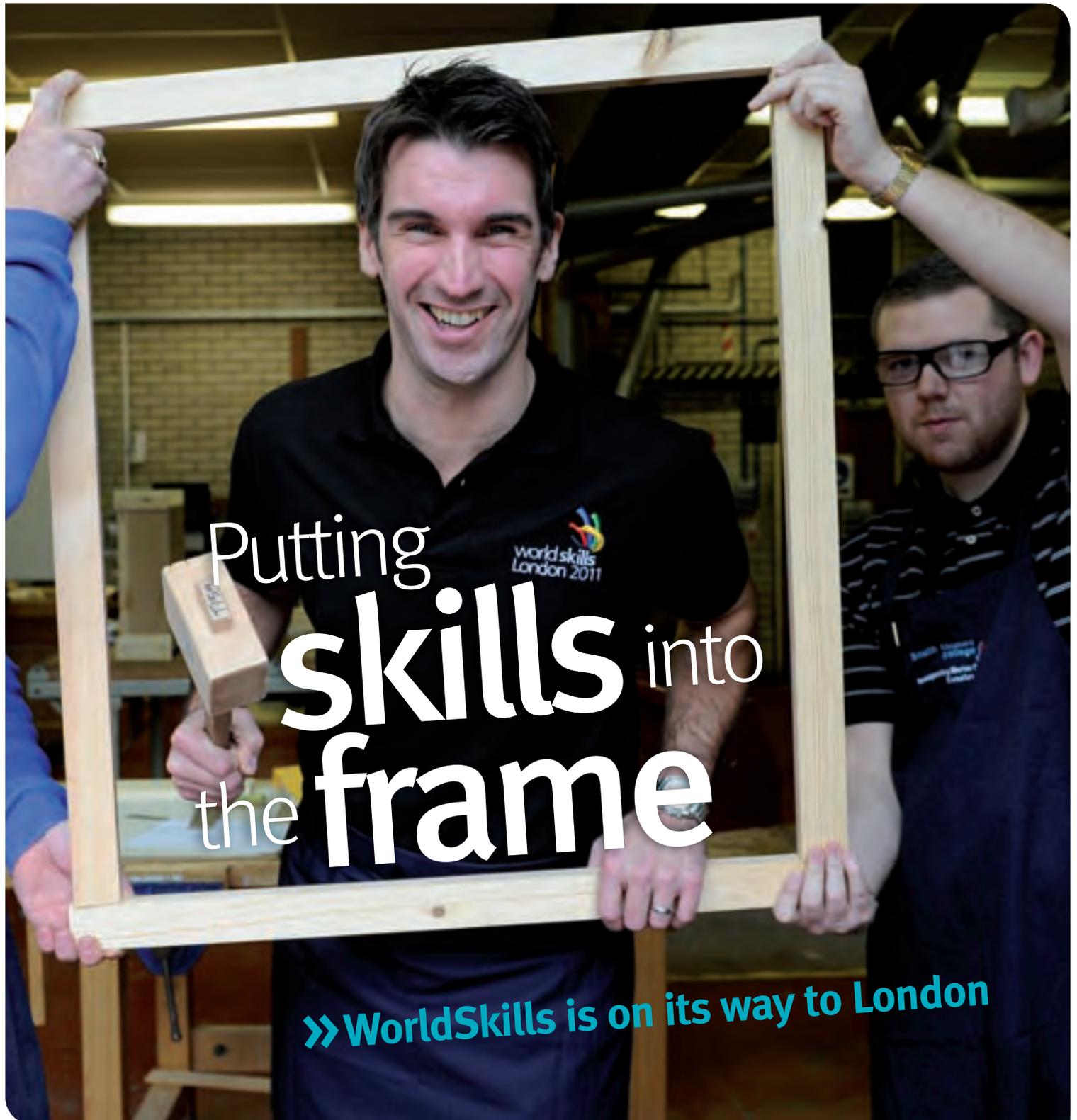


the learning rep

» Winter 2010



Putting
skills into
the **frame**

» WorldSkills is on its way to London

We live in interesting times

This is an interesting time for unionlearn and for union learning in general. Unionlearn has received a new funding agreement from the Government of over £21 million pounds for the next year.

This is obviously excellent news for the trade union movement, for unionlearn and for ULRs everywhere. It is also great news for all those people who will be benefiting from the training, advice and support we can bring to workplaces.

It gives us the chance to look at new opportunities for expanding the work we do including developing e-learning and making greater use of new emerging technology. This will be alongside expanding the number of ULRs we support; opening more learning centres; continuing to support workers faced with redundancy or needing re-skilling; and developing Skills for Life – as part of which we'll be continuing to promote campaigns such as Quick Reads (see pp16&17).

A big area for us will be opening up internet access to many more people using our existing networks and learning centres to promote our new campaign, Get Online – Get A Lifeline, which you will be hearing more about over the coming months (and features on p24 of this issue).

Obviously the wider FE and skills picture is controversial and many colleges will be affected by the changes in their Government funding so there will be new challenges as well as the new opportunities and new priorities. But we are looking forward to working with trade unionists and workers across the country to carry on the success story of union learning.

Tom Wilson

Director, unionlearn

The Learning Rep winter 2010

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We love music

Hip-hop teacher KMT (left) and CONEL lecturer Dave Smith show how to promote equality with music



Music workshops, family trees, walking tours, museum trips: ULRs had a lot do (and learn) at the unionlearn SERTUC conference in the autumn.

Unionlearn SERTUC conference participants didn't only talk the talk, they also got to walk the walk – in some cases quite literally, on walking tours of some of the famous parts of London around Congress House.

As well as guided tours of Covent Garden/Theatreland, Bloomsbury and Soho, participants were able to take part in a genealogy workshop, two different trips to the British Museum nearby and a coach tour taking in some of the capital's most notable sites.

The workshops included a session on the UCU ULF project Using Music to Promote Equality in Learning; designing union websites; apprenticeships; progression; and the right to request time to train.

The conference heard that 7,000 ULRs had been trained over the previous 12 months, 50,000 new learners enrolled onto courses, and 20,000 people encouraged into activity during Adult Learners' Week.

Speakers included TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber, unionlearn Regional Manager Barry Francis, unionlearn Board Chair Mary Boustead and author Lola Jaye, who signed copies of her Quick Read title *Reaching for the Stars* after encouraging participants to work hard and believe in themselves to achieve their dreams.

Photos: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk



UNISON and OU win participation award

UNISON and The Open University (OU) have won Widening Participation Initiative of the Year at the Times Higher Education Awards for their joint project that has helped more than 5,500 public sector workers access OU courses and training.

Working together, the OU and UNISON have successfully developed partnerships with local authorities to provide tailored education programmes for staff and encouraged employers to sponsor education and development opportunities for their workforce.

“We are delighted that our partnership with The Open University has been recognised for helping thousands of people develop confidence and skills through training,” commented UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis.

“As cuts hit the public services, training is needed now more than ever and we hope to continue this partnership to help thousands more staff reach their potential.”

Jeremy Roche, Dean of Health and Social Care at The Open University, said the partnership had achieved a tremendous amount in a relatively short space of time.

“This award recognises the significant contribution our partnership has to the widening participation effort, and we’re looking forward to continuing to provide education opportunities to public sector workers.”

» Find out more at www.open.ac.uk/choose/unison



UNISON Head of Learning and Organising Pam Johnson and Open University Pro-Vice Chancellor (Curriculum and Qualifications) Professor Alan Tait (left) pick up their award from Times Higher Education Events Director Keith Dalton

Photo: Charles Fox

Full speed ahead for rail skills scheme



Photo: Duncan Phillips/reportdigital.co.uk

The Government confirmed it is to pump £2.7 million into setting up the National Skills Academy for Rail Engineering (NSARE) as part of its new strategy for skills.

Matched by £2.2 million from employers, the money will help the skills academy deliver a highly skilled and qualified workforce to support the rail industry, specifically projects such as Crossrail (the Paddington to Liverpool Street link between west and east London) and High Speed 2 (the planned new London-Midlands line).

“The railway industry has many new exciting programmes going forward and we must make sure that we have the skills to deliver these programmes successfully,” commented NSARE (and Crossrail) Chairman Terry Morgan.

“The Skills Academy is, in my opinion, critically important to realise the full potential that the railway sector can contribute to the UK economy.”

NSARE aims to coordinate the capability and capacity of training providers to meet the needs of rail employers and the aspirations of employees by:

- promoting railway engineering as an exciting, sustainable ‘career of choice’ within schools, colleges and universities
- ensuring all engineers within the industry have at least a Level 2 qualification, and own and maintain a personal skills passport
- accrediting and auditing all education and training organisations, trainers and assessors
- ensuring national qualifications are available in the competencies that the industry needs, portable between employers and derived from National Occupational Standards (NOS) accepted by the industry.

Due to be fully operational early in 2011, the NSARE is one of 18 National Skills Academies that bring together employers and learning providers to shape training programmes to meet the needs of key UK industrial sectors.

» Get onboard the skills train: pp14&15



2012 legacy should be jobs and skills

The most important legacy of 2012 should be sustainable jobs and skills, Skills Minister John Hayes said when he presented learners at the Olympic Park Community and Trade Union Learning Centre with Inspire Awards in recognition of their achievements in the autumn.

“The Olympics should not only be viewed as a sporting event, but also as a catalyst for more widespread social and economic change,” he said, after meeting site staff, shopworkers, firefighters and community learners at the event.

“The most important legacy of the Olympics will be found not just in a short-term boost in income and publicity, nor even in medals, but in a longer-term legacy of facilities, sustainable jobs and skills,” he said.

TUC Deputy General Secretary Frances O’Grady said the learning centre was not only helping develop the Olympic workforce but giving local people the chance to improve their skills.

“When the great spectacle is over and the tourists have gone home, there will be something that is lasting,” she said.

Skills Minister John Hayes (second right) and TUC Deputy General Secretary Frances O’Grady meet inspiring learners at the Community and Trade Union Learning Centre in east London

Reformed UKCES continues union partnership work



John Lewis Partnership Chair Charlie Mayfield has taken over as chair of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) with a brief from Business Secretary Vince Cable to reform the non-departmental public body but continue social partnership with unions.

Charlie said he was looking forward to his new role at the helm of an organisation dedicated to increasing UK prosperity by helping to develop world-class employment and skills systems.

“I genuinely believe that the UK is a sleeping giant in respect of its skills and employment policies – there is so much potential to improve our skills, our productivity and our economy to create a fairer society,” he said.

UKCES continues to work with employers, trade unions, the voluntary sector and other public organisations to raise employer ambition, develop employer-led initiatives and deliver sector skills needs.

There are three trade unionists who are UKCES Commissioners:

- TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber
- Scottish TUC General Secretary Graeme Smith
- UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis.

Safety trainer wins ULR award

Ronald Munro, a training manager from Mines Rescue Service, Mansfield, was named ULR of the Year at the Proskills Awards 2010.

This was the first year that the expanded awards, run by the Sector Skills Council for the process and manufacturing sector and its Academy, included a learning rep category.

“Each finalist should be very proud of the achievements that they have made and the remarkable impact they are having in their workplaces,” commented Proskills UK Chief Executive Terry Watts.

Ronald is a training manager at the Mansfield site of Mines Rescue Service, a company with a long history that delivers a comprehensive range of health and safety courses to private and public sector organisations.



He is responsible for the development and delivery of training courses on a number of different topics, helping establish and create assessment criteria for National Occupational Standards.

“Ronald is an excellent listener, a great team leader and manager who motivates others: he puts in a lot of time and effort, and his tireless work to help everyone is to the great benefit of the industry,” the company says.

Ronald Munro receives his ULR award from comedian Hugh Dennis; Unite National Officer for Learning and Skills Tom Beattie; and Proskills UK Chief Executive Terry Watts



Plain sailing for marine learners

The Falmouth Marine Skills Project at Cornish ship repair company A&P Falmouth has marked the end of phase one by staging an awards ceremony for staff who have achieved qualifications.

Half of the 39 learners who passed their exams attended the ceremony at the Falmouth Hotel in September, picking up certificates in IT, literacy, numeracy and NVQ Business Management.

“It’s been plain sailing and hopefully this is just the start of things,” commented A&P Falmouth Personnel Manager Paul Kneebone.

“As a company, we are looking forward to continuing to support the project and continue building on the success so far.”

GMB organiser Gary Palmer (who helped launch the skills programme with management support) said it had been a pleasure to deal with a company where

everyone had been so enthusiastic.

“Learning leads to improved skills, higher morale and higher productivity – phase one has been really successful, achieving 99 learning outcomes so far, and I’m looking forward to equally exceptional results from phase two.”

The Skills Funding Agency’s Mark Williams, who presented the learners with their certificates at the event, congratulated the GMB union and the management for embracing workplace learning.

“It’s great to see so many people achieving, to see the use of funds first-hand and to meet the individuals who benefit,” Mark said.

“I’d like to see a lot more companies in Cornwall get involved with work-based, employer-led learning because there is still a lot of funding available.”

Calling all ALW winners

To mark the 20th anniversary of Adult Learners’ Week (ALW) in May, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is keen to track down past regional and national winners to take part in the celebrations.

“We want to hear from everyone who has won an Adult Learners’ Week award since 1992 and we’d be really interested to hear about their achievements since winning their award,” explains Richard Crabb, who heads the ALW team at NIACE.

“Every one of our winners had even more ambitious plans for their future following their remarkable achievements which had won them the award in the first place – we want to see how far they have gone towards achieving those ambitions and how their stories can continue to inspire others.”

NIACE hopes past winners will:

- take part in NIACE’s life history research
- attend one of the 2011 Adult Learners’ Week ceremonies
- tell their stories in print and online
- give press interviews (with the help of the NIACE media officer).

» If you have won an ALW regional or national award, please get in touch with NIACE by emailing 20@alw.org.uk, by visiting www.alw.org.uk/winner-contact-details or by phoning the Adult Learners’ Week team on 0116 204 4200.

One week to do your bit

Union branches can join thousands of organisations across the public and private sector showing what can be done to protect the planet during Climate Week in March 2011.

The new themed week aims to encourage events at workplaces or in the community highlighting the positive steps people are already taking to combat climate change.

The week kicks off with the Climate Week Challenge on day one, when small teams will have five hours to come up with an

environmental action plan to be submitted to a panel of judges who will decide the regional and national winners.

“Climate Week offers an annual opportunity to focus attention on the challenges and share ideas on how we can overcome them,” says the campaign, which is supported by organisations across business, science, education, local government and the third sector.

“This will result in many more people and organisations adopting the huge number of changes that

can be made, in virtually every area of human activity, to move towards a low-carbon society.”

Climate Week hopes to show that thousands of organisations are already taking steps to combat climate change, and to use those powerful examples to encourage thousands more to follow in their footsteps.

» You can find out more, including about registering for the challenge, at www.climateweek.com



Police proceed in educational direction

Leicestershire police staff facing redundancy due to budget cuts and restructuring are improving their employment prospects at a new learning centre at their Leicester headquarters.

UNISON Leicestershire Police Branch Secretary Chris Hanrahan (right) and Chief Constable Simon Cole support the new learning agreement

Chief Constable Simon Cole and Head of HR Alison Naylor signed a learning agreement with UNISON and formally opened the centre, which gives

staff access to computers and a range of online courses.

“Regional restructuring, budget cuts and privatisation have hit us all big time, and the only good news to come out of this situation has been the setting up of the centre,” says UNISON Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator Gary Jacques.

“We have been helping staff update their CVs and improve their IT skills and the

employers have been very supportive and have been encouraging people to make use of the centre.”

UNISON Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gavin McCann is full of praise for the local ULRs.

“The learning reps have been fantastic and have moved quickly to help members under threat,” he says.

Unionlearn’s Skills: Recession and Recovery (SRR) Project has provided funding and support, while ULRs have been using laptops to create a virtual learning centre for staff working in offices outside headquarters.

“In these difficult times, it is important that unionlearn is there to help union members respond to redundancy; but the SRR Project is also about learning centres being used to improve employees’ skills for the long-term,” says unionlearn Regional Manager Mary Alys.



Plymouth posties sign up to study

A pair of CWU learning reps who only completed their training in September organised a hugely successful Taste of Learning open day in the restaurant at the Plymouth Manual Data Entry Centre (MDEC) just two months later.

Leo Haynes and Martin Oram put the November event together to encourage staff to sign up for courses at the onsite learning centre – and after a slow start at the beginning of the day, the event built to a frenzy of activity as the 5 o’clock shift arrived.

“The final session was like ‘happy hour’ – I couldn’t believe it,” Martin says. In all, 34 people registered for Skills for Life courses and another five for The Open University, while many others took away course details to follow up later.

The duo are already thinking about further events in the new year.

“I am really quite proud of this, but I don’t want it to end here,” says Leo. “I want to carry on this great excitement and make this a regular thing that staff can look forward to.”

CWU Project Worker Phil Sutton is delighted that the new reps kicked off with such a successful open day.

“For such new ULRs, they have really hit the ground running – they must take credit for all their enthusiasm and their hard work in making this event such a success.”



Getting our skills

The Government has set out detailed plans for reform of the education and skills budget ...and it will continue to invest in unionlearn.

shi

Against the backdrop of 25 per cent cuts to the further education budget over the next four years, Business Secretary Vince Cable and Skills Minister John Hayes launched the Government's strategy for skills with the autumn publication of two key documents.

Skills for Sustainable Growth set out the Government's vision for reform of the further education (FE) and skills system, while the parallel publication *Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth* explained its spending plans in detail.

"If we are to achieve sustainable growth, nothing is more important than addressing current failings in skills training, and this strategy reflects this Government's determination to do both," Dr Cable explained.

"We are not in a position to throw money at the problem, but even against the backdrop of reductions, resource will be found to expand the apprenticeship programme for adults and support more people undertaking an increasingly respected form of vocational training."

The reform of the skills systems includes:

- replacing Train to Gain with an SME-focused programme to help small employers train low-skilled staff
- expanding the numbers of adult apprenticeships through an investment of £605 million in the next financial year
- protecting investment of £210 million in adult and community learning, to support personal development, inclusive communities and a route into formal learning for the disengaged.

Skills Minister John Hayes argued that the skills strategy was one of the most important documents yet published by the coalition.

"Despite a reduction in the FE and skills budget, we are continuing to protect and invest in programmes that provide the highest quality and greatest benefit to the maximum number of people," he said.

"Replacing Train to Gain with funding for workplace training

prioritised on SMEs will help employers with a small workforce train low-skilled staff, and as we continue to expand apprenticeships and reinvigorate community learning, more people will be able to build their skills and fulfil their potential."

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said there was much to welcome in the strategy, including the recognition of the crucial union role in workplace learning, but criticised plans to cut funding of courses adults can currently access for free.

"At a time when inflation is high, pay is being squeezed and hundreds of thousands of job losses are on the cards, paying for training is likely to be a very low priority for cash-strapped workers," he pointed out.

» You can download a copy of *Skills for Sustainable Growth* and *Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth* from the BIS website: www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2010/Nov/Skills-for-sustainable-growth

Union learning secures further funding

Business Secretary Vince Cable confirmed the Government's continued support for unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund (ULF) when he unveiled the new skills strategy in November.

Unionlearn exemplified "the best of co-operation between Government, business and unions," according to the document *Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth*.

The £21.5 million allocated in the next financial year would enable unionlearn and the ULF to build on their impressive track record of "promoting and supporting learning in the workplace, especially in reaching out to those who are poorly-qualified and most in need of support," the document said.

The news of the financial settlement followed a series of very public commitments to union

learning by members of the BIS ministerial team, including Dr Cable's keynote speech to unionlearn's annual conference in the summer.

"You have developed a powerful model, reaching out to businesses and giving individuals a chance they never would have had: I want you to build on what you have already achieved," he told the participants.

pshape

Unions are the key to growth

Companies can maximise skills and work practices by taking action to involve their unions and employees, according to new research by a leading academic.

“By harnessing employees’ creativity, employers can find ways to improve efficiency, devise new products or raise the quality of services provided,” argues Francis Green, Professor of Labour Economics and Skills Development at the Institute of Education.

Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson commended the research when it was presented at a Congress House seminar in the autumn.

“This paper shows that unions can do much to negotiate with management to promote work practices that are more efficient and allow staff to be creative without increasing workload – but this means establishing mutual trust and partnership with co-operative employers,” he commented.

Scottish TUC General Secretary Grahame Smith explained that the Scottish workforce was more highly qualified than its English counterpart but achieved lower productivity – which was why the Edinburgh administration had set up a Skills Utilisation Leadership Group.

UKCES Deputy Director of Research and Policy Lesley Giles pointed out that employers were not creating the jobs that required the higher-level skills people were acquiring in the UK, whereas our international competitors were changing their occupation profiles towards higher-end skills.

»» Download *Unions and skills utilisation* from www.tuc.org.uk/extras/skillsutilisation.pdf



It's all about the appliance of science

Prospect has won the WorldSkills UK Partner of the Year award for developing an environmental science competition that will feature in WorldSkills 2011.

A new environmental science competition developed by Prospect for the first time in 2010 was so successful it will feature at WorldSkills 2011 in London.

Prospect members at the British Geological Survey used their expertise to establish the competition in collaboration with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and with support from unionlearn, Natural England and STEMNET.

The competition aims to raise skills and awareness in science, engineering and related disciplines among young people interested in sustainable natural resource exploitation, sustainable energy production, environmental protection and climate change.

"The competition addresses one of the most important challenges facing the UK and we are aiming high for the future," says Prospect's Head of Research Sue Ferns.

"Although this is one of the newest UK competitions, we have secured agreement that it will feature at WorldSkills 2011."

Working in small multi-disciplinary teams, competitors had to devise the best combination of energy supply to a purpose-designed, generic island for the next 30 years and had to build a solar-powered oven.



Competitors developed their understanding of major environmental issues



Prospect Head of Research Sue Ferns receives WorldSkills UK Partner of the Year award from UK Skills Chief Executive Simon Bartley (right) and world-class chef and UK Skills board member Brian Turner

A team of apprentices from Chevron's Pembroke refinery took gold in the 2010 competition final, which was held at Pembrokeshire College and sponsored by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Semta and Cogent SSCs.

As well as confirming their commitment to go on to study science, the students pointed out the wider benefits of taking part in the competition.

"I now understand the complexities in maintaining an economy and jobs as well as improving the environment and how factors interlink," commented one.

"Although we didn't always have the same ideas, we listened to each other: this experience has taught me very important life skills such as team work, leadership and problem solving," added another.



Taking part in the competition taught students the value of teamwork

» For further information and to enter, visit www.worldskillsuk.org/competitions/built-environment/environmental-sciences

Frame! Lee wants to learn forever

Apprentice winner Lee McQueen gets in the frame with woodwork students at South Thames College

Photo: Daniel Denne



“I’m a big supporter of WorldSkills London 2011 because it recognises and showcases the talent that we’ve got here in the UK,” says someone who should know – former Apprentice winner Lee McQueen.

“The competition creates that desire of striving to win something – and to be better,” says Lee, who successfully strove to be picked as Sir Alan Sugar’s apprentice in the 2008 edition of the BBC TV show.

“Preparation and training for the event is an incredibly intense process, with huge personal development needed to reach the ultimate prize: it breathes ambition and drive into whole communities and I’m a huge fan.”

Lee is one of a team of WorldSkills London 2011 Ambassadors promoting the competition, which also includes London Mayor Boris Johnson, Skills Minister John Hayes, National Apprenticeship Service Chair Simon Waugh, UKCES Chief Executive Chris Humphries, and Theo Paphitis, from BBC TV’s *Dragons’ Den*.

WorldSkills is the greatest skills competition on earth and a fabulous spectacle in which young people compete in 45 different skills from welding to web design, stonemasonry to silver service.

The competition takes place every two years in a different

country with more than 50 nations competing. World Skills 2011 in London will see 100 colleges invited to showcase students’ talents.

The event will also feature a three-week Skills Festival from 19 September to 9 October across the UK.

Young people try their hand at a range of skills during Skills London



Visit London estimates hosting WorldSkills will directly benefit the capital to the tune of £27 million and the competition is likely to boost vocational education across the UK: after Finland hosted WorldSkills in 2005, vocational education in the country rose by 8 per cent.

The UK Squad for WorldSkills London 2011, which was announced in November, will now spend the run-up to the event in intensive training and practice.

In addition, the event will offer extensive opportunities for people to have a go at a huge range of skills. In October 2010, the WorldSkills stand at Skills London saw 45,000 young people passing through and trying their hand at landscape gardening, stonemasonry, beauty therapy, welding, cooking and much more.

Employers back skills

- 68 per cent of employers think there are too few candidates with vocational qualifications and practical skills.
- 52 per cent of employers think the jobs market has too many people with academic qualifications.
- More than 50 per cent of employers believe that vocational qualifications are under-valued.
- 81 per cent of apprentice employers say they make their businesses more productive.
- Nine out of ten employers say vocationally qualified staff are vital for their business success.
- 63 per cent of employers say skills training will play an important role in economic recovery.
- A 1 per cent increase in the proportion of employees trained equals an increase in productivity of 0.6 percentage points – worth around £6 billion a year to the UK economy.
- Superdrug found a 13 per cent return on investment from their training programme.

Employees need skills

- Getting a good vocational qualification will increase lifetime earnings by nearly £200,000.
- On achieving Level 2, earnings increase by 15 per cent on average.
- On achieving Level 2, employment rate increases by 50 per cent.
- Many vocational trades require skills at Level 6 and beyond (equivalent to a degree).
- The UK Happiness Index shows Britain’s vocational workers are at the top of the scale.

All together now

What would you do with £4,000? PCS ULRs and management at one Merseyside site joined forces to use it to improve learning. By Astrid Stubbs

Creating a Collective Learning Fund (CLF) has helped sustain the learning initiative on a Southport site shared by 850 staff working for the passport service and the NHS, says PCS Branch Learning Coordinator Fran Mellor.

CLFs are union-led initiatives to stimulate co-investment in the personal development of the workforce to make learning affordable.

The Southport CLF covers some 700 office staff working for the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) and another 150 at the NHS Information Centre.

The fund is managed by the site learning committee, which involves ULRs from across the whole site, the IPS and NHS Learning and Development managers, and providers Business Link.

The fund has helped set up a learning centre, produce publicity material and subsidise learning costs, supporting over 10 per cent of staff through a range of courses such as British Sign Language, Spanish and self-defence.

Both the employer and the provider have contributed to the fund – with cash and in kind. For example, the employer gave staff some time off to participate in Learning At Work Day (LAWD) taster sessions.



Photographs: Paul Herrmann



PCS IPS Branch Learning Coordinator Fran Mellor (right) and PCS ULR for the NHS Information Service Lilian Crossey (left) have used their Collective Learning Fund to organise a range of courses including sign language (above)

Making Learning Affordable – Setting up Collective Learning Funds A toolkit for trade unions



Unionlearn trialled CLFs at workplaces such as the IPS and NHS Information Service in the North West and in the East Midlands.

Now there's a new toolkit to help union reps and ULRs establish CLFs in their workplace that includes:

- a booklet that explains what CLFs are and their benefits to unions and learners
- a booklet containing six case studies
- factsheets that provide practical help on how to establish a CLF.

» Download the toolkit from www.unionlearn.org.uk/initiatives/learn-3653-f0.cfm

“CLFs are an innovative way in which to increase co-investment between employers, providers and individuals and to share enhanced learning opportunities and benefits more equitably within the workforce as a whole.”

Managers from both the NHS and IPS are now working in partnership with the steering group at CLF meetings. This relationship has greatly improved a whole organisation approach. Joint LAWD events are now common practice and ULRs support the delivery of new qualifications that weren't previously available such as Team Leader and ITQ.

During a time of major restructuring, the CLF helped to maintain a consistency in the learning agenda across the site. For example, LAWD activity raised the visibility of the union across the site, and led to recruiting members and a positive presence.

This meant that the union was more approachable and it created more pathways to be involved in PCS.

“Sometimes potential members would hurry away when we tried to talk to them about joining the union,” says one ULR. “Now people come to us to talk about learning, and we can use this opportunity to recruit them.”

The fund has also been valuable because it's enabled some autonomy for the ULRs, who have gained an opportunity for local inventiveness and have not had to wait on management approval of every detail.

“We see the learning work going ‘hand in glove’ with the other union work we do onsite,” says Branch Secretary Allie McLachlan. “It makes the union more approachable, and creates pathways to becoming involved with PCS.”

Recently awarded by NIAACE for his work on co-investment and CLFs, unionlearn Research and Strategy Manager Bert Clough says there has never been a greater need for increased co-investment in workforce development as public subsidy for lifelong learning is severely cut.

“CLFs are an innovative way in which to increase co-investment between employers, providers and individuals and to share enhanced learning opportunities and benefits more equitably within the workforce as a whole,” he argues.

Top tips

- Plan and be realistic.
- Establish a good team of ULRs – and involve all your union reps.
- Include the CLF in your learning agreement.
- Ensure the learning committee gets regular reports about the CLF.
- Be clear what your members want to study, and what they can contribute.
- Develop the best possible relationship with the employer.



The rail industry is set to train the next generation of engineers – thanks to pop svengali turned rail entrepreneur Pete Waterman and the NSARE initiative.

By Martin Moriarty

Get onboard the skills

Pete Waterman (in duffel coat) flanked by Unite officers Les Bayliss (left) and Bob Rixham (right) and apprentices at his Crewe rail engineering workshop

When Business Secretary Vince Cable confirmed the Government would fund the new National Skills Academy for Railway Engineering (NSARE) this autumn, he made an old pop impresario very happy.

As a lifelong railway enthusiast and supporter, Pete Waterman was one of the moving spirits behind the NSARE initiative and is a firm believer in the need to address the future skills needs of the industry.

“I couldn’t be more pleased that the Government has formally recognised the compelling need to invest in the training of the current and future generation of workers in this strategically important industry,” he says.

Central to the NSARE mission will be encouraging a new approach to apprenticeship training. It’s an issue close to Pete’s heart since he served his time at the General Electric Company in the 1960s long before he became the pop svengali who brought us Kylie, Jason, Rick Astley and Steps.

“I always thought an apprenticeship was the most amazing way of training people because it engaged them, it made them feel slightly special, so when we started building the London and North Western Heritage Railway Company, there was never a question for me about apprenticeships,” he says.

Based at Crewe, the company is training 27 apprentices, many of them young people whose negative experience at school resulted in them leaving with no qualifications.

“We tend to take kids with no educational skills – in the interview we don’t ask a kid if they’ve got GCSEs: we talk to them one-to-one and they get their apprenticeship based on what we think of their enthusiasm for the job and their ability,” he says.

Most of Pete’s apprentices remain with the company when they’ve served their time, and he believes it’s down to him to provide decent pay, quality training and something worthwhile for them to do when they finish.

“You must be doing something wrong if you lose them: my job must be to keep them, not just to train them. I get a lot of benefits when they’re training so I’ve got to look after that guy when he finishes – if I’m only using him for cheap labour, it’s pointless doing it,” he says.

NSARE Programme Director Gil Howarth, who has overseen some of the rail industry’s flagship projects in the past 20 years, agrees that apprenticeships are critical to the future of the industry.

“NSARE will be the focal point for attracting young people into the industry and ensuring that they are trained to the highest standards to enable them to realise their full potential,” he promises.

“I always thought an apprenticeship was the most amazing way of training people because it engaged them, it made them feel slightly special, so when we started building the London and North Western Heritage Railway Company, there was never a question for me about apprenticeships.”

train

New minimum wage comes into force

The new National Minimum Wage (NMW) for apprentices was introduced on 1 October 2010, and applies to all apprentices aged under 19, and apprentices aged 19 or over in the first year of their apprenticeship.

The apprentice NMW will be £2.50 per hour, and will apply to time working, plus time spent training that is part of the apprenticeship, ensuring that all apprentices in the UK receive the protection of the NMW for the first time.

Apprentices are good for business

The UK can develop the skills of its workforce through the apprenticeship programme, argues Simon Waugh, Executive Chairman of the National Apprenticeship Service.

With recent research from the TUC suggesting pre-recession employment levels may not return for some time, it is increasingly important that the UK leads in developing the skills of our workforce.

The Leitch report, published in 2006, warned that Britain needed to build a skilled workforce to prevent us lagging behind our international counterparts in terms of skills.

Evidence shows that apprenticeships help businesses across all industries to reduce skill shortages, minimise staff turnover, and increase productivity.

Recent research by the Return on Investment Academy for the National Employer Service shows that:

- in travel group TUI, former apprentices in the 16 to 18-year-old group outperform colleagues by 26 per cent
- at opticians Dollond & Aitchison, the increase in revenue from the apprenticeship programme is between 10 and 13 times the running cost
- high street retailer Superdrug's retention rate is twice as high for apprentices as for other members of staff.

With the renewables sector predicting it will need 66,000 more technicians by 2020, and the science, engineering and manufacturing sector requiring 19,200 Level 3 technicians by 2016, apprenticeships can help fill skills gaps and address the issues of an ageing population.

Apprentices help business reduce skill shortages and increase productivity, says NAS Executive Chairman Simon Waugh

It is therefore important that we start to anticipate need, and grow apprenticeships at the right level in the right industries – an advanced economy needs advanced skills.

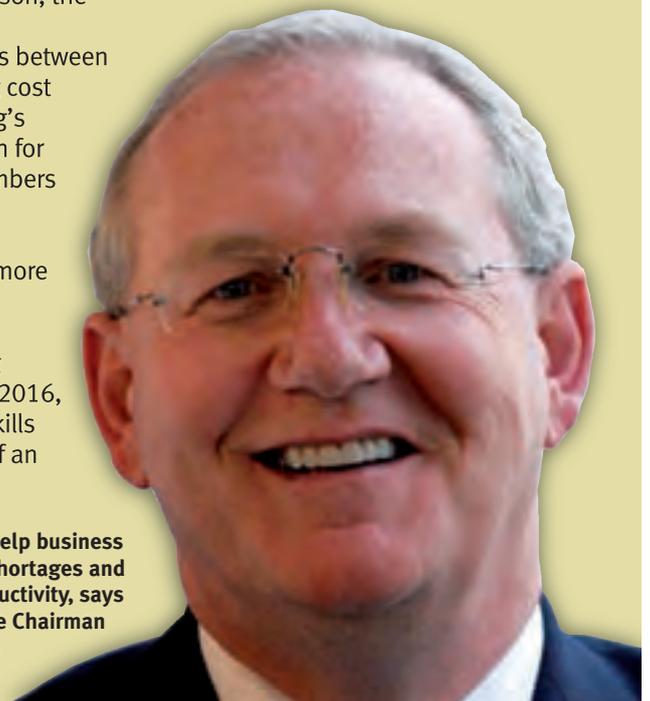
The National Apprenticeship Service wants to improve progression routes through apprenticeships into higher level skills and professional development.

To help us achieve this, we will need to work closely with trade unions: your role is vital in promoting and delivering the apprenticeship programme, as well as supporting achievements in the workplace.

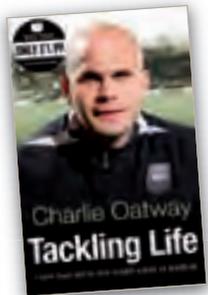
I want to take this opportunity to thank union learning reps for your dedication and commitment and for the apprenticeship opportunities you have developed and supported. I hope we can continue to work closely together.

Working together with the TUC and ULRs, we hope that we can encourage more businesses to offer apprenticeships, which will be crucial in ensuring a robust economic delivery.

Apprenticeships have a huge part to play as it is only through the development of a skilled and dedicated workforce that our economy will thrive and we will see employment levels return.



Tackling the difficu



From the lows of prison to the highs of professional football, Charlie Oatway has seen it all. Now he's sharing his story in a compelling new Quick Read.

By Astrid Stubbs

2011 could be a hat-trick year for Charlie Oatway. His first book is coming out in the Quick Reads series in March. His team, Brighton and Hove Albion, (where he now coaches) is moving to a new stadium in May. And by the end of the season, the Seagulls might even have won promotion to the Championship.

It's all a long way from where he started, when he left school with undiagnosed dyslexia aged only 13, spent too much time with friends and relatives who were in and out of prison – and then ended up inside himself.

Charlie found himself on his way to jail after striking out in defence of a friend who'd been racially abused. The struggle that ensued proved to be one fight too far – just as he had made it to the top as a professional footballer at Cardiff City.

But it was the beautiful game that came to his rescue on his release when he finally found help with reading through new club, Brighton and Hove Albion.

With the support of Alan Sanders, the Seagulls' community scheme manager, Charlie took classes at the club's study support centre for adults who struggled with maths, English and IT.

"The idea behind having a study centre at a professional football club is simple: people who didn't do well at school and think learning is for other people are less likely to be scared off going along to somewhere like a football club than going along to a college," says Charlie.

"I have become better and better: my spelling is non-existent but my reading is now a million times better."

Along with his improved reading abilities, Charlie now has a new-found confidence and is proud to be a Learning Champion. And as community relations manager of the club's charitable arm Albion in the Community (AITC), he is also a passionate advocate for adult literacy.

"The idea behind a study centre at a professional football club is simple: people are less likely to be scared off going to a club than going to a college."

It issues

“We managed to get people interested in learning all sorts and thousands of adults got themselves some proper qualifications too. It gave me a real sense of worth knowing that I could help other people so they wouldn't have to struggle to overcome their fears as much as I had done,” he says.

Charlie reckons that literacy and numeracy difficulties are not taboo subjects any more.

“When I was growing up, people didn't know much about literacy and numeracy but now it's very much out there and people can relate to it and everyone knows someone struggling with those things,” he says.

“Colleges are better able to cope with people like myself who obviously struggle, and I tell people that while it's hard the first time you go in to college, it gets so much easier and sooner or later you'll wish you'd done it years ago.”

He hopes his book, *Tackling Life*, will help spread the word that it's never too late to learn. “If one person takes what I say and tries to sort out their education then the book has been worthwhile,” he says. Any money raised from the book will be ploughed back into Albion in the Community to help other people.

With such a monumental year ahead, Charlie hasn't given much thought to future books yet. “I'll see how this one goes and what feedback it gets!” he says.

FOOTBALL FACT

He might have written a Quick Read, but Charlie's full name is guaranteed to slow anyone down. His full birth certificate reads: Anthony Philip David Terry Frank Donald Stanley Gerry Gordon Stephen James Oatway. His dad won a bet to use the names of Queen's Park Rangers' first squad of 1973, the year he was born. But when his aunt visited his mum in hospital after the birth, she thought the future football star looked “a right little Charlie” and the name has stuck ever since.



Sweet deal for Galaxy and Quick Reads

Confectionery firm Galaxy, which sponsors the National Book Awards, is teaming up with Quick Reads to promote the new books published on World Book Day, 3 March 2011.

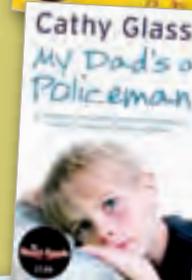
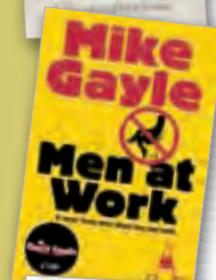
The 10 new titles include stories from the world number one James Patterson, Irish novelist Sheila O'Flanagan, rising star Linwood Barclay and ex-Python Terry Jones.

Now in their sixth year, Quick Reads have introduced hundreds of thousands of people to the joys of reading by providing short books by bestselling writers and celebrities.

The 2011 Quick Reads are:

- *Clouded Vision* by Linwood Barclay (Orion)
- *Strangers On The 16:02* by Priya Basil (Transworld)
- *Jack And Jill* by Lucy Cavendish (Penguin)
- *Men At Work* by Mike Gayle (Hodder)
- *My Dad's A Policeman* by Cathy Glass (HarperCollins)
- *Follow Me* by Sheila O'Flanagan (Headline)
- *Trouble on the Heath* by Terry Jones (Accent Press)
- *Tackling Life* by Charlie Oatway (Transworld)
- *Bloody Valentine* by James Patterson (Random House)
- *Kung Fu Trip* by Benjamin Zephaniah (Bloomsbury)

» Full details and tips on using the books to support members are at www.quickreads.org.uk



Photographs: Mark Pinder



The learning partnership between the GMB and Innovia Films in Wigton, Cumbria, is helping the workforce develop a wide range of skills for work and for life.

Innovia Films is the major employer in the small market town of Wigton

Meet

The biggest employer in the Cumbrian market town of Wigton, Innovia Films is investing in its future by supporting learning and development in partnership with shopfloor union GMB, local providers and schools.

The company is a leading global producer of speciality high-performance Biaxially Oriented Polypropylene (BOPP) (much of it used in food packaging) and cellulose films for packaging and labels.

With 900 staff onsite in a town with a population of 5,500, Innovia is focused on learning and development for the entire workforce to ensure it reaps the benefits of staff retention and maximises potential in what is a very competitive market environment.

Learning centre coordinator and GMB learning rep Paul Tiffen has worked at the company since he joined on a youth training scheme after leaving school in 1991. He was a process operator in the BOPP plant until he took over running the learning centre two years ago.

Paul's move was made possible because the GMB secured financial support to staff the centre from North-West unionlearn's Learning and Skills for All Fund (LSFAF), which supports a variety of projects across the region and supplements Union Learning Fund (ULF) activity.

"I became a ULR two years ago, about the same time as the Learning and Skills for All Funding was made available," he recalls.

"I've been very fortunate in that funding through unionlearn was allocated for me to be released off the job to staff the learning centre."

Now working two days a week in the centre, Paul has been overseeing NVQs in chemical operations and business improvement techniques, the ITQ through learndirect (supported by Pirelli) and Skills for Life courses.

The centre also offers staff the chance to pick up non-vocational learning including:

- diet and nutrition
- sign language
- digital photography
- bicycle maintenance.



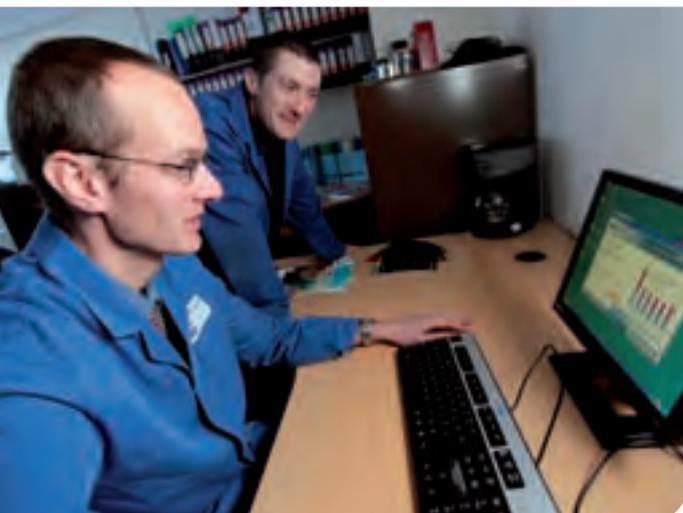
The focal point for union learning reps' work and the cornerstone of the initiative is the onsite learning agreement, which ensures staff can undertake 50 per cent of Skills for Life learning in work time; 100 per cent of their NVQs; and full use of the learning centre facilities for the variety of other learning opportunities on offer.

As a result of the learning agreement, and Innovia's fully supportive approach to workplace learning, 38 members of staff have achieved a Skills for Life qualification and eight have completed a Level 2 ITQ over the last 18 months.

The company works in partnership with the union because it recognises the benefits of developing a learning culture, according to Group Learning & Development Manager Richard Morris.



GMB learning rep Paul Tiffen took over running the learning centre two years ago with financial support from unionlearn

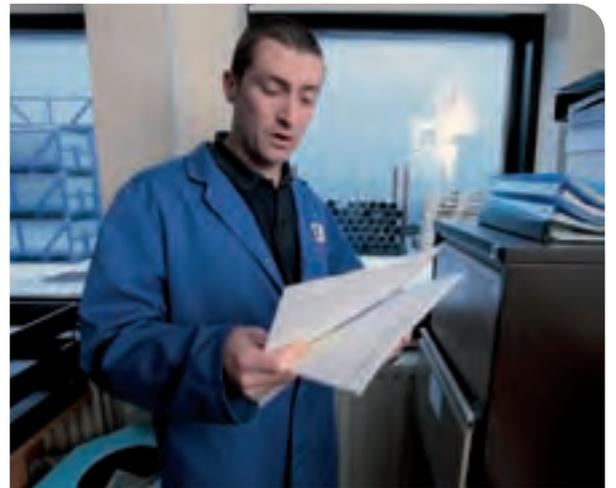


"We now have an improved health and safety record and absence levels and staff turnover are both low: the learning partnership and a changing learning culture at Innovia Films has certainly played a role in this success."

The learning agreement at Innovia Films means staff can undertake 50 per cent of their Skills for Life learning in work time



the film stars



Tracing the family tree

The British New Wrap Company was founded in Wigton, Cumbria in 1934, to start producing cellulose film on a site that had originally been set up to produce Rayon or ‘artificial silk’. The firm changed its name to British Rayophone two years later.

British Rayophone merged with British Sidac in 1963 and in 1967 entered into a joint venture with chemical giant ICI to manufacture Biaxially Oriented Polypropylene (BOPP) in a new £3 million factory on the Wigton site operated by the new joint venture, Sidex Ltd.

British Sidac became a wholly owned subsidiary of the UCB Group in 1973, which took full ownership of Sidex when the production partnership with ICI came to an end in 1987.

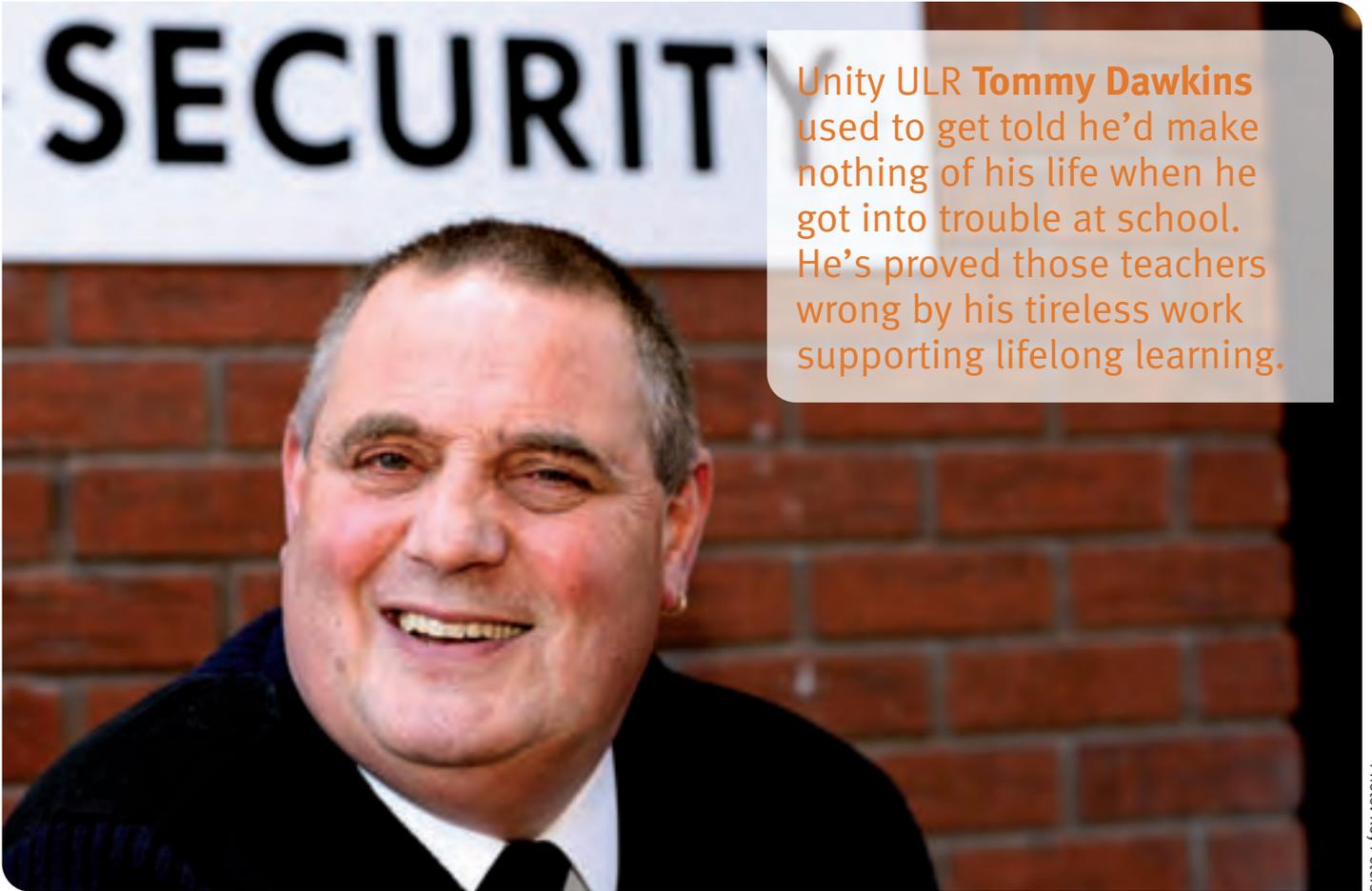
The films business of UCB was bought in 2004 by a consortium that established Innovia Films, which now employs 1,400 people worldwide with production sites on three continents producing 120,000 tonnes of film every year.

“Innovia Films now has an improved health and safety record and, absence levels and staff turnover are both low, which could be an indication that employee engagement is improving. The learning partnership and a changing learning culture at Innovia Films has certainly played a role in this success,” he points out.

Despite the economic downturn, not only has the company been able to retain all its staff but it’s been recruiting permanent staff to the workforce, and the legacy of the LSFAF investment may well result in the creation of a permanent position.

“Innovia Films is looking at the potential of developing further opportunities for learning and development resources at the Wigton site – the organisational advantages we have gained and success of the project have increased the focus on our development needs,” Richard says.





Unity ULR **Tommy Dawkins** used to get told he'd make nothing of his life when he got into trouble at school. He's proved those teachers wrong by his tireless work supporting lifelong learning.

Photo: Roy Peters

You hope you can help somebody

I was totally ignored when I was at school, stuffed at the back of the class and always getting into trouble. Back in those days a lot of teachers didn't realise children might have problems with dyslexia. They said to me: "Dawkins, you'll make nothing of your life." But that was a long time ago – and I have made something of my life: I've got an MBE!

I didn't realise I had a problem with basic skills until I went to Stoke-on-Trent College to enrol as an apprentice plumber: they gave me a form to fill in and I couldn't do it. So I went back to the firm where I was working at the time and told them I'd rather be hands-on than do an apprenticeship – and a few weeks later I was made redundant.

That's when I started in the pottery industry, where it didn't really matter at the time if you had problems with basic skills. But as soon as there was any pressure about reading and writing, I just left and went for another job. Eventually, I couldn't keep doing that and the missus said I had to knuckle down, so I started work at Steelite International in 1977 and I've worked here ever since.

Because I got very aggressive whenever I was asked to do anything involving paperwork, people said: "You're good at talking to bosses – you should become the union rep." So I took that on and I bluffed it all the

way through until I was asked to become a union learning rep – I hadn't a clue what one was but I said Yes. That's when I did my Skills for Life course.

There were 19 of us who were the first to become ULRs in the area and then I started going round the country telling my life story and how I did something about improving my literacy.

Steelite International has been absolutely fantastic: without the people there and the company, I wouldn't be where I am now. I've got a couple of good work colleagues who help me out – my reading is fantastic, and I can read the paper which I never used to be able to do, but I cannot spell anything.

When the letter came telling me I'd got my MBE, I thought it was a practical joke – I had to get my daughter to read it and confirm it. I'm very proud of it, but I always say I've been very lucky to get an award like that when all I've done is stand up and tell my story. You don't go out to get an award – you go out hoping you can help somebody, that they'll listen to what you've said and try and change things in their life.

Tommy Dawkins is a Unity ULR who works as a security guard for ceramics company Steelite International in Stoke-on-Trent.

I'm grateful for all the support I get

I work as a freelance TV/film make-up artist and hairdresser. I trained at BBC London in 1976, returned home to BBC Wales in 1978 and joined HTV in 1981 before becoming self-employed in 1986.

In 2004, after becoming a committee member of BECTU's South Wales branch, I was approached by branch chair Siân Gale to set up a course for my sector after gathering information from my colleagues about their individual learning needs.

At this time High Definition (HD) recording and transmission was on the horizon so the choice of course was an airbrushing class to update our skills ready for this new technology.

After the success of this project, we realised that an HD course for all our technicians would be invaluable as we could experiment, identify and implement any changes needed for this new technology.

The most popular courses to date have been our hairdressing courses, which serve as refresher courses for the most experienced artists as well as being hugely beneficial to our less experienced artists.

We used the established training company ISA who excelled in their learning techniques and their lecturer Dave Pearce was generous in sharing his knowledge and technical skills with everyone, regardless of their experience.

Some of the other courses we have run include prosthetics; laying on of hair; computer skills; CV development and self-marketing. Funding permitting, we hope to continue our courses to maintain standards in our industry.

I am so grateful for the continuing patience, support and advice I have from Siân Gale, who is a mine of information about funding as well as being full of enthusiasm for all aspects of learning in her role as project manager for CULT Cymru.

I also want to thank BECTU Wales National Officer David Donovan and North Wales freelance branch Chair Ann Jones: without their continued faith and confidence in me I would not have won the Wales TUC ULR of the Year award.

Ros is one of 20-plus freelance ULRs from the creative industries being developed by CULT Cymru (Creative Unions Learning Together), a BECTU-led joint union project funded by the Wales Union Learning Fund, financed by the Welsh Assembly Government and supported by the Wales TUC.

BECTU freelance learning rep **Ros Wilkins** has been named Wales ULR of the Year for dedicating so much of her free time to helping upskill colleagues in the creative industries – even though they could be competing with her for the same jobs.



Photo: Deryck Lewis

What's next

If you need help supporting your members into learning, why not pick up the phone?

Are you a ULR trying to help a potential learner who is facing change at work, has childcare difficulties, or needs more support to believe in themselves?

If all that feels overwhelming, you'll be relieved to know help is at hand in the form of a team of advisers at the end of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service dedicated free phone helpline.

The helpline is available on **08000 92 91 90** from 8am to 10pm seven days a week (free from landlines) and is provided by Next Step, the adult careers service.

Next Step was launched in England in August 2010 and its services are

also available online or through a face-to-face appointment with a local adviser. The service gives people the confidence to get the support they need to take the next step in managing their own learning and improving their working lives.

Services are free and available to all adults in England aged 19 and over, whatever their prior skills, qualifications or employment status.

It's often a lack of confidence that stops people taking steps to change their lives, and any of us can feel trapped when we don't have any goals to aim for.

Next Step adviser James Fernandes says the service aims to help people overcome these barriers and create a positive future by changing their lives, whether that be in their current job or by changing to something new.

"For most of us, it is hard work and determination that pays the bills," he says.

"The current climate has prompted some people to look at changing their careers and updating their skills and Next Step can help them do this.

"Skills development has a positive effect on individuals in terms of employment, earnings, job satisfaction and health, and the newly integrated Next Step service is helping people every day get the skills they need to realise their dreams."

Next Step aims to provide access to the best information, advice and resources to help individuals make more effective skills, careers and work and life choices.

Customers can speak to advisers in languages including Farsi, French, Gujarati, Polish, Punjabi, Somali, Sylheti and Urdu.

Everyone can register online with My Next Step, a secure, personal online space where you can assess your skills, build a CV, find a suitable course and discover what other support, including financial help, could be available. You can then store your information securely.

Along with other union reps and members, ULRs can access the range of resources available from Next Step at unionlearn.org.uk/uladvice.

your step?



We're here to help

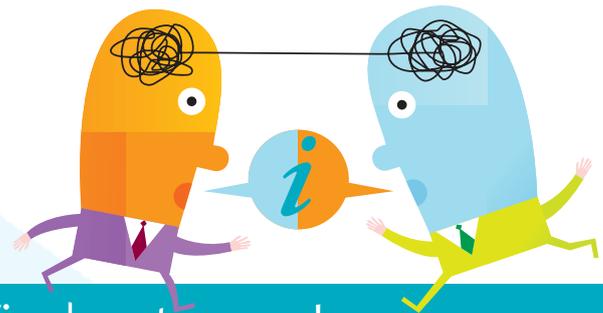
The learning and careers advice service is part of unionlearn's Supporting Learners Strategy, which aims to ensure union learners get the information, advice and support they need to progress in their learning and at work, from Skills for Life to higher education (HE).

The service and its wealth of resources is complemented by a raft of further support for reps, including publications (available at www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications) and the web-based Climbing Frame (available at www.climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk).

A booklet detailing how reps can train in advice and guidance, coaching, mentoring and tutoring will be available early in 2011. In addition, ULRs and other reps have been urged to use the resources and feed back their thoughts on the service in order to develop the strategy for 2011–14.

There are also plans for a microsite about progression to higher learning, where reps will be able to access a range of resources for themselves and their members, including publications such as *Higher Education At Work: Making The Case To Employers*.

“The current climate has prompted some people to look at changing their careers and updating their skills and Next Step can help them do this.”



Illustrations: Burcu Bayram

» Find out more!

Supporting Learners regional events will focus on the latest developments taking place on the Supporting Learners agenda and the changes to the Next Step service. The events will provide an opportunity to share approaches and good practice and regional initiatives to help reps develop their Supporting Learners work. If you would like to attend, contact your unionlearn regional office.

The event dates are:

Tuesday 11 January	<i>South West</i>
Friday 28 January	<i>Southern & Eastern</i>
Thursday 3 February	<i>Yorkshire and the Humber</i>
Thursday 10 February	<i>Midlands</i>
Wednesday 16 February	<i>North West</i>
Monday 14 March	<i>Northern</i>

New careers service on the way

The Government intends to create an all-age careers service for England in September 2011, bringing together Next Step and Connexions under a new brand and providing a service for young people and adults. Unionlearn will work to ensure that working people have access to these services and that ULRs can work alongside advisers to help union members make the best choices about learning and work for them.



On your marks...

 **Race Online 2012**

Unions can play a crucial role in connecting more people to the internet, says dotcom entrepreneur **Martha Lane Fox**.

Union learning reps can help more people get online, Martha Lane Fox told a unionlearn event in the autumn.

“With your 26,000 trained representatives that go out into the community, we can make a massive inroad to the people who don’t yet know how to use the internet,” she said in a video link.

The UK Digital Champion sent her message to the North-West conference on the very day unionlearn Director Tom Wilson signed a pledge to become a partner of Race Online 2012.

The campaign aims to make the UK the first nation in the world where

everyone can use the web.

The pledge commits unionlearn to:

- work with Race Online 2012 to encourage 6.2 million union members to pass IT skills on to colleagues, families and friends
- mobilise union reps across the country to create digital champions and help those who have never used the internet to get online by December 2012
- work with employer organisations to get businesses to sign the Race Online pledge
- develop a digital inclusion campaign that ensures people are not made redundant or retire from work without IT skills.

Watch Martha’s video message at vimeo.com/16885158

Throwing a lifeline to the excluded

Unionlearn has launched a major campaign Get Online, Get A Lifeline to put unions at the heart of a movement to ensure that every adult in the country can use a computer and the internet with confidence.

It’s joining forces with partners including UK Online, Race Online 2012 and the BBC to enable unions to play a full part in bridging the nation’s digital divide.

The partnership is vital at a time when 9 million adults still have not accessed the internet even though 90 per cent of jobs now require online skills. Of this group, 4 million are both digitally and socially excluded, 39 per cent are over 65, 38 per cent are unemployed and a worrying 19 per cent are families with children.

By contrast the ability to use the internet means:

- households can save £560 per year by shopping and paying bills online
- people with ICT skills earn between 3 and 10 per cent more than those without

■ internet access at home can boost children’s educational performance and earnings.

Unionlearn is involved in the push for greater internet access because the issue is about social justice and the most disadvantaged people are not able to enjoy being online.

“We need to do something as we are facing a time when existing jobs are under threat and all new jobs will need technology in the future,” says unionlearn’s Union Development Manager Judith Swift.

“Unions have a wide reach to more than 6 million members, but our positive influence extends much wider. We need our friends and family to have the confidence to get online – to communicate, save money and for enjoyment.

“There are some simple things we can do to use our positive influence to reach the 9 million people and in particular the 4 million who are both digitally and socially excluded,” she adds.

» raceonline2012.org

A 50-strong team of Swindon UNISON members celebrated National Poetry Day by knitting a 15 square foot poem.

It's Knit unusual

Knitting a poem to mark National Poetry Day was the brainchild of Shelly Fleming, Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator for UNISON at Swindon Borough Council.

"The theme of National Poetry Day was home, so I was determined to choose a local poet," says Shelley.

"Then I remembered reading *The Cottager's Evening* by Alfred Williams. It's a beautiful poem that says everything about what home is."

A team of 50 knitters, including a woman of 90 and two men, got to work producing 891 squares that were eventually assembled into a 15 feet square.

None of the knitters knew which poem had been chosen until the finished version was revealed at a special unveiling at Swindon Central Library.

The knitted poem was too large to be hung in the library, so had to be unveiled by being unrolled on the floor.

The branch now hope to give it a tour of local libraries to give the people of Swindon a chance to see it, and the Poetry Library in London is keen to display the poem.

The branch hopes the poem will eventually find a home in a local museum.

The Cottager's Evening

Sweet, simple poverty! How I love to see
The humble labourer's poor and homely fare,
The rustic fireside's cheerful, ruddy glare,
The blazing log, sawn from the woodland tree,
The singing kettle, spouting furiously,
The husbandman's return, the good-wife's care,
The golden-tinted loaf, the steaming ware,
The infant, perched upon the father's knee!
To see them sitting at the frugal board,
And hear the chosen compliment addressed,
The general happiness so well expressed,
The fond endearment and the loving word;
Parents and children mutually adored,
And after, peaceful slumber's balmy rest!

Alfred Williams

Photos: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk



Lola rewards quality

Quick Reads author Lola Jaye came to the SERTUC unionlearn annual conference to present Quality Awards to learning centres and providers for their inclusive and innovative work with unions.

The George Brumwell Learning Centre in partnership with Canary Wharf contractors, UCATT and Lewisham College won the award for its mobile technology programme Learning on the Move.

North East Surrey College of Technology (NESCOL) won the award with the FBU for its distance learning programme.



Lola Jaye presents Quality Awards to (clockwise from bottom left) the George Brumwell Learning Centre in Docklands, North East Surrey College of Technology, the POA Learning Centre at Bullingdon Prison and the Community and Trade Union Learning Centre at the Olympic site in London

The POA Learning Centre, at Bullingdon Prison, Oxfordshire, was recognised for its Skills for Life courses.

And the Community and Trade Union Learning Centre, at the Olympic site in east London, won the award for its European Computer Driving Licence provision.

Let's get campaigning

North West TUC Women Tutors Group focused on campaigning for its fourth annual conference for women activists in the region.

The event offered women the chance to network with others, exchange good practice, acquire information on the economy and the role of unions and influence future conference contents.

Guest speakers included TUC Education Manager Liz Rees, TUC Women's Officer Scarlett Harris, PCS National Executive Committee member Marion Lloyd, Greater Manchester Hazards Centre Coordinator Hilda Palmer, and Anna Cooper from Banana Link, a not-for-profit fair trade co-operative.



Real issues training

TUC Education specialises in training through tackling real issues activists face at work.

That's why it's so effective, says Scalloway Ports and Harbours Rep Stephen Simmons, who's taken the Stage 1 Health and Safety Reps course.

"We were given tasks which applied to real issues that one or more of us had. I found this method of training very effective – you will remember a regulation far better if you discovered it rather than if someone else reads it out to you," he says.

Scottish shop stewards, health and safety reps, pension scheme trustees, ULRs and other union reps can find details of all the courses the TUC's Regional Education Office will be running for them this year in a new booklet out now.

Courses include collective bargaining/industrial relations, employment law, equality, health and safety, pensions, information technology, partnership, and skills for reps. OCN credits are available for all courses.

In addition, the diploma programme provides opportunities for progression into higher learning in Contemporary Trade Unionism, Occupational Health and Safety and Employment Law.

» Download the course brochure at www.unionlearn.org.uk/about/regions_info_scot.cfm

» fast forward » on skills

Taking Skills Forward was the theme of this year's Yorkshire and the Humber unionlearn Conference.

NIACE Regional Programme Director Jan Novitzky (left) and unionlearn Regional Union Development Coordinator Sharon Burke (right) inspired ULRs at the Yorkshire and the Humber conference



Yorkshire and the Humber unionlearn designed its annual conference this year to equip ULRs with a range of strategies to enable them to continue to support and advance the learning agenda in their workplaces and in the wider community.

Held at the Irish Centre in Leeds, the event was extremely well attended, with delegates from more than 15 trade unions coming together to discuss the challenges unions and workers faced in the current economic climate. Workshops included Campaigning for Learning, Managing Change and Personal Resilience and delegates also had the chance to preview a new CV/ job-hunting resource for the region.

Regional Development Coordinator Sharon Burke opened the conference, and speakers included TUC Regional Secretary Bill Adams, unionlearn National Union

Development Manager Judith Swift, and NIACE Programme Director Jan Novitzky.

Feedback has clearly demonstrated that the structure of the conference, which scheduled social time afterwards to enable delegates to action plan for the future, was a great success.

Unionlearn Regional Manager Dr Alan Roe was delighted that the conference was such a success and was confident that new strands of work would grow and develop as a result.

The union role in community cohesion and increasing the opportunities for people to access and benefit from learning opportunities were particular priorities, he said.

ULRs spread the word at book firm

The election of two ULRs helped open the book of learning for staff at the giant TBS Distribution in Essex.

TBS is one of the biggest book distributors in Europe – part of the Random House group, which in turn is owned by Bertelsmann.

Unite ULRs Jonathan Tootal and Alex Clifford were elected in 2007 and with perseverance organised an ITQ Level 2 course for 12 warehouse staff.

“We then looked to widen the scope and approached the TBS

management with plans which led to the formation of a TBS learning group,” says Alex.

Train To Gain helped introduce learning providers, which led to a successful business improvement techniques course, followed by further learning opportunities.

After-work clubs have now been established for language lessons and digital photography and 17 warehouse staff have passed their NVQ Level 2 for warehouse and storage.



TBS business improvement technique learners display their certificates with Unite Eastern Region Officer Geoff Usher (far left) and Managing Director Mark Williams (second right)

Winners in the North West

Photos: Chris Gleave



Unionlearn Director Tom Wilson presents John Murphy (above, right) and Andrew Taylor (below) with their Quality Awards



Blackburn College and Mercia Partnership have secured the unionlearn Quality Award for the work of staff and members involved in learning.

Awards are made to providers that show they consider unions and union learners in the design, development and delivery of courses and programmes.

“We are delighted to receive this award. It shows what a crucial role trade unions can play in engaging their members in education and learning,” said Blackburn College Trade Union Education Course Coordinator John Murphy.

Mercia Partnership Managing Director Andrew Taylor said he was very proud to receive the award in recognition of the provider’s hard work on programmes including IT, Apprenticeships, Skills for Life and the relationship it had built with PCS and its learners.

“We are looking at our partnership with unionlearn growing over the coming months and improving on what we have already achieved,” he added.

Do it better

A book publishing company in London and a distribution centre in Manchester offer reps up to 10 days off for training in their first year and up to five days a year after that, with the option of additional training days.

These examples of best practice are contained in a new tool for union reps to use with employers to help improve access to rights to paid release.

The guide, *Training For Trade Union Workplace Reps – A Guide for Employers*, includes information on rights and best practice. It also contains details on the high quality of the training and the improvements at the workplace employers can expect through working with trained union reps.

The guide covers all reps, including shop stewards, safety reps, ULRs and equality reps.

It provides a tool for employers who receive requests from union reps for time off work to take part in union training and outlines their responsibilities over training for reps as well as offering practical advice about shared benefits.

The work of reps now includes health and safety, redundancies and reorganisation, equality and diversity, training and upskilling the workforce, as well as environmental and green strategies.

Employers need to know that requests for time off to train are legitimate and will be made with

regard to their business. They also need to see how the training will add value.

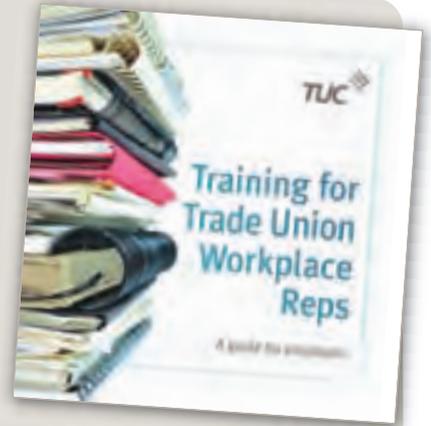
And reps need to know that they qualify for time off with pay to be trained, to ensure that they are competent in their role and confident when talking to managers and members alike.

Government research reveals that union reps in the public sector save the taxpayer between £167 and £397 million every year by helping to resolve disputes, increasing the take-up of training and reducing staff turnover.

Workplace reps in the public and private sectors reduce dismissals, creating a benefit to employers that is worth between £107 and £213 million, and by reducing voluntary exits benefit employers to the tune of between £72 and £143 million.

ULRs are worth between £94 and £156 million to employers in enhanced productivity.

» Download the guide at www.unionlearn.org.uk/education/learn-3714-f0.cfm



Ciao, Silvana!

Silvana Pennella (front row, fourth right) of the European Trade Union Institute and other union officers from across Europe visited the Scottish Parliament as part of a ETUI course in Project Management held in Edinburgh.



Derby College signs training deal with UCATT

Derby College has played its part in helping Midlands workers during tough economic times by signing a learning agreement with UCATT to offer essential skills training for more than 17,000 employees in the region.

These will include Skills for Life literacy and numeracy online courses; short courses both at the college and in the workplace; work-based NVQs; and construction trade courses, for which Derby College is one of the county's leading providers.

Future plans also include computer-related courses using the college's mobile netbooks.

"The learning agreement aims to provide access to flexible and timely learning facilities to meet the needs of unions, employers and workers during these difficult economic times," explains Derby College's Trade Union Education Centre Manager Simon Ferrar.



It's not all hard work

Union reps have enjoyed the TUC course Next Steps for Health and Safety at Stevenson College in Falkirk with the support of TUC tutor Penny Gower.

Next Steps builds on introductory training and afterwards reps are invited to study at diploma level with the TUC, a highly successful programme that provides them with membership of IOSH.

TUC tutor Penny Gower (centre) enjoys a lighter moment with union reps on a course at Stevenson College



Celebrating success

TUC Regional Education Officer Ian West (left) presented certificates, alongside tutor Tracey Errington (second right)

Northern region unionlearn marked the Celebration of Learning fortnight with a day of celebration and inspiration in Cumbria.

More than 70 ULRs used the day to share issues, advice and best practice.

They heard from David Kendall of The Reading Agency about the very popular Six Book Challenge initiative, which has proved a massive success in engaging learners in workplaces and encouraging them to read for pleasure.

Workshops were diverse, well-attended and thoroughly enjoyed:

- a Spanish taster from the Regional Language Network
- an introduction to UK Online
- a session on Green Skills by Sarah Pearce from the TUC Green Workplaces Project.

The celebratory atmosphere continued when Regional Education Officer Ian West presented TUC diplomas in Employment Law and Occupational Health and Wellbeing to a group of union learners.

"It's imperative that we do stop and take the time to celebrate our collective and individual achievements, and the difference learning makes to people's lives every day in every way," commented Union Development Coordinator Beth Farhat.

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Jay knows

Jay Sreedharan, unionlearn's website officer, answers some recent questions raised by site visitors

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Q I'm a new ULR and I want to get more involved with World Book Day but where do I start?

A World Book Day has become an event that ULRs, employers and the local community all like to get involved in, and this year it will take place on **Thursday 3 March**. This was a great success last year where workplaces across the UK set up bookshelves, organised bookswap schemes, got the local community involved and a lucky few had author book signings. You can do the same! NIACE's Quick Reads campaign and The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge will help you get started.

Quick Reads books are perfect for people who have lost the reading habit or who struggle to read long and complicated books. www.quickreads.org.uk has developed a range of great support materials to help you get the most from Quick Reads for World Book Day. Register with Quick Reads to receive a free resource pack, including posters and bookmarks to engage with your colleagues.

The Six Book Challenge invites less confident readers to read six books and record their reading in a diary in order to receive incentives, a certificate and the chance to enter a national prize draw. Visit www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk and you can get a range of free support and buy materials to run the scheme such as **First Choice Books**, a searchable database of more than 600 titles selected to appeal to emergent readers, and **Chatabout**, a free network for emergent reader groups for anyone already running or wanting to run reading groups. If you need further help please contact your regional unionlearn office.

Q I've recently read about 'green skills' but still don't understand what they are. Can you enlighten me?

A It's an umbrella term for a very broad range of occupational and more general skills and knowledge that contribute to improving the environment and tackling climate change. Very few 'green skills' are completely new. 'Green skills' are mostly skills that we already have but need to be updated for the challenge of climate change (e.g. construction related skills) or replenished because they are being lost to retirement (e.g. engineering skills). But as all industries must make very steep savings on energy and resource usage and cut pollution of our environment to meet the challenges of the age, so will every workplace be affected, with important changes to working practices a necessity. An 'environmentally literate' workforce will be a very important complement to this process of industrial change.

If you want to know more, unionlearn has created a page on its website for those interested in green skills issues and there are also a number of 'environmental awareness' courses being offered by TUC affiliates and their partners and in some unionlearn regions. And if you want to do more, trade unions have created a new role of 'green rep' to help co-ordinate environmental projects in the workplace and unionlearn has published **Greener Deals** on the website, which has a number of practical ideas as to how you can make your workplace greener.

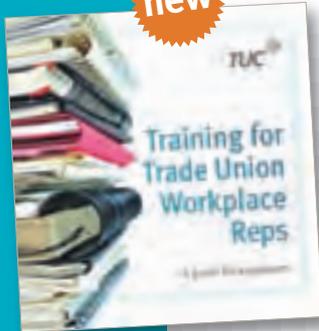
»» www.unionlearn.org.uk/greenskills
 »» www.tuc.org.uk/environment



Order now from
www.unionlearn.org.uk/freebooks
And postage and packing is also free

»» **Training for Trade Union Workplace Reps**

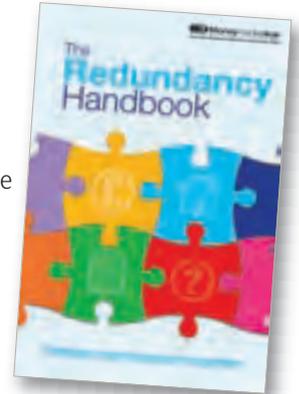
This guide is for employers who receive requests from trade union representatives for time off work to take part in union training. It outlines the responsibilities of employers and unions over training for representatives, and gives practical advice about how the benefits can be shared.



new

»» **CFEB Redundancy Handbook**

This handbook produced by the Consumer Financial Education Body (CFEB) is a useful information resource for anyone whose job is under threat of redundancy. This handbook covers issues from dealing with job worries and redundancy rights to managing money and the entitlements you can claim.



«« **Higher Education Case Studies**

This document contains a series of case studies that ULRs will find useful. From an introduction to higher learning to tailor-made higher learning; the OU through to Foundation degrees; the role of trade unions and more. Eleven case studies in total from Unite, FBU, PCS, UNISON, ATL, POA and CWU.



new

«« **Online Learning with TUC Education**

Over the past five years, thousands of trade union representatives have taken part in and benefited from TUC Education's online learning programme. This guide gives the details of our comprehensive range of courses and offers a convenient and effective solution to reps looking to develop their knowledge and skills.

»» **Unions and Skills Utilisation**

This authoritative paper sets out the need for greater policy focus on the utilisation of skills and how it is linked with High Involvement Work Practices (HIWPs). The report makes recommendations on how unions can get more involved in skills utilisation strategies and negotiate new organisational practices and fair shares of productive gains.



new

»» **An Engagement Checklist for Higher Education Providers**

This will help HE providers and union representatives and members to continue to engage successfully. It will be useful to providers embarking on new initiatives, and as a 'health check' for existing arrangements.



«« **Making Learning Affordable – Setting Up Collective Learning Funds**

This toolkit is a resource for union reps and ULRs to help them establish collective learning funds in their workplace. It includes a booklet that explains what CLFs are and their benefits to unions and learners, a booklet containing six case studies, and factsheets that provide practical help on how to establish a CLF.



»» **Spread the word about the work of ULRs and learning project workers by ordering more copies of The Learning Rep. Give them to colleagues at work, learners and anyone interested in union learning.**

