

# FBU-LEARN



NEWSLETTER  
SPRING 07



# Skills for Life Special



*A Skills for Life Session in Morpeth.*

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**Tim Davis**  
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# Your Project Manager Trevor Shanahan argues Skills for Life. Why?

The FBU's Lifelong Learning projects have been promoting and encouraging our members to brush up on their Skills for Life (SfL) – Numeracy, Literacy & Information Communication Technology (ICT).

While many of our members have readily picked up on the need for ICT courses there is still some apprehension when asked if they would like to do an initial assessment on their SfL.

There can be a number (no pun intended) of reasons why people do not want to revisit numeracy & literacy; didn't do well at school, don't see the need, embarrassed about their skill level, don't want management to find out they have a learning need and a lot more besides.

SfL, however, is an important part of our life that underpins all learning at work, home and in our social lives. Writing a report in a Word document does not take the need away for it to be laid out, spelt and be grammatically correct, OK, the software can take care of much of this but it cannot deliver what the point of the report is about. Likewise doing an Excel spreadsheet needs an understanding of numbers and formulae to ensure the resulting spreadsheet delivers the correct outcome.

Still pestered by the kids asking to help them with their homework? Off-loading their questions to somebody else? Doing a SfL assessment and any brush up courses required may help you understand their learning difficulties and being confident of helping them.

Statistics can always be interpreted and used by the user to suit their own devices but you cannot hide from the statistics that say:

*“Almost one half of adults (17million) have difficulty with numbers and one seventh (5 million) are not functionally literate.”*

There has been a real transformation in learning and development in the Fire & Rescue Service; the introduction of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), Assessment Development Centres (ADCs), Continued Professional Development (CPD) and National Vocational Qualifications (S/NVQs) has increased the need for staff to be confident in SfL.

The ULF project has been working on a draft strategy; 'Whole Organisation Approach to Skills for Life' that will soon be published for comments. The document hopes to stimulate debate on the issue of SfL in the FRS – not just for FBU members, but for all staff.

Our union has always been a strong promoter of equality & fairness both in the FRS and the wider Trade Union movement, SfL should be an integral part of this strand.

Matt Wrack and John McGhee have shown their commitment by becoming national TUC Skills for Life Advocates and I hope further senior officials will take up this role.

So don't ignore this opportunity to brush up on your skills, contact your ULF or ULF Co-ordinator about accessing a confidential skills check – it may just change your whole life.



Trevor Shanahan.

# So what does a Skills for Life Tutor actually do?

Morpeth Learning centre SFL Tutor Lorna Taylor gives us a brief insight into a typical day



I work for the FBU Lifelong Learning National Project and I am based within the Learning Centre at Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service.

It's Tuesday morning, I start with e-mails and catching up on learner messages on the tutor system. Most learners have progressed over a week and those who attend the Hexham group on a Tuesday evening are a priority target.

The Hexham group meet on a regular basis. This is an established group and is currently working towards level 2 maths skills. Tonight's session is working on the four rules of number. I have designed the resources around timesheets and the use of decimal place. The firefighters who

This will give him a good idea of what is expected in a test situation.

12noon and I am off down the A19 to Tyne and Wear. I have an appointment with a learner, who is working on a level 1 numeracy course, to develop her maths skills in measure, shape and space. She is having difficulty with conversion from imperial to metric and needs me to demonstrate the task in a more tactile learning style. I support this session with a worksheet to establish the learners' progress in this area of maths. My next learner arrives to take his National test. A room has been allocated for this exam, which is level 2 Adult literacy. The test has been downloaded onto a laptop and the learner takes his test. I am the invigilator and make sure all regulations are observed when testing. This learner passed and is off to celebrate.



attend the session generally work well and have little or no problems, however two of the learners need additional support and often arrange a one to one session to support any weak areas and future support.

Wednesday. I have appointments all day. One learner is working towards level 2 literacy, but likes to double check his progress. I deliver a practical session to test punctuation and grammar skills, and make sure he knows where to put those apostrophes. Bill has been studying for at least three months and is ready to progress to preparing for testing which is a mock exam.

My last appointment is with a learner who has dyslexic tendencies. The learner has decided to make an appointment for me to carry out a Dyslexic Adult Screening Test (DAST) This is will establish if they are in the 'at risk' category and we can progress from there. This result will assist me in any future design of lessons with this learner.

It all starts over again the next day but not necessarily in the same order.

**Lorna Taylor, Skills for Life Tutor, 2007.**

## Learning Co-ordinator Howard Weston explains how getting help with Skills for Life has given him his first ever educational qualification!

I have always been a great believer in “don’t ask someone to do something you wouldn’t do yourself”. As someone who had always hated school, who had left at age fifteen with no qualifications whatsoever, who now realizes what a waste that was, skills for life could just conceivably be the answer for me. I have always held the belief that I am not ‘thick’ but have never held any sort of qualification to prove otherwise. Here then, was the opportunity for me, to both take the lead and gain the qualification, and for the first time in forty eight years perhaps hold a formal recognised qualification. As a firefighter in Greater Manchester I had the opportunity to do an adult literacy level two ‘in house’ as the brigade has an accreditation system already up and running based at the Training Centre. Having this system in situ in Greater Manchester has allowed greater flexibility in the way in which we have been able to offer Skills for Life opportunities to the members within that particular brigade.

It was this route that I myself took (in order that I could check first hand that all of my fears on confidentiality were unfounded) and I have to say they were!! My particular route therefore was to take a mini test on a Skills for Life CD provided free of charge by ‘Move On’. This took no more than five minutes and advised me to attempt the practice level two adult literacy tests also on the CD. These tests consist of forty questions and are set out exactly as they are when you sit the formal qualification. Each of the ‘Move On’ CD’s has eight practice tests in literacy and eight

practice tests in numeracy, thereby covering both of the Skills for Life areas. Having attempted all eight literacy tests and having done some revision with the student notes which accompany the CD, I decided I was ready, and on 7th October last year attended the training centre and gained my first ever formally recognised qualification at forty eight years of age! What a great feeling, what a sense of achievement and I’m not stopping there. Along with four other colleagues,



*Learning Co-ordinator Howard Weston with Skills for Life tutor Anna Poulton.*

I am about to attempt the level two numeracy qualification using the same route. As explained above I had my own reasons for wanting to gain these qualifications and others will have different views. But if you, like me, have no formal qualifications or your qualifications are years old, and you just fancy giving them a brush up, then give these Skills for Life qualifications a go - it really is great fun. How do I know? Because I’ve done it!!

**Howard Western,**  
**Region 5 ULR Co-ordinator.**

# Humberside Firefighters Achievement in Learning Recognized



At a recent local Further Education awards ceremony, FBU Branch Official and Firefighter Pete Smith received a Learning Achievement Award from East Riding College for consistent outstanding effort in various courses he has undertaken over the last

2 years. A vociferous advocate of Learning for All Pete said, "I was delighted to receive this award. I believe in the power of learning and how the FBU in particular with Humberside Fire & Rescue Service had brought life long learning into the workplace."

## Competition time



Over the next 4 pages you will find a set of Skills for Life Questions, which make up this issue's competition.

You should try and take 20 minutes to complete the quiz without the aid of a calculator or dictionary. Write any workings out on the same page as your answer.

**All those returned** will be entered into a prize draw and you could find yourself the proud owner of an **iPod Nano** - and all for the price of a **second class stamp**.

When completed, pull out the pages and return with your name, address and telephone number to:

**Bob Fitz-Gerald, Tonbridge Fire Station,  
Vale Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1SW.**



1

## Fire and Rescue Service - Routine Notice

### Retained Pay Arrangements

An employee who has been called to an emergency incident and forms part of crew shall receive a minimum of one hours pay. Where the employee remains on duty for more than one hour and fifteen minutes he or she shall receive two hours pay. Where the employee remains on duty for more than two hours he or she shall then be paid for complete periods of fifteen minutes.

**Paul, a retained firefighter turns out to a call. He remains on duty for one hour twelve minutes. How much should he claim for on his time sheet?**

Circle your answer:

- (a) 2 hours      (b) 1 hour      (c) 1.50 hours      (d) 1.25 hours

2

## Go Boating stay safe

### Make a fire action plan

You can make the difference between safe escape and disaster for you and your crew by being prepared and making a fire action plan.

- Make sure that you know your boat and make a fire action plan with everyone in the boat.
- For each sleeping position plan the best escape route and if possible identify a second way out. If all routes are windows and roof-hatches, make sure they are big enough (see bss guide section 6.7) and that they open fully with ease. If they don't, provide means to break the glass such as a small hammer. Footholds, ladders or other means of climbing out of the nominated roof-hatches must be quickly and easily accessible.
- Fire extinguishers should be sited where they can be at hand to help you escape.
- Know how to safely isolate the electrical fuel and LPG installations in the event of a fire or gas leak.

**In the above text there are capital letters missing on which line should they appear?**

Write your answer here:



### 3 Pasta and Broccoli Bake

**Ingredients:** Use your favourite cheese to top this delicious gratin.

- 50-75g pasta shapes
- 100g broccoli florets
- 2 plum tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 125ml cheese sauce
- 1 teaspoon French or wholegrain mustard
- 25g cheese, grated
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

**Method:** Preheat the oven to 180°C, 350°F, gas mark 4.

1. Cook the pasta in plenty of lightly salted boiling water for 2 minutes less than the packet instructions and, 4 minutes before the pasta is cooked, add the broccoli to the pan.
2. Drain the pasta and broccoli florets and mix with the tomatoes, cheese sauce and mustard. Season to taste.
3. Transfer to a greased, ovenproof dish. Sprinkle with the grated cheese and cook for 20-30 minutes, until golden brown and bubbling.

**In the method above what are the conjunctions used in the text?**

Write your answer here:

### 4 January Shopping

Recycling has never been easier! Don't throw away your carrier bags or Christmas cards, just simply give them to your driver when we deliver your shopping and we'll recycle them for you!

**IMPORTANT - WE ARE UNABLE TO ACCEPT MOST E-VOUCHERS FROM 14th JANUARY 2007**

There are some important changes to our e-voucher terms and conditions of use which may affect you. Please go to the 'Help' selection and click on 'Terms and Conditions' for details.

**Half price, was £3.69 now £1.85** Evian Mineral Water 12x33cl **£1.85/unit**  
Delivery by 06 February

» [Click for all varieties in offer](#)

**Half price, was £3.79 now £1.89** Actimel Strawberry 12x100g **£1.89/unit**  
Delivery by 30 January

**What is the aim of the above text?**

Circle your answer:

(A) Inform

(B) Save you money

(C) Make an appointment

(D) Wish you a HAPPY NEW YEAR



## 5 January Shopping

Recycling has never been easier! Don't throw away your carrier bags or Christmas cards, just simply give them to your driver when we deliver your shopping and we'll recycle them for you!

Start shopping

**IMPORTANT - WE ARE UNABLE TO ACCEPT MOST E-VOUCHERS FROM 14th JANUARY 2007**

There are some important changes to our e-voucher terms and conditions of use which may affect you. Please go to the 'Help' selection and click on 'Terms and Conditions' for details.

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Delivery by 06 February

» [Click for all varieties in offer](#)

**Half price, was £3.79 now £1.89** Actimel Strawberry 12x100g **£1.89/unit**

**There is a spelling error in the above text. On what line does it appear?**

Write your answer here:

## 6 Units of Measure

How many millilitres are there in:

|                         | Write your answers here: |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) 1 litre             |                          |
| (b) $\frac{1}{2}$ litre |                          |
| (c) $\frac{1}{4}$ litre |                          |
| (d) $\frac{3}{4}$ litre |                          |

## 7 A day in the allotments

A leek trench is 300cm long, 275cm wide and 100cm deep.

**What is its volume when full of soil?**

Write your answer here:



## 8 Fire in the flats

Blue watch are called out to a block of flats.

One of the top floor flats has a serious fire. They are checking how many occupants are in each flat.

**What is the mean number of occupants per flat?**

| Number of occupants | Number of flats |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 0                   | 1               |
| 1                   | 6               |
| 2                   | 12              |
| 3                   | 7               |
| 4                   | 3               |
| 5                   | 0               |
| 6                   | 1               |

Write your answer here:

## 9 Healthy drinks in the house

The firefighters in Tynemouth Fire Station are making themselves a healthy drink before nightshift.

The recipe for the drink is 75ml of strawberry pulp, 100ml of apple pulp, and 150ml of mango juice.

**Write this as a ratio in its simplest form.**

Write your answer here:

## 10 Morpeth Learning Centre

Someone had dumped a load of sand in the front entrance to the Learning Centre. The Union staff can't get in.

The sand is estimated to weigh 250kg. The 3 staff, plan to divide the sand up into 3 equal parts and move it onto the grass.

**Find 3% of 250kg.**

Write your answer here:

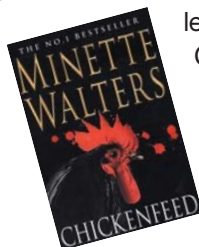


Richard Russel, Alan Westerby, Graham Humphrey, Minette Walters, John Mullins.

# World Book Day comes to Dorset Fire and Rescue Service

**D**orchester Fire station was the centre of attention on the 1st of March with both the local press and the BBC in attendance as it hosted the Dorset launch of 'World Book Day' and the 'Quick reads' scheme. Organized by the South West TUC and the FBU it was an opportunity to encourage and promote both learning in the workplace and reading for all. Local author, Minette Walters read the gripping start of her 'quick reads' book, *Chickenfeed*, to an invited audience of 40 and then signed books and discussed her work.

Minette has also written several books that have made it to T.V., such as *The Ice House*, *The Scolds Bridle* and *The Sculptress*. She has won many awards for her crime novels.



Some of the current 'Quick Reads' series of books were handed out to those who attended and it was also an opportunity to distribute learning materials from Unionlearn and Community Safety Information from Dorset Fire & Rescue Service.

Graham Humphries from the FBU's learning project welcomed everyone to the event and gave a brief report on the FBU project to date. This was then followed by a presentation on Union lead learning within Dorset FRS and an opportunity to look over The Wilts and Dorset 'Learning Bus' as members of the RMT gave demonstrations of its facilities.

**A.Westerby, FBU Dorset.**

# Avon and Gloucestershire part-time firefighters given funding to brush up on their IT skills

**F**irefighters working on the retained duty system in Avon and Gloucestershire F&RS will become some of the first in the country to receive support from a dedicated project worker on a full-time basis.

The FBU were successful in submitting a bid to Learning Works for All (LWfA), a partnership managed by South West TUC, for £64,800 to support the appointment of a full time project worker until October 2008.

'Firing Up – Learning for Retained Firefighters' is a project developed by the FBU in partnership with Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) and Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service (GF&RS) to organise and deliver training across the two fire service areas specifically designed to address the needs of RDS firefighters.

Trevor Shanahan, on behalf of the FBU, signed a contract with Learning Works for All on Tuesday 9th January 2007 to fund learning for retained fire fighters in Avon and Gloucester F&RS.

Firefighters from Keynsham, Paulton, Cirencester and Cinderford are likely to be the first to be offered the opportunity to engage in IT and Skills for Life (SFL) courses run in partnership with local colleges. (GLOSCAT and Norton Radstock College).

Bill Hendy, the Fire Brigades Union Regional Co-ordinator for the Union Learning Fund (ULF), put together a bid for funding following a successful pilot project run last year for retained firefighters working at Bath Fire Station. He said: "The pilot went very well and colleagues have asked for further training.

Initially we offered a bespoke IT course, but we now plan to work toward offering a National Qualification in IT. Bill went on to say: "I am delighted we were successful with the bid, we have been working for a long time to put this together and I am pleased to see our hard work has paid off."

Members of Red Watch at Bath Fire Station, Avon took part in computer training following a request from Station Officer Kevin Escott.

Between Stn. Officer Escott, Bill Hendy and AF&RS Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Kevin Pearson, a pilot project was launched and once the brigade saw the benefits the scheme was rolled out to all the watches at Bath, including the RDS firefighters.

"Members of Red Watch found they really enjoyed the training," said Bath firefighter and FBU Branch Secretary Alastair Dunlop.

"Within the group there was a wide-range of abilities, from those who had no knowledge of computers, to those who were more IT literate. Fortunately the course trainer, from the City of Bath College, was able to tailor the training to suit everyone." Part of the pilot involved identifying areas where the firefighters would need to use computers in everyday work and this provided the evidence for extending the scheme.

Alastair added: "There are many areas where database and spreadsheet work are required such as analysing data and providing statistics and, over time, our use of IT is only going to increase. It is important that everyone is brought up to speed and feels confident in using the technology.

“Those who took part in the training have definitely progressed and have been able to use their new-found skills in other areas – such as helping their children with homework.”

Members of Red Watch are now working towards Information Technology Qualifications (ITQ) and all members will soon be able to work toward achieving the ITQ qualification.

Bath Crew Manager Dave Cowley was among one of nine firefighters on the retained duty system able to take advantage of the pilot project. He said: “At the station we are using computers more and more and now we can use programs that we were not able to before – it has opened a whole new world. The six-week course we followed was extremely beneficial, for example we all have work e-mail addresses, but didn’t really know how useful this was, in terms of internal communication, until now. It has definitely made the job easier.”

With the Fire Safety College and DCLG currently looking at the way training and learning is delivered, with particular interest in on-line courses, this is the perfect opportunity to trial IT training, said Maggie Harte, Director of Service Improvement at AF&RS. She added: “For our workforce to benefit from e-learning, it is vital that we bring their IT skills up to speed. When we were presented with this opportunity it was clear that it was too good to miss.”

“The changing role of the Fire and Rescue Service has impacted on the skills and competences that all firefighters now need. However, because firefighters on the retained duty system also have full-time employment responsibilities, the issue of providing training and development has proved a difficult area for the service as a whole. This is why we are piloting the scheme - to see if people can work in this way and how we can best support their training.”

*Trevor Shanahan on behalf of the FBU signed a contract with Learning Works for All on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2007 to fund learning for retained fire fighters in Avon and Gloucester F&RS.*



# Computer Training comes to Nottinghamshire

**E**veryone who works for Nottingham Fire and Rescue: uniformed whole time, retained and officers, cleaners, cooks and office worker, are now get the chance to work towards an Open College Network ICT qualification, clocking up credits by working through modules delivered in work time.

Union Learning Reps from the FBU and Unison have been working in partnership with both Notts. Fire and Rescue Service and South Notts. College to develop a bespoke computer course to meet the needs of the workforce. Over 1,000 employees stand to benefit from this exciting development. Tutors equipped with laptops have been visiting stations around the county delivering four 3 hour long sessions with extra sessions tacked on to the end to ensure that everyone who starts the course gets the opportunity to complete it.

As a result of its success we are now working together with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service to run a pilot ICT course based on the Nottinghamshire model.



*Fire crews from Nottingham enjoying a session of ICT.*

**Kim Allen, ULR.**





Adrian Mayhew (Suffolk FBU ULR Co-ordinator), Bob Fitz-Gerald (Region 11 ULF Co-ordinator) & Steve Brinkley (Region 9 ULF Co-ordinator) attended this conference on behalf of the FBU.

It was an opportunity to network with other trade union learning reps in the South East region and also to participate in various workshops aiming to enhance our skills and share best practice.

condition from good fiction as well as actually living through events. Most thought provoking and inspiring! Joanne has written a novel for the 'Quick Reads' initiative and signed copies for delegates.

The workshops were an opportunity to share ideas with others and some were, for FBU members, very contentious. Continuous professional development is a contested concept it appears and what some think it may mean does not always agree with others! In fact some unions have negotiated time off for staff to meet the aspirations of their particular agreements. Could this be the next challenge for the FBU negotiators and could FBU Lifelong Learning assist?

Further workshops on topics as diverse as 'Learning & Organizing', 'Managing personal finances' and 'Working with skills councils' gave delegates plenty to think about for the rest of the day.

The conference certainly gave food for thought and the opportunity to debate current Unionlearn issues with others was a welcome one.

# 1st annual Unionlearn SERTUC conference

## TUC London 19th January 2007

A number of speakers (Frances O'Grady – TUC Deputy General Secretary & Barry Francis – Regional Manager, SE Unionlearn among them) began the conference by outlining their individual experiences of Union learning and how they feel why it's so important to engage workers in learning and the opportunities it provides to all.

A welcome contribution came from Joanne Trollope the famous author. She spoke passionately about the power of fiction. Negotiation is built on anecdote and past occurrences form future agreements she argued and went on to speak about how we learn about ourselves and the human



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