

# **The Great Jobs Agenda - Learning & Progression**

**A TUC guide for trade union activists**

# The Great Jobs Agenda

## What is it?

Work is an important part of our lives for most of us. On average we spend around one-third of our waking hours working, although some of us spend a lot more.

That is why people want to work in good jobs that they feel are rewarding. They want respect, decent pay, secure employment, hours that suit them, a safe workplace, basic standards of employment, job satisfaction and the ability to achieve their potential. They also want a voice in their workplace.

Yet millions of us work in jobs that are the exact opposite of that. Bad jobs lead to ill-health, depression and anxiety, low-self-esteem, and can leave people exhausted and unmotivated.

Bad jobs also effect not only the worker but their family, with millions of children living in poverty because of their parent's low pay, or rarely seeing a parent because of the hours they are forced to work.

That is why the TUC wants to end these bad jobs and instead promote "Great Jobs" - ones that promote good physical and mental health, and where workers feel listened to and valued.

The TUC wants the Government to pass a "Great Jobs Act" that gives all workers:

- A voice at Work
- Fair and decent pay
- Regular hours

- Fair treatment and respect
- A healthy workplace
- Access to learning and progression.

But while we want action from the Government on these issues, there is also a lot that union workplace representatives can do to try to ensure that their employer takes action to support the TUC Great Jobs Agenda. This guide suggests a few actions that you can take in your workplace to help achieve one of these important issues – supporting more people to have regular access to learning and progression at work.

**Everyone at work deserves a great job. A great job is one where the worker is paid and treated fairly. And it's one where workers get opportunities to progress, to learn and to have a voice on what matters.**

**That's why we've created the Great Jobs Agenda. The agenda will give the trade union movement a common set of bargaining asks in workplaces. And it sets out what we want the government to do to ensure that every worker has a great job with fair pay, regular hours and the opportunity to progress.**

*Frances O'Grady, TUC General Secretary*

# Access to Learning and Progression

## Introduction

A great job will always support people to fulfil their potential and develop their career opportunities. Access to learning and development on a regular basis is key to this.

Some people starting out on their careers will have access to a formal training programme, for example, an apprenticeship or a graduate training scheme.

Equally important is access to continuing learning and development throughout a person's working life. The demands of the modern jobs market mean that it is now more important than ever for people to update their skills to support their progression at work.

However, too many people are not getting access to regular learning and development in the workplace. One third of UK employers openly admit to training none of their staff and this is a trend that has seen no improvement since 2005.

UK employers also recruit less apprentices than in many other countries and there continues to be questions about the quality of training and pay and conditions for too many people doing an apprenticeship.

The TUC Great Jobs Agenda has identified three things that employers can do to support more people to access learning and development at work.

These are:

- Supporting the role of union reps to promote and deliver union-led learning and training.
- Negotiating with unions on high quality apprenticeships and regular training opportunities for existing staff.
- Making employees aware of their rights on training and development.

## 1. Union-led learning and training

Union support for learning and development makes a huge impact. Research shows that 39 per cent of union members get access to regular training and development at work compared to only 23 per cent of non-unionised employees. This positive union impact has been boosted in recent years by the increased support for learning and skills provided by union reps, especially through the expanding numbers of union learning reps (ULRs).

ULRs are workplace representatives that support members with learning and skills and they also work with employers to ensure that their workforce receive the training and support they need.

Union-led learning and training in the workplace is also delivered through Union Learning Fund (ULF) projects. These projects

are run by unions and supported by unionlearn, the learning and skills department of the TUC.

The latest independent evaluation of the impact of the ULF and unionlearn shows that union-led learning and training delivers an estimated net contribution to the economy of more than £1.4 billion as a result of a boost to jobs, wages and productivity. In addition to enhancing the skills of individuals, union-led learning and training also boosts union membership levels. Nearly half of non-members engaging in union learning subsequently go on to join a union.

Union-led learning and training, including the role of ULRs, is shown to be most effective where there is a collective agreement in place setting out how the employer and union(s) will work together on this agenda. Such agreements covering union learning are often called learning agreements and they will typically include a commitment by the employer to allow ULRs time off for training and to carry out their role to support colleagues to access learning and development opportunities.

Learning agreements also set out negotiated arrangements to give workers time off to attend union-led learning and training opportunities in working time. Workplaces where the employer and union(s) are working strategically in support of union learning and wider workforce development often have joint learning committees in place to support this.

Many studies show that poor access is one of the main barriers to learning and making it accessible in the workplace through union learning provides a solution to this problem. Access can be boosted further if the union is able to negotiate a union-led onsite learning facility. This can range from a fully equipped, dedicated workplace learning

centre to flexible use of workplace computers.

## **What you can do**

- If there are no union learning reps in your workplace, the workplace union(s) should negotiate with their members and the employer about establishing them. Make initial contact with colleagues who may be interested in undertaking the ULR role.
- Make sure that your employer is giving all union learning reps enough time off to train as a ULR and to carry out the wide range of tasks they need to undertake in order to support colleagues to access learning and development.
- Negotiate a learning agreement with your employer that sets out the rights of ULRs and also gives workers time off to attend union-led learning and training. Also consider negotiating the establishment of a learning committee to ensure regular discussions with management about learning and development.
- Encourage your employer to enable the workforce to access union-led learning and training through the use of ICT facilities in the workplace. A dedicated learning centre has been shown to be the best means of supporting learners, especially those lacking confidence and/or new to workplace learning.

For more guidance on how you can promote the role of union learning representatives and union-led learning, see the unionlearn guide, "Making the Case for Learners". This is available on the unionlearn website ([www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk)) along with a range of other resources and guides for union reps on how to support union-led learning and development.

## 2. Negotiating quality training for apprentices and existing staff

Regular access to high quality training and development is key to supporting career progression at all stages of working life. We know from research that when unions negotiate with employers on training, this makes a real difference. For example, longer durations of training are 16 per cent more likely in workplaces where union reps negotiate with the employer over training.

Union bargaining on learning and training generally falls within three categories and one of these, union-led learning and training, is covered in the first part of this booklet. We now look at how unions can:

- improve access to high quality training for young people new to the workplace, and
- empower all workers to benefit from quality training and development at regular intervals.

An increasing number of young people are starting off their careers through an apprenticeship. Trade unions support and represent apprentices in a number of ways, including negotiating for high quality training and decent pay and conditions.

The TUC Apprenticeships Charter sets out a number of key principles to underpin high quality apprenticeships, including: a job with a productive purpose; be paid a fair rate; ensure high quality training and clear individual development; involve the trade union at every level of the programme and ensure apprentices have regular access to, and support from, trade unions; be accessible to, and achievable by all; be part of, and contribute to, a healthy and safe environment; and, get a commitment from the employer to complement the workforce, not supplement it.

These principles are also applicable to many other training programmes for young people beginning their careers, whether they are school leavers or college/university graduates. Apprenticeship training is increasingly offered to existing staff, whatever their age, and unions have a role in ensuring that adult apprenticeships also meet the quality standards highlighted above.

Workers in mid-life, particularly those over the age of 50, often find themselves at greatest risk of redundancy or missing out on promotion due to limited training and development in the past. Many have developed skills and experience during their working lives but are unaware of how they can be applied in new areas. To address this the TUC has been supporting unions to work with employers to offer mid-life development reviews to help older workers.

These reviews should help people identify their transferrable skills and suitable training and development opportunities with the aim of revitalising their career prospects either with their existing employer or another employer. Staff should also be empowered to use their organisation's development and/or performance reviews to access suitable training and development (see next section for more information on this).

### What you can do:

- Encourage your employer to sign up to the TUC Apprenticeships Charter and to include the rights of apprentices to quality training and decent pay and conditions in some form of collective agreement.
- Negotiate with your employer to agree that all apprentices have an opportunity to meet the union as part of their induction.

- ☑ Work with your employer to support adult employees to have the opportunity to access apprenticeship training if this is appropriate (e.g. it is going to develop their job and/or allow them to take up a new position).
- ☑ Work with your employer to establish a programme of mid-life development reviews and a menu of training and development opportunities for older workers.

Apprenticeships and mid-life reviews are just two training options that unions will be supporting in the workplace. The unionlearn website – [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk) – contains guidance on a wide range of learning and development opportunities that union reps can help people to access at work.

### **3. Statutory rights on training and staff development reviews**

There are very limited rights to training in the UK with the exception of a statutory “right to request time off to train” that was introduced in 2010. This gives people the right to ask for time off work for training or study if the following two criteria are both met:

- The person must be classed as an employee in an organisation with at least 250 staff and have worked for their employer for at least 6 months.
- It must be demonstrated that the training or study that will be undertaken will help the person do their job better.

The government’s guidance on how the right to request can be implemented says that “employees should follow their organisation’s rules to ask for time off” in the first instance. In effect this means that

staff should be using the existing procedures in their organisation to request time off for training, including any performance/development review system that has provision for learning and progression opportunities.

However, research shows us that access to regular training in the workplace is highly inequitable and those most in need of it are most likely to lose out. For example, graduate employees are four times more likely to access regular training at work compared with workers who don’t have any qualifications. So influencing the operation of training and development procedures in the workplace to make access to learning and training a right of everyone must be a number one priority for trade unions.

This means that unions should be involved in negotiating the establishment of, or changes to, the staff development review system and other workplace procedures that trigger access to learning and development. In the event that there are no such procedures in place, or they are failing, there is an option to invoke the “right to request” by writing to the employer. This must stipulate that it is a request under Section 63D of the Employment Rights Act 1996 and include all necessary information to make it valid.

A TUC survey of union reps supporting individuals to use the right has shown that it can influence employers to review their training procedures. In addition, reps reported that many training requests were granted without the person even having to follow through all the ‘formal’ procedures as set out in the Right to Request Time to Train regulations. So in many instances a request of this kind will lead to a negotiated solution and improvements to learning and development procedures in the workplace.

## **What you can do:**

- Get staff feedback on how effective the existing procedures for requesting time off for training and development are. One way of doing this is to distribute a survey to union members asking their views on how satisfied they are with the level of access they have to learning and development at work.
- Use the evidence you have collected to encourage your employer to review the effectiveness of existing learning and development procedures or to agree to putting procedures in place if none currently exist.
- Ensure that anyone representing employees in your workplace is capable of supporting an individual through the process of submitting an official right to request time to train request.

## **Summary**

This booklet has looked at three of the many areas where union representatives can make a real difference in helping more people get access to learning and progression opportunities. You will find advice and guidance on many other issues on the unionlearn website, [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk).

The TUC Great Jobs Agenda is based on making a practical difference that will transform the working lives of millions of people. You can play your part by trying to get change in your workplace.

Details of the campaign, and the other issues that are covered in the Great Jobs Agenda are on the Great Jobs website.

## **Find out more**

For more information about the campaign, go to:

[tuc.org.uk/campaigns/great-jobs-everyone](http://tuc.org.uk/campaigns/great-jobs-everyone)

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