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**Branch resource pack**

**UNISON is campaigning for a consistent approach to pay, good quality training, and supportive environments for our apprentice members.**

This pack is designed as a useful starting point for branches wishing to campaign on this locally to begin exploring apprenticeships taking place in Trusts, along with their terms and conditions.

You will find included:

* Existing UNISON materials
* Background on our May 2019 Freedom of Information request to Employers
* Questions to ask your Trust
* Case studies template

Please contact Bea Adi: health@unsion.co.uk with any questions and to share how you get on in your local campaign.

**A national picture**

Many apprentices continue to receive poor pay as part of their apprenticeship programmes. We hear too frequently that managing on very low wages has a direct impact on their quality of life. UNISON believes that combating poverty pay should be a priority, and that is why we are encouraging branches to stand up for apprentices, and create active local campaigns that ensure voices are heard.

Following the pay deal, we had hoped that discussions around pay for apprentices would have progressed and led to a national position that recognises the value that apprentices provide daily, across the NHS. Unfortunately, employers are blocking any meaningful progress, and we now require more support from branches in order to raise the profile of the issue.

We have remained involved in discussions about apprenticeship roles, and have been campaigning for funding to support higher level apprenticeships. We believe that such apprenticeships can help people deterred by student debt to qualify in shortage occupations such as nursing and allied health professions. It is no secret that apprenticeship levy funds are being lost by Trusts, just sitting in employer accounts. By demonstrating some flexibility and using unused funds in this way, a real difference can be made.

As part of efforts to build a national picture of apprenticeships, branches are encouraged to explore recruitment practices and build case studies from member experiences.

The quality of apprenticeships offered to members varies across different sites within the same employer, and there is often little meaningful engagement with UNISON reps around planning apprenticeships. UNISON is keen to push employers to take a strategic approach so that there is consistency across all apprenticeships.

UNISON’s [Apprenticeship charter](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2017/07/24508.pdf) details the rights all apprentices should have, along with the responsibilities of employers. These include providing a safe and healthy working environment and payment at the rate for the job.

The union wide [apprenticeships page](https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/young-members/key-issues/apprenticeships/) provides a number of resources, including a model apprenticeship agreement, and toolkit for negotiators and reps. Our [Apprentices in Health](https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/health-care/big-issues/apprentices-health-doesnt-add/) page explores the issues facing apprentices in Health, in more detail.

**What we are calling for:**

UNISON has developed a set of policy proposals on apprenticeships which we have been sharing with government, NHS bodies responsible for workforce and parliamentarians.

We are asking for:

1. **A policy change so that unused apprenticeship levy money from the NHS is not lost to companies in other sectors but retained within the NHS and put into a ring-fenced ‘*National NHS Apprenticeship Fund’*.** This would support expansion of the apprenticeship route to higher qualifications in the NHS. The fund should be used to cover the salary support and backfill costs which employers say they cannot currently afford.
2. **The Government, as part of its long-term ‘People Plan’ for the NHS, to invest additional money into the ‘*National NHS Apprenticeship Fund’* to ensure that apprenticeship routes into the healthcare professions can operate on a large enough scale.** This will help address the major workforce shortages that the student-loan funded routes and international recruitment cannot fill and evidence from previous schemes shows that staff coming through ‘earn while you learn’ routes have good retention rates once qualified.
3. **NHS employers to make good on their commitment to negotiate a new deal on apprentice pay to deliver arrangements for apprentices that are fair, transparent, and consistent across the NHS.** UNISON is calling for apprentice pay to be integrated within wider NHS pay arrangements as apprentices should be seen as valued part of the wider workforce. NHS pay arrangements include a minimum rate of £9.03ph to protect against low pay and an objective system for measuring jobs and allocating them to pay bands based on the level of skills and responsibilities required. Bringing apprentices into this system will ensure they are paid fairly for the work they do while accounting for the fact that their responsibilities may be significantly reduced while they are training for a role. It will also guard against equal pay issues where apprenticeships largely done by women are relatively under-paid. UNISON has also called for a pay scheme for degree apprenticeships, where there is a large amount of time spent off-site at universities, which would see their pay gradually increase as they develop skills over a four-year period.
4. **Flexibilities to allow NHS employers within an area to pool their levy funding so they can run joint schemes in order to gain better for value for money and share costs.**

**Freedom of Information (FOI) requests**

In May 2019, UNISON sent FOI requests to employers, seeking information on levy expenditure. Employers pay into the levy on a monthly basis and if they haven’t spent it 24 months later they lose it. Two years after the levy began we wanted to build a picture of how much levy money is going unused and therefore at risk of being clawed back by the Government. In many cases, our FOI highlighted discrepancies between the amounts paid into levy accounts, and that withdrawn.

You can access responses received from our FOI in the resources section [here](https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/health-care/big-issues/apprentices-health-doesnt-add/).

If findings are not available for your employer, please consider using the questions we asked in our FOI (below), and approach them directly.

**FOI questions**

Please could you provide data on the following:

**1)** Total amount of apprenticeship levy funds paid into your apprenticeship service account from May 2017 to April 2019

**2)** Total amount of apprenticeship levy funds withdrawn from your apprenticeship service account and used for training and/or assessment from May 2017 to April 2019

**3)** The lowest hourly rate of pay in use for an apprentice in April 2019

**Questions for your organisation**

In order to inform our work and ensure you are best equipped locally, branches are encouraged to approach their organisation, using the questions below as a guide.

* How many apprentices are employed and in which departments/units?
* What pay rates and contracts are being used?\*
* What support is in place for apprentices?
* Are apprentice job descriptions being put through local job matching processes to ensure fair and equal pay for these jobs?
* How many apprentices are offered permanent contracts of employment upon finishing their programme?
* Will the organisation consider signing up to UNISON’s apprenticeship charter?

\*In preparation for this you might want to have a look on your employer’s vacancies page and run a search on NHS Jobs where many apprentice vacancies are advertised with job descriptions and pay rates.

In addition to the questions above, it would be helpful to obtain information about how long staff stay within the organisation, for both apprentices and those in other roles. This could allow a discussion around investment in opportunities that allow staff from local communities to obtain new skills and remain with the Trust, following completion of their apprenticeship.

* How much has been spent in the last 12 months on staff hired outside the UK?
* Can information be provided on the average length of time staff hired from outside the UK remain employed by the organisation?

**Case studies template**

We have created the template below as a useful starting point to help shape discussions with apprentices, about their experiences at work. Please feel free to amend this to include more detail, particularly if you have had feedback from apprentices with emerging issues. You should be able to identify apprentices in your organisation by using RMS, or asking employers for access to information.

 **Name (optional)**

 **How long have you been an apprentice?**

 **Were you an existing member of staff?**

 **Please tell us your job title and salary including whether per hour or per annum**

**Please provide information on the quality of training you have received during your apprenticeship**

**Please rate the overall quality of your training out of 5 (1 being lowest, 5 highest)**

**Please tell us about what your apprenticeship – include day to day responsibilities**