



Supporting apprentices in your workplace





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Editor: Martin Moriarty
Design: @www.the-design-mill.co.uk

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Supporting apprentices in your workplace

Many UNISON employers are currently aiming to ensure that new apprentice starts make up at least 2.3 per cent of their workforce under the government's Public Sector Apprenticeship Targets Regulations.

This means that more and more young people are joining many of the workplaces where we organise, alongside existing staff who are improving their skills and gaining qualifications by enrolling on apprenticeship programmes.

It's vital that we offer our support to new apprentices as they embark on their working lives – especially since the rollout of automation and digital technologies are likely to shape working lives that look very different from the careers of many current UNISON members.

Many branches are already offering support to their apprentices, and the case studies in this booklet demonstrate there are a range of different approaches currently on offer.

But although the models are different, the goal is the same: to help secure high-quality training, decent pay and the support young people need to successfully complete their apprenticeships

and start meaningful jobs afterwards. Of course, there are still some unscrupulous employers who try to use apprentices as cheap labour, paying little to no interest in helping them develop their knowledge and skills. That's why the union has developed UNISON's Apprenticeship Charter, which sets out what we expect to see in an apprenticeship programme we can support.

Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) has developed a range of resources to help branches, including the Apprenticeship toolkit and the apprenticeship e-note, and we can also offer financial support to branches running learning events for apprentices through our Kickstart and Moving on programmes.

We hope this booklet shows the range of different ways branches can work with their employers on developing support for apprentices, integrating our expertise in adult learning and our negotiating skills in developing programmes that benefit both the apprentices themselves and the organisations that invest in them.

By working in partnership with employers UNISON branches can help ensure the delivery of high-quality apprenticeships in the workplace.

New opportunities for helping apprentices

Between them, the government's Apprenticeship Levy and the Public Sector Apprenticeship Targets Regulations are creating new opportunities for branches to work with their employers to recruit and support apprentices.

The Levy encourages employers with an annual payroll of £3 million or more to invest in training apprentices by offering them access to the money they have paid over to cover the costs of apprenticeships for their own staff or for workers in their supply chains.

The Public Sector Apprenticeship Targets Regulations require public sector organisations with 250 or more staff to ensure that 2.3 per cent of their workforce are new apprentice starts every year.

According to the latest government figures, 1.4 per cent of workers in public sector bodies started an apprenticeship between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018.

MARTIN BIRCHALL PHOTOGRAPHY



How does the Levy work?

Wherever employers are recouping the costs of their Apprenticeship Levy by investing in apprenticeships, UNISON branches have the chance to get involved in the design and delivery of these programmes.

Many UNISON employers have to pay the Apprenticeship Levy, which applies to all organisations with an annual payroll of £3 million or more, but they can recoup the costs by investing in apprenticeships themselves.

UNISON broadly supports the Apprenticeship Levy, since the previous voluntary system, which relied on employers to invest in training off their own bat, had failed to deliver the number and quality of apprenticeships the economy needs.

This equates to 45,314 new apprenticeship starts over that period, a mix of existing staff (who may or may not yet be members) and new entrants.

All these thousands of people on apprenticeship programmes in public service organisations need the support of their UNISON branches to negotiate improvements to their pay, terms and conditions and training.

By getting involved in the planning and development of apprenticeship provision and ensuring that apprentices themselves have the chance to raise any concerns and find solutions, branches can:

- maintain or increase UNISON influence on employer strategies
- ensure that all decision-making considers the impact on staff
- help boost recruitment and retention
- develop the skills of stewards to a higher level.

Besides seeking employer endorsement of UNISON's Apprenticeship Charter (see sidebar), branches can lay a firm foundation for their work supporting apprentices by signing an apprenticeship agreement with the employer.

UNISON has produced a national template, based on an NHS employer, which can be adapted for any organisation and amended to suit local requirements.

To build on the apprenticeship agreement, branches can negotiate an apprenticeship policy, which

Promoting our Apprenticeship Charter
UNISON has specifically developed its Apprenticeship Charter as a tool to ensure apprenticeships deliver positive outcomes for both apprentices and employers.

It is already supported by a number of organisations, including Southport & Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and Hartlepool College in England, as well as Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Ceredigion County Council in Wales and NHS Highland in Scotland.

The charter sets out the key elements of an apprenticeship programme that UNISON will endorse, including:

- **structured job role using an approved apprenticeship standard / framework and SMART learning objectives**
- **pay rate in accordance with legislation or union negotiation with a written contract of employment specifying duration of apprenticeship**
- **adequate study time to be agreed, including for skills assessments, with a union learning rep (ULR) to be available to apprentices in addition to a mentor.**
- **Download the UNISON Apprenticeship Charter from: <https://bit.ly/2Bz4t3X>**

allows the staff side and the employer side to identify the responsibilities of all stakeholders.

- **Download the template apprenticeship agreement from the [UNISON.learning](https://www.unison.org.uk/learning) website.**

Putting apprenticeship support into action

An apprenticeship lead can help develop your branch's work more effectively on all aspects of the apprenticeship agenda.

Working with the employer on supporting and developing apprentices is usually most effective when there is an apprenticeship agreement in place between both sides.

But whether or not an agreement is in place, it is crucial to negotiate access to apprentices, either separately or as part of an agreement or policy.

Mentoring course

We have developed a course for branches and reps who would like to support apprentices through a mentoring scheme.

The course covers: the role of a mentor; key skills of a mentor; developing practical skills; and dealing with issues and further support.

● To find out when the mentoring course is running near you, contact your regional education team via our website listing: <https://bit.ly/2IAZbwy>

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The best place to start is with a UNISON slot during all apprentice inductions, when the branch can set out UNISON's aims and objects, our £10 annual membership rate for apprentices, and how the union can benefit apprentices who join (for example, through access to further training that will contribute to their development).

It is also useful and effective to negotiate with the employer to ensure they allow apprentices time to attend and take part in UNISON learning and training events.

To work most effectively on the apprenticeships agenda, branches should consider identifying a branch apprenticeship lead, a UNISON counterpart to the employer's apprenticeship lead.

A branch apprenticeship lead can undertake some of the key work on apprenticeships, such as identifying who is on an apprenticeship programme and where they work;



Promoting equality and diversity

UNISON branches can help improve equality and diversity in apprenticeships by working closely with their employers to ensure advertising, recruitment and selection processes do not create barriers to women, Black people and disabled people.

Branches could also encourage managers and staff involved in the recruitment process to enrol on equality and diversity training to ensure they are aware of any possible discrimination against women, Black people and disabled people.

The numbers demonstrate that we need to do more to promote greater equality and diversity on apprenticeships.

For instance, while there are similar numbers of female and male apprentices in England, female apprentices remain significantly under-represented in better paid industries and over-represented in

talking to apprentices about their experiences and any concerns with any aspect of the programme; and raising any concerns with the employer's apprenticeship lead.

The apprenticeship lead can also meet the employer's apprenticeship lead to discuss operational issues (e.g., progress towards targets, vacancies and job descriptions) and organise the delivery of appropriate UNISON workshops (with branch / regional support, if required).

poorer paid sectors such as early years care.

In addition, Black people are still not fairly represented on apprenticeship programmes – and this is not for want of trying, since 28 per cent of applicants are from Black communities but only 11 per cent start apprenticeships.

And while the proportion of starts by apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities has been steadily increasing since 2011/12, there was a 17.1 per cent drop in starts by people in these groups in 2017/18.

Employers have powers under the 2010 Equality Act to tackle disadvantage and under-representation experienced by particular groups on apprenticeships: they need to be more aware of them and more confident about using them, according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

● **Download the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) report at: <https://bit.ly/2ERk2Z6>**

Helping apprentices get the training they want

The Apprentice Learning Network at BCP Council is run by apprentices for apprentices – and that’s the key to its success, explain Freya Kendall and Nick Hillman.

The Apprentice Learning Network (ALN) is a self-organised group of apprentices at BCP Council in the south-west that gets together to access the training and development apprentices want.

Originally launched by the then Branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator and the council’s HR department, the network has been run for most of the past 18 months by Freya Kendall and Nick Hillman.

When Freya completed her marketing apprenticeship and secured a full-time job at the authority, the duo decided to hand over the reins to a new trio of apprentices and have been helping them get to grips with running the network themselves.

When they announced they wanted to take a backseat role, three apprentices volunteered to take over: Jack Matthews, a degree level apprentice; Matthew Tibbey, who is a Level 4 apprentice in project management; and Zack Cousins, a Level 3 apprentice.

As a result of their positive experiences running the Network, Freya and Nick have also been job-sharing

the role of young members’ officer for the branch, and have spoken at regional and national UNISON events about the success of their approach.

By the time they turn 27 and are no longer young members, they hope that one or all of the apprentices who have taken over the Network may follow in their footsteps into the branch young members’ role.

1 Leadership opportunities help develop apprentices

Freya: *“The Network works because it’s run by apprentices. When I was promoted to a full-time job, I wanted to hand my place over to another apprentice because it’s always been an Apprentice Learning Network run by apprentices themselves, with their direct input into all the planning.”*

2 Connecting with other apprentices develops support networks

Freya: *“I’m one of the youngest people in my workplace and I didn’t have a lot of other young members to communicate with and socialise with until the Network was set up.”*



Main: Freya Kendall and inset Nick Hillman.

TOP TIP

Be engaging, not patronising

Freya: *“It’s really important how you advertise anything to apprentices.*

There is a very fine line between being enthusiastic and engaging and being patronising – so you’ve got to hit that communication element straight on. We always advertise that the meetings will include training opportunities that count towards their apprenticeship and what I like to call a wellbeing break like a game or a quiz so they know it’s not going to be somebody talking to them for two hours and I think that’s why they love it so much.”

3 Developing new skills boosts self-confidence

Nick: *“For me, the Network has been a really big confidence builder and I know it is for the new apprentices who have started running it. I*

never thought it would lead to me giving presentations at national events for UNISON as well and really getting involved in that side – it’s opened up a lot of doors and given me so much more confidence in myself.”

4 Offering training boosts engagement

Freya: *“The themes we chose for the meetings have been a big part of their success: workshops on what to do at the end of your apprenticeship, how to apply for jobs, what employers may be looking for. And the wellbeing workshop helped me on a personal level: being young and going into my first proper workplace, you don’t know what to expect and the workshop gave you the tools you needed to deal with the stress – to take a step back and look at things and not worry about them too much and focus on yourself. What I have loved most about it is learning things that I want to learn because of the input we had on what training was being put on.”*

5 Supporting apprentices develops new activists

Nick: *“I only knew about trade unions because we live really close to Tolpuddle so that was mentioned in my history classes but that was all the information I had on leaving school. But once we got involved in the Network and went to our first regional UNISON meeting in Taunton to talk about what we were doing, we felt so welcomed and everybody was really eager for us to get a bit more active so I started saying Yes to all the opportunities and it’s been great getting involved with UNISON.”*

Using UNISON's negotiating power to support apprentices

Derbyshire UNISON has negotiated an apprenticeship charter with Derbyshire County Council that covers pay, conditions and support for all the apprentices now directly employed by the authority.

Every new apprentice at Derbyshire County Council receives a copy of the apprenticeship charter that UNISON has negotiated with the employer.

The charter sets out what apprentices can expect both from the local authority and the trade unions while they are progressing through their apprenticeship, says UNISON learning rep Jayne Barry.

The programmes last between one and three years, depending on the departments and vocations involved. While both sides hope everyone who successfully completes their apprenticeship will be offered a job, there is no guarantee that will happen in all cases at the moment.

The programme has proved so popular that it was massively over-subscribed when the council invited applications for the latest apprenticeships that started last September, with five times the number of applicants for the 105 positions on offer across all departments.

The council uses its Apprenticeship Levy funding to support the development of existing staff as well as new starters. This offers staff the opportunity to boost their skills and improve their chances of securing alternative employment if their current job comes under threat from spending cuts.

Through the Apprenticeship Charter, the council and the staff side unions have set up a regular Apprenticeship Forum, where different apprentices are invited to each meeting to discuss their experiences and whether they feel they are getting enough support or all the training they need.

1 Employers make a big difference by covering apprentices' travel expenses

Jayne: *"If an apprentice has to get to work on a bus, for instance, they are already low-paid and that's a large chunk of their money coming out before they've even got to work. And they may have to catch more than one bus to get to work if they are a peripatetic apprentice, for example."*



TOP TIP

Apprenticeships e-note

We have launched a new online training module to introduce activists to all the key issues around apprenticeships, including employers' obligations, apprentice rights and opportunities for UNISON.

- You can find the e-note at: <https://learning.unison.org.uk/>

2 Apprenticeships can help existing staff develop in a different field

Jayne: "If you're an existing member of staff, you stay on your current terms and conditions while progressing through an apprenticeship, you don't

drop down to apprenticeship pay. So this gives staff the opportunity to develop into a different field, which gives the branch another tool to try and keep people in work (when we are losing a lot of jobs) by swapping their careers from one thing to another."

3 It pays to take an active part in mentoring apprentices

Jayne: "The council offers mentoring training for union people and staff involved in supporting apprentices. We're pushing for more UNISON people to get trained on that course because the more mentors we have the better."

- UNISON offers its own mentoring course to fill gaps in employer provision (see p6).

Inset photo: John Wears.

Guaranteeing jobs for new starters

Apprentices who successfully complete their training are guaranteed a job with Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals, thanks to an agreement negotiated by UNISON.

New starters who successfully complete their apprenticeship at The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust are offered a guaranteed job, under the terms of an agreement between the Trust and Newcastle Hospitals Branch.

The branch was initially involved in the development of the apprenticeship programme through the Employment Partnership Forum (which includes senior management and staff side) and the Policy Group at the Trust (which comprises senior management, staff side and HR).

While the majority of apprenticeships were delivered to develop existing staff when the programme was originally launched two years ago, these days most apprentices are new starters, says John Wears. John works in the Trust's education & workforce development team and is a union learning rep and project coordinator for Bridges to Learning, UNISON's staff development partnership with the Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

Now that the apprenticeship programme is up



SASA SEVIC

and running, the branch also takes part in the monthly Apprenticeship Business Meeting, which oversees the development of the programme.

The branch also attends apprentice inductions to inform new starters about the support UNISON offers throughout their training and to explain the basics of their employment rights as apprentices.

And UNISON works closely with both the apprenticeship delivery and the workforce development teams to look at additional training that the branch can put in place to support apprentices, such as a workshop on minute-taking aimed at business administration apprentices.

Last year, the Apprenticeship Business Meeting agreed to launch a quarterly forum for apprentices, with the first meeting focusing on mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

The branch is currently developing a mentorship programme for staff who support apprentices, to fill a gap in development provision at the Trust.



TOP TIP

UNISON Apprenticeships Toolkit

The UNISON Apprenticeships Toolkit includes advice on negotiating and bargaining, the Apprenticeship Levy, apprentices' pay, health and safety, training, mentoring and more – all set out in a tabbed format that's easy to navigate and use.

● You can order copies by contacting learningandorganising@unison.co.uk

1 Make full use of partnership agreements

John: “The branch has a learning agreement with the Trust and the partnership work on apprentices comes under that agreement.”

2 Job guarantees make apprenticeships more effective for individuals and their employers

John: “We secured an agreement that anyone who successfully completes their apprenticeship (and their probation period) will be offered a Band 2 post within the Trust.”

3 Take the time to put an effective programme in place

John: “The Trust initiated work on its apprenticeship programme with the changes in funding and the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy. Senior management and staff side then put a series of processes in place to move the apprenticeship agenda forward. It has been slow progress so far but there has been work at local level to increase the numbers involved in the new financial year.”

4 Fill the gaps in management support

John: “There wasn't a training programme in place for mentors, which is something the branch discussed because what we found was that staff across the organisation were being asked to become mentors who had never done any mentoring in their job roles previously. So having identified that shortfall, we are now in the process of putting a mentorship training programme in place.”

The Hertfordshire branch is delivering skills development workshops to apprentices to offer them support to progress through their apprenticeships.

Helping apprentices develop their skills

UNISON Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council have signed an Apprenticeship Partnership Agreement formalising their commitment to working together to promote the apprenticeship agenda.

UNISON Assistant Branch Secretary Janice Ford has taken on the role of Apprentice Lead for the branch and is involved in regular discussions with the HR and learning and development teams.

With the help of Regional Learning and Development Organiser Emily Sole, Janice has also delivered a series of skills development workshops at meetings of the apprenticeship network convened by the council.

UNISON is also playing a vital role in the development of the Hertfordshire Apprenticeship Alliance (HAA), an umbrella group for public service organisations that works to maximise opportunities generated by the levy.



With the Apprenticeship Levy estimated to generate around £20 million across the public sector in Hertfordshire, the HAA has benefited from UNISON expertise on skills shortages and new apprenticeship opportunities.

1 Apprentice Leads develop sustainability
Emily: *It's vital to encourage branches to work in partnership with employers, to get that dialogue going and to set up processes to ensure that dialogue continues. Having an apprentice lead in the branch is one of the most effective ways of doing that, someone who can act as a contact point for apprentices and attend apprenticeship meetings with employers. And if someone is interested in becoming apprentice lead, they can have further training to enable them to deliver skills development workshops, which makes this work much more sustainable in the long term.*



TOP TIP

Use our Kickstart grant

We can offer up to £250 to help you run workshops and events aimed at apprentices, which you can use, for example, to pay for refreshments and make your event more attractive to potential participants. To apply for funding, complete the application form and return it to kickstart@unison.co.uk. If you would like to discuss how to use Kickstart, contact Learning and Organising Services on 020 7121 5116.

● Download an application form at: <https://bit.ly/2DQBv3t>



2 Make sure you talk to apprentices at their inductions

Janice: “We are allowed to talk to any new apprentices (the bulk of apprenticeships at the council are taken up by young people). This means they at least know what a trade union is and how they can join us. We know that we need more young members, so this is a good way of making ourselves known to some younger people and it’s good publicity for UNISON.”

3 Offering concrete help boosts engagement

Janice: “We have collected some very positive feedback from the apprentices for the skills development workshops that we have delivered with them. We have covered social media, because that’s very important; your rights and responsibilities in the workplace; and staying strong, about tackling stress – a real mixture. They all take part in the discussions, which is really good. And they have all said they have learned something, which is the most important thing.”

4 Signing an apprenticeship agreement makes sense

Janice: “UNISON’s Apprenticeship Charter is nothing to be frightened of: it simply provides that element of formality that you can use if you need to.”

5 The partnership approach pays off for UNISON and the employer

Janice: “Working together on the apprenticeship agenda has enabled us to build on our relationship with Hertfordshire County Council because we’re offering them something that is of benefit to them.”

How partnership pays off for apprenticeships in the Liverpool City Region

Andy Thornton, who is the apprenticeship lead at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, offers his top tips for supporting apprentices.

1 First-hand experience of an apprenticeship helps provide insights

“When I completed my Level 3 apprenticeship in learning and development last year, it really opened my eyes. I deliberately did functional skills and all the tests any other apprentice would do. That gave me a lot more empathy both with apprentices doing the learning and also with managers who need to identify opportunities for the required 20 per cent dedicated learning time. It’s really important to understand that from both sides, because the 20 per cent is a significant commitment for managers to make, particularly in operational areas, but demonstrates the commitment we have to developing our people.”

2 Senior managers undertaking apprenticeships helps change people’s perceptions

“Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) offers apprenticeships across all levels of the workforce ranging from craft and administration, through to middle management,

project management and some Level 7 senior leadership standards such as MBAs. We need to dispel the perception that apprentices are focussed on young people in new jobs and one of the great ways to do that is having those senior managers undertaking apprenticeships. At our learning awards last year, I was up on stage saying, ‘I’m an apprentice too’, which is really important to demonstrate the value and versatility of apprenticeships right across the workforce.”

3 Partnership pays off with UNISON

“The partnership we have with UNISON and with other unions is an integral part of how we approach the apprenticeship offer. We discuss apprenticeships and other learning issues at the Joint Health, Safety, Wellbeing and Learning Forum, which is a joint management-union discussion forum. When we presented our apprenticeship figures at the forum recently, the ULRs were very positive about what we’re doing to support apprentices, so it’s an important forum that really works.”



4 We need to focus on support as well as reaching targets

“We need to ensure that apprentices are on the right framework or standard, and we need to make sure they are getting the support and encouragement they need to complete. Here at the LCRCA, we offer our apprentices lots of support, we make sure they get good-quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) from when they start to when they finish, and are offered mentoring and other learning opportunities. As well as achieving the government apprenticeship target, it is also important to ensure the quality of the learning experiences and completion rates.”

Working together to develop the workforce

Both management and unions strongly support apprenticeships at the LCRCA, which works to drive prosperity, encourage innovation and expand opportunities for people and communities in every part of the city region.

“We have 46 apprentices at the moment, which means we are at 5.75 per cent of the total workforce. Currently over one in 20 of our staff is now on an apprenticeship and we’re ahead of the government’s 2.3 per cent target, but we still have a lot of work to do to keep up the momentum and target the use of apprenticeships to support succession planning, skills gaps and workforce development,” says Andy Thornton.

There is a structured mentoring programme in place for all apprentices that the vast majority take advantage of, says Andy, who used to manage the UNISON / Union Learning Fund (ULF) project Merseylearn at the organisation for more than a decade.

While Andy himself is currently mentoring one of the senior leader degree apprentices, he also makes sure he keeps in touch with the entire cohort of apprentices to keep track of their progress.

“Our apprenticeships are a key tool in supporting change within the LCRCA, because our society is changing rapidly and we need our staff to have access to new skills, current technology and innovation to make sure we not only manage change but thrive on it,” says Andy.

Your apprenticeship checklist

Use this checklist to ensure you cover all the bases when planning and monitoring branch support for apprentices and apprenticeships.

- Place apprenticeships on branch committee agenda and identify branch apprenticeship lead, where possible
- Set up meeting with employer lead to identify areas where the branch and employer can work in partnership on apprenticeships
- Identify current apprentices, where they work and their completion dates
- Set up branch system for maintaining apprentice information e.g., compiling starters / leavers lists
- Secure agreement with employer for access to apprentices e.g., UNISON slot at inductions
- Support branch health and safety officer in ensuring employer carries out suitable and sufficient risk assessment, on all aspects of apprentices' work, before they start
- Promote reduced UNISON membership rate for apprentices
- Promote young members' group to all apprentices under the age of 27 who qualify for membership
- Place apprenticeships on agenda for JNC
- Negotiate apprenticeship agreement with employer – including endorsement of UNISON Apprenticeship Charter where possible
- Negotiate apprenticeship policy with employer
- Work with HR on recruitment procedures to ensure non-discrimination against protected groups
- Create regular forum where apprentices can discuss their concerns
- Talk to employer lead and learning and development team about learning opportunities UNISON can offer to enhance apprenticeship programmes, including functional skills courses for existing staff interested in undertaking apprenticeships
- Ensure employers offer mentoring training to existing staff interested in mentoring apprentices

To find out more and how to join contact:
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