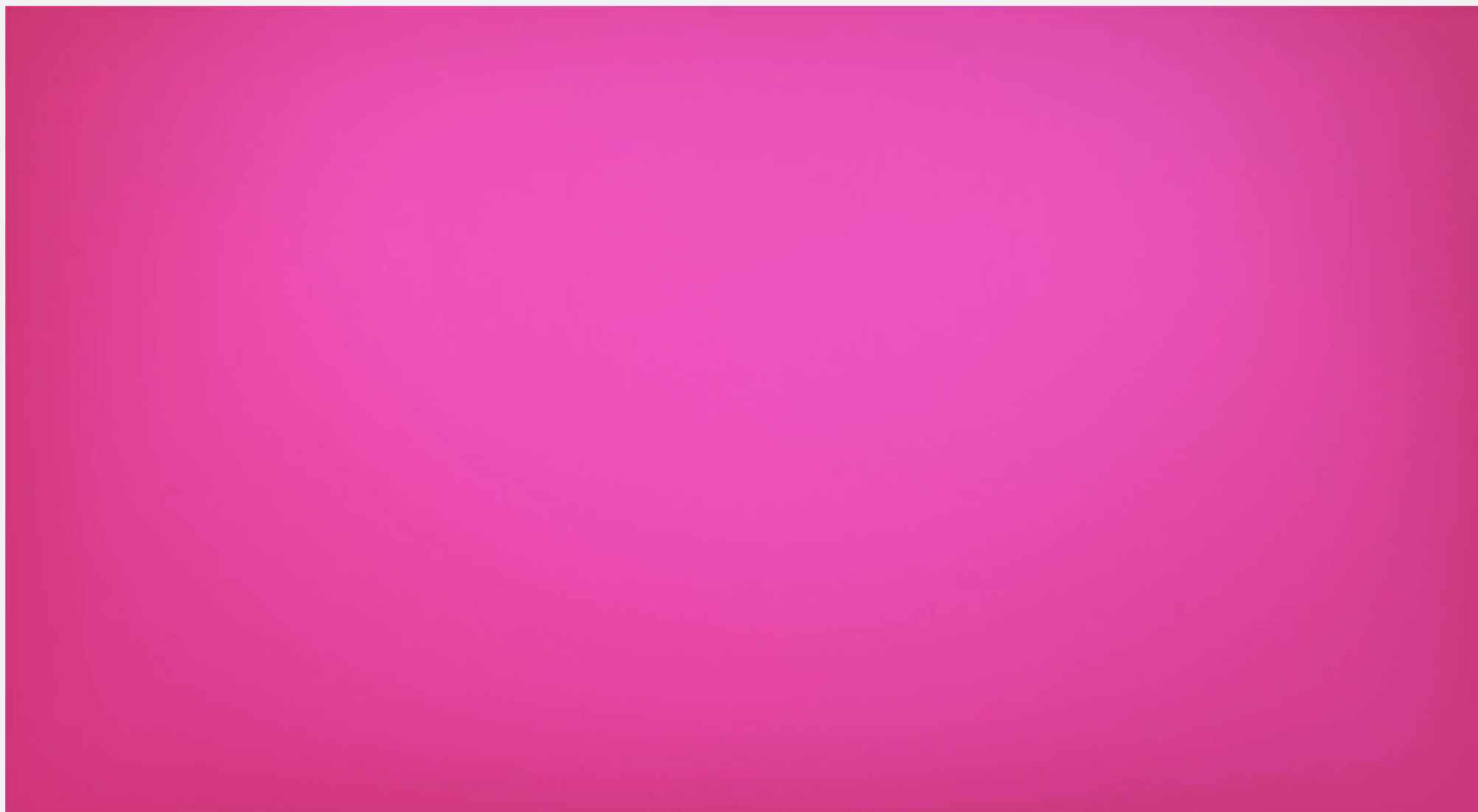


UNION LEARNING FUND NI

HOW & WHY UNION LEARNING WORKS

Julie Gorman - Julie.Gorman@ictuni.org



OUR ENVIRONMENT HAS CHANGED

- decline in manufacturing industry
- strong growth in private sector
- increase in retail and hospitality sector
- attacks on public sector jobs
- move to a carbon neutral economy

JOBS HAVE CHANGED

- more part time work
- no jobs for life
- casual, temporary and agency work

TRADE UNIONS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN:

- improving communication between employees and management
- negotiating improvements to pay and working conditions
- encouraging companies to invest in training and development
- acting as a positive force for change

KEY CHALLENGES FOR MODERN UNIONS

- to recruit and organise
- to extend our influence
- to recruit and activate more reps
- to ensure reps reflect the diversity
- to become more relevant to potential members.
- to shift more resources into organising
- to put 'organising into everything we do'
- to change the perception of trade unions

HOW HAVE UNIONS RESPONDED TO THESE CHALLENGES?

- Launching major recruitment drives
- Working in partnership with employers
- Mounting campaigns to defend the rights of working people
- Putting education and training high up on the bargaining agenda = workplace learning

WHY IS WORKPLACE LEARNING IMPORTANT TO UNIONS?

- raises profile and awareness of the union
- tangible benefit: answers 'what does the union do for me?'
- improves pay, job mobility/employability and job security
- provides a positive image
- improves Industrial Relations
- allows unions to exert more control in the workplace

"Learning is vital to the national economy, individual organisations and the people who work for them. It improves performance, helps to manage change and gives individuals a chance to make the most of their own talents - both at work and in the wider community"

Frances O'Grady,
General Secretary, TUC

THE ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS FOR WORKPLACE LEARNING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Research has shown that 17% of adults in Northern Ireland have poor levels of literacy skills and 24% have poor numeracy skills.

Figures indicate that, as a result, employers in NI could be losing thousands of pounds every year:

smaller employers = £86,000 per year

larger employers = £500,000 a year

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/advantages-essential-skills-training>

BACKGROUND

- The Union Learning Fund for Northern Ireland (ULF) was established in 2002 to promote activity by trade unions in support of the Government's objective of creating a learning society.
- It is a pot of money provided by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and managed by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU).
- The ULF's overarching aim is to promote a culture of learning and to equip people for work in a modern economy.

AIMS

The Union Learning Fund has 4 main aims: -

- ◆ To develop and expand the capacity of the trade union movement through union-led learning.
- ◆ To increase workplace learning by encouraging innovative, union-led partnership projects which lead to workers gaining nationally recognised qualifications.
- ◆ To address Essential Skills and learning that supports economic growth and improved activity.
- ◆ To widen participation and break down barriers to learning in the workplace by supporting projects which focus on social inclusion and engaging non-traditional learners.

2020-2023 PROJECTS & OUTCOMES TO DATE

- **Projects:**

- ❖ NIPSA, BFAWU, FSU, FBU, INTO, UNITE Construction, UNITE, UNISON, USDAW, AEGIS and GMB.

- **Outcomes to date :**

- ❖ Project has engaged with nearly 11,000 workers over the past two year

- ❖ Essential Skills = 760

- ❖ Other Accredited = 1940

- ❖ CPD = 4620

- ❖ Redundancy Response: Caterpillar, Court Care Home, Coca Cola, Capita, Swissport, Thompson Aero.

- ❖ Non Accredited = 3498

UNION LEARNING REPRESENTATIVES (ULRS)

ULRs are union representatives trained to support learning at work and to work in conjunction with employers for the benefit of all.

The logo is centered on a light blue rectangular background. It consists of a white rounded square containing the text 'ulr' in a large, bold, dark blue sans-serif font. Below 'ulr', the words 'UNION', 'LEARNING', and 'REPRESENTATIVE' are stacked vertically in a smaller, dark blue, all-caps sans-serif font.

ulr
UNION
LEARNING
REPRESENTATIVE

THE ROLE OF A ULR

- **ULRs are trained to support learning**
- **ULRs raise employees awareness of learning**
- **Identify learning and skills need**
- **Negotiate learning agreements**
- **Provide advise and guidance**
- **Negotiate learning facilities**
- **Support workplace development**
- **Secure equal opportunities in learning**

ULRS GIVE EMPLOYEES CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO:

- **they know**
- **is completely independent**
- **treat everything they say in confidence**
- **can give advice in familiar surroundings**
- **can provide advice about learning opportunities**
- **is properly trained and informed**
- **is trained to identify and work with providers**
- **provides up-to-date information about learning**

BENEFITS FOR THE EMPLOYER

- ULRs can be important allies.
- ULRs are effective in generating 'bottom up' demand for learning.
- ULRs have a significant role to play in engaging workers.
- ULRs are trained in their role.
- ULRs are an inexpensive source of advice for the employer.
- ULRs will have the confidence of their membership.
- ULRs will encourage broader learning to meet employee's needs.

OPEN UNIVERSITY TRADE UNION LEARNER OF THE YEAR ULAIN MCKEE, FSU



“After leaving school, over 30 years ago, I completed a year at Ulster University, only to leave and join the Bank, as at the time I thought it was a good career move and did not want to miss the opportunity. It was something I regretted over the years, wishing instead that I had finished my degree course by getting a highly recognised qualification, and then pursued my career in the Bank.

My circumstances changed in the early part of 2015 and I have been undergoing treatment for breast cancer. As you can imagine, this has made me rethink a lot of things within my life, one of them being I want to broaden my knowledge with a view to finishing the degree that I started all those years ago.”

Ulain enrolled for an Open University Access Module ‘People, Work, Society’. In between treatments for cancer, studying gave Ulain something positive to focus on. Ulain explained, “The course has renewed my confidence in my ability to excel in life. I believe we should make the most of any learning opportunity that comes our way, particularly in these uncertain times.”

Ulain’s experience has inspired other FSU members who are considering a return to education or to follow a course of studies. In addition, her children have been inspired and encouraged by witnessing their mother study through what has been a very difficult time for the family.

Ulain overcome the barrier of cancer treatment in order to study. She may prefer to describe this barrier as a challenge which motivated her to return to study and made her determined to succeed in her studies.

OPEN UNIVERSITY TRADE UNION LEARNER OF THE YEAR LAURA BOYLES, FSU



Laura completed her GCSEs/A Level in 2006. Since then she had wanted to attend a third level college, but had to work to cover the cost of living and spent long hours working two jobs and did not have time to carry on with her studies. Following this, Laura became a parent and any chance of returning to education moved drastically down her list of priorities.

One of the barriers Laura has faced was initially incorporating the study time into her daily routine around, work commitments, her daughter's school work, clubs and general day to day life. However, the major issue Laura had was lack of self-confidence or belief that she would still be capable of studying at an older age, never mind doing it successfully. Without the offer of the Access course from the Union Laura would have never taken the leap of faith to get back into education and be spurred on to continue studying at a higher level by her good results and feedback from the course.

Laura studied an Open University Access module 'People, Work and Society', 2016 – 2017 under the FSU Union Learn Project. She successfully passed the course in 2017. This gave her a good insight into the social sciences and psychology.

As a result of gaining the Open University Access Certificate, Laura decided to take the recent step of undertaking a BSc Honors Degree in Psychology with the Open University. She commenced this course in September/October 2017 and is currently in her 1st year which is based around Social Sciences and the Psychology material starts next year. All going well, she will complete the course in 2023.

Retail and finance staff given official skills recognition

BY STAFF REPORTER

MANAGEMENT-level staff in retail and finance were awarded certificates which formally recognised their skills at a ceremony at the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) campus in Lisburn.

The workers attained the training through the NIC-ICTU's UnionLearn programme, which is sponsored by the Department for the Economy and offers targeted in-work training and upskilling for union members.

On Thursday, 15 members of the Financial Services Union and 10 members from the retail union USDAW were handed their qualifications by Terry Park on behalf of the department's further education section. The courses in Project Management and First Line Management were organised through UnionLearn and delivered by SERC educators.

USDAW education co-ordinator Lorna Morton said: "Following a complete restructure across Tesco which affected up to 9,000 jobs

across the UK, mainly in managerial positions, the USDAW education officials recognised from different employers that the majority of managers come through management programmes but have no formal qualifications for their job role.

"These courses formalised and recognised the skills of these workers and are transferable for later career opportunities."

USDAW members remain amongst the most disadvantaged and vulnerable workers in the UK in educational background, skills base, and progression opportunities.

Marian Geoghegan from the Financial Services Union said: "Many of the challenges facing retail workers are similar to those facing workers in finance, not least the shift by customers to online and away from the high street.

"That is why trade unions need to work closely with government and employers to ensure that our members hold the skills and the recognition of those skills, to add

stability to a increasingly precarious working environment."

For the 2018/19 year UnionLearn has delivered 2,160 courses for members of 11 participating trade unions, across all sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, education, health, retail and services. It has been managed by the NI Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions since 2002.

Ms Morton added: "Through obtaining funding from Department for the Economy, USDAW were able to fully fund this CMI Level Three Award in Project Management course through the SERC. Our project focused on providing accessible and affordable learning, providing people with the fundamental skills to gain, maintain and progress in their employment.

"We had two classes running in Tesco Craigavon and at the SERC in Lisburn with 20 learners and who now have completed this qualification. Learners came from Tesco, Asda, Argos, Coca-Cola and Co-Op."



Marian Geoghegan of the Financial Services Union and Terry Park from the Department for the Economy at the SERC ceremony





Joanne Kirkpatrick is a bank official with First Trust Bank in a busy branch in Belfast. In 2018 she decided to take up the opportunity provided by FSU's Union Learn Project to learn new skills. Joanne is very aware of the changes in the financial services sector and the consequent demands on staff to adapt to the rapidly changing face of banking.

Joanne does not do things by half and so she decided to embrace the new learning fully and enrolled, not only in ICT Essential Skills, but also in two of the management courses offered. In just one year she successfully completed ICT Essential Skills (City and Guilds, Level 2) with the Belfast Met, Project Management (CMI Level 3) and Leadership Skills (CMI Level 3) with SERC.

Joanne spoke eloquently about the benefits of Union Learn at the presentation of certificates and celebration event held in Lisburn in June 2019. She believes in taking full advantage of union membership to self-develop and is encouraging her fellow-workers to invest time in their own life-long learning. Joanne is looking forward to enrolling on further FSU Union Learn courses autumn 2019, in particular on a coaching/mentoring course.



THANKS
ANY QUESTIONS?

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