unionlearn
from the TUC

Helping young people into work and training

Five case studies showing how unions and unionlearn are supporting young people in various ways to begin their working lives.

Overview

Unions and unionlearn are helping young people successfully enter the world of work, opening doors to fulfilling jobs.

The expansion of apprenticeships in recent years has helped more young people gain the skills and the qualifications they need to start a rewarding career. However, many school leavers face significant barriers and need wide-ranging support to stand a chance of even securing a place on a quality apprenticeship or progressing to further education and training.

This is especially the case for young people. At the end of 2017 more than half a million 16- to 24-year-olds were jobless, accounting for one in eight young people. In the same period nearly 800,000 people aged 16–24 were classified as 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET).

For many young people classified as unemployed or NEET, gaining a place on a high-quality apprenticeship or progressing to further education and training is a pipe dream. In addition to being jobless and/or out of education, they often lack the necessary qualifications or work experience that employers and colleges are asking for.

Some groups face additional barriers in accessing high-quality apprenticeships, including Black and minority ethnic (BME) young people, disabled young people and young women. BME and disabled young people are much less likely to be recruited to an apprenticeship compared to white and non-disabled applicants. And if they do get recruited, they are all too often trapped in low-paid and low-quality placements. While young women do not face the same initial recruitment barriers, enduring patterns of gender segregation mean they are also much less likely to get a place on apprenticeships with the highest rates of pay and best career prospects.

As highlighted in the case studies in this booklet, trade unions are playing a vital role in helping young people to get the support they need to develop their job prospects.

There are a range of programmes that enable young people to access such support, including the government's traineeship programme. This programme is designed to equip 16 to 24-year-olds with the employability skills, English, maths and work experience necessary to secure an apprenticeship or employment.

These traineeships usually last around six weeks, typically with two weeks of employability skills training (including CV writing, job application and interview skills) followed by four weeks of work experience (at least 100 hours) combined with English and maths support. Employers are not required to pay participants but are encouraged to help them with expenses such as transport and meals.

As two of the case studies in this booklet demonstrate, this traineeship model can prove useful for young people, helping them gain the skills and experience they need to enter workplaces as diverse as warehouses and racing stables.

However, there are other successful models for helping disadvantaged young people get their foot on the jobs ladder, as the other case studies in this booklet demonstrate: sector-specific initiatives like the film and television 'bootcamps' run by Creative Skillset; supported internships for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) such as Project Choice in the NHS; and the design skills programme at Keighley College – all run with crucial input from the unions involved.

The diversity of these approaches is rooted in the range of help and support disadvantaged young people require to gain the skills they need to find decent jobs or the kind of quality apprenticeships that are often highly competitive. Young people are by no means all the same: their needs are significantly impacted by geography, gender, race and socio-economic background.

All of this evidence suggests that the diversity of available models to help and support young people has the potential to offer effective solutions beyond those available through the government's traineeship programme.

Equally importantly, all these case studies demonstrate how proactive union involvement in the wide range of pre-apprenticeship programmes makes a crucial difference to the young people involved.

Unions are significantly improving disadvantaged young people's prospects of gaining the skills, training and work experience they need to level the playing field with their more advantaged peers. For example, unions can negotiate an offer of quality training/ work experience in a range of contexts (English and maths support, health and safety training, 'real world' challenges). Union reps can also input on terms and conditions (e.g. allowances and wages) and ensure decent working conditions for the young people.

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Helping Manchester youth into work

More than a dozen young unemployed people from Salford have completed traineeships that have helped them move on to apprenticeships or full-time jobs, thanks to a successful partnership between the GMB learning project ReachOut, adult learning centre St Antony's and TDB Training.

GMB ReachOut, St Antony's and TDB Training got together in January 2017, when TDB were looking for a provider that could deliver the mandatory English and maths components of traineeships for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

When TDB got in touch with ReachOut Senior Project Worker Dave Flanagan, he was able to put them in touch with St Antony's, the adult education centre that had delivered functional skills learning in the workplace for the GMB's Union Learning Fund project in the past.

The three organisations put together a six-week pilot programme with two young people, David Travis and Anthony Byrne. David had experienced significant health problems as a teenager that had prevented him from competing his formal education while Anthony had struggled academically and left full-time education without any qualifications.

Undertaking the traineeship enabled David and Anthony to gain their first significant work experience in the warehouse that TDB opened in November 2015 to provide free storage facilities for a network of food banks in Manchester and Salford.

The warehouse, operated by TDB's Community Interest Company (CIC), gives trainees the opportunity to learn the basics of warehousing, using fork lift trucks to unload donations from retail companies, sorting food into categories and date order and then dealing with the food banks who come to collect.

"Working with TDB means the trainees get the chance to work in the warehouse and understand that their training isn't only about their future jobs and income but they're also helping others in more difficult situations than themselves," explains ReachOut Contracts Manager Paul Callaghan, who has worked closely with all 13 trainees who have taken part in the programme to date.

Completing the programme last February, and gaining their Level 1 NVQs in Warehousing as well as improving their English and maths skills, has made a significant difference to both David and Anthony.

David has recently completed the apprenticeship he moved on to with a local warehousing company and is now a full-time member of staff who is planning to work his way up to managing the site, while Anthony has secured himself a place on a facilities management apprenticeship with Salford City Council thanks to the one-to-one support during the traineeship.

"The council liked the fact that Anthony was a local lad who had put himself through what was quite a challenging experience for him," Paul says.

Throughout the programme, the GMB has supplied union officers to deliver the employee rights and responsibilities components of the traineeship.

"We're fortunate that TDB are a socially minded provider, not just a bums-on-seats agency," Paul says.

"They were positive about bringing in officers from the GMB so that trainees get to hear from someone who has worked in the sector they are training for, whether that's business administration or logistics, who can tell them not just the skills requirements but what they can expect from working in the sector," he says.

Since the pilot last February, the partnership has run three further traineeship programmes in April and September 2017 and February 2018, with four, two and five young people taking part, respectively.

"The idea is to run the programme in small groups so we can ensure we can deliver a decent level of one-to-one support with the young people and have the time and space to work out what each individual needs to progress," Paul says.

All trainees are paid a daily allowance of £5 while they are on the six-week programme, which they can use to cover their food and transport costs.

"Working with TDB means the trainees get the chance to work in the warehouse and understand that their training isn't only about their future jobs and income but they're also helping others in more difficult situations than themselves."

All photographs: Paul Herrmann

While the ReachOut project has tended to see most of the trainees while they are working on their English and maths (which is taught in the same premises where the project is based), Paul has also visited the young people learning the ropes at the warehouse.

"You can see the look on their faces, the way they're enjoying the hands-on experience within the warehouse, especially when they're able to practise on the forklift trucks," he says.

Two of the trainees have joined the GMB, and others have gone on to work for organisations that already recognise the union.

Paul believes the traineeships have overall offered a positive experience for the young people involved. "We have had a very high retention rate and only one or two people have dropped out in the first year, which is always a good sign, and the overall outcomes have been very good, with the vast majority progressing on to an apprenticeship, further education or a job afterwards," he says.

"And we have had very positive feedback from the young people themselves. We had one lad who told us, 'When I started here I knew nothing and now I know everything!' Okay, we said, "Actually, now you know something!' But what he was saying was he could really see the difference we have made."

Closing the training gap in the racing industry

Introduction of traineeships to the horse racing industry has helped both trainers and their new staff since the previous training model was overhauled three years ago.

When people joined the horse racing industry in the past, they used to start their apprenticeship with a residential course at either the British Racing School (BRS) in Newmarket, Suffolk, or the Northern Racing College (NRC) in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, and then moved to a racehorse trainer's yard where they would complete the apprenticeship in Race Horse Care and Management.

Completing the residential would give learners an NVQ Level 1 and they would gain their Level 2 when they successfully completed their apprenticeship.

"What was happening was the learners were leaving home, having a 12-week crash course and then going straight into a work environment that might not suit the learner or where they might not meet the expectations of their new employer," explains National Association of Racing Staff (NARS) Union Learning Fund Project Manager Kevin Parsons, himself a graduate of the BRS apprenticeship when he was a teenager.

"And in terms of retention, we found that some learners who were completing the residential course were moving yards, or even leaving the industry altogether, and some trainers were signing up for apprentices and then losing them."

It was to address these issues that the industry overhauled the old model three years ago by introducing a traineeship between the residential course and the full apprenticeship, and NARS Chief Executive George McGrath was fully involved in the reform through his place on the Industry Development and Training group.

During the new six-week traineeship, the majority of employers not only cover the cost of board and lodging (as they do for the apprenticeship) plus expenses but also pay their trainees.

"Nearly all trainees are paid as per our industry minimum pay scale for normal employees," Kevin says.

The traineeship helps learners make the adjustment from their preliminary 12-week training to the world of work in general and, in particular, to the way their new employer runs their yard.

"In the past, some employers would take people on expecting them to be the finished article, so there was a bit of pressure on learners to come in and work at the same level as a fully qualified employee," Kevin says.

"This is definitely a better system, as the traineeship helps employers understand how learners need some work experience before they're able to do the job they need them to do and it gives the learners the chance to integrate into the yard over a period of time."

Kevin continues to visit the learners on their residential courses, sharing his own experiences of the industry and encouraging them to plan for the future since only a handful can make it to the very highest level as jockeys and life-changing injuries are only ever one bad fall away.

"It's quite similar to football – they all arrive at the British Racing School or the Northern Racing College and they want to be the next Frankie Dettori or Tony McCoy, so I always tell them that being a jockey isn't the be-all and end-all, there are other careers in the industry and all the courses we can offer them through NARS," he says.

"Nearly all trainees are paid as per our industry minimum pay scale for normal employees."

Photograph: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

Opening up opportunities in film and TV

Dozens of unemployed people got on the first rung of careers ladder in film and television with the help of health and safety training delivered by media and entertainment union BECTU (now part of Prospect) at specialist 'bootcamps' last year.

The one-day course helped participants gain their Production Safety Passport, the industry scheme that recognises health and safety training in the film and TV sectors (and is comparable to the Construction Skills Certification Scheme in the building industry).

All three courses were delivered by BECTU Training Official Martin Roberts, a former electrician who specialised in theatre lighting and built up 20 years' experience as a union rep as well before taking on his current role.

Creative Skillset, the Sector Skills Council, organised the Making Creativity Work five-day bootcamps last year for unemployed adults keen to start freelancing careers in television, film, animation, visual effects and games.

As well as helping the 38 participants to gain their Production Safety Passport, the courses covered:

- understanding what employers want
- where to look for work
- which roles might best suit participants
- the knowledge and skills needed to become a successful freelancer.

To teach the participants how to be safe on film and television sets, Martin used BECTU's Creative Industries Safety Passport one-day course at the bootcamps.

"The Creative Industries Safety Passport is approved by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), is also part of the Production Safety Passport scheme and is recognised by unions and employers such as the BBC, ITV, Sky, Channel 4 and film companies," Martin explains.

"If you have completed the course, it's taken as read that you are safe to be on set and able to undertake a risk assessment."

BECTU was the obvious choice to deliver the health and safety element of the bootcamps in May and June last year since the union originally developed the industry-recognised course to fill a gap in the training market.

"This is a course that is highly thought of, because it covers both film and TV, it is very much aimed at freelancers and the tutors are people like myself who have worked in the industry," Martin says.

"The feedback is always good: the organiser of the bootcamps at Creative Skillset thought the course was highly valuable and has arranged for us to deliver it again for them later this spring."

The majority of participants on the bootcamps were young unemployed people, some of them looking to get their own projects financed and off the ground and others looking for a career with established production companies.

The were all able to take the opportunity to network with industry freelancers and professionals and attend an exclusive recruitment event separate to the bootcamp itself where they had the chance to find their first job or freelance contract.

Photograph: 'Creative Skillset'

"If you have completed the course, it's taken as read that you are safe to be on set and able to undertake a risk assessment."

Helping IT students put their ideas into action

IT students in Keighley, West Yorkshire, have improved their chances of a successful transition into the world of work by taking part in an exercise to design and make marketing materials for the GMB.

Through a unique partnership between the union and Keighley College, the students were able to create the merchandise by using the onsite Fab Lab –a cutting-edge facility at the college that is equipped with the latest in digital fabrication equipment that allows users to design, cut, build, code, solder and engineer almost anything they can think of.

The exercise was developed by Chris Stott, Head of Business Engagement at Keighley College, and GMB Project Worker Michelle Graham as part of the Improving Productivity Using ICT unit of the students' IT qualification.

"We developed this idea that we could use the facilities to give young people some real work experience by designing and making prototypes for GMB merchandise," Michelle explains.

The brief to the students was to produce a range of marketing materials to promote the GMB's Learning Project, Working Towards Work – with the aim of producing items that would attract more attention than the usual giveaways.

The idea was that involving students in the design would enable them to experience the reality of making something to a design brief, a budget and a timeline – just as they would in a work environment.

The other advantage of the merchandising idea was the range of learning it would involve, including classroom discussions of employment rights and responsibilities and research into the full range of sectors organised by a general union like the GMB.

"I wanted them to learn about the union without me being stood in the front of the room boring them to tears by talking – because frankly, that's likely what would have happened!" Michelle says.

"It was more effective for them to go away and research and get a much better picture of what unions are all about by looking at all the different sectors in the GMB, not just the ones people usually think of, like the NHS."

Forty students in total were taught how to use the Fab Lab facilities and design software and then worked in groups over a number of weeks to design their materials and make the prototypes.

In addition to improving their IT skills, the students raised their game in English and maths since they were also required to put together PowerPoint presentations that would explain their ideas and show their costings against budget.

"We would turn up every so often to check on their progress and you could see they were coming on in leaps and bounds," Michelle recalls.

To complete the project, a group of 10 students representing all the different groups then pitched their ideas to a panel that convened at the Fab Lab itself – TUC Regional Secretary Bill Adams, former Selby MP John Grogan (now back in Parliament as MP for Keighley), GMB activist Andy Irvine and Michelle herself.

"All the presentations were really good: the students answered questions from the panel very well and their presentation skills were absolutely brilliant," Michelle says.

"From there we were supposed to pick some of the products but I picked them all: the key rings, trolley coins and pen-holders have been made and gone to various events we have run across the region – everybody knows about them!"

"We developed this idea that we could use the facilities to give young people some real work experience by designing and making prototypes for GMB merchandise."

Unlocking NHS pathways for everyone

UNISON's Bridges to Learning project is helping internees with learning disabilities, difficulties and autism as they progress through the supported internship and work experience programme Project Choice in Newcastle.

Funded by Health Education England (HEE), Project Choice is designed to help young adults with learning difficulties between the ages of 16 and 24 gain the skills and work experience they need to secure permanent jobs.

Every September, 12 young people join The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust programme, which was recognised with the workforce award in the Health Service Journal (HSJ) Awards in 2015.

Bridges to Learning Project Co-ordinator John Wears, who is also chair of the disability staff network at the Trust, has been involved with the programme over the past two years.

Bridges to Learning is a unique partnership between public services union UNISON, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and The Open University (OU) that helps public service workers in the north-east gain the skills and qualifications they need to develop at work. John has been on full-time secondment to the project since it launched nine years ago.

As well as his own personal experience (his oldest son is on the autism spectrum), John has been able to support the internees with the skills he has gained in his development as a project co-ordinator, including the diploma in autism awareness that he completed as the Special Educational Needs (SEN) component of his teaching degree.

Together with one of his colleagues from the training department at the Trust, John helped customise the corporate induction programme that the young people complete when they arrive at the Trust at the beginning of each academic year.

"We were asked to put together a bespoke programme for the Project Choice internees, taking into consideration what their particular needs might be and what obstacles they might need to overcome as individuals," he says.

"We looked at the induction programme as a whole and adapted the delivery to fit the group, taking into account both what is needed for mandatory training and what is needed for best practice, looking at particular sessions such as equality and diversity, customer care and conflict resolution."

The bespoke induction covered every element of the induction, from how to set up the room where it's delivered, to adapting handouts so as not to exclude internees with less effective literacy skills.

"Every cohort is different and every individual is different, of course, but 70-80 per cent of the internees have a diagnosis of autism, for example, so we look at what everyone's needs are and how we can best support them as an individual," John says.

Each internee is assigned an individual mentor in each department where they are placed and Project Choice has now trained 175 mentors to support people with learning disabilities, difficulties or autism (LDA).

"Through Bridges to Learning, we've also put together training that can support their mentors in the workplace," John says. "We've organised learning disability awareness courses, dyslexia awareness courses and accredited autism courses – and we have seen a lot of the mentors take up those courses or qualifications to support them in their workplace."

The internees undertake three placements that each span 10 to 12 weeks and are embedded in the team each time. The Project Choice team identifies any barriers they may face and areas of development they might need during each placement, while the learners are gradually assessed on how ready for employment they are throughout the programme.

Of the 52 interns who have been supported through the project so far, 77 per cent have made successful transitions into employment as a result – a figure that is all the more impressive considering that nationally, just 7 per cent of people with a learning disability are employed.

Of the most recent cohort who graduated in 2017, seven had already received job offers and three more were attending interviews by the time of the graduation ceremony in July, while the remaining two had decided to continue with further study in health and social care.

"The benefit for the individuals is that they get that real life experience of the workplace and gain that understanding of how the workplace works," John says.

"Some go on obviously to complete formal qualifications, which supports their career and job prospects going forward and some now work for the organisation and have applied for courses with the experience they have gained with the organisation."

The programme also pays off for the Trust, John points out. "The employer benefit is that they develop a diverse workforce with people coming in from all parts of the community," he says.

"Project Choice is a very worthwhile project in Newcastle that is very important for young people to gain work experience and employment at the end of it, so everybody benefits."

"The benefit for the individuals is that they get that real life experience of the workplace and gain that understanding of how the workplace works."

Further information and resources

1 Apprenticeships

Unionlearn has produced a free online learning module. Apprenticeships - a guide for union representatives eNote to help union reps learn more about apprenticeships. Unionlearn also offers other useful materials such as the *Your Rights as an Apprentice* leaflet and a comprehensively updated edition of the popular *Apprenticeships Toolkit*. The toolkit also includes new information on traineeships and supported internships.

You can find links to all these resources on the unionlearn website at:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeships

2 Traineeships

The TUC has produced a Model Traineeship Charter, which is designed to help unions negotiate for high-quality traineeships that safeguard against the exploitation of young people. You can find the full text of the Charter, and more resources on traineeships, on the unionlearn website at:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/traineeships

3 Work placements

The TUC has produced guidance that aims to ensure work experience schemes are high quality and consistent with TUC principles. You can find this on the unionlearn website at:

www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/work-experience-placements-guidance-reps

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

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