



**Unite response to the Department for Innovation,  
Universities & Skills Consultation:  
World-class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent,  
Building Skills for All.**

**This response is submitted by Unite the Union – Amicus Section. Unite is the UK's largest trade union with 2 million members across the private and public sectors. The union's members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction, transport and local government, education, health and not for profit sectors.**

**Executive Summary**

- **Skills and training, including apprenticeships, should form part of the negotiating agenda;**
- **government needs to implement initiatives that encourage completion rates;**
- **training provided should be of a high standard and must incorporate recognisable and transferable skills;**
- **commitments on employing apprentices should be made a stipulation on all publicly funded projects;**
- **Unite supports an increase in the minimum weekly wage for apprentices;**
- **a need for greater transparency in data collection and a review of systemic barriers to encourage atypical recruits;**
- **recognition of the role the trade unions play in working with employers to support learning in the workplace;**
- **where employers are not implementing a training and development scheme for their workers, Unite advocates that a training levy should be implemented.**

## **Introduction**

1. Unite congratulates the Government on the proposals outlined in the consultation document as a real step forward in developing the skills needed to ensure the UK remains competitive. However Unite also has concerns over some aspects of the proposals including a failure to address low pay for apprentices; a weakness in the proposals to ensure a permanent position at the end of the apprenticeship; and the lack of a transparent strategic programme to monitor the quality of delivery of the training and work based element of the apprenticeship. Promoting the role of the union in addressing these key failings could improve the proposals laid out significantly.

## **Negotiating for Skills**

2. Unite want to work with learning providers, employers and Government to deliver the skills the economy needs in order to remain competitive and retain jobs. To do this Unite believes that trade unions need be able to discuss the training needs of members with employers, and to influence the training and skills agenda in the workplace. However trade unions are restricted from doing this as skills and learning do not form part of the collective bargaining agenda.
3. Fulfilling the learning needs and personal and professional aspirations of our members is as important to Unite as the issues that form part of any collective agreement. Unite would therefore wish to see skills and training, including apprenticeships, on the negotiating agenda in order to influence and support employers in delivering a skilled and confident workforce.

## **Demand v's supply**

4. The level of demand versus supply is a fundamental issue and is at the heart of these proposals. Unite believes that unions have a vital role to play in increasing employer supply and involvement in apprenticeship provision. One of the biggest problems with the system is encouraging employer involvement. Government needs to supply the necessary incentives for employers to get involved and more importantly stay involved, and to offer excellent training schemes to apprentices.
5. The proposals put forward in Section 2.16 in the consultation, for "an apprenticeship place for each suitably qualified young person by 2013" is therefore welcomed. It states that if demand surpasses the anticipated target of applicants then the Government will find the resources to meet the demand within budgets available. However Unite would not wish to see supply at any cost. Unite would wish to see high quality employer places together with a firm commitment from Government to guarantee the resources to provide an

apprenticeship at the appropriate level to those with appropriate qualifications.

### **Generate take-up**

6. Unite believes that there needs to be improved information made available to schools on the advantages of an apprenticeship for young people who may not opt for an academic route to work for whatever reason. Unite therefore welcomes the proposals outlined in Section 3 which will promote apprenticeships to youngsters from 14 onwards, as an alternative route to skills when they reach 16.
7. Too many young people have disengaged with society. According to the Labour Force Survey the so-called NEET's (not in education, employment or training) now account for around 15% of 16-24 year olds<sup>1</sup> in England. This policy offers a real opportunity to change attitudes towards both learning and work and to instigate positive citizenship; raise aspirations and increase life chances; and to recognise the contribution less academic young people can make to society.
8. The recently announced Education and Skills Bill which ensures that young people must stay in education or training, including work-based training until age 18, may also create opportunities for young people to consider an apprenticeship as a means of complying with this legislation.

### **Quality & transferability**

9. There is a real problem with completion rates under the current apprenticeship scheme (63% in manufacturing). The government therefore needs to implement initiatives that encourage completion rates.

The main barriers to completion include:

- the quality of the apprenticeship programme and work strategy - for many apprentices the programme of work and training is not sufficient for their needs and Unite would want to see a clear and strategic programme of work, both inside the company and at any college of learning.
- low wages paid to apprentices (set in August 2005) - Unite would want to see this linked more closely to the minimum wage and a real effort to acknowledge and address the current gender inequality. For example, TUC has evidence of female

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<sup>1</sup> Labour Force Survey: (Q1 2005 - Q3 2007 time series)

apprentices being paid £1.54 per hour, this is grossly unacceptable.

- the lack of opportunity for a permanent position at the end of the apprentice training course.

10. Unite is keen to ensure that the training provided should be of a high standard and must incorporate recognisable and transferable skills. Unite also see a clear role for trade unions in quality assurance and monitoring of the training provided by ULR's. This is an area which could be explored further.
11. It is also important that the apprenticeship has in-built flexibility in order that a change in direction within the apprenticeship will not disadvantage the trainee – basically allowing the trainee to accumulate learning credits (Section 3.2) which can be transferred to an alternative apprenticeship if a particular apprenticeship proves unsuitable. This should encourage continued participation in the scheme rather than lead to an increase in the drop-out rate.

### **Public sector procurement**

12. Unite welcomes the Government's commitment on procurement stated in paragraph 5.32 to encourage the companies it contracts in large strategic projects to employ apprentices and to lead by example by setting targets within the public sector. However Unite would wish to go further and to see this initiative being made a stipulation on all publicly funded projects not only large strategic projects and to promote equality and diversity within those apprenticeship programmes.

### **SME's**

13. According to the Federation of Small Business (FSB) small businesses employ around 58% of the private sector workforce<sup>2</sup> and have therefore a vital role to play in promoting apprenticeships to employees. However Government will also have a vital role to play in supporting small businesses to take on apprentices, mentioned in Section 5, by providing adequate funding and support with time off for training.
14. Unite also supports an increase in the minimum weekly wage for apprentices. Indeed the TUC has recently called for an increase in the minimum weekly wage for apprentices from £80 to £110, once legislation has been passed to extend wage contributions to small employers who are taking on an apprentice. This move is supported by the FSB.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.fsb.org.uk](http://www.fsb.org.uk)

## **Equality of opportunity**

15. Unfortunately a gender segregated labour market appears to be mirrored in personal choices in apprenticeships. According to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, gender stereotypes in the apprenticeship system include:
  - 99% of construction apprenticeships are men;
  - 97% of engineering apprenticeships are men;
  - 97% of childcare apprenticeships are women; and
  - 91% of hair and beauty apprenticeships are women<sup>3</sup>.
16. Tackling a segregated labour market through the apprenticeship scheme will be a difficult task. However more must be done to promote a greater diversity in recruitment of apprentices as suggested in Section 7 of the document, which would create a more representative and balanced workforce and ensure that the workforce is more representative of the communities where firms are located.
17. The EOC document 'Free to Choose: Tackling Gender Barriers to Better Jobs' <sup>4</sup> uncovered a lack of places, inflexibility for women with children and a lack of childcare support. It also highlighted that pay in childcare, the only female-dominated sector, was half or less than half that of construction, engineering, plumbing or ICT, perpetuating pay discrimination.
18. The EOC identified a need for greater transparency in data collection and a review of systemic barriers to atypical recruits. Unite would support this view and would further support joint work between employers and unions, supported by Government to promote equality and diversity.

## **Over 25's**

19. Unite welcomes the proposals to extend apprenticeships to adults aged 25 and over and to provide additional funding and increased flexibility as a means to address the skills gap. However there remains a distinct problem with the proposed entry requirements for adult apprentice schemes. It is important to take into consideration previous work experience, on-the-job learning and skills training when assessing whether adults have the capabilities to enter the apprenticeship programme. If this is not addressed it could disadvantage and potentially put off candidates.

## **Best Practice**

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Balls, Hansard - 4<sup>th</sup> February 2008 - Column 639

<sup>4</sup> 'Free to Choose: Tackling Gender Barriers to Better Jobs' EOC (March 2005)

20. There are still problems with some people being unable to access good quality apprenticeship schemes in their area. Unite is clear that everyone should have access to information about what is available for them. An example of an excellent scheme is at Rolls Royce which is heavily over subscribed. The Rolls-Royce Motor Cars apprenticeship programme was successfully launched in 2006 and has received applications from around the world. The programme provides people with the opportunity to train with the company. The apprenticeships last for up to four years and combine on-the-job training with studying for nationally recognised qualifications.
21. There are also examples of where the system is not working at all. In August 2007 there were 6,500 unplaced apprentice candidates in the construction sector who have passed the entrance test for a traditional apprenticeship<sup>5</sup>.

### **Agency workers & migrant labour**

22. Twenty years ago the mechanical and engineering section of the construction industry in the UK recruited 5,000 apprentices a year, the figure is now closer to 2,800 and many major mechanical and engineering firms have abandoned recruiting apprentices in favour of using agency labour<sup>6</sup>.
23. Furthermore, increasing economic mobility has led to the movement of migrant workers to the UK which has helped plug the skills gap in the short term.
24. Unite is opposed to any employment practices used to undermine collectively negotiated agreements on terms and conditions. Unite argues that the Government must pursue a long term objective which supports apprenticeships and permanent employment as part of the programme to fulfil the demand for skilled labour employed in the construction industry and all other industrial sectors.

### **New industries**

25. Historically traditional industries supported the apprenticeship scheme and confidence in the apprenticeship 'brand' was unquestioned. Obtaining an apprenticeship place was seen as offering the best possible start on the career ladder for young people.
26. The Government however have a hard task in transferring the apprenticeship model associated with traditional heavy industries to the new industries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century including the creative arts, ICT and

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<sup>5</sup> Construction News – 23 August 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Electrical and mechanical Contractor – May 2006.

financial services, to encourage take-up, inspire confidence in delivery and to recognise the quality of the training provided.

27. Success in achieving take up in the new industries will be based upon clarity over quality and monitoring, together with sufficient support for apprentices in both the training and work-based elements of the apprenticeship and a recognition of the value of the apprenticeship on offer.

### **Trade union involvement**

28. Unite have faced hostility from some industrial sector employers, who see no role for trade unions in the learning agenda despite bringing funding opportunities through the Union Learning Fund and surveys of the workforce supporting the ULR scheme.
29. Unite therefore applauds the Government in suggesting the introduction of mentors to support apprentices and that this function could be provided by ULRs. Unite would be keen to work with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) to encourage entry by under represented groups and to support them through their training and further.
30. Unions can add value in a range of ways, from the shaping of training programmes, to the promotion of a learning culture in the workplace. Learning agreements between employers and unions have played an important part in addressing skills gaps and training needs and much can be achieved when management and unions work together and training is included on the collective bargaining agenda.
31. Trade unions can play an important role in promoting apprenticeships through their work with the Sector Skills Councils and the role that trade union board members have in both developing strategy and facilitating implementation. Sector Skills Agreements, and the trade union action plans contained within them, are a particular case in point. The apprenticeship learning framework could further be strengthened through workplace learning agreements in conjunction with trade unions and Sector Skills Councils.
32. Finally, where employers are not implementing a training and development scheme for their workers Unite advocates that a training levy should be implemented. This could then be redeemed by the company if they go on to provide a comprehensive training programme for their staff. This would also apply to apprenticeship training.

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