

## Learning & Skills Policy Update

---

January 2019

---

• <b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
• <b>Low-waged education &amp; training entitlement</b>	<b>1</b>
• <b>Apprenticeships</b>	<b>2</b>
• <b>Functional Skills</b>	<b>4</b>
• <b>T Levels &amp; technical qualifications</b>	<b>5</b>
• <b>Construction Skills Fund</b>	<b>5</b>
• <b>OECD report – union role on skills</b>	<b>6</b>
• <b>Workplace training trends</b>	<b>6</b>

---

### 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.

### Low-waged education & training entitlement

The government is currently running a [one-year trial](#) to fully fund courses for learners aged over 19 who are earning less than £15,736.50 a year.

The trial began in August and it will be running until 31 July 2019. The offer is open to anyone

earning below this salary threshold, including part-time workers.

This means that those who are aged over 19 and who are on low wages can now access learning for free for courses at level 1 and 2, including ESOL courses. This includes NVQ and equivalent vocational courses at level 1 and 2 and also academic qualifications up to GCSE level. Previously many of those aged 19+ had to pay 50% of the course fees for such qualifications.

Courses at level 3 and above are not covered by this trial. It should also be noted that some groups already have an entitlement to fully funded courses, regardless of their salary level, as follows:

- unemployed adults (19+) doing qualifications up to level 2, including ESOL qualifications
- young adults (aged 19 to 23) undertaking their first level 2 and/or first level 3 qualifications
- any adult aged 19 and over, without English and maths up to level 2, pursuing their first qualification in either subject up to level 2.

Union learning reps (ULRs) have previously used these funding entitlements to support workers to access fully funded learning, especially in the case of people doing English and maths qualifications. This has included Functional Skills qualifications as well as GCSEs. The low-wage trial offers the

opportunities for ULRs to broker access to fully funded courses delivered in the workplace covering a range of other areas, including ESOL. It also means that people who are eligible can access these fully funded courses independently in their own right by approaching a college or training provider and unions should be promoting this information.

The [London Mayor](#) has committed to continue the low-wage trial in London next academic year (2019/20) and also to make it more widely available by using a higher salary threshold. He is able to do this because from August 2019 the government is devolving the budget that funds adult FE learners to the London Mayor. In addition, the Mayor has decided to link the salary threshold to the London Living Wage (£10.55 per hour) and this means that from next August access to fully funded courses will be available to London residents aged 19+ earning less than £20,572.50 a year.

The government is also devolving this FE and skills budget to the following six Mayoral Combined Authorities: Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands, Tees Valley, West of England, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. However, none of the Mayors in these new Combined Authorities have given a similar commitment to extend the low-wage trial in their areas. If they emulated the London Mayor by extending the trial and linking entitlement to the Living Wage rate outside London (£9.00 per hour), residents in these areas could be eligible for fully-funded learning if they earned below £17,550 a year. The TUC is calling on all Mayors to take this approach.

There are some indications that the government is giving serious consideration to extending the low-waged funding entitlement trial beyond the current academic year. The latest [annual letter](#) from the Education and Skills Funding Agency

about FE and skills funding going forward, says the following:

“We introduced the AEB low-wage trial for 2018 to 2019 to support adults in low-paid employment and who want to progress further in work and in their chosen career. The Apprenticeships and Skills Minister will confirm in early 2019 if this trial continues in the academic year 2019 to 2020. If it does continue, we will confirm this in the ESFA funded AEB funding rules for academic year 2019 to 2020 and with relevant FE stakeholders. In the meantime, we encourage you to engage and support eligible learners who meet the low-wage criteria and ensure you record these learners accurately on the ILR.”

### **Apprenticeships**

#### **Government guidance and campaigns**

In recent months the government has produced a range of important new guidance on apprenticeships and also launched a new advertising campaign, *Fire it Up*.

In order to clarify the regulations on time off for training, new infographics and advice on what the 20 per cent off-the-job rule for apprenticeships covers (and doesn't cover) have been produced. The new resources are also aimed at encouraging employers and other stakeholders to better support people taking up an apprenticeship. While these concise guides are largely aimed at employers, they include useful tips for union reps to help them get to grips with the relevant rules and to use them to support high-quality apprenticeships in the workplace.

A [flowchart](#) helps employers determine which activities count as off-the-job training for apprentices and a [myth-busting](#) guide counters five common myths in this area. To supplement the myth-busting document, the government is

also [tweeting](#) a series of myth-busting infographics. An updated edition of the detailed guidance produced by the government relating to apprenticeship off-the-job training is in the pipeline and when this is finalised it will be made available at [gov.uk](#).

The government acknowledges that some young people may need additional support to settle into the workplace and reach their full potential. To address this, it has produced a new [guide](#) which aims to help employers provide an effective range of support for apprentices aged 16 to 24. It includes:

- steps employers can take to make their recruitment practices accessible for young people
- examples of on-the-job support for young apprentices in the workplace
- information on sources of additional funding which employers can use to support young apprentices.

In addition to all this new guidance, the government has commissioned a new [advertising campaign](#) to refresh the general public's views of apprenticeships. The *Fire it Up* campaign aims to promote the benefits and importance of apprenticeships in various parts of the media, including via national and social media adverts and on a new website offering advice and information.

### Education Select Committee inquiry

Last October the Education Select Committee published the [report](#) of its inquiry into apprenticeships and its key conclusion was “that too many apprentices are simply not getting the high-quality training they deserve and too many people, particularly the young and disadvantaged, are not being given the support the need to pursue an apprenticeship and get on in life.”

The concerns expressed by the Committee, and some of its recommendations, reflect much of the thrust of the TUC's [written evidence](#) and [oral evidence](#) to the inquiry. For example, the Committee highlights the link between poor-quality apprenticeships and low wages and the need to address this by moving to abolition of the apprenticeship minimum wage and introducing much stronger penalties for employers who don't pay the legal minimum. The TUC has been campaigning for an approach along these lines for a number of years.

Other recommendations that the TUC welcomed, included:

- Making sure that training providers delivering poor-quality training are tackled at a very early stage and that sub-contracted apprenticeship training is investigated much more closely
- Empowering people to progress to higher level apprenticeships instead of being trapped in low level training
- Improving funding incentives, including apprenticeship levy reforms, to support more people from disadvantaged groups to access high-quality apprenticeships and requiring EHRC to conduct an equality and diversity review every three years
- Removing disincentives in the benefit system and getting government to act on its policy commitment of reducing travel costs for apprentices
- Making sure all young people get proper careers advice on apprenticeships and introducing a national UCAS-style application process.

It is also welcome that the committee acknowledges the need to strengthen the voice of apprentices, including by boosting their direct role in the work of the Institute of

Apprenticeships. However, what the report fails to address is the need to strengthen union engagement in the apprenticeship system at a strategic level as is the case in all other European countries with a reputation for providing high quality apprenticeship training for a large proportion of their citizens.

### Liverpool City Region Mayor signs up to Charter for Apprenticeships

Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor, Steve Rotheram, has signed an agreement with the TUC committing the Combined Authority to “provide apprenticeships of the highest standard in line with the unionlearn apprenticeship charter.” The [unionlearn charter](#) sets out a number of principles to underpin a vision of high-quality apprenticeships as a skills development programme for the current and future workforce. Speaking after the [launch event](#), the Metro Mayor said: “I was delighted to sign the unionlearn apprenticeship charter today at the unionlearn supporting learners event. As Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor I am committed - with the TUC and unionlearn - to high quality apprenticeships across the City Region. Signing the charter demonstrates this joint commitment and builds on the work we are doing on skills in the city region”.

### New unionlearn guides

Unionlearn has produced two new guides to help union reps to support apprentices in the workplace. The [Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality](#) guide looks into why trade unions and union reps should negotiate for gender equality in apprenticeship programmes. The guide offers good practice examples and practical advice on issues which are pertinent for women entering apprenticeships, such as improving women's participation in male-dominated industries, addressing the quality and flexibility of apprenticeship programmes, and questions about health and safety and pay.

Tackling apprenticeship gender inequality is part of a series of unionlearn guides exploring how unions can support under-represented groups to access high-quality apprenticeships. The other two guides in the series are [Supporting Black and minority ethnic apprentices](#) and [Accessible apprenticeships](#).

Apprenticeships in the modern workplace are increasingly available to a wide age-range and are also often offered to both new and existing staff. These trends are being boosted by the impact of the apprenticeship levy with many large employers finding it difficult to spend all of their levy funding by recruiting young apprentices. Union feedback to unionlearn has shown that there is a demand for guidance in this area and as a result we have produced the [Apprenticeships for existing staff](#) leaflet.

This sets out how apprenticeships can offer opportunities for existing staff to develop their skills and career opportunities providing the apprenticeship is of a high quality. The leaflet helps union reps to think how they can support their colleagues in their learning and what essential advice to give them before they embark on their apprenticeship. The leaflet also highlights specific issues that unions reps should consider negotiating with employers about in relation to apprenticeship programmes offered to the existing workforce. To order hard copies please email [unionlearn@tuc.org.uk](mailto:unionlearn@tuc.org.uk) giving your name and delivery address and how many copies you would like.

### **Functional Skills**

The DfE has published a two-page factsheet to provide a condensed picture of forthcoming Functional Skills qualification reforms. The factsheet is available on the [Excellence Gateway](#) website.

The factsheet comes with a summary message from the DfE, as follows:

“English and mathematics Functional Skills qualifications are both respected and well-known. They help students to gain important real world skills for the future. Starting in September 2019, the current qualifications will be replaced by reformed Functional Skills qualifications to make them even more relevant and credible for the world of work. The content of the reformed qualifications is more specific and detailed than before. It will be easier to compare Functional Skills with other qualifications.”

### T Levels & technical qualifications

In a major speech in December, the Secretary of State for Education [announced](#) a range of new initiatives to boost the roll-out of T Levels and higher-level technical qualifications. He argued that “Britain must drop its ‘snobby’ attitude to technical and vocational education or risk being left behind after Brexit”. Some of the initiatives he announced included:

- Development of a new generation of Higher Technical Qualifications designed as an alternative to a university degree. These qualifications will be at Level 4 and 5
- Reform of the pupil destination measure used in school and college performance tables in order to create one measure that shows how many young people are doing higher training of any type. The new destination measure will show separately how many young people go on to study degrees, higher technical apprenticeships or Higher Technical Qualifications like a Higher National Diploma
- Development of Skills Advisory Panels, which will be local partnerships between employers and other stakeholders to assess what skills are needed in their local area.

During his speech, the Secretary of State argued “that the default route and measure of success

for young people should no longer just be an academic one, and unless Britain drops that mind-set it will never close the productivity gap with its European neighbours”, The Education Secretary also set out his 10 year ambition to upgrade the nations’ skills so more young people have the same high quality training opportunities with clear pathways to skilled jobs as those in top performing technical education countries like Germany. He pointed out that just 65% of the working population in the UK have completed a qualification at A-level or vocational equivalent, compared to 90% in Germany.

In the speech the Education Secretary also made a number of announcements about T Levels, including:

- Confirmation that the next seven T Level programmes to be taught from 2021 will be: Health, Healthcare Science, Science, Onsite Construction, Building Services Engineering, Digital Support and Services and Digital Business Services.
- UCAS points are to be awarded for new T Levels with each programme carrying the same UCAS points as three A Levels. As a result young people, parents and employers will know T Levels are “as stretching as their academic equivalents and will act as a stepping stone to progress to the next level whether that is a degree, higher level technical training or an apprenticeship.”

### Construction Skills Fund

The government has provided further details about the Construction Skills Fund, which was originally announced in tandem with the National Retraining Scheme announcement in the November 2017 Budget. According to the latest [DfE press release](#), funding of £22 million will be made available to 26 partnerships that will set up new ‘hubs’ which will train more than

17,000 people to be job and site-ready by March 2020. All the hubs will be based at live construction sites so trainees learn in a real-world construction environment and gain the practical skills they need to secure a rewarding career in construction.

The government also highlighted that it will be boosting construction skills through the introduction of the T Level in construction, which will be rolled out from 2020. The government estimates that an estimated 158,000 new construction workers will be needed in the UK over the next five years,

The scheme is funded by the Department for Education and is being delivered by the Construction Industry Training Board.

Commenting on the announcement about the winning bids, Sarah Beale, Chief Executive of CITB, said:

“The Construction Skills Fund can be a genuine game-changer for both the construction industry and the individuals being trained. We have a massive need for homegrown talent and these projects will bring thousands of new people into our sector, giving them the crucial onsite experience they need to start a career in construction. These 26 hubs will be based at some of the most innovative sites in the UK, and CITB will be working hard to make sure they deliver the skills our industry critically needs.”

The press release also says that the Construction Skills Fund will help inform the design of the National Retraining Scheme which is currently under development.

### **OECD report – union role on skills**

The OECD has publicised its latest jobs strategy, which highlights the positive benefits of collective bargaining, in particular the boost it gives to workplace training. The TUC has welcomed this central finding and that

unionlearn and the Union Learning Fund have been held up as very positive examples of good practice in supporting workplace learning.

The OECD report, [Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work](#), highlights that the digital revolution, globalisation and demographic changes are transforming labour markets. It also concludes that unions and employers have an important role to play and can work together in “shaping education and training to make them more relevant to the current needs of the labour market.”

The report recognises that a lot of learning will take place in the workplace and that “the engagement of employers and unions in the design, implementation and financing of skill development opportunities is critical to raising participation in job-related training.” The OECD points to the fact that in many countries trade unions work to promote and manage training for workers, going on to acknowledge the work of unionlearn saying that: “Unionlearn [...] assists its members in the delivery of learning opportunities and the management of the Union Learning Fund. This initiative has been particularly successful in recruiting low-skilled workers into training courses.”

Commenting on the report, Kevin Rowan, the Director of unionlearn said:

“Unionlearn welcomes the OECD report, its recognition of the importance of collective bargaining to support workplace skills and learning and its acknowledgment of the important work unionlearn does to support workers. As unionlearn begins the 20th year of the Union Learning Fund, it’s increasingly clear that trade unions, employers and government working together provides the best route to lifelong learning for working people.”

### **Workplace training trends**

A research report commissioned by the Social Mobility Commission has highlighted the extent of the “training divide” in UK workplaces. According to the [press release](#), the research clearly shows that adult training is often only available for workers who are already highly paid or highly qualified. The report, [The Adult Skills Gap](#), shows that the poorest adults with the lowest qualifications are the least likely to access adult training – despite being the group who would benefit most. Men in routine and manual occupations are the least likely to learn new skills. The research was carried out by the Institute for Employment Research, Warwick University.

Some of the key findings include:

- About 30% of those employed in managerial and professional occupations participated in training in the last 3 months compared to 18% in routine and manual jobs. This follows earlier research showing that half (49%) of adults from the lowest socio-economic group receive no training at all after leaving school.
- In contrast, high-skilled workers tend to benefit from ‘a virtuous circle’ of frequent in-work training and pay increases. Professional or managerial workers are twice as likely to be sent on courses as other workers, while graduates are 3 times as likely to access training as those with no qualifications.
- An individual’s background also has an impact. Workers whose parents came from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to benefit from adult training – which can impact on social mobility. Employees from more privileged backgrounds are more likely than other low-skilled workers to take advantage of in-work learning to rise up the ranks.
- The commission has previously found that 1 in 4 of the UK’s low-paid workers will never

escape low pay – a problem due largely to low skill levels. Yet the UK lags behind other countries in giving adults a second chance to learn new skills and achieve their potential. The UK spends just two-thirds of the European average on adult training, and investment is in decline. Between 2010 to 2011, and 2015 to 2016 government funding for adult skills fell by 34% in real terms.

- The problem is that employers fund 82% of all UK training and tend to prioritise senior, high-skilled employees. Most other training is paid for by individuals themselves – if they can afford it. Free courses run by government make up just 3% of all accessed training courses.
- The result is a system with vast numbers of low-skilled workers with little opportunity to build skills and escape low pay. This urgently needs rebalancing – for productivity as much as social mobility, says the commission.

Commenting on the research, Dame Martina Milburn, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, said:

“Too many employers are wasting the potential of their employees by not offering training or progression routes to their low and mid-skilled workers. Both employers and the government need to act to address this problem. They should start by increasing their investment in training, to bring it closer to that of international competitors, and prioritise this to those with low or no skills. Doing this would benefit both business and the economy as a whole.”