

Apprenticeships for existing staff



unionlearn
from the TUC

New apprentices are often new to the world of work. But in some workplaces existing staff are on apprenticeships, or thinking of starting one, to help them gain new skills and qualifications.

Employers also want to take on more apprentices to recoup their levy payments and meet targets.

Existing staff who become apprentices tend to be older than new entrants, but they still need advice, information and ongoing support to complete their apprenticeship.

Union reps can play a key role in supporting all apprentices and highlighting progression routes in the organisation. They can also explore pathways for apprentices to progress to higher level learning opportunities and careers.



What is an apprenticeship?

- An apprenticeship is a mix of work and work-based learning.
- Some of the learning happens on the job and some off-the-job, but during working hours.
- Apprentices are employed and covered by the terms and conditions according to their contract of employment and relevant employment legislation.
- Apprenticeships are open for anyone older than 16.
- Apprentices can be new entrants and existing staff.

A high-quality apprenticeship offers:

- new skills
 - progression and new job roles
 - learning and training opportunities
 - updating English and maths skills with Functional Skills or GCSEs
 - time off to learn with off-the-job training for 20 per cent of the working time
 - an opportunity to get certification in an industry-recognised occupation.
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Negotiating with employers

- Find out where any existing apprentices are in your workplace, in which roles and on which programmes, to have a full picture.

- Discuss workforce planning with the employer and how apprenticeships can fulfil future skills needs and provide new roles or progression for existing staff.

- Check that all staff have access to high quality apprenticeships, regardless of what level or pay grade they are on.

- Get the employer to set up initiatives that encourage under-represented groups on all levels and pay grades (BME, disabled, women in male-dominated industries, etc) to take up apprenticeships. Check whether additional support is needed, eg for members with dyslexia.

- Ensure that existing staff starting an apprenticeship maintain their terms and conditions, pay, holidays and other rights.

- Negotiate a mentoring programme to support workers on apprenticeships.

Remember that apprenticeship programmes don't replace normal training budgets or existing jobs.

See the apprenticeship toolkit for helpful information
unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018

Apprenticeship pay

Existing staff will already have a contract of employment covering pay and conditions, such as holiday entitlement. Starting an apprenticeship should not affect these, or the permanence of a contract, even if the apprenticeship is time-bound.

For new entrants, unions should insist that apprentice pay reflects the job done. Unions regularly negotiate pay rates well above the minimum for apprentices.

The minimum apprentice wage rate applies to those aged 16 to 18, and those 19 or over who are in their first year of an apprenticeship. All other apprentices are entitled to the national minimum wage (NMW) for their age. All the rates are reviewed each year.

Check the minimum pay rates at gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates.

“ You have to be seen in the workplace – talking to staff, talking to reps, explaining the programme.”

RMT learning rep



Union reps' advice to existing staff

- If you are considering an apprenticeship think of the additional learning support you may need.
 - Check the relevant apprenticeship standards on the government website to see what new skills the apprentice job role provides
instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards.
 - Ask what the end-point assessment looks like – is it, for instance, a written assignment or an exam, and think what learning support you will need in order to pass.
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- Be careful about signing a new contract with your employer, especially if this means agreeing to a change of terms and conditions (always talk to your rep first).
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- Read the Commitment Statement carefully (see below) – this is an agreement between the apprentice, employer and training provider that describes the content and length of the apprenticeship.
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The Commitment Statement should be signed by the apprentice and the employer and include the following information:

1. The skill, trade or occupation for which the apprentice is trained
2. The apprenticeship standard or framework connected to the apprenticeship, including the level of learning
3. The start and finish dates of the apprenticeship
4. The amount of off-the-job training that the apprentice will receive.

Note that the training provider signs a separate contract with the employer that outlines the planned content and schedule of training. It is important that union reps monitor learning progress with the employer.

“ It’s a really important area where the company and the union are working collaboratively to deliver an important outcome for the people who work for the company and who are trade union members. ”

HR director, Network Rail

More information

Supporting apprenticeships unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeships or email unionlearn@tuc.org.uk

Your rights at work, or about joining a union
tuc.org.uk/join-union

Apprenticeship opportunities getingofar.gov.uk

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