



**The Professional Trades Union for Prison,
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers**

National Chair: Mark Fairhurst
General Secretary: Steve Gillan

Headquarters:
Cronin House
245 Church St.
Edmonton
London N9 9HW
t. 020 8803 0255
f. 020 8803 1761
e. general@poauk.org.uk
w. www.poauk.org.uk

North Regional Office
1 Linden House
Sardinia St.
Leeds
LS10 1BH
t. 01132 428833
f. 01132 429075
e. adminnro@poauk.org.uk

Northern Ireland
Castell House
116 Ballywalter Rd.
Millisle Co Down
BT22 2HS
t. 02891 861928
f. 02891 861839
e. adminni@poauk.org.uk

Scotland
21 Calder Rd.
Edinburgh
Scotland
EH11 3PF
t. 0131 443 8105
f. 0131 444 0657
e. adminscot@poauk.org.uk

POA Circular 147/2020

26th October 2020

Dear Colleagues

POA SUPPORTS TUC CAMPAIGN TO SAVE UNION LEARNING

LETTERS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE SECTOR EMPLOYERS

As you are aware, POA Circular 144/2020 was promulgated on 19th October 2020.

Please find attached two letters which have been sent to Criminal Justice Sector employers and The Rt. Hon. Gavin Williamson Secretary of State for Education CBE MP today.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary

Yours sincerely

MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair



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Our Ref: GS/008/20

26th October 2020

Dear Secretary of State

THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE UNION LEARNING FUND

On behalf of a wide range of POA members working in the Criminal Justice Sector, we wish to express our surprise and disappointment at the decision taken by government to cut all the funding for the Union Learning Fund (ULF) and Unionlearn from April of next year.

This was especially surprising coming so soon after the Prime Minister's welcome announcement about a new Lifetime Skills Guarantee, which will include a fully funded entitlement for all adults to progress to a first full level 3 qualification. Experience tells us that for many workers eligible for this entitlement, the key barriers to take-up are likely to be a lack of confidence, an inherent reluctance to engage in learning, and in some cases relatively poor standards of attainment in English, maths and digital skills.

Empowering and incentivising workers falling within this profile to re-engage in learning and training has been a widely acknowledged achievement of ULF projects, in particular through the powerful role of union learning reps. These projects and reps have been hugely successful in helping these adults to take that first step back into learning, equipping them with the necessary basic skills, and empowering them to progress to intermediate and higher-level qualifications. This has certainly been our experience across many workplaces in the Criminal Justice Sector and this union-led provision has also helped us to boost take-up of the learning and training we offer.

The role of the ULF and Unionlearn has also served to boost the traditional role that unions and their workplace reps play in negotiating high-quality apprenticeship schemes with employers. Union reps are as a result providing more direct support to apprentices in the workplace and also helping employers to reach out to key groups facing barriers in accessing apprenticeships including women, BAME groups and disabled people.

Finally, the POA have large number of members who would benefit from the government's aim of widening access to higher-level technical qualifications. The support of the ULF and Unionlearn will be crucial in incentivising and supporting these workers to progress to level 4 and 5 qualifications.

In conclusion, we would strongly advise you to reconsider the decision to cut the funding for ULF and Unionlearn. In the Criminal Justice Sector this will lead to a reduction in support for workers and employers who are doing their utmost to upskill and retrain in these very challenging times. It will also, in our view, weaken the thrust of anticipated policy initiatives by government to boost adult skills, apprenticeships and technical education through the forthcoming white paper.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Gillan', with a small horizontal line at the end.

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary

Emailed: sec-of-state.ps@education.gov.uk

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson
Secretary of State for Education CBE MP

Copy Letter to Criminal Justice Employers

26th October 2020

Dear

As you may know, the Department for Education has decided to axe the Union Learning Fund from March.

We are bemused by the decision to end the fund – just weeks after the PM made a speech setting out his National Skills Plan, which was all about helping workers get qualified and retrain for the jobs of tomorrow.

We are asking employers who have worked with us on union learning to raise their concerns with the government about the decision to axe the fund from March 2021.

I would very much appreciate it if (Employer) would consider adding your voice to those expressing concern.

We intend to run a positive non-partisan campaign focused on the benefits of the Union Learning Fund to workers, employers and the wider economy. We believe this decision to be mistaken, and out of kilter with the direction of the government's skills policy. We believe it can still be reversed.

So far, a number of employers of all sizes have spoken out about union learning, including Tesco, Heathrow, Arla Foods and Tata Steel. And lots more have written privately to the education secretary.

If you were prepared to write to the education secretary, copied to relevant local MPs, the chancellor, and the general secretary of the TUC, that would be enormously helpful.

And if you were able to make a public statement on the value of union learning for us to use in press work, that would be fantastic.

Yours sincerely



STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary