are jobless), Tower Hamlets residents have been quick to seize the opportunities to improve their skills and boost their chances of finding work.

The centre is already helping to empower people through a combination of skills, training and advice, as Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey forecast when he opened it in May 2013.

"As part of a drive by Unite to empower communities,



“Tower Hamlets residents have been quick to seize the opportunities to improve their skills and boost their chances of finding work”

the new centre will help people take charge of their lives and have a greater say in their futures on issues such as work, education and health,” Len said.

Unite opened the community centre in partnership with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Barclays Bank, which funded the state-of-the-art learning suite from its corporate social responsibility budget.

“At the moment we are offering basic IT classes to all members of the local community, with older Bengali and Somali women currently making up the majority of our learners,” explains Union Learning Organiser Willie Howard.

On average, between 12 and 15 people sign up for each of the eight-week courses. “We’ve had people come in who have never used a computer in their life before and now they’re doing intermediate PowerPoint classes,” he says.

The centre is currently offering unaccredited courses, since external funding for formal qualifications is hard to come by at the moment and the cost of a course like the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) would be prohibitive for many local people.

“The classes are free if you are claiming any sort of benefit or if you’re retired – we have a number of retired people who have started to come in,” he says.

In addition, the centre offers both beginner and intermediate English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes twice a week, using the trained volunteer-led model developed by Unite’s United Migrant Workers Education Project (UMWEP).

“We started with me tutoring three women, but the classes have been getting bigger and bigger, and we now have around 12 to 15 in every class and four tutors,” Willie explains.

“It’s completely free, it’s unaccredited, it’s somewhere you can improve your spoken and

written English with a qualified tutor, and it’s also a place where you can come with your kids, which is a popular approach for people who have work and family commitments.”

The courses have proved very popular with local learners, and many of them have taken out Unite community membership as a result of their positive experiences learning with the union.

Ayesha has been attending for three months, often bringing her youngest son Usman with her, who happily plays by himself while she works through the assignments.

“Improving my English here has really helped me when I talk to my oldest son’s teacher at school, or when I talk to my GP in the doctor’s surgery,” she explains.

Hasina is very glad she found out about the courses through a friend six weeks ago. “I enjoy these classes very much and the tutors are very good,” she says.

To help break down the barriers with local communities that have often little direct experience of trade unionism, the centre identified and now works with a number of community leaders who have been able to bridge the gap.

“When people first started coming in, they saw us as a hoop they had to jump through, like they would with a local housing benefit office, and that’s not what we’re about, which was why it was so important to identify volunteers in their community to help us,” Willie says.

“A case in point was when I was trying to follow up a long list of contacts for our IT classes and getting nowhere, but then I found Nurjahan, a local parent-governor who is held in high esteem locally, and she came in and rang everyone herself and on enrolment day, 40 people turned up as a result.”

The union is keen to develop the centre into a genuine community resource, which is already beginning to happen: Tower Hamlets Unemployed Community Group holds a weekly coffee morning where local jobless can get help and advice; Tower Hamlets Renters has held advice and support sessions at the centre; and local councillors have run surgeries in the space as well. ■

Bridging the gap in professional development

Hampshire CYWU is helping youth, community and play workers improve their skills by providing the kind of development opportunities they would otherwise miss out on.

The Hampshire Branch of Unite's Community and Youth Workers section ran its third annual development day in May 2014 to help about 40 youth, community and play workers learn more about their chosen field.

When the branch began looking into learning options three years ago, it recognised that the majority of members in youth, community and play work already had at least Level 2 qualifications in literacy and numeracy while many held degree-level and professional qualifications and therefore would not need Functional Skills support.

What members were missing out on was the chance to refresh and update their knowledge and skills, share good practice and gain professional support – hence the development day model.

"With local authorities dismantling youth services as a result of the spending cuts that have been imposed on them, they are no longer co-ordinating and supporting youth and community workers as they used to do," explains ULR Colin Smith.

"Three years ago, we recognised we could fill this gap in provision and show how Unite supports workers and takes responsibility for the well-being of our members in a very professional way by organising these development days."

The first day in 2012 went down very well with the 40-plus participants, who took part in six popular workshops and increased their knowledge of important issues for communities like activities for young people, sexual health education, drugs, alcohol and successful



community engagement.

"This was fantastic," said one participant. "I felt a real buzz from being surrounded by professionals from such a diverse range of organisations and the day really enthused me about why I love youth work." Another called the opening plenary "an inspirational start which forcefully reminded me of why I'm a youth worker."

The development days have helped change people's perceptions of Unite, Colin says. "The days are good opportunities to show how Unite cares for its members and for everybody working in the profession," he says.

Local Rotary Clubs, the National Youth Agency, Hampshire County Council, Councils for Voluntary Service and the YMCA George Williams College all took part in the 2014 development day, along with members and non-members from all over the region.

Last year, the Hampshire branch also organised a

Promoting learning on the buses

Unite member Lee Foster has grown into an all-round activist since taking on his first union role as a learning rep at the Dartford bus depot, where he works as a driver for Arriva Southern Counties.

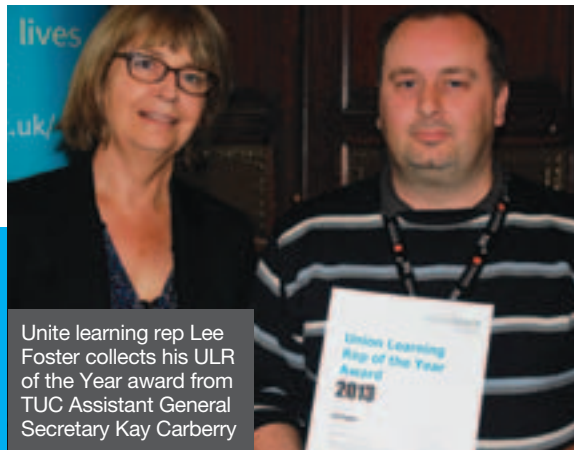
Before volunteering to become a ULR, Lee already had a learning role at work, teaching drivers how to operate new ticket machines.

Since 2011, Lee became an NVQ assessor at the depot, and has helped around 50 colleagues complete qualifications in driving and customer services since then.

“Because the NVQs involved key skills and Functional Skills, that meant there was quite a number of people who worked through the courses to get their maths and English to a higher level, which means they now have a relevant qualification, which is a major bonus in this day and age when even bus industry jobs are not as secure as they used to be,” Lee says.

“To give people the opportunity to put something on their CVs to show they are up to date with their education, that’s the bit I enjoy the most: I’m most proud of helping people lift themselves. It’s not about the glory for me, it’s more about improving people’s skills.”

Lee says his work has changed the way people at the garage think about Unite. “We have promoted quite a big change in the idea



Unite learning rep Lee Foster collects his ULR of the Year award from TUC Assistant General Secretary Kay Carberry

PHIL SPRY

that the union was there to help you when you got into trouble,” he says.

“Now, they know the union is there to help them in whatever they want to do and whenever they want to do it.”

Since becoming active around learning in 2010, Lee has been elected a branch official earlier this year, and has also become an active member of the LGBT committees of his own union and the regional TUC.

“Getting active as a ULR was what made the difference: I don’t think I would have done anything like it if I hadn’t got into the union through learning,” Lee reckons.

It was his combination of helping others and developing as an activist that secured Lee the unionlearn SERTUC ULR of the Year Award in November 2013.

Presenting him with his award, TUC Assistant General Secretary Kay Carberry commented: “If Lee’s record is not a model for a ULR, I don’t know what is!”

“ I felt a real buzz from being surrounded by professionals from such a diverse range of organisations ”

celebration evening and barbecue in the summer that enabled local projects and young people to celebrate their successes over the previous year.

Throughout the last three years, the development day planning group has enjoyed full support from the Hampshire branch and Regional Learning Organiser John Barr, who has also helped secure some central funding from Unite as well. ■

Sowing the seeds of recovery in the Forest of Dean

A brand new learning centre in the heart of the Forest of Dean is helping local people acquire new skills to help them back into the jobs market.

Unite is helping to equip hard-hit rural members in the south-west with crucial skills to boost their chances in the jobs market through its new community learning centre in the heart of the Forest of Dean.

"We have a number of courses here getting people the skills they need to help them to get back into the workplace and we're re-engaging the union with local people at the same time," explains Unite Regional Learning Organiser Andy Hewlett.

The learning centre, which formally opened in the Miners' Welfare Hall in September 2013, offers union members free IT and employability skills courses, as well as Level 2 BTECs in customer service, warehousing and storage and forklift truck driving.

"The miners originally built the Welfare Hall as a community centre for themselves and their families back in the day, but the premises have been struggling in recent years and even threatened with closure," explains Andy, who lives locally.

"So we have taken a room and turned it into our training centre, providing something for people in the area and helping a vital community resource keep going at the same time."

Unite has spread the news about the new centre through the local press and by advertising in local businesses, but the best promotion has been by word of mouth from many of the people who have already improved their skills through the union.

"People are coming in to ask when we are running



ANDY HEWLETT

our next courses, which has worked really well for us," Andy says.

"The training offer is helping us grow the union: we have recruited about 50 members because of what we are doing at the learning centre, and we are only just starting to scratch the surface – I think this could really take off."

To build on what is already underway at the new centre, the union is beginning to put together a learning package for workers in the social care sector in the Forest with which to offer them the training that so many employers fail to provide.

In addition to using the space for learning, the union is also organising regular surgeries where officers from

“The training is helping us grow the union: we have recruited about 50 members because of what we are doing”

Andy Hewlett,
Regional Learning Organiser

Unite’s Gloucester office can talk to local people about employment problems, and local councillors are also running weekly surgeries at the premises as well.

“The building is very proud of its mining roots, and the old Forest of Dean National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) banner is still hanging on its walls after all these years,” Andy says.

“We have had an invitation to send an official Forest of Dean delegation to this year’s Durham Miners’ Gala, so we’re going to see if we can take the old banner, which hasn’t been seen at the Gala for 40 years – and I’d be very proud if we could do that,” Andy says. ■

Engaging minority ethnic workers

Unite is engaging minority ethnic workers at Iceland DHL’s Swindon site through its online learning offer, which includes courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

“We aim to make Unite more meaningful to the high proportion of Goan workers at the site, which provides warehousing and transport support for the supermarket across the south-west,” explains Union Learning Organiser Roy Winter.

Roy launched the programme with a successful open day in November 2013, where the union ran a learning needs assessment and recruited more than half a dozen new members attracted by the offer of free courses.

“We saw groups of six workers every 15 minutes to talk to them about learning with Unite: overall, the message was well received, including by members of management who had no idea of how the union helps its members through learning,” Roy explains.

There are soon to be four ULRs promoting the learning offer to members at the site, and Roy is keen to build on their work by negotiating a learning agreement and opening a learning centre onsite.

While the union is particularly keen to help minority ethnic workers access learning, it is determined that all its

members and potential members at the site get the chance to improve their skills.

“We are re-engaging with people who might be 45 years old and haven’t engaged with learning since they were in school and told they couldn’t succeed perhaps 30 years ago,” Roy says. “Improving their Functional Skills helps them change their lives.”



ANDY HEWLETT



Helping aircraft workers take off in new directions

When the Ministry of Defence announced it would be closing its aircraft maintenance operation in the Vale of Glamorgan, Unite swung into action to help the 300-strong workforce prepare to re-enter the jobs market.

Eighteen months before the last VC10 flew off the MoD St Athan base to end 75 years maintenance at the site, Unite learning rep Graham Wilson, universally known as Tug, began talking to union members about the support the union could offer.

"The main thing people wanted was help with putting together an up-to-date CV: some of the men had been working at the camp for 30 years or more and hadn't even had a CV when they first started it was that long ago!" he recalls.

"So I got in touch with Unite's Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) Manager Julie Evans, and she put me in touch with the local education authority (LEA), who said they would be able to send tutors onsite if I could get people together."

Tug began arranging a series of Friday morning classes in a conference room onsite, and management agreed paid release for everyone who wanted to start from scratch or improve an existing CV with expert help from the tutors.

"The course showed people how to build a new CV,

although we encouraged them to bring in their existing CV if they had one so tutors could make suggestions about the best way to update it," Tug says.

In addition to organising the CV courses, which attracted more than 100 of the 300-plus staff onsite, Tug was able to signpost members to offsite learning opportunities through the Bridgend-based provider TSW, and advise them about funding available both through the MoD and through the union.

He was also able to help a number of members find new jobs in the aircraft industry at the British Airways (BA) maintenance site at Rhoose, a few miles from St Athan, with the help of his opposite number there, Unite Learning Rep John Rose.

"My involvement was to try and get as many of their guys as we could across to BA but many of them didn't have the minimum qualification that the company requires, which is the Certificate in Aeronautical Engineering (2597)," John explains.

"So I arranged for the company to take people on as mechanics while they took their 2597 one day a week at the Barry College International Centre for

(Left): Unite members at MoD St Athan developed key employability skills before the final VC10 flew out of the base

Aerospace Training (ICAT), which was able to work around the learners' shift patterns."

While learners were asked to contribute less than one-third of the £280 cost of the course from their own pockets, John was able to secure WULF funding to cover the rest of the fees, and also ensured BA gave everyone involved time off to complete the qualification.

In addition to the jobs at Rhoose, other members were able to find work at Airbus in Broughton on the Welsh borders and Filton near Bristol and for European Skybus in Bournemouth.

But after MoD St Athan finally closed in 2012, many workers were forced to leave the sector and find jobs elsewhere (Tug himself now works as a driver for a supermarket online delivery operation).

"Without the redundancy support programme, people would have been in a far worse position: it was definitely worthwhile and helped prepare people for leaving," Tug reckons.

Management was very impressed with the programme. "I would like to add my congratulations and gratitude to Unite for the support it has provided for my staff via WULF funding during this difficult and testing time," Head of Business (Large Aircraft), Mark Alston told Julie Evans.

"This scheme made, and continues to make, a real and tangible difference to my workforce and for that I am forever grateful," he added.

Tug's relentless efforts to help his members improve their chances in the jobs market secured him a Unite WULF Outstanding Achievement Award to mark his huge contribution to the success of the programme.

"Tug played a vital role supporting large numbers of members during this very difficult time by sourcing, organising and delivering relevant 'next steps' courses on site," says Julie.

"I am very proud to have worked with him on this initiative, which shows how targeted learning and partnerships between ULRs at different sites within Wales can really benefit our members facing redundancy." ■

ULR Ian helps Kellogg's learners rise and shine

Unite Learning Rep Ian Rowley, who spearheads a seven-strong team of ULRs at Kellogg's in Wrexham, won the Wales TUC ULR of the Year award in 2013.

Ian has been particularly active promoting the apprenticeships scheme at the plant, helping to organise two-week work experience trips to Europe for some of the apprentices every year – a scheme that has been so successful it now includes apprentices from Kellogg's Manchester plant and from other companies in South Wales.

Ian was part of a small team from the company to make a presentation about the Kellogg's apprenticeship programme to Ministers and Business Managers at the Welsh Assembly in 2013.

Ian has also been central to the growth of wider workplace learning at the site, and has helped establish a state-of-the-art learning centre where staff can improve their skills online, and set up a wide range of informal learning courses covering fitness, cycle maintenance, map-reading and photography plus French and Spanish courses.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Unite and engineering firm MAHLE celebrate the delivery of more than 100 accredited learning opportunities for workers through their learning agreement

Saving engineering jobs through learning

Unite's lifelong learning team at MAHLE Engine Systems has helped save hundreds of jobs at the Kilmarnock engineering firm by delivering a wide-ranging development programme that has boosted vital skills at the plant over the past three years.

Union Learning Reps (ULRs) originally developed and circulated a workplace learning survey which clearly demonstrated the appetite for development at the plant in March 2011.

The union then signed a Lifelong Learning Partnership Agreement in May 2011 and began to offer the courses members had indicated they were interested in.

But only a few months later, the company's German owners announced a plan to offload work to sites in Italy and Slovakia that would have meant compulsory redundancies and put the entire future of the plant in jeopardy.

Having lived with the economic after-shock of drinks giant Diageo closing the Johnnie Walker bottling plant in 2013, the branch knew what disastrous consequences for the community would follow from the last major employer in the area shutting up shop.

Along with the whole of the branch leadership, the

lifelong learning team helped develop the business case for retaining the work at the plant with a central role for up-skilling of the membership via union-led learning.

The ULRs also played a major role in the strike action in April 2012, when the negotiated agreement that followed ensured the work would remain in Kilmarnock and removed the threat of closure that had been hanging over the site.

Overall, ULRs have now delivered more than 100 accredited learning opportunities for members at MAHLE at shift-friendly times since the union signed the learning agreement three years ago.

By running the courses themselves, the ULRs have helped their co-workers boost their skills in literacy, numeracy, languages, IT and industry-specific certifications and made a vital contribution to the continued viability of the site.

The programme has proved a massive hit with

“This union/ employer partnership demonstrates the importance of investing in people”

Pat McIlvogue, Unite Union Learning Organiser

members. “As an older member of the workforce, this has provided an opportunity to get back into learning something that otherwise I wouldn’t have looked for before,” says 60-year-old maintenance electrician David Carruth.

Maintenance fitter Krzysztof Stawiak has also improved his skills through the Unite learning programme. “As a worker who is not native to the UK, I have undertaken courses in German and Computer Aided Design (CAD), which has given me better skills to carry out my duties in the maintenance department,” he says.

The ULR team organised a special awards ceremony in November 2013 to celebrate the 100-plus accredited learning opportunities members have taken up through the programme, when MAHLE Kilmarnock Site Director Angus Gray handed out the certificates.

“I have a great deal of respect for our workers who have shown the commitment and desire to take on new learning opportunities and would hope that we could encourage others to do the same,” he said.

“MAHLE Kilmarnock is committed to participating in the Lifelong Learning Partnership and hope to continue to recognise and reward individuals for their achievements in the future.”

Unite Regional Learning Organiser Pat Egan points out that the lifelong learning programme demonstrates a level of social partnership that is unusual in British industrial relations.

“In the midst of deep recession, when training budgets are being slashed in many organisations, this union/employer partnership demonstrates the importance of investing in people and developing a skilled workforce,” he points out.

“We believe it is an example that other organisations would be advised to follow and we hope to further develop the programme at Mahle in the coming years to ensure the Kilmarnock site’s continued existence.” ■

Helping members get back to work

When rail maintenance firm RailCare went into administration in August 2013, one-third of the workforce was made redundant and the remaining workers were warned they would be following if a new buyer could not be found.

So Unite set up a Back to Work Forum at John Smith House to help members improve their employability skills through concrete, practical support on writing CVs, searching for jobs, sharpening their interview skills and managing money.

The forum, along with a continuous programme of Back to Work surgeries, has proved enormously useful to union members – many of them pointing out how Unite’s redundancy support was significantly more helpful than what was on offer through statutory bodies such as Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) or the employer.

“The support I have had from Unite through the Back to Work forum has been excellent,” says Robert Fleming.

“The help I have received from government bodies has been very disappointing, they could learn a lot from the Back to Work Forum on how to support workers who have been made redundant after a long number of years at work.”

Building on the Railcare programme, the union has now developed CV, interview skills and letter-writing courses for members facing redundancy, and further developed the union’s pioneering Back to Work Membership scheme.



Unite Regional Secretary Jimmy Kelly steps in to the ring to celebrate the union's sponsorship of the 2014 Ulster Elite Boxing Championships

Landing another blow against unemployment

Unite's community learning is helping to break the vicious circle that has trapped so many jobless people in Northern Ireland, who need to train to find a job but can't afford the fees to enrol on a course.

Taking union learning into the community in Northern Ireland is helping unemployed people access the training they need to find a job without having to find the money they would have to pay out to private providers.

The courses have proved so popular and so useful that literally hundreds of learners are taking out Unite community membership as a result of boosting their job prospects with the specialist help of the union's education team.

The focus is currently on employment skills, providing Functional Skills (English, maths, IT) to help people

find and apply for jobs, and also offering industry-specific courses to help people qualify for jobs in the construction, security and taxi sectors.

The union promotes the courses on offer by word of mouth, through its community branches and by local advertising, explains Unite community coordinator Rob Montgomery.

And whenever the union starts working on a local issue with a community group, it offers them the opportunity of learning through Unite, as well.

"Sometimes a group will want English, maths or IT, sometimes First Aid and sometimes they might be

“I have never had a union card in my life but now I am so proud of being a member of Unite”

looking at arts or crafts or dance and we will try to facilitate that as well,” he says.

“But we will provide these courses whether people are members or not, because it’s a good way of introducing people to the union.”

Because many people who prefer not to leave their own neighbourhoods given the political situation, the education team identifies community centres it can use to take learning out to people where they feel comfortable.

Many learners are long-term unemployed people on the brink of giving up. “We always encourage them that we can organise whatever courses they’re interested in, and show them that they are much more likely to find a job with a qualification,” explains Unite Community Education Tutor Albert Hewitt.

In addition to providing employment-related courses, the education team helps learners prepare CVs and complete job applications forms. “We build their confidence as well as improve their ability to do whatever it is they want to do,” Albert says.

While the courses are free to learners, they also involve no cost to the union, as the education team builds partnerships with organisations that can draw down funding for training.

As well as offering support with Functional Skills, the education team is helping people without the usual formal qualifications access Higher Education (HE), a priority area for Northern Ireland’s Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

“We have helped dozens of students complete the

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) process, which enables them to begin Foundation degrees,” Albert says.

Union learning is definitely changing people’s perceptions of Unite, he points out. “I’ve lost count of the number of people who have said, ‘I have never had a union card in my life but now I am so proud of being a member of Unite’,” he says.

It’s also engaging with potential members in a new way. “Community learning is helping us touch base with people that we haven’t been reaching before: we’re going back to the grassroots,” Albert says.

Grassroots engagement is very much the idea behind Unite’s partnership with the Ulster Boxing Council (UBC), the non-sectarian sports organisation that runs more than 120 clubs throughout Northern Ireland.

As a result of hard work with the UBC by Unite Learning Organiser Clare Caulfield, Unite is now building on its sponsorship of the Ulster Elite Boxing Championships to offer learning support at the UBC’s clubs.

“Unite is going in to support people by giving them access to Functional Skills for employment, which will be just as important to them in the future as the discipline they develop within the boxing ring,” Rob says.

Unite’s non-sectarian approach to community learning is what gives the whole programme enormous potential, Rob reckons.

“It’s going to take a while to change people’s minds since we live in different sections of the community but if we can talk to them through our education, through our history, through all the trade union stands for, I believe in time we can bring people together over the real issues that affect them,” he says.

“We believe that through the trade union, especially, there’s a void that we can fill, that we can be there as a voice for our community and hopefully in the future lead them away from sectarian politics and lead them into the new politics, so that’s our future aim.” ■



COLIN MCPHERSON

Stand out from the crowd: improve your skills at learnwithunite.org

Unite offers a range of help, support and qualifications to members, both workplace and community-based, through a blended approach of guided and online learning. To get started, simply log on to www.learnwithunite.org and register with a valid email address.

What do you want to learn?

- Are you new to computers but keen to learn?
- Are you happy using a computer but want a qualification?
- Do you want to progress your skills to higher levels?
- Do you want to enhance your research skills to aid your role as an activist?

Just some of the things on offer

- Online basics (a taster for novice users).
- An Introduction to ICT (ITQ Level 1 award) course.
- An Introduction to ICT Part 2 (ITQ Level 2 Certificate) course.
- The Level 3 award in ITQ: units include 'creating a web presence'.

- Graphic design and improving your research techniques via technology.
- Keyboard skills Pro (touch typing).
- Redundancy support course.
- Blended English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- Our activist and members support resource banks.

To find out more, speak to your Unite learning rep (ULR).

Functional Skills

To supplement our existing programmes, we are currently developing both maths and English to Level 2.



Useful resources

This is a short selection of websites and self-help portals where learners and learning reps can find useful information and resources.

Improving skills

British Dyslexia Association

Support and resources for dyslexic learners
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Learn with Unite

Your union's own learning portal with a range of resources
www.learnwithunite.org

Move On

National campaign to improve adult literacy and numeracy
www.move-on.org.uk

Quick Reads

Publishes annual collection of short novels for emergent adult readers
www.quickreads.org.uk

Skills Workshop

Free functional skills resources
www.skillsworkshop.org

Six Book Challenge

Useful reading initiative for workplaces
www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

National Careers Service

Provides IAG on learning, training and work opportunities
nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk
 0800 100 900

Unionlearn

Helps ULRs inform, advise and guide their learners
www.unionlearn.org.uk/supportinglearners

Floodlight

Now covers 43 major UK towns and cities
London.floodlight.co.uk

Sector Skills Councils

Independent, employer-led organisations that help shape the learning opportunities available to Unite members.
www.unionlearn.org.uk/our-work-and-projects/supporting-learners/careers-advice/sector-skills-councils-careers-links

Campaigning organisations

Campaign for Learning

Runs Learning At Work Week
www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk

National Institute for Adult Continuing Education

Runs annual Adult Learners' Festival
www.niace.org.uk

Equality and diversity

Equality & Diversity Forum

Network of national organisation committed to progressing equalities
www.edf.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Responsible for promoting equality and human rights, producing codes of practice and giving advice
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Higher Education (HE)

Birkbeck, University of London

Union members can claim a 10 per cent discount on their course fees at London's only specialist provider of evening higher education, which runs regular free advice and support sessions for prospective students
www.bbk.ac.uk/unions or www.bbk.ac.uk/tryit

Whatuni.com

Degree guides, rankings and reviews
www.whatuni.com

UCAS

Useful search tool to find Foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses
search.ucas.com

Openlearn

Free online learning resources from the Open University
www.open.edu/openlearn

Graduate careers advice

Download free career planning publications from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) from the OU careers site
www2.open.ac.uk/students/careers



Introducing the lifelong learning team

Unite's lifelong learning team works to create flexible, quality learning opportunities within the workplace and the community. We support members with personal development, improving their employment prospects and quality of life while enhancing the union's strategy for growth.

What we do

- Develop educational opportunities that support the diversity of our society both in the workplace and the community.
- Ensure that learning is available, accessible and inclusive for all, allowing all who wish to join us the chance to grow and reach their full potential.

How we do it

- Recruiting and training Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) to promote learning in the workplace.
- Collaborating with local education providers

to ensure high quality learning, support and progression, from English, maths and ICT to Higher Education.

- Building free community learning initiatives, using community members to facilitate learning programmes through Unite's Alternative Education Model.

What it means for you

Through lifelong learning, we can help you develop your potential in the workplace, the community and also within Unite the union itself.

Stay in touch

The team comprises the Head of Lifelong Learning, Regional Learning Managers, learning organisers and national coordinators.

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