

Training the next generation

DEVELOPING APPRENTICES IN UNISON



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contacts...

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hello...

CONNECTING TO THE NEW GENERATION

UNISON HAS ALWAYS campaigned to help secure a genuinely fair deal for apprentices in the workplace.

Indeed, we led the successful campaign to include apprentice pay as part of the National Minimum Wage, something that has put a stop to the worst exploitation of young people on poor quality training schemes. However, we believe the rate is still too low, which is why we continue to campaign for a better deal as part of the broader struggle for the living wage.

We have also worked hard to reach apprenticeship agreements across the public sector that can help unions and employers offer the best start to a new generation of young people – especially in the award-winning apprenticeships project in our Eastern Region, which has contributed the majority of the case studies contained in this booklet.



In addition, both as UNISON General Secretary and as a commissioner on the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, I am particularly proud of the new apprenticeship programme currently underway at our National Centre, which is also showcased in this booklet. We're giving the young people involved a great start at work, and I'm looking forward to everything we will be able to achieve, for young people and for UNISON, when we extend the pilot across the union as a whole.

Apprentices are a crucial part of the future of our workplaces: by working to ensure apprenticeships are a rewarding and valuable experience, we can connect with a new generation of trade unionists. I hope this new booklet encourages more branches to get involved in this crucial area of work.

Dave Prentis
General Secretary



Changing the apprenticeship landscape



UNISON EASTERN REGION has chalked up a string of successes with its apprenticeships project, the very first to be launched anywhere in the country three years ago.

The project has negotiated apprenticeship agreements with several key major employers to secure the best deal for their apprentices, making an important contribution to combating youth unemployment, which stands at 30 per cent in many parts of the region.

It has won the Sarah Swane Award, which the East of England Local Government Association makes to projects that enhance workforce development, equality and diversity.

And the project has helped UNISON recruit new young members, identify and train new activists and also renew branch organisation.

The project's impressive track record drew the then Skills Minister (and local MP) Mathew Hancock and former Labour schools minister Lord Adonis to visit St Edmundsbury Borough Council in December 2012.

UNISON IS GETTING A BETTER DEAL FOR APPRENTICES, HELPING EMPLOYERS WITH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING STRONGER BRANCHES THROUGH ITS PIONEERING APPRENTICESHIPS PROJECT IN THE EASTERN REGION...

"I'm very proud of what you're doing," Matthew Hancock told the audience of councillors, council officers, union representatives and apprentices, while Lord Adonis tweeted: "Great apprenticeship scheme at West Suffolk councils, in partnership with UNISON."

St Edmundsbury Borough Council, which has since formed a local government partnership with neighbouring Forest Heath District Council, was the engine room for the project even before the two authorities signed their apprenticeship agreement with UNISON in early 2012.

“Starting in April 2011, the project’s main aim was to seek agreements between UNISON branches and their employers within the NHS and local government in Norfolk and Suffolk with a view to increasing membership,” explains UNISON West Suffolk Branch Secretary Mark Johnson.

“The emphasis was to work in partnership with employers to ensure quality and safety of apprentices as they work through their apprenticeship, with a fundamental role for mentors and union learning reps in the process.”

Project Worker Craig Young says that the object of the exercise is to ensure that apprentices are treated properly in the workplace, are not exploited and are helped onto the best possible training through UNISON’s partnership with their employers.

But sustained workplace campaigning around apprenticeships also offers significant returns for the union, he points out.

Apprentice mentoring is a case in point. At a recruitment event for ULRs and mentors the project hosted in one of the major hospitals in the region, a dozen people volunteered as mentors and another half a dozen signed up to become ULRs.

“Mentoring is an important role, as it puts our existing members in front of these potential members in the workforce at an early stage, and can help recruitment if it is done well,” explains Craig.

It also attracts members who would not consider themselves traditional activists. “UNISON members who would not normally volunteer to be activists will do so as mentors for apprentices,” he points out.

Apprenticeships Project Worker Craig Young (left) and UNISON Regional Secretary Glyn Hawker (second left) collect the Sarah Swane workforce development award in 2012, alongside West Suffolk Head of Human Resources Karen Points and Councillor Jim Ranger, Chairperson of the East of England LGA Local Government Employers Panel



Talking to the next generation



THE EASTERN Region's apprenticeships project is a great opportunity to work with employers on an important national issue that results in a win for everybody: it benefits UNISON, employers and the apprentices, as we work to ensure that the standard of training is high.

It was this combination of positive spin-offs that very much inspired the late Phil Kemp to help set up the project while working as the Eastern Region's learning and development organiser.

We recognise that apprentices come into organisations in varying numbers and so far these numbers have been relatively small in the public sector.

**APPRENTICESHIPS
PROJECT WORKER CRAIG
YOUNG EXPLAINS HOW
CAMPAIGNING WITH AND FOR
APPRENTICES HELPS UNISON
BUILD STRONGER, MORE
EFFECTIVE, BRANCHES...**

But with government pressure sending more youngsters into our sphere of influence, we need to ensure that we are ready and properly resourced to meet the challenge of helping to create quality training for them as well as retaining our current terms and conditions.



We have a mountain to climb to demonstrate to today's youngsters that the trade union has a viable role in the workplace. Our message – that it's trade unions that have secured the

UNISON Project Worker Craig Young (seated, left) signs the apprenticeship agreement with James Paget University Hospitals interim Chief Executive David Hill in April 2012, watched by Phil Kemp (far right)

The then skills Minister Matthew Hancock (top picture, far right) and Lord Adonis (far left) meet apprentices at St Edmundsbury Borough Council late in 2012; while UNISON and unionlearn staff and activists (below) celebrate the apprenticeship agreement signed with the authority earlier in the year



hard-won terms and conditions people enjoy today – has often passed them by as they have been growing up.

But whenever a branch adopts the approach we have developed through this project, it becomes involved with a topical issue that is close to the core of trade unionism and gives it a platform that will help educate the workforce as to the benefits of joining UNISON.



PETER SMITH

Working towards an apprenticeship agreement encourages branches to become active around the issue and we should see recruitment increase not only from the apprentices themselves but also from the wider workforce that sees the positive work we are carrying out in the workplace.

The whole process raises the profile of UNISON in the workplace as we work on a positive issue with many important components, such as youth unemployment, quality training, working

We can see branches that have been on the back foot begin to take the initiative within the workplace

with employers, as well as protecting terms and conditions for existing members when apprenticeships are introduced and helping the branches become more effective representatives of the workforce.

In addition, branch relationships with the region are strengthened as this progresses and membership retention is enhanced.

Ultimately, we can see branches that have been on the back foot begin to take the initiative within the workplace as new activists are recruited.

As a result, the branch becomes more active and that new energy can be built on as we work in a positive partnership with the employer to help deliver the best possible future for apprentices.



**TAKING THE APPRENTICESHIP
ROUTE HAS PAID OFF
FOR KIRSTY DOWNES
AT ST EDMUNDSBURY
BOROUGH COUNCIL...**

More learning less debt



KIRSTY DOWNES was planning to study events management at university when she left school but the size of the debt she would end up carrying after three years eventually swung her to take the apprenticeship route instead.

She had heard about the pioneering programme at St Edmundsbury Borough Council while on work experience at the authority and decided to follow it up.

The role seemed tailor-made for her, as she would be working in administration for the Leisure Services community development team, and offering special support for youth events.

Kirsty's apprenticeship ran from December 2010 to December 2012, but she completed her Level 3 Business Administration Diploma after just nine months at the authority.

"The study component ran alongside my work," she explains. "My tutor would come

in to see me and we would have a meeting to go through my portfolio, where I wrote up my experience as case studies."

After completing her diploma, Kirsty enrolled on a part-time Foundation degree in events management, and began a top-up year to gain an Honours qualification in September 2014.

"It was really helpful being able to start my Foundation degree during my apprenticeship," she says.

"It's been difficult studying part-time, and you definitely need to prioritise, but my colleagues are really supportive, so when

My colleagues are really supportive, so I've been able to take study time when I've needed to complete an assignment



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

there have been times when I've needed to complete an assignment, I've been able to take study time to do that: I always keep the team updated and I can speak to them if there are any problems."

When Kirsty's apprenticeship finished, she was very happy to secure a permanent job on the council payroll. "It's really good having a permanent job: it means I didn't have to keep looking for another job and could plan other things around it," she says.

Juliet Fulford, the learning and development adviser at West Suffolk (which provides shared services to both St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath District Council), is full of admiration for the way Kirsty has progressed her career.

"Having completed her apprenticeship, moved into full-time employment and now working towards her degree, Kirsty is one of our great success stories," Juliet says.

And she's not the only former apprentice to develop themselves beyond the

Bringing youth and new ideas through an apprenticeship programme is of huge benefit to an organisation

apprenticeship programme. "Now we have other apprentices who are following in her footsteps and progressing onto professional qualifications," Juliet says.

West Suffolk is clear about the benefits of the apprenticeship programme, originally launched when the two authorities signed an apprenticeship agreement with UNISON two years ago.

"Bringing youth and new ideas and new ways of looking at the world through an apprenticeship programme is of huge benefit to an organisation," Juliet says.

"It's a two-way process: the apprentices bring lots of new ideas to the staff that work with them and we support them by giving them employment, by mentoring





them on their journey and by offering them access to corporate learning and development they're interested in."

The partnership with UNISON is enormously helpful, Juliet believes, particularly when it comes to mentoring.

"It's of great benefit that UNISON offers mentors to our apprentices: I work closely with those mentors, so we can deal quickly with any issues that arise with the education provider, for example, and make sure the apprentices are getting the service that they should be," she explains.



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Working with UNISON's mentors helps apprentices find their way through the language of work-based education

"Working with UNISON and UNISON's mentors can also help the apprentices find their way through the language of work-based education and learning, which can be a bit daunting when you have just come from school."

Kirsty herself first encountered UNISON during her apprenticeship induction, and discussed joining with her parents. "I spoke to mum and dad about it and they said, 'If we had a union, we would definitely join it – you'll never know when you'll need them'," she recalls.

While her study commitments have prevented her from taking an active role in the branch to date, she was very glad that the branch sent her to the UNISON young members weekend in Leeds in 2012.

"I didn't know much about the union before I went, so it was really interesting to learn about it there, and find out what was going on in other young members' groups and what they were campaigning for," she says.

"I would like to become more involved, but I have to keep a balance with uni as well as work, so I have talked to the stewards about it and they always copy me into emails in case I can help with anything they're working on."





LESS THAN TWO YEARS SINCE STARTING HIS APPRENTICESHIP AT WAVENEY DISTRICT COUNCIL, STEPHEN MARAJ HAS RISEN THROUGH THE UNISON RANKS TO BECOME BRANCH SECRETARY AT THE EAST ANGLIAN LOCAL AUTHORITY...

From apprentice to activist


FROM KNOWING nothing about UNISON when he started as an apprentice in Waveney District Council's revenue and benefits team 18 months ago, Stephen Maraj has thrown himself into rebuilding his local branch.

After taking on the young members' officer role, he trained to become a health and safety and a workplace rep and acted as branch chair for a period before he was elected secretary at the branch AGM earlier this year.



WAVENEY DISTRICT

Stephen's own enthusiasm, persistence and hard work have enabled him to develop from an isolated and frustrated apprentice into a crucial component of a reviving branch organisation



He's the first to admit that he couldn't have done it without the support he has had from regional organiser Sam Leigh, local organiser Andrea Barker and young members' organiser Tracey Butcher, as well as from within his own branch.

But those key members of his regional support team reckon that it's Stephen's own enthusiasm, persistence and hard work that have enabled him to develop into a crucial component of a reviving branch organisation.

"He's a great young man who's been a pleasure to work with, and has encouraged a lot of other people to come on board to try and help the branch get up and running again," explains Andrea.

Tracey agrees that he's been a huge asset to the union, helping the branch rebuild after a period of problems.

"When the branch ran into difficulties, Stephen could easily have walked away

but he took the plunge and has done really well, partly thanks to the support he has had from the region," she says.

Stephen joined UNISON shortly after attending a town hall event where the council and the union signed their apprenticeship agreement.

He had been feeling frustrated by some of the teething problems after he started, including the fact that he had to repeat some of the work on his Business Administration Level 2 NVQ because the original provider lost his records when it was taken over by learndirect.

"After the signing ceremony, I spoke about my experiences to a UNISON activist who worked in the same section as me and he suggested I join, which I did," he recalls.

"It might sound like a cliché, but when I got involved in the union, I could shake off the negative experiences, and everything improved from there as I gained more respect from people," he recalls.

With the help and support he's had from the branch and the region, Stephen has adapted quickly to the stresses and strains of union work in a branch that has been rebuilding its role in the workplace.

He has also been developing his knowledge and skills through UNISON's activist development programme, learning effective approaches to disciplinary issues and challenging austerity (in addition to the courses for workplace and health and safety reps).



"The support I have received is phenomenal, and I couldn't have done it without those people from UNISON," Stephen says.

Stephen was one of the activists to staff the young members' tent at the region's Big Birthday weekend in 2013, celebrating 65 years of the National Health Service and 20 years since the birth of UNISON itself.

"It was a good weekend, and I enjoyed speaking to all the people who visited the tent about what we can do in UNISON as young people, and listening to all the ideas they had, too," he says.

Support is crucial in the development of young activists, Tracey reckons. "It's good to get someone's name down as a young members' officers in a branch, but if you don't make the time to support that young person, you run the risk of losing them," she argues.

And, as Andrea points out, Stephen has been very successful at persuading other members to join in the renewal of the branch structure: having stepped

down as young members' officer himself, he recruited Callum Dorling to take on the role and encouraged other members to become international officer and communications officer.

Stephen has a simple and straightforward message to any young people who run into problems during their apprenticeship: don't give up.

"A lot of people focus on apprentice pay, and we should make sure everyone is paid a decent wage, but we should not lose sight of the way some apprentices are treated," he says.

"But if people are not being treated well, they shouldn't grin and bear it, they should find something that will help them get through, the way I did with UNISON – and look at where I've got to in the short space of time I've been here."

Stephen is now determined to encourage more members and potential members to see how they could take action to make a better working lives for themselves and their colleagues.

"I have met so many people, and travelled a lot to meet different people who have helped me to shape my branch into something I can be proud of," he says.

"It's this that I want to give to others, at a time when aspiration has been diminished by the zeitgeist, the economy and everybody who has ever made it difficult or put you down. I have a lot of plans for the future, and hope that I can inspire others to do the same."



THE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME AT THE QUEEN ELIZABETH HOSPITAL IN KING'S LYNN HAS HELPED MORE THAN 700 EXISTING STAFF AND NEW ENTRANTS DEVELOP THEIR CAREERS IN THE HEALTH SERVICE....

Planning for the future



WHEN HE BEGAN his Access to Apprenticeship course at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust in October 2012, Craig Elvin was a quiet 18-year-old who had just left school after A Levels.

Eighteen months later, he has finished his apprenticeship, secured a two-year contract as a medical equipment library assistant and recently won election as the UNISON branch young members' officer.

"I came across Craig because he was working in the same department as me, and while he was very energetic, he was very shy, very quiet, and didn't say very much," recalls UNISON Branch Secretary Darren Barber.

"But I could see the potential for leadership in him, and in the past 18 months I have seen him grow up into a young man who – literally – tells me what to do now!"

Craig himself was keen to join the apprenticeship programme at the Trust partly because he had family connections (his mum also works onsite) and partly because he was more interested in the vocational than the academic route.

"I wanted to work in my local hospital and learning while you work was something that appealed to me," he explains.

Craig says he found the Customer Service Level 2 NVQ directly useful in his day to day work in the medical equipment library, which manages medical devices and hospital equipment onsite.

"There's a lot of interaction with people over the phone and face to face, so the NVQ was very helpful," he says.

The Trust uses JHP Training to provide the study component of the NVQ: everything



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



is done onsite through visits by an assessor, although Craig sometimes had to complete portfolio assignments at home.

Since the Trust originally launched its apprenticeship programme four years ago, more than 700 existing staff and new entrants have developed themselves through the scheme, explains Apprenticeship Coordinator Sharon Carter.

Completion and retention rates for new entrants indicate the programme is definitely meeting the needs of new entrants, with 70 per cent of young people staying on at the Trust after finishing their apprenticeships, and a further 10 per cent finding work elsewhere in the public sector locally.

“It was a slow start at first, bringing apprentices into the NHS, but now it’s rolling, it’s a very successful programme, and there are few departments without an apprentice now,” Sharon says.

The programme is directly helping the Trust’s succession planning by creating a framework in which experienced staff can pass on their knowledge and skills to younger counterparts well before they retire.

“Like most NHS trusts locally, we have a lot of people coming up for retirement in the next five to ten years, so now they’re able to pass on the skills they have acquired over many years while they’re still in post to help prepare the workers of the future,” Sharon says.

The programme also includes a mentoring scheme, and staff who participate can undertake a mentoring qualification – and there are even some older staff undertaking Team Leadership apprenticeships while they mentor younger apprentices.

In addition, the programme is also introducing new ideas and new ways



QUEEN ELIZABETH HOSPITAL

That programme is also extremely successful: 90 per cent of the young people involved are now going on to a full apprenticeship

of working that come from the young people themselves, she points out.

"Now we have young people on our various committees and representative groups, which is bringing a breath of fresh air," she says.

The programme is now so well-established that the Trust has enrolled its first cohort of Level 4 apprentices in Business Administration and has helped its first group of carpenters and electricians start their Level 5.

UNISON has been fully supportive since the apprenticeship programme launched in 2010, Sharon says.

"Union backing is very useful to combat cynics who think that apprentices are just cheap labour – and it's not a cheap option if you invest properly in training staff," she argues.

UNISON has also supported the Trust's pre-apprenticeship programme, which is targeted at under-19-year-olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

"These are the sort of young people who wouldn't even get an interview for an apprenticeship because the quality of applications is so high, so we have put into place a NEET programme which UNISON fully supported," Sharon says.

"That programme is also extremely successful: 90 per cent of the young people involved are now going on to a full apprenticeship."

Craig himself started at the hospital at the same time as half a dozen other apprentices. "When it's your first time in a working environment, it's nice to have some familiar faces who are going through the same thing as you," he says.

Throughout his apprenticeship, Craig never felt he lacked support from co-workers or managers or the union. "In the library, I've had full support from both work colleagues and managers: there was not a lot that I've asked for from them, but they were always willing and able to help if I needed anything," he says.

Craig was part of the nine-strong QEH team that was the very first from an NHS Trust to reach the finals of the prestigious Brathay Apprentice Challenge in June 2014.

Supported by the National Apprenticeship Service, the annual Challenge concludes with a three-day outward bound finale to test the eight teams' problem-solving and physical abilities, finishing with a boat race across Lake Windermere that pushed the teams' strength and teamwork to the limit.



apprentices at the Trust in his position as UNISON young members' officer.

"I start off by asking them what they know about unions and the feedback is not a lot, unfortunately – which was the same with me when I first started two years ago," Craig explains.

"I think it helps that I was in a similar position to them so recently: I know what they might be thinking about coming to work in a big organisation like the NHS, which helps us find common ground, so I can talk to them about trade unions in general and my role in particular and what I can do for them."

As UNISON branch secretary, Darren has been working closely with Sharon Carter on the development of the apprenticeship programme.

"Although it's new to be running a programme on this scale, management are fully supportive of the apprentices: we talk about the issues at various different meetings," Darren says.

While the apprenticeship programme helps the Trust with workforce development and succession planning, it also gives the local UNISON branch the chance to reach out to the next generation, Darren points out.

"We can now train Craig about our lifelong learning programme and he will be able to go out there and help other young people find a better pathway, enhance their working lives and develop a stronger voice in the workplace," Darren says.

"It was very challenging, and obviously completely different from what we do at work," says Craig.

"We were all from different departments in the hospital and we had to come up with solutions to the problems we were only given when we arrived, so we had no chance to prepare, but we all enjoyed the teamwork, which was the most important thing we got out of it."

For Craig, taking part in the Challenge further boosted his self-confidence by teaching him the value of his own contribution.

"The main thing I learned was about making my feelings known: if I have a solution that needs to be put forward to a group, I'm not afraid to speak up about it now," he says.

Although his team narrowly missed a podium spot, the nine members still came home on a high, says branch secretary Darren. "They proved that nothing is out of their reach and we got a great morale boost out of that," he says.

Since returning from the Challenge, Craig has started talking to the new intake of



WITH THE HELP OF UNISON AND A RANGE OF OTHER HEALTH SERVICE ORGANISATIONS, HEALTH EDUCATION ENGLAND IS AIMING TO DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF NHS APPRENTICESHIPS...

Expanding apprenticeships in the NHS



BACK IN 2009, there were 1,500 NHS apprentices across the country. Just three years later, that figure had risen to more than 8,000. And now the 2013/4 target of 9,600 is set to double in the next two years, as part of the government's mandate for the new staff development organisation, Health Education England (HEE).

HEE's creation two years ago means that, for the first time, a single national organisation now has responsibility for all NHS staff education, recruitment, training and development.

Overseeing HEE's apprenticeships mandate is Jill Elsworthy, who used to work closely with UNISON Eastern Region's apprenticeships project in her previous role as Apprenticeship Co-ordinator at James Paget University Hospitals in Great Yarmouth.

"We know that provision for, and access to, apprenticeships is really good in some parts of the country, such as the North-West and the East of England, and is not so good elsewhere," explains Jill, who is now HEE's National Programme Manager – Talent For Care (Apprenticeships).

"We want to work to ensure that if you are a young person who is keen to work in the NHS that you have a good opportunity of accessing an apprenticeship, wherever you live."

Some of our support staff fulfil some of the most vital roles in delivering care: they are unsung heroes of our NHS

Health Education England wants to ensure all parts of the country offer high quality NHS apprenticeships, explains Jill Elsworth (left)



the NHS, so it really helped having someone like Craig Young in his role who could reassure everyone that apprenticeships would benefit their organisations," Jill says.

"I'm hopeful that the new joint post that we are joint-funding with UNISON in South London, which is one of the areas where we want to improve access to NHS apprenticeships, will help us remove the barriers, in much the same way as we did in the east of England."

As well as driving the apprenticeship agenda, HEE has run the first national consultation on a development strategy for Bands 1-4 staff, which attracted more than 5,000 responses, a huge proportion of them from Bands 1-4 staff themselves.

UNISON Head of Nursing Gail Adams has welcomed the opportunity to deliver the strategic framework that has emerged out of the consultation.

"Some of our support staff – our porters, cleaners, receptionists and healthcare assistants – fulfil some of the most vital roles in delivering care: they are unsung heroes of our NHS," Gail says.

"This strategic framework, developed in partnership, makes a continued commitment to their development. Our challenge is to make it a reality – one NHS from cradle to grave, with all staff receiving education, training and development and all patients receiving care and compassion, wherever and whenever they need it."

Central to reaching the apprenticeship target are the 13 Local Education and Training Boards (LETBs) that are responsible for the training and education of NHS staff, both clinical and non-clinical, within their area.

"At the moment, we are going out there and finding out what is happening well and identifying good practice in the most successful areas and then finding out how best we can support the LETBs that are at an earlier stage when it comes to using apprenticeships to recruit and develop staff," Jill says.

Jill believes that her experience of working closely with UNISON Eastern Region in her previous role has paid off in her new role at HEE.

"When I started working on this agenda at James Paget five years ago, nobody was really doing apprenticeships in



UNISON HAS PUT ITS MONEY WHERE ITS MOUTH IS AND TAKEN ON ITS FIRST COHORT OF APPRENTICES AT NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, WITH THE AIM OF EXTENDING THE PROGRAMME INTO THE UNION'S REGIONAL OFFICES...

Investing in the future at UNISON HQ



AFTER LEADING the campaign to secure a fair deal for apprentices wherever UNISON organises, the union demonstrated its commitment to training the next generation by welcoming its first cohort of apprentices to UNISON Centre in November 2013.

Ella Ford, Dominique McIntosh, Christopher Palmer, Michael Teixeira and Sophie Wilkinson are all working towards Level 3 qualifications in Business Administration in different departments at national headquarters (strategic organising, education, systems management, human resources and the conference office).

With the pilot project now well underway, the union is looking into the nuts and bolts of extending the programme out into the regional offices as well.

Determined to design a high-quality programme that would develop the apprentices themselves and meet UNISON's own organisational needs, Head of Staff Engagement and Innovation Katherine Bassey took her time devising the scheme before advertising the vacancies.

That allowed her to take full advantage of help from staff at the TUC (including Zoe Molyneaux, who started at Congress House as an apprentice herself), the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and the London Borough of Camden, as well as from UNISON's own Learning and Organising Services team.

In addition, she was able to discuss potential opportunities with departmental managers and involve the staff unions in all the aspects of the scheme.



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“There were a lot of people involved, and I used that quite deliberately to build the energy around the programme,” Katherine explains.

Once it came to advertising the apprenticeship vacancies last year, the decision to offer the London Living Wage ensured the union ended up with a good field of candidates to select from.

“We had more than 40 applications for five roles from within the local area, and I think paying the London Living Wage had a lot to do with that,” Katherine explains.

While the programme was originally advertised as 12 months at Level 2, in recognition of the skills levels of the five apprentices, the union decided to raise participants onto Level 3 qualifications on their induction day.

UNISON was also determined to ensure that the apprentices had the kind of support that can make the difference between a successful

programme and a well-intentioned scheme that fails to deliver – hence the decision to ensure that each apprentice had a buddy in their own department in addition to their named line manager and a mentor from another part of the union as well.

“Line managers are usually very busy people and we wanted to make sure there would be someone who knew the work of the department and would be available to do some hand-holding, if necessary,” Katherine explains.

“We also wanted our apprentices to develop a deeper understanding of the union, which is why we identified and trained mentors for each of them from different departments, a two-way process that also helps other parts of the union understand what we are doing as well.”

While the support mechanism is definitely at the upper end of the continuum, it’s had a massive return for the union, Katherine says.





"It hasn't been a one-way street by any means: it's been something that I think the mentors have also enjoyed, regardless of what kind of role they have had to play – some have been very active and some have not needed to be."

The study component is delivered by a tutor from LeSoCo (the south London provider formed by the merger of Lewisham and Southwark colleges), who comes onto site for two days every three weeks to deliver a taught block on one day and run individual sessions with the apprentices on the other.

In addition to developing their own skills, the apprentices have helped the union meet its organisational needs, just as they were intended to do. For example, since 2013, in line with Camden council's aim of building a more strategic approach to work placements between



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local schools and employers across the borough, UNISON National Centre has been offering work experience placements to Year 10 pupils from four local schools, in addition to the usual connections through family and friends of members of staff.

But while the 2013 pupils were supervised by UNISON staff, the 2014 pupils were supervised by the apprentices themselves, who conducted the orientation interviews, organised their timetables for the week and talked to them about their own experiences of being apprentices and working for UNISON.

The group also made a very positive contribution at the 2014 UNISON Young Members' Weekend in Glasgow. Originally set a goal of collecting 30 feedback forms from the 110 participants, the apprentices ended up ensuring more than 80 young members completed the questionnaires, creating a much richer resource for the union in the process.

And their talent has not only been recognised within UNISON National Centre: in July 2014, Chris Palmer

UNISON CENTRE APPRENTICES



(pictured left) won Camden Council's most improved apprentice award, much to the delight of the staff who have supported him since he started in his role.

While the union cannot guarantee jobs when the apprentices complete in 2015, Katherine hopes some at least will successfully apply for permanent roles. The union will offer employability skills support to all of them.

"I hope that those that do not stay with us will go away with a positive impression of the union and act as ambassadors for us in the workplaces where they move on," Katherine says.

Twelve months into the 18-month pilot, and the union is happy with how the programme is progressing.

"There has inevitably been the odd hiccup, but it's been pretty successful and I'm very proud of the work: a lot of people have got a lot out of it and it's shown what the union can do," Katherine says.

Ella Ford (left) saw the advertisement for UNISON's apprenticeship programme last year a few weeks after leaving Sheffield, where she grew up, to look for work in London.

"I knew a lot about trade unions with many of my family being union members, and I was attracted to the apprenticeship itself," she explains.

She has definitely enjoyed her first 12 months with the strategic organising unit. "My department has been really friendly and they have given me loads of work to do in the office and at seminars and conferences," she says.

Unlike Ella, Chris Palmer didn't know very much about trade unions before he came across the UNISON advert, but he liked what he saw when he did his research.

"I liked the fact that UNISON stands up for people – that really helped me decide that this was the one I wanted to do," he explains.

Having completed his A Levels only a few months before starting, what Chris didn't know was how he and his new co-workers in systems management would get along.

"That's probably the one thing I wasn't really sure about, how people were going to accept me, but it's been good: they've been friendly and no problems at all," he says.

Ella and Chris both appreciate the support the union provides. "My mentor actually sits just across from me, so I can talk to him whenever I need help with anything," Ella says.

Chris agrees. "It's great to have someone you can go to if you're struggling or you just want to have a chat to get away from things: they're always there for you," he says.



UNISON YOUNG MEMBERS' OFFICER GARY WILLIAMS EXPLAINS HOW THE UNION HAS LED THE WAY IN WORKING TO ENSURE HIGH-QUALITY APPRENTICESHIP SCHEMES BECOME THE NORM THROUGHOUT THE PUBLIC SERVICES...

Securing a better deal



UNISON HAS consistently worked to secure the best possible deal for apprentices. Recognising that too many unscrupulous employers were exploiting young people through low-paid, poor-quality training schemes, we led the campaign to make apprentice pay part of the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

That was a campaign we won when the government instructed the Low Pay Commission to consider the issue of apprentice pay for the first time in 2009, and that led the way for the introduction of the NMW for apprentices one year later.

Of course, the rate is still too low and is not keeping up with inflation. UNISON is campaigning to raise the rate substantially as part of the wider battle for the living wage. But the NMW for apprentices remains a vital protection against the very worst exploitation of young people.

We have been very positive about encouraging branches to get involved in discussion and negotiation with employers



Apprentices are the UNISON members of the future, argues Gary Williams (above)

about new apprenticeship schemes as early as possible. UNISON involvement helps ensure employers don't use apprentice labour to substitute for existing jobs and means decent schemes are designed that will work for apprentices themselves.

**It's a great package,
and I look forward to
ever more apprentices
joining UNISON and
taking part in our
activities and campaigns
in the years ahead**

When young people start their apprenticeship, we have the chance to show them the concrete help and support UNISON can offer in the workplace. We can talk to them about what to expect from the world of work in general and their apprenticeship in particular, and show them how UNISON can help them progress, both in terms of undertaking the best qualifications for them and hopefully securing a permanent post when they complete.

We're very happy that so many branches make sure they have space at apprentice inductions to explain what UNISON is to young people who might bring very little knowledge of trade unions to their first job. We don't believe apprentices should be treated as invisible people with a spare pair of hands: they are potentially our future members, and we need to think about how to involve them in everything we do.

Wherever we can, we encourage our young members themselves to talk to new apprentices: it's usually more effective when people closer to their own age talk

to 18 or 19-year-olds. Our special rate of UNISON membership of £10 a year for apprentices entitles them to participate in all our activities and take advantage of a whole host of membership benefits: there's no doubt that it's a very good deal!

We also encourage as many apprentices as possible to join us on our annual young members' weekends, which helps young members (including apprentices) overcome any feelings of isolation by being able to get together with other people of a similar age as part of an organisation that is vibrant, full of energy and full of ideas.

The weekend can be very useful for apprentices in particular, as they can often work with colleagues who are a lot older and might not meet people of their own age that much at work, and can feel vulnerable about putting their head above the parapet before they have a permanent contract. It's an important opportunity to discuss things with other young workers, speak out about what is happening with their apprenticeship and articulate what makes a good quality scheme and criticise the poorer quality schemes.

UNISON has an enormous amount to offer apprentices – our special membership rate makes joining cost-effective; our learning and industrial expertise helps them get the most out of their apprenticeship; and our young members' weekend gives them the chance to discuss key issues and socialise with people of roughly the same age. It's a great package, and I look forward to ever more apprentices joining UNISON and taking part in our activities and campaigns in the years ahead.



SINCE COMPLETING HER APPRENTICESHIP, KATRINA RANKIN HAS BECOME EAST RENFREWSHIRE BRANCH YOUNG MEMBERS' OFFICER AND NOW CHAIRS THE SCOTTISH YOUNG MEMBERS COMMITTEE (SYMC)...

Learning while you earn



AFTER STUDYING at college for a year on leaving school in 2009, Katrina Rankin discovered Targeted Pathways to Apprenticeships, the Skills Development Scotland programme that helps young people progress onto a Modern Apprenticeship.

"It was a 12-week course that included team-building activities and workshops on job application interview skills, and they sent you information on apprenticeship opportunities every week," Katrina explains.

"After six or seven weeks, I successfully applied to start an apprenticeship with an estate agent, but I later transferred to the human resources department at East Renfrewshire Council."

Katrina was attracted to the apprenticeship route because she was keen to start work.

"I thought the apprenticeship would be a good stepping stone, because you get into work, gain your qualification and then have the chance to apply for vacancies within the local authority," she says.

And that is exactly how things have panned out for her: after 16 months of her apprenticeship, she successfully applied for a social work job at the authority and completed her qualification in the first two months of her new full-time post.

The learning component of the programme involved her Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) assessor visiting her office once a month to look at the work she had done already and what was coming up.

"I preferred having someone come into my work rather than me going to college: going through anything I



PAULI BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

The UNISON young members' weekend allows apprentices to join other members of a similar age to plan future activities

wasn't sure about with my assessor never took more than an hour a month, and it was really helpful," she says.

Katrina's overall assessment of her apprenticeship is overwhelmingly positive. "I think apprenticeships are a really good way of getting hands-on experience while you're learning at the same time," she says.

"I also took the chance to help out other teams in the department I was working in, which broadened my overall knowledge as well, and it gave me the confidence to apply for a full-time job."

Becoming active in UNISON has helped Katrina further develop herself, taking UNISON courses to improve her knowledge and skills in equalities and workplace representation and also tackling a wide range of union organising issues.

"I have gained experience in case work, meeting new people, helping people

deal with problems, communication skills, running recruitment stalls within workplaces in my own branch, as well as helping other branches through the SYMC," she explains.

When she was first elected branch young members' officer, Katrina created a newsletter targeted at young members, but she changed tack when it failed to gain the response she was after.

"I am now working on mapping young members within my branch: I speak with them as to what they think is the best way to engage with our young members, and encourage them to get involved with the issues that the SYMC is campaigning on," she says.

And she is keen to support new apprentices as they arrive at the authority. "Once I complete my mapping exercise and successfully organise my young members, I would hope I could be some kind of mentor to those currently undertaking apprenticeships," she says.



GREG SMITH HAS TAKEN EVERY OPPORTUNITY THAT HAS COME HIS WAY SINCE STARTING AS AN APPRENTICE WITH SHEFFIELD HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST...

Following the learning curve



WHEN GREG SMITH applied for a Business Administration apprenticeship with the Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust, he leapt at the chance of a placement in the Sheffield Community Health Branch office.

"There were three positions available, and I went with the union because that would mean contact with service users, with UNISON members and with the human resources department, which sounded like a good learning curve," he explains.

"I thought that with the NHS and UNISON both being good organisations, the union office would be the best place to work and learn – and, as it turned out, I was right!"

Greg enjoyed his year-long course from day one back in April 2013, when he was just 19 years old.



UNISON young members take to the streets to campaign on union issues during Young Members' Weekends

You need to show that you are worth hiring, and most importantly that you're worth keeping on

"I absolutely loved it, I really did," he recalls. "They started me off easy, tutoring me while I was working, which was really helpful, and then gradually moved me on to bigger things."

He relished the way the UNISON team always offered him the chance to take on new responsibilities and try new experiences – which is how he came to be branch young members' officer.

"I feel like I have been part of the team from the beginning because they involved me and gave me good responsibilities, not only the small tasks like making the tea, which I also did!" he says.

That's not always the case, as he knows comparing his experience with people he met on the college course he took before his apprenticeship.

"There were a few people from college who didn't have a good relationship with their workplace and their manager would only give them miniscule tasks, which made them feel a bit worthless," he says.

In contrast, Greg always felt confident about his relationship with his manager – even when he had made mistakes.

"There have been a few occasions where I have messed up but I always knew that I could go to my manager and say, 'I have messed up and I might need some help' because they have always been understanding and seen it as a learning curve for me," he says.

"This was my first proper job, and I have learned other skills as a young person that have helped me in my life outside work, as well as all the skills you need to work efficiently and effectively in an office."

A positive attitude and an open mind are crucial, he reckons. "You need to show that you are worth hiring, and most importantly that you're worth keeping on: taking on new responsibilities shows that you are up for the task," he says.

It definitely paid off for Greg: after completing his apprenticeship in April 2014, he accepted the Trust's offer of part-time (22.5 hours per week) work, and has continued to work in the branch office.

While he thinks his Level 2 qualification will be enough for now, Greg is more than open to any training that UNISON can offer in the future.

"My managers want me to go on a training course on employment law so I can help people more and give advice, which I can't at the moment because I'm not qualified. It's given me hope for the future that I can make a career: from this I think I definitely can," he says.



CHECKLIST

UNISON BRANCHES HAVE A VITAL ROLE TO PLAY IN SUPPORTING APPRENTICES, STARTING WITH THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF HIGH QUALITY APPRENTICESHIPS THAT ARE DECENTLY PAID. HERE ARE SOME KEY POINTS TO HELP ENSURE EVERYTHING RUNS SMOOTHLY...

Doing the best by your apprentices



CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

Apprentices are employees and should have contracts of employment for at least the duration of the training period. If the guarantee of a job at the end of the programme is not possible, the employer should commit to offering guaranteed interviews to apprentices when full-time posts become available and/or offering training and support in employability skills. Where there is a negotiated rate for the job, apprentices should be on that level of pay to prevent them being used as cheap labour. Branches should try to negotiate a rate for apprentices based on the full rate for the job. Apprentices should also be entitled to the same terms and conditions, such as sick leave and holiday entitlement, as their colleagues.

PAY AND CONDITIONS

Apprentices over the age of 19 are entitled to the National Minimum Wage (NMW) rate for their age after they have completed the first 12 months of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices under the age of 19 or in the first 12 months of a Level 2 or Level 3 apprenticeship are currently entitled to the Apprenticeship National Minimum Wage, which is set annually by the Low Pay Commission. Apprentices should be paid for time spent training off the job as well as the time they spend in the workplace.

HIGH QUALITY TRAINING

Apprenticeships should include a clear programme of training that allows apprentices enough time in college, in workplace training centres or in private study to complete their studies. The level of study and the choice of provider for the study component can be crucial. Union branches should use any knowledge they have accrued through contact with local providers to guide the employer's choice, and should aim to ensure that the level of study is appropriate to an apprentice's existing skills levels: too low, and they may feel like the study is a pointless tick-box exercise; too high, and they may think about giving up.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Since apprenticeships should be accessible to the widest demographic, unions have a crucial role to play in challenging sexist and disablist job stereotypes and combatting discrimination against young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, young people with disabilities, and other members of disadvantaged groups. Branches should:

- ✿ help employers encourage applications from under-represented groups (eg, by adopting marketing and recruitment strategies to reach the widest audience)
- ✿ review recruitment and selection criteria to ensure they don't exclude or discourage under-represented groups
- ✿ ensure managers and recruitment staff take part in equality and diversity training.

MENTORING

Since apprentices are usually young people entering the workplace for the first time, it is vital that they have support mechanisms in place. Union-trained mentors are usually the best solution, as they can:

- ✿ offer support and advice on work issues outside the line management chain
- ✿ help with all aspects of the study component of the programme
- ✿ work with the apprentice and their line manager to quickly resolve any problems.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Young people are particularly vulnerable to accidents at work as they do not have as much experience or training as older workers. If an apprentice does have an accident at work, branches should do all they can to ensure they are supported both at the time and when they return to work.

Branches should ensure that apprenticeship programmes include:

- ✿ comprehensive risk assessments before apprentices start
- ✿ health and safety training at induction
- ✿ apprentice supervisors and line managers complete health and safety training
- ✿ apprentices are issued with protective clothing and equipment where appropriate.

UNION SUPPORT

Bearing in mind that many young people do not know much about the power of trade union membership, branches should aim to ensure they have a role in apprentice inductions, explaining what UNISON can do for new employees. Union members should also be encouraged to talk to apprentices in their departments, invite them to union meetings and events and make sure they know about union learning opportunities they might be interested in. To help branches recruit and organise apprentices, UNISON offers the special £10 per year apprentice membership rate.

JOB SUBSTITUTION

Branches should negotiate to ensure that apprentices are not used for job substitution, and that they are recruited to fill genuine skills shortages and plan for future skills gaps. In addition, when apprenticeships are designed in the right way, branches should use their influence in the workplace to guard against suspicions of job substitution that can lead to lack of acceptance of individual apprentices.

AGREEMENTS

Branches may find it useful to negotiate a specific apprenticeship agreement to reinforce the elements on this checklist.



HOW TO JOIN

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textphone users FREEPHONE **0800 0 967 968**
Lines open 6am – midnight Monday to Friday
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