

Learning & Skills Policy Update

December 2016

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Introduction

This newsletter is intended to keep unions and other stakeholders abreast of policy developments in learning and skills, including providing updates on what the TUC and unionlearn are saying on specific policy issues. If you have any suggestions about either the content or the design of the newsletter, please contact Iain Murray: imurray@tuc.org.uk. The newsletter and a range of learning and skills policy briefings are available on the [unionlearn](http://unionlearn.org) and [TUC](http://TUC.org) websites.

Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund and unionlearn

In June 2015, the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at the Leeds University Business School, in

collaboration with the Marchmont Observatory at the University of Exeter, were commissioned by TUC/unionlearn to conduct an [evaluation](#) of the Union Learning Fund Round 15 (2012/13 to 2014/15) and Round 16 (2015/16), and also the support role of unionlearn.

The evaluation looked at the impact of the ULF and unionlearn from a number of perspectives and drew on findings from two key surveys. A survey of 2,550 learners took place in January-March 2016 and this included a follow-up of 228 learners previously surveyed in early 2015. A survey of 385 employers took place at the end of 2015 and this was compared to data from a similar survey undertaken by CERIC in 2010. Interviews were also conducted with 22 union officers and 12 non-union national stakeholders.

The evaluation identified a wide range of positive impacts of engagement in union learning for both employees and employers and these key findings are set out on the following page. In addition, an analysis based on a methodology developed by the government highlighted that ULF 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. Importantly, the research also showed that nearly half (46%) of non-union members that took up the offer of training and development via the ULF subsequently went on to join a union. There was also a boost to wider union

activity by over half of those who had engaged in learning and training via the ULF.

The evaluation also produced a number of recommendations to improve operational aspects of the ULF, including improving and integrating project monitoring, reporting and project evaluation systems in order to better track outcomes and assess overall impact over the longer term.

More detail on the key findings are highlighted below:

- Over two-thirds (68%) of learners with no previous qualification and just under half (47%) of those starting with Entry level or Level 1 qualifications got a qualification at a higher level as a result of ULF support
- More than three in four (77%) employers said that engagement in the ULF had a positive effect in their workplaces, with over two-thirds (68%) saying unions were particularly effective at inspiring reluctant learners to engage in training and development and 53% saying ULF led to an increase in the number of employees gaining qualifications
- Union learning stimulates demand for further learning. Three quarters (76%) of individuals reported that they had become more enthusiastic about learning and nine in ten (91%) that they were interested in further learning
- Four in five (80%) employees said they had developed skills that they could transfer to a new job, while two in three (62%) said the new skills they acquired made them more effective in their current job.
- One in five (19%) said they had gained a promotion or increased responsibility and one in 10 (11%) gained a pay rise. These type of outcomes were greatly boosted when an employee engaged in successive episodes of union learning. For example, employees who completed at least three episodes of union learning, compared with those completing only one episode of union learning, were:
 - 3.6 times more likely to get a new job with their current employer
 - 2.7 times more likely to receive a pay rise
 - 5.7 times more likely to attain promotion
 - 3.4 times more likely to report that they could do their job more effectively
- Nearly half of employers (47%) said their staff were more committed as a result of their engagement in union-led learning and training and 44% said that the ULF led to improved employment relationships in the organisation
- The evaluation found that for every £1 invested in the ULF, there is a return of £12.30, with £7.60 going to the worker taking part in the training, and £4.70 going to the employer. On this basis it is estimated that learning and skills supported by the ULF 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
- The evaluation also estimated the return to the Exchequer (e.g. through reduced spending on welfare benefits and other factors resulting from the boost to jobs and wages). This analysis found the return to be £3.57 for each £1 spent on the ULF
- Twenty per cent of learner surveyed were not union members before they engaged with learning or training via the ULF. However, almost half (46%) of these learners subsequently went on to join a union
- There was also a boost to union activity among union members that engaged in ULF learning and training. A third of all those that engaged in union learning reported

becoming more active in their union. This particular impact was greatly boosted when an employee engaged in successive episodes of union learning. For example, employees who completed at least three episodes of union learning, compared with those completing only one episode of union learning, were:

- 11 times more likely to become more active in their union; and
- 26 times more likely to become a union learning representative.

Apprenticeships

Guidance on Apprenticeship Levy

Following a consultation launched in August, in October the government updated its [operational guidance for the apprenticeship levy](#). It also confirmed a number of outstanding policy issues and revised some previous proposals in light of feedback from stakeholders via the consultation process. Some of the headline announcements were as follows:

- higher funding for STEM apprenticeship frameworks and higher pricing of apprenticeship standards to support improved quality, and greater flexibility to train those with prior qualifications
- a longer period of time for employers to spend funds in their digital account (24 months compared with original proposal of 18 months)
- a commitment to introduce, in 2018, the ability for employers to use their levy payments to support apprenticeships in their supply chain and not just those in their own company. An employer stakeholder group to help the government develop this system has been established

- 90% contribution from government to the cost of training for employers that will not pay the levy and additional assistance, as follows:
 - 100% contribution from government to the cost of training for small employers (i.e. less than 50 employees) that will not pay the levy and who take on apprentices who are 16 to 18 years old, 19- to 24-year-old care leavers or 19- to 24-year-olds with an education and health care plan
 - £1,000 each from government to employers and training providers when they take on 16- to 18-year-olds, 19- to 24-year-olds who were in care or who have an education and health care plan
- help for training providers to adapt to the new, simpler funding model through an additional cash payment equal to 20% of the funding band maximum where they train 16- to 18-year-olds on frameworks
- a simplified version of the current system of support for people from disadvantaged areas to ensure the opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship is open to everyone, no matter where in England they live, their background or family circumstances.

In addition to the updated guidance, the government published a new policy paper on the apprenticeship levy and more detail on the funding bands on its [website](#). The [DfE press release](#) contained a quote from the TUC General Secretary, as follows: “High-quality apprenticeships are vital to our economic growth, and to young workers looking for a decent start to their career. The levy will give a welcome boost to funding for apprenticeships, and will make sure that all employers who benefit from a skilled workforce are paying their way. Trade unions look forward to working with employers to make a success of the levy and the apprenticeships that it funds.”

Since this announcement, the [Skills Funding Agency](#) and [HMRC](#) have published new specialist guidance on the levy respectively aimed at colleges/providers delivering apprenticeship training and employers who are having to pay the levy.

Unionlearn has developed a range of tools to support union reps, officers and ULF projects that are negotiating good quality apprenticeships with employers, including the [apprenticeship toolkit](#) and [15 key apprenticeship levy negotiating tips](#).

Higher/Degree Apprenticeships

Universities and colleges across England have been awarded a total of £4.5 million to develop new degree apprenticeships for students starting in September 2017. The government funding was [announced](#) by the DfE in November and it is a continuation of an initiative called the Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund. The 18 successful projects, including the University of Cumbria, Sheffield Hallam University, London South Bank University and Nottingham Trent University, have been awarded funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in the first round of a 2-year programme. Working in partnership with leading employers, the universities and colleges will offer 5,200 new opportunities for apprentices and their employers in preparation for the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017.

The expansion of degree apprenticeships will be boosted further as a result of recent announcements about the development of nursing and police degree apprenticeships. The first [apprentice nurses](#) could be in place by next September and it is predicted by the government that once the programme is established, up to 1,000 apprentice nurses could join the NHS each year.

All new [police officers](#) in England and Wales will need a degree-level qualification under future plans and recruits will have the option of doing this via a degree apprenticeship. They will be paid £21,000 to £23,000 during the apprenticeship and will have three years to complete the degree, spending around a fifth of their time in the classroom. There are also indications that the government is supporting the development of a [degree apprenticeship for teachers](#).

New policy reports

A number of policy reports on apprenticeships have been published in recent months. In September the National Audit Office (NAO) published a report entitled [Delivering Value through the Apprenticeships Programme](#). The report says that the government “has not set out how it will use the increase in apprenticeship numbers to deliver improvement in productivity, and how it will influence the mix of apprenticeships in order to deliver the most value.”

The report also notes that whilst employers report high levels of satisfaction with the training offered and benefits experienced, surveys of apprentices provide a less clear view on quality of delivery. According to the NAO one in five apprentices report that they had not received any formal training at all, either at an external provider or in the workplace. In addition, it highlights that between 2012/13 and 2014/15, 127 apprenticeship providers fell within the scope of formal intervention by the Skills Funding Agency due to poor quality training, but of these providers, only four had their contracts terminated.

The NAO recommends that the government should “set out the planned overall impact on productivity and growth, along with short-term key performance indicators to measure the programme’s success”. It also recommends that

government should “determine the respective roles of government bodies and the Institute for Apprenticeships, with particular regard to: overseeing the quality of apprenticeship training.”

Some of these key concerns have been reiterated in a House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report, [The Apprenticeships Programme](#). This report calls on the government to “publish, and regularly report on, a broader range of success measures”, including future earnings of apprentices and “whether the programme is delivering improved access to under-represented groups across all occupations.”

This report also calls on the government to clarify the role of the Institute for Apprenticeships, in particular as regards its remit to regulate the quality of apprenticeships. For example, it points out that it remains “unclear whether the employer-led IfA will draw on the perspectives of other important stakeholders such as the trade unions”. The TUC continues to make the case for union membership at senior governance levels of the Institute as is the case with equivalent national skills bodies in other countries.

The DfE has recently published two [reports](#) drawing on surveys of employers and apprentices. While the findings in these two reports are largely positive, they do still highlight some key issues of concern regarding the quality of apprenticeships. For example, one in twenty (5%) apprentices report that they are not receiving any kind of training at all, either formal or informal.

A number of policy think tanks have also recently published policy reports on apprenticeships, including the [IPPR](#) and the [Policy Exchange](#).

Technical and Further Education Bill

Earlier this year the government set out significant reforms to post-16 education and skills in England. A report into technical education by an independent panel, chaired by Lord Sainsbury, recommended simplifying the current system so technical education is provided through 15 high-quality routes with standards being set by the Institute for Apprenticeships (which is to be renamed the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education). The report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education and the government’s Post-16 Skills Plan are both available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-skills-plan-and-independent-report-on-technical-education.

The TUC has recently submitted [evidence](#) to the Public Bill Committee that is considering the [Technical and Further Education Bill](#), which is taking forward these reforms. The TUC evidence to the Bill Committee has welcomed the general thrust of the reforms, including developing an integrated apprenticeships and technical education system and extending the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships so that it has responsibility for both apprenticeship and technical education standards. In addition, the TUC has welcomed the following features of the proposed system:

- Flexibility that enables students to switch between academic and technical education pathways
- Tailored support for disabled students and those with special educational needs
- Ensuring adults can access the new technical education system to retrain or upskill.

The TUC evidence also highlights three key challenges that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the proposed reforms successfully deliver a new system of high

quality apprenticeships and technical education.

Firstly, there is a need to give trade unions a central role in setting and monitoring quality standards in the evolving apprenticeship/technical education system as is common practice in many other European countries with high quality training systems. Secondly, if these reforms are to succeed, the government must back them up with serious investment in colleges and further education as recommended by the Sainsbury panel. Thirdly, it will be important to put in place safeguards to ensure that the work placements that technical education students engage in are of a high quality so that young people are not exploited and the apprenticeship system is not undermined.

Further Education & Skills

Speech by Skills Minister

The Skills Minister, Robert Halfon MP, set out his thinking about further education and skills in a recent [speech](#) at the annual Association of Colleges conference. The Minister made a direct reference to the role of unions and in particular highlighted the huge benefits delivered by the Union Learning Fund (ULF) and unionlearn. He said:

“Unionlearn develops the capacity of trade unions and union learning representatives to work with employers, employees and learning providers to encourage greater take-up of learning in the workplace. I am proud that this year the government has invested £12 million in this service, which has reached over 2.25 million learners over the last 10 years.”

The Minister also highlighted that as the new FE and Skills Minister, he had 5 priorities for the sector: prestige; skills; social justice; strong leadership and financial stability; and quality.

Autumn Statement

In the run-up to the Autumn Statement, unionlearn [called on the government](#) to increase investment in further education. In a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, bodies representing further education staff, students and providers called for extra investment to “develop a strong and vibrant further education sector which can cater to different people’s needs and aspirations”. The letter was co-signed by the University and College Union, the Association of Colleges, the National Union of Students, the Learning and Work Institute, UNISON, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, Voice, GMB and unionlearn.

Local Area Reviews

The House of Commons Education Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the Local Area Reviews and a number of education unions have submitted [evidence](#) and raised a number of concerns. In particular, unions have highlighted that their input to these reviews have been too limited and that wider workforce development priorities are being sacrificed to a focus on achieving efficiency savings by prioritising college mergers at all costs. Other concerns include a lack of transparency about the whole process and that FE and sixth form college staff and learners are not being properly consulted about the impact of structural change in their locality.

CITB and ECITB reviews

The government has appointed Paul Morrell, the former government construction advisor, to undertake a [review](#) of the two remaining industrial training boards with an operational training levy in place. The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) are funded by the industries they serve by way of a

statutory training levy. The levy proceeds are redistributed by the industrial training boards chiefly in the form of grants to subsidise training costs in the sector.

Setting out the case for the review, the government said the following: “The introduction of the apprenticeship levy in April 2017 will impact on larger companies currently in scope of the levies operated by the industrial training boards. A key question for the review, and any subsequent levy order will be whether market failures in construction still require a separate levy and grant system and if so, how this can operate alongside the apprenticeship levy.”

In addition, the review will take into account the findings of a recent report by Mark Farmer for the Construction Leadership Council – [Modernise or Die](#) - which posed a number of questions about the ability of the UK construction sector to maintain and expand capacity, and the effectiveness and future role for the CITB.

English and maths

Unionlearn Literacy/English Campaign

Unionlearn will be running a literacy and English skills campaign week from the 30th of January to the 3rd of February 2017. You will be able to follow the campaign activity in Twitter and Facebook with the hashtag #ulliteracyworks. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness and promote literacy learning opportunities through the union route. It will be wide-ranging and address how to develop skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking and ESOL. The campaign week will focus on engaging people to think about their English language and literacy skills and how to develop them further.

The campaign will encourage people to access various online resources, including the free Use-It online assessment tool, www.unionlearn.org.uk/use-it. Union reps will be encouraged to access the new ESOL eNote (see below) and to look at [new videos](#) designed to be used by trade unions and other organisations promoting good practice in industrial relations with migrant workers.

ESOL

Unionlearn has welcomed the call for the government to develop an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) strategy. The National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) has released a draft strategy - [Towards an ESOL strategy for England](#) - highlighting the need for a coherent approach to ESOL learning in England. The report also draws attention to the role trade unions play in supporting ESOL learning in the workplace and highlights the [Working in the UK guide](#) which the TUC has produced to help migrant workers to know more about their rights in the workplace.

The recommendations in the report include a call for ESOL courses to be offered for free for the unemployed, newly-arrived asylum seekers and people with low literacy in their first language. It also says that curriculum and learning resources should be provided by central government via a national website and that there should be better professional development routes for ESOL teachers. NATECLA has collected evidence which shows that ESOL strategies in Scotland and Wales have proved to be beneficial and recommends that England should follow suit.

TUC Education has launched a new eNote entitled *Language support for workers*, which focuses on ESOL provision in the workplace. This new eNote will help equip reps with the

skills to plan, arrange and promote ESOL activities in the workplace, including recognising the value of these activities to support union organising. It will also help union reps to understand and communicate the impact of ESOL issues in the workplace, so that they can influence and win the support of employers, decision-makers and colleagues. All the TUC Education eNotes are available at: www.tuceducation.org.uk/ (click on eNotes).

16-19 year-olds

Commentators, such as the [FE Week website](#), have recently suggested that the government may be considering reviewing its current English and maths policy for 16-19 year-olds. Since 2014 there has been a requirement on young people not achieving a grade C to continue their studies in English and maths, including taking re-sits.

However, the evidence shows that many young people continue to fail to achieve a grade C and various stakeholders (including unionlearn) have questioned this policy. In particular, there has been a widespread call for an approach that enables more young people to take Functional Skills English and maths qualifications instead of GCSEs. Most telling of all was the analysis in this year's annual [Ofsted Report](#), as follows:

"It remains unclear whether the GCSE qualification is the best way of ensuring that students have the English and mathematical skills needed for their intended career. Inspection evidence shows that, for some students, having to retake their GCSE can be demotivating and that attendance at these lessons is lower. For many students, an alternative level 2 qualification may be a more appropriate means of improving their English and mathematics and ensuring that they are ready for work".

In his [speech](#) to the AOC conference, the Skills Minister said that he recognised that "it is also clear that we need a credible, high-quality option for students for whom GCSEs are not appropriate or achievable" and that "this is why we are reforming functional skills to make sure that they are genuinely relevant to employers, and consequently have credibility and prestige in the jobs market." The [Education and Training Foundation](#) has been charged by government with reforming Functional Skills qualifications and the process should be completed by 2018.

ICT and digital skills

Unionlearn welcomed the government's [announcement](#) in October that it plans to "make training in basic digital skills free for adults lacking relevant qualifications". In principle this should put ICT/digital skills on a similar footing to English and maths, which are currently fully funded for adults who have not yet achieved a Level 2 qualification. According to the statement, the proposal will be taken forward through an amendment to the Digital Economy Bill and this will result in "publicly-funded basic digital skills training being offered free of charge to adults in England who need it."

The government press release highlighted some telling statistics, including that more than 10 million adults lack such skills and that 5.3 million people in the UK have never used the internet. Unsurprisingly, older citizens are less likely to have basic digital skills – 57% of the over-65s fall into this category compared with 7% of 15-24 year-olds.

The statement says that courses will be delivered by colleges and other adult education providers and will be funded from the government's Adult Education Budget. Unions have a long tradition in supporting ICT/digital skills in the workplace, especially through Union Learning Fund projects and the work of union

learning representatives. The government will be consulting on the details of the proposal in the coming months and this will provide an opportunity to make the case for the importance of the union role in supporting promotion and delivery of this new ICT/digital skills entitlement.

European workplace learning toolkit

In September a new European workplace learning toolkit was [launched](#) at a unionlearn event - *Implementing a European trade union strategy to support the development of workers skills in manufacturing and beyond* – which drew in delegates from unions, employer organisations and providers from across Europe. The toolkit was developed through a European Union funded project supported by the ETUC and a number of trade union confederations (including the TUC). The project has been working with trade unions in six countries over the last year - Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain and the UK. The result is a toolkit for members aiming to improve access to learning within workplaces.

Using a six-step approach the toolkit provides a series of ideas, suggestions and templates to support trade union representatives in their discussions and negotiations with employers - with a version of the toolkit available in the language of each country involved. The toolkit is available on the unionlearn website at:

<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/developing-workplace-learning-toolkit-trade-unions>

Other policy and research news

Remaking Tertiary Education

Professor Alison Wolf, a leading government advisor on technical and professional education, has recently authored a report - [Remaking Tertiary Education](#) – that calls into

question the current post-18 education system. In the report she argues that increasingly limited access to higher level technical qualifications and the large numbers studying to degree level is damaging for the economy and also for individual opportunity in certain circumstances. Her central argument is as follows:

“The number and availability of tertiary awards at sub-degree level have declined rapidly in England in recent years in both higher and further education institutions. HNDs, HNCs and Foundation degrees make up a tiny proportion of tertiary qualifications, in absolute terms and compared to a generation ago. In a large number of other advanced economies, by contrast, such qualifications remain very popular and important and are an effective way of developing advanced technical and applied skills”. She also points out that “labour market data show that many graduates are working in non-graduate jobs, and that for many people, a degree is not associated with earnings that are well above the non-graduate average.”

In her report Professor Wolf recommends a number of reforms to the current student loan and qualification systems in order to give more people an opportunity to pursue two-year higher level technical qualifications rather than three-year degrees.

Poverty and skills

In September unionlearn [welcomed](#) a new report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation – [We Can Solve Poverty in the UK](#) - that set out a national anti-poverty strategy. Improving education and skills standards and enabling adults to improve their skills levels is one of the pillars of the five-point plan set out in the report.

The report draws particular attention to English, maths and digital skills needs and the official

estimates that 5 million adults lack core literacy or numeracy skills and 12.6 million lack basic digital skills. The role than unions play in the workplace in supporting individuals to improve these skills is acknowledged in the report.

Apprenticeships for young people, and especially a drive to improve quality, is another skills area the report prioritises as a key means of supporting more people into sustainable well-paid employment and long-term career pathways.

Social Mobility Commission report

In November the UK Social Mobility Commission published its fourth annual [State of the Nation report](#) and this contained a number of recommendations on learning and skills. It says that, as part of a ten-year programme of social reform, the Commission recommends that:

- The Government should create a single, UCAS-style portal that includes vocational training alongside HE options and shows the outcomes associated with different qualifications
- The Government should build destinations data into accountability frameworks for schools, encouraging them to take responsibility for the choices of all pupils, including those who take technical routes at 16
- The Government should encourage sixth-form provision in areas where it is lacking and give schools a central role in supporting FE colleges to deliver the Skills Plan. It should aim to reduce the number of 16- to 18-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training to zero by 2022
- The Institute of Apprenticeships should impose robust quality criteria for apprenticeships and not allow schemes that do not meet these criteria to be called

apprenticeships

- The Government should make social mobility reputational for universities, by publishing an annual social mobility league table
- The Government should work with universities to ensure HE can be accessed locally in all parts of the country. The 90 areas with no HE provision should be assessed and there should be locally accessible provision everywhere by 2025.