

**September 2016**

## **Apprentices – New Requirements**

In 2016 the government announced new policies on apprenticeship schemes. These included proposals to:

- Create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020.
- Create legal protection of title for apprenticeships, similar to that for degrees.
- Produce new apprenticeship standards, designed by employers
- Set apprentice targets for public sector bodies (2.3% for organisations with more than 250 employees, but all encouraged to have apprentices)
- Introduce a new levy on larger employers (those with paybills above £3million), topped up by the government to pay for the new proposals.
- A new funding regime for training providers.
- Set up an institute for apprenticeships which will oversee standards, quality and rigour

Whilst training and skills policy is a devolved matter, some policies are being applied across the UK. For instance contributions to the new apprenticeship levy will be set UK wide, but accessing the money paid under the apprenticeship levy will be devolved and separate arrangements will be in place for Scotland<sup>1</sup>, Wales<sup>2</sup>, Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup> and England<sup>4</sup>.

The government in England is making the most change and has already started to provide more details on the proposals, most recently consulting on aspects of the levy and funding for training providers. Details can be found on .Gov UK.<sup>4</sup>

## **UNISON is campaigning for a better deal on public sector apprenticeships**

UNISON has welcomed government commitments to increase apprenticeships and engage employers and providers in raising the quality of apprenticeships. However UNISON believes that some of the proposals (and particularly a number of those to be introduced in England) are problematic.

We know that in the future economies will need better skilled professional and technical workers. More needs to be done to ensure that all apprenticeships in the UK provide a meaningful, high-quality vocational pathway into employment that is a genuine alternative to university and enables career progression.

UNISON has raised a number of concerns with the government and opposition MPs:

1. There is a danger that with current budget cuts apprenticeships could be used to replace staff in public services, rather than increasing the workforce. The setting of targets for numbers of new apprenticeships may result in employers rushing to fill staff gaps and go for low entry

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<sup>1</sup> <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Apprenticeship-levy-269c.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/apprenticeships/the-apprenticeship-levy/?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeships-explained>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/apprenticeship-changes>

levels rather than aiming at higher quality longer apprenticeships . Six in every ten apprenticeships created in the UK are only at Level 2. Private sector companies delivering public services in particular may focus on low level low quality apprenticeships. This could result in a mismatch of skills. Unless there is joined up workforce sector planning linked to public procurement contracts career progression planning will be more fragmented with potentials for a 'skills drift' across the public sector

3. If larger employers have to pay a compulsory levy then existing staff training budgets may be hit as employers divert them to cover the levy.

4. The proposed rapid increase in numbers on top of existing apprenticeships could mean employers taking on more than they can accommodate to ensure quality. Services are already over-stretched and in may struggle to provide staff to supervise and mentor additional apprenticeships. The fragmentation of the public sector into smaller employers means new employers with limited HR capacity and knowledge may face additional challenges.

5. UNISONs local government and schools surveys and freedom of information requests to the NHS have shown that the quality, pay and training of apprenticeships varies enormously between employers. For example more than a third of employers across the NHS are hiring apprentices at the statutory minimum of £3.30 per hour, when there are provisions to pay them much more under established Agenda for Change pay rates. The UNISON report raised concerns that NHS employers are failing to ensure that their staff on in-work training programmes either gain a recognised qualification or complete their apprenticeships.

6. Overall quality and standards need to be regulated properly. The move from a wider regulated industry agreed apprentice standards to new 'trailblazer' standards set up only by employers has obvious dangers. There should be a strong institutional framework to support collective commitment by employers, providers, apprentices and unions to raise the quality of skills and apprenticeships particularly among low-skilled, female-dominated industries such as care and food services.

7. Funding for providers must be adequate to ensure that quality is not affected. Analysis by FE Week suggests that the funding formula proposed for 16 to 18 year-old apprentices in England could result in cuts to current rates for colleges and training providers of around 30 per cent, rising to over 50% for those apprentices living in the most deprived areas of central London.

### **What branches can do**

Branches need to be ready to engage with their employers on how they will fund the levy and meet the new public sector targets. Apprenticeships can be an important way for young people to get into employment and earn while they learn. But young workers should not be used as cheap labour and need the protection of a union around them.

To assist branches in apprenticeship negotiations with employers UNISON has a variety of resources:

- Negotiating an apprenticeship scheme in the workplace
- Understanding what an apprenticeship is
- Explaining apprentice entitlements
- Organising and recruiting apprenticeships
- Apprenticeships in Local Government Guidance

Visit the UNISON website page <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/young-members/key-issues/apprenticeships/>

For further information on apprenticeships email Bargaining Support: [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)

**Remember Apprentices can [join UNISON for just £10 a year](#)**