

LEARN

WITH UNITE

EDITION 5

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GAINING SKILLS BUILDING BRANCHES

Union
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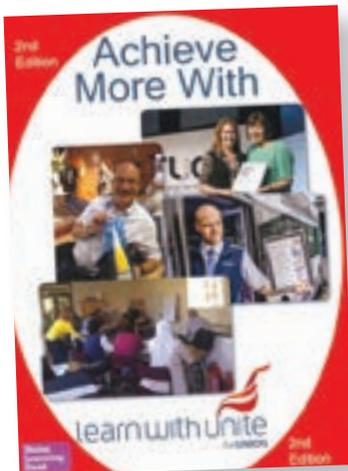
with unionlearn



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.

Find out about all the courses you could take through Unite in our prospectus (left). Available from your regional Learn with Unite team (contact details on p27).

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Front cover photograph: Unite learner Simon Cotton, who has developed his English skills through the union learning project at Southampton City Council and is now a branch activist. **Photo:** Robin Jones/The Digital South Ltd

Back cover photographs: (top row & third row) Paul Box/reportdigital.co.uk & Mic Lowe

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WELCOME...

Several things are clear from reading the case studies collected in this edition. Learn with Unite is about taking the initiative and finding solutions. We have made an incredible amount of progress since the previous edition. Some of our best outcomes are where our elected Union Learning Reps (ULRs) have worked closely with the employer, underpinned by a signed learning agreement – part of our proven 10-step approach that is taught on ULR courses.

Something else that is apparent from these reports is how closely we have worked with Regional Officers and Organisers throughout the UK to achieve our solutions. Workplace-based learning, online opportunities and community learning are all extremely effective recruitment, retention and organising tools when embraced by our branches and led by ULRs. In Southampton, for example, Simon Cotton on our cover has progressed from English learner to branch activist: you can read more about him in unionlearn's Learning Rep magazine (Winter 2018).

The United Migrant Workers Education Project continues to thrive, celebrating another anniversary prior to Christmas 2018. This project is quite unique and is key to equipping migrant workers to maximise their own potential and play an active part in our union.

Leeds learner Ashley Pickering is a good example of someone that thrived on his employer-provided vocational training after gaining the benefits of a broader preparation in Functional Skills subjects from Learn with Unite.

Similarly In Northern Ireland, Unite provided solutions for young people who were not job-ready and our input and support on that 'first rung' proved vital to their progress.

At Bentley Motors in the north-west, we have opened up union-led learning to agency staff, which has exposed a fresh cohort of workers to



BRIAN DAVIS

trade unionism. The branch clearly recognised that promoting learning can be the first step into activism.

And at BMW in Oxford, our efforts also led to cleaners and facilities management staff being included in the learning offer.

The last year or so has seen an enormous expansion in our own Learn with Unite provision via our online learning platform and has been widely promoted by a second edition prospectus. It is now possible to begin learning with a very short course and progress through to a professional qualification. You can explore the whole offer at: www.learnwithunite.org

Workers believe that achieving the right skills will be their biggest issue this year, according to research by ACAS in January 2019. I think Edition 5 proves that we are well placed to meet that challenge while helping to build Unite branches in the process!

Kenny Barron
Head of Lifelong Learning



GREEN LIGHT FOR LEARNING AT BUS DEPOT

The persistence of Unite learning rep Nigel Thakrar is paying off with the opening of a new learning centre and the signing of a new learning agreement at the First Bus depot in Leicester.

Dozens of workers at Leicester’s First Bus depot are signing up to take advantage of new opportunities to improve their skills now that Unite and the company have opened a new learning centre on site.

“We have more than 40 members who are ready to start English, maths and IT courses using the opportunities available through the LearnwithUnite portal and the First Academy website,” explains Trade Union Learning Rep (TULR) Nigel Thakrar.

Bus driver Nigel, who has been working for First for nine years, became TULR three years ago, at a time when there was little union learning activity on site.

“Education has always inspired me: when I was at school I did well, but unfortunately could not go on to further education as I had to support my family,” he recalls.

“I thought the TULR role would be a good way of further educating myself as well as passing on my knowledge to colleagues who work alongside me.”

The new learning centre is a genuine partnership between the union and the company: First has allocated the space for the learning centre,

equipped it with tables and chairs and connected it to the depot’s broadband, while the branch has provided six laptops for learners.

It has required a great deal of determination on Nigel’s part to get to the point where the new learning centre was ready for its formal opening, according to the then Learning Organiser Michelle Abbots.

“Over the last few months, we have met with management to explain exactly what we are trying to do, how we are looking to upskill the workforce by offering certain courses to them and how the

“ YOU SAY ” I thought the TULR role would be a good way of further educating myself as well as passing on my knowledge”

TULR NIGEL THAKRAR

learning centre will benefit,” Michelle says.

“Nigel has been very persistent over the last 12 months and we would not have got to where we are now without his tireless work.”

Nigel himself reckons his perseverance has played a crucial part in the positive outcome. “I kept on pushing, pushing, pushing, getting together with our branch secretary Hugh Smith-Kerr and meeting with management to get everything resolved – It hasn’t been easy, but our patience has paid off,” Nigel says.

Gaining the support of the depot’s managing director Nigel Eggleton and of David Pugh, the National Education Coordinator within First Bus, has also been vital. “Our MD has really pushed the learning project since he became involved,” Nigel says.

To promote the new opportunities in the learning centre, Nigel and Michelle organised an open day on site last April. By taking the time to explain about all the courses available through LearnwithUnite and First Academy, they succeeded in signing up more than 40 members of staff.

Nigel followed that up by maintaining a high profile during Learning at Work Week (LaWW) at the depot in May, setting up his stall in the canteen so he could speak to as many people as possible throughout the week when the busy programme of events was encouraging more co-workers to think about learning.

As well as visits from the Silver Star Mobile Diabetes Unit, Macmillan Cancer Research and Transave Credit Union plus a presentation by one of the company’s Drive Green champions, the depot LaWW programme included a lunchtime talk by Nigel Eggleton himself, setting out the key steps on his own journey from bus driver to managing director.

“There were a lot of activities during Learning at Work Week and going forward we will be promoting a lot of other activities to get more members involved as education is the key thing,” Nigel says.

As well as persuading local management of the benefits of workplace learning and the effectiveness of a learning centre onsite, Nigel and Michelle have also been negotiating a depot learning agreement to sit alongside the long-established national learning agreement between Unite and First.

“Once the agreement is signed, I will be



There were a lot of activities during Learning at Work Week and going forward we will be promoting a lot of other activities”

BUS DRIVER, NIGEL EGGLETON

allocated one day a week to start helping members with their learning – a whole day off the road, in the learning centre, helping people with any problems that they have,” Nigel says.

The learners themselves are set to be able to undertake some of their study in work time, since Nigel and Michelle are negotiating a 50-50 split whereby courses will be undertaken in a mix of company time and learners’ own time.

Creating learning opportunities on site will help the large number of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) workers at the depot, Nigel says.

“When people have problems understanding English, they have trouble filling in forms and understanding rules and regulations,” he says.

“This is where I come in: I can give them a lot of help because I speak a lot of other languages, which will help them overcome their fears, and I can offer a helping hand so that members understand all the rules and regulations.”

As well as supporting existing staff, Nigel is also keen to help new entrants to the industry. “We have a lot of youngsters coming in to First: they have a lot of passion and they want to progress within the industry,” Nigel says.

“My attitude is, Come into the learning centre, let us put you through all the education programmes that are needed within our company, so you can use the certificates you gain through these courses in your CV to give you a better chance of moving up the ladder when you apply for new jobs.” ■



SUPPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS TO GAIN THE SKILLS THEY NEED

UMWEP has been helping migrant workers develop their English skills and secure their rights at work for 11 years now.

Unite celebrated another successful year for its pioneering United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP) with a one-day event unlike any other in the union calendar in the run-up to International Migrants Day in December 2018.

The annual celebration, which marked 11 years of helping migrant workers gain the education they need to secure rights at work, featured a workshop on Brexit and migration, a theatre workshop about power plus music, song and dance from Latin America and north Africa.

Presenting certificates of achievement to the latest cohort of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners in the afternoon, Unite's Director of Education Jim Mowatt set out the significance of UMWEP for the union.

"UMWEP is a big programme for Unite the union that illustrates the union at its very best," said Jim, who has helped support the programme's development since it originally launched 11 years ago.

To the delight of the many Spanish speakers at the event, London Regional Secretary Peter Kavanagh

opened his speech with a few sentences in Spanish.

Switching to English, Peter said: "We treasure our migrant workers: you come from every country in the world, fleeing persecution, to make a better living for you and your families and we want to support you as we don't underestimate the challenges you face."

London & Eastern Regional Learning Organiser Carlos Cruz-Garcia said he felt proud of all the learners who have taken part in the programme for the way they confront the barriers that face them every day.

"UMWEP is a remarkable community institution where vulnerable workers can get education – one of the most important things for human beings," Carlos said. "We feel proud of Unite because they are fighting with us to get dignity and respect in the workplace."

The morning session featured two contrasting workshops: one that drilled down into the detail of the implications of Brexit for migrant workers in the UK, the other a participatory session where attendees explored power dynamics in negotiation through dynamic role-play techniques.

At the Brexit workshop, which was led by Unite



Political Education Coordinator Barry Faulkner, simultaneous translation into Spanish was provided by long-term UMWEP learner Celia Carreiras and UMWEP volunteer tutor Elise Tessier, who has been teaching at UMWEP's weekend classes for the past two years.

"The whole Brexit debate has had a knock-on effect on the way in which people behave in the country," Barry said. "I've seen it, I've heard it, I've witnessed it: some people feel confident to be racist and attack other people for their religion or the colour of their skin because they feel able to say things they wouldn't have before."

The perception of migrant workers would become an increasingly important political issue in the years ahead, Barry said.

"The question of migrant rights is going to be thrown into chaos not just by Brexit but by the hostile environment: if you can command a large wage, plenty of money, coming as a high-skilled worker may be quite simple but if you're not in that situation, it's going to be a lot harder," he warned.

The second morning workshop was led by Utopia Arts Artistic Director Frances Rifkin, who set up a series of role-play situations between migrant workers and employers in which they explored how to secure their rights at work.

Frances is a former student of Brazilian theatrical pioneer Augusto Boal, who created Theatre of the Oppressed as a set of techniques to use theatre in the service of social change. Boal in his turn was profoundly influenced by educational thinker Paulo Freire, whose classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has shaped much of UMWEP's work over the past 11 years.

In the workshop, Frances set up role-play situations rooted in the participants' own experiences – asking a manager for sick pay; resisting being allocated a different job role; demanding the pay rise promised at the end of a probation period.

In each situation, participants swapped roles or changed their approach to the same role to explore the power they had (or didn't have) on either side of the negotiating table.

And at the end of the workshop, participants pooled their feedback about what would make a difference in each of the situations, such as knowledge of employment law, membership of Unite or the vital need for language skills and/or translators.

No UMWEP event would be complete without music, and the 2018 celebration was no exception. The Latin American Community Choir, decked in festive outfits, sang traditional Christmas songs *Los Peces en el Rio* and *Feliz Navidad*, as well as two Cuban songs, *Yolanda* and *Lagrimas Negras*.

Folk music and dance group Expression Inka performed a Peruvian dance after a performance by their Young Musicians Group, while the Moroccan Folk Group sang *Prayer on the Prophet Mohamed* (May Allah bless him and grant him peace).

Twelve months earlier, around 300 people gathered in Congress Centre in London to mark UMWEP's tenth anniversary with an event that also featured music, song, dance, drama and film.

Since it was launched 11 years ago, UMWEP has helped more than 7,000 migrant workers gain the confidence and skills to stand up for their rights at work as they build new lives in the UK.

"Unite is proud to have been at the forefront of promoting a comprehensive educational programme that has helped more than 7,000 people from a wide range of countries to fulfil their potential as they embark on their new lives in Britain," Jim Mowatt told the 2017 event. ■



UMWEP is a remarkable community institution where vulnerable workers can get education"

CARLOS CRUZ-GARCIA



JOHN JONES

Four Unite learning reps and a learner in the North-East, Yorkshire & Humberside have won prestigious awards to mark their hard work, dedication and results.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

Daphne Robins was named the 2017 TUC ULR of the Year for her dedication promoting workplace learning at Hull City Council, where she has worked as a technical adviser on European funding for the past 15 years.

As soon as she took on the ULR role five years ago, Daphne sat down with Unite Learning Organiser Chris Muscoft and the two of them began to develop a plan of campaign.

They set up a steering group with colleagues from the council's Learning and Development team. They met the ULR team at nearby Kirklees Council to find out more about good practice in a local authority setting. And they launched a programme of awareness-raising events and workplace assessments right across the council in Hull.

They also set about persuading senior and middle managers of the benefits of workplace learning by sharing examples from other workplaces of the benefits of adding union-led learning to the development mix, which helped the branch negotiate a learning agreement with the council in 2015.

The package of national qualifications that Daphne was able to put in place was wide-ranging, including

16-week Level 2 short courses to help learners refresh their skills, or branch out in new directions, plus a range of adult apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 5 that are relevant to staff in a number of different departments.

"I was absolutely delighted and at the same time very humbled when I found out about the TUC award," Daphne says.

"Any kind of achievement takes place in a partnership and without the support of the Learn with Unite team in Leeds, without the support of the branch, of other reps and colleagues, and without the support from the council – right up to the council leader, chief executive and elected members – I wouldn't have achieved a fraction of what has taken place – it's a credit to everybody."

■ Sue Kinnaird and Danuta Smoliniec became the latest Unite learning reps from the North-East, Yorkshire & Humberside Region to be recognised for their work promoting learning in the workplace last summer when they won the ULR of the Year Award for Supporting Disadvantaged Learners at unionlearn's 2018 annual conference.

The duo work at Grimsby food company Seachill,

North East, Yorkshire & Humberside

Left: Sue Kinnaid collects her ULR award from TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady (left) and Skills Minister Anne Milton



JESS HURD/REPORT DIGITAL.CO.UK

where many of the Eastern European workers need help with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

“Thirty percent of the workforce are Eastern European and we’ve also got English speakers who need our help with dyslexia, so we’ve put together an ESOL course that will get them through health and safety, first aid and the skills they need outside the factory,” explains Sue.

Some of the colleagues Sue and Danuta identified as potential beneficiaries of ESOL classes were at risk of losing their jobs because their lack of English skills was preventing them from passing basic food hygiene and health and safety training.

Working closely with Chris Muscroft, Sue and Danuta were able to secure paid release for learners to study outside of their core hours through a learning agreement between Unite and the company, and also persuaded the company to fund the courses for non-members since local funding for ESOL was not available.

“Both Sue and Danuta became ULRs to offer support and opportunities to their work colleagues, with a view to making a difference in their everyday lives, both in and out of work,” says Regional Learning Manager Gill Pearson.

“They have both worked tirelessly, in a proactive and constructive manner with their employer, to ensure that they can deliver what they set out to and offer the best opportunities possible to the workforce.”

■ The duo were following in the footsteps of another ULR from the region, Danny Davis, who won the ULR of the Year Award for Supporting Apprentices in 2017, in recognition of his achievements in helping more than 1,000 colleagues at insurance giant Aviva progress through the apprenticeship route.

Danny, who retired from Aviva in February 2018, was proud that he could leave work having helped literally hundreds of people improve their job and career

prospects through the apprenticeship programme.

“I have absolutely made a difference into four figures of people through this, so I can go with my head held up high – that was really important for me,” he says.

■ Leeds member Ashley Pickering was named regional winner of the 2017 Festival of Learning ‘Learning for Work’ Award, in recognition of the achievements he has chalked up with the help of the union since joining First Group Leeds two years ago.

Diagnosed with dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at school, Ashley left full-time education with no formal qualifications and the belief he would never get any.

But with the support of his Unite learning rep Barry Young and First Group NVQ Assessor Amanda Harmer, Ashley has successfully completed his Passenger Carrying Vehicle apprenticeship, along with his first qualifications in English, maths and IT.

After his negative experiences at school, Ashley wasn’t convinced he would thrive on the apprenticeship when it was first offered him. But when Barry and Mandy pledged their support, he decided it would be worth a try.

After passing his English and maths Level 1 exams with the help on offer in the union learning centre onsite at Bramley, Ashley moved on to IT.

“The buzz that boy got from completing his Level 1 was unbelievable,” Barry says. “He asked, What do I need to do now? And I said, Go on to Level 2 and he said, Fantastic!”

Ashley admits Level 2 was more of a challenge. “It started off easy and I was doing a couple of questions in a dinner break but towards the end it got quite hard and it got to the point when I was barely doing a question a week, so it took a while,” he says.

Now that Ashley has completed his Passenger Carrying Vehicle apprenticeship, his enormously increased self-confidence has helped him take on new challenges at work: he has recently switched to the school bus run and is looking to apply for a supervisory job at the depot when the right one comes up. “I want to make a proper CV for myself so I can apply for some other jobs here – I’m always looking at what’s up on the board,” he says. ■



The learning partnership between Unite and Bentley Motors has helped hundreds of workers, including agency staff, improve their functional skills over the past decade and more.

PUTTING LEARNERS IN THE DRIVING SEAT

More than 1,250 Bentley Motors workers have improved their English, maths and IT skills over the past decade and more, thanks to the work of Unite's team of union learning reps (ULRs) at the factory in Crewe.

"Hundreds of employees have benefited from access to learning supported by our dedicated ULRs," explains Regional Learning Organiser Steven Turner.

"Our skills strategy has complemented the company's training programmes and created learning opportunities for employees to develop new skills."

The learning partnership between Bentley and Unite covers the core workforce of 3,500 full-time workers plus the agency staff whose numbers change depending on seasonal fluctuation but usually are between 1,000 and 1,500.

Union Learning Coordinator Paul Morrey leads the seven-strong team of union learning reps, which meets once a week to look at new courses that are available, new initiatives from Unite and unionlearn and any other issues connected to lifelong learning on site.

Bentley has agreed a 50-50 split on learning

in work time, which means learners can use 50 per cent of their own time and 50 per cent of work time to complete most courses – although Paul is keen to improve that to help encourage even greater take-up among colleagues.

English, maths and IT make up the core of the learning offer and the ULR team supplements these courses with a range of other learning opportunities during Learning at Work Week (LaWW) or Festival of Learning and also works closely with the Bentley occupational health department.

Although there isn't a learning centre on site, Unite has access to the company training suite and has also used the union office for English and maths courses in the past.

Unite's commitment to developing a learning culture at Bentley means that this setup has enabled the branch to rack up some impressive numbers over the past decade.

"In the past 10 years, we have helped 1,000 through the ITQ and more than 250 through English and maths Levels 1 and 2," Paul says.

“Although English, maths and IT are the bread and butter courses, we have done many other things as well, such as workshops on diet or dyslexia awareness: we make ourselves visible to as many colleagues as we can.”

The ULR team works closely with the Bentley training and development team, and Paul meets the teams once a month to talk about what the union has been doing on the learning front.

“There is an element of trust between the ULRs and the training and development team: obviously we have our own thing and the company have their thing but we try and work closely with the training and development team,” Paul says.

Because of their knowledge of the learning and training agenda, the ULRs can all book workers onto any courses on site, not just Unite courses. “Because we are the visible people across the site and reach parts that other areas of the business can’t, we have a system where the ULRs are all ‘super-bookers’, and we can book colleagues on to any internal course if they don’t know how to do that or can’t access a computer,” Paul explains.

Paul is part of the nine-strong Apprenticeship Levy project team on site, which is examining how the money that the company can claim back from the government can be spent at the factory.

“Because the Levy is relatively new, it’s not yet clear how it’s going to affect each business so the team is breaking it down about how it will affect us,” Paul explains.

The ULR team makes sure to extend the learning offer to the agency workers, as well as the core workforce.

“The agencies aren’t very keen on developing workers but we create a learning environment at Bentley and try to fill that vacuum for the contractors and agency labour,” Paul says. “Obviously then one or two start thinking more about their careers and other people then follow suit.”

The ULR team has been instrumental in setting up a new Women in Engineering course at the factory, which is designed to attract more women into the discipline.

The branch has discovered over the years that

promoting learning can be a first step into activism.

“Some people feel they don’t have the confidence to become a fully-fledged workplace rep, so they become a ULR first, which is a nice introduction to activism, and after a while they feel they would like to become activists in the workplace and volunteer for things outside work as well, like regional committees and things like that,” Paul says.

When the union and the company celebrated the tenth anniversary of their learning partnership in March 2017, Unite was happy to welcome shadow education secretary Angela Rayner MP to the event organised to mark the occasion.

Angela is someone who knows all about the benefits of union learning. After leaving school with no qualifications and finding a job as a home care worker with Stockport council, Angela became a union activist and helped many of the mostly female workforce complete Foundation degrees that allowed them to become assistant practitioners.

“Angela’s background within the trade union movement and rise to the shadow cabinet is truly amazing and many Bentley colleagues could take inspiration from Angela’s story,” Paul says.

The culture of learning Unite has helped establish at the factory over more than a decade is the guarantee that learning will continue to be part of working for Bentley, Paul says.

“Managers and directors and people who run the business come and go, so it’s good to have an established way of working, so when people that run this business start, there’s something on paper there as a reference point – it’s always worked for us,” he says.

Steve Turner says that the ULRs have made a massive difference at the company. “Led by Paul, our ULRs have been an inspiration at Bentley’s by working in partnership with the company to encourage employees to develop their life skills,” Steve says.

“The dedication of our team at Bentley’s has not only opened the doors of education for all employees but it has given them the confidence to come forward and learn with their friends. Employees at Bentley’s see the value of sharpening their skills and know our Unite ULRs are a source of information and support.” ■



BUILDING FOUNDATIONS THROUGH LEARNING

Unite is aiming to help hundreds of people from some of the most disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland prepare themselves for work through a brand new two-year project jointly funded by the union and the Construction Industry Training Board NI.

Unite has launched a new project in Northern Ireland that aims to engage young people who don't have the skills and qualifications they need to secure work in the building industry as well as established members of the workforce who have years of experience but lack the qualifications expected in today's employment market.

For the past 10 years, Unite has been managing a Union Learning Fund (ULF) project that has helped more than 1,500 construction workers improve their skills by gaining nationally recognised qualifications.

But the limitations on available funding have prevented the union from meeting the full scale of the demand for upskilling across the Northern Ireland building sector.

All that is set to change, now that Unite has secured substantial financial support from the Construction Industry Training Board NI (CITBNI) for this new project, Demolishing Barriers and Building Learning in Construction, which launched in summer 2018.

The project emerged from discussions between Unite Regional Secretary Jackie Pollock, Regional

Learning Organiser Ciaran Brolly and CITBNI Chief Executive Barry Neilson (Jackie and Ciaran both sit on the Board as employee representatives).

The initial focus has been on supporting young unemployed people in east and west Belfast, whose communities still bear the economic and social scars of the Troubles, where three generations of families on both sides of the sectarian divide never knew regular work, while drugs and alcohol issues continue to blight many lives.

"We began by engaging with the communities in specifically very disadvantaged areas which continue to experience high unemployment, low educational achievement and all the social issues around drink and drugs," explains Ciaran, who jointly runs the project with Regional Community Coordinator Albert Hewitt.

"We're engaging young people who are not job-ready, who failed in school and don't have the qualifications to work on a construction site, and we're also aiming at those members who have been working in the industry for years but never had any qualifications."

The project has hit the ground running: within



We're engaging young people who are not job-ready, who failed in school and don't have the qualifications"

ALBERT HEWITT

the first three months of operation, it has already helped 60 people gain close to 80 qualifications.

Ciaran and Albert started by organising a series of face-to-face meetings with community leaders in the target areas to talk to them about the project's potential to help people gain new opportunities.

The community leaders then put Ciaran and Albert in touch with learners so they can have face-to-face meetings with them about their educational experience (including what qualifications they have, if any) and their aims (including qualifications they're interested in).

Those conversations help the union put together an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for every learner that is then entered on a digital database so it can be regularly reviewed and updated as necessary.

Drawing up the ILPs with learners also helps the project identify any literacy, numeracy or IT needs they may have (in Northern Ireland, these are referred to as essential skills) – and the need is likely to be high, Ciaran forecasts.

"I would safely say around 50 per cent of our learners have essential skills needs," he says. "The difficulty with the way essential skills are delivered is that people have to commit to 22 weeks of learning and getting that kind of commitment from these young people can be difficult given the background they're coming from."

The low expectations of many target learners is one of the key potential problems that the project is keenly alert to. "A lot of these people failed in school and therefore don't see education or training as the way forward – showing them the importance of being job-ready is one of our top priorities," Ciaran says.

Some employer attitudes also need updating, Ciaran reckons, since some of the major companies on the CITBNI board have tended to see trade unions as obstacles rather than potential

partners – but he is confident that the project will convince them to change their minds.

"I hope that we will demonstrate through the success of the project in getting people qualified to help with skills shortages in the industry – I think they will come round," he says.

The qualification that the majority of the first cohort of learners secured was the Construction Skills Register (CSR) card that is necessary for employment in the sector in Northern Ireland as well as first aid and working at heights courses – all delivered in Unite's Belfast office on Antrim Road. "That gives them a strong union identity when they're in the building."

Training providers that the union has established relationships with are also delivering NVQ Level 2 courses to learners who want qualifications to use JCB trucks on construction sites.

"When someone completes their first qualification, gaining their CSR card for example, we then review their ILP with them and try to put them on a ladder of qualifications until such time as they get a job," Ciaran says.

"And over the course of the two years of the project, if and when they get a job, we can ask them what we can then do in terms of training to help them cement that job or get them promotion prospects, so there's a very close tracking process going on with each individual learner."

Of the first cohort of learners, three-quarters were between 18 and 21 years of age, with the rest between 30 and 40 years old. The vast majority were men, reflecting the current gender breakdown of the industry.

Ciaran takes great pride in seeing learners gaining qualifications that will open doors that they used to believe would forever be closed.

"When you see someone who never really had a notion of working (because their father and grandfather and great-grandfather never had a job) go on to gain qualifications – the absolute joy on their faces when they begin to realise they're capable of doing a, b or c – the joy is in turning people's lives around," he says.

"Unemployment was one of the biggest contributors to the Troubles and I strongly believe that our troubles will cease when working people get work and become economically independent – making that difference as a union is what we're all about." ■



ALAN LINDSAY

SUPPORTING APPRENTICES INTO NEW JOBS

Six oil and gas apprentices on Shetland have secured extra training and found new jobs thanks to a successful campaign by Unite's lifelong learning and industrial teams working in partnership with their branch reps and members.

United action by Unite Scotland's lifelong learning and industrial teams has helped secure vital training for a group of apprentices on Shetland who lost their chance of a job when their original employer sold the business.

The six apprentices started their apprenticeships with oil giant BP at the Sullom Voe oil and gas terminal on Shetland, which covers 1,000 acres, making it one of the largest in Europe. The terminal receives production from the East Shetland Basin and the west of Shetland and stores it ready for tankers to ship worldwide.

Two of the six were undertaking electrical technician apprenticeships; two were working towards becoming instrumental technicians; and two were mechanical technician apprentices.

When the six started their training, Sullom Voe was operated by BP on behalf of the 19 companies that had an ownership interest in the terminal but BP sold its interest to EnQuest in January 2017 as part of a multi-million deal.

For its part, EnQuest seemed focused on cutting costs to extend the life of what is by now a mature site – Sullom Voe was opened as far back as 1981.

But when the new owners took over, there was no indication at first that they would not be honouring BP's commitment to offer the apprentices full-time jobs on completion of their training in summer 2018.

"Generally things were going quite well during the handover period and it was only at the start of 2018 that we were made aware that EnQuest would be looking to release them – even though BP had always kept on its apprentices in the past," explains Regional Officer John Boland.

"We have had our run-ins with BP and they were no easy employer but they would have seen right away that there was an obligation on them to actually do the best by the apprentices but EnQuest didn't see that."

With massively reduced prospects for work at the terminal, the obvious route for the six young men was to look at trying to secure work offshore.

But to better equip themselves for finding work outside the terminal, the apprentices realised they would need to acquire skills that had not been included in their training to date.

The two mechanical technicians were looking to complete two mechanical joint integrity courses



Most companies agree that apprentices are the future of our industry and they need to be protected”

REGIONAL OFFICER JOHN BOLAND

(MJI 10 and MJI 19) that would give them vital hand torquing skills to minimise the safety issues associated with incorrectly bolted flanges in flammable environments like offshore oil platforms.

The four instrumental and electrical technicians were keen to undertake the hazardous areas five-day Complex competence-based course, which covers selection, installation, inspection and maintenance of electrical and instrumentation equipment in potentially hazardous areas both onshore and offshore.

“Our view was that getting them this additional training would put them in a much better position for getting other jobs, particularly if they wanted to go offshore,” John says.

The main issue for all six was money: to undertake the courses, they would not only have to find the fees (which totalled £4,000 between them), but also cover return their air fares to Aberdeen, headquarters of industry training provider Asset, and the costs of their accommodation for the week they were there.

“The apprentices asked EnQuest, ‘If we’re being let go at the end of our apprenticeship, would you pay for us to do this additional part of our training, which would give us further opportunities in the jobs market for offshore?’,” explains Highlands & Islands Learning Organiser Wendy Skinner, who joined John in the search for a solution earlier this year.

“But EnQuest said there was no value for their company for them to do that – they weren’t going to be keeping the guys on so they would get no return on that training, so they said ‘No’.”

The apprentices’ full-time colleagues at the terminal were outraged at the company’s position – so much so that they offered to club together to cover the travel and subsistence costs associated with the additional training

if the course fees could be covered some other way.

“Their colleagues said, ‘We will all chip in to ensure these guys have their accommodation and travel paid’ – that was a really great move from their colleagues: they felt so strongly about this,” Wendy says.

John, Wendy and the EnQuest shop stewards continued to exert pressure on the company to persuade it to change its position, with Unite members at the terminal who are also local councillors raising the issue at the local authority.

“Our view was that there was a moral obligation on EnQuest: there’s a very big community spirit in Shetland and if they didn’t train up these apprentices, that wouldn’t go down well with the community – for what is a small amount of money for them, the loss of that goodwill in the community and the workforce wasn’t really worth it.” John says.

John also pointed out that even if the apprentices wouldn’t be working for EnQuest, they would be working elsewhere in an industry that needs to close its skills gaps.

“Most companies agree that apprentices are the future of our industry and they need to be protected: one of the things we said to EnQuest was that these apprentices may not be working for you but you’re getting these skills back into the marketplace because we’re going to have a skills shortage and the more apprentices that are being trained the better,” John explains.

But in case EnQuest dug their heels in, Wendy and John also looked into possible alternative funding routes, such as Shetland Skills Development Scotland or Scottish Union Learning.

That proved unnecessary in the end, as the joint industrial and lifelong campaign paid off when EnQuest agreed to pay all the costs of the extra courses, which the apprentices were able to undertake before they completed their apprenticeships last summer.

And thanks to the additional qualifications, all six have now found new full-time jobs in the industry with a variety of companies.

“We were always certain – whatever it took – that we would get these apprentices through their training to give them the best opportunity they could have,” John says. ■



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

OPENING UP BMW LEARNING TO ONSITE PARTNERS

Unite is opening up learning opportunities to the workers at all the different companies based on the BMW's Mini production site in Oxford.

Workers across five different companies at Plant Oxford, BMW's production headquarters for the Mini, are improving their skills at work thanks to the learning culture Unite is establishing across the whole site.

The learners come from the BMW core workforce and agency workers from the GI Group, plus logistics staff from Rudolf & Hellman, cleaners from facilities management firm Mitie and catering staff from Grayson's.

BMW redeveloped the Cowley site into its current configuration in the early 2000s as a result of the break-up of the Rover Group, which the German-based multinational had taken over a decade before.

"We take the learning opportunities to the membership at all five employers because what we're trying to develop is a culture across the site where everyone buys into learning," explains Regional Learning Manager Dean Briody.

To help ensure logistics workers on site can access the learning they need, Unite signed a learning agreement with Rudolf & Hellman in September 2018 that extends the opportunities available to BMW workers to people on the payroll of the logistics firm.

With the help of ULRs Barry Wooding and Sam Webster Moore and workplace rep Debbie Giles, Dean helped organise four successful open days in September 2018, also attended by Functional Skills

tutor Mike Bridges from new provider DA Training.

The team engaged around 125 workers from the BMW assembly plant, body shop and paint shop, GI Group and Rudolf & Hellman, with some additional requests for English support from Mitie.

As a result, more than 70 expressed interest in tutor-led sessions in English and 30 for Maths (both provided by DA Training), while close to 50 expressed interest in accredited online ICT courses and more than 30 for tutor-led ICT courses that Dean himself will deliver.

In addition, 35 are keen to undertake a German language course delivered by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), while more than 50 were interested in the short online courses available through online provider Litmos, which can be accessed on computer, smartphone or tablet.

"We agreed to start with tutor-led English first, because the tutor was travelling up from Southampton and we wanted to ensure good numbers for success," Dean says.

"We had 38 learners enrol and take the initial assessment, the numbers attending are good and the feedback is that the course is going well: we now have the numbers in waiting to run a second group for English."

Now that the team has all the results from the open days and surveys, it is working its way through all the requests, taking care to ensure distance learning opportunities don't impact on tutor-led learning.

The four events followed on from two open days at the site the previous autumn, when more than 80 people from all five employers took English, maths and IT assessments.

The 2017 open days enabled Unite to set up two English courses early in 2018, one at Entry Level 1 and the other at Level 1, and two maths courses (at Level 1 and Level 2), as well as an online IT course through the LearnwithUnite portal.

The English and maths courses were delivered by tutors from City of Oxford College, part of the Activate Learning group, and the courses were open to workers from all five companies, providing they could secure release.

"We tend to run our English and maths courses at the end of the shift at BMW or before the next shift,

which can cause a bit of trouble if they're not on the same shift pattern but if they can get to our courses they are all welcome, whether they are members of the union or not," explains Barry, who is an assembly operator on full-time secondment as an area deputy.

BMW management support learning on site by banking 50 per cent of the time it takes to complete a course in each individual's Working Time Account. "If they do a 30-hour course, the company will give them half of that back, which means 15 hours banked that they can take off when they want," Barry explains.

The branch is also able to advertise learning opportunities on the TV screens in all the BMW buildings on site, distributes leaflets to workers and puts up posters on noticeboards, while the company provides space in classrooms for the taught courses.

Running workplace learning on site is very useful, Barry says. "It's really effective: it's a wonderful tool for people who want to use it," he says.

"It has encouraged people to join the union and when anyone asks about the union, they can say there are benefits, as learning is definitely a benefit, so it helps in that they talk the union up to other people as a result, which definitely helps advertising-wise."

Barry himself originally completed his Stage 1 and Stage 2 ULR training through the union seven years ago.

"I used to be an area deputy on the weekend shift but when that shift finished, I went back on the shopfloor and that's when the branch told me about the ULR role," he recalls.

"I said I'd have a crack at it as I've always liked learning – that's one of the good things about being part of the union – they've always given us plenty of training. And it just meant I could do a bit more for everybody. BMW gave me a day release to do it and I went from there."

The courses have already proved very useful to migrant workers on site, Barry says. "A lot of our lads come from abroad: they've got degrees already and when you put the English and maths to it, they can start going places," he says.

"We have had people go off the shop floor and get promotion on the back of their learning through the union – that's really nice to see. I just wish more English people would see the benefits and jump on board!" ■

ALL THE FUN OF THE JOBS FAIR

Hundreds of people seized the opportunity to improve their job and career prospects when the South-West region organised the very first union-led jobs and training fair in Bristol.

With Bristol becoming England's first UNESCO Learning City, Unite is getting set to extend its development work with local communities by opening a learning centre at the regional head office.

Based in Tony Benn House, the new learning centre will offer employability skills (job-searching, CV writing and interview techniques) as well as English, maths, IT and courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The learning centre aims to build on the partnership work with key local organisations, including Jobcentre Plus, that helped mount the enormously successful jobs and training fair at Tony Benn House in October 2016.

A wide range of reputable local employers looking to fill current vacancies set out their stalls, where they were able to have one-to-one conversations with the 200 visitors who attended throughout the day.

In addition, Unite learning reps Zarria Philipps and Andy Mitchell from Unite Community and Juanita McKenzie from the City Council Branch ran popular IT drop-in sessions, where they advised a range of young and old attendees about how to advance their computer skills.

"Having been to job fairs where the organisers are only interested in getting people any work whatsoever to get them off the books – zero hours, part-time,



insecure – we thought we could do something with decent employers, offering decent pay and conditions, where we are recognised if possible," explained Education Officer Matt Gillett, who organised the event while he was a union learning organiser.

"As well as bringing in reputable training providers, we wanted to offer computer drop-in sessions to show people the Online Basics package and the courses available on the Learn with Unite portal, because IT is a vital skill for people trying to get into work and even for people trying to find their way round the benefits system."

Exhibitors included University Hospitals Bristol NHS Trust (which recruits 1,200 new staff into the health service every year), transport operator First Bus (which is keen to sign up more drivers to help it run new congestion-busting routes) and Hinkley Point C (which will create 25,000 new jobs in the region over the lifetime of the project).

Exhibitor feedback was very positive. "The people we have seen have been of good quality and we think we have got some good applicants out of today," said University Hospitals Head of Resourcing Peter Russell.

Clare Dalton from First Bus was equally enthusiastic. "We have done a few of these events in different places with different companies and this has been quite busy, which is great to see," she said.



N-Gaged Training and Careers Consultant Sarah Cox was also impressed. “It’s been very well organised and there’s been something for everybody – there’s a good selection of different jobs and training, which it’s good to see in one place,” she said.

Alongside the employers and recruitment agencies were some of the training providers that the union frequently partners with, such as N-Gaged and Element, who have helped many Unite members in workplaces affected by redundancy.

The purpose of the event was two-fold, according to Regional Legal and Affiliated Services Coordinator Kathyne Albanese, who looks after Unite’s Back to Work membership in the region and co-led the event organising team with Matt.

“I have dealt with so many redundancies and once the officers have negotiated the best packages with the employers, we can have members who don’t have any other skill set after working in the same workplace for 25 years – and I feel we have to be responsible to upskill them, retrain them and get

them back into employment,” Kathyne said.

But the event also offered something for younger people at the beginning of their careers, she pointed out. “It’s really exciting to see so many young people come through to talk about apprenticeships and jobs and sit with the different advisers – that’s a demographic we want to reach,” she said.

Employment charity Tomorrow’s People, which jointly organised the event with the union, was on hand to explain the full range of employment support it offers both young people and adults, and provided National Careers Service advisers offering one-to-one careers advice to visitors who had booked in advance. “The feedback has been really positive, so we’re really pleased,” said Tomorrow’s People Hub Manager Dina Stanley.

The IT drop-in, on the ground floor opposite the careers advice sessions, was a crucial component of the success of the day, said Juanita McKenzie.

“Some of the young people who came in have good ICT skills, they probably knew more than we do, but they don’t know about trade unions or apprenticeships,” she pointed out.

“Some of the older people told us they needed a refresher course and were surprised by how easy, accessible and user-friendly Learn with Unite is, so that was great fun.”

Zarria Phillips talked to Community members about all their online learning options and shared her contact details with them so they could get in touch if they ran into problems further down the line.

It was after improving her own IT skills through Learn with Unite that Zarria trained as a ULR. “The role offered the opportunity to support other people who have lost their jobs and to share my skills with them,” she said. “Years ago, you just needed maths and English, but if you don’t have IT skills these days, you’re scuppered.”

Kathyne is delighted that the first union-led jobs fair in the region proved such a success. “From what I heard on the day, lots of the attendees got a lot out of it; the careers advice went down very well, as did the financial consultations; and I hope the members of the general public who came through could see that this is what we do in the community,” she said. ■

ALL PHOTOS: PAUL BOX



BRIAN DAVIS

DELIVERING ESOL IN THE COMMUNITY

Unite's Wales region has been delivering courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for communities in Cardiff and workplaces in Wrexham.

A group of Unite Community members have started to deliver English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses using the training they have completed with the union and new materials customised for Wales that complement existing LearnWithUnite workbooks.

With support from the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF), the regional lifelong learning team developed a pilot course in partnership with Unite's Cardiff Community Branch, Addysg Oedolion Cymru / Adult Learning Wales (AOC / ALW) and Action in Caerau & Ely (ACE), a regeneration charity based in the deprived area of Ely in the west of the city.

The initial pilot offered a mix of face-to-face and online learning to a diverse group of entry level ESOL learners.

Delivered in the well-equipped training room at ACE's Our Place: Dusty Forge community centre, the flexible course was able to help the diverse

group of learners, who arrived with different first languages, English skills and overall aspirations.

Following the Ely course, a second project ran at a primary school in the traditionally working class area of Adamsdown, in the south of the city.

Using ICT facilities provided by the school, the blended course, mixing face-to-face and online learning, was delivered by an experienced tutor to a group of parents who wanted to improve their English skills so they could better help their children with homework.

Because the group was able to commit to two lessons a week, the learners made excellent progress and completed the ESOL course on the LearnWithUnite platform.

Since many learners needed to acquire basic digital literacy to make full use of online resources, the tutor invited the local community librarian to visit the course to help the learners sign up for library membership.

"The learners enjoyed the blended learning sessions, particularly the parents who were accessing them in their children's schools," says Regional Learning Organiser Sue Da'Casto. "The workbooks were very well received and gave the learners a lasting relevant resource as they covered new vocabulary in a topic-based format."



The learners were also pleased with the flexibility of the LearnWithUnite platform, which allows learners to work at their own pace.

To complement the LearnWithUnite workbooks, the ESOL project has produced additional resources more relevant to Wales, including, for example, background information on the contribution of South Wales MP Anuerin Bevan (above) to setting up the National Health Service while he was Minister of Health from 1945 to 1951.

The union has also promoted the LearnWithUnite ESOL programme in workplaces in North Wales – at food processing firm Two Sisters and Wrexham-based Benders Paper Cups. ■



Mental health

Unite has signed a new learning agreement with Wrexham Council in north Wales based on the local branch’s successful partnership on mental health with the local authority.

With funding from Unite, mental health charity Mind trained around 50 key staff as mental health first aiders to support co-workers with issues.

“We help a lot of people in a lot of locations with mental health first aid,” says Unite Branch Secretary and Convenor Gary Simpson.

The branch also ran a suicide intervention course that has helped participants intervene with co-workers struggling with suicidal thoughts.



Health and safety issues

Flintshire County Council staff who look after refuse collection, recycling and street lighting and other associated services have improved their reporting of health and safety issues, thanks to a bespoke training course funded by Unite.

As a result of the successful partnership on duty of care training, Unite has significantly improved its working relationship with the local authority and both sides are currently looking into the development of further learning opportunities.

To improve reporting of health and safety issues at Streetscene, which is the point of contact for all services associated with streets, highways and open spaces at the council, Unite persuaded management that a bespoke training course would be the best solution to raise awareness and develop a more pro-active culture.

The aim was to develop and deliver

a series of workshops and sessions on duty of care that addressed how every unreported near-miss could have significant impact on co-workers further down the line and enabled staff to contribute feedback that would inform changes in process, policy and culture.

Management, unions, the training department and the provider worked together to ensure every one of Streetscene’s 160 staff attended one of the 90-minute training sessions without interrupting service delivery over 10 weeks.

“Feedback illustrates that there has been a real change in attitudes and increase in reporting and new and more effective methods of reporting: the employees felt as though they had been consulted and as a result felt invested in their own training,” says Regional Learning Organiser Sue Da’Casto.



WE'RE OPEN FOR JOBS AND TRAINING SUPPORT

West Midlands Unite held a successful jobs and training open day that helped hundreds of local people improve their job prospects.

More than 300 local people boosted their chances of securing jobs in the public and private sector at the very first West Midlands Unite jobs and training open day, held in June 2018 at Villa Park in Birmingham, the home of Championship team Aston Villa FC.

And thanks to the members of the Learn with Unite team and two active union learning reps (ULRs), everyone who attended the successful event was also able to discover more about the wide range of learning available through Unite to help them more effectively search for work.

The jobs fair was a timely initiative in the wake of Jaguar Land Rover's announcement of 1,000 job cuts in the region, the closure of the Sainsbury's distribution centre in Staffordshire and the loss of thousands of construction jobs with the collapse of Carillion.

ULRs Nick Wareing and Emma Randle (who both work for Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust) were able to use their experience supporting members in the workplace when talking to the people attending the event about the kind of learning they might need to help boost their job prospects.

"We've been looking at ways of getting people back into work if they're out of work, how they can start accessing online learning through LearnWithUnite, and telling them about joining a Community branch in some areas – it's been going really well," Nick explained.

Many people were surprised to discover that Unite provided learning opportunities to members, Emma said. "People are surprised that the courses are free: where people are unemployed, we can signpost them to Community membership, which is more affordable so they can retain their membership and learn at the same time."

Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust brought staff and current apprentices to promote its mix of current and upcoming apprenticeships, currently concentrated in entry-level roles, particularly IT and business administration.

"In the long run we are helping ourselves by coming here because when you post a job advert online you're mostly looking at youngsters picking it up, but here you're talking to the people who you want to reach in the slightly older generation," explained Sheroze Arif, who works as widening

participation and volunteer coordinator at the Trust.

It was particularly useful to have the Learn With Unite team on hand at the event, Sheroze said.

“When I was giving a brief to my colleagues about the kind of questions that might come up from people visiting the stand, I was going to say that if they need support to gain English and maths qualifications, they’d have to contact somebody else,” he said.

“But then I saw the Unite stand, where they can get that information – It’s helped that we can signpost people to support for English and maths from Unite.”

Birmingham City Council’s waste and recycling stand was being staffed – uniquely – by representatives from the management team and the union side – Principal Operations Manager Les Williams and Unite Convenor Richard Beddows. The move symbolised the massive improvement in relations between the two sides since the major 2017 dispute, sparked by the council’s threat to more than 100 refuse workers’ jobs.

“In the past, we had this historical element of ‘us’ and ‘them’ but the recent dispute has taught everybody that we are not just here as an antagonistic element – we are first and foremost operatives with a wealth of experience,” Richard said.

Les said he was encouraged that Unite had organised the day. “It’s really good that Unite have taken the bull by the horns and tried to give some guidance to people who may be trying to get a job but just don’t know what to do,” he said. “I’m thankful to Unite for putting this on because it’s definitely bringing people out that we want to employ.”

At Black Country Care, which provides home care, residential care and supported living services, Community Team Leader Paula Nicholls said that she was finding the event very helpful in terms of reaching potential new staff.

“I’ve done several of these jobs fairs now all over the Midlands and this seems a much better event in terms of numbers through the door and people coming to speak to us: at some of the smaller ones, you might only speak to two or three people, and you’ve been there all day, but this one seems as if it has a higher profile and there are more people coming through the door,” she said.

Helen Shields, Talent Administration Team Leader at Culina Logistics, the specialist chilled logistics arm of the Culina Group, explained that the company attended the event both to find



new staff and raise the profile of the business.

“With this being a Unite event, the difference is that you have a high volume of people who have been made redundant so that helps us see people who are genuinely interested in finding employment.”

Having members of the lifelong learning regional team and ULRs Nick and Emma staffing the stall not only showed the learning opportunities available through the union but also enabled Unite officers and reps to provide concrete help to members directly affected by the wave of regional redundancies, commented Learning Organiser Neil Vernon.

“Our Learn with Unite stall is really important for people who are unfortunately losing their jobs – we’ve spoken to several Unite members from Jaguar Land Rover who we can help with CV writing and gaining qualifications,” he said.

The whole event was put together by Unite Legal & Affiliated Services National Co-ordinator Jenny Clews and West Midlands Legal & Affiliated Services Assistant Dan Evans. They found the venue (secured at a significant discount), reached out to all the organisations who ran stalls and promoted the event by writing letters to members directly affected by the redundancies at Jaguar Land Rover, Sainsbury’s and Carillion, as well as emailing every regional member.

Overall, Jenny and Dan are happy that the event was able to help at least 318 people, members and non-members, find new employment and learning opportunities.

“We have had several people saying ‘thank you’ for the event and they have either gained employment, got several interviews or signed up to Unite’s free courses to help them stand out from the crowd when applying for jobs in the future,” Dan says. ■



DEVELOPING SKILLS ON SITE AND IN THE COMMUNITY

The Unite Construction team is not only helping building workers on site develop a wide range of important skills, it is also taking new learning opportunities into local communities.

The Unite Construction team within the national Union Learning Fund (ULF) project is helping building workers and local community members develop their knowledge and skills through a wide range of courses, from English, maths and IT to construction safety, redundancy support, mental health and even creative writing.

Delivered in learning centres and workplaces, the courses include the extensive portfolio available through the LearnwithUnite online learning platform, where there has been promising take-up of the free-to-access Level 2 qualifications.

Working in partnership with key employers ensures the team can help create the maximum number of learning opportunities during the lifetime of construction projects – and beyond.

“Construction work begins and ends as a ‘visiting circus’ model – once the construction project is completed, workers and employers move on to the next site and, in many cases, so

does the learning activity,” explains Construction ULF National Project Manager Keith Lewis.

“Unite will have members and workers accessing learning from the very beginning right through to completion and into the workplace for what the building or site will be used for post-construction. This enables us to provide an offer to members across a variety of sectors with Unite being the link throughout development and completion.”

With the focus on the need to improve English, maths and IT skills, in addition to achieving formal NVQ Level 2 construction qualifications, the team is supporting new learning centres to complement the existing provision at Canary Wharf and Liverpool.

In September 2018, with the help of ULF funding, Unite opened a learning centre in partnership with Nottingham City Homes that provides a wide range of learning opportunities for all staff, through the work of Unite’s three union learning representatives (ULRs) on site covering 440 members.

Both sides are keen to open up the learning centre to the community, enhancing Unite's footprint in the workplace and community.

Unite Construction has also provided support to members and potential members in accessing their Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) and Electro-technical Certification Scheme (ECS) cards, essential requirements for construction workers and electricians respectively to access and work on construction sites.

The team continues to support apprentices within the construction sector, trainees and young people looking for employment through supporting access to a wide range of courses, as well as helping learners through community-based learning centres.

The project continues successfully to link the learning and organising agendas. After signing a learning agreement with Derby Homes that covers 550 workers, the project was invited to deliver presentations to Derby Homes employees at an open day.

"This was a fantastic opportunity with non-members, existing Unite members and members that had previously been part of UCATT in attendance, and not only did we have a stand, we also had a 15-minute slot to talk about Unite membership," Keith says.

Further activity focused on developing the link between learning and organising has enabled the project to recruit dozens of new members in recent months.

Team members have also:

- provided briefings on employment rights and responsibilities to members and potential members
- promoted and supported NVQ provision in the industry
- negotiated and updated learning agreements with employers across the industry and provider agreements to the benefit of members, in support of the whole lifelong learning team's aim to cover 1 million workers with learning agreements.
- continued to promote the LearnwithUnite online learning platform, enhancing the union's offer to current and potential members.

Keith is particularly proud of the positive impact

on health and wellbeing that Unite Construction continues to make, with the team investing significant time in promoting positive mental health and tackling problem gambling in the workplace.

"The project offers support and raises awareness in these areas, emphasising the importance learning has around mental health and problematic gambling, and we continue to work with employers and organisations such as Beacon Counselling Trust and GambleAware to support members and workers," Keith says.

Unite Construction has also partnered with the pioneering creative organisation Writing on the Wall, the Liverpool-based charity that works on writing and social inclusion, to deliver the 12-week Write to Work programme, engaging a cross-section of community learners in terms of age range, gender and writing experience as well as some of the project's own staff.

With the growing demand for writing skills in different formats, the course was designed to cover: social media, creative writing, blogging, cultural and critical writing, podcasts, copy writing, non-fiction and research. It also included the spoken word and poetry.

The course offered all 12 participants the chance to explore each other's interests and stories, enabling learners to articulate their own experiences, ideas and opinions through the power of writing.

Writers Unite!, an anthology of stories, poems, reviews and observations by course participants, was launched in October 2018 with a special event run by Writing on the Wall in Liverpool's jazz and blues bar, Studio 2 Parr Street.

"Each participant engaged fully with the activities that were developed by a talented group of writers and tutor/facilitators and every contribution shone a light on each individual's identity and their journey in life, be it social, economic, cultural or political," Keith says.

"Judging by the feedback, everyone thoroughly enjoyed the course and 12 weeks could easily have been increased if the programme was extended further. This is something which should be built upon and developed – helping people, particularly young people, from our communities including marginalised groups who feel they have no voice." ■

WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU LEARN

From improving your computer skills to studying at degree level, you can develop yourself with the support of your union.

LearnWithUnite

LearnWithUnite enables our members to improve their skills through online learning. We currently offer:

- LITMOS Heroes: 700-plus bite-sized tasters, from five minutes to three hours duration
- ICT Skills: NOCN L1 & L2 Certificates (ITQ) – free to members!
- Level 2 qualifications: fully funded in England and Scotland only
- E-Careers: professional qualifications at heavily discounted prices
- Level 1 NOCN Award in English skills
- Initial assessments in English, maths and ICT
- Back to Work Support Programme
- ESOL resources.

Find out more from www.learnwithunite.org

Helping migrant learners

The United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP) successfully delivers flexible learning opportunities for migrant workers and their families in many communities across London and further afield, using our pioneering Alternative Education Model (AEM).

Find out more from your Regional Learning Manager.

Community learning

Unite currently runs community learning centres in Liverpool, Nottingham and Oldham. Please check what learning opportunities each centre offers via their contact details below.

- Unite Community Learning Centre, Back of Dovecot Place, Dovecot, Liverpool L14 9BA.
0151 228 6446 keith.lewis@unitetheunion.co.uk
- Nottingham City Homes Training Station, Harvey Road, Nottingham NG8 3BB. 0115 915 2500.
David.Cousins@nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk
- IGA-Learning CIO, Oldham Town Mission, OL4 1JW. 07804 634270. igaoldham@gmail.com. www.igalearning.co.uk

University discounts

- Birkbeck, University of London.

10 per cent discount on course fees.

Regular free advice and support sessions for prospective students. To claim your discount, download the discount form from the Birkbeck website (www.bbk.ac.uk/unions), fill in your personal details and sign. You will need to have your membership verified by a ULR, Regional Officer or a member of Learn With Unite staff.

- University of Wolverhampton.

10 per cent discount on course fees for new students who are Unite members.

To claim your discount, mention that you are a Unite member when you enrol (www.wlv.ac.uk). The university will confirm your membership with the regional Learn with Unite team. ■

YOUR LEARN WITH UNITE TEAM



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

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