



Building our future

in the workplace and in the community

THROUGH LEARN WITH UNITE

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Introduction

Having recently been the victim of the cynical political act that ended the Union Learning Fund (ULF), we are however able to reflect on two decades of success and subsequent benefit that the ULF projects brought to Unite, by utilising the government funding previously available to us.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, almost 41,000 learners were recorded through Learn with Unite activities in the English regions. Also as a result, it was calculated that more than 1,600 new members had been recruited while a further 1,900 retained by using the learning offer as a tool since April 2019.

When we published the most recent 'Learn with Unite' case study booklet (right), we subtitled it 'Gaining Skills, Building Branches'. That has very much been the mantra of our approach, with the role of the Union Learning Rep (ULR) in the workplace at its very core.

Over the years, we have come to regard certain embedded activities as our 'jewels in the crown'. In London and Eastern, we have the United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP); in the North West, the Taxi Education project; and the Learn with Unite platform was born in, and continues to be administered from, North-East, Yorkshire & Humberside.

Now the new Learning Hubs mainly focussed around airports in the South East and London & Eastern regions look likely candidates to become future jewels within that metaphorical crown. Please absorb the following updates from our English regional teams, prior to considering the positive opportunities that the changed funding environment presents us with in our concluding section.

Jim Mowatt
Director of Education



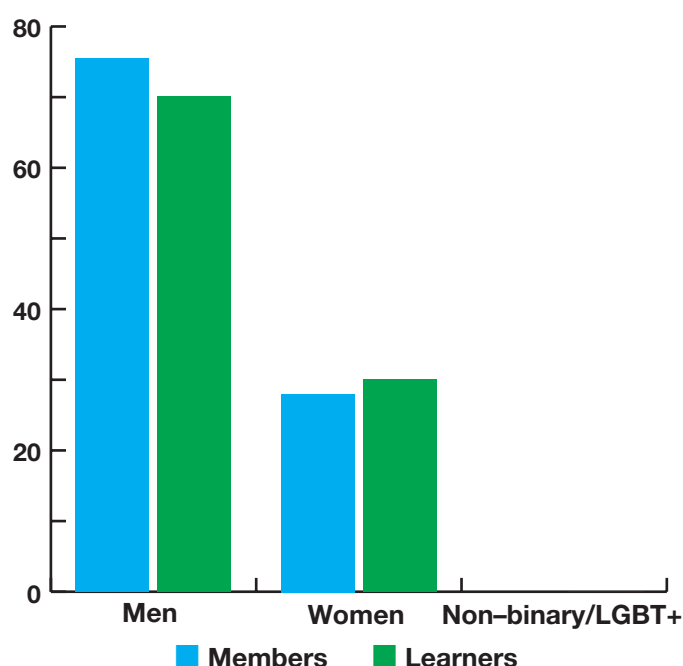
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Equality and diversity data

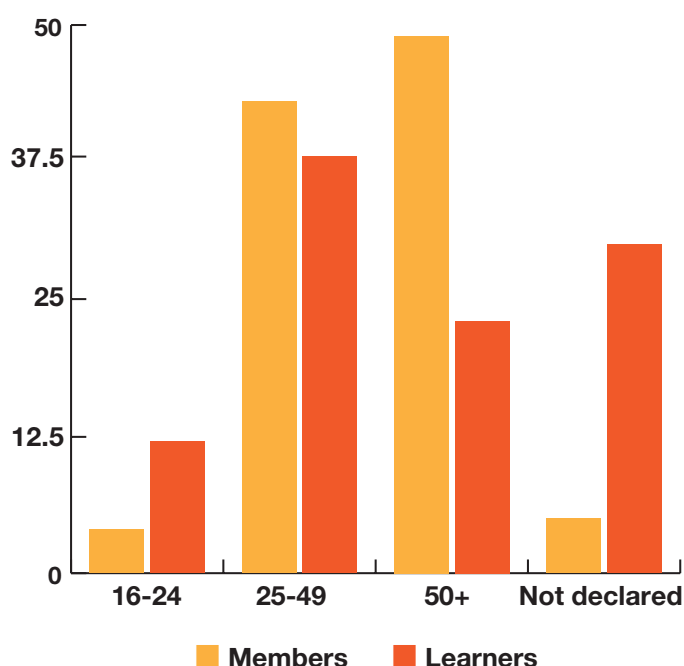
English regions, April 2020 – March 2021

Table 1: Learners compared with members: gender identity



The overall age profile for the year 2020/21 reasonably mirrors the membership profile, although women's participation was 3 per cent above their membership profile and men's almost 3 per cent below. It was only the second year that we have collected data for learners identifying as non-binary/LGBT+ (0.09 per cent).

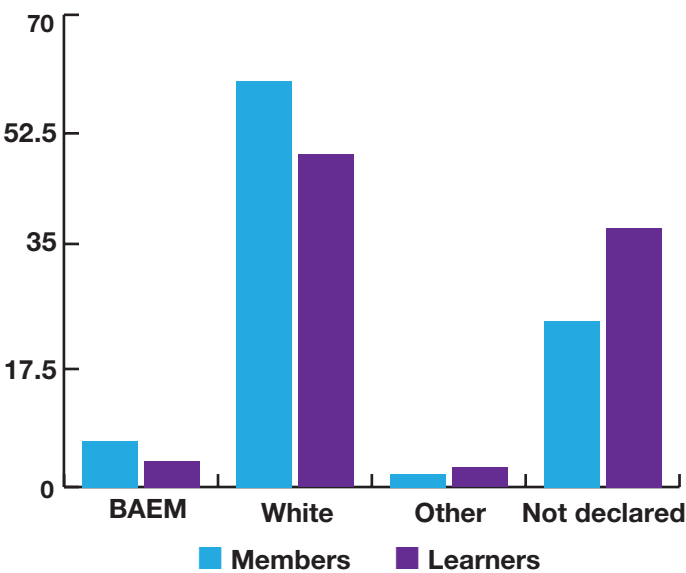
Table 2: Learners compared with members: age



The most striking conclusion in this category is that the project engages with almost four times the number of 16-24 years olds than recorded in the membership profile by percentage terms, at 11.87 per cent. This represents a recruitment and organising opportunity that is yet to be fully exploited.

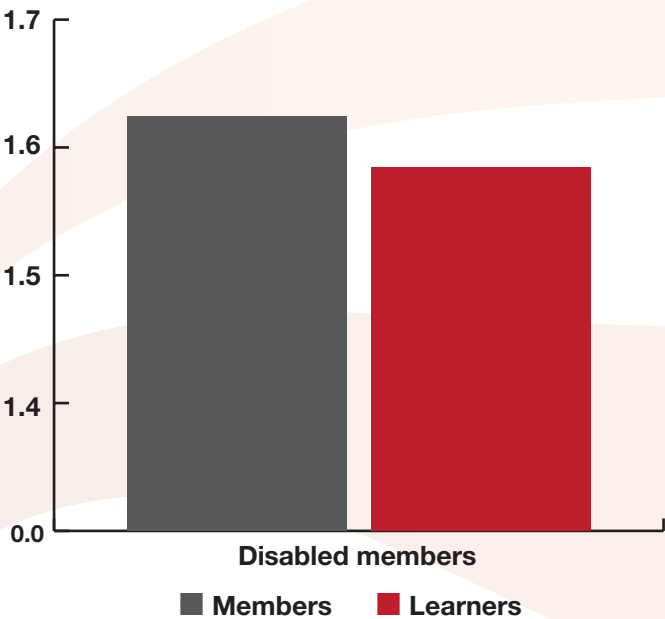
Much lower engagement with the 50-plus age group may be explained by a large 'non declared' cohort and the Covid era shift to online learning.

Table 3: Learners compared with members: ethnicity



The learners recorded broadly mirror the ethnic profile of the English membership. We have aggregated African-Caribbean, African, Asian and Black (other) learners in order to make a reasonably clear graphic. However, aggregating the numbers obscures one important variation: engagement with Asian learners at 1.76 per cent was lower than their membership profile of 4.13.

Table 4: Learners compared with members: disability



At 1.49 per cent, the proportion of learners reporting a disability was narrowly behind the membership profile.

The LWU team proactively works to reduce the amount of undeclared data in each category.

A discussion has commenced on appropriate revisions to E&D data collection categories for 2022 and beyond.



Supporting migrant workers

London & Eastern has successfully met the challenges of delivering learning opportunities and building the union through the global pandemic. Before the first UK lockdown, the region's pioneering United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP) was supporting a wide range of learning for more than 140 people from migrant communities every weekend at our offices in Holborn.

By making the switch to online delivery, the region is engaging up to 50 migrant learners through UMWEP's five classes every weekend, which is a remarkable success and proves the appetite for learning among this marginalised group remains as sharp as ever.

"UMWEP is a valuable resource that underpins core union values, taking learning opportunities into the communities and giving them the voice to tackle key issues," says Regional Learning Manager Pete Myers.

■ **With the aviation sector facing unparalleled challenges as a result of the enormous changes necessitated to tackle Covid-19,**

there are estimates that more than 30,000 workers at Heathrow Airport face losing their jobs.

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This makes the continued operation of the Heathrow learning hub even more vital in the coming period, as the employability skills courses on offer help learners develop their CVs, prepare for job interviews and gain workplace skills like problem-solving and teamworking. Learners can also use the hub to improve their English and maths.

"This is a massively helpful initiative from Unite," commented local MP John McDonnell when the hub went live last year. This will give local union members and their families real opportunities to gain access to the training and skills people will need for the future. With the current employment challenges people in our community are facing, it comes just at the right time."

Supporting apprentices

Despite the faster pace of redundancies as a result of the pandemic, the East and West Midlands regions are retaining members who are losing their jobs through the high-quality one-to-one redundancy support they offer.

Working with the retention units in the East and West Midlands during the lockdowns, the lifelong learning team has retained 60 members since Christmas and more than 175 in all since last summer. “There are swathes of worried people out there – even before Covid, we were helping a number of people in older age groups,” explains Learning Organiser Tracy Shannon.

“Many of our members who come to us for help have never written a CV before: we help them with the whole CV-writing process and interview skills. Many people were concerned they were too old to get another job – this really sums up how vital our support is.”

While the furlough extension has slowed the pace of redundancies in the regions, reps and officers have been alerting the lifelong learning team about companies that are facing job losses or even closure. “That’s not going away and, as September comes, more members will need our support – we are ready for that,” Tracy point outs.

The learning organisers have also been providing vital support to apprentices, another group of workers who have been adversely affected by the pandemic, both in terms of the disruption to their learning timetables and the massive increased in uncertainty about employment options at the end of their programmes.

After the learning organisers were alerted that apprentices at Bombardier in Derby were unable to complete their college work because of the



Supporting apprentices helps engage the young workers who will become the next generation of Unite members and activists

The initiative has proved so positive that it has led to the union forging a learning agreement with the train manufacturer

pandemic, the union was able to supply them with laptops. The initiative has proved so positive that it has led to the union forging a learning agreement with the train manufacturer for the first time.

“Often, the younger people we encounter have never heard of trade unions or have any idea what they do,” says Learning Organiser Neil Vernon. “Our apprentice support provides an ideal opportunity for Unite both to educate about trade union benefits and to offer support early through our employment rights and responsibilities sessions.”



Union learning reps like Daphne Robbins at Hull City Council continue to win recognition for the impact they make

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Opportunity for members

The North-East, Yorkshire & Humberside region has worked throughout the pandemic to expand opportunities for members and reach those who are often disenfranchised.

With redundancies impacting members but Covid making workplace visits impossible, the regional learning team focused on online delivery, working with professional partners to create a programme of workshops that could be delivered over Zoom.

Covering themes including redundancy support awareness, CV support, Interview skills and financial awareness, the workshops have proved popular with members.

“Utilising this type of delivery for the first time helped us reach people who would not always have had the opportunity to attend and access such support,” explains Regional Learning Manager Gill Pearson.

■ Born in the region, the Learn with Unite (LWU) online learning platform will continue to play a vital role in expanding learning opportunities in the months and years ahead.

The region has already chalked up great success using the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) offer to engage health members as part a regional campaign to grow our representative core

in this sector, as well as Litmos Heroes and other Level 2 qualifications available through LWU.

“LWU has been a saving grace during the pandemic, giving us a platform to continue promoting our learning benefits to our members but it does not detract from the great work we have always carried out face to face, supporting our learning reps in the workplace,” says Gill.

The courses have always make a real difference to members. For example, by providing a Level 5 leadership course to apprentices at coach builder Alexander Dennis (Plaxtons) in the past, the union helped them to secure promotions at the company.

“We can give members the best offers out there, which is an important part of retaining membership,” Gill says.

The team is also involved in looking at the issues around changing work-life patterns, with many sectors and workplaces indicating that both home working and a hybrid of home and office working are likely to continue after Covid.

“As we emerge from the pandemic, home working could be the new normal for many,” Gill says. “We need to raise awareness of the pros and cons to this new era for both individual members and Unite organisation in workplaces.”

Taxi education project

Unite's Taxi Education programme is the only one in the UK that can guarantee employment once learners complete their courses and has continued to provide Covid-secure learning during the pandemic.

The programme has helped taxi and private hire drivers complete more than 18,000 qualifications over the past 12 years from its offices in Liverpool, providing drivers with all the information they need to protect themselves and their passengers.

The purpose-built training cab on site for assistance training and CCTV cameras for observation helps the 10 tutors get the best out of the candidates and achieve the highest levels of learning.

"The project has evolved from a basic delivery model to an enhanced delivery model that has

earned us the accreditation of Pearson's and ICQ's top centre in this field," explains Regional Learning Manager Jane Broome. "We are the only recognised provider of these qualifications for many local authorities across the country."

■ **More than 450 learners have accessed education and other support through the United Migrant Workers Education Programme (UMWEP) delivered in the North West by the charity IGA-Learning CIO.**

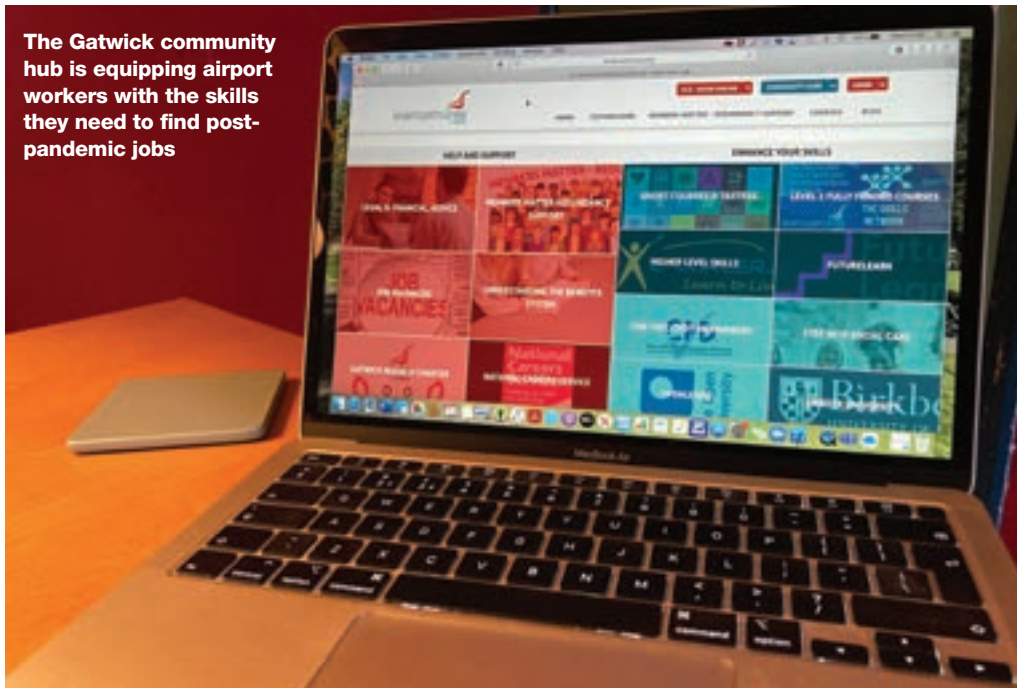
The learners are mostly migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees who have been able to access accredited courses through Learn With Unite and moved on to further or higher education courses and/or into decent jobs.

Many community members go on to become full members as they secure full-time employment.

Unite's Taxi Education project is providing Covid-secure courses to prepare drivers for their working life behind the wheel



The Gatwick community hub is equipping airport workers with the skills they need to find post-pandemic jobs



Gatwick hub

While the Gatwick community hub had been in the pipeline for some years, the mass redundancies in the wake of the pandemic made its launch in December 2020 absolutely essential, with up to 10,000 people dealing with Covid' impact on the airport and the businesses around it.

Joining the existing hubs in the Solent and Oxford areas, the new Gatwick hub offers online access to redundancy advice, benefits advice, CV writing, employability skills and more than 1,400 short courses, as well as specific support for young people and members of Black and Asian Ethnic Minority (BAEM) communities.

Its launch could not have been more timely, with the pandemic's impact on the aviation industry transforming Crawley from a high employment area to one of the most at-risk places of joblessness in the UK.

"When faced with redundancy, our members are encouraged to access our hubs in these areas where they can get support, including CV writing and upskilling," explains Regional Learning Manager Dean Briody. "This is one of the key points and crucial to recruitment and retention of Unite members."

The lifelong learning team ensures that each of the hubs offers relevant

opportunities to the local communities.

"Making each hub relevant locally means that members and businesses in those communities take more ownership of the hubs and are more engaged," says Learning Organiser John Barr. "Concentrating funding locally means that we are able to meet local needs for each area and cater to different priorities."

While the platforms are still quite new, the team wants to build on its initial successes in the coming period to make them even more effective for members and potential members by spreading the word with more employers through our network of reps and securing the support of local councils.

■ Rapidly establishing weekly Zoom support sessions for the region's 60 or so ULRs at the beginning of the pandemic has paid dividends. After starting on a trial basis, the sessions are still going strong more than 12 months later, with guest speakers supporting the ULRs on a different topic each week.

"This has been a booming success for us with a good uptake and pleasing engagement from our ULRs," says Dean. "We get very positive feedback – our reps overwhelmingly tell us how grateful they are for these opportunities for development during the pandemic."

The Hinkley project

The Hinkley project, with its huge potential for recruiting new members, remains one of the region's key priorities, even though the pandemic has precluded in-person on-site support for learners and other members and potential members.

The Regional Officer and Learning Organisers continue to find that the Unite learning offer is a powerful tool for signing up new members during their inductions.

Through our partnership with Somerset Passenger Solutions (SPS), we were already providing IT courses for the transport staff bringing Hinkley workers to, from and around the site and moved the courses online to enable SPS staff to continue to access the learning throughout the UK lockdowns.

The region aims to provide comprehensive redundancy support, with the help of its retention units, where the learning opportunities available through the union can make the case to wavering members.

"Reiterating to members the benefits of Unite, particularly the courses and transferable skills available

to them, is especially effective," says Regional Education Organiser Matt Gillett. "In many cases, people are not aware they exist. By doing this, members are not only retained but they also become more engaged with us."

■ The region has recently launched an important initiative to provide learning opportunities to migrants and refugees, which will only become more significant in the light of the post-Brexit spike in hate crime and the current government's war on migrants.

The project is designed to give these vulnerable people the support they really need to help them integrate into their local communities and the team hopes to use its connections with large employers to help them access work experience opportunities.

The Learning Organisers have recently trained a number of new community learning reps to underpin this project, which is looking into supporting refugees and asylum-seekers into community membership in order to access learning opportunities.



ANDY HEWLETT

Unite's learning offer is a powerful recruitment tool among the Hinkley workforce

Construction sector

Unite's Harmful Gambling Workplace Charter is helping support workers who have struggled during lockdown



Building for future

As the UK attempts to build back better in the wake of the pandemic, the work of Unite's Learning Organisers on construction sites, in workplaces and across communities underlines just how many opportunities there are, and will be, to recruit and retain members.

The Electrotechnical Certification Scheme (ECS) assessments that Unite invigilators conduct in offices, workplaces and learning centres bring the union into contact with those working not only in core electrotechnical occupations but also in specialised industry areas such as building controls, data communications, highway electrical and fire and security.

"ECS sessions are an excellent recruitment tool for the union and, despite the numerous challenges encountered as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Unite has been able to maintain the delivery of a sizable ECS programme," explains Construction Sector Learning Manager Keith Lewis.

In the last year alone, the union has recruited

In the last year alone, the union has recruited nearly 250 new members through the programme, which has continued to operate

nearly 250 new members through the programme, which has continued to operate at centres in Bradford, Birmingham, Liverpool, London and Manchester throughout the pandemic.

Administered via the Learn with Unite portal, the programme is also a self-sustaining source of funding for the union that has brought in around £500,000 worth of income in the last five years.

The union's pioneering work addressing problem gambling has only become more important during the Covid era

■ **The union's pioneering work addressing problem gambling has only become more important during the Covid era, with reliable estimates suggesting there are at least 400,000 problem gamblers in the UK, Unite's Harmful Gambling Workplace Charter offers practical, evidence-based ways in which employers and trade unions can promote worker health and wellbeing among those experiencing gambling-related harms. It endeavours to help reduce sickness and absence and support those who want or need to change their relationship with gambling.**

Unite's accredited Level 2 online course to raise awareness, which is aimed at reps, members and trade union professionals, has proven popular, with

more than 160 people accessing the course since June 2020, with a further 500 attending Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions.

"With possible redundancies upcoming, it's vital we continue to emphasise the dangers of gambling," says Keith. "Gambling support remains key for us: we will continue to support members to take the path to support, treatment and recovery."





BRIAN DAVIS

Conclusions

1 Growing through learning

ULRs and ULOs actively recruit and retain members using learning as a tool.

2 Developing our ULRs

Many workplaces / branches have vacancies for the ULR role. Now is the time to free ourselves of the previous ULF funding shackles and develop the ULR role as never before, at the heart of each Unite branch in line with our mantra, 'Gaining Skills, Building Branches'.

3 Building our organisation

ULRs have a proven record in progressing on to become Workplace Reps and many other significant activist roles within Unite.

ULRs and ULOs actively recruit and retain members using learning as a tool

4 Expanding our hubs

The new Hub concept looks primed to expand across the English regions to add to our already innovative range of approaches.

5 Promoting green skills

Learn with Unite is well placed to organise and recruit around the green skills agenda via learning.

6 Recruiting and supporting young members

Our data collection process shows that almost 12 per cent of our learners are within the 16–24 age range in England. This compares with just over 3 per cent of our membership. This statistical gap presents a very real and realistic recruitment and organising opportunity.

7 Prioritising ESOL

Unite remains the only trade union to offer a significant English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programme to the most vulnerable migrant workers and communities. The UMWEP concept is ripe for expansion, given the resources.

8 Generating income

Learn with Unite activities are proven income generators for the union.

9 Promoting the Harmful Gambling Workplace Charter

The already successful charter has huge potential to be rolled out across all sectors, to engage with workers and employers.

10 Using our Learn with Unite team

We have a highly skilled and experienced Learn with Unite team ready to face the challenges of the future, whose members have accumulated more than 250 years of experience in organising trade union lifelong learning. The wealth of experience also extends to individual branch activism; Labour Party activity; Trades Councils; and significant industrial experience, due to formerly held workplace activist roles and Regional Officer 'stand down'.



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