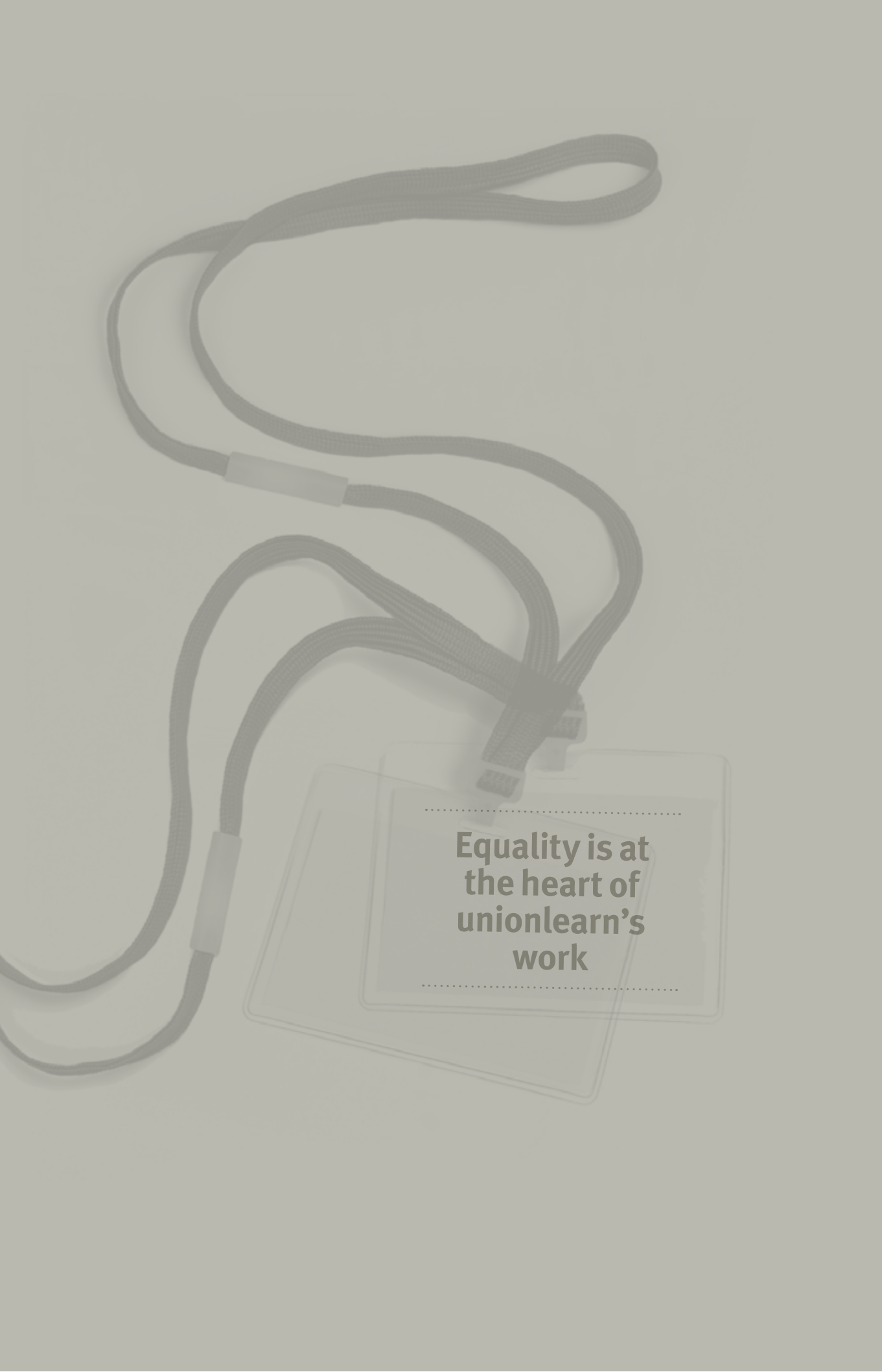




Equality Works

Six case studies that show why equality is such an important part of the workplace environment



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**Equality is at
the heart of
unionlearn's
work**

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Helen Cole speaking at unionlearn South West's Digital Welfare conference in January. Image by Clint Randall pixelprphotography.co.uk

Equality is at the heart of unionlearn's work in educating and developing peoples' skills. We know this helps people to reach their full potential and improve the quality of their lives.



Everybody wins when there's equality

Introduction by unionlearn South West Regional Manager Helen Cole

This booklet gives some great examples of good practice from around the South West, covering different aspects of equality work. I hope you will find these inspiring and helpful in your own situations.

Reps and unions have always been at the forefront of learning and equality, and continue to strive and work with these ideals even in more difficult times. I'm grateful for the time given by those featured to tell their good news stories and share their experiences with others.

This work really makes a difference to ordinary people and can have a positive effect on workplace cultures and the quality of service provided to the public.

So let's celebrate our good work and continue to move forward with equality and education.

Maureen Loxley describes herself as a pain in the butt.

Those who have met her know the Usdaw rep is a gentle, kind woman, but her friendly personality masks a tough determination to stand up for her members at work, especially if she feels they have been treated unfairly.

“Some union reps take the softly, softly approach when it comes to dealing with managers,” she says, “but although I try to nip any problems in the bud before they escalate, I’m not afraid to be a pain in the butt when needs be.

“In the workplace you always have eyes around you that come and tell you what’s going on, if anything’s wrong. If the managers don’t sort it, they tend to come to the reps afterwards, when we take up the challenge.

L to R: Maureen Loxley at work, and collecting her South West TUC equality rep award in 2011. Images by Clint Randall www.pixelprphotography.co.uk



“Sometimes if it’s not too drastic, you can speak to the boss and get them to rectify it before it gets too big. If they don’t, then that’s when we put in a grievance. I don’t like putting in grievances because it can be stressful for the members, but I’m not afraid to do it if I have to.”

Maureen works for Tesco in a store on the outskirts of Gloucester, and puts equality at the heart of everything she does.

“Almost all my work revolves around equalities – you can’t really single anything out,” she says. “For example, when we have structure reviews at work, when we change things around, we need to make sure that each member is dealt with equally and not disadvantaged in any way.”

As an example she cites a case where she intervened after managers wanted to change the hours of two staff members; one of whom had been working for the company for 15 years, the other in the department for just a few months.

“We won that case and she was happy,” Maureen says. “It was important that it was done equally, fairly and she wasn’t discriminated against.”

Maureen is also very much involved in race work with Usdaw which, she says, is still a problem in the industry, more so in warehouses than supermarkets themselves.

“Sometimes it’s blatant, like the case when some people were told ‘You lot are taking our jobs’. Otherwise it’s more subtle, such as you’d find managers giving overtime to white staff but not to black or Asian employees.

“The important thing in these, and any cases, is that when you have strong union backing, you can fight it, and that’s exactly what I do.”

Leaving discrimination on the shelf

Udaw rep Maureen Loxley says workplaces are fairer when unions are involved



“Although I try to nip any problems in the bud before they escalate, I’m not afraid to be a pain in the butt when needs be”



Clockwise from below: Ellie Freeman in the learning centre at Royal Mail, Swindon; signing in to collect her keys; standing outside the truck she's learning to drive; union learning rep Sandra Absalom.

All images by David Morrison www.dmp photography ltd.com

“For a woman of my age, driving trucks is an adventure...girls didn’t drive lorries”



“Driving trucks is an adventure,” says a beaming Ellie Freeman. “I’ve worked here for 23 years and the moment I got a chance to drive one, I went for it. I’ve been doing it for six years now and it’s still an adventure, especially being a woman of my age – girls didn’t drive lorries!”

CWU member Ellie works as a driver for Royal Mail, operating out of its Swindon depot, driving her 7.5 ton truck around the Wiltshire and Oxfordshire countryside, collecting mail and dropping it back to Swindon for it to be sorted.

Through the union she is learning to drive a 17 ton truck and then, if she passes her exam, her eyes are set on the ultimate – an articulated lorry.

“I want to drive a bigger one and a bigger one . . . because I can,” she grins. “The union has got this deal which means it’s not going to cost me nearly as much as if I went out privately and did it on my own.”

Driving ambition

CWU member Ellie Freeman delivers a strong message for equality of opportunity



Ellie is one of more than 50 workers in Swindon to attend the CWU-organised courses, overseen by the site’s lead union learning rep Sandra Absalom.

“We’re giving our members an opportunity to enhance their careers,” Sandra explains. “We’ve lots of members who work on machines in the sorting office, or work part-time at the weekend, so thought if we offered the course, they would be able to apply for new jobs when they came up.

“It’s very important to treat people equally and fairly. This is a very inclusive place. We’ve done lots of different courses here, but wanted to do HGV ones to offer the opportunities to all our members, women as well as men.

“A few women have come forward to do the course. Ordinarily it might not have been something they would have thought of doing, but they saw the posters and we encouraged them.”



Ellie is someone who needed little encouragement, saying: “I have no idea what excites me about driving trucks – I just love it,” she says. “Maybe it’s a sort of power thing, but I couldn’t tell you for certain.”

And with that, she climbs into her cab and drives happily off to work.



Left: Sabina Clark with fellow learning reps Trevor Fletcher and Eric Stone, and former Unite Regional Learning Organiser, currently Community Co-ordinator, Brett Sparkes (middle)



Steering a path to equality

Unite rep Sabina Clark helps her colleagues gain new qualifications

Sabina Clark can't stop herself grinning as she slips into the driving seat of the shiny new Mini for the photo shoot.

"I love this," she beams, as her colleagues pose behind her. "I'm going to be in a magazine."

One of her colleagues at Swindon's BMW / Mini plant is Trevor Fletcher, Unite's senior Union Learning Rep (ULR). He affords himself a smile as the pictures are being taken because he's seen a change in Sabina since she became a ULR herself two years ago.

"She's been excellent," he nods, proudly. "She didn't have a union background before, but she came into the role and has been really committed. She puts herself out because she works shifts, starting at half past five in the morning, and she's often here until half past five in the evening, helping learners with their courses."

"She's taken to the role excellently and I've seen her confidence grow hugely as she's been doing it."

There are some 750 Unite members at the plant and the union has signed a learning agreement with the employer to provide learning on site. A new learning centre has recently been built and, with it, a range of courses is expected to begin.

"I'd like to see 100% of people doing some learning," Sabina smiles, only half in jest. "People think courses

“She puts herself out because she works shifts, starting at half past five in the morning, and she’s often here until half past five in the evening, helping learners with their courses”

take for ever, but they don’t, and they’re really interesting once you get into it.

“I completed an English course recently and I enjoyed it. When you use computers all the time you tend to stop writing, so it’s good to be reminded of nouns, verbs and adverbs that I forgot at school. You pick it up, using your grey matter again, and to have another qualification will help in the future, if I want to go higher in work or do something different.

“We’ve previously run numeracy and literacy courses, but we might be looking at doing other courses such as holiday Spanish or digital photography.”

Sabina enjoys her role as ULR, saying it revealed to her a new side of trade unions.

“A lot of people think unions are only here for problems, but that isn’t the case – unions can help with learning,” she says. “A lot of people can’t read or write properly. They get left by the wayside and are to embarrassed to say anything about it, so learning gives them an opportunity to change that.

“I became a ULR to help others and help myself. I hope people feel they can come to me if they have a problem, or if they want to learn a specific subject. It shows they have other interests than just coming into work and working – they want to better themselves as well, and me and the union want to be able to help them achieve that.”





He’s a fair cop

UNISON member Sue Bickle explains why her police commissioner boss believes in equality and diversity



You may have heard of Danny Baker’s sausage sandwich game on BBC Radio Five Live, but it’s not a patch on Sue Bickle’s sausage story.

Instead of having to guess whether a guest has red or brown sauce (or no sauce at all!) on their sausage sandwich, young mum Sue had to guess why her small son was bullying his classmate.

“I was really, really surprised when a teacher told me my son was trying to hide his salami sausage in this boy’s lunchbox,” she says. “When we got home, I said: ‘If you’ve gone off salami, it’s no problem – just tell me and I won’t give it to you. There’s no need to hide it.’

“And he looked at me and his little eyes filled up and he said: ‘But he’s hungry’ and I said: ‘Why is he hungry?’ and he said: ‘I don’t know, but we sent them a cow’.

“I was baffled, but when it turned out he was sitting next to a Nigerian foster child the penny dropped. It was 1985, and the only experience of black children my son had ever had was of starving children in Ethiopia.



“I thought it was awful he was making this assumption, that because his classmate was black, he must be hungry. I wondered how many more assumptions he was making and that really sparked my interest in equality.”

Now, 28 years on, Sue has put her interest in equality to good use. Formerly equality lead officer with Weymouth & Portland Borough and West Dorset District councils, she currently works as community engagement officer for Martyn Underhill, the newly-elected Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset.

“Martyn’s role is to be the voice of the public in policing,” she says, “so he wants to engage with all the residents in Dorset. My role is to make sure that happens.”

Part of Sue’s job is to set up public meetings for her boss to attend, as well as booking individuals into surgeries where they can meet him one-to-one.

Not everyone, though, feels comfortable talking to the police, which is where Sue’s expertise comes to the fore. She has brought with her an impressive list of contacts from the equality world with which she plans to gain the trust of all sectors of the community.

“I don’t see equality & diversity and the community as being two separate things,” she says, explaining

“Every single person has a protected characteristic. We all have a sex, we all have an age, we may not have a disability but we all have a sexual orientation, we all have a religion or non-belief, so equality is at the very heart of the community because it affects everybody in it”

it is unlawful to discriminate against people with a ‘protected characteristic’ such as age, gender or disability.

“Every single person has a protected characteristic. We all have a sex, we all have an age, we may not have a disability but we all have a sexual orientation, we all have a religion or non-belief, so equality is at the very heart of the community because it affects everybody in it.

“There are certain protected characteristics that may be harder to hear from because of barriers they may face in access, and the way we’re approaching that is to advertise widely in the localities but also make contact through groups that are already established in the community, such as the Race Equality Council and various other partners and stakeholders, so they can send out information to their members via their own bulletins.”

It’s been a long time since the sausage story inspired Sue’s passion for equality, but that passion still serves to inspire today, with police commissioner Martyn Underhill saying: “We police by consent, so it’s important the police service in Dorset is both representative of, and listens to, the diverse range of individuals and communities it serves.”

(L to R) UNISON organiser Chris Dayus; Elliott Gowan; Michelle Winn; Lisa Allen and Angie Baigent. All images by Paul Glendell www.glendell.co.uk



A healthy environment for equality

UNISON members explain how they're taking opportunities to improve their career prospects

Would you go back into the classroom if you weren't pushed?

The answer from four UNISON members working at Treliske Hospital in Cornwall is an unequivocal “No”.

“The union gave me a push to get on with it,” nods Lisa Allen. “I wouldn’t have gone back if it wasn’t for the union coming round and asking me,” agrees Elliot Gowan. “This has jumped into my lap,” admits Angie Baigent. “The union persuaded me to go ahead with it,” concedes Michelle Winn.

All four work in low-skill positions at the hospital and are taking advantage of unionlearn’s European Social Funded Raising Aspirations project to dip into the realms of further education with the aim of furthering their careers.

Lisa and Elliott sterilise surgical instruments and are to undertake a higher education course in psychology.

“I couldn’t decide whether to go back to college or go on to university,” says Lisa. “I kept changing my mind because different things kept popping up in my life. Now this course has come along that I can fit in with my work.”



Elliott tells a similar story: “Before working here I was ummming and ahhhhing about whether to go back to university, but decided against it because I needed the money. Now I have the opportunity to do both.”

Angie works as an administrator in the same unit and hopes the course will help her with her work. “I think I can go further if I understand what makes people tick, what makes them react the way they do,” she reasons. “I’ve had two children, so my education stopped then. I wanted to go back to it but the money wasn’t there, so now this is funded, it’s given me a chance I didn’t think I would have again. I’m looking forward to it, although I’m wondering what it’s going to be like to go back into a classroom with everybody.”

“I’ve always been interested in psychology,” says Michelle, who works in the hospital’s blood bank, “but for one reason or another my education was stopped, then finances became an issue, so to have this opportunity is brilliant. I’m really excited about it, but a bit nervous as well as it’s been a long time since I studied.”

Another person who is excited is UNISON organiser Chris Dayus, who has worked for two years to get all the partners on board. It is, she says, all about equality of opportunity.

“This is the part of my job I really, really enjoy – providing opportunities for people,” she smiles. “Particularly people who think ‘Oh no, that’s not for me, I couldn’t do that’, seeing them coming along, getting a taster and thinking ‘Ooh, maybe I could do this’, then seeing them sign up for a course.”

“The majority of people participating are women. A lot of them have caring responsibilities so finding the time to dedicate to this just shows the value they place on it once they realise what’s on offer.”

“This project helps low-skilled people develop their careers. Do they want to stay within the NHS, or look outside it? We don’t have a big labour market in Cornwall, so if people are going to offer something to a new employer, they need to demonstrate they have the skills already. Existing employers benefit too because it raises staff morale.”

Helen Lynch, the hospital’s vocational lead, agrees, saying: “This is an ideal opportunity for people between bands one and four to engage in learning and develop their skills. UNISON and unionlearn have put a lot of resources and expertise into supporting their members, and we’re looking forward to see the benefits come to fruition.”

The courses are delivered by Cornwall College and the National Careers Service, for whom Katherine Alexander said: “It’s been absolutely brilliant to see people moving into the realms of higher education and realising this is a world they can participate in and it’s very much going to be a part of their lives in the future.”

Charli Roach, from Combined Universities in Cornwall said: ‘I am really happy to see first-hand the impact that the activities delivered through this ESF programme have had for staff at RCHT and want to thank all of the team involved in developing these opportunities and ensuring that the needs of the learners remained central throughout.’

‘The ESF Raising Aspirations Programme aims to support local adults to explore different pathways into higher level skills and aid them to realise their potential through innovative and flexible access routes’.

Rita Joyner (submitted image)



Injustice serves to inspire

Unite rep Rita Joyner calls on all employers to embrace equality

It was an injustice that set Rita Joyner on the road to becoming a champion for equality in her workplace.

Passed over for promotion at work, the Unite member took a grievance against her employer for discriminating against her on the grounds of her gender.

“I was very angry,” she explains. “I found I wasn’t being judged on how good I was at doing my job, but on my gender; this was absolutely clear. I felt as if I had to fight three times as hard to get on at work, to demonstrate I was three times better than a man. That incident brought up my passion for equality work.”

That same searing sense of injustice and desire for people to be treated equally still drives her on today in her position as chair of joint unions at University Hospitals Trust in Bristol. She is also involved in her national union.

“Equality should be at the heart of the trade union movement,” she says. “If you look at the economic climate at the moment, you’ll see how the consequences of the recession are affecting different people in different ways.



“I’m not looking to give others an advantage; I want fairness, nothing more!”

“For example, people from black, minority, ethnic [BME] backgrounds, especially those from Bangladeshi communities, are more likely to be unemployed and the first to be made redundant.

“Black males are also highly likely to be unemployed, and a lot of those young men have grown up in England, so you have to ask the question: ‘Why aren’t they being employed?’ Especially as many are actively seeking work.

“Within the union and the workplace we should be looking to answer that question. Is it a training issue? And, if it is, should we encourage our members with more training?”

Resistance to Rita’s equality work merely serves to stiffen her resolve.

“We get people saying we shouldn’t be pandering to certain groups, shouldn’t be giving them an advantage,” she says, “but if you look at our workplace, for example, you will find a huge proportion of BME people in the low positions, yet at the top there are only two or three. I’m not looking to give others an advantage; I want fairness, nothing more!

“I think the solution is for all employers to embrace equality. If they ask the questions: ‘Why aren’t we

getting the same amount of movement up through the organisation from BME people? Why aren’t more black people progressing?’ they are on the right track to finding the solution.”

Unofficial feedback from job interviews reveals why BME staff members may find it harder to progress than their white colleagues.

Rita says: “We find that nine times out of ten managers pick people for promotion who are similar to themselves rather than take the risk and have a black person in the job.

“All we’re trying to do is create a level playing field because employers have a non-prejudicial duty of care to each member of staff, including their black and female staff. However, equalities has a far broader range than just race and gender; we all need to be aware of the bigger picture.”

As the interview draws to an end, Rita tells me she is soon to start work as a TUC Education tutor. “I’ve done a lot of teaching within my workplace and the next step is to do that on a wider basis within the TUC.”

She walks off, then turns back to me and grins: “I’m looking forward to the challenge.”

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This and other unionlearn publications are available from the unionlearn website, with union learning updates and further case studies.



Funded by



convergence
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transformation

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Written and edited by Tim Lezard
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Designed by Rumba (rumbadesign.co.uk)
Printed on recycled paper containing
70% post-consumer waste
Published in 2013