

Apprenticeships are Union Business

A guide for union negotiators and reps



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Foreword

Unions have a long history of involvement in apprenticeships. Many industries developed generations of apprentices who 'did their time' to learn their trades.

After years of decline, apprenticeships were reintroduced during the 1990s and today more people than ever have the chance to 'earn and learn'.

But this new apprenticeships picture now looks very different, which opens up new opportunities and challenges for unions.

Apprenticeships are available across a wide range of traditional sectors, as well as newer areas such as business

administration, retail, health and public services. Apprenticeships are now available to people of all ages.

Why is union involvement important?

Unions can help encourage more organisations to employ apprentices or up-skill existing workers.

And union involvement can secure a fair deal for apprentices, high quality learning and support, as well as a safe working environment and increased equality and diversity.

In turn, apprentices will experience the positive role that unions play in today's workplaces.

Union negotiators can help by putting apprenticeships on the bargaining agenda. And by working together, shop stewards, union learning representatives, health and safety reps and equality reps can support apprentices and secure a fair deal.

This bargaining guide provides an overview of apprenticeships, advice on bargaining around apprenticeships and practical suggestions for implementing high-quality apprenticeship programmes. We hope that you will offer your support.



Brendan Barber
TUC General Secretary



Billy Hayes
General Secretary,
CWU and Chair,
unionlearn Board

“ Unions can help encourage more organisations to employ apprentices or up-skill existing workers ”

Introduction

Apprenticeships have existed for hundreds of years but had fallen into decline until a decade ago when the scheme underwent a resurgence. The number of people starting apprenticeships has risen from 65,000 in 1996/97 to **184,000 in 2006/07** and the Government is committed to boosting the number of apprenticeship starts in England to over 250,000 by 2020.

The diversity in programmes available today means that there will be apprenticeships in the sectors covered by most unions. While more traditional apprenticeships continue, the largest area of expansion has been in the service sector – comprising half of the 10 most popular apprenticeships.

During 2009, a draft bill will go before Parliament proposing measures to realise the Government's commitment on numbers and to ensure that apprenticeships provide a high-quality route for young workers – and adults in some cases – to acquiring skills. The Bill is expected to lead to new standards in late 2009, please check the TUC website for more information.

The TUC has strongly supported the Government's commitment to raise the number and quality of apprenticeships and broadly welcomed the draft Bill. However, more could be done to increase employers' engagement with high-quality apprenticeships.

In the sustainable economy of the future apprentices must have the opportunity to develop transferable skills, as well as the opportunity for progression.

The expansion of apprenticeships must be backed by increased efforts to ensure that all programmes are of a high quality and lead to good jobs, and that expansion has tackling inequality and improving diversity at its heart.

Union negotiators and reps – including learning reps, equality reps and safety reps – have a key role to play through collective bargaining in encouraging more employers to set up quality apprenticeships, allowing under-represented groups to access them and ensuring that all apprentices receive good training, decent pay and a safe working environment.



And apprenticeships provide an ideal opportunity for unions to recruit and organise young workers who are currently under-represented at all levels in the union movement.

This guide aims to help full-time officers and senior union representatives in getting apprenticeships on the bargaining agenda, in supporting and organising apprentices and in building equality and diversity.

A close-up, monochromatic photograph of a woman with glasses and traditional jewelry, including a necklace and bangles, working on a piece of jewelry. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark green filter. The text 'About apprenticeships' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

About apprenticeships

What are apprenticeships?

Apprenticeships provide the opportunity to gain job-related skills and qualifications through on-the-job and off-the-job training. An apprentice learns by working alongside more experienced employees and by being shown how to do specific work tasks, with support from a workplace mentor and/or union rep.

Time away from the job is given to help the apprentice build knowledge and understanding that underpins the role and to gather evidence to demonstrate that knowledge and understanding. This off-the-job training is delivered by an approved training provider in most cases, although some large employers have accredited on-site training.

There are now more than 200 different apprenticeships on offer across a wide range of industrial sectors, from retail to nuclear power. There are two main programmes: Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships. The programmes are generally aimed at 16- to 24-year-olds, but there are an increasing number of opportunities for older workers accessing them through adult apprenticeships.

Industry-led sector skills councils develop apprenticeships for their specific sectors. In England, Apprenticeships are managed and funded through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). From April 2009, the National Apprenticeships Service will assume end-to-end responsibility for the delivery of Apprenticeships. In Scotland, the Skillseekers and Modern Apprenticeship programmes are run by Scottish Enterprise; in Wales the Welsh Assembly runs National Traineeships and Modern Apprenticeships; and in Northern Ireland the Department for Employment and Learning runs Jobskills and Modern Apprenticeships.



Each apprenticeship has a framework that sets out the qualifications an apprentice is expected to leave with. The following are mandatory outcomes in England:

- a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 for Apprentices and Level 3 for Advanced Apprentices

- key skills qualifications (which are transferable work-related skills)
 - application of number and communication are mandatory

- a technical certificate relevant to the work sector, such as BTEC National Diploma or City & Guilds Progression award

- a knowledge of employment rights and responsibilities, which must include equality of opportunity and health and safety, and may have other elements depending on the specific sector.

Some apprenticeships require other specific qualifications important to the work area, such as food hygiene. All English frameworks are summarised at www.apprenticeships.org.uk

For information on apprenticeships in other countries of the UK, visit:

Scotland:

www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk

Wales:

www.careerswales.com/home

Northern Ireland:

www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills/apprenticeshipsni.htm

Making the case to employers

There are many benefits to employers running apprenticeship programmes that can be raised by union negotiators when making their case.

The most obvious is to plug skills gaps in the medium term or to bring new skills to the organisation. This was a key motivation for British Gas, which has recently expanded its recruitment of apprentice gas engineers (see case study on page 8).

Employers stand to gain from being provided with apprenticeship learning plans designed externally. The Government provides funding for the training element (although there are some differences in the amount of funding available based on sector and age of the apprentice: more details are available in the TUC/unionlearn toolkit *Apprenticeships are Union Business: a detailed overview of apprenticeships* – see Further Information on page 41).

Organisations offering apprenticeships generally experience a positive return on their investment and reduced costs through higher productivity and quality of work (e.g. see www.employersforapprentices.gov.uk/docs/research/Research_1_521.pdf). They also enjoy better rates of staff retention and employee satisfaction.

Maintaining investment in training is important even during a difficult economic climate, and organisations that continue to do so will be better

placed for the future. Cuts in training from earlier recessions have left many industries with chronic skills shortages.

The Government has continued to increase funding for apprenticeship places. Rolls Royce has announced its intention to take on 50 extra apprentices in addition to the 170 it had planned to take on in 2009. This is in line with the views expressed by a range of companies who told the *Financial Times* at the end of 2008 that they would maintain, and in some cases increase, their recruitment of apprentices. These range from defence manufacturer BAE Systems to catering giant Compass Group.



“There are now more than 200 different apprenticeships on offer across a wide range of industrial sectors, from retail to nuclear power”

Other points that can be used to make the case include:

- an apprenticeship programme retains knowledge and experience within the organisation and passes it on to successive generations of workers
- recruitment of apprentices can develop valuable links with local schools and the wider community
- apprenticeships are well structured and require commitment from the apprentice, meaning they are more likely to be a committed and motivated member of the workforce

- apprenticeships can help the employer meet various good employer marks, such as Investors in People, and demonstrate their commitment to learning under the Skills Pledge
- employers who support apprenticeships are contributing to the country's industrial future
- well implemented apprenticeships can address inequalities, particularly in the organisation's age profile.



Photo: Mark Thompson

CASE STUDY



British Gas

The GMB negotiates around apprenticeships at British Gas. In September 2008 British Gas trebled its recruitment of apprentice gas engineers in a bid to tackle a 20,000 shortfall in domestic gas engineers, creating 1,000 new jobs over 18 months. During the year it took on 400 apprentices and plans to recruit another 575 in 2009 and a further 600 in 2010.

These apprentices will study to NVQ Level 3 through the company's Academy training centres established in 2003, and will also receive energy efficiency training. The length of their training has recently increased from 12 to 18 months.

The expansion is a testament to the return the company feels it gains from

the programme, with a spokesperson saying: "Research has shown our apprentices to be 25 per cent more efficient and customer focused than employees trained elsewhere."

The company feels the programme has delivered "exceptional success, with retention rates at 96 per cent for those recruits who join and remain in training through to completion... furthermore, 90 per cent of apprentices are still with the company after five years."

The GMB welcomed the £40m investment and its commitment to use it to further increase the number of women engineers, which has risen from four to 13 per cent over the last two years.





Making the most of purchasing power

Both public sector and private organisations can use their purchasing power to increase the number of apprenticeship places in their workplaces.

The public sector spends over £150bn a year on goods and services, while private sector organisations often have influence through their supply chains.

Public procurement and supply chains can help build the skills of an industry, as well as opportunities for workers.

In bargaining, union officers and reps can ask public and private sector employers to boost the availability of apprenticeships by using their purchasing power.

Public sector procurement

Public sector procurement is regulated by European law. It is possible to require social clauses be built into the contracting of goods and services – as long as it is made clear in the tendering documents from the outset.

A possible approach could be to add a clause in tender documents that “by agreement between the organisation and recognised trade unions, a proportion of staff required to complete the works will be apprentices employed by the contractor [or sub-contractor] who are engaged in a recognised apprenticeship programme”.

Further information about including social issues in public procurement is available in the Office of Government Commerce (2008) document *Buy and Make a Difference: How to Address Social Issues in Public Procurement* available at: www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Social_Issues_in_Public_Procurement.pdf

Private sector supply chains

Private sector employers can also require potential contractors to meet social objectives such as building skills and employment through apprenticeships.

Good practice would mean including a requirement for apprentices to be clearly indicated in tendering documents.

Checklist:

- Ask employers if they have considered requiring their contractors to employ apprentices.
- If not, ask them to include a clause about apprenticeships in tendering documents.
- In the public sector, refer to the guidance on how to address social issues in public procurement detailed above.



CASE STUDY



Construction unions and Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA)

In 2008, the construction unions signed a memorandum of understanding with the ODA covering pay, conditions and apprenticeships. The ODA has now announced a contractual requirement for future ODA contractors to commit to 3 per cent of their Olympic Park workforce being apprentices, covering new contracts worth

a total of around £500 million. This reflects the average level of apprenticeships for England and Wales (3 per cent of the workforce) and exceeds the average for London and the South East. This is in addition to an existing commitment to 2,000 apprentice and trainee places.

What makes a good apprenticeship?

Elements of a good apprenticeship programme

If negotiators and reps are successful in getting the subject of apprenticeships on the bargaining agenda, the next step is to work with employers to ensure they provide good quality programmes.

The following sections give guidance on the kind of areas negotiators need to think about. They also contain examples of good practice in unionised workplaces. The elements of a good apprenticeship programme include:

- **Equality and diversity** – putting in place strategies to ensure apprenticeships are open to the widest possible demographic
- **Employee status and job guarantee** – apprentices should have proper contracts of employment. Every effort is made to ensure apprentices complete their apprenticeship and secure a decent job

→ **Pay** – negotiators should try to get apprentices onto main pay structures for the job; or on good percentage rates; and to have fast incremental increases

→ **Learning and training** – training must be of good quality with adequate paid time off the job for learning and study

→ **Mentoring and support** – there should be a clear system for supervision, support and mentoring, ideally with union involvement

→ **Health and safety** – ensure full account is taken of the extra hazards for inexperienced workers, particularly young people; that they get fully safety trained and that health and safety on programmes is regularly reviewed

CASE STUDY



Apprentices at Vale INCO

Some of the best arrangements for apprentices are in the traditional craft sectors, such as construction and engineering, and principles from these can be used as models for the newer programmes being set up in other parts of the economy.

Unite is active in promoting the employment of apprentices at metal processing company Vale INCO, and takes an active interest in their training. The result is a good-quality and well organised apprenticeship programme.

The company employs four engineering apprentices in its refinery and intends to employ them all on completion of their apprenticeship. Apprentice pay starts at

£9,948 a year (as at January 2009), rising to £18,592 in year four, and apprentices have full employee status, receiving parity of conditions, including company bonus and overtime for training purposes.

Apprentices are given one day a week to attend technical college plus reasonable time off for training and study. Support is given to their training from in-house or external sources.

Close attention is given to apprentices' health and safety. For example, until the final year of their apprenticeship they are accompanied at all times by an experienced craftsman and are prohibited from undertaking tasks involving the wearing of breathing apparatus.



Equality and diversity

If employers – and workers – are to benefit fully from an expansion of the apprenticeship system it is important to ensure that all sections of the potential workforce get access to the programmes, and are not put off by the traditional image that apprenticeships are only for white, non-disabled, young men.

During 2006–07 the proportion of female apprentices had increased to 45.8 per cent following the expansion of apprenticeships from traditional craft-based jobs to a wider range of occupations. However, women are under-represented in sectors such as construction and engineering, which tend to have superior pay and prospects (see section on Pay on page 20).

In addition, only six per cent of those starting apprenticeships are from ethnic minorities, even though they make up nine per cent of England's population. And while the 12 per cent of apprenticeship starters who have disabilities is reasonably reflective of wider society, only five per cent of those on advanced apprenticeships are disabled.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) shows how the overall

percentage figures mask inequalities among apprentices. In one of the best paying sectors, engineering, for example, only two per cent of apprentices are female, only four per cent are from ethnic minorities, and only six per cent have a learning difficulty, disability or health problem. The figures are similar in plumbing.

On the flip side, in one of the lowest paying sectors – children's care, learning and development – only 3 per cent of apprentices are male; 10 per cent are from ethnic minorities; and eight per cent have a learning difficulty, disability or health problem.

The EHRC points out that, by 2010, less than 20 per cent of the full-time workforce will be comprised of white, non-disabled men aged under 45. It says the best employers will benefit from opening up their apprenticeships to the increasingly diverse workforce of the future. It also notes that the sectors facing skill shortages have low numbers of female and ethnic minority employees.





While managers and union reps may think apprenticeships are being offered on an equal basis, the figures show otherwise, and special measures may have to be used to fully tap into the potential of all groups.

There are many benefits for employers in recruiting apprentices into atypical areas, including: ensuring workforces are more representative of the communities in which they are located; creating routes into management for a wider group of people; and extending to a more diverse group the advantages of employee satisfaction and staff retention, with all the ensuing cost savings.

Union negotiators can make these points to employers when discussing potential apprenticeship programmes. This can also be a good opportunity to get women and ethnic minority members involved in a process in which they may not normally be particularly active.

If there is an equality rep on site, they could be the ideal person to raise these issues and follow them through. If there is no equality rep, it may be a good time to see if any union member is interested in taking on the role.

The EHRC has set out a range of strategies for achieving better diversity in apprenticeship programmes that

negotiators/equality reps can discuss and, if appropriate, propose to management:

- Be proactive in apprentice recruitment, for example by adopting positive action strategies to encourage applications from under-represented groups.
- Ensure that marketing materials – like leaflets and posters – portray a diverse range of individuals.
- Review recruitment and selection criteria to ensure they do not contain outdated, narrow or irrelevant criteria that may exclude or discourage some people.
- Consider giving all 'atypical' applicants who meet the minimum selection criteria an interview.
- Carry out equality and diversity training for managers and others involved in recruitment, to ensure they are aware of the business case for diversity and are able to make decisions free from bias.

CASE STUDY



CWU and BT

The CWU has campaigned with telecoms firm BT to get more women and people from ethnic minority communities into engineering roles, many starting off as apprentices.

BT's Openreach operation (which looks after local access networks) tackled the perceived diversity problem by:

- creating job adverts for engineers targeted at women
- placing real-life role models and stories in women's and gay-orientated magazines

- launching an internet campaign to attract women into engineering jobs in BT Openreach and as apprentices in BT generally, and
- making use of internal BT support networks and events.

The campaign was highly successful, initially doubling the numbers of women recruited, albeit from a very low base. At the end of the project, the proportion of women recruited had risen from two to seven per cent.





- Consider how and where flexible working can be promoted and implemented within the organisation to attract and retain talented apprentices and workers.
- Establish good links with local schools and offer work experience placements, single-sex taster days and open days.
- Give presentations in schools and colleges, and at careers fairs, to generate interest among target groups.
- Work in partnership with sector skills councils to build links between business and education.
- Ask current apprentices and employees from under-represented groups to act as role models. This can help to inspire young people by highlighting the benefits and satisfaction of a particular career, and by providing clear evidence that it is possible to overcome barriers.

- Target particular groups by holding recruitment days at community events and locations they tend to visit. Larger employers could consider using outreach workers with which the target group can identify.
- Consider working with training providers and other organisations that are actively involved in training atypical apprentices.
- Get involved in project-based programmes to increase opportunities to recruit, train and support non-traditional apprentices.

The Communication Workers Union and BT successfully used some of these strategies to recruit women engineers, many of whom came in as apprentices, though more recently recruitment into the company generally has slowed (see opposite).

Another approach to attracting what the EHRC calls 'atypical' applicants is to avoid unnecessary entry criteria for apprentices. A draft programme for Nottingham Council leisure centres (which has undergone a successful pilot) wants to attract a wide range of young applicants "to include people that would not traditionally apply for city council jobs". It states:

"To facilitate this there will be no qualification requirement as a condition of recruitment. Candidates will undergo an initial assessment to ensure that they have the abilities required to complete the apprenticeship framework. If support needs are identified at initial assessment and candidates are otherwise appointable to the post, support will be provided to develop specific skills that will enable the apprentice to obtain maximum benefit from their training and achieve accreditation."

CASE STUDY



Unite and Ford



For the women tool makers at Ford, who are all members of Unite, training and skills are a way of life. They have all completed the four-year apprenticeship the job requires and are now working side-by-side with male colleagues. It is clear from talking to them that they love their jobs and appreciate the opportunity Ford and the apprenticeship scheme has offered them.

These opportunities include working for a multi-national company, working with colleagues who have years of experience

and knowledge, and being given the chance to build on the training they have already undertaken with opportunities for foundation and higher degrees.

All of the women reported the positive benefits of 'earning while learning' and said they felt engineering and manufacturing were not given a high enough profile. They also felt that employers could be missing out on competent and capable prospective apprentices because of a lack of marketing.

However, for some industrial sectors there will be clearly defined entry criteria. Reps and unions can be supportive in assisting prospective apprentices to understand these criteria before they apply by offering them guidance on how to access and achieve the qualifications necessary.

Other approaches could include an entrance exam rather than pre-qualification requirements, as some employers can set pre-qualifications too high.

Older workers

Unions – and some employers – are increasingly looking to broaden access to apprenticeships to workers aged 25 and over. They are hoping to tap into a large increase in funding for adult skills and apprenticeships announced by the Government in 2007.

Adult apprenticeships offer the existing workforce and new entrants opportunities for up-skilling. This has been identified

as a way to open pathways for women returning to the labour market into better paid, non-traditional areas of employment.

The PCS civil service union, facing widespread redundancies, is particularly interested in opening central government apprenticeships to existing, older staff.

A pilot Apprenticeships Pathfinder was launched in 2008 in five government departments in areas such as customer service, business administration, team leader and first-line management. It has no age limit, is focused on adults already working in the civil service and aims to help them achieve a Level 3 qualification.

PCS has urged local negotiators to ensure that the apprenticeships should go to staff who have an out-of-date Level 2 or 3 qualification, as well as those with no qualifications.

Employers may be more willing to open programmes to adults in areas where there are particular skills shortages, such

as at the supermarket giant Sainsbury's, where six per cent of its apprentices are aged over 25.

The store had a clear need to retain skills in its bakery section – a key area of business development. It developed a bakery apprenticeship, open to all workers, irrespective of age, to “redress difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled bakers in a tight and restricted market where there is a lack of people entering employment”.

Adult apprentice bakers are taken on at Sainsbury's recruitment rate (currently £5.92) and, once qualified, receive the higher rate of around £6.80 (depending on region), including a skills supplement introduced after it was raised by USDAW during the 2007 wages review.

Sainsbury's won an award from the Employers Forum on Age for the programme – see www.efa.org.uk/latest/downloads/awards%20brochure%20FINAL.pdf

CASE STUDY



Adult apprenticeships

Adult apprenticeships can make a big difference to the lives of workers. As a grade 3 production group leader at Ford, Unite member Eddie realised he was unable to progress higher in his work with the qualifications he had and that he needed to retrain. Eddie left school with no qualifications and like many others only realised what a problem this could be as an adult.

Eddie set about changing his life chances and undertook a City & Guilds in Communication Skills; this led to an application for the Adult Apprenticeship programme at Ford. Eddie was accepted

and as part of the initial assessment he was awarded credits for his recent City & Guilds qualification and his experience as a group leader.

Eddie said, “going back to school at 38 was a little daunting to say the least,” but he acknowledges that the group he was with supported each other and the instructors and tutors were knowledgeable and helpful. He also mentioned that working with experienced fitters at Ford was important too, as they are passing over their extensive knowledge and experience to new workers like Eddie.



Employee status and job guarantee

Negotiators should aim to ensure that apprentices have employee status – that is a contract of employment with the employee for at least the duration of the training.

At metal processing company Vale INCO, where Unite has been active in promoting apprenticeships, apprentices have full employee status and are entitled to staff conditions such as the company bonus and overtime payments.

Another key point to consider is the likelihood of the apprentice gaining a permanent job on completion of the apprenticeship. At Thales Optronics instrument maker, for example, a permanent job is guaranteed. While most programmes do not give a cast-iron guarantee, traditionally most successful apprentices do in practice end up as a member of the permanent workforce.

The apprentice may be employed as an employee on a fixed-term contract, but this gives them some security, as well as basic employee conditions and rights.

It is important to negotiate a system that builds in a good chance of apprentices ending up with a job, as indicated by the

National Union of Journalists rep at the Birmingham Post and Mail. Although the newspaper group does not guarantee apprentice journalists a permanent job, in recent years apprentices have generally been given jobs to fill vacancies that have arisen during their training. Unfortunately the union is concerned that, in the current climate of recession and redundancies, this may not continue.

UNISON's model apprenticeship agreement proposes that apprentices are appointed into fixed-term contracts on the basis that it will take a set number of years to become competent in their role. It then says: "Thereafter, subject to satisfactory assessment, apprentices will be appointed into the substantive post and receive the appropriate pay rate."

UNISON and Lancashire County Council have agreed a 'prior consideration process', which means that, once the apprentice reaches 21 months into their 24-month training contract, if a post becomes available of the same grade they will be given a prior consideration interview before the post goes to advert.



Photo: Duncan Phillips/reportdigital.co.uk

“ It is important to negotiate a system that builds in a good chance of apprentices ending up with a job ”



Given the expansion and diversity of apprenticeships, the nature of the labour market will also influence the union approach, for example in the film industry (see case study below).

Checklist

- Ensure apprentices have a contract of employment.
- Build in a guarantee of a permanent job after successful completion, or at least make every effort to ensure apprentices complete their apprenticeship and get a fair chance to secure a decent job
- Develop a union approach that is relevant to the industry.
- Share experiences within and between unions.

CASE STUDY



BECTU and the film industry

'Grips' are technicians responsible for erecting and operating specialist equipment to achieve camera movements in the film and TV industry. Much of the equipment is hazardous – for example, in using counter-weighted cranes – and the job is safety-critical. Like most film industry technicians, grips are freelance. They are engaged film by film, and have no permanent employer. This posed a real challenge when it came to setting up an apprenticeships programme.

The solution has been to pool resources across the industry. The apprenticeship programme is co-ordinated by Ealing Institute for the Media, a further education college that is accredited by Skillset, the sector skills council, as a recognised industry 'academy'.

The Institute organises off-the-job education, and oversees the grips' equipment rental companies, which have undertaken to 'share out' apprenticeship placements between them. In addition, apprentices are placed on films as and when the opportunities arise.

Apprenticeships last two years, and with financial support from Skillset, apprentices receive a weekly wage of £300. The film and entertainment trade union BECTU has been fully involved in helping devise the programme and has access to the apprentices throughout.

On completion, apprentices are eligible to register for their Level 2 City & Guilds Grips Qualification: it is BECTU policy that all UK grips should be formally qualified.





Pay: the legal framework

Apprentices under the age of 19 are not covered by the national minimum wage (NMW), nor are those aged 19 or over in their first year of an apprenticeship.

The only lower limit on young apprentices' pay is a requirement of the Learning and Skills Council, which funds apprentice training in England, of £80 a week, which will rise to £95 a week in August 2009.

In other parts of the UK there is no centrally set wage minimum for apprentices. Non-waged apprentices are entitled to £55 a week in Scotland, £50 in Wales and £40 in Northern Ireland, while the amount paid to waged apprentices is set at a local level for 16- to 18-year-olds and for older apprentices in their first year.

Naturally, the TUC welcomes the increase in the minimum rate in England to £95 – the first rise since 2005. But it points out that, in practice, it only affects apprentices in sectors that actually pay the minimum rate, such as retail, childcare and hairdressing.

The Low Pay Commission has been consulting over apprentices' exemption from the national minimum wage. Unions, the TUC and young people's

organisations have made strong submissions arguing for a removal of the exemption. The outcome of the consultation will be known in May 2009.

A survey by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) found that average net pay per week for an apprentice in 2007 was £170, but this masks large variations across industry sectors. The lowest average rate was in hairdressing, at £109 a week, and the highest was in electrotechnical, where it was £210.

Union role

One of the key issues for union negotiators, then, is to ensure apprentices are paid a decent wage.

Research carried out in 2006 by the Labour Research Department confirmed that union organisation and negotiation gives apprentices the best chance of receiving decent pay. (Labour Research Department (2006), *Workplace Report*, No. 38, July 2006).

The survey of 180 apprentice arrangements, largely from unionised workplaces, but also some non-



unionised ones, showed that in unionised workplaces, apprentice pay levels often meet the NMW rate for 18- to 20-year-olds – and may even exceed the adult rate of NMW.

Around 30 per cent of apprentice arrangements with pay reached by collective agreement with unions met the adult NMW rate. Another 30 per cent met the rate for 18- to 20-year-olds and another 25 per cent met the rate for 16- to 17-year-olds.

At the bottom of the scale, however, around 10 per cent paid less than £3 an hour to new apprentices, including all pay rates collated from non-unionised workplaces.

Making the case for higher rates

There are good moral and business reasons for employers to pay apprentices a decent wage.

Rising costs of basics like food, fuel and housing mean it is increasingly difficult for young workers to manage on a wage below the national minimum. Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

shows that a single person with no dependents living in council housing needs at least £257 a week to afford a basic, but acceptable standard of living (www.minimumincomestandard.org).

And it should not be assumed that families of apprentices can supplement their children's wages. As UNISON points out: "Low-income families, where young people are most in need of a route into employment, are likely to be least able to subsidise their children's apprenticeship."

Low pay rates for apprentices lead to a high apprenticeship drop-out rate (of around a third), representing a serious loss of investment for employers.

The YWCA charity says that many of the disadvantaged young women it works with find the money offered on apprenticeships is not enough and they are tempted away by better paid jobs with no training.

Similarly, the National Union of Students says that wage levels for up to 40 per cent of apprentices remains below levels that could be achieved taking a job without

Photo: Simon Weller



training at the minimum wage and is a major reason for many apprentices quitting their programme.

Completion rates improved nationally from 24 per cent in 2001–02 to 63 per cent in 2005 when the recommended minimum rate rose to £80. UNISON highlights the efforts of North Yorkshire County Council, whose Real Start apprentice programme sees the majority of apprentices paid on full rates within six months (see page 24). Only three of 200 apprentices on Real Start have not completed their course over the last two years, a non-completion rate of just 1.5 per cent.

Pay gap

In addition, the very low rates of pay are contributing to a much bigger earnings deficit for women, ethnic minority and disabled apprentices than in the workforce at large.

The Government's equalities watchdog, the EHRC, has provided evidence that women, disabled and ethnic minority apprentices dominate low-paid, poorer quality apprenticeships

“ Apprentices should always be entitled to the same terms and conditions, such as sick leave and holiday entitlement, as their colleagues ”



offering “little in the way of pay returns, career development or progression opportunities” (see page 13).

Bargaining on pay

Traditionally it has been accepted that apprentices are not paid the full rate for the job they are training to do in return for receiving high-quality, on-the-job learning. On most programmes in unionised workplaces they are paid an increasing percentage of the full rate wage for the relevant job.

The most common formulation involves annual progression based on time served as an apprentice, but in some cases it is

based on age or qualifications achieved / milestones passed.

Starting percentages can be 40 to 50 per cent of comparable full-time pay, rising each year to 80 or 90 per cent after four years. A traditional union aspiration is 80 per cent.

For example, under the NHS’s Agenda for Change national agreement, trainees who are more than three years from completion are paid at 60 per cent of the band maximum for the job, rising incrementally to 75 per cent within a year of completion. These percentage rates are subject to a minimum of the adult rate of the NMW.

CASE STUDY



Public sector: craft apprentices in local authorities

A good example of percentage rates is those negotiated by Unite, the GMB and UCATT for craft apprentices in the local authorities national agreement.

These give 16- to 17-year-old apprentices 55 per cent of the qualified rate in their first year, rising to 95 per cent on passing their skills test or NVQ Level 2. This means (from April 2008) apprentice builders started on

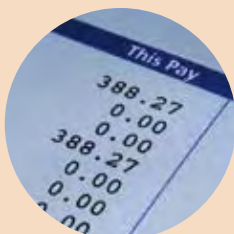
£150.99 a week, plumbers on £161.69 and engineers and electricians on £166.90.

Apprentice builders aged 18 or over start on 85 per cent of the qualified rate giving them a starting rate of £233.35. Apprentice plumbers and electricians start on 80 per cent, which is £235.17 for plumbers and £242.77 for engineers and electricians.

Private sector: engineering apprentices in Stagecoach

Good percentage rates for apprentices apply in a number of the bus company Stagecoach’s local agreements, including the East Midlands and Chesterfield agreements. Here the RMT has negotiated for engineering apprentices to start on

60 per cent of the skilled day rate, rising to 70 per cent in year two, 80 per cent in year three and 90 per cent in year four. This gives the apprentices (from April 2008) a starting rate of £221.52 for a 39-hour week.





National agreements

British Furniture Trade JIC

Rates negotiated by the GMB in the British Furniture Trade national agreement are set out below.

GMB	Age 16 - £3.21
1 Jan 2008	Age 17 - £3.99
(under review)	Age 18 - £4.73
	Age 19 and above - £6.11

Electrical JIB

The Joint Industry Board for the Electrical Contracting Industry is the partnership arrangement between Unite (Amicus Section) and the Electrical Contractors Association (ECA). The aim of the board is generally to improve the industry, its status and its productivity in the interests of the employers, employees and the nation.

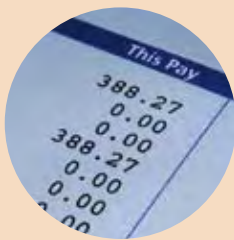
The national agreement includes arrangements for apprentices. These contain two different wages rates, depending on whether the employer transports them to the site or whether they provide their own transport.

Regarding off-the-job training, the agreement stages that:

"All apprentices will be required to attend college, or any other approved training establishment, as approved by the training agent. By the contractual agreement to train, the employer must allow the apprentice to attend college at the designated times in order to complete the off-the-job vocational education and training elements required to complete the scheme.

"For each college/training day, where not recoverable from other sources, the employer will meet any fees applicable to the scheme and pay the apprentice's normal working days' pay, plus the actual fares incurred."

Grade	Transport provided	Own transport
Stage 1	£3.96	£4.64
Stage 2	£5.84	£6.53
Stage 3	£8.46	£9.16
Stage 4	£8.95	£9.66



Apprentice journalists at the Birmingham Post and Mail start on 70 per cent of the senior rate, rising to 90 per cent as training progresses and 100 per cent on passing the final exams. The NUJ has an agreement that apprentices are put in for their exams at the earliest opportunity.

However, there can be problems with percentage approaches, particularly as apprentices in many sectors are now doing a full job very soon after they are taken on. Of course, apprentices should not be doing a full job. However research by UNISON found that apprentices very often carried out the same tasks as their colleagues, but for significantly less money. As well as being unfair to the apprentice, this also means that low rates for apprentices have the potential to undercut negotiated rates of full-time staff where employers are under budgetary pressure to fill posts cheaply.

It is therefore important to try and negotiate a rate for apprentices based as far as possible on the full rate for the job. The programme at North Yorkshire County Council allows most apprentices to reach the rate for the job after six months.

UNISON's own model apprenticeship agreement recommends that apprentice salaries be paid on the bottom point of the appropriate grade, following which the apprentice should be appointed to the substantive post and receive the appropriate pay rate.

Apprentices should always be entitled to the same terms and conditions, such as sick leave and holiday entitlement, as their colleagues.

Checklist for negotiators

- Apprentice rates should reflect the job done – if the apprentice does a full job they should be paid for it, or quickly progress to that point.
- If percentage rates are negotiated, they should start as high as possible and progress by time served or milestones reached, rather than by age.
- As the Government is considering ending the exemption from the NMW rates, a link with these could be used.
- Aim for apprentices to have the same sick pay, leave and other conditions as non-apprentices.
- In industries like construction with nationally agreed apprentice pay, ensure the local employer is complying with the agreement.

CASE STUDY



North Yorkshire – quick progression

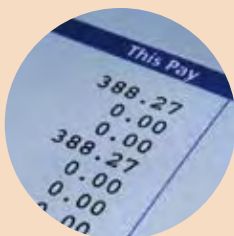
North Yorkshire County Council's Real Start apprenticeship programme provides "high quality training, quick progression to full, negotiated pay rates and permanent jobs" according to UNISON, which has negotiated the programme with the authority.

The programme is open to people aged 16–24 and by 2007–08 it offered 120 apprenticeships with a target of 150 in 2008–09.

The workers begin on the minimum £80 a week "but get the same package as

everyone else in terms of annual leave, sickness benefits and so on," says Justine Brooksbank, the council's assistant chief executive for human resources.

Apprentices move on to the full rate for the job once they reach the required competence standard, usually within the first six months of their apprenticeship. Where full pay cannot be offered within the first year, pay is increased at three, six and nine months from the initial £80 to £188 a week. Apprentices can also receive assistance with travel costs of more than £10 a week.





Training and support for apprentices

The expansion of apprenticeships must not come at the cost of quality, and particularly with the growth of expertise around learning, unions are well placed to ensure good quality training, as well as time off for study and solid mentoring and support.

Ensuring this may be the responsibility of the senior steward, but in many workplaces there are specialist union learning representatives (ULRs).

Union learning representatives

ULRs have statutory rights to promote learning or training with their colleagues and to work with their employers and local providers to ensure all the workforce can take up the opportunities.

There are over 20,000 ULRs trained to provide information and advice about learning or training and to work with employers to identify and help meet the needs of the workforce in these areas.

ULRs work closely with the senior steward at the workplace. ULRs can provide a

mentoring role within the apprenticeship system, as well as support apprentices in learning and career development. Some ULRs have also been accredited as trainers and assessors in support of apprentices.

If there aren't ULRs in the workplace, the introduction and support of apprenticeships can provide a good opportunity to recruit for these posts.

Training and study

Union negotiators and ULRs will want to ensure that apprenticeship programmes in their workplace identify a clear programme of training that apprentices will undertake, including time spent off the job (at college, or in dedicated training centres at the workplace, or for private study), the required qualifications and the timescale of the programme. Apprentices should always be working towards National Vocational Qualifications and other learning (see page 6), provided and supervised by a reputable training provider.





In a sector that has been running craft apprenticeships for many years this is likely to be well understood, but in some of the newer sectors union reps/negotiators may feel it is useful for this to be set out formally. Even in the construction sector the UCATT building union has criticised the ‘sticking plaster’ approach of programme-led apprenticeships rather than ‘high-quality craft apprenticeships’.

UNISON has also reported some problems with poor quality training, lack of supervision and failure to provide a clear learning plan. In addition, there is often a temptation on the part of line managers not to release apprentices from the workplace when there are particular work pressures.

Time off the job

There needs to be adequate and clearly demarcated paid time off the job for college- or tutor-based training, including the key skills element. This will vary according to the apprenticeship being followed. In traditional craft apprenticeships it is often one day a week paid release, but it can be more. At Birds Eye Frozen Foods, for example, engineering apprentices have two days a week at college.

Some receive much less time off and unions should try to ensure apprentices access good quality transferable training.

Where possible and appropriate, reps might negotiate an additional allowance for study leave, for example when preparing for exams. At Rolls Royce Derby, as well as one day a week at college, further time off required to catch up or keep up is always accommodated, according to the Unite rep.

The draft programme at Nottingham City Council, as well as giving apprentices time off for tutor training, will give them time in the workplace to collect evidence for their NVQ portfolio, plus a block of time to complete the key skills elements of their programme.

Monitoring and support

A good training programme should also include systems for monitoring and supporting apprentices during the course of their programme.

Such systems will also benefit the employer by ensuring a low drop-out rate. According to UNISON, the Realstart programme at North Yorkshire County Council (see page 24) offers high-quality training, mentoring and supervision and the high probability of a job at the end of the process. Only three of the nearly 200 young people starting the programme in 2006–07 failed to finish, with two of those choosing different careers and one unable to pass the probationary period.

“ There are over 20,000 ULRs trained to provide information and advice about learning or training ”



Photo: David Mansell/reportdigital.co.uk

Ideally the apprenticeship programme should include:

- clear arrangements for supervision and monitoring of apprentices. Each apprentice should have a mentor and a line manager that keeps track of their progress, oversees their work and helps them with their learning. (Staff taking on these duties should be entitled to additional training and pay in recognition of this)

- monthly one-to-one meetings between the training provider and the apprentice so that they can raise any difficulties they are having with skills element of the programme

- regular meetings between the provider, the apprentice and the employer to reassure the apprentice that they are on track to complete the apprenticeship

- opportunities for all apprentices working for the employer to meet together for induction at the beginning of their course and for networking and support during their apprenticeship

- support systems for minority groups of apprentices, such as those from ethnic minorities, or those from disadvantaged groups such as people leaving care

Union reps/ULRs have an important role in supporting apprentices throughout the programme.

Apprentices are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment from colleagues (see page 31) as they are often young and in the workplace for the first time. Line managers are in a particularly strong position to exploit their charges, and may constantly pick on them to do the dirtier or otherwise undesirable jobs.

Union reps/ULRs are important in ensuring apprentices have some protection from unscrupulous managers. They can also ensure that appraisal meetings between employer and apprentice are not conducted in such a way as to intimidate the apprentice.

Union reps and ULRs can also support apprentices with problems they may have outside work but which impact on their ability to continue with the apprenticeship. For example, something may happen at the apprentice's home that forces them to move from the immediate area, making it more expensive to travel in or impossible for them to make the normal start time.

Union reps can facilitate agreements with managers or employers to help the apprentice continue with their programme.

Union reps/ULRs acting as mentors can also:

- ensure apprentices are provided with the relevant information, advice and guidance (IAG)

- support them if they have trouble with the key skills element of their programme

- facilitate work with providers to encourage flexible training provision, and

- establish mechanisms to support apprentices through learning centres.

For these reasons it is helpful if union reps/ULRs volunteer or get themselves appointed to be mentors for apprentices. This is also useful to the union at workplace level as it can be an opportunity to draw apprentices into the union organisation (see page 34).

The Midlands region of unionlearn is establishing a course for union reps in supporting and mentoring apprentices.

Checklist

- Agree a clear programme of the apprentice's role, the training given, qualifications to be attained and the timescale.

- Ensure adequate and clear paid time off the job for training, including key skills.

- Aim to negotiate additional study time if appropriate.

- Establish clear systems for supervision, support and feedback.

- Agree named mentors, preferably union representatives or ULRs.

- Ensure that apprentices have access to information, advice and guidance.

- Ensure high-quality provision.



Health and safety

Union safety reps and negotiators are likely to be aware of the general potential hazards in their workplace and the measures that should be taken to protect their members' health and safety.

But the majority of apprentices will be young, and this means they are more likely to get injured at work: according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), young men aged 16–24 face a 40 per cent higher relative risk of all workplace injury than men aged 45–54, even after allowing for occupations and other job characteristics.

There is a popular perception that young workers are killed or injured because they fool around or are immature. But the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work argues that many employers give young workers jobs beyond their capabilities and provide inadequate information, instruction and training. Young workers are ignored in risk assessments and are not properly supervised.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents provides ample illustration of what can go wrong to young workers in agriculture, care and medical work, construction, hospitality/catering, leisure,



Photo: David Mansell/reporndigital.co.uk

the motor vehicle trade, manufacturing, office work and retail (www.youngworker.co.uk/youngpeople/casestudies/index.htm). The case study from the retail sector (below) shows how employers need to be particularly vigilant with young trainees – even in what might not seem high-risk areas.

CASE STUDY



Supermarket injury

A young apprentice with a major supermarket company was part way through a three-week placement on stock and warehousing when she was asked by her supervisor to help restock the tinned vegetables quickly.

The supervisor pointed to a box and lifted it into a trolley indicating she should follow suit. But when the trainee lifted the box

she felt a shooting pain in her back and dropped the box on her foot. She needed time off work and was told she might have recurring back problems.

The company was instructed to improve its training and supervision, as the supervisor should not have assumed that the trainee knew the correct way to lift and should not have rushed a new worker.





Negotiators and safety reps need to ensure that health and safety is core to any apprenticeship programme. This means checking that:

- the employer has done a full and sufficient risk assessment on all aspects of an apprentice's proposed work before they start, and that the apprentice's lack of experience and lack of awareness about possible risks is taken into account
- health and safety is part of the induction training, and that it is appropriate to the kind of work that the apprentice will be doing
- supervisors are trained and competent to supervise a young person; and are given the time to do so
- health and safety is an integral part of the training that the apprentice receives
- apprentices are issued with appropriate personal protective equipment
- the employer monitors the training being given at regular intervals, and
- all injuries and work-related illnesses of apprentices are recorded and analysed separately.

At Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery apprentices are given 'Toolbox Talks' and specific young people's risk assessments are carried out. At Babcock Engineering apprentices go on a health and safety induction course and there are bi-monthly health and safety meetings between the apprentices, health and safety officers and union officials. And at FirstGroup Leeds apprentices never work alone; instead they shadow a skilled person until they are confident to work on their own tasks.

Bullying

All apprentices – including adult apprentices – can be vulnerable to harassment and bullying from supervisors or colleagues because of their status in the pecking order due to their perceived inexperience. This is exacerbated for young apprentices because they are new to the world of work.

Union reps have an important role in supporting apprentices against bullying behaviour, advising them of their rights and, if necessary, undertaking a grievance procedure on their behalf.

The law

Under the *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974* young workers should receive at least the same protection as other workers. But there are some legal provisions specifically applying to workers aged under 18 years of age. There is a section on the Health and Safety Executive website with all the relevant legal information:

www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/index.htm



Working time

There are specific requirements in the *Working Time Regulations* for workers under the age of 18 (and above school leaving age). The basic ones are:

- The maximum length of each working day is eight hours. For the working week the maximum is 40 hours. There should be a rest break of 30 minutes when working for 4.5 hours and a rest period of 12 consecutive hours daily rest plus 48 hours' rest in seven days.
- Young workers should not work between 10pm and 6am or 11pm and 7am except in certain sectors (including hospitals and artistic activities). In all cases they must not work between midnight and 4am.
- Young workers should have 4.8 weeks' paid leave, rising to 5.6 weeks from 1 April 2009, which can include public and bank holidays.

Union checklist

- The health and safety of young workers should be a standing and separate agenda item on safety committees, to review health and safety arrangements for young people and monitor performance.
- Young people should not be required to undertake tasks where their lack of experience may put their own or other people's health and safety at risk. Such tasks should be clearly identified in the health and safety policy.
- Particular care should be taken when placing young people in work involving use of dangerous machinery or harmful substances. Young people are often more susceptible to health damage from exposure to toxic substances – even though harmful effects may not appear until later in life.
- There must be proper arrangements for supervision. Work operations requiring constant supervision should be clearly identified – this may mean recruitment of more supervisors.
- Supervisors and first-line management should always be adequately trained in understanding the risks and control measures connected with the work young people are required to do.
- Every young worker should be given adequate health and safety induction training to explain the hazards of the job and precautions to be observed. Induction training should emphasise not only the young person's duty to co-operate but also what they are entitled to expect from their employer and others. Safety representatives should be given the opportunity to take part.



- Health and safety training should be an integral part of job training programmes.
- Safety representatives have the legal right to be consulted on the health and safety content of training programmes for young people – they should be involved in the planning of programmes at the earliest possible stage rather than reacting to problems when training programmes have started.

Organising around apprenticeships

A man in a long-sleeved shirt is working in a server room. He is reaching into a server rack, possibly to install or maintain equipment. The room is filled with rows of server racks, and the lighting is dim, with a purple tint. The man is looking intently at the equipment he is working on.

Union organising

There are many reasons why union reps and negotiators need to engage with apprenticeship programmes, from the point of view both of protection and support of apprentices, and of their potential to help the union grow and remain an active force in the workplace.

The huge expansion in apprenticeships promised by the Government offers unions excellent potential not only to recruit new members but to engage with and organise young workers. This is vital, as young people are hugely under-represented in the union movement – just 9.8 per cent of employees aged 16–24 are union members compared with 28 per cent of all employees.

In addition, if workers are given a positive view of unions at the start of their working lives they are likely to remain loyal as members and get more involved and active in the union in the future.

Access to apprentices

As well as negotiating good quality and well paid apprentice programmes, then, union reps and negotiators can try to establish conditions at work which are conducive to ensuring apprentices join the union.

Union reps need to be able to access apprentices from the moment they start work and should press employers for names and locations of any new apprentices starting. The union rep or committee should then ensure that every apprentice is asked to join the union: most non-union members in unionised workplaces say they have never been asked to join.

Union reps will also want to ensure that a representative of the union is invited to apprentice induction sessions – preferably to have a slot in which to explain the role of the union and to potentially sign the apprentices into membership. At Thales Optronics instrument manufacturers, for example, there is an induction timetable for apprentices with a slot for trade union (Unite) recruitment. All apprentices are given the opportunity to join the union, and all apprentices have done so.

The rep's work can be helped by positive statements from the employer on the value of the union. Some employers are happy to issue statements encouraging new staff to join unions, and reps should



build on this by persuading employers to include apprentices in such statements.

Northumbria University has a particularly strong statement:

“The University supports the system of collective bargaining in every way and believes in the principle of solving industrial relations problems by discussion and agreement. For practical purposes, this can only be conducted by representatives of the employers and of the apprentices. If collective bargaining of this kind is to continue and improve for the benefit of both, it is essential that the apprentices’ organisations should be fully representative. It is equally sensible for staff too, to be in membership of a trade union representing them on the appropriate negotiating body, and they are encouraged so to be. Staff have the right to join a trade union and to take part in its activities. Details of the specified trade unions on the appropriate negotiating body are available for staff to refer to in the Human Resources Department.”

Apprentices should be made fully aware of any involvement the union has had in drawing up and running the apprenticeship programme, any support they are able to give the apprentices and generally make them feel welcome in the workplace and in the union.

Some unions have lower contribution rates for apprentices or trainees than other members. For example, they can join UNISON for £10 a year and Unite for £26.52 in their first year. Other unions have youth rates and in others contributions vary according to members’ earnings. Reps should check with their union official or the website if they are unsure.

Perhaps the most effective way in which union reps or stewards can be involved with apprentices is to arrange to act as an apprentice’s mentor, trainer or assessor.

At Cadbury Trebor Bassett members of the Amicus union (now part of Unite) went out of their way to help two engineering apprentices from MG Rover who had lost their jobs when it closed down part way through their programme.

The union members wanted to give the two a chance to complete their apprenticeships and clubbed together, out of their own wages, to pay for them to do so. After completion, the two were given permanent jobs at Cadbury’s Bourneville site.

Increasing union involvement

Discussion and negotiating around apprenticeships can also act as a way of involving members of the union who may previously not have been particularly active. For example, those interested in learning and skills might be persuaded to take on the role of union learning rep, and there is a clear role for those with an equalities interest in making sure programmes are promoted in a way that encourages diversity of uptake.

Once apprentices join the union, they too can be encouraged to get involved – particularly through discussions about their own conditions and concerns.

Another way to involve apprentices in the union is to encourage them to

CASE STUDY

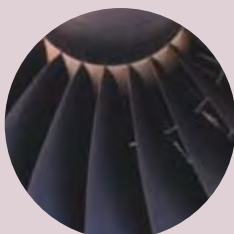


Reps as mentors

At Siemens Industrial Turbomachinery there have been 17 apprentices in each of the last two years. Unite representatives successfully argued the case that all apprentices should have a mentor. Reps attend induction meetings and senior union reps attend each apprentice’s review meeting with the training department at the college. Around 85 per cent of apprentices at the site complete their programme.

The union has been instrumental in persuading three other Siemens sites in the UK to take on apprentices.

At Babcock Engineering Services (Rosyth), where there is an employer commitment to taking on 200 apprentices over four years, the shop stewards act as mentors. Mentors and apprentices meet on induction day and exchange contact details. There is currently one mentor to two apprentices. Around 95 per cent of apprentices complete their programme.



take on a union role, perhaps as an apprentice representative or in setting up an apprenticeship network.

Checklist

- If there is a ULR, make sure they are involved from the start. If there is not, see if any member is interested in taking on the role.

- Obtain lists of new apprentices and make sure all are asked to join the union.

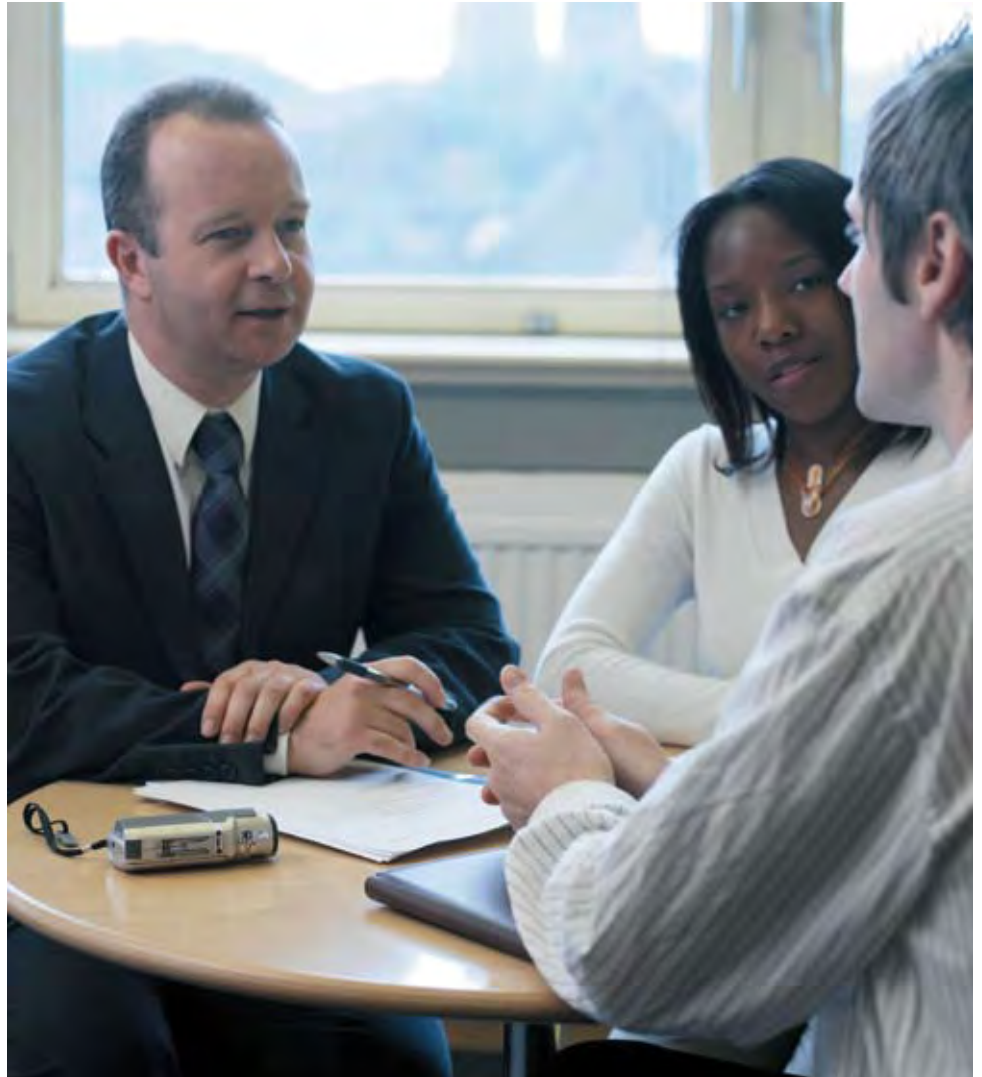
- Negotiate a slot in apprentice induction sessions.

- Try to get a union-positive statement from the employer.

- Ensure the union is welcoming to apprentices and has a high profile in the workplace.

- Encourage apprentices who join to get more involved with the union.

- Consider ensuring that mentors are union reps or members.



“ Try to get a union-positive statement from the employer ”

Union approach for apprenticeships

Unions have different traditions and levels of experience around apprenticeships, as well as very different industry settings. However, the following provides a model approach to apprenticeships at the workplace level that unions can draw from.

The introduction and support of apprentices into the workplace should involve a full and agreed role for unions using a branch approach that includes stewards, union learning reps, health and safety reps and equality reps.

A workplace agreement will need the full support of senior management, personnel and training, and the union. It will also need the backing of the wider union responsible for bargaining in the workplace.

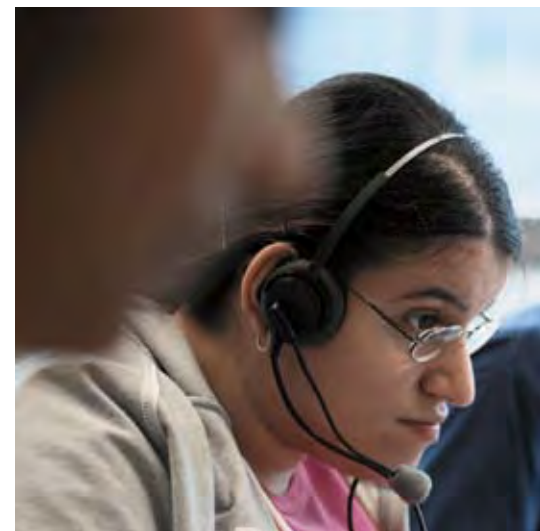
The apprentices should be guaranteed the same rights and entitlements of all employees in terms of equality of opportunity and access to full and effective training and support.

Apprentices should be included in the general workforce terms and conditions arrangements, receive fair pay and be supported by all relevant Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety policies, as well as any other workplace agreements.

Membership of the relevant union will be actively promoted and apprenticeships should be supported by the union through their programme



Photo: Paul Box/reportdigital.co.uk



of recruitment, induction, and training, and during their move into employment when their apprenticeship ends.

“ Unions need to be relevant and open to young workers – they are the lifeblood of the union ”

Why are apprenticeships a union issue?

- **Unions stand for equality and fairness** – apprentices can be vulnerable
- **Unions can promote quality in apprenticeships** – fair pay and good training
- **Occupational segregation** – apprenticeships can reinforce lack of progress in some sectors on equality and diversity: for example, too few female apprentices in engineering and too few men in care, as well as too few BME apprentices generally
- **Occupational segregation reinforces equal pay issues** – pay for apprenticeships in hair and beauty is much lower than in engineering. The gender pay gap in apprenticeships is higher than in the wider labour market.
- **Unions need to be relevant and open to young workers** – they are the lifeblood of the union
- **Taking on apprentices can create a training culture in an organisation which benefits everyone**



What is the union role?

- **Equality and diversity** – putting in place strategies to ensure apprenticeships are open to the widest possible demographic
- **Employee status and job guarantee** – apprentices should have proper contracts and every endeavour should be made to ensure they secure a decent job at the end of their programme
- **Pay** – negotiators should try to get apprentices onto main pay structures for the job they are doing; or on good percentage rates; and to have fast incremental increases
- **Learning and training** – training must be of good quality with adequate paid time off the job for learning and study
- **Mentoring and support** – there should be a clear system for supervision, support and mentoring, ideally with union involvement
- **Health and safety** – ensure full account is taken of the extra hazards for young, inexperienced workers, that they get fully safety trained, and that health and safety on programmes is regularly reviewed

A woman with long hair is shown in profile, looking down at a book she is holding. She is in a library or bookstore, with bookshelves filled with books in the background. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

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Further information

Publications

Young workers: a guide for safety representatives, TUC
www.tuc.org.uk/extras/youngworkers_safetyreps.pdf

Apprenticeships: A short guide for union safety representatives, TUC and LSC 2005

Useful websites

www.apprenticeships.org.uk

www.tuc.org.uk/apprenticeships

www.unionlearn.org.uk

www.unionlearn.org.uk/advice/learn-1531-f0.cfm

www.unionprofessionals.org.uk

www.unionreps.org.uk

www.worksmart.org.uk

www.lsc.gov.uk

www.traintogain.gov.uk

<http://inourhands.lsc.gov.uk/employersSkillsPledge.html>

Additional information

TUC Apprenticeships project

The TUC has secured funding for two years to raise awareness among unions and employers of the value of getting involved in apprenticeships. This project will commence in spring 2009 and include support to unions around bargaining with employers on apprenticeships. For more information, please contact the TUC's Organisation and Services Department on 020 7467 1290.

Additional materials

Training materials are also being developed by TUC Education and will be available from Spring 2009. Please contact the TUC Regional Education Officer in your region if you are interested.

Additional materials are also being developed, including a detailed overview of apprentices for unions interested in implementing apprenticeships in the workplace called *Apprenticeships are Union Business: a detailed overview of apprenticeships*. This will be available from Spring 2009, and will contain more detailed information, including the funding available.

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