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Learning & Skills Policy Update

December 2020

Contents:

Introduction

This newsletter is intended to keep unions and other stakeholders up to speed on recent learning and skills policy developments, including commentary by the TUC and unionlearn. It also highlights new resources developed by unionlearn to support union reps to boost learning and skills opportunities in the workplace. If you have any suggestions about either the content or design of the newsletter, please contact Iain Murray: imurray@tuc.org.uk. The newsletter and a range of other learning and skills policy briefings are available on the unionlearn and TUC websites.

Union Learning Fund

At the beginning of October the Department for Education communicated to the TUC that it would cease to provide an annual grant for the Union Learning Fund (ULF) beyond the end of March 2021. The TUC immediately launched a campaign to save the ULF – Don't Let Government Cut Union Learning – and this sets out a number of calls for action that people can take in support. This includes signing a national petition calling on the government to reverse the decision and asking people to contact their local MP to add their voice to the campaign. Below is a summary of progress with the campaign since it was launched.

An initial campaign briefing was produced setting out the range of evidence from independent evaluations about the unique impact of the ULF and in particular how it supports adults most in need of opportunities to upskill and retrain. Further briefing material was made available highlighting support from a range of employers (e.g. Tesco, Heathrow Airport, Tata Steel), the lead HR body in the UK (CIPD), and a number of learning and skills organisations (e.g. WEA and the Learning & Work Institute). The growing call from employers and other stakeholders for government to reverse the decision has been a highlight of the campaign and has included a joint letter from major manufacturing employer bodies, including Make UK.

Last month the TUC produced a new report analysing the detrimental impact of the closure of the ULF on the potential take-up of the new level 3 entitlement for adults announced by the Prime Minister at the end of September. This report sets out how the ULF would make a significant contribution to promoting take-up of this new entitlement among the hardest-to-reach groups when it is launched next April. We know from the experience of other free entitlements to learning (e.g. English and maths level 2 qualifications) that there are significant barriers to learning beyond cost, which the ULF and union learning reps have successfully addressed in order to boost take-up. There would be a similar approach for the new entitlement, with union learning reps helping adults to overcome initial barriers to engagement, supporting them to achieve the necessary skills required before embarking on a level 3 qualification, and sustaining adult learners throughout to ensure they complete and attain the qualification.

The TUC has also pointed to new evidence from an independent report by the University of Exeter, which argues that the ULF can play a key role in "levelling up" skills and productivity across England as the country recovers from the pandemic. Using an economic model devised by the government, the authors estimate that ULF Round 20 (2019-20) would have an overall economic impact (benefits to employers and individuals) of nearly £1.5 billion. For every £1 spent on ULF-supported learning and training, the economy gets £12.87 back and £7.56 of this economic return comes from the boost union-led training gives to workers' wages and employment prospects over their lifetimes. However, the research also reveals that for every £1 spent, employers see a return of £5.31 thanks to staff becoming more skilled and productive. Taking into account both the cost of ULF Round 20 and the cost to partners of delivering ULF generated learning and training, the estimated return to the Exchequer is £3.60 for each £1 spent

The Learning & Work Institute has also recently published a report highlighting the positive links between trade unions and workplace training, and the potential benefits of developing stronger social partnership arrangements in our skills system. It recommends that in order to engage more adults in upskilling, the government should continue to invest in the ULF and ensure that union learning is a central part of its drive to level up skills, boost productivity, and adapt to a changing world of work after the pandemic. It calls on the government to take account of studies by the OECD and our own Industrial Strategy Council, among others, highlighting the benefits of robust social partnership arrangements. It recommends that the government should establish a National Skills Partnership as a new social partnership body to provide a long-term vision for the skills system as we rebuild and reskill after coronavirus.

There have been a number of parliamentary debates and questions to government ministers about the ULF in recent weeks. This culminated in a Westminster Hall debate on the 'Future of the Union Learning Fund' on 18 November, initiated by Lilian Greenwood MP. A video recording of the debate is available and the House of Commons Library produced a detailed briefing pack in advance of the debate. This briefing includes all the parliamentary coverage of the government's decision on the ULF since the beginning of October and it also details press coverage of the ULF in this timeframe.

Spending Review

The Spending Review set out by the Chancellor of Exchequer on 25 November did not contain any major new skills initiatives. The TUC had been calling on the government to launch a massive adult retraining programme to boost job prospects, especially for workers in those sectors hardest hit by Covid-19. The TUC proposal included bringing forward the committed funding for the National Skills Fund next year (2021-22) into the current financial year. The Spending Review does provide a breakdown of spending on the National Skills Fund in 2021-22 and this will comprise a total of £375 million allocated to the following three areas:

- £138 million funding for the new adult level 3 entitlement and related initiatives (e.g. skills bootcamps) announced by the Prime Minister at the end of September
- £110 million, including £50 million of capital investment, to drive up higher technical

provision in support of the future rollout of a Flexible Loan Entitlement to test and develop innovative models for local collaboration between skills providers and employers. See page 4 for more detail about the level 3 entitlement and flexible loan entitlement

- £127 million to continue support for people to build the skills they need to get into work, building on the summer *Plan for Jobs*, including funding for traineeships, sector-based work academy placements and the National Careers Service. More detail on the Plan for Jobs is available in the last edition of this newsletter.

However, the totality of spending on the National Skills Fund in 2021-22 (£375m) is much less than the original commitment of £500m per annum. According to a FE Week report the DfE has said the underspend is explained by a reprioritisation of funds to "support the government's response to Covid-19". However, this report also says that the DfE has given a commitment that "the £125 million underspend will be used as part of the National Skills Fund in future years, and it remains committed to spending the full £2.5 billion".

There have also been question marks over the use of the 2021-22 NSF funding allocation for "£50 million of capital investment, to drive up higher technical provision" (see bullet point at top of this page). In addition to the £2.5 billion NSF funding, the government has committed over £1.5 billion of capital spending for investment in college buildings and facilities. On this basis it is not clear why the NSF allocation is being used for capital spend as the understanding was that it would be dedicated to funding training provision.

The Chancellor also made a number of announcements on apprenticeships, including extending to 31 March the incentive payments available to employers for hiring a new apprentice introduced in the *Plan for Jobs* (these incentives were due to end on 31 January). Two changes were announced to the Apprenticeship Levy (whilst retaining the rule that employers' unspent levy funds will still expire after 24 months):

- from August 2021, employers who pay the levy will be able to transfer unspent levy funds in bulk to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with a new *pledge function*. At the same time the government will introduce a new online service to match levy payers with SMEs that share their business priorities
- from April 2021 employers in construction (followed by health and social care) will be allowed to front-load training for certain apprenticeship standards. The government will explore whether this offer can also be made available in other sectors.

It was also announced that during 2021-22 the government will test approaches to supporting apprenticeships in industries with more flexible working patterns, including consideration of how best to support apprenticeship training agencies. According to the DfE website apprenticeship training agencies (ATAs) "recruit, employ and arrange training for apprentices on behalf of employers. To be eligible to operate an apprenticeship training agency, organisations must be registered on the register of approved ATAs." However, the DfE website also states that the "register of apprenticeship training agencies is currently closed for applications".

The TUC has expressed concerns about some apprenticeship training agencies in the past. For example, a TUC policy brief highlighted the following issues: "The fact that ATAs involve an apprentice losing their direct employment link with an employer and effectively turns the apprentice into an agency worker is a cause for concern for the TUC and affiliate unions. There are clear implications both for the job security and employment prospects of the apprentice as well as the ability of unions to organise and bargain effectively." However, the TUC and affiliated unions have given support to an alternative apprenticeship model called Group Training Associations involving employers and unions collaborating on joint training facilities and training provision to maximise investment.

Level 3 entitlement & related initiatives

Level 3 entitlement

At the end of September the Prime Minister announced in a speech that the government would be taking forward a new fully-funded entitlement for adults to achieve a level 3 qualification if they have not already attained an equivalent qualification. According to the government press release:

- Adults without A-Levels or equivalent qualifications (e.g. vocational qualifications such as a BTEC level 3) will be offered a free, fully-funded college course - providing them with skills valued by employers, and the opportunity to study at a time and location that suits them
- This offer will be available from April 2021 in England, and will be paid for through the National Skills Fund.
- The government has been referring to the new entitlement as a *Lifetime Skills Guarantee*.

At present only people up to the age of 23 have a fully-funded entitlement to attain their first level 3 qualification. Extending the level 3 entitlement to adults was a central recommendation of the independent review of post-18 education and skills led by Philip Augar that reported in May 2019. The TUC welcomed this and other recommendations by the review, including: a significant long-term boost to government funding for FE and adult skills; improved financial support for FE students; and, a new deal for the FE workforce.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement, the TUC said that unions would play a key role in promoting take-up of the new entitlement with the support of the Union Learning Fund (ULF). Within a week of this announcement the government communicated that it would be cutting the funding for the ULF. As highlighted on page 1, the TUC has released a report showing that take-up of the new level 3 entitlement will be undermined by the decision to cut the ULF funding.

In addition the TUC has been calling for a much more extensive right to retrain in comparison with the limitations of the level 3 entitlement that has been announced. Since the original announcement by the Prime Minister, the government has been working up a list of the eligible courses for the new level 3 entitlement. These have now been published on the DfE website. There have been concerns expressed that qualifications in many sectors are completely excluded, including those most affected by Covid-19 (e.g. hospitality, media & culture etc.). Other concerns raised about the limitations of the entitlement include that that many adults with very old level 3 qualifications in need of retraining will not be eligible. There is also currently no commitment by government to provide maintenance support for adults using the new entitlement to pursue a level 3 qualification.

New entitlement to flexible loans

The Prime Minister also announced a "new entitlement to flexible loans to allow courses to be taken in segments, boosting opportunities to retrain and enhancing the nation's technical skills." As with the Level 3 entitlement, a specific funding allocation for this was confirmed in the Spending Review (see earlier section). Again, this measure is in line with some of the key recommendations of the Augar Review calling for:

- A number of measures to boost take-up, and status, of higher-level technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5; and
- Introduction of a lifelong learning loan allowance to be used at higher technical and degree level at any stage of an adult's career for full and part-time students.

When the forthcoming FE White Paper is published it will become clearer to what extent the government is accepting all of the review's recommendations relating to a lifelong learning loan. The press release does say that:

- The government is committed to making higher education more flexible to facilitate lifelong learning, and to make it easy for adults and young people to break up their study into segments, transfer credits between colleges and universities, and enable more part-time study
- Higher education loans will be made more flexible, allowing adults and young people to space out their study across their lifetimes, take more high-quality vocational courses in further education colleges and universities, and to support people to retrain for jobs of the future.
- This new arrangement will provide finance for shorter term studies, rather than having to study in one three or four year block.

The press release highlights the large fall in numbers pursuing level 4 and 5 qualifications in recent years. For example, twenty years ago over 100,000 people were doing Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, but that has now fallen to fewer than 35,000 each year. Those doing foundation degrees has also declined from 81,000 to 30,000. As a result, only 10% of adults hold a Higher Technical Qualification as their highest qualification, compared to 20% in Germany and 34% in Canada. In July the government set out plans for a major reform of higher-level technical qualifications to address the low numbers pursuing this route and a summary of this is available in in the last edition of this newsletter.

Skills bootcamps

The Prime Minister's announcement also referred to new digital skills bootcamps that the government is currently developing. This new training provision was initially developed through the National Retraining Scheme and more information on this is available in a recent key findings policy paper about the scheme. The NRS policy paper describes the new training model as follows:

"These bootcamps will support local regions and employers to fill in-demand vacancies by providing valuable skills based on employer demand and will offer a guaranteed job interview on completion. In doing so, they help to address key areas of uncertainty and risk in the retraining process identified in the National Retraining Scheme user research. For example, employers' concerns around taking on new staff from a new sector and individuals' concerns around undertaking training when there are not clear links to jobs."

The bootcamp courses are being delivered flexibly over approximately 12-16 weeks and the initial focus has been on digital skills. According to the DfE website and reports in October and December on the *FE Week* website:

- The first phase that began recruiting in September included digital skills bootcamps run in the following areas: Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and the West Midlands
- The second phase of the skills bootcamp programme, which was launched in December, saw the introduction of additional courses on technical skills (e.g. welding, engineering and construction). The bootcamps were also extended to three new areas: Leeds

City Region; Heart of the South West LEP area; and, Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire.

More information on the skills bootcamps in each locality is available at the following links:

- Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire
- Greater Manchester and Lancashire
- Heart of the South West
- Leeds City Region
- Liverpool City Region
- West Midlands

As to further developments, the DfE website says: "We will expand the skills bootcamp programme into other areas in 2021. An investment of £43 million from the National Skills Fund, will enable greater availability across the country and a wider range of course subjects on offer to meet the skills needs of local areas."

Kickstart Scheme

The government introduced a new national £2 billion Kickstart Scheme in July 2020 with an intention to create around 250,000 placements of six months for 16-24-year-olds. In the scheme only the work coach at the job centre can refer the young participant who has to be claiming universal credit and be seen to be at risk of long-term unemployment.

The scheme has been launched and the first placements were due to start in November 2020. It is due to end in December 2021 and as placements will last for six months the scheme should close in May/June 2021. The scheme is open to the public, private and voluntary sector employers.

The funding available for the employer for each placement covers 100 per cent of the relevant national minimum wage for 25 hours a week plus the associated employer national insurance contributions and employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

The government will also pay employers £1,500 to set up wrap around support which includes training. Besides training the funds can be used to pay for employability support, uniforms or other similar costs. The training can be delivered by the employer or by an external provider such as a local college or a charity.

The government has not given a clear guidance on what the training must include or how it is evidenced that training has taken place. They have made suggestions that the training could include employability skills such as teamwork or timekeeping, CV writing, interview skills and searching for a longer-term employment.

As part of the application process the employer must demonstrate what employability support they will give to the participant while on the scheme. This is aimed to provide the skills to enter in to work, training such as apprenticeships.

The employers must also show how the jobs being offered through the scheme are quality placements. The placements created with Kickstart funding must be new additional jobs. They must not:

- replace existing or planned vacancies
- cause existing employees or contractors to lose or reduce their employment

The employer needs a minimum of 30 jobs to apply for. If they do not have the numbers, they can use an intermediary which is called a gateway. Employers can get in touch with their local jobcentre for information on intermediaries.

If the employer is using a gateway organisation to access the scheme, they can use a part of the £1,500 training grant to pay the gateway for training services. Our understanding is the DWP expects that the gateway organisations will be the ones delivering some of the employability skills and work search support. As per normal Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding arrangements, providers can use it to help young people access training in basic skills such as English and Maths and get them to GCSE level if they have not achieved this.

The TUC has produced guidance for union reps on Kickstart and identified some key principles for union negotiators:

1. Kickstart participants must have access to a trade union.
2. Union reps should negotiate for Kickstart participants to be paid a living wage.
3. Kickstart participants must have access to good quality off-the-job training, not just employability or CV support.
4. Jobs should be futureproofed, and in industries where young people will have job prospects.
5. Jobs must have a clear plan for how the young person can progress – not just a revolving door of six-month placements.

A TUC webinar recording and blog are available on the website as further resource.

Apprenticeships

Changes in rules and policy

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has updated the apprenticeship funding rules. These include any policy changes and clarifications of previous rules and are pertinent especially since different rules apply depending on when the apprenticeship started (before or after 1 August 2020). We've gathered some of the changes that are important for union reps and apprentices themselves to understand:

- From 1 August 2020, all new apprentices had to start on apprenticeship standards. Existing learners on apprenticeship frameworks will still be able to complete their framework providing they started on or before 31 July 2020. The intention is that these learners complete their apprenticeship framework by 31 July 2025.
- The commitment statement must:
    - be a separate document from apprenticeship agreement
    - be kept up to date with any material changes
    - include confirmation that the employer will release the apprentice for off-the-job training.
- From 1 August 2020 onwards, employers have been offered an incentive payment for apprentices starting an apprenticeship as new employees. To be eligible for an incentive payment, the apprentice must not have had a contract of employment with the employer within the six months up to but not including 1 August 2020. Employers are required to sign a declaration confirming that they are a new employee when making a claim through the apprenticeship service. They must claim the incentive payments by the end of 30 April 2021.
- Employers will be eligible for an incentive payment for all individuals progressing from the Kickstart Scheme (see more about Kickstart above) to an apprenticeship regardless of their employment history as long as they start the practical period of their apprenticeship on a date up to and including 31 January 2021.
- The rule requiring level 2 apprentices to study towards and attempt the functional skills assessments at level 2 has been suspended and this suspension has been extended until 31 March 2021.
- Apprentices who have been made redundant and their apprenticeship agreement

terminated on or after 15 October 2020 and are either within six months of the final day of the practical period, or have completed at least 75 per cent of the practical period specified in the apprenticeship agreement, may continue their apprenticeship training without being employed under an apprenticeship agreement.

End-point assessment flexibilities

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) has announced some flexibilities to apprenticeship end-point assessments (EPA) during the pandemic. Their starting point is that EPAs should take place as normal. If this is not possible, they recommend rescheduling the EPAs which might require a break in learning.

Alternatively, the IfATE has agreed temporary discretions to certain standards. Other flexibilities include possible alternative assessment venues such as apprentice's home or using video conferencing or simulation if invigilation and other requirements can be arranged according to the procedures.

The IfATE has also disclosed plans to integrate EPAs with assessment arrangements for apprenticeships with a statutory regulator such as nursing apprenticeship which will be the IfATE's pilot case. The aim is to simplify the system and make EPAs "reflect the statutory regulators' requirements for entry into that occupation". The IfATE will get in touch with each relevant trailblazer group and also consult on each standard before moving to integration.

Research on level 2 and 3 apprenticeships

The DfE has published a piece of qualitative research on level 2 and 3 apprenticeships. The research took place in 2019 and covered a moderate number (91 altogether) of interviews of employers, providers and apprentices. There has been a decline in level 2 apprenticeship numbers since 2014.

Employers responded that their decision to offer level 2 apprenticeships was a company policy, to create a foundation level of training and because they primarily recruited people with little prior experience. However, the decision to offer level 3 apprenticeships related to an aim to upskill staff. Level 2 was therefore seen as an entry point to the organisation and level 3 as a way for more experience staff to move to "more specialised or supervisory roles".

An exception to this was found in engineering and manufacturing where level 3 was an entry point and apprentices "had higher entry qualifications such as higher-level GCSE passes, or even A-level or equivalent qualifications such as BTEC".

The apprentices seemed to be aware of the levels but didn't feel they were able to make choices according to the level because programmes were only offered at certain level or provider assessment directed them to a certain level.

Some employers' perception was that 20 per cent off-the-job (OTJ) requirement meant that apprentices spent more time in training than before and required direct staff cover for this time. This was thought to one of the reasons for decline in level 2 apprenticeship numbers. The providers felt that employers didn't necessarily understand the OTJ rule and thought that the only way to fill it was classroom-based learning.

Employers described issues with fulfilling the requirements to support apprentices on functional skills English and maths to level 2 (GCSE equivalent). The employers were wary of the end-point assessment (EPA) process and managing it. Both these topics were cited as reasons for not offering level 2 apprenticeships.

Apprenticeship levy has had an impact too. The providers thought "that more levy-paying employers are utilising their levy funding for higher level apprenticeships to upskill existing staff, rather than to fund Level 2 apprenticeships for new recruits. This was felt to be a result of employers' desire to spend their levy pot to avoid losing it, along with the perception that higher level apprenticeships - although they cost more - provide better value for money because they provide more value-added for the employer." Smaller non-levy employers saw the 5 per cent contribution cost off-putting too. The general view was that the number of higher-level apprenticeships was going to grow in the future. Partly this was due to a "need for more technical skills because of changing job roles and increased automation".

The decline in level 2 apprenticeship numbers seems to have an impact especially on young people especially in sectors such as retail. Level 2 apprenticeships were widely seen as entry routes to employment especially for 16-18-old school leavers. In some instances, traineeships were seen as a helpful way to get young people apprenticeship ready especially with regards to English and maths requirements.

Apprenticeship statistics

The government has issued the final data on apprenticeships in England for the 2019/20 academic year (August 2019 to July 2020). This includes analysis of the period since the start of the first lockdown (23 March) up until 31 July 2020). In this timeframe there were 60,860 starts, which was 45.5% less than in the same period in 2018/19. In the full 2019/20 year there were 322,500 starts compared with 393,400 in 2018/19 (a decline of 70,900 or 18%).

Apprenticeship support in Scotland

The Scottish government has announced a range of new financial incentives to encourage employers to recruit apprentices. These include

- £5,000 for employers taking on or upskilling a 16 to 24-year old apprentice, and for those aged up to 29 years who are from BAME/ disabled/care leaver groups
- £3,500 for employers taking on or upskilling an apprentice aged 25 plus.

The financial incentives will be available for eligible employers where the apprenticeship start date was on or after 1st December 2020 and up to the end of March 2020.

In addition, a new initiative – the *Young Person's Guarantee, Pathway Apprenticeships* - will provide a new route into the workplace for school-leavers up to 18-years-old who might be facing fewer options due to the economic impact of Covid-19. This will offer 26 weeks of training with a £100 weekly allowance and this can be extended for participants who are disabled or care experienced.

These new initiatives build on the *Adopt an Apprentice* scheme announced in August by the Scottish government, which offered financial incentives for employers willing to recruit apprentices made redundant.

College of the Future Commission

The Independent Commission on the College of the Future was established last year by the Association of Colleges to develop a strategic response to a central question: What do we want and need from our colleges in ten years' time? The Commission brought together leading figures from business and the trade unions as well as national and international experts and key stakeholders from across the four nations of the UK. The Commission has now published its final UK-wide report and also its England-specific report. Paul Nowak, TUC Deputy General Secretary, was a Commissioner and the TUC facilitated two round-table sessions of the education unions to feed into the work of commission. The commission also called for written evidence and the TUC and a number of the education unions submitted responses.

Some of the key recommendations by the Commission include:

- Create a statutory right to lifelong learning by making lifelong learning accessible and financially viable to all through offering equal loans and grants across further education and higher education so that everyone can access the training they need, no matter where they come from, their circumstance or their background
- Establish a new service through college employer hubs to tackle skills gaps, giving businesses a one-stop shop for upskilling current employees, finding the skilled workers they need, as well as innovation support, for example prototyping
- Overhaul, rebalance and integrate the whole post-16 education and skills system in each nation with a 10-year strategy for how colleges will deliver what each nation's economy and society needs and redressing funding inequity where it exists
- Introduce a legal duty on colleges to establish networks across appropriate economic geographies – which must be matched by a duty on all other post-16 education providers – to collaborate in the interests of students, communities and the economy.

In relation to England the Commission calls for the following:

- Pay has declined significantly over the past decade, and is a major strategic issue. We propose a new starting salary of £30,000 for teaching staff in colleges, and urgent work undertaken to prioritise increased investment in the workforce, across remuneration and investment in CPD
- A national social partnership must be established between government, the Association for Colleges and trade unions to look at long-term strategic workforce challenges. It is proposed that DFE, AoC and TUC form an initial working group to develop this model, to report by September 2021.

Commenting on the England-specific report, Paul Nowak said: "This report sets out a comprehensive vision for how colleges in England can support a fairer economic recovery and increase access to learning and skills. A new collaborative approach that draws on the voices of learners, employers and unions will benefit new learners, businesses, local economies - and wider society. But progress will depend on a better deal for the college workforce. College staff in England have suffered years of cuts, redundancies, limited pay rises and casualisation. We urgently need government action to better recognise and reward the efforts of the whole staff team, listen to their ideas and invest in their development."

Employer Skills Survey 2019

New government statistics show a sharp increase in the proportion of employers who are not providing any training. In the two year period, 2017 to 2019, non-training employers increased from 34% to 39% of all employers. This is one of the key findings from the latest edition of the Employer Skills Survey, which the government produces every two years. The latest survey provides a snapshot of workforce training trends during the second half of 2019 when the interviews with employers were undertaken. It also allows comparisons with the preceding surveys conducted using the same methodology.

Of course, the timing of the survey means that the latest findings do not give us any indication about the impact of Covid-19 on workforce training. On this point the authors of the survey stress that "the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020 means that the economic landscape has changed significantly since survey fieldwork was conducted."

Over 81,000 employers were interviewed between June and December last year in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scottish employers were not included in the 2019 survey presumably as a result of a policy decision by the Scottish government. Comparisons with earlier years highlighted in the 2019 report are therefore for the same geographical coverage (i.e. England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

The 2019 survey highlights many fewer training opportunities for workers since the previous survey in 2017. For example, the amount of training per worker - measured as *average training days per employee per annum* - fell from 4.0 days in 2017 to 3.6 days in 2019. The trend since the 2015 survey shows a greater rate of decline, falling from 4.2 days to 3.6 days. Between 2017 and 2019 the total volume of training – measured as *total days of training per annum* – declined by 6 million, down from 105m to 99m. Again, the trend since the 2015 survey shows a greater fall - declining by 9 million from 108m to 99m training days.

Forty per cent of workers said that they had received no training in the past 12 months compared to 38% saying this in 2017 (and 37% in 2015). Employers offering off-the-job training were down 5 percentage points, from 48% in 2017 to 43% in 2019. Expenditure by employers on training per employee also saw a decline, down from £1,600 in 2017 to £1,500 in 2019 (and down from £1,700 in 2015). Despite the reductions in training levels and investment, the proportion of employers classified by the survey as being in a "training equilibrium" (i.e. content with their current levels of training) increased from 59% in 2017 to 61% in 2019. This attitude was highest, at 72%, among non-training employers.

The survey also looks in great detail at skills shortages and skills gaps, in particular by examining trends relating to skill-shortage vacancies. These are vacancies that employers have difficulties filling due to applicants lacking the relevant skills, qualifications or experience. In 2019 skill-shortage vacancies accounted for 24% of all vacancies compared to 22% in 2017. By occupation, employers faced the greatest challenges in finding suitably skilled candidates for "Skilled Trades" positions, with nearly half of vacancies in these roles classed as skill-shortage vacancies (48%).