

FBU *U-learn*

The latest news from Fire Brigade Union Lifelong Learning

Spring 2008

*Avon Fire and
Rescue Service
invests in Skills
for Life*



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Avon Fire and Rescue firefighters brush up on Maths and English

Over the last six months firefighters working on the retained duty system at Keynsham Fire Station have been improving their Maths, English and IT skills.

The eight-strong group have had to work around shouts, changing shift patterns and family life in a bid to gain Skills for Life (SfL) qualifications.

Their three months of weekly sessions at Keynsham Fire Station have now paid off with all achieving passes at Level 2 in literacy and numeracy. The group has also given their IT skills a boost as a result of the online training and additional opportunities to follow tailored computing courses.

Almost £65,000 was awarded to Firing Up – Learning for Retained Firefighters, a project set up to promote lifelong learning opportunities across Avon and Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Services.

Initiated by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the project, which includes representatives from both Avon and Gloucestershire, successfully bid for funding from Learning Works for All (LWfA), a partnership managed by South West TUC.

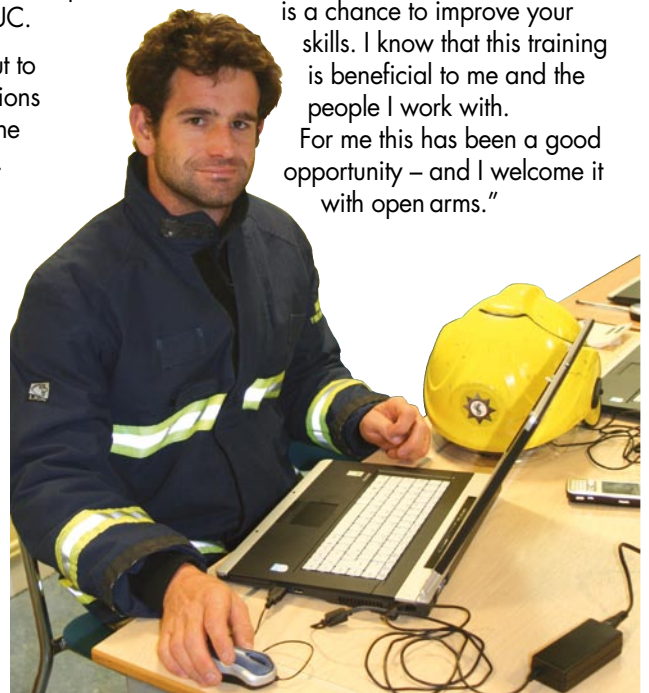
The project will be rolled out to around six retained fire stations within the AF&RS area by the time the pilot ends in 2008.

Trudi Cox, the Learning Project Worker for 'Firing Up', is delighted with the results of the Keynsham pilot. She said: "For those who got an O Level all those years ago it is a chance to update their qualifications in Maths and English, or gain a national qualification if they have missed out on getting that all important certificate at school. Some have simply enjoyed having a go.

"The courses have certainly helped them gain confidence – and it serves as a reminder about what they can do."

This sentiment is shared by Keynsham firefighter Rob Williams, who was keen to see the courses brought to his station. Rob said: "I left school without any qualifications – and wasn't even entered for the Maths exam, so when it was announced that these courses would be taking place at my station I jumped at the opportunity. I have taken other courses in the past and those, like the one I have just completed with AF&RS, have helped build my confidence. For me, studying now is completely different from when I was at school and I find that I understand things in a different way. In fact I've found that the level I have been working at is better than I thought! The problem is that what you are told at school tends to follow you through into later life and it can seriously knock your confidence. Fortunately this course has helped me learn a bit about myself and my capabilities. Sometimes it can be hard for people to admit if they have a weakness in certain areas. If you're great at Maths and English then that's fine, but if you're not then this

is a chance to improve your skills. I know that this training is beneficial to me and the people I work with. For me this has been a good opportunity – and I welcome it with open arms."



Rob Williams gets to grips with his Maths and English

FBU ULF – Successful bid paves the way for the next two years and strives to avoid the ‘P’ word – Project!

A new bid for funding by the FBU to the Union Learning Fund (ULF) was successfully agreed by the Unionlearn panel in January. The new funding of just over £1.2 million will extend the life of the ULF Project until April 2010 and secures, for the union, the ability to enhance the current learning being provided across the regions.

The FBU application was one of 33 bids for funding and one of only eight that went through without the need for further negotiation. There is no doubt that the work of our current Union Learning committee, ULR's and our members eagerness to take up learning opportunities provided a strong supporting case for the bid so well done to all.

One of the key areas of the successful ULF application was the FBU's aim to embed and mainstream Lifelong Learning as another fundamental benefit of being a union member. A working group, formed out of a resolution to last year's Annual Conference, is due to meet and consider the implications of the new funding within the context of embedding Lifelong Learning in the FBU and throughout the UK FRS.

So how do you set off on the path to mainstreaming learning? At the February meeting of union's ULF committee we took what we thought would be a very simple decision – stop using the word 'PROJECT'. Now that sounds pretty straight forward but when you have been using that word in a certain context for nearly six years... well we're finding it not so simple!

It is of course a small step towards the debate and discussion that will need to take place within the FBU of how this is taken forward and will, no doubt, touch on an area that is raised with us in just about every region – Workforce Development.

So where and what has the unions learning agenda been currently engaging in? Well we are currently completing the review of the FBU's 'Whole Organisation Approach to Skills for Life' following its period of consultation and will be re-launched as the first critical guide to Skills for Life in the UK FRS. A 'Go Fire Award' is to be launched in the FRS at the end of March and is a subject that will no doubt be getting raised in brigades.

Over 6,500 courses have been delivered across the FRS community - in the region of 4000 union members and FRS staff and families have participated in a learning opportunity, many of them achieving a qualification. Our FBU learning centres have delivered over 1250 Learndirect courses and over 1200 FRS staff have had an initial Skills for Life assessment in Numeracy or Literacy with the vast majority taking and passing a National Test.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) courses have been delivered to over 2500 resulting in them achieving

ICT qualifications in CLAiT, the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and the new vocational Information Technology Qualification (ITQ). Basic language courses have been delivered in: Spanish, French and Polish (this has also involved links with local Polish communities) and we are currently finalising agreement with Park Lane College Leeds to deliver Urdu and Bengali in SYFRS. Better not forget the deaf awareness and the sign language courses.

Oh yes, and we have also supporting our members undertaking S/NVG's or going through Assessment Development Centre's.

Union Learning is growing-up, now, about the simple objective of getting rid of the word 'PROJECT'!

Trevor



True partnership working on the Isle of Wight

Early last year the learning agreement was signed on the Isle of Wight between management and the local FBU. Following on from that a learning forum was quickly established which initially consisted of FBU and Management only. This developed into a larger group including an outside private provider, HTP and two more affiliated trade unions, POA and UNISON.

From the openness and genuine effort by all, the partnership managed to plan a Whole Organisation Development Programme that is due to be rolled out fully by the end of spring 2008. IOWFRS Group Manager Steve Apter said:

"Our learning and development strategy has now been able to move forward through the creation of capacity which in turn has created learning opportunities across the service. From the learning forum we now have a mutual understanding of what the service and the staff requirements are. Staff now have access to opportunities that without this partnership would not be available."

The FRS Future Leaders Development Programme has been designed by HTP to support the FBU and FRS Lifelong Learning Strategy through sustainable and collaborative partnership working. The programme aims to ensure all Brigade staff are given equal opportunity to take up effective, fair and sustainable learning by offering staff a range of accredited training modules and qualifications to meet their individual needs.

Through the input given to them by myself, Brigade Management and the POA Learning Centre Manager, HTP have designed the materials and structure of the Fire and Rescue Service Future Leaders Development Programme, which includes Assessment Centre Preparation



IOW Brigade ULR Nick Senior, Vicki Bonnett HTP, Trish Bloomfield POA, Sharon Wheeler HTP and Paul Fletcher Regional Learning Co-ordinator

training packages for Supervisory, Middle and Strategic Management. This is an accredited course that can be classed as approved prior learning (APL) when the candidate undertakes their management qualifications once in development.

As well as the nationally recognised qualifications for management, the programme includes opportunities for all staff. This is an essential part of the project, ensuring that all members of staff have access to development training opportunities. Individual programs have been worked out for Control/Support Staff/RDS/and Wholetime staff members. With this equal access it has also been designed that skills for life are embedded into every element of it. No matter what level the learner is starting their individual learning journey they will be assessed for key skills to make sure that they can all undertake the proposed courses, without any problems. A number of pilot courses are underway including Business Administration NVQ's for Support staff, Information Technology Qualification (ITQ) for Control staff, stand alone skills for life assessments and

Pre Supervisory Manager Assessment Centre Development Training.

Every member of staff has the opportunity to speak to an independent training consultant who will guide and mentor them through the work based programme. As with the pre-assessment training package, HTP hope to develop new accredited qualifications to meet identified training and development needs.

We recently carried out a learning needs survey on the island and the results generally mirror the rest of the UK. Staff are more willing to learn in the workplace, especially if there is a nationally recognised qualification given for the work carried out. Fortunately to assist with this programme the Isle of Wight now has a team of dedicated Union Learning Reps based in different departments to offer confidential support and guidance to anyone within the organisation who needs it, so what are you waiting for? For details of your nearest ULR, contact Paul Fletcher on **07917065859** or email him at **ulf12@fbu.org.uk**.

Sara joins ULF!

It seems a lifetime away that I read an advertisement for a secondment opportunity as 'Union Learning Representative Partnership' within Kent Fire & Rescue Service.

I am a Station Manager in charge of Red Watch Control where I have worked for the last 22 years. Having returned from 18 months off work, I felt it was the positive opportunity I was looking for.

If I was honest, I didn't know anything about the ULF and very little about Lifelong Learning and where everything fitted in, some may argue that I still don't!

With the help of my predecessor Nick Ralph and our Regional Co-ordinator Bob Fitzgerald, I was pointed in the right direction to find out the facts and prepare myself for an interview for the post.

I was fortunate to be appointed the secondment in early December and since then I cannot believe what has happened. With uncertainty hanging over the future of Control and other service reviews causing many individuals to question their future; I took on board the important message that this scheme is there to help

each and every one of us, no matter what skills we may already have or would like to have.

Trying to sell the "Learning" message can be difficult in an organisation where traditionally the mere mention of test or assessment causes morale and motivation to take a nose dive or cause the cynics out there to question "why". However, not to be deterred I have started the campaign to publicise the ULF and Lifelong Learning scheme within KF&RS, by whatever means I can!

We now have an intranet page up and running, with details of the scheme, courses available, useful website links and of course contacts. A regular article in our magazine has just started and a recent ULR meeting has also started the ball rolling with communicating to our entire workforce.

We are due to commence a 20 week conversational French course and an Exercise and Nutrition Course in the next few weeks with more individuals already interested in more!

The support of our Management Team has to be acknowledged and the contacts



that I have used and (coerced at times!) has not gone unnoticed, but are too many to mention.

I am hoping that we can go from strength to strength and that in time, we all accept that Skills for Life and Lifelong Learning is the future and is here to stay.

Sara Richards

Crawley Fire Station gets on line with IT as Union Learning Rep Frank Pickett brings Central Sussex College to the Station.

Watch Manager and Union Learning rep Frank Pickett has been hard at work developing a relationship with Central Sussex College and it is beginning to pay off. Frank's watch are currently enrolled on the ITQ (Information Technology qualification) an NVQ based qualification that is being run at the college and on station. At a recent visit to the college they explained how things were progressing. Crew Manager Rob Johnson said "the course is going really well; I like the fact that it's flexible and we can fit it around the

rest of our work during a shift". Firefighter Lee Burridge said the course has been very helpful for both work and home; "in particular I now find it easier to put presentations together for both training and giving Fire safety talks to the public".

Frank is delighted that his watch are becoming computer literate; he said "it's great to see the watch engaging with learning and having the opportunity to do it at work is a real bonus". In addition to the college Frank is making use of the IT bus provided by the joint FBU/WSFRS learning partnership.



FBU Southern Joint Regional

27th and 28th November 2007

The First FBU Union Learning reps seminar for the Southeast was held at the Eastbourne centre, Sussex and included regions 10, 11 and 12. It followed the successful seminar held at Stoke Rocheford for regions 6 and 9.

The seminar "Promoting Union Learning in the Regions", was designed by Park Lane College dept of Trade Union studies and the Union learning Project Team to help Union Learning reps and Education Officers discuss the focus of the project, update and develop their knowledge of contemporary learning issues in the workplace, including the "skills for life" agenda.

The Seminar held over 2 days was attended by 20 students including learning reps, brigade officials and regional officials from 3 regions. Significantly a number of the students were either new reps or had never previously attended a Union school of any description. In addition National officer Sean Starbuck and Region 8 Learning co-ordinator Nigel Williams, attended as Students and took an active part in the 2 day program.

The program was facilitated by Trevor Cave, TUC studies Tutor Park Lane college, John Arnold, Learning and Development Manager for Northumberland FRS, Lorna Taylor, National Learning Project Skills for Life Tutor and Trevor Shanahan National Learning project Manager. Additional assistance was provided by Union Learn South East Project workers Karen Brooks and Adrian Ryan.

The program began with a welcome to the School and once we'd completed introductions group work started with a review of individual experience and progress using a Strengths

Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats analysis. The report back indicated a wide and varied range of experiences with some reps who had either just started and had achieved little or nothing to others who had been successful in a number of different areas from access to learning at work including IT and Languages, to getting individual time off to undertake learning.



The next activity was led by Skills for life (Sfl) Tutor Lorna Taylor. She delivered a presentation on Sfl in the workplace and everyone then had the opportunity to have a go at an "initial assessment" in literacy, numeracy or both. Although treated as a "bit of fun", the object was to show in a non threatening environment, both the importance of Sfl and the impact of poor Sfl in the workplace. This then linked in with the final activity of the day which looked at member's jobs/roles and the skills levels required to carry them out. Using Fire service role maps and the adult core curriculum (ACC), groups then had to discuss the skills required to carry out a particular task within the role map and at what level within the ACC those skills need to be.

The report back identified similar outcomes to the previous seminar in that without analysing in detail task specific skills, it is quite easy to underestimate the range of skills needed to carry out individual tasks and particular roles. Following the activity everyone was somewhat surprised at the results which

Learning Seminar

subsequently had them looking at Sfl from a very different and positive perspective.

Day 2 started with an introduction to Evidence based learning (NVQ's) in the UKFRS delivered by John Arnold from Northumberland FRS. As Learning and Development Manager for NFRS John is a qualified assessor and internal/external verifier. John's detailed but clear presentation on the NVQ structure and how it should work produced an interesting debate about NVQ's within the Fire Service. With so many F&RS now undertaking NVQ's with varying degrees of success it was felt that this session was invaluable in helping those who attended gain a better understanding of the whole process and this was reflected in the comments given in course feedback.

The second part of day 2 was a presentation from Project Manager Trevor Shanahan on the FBU Draft Strategy Document "Skills for Life a whole organisational approach". Students were then asked to look at the draft summary and discuss in groups a response to the document and how to raise awareness of Sfl in the UKFRS. Feedback on the draft produced a number of points both positive and negative. It was commented that certain language and terminology might prove confusing and that depending on target audience may need to be more user friendly, however it was also thought that the link between Sfl IPDS and NOS was important in ensuring staff understood the need for good Sfl to allow them to develop at their current position while helping them to develop for the future.

Trevor remarked on how useful the feedback was in addition to comments and suggestions received from various parties across the UK during the consultation period. These would prove extremely helpful in making relevant amendments to the draft prior to publishing the final document.

The final activity of the day looked at how ULR's and Education Officers can support Union Learning within the wider FBU. Groups had a thought provoking session which developed ideas about promoting a joined up approach where Learning is seen

as part of or an element of wider TU education programs. FBU regions that had no education program would need to look at ways in which those programs could be re-established and one way could be to incorporate additional non TU based learning through learning reps, this may also encourage additional new learning reps to volunteer where there is a shortfall. It was also thought that education reps needed to be more actively involved in the wider learning agenda as they have a direct link into the wider FBU movement.

As is usual with FBU schools the program for "Promoting Union Learning in the Regions" was packed and varied and whilst good time keeping was essential to ensure we covered all the activities it proved for all those who attended an informative and thought provoking 2 days and well worth the effort.

R Fitz-Gerald, Region 11 Learning Co-ordinator
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2nd Annual Union Learn Sertuc Conference Congress House London, November 9th

At the recent Sertuc Union Learn Conference delegates from across the South East came together for the second annual event held at Congress House. Once again we were given the opportunity to network with other learning reps and project workers from around the Southeast and also participate in a variety of workshops to hone our skills.

Speakers included Liz Smith, Unionlearn Director, Gail Cartmel, Assistant General Secretary Unite and a member of the Unionlearn Board, and Murziline Parchment, Director of Major Projects and Service Delivery for the Mayor of London Office.

A particular highlight was Author Adele Parks, whose entertaining presentation had conference delegate's undivided attention throughout her speech. Adele having written a novel for the "Quick Reads" range of books said 'It strikes me that reading helps every one of us. Books offer entertainment, education, escapism, and inspiration. What could be more important than having those tools at your fingertips? Quick Reads are an excellent way to get back into reading or, if you've never been much of a reader, they are an excellent place to start. By getting into the habit of reading, we're doing the equivalent of eating five portions of veg a day; we'll feel better, function better and it will even seem that we live longer, as we are able to live through experiences in literature we may never get in our real lives. Books allow us to



Adele with Steve Brinkley, Joe McMahon, Adrian Mayhew
Bob Fitz-Gerald, Paul Fletcher and Sim Pieroni

travel time, space and distance the way no machine, rocket or aeroplane can do as yet. What could be more exciting?' Of course she's right and suitably motivated we moved on to the workshops which gave us an opportunity to use the new Learning reps help and advice line which proved very successful and choose from other sessions on Skills for Life, Challenging Racism, Managing Personal Finances, and Continuing Professional Development.

The conference was a great success giving much food for thought and the chance to debate current Union Learn issues with others was both a welcome and helpful one.

Quick Reads Campaign proves successful for one Firefighter

My name is Bob Dewis and I am the National Retained Committee Member for Region 12.

If anyone said to you 'I can't read' you might think they were stupid. Well, I'm not, but I have only read one book in my life and that was when I was about 10. It took about three months (Biggles Flies West) and since then I haven't bothered to pick up a book as there are normally hundreds of pages long and I know I would give up before the end. Even reading a newspaper or magazine, if it was a long article I would give it a miss choosing the shorter items.

I then found out through the FBU's Learning project, that there was a range of books called "Quick Reads". Ideally suited for me, not too long, not too much in depth but with interesting and inspiring stories.

So with much trepidation and not wanting to ask for fear of being embarrassed, I went to WHSmiths, searched out the "Quick Reads" and bought Reading My Arse by Ricky Tomlinson, it was fantastic.

Then, whilst in Milton Keynes recently, I saw a Waterstones and rather than be dragged round shopping I went in and was amazed by the amount of information describing the books on the shelves but I was still frightened to look or touch. A shop assistant asked if I needed any help, my heart started beating faster and I said have you got any of those books which are part of the Quick Reads range? The assistant disappeared for a while and then came back with one.

I was disappointed with only one, but bought it anyway. I'm not quite sure what it was called as I ended up lending it out and haven't got it back, however it was based on a true story about a young couple who got married and the Husband murdered his wife on a chicken farm, it took 10 days to read, which for me was a real achievement.

I searched out more "Quick Reads" but couldn't find any, so in passing I mentioned it to our Regional learning co-ordinator Paul Fletcher; he said no problem and sent me two more "Quick Read" books. "Centre of The Earth" by Danny Wallace, which I have now read and I am just starting "The Poison in Blood" by Tom Holland. I'm not a book worm yet but getting

there. On my birthday wish list is the Autobiography of Ricky Tomlinson, a good socialist who went to prison whilst on strike as a plasterer and it is where he took up reading and what inspired him to embark on his successful acting and writing career. (Oh yes and he swears he was innocent!).

I recommend to anyone like myself, if you haven't picked up a book for a while have a go with "Quick Reads" take up the challenge and believe me you won't look back. I don't expect that I will ever read the works of Shakespeare but it's a lot better than watching TV.

For more information on "Quick Reads" go to www.quickreads.org.uk or contact your Regional learning Co-ordinator or workplace Union Learning rep.



Quick Reads

Easy to pick up, hard to put down



Scottish Parliament addresses “Dyslexia in the workplace”

Union Learning Reps from across Scotland travelled to the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 16th January 2008 to have their say on Dyslexia.

The ‘Dyslexia in the Workplace’ session launched the development of a Scottish Trade Union Strategy to support working adults with dyslexia.

Union Learning Reps Neil Bell from Dundee and Chris Williams, (FBU SULF Coordinator) from Peterhead in Grampian spoke about their experiences of dyslexia in their workplaces. Chris works in the Fire Service training department and felt his discussion with MSP Elaine Smith was particularly helpful.

“We talked about dyslexia and how trade unions raise awareness of dyslexia-related issues in the workplace. I think that since dyslexia affects so many in our society, the Scottish Parliament has a responsibility to address these issues and come up with a strategy to raise awareness. Elaine listened to our points of view and I’m looking forward to seeing how she and other MSP’s take it forward from here.”

Neil Bell, an employee for the Department of Work and Pensions in Dundee says,

“Today was about making people aware of disabilities that aren’t visible. It was particularly good that there was a wide variety of MSP’s who attended and it was good for them to listen to the different situations dyslexic people find themselves in within the workplace. There are many positive points about people with dyslexia which need to be brought out so that more people have a better understanding of dyslexic issues.”

The STUC defines dyslexia as a ‘learning difference’. It is estimated that 10% of our population is dyslexic, and four percent have severe dyslexic difficulties. It is also estimated that 75% of all dyslexic people are identified as being dyslexic after reaching the age of 21.

Wendy Burton, STUC Development Officer - Everyday Skills, says

“Dyslexia is much wider than just difficulties with reading and writing, and there are many specific to the workplace such as

time management, repetitive errors and attention span and speed of completing tasks. Although employers have responsibilities to dyslexic employees under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) we believe ULR’s can be utilised in working with employers to understand what these responsibilities are, and how ‘reasonable adjustments’ can be made.”

MSP’s Peter Peacock, John Farquhar Munro, Joe Fitzpatrick, Marlyn Glen and Keith Brown also attended and took part in the discussion.

Chris Williams and Elaine Smith MSP discuss dyslexia issues



The ‘Dyslexia in the Workplace’ session with Willie Chisom and Chris Williams centre at the Scottish Parliament.



Partnership Approach reap Awards

The FBU and Learning Providers gain recognition for joint approach to learning with Fire and Rescue Services.



Trevor Shanahan, Mike Kirby, Ron Oldfield, Frances O'Grady-DepGen Sec TUC, Tim Davis, Ann Buckley, Trevor Cave

At a recent Union Learn award event held in London entitled Supporting Union Learners Trevor Shanahan, FBU National Learning Project Manager and Adrian Slassor, FBU Union Learning Fund Finance Officer, received a Unionlearn Quality Award from the Right Honourable Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, John Denham MP. The award was made for the FBU Learning Centre's Numeracy and Literacy, European Computer Driving Licence and ITQ Level 2 courses. Trevor said: 'It is always pleasing

to receive recognition for the work that the learning centres, staff and learners have achieved. To receive one from your own parent organisation - Unionlearn - is of particular importance and value. We look forward to continuing our work with members of trade unions in the Fire and Rescue Services and ensuring that the standard we have set continues.' Also receiving awards at the event from Jon Denham were Ann Buckley, Director of the Faculty of Adult and Community Education and Trevor Cave, Head of

Department, Trade Union Studies at Park Lane College. The Unionlearn Quality award was made to the Faculty of Adult and Community Education for their Fire Brigades Union Education and Union Learning Programmes. In addition Ron Oldfield, Course Co-ordinator, East Riding College received a Unionlearn Quality Award. The award was made for East Riding College's ICT and Skills for Life work with Humberside Fire and Rescue Service.

The FBU joins in with the Welsh TUC Union Learning Reps Conference 2007

The conference took place in Wrexham over a two day period in early November.

This is the first year in which the FBU has been able to take an active participation in the conference now that the first members have completed their training as learning reps and

they joined over 120 other learning reps from across Wales. There were many speakers from a variety of organisations plus workshops seeking feedback from ULR's on planning for the future. All the FBU learning reps that attended said how useful it was and hoped to make attendance at the conference an annual event.



The Welsh FBU delegation



Welsh Co-ordinator Nigel Williams emphasises a point during workshop feedback

Berkshire CFO Iain Cox goes back to school!

Just before Christmas Berkshire CFO Cox came down to Caversham road in Reading, to try his hand at the National level 2 numeracy test. The test along with Literacy is being offered as part of a pilot scheme at stn 1 and is linked into the FBU's Skills for Life strategy which was launched last year. Working in conjunction with Newbury College, level 2 certificates in literacy have already been awarded to staff at stn 1 and they are now working towards the numeracy qualification. Newbury and Maidenhead stations are also involved in the project and are expected to start imminently.

"Skills for Life" addresses the need for people to either brush up or attain a basic level of literacy and numeracy that may have gone unchallenged since school. This can help with day to day fire service activities, make helping your kids with homework that little bit easier or looking to the future it may assist with maintaining CPD by demonstrating a commitment to personal & professional development.

Once the pilots have run their course a forum will be set up between the FBU, the F&RS and other stakeholders to discuss how we can deliver the scheme to all staff within the organisation later on in the year.

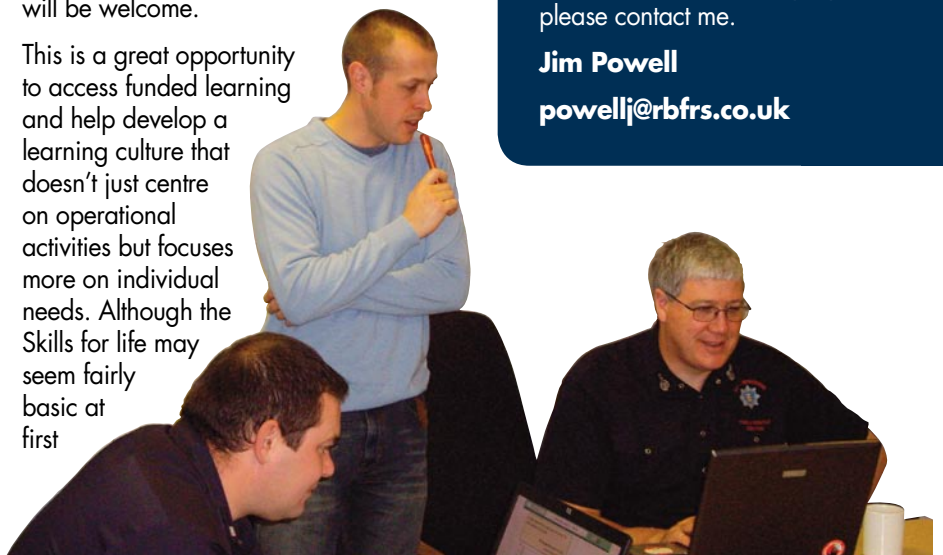
Also in the pipeline is an IT project based around the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), and we are currently in the process of building a CD-ROM library that can be accessed by all staff to assist with their personal development. Titles at present include touch typing and languages but requests for new additions will be welcome.

This is a great opportunity to access funded learning and help develop a learning culture that doesn't just centre on operational activities but focuses more on individual needs. Although the Skills for life may seem fairly basic at first

glance it does present its own challenges as Iain found out, he said "It was a challenge and rather more difficult than I expected".

This is just the beginning, with a good level of participation now; we can go on to source wider and more varied opportunities in the future. To that end if you would like to discuss your needs or have a suggestion or you are interested in being involved in the project please contact me.

Jim Powell
powellj@rbfrs.co.uk



Jim Powell looks on as CFO Iain Cox grapples with skills for life

Computer Training comes to London Fire and Rescue Service

The Challenge

During the last 25 years, the firefighter's job has changed dramatically. While tackling fires remains at the centre of the role, computer skills have become increasingly important.

"Today's firefighters have to do a lot of work on computers," said Tim Davis, the Union's learning co-ordinator for the London region. "They use PCs for a wide range of tasks, like writing up fire reports, sending emails, creating presentations for local community fire safety briefings, ordering materials for the station, submitting annual leave requests and accessing new health and safety policies.

"The trouble is, despite years of dabbling on the computers at work, many still don't feel at all confident in this area because they've never received formal IT training. When this sentiment was confirmed by 81 per cent of respondents in a recent learning survey among Brigade staff, I knew we had to take action. I also knew that training the firefighting teams would not be straightforward because of their complex shift patterns. But then I found out about Train to Gain, got in touch with Kingston College and the ball started rolling."

The Solution

Tim met with Lida Moghaddam, the Skills Development Manager for IT at Kingston College to explain his very specific requirements. "The College staff bent over backwards to help," said Tim. "A tutor came out with me to meet local firefighters at our stations at Kingston, Surbiton and New Malden. He told them about the IT training they could access through Train to Gain, which generated a huge amount of interest.

"I then worked with Lida to find the right solution to meet our needs in full. It's complicated, but it works! The ITQ course lasts for between nine months and a year and the firefighters are learning in small groups, along with colleagues from their watch. They attend college for an afternoon every three weeks, just before they start their night duty, and are working through four modules: Word, Excel, Outlook and Powerpoint. On top of that they have a couple of hours' work to do each week, at the station or at home."

The Results

Christian Wilkins, Deputy Director of Business Enterprise at Kingston College, is impressed by the commitment shown by the firefighters taking part in the training. She said: "They are very appreciative of the opportunity they have been given to improve their IT skills. From the feedback we've had to date, the training is definitely making a difference to their lives and adding value to their work."

Thanks to the IT tutors' input, described by Fire Safety Inspecting Officer Nicholas Coleshill as "excellent and down to earth", the firefighters no longer waste time completing simple, everyday IT tasks; instead, they confidently apply the shortcuts learned on their course and get the job done in half the time. Firefighter Gary Smith said: "I only had a very basic knowledge of IT, but can now carry out more tasks at work involving IT, with more confidence and efficiency."

Tim said: "The course has contributed greatly to the smooth running of the station and has definitely boosted the firefighters' confidence levels. In our survey, 86 per cent of respondents said they were keen to gain an external qualification. Having a Level 2 IT qualification under their belt is a huge plus, especially for those firefighters who are approaching retirement." He is now looking to expand the training to other fire stations across south London.

FBU National Union Learning Fund Manager Trevor Shanahan concluded: "Skills in IT are requisite at work and in family life. Train to Gain has given Fire and Rescue Service staff the opportunity to gain these skills and get a qualification."

FBU Regional Co-ordinator Tim Davis
Photo courtesy of Simon Keats



Fire Service staff sign up for deaf awareness courses

Fire and Rescue Service staff are currently learning sign language and increasing their deaf awareness as the result of funding by the London Development Agency (LDA) and support from unionlearn, the TUC's learning and skills organisation. The Deafworks course for firefighters attached to Red Watch at New Malden fire station, a Fire Safety Inspecting Officer and borough-based fire safety admin staff from Lambeth, Croydon and Kingston, specifically focuses on how a deaf or hard of hearing person would need to be approached when carrying out a Home Fire Safety Risk Assessment. It also looks at the need for the appropriate smoke alarm which a deaf person would need in their home, for example, one with flashing lights and a vibrating alarm for under pillow when asleep.

One benefit of the course is already apparent – the course tutor did not have an appropriate fire alarm, but the students soon fixed that problem. The training came about because of firefighters' involvement with Surbiton Deaf Club where they recently gave a short fire safety presentation with the assistance of a Fire Brigade signer. This sparked a lot of interest among the firefighters and at least two of them are aiming to become British Sign Language (BSL) qualified.

The Watch Manager is keen for this session to form part of the initial training firefighters receive when joining the Fire Service as not only does it provide excellent advice on communicating with people suffering from forms of deafness but it is also very useful for helping engaging with anybody who has difficulties with English.

Not only will the course benefit deaf and hard of hearing people in the community, but it will also benefit the learners in their workplaces. The Inspecting Officer meets people deaf and hard

of hearing people quite often in various workplaces and skills learnt will help her role tremendously. The office-based staff who work alongside people with hearing difficulties have said how very useful this course is in raising their own awareness of deafness and the best methods to overcome any communication issues.

A recent learning survey carried out over the whole of the London Fire and Rescue Service indicated that over 20% of respondents were interested in sign language, which came a close third behind Spanish and French.

Tania Fletcher, Head of Employability at the LDA said: "This course will break down communication barriers between communities and ultimately save lives. Deafworks has found a new way of working between the fire service and the deaf and hard of hearing communities, and will encourage better practice when engaging with other vulnerable communities. I am delighted the LDA is part of such a worthwhile and innovative programme."

Barry Francis, Unionlearn with the Southern and Eastern Region TUC said: "Learning at Work Day has produced a real benefit for the local deaf and hard of hearing community as well as setting Fire Service staff on a personal learning journey. This serves to underline the value of union learning as an important part of social cohesion. The partnership between the LDA, unionlearn and the FBU has resulted in a real benefit to the community."

Tim Davis, London Region Lifelong Learning Coordinator, FBU said: "This is a fantastic course, which the students have really enjoyed and which has taught them many useful skills. The Fire and Rescue Service plays an important role in the community and we want to be able to serve the whole of the community. Better communication with those who are deaf or hard of hearing will enable staff to serve the whole community."



Taking Highland Learning To Holyrood with 'Sign Here' the Deaf Awareness Project in the Highlands & Islands

During Trade Union Week Union Learning Reps from across Scotland travelled to the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday 16th January 2008 to have their say on Deaf Awareness and Lifelong Learning.

MSP's met in the Scottish Parliament with Deaf Tutor Mary Whittaker, STUC Development Officer Pam Urquhart and Union Learning Reps from the Highlands and Islands to discuss deaf awareness issues in Scotland.

MSP's Cathie Craigie, Marlyn Glenn and Peter Peacock took a "Deaf Awareness Quiz" and discussed ways of improving communication between union members and deaf people who use the services of their workplace. MSP's John Park, Sandra White, Karen Gillon and David Stewart also attended and took part in the discussion with Union Learning Reps.

The Sign Here initiative is a deaf awareness project for union members across the Highlands and Islands. The project was set up by unions

and the STUC operating in the Highlands and Island including the FBU. Funding was sourced through the European Social Fund and was also supported by the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF).

Willie Chisholm, a firefighter from Fochabers who works in Elgin, says *"It was a really good experience to visit the Parliament and explain what the course involved from a Fire Service point of view. We have benefited from learning more from the deaf community in our area. We were able to explain the process of organising these types of courses to MSP's who have a genuine interest in those issues. It was good to explain how we have interacted with local deaf people and how as a result, the Fire Service provides better support to the deaf community in Elgin."*

Pam Urquhart (STUC Highlands and Islands) said, "It was great to see MSP's engage in the issues surrounding deaf awareness and to hear first-hand how trade unions and our partners are addressing communication barriers in the workplace."



Cathie Craigie MSP and Deaf Tutor Mary Whittaker



Sandra White MSP discusses deaf awareness with union learning reps and Pam Urquhart from Inverness.

Deaf awareness sessions for staff in Hampshire, leave staff wanting to learn more.

Following the success of the Deaf Awareness session's run on the Isle of Wight as part of Learn at Work Day 2007, and the positive feedback given, staff from their neighbouring Brigade had the opportunity to take part themselves.

The hour long session highlights the importance of understanding the difficulties faced by people that are deaf.

Martin Merritt (ULR), who is stationed at Winchester Fire Station as an RDS member has worked hard to arrange the sessions due to major changes at the station. Along with help from Simon Kneller, local FBU W/T Rep, sessions have now been given to all wholetime watches and a session is planned in for the RDS staff as well. The funding was secured through Unionlearn and SEEDA, by their Regional ULF Coordinator.

Further sessions are now booked in for some other stations in Hampshire.

The feedback has stated that,

'it has given a good insight to being deaf, enabling us to have a greater understanding', 'an eye opener that has raised my interest to learn more'.

The sessions are given by Kate, a qualified tutor from Hampshire Deaf Association, who said during our evaluation of the courses that she has thoroughly enjoyed providing the sessions and was encouraged by every single persons participation and willingness to learn.

The feedback sheets from the Island and Hampshire both stated in their numbers that the majority of those that had taken part want to go and learn the accredited courses in British Sign Language and Deaf Awareness.

Details of individual and corporate rates can be obtained through:

Paul Fletcher, Region 12 ULF Coordinator.



National Learning at Work Day

learning at work day



**CAMPAIGN
FOR LEARNING**

National Learning at Work Day, the biggest annual celebration of workplace learning, will take place on Thursday 22 May 2008. It is run by the "Campaign for learning" as part of Adult Learners Week (17 – 23 May). So what will you be doing on May the 22nd? Why not get involved and take part? You could try something new or unusual just ask your Union Learning Rep what events are planned for your workplace or if you haven't got a workplace rep get in touch with your Regional Learning Co-ordinator (Contact details below) and find out what's happening in your Fire and Rescue Service.

Get Involved!

Get Active!

Get Learning!

For more information go to
www.campaignforlearning.org.uk or
www.learningatworkday.com

Co-ordinator contact details:

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North East	Adrian Slassor	07795 592224
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