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# unionlearn

with the Midlands TUC



# Changing lives through learning

a guide to **unionlearn**



This publication is an outcome of the TUC High Road project. The project is part of a community programme called Equal, a European Social Fund initiative that tests and promotes new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The GB Equal Support Unit is managed by ECOTEC.

All TUC publications can be made available in accessible formats for dyslexic or visually impaired readers.

# Foreword

## From the Director

Unionlearn is about creating strong unions for the future. It's about building on their success in learning and skills. It will provide a coherent framework for bringing together union rep training and wider learning. It has been established under the auspices of the TUC and as such will be run by unions for unions.

With an annual turnover of £12m in 2007/2008 and around 120 staff, the new organisation will be able to give the union movement much more impact on learning and skills.

In providing such support to unions, unionlearn will be responsive to their individual needs. The services will add value to and not compete with existing union provision. They will all be 'kitemarked' to a high quality.

Unionlearn will also be very much a devolved organisation, with most of its staff operating in offices in the six TUC English regions. They will support unions directly and through a network of unionlearn branded learning centres, based in colleges, union offices and workplaces.

Our goal is to become the centre of excellence in England for supporting high quality union-led learning activity. Our success will be determined by how we can help unions put learning and skills at the heart of their organising agenda.



**Liz Smith**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Smith".

Director, unionlearn

## From the Regional Manager

Unionlearn in the Midlands will build on the valuable work unions have done in the region to date by continuing to support the development of workplace learning initiatives.

An expanding offer of training for reps and officers will continue to be provided through TUC Education, ensuring protection for thousands of workers remains in place. At the launch of unionlearn the numbers of union learning reps (ULRs) in the region stood at 1,800. We will continue to build on this.

We aim to increase the number of newly trained union reps and assist unions to support many thousands of learners. At the same time we are strengthening regional partnerships, working with regional skills partnerships, regional development authorities, learning and skills councils, sector skills councils and Next Step, as well as other key organisations and public bodies.

To help do this more effectively, we will be offering capacity building training and support to existing trade union reps on public bodies as well as those interested in taking up such positions.

Through prioritising equality, quality and innovation, we aim to raise the profile of the valuable union contribution to learning, reaching out to the many communities of the Midlands.

Unionlearn will ensure that trade union members can access the opportunities offered by government initiatives such as Train to Gain. We will continue to grow a network of quality learning providers across the Midlands. By working together we will build and strengthen unions and create many new opportunities for people at work.



**Mary Alys**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Alys". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Regional Manager, unionlearn



# Mission statement

## *Our belief*

is that the life chances of all people can be transformed through access to learning, throughout their working lives. Such learning opportunities must be available to the entire workforce, regardless of their employment status or educational background.

Everyone should have fair and equal treatment to develop his or her potential, free from discrimination. We believe people's learning and skills can best be delivered collectively with trade unions.

## *Our purpose*

is to help unions open up a wide range of learning opportunities for their members. This will both promote their personal progression and develop their trade union role, strengthening workplace organisation.

We will guarantee that all provision is of a high standard and continuously improves in both its quality and diversity.

## *Our goal*

is to become the centre of excellence for supporting high quality union-led learning.

We also aim to become the authoritative organisation for promoting innovation and research and disseminating best practice in such learning.

## *Our success*

will be determined by the sustainability of this activity, through unions securing learning and skills at the heart of their organisation.

# Main functions

## **Unionlearn will help unions to become effective learning organisations. It will do this by:**

- running programmes for union representatives
- delivering programmes for regional officers
- providing strategic support for national officers
- promoting integrated learning and organising strategies
- supporting Union Learning Fund and regional projects
- offering a consultancy service on funding, management, standards etc.

## **Unionlearn will help unions to broker learning opportunities for their members. It will do this by:**

- providing support for unions and their union learning reps
- supporting learning centres (including learndirect provision)
- promoting learning agreements at the workplace

- establishing websites to advise learners and their union representatives
- providing a brokerage service to secure quality provision
- 'kitemarking' provision to a quality standard.

## **Unionlearn will help unions to have an impact on learning and skills policy. It will do this by:**

- researching union priorities in learning and skills
- identifying and disseminating good practice
- helping evaluate unionlearn projects
- supporting union members on learning and skills bodies
- helping to shape and deliver sector skills agreements.

A close-up photograph of a man with a goatee, wearing a dark beanie and a high-visibility vest over a dark jacket. He is looking down at a stack of papers on a table. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with other people and red banners.

## Unionlearn targets

For 2006/2007:

- 3,500 new ULRs to be trained
- 600 ULRs progressing to Skills for Life module
- 18,000 Skills for Life learners
- 4,000 NVQ 2 learners
- 100,000 learners going through the union route.

By 2010:

- 22,000 union learning reps in place
- 250,000 learners going through the union route.

## The union record

- Every year more than 42,000 union representatives are trained through the TUC Education Service.
- More than 13,000 ULRs have been trained.
- More than 450 Union Learning Fund projects have been run, covering over 3,000 workplaces.
- More than 67,000 learners access courses each year through the projects.
- The Trade Union Hub runs 87 learndirect centres.

# The senior regional team



**Regional Manager:**

***Mary Alys***

Mary promotes, develops and manages a wide range of activities with the support of the national managers. These include trade union education, learning centres and regional projects as well as supporting union project workers and regional union learning rep networks.



**Trade Union Education Officer:**

***Pete Try***

Pete organises accredited courses for stewards, safety reps, pension scheme trustees and other union representatives. He works closely with colleges and trade union tutors to ensure high standards of programme delivery.



**Union Development Co-ordinator:**

***Gary O'Donnell***

Gary actively supports unions in the region in developing their learning activities, liaising closely with local learning and skills councils and providers such as colleges by supporting projects and brokering provision.



## **Development Workers**

### ***Paresh Patel and Paul Humphreys***

The Union Development Co-ordinator manages a team of development and project workers. Each Development Worker operates in a specific area. Paresh supports the East Midlands team based in Leicester while Paul supports the West Midlands team.

There are also additional unionlearn staff in the region working on locally funded projects. They are able to provide advice and support on a range of workplace learning matters including Skills for Life, Train to Gain and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). They are also trained to help reps set up learning centres and develop partnership arrangements with employers and providers. Initial enquiries should go through the Development Worker for the appropriate sub-region.

# Union learning representatives

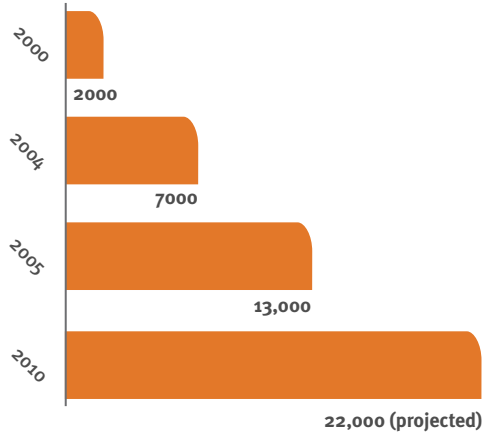
Union learning representatives (ULRs) are the driving force of union-led learning. Their unique position in the workplace helps them to provide their colleagues with advice on learning, identifying learning needs, arranging training and consulting with employers.

Over 14,000 ULRs have been trained to carry out their roles. Under the 2002 Employment Relations Act they have rights to paid time off to train and to carry out their functions within union recognised workplaces. There has been a significant increase in the number of ULRs trained since their recognition.

Unionlearn will develop the key role of ULRs in raising demand for learning, especially among workers with low skills levels. This will involve:

- training more ULRs and to higher levels
- supporting regional networks of ULRs
- strengthening the role of ULRs through agreements with employers
- helping unions to integrate ULRs at workplace and branch level

## ULRs: The growing national army



- securing ULR involvement in the delivery of paid time off to train through Train to Gain
- maximising ULR impact delivering sector skills agreements.

Unionlearn will continue to provide support to local and regional ULR events and run conferences in the region, which have proven to be a useful means for ULRs to support each other.

# Engaging with unions

Unionlearn will add value to union provision, not attempt to replace it. It will respect union traditions, democratic processes and delivery. Unions that want to will continue to provide their own training programmes and learning services. Relations between unionlearn and individual unions at national, regional, branch and workplace levels will be governed by clear agreements on funding and outcomes.

The aim of unionlearn is to provide generic services that can be used by individual unions to develop their own provision. It will also customise services for unions. It will be up to individual unions to decide which services it requires from unionlearn. Even if a service is directly provided by a union, it could still be awarded the unionlearn 'kitemark', provided it meets the standard.

Unions will continue to bid for projects under the Union Learning Fund when it transfers to unionlearn. Projects will help unions develop and deliver strategies for sustainable learning, integrated with their organising agendas.

## Strengthening union organisation through learning

Unions will be able to:

- use learning services to help recruit potential learners into union membership and develop a more diverse membership
- use learning to retain members and build active workplace organisation
- reinforce the statutory rights of ULRs in learning agreements at the workplace
- ensure that ULRs have a central role in the union organisation and have strong links with shop stewards
- encourage union learners to train to become union representatives
- use learning centres as union support centres for ULRs and other union reps.



# Promoting partnerships

## Train to Gain

Many of the partnerships with local learning and skills councils (LSCs) have concentrated on engaging employers and the workforce in Employer Training Pilots (ETPs). TUC project workers have done much to increase the number of low-skilled employees taking paid time off to train for their first level 2 qualification, especially in Skills for Life.

Now, with the new national employer training programme, Train to Gain, unionlearn will:

- support unions and ULRs to work with brokers on delivering the programme in the workplace
- ensure that as many employees as possible take up the offer
- support ULRs in mentoring learners and help them to reach higher levels of training
- help unions to integrate paid time off to train into learning agreements reached with employers.

## Working together

We have worked with the two regional development agencies and have established good working relationships with LSCs, IAG partnerships and sector skills councils. These relationships have allowed us to work collaboratively on a range of workplace learning activities. Projects have included:

- East Midlands Development Agency and Advantage West Midlands funded workplace learning projects
- ETPs with Birmingham and Solihull, The Black Country, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Shropshire LSCs
- An East Midlands LSC Trade Union Fund
- Local IAG initiatives
- Local union Skills for Life projects
- Local initiatives to support migrant workers.

# TUC Education

The key to an effective employee voice in the workplace is training union workplace reps and professionals to a high standard. TUC Education is responsible within unionlearn for offering high quality, accredited training through a partnership with colleges and universities across the UK. Fuller details of the provision are set out in the *Unionlearn Directory of Programmes and Centres*.

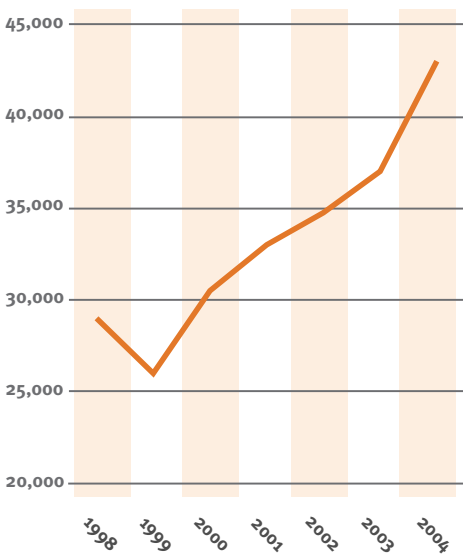
## TUC Education provides training for:

- union reps
- safety reps
- learning reps
- pension scheme trustees
- equality reps
- other trade union reps
- union professionals
- trade union tutors.

TUC Education has gone from strength to strength in recent years, with over 42,500 course enrolments each year. The programme is organised by the Regional Education Officer and delivered locally through dedicated TUC units in 76 colleges around the UK. All course materials are designed, developed and provided by the TUC and tutors are recruited for their expertise in trade unionism and the world of work. Courses are accredited through our awarding body, the National Open College Network. In our 10 years of partnership, more than a million credits have been awarded to union reps.

Quality is taken very seriously within TUC Education – 10 consecutive Adult Learning Inspectorate reports have rated provision as Grade I and classed it as “outstanding”. This standard has been unmatched by any other curriculum area in adult education. Before starting their rep courses, many participants had gained no qualifications since leaving school. Now some are progressing to further and higher education.

Reps on TUC courses 1998-2004



In the Midlands, unionlearn currently works in partnership with seven further education sector providers, running courses through our Trade Union Education Centres. These benefit almost 6,000 union reps, safety reps and union learning reps annually. For many participants, a TUC course represents a return to learning, so it is important that the experience is as enjoyable as it is worthwhile.

At the same time as offering access to well-established, high quality core training for unions, one of our aims is to open up the programme – offering new courses in new ways. The unionlearn Union Professional Development Programme is becoming established in the Midlands. We will continue to develop this side of our work, offering union officers and staff continuing professional development through to foundation degree access.

Under unionlearn, TUC Education will:

- build and sustain the education programme in further education
- open up new opportunities to access education programmes online
- support the work of union reps on sector skills councils, regional development agencies and learning and skills councils through new support programmes
- establish a mentoring service to enable union officers to support each other's development needs
- train and develop equality reps, using high quality learning materials.

# Education centres

## **South Birmingham College**

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## **Workers Educational Association**

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