



# Scottish Union Learning

Annual Report

2025 - 2026

## Learner Quotes

*I enjoyed taking part in this course very much and have learned lots of concrete tips that I have successfully been implementing on a daily basis both at work and at home. The course leader ensured advice was relevant and actionable for all participants.*

*Very professional and not just for personal skills, I can use the skills to apply for jobs.*

*A superb course, structured with care and expertise, and delivered with skill. A repeat of this course, as well as follow-on courses, is essential.*

*It made me glad to be in a union as I've been freelance for 25 years and don't get the training that staff get.*

*The course was excellent overall and, in every detail, the hosts were knowledgeable and helpful. The resources provided were excellent, they will keep me learning. I love the conversational character of the course and the spaces for learning together.*

*This was an excellent course that provided valuable opportunities to explore and reflect on leadership skills within education. Overall, this was an inspiring and empowering course that has strengthened my confidence in my own leadership capacity.*

*I really enjoyed this course, as it was at an appropriate level and relevant to my job.*

*Very grateful I got this opportunity from Unite Union/Scottish Government, it'll push me to excel within my offshore career and hopefully help me secure future work in the Renewable Energy sector. The Union has been an amazing support, guiding me through everything up towards the course and afterwards!*

*I found the course to be fascinating, encouraging and helpful. It gave me lots of food for thought. I'm looking at other areas of learning that I could make use of this training. I also enjoyed the opportunity to hear the other attendees' ideas and experiences.*

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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



It has been another busy year for Scottish Union Learning. The financial year 2025-26 was the first year of a two-year SUL Programme, funded by the Scottish Government.

Following on from previous Programmes, SUL continued to manage the Development Fund, Learning Fund, Cyber Resilience Project, and a grant to TUC Education for the development and delivery of Rep training and development. This funding has enabled SUL to offer work-based learning and skills opportunities through 23 union learning projects operating across Scotland.

These projects work across a range of industrial sectors, including public services such as education, health and social care, and the fire and rescue service. Other sectors include construction, engineering, transport, retail, football, and the creative industries. SUL has also facilitated learning through external opportunities offered by unions, employers, and other partners. Opportunities have also been offered through national initiatives, such as Book Week Scotland, Dyslexia Awareness Week, and Cyber Resilience Week. As a result, almost 11,500 learning outcomes have been achieved throughout the year. Our work has enabled workers to undertake learning that enhances career development, supported those facing redundancy to up-skill and re-skill, and created opportunities for unions to engage with employers on workforce planning and the implementation of Fair Work principles.

This report highlights the range of learning activity that has been delivered throughout the year, including our Everyday Skills Programme, vocational skills, cyber resilience, support around apprenticeships, and specific programmes for workers in the Highlands and Islands. SUL has continued to help workers overcome barriers to learning, such as shift patterns, caring responsibilities, geographical barriers, and disabilities. The SUL Programme offers access to learning that would otherwise not take place, and it is essential that we continue to promote, support, and value this work. However, trying to balance the increasing demand for union-led learning against funding and resource limitations is a constant challenge.

As Chair of the SUL Board, I would like to thank our funders, Scottish Government. I congratulate our award recipients, whose achievements you can read about in this report. I would like to thank our learning providers and other partners for their continued support, and we look forward to working with them all again. I also express thanks from the SUL Board to all SUL staff for their continued efforts. Wendy Burton is stepping down from her role as Director of SUL in the Summer, and we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding work she has undertaken in this role throughout the last decade. Tommy Breslin has been appointed as the new Director, and we wish him all the best in his new role.

# 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 2025-26

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

Members: Craig Anderson (CWU); Jim Baxter (ASLEF); Angela Johnston (Unite the Union); Brian Linn (Aegis the Union); Steven McGurk (Community); Esther O'Hara (Unite the Union); Raza Sadiq (STUC Black Workers' Committee).

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.

SUL staff in Attendance: Wendy Burton, SUL Director; Tommy Breslin, SUL Senior Development Officer, and Catherine Garvie, SUL Senior Development Officer.



*Bargaining for Skills session at 2025 SUL Conference*

## 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:

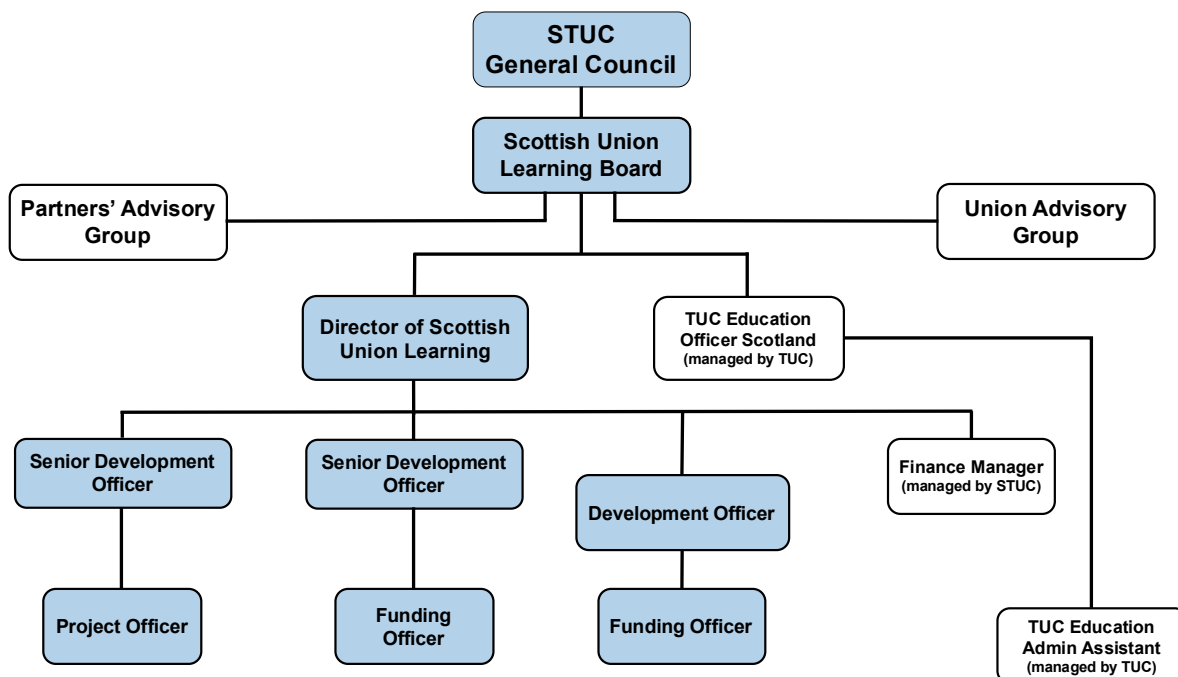
- Providing information to inform the Board in making strategic decisions.
- Identifying strategic or operational issues for the Board to consider.
- Advising the Board of changes in the strategic direction of individual unions.
- Providing the Board with examples of good practice in trade union learning.

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 2025-26



# SUL Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of Scottish Union Learning are to:

- Work with the Scottish Government Jobs and Wellbeing Economy Directorate and unions to agree an approach that ensures that union-led learning fulfils its full potential in addressing workforce development challenges
- Develop and promote trade union-led learning and skills development in line with Scottish Government policy
- Encourage and support employer engagement in skills, particularly in relation to workforce development
- 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
- Support unions in identifying and meeting the learning and skills needs of their members and in organising workplace learning opportunities across Scotland
- Assist unions in accessing relevant learning provision to support advances in technology and AI, and green skills
- Support unions in accessing externally funded learning provision that complements SUL-funded learning
- Continue to deliver a series of webinars on a range of relevant topics
- Develop relationships with partners in the provision of learning and skills
- Ensure that robust processes and procedures are in place to manage the funding requirements of the Scottish Government and any additional funding
- comply 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
- Work with TUC Education to ensure the provision of a comprehensive trade union education service suitable to the needs of unions in Scotland
- Develop resources for ULRs and learners, including the SUL website
- Work with Scottish Government, SDS, and unions to support the development and governance of Scottish Apprenticeships
- Work with the Scottish Government and unions to promote PACE services
- Support the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Fair Work Framework in delivering fair work
- Ensure that the Scottish Government's Fair Work principles are adhered to as an employer and funder
- Continue the strategic and operational development of SUL

# 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, delivering courses, and championing union learning in the wider learning and skills environment.

Partner organisations include a range of colleges, universities, and other learning providers. In addition, SUL works with the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland, Dyslexia Scotland, The Open University in Scotland, Scottish Book Trust, Newbattle Abbey College, and Show Racism the Red Card. The following are some of the partners SUL worked closely with during the last year:

## Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

SUL works with SDS across the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE), Careers Service, and Scottish Apprenticeships, to enable unions to effectively engage with 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 can access effective accredited and non-accredited online learning opportunities and to develop broader skills to engage with online learning. The Open University is a SUL learning provider.



*The Open University workshop at the 2026 Everyday Skills Event*

## 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

SUL has continued to work with Digital Skills Education (DSE) to deliver training on cyber security skills to build the cyber resilience capacity of unions and workers. Through access to additional funding, DSE has delivered cyber security Cascading Skills sessions using the 'Safe for Work' online playlist.

### **Show Racism the Red Card**

SUL worked with Show Racism the Red Card to deliver workshops on Tackling Harmful Narratives as part of the United Workplaces project. Show Racism the Red Card is a SUL learning provider, delivering courses in unionised workplaces.



*Show Racism the Red Card workshop at the United Workplaces training*

### **Time for Inclusive Education**

SUL worked with Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) to deliver workshops on 'Strategic Dialogue: Understanding and Countering Online Hate and Disinformation Tackling' as part of the United Workplaces project. TIE is a SUL learning provider.

### **Scottish Hazards**

SUL worked with Scottish Hazards to run an exhibition and information stand at the SUL Conference. Subsequently, Scottish Hazards is working with Development Fund projects on a Health and Safety programme for Apprentices and young workers. Scottish Hazards is a SUL learning provider.

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

SUL works with the Highland Third Sector Employability Forum (TSEF). The Forum was established as a platform to influence public services across the Highland region, in how they are funded and commissioned.

### **Highlife Highland Adult Learning**

SUL works 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 strategies and supports workforce development by increasing the capacity of unions to offer learning and skills opportunities to workers across Scotland.

A total of eleven Development Fund projects in the Lowlands and Uplands area of Scotland and five in the Highlands and Islands area were allocated funding for 2025-26 to support work-based 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 identify and address skills needs of their members in a range of sectors and industries.

## Lowlands and Uplands Projects:

- **Community:** Increasing your Skills with Community Learn
- **Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS):** EIS Professional Learning Programme
- **Fire Brigades Union (FBU):** FBU Scotland Workforce Development Union Learning
- **National Union of Journalists (NUJ):** Staying Ahead: Empowering Journalists to Navigate new technology and maintain trust
- **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):** Artists are Workers
- **Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw):** Usdaw. Build, Benefit and Budget
- **UNISON:** Pathways to Learning and Workplace Accreditation
- **Unite the Union:** Diversifying for the Future & Bridging the Gap

## Highlands and Islands Projects:

- **National Union of Journalists (NUJ):** Creative Pathways for Journalists
- **National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT):** All Aboard for Learning
- **Scottish Artists Union (SAU):** Artists are Workers
- **UNISON:** Learning Pathways for Inclusive Empowerment and Fair Workplace Growth
- **Unite the Union:** Diversifying for the Future & Bridging the Gap

# **Development Fund Case Study**

## **Union: PCS Lowlands and Uplands**

### **Learning & Skills: Building, Growing and Winning**

PCS recruited a new Learning Organiser, Gail Bell, in early 2025. With 25 years of experience as a ULR, Gail has ensured the PCS programme has continued to grow. PCS branches across devolved and reserved workplaces invited the Learning Organiser to address branch meetings to speak about the impact that union-led learning can have on workers, workplaces and union branches. Branches engaged with members and elected new ULRs who were subsequently trained through the PCS Academy. The increase in the number of ULRs led to a demand to continue to build and enhance the PCS ULR Network, which is now a vibrant and impactful network which influences the direction and delivery of the PCS learning programme.

ULRs have continued to undertake developmental opportunities through the Scottish Union Learning Conference, SUL-organised Union Learning Development Days, and PCS Regional Learning Meetings. The Learning Organiser has also supported the development of ULRs through the Fair Work, Leadership and Equality Programme and the new PCS Black Workers Network. PCS has ensured that ULRs have release to attend additional and ongoing training and development opportunities through attending the Union Learning Development Days, Everyday Skills Event, and the annual Scottish Union Learning Conference.

Wendy Ross, PCS ULR said, 'I thoroughly enjoyed the development days and learning conference. I found the workshops and presentations very useful and have used these skills learned in my role as a ULR. These training opportunities provide us with the opportunity to meet other ULRs and learn from their experience'.

ULRs have increased workplace visibility through speaking directly to members, developing workplace newsletters, and delivering learning programmes. Feedback from branches and members has been positive with demand for courses continuing to grow across workplaces and branches. ULRs negotiate paid release for learners to undertake training. The Learning Organiser is now working with ULRs and branches to assess current Learning Agreements with employers with a view to updating these local agreements.

On reflecting upon the work undertaken over the year, Gail said, 'It has been a busy year for PCS Union Learning. We are expanding our network of new ULRs, creating a diverse group of reps. We have ensured opportunities to share good practice both within PCS and with our sister unions through the additional developmental opportunities organised by SUL'.

## Development Fund Case Study

### Union: Bectu (a sector of Prospect) Lowlands and Uplands

#### LIGHTS, Camera, Action

Electricians are essential members of a film and television crew, responsible for planning, setting up, and safely operating lighting equipment on set. Bectu (a sector of Prospect) supports the development of a skilled, locally based lighting department workforce to meet the demands of film and television productions across the country. This year, through the Bectu Electrician Conversion Programme, two new lighting trainees were recruited to work on the latest series of River City, followed by placements on filming productions in the Spring.



The 13-week placement began in January at the River City studios in Dumbarton and the trainees worked with experts where they gained first-hand insight into using equipment and the day-to-day requirements of an electrician on a television production.

In addition, the trainees visited 'Panalux', Scotland's largest lighting hire company, to build familiarity with the range of equipment used on film and TV productions.

Following their initial placements at River City, the trainees spent time on a variety of other filming productions in Scotland including Shetland and Department Q, as well as other studio-based productions in Glasgow. These placements allowed them to experience different scales and styles of production while building a professional network and connecting with electricians and other crew across the industry. Their traineeship continued with the completion of a three-day Programme in the Application of BS7909 to temporary power systems with a cohort of experienced electricians already working in film and TV, as well as those looking to transfer their skills into the industry.

By continuing to raise awareness of the electrician's role on set and through supporting both new entrants and experienced electricians transitioning into the sector, Bectu aims to strengthen Scotland's lighting departments and ensure productions have access to a skilled local workforce. The training is supported by Screen Scotland and the British Film Industry (BFI) Skills Cluster Fund.

## **Development Fund Case Study**

### **Union: UNISON Lowlands and Uplands**

#### **Positive action to ensure inclusion**

UNISON organises a sector-specific workforce development programme within social care. Social care has a high reliance on BME and migrant workers as employees. UNISON's focus on the health and social care sector has ensured enhanced engagement with migrant and BME workers and has supported the effectiveness and reach of the UNISON Black Workers Network.

UNISON's programme has sought to ensure workers have access to skills programmes which meet their needs through the implementation of a positive action strategy. This strategy has led to a significant increase in UNISON's Black Workers Network and has increased the number of reps from BME and migrant communities which led to the establishing of a unit within UNISON to support workers in this field.

Kevin Duguid, UNISON Learning Organiser said, 'Utilising Scottish Union Learning funding, we are able to bring workers together to access opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. We can see that the membership of our Black Workers Network has increased significantly, alongside gaining skills they are getting more active within our union'.

Kay McKerrell, the Scotland Rep on the UNISON Black Members Committee added, 'UNISON's Black Workers Network is an inclusive and supportive environment, in which all members can thrive and realise our collective purpose. Supporting workers to development their skills through union-led, learner-centred training programmes is essential and helps workers realise their potential'.

Zia Hussain, Secretary to the UNISON Scottish Black Members Committee, said, 'The Scottish Black Members Committee is an inclusive and transformational vehicle, ensuring leadership capacity and inspiring many Black members to become actively involved in UNISON. Through UNISON's learning programme, we have delivered impactful initiatives addressing workplace inequalities and improving representation. The Scottish Black Members Committee has transformed into a progressive, challenging, and solution-focused self-organised group'.

# 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 16 Development Fund projects across Scotland, a further seven Learning Fund Only projects were allocated funding for 2025-26 to support and increase workplace learning opportunities.

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

Communication Workers' Unions (CWU), Equity, First Division Association (FDA), Prison Officers' Association Scotland (POA Scotland), Professional Footballers' Association Scotland (PFA Scotland).

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

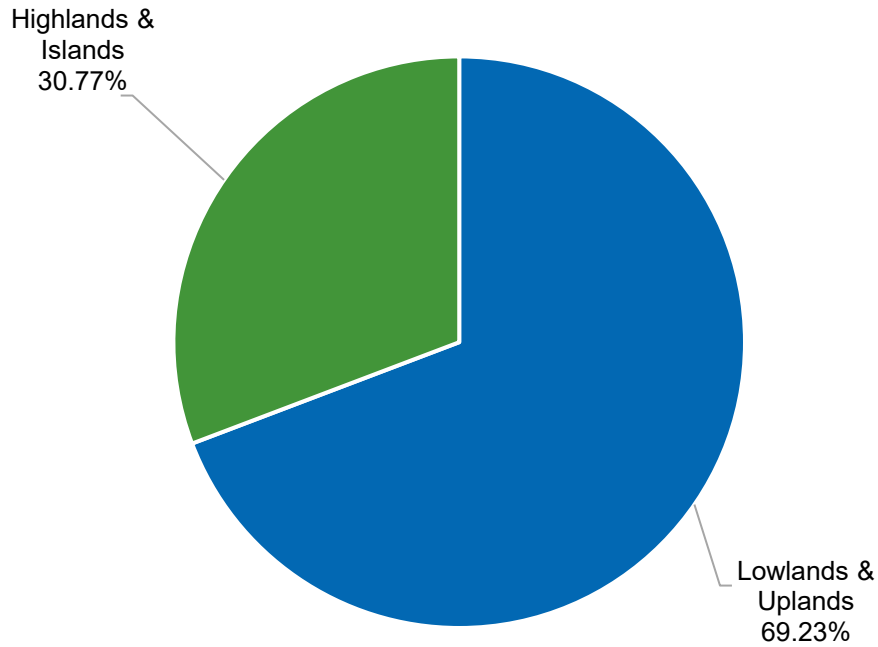
Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Fire Brigades' Union (FBU).

Throughout 2025-26, the Learning Fund supported 3531 learners through 392 courses delivered through 16 Development Fund projects and seven 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 employability and vocational skills such as: Literacy and Numeracy, Business Skills for Creative Industries Freelancers, Data Detox, Artificial Intelligence, Diversity & Inclusion for Modern Apprentices. Microsoft Excel, 18th Edition Wiring Regulations, Wood and Timber Conservation and Maintenance, and courses specific to the Offshore Wind Industry.

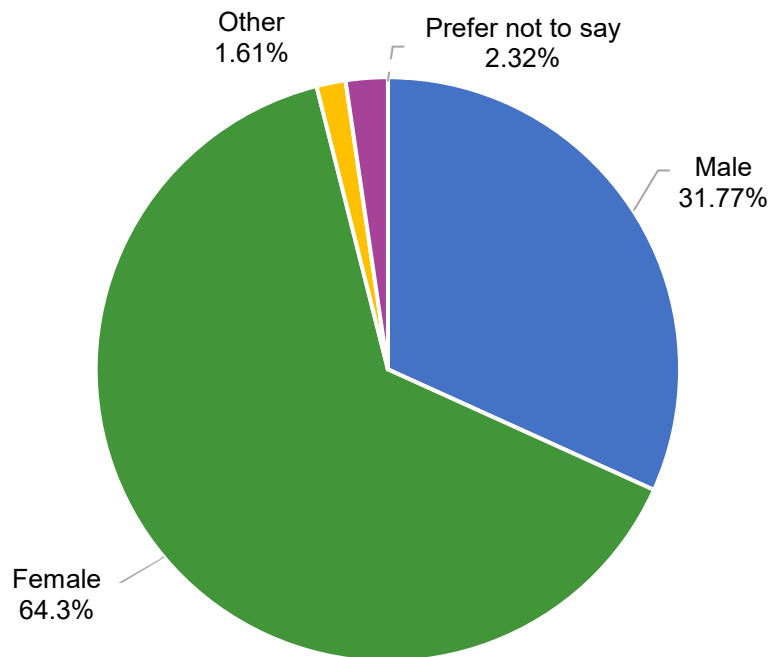
Union-led learning enables workers to improve existing skills and gain new skills, increase confidence and job satisfaction, and it can assist them in moving into higher grade posts. It can also support those at risk of redundancy to retain roles or seek alternative employment. Of workers participating in Learning Fund courses throughout the year, 64.3% were women, over 49% of workers were aged between 25-45, and over 16% declared a disability. A total of 18 ethnic origins were reported. The largest ethnic group supported through the Learning Fund was White Scottish, equating to 67.5%. Learners of white UK ethnic origin accounted for just over 80%.

## Learning Fund: Who are our learners?

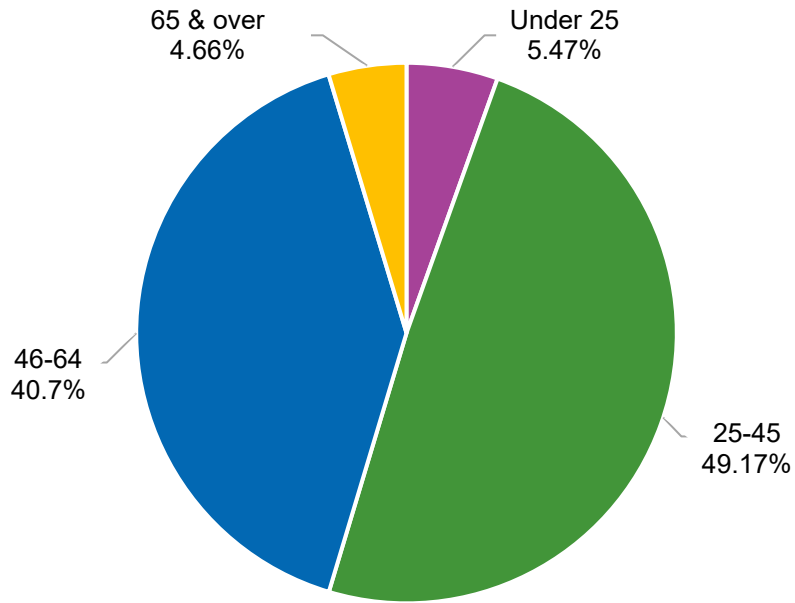
Number of learners during 2025-26 by region.



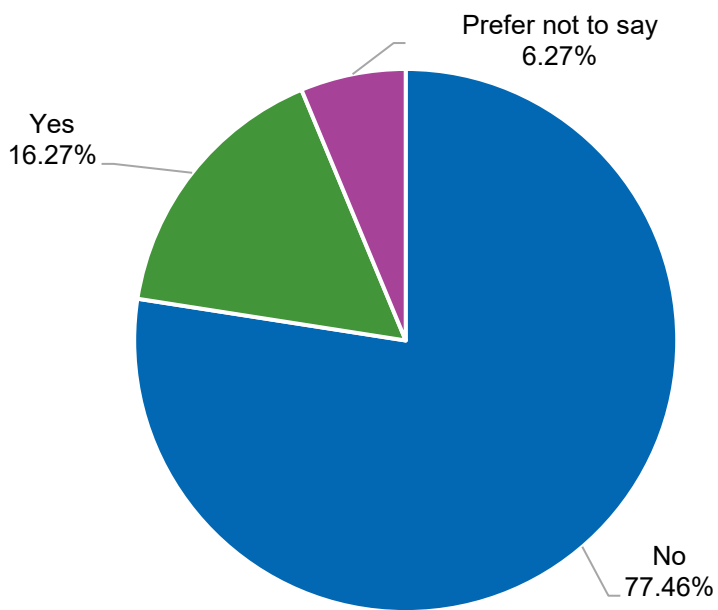
## Gender identity



## Age Range



## Disability



All based on data from completed Participant Equalities forms returned to SUL during 2025-26.

# Learning Fund Case Study

## Union: Professional Footballers Association Scotland (PFA Scotland)

### Tackling the future

Professional Footballers are in a unique position as, at a young age, they will all need to assess and change career paths. This presents an essential challenge that the PFA Scotland has risen to tackle through the implementation of a member-centered, union-led educational programme with interventions made from the start of members' football career.

Over the past few years, PFA Scotland has organised a series of Kick Off events which are designed especially for first-year apprentices taking their first big step into the world of football. The events run in three locations across Scotland to ensure as many members as possible can participate. Valued by players and coaches alike, Kick Off covers areas that young footballers need as they begin their careers, from settling into the dressing room and managing life on social media, to understanding gambling risks and hearing real stories from ex-professionals who've been in their shoes.

My Future Now is an annual event focusing on second-year apprentices coming to the end of their contracts, and the options they can consider alongside and away from football. In February 2026, PFA Scotland organised and introduced a Careers Fair aimed at young players looking for employment opportunities beyond their playing careers. Taking place in Cumbernauld, the Careers Fair brought together young workers from multiple clubs based across central Scotland. The union worked with sister unions to engage unionised employers, alongside further and higher education providers. For footballers aiming to make the transition from football players to management roles, PFA Scotland has worked with Napier University to deliver the Applied Management in Football course. The transferable skills can be utilised both within the football industry and beyond.

Jane Ross had a remarkable 19-year career, having played at West Ham, Manchester United, Manchester City, and Rangers, in addition to scoring 62 goals over 146 appearances for Scotland. In preparation of hanging up her boots, Jane studied the Applied Management in Football course and is now the Youth and Women's Football Development Officer at PFA Scotland.

Jane said, 'Having navigated life as a professional footballer and experienced the decisions that come with planning for life beyond the game, I understand that each journey is personal. That's why our Education and Employability support is completely tailored to our members' goals, interests and pace'.

PFA Scotland recognises the need for an ongoing and diverse union-led learning programme. The union organises a broad learner-centred approach to support members in developing skills that can be used beyond their playing careers. Through the Learning Fund, PFA Scotland has run short accredited and non-accredited courses, including Podcasting, Manicure, Barbering and Barista skills which have led to learners securing jobs.

PFA Scotland Chairman and recently retired Ayr United defender, Michael Devlin, highlighted why he jumped at the chance to take part in the Barista course. 'I love the social aspect of coffee. I've got a machine of my own and I've always liked the thought of maybe having my own shop in the future, after I retire'.

Chris Higgins, Player Services Manager, PFA Scotland, added, 'it is never too early to start planning for the future'. Research has proven that studying or preparing for the future can actually help players' football development. Players from across the leagues are already embarking on their own journey for the future'.



## **Learning Fund Case Study**

### **Union: National Union of Journalists (NUJ) LUPs**

#### **Scottish Government Criminal Justice Division - Trauma Reporting**

The NUJ was approached by the Scottish Government's Criminal Justice Division (SGCJD) to address media reporting on child homicide victims. This included exploring the possibility of providing training on sensitive reporting for journalists covering these cases. After ongoing discussions with their team and considering feedback from Victim Support Scotland, NUJ developed a new course, 'Trauma Reporting for journalists', which was delivered at the end of January 2026.

The course was delivered in conjunction with a psychologist and aimed to make journalists more trauma informed and trauma aware and improve ethical standards. Subjects covered included child homicide, sexual abuse, and terrorism. The course encouraged journalists to change their approaches and questioning techniques to deal more sensitively with the victims of different kinds of trauma. The course was attended not only by journalists but also representatives from the SGCJD and Victim Support Scotland. Additional sessions will be funded by SGCJD in the future.

The feedback was very positive and comments included:

'One of the most useful NUJ courses I have ever taken - really engaging/thought-provoking in terms of how to approach interviews with traumatised people, and good to have the insight/perspective of a psychologist.'

'An important topic which was sensitively and comprehensively covered. I appreciate that the tutor shared a story from her own life - putting myself in her shoes in that moment was a real "lights on" moment for me. It's easy to believe that you empathise with people, but this example plus the exercises we did were genuinely eye-opening and I will carry those with me as tools to get myself into the correct mindset when approaching the "transaction" of an interview with a person who has experienced trauma. Thank you!'

## Learning Fund Case Study

### Union: Scottish Artists Union (SAU) Lowlands and Uplands

#### Art and Class: Co-ordinating across the Learning Fund and External Learning



SAU delivered an Art and Class course at the Community Wellbeing Collective in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh. The course was designed to tackle one of the most significant yet under-represented issues in contemporary art: the barriers facing working class artists and art workers. The Community Wellbeing Collective is a grassroots organisation that serves working class audiences and presents work by working class artists, and as such was selected strategically as a venue for the first session. Hosting the session in this venue meant discussions were rooted in the realities of communities mostly affected by class-based exclusion.

The first session introduced participants to the course's central premise: that class is one of the most significant factors determining who can access and succeed in contemporary art careers in the UK. Despite its major impact on artistic production and industry participation, class inequality is actively ignored in art education and professional discourse. The session attempted to remedy this by providing participants with frameworks for understanding the economic structures that shape class composition within the UK art sector. Participants examined their own positions within class structures and considered how these dynamics affect their professional lives. The session then gave participants structured time to consider and collaborate on practical strategies for combating class-based exclusion that they experience.

This was a first for SAU LUPS, as the course was designed as a collaboration between the SAU Learning Project and external learning partnerships. The first session was followed by an ambitious external learning collaboration with Arika, a political arts organization connecting artistic production with social change and, A Revolting Class, a new organisation focused on critical education class-based education in the UK. This workshop took place in Glasgow over two days and was attended by 17 participants working in the arts in Scotland. It focused on detailed understandings of class inequality in the sector and how these are reinforced through different forms of capital. Tutors introduced participants to renowned sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's framework of different forms of capital - Economic, Cultural, Social and Symbolic - to understand how workers in the cultural sector often have contradictory class locations due to high amounts of Cultural, Social and Symbolic capital but very low amounts of Economic capital. This workshop series will continue with additional sessions and is an important step for SAU to bring greater class consciousness to the sector and raise awareness of the barriers faced by working class artists in Scotland, with the aim of creating a stronger voice for working class artists to demand better conditions within the industry.

## **The Learning Fund in the Highlands and Islands**

During 2025–26, SUL-funded projects across the Highlands and Islands continued to thrive, delivering impactful learning opportunities in vital sectors such as:

- Health and Social Care
- Transport
- Arts and Culture
- Education
- Scottish Fire and Rescue
- Journalism

These projects have not only maintained strong individual momentum but have also deepened collaboration. Highlights from the year include:

- Gaelic Culture and History
- Professional Qualifications for social care
- Learning Pathways for workers at CalMac
- Broad learning programmes for equality, diversity, and inclusion
- CPD for education professionals
- Reskilling for freelance workers in the media

By working together, these initiatives have extended their reach, optimised resources, and reinforced the collective strength of trade union learning across the region.

### **Responding to Regional Needs**

Highlands and Islands projects have remained responsive to the evolving concerns of workers, delivering learning in areas that matter most:

- Challenging racism in local contexts
- Promoting equality of opportunity in maritime transport
- Upskilling freelance workers for future employment

The transition to a greener economy remains a strategic priority. Significant strides have been made during 2025-26 by:

- Establishing and renewing partnerships in adult learning and community development
- Supporting workers in the renewable energy sector

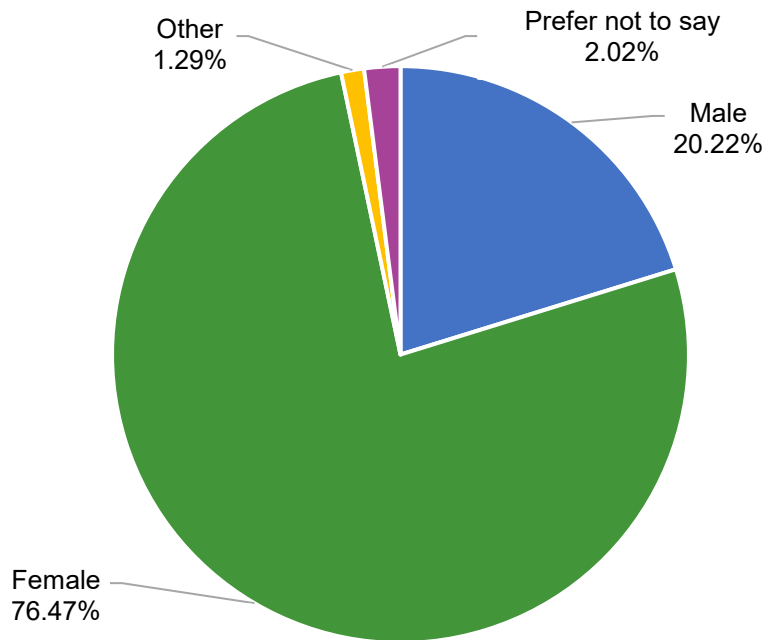
SUL's development footprint has also grown, with active contributions to:

- Highlands Adult Learning Group
- Highlands Third Sector Interface Employability Group
- Highlands and Islands Climate Hub

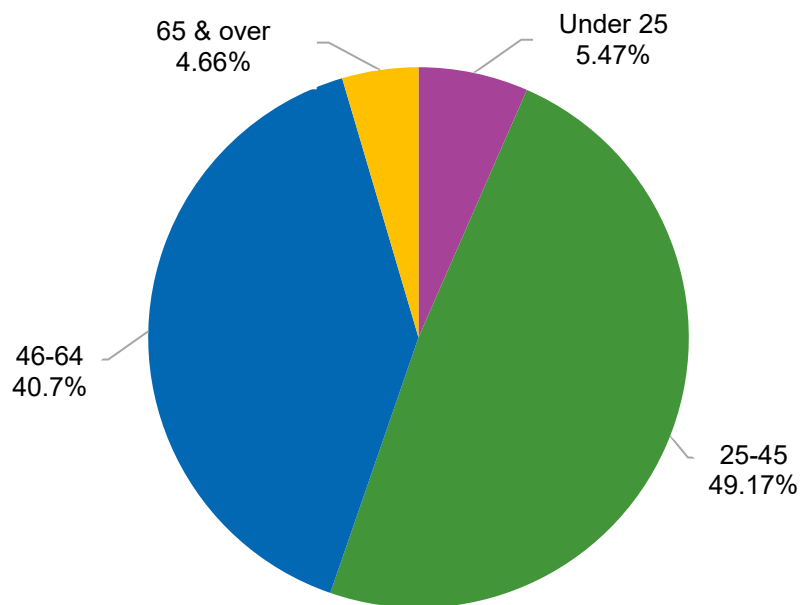
These connections are helping to shape a more resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking learning ecosystem across the region.

# Learning Fund in Highlands and Islands: Who are our learners?

## Gender Identity in Highlands and Islands



## Age Range in Highlands and Islands



# Highlands and Islands Case Study

## Union: Scottish Artists Union (SAU) H&I

### **Collaborative Artwork Description: an audio description workshop for artists**

The Scottish Artists Union Highlands and Islands learning project delivered 'Collaborative Artwork Description: an audio description workshop for artists' as a two-hour online workshop in August 2025.

Guided by blind writer, poet, and researcher Joseph Rizzo-Naudi, participants explored collaborative, blindness-led approaches to beholding, describing, and communicating artworks. The course developed learners' knowledge of disabled-led art practice and accessible approaches, equipping them with the tools to reach a wider audience and commit to inclusive art practice by being able to provide their audience with audio descriptions of their artworks, installations and exhibitions. This learning had the added benefit of improving employability and relationships with potential employers, as galleries and arts organisations must provide inclusive and accessible exhibitions in line with equality, diversity, and inclusion policies.

Importantly, this workshop was disabled-led and blind-led. Under the 'participation' aim of the project which seeks to 'ensure equality of participation for artists as workers across the sector', the learning programmes are targeted at those who are under-represented and the approach is a collaborative, intersectional exploration of the needs of the sector. In line with this aim it is vital that learning about accessibility, disabled people, and disabled art practice is led by disabled people, tutors and artists themselves. As a Scottish Union Learning Project and as a trade union, the SAU is grateful to Joseph for the opportunity to develop learning around how to create accessible learning environments for members, whilst also supporting and advocating on behalf of disabled artist workers. This workshop also signals to the SAU's wider membership that the union is committed to championing disabled artists and learning from their experiences, knowledge and perspectives.

The workshop was attended by 11 artists. Participants were mostly based in the Highlands and Islands, including those who live and work on the Isle of Skye, Isle of Lewis, the north-west Highlands and Inverness, as well as those based in the central belt. Joseph began by sharing his practice, speaking of his recent work along with an outline of his research and practice. A recording of this is available for SAU members in the learning resources section of the SAU website.

The workshop developed as he invited participants to draw on the union's unique sensory, biographical, and place-based perspectives to create and communicate descriptions founded in blind knowledge making. Over the two hours, using Joseph's deliberate and staged process of beholding and listening, participants co-created new, self-contained, language-based artworks, and reflected on experimental image description processes and practices. By turning the hierarchy of the senses on its head, Joseph's process allowed them to learn how they might be able to explain a visual artwork through language and words, as well as understand new methods of gaining insight into how their artworks may be perceived or understood by others.

It is hoped that this course might also be able to offer useful learning across the trade union landscape. The learning achieved, based in blindness-led knowledge-making and generative collaborative approaches, may be highly useful to other sectors. This may provide particularly interesting learning development for general workplace inclusivity as well as for sectors with workers in public facing roles, with disabled service users, audiences, and the general public. However, this course also provides important learning for union projects and project workers who are keen to develop their provision of inclusive and accessible learning environments for their members.

## **Highlands and Islands Case Study**

### **Union: RMT Highlands and Islands**

#### **Men and Menopause**

During the last few years, the RMT Highlands and Islands project has engaged in activity focused on Menopause and the effect it has all workers and their families. Working with the employer's Wellbeing Group, the project considered the possibility of facilitating a Men and Menopause session for some time. Working in a male-dominated industry has strengthened the case for such a session to give men a better understanding of what colleagues, wives, partners, or family members may be experiencing.

During the relaunch of the Women's Network, RMT was approached by a few members of the group. Feedback from a previous event had also requested that there should be a session on Men and the Menopause to educate men on the effects of Menopause and what can be done to help those who are affected this. The session was promoted on World Menopause Day, 19<sup>th</sup> October, and the session was delivered online two weeks later, with 25 participants, including husbands or partners of CalMac employees and members of the Women's Network.

Feedback was very positive. Conversations since the session have taken place within the workplace and in Wellbeing and Women's Groups have justified the decision to go ahead with further sessions.

# Highlands and Islands Case Study

## Union: National Union of Journalists (NUJ)

### Poetry Masterclass for Journalists, with Alan Spence

When compared to training that teaches digital or industrial skills, a poetry masterclass may seem like an esoteric luxury. Yet, for writers, there is so much to learn from poetry that will improve general writing skills and cut across writing genres: the ability to distil complex ideas into few words; the focus on effective imagery; and not least the ability to capture strong emotion in writing, what the Romantic poet Wordsworth called, ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.’ All of this was illustrated by multi-award-winning writer, Alan Spence, who delivered both a Book Week session in haiku and a poetry masterclass for the NUJ.

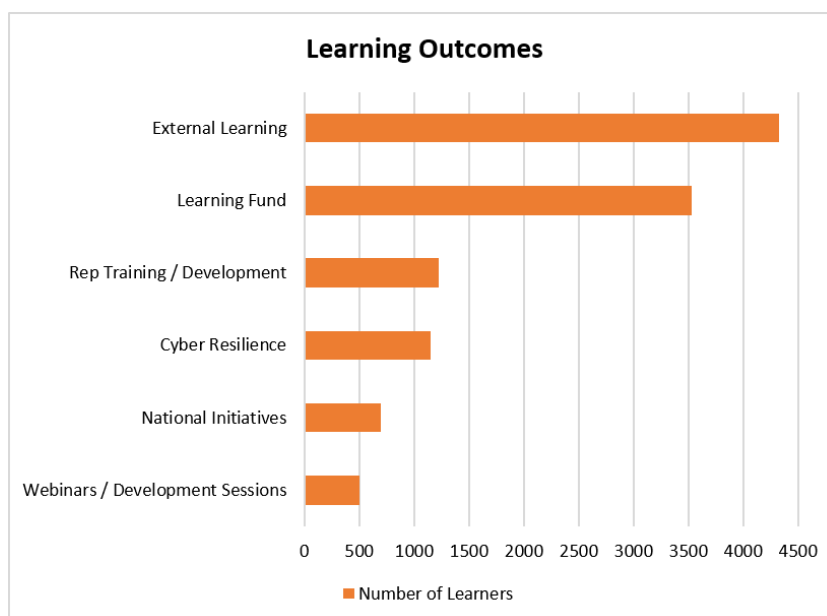
The Emeritus Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen, and founder and director of the city’s WORDS festival, Spence is a former Scottish Writer of the Year, and his output has been phenomenal across all writing genres: short stories, novels, plays, poetry, and even an opera. His sessions were very special: an opportunity for people to hear not only his writing advice borne from personal experience, but also to hear him read his own work.

Haiku, a Japanese poetic short form, usually consists of just three lines and is therefore an accessible starting point and useful poetic discipline for writers beginning their poetry journey. Spence led his audience through his more conventional haiku output to his Glasgow Zen poems – quirky, insightful observations of the city and life in general. He also gave participants the rare treat of reading new and unpublished poems that he has been working on, in particular his latest attempts at sonnet writing. His gentle, sincere delivery was both moving and inspiring, with many participants emailing afterwards to express thanks for the session and note the magical quality of the experience.

A positive spin-off from the Book Week Scotland event was the way that it encouraged the NUJ’s growing community of writers, not just NUJ members but members across different unions who have taken part in creative writing courses and have retained an interest in writing. A diverse cohort of learners attended, including a carpenter, rail workers, teachers and journalists. Scottish Book Trust support for the session also enabled a reasonable rate for high quality services. The last survey showed the average annual earnings for writers stood at just £7,000, Scottish Book Trust’s support for Scottish writers is hugely valuable. As the poet Robert Graves once said, ‘There is no money in poetry, but then there is no poetry in money either’.

# Learning Outcomes

Scottish Union Learning records information on outcomes from a range of SUL activity throughout the year. This includes outcomes generated through SUL-funded union learning projects and externally funded sources. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, SUL recorded 11,438 learning outcomes.



## Externally-funded Learning (4329)

This learning activity is generated through SUL projects and funded by unions and employers, and through partnerships with learning providers.

## SUL Learning Fund (3531)

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.

## Union Learning Rep Training and Development (1223)

ULR Training and Development delivered by TUC Education through SUL funding (889) and through unions' own rep training programmes (334).

## SUL Cyber Resilience Project (1156)

In partnership with Digital Skills Education Limited, this project enabled workers to improve cyber security and data protection skills. During 2025-26, the focus was on 'Train the Trainer' cascading cyber skills courses for Reps.

## National Initiatives (700)

National Initiatives includes our work with Scottish Book Trust to promote the Book Week Scotland Campaign, as well as engagement during Dyslexia Awareness Week, Maths Week Scotland, National Numeracy Day, and Cyber Week Scotland.

## SUL Webinars and Development Sessions (499)

Additional learning outcomes achieved during 2025-26 include online and in-person sessions organised by SUL and STUC, in partnership with external organisations.

# Improving Everyday Skills

SUL defines Everyday Skills as the language, literacy, numeracy and basic IT, digital skills, and increasingly cyber security 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 be neurodivergent, or have other learning differences and disabilities. Everyday Skills promotes diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

SUL promotes Everyday Skills activity through Development Fund and Learning Fund Projects, Everyday Skills Events, Learning Conferences, STUC Equalities Committees, Health & Safety networks and ULR Development Days. Scottish Union Learning works with the Scottish Government, and other external partners to raise awareness of Everyday Skills needs and suitable means of support.

## Everyday Skills Group

Through the Everyday Skills Group, unions are encouraged to engage with relevant Scottish Government strategies and are supported in participating in national initiatives such as Adult Learners' Week, Book Week Scotland, Dyslexia Awareness Week and Maths Week Scotland. The Group is comprised of members from affiliated unions, Dyslexia Scotland, Dyslexia Scotwest, The Open University in Scotland, Playlist for Life, Scottish Book Trust, and the Workers' Educational Association. The Group meets quarterly to discuss all aspects relating to workplace literacies, digital participation, cyber resilience, and additional learning and support needs. More recent developments include providing information and opportunities around Environmental and Green Skills and understanding Artificial Intelligence. The Group also contributes to the planning of the annual Everyday Skills Event.



*Craig Steele, Digital Skills Education Ltd, at the Everyday Skills Event*

## Everyday Skills Spotlight

### Book Week Scotland

Scottish Union Learning and Scottish Book Trust worked in partnership to celebrate Book Week Scotland, which took place from 17<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2025. Unions, including Bectu (a sector of Prospect), NUJ, RMT, Unite, and Usdaw, organised a series of book-related events which included a celebratory lunch, raffle, virtual book club event, and promotional activities, with over 500 free books distributed throughout workplaces. Activities were linked to the 2025 Book Week Scotland theme of 'Friendship' and encouraged workers to improve their literacy skills and develop their passion for reading.



*Bectu participants engaging in Book Week Scotland*

**BECTU, (a Sector of Prospect)**, distributed 30 books at events in November and December. At an Age Scotland 'Planning for Your Future' course, learners were thoroughly delighted to find out about Book Week and receive their copies.

**CWU** distributed 100 books among members and seasonal staff over the course of Scottish Book Week and beyond. Books were also left in a shared 'quiet room' in the Glasgow Mail Centre, in the key2learn room and the reception area. General feedback from members indicated they were pleased with a book that is new and refreshing.

**NUJ** organised a Virtual Book Club: Haiku writing with Alan Spence, the multi-award-winning poet, short story writer, novelist and playwright.



The guest at this year at NUJ's Virtual Book Club was Alan Spence, a multi-award-winning writer whose prolific output over the years has included short stories, poetry, novels, plays, and even an opera.

Alan is renowned for his interest in Japanese culture, and particularly his haiku writing, a Japanese short-form poem that usually consists of just three lines.

For the Book Week Scotland event, Alan delivered a session on this highly accessible form of poetry for those starting out on their poetry journey. The informal feedback NUJ received spoke of the very special nature of Alan's inspirational session, and the pleasure of hearing a top writer reading their own work.

The annual Virtual Book Club events have enabled the NUJ to keep alive the writing community that has been established through the union's Creative Writing for Wellbeing courses, with past participants from all occupations and unions joining the sessions. This year's event included 16 participants, with Alan returning the next week to deliver a very special Learning Fund poetry masterclass for an additional 13 people.

During Book Week Scotland, **RMT** ULRs handed out 150 books to Network Rail, Caledonian Sleeper and ScotRail colleagues in Inverness, London, Glasgow, Fort William, and Edinburgh. There was a raffle draw, and winners received a book token.



**Unite** celebrated the recent graduation of learners on a SUL-funded course with a literary lunch. Eight members met and discussed their recent book studies which enabled their current career aspirations and pathways. They discussed further reading and future opportunities and agreed to meet again in two months. They also agreed to set up a WhatsApp Group to facilitate study and share ideas and authors. Feedback was positive.



In addition, Unite distributed 30 Book Week Scotland books at three Scottish engineering teams in Zurich Engineering.

**Usdaw** ULRs ran campaign stalls in the retail sector over seven days, promoting learning, reading and writing with 200 BWS books handed out. Book Week stalls were held at Sainsbury's Darnley and Braehead stores. Books were available at the Usdaw learning stall at Regional Conference, where Shop Stewards, H&S Reps, ULRs and members attended. Tesco Bank had a learning stall for an employability skills course and distributed the books as gifts. Two separate stalls at Tesco Depot Livingston were organised for two different calendar campaign events. Books were also distributed at a campaign day in Anglo Beef Processing.



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

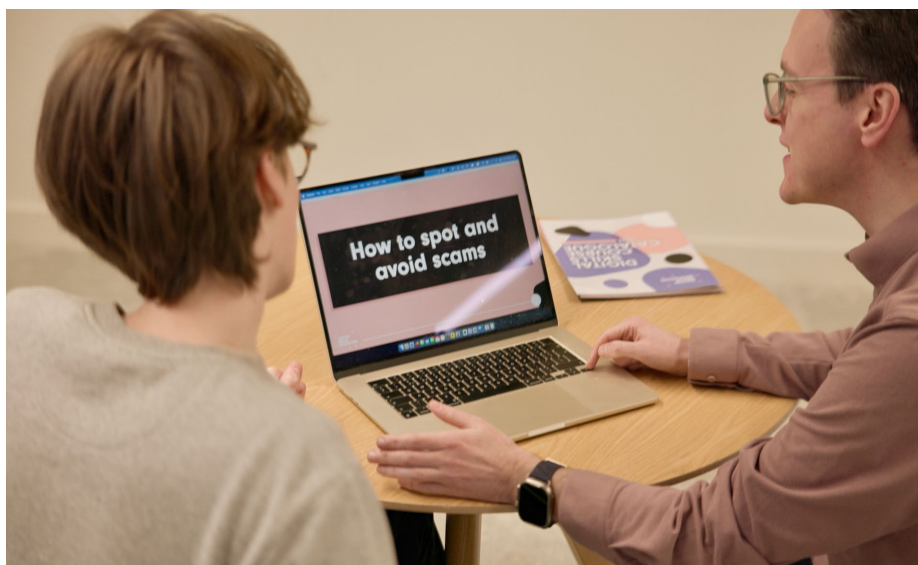
## Digital Unions: Cyber Resilience

**Scottish Union Learning works in partnership the Scottish Government Cyber Resilience Unit and Digital Skills Education Ltd to provide cyber security workshops, data protection workshops, cyber security webinars and online training resources for reps and workers across Scotland.**

A further successful funding bid for £21,500 was submitted to Scottish Government's Cyber Resilience Unit to undertake a more in-depth Cyber Resilience Cascading Skills 'Train the Trainer' programme with Learning Organisers and Reps from November 2025 to the end of March 2026.

Further resources were developed by Digital Skills Education which included refreshing the e-learning modules and 25 videos on the Cyber 'Safe for Work' playlist. 'Train the Trainer' sessions were delivered with Bectu (a sector of Prospect), Community, CWU, EIS, Prospect, PCS, UNISON, Unite and Usdaw. Topics included how to secure sensitive data, spot online scams, and keep your social media safe and secure., dealing with potential data breaches and phishing, protecting online accounts and computers from viruses, and malware.

To date, 20 people have attended 'Train the Trainer' sessions, 400 people completed one of the e-learning modules and 736 watched the 'Safe for Work' video playlist.



*DSE's e-learning module on spotting online scams*

# Apprenticeships

SUL represents the STUC General Council on the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board and Apprenticeship Approval Group, ensuring unions have an effective voice in the governance of Apprenticeships in Scotland.

SUL established the Trade Union Apprenticeship Group (TUAG) to bring together unions every quarter to collectively engage in discussions about Scottish Apprenticeships. Skills Development Scotland has a standing update item on the agenda to ensure unions have direct and meaningful access to this key stakeholder and are invited to participate in Technical Expert Groups.



*Ministerial workplace visit to City Building and RSBi with STUC, Unite and Community*

Due to demand from local reps, an Apprenticeship Event was organised to run during August 2025 at The University of St Andrews in Fife. Events such as this bring together apprentices and their reps with the common purpose of developing the skills of apprentices and their understanding of Fair Work. The TUAG organised the fourth annual Apprenticeship Event at the STUC Margaret Irwin Centre in March 2026 as part of Scottish Apprenticeship Week.

Throughout the year, SUL worked with STUC affiliates to support union representation on Technical Expert Groups to influence the development and design of Apprenticeship Standards and Frameworks, including Agriculture, Horticulture, Greenkeeping and Sportsturf, Archaeology, Construction (Carpentry and Joinery), Construction (Design and Contracting), Construction (Fitting Building Interiors), Dental Nursing, Fashion and Textile Manufacture and Aftercare, Land Use, Plumbing and Heating and Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship). Unions working across these areas included Community, Prospect, UNISON, Unite and Usdaw.

RMT at CalMac and Scotrail organised additional developmental programmes specifically for Apprentices to provide them with skills to successfully integrate into their workplaces. RMT at CalMac organised a mentoring training programme for existing staff to support the integration of the new workers. Most of the learners on the mentoring course were graduates of previous Apprenticeship programmes, which ensured their ongoing development.

## Apprenticeship Event St Andrews 2025

Following on from the success of the annual Apprenticeships Event SUL had organised in Glasgow as part of Scottish Apprenticeship Week 2025, union reps at the University of St Andrews in Fife requested a similar event to be run at the University for the new cohort of Apprentices. SUL worked with STUC colleagues, the Trade Union Apprenticeship Group and the University of St Andrews to develop an event which would reflect local needs and demands. Taking place in August 2025, the event was open to unions across Fife and Tayside. Unite and UNISON apprentices from Dundee City Council, Fife Council and the University of St Andrews along with their union reps.



Workshops exploring Fair Work, Equalities, and Health and Safety, were delivered by the STUC.

Chris Higgins, Personal Development Manager at the PFA Scotland, spoke about his experience of apprenticeships within football and as a professional football player at Motherwell and East Fife.

Unite, UNISON and Community all addressed the event, underlining the importance of trade unions and how young workers can ensure their voices are heard within their workplaces and unions.

Polly Cave, an Estates Apprentice at the University of St Andrews, said, 'This event helped open my eyes to the wide opportunities of support in the working world. I liked how the speakers got the audience involved and kept their speeches upbeat. A day packed full of significant information'.

Tam Kirby, Fife Trades Union Council added, 'It is crucial to provide young workers with the tools and confidence to get more active in their workplaces and unions. Events like these help support those aims and objectives and are crucial in ensuring young workers are able to inform their reps and officers about their ongoing skills needs and to access developmental opportunities'.

Organising the event, UNISON rep Fiona Macdonald said, 'Events like this are essential in bringing our new cohorts of apprentices together to help develop their understanding of what Fair Work in the workplace should look like and how we can all pull together to ensure it is part of our working lives'.



University of  
St Andrews



## Apprenticeship Event Glasgow 2026

As part of Scottish Apprenticeship Week, the 4th Annual STUC Apprenticeship Event was held on 5<sup>th</sup> March in the Margaret Irwin Centre, Glasgow. The theme of the event was, 'Skills for Life: Uniting workplaces through learning', with workshops covering skills and learning opportunities that extend beyond the core content of apprenticeship programmes. Workshops were delivered by Show Racism the Red Card and the STUC Fair Work Team.

RMT and Unite Apprentices came together along with their reps, with a wide array of skilled workers from a variety of workplaces including maritime apprentices from CalMac, craft apprentices from City Building and engineering apprentices from Rolls Royce and Babcock.



The Show Racism the Red Card workshop, 'Shifting the Dial: Tackling Harmful Narratives', focussed on how social media is playing a significant role in promoting concerning and damaging narratives.

Sean Baillie, STUC Fair Work Officer, delivered a focused workshop on understanding Fair Work principles and how these can be implemented in workplaces.

Jane Ross, Youth & Women's Development Officer at PFA Scotland, delivered a powerful presentation on her journey and experiences of becoming a professional footballer. Jane spoke about the role of the union in the move to professionalising women's football in Scotland and how the union is continuing to organise across our national game.

Dan Henderson, RMT Union Learning Organiser, said, 'RMT was delighted that the CalMac Deck and Engine Modern Apprentices were released from college to attend this event. The 20 young workers, who live and work across the west coast of Scotland, thoroughly enjoyed spending the day with Apprentices from other workplaces and sharing their experiences and challenges while developing skills and knowledge that are essential for progressive working lives'.

The highlight of the day was a panel presentation and discussion, with Unite members Sam McLeod (Apprentice Plumber), Lee Hynes (Apprentice Plumber) and Aiden Boyce (Apprentice Joiner) of the Joint Trades Union Committee (JTUC) at City Building. Chaired by Bryan Deazley, the apprentices spoke about how they established a workplace JTUC Young Persons Committee following participation at the STUC Apprenticeship Event 2025.

Sam MacLeod, Plumbing Apprentice, said, 'The establishing of a Young Persons Committee is a great way of teaching the next generation the values and skills needed to participate in a unionised workplace as they develop and integrate into the future workforce. It will also help maximise the effects which union participation has on a workplace - for all its workers, here and now'.

# STUC Union Rep Awards

The Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award and the Helen Dowie Award for Lifelong Learning were presented by the First Minister, John Swinney, at STUC Congress 2025 in Dundee's Caird Hall.

## Helen Dowie Award for Lifelong Learning 2025



The recipient of the 2025 Helen Dowie Award for Lifelong Learning was Steven Black of the Unite the Union. The award celebrates the achievements of Scotland's Union Learning Representatives, promoting union-led workforce development opportunities across the trade union movement.

The award was sponsored by [TUC Education in Scotland](#).

The award was presented by First Minister John Swinney and STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer at the 2025 STUC Congress in Dundee on 28<sup>th</sup> April. Steven, who is the Unite the Union representative for Stagecoach Bluebird in Aberdeen, was nominated following his work in building inclusive workplaces, such as ensuring adaptations for dyslexic workers. He further worked with the Stagecoach Bluebird training team to develop good working solutions to modify mentoring techniques for neurodivergent colleagues.

Commenting, award recipient Steven Black said, 'It is an honour to be presented with the Helen Dowie Award by the STUC. I never set out to get something like this: all I wanted to do was share my experience and highlight the challenges a dyslexic thinker like me faces on a day-to-day basis.

'I hope that by receiving this, I have been able to encourage others who are neurodivergent that anything is possible and not be afraid to speak up and share their challenges with their employer and colleagues. I would also like to thank everyone who has helped me achieve this position, which has enabled me to receive this award.'

Commenting, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer said, 'I pass on my warmest wishes to Steven and thank him sincerely for his work to our movement. He's a shining light amongst our workplace reps who do so much to provide inclusive, welcoming and safe workplaces for all workers to thrive.

'It's clear that, without his work, neurodivergent and dyslexic colleagues would not be able to reach their potential. Steven has ensured that the workplace is for everyone, regardless of barriers or backgrounds and it is only fitting that he has been recognised by the First Minister and our entire trade union movement for his dedication to his fellow workers.'

Commenting, Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, said, 'We congratulate Steven on receiving this Award. Steven has excelled as a Union Learning Rep, using his own experience of dyslexia to build an inclusive work environment for neurodivergent colleagues.'

Steven has improved employer-led training and mentoring, in addition to ensuring that training programmes provided by his union are accessible. His strong commitment to the union movement is unparalleled and he is a very worthy recipient of the Helen Dowie Award. We thank him and give him all best wishes for the future.'

Commenting, Nuala Ashe, Regional Learning Organiser, Unite the Union said, 'The Learn with Unite team is immensely proud of Steven's accomplishment in gaining this top accolade from the STUC.'

'Through his volunteer roles as a Workplace and Learning Rep and Chair of the Aberdeen Branch of Dyslexia Scotland, Steven uses his lived experience to champion neurodiversity within the workplace, the union movement, and the Aberdeen community, paving the way for a more inclusive Scotland. Well done, Steven.'



*Glasgow Trades Union Council speaking at the Glasgow Union Learning Development Day, March 2026*

## Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award 2025



The recipient for the Scottish Union Learning Learner of the Year Award 2025 was Sean Paul Gracie, a member of the Community trade union.

The annual award, presented by First Minister of Scotland John Swinney and STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer at the 2025 STUC Congress in Dundee on 28<sup>th</sup> April, celebrates the achievements of Scotland's trade unionist workplace learners.

This year the award was sponsored by [TUC Education in Scotland](#).

Sean Paul, who works for Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries (RSBi), seized the top prize after completing literacy, numeracy and manufacturing courses. Commenting, Sean Paul said, 'I still can't believe I won this award. I used to find learning really hard and I didn't feel confident, but the support I've had from my union and Tutor at RSBi has helped me so much.

'The classes made me feel included and I began to really enjoy learning for the first time and became more confident. I'm proud of how far I've come, and I hope this shows other people who feel the same as I did about learning, that with the right support they can achieve anything they put their mind to.'

Commenting, STUC General Secretary Roz Foyer said, 'I pass on my warmest wishes to Sean Paul and thank him sincerely for his work to our movement. He's a complete credit to not only himself and his family, he is a real positive example of the benefits of union-led workforce development and the role of our Union Learning Reps.

'It's clear that, despite challenges to his learning, he has broken down barriers and overcome huge challenges which often keep workers from achieving their learning goals. It is only fitting that he has been recognised by the First Minister and our entire trade union movement for his dedication to his fellow workers. We wish Sean Paul all the best for the future.'

Commenting, Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, said, 'We congratulate Sean Paul in receiving this Award. Sean Paul has undertaken an incredible learning journey throughout the last few years, overcoming challenges and significantly increasing his skills and confidence.

'His journey demonstrates the opportunities available through union-led learning, the support that can be provided by unions, in particular, Union Learning Reps, and how improving everyday skills such as literacy and numeracy can build foundations for further learning. His achievements to date are admirable and we wish him well as he continues on his learning journey.'

# Conferences and Events

Scottish Union Learning organises regular conferences, webinars, and other events throughout the year to support Union Learning Reps and trade unions in promoting and accessing learning opportunities, and to promote development opportunities in workplace learning and skills.

## Scottish Union Learning Conference 2025

### Building Union Learning: Developing Fair Work in the workplace

Union Learning Reps and Project Workers/Union Learning Organisers from across Scotland gathered at City of Glasgow College in November to join Scottish Union Learning's annual Conference, developed in partnership with TUC Education. The theme of the event was 'Building Union Learning: Developing Fair Work in the Workplace'. The Conference was developed in direct response to demands and requests from Project Workers/Union Learning Organisers and ULRs attending the Autumn iteration of the newly formed Union Learning Development Days.



*Delegates at the 2025 SUL conference, City of Glasgow College, Riverside Campus*

Throughout the day, delegates discussed how Fair Work can be built in the workplace through developing, organising, and delivering effective and impactful union-led learning programmes. Participants explored how union learning is vital in ensuring workers have an effective voice and are able to access opportunities which would otherwise be denied.

The Conference was addressed by Dave Moxham, STUC Deputy General Secretary, and Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education. During workshops facilitated by STUC colleagues, reps discussed the growing tide of discrimination, how it can be tackled, and how we can work to ensure that union-led learning is open and inclusive to all workers.

Guest speakers and exhibitors reflected our diverse communities, demonstrating the cultural, community, and workplace reach of Scotland's trade union movement. Exhibitions from Scottish Hazards, Show Racism the Red Card, and Glasgow's history-focused band, 'The Tenementals', enabled attendees to develop networks while promoting resources for hope and action.

The Conference took place during the tenth anniversary of the Havana Glasgow Film Festival, delegates heard from Cuban Filmmakers and Screenwriters, Dani Acosta and Hugo Rivalta. Hugo said, 'It is an honour to be here at this Conference, learning from Scotland's trade union movement. The challenges ahead will require more conferences like this, and a higher level of learning and organising. International solidarity has always been a defining part of Scotland's trade union movement, and we are deeply grateful for your solidarity with Cuba throughout difficult times, when we needed it most. We will also be there for you.'

Following the conference, Keynote Speaker, Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education said, 'Working in partnership with trade unions ensures workers gain high-quality, industry relevant skills, while contributing to the development of the skilled workforce Scotland needs.'



*Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education, addressing the SUL Conference*

Speaking after the event, Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning added, 'Scottish Union Learning expresses thanks to the Scottish Government for funding which enables us to offer work-based learning and skills opportunities to workers across Scotland. Our Conference has highlighted some of the incredible work being undertaken by unions to improve skills, while providing a space to explore how Fair Work practices can be implemented in our workplaces.'

## Highlands and Islands Union Learning Week 2025

The annual SUL Highlands and Islands Union Learning Week took place from 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> June, celebrating work-based learning and empowering workplace reps across the region.

The programme featured a mix of online and in-person events. Highlights included 'Using AI to Improve Your Writing' led by UNISON, a full-day exploration of 'Neurodiversity and the Workplace' with Unite the Union, and thoughtful sessions on 'Resilience' with Samaritans Scotland and 'Understanding Trauma in Early Years'. The week also featured 'Leadership' with the Social Enterprise Academy and an inspiring 'Creative Writing and Wellbeing' showcase for workers led by Catherine Deveney from NUJ.



*Highlands Union Learning Development Day held in Inverness during H&I Learning Week*

## STUC Congress 2025

Scottish Union Learning (SUL) organised a Fringe Event at the 2025 STUC Congress in Caird Hall, Dundee. The theme was: 'Developing skills for Union Learning Reps'.

Welcoming guests, Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, introduced the panel of speakers. The panellists spoke about the need to support ULRs to continue to develop their rep skills to ensure impactful union-led learning in workplaces across Scotland. Attendees spoke about the need to ensure ULRs are equipped with skills to effectively respond to a diverse range of union learners.

The panel consisted of:

- Gail Bell (PCS)
- Dan Henderson (RMT)
- Catherine Garvie (Scottish Union Learning)
- Tommy Breslin (Scottish Union Learning)

Attendance was high, with the room reaching capacity. SUL noted the points raised in the ensuing discussion and committed to acting on developing upskilling opportunities for ULRs over the subsequent year.

Gail Bell, PCS Project Worker, said, 'Although I was new to the role of Union Learning Organiser, I have many years of experience as a ULR so I'm keen to bring that experience to help shape developmental opportunities for ULRs as we move forward. This fringe provided me with the opportunity to hear from colleagues in similar roles with sister unions.'

Dan Henderson, RMT Project Worker, added, 'ULRs are key to the effective organisation and delivery of skills programmes for workers across Scotland. Our reps have a unique understanding of the needs of members and how best these needs can be met'.

SUL also held a popular exhibition stall, which provided an opportunity to speak with delegates from across Congress. SUL also organised and supported presentations of the STUC Union Rep Awards, with the Scottish Union Learning 'Learner of the Year' award and 'Helen Dowie Award for Lifelong Learning' being presented at Congress by the First Minister.

## Everyday Skills Event

The 18<sup>th</sup> Scottish Union Learning Everyday Skills Event, themed 'Creativity and Neurodiversity in the Workplace', took place on Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2026 at the STUC. The Event focused on supporting workers to improve their creative writing skills and knowledge of neurodiversity in the workplace. Attendance was good with over 50 delegates attending.

Keynote Speakers included Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary, Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Business and Employment, and guest speaker Gillian McConnell, Course Leader for the MSc in Autism course at the University of Strathclyde. In addition, participants were able to attend two interactive breakout sessions which focused on creative writing to improve literacy skills and AI tools to support neurodivergent workers.

**Breakout Session 1:** Creative Writing and Literacy Skills in the Workplace, led by Dr Rachel Marsh, Associate Lecturer of Creative Writing, and the Humanities at The Open University. This session introduced creative writing and how creative writing skills can be used as a hook to improve the literacy skills of workers. Participants learned about methods to create compelling dialogue, write scripts, and glean tips from a wide range of contemporary fiction, and use their imagination to try out different approaches and techniques.

**Breakout Session 2:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to support neurodivergent workers, led by Craig Steele, Director, and Daniel Devine, Head of Programmes, at Digital Skills Education Ltd. Artificial Intelligence apps and tools can make a huge difference for neurodivergent workers. This was an interactive, practical, supportive session that explored how these tools can help neurodivergent people thrive at work and provided guidance for participants supporting colleagues who are neurodiverse, or simply curious about inclusive technology.

Feedback on the Event was extremely positive and included requests for more in-person events and training opportunities to develop the skills of reps in the future.



*Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary, addressing the 2026 Everyday Skills Event*

## **STUC General Secretary and Public Finance Minister Workplace Visit**

Scottish Union Learning worked with the Joint Trades Union Council (JTUC) at City Building and RSBi to organise a workplace visit from Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary, and Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Public Finance, which took place on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

City Building is one of the biggest employers of apprentices in Scotland. Unite works to ensure union-led learning opportunities beyond the confines of the apprenticeship frameworks are open, available, and accessible to apprentices across the trades. City Building was presented with the Platinum Investors in Young People Award that day, in recognition of the work undertaken by the employer.

Thomas Glavin, Chairperson of the JTUC, said, 'The event was a great chance for the workforce at the City Building Training College and RSBi to showcase the great work that can be done when organisations work closely with their employees. When the workplace is organised trade unions can make great things happen, benefitting all parties.'

'This workplace visit demonstrated that young people are at the forefront of all we do. It provided a unique opportunity to give our support staff, and trade union reps a chance to be seen and appreciated for all the hard work that they do in providing additional support to the workforce.'

Scottish Union Learning funding brings great benefits to our workplace; it is something that we value greatly and needs to be supported.'

The visit provided an opportunity for Mr McKee and Ms Foyer to hear directly from young workers who had benefitted from learning programmes organised by Unite and Community. Sean Paul Gracie, recipient of the SUL Learner of the Year Award 2025, was on hand to welcome the dignitaries to RSBi, where they met with young people on the workplace schools programme.

Steven McGurk, Community ULR, added, 'The workforce development opportunities delivered through the unions and funded by Scottish Union Learning helps learners develop skills that they need both at work and within their broader lives. We work hard to ensure that our workplaces implement Fair Work practices; you can see the result of those efforts here today.'

Sharon Wearing, Executive Director, City Building, said, 'We value the joint work we deliver with our trade union partners. Working together is an essential part of how our business operates, to the benefit of all, including our customers. We are delighted to be receiving the Platinum Investors in Young People Award today and to welcome the STUC General Secretary and Minister for Public Finance to our campus.'

Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary added, 'The workers at City Building are a shining example of how unions can work alongside employers to build a thriving workforce with learning and development at its heart. They're thoroughly deserving of their award, and I look forward to them going from strength to strength with decent, fair work practices underpinning their working lives.'

Congratulating City Building on receiving the Investors in Young People Award, Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Public Finance said, 'This achievement demonstrates City Building's commitment to developing Scotland's young workforce and creating opportunities that can transform lives.'

'We are backing organisations like City Building to deliver high-quality training and skills development that workers need. Through our £2 million union learning funding, we're supporting 23 programmes across Scotland, including expanding access to literacy and numeracy courses for some employees at City Building.'

Unite and Community continue to implement a model of workforce development at the site, placing learners at the heart of the programmes. Working together as union members, workers develop innovative skills-based programmes and models of delivery which lead to real and progressive advances in their working lives.



*Ministerial workplace visit to City Building and RSBi*

# Union Learning Development Days

## Locations: Aberdeen, Fife and Tayside, Glasgow, and Inverness

Following feedback from Project Workers/Union Learning Organisers that there was demand for a return to localised in-person development opportunities for ULRs, SUL responded by organising a relaunch of reinvigorated and rebranded Union Learning Development Days (ULDDs). The aims of which were agreed in consultation with ULRs and Project Workers, with the overarching aims being:

- To provide an opportunity for ULRs to access ongoing developmental training
- To provide a forum for ULRs to highlight development needs
- To support ULRs to develop local trade union actions and share good practice
- A forum for ULRs to influence Scottish Union Learning activities

An initial series of ULDDs were launched in Autumn, taking place in Aberdeen, Kirkcaldy and Glasgow. Each ensured inclusion of the local Trades Union Councils. These were then repeated in Spring, with the developmental training being changed with each iteration. The first series included a workshop on Artificial Intelligence, facilitated by Digital Skills Education Ltd. The second round focused on the 'United Workplaces: Uniting Workplaces Through Learning' project, with a workshop on 'Tackling Harmful Narratives' delivered by Show Racism the Red Card and a 'United Workplaces' session delivered by the host Trades Council.



*Union Learning Development Day at Kirkcaldy Galleries with Digital Skills Education*

ULRs developed local networks to support each other in the training which they were required to undertake between ULDDs, developing skills to ensure more effective social learning in utilising free online learning. The Trades Councils spoke about the importance of local trade union networks, work undertaken by Trades Councils and how to get involved in upcoming activities.

Similar Highlands and Islands Development Days took place in September and March at the Inverness Community Fire Station. These events brought ULRs from across the Highlands and Islands together to connect, collaborate, and share best practice, with input from Show Racism the Red Card and Inverness Trades Council.

Amy Snell of Aberdeen Trades Council said, 'It's more important now than ever, that we bring together and strengthen our community within the trade union movement. Being a rep can be hard work, and we are facing unprecedented attacks on the working classes, this is why it is vital to build a strong local and national network of kindness, resilience and solidarity. We must galvanise workers from all sectors and be the backbone of our movement. This is the role of the trades' council'.

Andrew Dainty, a PCS ULR and Branch Learning Coordinator added, 'Bringing ULRs together from different unions and workplaces ensures we are able to share good practice, to learn from each other and for us to develop our skills'.

Nuala Ashe, Unite Union Learning Organiser, said, 'The Union Learning Development Days have been instrumental in bringing together Project Workers and ULRs for essential cross-sector and cross-union networking and collaboration within their local areas. The opportunity to learn from and be inspired by talks from activists and leaders within the union movement, sparks ideas and motivates delegates to return to their workplaces and initiate discussions on the benefits of collective learning for upskilling, re-skilling and personal development'.

Work is now being undertaken to assess the feasibility of developing ULDDs in additional locations.



*United Workplaces training at STUC, Glasgow, with Time for Inclusive Education*

## United Workplaces: Uniting workplaces through learning

Scottish Union Learning organised a four-day training programme, 'United Workplaces: Uniting workplaces through learning', which was open to Project Workers/Union Learning Organisers. The programme also welcomed local Trades Councils, building on work undertaken with the Trades Councils in Aberdeen, Dundee, Fife and Glasgow earlier this year. A second programme was organised to provide ULR developmental training on Tackling Harmful Narratives was delivered by Show Racism the Red Card at the Spring 2026 iteration of Union Learning Development Days. The training was further supplemented by Trades Councils delivering a United Workplaces session, where they spoke about local concerns.

The four-day programme consisted of intensive training:

- Show Racism the Red Card: Developing framing and messaging skills to counter discriminatory narratives and misinformation
- Time for Inclusive Education: Strategic Dialogue - Understanding and Countering Online Hate and Disinformation
- Hailey Maxwell: Women's Equality and Intersectionality
- Hailey Maxwell: Managing difficult conversations
- Neish Training: Developing and implementing positive action approaches

Feedback from the programme has been positive with attendees reinforcing the need for such training, that they have felt and seen growing hostilities within their workplaces and communities. SUL ensured two representatives from the training programme participated in the STUC's dissemination event in March, sharing good practice and the challenges faced.

Kevin Duguid, UNISON Learning Organiser said, 'This programme provided essential learning and networking opportunities, which really brought home the need to widen out this type of work not just to union activists but to people in communities who often see a very one-sided narrative, littered with disinformation and outright lies, driven by far-right agitators'.



*United Workplaces training at Aberdeen TUC with Show Racism the Red Card*

# TUC Education Scotland

TUC Education focuses on supporting unions and their reps to continue to make a difference in their workplace. Training has been delivered, with both 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 2025 to March 2026, courses were delivered to 930 reps in Scotland, covering every stage in the Union Rep journey from introductory courses to diploma level courses for experienced Reps.

The Trade Union Education Strategy Group continues to meet to facilitate wider discussions on rep training and development with affiliates, and to ensure appropriate models of training can be developed and delivered.

## Working together to train together



*TUC Education Award in Organising and Learning at City Of Glasgow College*

During meetings with SUL and TUC Education, Project Workers identified areas of professional development which would contribute to increased effectiveness of their Development Fund programmes. Jill Little Woodhouse, TUC Education (Scotland) Officer had worked closely with TUC Education colleagues and SUL to develop an initial accredited programme to meet the demands. A Short Life Working Group was established by SUL to ensure co-design of the programme with learners.

The TUC Education Award in Organising and Learning was delivered in 2025 at the City of Glasgow College Riverside Campus. With a strong cohort of diverse unions in attendance, the programme took place over six full-day sessions with active learning scheduled between tutored days which resulted in delivery taking place over a three-month period. The programme covered good governance and planning, with workshops delivered by SUL and the Social Enterprise Academy. A half-day interactive workshop on Fair Work was delivered by STUC, as Fair Work is embedded in all areas of Development Fund and Learning Fund activity.

Roz Foyer, STUC General Secretary, attended as a guest speaker and led an open discussion on the importance of ensuring the link between effective voice and the role of union-led learning in supporting effective workforce development. Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, presented on the importance of good project management and the need to ensure effective reporting and budgetary monitoring in funded organisations.

Kevin Duguid, Regional Learning and Development Organiser, UNISON Scotland, said, 'The course was an excellent opportunity to enhance our skills as well as reflect on our own practice with our peers which has already resulted in some changes to my own approach to delivering UNISON's learning programme'.

Wendy Burton, Director of Scottish Union Learning, added, 'Training programmes like this ensure we all keep our skills up-to-date, learn from each other, and develop agreed paths for moving forward'.

Following the course, TUC Education facilitated a de-brief workshop with learners to look at what worked, what could be improved, and what the next steps should be. This session and the ongoing feedback have led to the re-introduction of Union Learning Development Days to deliver a deeper ongoing programme of skills development for ULRs and modular interventions to ensure ongoing professional development for Project Workers.



*Recipients of the TUC Education Organising and Learning Award*

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 on the work of Scottish Union Learning can be found on the [SUL website](#), social media platforms, and 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 LinkedIn.

Facebook: [@scottishunionlearning](#)

LinkedIn: [@Scottish Union Learning](#)

## STUC Newsletter

The STUC mailing list lets you stay up to date with the latest news and events from STUC and Scottish Union Learning.

Subscribe to the mailing list: [www.scottishunionlearning.com/STUC-newsletter](http://www.scottishunionlearning.com/STUC-newsletter)

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## Learner Quotes

*As someone from a remote rural area, I am grateful for the support that was provided during the course and afterwards.*

*An incredibly interesting course, which gives me a sense of direction for my research and further learning as I change role in the industry.*

*The organisers and speakers were very approachable and informative. I would recommend this course and look forward to cascading content and links to colleagues.*

*Pre-course communication was excellent. The course was exactly as advertised. Course tutors were very knowledgeable, which instilled my confidence in learning. Real life examples backed up the learning.*

*The course was a well-structured and a valuable experience. It provided a strong balance between theory and practical application, helping reinforce key concepts effectively. The tutor was knowledgeable and supportive, making complex topics easier to understand. Overall, it was a worthwhile course that has boosted my confidence and competence in the subject.*

*I found this session excellent, inspirational, insightful and with immediately applicable knowledge and advice.*

*Very professional and not just for personal skills, I can use the skills to apply for jobs.*

*The course provided me with practical, hands-on knowledge that I could apply directly in my work environment, which helped build both my confidence and competence. I particularly valued the opportunity to learn at my own pace while receiving support and guidance from my assessor when needed.*

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