unionlearn
with the TUC

Supporting learners at mid-life

A signposting guide to

Financial planning and pensions

Contents

Introduction

The strength of trade unions is the connection they have with the workplace. They represent members collectively and deal with employers, chiefly on work-related problems. These can also be individual issues caused by work, or made worse by it. Examples of these are stress due to workload or aches and pains caused by work tasks.

Sometimes members come to reps with more personal problems. For example, falling into debt can put pressure on pay, while developing an illness or suddenly having to care for a dependant can conflict with standard working hours.

Often these personal problems can be resolved or at least alleviated by having good agreements with employers over issues such as sickness absence, dependant leave and access to an Employee Assistance programme.

Occasionally, however, a member may need help with issues where no support is available through the employer and the union cannot directly help them. These are the cases that this guide is intended to help you with.

For members in mid-life, unions can offer a chance to have a conversation about development in the workplace in the context of the whole of a person's life. People don't get enough opportunities to talk about themselves in a positive way or to discuss making a change or take up new opportunities. Having a mid-life development review can have a considerable impact on people's lives: it gives people space to think, take stock and locate specialist help.

As a union rep your experience and training will have already equipped you with a lot of the skills needed to conduct a review like this. You are not expected to be an expert in every issue but you can provide additional help and support by signposting your colleagues to professional services and sources of useful information, both on- and offline. You can encourage people to explain key personal issues and to work out what questions they need to ask, and of whom.

The mini-guide series

This is one of four unionlearn mini-guides to support learners at mid-life. They cover health and well-being in general, mental health in particular, pensions and financial advice, and how to balance work with family and dependant care.

This signposting mini-guide is designed to help reps support people in the workplace who need advice on financial planning and pensions. It will help you to provide accurate information and advice to people in your workplace.

Financial planning and pensions – how can you help?

This mini-guide is about financial planning at mid-life, particularly pensions and funding of retirement plans. If you are offering mid-life development reviews in the workplace, it is likely that most people will have some thinking to do about their personal finances, often before they can start to make any type of action plan. A lot of free information services are available, but there is often a cost implication for personalised advice.

Personal finance as an issue in a mid-life review

As part of a mid-life review, you may be asked questions about personal financial issues and pensions. Here are some examples.

I don't want to work until I am 70! When will be the best time for me to retire?

I don't really understand what pensions are and how they work – are they really for people like me or just for rich people?

I don't know how much state pension I will receive and when, or if I will be entitled to any other benefits – how can I find out?

How do I go about making a will? What should I put in it?

I worry about who will pay for my parents' care and how my children will manage. What can I do to provide for them and leave enough for my old age?

How much money will I need to have saved to fund my retirement?

I want to take a lump sum out of my pension fund to do some travelling. Will I have to pay a lot of tax on it?

What is signposting?

Signposting means pointing the way to useful information. You can signpost to:

- your union and employer
- websites and web chat
- telephone helplines
- social media contacts and Apps
- face-to-face services including support groups
- learning opportunities.

Knowing when to signpost

Learning reps do a fantastic job in the workplace but it is important that you know your limits. Don't assume you are an expert on personal problems. Sometimes another workplace representative, such as a steward, equality or safety rep, or a branch officer, will be able to help you but often you will need to point members to different advice-givers. You should be able to signpost members to trained and qualified specialists who can help on key topics and have access to the most up-to-date information.

"I've got my retirement planned. I've helped other people in the family to do their sums, and I know what to do. Why should I not give advice myself?"

Know your limits – signpost to the experts!

By finding out who these specialists are and by providing links to their services you can help workers plan their conversations with experts, to decide on priority issues, to decide what questions to ask and to identify areas where more help may be needed.

Do:

- listen and ask questions
- explore issues and help members to prioritise these
- build confidence and increase motivation
- identify learning needs
- set up learning opportunities
- help to make an action plan to solve the issue
- help to find information on websites
- signpost to experts
- discuss and make some notes about what to tell the experts and what questions to ask
- provide continuing support
- help the member explain the issue to their employer.

Don't:

- tell people what you would do if you were in their place; focus on the person you are listening to – it is all about them!
- promise anything about support that may be available or say that everything will be fine
- provide personal counselling, coaching, mentoring or careers advice unless you are trained
- give information or advice about complex topics such as finance or health – these need a personalised expert approach.

If you are helping someone, remember:

- It is not about you, but about them.
- You should always signpost on issues to do with personal finance or health problems.
- Every case is about the individual and their own circumstances – each person needs personalised assessment and advice.
- Expert information and advice changes frequently.
- Individual rights or entitlement to services are complicated.
- Union reps can help employers provide support for employees who have financial problems.

Tips for supporting people in the workplace

Planning for retirement

The Money Advice Service www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk has the following tips, with detailed pages and links to help you follow the advice:

- Draw up a budget.
- Work out your likely retirement income and when you can afford to retire.
- Identify possible cuts in your spending.
- Look for ways to increase your income and boost your spending.
- Track down your workplace or personal pensions.
- Claim your state pension and other government entitlements.
- Review the performance of your savings and investments.
- Consider whether your home may be a source of income.
- Work during your retirement.

Pensions

The Pensions Advisory Service www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk has the following tips:

- Check your National Insurance contributions.
- Stay enrolled if your employer enrols you into a workplace scheme.
- Save more if you can.
- It's never too early or too late to start saving.
- Check your annual pension benefit statement.
- Get some impartial professional advice.

Where to find expert help

Before you start, check if your union can help. Some unions select a financial adviser or panel of advisers for their members to choose from. You can then select others from the Money Advice Service directory (see below) to compare services and costs.

Financial planning

Citizens Advice (see page 9) points out that you should be careful when seeking help with personal finance. If you want general information about options then organisations like the Money Advice Service can help. These services are not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). This means if things go wrong with your financial choice, you may not be able to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service or Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

Financial advisers

Advice from an independent financial adviser (IFA) informs you which specific products would best suit your needs. This will have a cost but may save you a lot of money in the long run. Personal recommendation from friends or family is one way to find a financial adviser but you need to check that they are reliable.

website helpline email face-to-face webchat

Key to services offered

- https://directory.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en has a directory of FSA registered retirement advisers
- www.moneysavingexpert.com can help you to choose an IFA
- www.unbiased.co.uk can help you to choose an IFA
- www.vouchedfor.co.uk can help you to choose an IFA

General

Money Advice Service

www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk has a free helpline 0300 500 5000, also web-chat, printed and online information and guides, and can book a face-to-face money advice session locally.

The Money Saving Expert

Originally set up by journalist Martin Lewis, this provides detailed information about a range of options www.moneysavingexpert.com

Pensions

Age UK

www.ageuk.org.uk has videos from Paul Lewis, financial journalist and presenter of Radio 4's Money Box, and can provide information about financial issues which concern older people. You can call the Age UK Advice Line on 0800 169 2081 or make an email enquiry. There are also local branches of Age UK. It also has a comprehensive pension calculator www.ageuk.org.uk/money-matters/pensions/pension-calculator/

Careersmart

Has some useful pages on pensions, visit: www.careersmart.org.uk/pensions

Citizens Advice Bureau

You can get free impartial confidential advice from your local CAB, either face-to-face or by telephone on the Adviceline 03444 111 444. Visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk for details of how to get advice by email, how to join in web chat, and to search for your nearest local service. Go to the section on debt and money for useful information about pensions and benefits.

gov.uk

Information about the State Pension www.gov.uk/state-pension and a State Pension Calculator www.gov.uk/calculate-state-pension

Money Advice Service

Offers free guidance on all aspects of personal finance, including pensions and using the Pension Wise service (see below) www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/categories/pensions-and-retirement

Money Saving Expert

www.moneysavingsexpert.com/savings/discount-pensions lists 16 things you need to know about pensions, and also has sections on the state pension.

Pension Tracing Service

If you think you have a pension but have mislaid the details contact 0845 6002 537.

Pension Wise

www.pensionwise.gov.uk is a free and impartial government service about your defined contribution pension options (use the Pensions Advisory Service for other types of pensions). You can book a free telephone or face-to-face appointment online.

Pensions Advisory Service

www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk provides free impartial help with all types of pensions. Visit the website or call the helpline on 0300 123 1047.

TUC WorkSmart

Introduces the pension basics https://worksmart.org.uk/pension-advice/pensions-basics and has information on benefits and tax.

Make your own local signposting directory

You may find there are face-to-face services available locally, and there will be local and regional telephone helplines. These will vary depending on the area you live in so you will need to do some research in order to signpost effectively. If you have time to visit or telephone any of them to find out what is available, you will get a feel for how user-friendly they are.

On these empty pages you can add your own list of services you have found locally, for example:

- your union
- Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)
- public library
- Credit Union
- Age UK
- Financial adviser

For each you can note:

Organisation

What they provide

Local office address and directions

Telephone

Email

Website

Contact name

Organisation

What they provide

Local office address and directions

Telephone

Email

Website

Contact name

Organisation

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TUC and unionlearn resources

Other signposting guides in this series:

- Support for carers
- Health and well-being
- Mental health

Unionlearn

www.unionlearn.org.uk

Union learning Climbing Frame website and learning themes

www.climbingframe.unionlearn.org.uk/Home

TUC eNotes

Supporting Mid-Life Development
www.tuceducation.org.uk

TUC

The TUC Workplace Manual has a chapter on pensions
www.tuc.org.uk/activist-resources

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