

## Learning & Skills Policy Update

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December 2017

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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](mailto: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.

### Budget and Industrial Strategy

There were a range of skills policy announcements in the Budget and Industrial Strategy reports and the government provided a further update at a [Skills Summit](#) on 30th November. Some of these were new announcements, but many were updates on taking forward previously announced policies, including T levels, Institutes of Technology, and lifelong learning pilots.

The key announcements were as follows:

- The Budget said that “government will enter into a formal skills partnership [National Retraining Partnership] with the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry, to develop the National Retraining Scheme.” This partnership “will help set the strategic priorities for the scheme and oversee its implementation, working with new Skills Advisory Panels to ensure that local economies’ needs are reflected.”
- The National Retraining Scheme will be supported by £40m of funding and the first priorities will be to support innovative delivery of training in digital skills (£30m) and construction skills (£34m). There was of course also a commitment by the Chancellor to maintain funding for unionlearn.
- The new Skills Advisory Panels will play a key role in supporting the Local Industrial Strategies that will underpin the policy approach set out in the Industrial Strategy. The first Skills Advisory Panels will be established in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, Greater Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Leeds and Thames Valley.
- The Industrial Strategy also contained more detail on the development of Sector Deals

to "help sectors grow and equip businesses for future opportunities". The first four are in construction, artificial intelligence (AI), automotive and life sciences. However, there is little or no mention of Sector Skills Councils in the Industrial Strategy.

- Employers are to be asked to sign up to a new skills partnership and to make a better offer to young people (36 leading companies have already done so and this was publicised at the DfE Skills Summit).
- There will be £10 million for a set of lifelong learning pilots in areas (including Leeds, Devon and Somerset, Lincolnshire, Stoke-on-Trent and the West Midlands) to test the best ways of incentivising adults to train in the skills that their local economy needs.
- The bidding framework for the new Institutes of Technology (IoTs) was publicised - institutions will be able to bid for £170million of funding and it is anticipated that the IoTs will be "collaborations by employers, HE and FE colleges, and specialise in science, technology, engineering and maths".
- There will be consultation on the design and content of the new T levels and the government also announced the membership of the full list of the members of the 15 panels that will be helping to create the content for the new T levels, which will begin rolling out in 2020. The government will also be providing £20 million to help teachers and FE colleges to prepare for the phasing in of the new T levels.
- The Budget and Industrial Strategy also contained a number of initiatives to support STEM skills and maths and computing science from primary school onwards.

The Chancellor also gave a commitment in the Budget to keep under review the idea of allowing some degree of flexibility as regards to how employers paying the apprenticeship levy can spend the proceeds (e.g. on training other than directly on apprenticeships). In the Budget Submission the TUC recommended that employers should be given some flexibilities (e.g. to fund pre-apprenticeship programmes and any new national retraining programme for adult employees).

### **Apprenticeships**

#### **Transferring Apprenticeship Levy funds**

The Government has published their plans to allow levy-paying employers to transfer funds to other employers from April 2018. Levy-paying employers will be able to transfer up to 10% of the annual value of funds entering their apprenticeship service account. They can transfer funds to any employer, including smaller employers in their supply chain and apprenticeship training agencies. Employers will need to be aware of 'state aid' rules when receiving funds from other organisations.

The plans cover two key features:

- Levy-paying employers who wish to transfer funds will have to agree the apprenticeships they are funding with the employer receiving funds. The aim is to support transferring and receiving employers as they take a strategic view of their skills needs and how the funds can be used to meet them.
- Employers receiving transferred funds will only be able to use them to pay for training and assessment for apprenticeship under the new standards (employers will not be able to use transferred funds to pay for training for apprenticeships under old frameworks). Standards are being developed to raise the quality of

apprenticeships and the government wants the transfer function to support the transition to standards.

The update can be found under the paragraph heading, Share Funds with Another Employer, on the GOV.UK site:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work).

### Apprenticeship statistics

The government's analysis of the number of people starting apprenticeships in 2016/17 show that the numbers dipped in the last quarter (June-August 2017). Overall the DfE recorded 491,300 apprenticeship starts in England in 2016/17, which was 18,100 less than in the previous academic year.

The health and care sector continues to be the one employing most apprentices. People aged 25 and over made up 46 per cent of the apprenticeship starts and just over a half (53 per cent) of the starts were at intermediate level (Level 2). Women took up 54 per cent of the apprenticeship starts. The higher level (Level 4 and above) apprenticeship numbers continue to grow. The number of higher apprenticeships starts doubled to 7 per cent of the overall starts.

A summary of the statistics is available at: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SNo6113>

Changes in funding, including the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in May 2017, has been cited as one of the reasons for the reduction in starts in the last quarter. However, the CBI and the Skills Minister have expressed a similar view that the number of starts will recover once employers adjust to the changed funding system.

### Updated apprentice leaflet and eNote

Unionlearn has updated its *Your Rights as an Apprentice* leaflet to cover the latest changes in regulations and policy. Among other things the leaflet now highlights the 20 per cent off-the-job training rule which came into force earlier this year. The leaflet is a handy pocket-size with the key information needed by all apprentices. It is available at:

[www.tuc.org.uk/publications/your-rights-apprentice-2017](http://www.tuc.org.uk/publications/your-rights-apprentice-2017).

Unionlearn's eNote – *Apprenticeships: Know Your Rights* - has also been updated to include the changes relevant to apprentices. An eNote is a self-contained module that contains a mixture of text, video and quizzes. eNotes generally last between 20 and 45 minutes and can be returned to as many times as you like. The *Apprenticeship: Know your rights* eNote is available at:

[www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeship/knowyourrights](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/apprenticeship/knowyourrights).

### OECD recommendation for greater union involvement

The TUC has consistently called on the government to provide a proper voice for trade unions in the reformed apprenticeship system and has expressed disappointment that the current make-up of the board of the Institute for Apprenticeships does not include anyone with a union background. The OECD has made a similar plea in its [latest assessment](#) of UK skills policy, saying: "Trade unions should also be involved in the process of apprenticeship standard setting, perhaps with representation on the Institute for Apprenticeships." The report goes on to say that "consulting with trade unions in the design of apprenticeship standards could improve their quality by, for example, ensuring that standards do not become too job-specific and provide apprentices with sufficient transversal skills." The OECD also points to the significant role that

trade unions play in agreeing apprenticeship standards in other European countries, especially Germany and Austria.

### **Government's Careers Strategy**

The government launched its new [Careers Strategy](#) on 4 December.

The strategy is based around four key priorities:

- ensuring every school and college has a high-quality careers programme
- providing opportunities for work experience
- offering tailored support to students
- utilising appropriate sources of information about jobs and careers.

Under the strategy, every school and college will aim to have a dedicated careers leader in place by the start of the new school year (backed by £4 million of funding) who can "give advice on the best training routes and up-to-date information on the jobs market, helping young people make decisions about their future".

Another £5 million has been allocated to boosting careers support in the areas of the country most in need, to create 20 careers hubs that will "link schools and colleges with local universities and employers to help broaden pupils' horizons".

The strategy has been developed in partnership with the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and coordinated through an expanded role for the Careers and Enterprise Company.

Secondary schools will be expected to provide pupils with at least one meaningful interaction with businesses every year, with a particular focus on employers from science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) industries.

Careers activities will be trialled in primary schools. Backed by £2 million, these pilots will test out ways of engaging children from an early age on the wealth of careers available to them, helping to raise their aspirations. These trials will focus on some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country through the government's opportunity areas programme.

Specialist advice will also be on offer for long-term unemployed and those with additional needs. The National Careers Service will provide access to specialist support for adults who need it most, ensuring that we help create opportunities for everyone, no matter where they live or their background.

### **English and maths**

#### ESOL strategy progress

A range of organisations have joined the National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults (Natecla) to renew their appeal for the Government to develop an ESOL strategy for England. Scotland and Wales already have such strategies for promoting, providing and delivering English language courses for migrants who need to learn English.

Natecla consulted a variety of stakeholders and published a [strategy development document](#) in 2016 and a [progress report](#) was published in October 2017. Both reports call for flexible and high-quality provision of English language courses for all migrants who need to learn English. It has been shown that improved language skills enable more effective integration into local communities and active contribution to society.

Unionlearn welcomed and joined the strategy development by highlighting the role unions already play in workplaces in helping ESOL learners and others access learning opportunities. We also highlighted the need to

ensure employers are fully engaged in supporting the learning and skills development of the workforce, including ESOL. A perennial issue for ESOL has been funding cuts and lack of funding for workplace ESOL provision, even though learner motivation to engage is strong.

The All Party Parliamentary Group's report on [Social Integration](#) published in June 2017 prioritised the need for a "comprehensive strategy to promote English language learning".

### **Literacy Works campaign week**

All things reading, writing and ESOL are the stars of unionlearn's Literacy Works week 5-9 February 2018. This will be the second time unionlearn organises a week for unions to campaign on literacy and English language skills. The workplace activity can cover writing stories, reading and sharing books or encouraging all colleagues to take up an initial assessment to check out their English skills.

Under the hashtag #literacyworks the Literacy Works week is an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of reading, writing and communication skills for work and life generally. The week showcases all the support union learning projects offer.

During the Literacy Works week unionlearn will post up interesting blogs from unions and partners, tweet daily brainteasers and organise events to join in.

Contact [kkekki@tuc.org.uk](mailto:kkekki@tuc.org.uk) for more information on Literacy Works week.

### **Free SkillCheck for initial assessments**

Unionlearn has launched SkillCheck which is a tool for initial assessments in English, maths and ICT. The tool is free to use and it has been developed for anyone to check up their skills flexibly using computers, tablets or smart phones. Find out more about SkillCheck at [www.unionlearn.org.uk/skillcheck](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/skillcheck) or use the

app stores to download a SkillCheck app to your phone or tablet.

### **Digital skills**

The Government is making plans to take steps to implement an entitlement to digital skills. The commitment featured in the Conservative party manifesto as well as in the digital skills strategy which was published in March 2017. The estimate is that five million people (21 per cent) in the UK lack basic digital skills. The lack of digital skills hinders access to government services as well as employment opportunities and general well-being and management of everyday life.

The entitlement will follow the funded learning approach which applies to adult literacy and numeracy, providing skills up to Level 2. As with the literacy and numeracy entitlements, the new digital skills entitlement is likely to be qualification based.

The DfE is currently working on defining what the basic digital skills are needed for work and life and figuring out what the free training offer should cover, considering rapidly changing technological changes. The DfE is making plans to commission standards for digital skills from Entry Level 1 to Level 2. Consultations are forthcoming.

Labour MP Liam Byrne has launched a new website, [People's Plan for Digital](#), to gather and share ideas and views on how digital policy in the UK should develop.