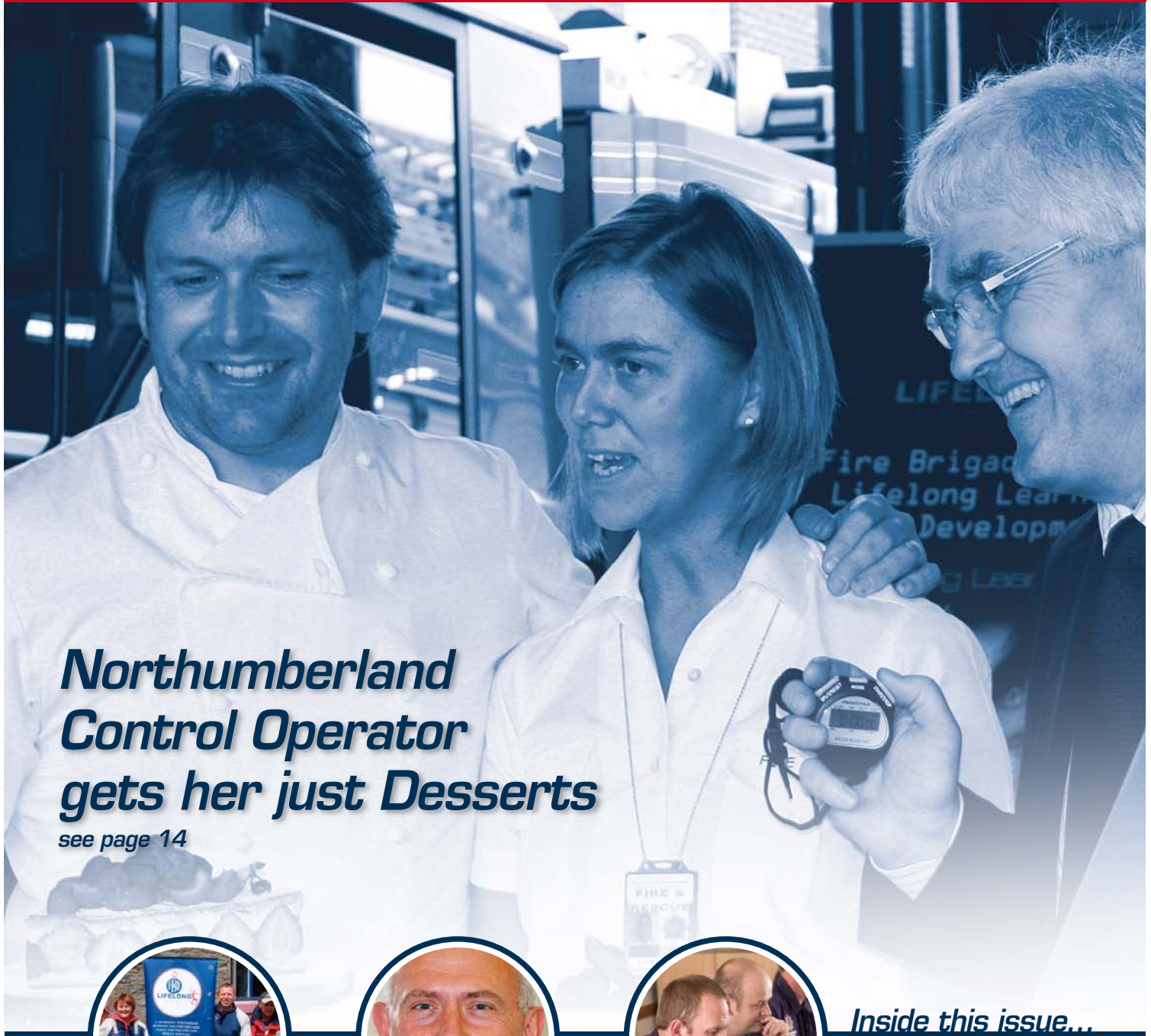


# FBU Learn

The latest news from Fire Brigade Union Lifelong Learning

Autumn 2008



## Northumberland Control Operator gets her just Desserts

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Learning at Work Day



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View from the top



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Skills for Life

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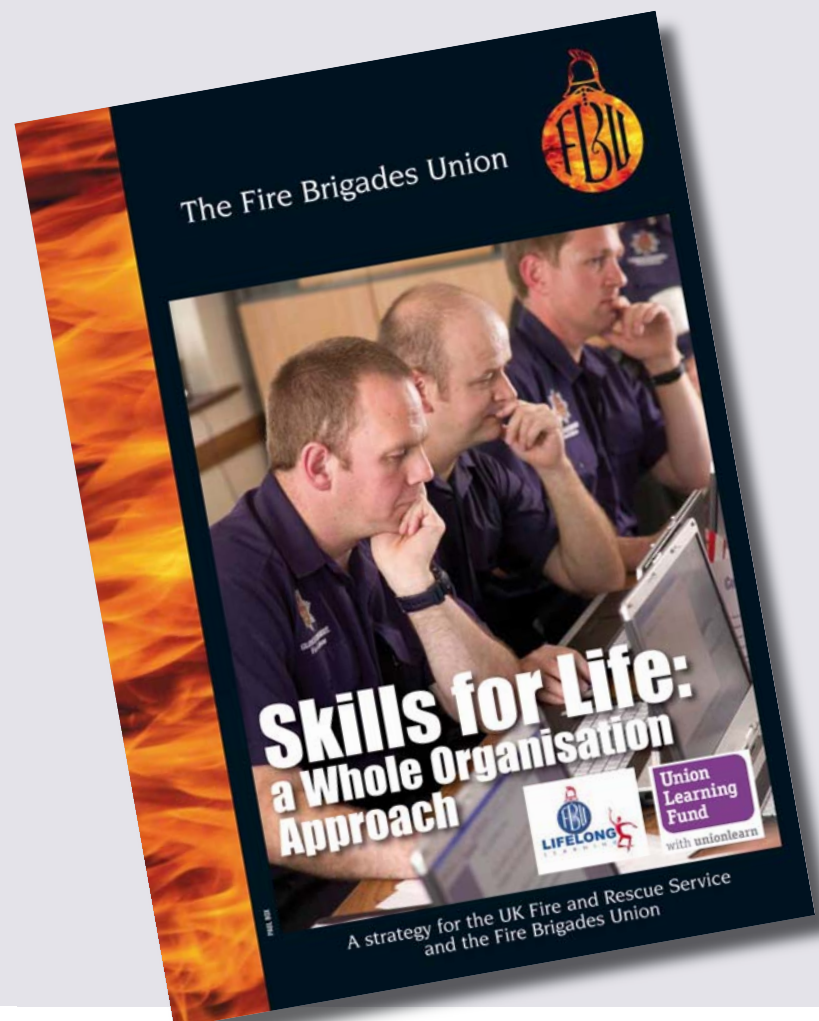


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*Tim Davis*  
*Steve Brinkley*  
*Graham Humphrey*

# *FBU launches its Whole Organisation Approach to Skills for Life*





## After two hard years of work the FBU's Strategy for Skills for Life was launched at the FBU National ULR seminar by Matt Wrack, General Secretary.

Heralding the strategy document Matt informed the seminar that the FBU was the first union to deliver such a document; a document that reflected not only the Skills for Life (SfL) needs for our members in the workplace but that of our own officials. Matt added "the FBU has a proud tradition regarding education and we should be extremely proud of this strategy document. SfL is essential to all learning and development, whether it's a member brushing up skills to improve their chances of promotion or to engage with their children's homework."

The original draft strategy was published last year and went out for consultation to all Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) 'stakeholders', TUC and Fire Service Colleges for comment.

The vast majority of comments were complimentary along with a number of suggestions to improve the document. These were taken on board along with updated information that became available during the consultation period.

The ULF project team has had to overcome many issues in driving the FBU's lifelong learning agenda forward and I think it is fair to say that raising SfL issues has been one of the most problematic.

Senior management's refusal to accept that there are Firefighters, Emergency Control Staff and Support Staff with difficulties in Literacy and Numeracy has been a major barrier to overcome, as was ensuring that our members who did come forward with SfL issues were treated confidentially and sympathetically. This also highlighted the issues of some members /employees who had various levels of dyslexia and dyspraxia and needed support and provision of suitable coping strategies.

Terminology and course provision was also a problem; brigade training centres and training managers had little idea of SfL (despite statistics showing that over 7 million adults had problems with SfL) and less about how to signpost or fund any particular literacy or numeracy learning needs.

There clearly was a lack of understanding that S/NVQs (level 3 and equivalent to working at 'A' level standard) were underpinned by key skills in Numeracy, literacy, IT and problem solving. SfL assessments for new trainees, prior to taking up the S/NVQ, are still just about invisible; you could probably count the number of brigades who afford this on one hand.

The WOA SfL document does not and cannot overcome barriers such as those above but it does offer guidance, support, organisational support and external links to ensure that SfL can be addressed – a strategy that supports the individual at work and in their family and social lives. After all, aren't we always being told by our employers that their greatest resource is us – the workers?

I am pleased to say that the acceptance of the need for the FRS to provide access to SfL courses is improving and the number of brigades who are discussing what can be done with the ULF team and Union Learning Reps is on the increase. This is due to the energy and support of all the officials involved in the learning agenda.

The strategy has been developed with support and guidance from a number of FRS groups including: CFOA, FSC, SFSC, IPDS team and Unionlearn. It will take all of the groups to continue to press for brigades to recognise that SfL does underpin all learning and to make good use of the document.

# National Learning at Work Day

Fire Services across the UK continue to embrace Adult Learning at Work Day, as a varied range of opportunities and taster sessions were organised by ULR's and Coordinators up and down the country. With such diverse ideas as sailing and lip reading on offer here's a round up of what happened.

## FBU SAILS INTO LEARNING AT WORK WEEK

FBU-Learning sailed into Learning at Work Week with a Royal Yacht Association accredited sailing course. The course took place at Holyhead in North Wales and apart from highlighting to its members the vast range of courses on offer through Unionlearn this course actually achieved a second outcome. The course was

delivered by the Sea Cadets, a nationwide voluntary uniformed youth organisation with its beginnings dating as far back as 1854 and some of the money paid for the course went directly towards supporting them.

Garry Harney FBU North West Learning Coordinator said: with young adults getting bad press nearly every week in the UK, it's important to highlight the good side of our young citizens and the organisations that support them. The Sea Cadets probably has the longest continuous history of any youth movement in the UK and it's important that we as adults support these type of organisations. We hope to expand on this relationship with more courses rolling out later in the year. In addition to the sailing Gary also organised 3 other events in region 5 with taster sessions in Sign Language, Digital Photography, Spanish Language for holidays and the stress busting exercise of Tai Chi.



London Fire and Rescue Service saw fire brigade staff attended a successful Learning At Work Day event organised by the FBU, UNISON and management at the brigade training centre in Southwark, South London.

A total of 20 stalls showcased the range of lifelong learning opportunities available to union members who came along, most of them from the training centre itself or brigade headquarters nearby.

"It was a very successful event," said FBU London Regional Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator Tim Davis. "Around 160 people attended in all and for 90 minutes or so we were absolutely mobbed!"

# goes from strength to strength



LFRS cooks sign up to learning

Learning resources from the BBC Reading and Writing "RaW" campaign and the Campaign for Learning proved particularly popular, and one of the Quick Reads Employer Packs (display units with 60 Quick Reads titles plus posters) purchased for the event have been donated to the brigade headquarters library.

Tim went on to say, "The BBC RaW Swaps kits went like hot cakes and people were very pleased with the CFL resource packs – I think we got through 200 of those".

Station cooks (all UNISON members) due to be made redundant in 2010 were particularly keen to investigate what was on offer, in addition three FBU members registered their interest in becoming union learning reps.

"The cooks turned up en masse, taking Skills for Life assessments with tutors from Kingston College and signing up for courses," Tim said, he went on to say "having the money from the Learning At Work Day Fund allowed us to buy in lots of resources to support the day and get people involved, it really helped.

Around 60 union members completed learning surveys, with three of them winning £25 book tokens in a prize draw at the end of the day.

"The event showed people what we are about, and next year we'll be looking at staging Learning At Work Day events in individual fire stations to make sure we reach more of our firefighters."

Kent Fire and Rescue Service's LaW day saw 120 staff access one or more of the varied programmes on offer. The day got off to a great start with deaf awareness sessions delivered by Kayte Terry from Hampshire Deaf Association where participants got the chance to find out how difficult lip reading is when they took it in turns to have a go.



Asjad Mohammed Hussain and Roy Davies have a go at lip-reading!

Nescot College from Surrey provided IAG on the "Health for Life" portfolio of courses and carried out an induction session for 14 individuals who signed up for one of the courses on offer from Health and Fitness, Health and Nutrition and Equality and Diversity. Lyn Terrell from Nescot expressed how delighted they were with the response and looked forward to developing the relationship with KFRS and the FBU.



Helen and Lyn from Nescot College

Kent's occupational health carried out health checks and distributed information and handouts from the British Heart Foundation. Dr Les Smith from Health and Wellbeing UK LTD gave a presentation on wellbeing encompassing mind and body, spiritual and financial health which was enthusiastically received by those who were present.

In addition West Kent College provided IAG on the ITQ and carried out Skills for Life assessments, for which all those who took part were entered into a prize draw to win an ipod. The eventual winner Tracy Campbell from Occupational Health was delighted with her prize, she said "I didn't realise Maths and English could prove so fruitful".



Tracy Campbell receives her ipod from FBU Learning Co-ordinator Bob Fitz-Gerald

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service held an Information Advice and Guidance day for its staff CFO Frank Sheehan (4th from left) commended everyone on the success and effort put into the Learning at Work Week event held at Central Fire Station H/Q in Birmingham. Phil Jones (4th from right) the West Midlands Brigade Co-ordinator said that 'the event had resulted in over 50 people signing up for courses, the take up in the West Midlands is happening at an unbelievable speed. People are enthusiastic about what we are trying to deliver and achieve'.



West Midlands FRS advice and Guidance day

At two of these events we were able to get together with Brigade managers and the other trade unions in the fire sector to sign Learning Agreements. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service signed up with the FBU, Unison, Unite and the GMB to form a strong learning partnership covering all sections of the workforce. Similarly, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue signed up with FBU and Unison where the local MP Mike Woods was on hand to support the agreement and retiring CFO Phil Toase spoke at length about the Brigade's commitment to working in partnership.



West Yorkshire FRS sign the learning agreement

In Yorkshire and Humberside money donated by 'Yorkshire Forward', the Regional Development Agency for Yorkshire and Humberside meant they were able to provide many fire stations with their first taste of workplace learning through the learning partnerships brought together by the FBU.

Stations that were already benefiting from having active ULR's were able to run taster sessions in new forms of learning such as e-learning and community-based languages such as Urdu, Polish and British Sign Language.

Brigade headquarters around the region were hosts for learning seminars dedicated to Skills for Life and experts from Dyslexia Action were on hand to deliver accredited learning and support for this condition.



South Yorkshire FRS sign the learning agreement



Urdu classes at South Yorkshire

For the first time in this region we had RDS firefighter ULR's helping to organise learning evenings on their stations such as ULR James Kirby arranging Skills for Life initial assessments and Polish for fire-fighters at Epworth fire station in Humberside. Their tutor Barbara Perry finished off the session by running an exercise where fire-fighters were able to practice their new skills in Polish at an imaginary house fire.

ULR Lisa Marchant at Northallerton fire station in North Yorkshire brought in tutors to run a taster class in British Sign Language. So far she has 24 learners signed on for the full course thanks to East Riding College.

Meanwhile across the region, courses are bearing fruit for learners as many are picking up qualifications for their hard work so well done to one and all.

# The Fire Brigades Union and Prison Officers Association unite in Lifelong Learning

The FBU and POA have always had strong ties and similar political beliefs and aspirations as trade unions. This was reflected at this year's FBU Annual Conference where Brian Caton, General Secretary of the POA, was invited to address the conference and delivered a very warm and honest speech.

Both unions have also been involved with Union Learning Fund projects and have worked closely together to deliver a Lifelong Learning agenda on behalf of their respective members.

Following discussions at senior official level it was proposed that a 'Memorandum of Understanding' in relation to closer working in Lifelong Learning could be of further benefit to both unions.

This would see the opportunity to share resources such as access to POA and FBU Learning Centres, closer ties between ULF project staff and Union Learning Reps to share best practice and attend joint seminars.

Agreement was reached regarding the MOU content and following agreement by the Executive Council was signed by Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary and Steve Gough, POA National Vice-Chair.

Speaking on behalf of the FBU, Matt said "The FBU welcomes the Memorandum of Understanding in working closer together in promoting Lifelong Learning with the POA. It will benefit the membership of both unions and continue to foster the good relationship enjoyed by both unions.

Steve Gough added "Both unions have made a commitment over previous years to enhance the skills and learning opportunities for their members and are involved in successful



Matt Wrack and Steve Gough

ULF projects. This will enhance those opportunities and offer access to quality learning through our union learning centres".

The MOU, which contains the contact details and locations of project staff and learning centres can be found on the FBU website; [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk) FBU Union Learn; [www.ulf.fbu.org.uk](http://www.ulf.fbu.org.uk) and the POA website; [www.poa.uk](http://www.poa.uk)

# *View from the top (well almost)* *EC Member Dave Green asks the question*

I trust that most of you, whilst perhaps not knowing me personally, will be aware of the role of Executive Council members within the FBU. For many members our role mainly revolves around representing members from within our Region at the Executive Council and in turn conveying back to them issues that are of interest from a



Dave Green

national perspective (and there have been plenty of those in the recent past). I have performed this function for over 8 years now, representing FBU members from the East Midlands. This though only tells some of the story.

Part of the role of an Executive Council member is to sit on various working parties and sub committees that are set up. One such sub committee that emerged during the fall out from the pay dispute was entitled, 'The Union Learning Fund'. This was certainly not as a result of the pay dispute but unfortunately anything that came about in that era got tarred with that particular brush.

As I was seen to be a 'bit keen' on education I was volunteered to see what was going on (I am sure it was phrased a little differently). At the outset I met up with a few officials that I knew from around the country, those who were also a 'bit keen on education'. These first meetings really were a little unreal. In the aftermath of the pay dispute when the Government was dead set against giving us anything and was intent on crushing us, I was now expected to believe that they would give us money to educate our members? Come on, where's the catch?

So, I was given a crash course in the Union Learning Fund. The TUC were mentioned a lot, Government money,

Lifelong Learning, Train to Gain... I could go on. I thought I could do jargon before, but this lot were in a different league.

To condense many months and years hard work into a single article is as difficult, as it is unfair on the individuals and organisations that have worked tirelessly to make it work. I suspect that if you have read this far, then you will have already acquainted yourself with the various successes of the project and it is not my intention to regurgitate the great work that has been done. You will note, by the way, that I said the 'p' word. I am afraid I still view it as a project as we are not yet in a position to really say it is an established part of the FBU. It is still seen, in some quarters, as being distinct. The aim has to be to close that distinction, to mainstream the concept and finally get acceptance that it is a part of the FBU.

As I have alluded to, the Union Learning Project, as it became known, has had its detractors. At the outset there was concern and suspicion surrounding any form of Government projects, often with good reason. However, what cannot be ignored is that a Labour Government has recognised the value of Lifelong Learning for everyone. That learning does not and should not stop when we leave full-time education, and should be a lifelong experience. I am confident in saying that such a scheme would not have come from a Tory administration and I am doubly confident in saying that they would not have entrusted it to the Trade Union movement to administer. It is important that, when we (rightly) criticise this Labour Governments' derisory steps to narrow the gap between our members and the privileged of this country, we also recognise the good work done in areas such as this.

However, even having got over the fact that we are administering a Government scheme many are still cautious about the role of the trade union movement. Education in a Trade Union context is often seen as 'political', 'industrial' or 'work-related'. To an extent this is true and I for one have reason to be grateful for my Trade Union education through the FBU's education program. But surely grasping the many concepts of modern-day politics, trade unionism and the complex relationship between employer and employee requires a rounded educational platform. One that requires not only the recognised political Trade Union education but also an "educational" one that will give our members the

## *“Is Lifelong Learning a political concept?”*

skills they need to communicate with the Fire Service at all levels and through any form of verbal, written or other media. As ever the political can and will be supplied by the FBU's education program but the other can and does need to be met through Lifelong Learning. This is not an area or opportunity we can afford to miss.

When first set up in 1997 the foreword to the Green Paper on Lifelong Learning extolled the virtues of vocational education and described the benefits of the learning agenda:

*‘For individuals learning offers excitement and the opportunity of discovery... learning helps create and sustain our culture’*

You can imagine much of what else was contained therein, it is often New Labour speak and is characterised by a strong belief in creating ‘equality of opportunity’. However, this commitment must be recognised for what it is, as New Labour has proved itself unwilling to challenge the structures of a deeply unequal society. New Labour clearly does not see Lifelong Learning as producing radical change and we would be foolish to think that’s what they want. But, that does not mean we cannot grasp the concept of Lifelong Learning and make it work for the benefit of the member and the union.

Since 1997 even the most vehemently anti-New Labour critic (and I am referring mainly to those on the political left) has found it difficult to criticise the Government’s Lifelong Learning agenda. One such critic says: “On the other hand there have been some genuine, albeit modest, achievements: the success of the Union Learning Fund initiative....” (Richard Taylor, University of Cambridge)

So, the issue we have to grapple with is mainstreaming, or embedding the concept of Lifelong Learning into the culture of the FBU. A Working Group has been set up to try and aid this process (a process unanimously agreed at Annual Conference 2007).



Annual Conference supports the work of the FBU Learning Projects

However, this is by no means easy. Many still do not see that link with traditional Trade Union education despite the successes of the Project in many areas of the country. With the possibility of funding drying up in 2010 and the ever-increasing prospect of a Tory Government around then, we need to be taking steps now to enshrine the concept in our collective consciousness. Until that is achieved then I am afraid it remains a ‘project’.

We have, however, started the process: we have held a variety of seminars across the country, explaining the link between Lifelong Learning, Workforce Development and Trade Unionism in the Fire Service context. It’s about workers getting the most out of their employment for the benefit of not only the individual but all workers. It’s about the Trade Union being better able to represent the membership with a greater skills base. Crucially it’s about all our members being able to engage confidently on any level with their line manager, their area manager or the Chief Fire Officer. We should not be afraid of challenging them and they in turn should not be afraid of being challenged. As a Trade Union we can then proudly and justly embrace the concept of Lifelong Learning for all our members. Because if we don’t embrace it fully you can rest assured that the Fire Service in its various guises will step in and do it for us. There is a real risk of us handing over the agenda to them; a successful agenda the union has led during the last ten years.

Many apologies if this seems a little hard going at times and I do hope you see the message that is being conveyed. That Lifelong Learning can be and is a Trade Union issue, not only because it better prepares members and officials to consult, negotiate or just converse with middle and senior management, but because it enriches their lives. Surely a concept we should not be afraid of as Trade Unionists.

I will finish with a quote; it always seems the proper thing to do:  
“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” (John Dewey).

# FBU Union Learning Reps National Seminar Stoke Rochford Hall 20th & 21st June 2008

FBU Union Learning – Growing up and losing the ‘P(roject)’ word!



Stoke Rochford Hall

With Circular NJC/11/08 – Skills in the Workplace hot off the press and the announcement by Gordon Brown that opening the consultation on legislation that will give workers the right to request time off to train it seemed the FBU National ULR’s seminar for 2008 had been perfectly timed.



Mick Shaw FBU President

FBU President Mick Shaw opened proceedings and welcomed over 70 ULRs, education officers and officials to Stoke Rochford Hall.

In Mick’s opening, the FBU’s learning agenda was, he said, “a very important part of the unions work and the benefits to the membership were very clear. Having achieved further funding from the Union Learning Fund until April 2010 (and the Scottish ULF for

the same period) it’s vital we continue to mainstream Union Learning in to the FBU.”

Trevor Cave, FBU education, explained the purpose and programme for the seminar and the two themes that it would cover; to discuss and debate issues around Lifelong Learning in the FBU and FRS and to increase knowledge of Workforce Development issues including S/NVQs and qualifications. It was also to be the launching pad for a Memorandum of Understanding with the POA

and the Whole Organisation Approach to Skills for Life for the Fire and Rescue Service and the FBU.

ULF manager, Trevor Shanahan, updated delegates on progress with Union Learning and the need for ULRs to really start taking responsibility for the learning agenda, as time was ticking towards the end of prime funding from the ULF. Referring to the Annual Conference resolution (2007) and the EC’s agreed recommendations from the mainstreaming working group it was clear that a lot of work needed to be carried out to ensure that Lifelong Learning was firmly embedded in the FRS and our members would continue to get access to learning.

Introducing the second session, Dave Green, Region 6 EC member, said the FBU school was about to get a rare delight – a joint presentation by the union and management!

Organised by Andy Brickles, ULF co-ordinator in region 6, a ‘Challenge Derbyshire FRS’ event had taken place that encouraged all members and staff to undertake a Skills for Life (SfL) assessment – a challenge that was supported by management and included CFO Brian Tregunna doing his assessment as well.



Andy Brickles

Apart from the FBU officials and Derbyshire management, other partners that worked to deliver the challenge included; other FRS’s, recognised trade unions, seven learning providers, the ‘Move On’ campaign team and Derbyshire Skills Council. As Andy said, it was a real partnership with all having a roll to play.



Andy Rowett

Working with other unions is a theme behind the ULF projects; no more so than the relationship between the FBU and the POA. The next session saw the POA ULF Manager, Andy Rowett, explain how they were progressing lifelong

learning in the prison service and some of the similar issues and barriers they were meeting.

They have a number of learning centres around the country and as Andy said, the POA would warmly welcome FBU members, families or friends to come in and see what was on offer.

ULRs and officials took part in two workshops covering both the subject areas resulting in excellent plenary sessions about how to use and share best practice in Sfl and working with other unions.

A Memorandum of Understanding in relation to working closer together in the learning agenda between the FBU and the POA was signed by Matt Wrack on behalf of the FBU and Steve Gough on behalf of the POA.

Day two concentrated on Workforce Development and qualifications in the FRS – given that some brigades are making noises about technical awareness and IFE examinations it was perhaps quite timely.

John Arnold, Deputy Head of Training and Development Northumberland FRS, delivered a lively session and invoked debate on evidence based qualifications – S/NVQs and the National Occupation Standards. It clearly raised official's awareness of S/NVQs and challenged the way that they had been introduced and subsequently delivered in the service.

The workshop activity that followed involved; looking at the barriers and issues identified with such qualifications and identifying benefits and issues of access to qualifications such as NVQs / SVQs and ILM.

As expected there were real differing experiences within brigades and some of the practices that were being used had never been challenged. A discussion around the unions approach to training, development and qualifications provided officials with useful good practice for them to take back.

The final morning session was perhaps one of the most liveliest and interesting and was delivered by Cliff Sears – Chair of the Fire and Rescue Sector Vocational Standards Group.

Covering issues around NOS Maintenance, Sector Skills Councils, and the Qualifications Framework, Cliff gave an excellent overview of the FRSVSG and introduced us all to a new FRS vocabulary.

Included in this were VRQs – which we all knew were Vocational Related Qualifications (well ok perhaps not all of us!). This really did open up a can of worms as ignorance of VRQs was clearly apparent – as was the opportunity for our members to access them.

National Officer, Sean Starbuck and AGS, Andy Dark, took the time to add a few FBU 'qualifications' to the mornings debate and I am sure that everyone went away with something to find out about on return to their respective brigades.

The final session was led by Matt Wrack, General Secretary, who had an additional role in launching the FBU's Skills for Life strategy document. It was, he said, "a piece of tremendous work delivered by the FBU ULF project team and again showed the FBU to be leading the way in encouraging and supporting our members in learning new skills and brushing up on old ones." He welcomed the involvement of CFOA in the documents production and hoped that it would be used as a source of reference for the FRS and the FBU.

This was echoed by CFOA representative, Des Williamson, who also reminded officials that the ULF was part of the FRS National Training and Development strategy and therefore had a recognised place in the delivery of learning and development opportunities.

In closing the seminar Matt went on to assure the ULRs and officials that the FBU was committed to mainstreaming the Lifelong Learning agenda. It was, he said, "clearly another benefit for being a member of the FBU and the wider trade union movement."

Referring to Circular NJC/11/08 – Skills in the Workplace, he welcomed the move by FRS employers to recognise the importance that Lifelong Learning had on individuals and that it was everyone's right to be able to access learning, training and development opportunities.

There were many positive responses made within the course evaluation and a number of good suggestions of how it could be improved. One thing that did stand out was the positive response regarding the quality and content from all the speakers and the signals that the FBU needs to embed its learning culture.

The final word has to be about the ULRs, education officers and officials who attended the course. Without their input, ability to ask challenging questions, involvement in the workshops there would be no seminar – so many thanks to all the students, tutors, those who helped organise the school and the national officials for their support.



Stoke Rochford Group Work



Group Work

Region 6 Co-ordinator Andy Brickles took the opportunity (with a captive audience) to get delegates to sponsor him in a cycle challenge that has since taken place. Andy completed the 88 miles in 4 hours 35 minutes with an average of 18 miles an hour, a superb effort! Delegates to the seminar sponsored Andy to the tune of £285 and he would like to pass on his heartfelt thanks to all who contributed.

# Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Sign the Pledge



*LFRS DCFO Ian Scarrott signs Skills Pledge with Learning and Skills Council Sue Peak*

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service has made a public commitment to ensure their 900 staff are up to date with the skills and knowledge they need to do the best job they can for their local communities.

On 29th April Deputy Chief Fire Officer Ian Scarrott, signed the Learning and Skills Council's Skills Pledge, on behalf of the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, Dave Webb. The Pledge is a public commitment to support the skills development of all its employees to a minimum of Level 2, to ensure that all staff are skilled, competent and able to continue to make a full contribution to the success of the service.

CFO Dave Webb said: "By signing up to the Skills Pledge we're declaring our commitment to our employees, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to make sure they can do the best job they can for the people that live, work and visit Leicestershire and Rutland.

"We also hope that by signing up to the Skills Pledge we can show other public sector services that we are an employer that is committed to developing our workforce."

# Derbyshire Fire & Rescue take the skills challenge

31 March – 4 April 2008 saw staff in Derbyshire FRS step into unknown territory when they accepted an invitation to "Challenge the Organisation"

The chance to help fire service personnel brush up on their "skills for life" was too good to miss so, in partnership with DFRS Learning & Development, FBU and Unison ULR's and a number of learning providers from around the county, a series of local events within the organisation was arranged whereby any member of staff was able to sit an assessment in literacy, numeracy or both.

The key aim of the week long event was wide ranging participation across all ranks/grades/roles within Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service including the Chief Fire Officer Brian Tregunna.

At approximately 30 venues throughout Derbyshire, individuals were given the chance to take part in anonymous assessments and at the same time benefit from information on funded literacy and numeracy courses as well as guidance on other adult education opportunities.

The number of people taking part in the assessments totalled 31% of the workforce – a particularly successful outcome for an

event run on a voluntary participation basis. Having said that of course, the key now is to use what we've learned during the Challenge to take the workforce of Derbyshire Fire and Rescue to the next level where poor "Skills for Life" aren't a barrier to organisational success.



*Tina Lloyd (DFRS Learning & Development), CFO Brian Tregunna, Dom McGlynn (FBU ULR) and Andy Brickles (FBU Union Learning Fund Regional Co-ordinator) prepare to take part in 'Challenge DFRS'*

## Ready, aim, fire



Pictured left to right Jason Hill, Keith Denning, Mark Blake, Damian Snell, Gareth Sydenham, Pat Clarke, Ian Treadwell, Steve Maxwell, Wayne Broom, Alan Kyle (kneeling), Neil French, Tom Statton, Andy Boraston

Thirteen intrepid fire fighters from Exeter Fire Station recently played paintball as a team building exercise, organised through the Fire Brigades Union, Union Learning Fund.

Wayne Broom FBU Branch Secretary for Exeter Fire Station organised the event with help from Regional Union Learning Organiser Bill Henty. Funding for this 'Team Building and Leadership' activity was generated when 16 Activists from

Devon and Cornwall area attended a presentation by "Train to Gain" at Exeter Race Course.

Wayne said "It was a very valuable day all round, there was a great team spirit. We learnt a lot about each other, and had a thrilling time into the bargain. We even included a Stag Hunt for soon to be bride groom Mark Blakey, who was sent out into the woods with a target on the back of a highly visible white boiler suit – well it wasn't white once we'd caught up with him!"

"As a result of this event, a lot of our colleagues at Exeter have been enquiring about educational courses available through the Learning Fund such as 'Skills for Life' in Maths and English. So it has really helped to raise the profile of the scheme. Our station is due to be rebuilt soon and we are keen to establish a Union Learning Space in the new building" he added.

The nearby Skirmish Paintball Park at Exeter was chosen for the event.

Director Martin Collins commented, "This is a great demonstration of the team building value of paintball for a bunch of workmates or any group. If you can play as a team, you're more likely to work as a team. It also helps build group cooperation and develop leadership skills".

## The BBC's RaW campaign proves a hit with West Mids Fire and Rescue Service

The FBU in the West Midlands has been a key partner in the delivery of "RaW", the BBC's largest ever adult literacy campaign. Together we have successfully supported programs of informal adult learning activities to adult learners across West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service. Activities have included RaW book swaps and the targeted distribution of family storytelling activity packs. Alistar Kerr from BBC Learning said "It's been great working with the Fire Service and I would like to thank the FBU and West Mids FRS staff and management for all the support and hard work they've put in. I'm really looking forward to building on a strong relationship that can help develop future strands of RaW".

If you would like further information on the BBC's RaW campaign visit their website at [www.bbc.co.uk/raw/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw/)



White Watch at Sheldon Fire Station West Mids get to grips with BBC's RaW campaign

## “Therapy is good for Lee”

Lee Wilkins is a firefighter in Suffolk, based at Princes Street Fire Station in Ipswich. About a year ago, Lee’s watch took part in a level 2 literacy course, organised by the local Union Learning Rep at the Fire Station. Having enjoyed the course and gained the qualification, Lee had been bitten by the learning bug!

Lee has always been interested in sport and is a keen footballer, having been injured a number of times at football, he wanted to know more about sports therapy and massage techniques.

Although a little apprehensive he applied to the Sports Therapy Training Centre in Manchester. The course was a ‘Level 5 advanced diploma in sports therapy and remedial massage’

Lee passed the course with distinction, and is already looking for the next course that goes with his qualification.

“Last year, if anyone told me I would have a diploma, I would have said they were mad! The literacy course that I attended made me realise that I have the skills to be able to learn more, it was just a confidence thing. The brigade was very good allowing me the time for the course and the opportunity to study at work. I can now use my new skills in my leisure time and to offer advice to workmates who may have a sports injury”.



Lee Wilkins practices sports therapy on fellow firefighter

Adrian Mayhew FBU Union Learning Rep said “It is very satisfying as a Union Learning Rep to see someone go on to do more learning after taking part in a level 2 literacy course. Not only did Lee pass the course, he was awarded a distinction for his efforts and that should be applauded. I would like to think that Lee’s achievement could be an example to other F&RS employees that there are life changing opportunities out there”

## Greater Manchester and Cheshire FRS celebrate World Book day and International Women’s Day



Gary Harney presents raffle prize to Mark Goodier and Andy Sherlock at Bury Fire Station

After successfully applying for funding to the “Learning and Skills For All Fund” to support activities to promote learning, FBU Region 6 Learning Co-ordinator Gary Harney and Greater Manchester Learning Coordinator

Paul Smith, organised and ran various events at Fire Stations in Greater Manchester and Cheshire to raise awareness of World Book Day and International Women’s Day.

As well as promoting reading and celebrating women’s achievements, learning taster sessions took place including Digital Photography, Sign Language and Spanish Lessons. Various competitions and a raffle took place, with prizes of book tokens given out and people were also given the opportunity to take a skill’s check in Literacy and Numeracy. Gary said “Although these events were to highlight reading, writing and achievements made in the world by women, they also had the added benefit of promoting learning in the work place a key benefit of FBU Learning”. Gary went on to say “our thanks go to the various Colleges and education providers who attended these events and a special thanks to Unionlearn Reps Ged Bretherton, Keith Lewis and Jeff Latham who supported us throughout the program.

## Northumberland Control Operator gets her just Desserts

TV celebrity chef James Martin during his visit to the North East challenged Caroline Saunderson, an emergency control operator and a learner at the FBU learning centre in Northumberland, to a culinary challenge.

The culinary challenge was brought to the North East to promote the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) Skills for Life campaign, a national strategy aimed at improving adult numeracy and literacy.

James, star of the BBC's Saturday Kitchen, was put through his paces as we went up against the clock during his visit to Northumberland FRS headquarters in Morpeth.

James challenged Caroline against the clock to see who could create and serve up a strawberry gateau in the fastest time. Desserts expert James was victorious from the challenge with a time of 2 minutes and 24 seconds compared to Caroline's 4 minutes and 47 seconds.

Caroline who recently completed her level 2, numeracy said, "I was extremely nervous but thoroughly enjoyed the competition and was pleased to be part of the LSC Get On campaign in improving adult numeracy and literacy skills".



Celebrity Chef James Martin cooks against the clock

## Passionate about learning? Become a Union Learning Rep!

Union Learning Reps (ULR's) play a key role in organising, delivering and guiding members through the maze of learning opportunities. It is a new union role that many FBU members may be interested in without the hurly-burly of the everyday role of being a Union official. ULR's in the workplace can make a difference, over 18000 throughout the trade union movement and more than 300 in the FBU are already trained having completed the 5 day TUC accredited course. ULR's are now recognised officials and have similar rights to time off and access to facilities as H&S reps. During last year's T.U.C. Conference The Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, gave a clear signal that union-led learning is central to the future not just of trade unions but of our country, calling union learning '**the biggest transformation of trades unions since the growth of the shop steward movement**'.

**If you are interested in becoming a ULR and being involved with;**

- promoting the value of learning and skills
- work with managers to plan learning opportunities within the workplace
- consult with members and identify their learning and skills needs
- find out about government policies and programmes for learning and skills
- build contacts with local education providers

Please contact your regional Co-ordinator (back page).

## Co-ordinator contact details:

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