

Negotiation and representation at work



Curriculum Topics

- Trade Unions
- Representation at work
- External factors
- Negotiation

Introduction

Trade unions play a key role in protecting the interests of their members. This includes making sure good quality training opportunities are provided for their members. Training enables workers to gain qualifications and progress within their careers.

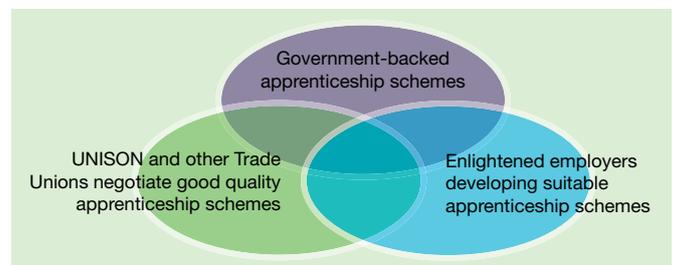
UNISON is Britain and Europe's largest **public sector** trade union. It has more than 1.3 million members with over 75,000 members under the age of 27. UNISON members work in a range of sectors including local government, health, police and education. UNISON is involved with issues such as:

- raising its members' pay
- achieving safe, secure working conditions
- protecting job security
- influencing decisions in the workplace.

UNISON has also been closely involved in the introduction of **apprenticeship** schemes within the public sector. An apprenticeship is a nationally recognised training programme combining real work with learning and training. The training takes place both on-the-job and off-the-job. On-the-job training takes place at work. Off-the-job training takes place away from the workplace, e.g. at college. At one time craft and technical apprenticeships, such as joinery, were common in public authorities. These have significantly reduced over the last 20 years. As a result, many public service employers are now

faced with an ageing workforce, skill shortages and difficulty in attracting younger workers with relevant practical skills. In response to this situation, many of these employers are now developing their own apprenticeship schemes.

The UK government wants to have a major increase in the number of public sector apprenticeship schemes for young people. It needs to ensure that there are enough places available for every suitably qualified young person by the time the education and training participation age is raised in England in 2013. It plans to create at least 21,000 new apprentice places in the NHS, education and local government. To support this plan, from November 2009, apprenticeship programmes are now covered by Act of Parliament. In 2009, 250,000 apprenticeships started. High quality training through apprenticeships gives young people the confidence and skill to take on important work roles. This not only benefits the businesses they work in but also allows the UK economy to grow.



Trade union: An organisation that represents the mutual interests of employees across a range of issues.

Public sector: That part of the economy that is owned by the Government or its agents.

Apprenticeship: Individuals taken on by a business which agrees to train them for a particular trade or role and gain a recognised qualification within that industry.

This case study shows how UNISON is working with employers to support and develop high quality apprenticeship schemes for young people in line with government policy. One scheme with North Yorkshire County Council demonstrates UNISON's role in supporting its development and highlights what a young person should expect from an apprenticeship placement.

Representation at work

Trade unions represent their members at work. They can help to increase wages, agree working hours and improve working conditions. They do this by negotiating with employers on behalf of their members. This is called **collective bargaining** and it gives trade unions greater power than one individual worker would have during negotiations. Sometimes trade unions encourage workers to take industrial action to help them meet their goals. Strikes and overtime bans are examples of industrial action. However, most disputes are settled before this takes place. The number of days lost through strike action has significantly decreased in the past two decades. Unions now work more closely with employers in partnerships which benefit the employer and employee and help contribute towards a more competitive economy.

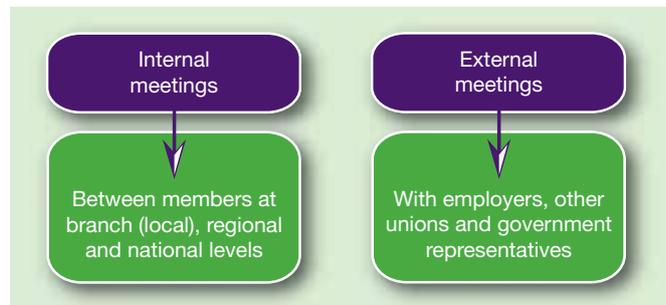
Membership of a trade union can also provide other benefits. Members may receive:

- legal advice and services to help with any problems at work
- special offers and discounts on things like car insurance
- personal development opportunities to gain basic skills or professional qualifications.

Trade union membership is particularly important for young workers. These employees are the most likely to receive low wages. They may also lack the confidence to query whether their working conditions are suitable.



By joining a trade union a young worker becomes part of a group of fellow workers with a shared interest. The union appoints representatives who hold regular meetings within the union and externally.



UNISON is involved at local and national levels in industrial relations and collective bargaining. It is able to make sure that apprentices are:

- provided with good quality training schemes in public services
- covered by **minimum wage** legislation to receive decent wages
- not discriminated against for any reason.

UNISON has a commitment to involving young members in running the union. Its members act together to sort out work problems. Being a member of UNISON gives access to free legal advice, a telephone support service (UNISONdirect) and a host of other benefits such as discounted mortgages, insurance and holidays.

External factors supporting apprenticeships

The demographic profile of the UK workforce is changing. Large numbers of people now fit into what is described as the Baby Boom generation. This consists of people born in the years that followed the Second World War. These people are now in their fifties and sixties and retiring from the national workforce in large numbers.

The British economy needs more young skilled workers who have been adequately trained to carry out important job roles. This is particularly true in the public sector. For example, within the next ten years, over one third of existing local government employees will have retired. Employers therefore need to provide opportunities for young people to climb the qualifications and skills ladder. An apprenticeship is an ideal start for many young people.

UNISON supports apprenticeship schemes because they have multiple benefits. They:

- offer opportunities to young people and bring new people into industry
- provide a progression ladder to higher level skills and qualifications
- create a positive learning atmosphere within an organisation.

Union support can help to ensure that apprentices are paid a fair wage and that the scheme is well structured and beneficial to them.

UNISON does not have authority to approve or set up these apprenticeship schemes. However, by developing positive working partnerships with employers, it is able to influence them in various ways. For example, UNISON:

- identifies and promotes existing schemes which show **best practice**. It consults UNISON members on the effect of apprenticeship schemes and feeds the reports back to employers
- provides a negotiation guide for use with employers looking to introduce a scheme
- has been active in seeking to persuade the Low Pay Commission to set fair and appropriate pay levels for apprentices. Apprentices are all now covered by minimum wage laws.

Scheme benefits also include apprentices having the same entitlement to holidays or sick leave as other colleagues. In the North Yorkshire County Council scheme, young apprentices also get help with travel costs. Apprentices at a new scheme at Kings College Hospital in London are paid the going NHS pay rates and have full conditions of service.

Negotiation

A key role of trade unions is to negotiate with employers on a wide range of work issues. These range from higher pay, better canteen facilities or more onsite childcare provision to time off work for family occasions.

UNISON representatives seek to ensure the maximum number apprenticeship places within individual workplaces. UNISON's **bargaining agenda** also includes key training issues of young people. This includes:

- ensuring apprentices have access to high quality training
- making sure that apprenticeships do not become substitutes for existing jobs.

UNISON worked with North Yorkshire County Council and the Learning and Skills Council to develop a strong apprenticeship scheme.

2006/7	Started small with 70 new apprentices A Senior Young Person's Development Advisor was appointed
2007/8	120 new apprentices
2008/9	108 new apprentices

100% of the apprentices achieved **NVQ** level 1 qualifications (the equivalent of GCSE grades D-G) during their apprenticeships. Over half have now met the standard required for level 3 (the equivalent of A-levels).

Each trainee on the scheme was matched with a mentor, i.e. a more experienced person to guide them. Once in post each apprentice was issued with a contract setting out their terms of employment. Importantly, the terms are the same as for any full time employee with the County Council. This includes annual leave and access to the pension scheme. The salary scale builds up from £95 per week at outset to £205 per week by the end of the first year. The apprentice is also entitled to an allowance if they travel more than a certain distance to the workplace.

Each apprentice is employed for a **probationary** period of 12 months. A review takes place at the end of 3, 6, 9 and 12 months. The review provides the chance to assess performance and set targets. At the end of the programme the apprentice and the employer sit down together to decide whether a permanent position can be provided. These terms were agreed between UNISON and The County Council and ensure that the young workers get fair rewards and conditions.



Best practice: The development of performance standards based upon the most efficient practices within an organisation.

Bargaining agenda: Series of issues that are itemised when trade union representatives talk with employers.

NVQ: National Vocational Qualification. NVQs are work-related, competence-based qualifications.

Probationary: A period of time at the start of a new job when you are watched and tested to see if you are suitable for the job.

North Yorkshire County Council trainees study for an NVQ which is relevant to their job role. For example, this may be in Customer Service or for an Apprentice Administration Assistant, in Business Administration. Each week the apprentice is entitled to spend 1-2 hours on building up his or her NVQ portfolio as part of the course requirements. During the first six weeks of the work placement the apprentice meets with the training provider responsible for helping them to achieve the NVQ certificate. The scheme agreed between UNISON and North Yorkshire County Council provides a first class model of how unions and employers can work together to create entry to work for young people.

Benefits to members

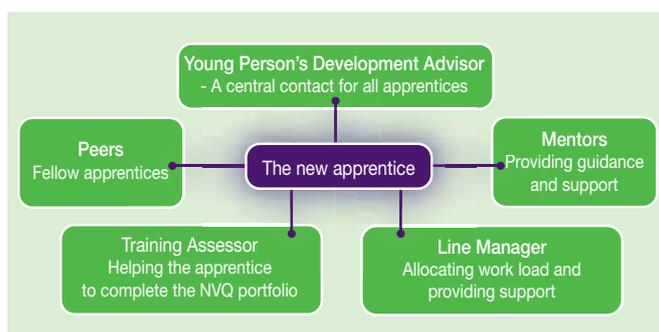
An apprenticeship provides a young person with the skills and support for them to take the first steps in building a career. It is particularly important that young apprentices are provided with the right sort of support and protection. Unions like UNISON are important because they make sure that the schemes are relevant to the needs of the trainee as well as the employer.

UNISON is able to collect first-hand information from members and apprentice members. Through negotiation, UNISON branches make sure that the following conditions are in place to create an apprenticeship with achievable goals:

- Clear arrangements with one or more colleges that offer the required apprenticeship qualification
- Programmes for recruiting candidates as widely as possible. This often involves providing pre-apprenticeship work placements
- Structured procedures for recruitment, selection and placement of apprentices in appropriate posts, making sure that the process fits with equality guidelines
- Well-organised supervision of apprentices and checks on their progress. Each trainee should have a mentor and a line manager who track their progress, oversee their work and help them learn. Staff who take on this role are entitled to extra training, pay and time off in recognition of their additional responsibilities
- Provision for apprentices to have study time, either at college or away from work to complete their NVQ work.

This feedback provides a base on which to negotiate appropriate terms and conditions of apprenticeship schemes.

New apprentices can get support from different sources.



Being accepted on to an apprenticeship scheme therefore provides new employees with a first class entry route into the world of work. UNISON works to ensure that such schemes:

1. support the career needs of the individual employee
2. provide them with a fair wage while training
3. do not replace existing jobs
4. launch them on a career path
5. provide detailed coverage of employment rights.

UNISON actively encourages apprentices to seek further help. To support apprentices in the workplace, UNISON has provided a special membership fee of only £10 a year.

Conclusion

Public Sector employers like North Yorkshire County Council are facing a skills gap resulting from the retirement of older workers. To fill this gap, UNISON is supporting the development of apprenticeship schemes for young people. These provide a working base for them to acquire new skills and qualifications.

UNISON aims to ensure apprentices are protected from being used as cheap labour. It also aims to give young people a secure footing on the career ladder. UNISON is the main union representing employees in local government and other occupations. It is influencing employers to develop relevant apprenticeship schemes. By sharing knowledge and actively working with employers at a policy level, its activities support young workers and play a lead role in making sure that the apprenticeship scheme meets the needs both of young people and of employers.

1. How has UNISON been involved in making sure that apprenticeship schemes protect new workers and provide them with suitable training?
2. Describe and explain two external factors that have made the development of apprenticeship schemes so important.
3. What do you understand by the term 'bargaining agenda'? Who does UNISON negotiate with to create an effective apprenticeship scheme?
4. How important do you think the benefits are that UNISON provides for new apprentices? Explain by providing examples of the way in which UNISON looks after new apprentices.

QUESTIONS

The Times Newspaper Limited and ©MBA Publishing Ltd 2010. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure accuracy of information, neither the publisher nor the client can be held responsible for errors of omission or commission.