



# Scottish Union Learning

Annual Report

2023 – 2024

## Learner Quotes

A great introduction to the subject and I look forward to the next course which I am very happy to have been enrolled on. My interest is growing exponentially and the timing for me is perfect.

The tutor made this course so enjoyable. He got in touch beforehand to help us prepare, and supplied lots of very practical info on apps to download / kit to buy. A fantastic, simple, teaching style. Really helpful, non-intimidating introduction to podcasting for this absolute rookie.

It was really nice to meet other people on the course and have a chance to share experiences within a safe learning environment.

Great starter course for going on to further learning. Would definitely recommend.

Excellent tutor and I would recommend the course to all.

I thought the course was very good and the facilitator was very helpful. I learned a lot and I would like to continue learning to improve my skills.

Really enjoyable course. Good to connect with others who have a shared interest. Informative plus practical and fun ideas for the classroom.

Great course, with a fantastic tutor.

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**Mission Statement: Scottish Union Learning supports trade unions in developing, organising, and delivering work-related learning and skills programmes for their members that contribute to collective prosperity and wellbeing, Fair Work, and equality for workers across Scotland.**

# Introduction

## Susan Quinn, Chair, Scottish Union Learning Board



In June 2023, I took on the role of Chair of the Scottish Union Learning Board; previously, I served as Vice Chair and regular Board member. I have, therefore, seen first-hand how SUL activity has evolved over recent years, despite the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, industrial action, and the short-term nature of funding.

Through funding from the Scottish Government, and with contributions from other partners, SUL has been working with unions to promote and create opportunities for union-led learning and skills development, with a focus on Fair Work and equality, and in supporting workers to overcome barriers to learning.

Our SUL-funded union learning projects enable workers to undertake learning opportunities that improve their employability and vocational skills across a range of sectors, including health and social care, education, construction, creative industries, engineering, financial services, retail, telecoms, and transport. This also encourages employer engagement around workforce development.

During the financial year April 2023 – March 24, which was the first year of a two-year learning and skills programme, SUL administered several funds, including the Development Fund, Learning Fund, Cyber Resilience Fund, the Fair Work: Leadership and Equality Fund, and a grant for TUC Education Scotland to deliver Rep Training and Development. SUL also facilitated opportunities to generate externally-funded learning provision from unions, employers, and other partners. Overall, SUL created over 12,000 learning opportunities for workers across Scotland. While outcomes are lower than those of the previous year, this is still a significant achievement as the previous year included outcomes gained through an additional Scottish Government fund, the COVID-19 Recovery Fund, which ended that year. In addition, the funding available for the Cyber Resilience project (UK Government funding) was reduced considerably.

The year ahead faces an additional challenge, with SUL funding being reduced for the first time. However, the SUL Board will pursue an increased level of funding and a longer-term funding period. We will also support unions in accessing additional externally-funded learning provision. We anticipate a continuation in demand for skills for a Just Transition, and to meet the needs for advancements in technology, and will explore potential funding opportunities in these areas.

In the meantime, I would like to congratulate our award recipients; you can read about their incredible achievements later in this report. I would also like to thank our funders, the Scottish Government, and all of our partners and learning providers for their continued support.

# SUL Structure

## The Scottish Union Learning Board

The STUC General Council established Scottish Union Learning to deliver, in partnership with unions, workplace learning opportunities in all sectors across Scotland, in line with STUC policy on learning and skills. Appointed by the STUC General Council, the Scottish Union Learning Board oversees and directs the work of Scottish Union Learning.

The SUL Board meets quarterly and has responsibility for agreeing the strategic objectives of SUL and setting and monitoring its business and operational plans and budgets, in line with Scottish Government and STUC learning and skills policies. The SUL Board consists of members of the STUC General Council, representatives of affiliated trade unions, the STUC General Secretary and a TUC nominated member.

## Board Membership 2023-24

Chair: Susan Quinn (EIS); Vice Chair: Peter Hunter (UNISON)

Members: Brian Linn (Aegis the Union); Jim Baxter (ASLEF); Steven McGurk (Community); Craig Anderson (CWU); Karen Foster (PCS); Satnam Ner (Prospect); and Esther O'Hara (Unite the Union).

Rozanne Foyer, STUC General Secretary, is an ex-officio member of the Board. Carl Roper, TUC National Education and Organising Manager, is the TUC nominated member. A representative of the Scottish Government attends meetings of the Board as an observer.

Staff in Attendance: Wendy Burton, SUL Director; Tommy Breslin, SUL Senior Development Officer, Catherine Garvie, SUL Senior Development Officer; Jill Little Woodhouse, TUC Education Officer (Scotland).



## Union Advisory Group

The Union Advisory Group comprises of nominated representatives of trade unions. It provides advice and information on strategic and operational matters, at the request of the Board, and advises on any changes in the strategic direction on learning and skills made by individual unions.

The Union Advisory Group supports the Board by:

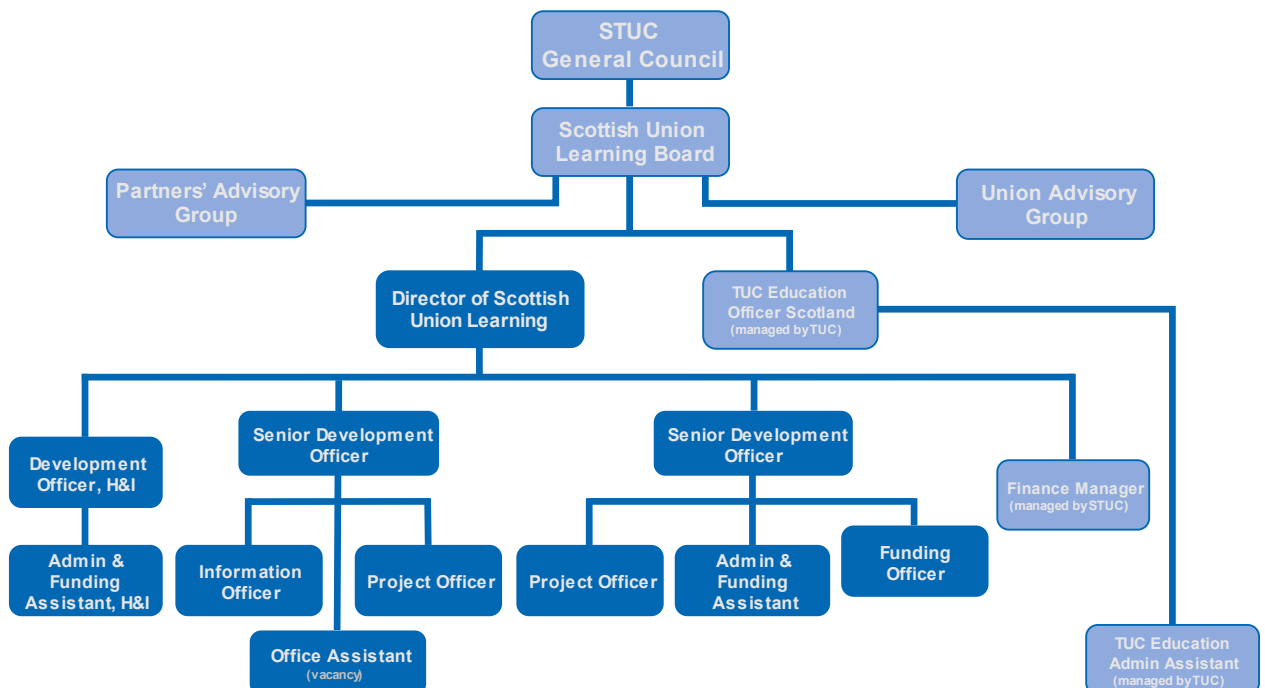
- Providing information to inform the Board in making strategic decisions;
- Identifying strategic or operational issues for the Board to consider;
- Advising the Board of changes in the strategic direction of individual unions;
- Providing the Board with examples of good practice in trade union learning.

Membership is by nomination from all STUC affiliated organisations.

## Scottish Union Learning Staff

Scottish Union Learning has staff located in the STUC offices in Glasgow and in the UNISON office in Inverness. The Finance Manager is managed by the STUC and the TUC Education Officer and Admin Assistant are managed by the TUC. Staff deliver the work of Scottish Union Learning in line with the annual Business Plan, Workplan and Budget approved by the SUL Board and Scottish Government.

## Scottish Union Learning Organisation Chart 2023-24.



# SUL Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of Scottish Union Learning are to:

- work with the Scottish Government's Directorate for Economic Strategy and Fair Work and unions to agree an approach that ensures that union-led learning fulfils its full potential in addressing Scotland's workplace and workforce development challenges;
- support the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Fair Work Framework in delivering fair work: providing effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect for workers across Scotland;
- ensure that the Scottish Government's Fair Work principles are adhered to as an employer and funder;
- develop and promote trade union-led learning and skills development in line with STUC policy on learning and skills;
- support unions in identifying and meeting the skills and learning needs of their members and in organising workplace learning opportunities across Scotland with specific resources dedicated to Highlands and Islands;
- encourage and support employer engagement in delivering learning and upgrading skills particularly in relation to Workforce Development and Workplace Transformation;
- ensure that robust processes and procedures are in place to manage the funding requirements of the Scottish Government and any other funding that may become available;
- manage and promote the Development Fund and the Learning Fund and publicise the benefits of these funds;
- provide assistance to unions in accessing Everyday Skills, Digital Skills and Cyber Resilience skills in line with Scottish Government strategies;
- co-operate with the reporting and monitoring requirements of the Scottish Government;
- record data detailing the numbers of courses delivered through the Learning Fund and the number of participants on each course;
- facilitate an external audit of at least six union projects funded through the Development Fund;
- assist unions in identifying the needs of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) and provide appropriate support;
- develop resources for ULRs and learners including the SUL website;
- work with the Scottish Government's Fair Work Directorate and unions to promote and give access to PACE;
- work closely with Scottish Government, SDS, and trade unions to support the development and governance of Scottish Apprenticeships;
- further develop relationships with partner organisations, including SDS, in the provision of learning and skills;
- work with the TUC to ensure the provision of a comprehensive trade union education service suitable to the needs of unions in Scotland;
- continue the development of Scottish Union Learning.



# Working with Partners

Scottish Union Learning has developed strong partnerships with organisations throughout Scotland. These partners provide support to SUL by contributing to the strategic direction of SUL, sharing information and good practice, and championing union learning in the wider learning and skills environment.

Partner organisations include: Scottish Government, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), Dyslexia Scotland, Learning Link Scotland, Newbattle Abbey College, and Zero Waste Scotland. The following are some of the partners SUL worked closely with during the last year:

## **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)**

SUL works with SDS across PACE, the Careers Service and Scottish Apprenticeships, to enable unions to effectively engage across these areas to the benefit of their members across Scotland.

## **The Open University in Scotland (OUiS)**

SUL works closely with OUiS to develop strategic interventions to ensure union members are able to access effective accredited and non-accredited online learning opportunities and to develop broader skills to engage with online learning. OUiS participated in SUL webinars, conferences and events over the year and has supported union members in applying for funded microcredentials.

## **Scottish Book Trust**

SUL has continued to work with Scottish Book Trust to promote the Book Week Scotland Campaign. Through access to additional funding, unions develop and deliver book-related events and activities for workers each year.

## **Digital Skills Education Ltd**

SUL worked with Digital Skills Education Ltd to deliver training on cyber security, digital detoxing, information management, and the ways in which learners can cultivate a more positive relationship with technology.

## **Show Racism the Red Card**

SUL organised a short-life working group with Show Racism the Red Card and unions to develop workplace interventions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

## **Highland Third Sector Interface Employability Forum**

SUL joined the Highland Third Sector Employability Forum (TSEF) in 2023. The forum has been established as a platform to influence public services across the Highland region, how they are funded, and how they are commissioned.

## **Highlife Highland Adult Learning**

SUL has worked with Highlife Highland Adult Learning on a number of initiatives including a learning programme for workers with basic IT learning needs in rural areas. SUL also contributes to the Highland Adult Learning Group which is co-ordinated by Highlife Highland Adult Learning



# The Development Fund

**The Development Fund complements existing trade union learning strategies and supports developments in workplace transformation by increasing the capacity of unions to offer learning and development opportunities to workers across Scotland.**

Fourteen Development Fund projects in the Lowlands and Uplands area of Scotland and five in the Highlands and Islands area were allocated funding for 2023-24 to support and increase workplace learning opportunities. This funding helped unions to develop capacity through building networks of Union Learning Reps (ULRs), create and develop strong working relationships with new and existing employers, and to identify and address skills needs of their members in a wide range of sectors and industries.

## Lowlands and Uplands Projects:

- **Aegis the Union (Aegis):** Developing Skills in Financial Services
- **Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU):** Overcoming Work Precarity Through Learning
- **Community:** Increasing your Skills with Community Learn
- **Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS):** EIS Professional Learning Programme
- **Fire Brigades Union (FBU):** FBU Scottish Union Learning
- **National Union of Journalists (NUJ):** Partnership Pathways for the Media Industry
- **National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT):** Creating and Developing Skills in Rail Passenger, Rail Infrastructure, Ferry Passenger and Offshore
- **Prospect:** BECTU Vision
- **Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS):** Union Learning & Skills – Building, Growing, Winning
- **Scottish Artists Union (SAU):** Fair Work for Artists
- **Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw):** Build, Benefit and Budget
- **UNISON:** Learning & Development Pathways for Workers in Social Care, Schools and more
- **Unite the Union:** Increased Innovation, Improved Inclusion for a Fair Work Focus
- **Young Workers' Project (YWP):** Controlling the Future

## Highlands and Islands Projects:

- **National Union of Journalists (NUJ):** Mentoring and Mastery: A strategy for Media Training in the Highlands and Islands
- **National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT):** All Aboard for Learning
- **Scottish Artists Union (SAU):** Fair Work for Artists
- **UNISON:** Progression through Learning for Fairer Workplaces in H&I
- **Unite the Union:** The Green Economy and Inclusion

## Development Fund Case Study

Union: Prospect/BECTU Vision



### Working Behind the Scenes in Film and TV: The BECTU Vision Roadshow

During 2023, the BECTU Vision team hit the road and delivered a series of outreach sessions around Scotland to encourage people to think about careers behind the scenes in film and television. Each roadshow event consisted of a one-hour presentation, followed by an opportunity for coffee and a mingle where industry professionals were on-hand to share their experience and advice. The aim of the roadshow was to raise awareness on roles and opportunities in film and television as well as build an audience Scotland-wide for BECTU Vision's new entrants' activities.



They took the roadshow to Aberdeen, Inverness, Dundee, Dumfries, Glasgow and Edinburgh, and delivered an online event for those unable to attend the in-person sessions.

The events were delivered at relevant local venues such as art centres, community spaces and independent cinemas.

They conducted extensive outreach and promotion through local contacts, community groups and social media to reach a wide audience. They had a total of 338 attendees across all events, aged 16 to 58 years old, and with a range of experiences. The roadshow received great positive feedback, with 97% of attendees giving the event a 4 or 5 star rating out of 5.



Each roadshow event provided insights into:

- Which roles exist within a film crew
- What it's like to work on a film or tv drama production
- How crews are hired and what employers are looking for
- Practical signposts for support available to help with your next steps



Attendees had the opportunity to speak with industry guests comprised of local film offices, film access centres such as the Scottish Youth Film Foundation, Screen Education Edinburgh and Station House Media Unit. The social aspect of the roadshow allowed audience members to have all their questions answered and start building their network and even send their CVs.

The Roadshow has been successful in pooling interest across Scotland and their New Entrants' Base has a range of follow-on opportunities and activities to allow audience members to continue the learning and build further connections. In addition to continued support through 1:1 sessions which provided bespoke advice and signposts, they organised a networking event in Edinburgh, CV workshop, Health & Safety drop-in and Floor Runner Workshop.

Feedback from audience members confirmed the need to deliver outreach sessions across the country. The words 'informative', 'useful', 'friendly' and 'well presented' were most recurrent in the feedback.



BECTU Vision is supported by  
Screen Scotland, BBC, Scottish Union Learning and BECTU.

SCREEN SCOTLAND  
SGRÌN ALBA

BBC



bectu

# Development Fund Case Study



## Union: UNISON Highlands and Islands

In April 2023, Public Health Scotland published a report containing data on children's development following the pandemic in Scotland. The report includes data on the percentage of children where there is a concern that at least one area of their development, such as speech, walking, or social skills, may not be developing as expected. There was an increase in this percentage which was more notable in some areas of development, including emotional and behavioural development, problem solving, personal and social development, and speech, language and communication. There also continue to be marked inequalities between groups of children, with children living in the most deprived areas more than twice as likely to have a developmental concern at 2.5 years than those in the least deprived areas.

These issues were highlighted to the Project by the UNISON Early Years Learning Rep, who noticed that they put an additional pressure on Early Years Workers, and who believed they would benefit from gaining new skills and knowledge to improve their confidence and satisfaction at work. Working in partnership with the employer, UNISON Local Government Branch, and an Educational Psychologist, they developed a two-part course to address this skill gap.

The course draws on recent practice guidance and international research to identify what is important for young children and how experiences of play with sensitive adults can build lifelong resilience. Session 1 focused on how children develop positive relationships with key adults, and how these can be formed and deepened in an ELC setting. It also covered how this relates to pressure for children to "catch up" or be ready for school, and how wellbeing and learning can be balanced. Session 2 considered in more depth, how young children are affected by trauma and adversity, and how play within a positive environment can help. It also included the essential issues of staff wellbeing, and how staff can manage pressures of work and the burdens of their own lives while doing this life-changing work with children.

The course was delivered by James McTaggart, an Educational Psychologist in the Highlands, who has worked with Early Years Practitioners to help reduce the impact of the pandemic on young children and their families. In the course, they reflected together on the huge impact on children's wellbeing that being able to play, talk and have fun with kind and responsive adults can have, developing secure attachments and addressing gaps in their development. They looked at how practice can be trauma-informed, and how to work out what it is important to do, and not do, for children in a complex situation with many calls on time. Finally, and most importantly, they considered the wellbeing of practitioners, the impact on workers and how this can be addressed.



# Development Fund Case Study

**Union: Unite the Union**



**Employer: Various**

Unite the Union in the Lowlands and Uplands region organises workforce development programmes across the construction, hospitality and social care sectors. Unite works to ensure greater security of employment by ensuring their learners have the appropriate skills and qualifications. Unite establishes Joint Learning Committees and Learning Agreements with employers and negotiates with employers on workforce development. Unite builds and develops new networks with hard-to-reach and precarious workers to ensure the union's learning programme is inclusive across its membership.

Unite's interventions across workplaces and sectors ensures effective responses to changing needs and demands from their membership. Throughout 2023-2024, Unite has continued to adapt to the emerging growth of job opportunities for workers with green skills. Workers are demanding their union provides opportunities that support their skills diversification to ensure job security, gaining industry-recognised qualifications that would otherwise be unobtainable.

Over the year, Unite organised the delivery of industry and government recognised accredited training in Solar Panel Installation and Battery Storage. Due to ongoing demand from workers, Unite also organised accredited green skills courses including the City and Guilds Electric Vehicle Charging Installations and, to allow learners to be equipped to work with wind turbines, the GWO Basic Technician Training.

The impact of these programmes supports workers in developing skills pathways to move into new and emerging jobs. Unite continues to have exceptional demand from across its membership for skills to support learners in continuing their employment in an uncertain and changing job market.



### Union: Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)

#### Building the ULR Infrastructure

Throughout the year, PCS re-focused its Development Fund project to re-develop its ULR infrastructure across Scotland. The union's ULR infrastructure had been negatively impacted through a combination of workplace centralisation and redundancies, reps retiring, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address the growing need for a vibrant ULR network, PCS initiated effective proactive actions. These included the organising of a quarterly online ULR Forum, which is open to current and prospective ULRs, Branch Learning Co-ordinators (BLCs) and Regional Learning Co-ordinators (RLCs). The online meetings allow reps to attend from across Scotland, share good practice, and meet colleagues from an array of PCS workplaces. Crucially, the meetings focus on upskilling ULRs. These forums have been effective in ensuring ULRs come together as a cohesive cohort of reps, that they feel they are a valued part of the union and are able to influence positive union-led change in their workplaces.

PCS has ensured that new and prospective ULRs are mentored by experienced BLCs; this has helped support ULRs through challenging periods and ensured their integration within the union. BLCs in turn, are now supported by a fresh and growing cohort of ULRs that can provide support in meetings with members, employers and the PCS Union Learning Organiser.

To ensure visibility within workplaces, PCS organise activities as part of Learning@Work Week. This can help keep ULRs active, while ensuring members, non-members, and employers value the ULRs as having a vital role within their workplace in specific relation to workforce development.

Learning@Work Week is an annual event led nationally by Campaign for Learning to build learning cultures at work. It aims to put a spotlight on the importance and benefits of continual learning and development. While employers are invited to mark Learning@Work Week, this is open to everyone, and unions are welcome to engage. Campaign for Learning provides resources, activities, and ideas to run creative and inclusive campaigns and events. Further information Learning@Work Week can be found at: <https://www.learningatworkweek.com/>

# Development Fund Case Study



## Union: National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)

Supported through the Development Fund, the RMT Learning Organiser in the Lowlands and Uplands region has utilised the Learning Fund to further negotiate with employers to develop their respective workforces.

Negotiations with Scotrail led to a significant additional contribution from the employer to support learners to progress from the Mind the Gap course on to study the Chartered Institution of Railway Operators' Certificate of Higher Education in Railway Operations Management at SCQF Level 7. Scotrail also agreed to make an additional contribution to the costs of the programme for an earlier cohort of learners. This programme significantly enhances the learners' understanding of railway operations and their career progression prospects.

In addition to organising Learning Fund courses for new apprentices at Scotrail, RMT participated in the Technical Expert Groups which worked on the development of the incoming Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks covering Customer Services and Travel Services.

RMT has been working to re-establish its work with Caledonian Sleeper with action to develop a ULR network to support future activity. Alongside the RMT Regional Organiser, the Learning Organiser has also been developing a strategy to support the learning needs of seafarers at NorthLink Ferries.





# The Learning Fund

**The Learning Fund supports unions in engaging with workers, employers, and learning providers to identify and address skills needs across a wide range of industries and sectors. The Learning Fund covers the course costs for Development Fund projects, and it enables unions to support thousands of workplace learners each year to upskill and reskill, to protect and enhance their employment prospects, and to improve the skills base within workplaces.**

In addition to the 19 Development Fund projects across Scotland, a further 11 Learning Fund Only projects were allocated funding for 2023-24 to support and increase workplace learning opportunities.

## **Lowlands and Uplands Learning Fund Only Projects:**

Communication Workers' Unions (CWU), Equity, FDA, Musicians' Union (MU), Prison Officers' Association (POA) Scotland, Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) Scotland, Royal College of Midwives (RCM).

## **Highlands and Islands Learning Fund Only Projects:**

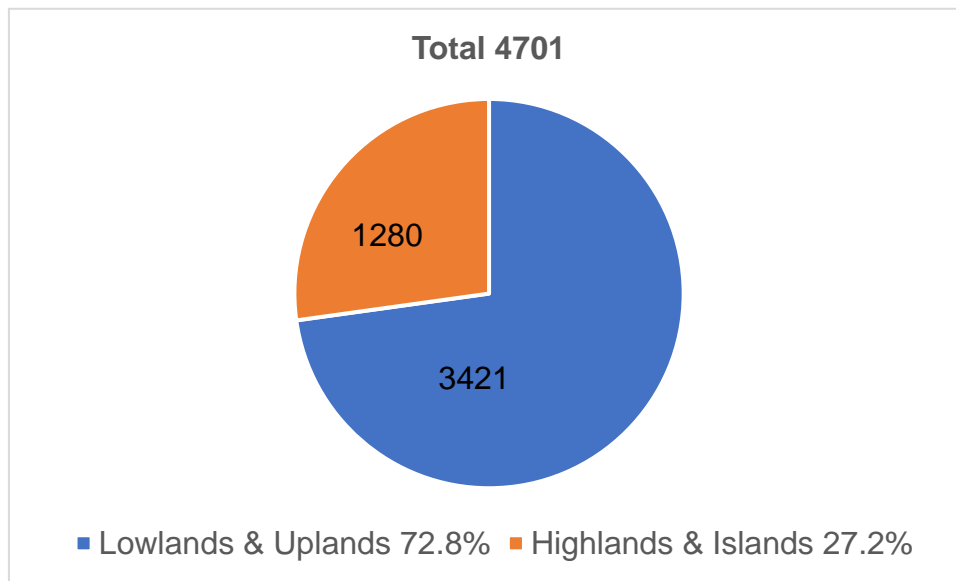
Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Fire Brigades' Union (FBU), Musicians' Union (MU), Royal College of Midwives (RCM).

Throughout 2023-24, the Learning Fund supported 419 courses delivered through the 19 Development Fund projects and 11 Learning Fund Only projects. Delivery methods include online, blended and in-person. Online learning has enabled unions to engage with learners who faced barriers around face-to-face delivery, including disabled workers, those with caring responsibilities, and those in rural and remote areas.

Learning Fund activity continues to reflect the different learner, workplace, and industry needs, and includes a range of employability and vocational skills such as: IT, Digital Tools for Teachers, Law for Journalists, Special Effects for Film and TV, Business Skills for Freelancers, Challenging Racism in the Workplace, Solar Panel Installation, Electrical Vehicle Charging, Climate Change and Net Zero.

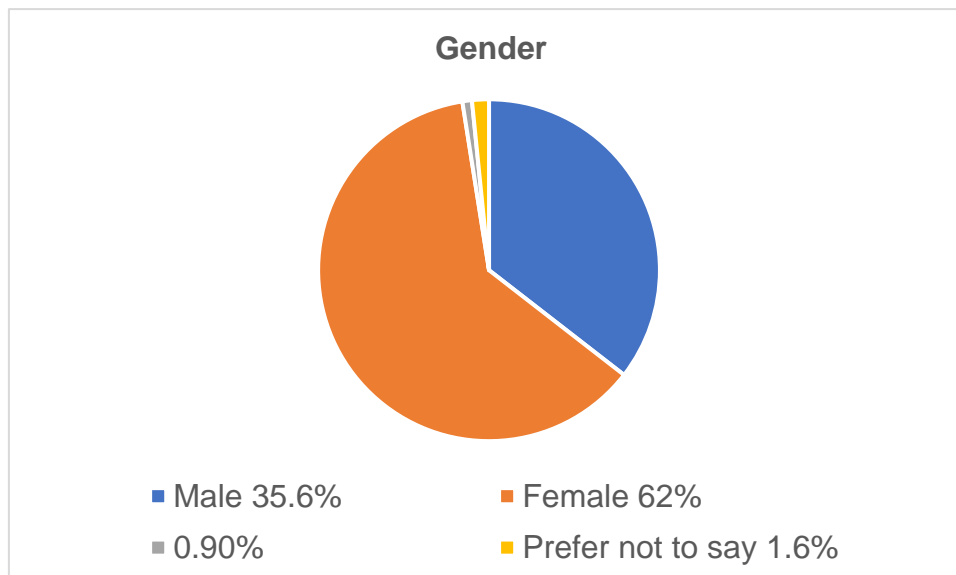
Union-led learning enables workers to improve existing skills and gain new skills, increase confidence and job satisfaction, and it can assist them in moving into higher grade posts. It can also support those at risk of redundancy to retain roles or seek alternative employment. With women making up 62% of the total number of learners across Scotland, the positive impact of union-led learning can reach beyond the workplace.

## Learning Fund: number of learners 2023-24

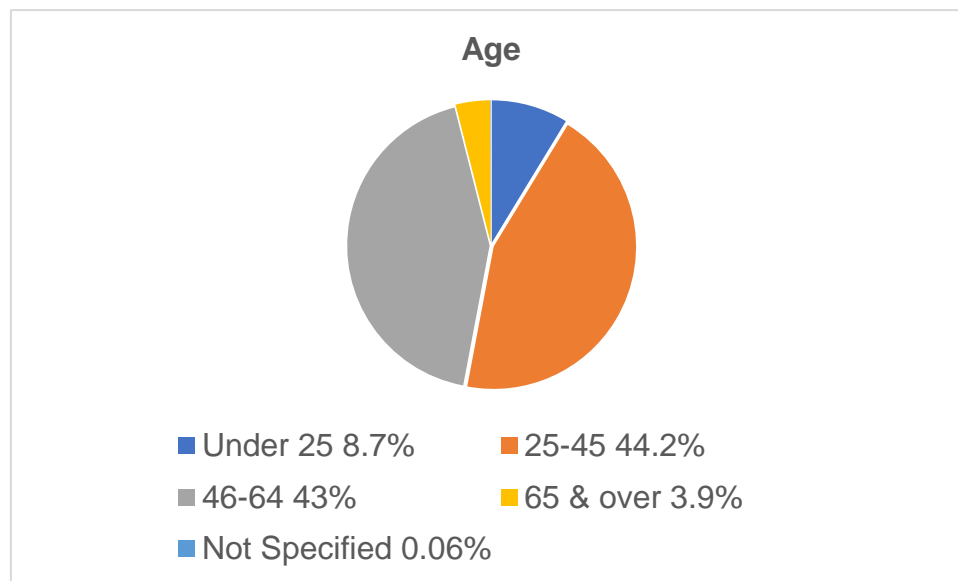


## Learning Fund: Who are our learners?

### Gender identity



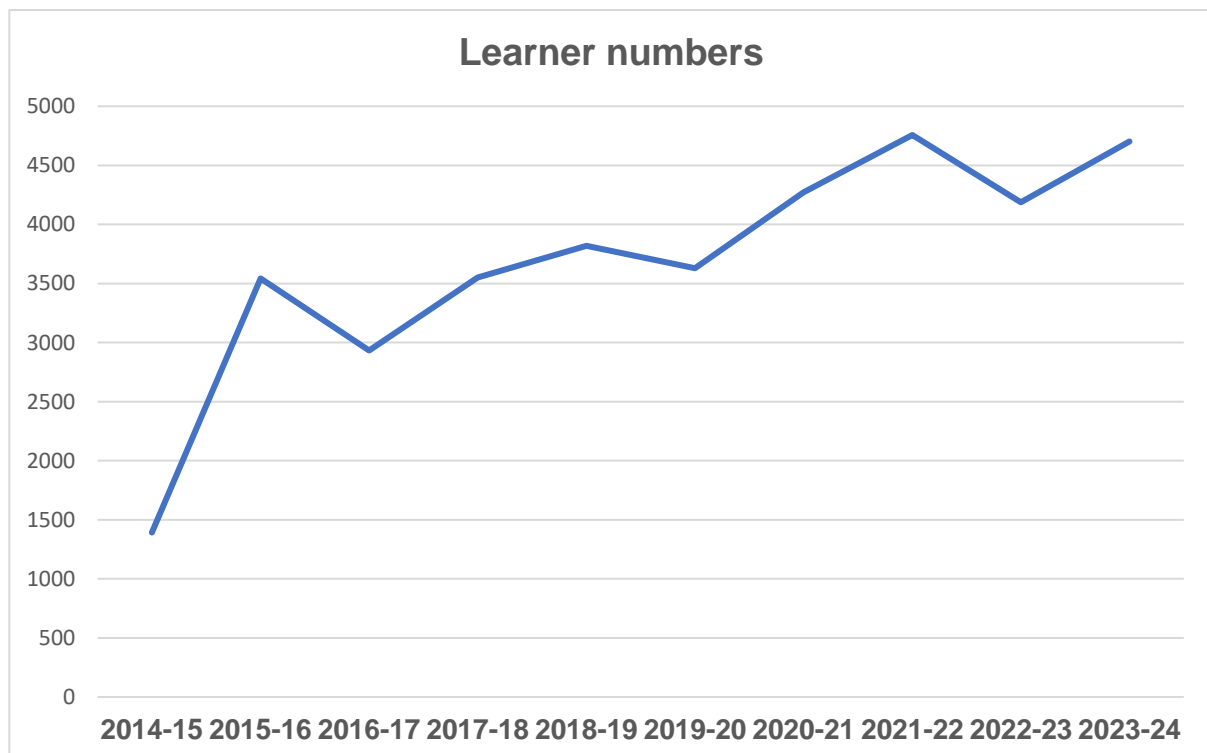
## Age Range



Based on data from 3,565 completed Participant Equalities forms returned to SUL during 2023-24.

## Learning Fund: Learner numbers 2014-2024

The chart below shows the increase in learner numbers over the last 10 years, demonstrating growth in the demand and delivery of union learning.



# Learning Fund Case Study

**Union: Educational Institute of Scotland**

**Employer: Various**

Professional learning is integral to the professional identity of Scottish educators. Ensuring the sustainable skills development of the teaching profession, it is both a right and a requirement. While professional learning is predominantly self-directed, with the workers as the leader of their own learning, careful balance between the needs and aspirations of learners, and the policy and practice drivers of the workplace.

The EIS has developed a programme of professional workforce development which brings together the needs and demands of the workforce while considering that of the education sector. The EIS work with their internal structures to ensure their programme is union-led and inclusive, with participation in the design and delivery of the programme being guided by members primarily by the EIS Council, Education Committee, CPD Sub-Committee, and Learning Rep Network.

The powerful and positive impact of the union's programme is felt across the membership and within educational settings, as the union adapts to the changing needs of professional learning and the subsequent demands from the workforce.



# Learning Fund Case Study



## Union: Communication Workers' Union (CWU)

### Employer: Various

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) manages a Learning Fund Only project within the Lowlands and Uplands region and has a well-developed Union Learning Rep-led programme, with support from CWU officials whenever necessary.

The focus of the project has been to support learners to up-skill and re-skill. The workforce development programmes organised by the CWU are not provided by employers. The accredited programmes improve opportunities for workers to secure enhanced positions within their workplaces. The workplaces in which CWU organise the training include BT, Openreach and EE. Through the Learning Fund, the CWU organised the delivery of an accredited Cyber Security module at SCQF Level 6, Cisco CCNA Routing, Switching and Wireless Essentials, also at SCQF Level 6.

The model of delivery, developed with Glasgow Clyde College due to the impact of the pandemic, has continued to prove effective and allows workers across different workplaces covering a broad geography to participate in the programmes as a cohesive collective.

CWU is working to ensure the workforce development programmes they organise across the telecoms sector continue to meet the needs of workers as the fast pace of technological change continues to impact on the need for workers to have up-to-date skills.



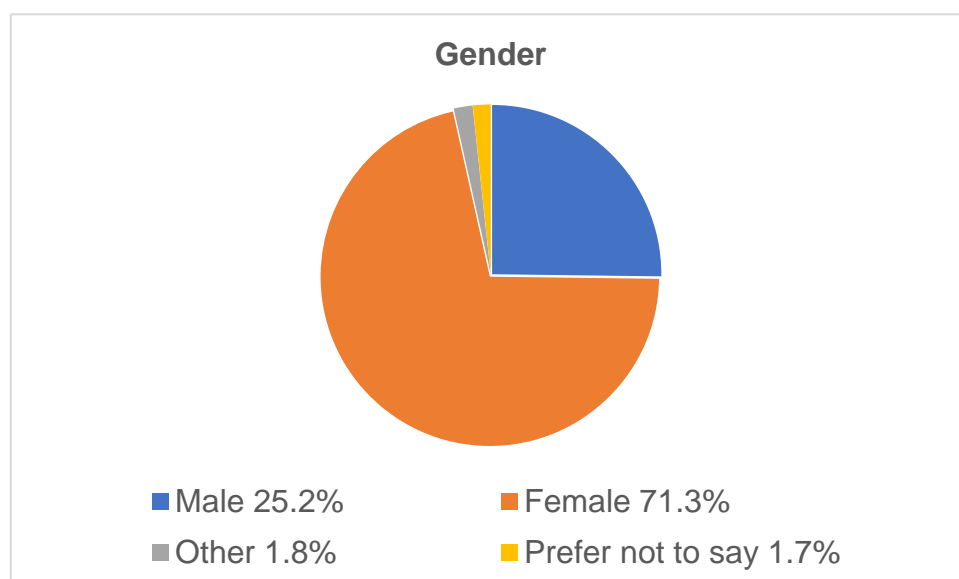
## The Learning Fund in the Highlands and Islands

SUL Highlands and Islands projects operate in key sectors including health and social care, transport, culture and arts, education, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and journalism. These projects continue to work well together and there have been several successful collaborative learning programmes across 2023-24, including a family maths workshop, two creative writing programmes and a mental health accredited course. By working together in this way, trade union learning projects are able to expand their reach, reduce costs, and strengthen links between trade unions more generally.

Highlands and Islands projects continue to evolve and have organised learning programmes on a range of key subject areas in recognition of the concerns of workers across the region, including skills for challenging racism, climate awareness and neurodiversity. In addition, SUL-funded projects provided substantial support through learning for freelance and insecure workers, particularly through SAU and NUJ projects, to offer opportunities for upskilling and progression in line with Fair Work principles.

Skills for renewable sectors continue to be a priority for our work and Unite's Highlands and Islands project has made substantial progress in building links with key learning providers in Inverness who will be able to support our work going forward. In addition, SUL's development work in Highlands and Islands has expanded over 2023-24 with the organisation now contributing to the Highlands Adult Learning Group, Highlands Third Sector Interface Employability Forum, and the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub.

### Learning Fund: Gender Identity in Highlands and Islands



# Highlands and Islands Case Study

**Union: Unite the Union**



## Green Skills

Supporting workers to develop skills and knowledge for the renewable energy sector is a central objective to Unite's learning project in H&I. High quality learning providers are central to the success of this area of work and throughout the year we have seen significant progress in training provision for workers in Inverness, where a new training centre focusing on all aspects of 'working at heights' training together with renewables courses, has been established.



Unite's Project Worker had already worked with the training provider, IATS, to deliver rope access courses. The quality of their training and the ease and flexibility of all communications and arrangements with them was clear. Previously, members wishing to attend GWO courses had to travel out-with the region, so it was a great boost to have a provider set up in Inverness.

In October 2023, Unite's Project Worker was given a tour of the premises and a presentation of the types of training being developed to cover the oil and gas and renewable energy sectors.

That same month, 23 of the first learners attended Aurora Energy Service to undertake the five-day Basic Safety Training course; a pre-requisite to obtaining work in the Offshore Wind Industry.

Unite looks forward to engaging with workers, providers and employers over the coming months and years to support the renewable energy sector across the region.



## Highlands and Islands Case Study

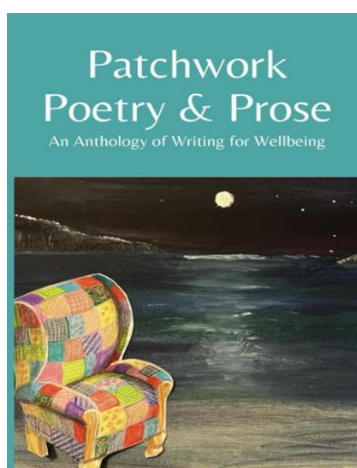
Union: National Union of Journalists (NUJ)



### Creative Writing for Wellbeing: Patchwork Poetry and Prose

There is something very special about the first time your work is published. The arrival of the finished product in the post, the feel of the pages in your hand, the colours of the cover coming to life rather than being a flat representation on a screen. It is an achievement that writers never forget and one that many of the writers in the NUJ's Stage 4 Creative Writing class said they never dared hope to achieve. Until, that is, the publication of their group anthology "Patchwork Poetry and Prose".

This was the fourth stage of the NUJ's Creative Writing for Wellbeing course. The class started as a COVID-19 recovery programme but developed into so much more. Each year, participants asked for another stage to be added. This time, it was decided that the theme would be self-publishing, and that the outcome would be a self-published anthology of the group's work. For participants, having their work in print was a dream. Writing is a solitary activity but it is one that is essentially designed for an audience. In Stage 1, participants were using writing to talk to themselves: working out their own thoughts, feelings and behaviours in writing. Gradually, as they gained in confidence, they became absorbed by the art form of writing and switched their focus to their readers. The anthology was a way of capturing an audience and learning about self-publishing in the process.



The Stage 4 class was open to those who had completed previous stages, including those from the RMT and EIS trade unions. Learners wanted the anthology published by Christmas and this meant very tight deadlines had to be adhered to. With the help of a number of journalists in the group who had worked as editors and proofreaders, the final draft was completed. All artwork was drawn or photographed by participants themselves, with the cover drawn by an RMT participant. One member of the group also created artwork for section heading pages using a combination of Japanese calligraphy methods, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh inspired designs to give it a Scottish flavour.

There were many setbacks in the process and many problems to solve - both technical and artistic - and at times, but the dedication and determination of the group, and the unique bond they had formed over the years, meant that everyone reached the finishing line together – and still speaking! The book was published with just days to spare, and while not everyone's copy arrived before Christmas, many of the group experienced an early present: the thump of the anthology landing on their mat. "Learning by doing" had led to the unique thrill of their first published book. As the group started as a way of using writing to improve mental wellbeing, it was agreed that any proceeds from sales would go to mental health charities.

# Highlands and Islands Case Study

## Union: Cross Union

### Family Maths

In September 2023, workers in the Highlands and Islands put on their maths glasses to celebrate Maths Week Scotland, and discovered how maths really is everywhere. The session was a cross-union initiative organised by EIS and UNISON Highlands and Islands learning projects.

Working with Maths on Toast, an educational charity specialising in 'family maths', the session was designed to reach both education workers and parents/guardians. On the day, there was a broad mix of participants working in a variety of sectors and roles. It was also attended by some very knowledgeable young people.

The session very much focussed on the potential for maths to be fun, and through positive engagement in learning, the group discovered valuable teaching techniques which can be applied to a range of teaching environments, both formal and informal.

Topics covered included:

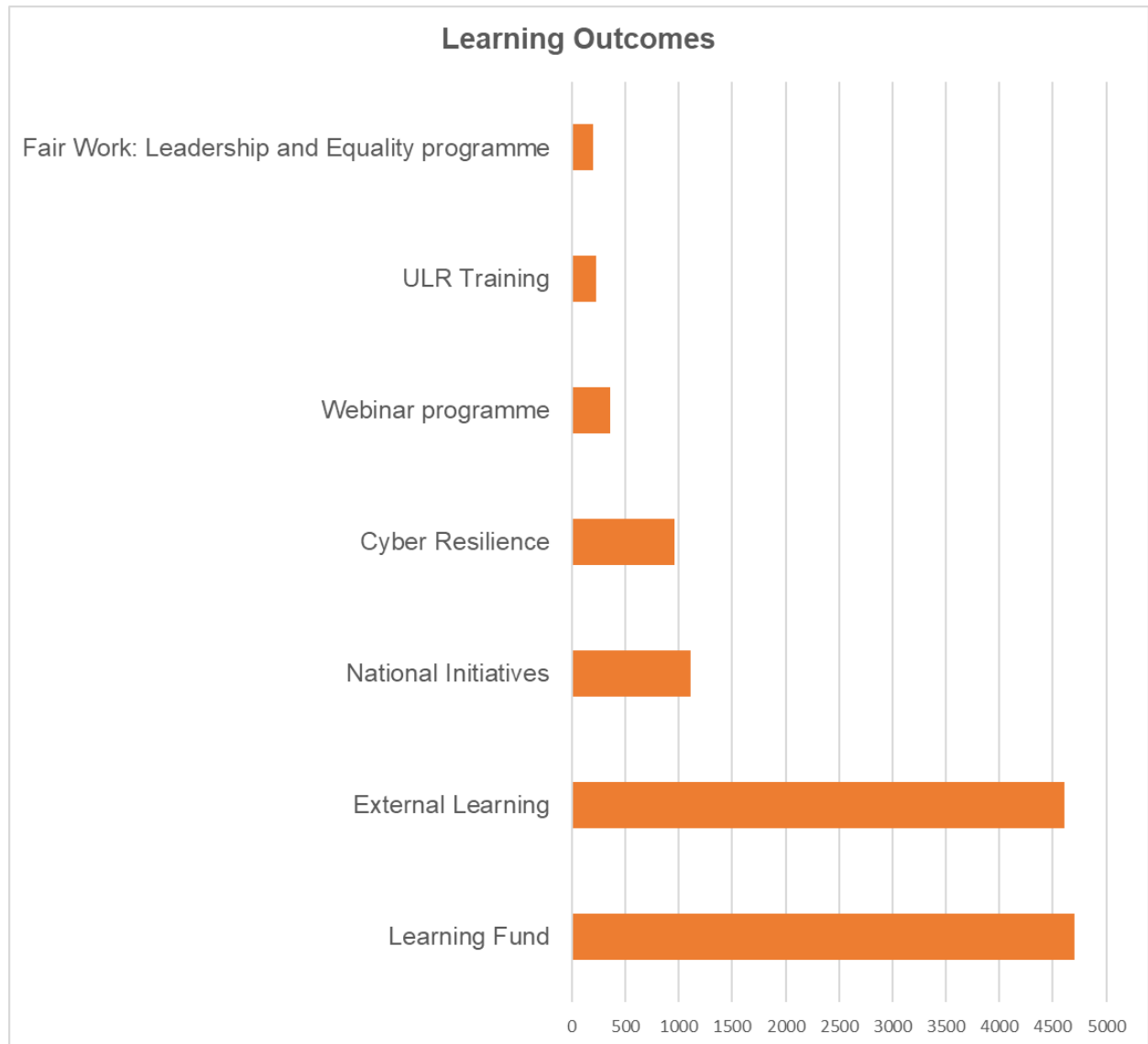
- how to 'play' with maths
- exploring a selection of creative, hands-on activities suitable for all the family
- discovering existing resources to support learning at home and help everyone feel more positive about maths!

The session, which was delivered in the Merkinch Community Centre in Inverness, was a real success and there are plans to build on this through engagement with local community learning services.



# Learning Outcomes

Scottish Union Learning records information on outcomes from a range of SUL Programme activity throughout the year. This includes outcomes generated through SUL-funded union learning projects, additional areas of work, and externally- funded sources. During the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, SUL recorded 12,162 learning outcomes.



## **Learning Outcomes**

### **SUL Learning Fund (4,701)**

The Learning Fund supports skills needs across a wide range of industries. Further information can be found in the Learning Fund section of this Report.

### **External Learning (4,605)**

This learning activity is funded by unions and employers, and also through partnerships with learning providers.

### **National Initiatives (1,108)**

Additional learning outcomes achieved during 2021-22 include our work with Scottish Book Trust, to promote the Book Week Scotland Campaign, as well as work undertaken during Dyslexia Awareness Week, Maths Week Scotland, National Numeracy Day, and Cyber Week Scotland.

### **SUL Cyber Resilience Project (961)**

Working in partnership with Digital Skills Education Limited, this project provides the opportunity to improve workers' cyber security and data protection skills. Further information can be found in the Digital Unions: Cyber Resilience section of this Report.

### **SUL Webinar Programme (363)**

Webinars were organised by SUL and STUC, in partnership with external organisations. A total of 363 learning opportunities were supported through attendance at these webinars, which included:

- 'When the Health and Safety Inspector Calls', delivered by STUC, Health & Safety Executive, Environmental Health, and Scottish Hazards.
- 'Developing Financial Wellbeing Skills', delivered by Glasgow Credit Union.
- 'Microcredentials', delivered by The Open University in Scotland.
- 'Political Education: Cost of Living', delivered by STUC.

### **Union Learning Rep Training and Development (228)**

ULR Training and Development delivered through SUL Development Fund Projects.

### **SUL/STUC Fair Work Leadership and Equality Programme (196)**

This programme was aimed at developing leadership capacity at all levels within the trade union movement in Scotland, with a focus on under-represented groups. Further information can be found in the Fair Work Leadership and Equality Programme section of this Report.

# Improving Everyday Skills

**Scottish Union Learning promotes Everyday Skills activity through Development Fund / Learning Fund projects, STUC Conferences, Learning Conferences, Everyday Skills Events, Union Rep Development Days and SUL webinars.**

Scottish Union Learning defines Everyday Skills as the language, literacy, numeracy, basic IT, digital and cyber skills required both in the workplace and at home. Everyday Skills activity also includes English language learning for those who do not have English as their first language, and support for learners who may have dyslexia and/or other learning differences and abilities.

Scottish Union Learning works with Scottish Government, Dyslexia Scotland, Dyslexia Scotwest, The Open University, Scottish Book Trust, Workers' Educational Association, and other partners to raise awareness of Everyday Skills and suitable means of support.

## Everyday Skills Group

Through the Scottish Union Learning Everyday Skills Group, unions are encouraged to engage with Scottish Government strategies, including those for Adult Literacies, Cyber Resilience, Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM), and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, which includes Green Skills. Unions are also supported in participating in national initiatives such as Book Week Scotland, Dyslexia Awareness Week, and Maths Week Scotland.

The Group is comprised of members from affiliated unions, Scottish Union Learning, Dyslexia Scotland, The Open University and Workers' Educational Association. The Group meets quarterly to discuss all aspects relating to workplace literacies, digital participation, cyber security, dyslexia, and additional learning support needs; it is also responsible for contributing to the planning of the annual Everyday Skills Event.





## Everyday Skills Spotlight

### Book Week Scotland

Scottish Union Learning and Scottish Book Trust worked in partnership with unions to celebrate Book Week Scotland, which took place in November 2023. Unions organised a series of book-related events, from author talks to storytelling sessions, with over 1600 free books distributed throughout workplaces. Activities were linked to the year's theme of 'Adventure', with people encouraged to share their stories on such topics as 'New beginnings', 'When we were young', 'Everyday adventure', 'Answering the Call' and 'Into the wild'.

**BFAWU** reps ran promotional sessions in Bellshill and East Kilbride. Over 400 workers attended and were encouraged to share their stories, and accessed free 'Adventure' themed books, resources, and materials. The sessions were particularly successful in opening up communication channels, particularly in multicultural workplaces, with workers joining in discussions over their love of books.



*BFAWU Member  
East Kilbride*



**CWU** held an event at BT, Alexander Bain House in Glasgow reaching approximately 1000 people throughout the day. Workers dropped by during their breaks and a total of 800 'Adventure' books were distributed. A prize draw was organised for members who submitted 'Adventure' themed stories, which brought laughter and feelings of nostalgia to those who engaged.

**EIS** organised an online writing workshop led by author, Alison Irvine. The event included a range of writing activities. The overall aims of the workshop were to boost confidence around storytelling, offer creative writing activities as a way to build skills, and tell personal stories.

One of the participant's stories was featured in the February Scottish Educational Journal <https://sej.org.uk/feb2024/herstory/>.



**NUJ** hosted 'The Virtual Book Club: An Evening with Scotland's Makar, Kathleen Jamie', which was held online and well attended with 55 participants.



*Kathleen Jamie*

Kathleen read several of her poems, including 'The Morrow-bird', which she composed for the opening of the session of the Scottish Parliament in October 2021. She also discussed her work as 'Makar' and her interesting initiative to include the Scottish nation in poetry writing by compiling poems based on lines the public submitted to her. The session ended with an audience Q&A.

**RMT** distributed 120 books at various rail depots in support of Book Week Scotland.

Participants were entered into a prize draw with a lucky winner from each depot awarded a book token.



*RMT members in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Inverness receiving their book tokens*



**Usdaw** reps handed out 600 books and promotional materials during events at six industrial sites in Bellshill, Cambuslang, Coatbridge, Dundee, and Glasgow.

Different themes were promoted at each site, including Cyber Security, Dyslexia Awareness, Employability Skills, ESOL, Mental Health Awareness, and options for accredited learning.

The reps used the campaign as an opportunity to distribute a learning survey to gather information about learner needs at each site.

Inspired by conversations around Book Week Scotland, Usdaw ULR Gary created a borrowing library and book club corner at his workplace at Sainsburys Darnley. Gary said: "If I can get colleagues to take books home with them and read to their children, or a family member perhaps with dementia, it will be a great gift all round."



Book Week Scotland is supported by  
Scottish Book Trust and Scottish Union Learning



## Digital Unions: Cyber Resilience

**Since 2017, Scottish Union Learning has successfully applied for external funding from the Scottish Government to deliver a series of Cyber Security projects to build the cyber resilience capacity of unions, workers and organisations. Working in partnership with Digital Skills Education Limited, the projects provide reps, members and workers with training to improve their essential cyber security skills.**

During 2023, SUL delivered digital wellbeing and cyber security workshops with 961 learners, in partnership with Digital Skills Education Ltd and focused on delivering training to a range of under-represented groups including workers:

- from disadvantaged backgrounds and those in low-paid jobs
- living in remote and/or isolated communities
- over the age of 50
- who do not have English as their first language
- with a disability and/or with learning support needs
- from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Over seventy-five percent of the learners identified as belonging to one or more of these under-represented groups.

By emphasising the importance of digital wellbeing alongside traditional cyber security best practices, learners reported that they felt more empowered which in turn made them feel more confident in their ability to protect themselves and their workplace from cyber security threats.



*Image courtesy of Martin Shields*

## Cyber Resilience Case Study



**Union: Community**

**Workplace: Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries (RSBi)**

### Digital Security Sessions

The Community Learning Project facilitated the delivery of a course, consisting of eight Digital Security sessions, to members working at RSBi, Glasgow City Building. The course was designed and delivered by Digital Skills Education Ltd. Funded through the Learning Fund, it was delivered in response to demand from Community members on-site, who had seen a number of staff members become victims to online social media scams. The Community Learning Organiser worked closely with the branch and Digital Skills Education Ltd to design and deliver a bespoke course that gave members the confidence to identify common social media scams and learn how to protect their online accounts.

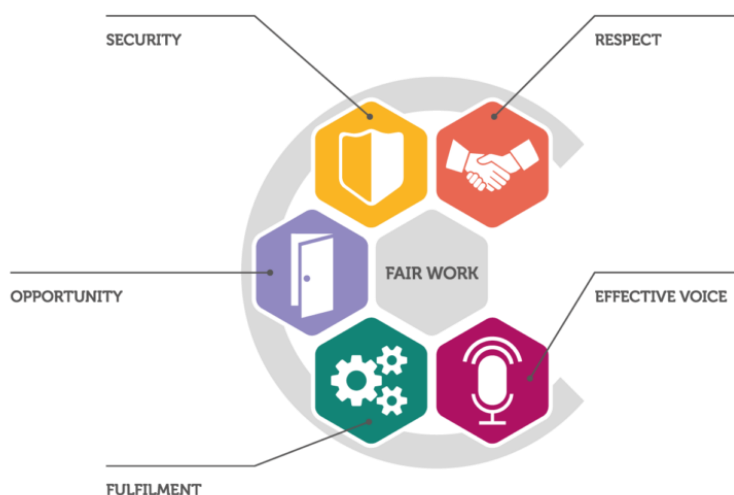
RSBi Glasgow is a supported workplace where over fifty percent of the workforce have a disability. Many of the workers have learning or developmental differences and can be more vulnerable to online fraud. It was important that the course was designed to be accessible to all learners and wasn't used to discourage anyone from using social media. Attendance across the eight sessions was high, with almost 60 learners taking part and included 16 learners with hearing impairments who were supported by a British Sign Language interpreter provided by the employer.

Branch Secretary, Steven McGurk, said, "These digital security sessions have been great and are the talk of the factory. I have had so many people approach me, telling me how much they enjoyed the course and how much they learned. The sessions were also really needed – we have quite a large number of staff who are really active on social media. It's really important that they are equipped with the skills to keep themselves safe."



# Fair Work: Leadership and Equality Programme

The STUC obtained funding from the Scottish Government's Fair Work Directorate to help develop leadership capacity within the trade union movement in Scotland. This programme is managed by Scottish Union Learning. Building leadership capacity within unions is considered to be essential in taking forward the Fair Work agenda and the programme has been aimed at developing leadership capacity at all levels within the trade union movement in Scotland, with a focus on under-represented groups.



The unions and projects supported during 2023-24 were:

- EIS:** Our Voices in Union: Leadership Learning for EIS Equality Networks
- FBU:** Fair Work – Anti Sexual Harassment Capacity Building Seminar
- FDA:** Effective Voice – Sustaining Fair Work through Leadership
- GFTU (Cross-union project):** Women in Trade Union Leadership
- NCS Unions (Cross-union project):** Fair Care for Scotland School
- PCS:** Leaders of the Future
- PFAS:** Understanding Leadership in Football
- STUC Health and Safety (Cross-union project):** Improving our Fair Work Effective Voice on Equality, Fair Work, and Health & Safety – Campaigning, Organising, and Challenging Discrimination, Harassment, and Unsafe Work
- Unite the Union:** Enhancing Race Equality.

A total of 196 learners took part, and, on completion of the leadership activities, a dissemination event took place online, allowing participating unions to share good practice in relation to the development and delivery of leadership and equalities training.

# Fair Work: Leadership and Equality Case Study

## Union: Unite the Union



The Unite Fair Work, Leadership and Equality training was developed to equip reps with an understanding of the issues that BAME members face in workplaces and to ensure bias, unconscious or not, is challenged. This training aimed to develop the skills of reps in supporting members facing racism and to recognise institutional bias.

Unite Learning Organisers developed the content of the course alongside the Unite Equalities Officer. Learners were keen to undertake the training in-person facilitated by a Unite Tutor. The programme drew on expert speakers to enhance the content of the training. Sir Geoff Palmer presented on Institutional Racism in the Workplace. While drawing on her own activism Anita Shelton spoke about Historical Experiences of the Civil Rights Movement. Rebecca Sixsmith-Hughes (TUC Building BME Networks Project Officer) delivered a workshop on how to build and maintain BME networks and the need to ensure a diversity and inclusion across the union rep base. Denise Christie (STUC Co-ordinator for the Fair Work, Leadership & Equalities Project) facilitated a session on Fair Work and the need for fair work to be a lived experience for all workers.

Reps left the programme enthused, determined, and better equipped to ensure fair work, tackle racism, and create safe spaces within their workplaces and communities.





# Apprenticeships

**Scottish Union Learning takes forward the STUC's work on apprenticeships, ensuring representation on the relevant governance groups, committees, and working groups, and the direct involvement of trade unions where appropriate.**

The STUC is represented on the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board and Apprenticeship Approval Group through SUL, ensuring that unions have an effective voice in the governance of Apprenticeships in Scotland.

The Trade Union Apprenticeship Group (TUAG), organised by SUL, meets quarterly to support unions in collectively engaging in discussions about Scottish Apprenticeships with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to ensure that unions have influence across apprenticeship standards and frameworks, and to engage in work undertaken through the Technical Expert Groups. The TUAG has also organised a Short Life Working Group to influence the work SDS is developing around health and wellbeing across apprenticeships.

Throughout the year, SUL worked with STUC affiliates to ensure union representation on Technical Expert Groups to influence the development and design of Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks, including Accounting, Construction (Carpentry and Joinery), Construction (Design and Contracting), Construction (Fitting Building Interiors), Customer Service, Engineering, Hospitality, Transport (Rail), and Transport (Road). Unions working across these areas have included ASLEF, RMT, UNISON, Unite and Usdaw.

SUL worked with unions to develop skills for the wider workforce in mentoring apprentices, with experienced young workers that started as apprentices now mentoring new cohorts of apprentices. Through the Learning Fund, SUL has worked with unions to provide wrap-around support to apprentices, and also to support their move into the workplace through utilising the Learning Fund to support apprentices in developing skills beyond their apprenticeships.

Additional information on Apprenticeships in Scotland can be found at the following link: <https://www.apprenticeships.scot/>



# Apprenticeship Case Study

**Union: Unite the Union**



**Employer: City Building, Glasgow**

Unite has developed an enhanced capacity to support apprentices by ensuring effective representation on, and engagement with, Technical Expert Groups to develop Apprenticeships Standards and Frameworks across the construction sector, through to additional support in the workplace.

Unite, working with apprentices at City Building in Glasgow, identified demand from the apprentices for additional skills beyond the work-based training elements within their apprenticeships. One of these was demand for a signwriting course.

Through negotiations with City Building's Painting and Decorating department, Unite was able to ensure paid release for workers to access on-site facilities. The employer also agreed to provide additional signwriting tools. This high-quality skilled programme and multi-partnership approach ensured the course was a success for all involved and has supported apprentices to develop additional skills and career opportunities.



# STUC Union Rep Awards

**The SUL Learner of the Year Award and STUC Equality Award were presented by the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf, at STUC Congress 2023 at the Caird Hall in Dundee.**

## **Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award 2023**



*Image courtesy of Fraser Band*

The recipient of the 2023 Learner of the Year Award was Fadzai Mwakutuya, a member of the Scottish Artists Union (SAU).

Artist and union activist, Fadzai Mwakutuya, received the Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award at the STUC Annual Congress in Dundee.

The award recognised Fadzai's achievements in undertaking SAU learning courses, as well as her integral role in co-founding the SAU's Intersectional Subgroup. Fadzai has represented the SAU on STUC business, such as attending the Black Workers' Conference, and the Women's Weekend School. The award was presented by First Minister Humza Yousaf. This year the award was sponsored by The Open University in Scotland.

Commenting, Fadzai Mwakutuya said, "It's a great privilege to have received the Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award with all praise and gratitude going to my colleagues within the Scottish Artists Union. Being based in a remote area of the highlands, it can often be difficult to access training and support, but Scottish Union Learning and the Scottish Artists Union have been great at making their events accessible.

"Taking part in union learning courses has been a transformational experience and I feel lucky to have met so many like-minded artists and activists. The welcoming, creative environment has empowered me to keep making art and actively participate within and contribute to the wider arts community. It has made me a more confident trade unionist and has given me skills that I can apply to many aspects of my life. When we all come together, trade unionists can make real changes in workplaces, industries and in communities. That's precisely why I'm a proud member of the Scottish Artists Union."

Commenting, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer said, "Right across Scotland, in every sector of the economy, our reps and shop stewards are the face of our trade union movement in our workplaces and in our communities. Our annual Union Rep Awards celebrate these stalwarts and all those who have gone above and beyond this past year.

"This year was no exception and Fadzai thoroughly deserves her recognition as the recipient of the Learner of the Year Award for 2023. She is a driven and dedicated learner, artist and trade unionist and has tirelessly supported other artists of colour who've come forward with discriminatory working conditions.

"Our reps are the lifeblood of our movement; an incredible force for good in helping others in need. Every single one of them deserves an award for the amazing work that they do and they have my utmost praise as they ingrain trade union values throughout their workplaces."

Commenting, Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, said, "We are absolutely thrilled that Fadzai has received our Learner of the Year award. Fadzai has been extremely proactive in engaging in learning opportunities facilitated by the Scottish Artists Union and Scottish Union Learning. Fadzai's journey is a wonderful example of how workers can grow their skills and confidence, and she demonstrates the benefits union learning can bring, not only to the learners themselves, but also to their respective unions. Fadzai is an inspiration to us all, and we wish her all the very best for the future, as an exceptional artist, learner, and union activist."

Commenting, Susan Stewart, Director of The Open University in Scotland, said, "Access to learning opportunities is vital for Scotland's communities and workforce. The Open University in Scotland is proud to continue to work alongside Scottish Union Learning and the STUC, to deliver a wide range of learning to union members throughout Scotland, including in remote and rural areas. We are delighted to support the Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award, which this year recognises Fadzai's work to support and encourage fellow union learners within Scotland's arts community. Many congratulations to Fadzai as the worthy winner of this award."

## **STUC Equality Award 2023**



*Image courtesy of Fraser Band*

Pharmacy student and union activist, Soh Xi Ken of the Pharmacists' Defence Association (PDA), received the STUC Equality Award at the STUC Annual Congress in Dundee. The award recognised Xi Ken's tireless advocacy for furthering the rights of members of the LGBT+ and Black and Minority Ethnic members of the PDA.

Xi Ken was integral to the launch of an Equality network within the PDA, with the main goal of the committee being to increase levels of diversity and inclusion within the pharmaceutical industry. Xi Ken is keen to increase knowledge and awareness of the fact that LGBT+ patients may have their own unique needs or their own specific health inequalities whilst under pharmacy care. Xi Ken has also been open about the racial discrimination he faced during his time as a pharmacy student at university.

Commenting, Xi Ken stated, "It's a great privilege to have received the STUC Equality Award with all praise and gratitude going to my colleagues within the Pharmacists Defence Association. It has been an honour to fight for LGBT+ rights within the pharmacy sector. When we all come together, trade unionists can make real changes in workplaces, industries and in communities. That's precisely why I'm a proud member of the PDA. We're seeking to root out discrimination in all its forms within the sector, leaving no stone unturned in our collective fight for fairness and equality throughout the Scotland's pharmacies."

Commenting, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer stated, "Right across Scotland, in every sector of the economy, our reps and shop stewards are the face of our trade union movement in our workplaces and in our communities. Our annual Union Rep Awards celebrate these stalwarts and all those who have gone above and beyond this past year.

"This year was no exception and Xi Ken thoroughly deserves his recognition as the recipient of the Equality Award for 2023. He is a driven and dedicated proponent of equality and has been a key component in the campaign to ask the UK Pharmacy Schools Council (PhSC) to include, and be more inclusive of, LGBT+ health issues in the curriculum.

"Our reps are the lifeblood of our movement; an incredible force for good in helping others in need. Every single one of them deserves an award for the amazing work that they do and they have my utmost praise as they ingrain trade union values throughout their workplaces."

Xi Ken, who was presented with the Equality Award by First Minister Humza Yousaf, was integral to the launch of the LGBT+ Pharmacists Network within the PDA. Xi Ken raised the profile of issues such as LGBT+ inclusive education, and ensured that LGBT+ inclusion was high up on pharmacy schools' teaching and learning agenda.

Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, added, "We are delighted that Soh Xi Ken of the Pharmacists' Defence Association has received our Equality Award. His exceptional work in raising awareness of the need for inclusive education, and in helping pharmacy schools embed LGBT+ inclusion within their teaching and learning, demonstrate his passion and commitment to improving equality in an extremely challenging environment.

"Soh Xi Ken is a very deserving winner of this award, and we wish him all the best as he continues to campaign and advocate for LGBT+ pharmacists across Scotland."



# Conferences and Events

**Scottish Union Learning organises conferences, webinars and development events throughout the year to support Union Learning Reps (ULRs) and trade unions in promoting and accessing learning opportunities, and explore developments in workplace learning and skills.**

## **SUL Highlands and Islands Learning Conference**



*Image courtesy of Ewen Wetherspoon*

The SUL Highlands and Islands Learning Conference was held in June 2023 in the Kingsmills Hotel in Inverness. The theme was, 'Regroup, Rebuild and Renew!', and the Conference brought Union Learning Reps, SUL-funded Project Workers, and partner organisations together. This was the first Highlands and Islands Learning Conference to take place in-person since 2019, and feedback from delegates was overwhelmingly positive.

The Conference was addressed by Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary. Delegates also heard from Matt Wallace, founder of Clarity Walk, a Highlands and Islands social enterprise formed to improve mental wellbeing and reduce social isolation through walking and talking.

A panel session on 'Supporting ULRs across Highlands and Islands' featured inputs from Jill Little Woodhouse, TUC Scotland Education Officer; Kirsten Body, Scottish Artists Union Learning Manager for Highlands and Islands; Fadzai Mwakutuya, Visual Artist, member of Scottish Artists Union, and SUL Learner of the Year Award recipient for 2023; and Harper Loonsk, Climate Change Co-ordinator for Highland Adapts.



Delegates also attended the following workshops:

- STUC Unions into Schools: STUC
- An Insight into Disability in Scotland: ENABLE Works
- Every workplace, every worker – how we tackle climate change: STUC

Delegates visited exhibition stalls at the breaks and close of Conference; these were staffed by SUL, ENABLE Works, Lighthouse Financial Advice, Open University in Scotland, Inverness College, TUC Education in Scotland, Barnardo's, Mental Wealth Training, Highland Adapts, and Clarity Walks.

## **Annual SUL Learning Conference**

The annual SUL Learning Conference took place online, with 90 delegates attending. The theme of the Conference was, 'Learning, Organising, Responding: making work fair'. The conference was chaired by Susan Quinn, Chair of the Scottish Union Learning Board, and was addressed by Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary; Neil Gray, Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy; and Raza Sadiq, a Union Representative for UNISON.

Delegates attended the following sessions:

- 'Let's Be Heard: Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry' presented by Linda Somerville, Deputy General Secretary, STUC, and Dr Alexandra Anderson, Head of Let's Be Heard
- 'Organising Through Learning' chaired by Catherine Garvie, SUL Senior Development Officer, with input from Deri Bevan, Head of Organising and Learning, FDA; Wilma Wheatley, Learning Organiser, PCS; Kirsten Body, Learning Organiser Highlands and Islands, Scottish Artists Union; and Tam Wilson, Young Workers' Project Officer, STUC.
- 'Green Skills: What are they? How can unions organise around green skills?' chaired by Tommy Breslin, SUL Senior Development Officer, with input from Joan Lawrie, Hub Manager, Highlands and Islands Climate Hub; Dr Leslie Mabon, School of Engineering and Innovation, The Open University; Chris Brodie, Director of Regional Skills Planning and Sector Development, Skills Development Scotland; Michael Conroy, Learning Organiser, Unite the Union, and Ryan Morrison, Just Transition Officer, STUC.

## **Everyday Skills Event**

The Everyday Skills Event was held online on in February. The theme of the Event was, 'Building Workplace Skills'. The Event was addressed by Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary, Neil Gray, Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work, Energy, and David Coyne, Independent Advisor on Labour Market Policy, and Dr Catherine Deveney, NUJ Scotland.

Delegates attended interactive sessions on the following topics:

- 'How are criminals using Artificial Intelligence (AI)?' facilitated by Craig Steele and Daniel Devine from Digital Skills Education Ltd.
- 'Toolkit for talking climate: why it matters and how to get started' facilitated by Johanna Saunderson and Kirsty Heron from Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN).
- 'Does maths make you feel anxious?' facilitated by Stephen McGuire from the Workers' Education Association (WEA).

## **Fair Work Leadership and Equality Dissemination Event**

The Leadership Dissemination Event took place virtually in March 2024. Unions that received funding through the Leadership Development Programme delivered presentations on the activities they had undertaken, sharing experience and good practice.

## **STUC Congress 2023**

The STUC Annual Congress was held in Dundee in April 2023. SUL organised a Fringe Event: 'Fair Work: 'Organising through learning'', which was sponsored by TUC Education in Scotland. This Event featured a panel session which focused on opportunities for embedding Fair Work into workplaces through union-led learning and skills programmes. The panel comprised of Kirsten Body, Scottish Artists' Union, Deri Bevan, FDA, and Caroline Baird, Usdaw.

SUL organised an exhibition stand to engage with union delegates from a wide and diverse array of sectors. SUL also organised and supported the presentations of the STUC Union Rep Awards, with the Scottish Union Learning 'Learner of the Year' award being presented at Congress for the first time.



**TUC Education focuses on supporting unions and their Reps to continue to make a difference in their workplace. Training has been delivered, with classroom and online learning supported by a wide range of digital learning interventions developed by the TUC Education Team.**

TUC Education in Scotland continues to work in partnership with Scottish Union Learning and the STUC to develop and deliver effective training opportunities for Reps across the country. From April 2023 to March 2024, courses were delivered to 686 Reps in Scotland, covering every stage in the Union Rep journey from introductory courses to diploma level courses for experienced Reps.

Joint work with the STUC and SUL has continued, with a new course in development with SUL, the 'Award in supporting learning and organising', aimed at union learning Project Workers and Organisers, and ongoing work with the STUC Unions Into Schools team for a new course on 'Community Organising'. TUC Education also supported a joint Fair Work event with the STUC at the University of Strathclyde in March and held a joint TUC Education and SUL Fringe Event at STUC Congress in Dundee in April, based on the theme, 'Fair Work: Organising through learning'. TUC Education in Scotland also sponsored the Apprenticeships Event, held jointly with the STUC and SUL in May. In addition, TUC Education has been working with Scottish Hazards on a new project to train and support new and young Health and Safety Reps in Scottish shipyards. Work is ongoing around Mental Health training for reps and a new, 'Bully-proof your workplace' course. In addition, new courses are being developed on topics such as Employability, Fire Risk Assessment, and Neurodiversity in the workplace, as well as bespoke training programmes for unions.

During 2023, research was commissioned by TUC Education Scotland to provide an up-to-date profile of trade union reps in Scotland. This was undertaken by the University of Strathclyde, and focused on union reps' engagement in learning, their assessment of their own learning and skills needs, how their learning and skills support their key roles and activities, and their knowledge of, and training needs, in relation to Fair Work. The findings set out the scale of the challenge required to recruit a membership representative of a diverse Scotland, and informs of areas where existing reps require further information and development. These findings have been shared with stakeholders across Scotland, and the outcomes will help to inform the work of TUC Education in Scotland going forward.

TUC Education, nationally, continues to develop and deliver online learning opportunities for Union Reps across the country. Webinars remain incredibly popular, with hundreds of Reps watching live online, or watching the recordings. TUC Digital Education experts also develop and publish short self-study units on emerging themes in the workplace.

For more information on the work of TUC Education in Scotland please courses, events, webinars and eNotes, please visit the TUC training page at: [www.tuc.org.uk/training](http://www.tuc.org.uk/training)

# Resources and Communications

Information about the work of Scottish Union Learning can be found on the SUL website, social media platforms, and online events, as well as through trade union and partner websites.

## Scottish Union Learning Website

The Scottish Union Learning website provides access to resources, publications, events and information and is a valuable resource for unions, ULRs, learners, and partner organisations.

Website: [www.scottishunionlearning.com](http://www.scottishunionlearning.com)

## Social Media

Scottish Union Learning can be found on Facebook and Twitter/X.

Facebook: [@scottishunionlearning](https://www.facebook.com/scottishunionlearning)

Twitter/X: [@unionlearning](https://twitter.com/unionlearning)

## Contact us:

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## Learner Quotes

Aimee the tutor was very down to earth and friendly. The course material was very relevant and presented clearly.

A great bite-sized course where I have learnt a few things that I am already taking back into my team to pass on.

I would definitely recommend the course to anyone who works in costume (or SFX, makeup, props etc.) if it is organised again, and would look forward to any further courses that could be organised around the topic of dye and breakdown.

Very informative.  
Thank you.

I would recommend this course to colleagues. Good to hear real-life examples and application of techniques and approaches.

Fantastic course well-presented and extremely knowledgeable trainer. Would highly recommend - well done!

I'd happily attend courses with the trainer - she is a fantastic trainer, with a huge amount of knowledge on the subject. Really interesting, and enjoyable course! Thank you.



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