



Technician Pathways

Kirsi Kekki, Policy Officer

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Technician Pathways trade union survey

As per the Technician Pathways project operational plan a survey was sent out to unions to gauge their officers' and reps' awareness of the technician professional registration agenda generally and the unionlearn project specifically. The survey was open online from mid-October 2014 to mid-January 2015.

The introduction to the survey explained that the Technician Pathways project was starting its second phase and mentioned that the project aims to improve technicians' access to continuous professional development (CPD) and promote their professional standing through registration.

The purpose of the survey was to find out about the trade union official and rep awareness of the unionlearn project and technician registration. We were also keen to hear how the project can best support unions.

The survey was sent out twice with the Technician Pathways project email updates and separately to various union contacts. UNISON got in touch asking if they could circulate the survey.

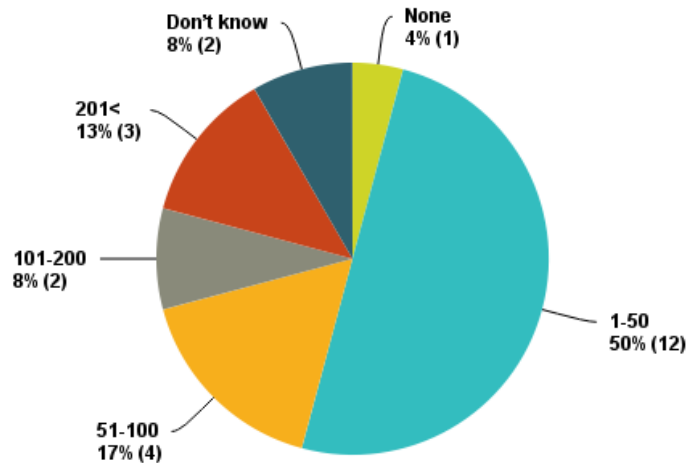
Survey respondents

There were 24 responses of which eight were from UNISON and 16 from Unite. Out of the respondents one person was a union organiser, 15 were union reps or shop stewards, two were union learning reps (ULRs) and six chose the "other" category. Of these six, three were union members, one was a health and safety rep, one was a department and safety rep and one was a secretary (which probably means a union branch secretary since the question asked about the union role).

Three respondents said they did not cover any workplaces which tallies up with the three members who did not specify a union role. Fifteen respondents covered a single workplace, four covered 2-5 and two said they covered more than 11. Half of the workplaces the respondents covered had fewer than 50 technicians, and three respondents reported that there were over 200 technicians in their workplaces.

Q4 In your estimate, how many technicians are there in the area you cover in your trade union role?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0



For eight respondents education was the industry or sector they work in or cover as a rep. These include five responses that had an additional clarification on the specific part of the education sector, as follows: visual arts, research, Sixth Form College, state college and training. Eleven respondents said they were from higher education (one of these was clarified by a comment University – Research and Education).

The other industries/sectors were bricklaying and Visual/Performing Arts/IT. One respondent listed Motor Vehicle, Engineering, Science, Construction, Art & Design, Hair & Beauty, Catering, Reprographics, ICT Support, Portable Appliance Testing, Painting & Decorating, Floristry and Graphic Design which presumably referred to the various courses provided by an FE college.

Technician agenda as part of union agenda

Nine respondents said professional registration had featured and 15 said it had not featured in their, or their union's, discussions with the employer or employers they deal with.

Regarding barriers to the technician registration and access to better continuous professional development (CPD) the respondents were asked to choose any option that applied to them. On top of the list is lack of knowledge/understanding of registration (15 responses; 63%) with cost as a close second (14 responses; 58%) and half the people responding identified lack of time. Only four respondents chose complexity of the application process as a barrier.

Q7 In your view, what are the main barriers to technician registration and better access to continuous professional development (CPD)? Choose any that apply.

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0



The other barriers mentioned were:

- Never heard of it.
- Unaware of any policy for technician CPD
- Age and experience of technician. Someone with many years of experience who may retire in a few years often doesn't see the need for registration and some employers do not have long term succession planning for technical staff but rather hope to use recent graduates on fixed term contracts
- Having looked at the Technician Registration scheme, it doesn't seem to have a lot to offer our technicians who work in a broad range of areas, and are actually employed as Technical Demonstrators, with some teaching hours as part of their contracts. They cover the following areas: Brickwork, Plumbing, Painting and Decorating, Carpentry and Joinery, Automotive Engineering, Engineering, Textiles print, Fashion and Textiles production, Fine Art Printmaking, 3D Art and Design Workshops, Film and Photography, Science Labs. Our Tech Dems work very hard, and many feel they are treated as teachers on the cheap (they are not wrong about this). Many have been employees of our organisation for a long time. Anything that is remotely onerous would be a burden to them, and unless it resulted in a real increase in salary, they just wouldn't have the motivation to take part. Like everyone working in public services, they have progressively been expected to more and more work, without any increase in remuneration, not even an increment.

As far as apprenticeships go, 16 people said technician registration is not part of apprenticeship schemes and eight were not sure.

Questions 9-13 were left for free text. Q9 asked about involvement with the Technician Pathways project. Half of the respondents said they had not had any involvement and one person said they had been involved through the HEaTED project. The rest of the respondents had seen presentations or been to events or conferences where the project had been introduced. Other comments included:

- Just starting to gather information and put myself through a registration scheme, to see what the potential hurdles are which I can share with my colleagues.
- So far not enough as dealing with various urgent matters as detailed in 8 above
- Talks with management regarding a new apprentice scheme

Question 10 of the survey asked how the Technician Pathways project can provide support:

don't know just yet, I am not fully aware of it
More workshop based help, eg. help with filling out application forms and the benefits of registration.
not aware of scheme
Keeping them updated. Encouraging employers/funding bodies to have tech registration as a requirement for tech vacancies to encourage the recruitment of those who want being a technician/scientist as a career and not just a stepping stone for a recent graduate
It will allow technicians and apprentices become registered
By giving us as much information and direct access as possible.
Better pay and CPD
Don't know
Don't think it can help me as very close to retirement but could help others if well presented to tech staff.
Work with UNISON and members as well as Association of Colleges (maybe?) to produce guidance on how to include this scheme, its benefits to a college, and also explain these benefits to technicians themselves.
Clear and achievable recommendations

Don't know
Understanding the different aspects of Technical support being provided, a clearer understanding of the Technical pathways depending on the experience and professional registration
I am not sure as I need to talk to both employers and members to gauge their willingness to become involved.
If it can be recognised by the HE Sector i.e. Universities employer bodies and individual institution.
I don't know
More information to be cascaded down
Encourage employer to support Technicians Registration

Question 11 produced three contact details for case studies and 11 people were happy to give their contact details for more information.

Finally, there was room for any other comments:

None
not aware of scheme
Incentives needed for HEI's to recruit apprentice technicians and pay them realistic salaries when qualified
In my team, all techs have degrees and industry experience, but earn the same as cleaners and caretakers
technical staff need to be valued not just for their role but the experience and expertise they bring to the workplace and work in a diverse areas from Engineering, graphic design, sciences just to mention a few areas!
This is exactly what our technicians are crying out for (more recognition and appreciation, links between qualifications, experience and salaries, better training etc) but I'm having a hard time explaining that to them. Whilst the college Principal is interested, other things seem to be more important. Budgetary controls might also stop this being taken any further right now.
The project aims to improve technicians' access to continuous professional development (CPD) and promote their professional standing through registration.
The statement above is something that has been badly needed for a long , long

time.

In the past I was a registered Mechanical Engineering Technician with the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. At the time I was changing jobs more regularly and it was a good thing to have on my CV/ business card. However now I work in HE, and have done for the past 25 years, I have let my membership lapse as I did not feel it was valued by the University and the cost per year was considerable.

HeaTED was a previous initiative but proved not to be relevant to most Technicians but only to Technical Managers.

Conclusions

The response rate was fairly low with 24 people and represented only two unions although this was the largest two unions covering 40% of all union members. All bar one respondent had technicians in the workforce which they covered in their union role.

The presumption of the survey was that respondents know what we mean with the term technician. It appears that only one of the respondents was in a full-time union officer role (union organiser) and the rest were either union members or lay reps. However, since there was no specific question on who the respondents worked for, some of them might be seconded reps or full-time executive members, for instance, depending on the union structures. Having said that, it seems likely that the union full-time officers the Unionlearn project team has already been in conversation with did not respond and the survey did not reach the union officials who have not been in touch with the project yet.

Overwhelmingly the respondents represented people in the education sector. Both higher and further education was specifically identified. This leads to questions why there were no responses from other sectors such as automotive, utilities or health and what we can do to reach individuals in these sectors.

On the other hand, the education sector has been closely involved with the unionlearn project from the beginning so it is not surprising that the reach of the project is better in that sector. In addition, the TSSA union covering the transport sector, for instance, has run its own surveys and briefed their officers and Prospect is running its own project and surveys.

By and large responses to the barriers question were not a surprise except maybe that the cost did not come out as the number one barrier as might have been anticipated based on discussions to date that the project has engaged with in the education sector, especially in FE colleges.

There is obviously more work to do to raise awareness of the project and technician registration. On a positive note, the survey did produce a number of contact details which we can investigate further. The survey also gave a strong indication that the education sector currently seems the most fruitful area for engagement to raise the profile of registration with trade unions and the Technician Pathways project will build on this over the coming months.

More information:

Kirsi Kekki, Policy Officer

T: 020 7079 6953

E: kkekki@tuc.org.uk

www.unionlearn.org.uk/technician-pathways

@unionlearn