

# Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality



unionlearn  
from the TUC

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# Introduction

This guide shows why trade unions should negotiate for gender equality in apprenticeship programmes. It suggests practical issues unions should include on their agenda for collective bargaining.

## Apprenticeships and women's equality

Although the number of women starting apprenticeships overall is comparable to that of men, fewer young women start apprenticeships. A much greater proportion of male apprentices are under 25, while women apprentices are much more likely to be older workers.<sup>1</sup> This indicates a larger proportion of apprenticeship spend for women is directed to existing workers, rather than young people specifically recruited as apprentices. While it is encouraging that older women have opportunities for skills development, fewer young women than men are finding suitable apprenticeship positions.

Given that apprenticeships can potentially provide an excellent first step on a career pathway, the current apprentice numbers suggest that young women's career options are being limited from the start of their working lives, in comparison to the opportunities open to young men.

There is also a striking difference in the types of apprenticeships that young men and women are doing, with prevalent patterns of occupational segregation.

Gender inequality is further compounded by the fact that young women are less likely to obtain a permanent position when they finish their apprenticeship.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the demand for labour in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) sector means that apprentices, who are mostly male in the sector, find it easier to secure permanent jobs.

However, some studies also suggest that even the few young women who do secure apprenticeships in male-dominated sectors are less likely to complete them and progress to permanent employment.<sup>3</sup>

## Apprenticeship gender pay gap

The TUC's analysis of Office for National Statistics data reveals a gender pay gap (the difference between men's and women's average earnings) of 18.4 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Ongoing occupational gender segregation (i.e. under-representation of women in jobs traditionally viewed as men's work, and vice versa) is one of the main factors contributing to this pay inequality.

<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, apprenticeship framework data tool [gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/643186/Apprenticeships-experimental-pivot-v2.xlsx](http://gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643186/Apprenticeships-experimental-pivot-v2.xlsx)

<sup>2</sup> [youngwomenstrust.org/apprenticeshipcampaign/making\\_apprenticeships\\_work\\_for\\_young\\_women](http://youngwomenstrust.org/apprenticeshipcampaign/making_apprenticeships_work_for_young_women)

<sup>3</sup> [youngwomenstrust.org/apprenticeships-still-not-working](http://youngwomenstrust.org/apprenticeships-still-not-working)

<sup>4</sup> [tuc.org.uk/news/gender-pay-gap-means-women-work-free-more-two-months-year-says-tuc](http://tuc.org.uk/news/gender-pay-gap-means-women-work-free-more-two-months-year-says-tuc)





Photo: John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk

The apprenticeships system does little to address the gender pay gap. Research reveals that male apprentices in 2017 earned an average £7.25 per hour, while female apprentices earned £6.67.<sup>5</sup> This apprenticeship gender pay gap largely reflects differences in the sectors that men and women undertake apprenticeships in, and the huge variations in pay levels between them.

For example, average weekly rates of basic pay for apprentices in the female-dominated programmes of hairdressing and childcare were £161 and £206 respectively in 2016. This compares to £289 for engineering and £290 for electro-technical apprentices, both of which are heavily male-dominated.<sup>6</sup>

Research also shows that for every woman apprentice entering the construction sector in England there are 50 men, and 25 men for every woman starting an engineering apprenticeship.<sup>7</sup> If this imbalance continues, apprenticeship schemes will have the effect of worsening the gender pay gap in some industries.<sup>8</sup>

Occupational segregation also results in a much lower earnings payoff (the expected additional annual income achieved through completion of an apprenticeship) for women in comparison to men.<sup>9</sup>

### **The trade union role**

There are many reasons for gender segregation in apprenticeships, including inadequate careers advice at school, but there are also factors that trade unions can positively influence. As trade unionists we need to challenge discrimination at every level. We are concerned not just with the overt sexism, sexual harassment, and sex discrimination that remain in many workplaces, but also with policies and practices that perpetuate sex discrimination more subtly. This includes discrimination relating to new-starter apprentices, the union members of tomorrow.

Once apprenticeships are on the collective bargaining agenda, we can specifically tackle sex discrimination by, for example:

<sup>5</sup> [youngwomenstrust.org/apprenticeships-still-not-working](http://youngwomenstrust.org/apprenticeships-still-not-working)

<sup>6</sup> [gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-pay-survey-2016](http://gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-pay-survey-2016)

<sup>7</sup> [youngwomenstrust.org/positive-action](http://youngwomenstrust.org/positive-action)

<sup>8</sup> [learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Understanding-the-under-representation-of-women-in-engineering-apprenticeships-1.pdf](http://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Understanding-the-under-representation-of-women-in-engineering-apprenticeships-1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/is03.pdf>

# “ We particularly need to negotiate with employers in male-dominated sectors to ensure that they take action to tackle occupational gender segregation. ”

- explaining the business benefits of improved workforce diversity to employers
- ensuring employers adopt non-discriminatory apprentice recruitment practices
- encouraging employers to undertake outreach activities to specifically attract women applicants
- negotiating for apprenticeships to be offered in part-time and flexible working roles as well as full-time
- establishing a working environment with zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

See the *What trade unionists need to do* section of this guide for more details.

We particularly need to negotiate with employers in male-dominated sectors to ensure that they take action to tackle occupational gender segregation. The STEM sector, seen as the powerhouse of the UK economy, faces serious challenges in recruiting enough young people for its future viability.<sup>10</sup> STEM employers, many of which recognise trade unions, need to take positive steps to widen participation among

young women, who remain massively under-represented in these industries.

Unite has showcased the positive experiences of its women members who have undertaken apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing employers, including BMW, Brush and Unilever.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, we can help make apprenticeships a more practical proposition for women by ensuring that all apprenticeships offered in our workplaces:

- are of high quality, providing genuine skills and knowledge development for apprentices, whether existing staff or new starters
- provide full support for apprentices to achieve their learning goals
- attract fair wages for new-starter apprentices that neither exploit apprentices or undermine collectively bargained rates of pay
- lead to genuine employment opportunities and career progression.

<sup>10</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpublic/691/691.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> [unitetheunion.org/media/1121/thinking-about-an-apprenticeship.pdf](http://unitetheunion.org/media/1121/thinking-about-an-apprenticeship.pdf)



# The current apprenticeship landscape

The last few years have seen significant changes to apprenticeship format and funding.

Employers pay a levy to fund training apprenticeships and are encouraged to employ more apprentices. Apprenticeships' minimum length has been set to one year, but many are longer and new apprenticeship standards are being developed. Roughly half of apprentices overall are female but there is still a way to go to ensure women are represented in a wider range of industry sectors.

## Apprenticeship levy

From April 2017 the government introduced an apprenticeship levy. All employers whose payroll exceeds £3m annually must now pay 0.5 per cent of payroll to central government. Employers can recoup their levy payment by using it to fund training of apprentices, who can be new starters recruited specifically as apprentices, or existing staff. The government has committed to three million apprenticeship starts by the end of the current parliament, and set public sector organisations a target of 2.3 per cent of staff undertaking an apprenticeship.

Additionally, in response to perceptions that apprenticeships were failing to meet occupational skills requirements, the government has enabled employer-led development of new occupational standards to replace the old apprenticeship frameworks, which are being phased out.

Awareness of apprenticeships is improving. They have, or will become, central to many employers' training and development plans, and the levy is expected to deliver better employer investment in training. However, the ambitious targets, combined with the overhaul of standards, raise questions around quality in apprenticeships and the learning experience for apprentices working to complete them.

## Quality in apprentice training

The government sets apprenticeship funding rules, which are supported by apprenticeship quality principles established by the Institute for Apprenticeships.<sup>12</sup> These dictate that employers can spend apprenticeship levy funds only on training towards approved apprenticeship frameworks or standards. Funding rules are intended to ensure apprentices are being trained, are benefitting from a minimum paid time for off-the-job training and that apprenticeships are genuinely developmental, rather than simply an accreditation of apprentices' existing knowledge and skills.

<sup>12</sup> [instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship](https://instituteforapprenticeships.org/quality/what-is-a-quality-apprenticeship)



“ Apprenticeships delivered under the new standards are subject to end-point assessment by an assessor who is independent of the training provider. ”



Photo: Roger Moody

Apprentice training can only be delivered by approved, registered apprenticeship training providers. Apprenticeships delivered under the new standards are subject to end-point assessment by an assessor who is independent of the training provider. Ofsted, the government’s education regulator, evaluates providers’ planning and delivery of apprenticeships, and resulting achievement rates.

### Recruitment

Recruitment practices around apprenticeships are less closely scrutinised. A large proportion of new-starter apprentices apply via a central vacancy system. Apprentices are then allocated to a training provider, which arranges for an interview with the employer. Apprentices who are existing employees are selected by whatever method their employer uses.

The recruitment processes need not be overseen by any third party, which leaves them open to bias against women applicants. This is an area in which trade unions could usefully intervene – see the *What trade unionists need to do* section of this guide.

### Employment

As employees, apprentices have statutory employment rights. The government has set apprentices an entitlement of 20 per cent off-the-job time for training. There is a lower national minimum wage rate for apprentices.

As part of their inspection framework, Ofsted inspectors should consider apprentice welfare and employment sustainability. It should be noted, though, that individual workplaces are unlikely to receive an annual inspection. Additionally, inspectors rely on employers’ reports of reasons apprentices leave before completion. It is questionable whether any discrimination or harassment cited by women leavers will be accurately reported.

### Trade union perspectives

The government’s target of three million new apprenticeship starts is challenging. The main union concern about the targets and the levy is that quality will lose out to quantity as some employers may seek to recoup their levy funds by prioritising the quantity of starts over quality.

Union reps need to be alert to these issues and ensure that employers account for their decisions.

Watch out for:

- Employers dropping commitments to widening women’s participation as they strive to spend levy funds before they lose them.
- Apprentices being forced to complete training in unpaid time – this can impact more acutely on women apprentices, who are more likely to have caring responsibilities outside of work.

“ Unions have argued that young people starting employment as apprentices are potentially vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. ”

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→ Employers perpetuating existing occupational segregation and under-representation by replicating established patterns of training spend with levy funds.

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Unions have argued that young people starting employment as apprentices are potentially vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. They may be placed on programmes with no realistic prospect of a permanent job, and used to undermine negotiated rates of pay. Reps need to be vigilant on these issues too.

The unionlearn apprenticeship toolkit provides more-detailed general guidance on apprenticeships. You can find the most recent version at:

**[unionlearn.org.uk/publications/  
apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018)**

# Supportive initiatives and good practice

There are initiatives which focus specifically on improving women's participation and tackling gender occupational segregation. Here are a few notable examples:



## **The Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN)**

The ADCN seeks to champion apprenticeship diversity amongst employers, and to encourage more people from under-represented groups to consider apprenticeships. Attracting women to STEM industries is a key strand of its work. Members of the ADCN pledge to work towards measurable targets on apprenticeship diversity, create internal structures to promote positive support for diversity in organisational culture, champion diversity among business contacts, and collate and report data on progress. Employers such as B&Q, Rolls-Royce, and some local authorities are ADCN members.

***[gov.uk/government/groups/apprenticeship-diversity-champions-network](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/apprenticeship-diversity-champions-network)***

## **Strategic Transport Apprenticeship Taskforce (STAT)**

Trade unions are represented in STAT, which has the aim that by 2020, 20 per cent of new entrants to engineering and technical apprenticeships in the transport sector will be women.

***[gov.uk/government/news/transport-industry-leading-the-way-in-apprenticeships](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-industry-leading-the-way-in-apprenticeships)***

## **The employer toolkit**

The Learning and Work Institute's employer toolkit brings together case studies of employers who provide an inclusive apprenticeship programme, along with hints and tips on how to improve accessibility of apprenticeships. There is a section focused on tackling gender occupational segregation.

***[employer-toolkit.org.uk/gender-3](https://employer-toolkit.org.uk/gender-3)***

## **The Women in Science and Engineering campaign**

WISE is an industry-led campaign aiming to redress gender imbalance in this traditionally male-dominated sector. Its website includes information and resources, case studies and advice, and makes a compelling business case for increasing women's participation in the sector. WISE offers training for employers in dealing with unconscious bias, and provides a detailed, practical guide called Ten Steps. There is also a specific apprenticeship toolkit, aimed at attracting, engaging, supporting and retaining women apprentices.

***[wisecampaign.org.uk](https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk)***

## **Civil Service National Trade Union Committee agreement**

The Civil Service in England has a target of 30,000 apprenticeship starts by 2020. To optimise the benefits delivered by this target,

“ Notably, the agreement recognises the potential for apprenticeships to improve diversity within the Civil Service, and embeds apprentices in longer-term career pathways. ”

it has reached an agreement with its seven recognised trade unions. The agreement aims to engender a fair and equal approach to apprentice recruitment, pay salaries appropriate to the level and profession of the apprenticeship, and ensure apprentices benefit from high quality training and support.

Notably, the agreement recognises the potential for apprenticeships to improve diversity within the Civil Service, and embeds apprentices in longer-term career pathways. It states that diversity of apprenticeship applicants will be reviewed to ensure that recruitment and selection processes are free from bias, and suggests that departments conduct equality impact assessments to ensure processes are non-discriminatory. It allows for apprenticeships to be undertaken on a part-time basis to accommodate the role or the individual's circumstances.

Most usefully, the agreement firmly establishes union involvement in:

- workforce planning
- selection of training providers
- pay rates for apprentices
- supporting apprentices (through union learning reps)
- monitoring the implementation of the apprenticeship programme at all levels throughout the Civil Service.

The full text of the agreement:

[pcs.org.uk/sites/default/files/site\\_assets/group\\_websites/dwp/2017/Civil%20Service%20Apprenticeships%20Agreed%20Principles%20CO%20%20NTUC%202024.01.17.pdf](https://pcs.org.uk/sites/default/files/site_assets/group_websites/dwp/2017/Civil%20Service%20Apprenticeships%20Agreed%20Principles%20CO%20%20NTUC%202024.01.17.pdf)



# What trade unionists need to do

The introduction of the apprenticeship levy presents an opportunity for union negotiators and reps to take the initiative in working with employers to provide good quality apprenticeships and long-term opportunities for all young people entering the labour market.

These are all issues that affect the future of the organisation – not solely issues around training, but key industrial concerns for all trade unionists. Unions should be pressing for involvement in every aspect of apprenticeship programmes, stressing the importance of proper workforce planning rather than a piecemeal approach to spending levy funds.

To get the best out of this, workplace reps need to develop a clear bargaining agenda around apprenticeships, including addressing women apprentices specifically. As a minimum, we should be asking employers to explain and justify apprenticeship levy spend, for example:

- 
- If a proportion of levy funds is to be used for training existing employees, which employees are offered the opportunity to undertake apprenticeships, and how is this decided?
- 
- Is there equal access for women and men to the apprenticeships on offer?
- 

- 
- Where new-starter apprentices will be recruited, how many will there be and in which roles?
- 
- How will the employer address any occupational gender segregation?
- 
- On what rates of pay and other contractual terms will they be employed?
- 

Unions will want to ensure that young people get a fair deal, are not exploited as a source of cheap labour, and that new-starter apprenticeships will lead to genuine, long-term jobs.

If there is an equal opportunities policy in your workplace, you could use this as part of your negotiations, and consider amending it to include the apprenticeship programme.



Photo: Darren O'Brien/Guzelian

“ If your organisation employs more than 250 people, you could begin by discussing the organisation’s gender pay gap report. ”

### Begin with the data

Access to data to inform collective bargaining is a good starting point for dialogue.<sup>13</sup> If your organisation employs more than 250 people, you could begin by discussing the organisation’s gender pay gap report. You can find your company’s report on the government gender pay gap reporting portal.<sup>14</sup> In any event, you might want to request more detailed data, for example:

- roles performed by men and women, together with rates of pay
- apprentice achievement rates, and where apprentices go after completion, by gender
- statistics on job vacancy applications (both internal and external) by men and women, and success rates

- the number of women returning to work after maternity leave
- length of service and career progression for men and women
- the number of successful and unsuccessful requests for flexible working
- the number of employees who have taken shared parental leave
- access to training (including apprenticeships) for men and women
- numbers of men and women in supervisory or management roles
- numbers of women in senior management.

<sup>13</sup> It is also a legal right, enforceable through the Central Arbitration Committee [http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/c/b/11287\\_CoP2\\_Collective\\_Bargaining\\_v1\\_0\\_Accessible.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/c/b/11287_CoP2_Collective_Bargaining_v1_0_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/Viewing/search-results>



Photo: John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk

“Closing the gender pay gap should provide a big incentive to many employers.”

Any employer taking equality seriously should be collating and analysing such data. Establishing these existing baselines enables unions to propose remedial actions.

### **Making the case**

Some employers may do little more than make positive statements about equality and diversity, while others may be resistant to the concept of gender equality altogether. This means unions need to demonstrate potential benefits to the employer. Closing the gender pay gap should provide a big incentive to many employers – particularly those who have to report under the new pay gap reporting regulations.

Fortunately, much work has already been done around the business case. Check with your union for guidance on this, but commonly cited business benefits include better staff recruitment and retention; greater skills mix; improved team and individual performance; and enhanced customer relations.

The WISE Campaign (see previous section) has developed many useful case studies and convincing arguments. It points to a close correlation between a diverse workforce and profitability, which should interest for-profit organisations. The arguments that gender-balanced workforces optimise available

talent, delivering increased innovation and productivity, should gain the attention of all employers.

### **Tackling discriminatory practices**

Employers should develop a strategy for diversity (your union will have model policies that can be used for this) and communicate it to the workforce. This should include policies to promote work/life balance and policies to tackle discrimination and harassment, as well as initiatives to increase diversity through recruitment and retention.

This could be conducted as a joint management-union initiative. In relation to access to apprenticeships, unions should urge employers to:

- ensure the language used in apprenticeship vacancy notices and employment documentation does not perpetuate gender stereotypes<sup>15</sup>
- establish objective, non-discriminatory criteria for apprenticeship selection

<sup>15</sup> See [tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/diversityindiction.pdf](http://tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/diversityindiction.pdf)



Photo: Darren O'Brien/Guzelian

- train staff with recruitment or selection responsibilities in diversity issues, and how to eliminate unconscious gender bias in selection decisions
- convene gender balanced recruitment panels
- consider the use of part-time or flexible hours for apprenticeship roles, to enable women with childcare responsibilities to take up apprenticeships – research shows many employers would be interested in offering part-time apprenticeships, but that training providers rarely offer them.<sup>16</sup> However, part-time apprenticeships are permissible under the funding rules, provided the duration of the apprenticeship is extended accordingly.

### Positive action

Apprenticeship programmes are an excellent opportunity to address diversity issues; indeed many large employers have recognised this.<sup>17</sup> Some employers, though, are wary of taking action to address gender inequality, for fear of accusations of unlawful positive

discrimination.<sup>18</sup> The Equality Act allows employers to take steps to advance equality for people who may be under-represented in a particular activity, have suffered a disadvantage or have different needs related to one of the protected characteristics.<sup>19</sup>

Positive actions that unions could press employers to adopt:

- setting targets for increasing women's participation in apprenticeships. Without targets, it is difficult to measure the initiative's success
- outreach work to raise young women's awareness of opportunities in traditionally male sectors – this could include working with schools, further education colleges, running taster days, promotional events and more; this is important, as research shows young women make fewer applications for apprenticeship vacancies in male-dominated sectors<sup>20</sup>
- appointing female apprenticeship ambassadors as role models



<sup>16</sup> [youngwomenstrust.org/what\\_we\\_do/media\\_centre/press\\_releases/742\\_employment\\_organisations\\_call\\_for\\_part-time\\_apprenticeships](http://youngwomenstrust.org/what_we_do/media_centre/press_releases/742_employment_organisations_call_for_part-time_apprenticeships)

<sup>17</sup> [employer-toolkit.org.uk](http://employer-toolkit.org.uk)

<sup>18</sup> [youngwomenstrust.org/positive-action](http://youngwomenstrust.org/positive-action)

<sup>19</sup> [tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/guideequalitylaw2011.pdf](http://tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/guideequalitylaw2011.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [gatsby.org.uk/education/latest/calls-for-greater-efforts-to-encourage-women-into-engineering-apprenticeships](http://gatsby.org.uk/education/latest/calls-for-greater-efforts-to-encourage-women-into-engineering-apprenticeships)

“ It is vital that employers monitor the effectiveness of any initiatives to address equality in apprenticeships. ”

- reserving places on training courses for women
- explicitly welcoming applications from women in advertisements
- producing marketing material that challenges gender stereotypes, for example by including images of women working in construction roles
- removing formal academic entry requirements for apprenticeship positions unless they are strictly necessary for the role
- utilising positive selection of women candidates where there is a tie-break situation with equally suitable male applicants.

### Monitoring impact

It is vital that employers monitor the effectiveness of any initiatives to address equality in apprenticeships. This will

help identify any ongoing institutional discrimination issues.

Points to consider when discussing monitoring with your employer:

- How will information be collated and stored?
- Are all aspects of the apprenticeship process included? For example, gender-based data on applications, completion rates, grievance and disciplinary actions, and next destination for completed apprentices are all relevant.
- How will monitoring data be acted on? Where monitoring suggests potential adverse impacts on women, what steps will the employer take? Make sure any actions are realistic and measurable.

Insist that you are consulted on all these aspects, and ensure you reach agreement with the employer around ongoing consultation on monitoring outcomes.



# Supporting women apprentices at work

Union reps will want to ensure that apprentices in their workplaces are employed on fair wages, with good contractual terms and conditions. Apprenticeships should provide quality training and effective mentoring and support, leading to permanent jobs and/or career progression.

You can find further guidance on these general principles in the unionlearn apprenticeship toolkit.<sup>21</sup>

Here are some additional considerations relating specifically to women apprentices, which union reps should ensure are not overlooked.

## Affordability

An astonishingly high number of apprentices report that their pay is less than the cost of undertaking their apprenticeship, so they are forced to rely on financial support from relatives, or take additional paid work. This can particularly impact on young women apprentices with childcare responsibilities, as they are currently ineligible for the support available to full-time students.<sup>22</sup> Unions should negotiate with employers for financial support for apprentices with caring responsibilities, and ensure that the availability of such support is communicated via recruitment processes.

## Flexibility

As noted previously, apprenticeships can be delivered on a part-time basis, though this is often discounted as an option because providers do not routinely accommodate such arrangements. Unions should ensure that employers consider part-time or flexible hours options in apprenticeship programmes, for both existing staff and new starters. Some women would otherwise be unable to consider apprenticeships as a realistic option.

## Health and safety

Some employers fail to consider women and men's differing health, safety and welfare needs. A survey by Prospect,<sup>23</sup> revealed only 29 per cent of women had access to personal protective equipment (PPE) that had been designed to fit women. 57 per cent said their PPE sometimes hampered them because of this, and some reported having to change roles while pregnant or during the menopause because of PPE unsuitability.

Lack of access to appropriate clothing and changing facilities poses risks to women workers' health and safety and also is a factor in women dropping out of male-dominated sectors. Unions should ensure women's needs are specifically addressed in health and safety management. The TUC's gender checklist on



Photo: Lorne Campbell

<sup>21</sup> [unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018)

<sup>22</sup> [gov.uk/care-to-learn/eligibility](https://gov.uk/care-to-learn/eligibility)

<sup>23</sup> [prospect.org.uk/news/id/2016/June/21/Women-workers-highlight-problems-with-ill-fitting-protective-equipment](https://prospect.org.uk/news/id/2016/June/21/Women-workers-highlight-problems-with-ill-fitting-protective-equipment)

“ Sexual harassment is more prevalent in male-dominated workplaces and younger women workers experience the highest levels of sexual harassment. ”

health and safety is an invaluable guide [tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/GenderHSChecklist.pdf](http://tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/GenderHSChecklist.pdf).

### **Mentoring and support**

Effective mentoring and peer support has been shown to boost the success of apprenticeship programmes. Unions might want to set up their own mentoring schemes, including women-only peer support networks. Remember that mentors do not need to be managers – union reps can make great apprentice mentors too.

### **Sexual harassment**

TUC research reveals widespread sexual harassment across the UK economy.<sup>24</sup> Sexual harassment is more prevalent in male-dominated workplaces and younger women workers experience the highest levels of sexual harassment. It is possible this is one of the factors contributing to lower completion rates of women apprentices, particularly in male-dominated workplaces.

Women in insecure employment are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment – another reason unions should seek guarantees of permanent employment post-apprenticeship.

If there is no existing sexual harassment policy in your workplace, your union will have model policies to help you negotiate one.

Ensure that:

- the organisation adopts a zero-tolerance approach to harassment
- there is a transparent procedure for dealing with complaints fairly and effectively and this is communicated to all staff
- all staff, especially managers, are trained in what constitutes sexual harassment, the law, and how to respond to complaints.

Photo: Darren O'Brien/Guzelian



<sup>24</sup> [tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf](http://tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf)

“The needs of women apprentices are adequately represented at all points.”

It is important to train reps in recognising and tackling sexual harassment, and in supporting sexual harassment victims. You could also raise awareness and give members confidence to speak out against harassment through workplace campaigns and posters on noticeboards.<sup>25</sup> Negotiating facility time for equality reps will help to challenge sexism in the workplace.

### **Union representation**

Finally, the best way to ensure that apprentices are fully supported is to recruit them into union membership. Make sure new-starter

apprentices are included in collective bargaining arrangements, are explicitly advised of their rights to join a union, and that the union has access to them during inductions.

Some union branches have taken the decision to subsidise the cost of apprentices' membership subscriptions, while others have reached agreements with employers that apprentice members can elect their own representative. Make certain that the needs of women apprentices are adequately represented at all points.

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<sup>25</sup> Posters are available from the TUC publications office



# Find out more

## **Unionlearn's Apprenticeships**

**Toolkit** provides a thorough overview of apprenticeships, with key points for negotiators, including guidance on diversity: [unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018](https://unionlearn.org.uk/publications/apprenticeships-toolkit-updated-june-2018)

Your own union may also be working hard to achieve gender equality in apprenticeships. Check union websites for details.

**Young Women's Trust** is an advocacy and campaigning organisation supporting women under age 30. Among other activities, it commissions research on young women's engagement with apprenticeships, and provides helpful reference material: [youngwomenstrust.org](https://youngwomenstrust.org)

Some campaigning and employer associations are also undertaking initiatives around women's equality:

## **The Women in Science and Engineering**

**Campaign** is primarily concerned with recruiting women into STEM industries. Its Ten Steps programme and apprenticeship toolkit are particularly useful, and could be adapted to any industry:

[wisecampaign.org.uk](https://wisecampaign.org.uk) and  
<https://toolkit.wisecampaign.org.uk/apprenticeship-toolkit>

## **The Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation**

has produced a practical guide on general workforce diversity, which could be adapted for apprenticeships: [ciht.org.uk/media/4760/ciht\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_diversity\\_interactive\\_12603.pdf](https://ciht.org.uk/media/4760/ciht_the_case_for_diversity_interactive_12603.pdf)

## **The Engineering Employers Federation**

supports employers to determine the skills they need, draw up job descriptions and vacancies, and advises on diversity in selection of apprentices: [eef.org.uk](https://eef.org.uk)

**EngineeringUK** is a not-for-profit organisation aiming to promote engineering careers to young people. Its *Tomorrow's Engineers* programme coordinates schools outreach for employers seeking to engage young people: [engineeringuk.com](https://engineeringuk.com)

This title may also be made available, on request, in accessible electronic formats or in Braille, audiotape and large print, at no extra cost.

Published by unionlearn

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December 2018