

**ONE
TEAM**



UNISON
the public service union

Learning and development opportunities in the workplace for the Operational Services sector

Findings from the November 2017 UNISON survey

2017 Learning and development survey report

Introduction

The Operational services sector is formed of staff in a wide range of roles. Within this group, the roles with the largest membership include porters, cleaners, administrators, IT officers, and medical secretaries. Staff working in the sector make up a significant proportion of the NHS workforce and include many of the lower paid roles within the NHS. It is often the case however, that many face obstacles when attempting to access learning and development opportunities. Reasons for this are varied, although some staff have told us anecdotally that as they are often in non clinical roles, they do not feel prioritised when it comes to development.

As a result, in November 2017, UNISON undertook a survey of its members working in Operational services, to find out more about their experiences accessing learning and development opportunities. We wanted to gain an accurate picture directly from staff, to better understand the challenges faced, along with perceived attitudes from management.

Over 1800 people responded to our survey, and results in parts, make for grim reading. We found that when staff raise concerns with management about the quality of training available, they often see little change. UNISON is calling for Employers to act upon feedback provided by staff and implement real change, as a well trained workforce benefits not only organisations, but staff and patients too.

All staff, no matter their role, deserve to feel valued within the NHS. UNISON's One Team campaign aims to raise awareness about staff within the health service that are often forgotten or undervalued. Without learning and development opportunities that are accessible, there is a risk that many will fail to develop key knowledge that could help both themselves at work, and patients too. In addition, there may be an increased risk that staff will feel de-motivated and frustrated, leading to reduced retention rates. This of course, is likely to have a wider impact on the NHS.

Survey findings

In December, UNISON undertook a survey of members working in Operational services in order to gain a better understanding of staff experiences accessing learning and development opportunities. Over 1800 responses were received from staff working in various roles across the sector. Almost a third of respondents worked in administrative roles, and responses were received from staff working on hospital wards, as personal assistants, and support workers too.

Opportunities in the workplace

When asked to describe the learning and development opportunities available in the workplace, there was a 50/50 split amongst respondents who voted it as either excellent/good, or as bad/poor. It is positive to see when we look deeper into the responses, that 42% (the largest percentage) described opportunities as good.



It is important to note that how the availability of opportunities were described by participants, differed depending on gender. Most male participants described the above as poor (35%) and most females as good (56%). Of those who identify in another way to male or female, responses indicated that they too did not think opportunities available were excellent or good.

Availability of opportunity to staff in low paid bands

As part of the One Team campaign, UNISON has been raising awareness about the often limited opportunities that lower paid staff within the NHS experience, when trying to improve their skills and knowledge. The majority of our survey respondents stated they were in either band 2 or band 3 on the Agenda for Change pay scale and so we are therefore able to analyse responses from a snapshot of staff working in these bands.

Half (52%) of staff in bands 2 and 3 described the learning and development opportunities available to them as either bad or poor and 60% of this group had raised their concerns with management. Whilst it is encouraging to see that the majority of respondents felt confident

enough to approach managers with their concerns, it is disappointing to hear that over two thirds of respondents recorded that they saw no improvement in the quality of training, after doing so. This figure was even higher at 70%, if we include views from respondents outside bands 2 and 3.

For those in band 1, there was a 50/50 split amongst those who reported opportunities as either excellent/good, or bad/poor. 64% indicated that they had raised their concerns with management; however an alarming 68% confirmed that they had not seen any improvement in the quality of training.

Staff who had not approached management with their concerns provided reasons that showed the recurrence of shared themes including the perception that *“management is unapproachable”*, views raised previously had led to little or no change, and that *“they [management] do not listen”*.

UNISON believes it is important for Employers to create environments that encourage open communication about concerns around learning and development opportunities. Our survey shows that the failure of managers to act upon feedback is discouraging individuals from raising concerns, and causing a negative cycle that ultimately, sees the issue of poor quality training remain in place for many.

Bands 4 - 8

A slight majority (55%) of respondents in bands four to eight reported that learning and development opportunities were either excellent or good. Of those who described the quality of opportunities as bad or poor, over two thirds (69%) stated that they had raised these concerns with management; yet similarly to those in lower bands, the majority had not seen an improvement in training.

Staff who chose not to raise concerns with management echoed views of others in the sector, in bands 1-3. These included *“because we are always told there is no funding for courses. Therefore, what is the point”*, *“not much point”* and *“Aware of the financial constraints which prevent I & d”*

Accredited training

The quality of training provided by organisations should be an important consideration when we discuss learning and development and ways in which opportunities can become genuinely available.

Over half of respondents to our survey (57%) stated they had not had mandatory training in the last year. Of those that had completed this training, less than a third could confirm it was accredited.

UNISON believes suitable learning and development opportunities should be available to all working in the NHS, and that that opportunities available need to be of good quality. Our survey results indicating that a large number of respondents have not completed mandatory training in the last 12 months, raises concerns about how invested organisations are in monitoring training, as well as developing and encouraging learning and development opportunities.

Perceptions around access to training

How staff perceive the availability of training opportunities and to whom it is offered, is likely to have an impact on decisions to challenge management or not. For example, those in lower bands who feel opportunities are only offered to staff in higher bands may hesitate to initiate discussions.

42% of survey respondents stated they disagree with the statement “All staff have equal and fair opportunities to access training” and less than half (44%), agreed that the importance of development was valued at their workplace.

UNISON believes that Employers should not only be providing learning and development opportunities, but actively encouraging staff to explore these. When asked whether staff felt their employer encouraged members to undertake training and development opportunities, 47% reported that they did not believe this was true for them. There needs to be a shift in approach that sees such opportunities, as a key part of the workplace.

Conclusion

The availability of learning and development opportunities at work should be improving at all times. It is disappointing to hear from staff working in the Operational services sector, of which a significant proportion of roles within the NHS can be categorised as falling under; that often, the opportunities on offer are of bad or poor quality.

The NHS should be a place where individuals feel able to progress, with genuine learning and development opportunities that help shape careers. Where staff inform Employers about concerns, there must be a commitment to explore these, in order to provide improved opportunities. A failure to act from Employers, not only creates an environment that may limit staff coming forward, but also low morale amongst staff.

Some responses received from survey participants, mentioned limited resources and/or funding, impacting the provision of quality learning and development opportunities. UNISON continues to call on Government to consider the dangerous impact that funding cuts are having across a number of services.

For more information on the work UNISON does to champion staff working in the Operational services sector, please visit unison.org.uk/oneteam

Survey findings – in brief:

Key points

- UNISON's learning and development survey was circulated in November 2017 and received 1873 responses
- Responses were received from staff across all of UNISON's regions, with the most responses coming from the North West and Scotland regions
- 80% of respondents identified as female
- Respondents worked across a broad range of occupations within Operational services, including in domestic, clerical and management roles
- Half (49%) of respondents stated they were either in band 2 or band 3 on the Agenda for Change pay scale

Learning and development in the workplace

- 50/50 split amongst respondents who stated learning and development opportunities available at work were "excellent/good", or "bad/poor"
- Almost two thirds of respondents (64%) who thought learning and development opportunities were bad/poor had raised their views with management
- 68% of survey respondents who had raised their views with management reported seeing no improvement in the quality of training

Training

- 58% of respondents had not undertaken any mandatory training in the last year
- Less than a third (31%) could confirm that the mandatory training they had taken was accredited
- Only 42% agreed that all staff had equal and fair opportunities to access training
- 43% of respondents thought their employer encouraged them to undertake training and development opportunities