



Learning & Skills Policy Update

February 2010

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the TUC/trade union view on them as well as keeping you up-to-date on a range of union learning initiatives. If you have any suggestions about either the content or the design of the newsletter, please contact Richard Blakeley: rblakeley@tuc.org.uk.

The newsletter is available on the main TUC website www.tuc.org.uk/skills along with more policy briefings. For much more detailed information on union learning, you should go to www.unionlearn.org.uk (the unionlearn website). You can register for email alerts on either or both of these websites.

Please note that the following acronyms are used in this newsletter for the key Government organisations covering skills: DBIS (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills), DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) and UKCES (UK Commission for Employment and Skills).

Skills White Paper - Skills for Growth

The Government published its Skills White Paper - Skills for Growth - on 11th November and subsequently released the detailed skills funding plans for the next financial year (Skills Investment Strategy 2010-11). Both publications can be downloaded from the DBIS website (www.bis.gov.uk/policies/skills-for-growth). There is also a detailed briefing on the TUC website, learning and skills section:

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/skills/tuc-17288-f0.cfm>

The TUC welcomed the broad thrust of the White Paper and in particular the focus on

Introduction

This newsletter is intended to keep you abreast of policy developments in learning and skills and

strengthening the apprenticeships route further whilst also maintaining investment in key skills entitlements (e.g. Skills for Life, Level 2 entitlement and Level 3 entitlement for young people). The TUC also supports the emphasis on a skills strategy linked to the new “industrial activism” and the positive noises about the potential for using regulatory measures to drive up employer investment in training albeit largely on a voluntary basis. Procurement is one such lever which is highlighted and the White Paper says Government will build on recent developments by using its spending power even more extensively in order to require contractors to recruit 20,000 apprenticeship places over the next 3 years. The role of local government to use its spending power more proactively to require greater skills investment by contractors is also flagged up. The White Paper also highlights the potential for more government regulators to use their powers to increase employer investment in training, building on positive initiatives by Ofgem and Ofcom .

It is also welcome that the White Paper includes a recommendation that there should be a greater use of occupational licensing (i.e. Licence to Practice) to lever up employer investment in skills. The benefits of this approach in driving up skills in the gas heating and social care sectors are referred to and the White Paper includes a commitment that in future the Government 'will be sympathetic to employer proposals for new occupational licensing arrangements'.

However, the TUC also highlighted that achieving the goals set out in the White Paper would require a 'genuine commitment from businesses to invest in staff training' and a renewed focus by Government on the third of employers that currently provide no training.

Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act came in to being in November 2009 and introduced the following measures:

- Provides for a statutory framework for apprenticeships and creates a right to an

apprenticeship for suitably qualified 16-18 year olds

- Introduces a right for employees to request time away from their duties to undertake training, and places a corresponding duty on employers to consider such requests seriously and to be able to refuse them only for specified business reasons
- Dissolves the Learning and Skills Council
- Transfers the responsibility for funding education and training for 16-18-year-olds to local authorities
- Makes provisions with respect to the education of offenders
- Creates the Young Person’s Learning Agency, the Skills Funding Agency, a new regulatory body for qualifications (Ofqual), and a new agency to carry out the non-regulatory functions currently performed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
- Strengthens the accountability of children’s services
- Amends intervention powers in respect of schools which are causing concern
- Establishes a new parental complaints service
- Changes the school inspection arrangements
- Creates a new negotiating body for pay and conditions for school support staff
- Makes provisions in respect of pupil and student behaviour.

The TUC has supported the government in introducing this act and some of the key areas of interest are covered in this newsletter.

Government social mobility paper

On 18th January the government published ‘Unleashing Aspiration: the government's response to the final report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions.’ The government

agreed to take forward the vast majority of the recommendations in the final report of the Panel, including establishing a Social Mobility Commission, introducing a new duty on key public bodies to tackle socio-economic inequalities, promoting wider access to higher education, ensuring that more young people can progress through vocational routes (especially apprenticeships) to the professions and improving information, advice and guidance for young people.

In addition the government accepted the Panel's major finding that barriers to internships unfairly prevented too many young people from progressing into the professions and that a range of measures were necessary to address this. The TUC welcomed many aspects of the government's response but remains concerned that some employers are still liable to exploit the internship route unless interns are fully protected by employment law, especially the National Minimum Wage. As well as conveying to government that employment law must be respected, the TUC also plans to ensure that interns know their rights and will be launching its new 'Rights for Interns' website in March of this year. The website will act as both a resource for interns and as a campaigning tool for the TUC.

It was also welcome that the response did not commit to take forward the recommendations in the Panel's final report calling on the government to accelerate the expansion of Academy schools and to introduce education vouchers. The TUC and education unions had lobbied against these particular recommendations.

Downing Street Launch event for Apprenticeship project

On 2nd November, the TUC held an apprenticeships focussed event at No.10 Downing St. Around 150 people attended, including apprentices, General Secretaries of

Trades Unions, employers, employer groups, and National Apprenticeship Service representatives.

The Prime Minister gave a speech celebrating apprentices and the work of trade unions in promoting apprenticeships. Ed Balls MP, Pat McFadden MP, Kevin Brennan MP, Iain Wright MP and Lord Mandelson were also in attendance.

National Apprenticeship Week

National Apprenticeship Week took place from 1st to 5th February this year. As well as unions running their own events to mark the occasion, SERTUC held a conference on apprenticeships at Congress House. Speakers included Dai Hudd, Assistant General Secretary, Prospect, Simon Bartley, Chief Executive Officer, UK Skills, a speaker from Cogent, Loraine Martins, Head of Equality, Inclusion, Employment and Skills at the ODA, and Frances O'Grady, Deputy General Secretary of the TUC.

The National Apprenticeship Service ran several high profile events during the week and gained a significant amount of press coverage. NAS also used the opportunity to launch a £2500 cash incentive for employers taking on 16-17 year old apprentices.

Group Training Associations/Apprenticeship Training Agencies

The TUC has been speaking to affiliate unions and providers about Group Training Associations and the new Apprenticeship Training Agencies. As the number of apprenticeships has significantly grown in recent years, so has the interest in different models of training apprentices. The Group Training Association (GTA) model has generated a lot of interest and is being promoted by DBIS and the National Apprenticeship Service.

A Group Training Association (GTA) is a not for profit organisation providing support on accessing and managing training for a group of employers to encourage their involvement in Apprenticeships.

An Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA) is a not for profit organisation, which directly employs and manages individuals who undertake their apprenticeship with an approved Training Provider whilst being hired out to a “host employer”. The ATA also co-ordinates the training activity for the apprenticeship which is delivered through LSC contracted training providers.

The TUC believes that both models have implications for apprentices and should be of interest to unions. GTAs and ATAs are on the agenda of the Learning and Skills Policy Network meeting on 22nd February. If you would like to find out more about GTAs/ATAs or you would like to add your experience or views to the discussion paper, please contact Scarlet Harris on sharris@tuc.org.uk.

Right to Request Time to Train Project Launch Event

The TUC launches a project to promote the new right to request time to train at an event at Congress House on 8th April 2010. The event will have guest speakers, new resources for union learning representatives and a workshop to discuss organising strategies relating to the right to request time to train. If you would like to attend the event on 8th April please mail Paul Clarkson at pclarkson@tuc.org.uk.

The new right to request training will be in operation from April 6 2010. The TUC has long campaigned for workers to have statutory rights relating to training and supported the introduction of this right. Guidance for workers on how the right will work is available from the government's direct-gov website on the following link:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/Timeoffandholidays/DG_183635

And guidance can also be found for employers on the Business Link website.

Unionlearn's project will

- promote awareness, understanding and confidence in exercising the right amongst workers
- provide resources for union learning representatives to support members exercising the right; and
- develop the trade union organising and negotiating agenda with regard to the right

Further information can be obtained from Richard Blakeley, Policy and Campaigns Officer for the Right to Request Time to Train (rblakeley@tuc.org.uk, 020 7467 1252)

Inquiry in to young people not in education

The TUC gave evidence to the select committee for children, schools and families inquiry in to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The evidence drew attention to the impact of the recession on young people attempting to enter the labour market but welcomed recent policy initiatives such as the “Youth Guarantee” to provide working opportunities for 18 to 24 year olds who have been out of work for six months

The TUC response also highlighted the need for a more co-ordinated response to 16 to 17 year olds who were not in education or employment and supported the government's work to bring the compulsory participation age up to 17 in 2013 and 18 by 2015. However the evidence warned that there needed to be concerted effort to make sure that there is both the number and quality of apprenticeship and other education places to make this a feasible and attractive proposition by 2013.

Higher Education framework

The TUC welcomed the Government's report on the future of universities entitled "Higher Ambitions" which mapped out the role of universities within the new skills landscape and the sector's contribution to economic competitiveness and growth.

The report contained a preview of how universities could be made more accessible to people in work, further education and apprenticeships through accreditation and qualification reform. There are also proposals for clearer and more succinct information being available for students regarding course content, quality standards and post graduation employment and for employers to work more closely with universities so that curriculums could reflect the skills needs in British industries.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said he did "welcome the focus on widening access to higher education by making it more accessible to workers, people in further education and apprentices."

"Businesses should play an important role in shaping higher education as employability is crucial to encouraging take up of courses but the valuable insights of students and university staff must not be ignored."

The government also appointed a panel to review tuition fees which will report after the election. Brendan Barber warned that "The forthcoming tuition fees review cannot simply be a rubber stamp to increase tuition fees, a move which would price out poorer students and strike a blow against social mobility."

Train to Gain and Skills Pledge

The Train to Gain funding plan for 2010 to 2011 increase the intended training places whilst reducing the funding, meaning that the government anticipates more co-investment arrangements with employers, particularly larger employers and also will cease repeat level 2 qualification funding. This may present challenges for trade unions engaging employers on Train to Gain activity.

The Learning and Skills Council Skills Pledge website is building up a case studies resource highlighting the difference that the pledge can make to businesses. They are keen to include case studies where trade unions play an important role. If you have a case study to share, please contact Richard Blakeley on rblakeley@tuc.org.uk.

Advancement and Adult Careers Service and Skills Accounts

The Advancement and Adult Careers Service and Skills Accounts service is to be launched in the autumn, although the full plans to launch the network of careers advisory services will be rolled out over time. The skills account will be launched as a "wrapper" allowing the user to find out about their public funding entitlements, rather than having personal funds available but the government is examining if there are ways that the account can be used to help individuals to save for learning.

There are currently extensive consultations taking place regarding workforce development and qualifications being led by Lifelong Learning UK and a developing public policy debate regarding the strategic direction of careers advice in the UK.

Low carbon skills strategy

The government is expected to release a cross departmental consultation on a low carbon skills strategy in March 2010. This follows lobbying from the TUC and other organisations and a number of key reports from IPPR, Green Alliance and the Aldersgate Group. A "Low Carbon Cluster" of eight Sector Skills Councils have recently published a skill assessment for low carbon skills requirements in key sectors:

<http://www.euskills.co.uk/home/resources/942/Low+Carbon+Cluster+Sector+Skills+Assessment+Report>

The TUC is seeking a commitment to advancing the basic and generic green skills needs of all

workers (eg business resource efficiency skills) and for there to be a “just transition” to a low carbon labour market with opportunities for young people to develop more specialist “green skills” through education and vocational training and for workers in high carbon industries to receive investment to adapt their skills set.

The TUC is also promoting the activity and skills of the new green representative networks which have shown that significant progress can be made with regard to business resource efficiency and other environmental goals with collective action and partnership with management. For further information, please see the enclosed link to the TUC’s Green Workplaces website:

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/index.cfm?mins=402&minors=402>

Learning and skills institutional framework

The government has introduced a number of key changes to its learning and skills institutional framework. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act dissolves the Learning and Skills Council and creates the Young Person’s Learning Agency, the Skills Funding Agency and transfers regional Learning and Skills Council commissioning functions to local authorities. This process should be largely completed by April 2010.

The TUC supported the broad thrust of these changes whilst warning of a number of major challenges including the potential for overdue complexity as regards the new FE funding structures. There are also concerns about how ‘employee voice’ will be articulated effectively in the new demand-led system for adults under the remit of the SFA and YPLA. The TUC also called on the government to ensure that the expertise built up by LSC staff was utilised in the future and that the trade unions were closely involved in agreeing transition to the new arrangements.

Since the government’s changes to learning and skills institutional framework were formulated, the government set out its plans to take a more

interventionist approach to industrial and skills policy frameworks by developing the concepts of ‘industrial activism’ and ‘skills activism’. The policy developments of most significance are the decision to strengthen the skills remit of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to include strategic advice regarding skills investment and for the Commission for Employment and Skills to be tasked with producing an annual national skills audit based on evidence from the regional development agencies and sector skills councils which should have strong influence over public investment in skills.

Collective Learning Funds

Unionlearn has been piloting the union concept of Collective Learning Funds in 23 workplaces the North West and East Midlands. Collective learning funds (CLFs) are union – led initiatives to stimulate co-investment in broad workforce development. They are arrangements where employers might provide cash, time off to study or in-kind provision such as a learning centre. Employees might study in some of their own time or contribute to the fees. Colleges might subsidise courses and provide laptops. Unions could put in resources and time. Union learning representatives would help support the learners. The project allocated £4,000 to each pilot for start up activity. An evaluation of the pilots by the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change (CERIC) at the University Of Leeds University found that CLFs have considerable value

Early results show that employees have accessed 2,719 learning episodes as a direct or indirect result of CLFs. These include 721 Skills for Life, 527 ICT and 884 NVQ episodes. There has also been a large take up of informal adult learning for personal development; 587 learning episodes covering British Sign Language, Spanish, bricklaying and plastering. The number of learning outcomes will increase throughout the life of the project and also afterwards as the CLF sustains the learning activity. The evaluation

found that companies identified the most common benefits as “soft” outcomes such as “improved morale” and “improved employee engagement”.

The success of the CLF pilots should not just be judged in terms of learning outputs alone. There are wider benefits being derived from sustaining CLF work beyond the life of the project. The evaluation found that CLF played an important role in a number of workplaces in terms of initiating partnership working between unions and management for the first time. This was evolving through the embedding of learning activity via learning committees and agreements. In some cases it took some time for the employer to engage fully with the union but this increased when management saw something tangible taking effect.

Unionlearn is extending the project to continue to support the existing pilots, test other models and disseminate the concept throughout the two regions. Brochures and a union toolkit are being published and events are being organised to disseminate the CLF concept.

Learning representative initiatives in the UK and New Zealand

The learning representative concept is now being adopted by unions in other countries. One such country is New Zealand where the learning representative initiative is relatively recent and therefore less developed than that in the UK but is already having considerable impact.

Learning representative initiatives in the UK and New Zealand : a comparative study is a unionlearn research paper, written by Dr Bill Lee and Professor Catherine Cassell which compares and contrasts ULRs in the UK with learning representatives in New Zealand through the use of case studies. A major difference is that, unlike ULRs, learning representatives in New Zealand have no statutory rights to paid time off to train and carry out their duties. Nevertheless, both

roles are recognised in collective employment agreements. New Zealand also focus their work with industrial training organisations on job-related training, while ULRs support their members over a wider range of learning including personal development.

<http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/files/publications/documents/171.pdf>