Skills for the Future: Regions

About the survey

UNISON’s Skills for the Future Survey, based on the responses of more than 38,700 members, represents one of the largest skills surveys in Europe and provides a detailed picture of members’ skills and their associated aspirations and concerns.

The objectives of the study were:

* to survey members on what current learning and training they undertake
* to establish the level of support members receive to do their current jobs
* to establish the skills needs of public services employees in the future

The survey generated more than 38,700 responses between November 2018 and February 2019. This equates to a response rate of approximately 3%. The large sample size generates accurate results that we can be confident truly reflect the wider UNISON membership.

The findings of this report must also act as a wakeup call for government and employers. We need to invest in lifelong learning if we want to sustain high quality public services for all. Employers must take responsibility for investing in and developing their workforce, preparing them for the challenges and changes ahead, and they must do this in partnership with a well-resourced further and higher education sector.

We must ensure that as jobs for life become a thing of the past and as we work later into our lives, an ‘all ages all stages’ careers service is there for those both in and out of work. Because all our public service workers should have access to the education and training they need – not just to get the job done, but to excel in all areas of their lives.

Key general findings

The below outlines the general findings from UNISON’s Skills for the Future survey covering all public service worker respondents.

Headlines

* More than four-fifths (82%) of respondents claim that ‘learning is important to my self-esteem’ and they were ‘ready to learn new skills to remain employable in the future’
* Skills deficiencies were most reported in respect of ‘computer and digital skills’ (14%) and ‘management or supervisory skills’ (18%)
* Those with no or low qualifications were more than twice as likely as those with the highest qualifications to report a deficiency in ‘computer and digital skills’ and ‘management and supervisory skills’ and were more than five times as likely to report deficiencies in literacy and numeracy
* A lack of skills and/or confidence in literacy or numeracy had stopped just under a fifth (17%) of respondents from applying for promotion
* People with a disability were most likely to feel that a lack of training had a negative effect on their employment prospects

Participation

* The vast majority of UNISON members are recent learners with four-in five (79%) participating in some form of learning during the last 12 months
* Training occurred most commonly for work or career (70%) rather than private or personal reasons
* While ‘attending training away from your work station’ was the most common method of accessing training (66%), more than half recent learners had accessed an ‘online training course’
* The vast majority who were learning for their current job felt that the provision was adequate in keeping them up to date with the skills they required in their job

Barriers to Learning

* More than half (52%) of those who had not undertaken any work-related training over the last 12 months thought that it would have been useful
* Employer-related factors such as ‘employer was not willing to provide additional training, even though I wanted it’ were more frequently reported as barriers to learning than personal factors such as difficulty ‘finding time for training’
* Very few respondents (2%) did not train because they ‘did not want any training’: there were usually another reason
* Almost half (48%) of those who were not learning for their current job didn’t think this had harmed their employment prospects, although one-third (31%) did feel their employment prospects would suffer through their lack of training

Workplace Challenges

* The majority (84%) of respondents had observed at least one form of workplace change during the last 3 years
* 45% had seen reductions in the number of people doing the same work as them and 22% reported redundancies within their workplace
* Around one-third (34%) of members felt that it was ‘very likely’ or ‘somewhat likely’ that their position would be made redundant in the next three years
* Almost three-fifths (57%) felt that ‘technological automation is putting public sector jobs at risk’

**Regional findings**

At the aggregate level, in most respects, the main regional differences were between countries and in particular between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), with relatively little variation between the English regions although Greater London did stand out from the rest of England on some topics. This is particularly apparent in the questions on organisational change where respondents in Northern Ireland were considerably less likely to report any of the organisational changes explored.

 Northern Ireland members were also considerably less likely to report redundancies (8%) compared to Greater London (29%), Northern region (29%) and the West Midlands (29%). Reflecting this, members living in Northern Ireland felt less at risk of redundancy themselves than members living elsewhere in the UK.

Members living in Greater London and to a slightly lesser extent Northern Ireland were more likely than members in other regions to report being discouraged from progressing their career due to concerns about their literacy and numeracy skills. Union activism was highest in the Eastern (13%) and Greater London (12%) regions and lowest in Northern Ireland (7%) and Scotland (7%). Members in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely than those in other regions to access UNISON member learning with one-day workshops being particularly popular in the region.

**Headlines**

* Take up of UNISON member learning opportunities tended to be highest in from members living in Northern Ireland (25%) and the East Midlands (19%) and Northern region (16%) and lowest in the South West (10%), Scotland (11%), Greater London (11%) or the North West (11%).
* Differences by region were fairly small in relation to who had accessed training within the last 12 months, with the lowest levels of training in the West Midlands (23% not training in the last 12 months), Northern Ireland (23%) and North West (23%) and Northern region (22%). By contrast, participating in training was highest in the South West (18% not training in the last 12 months).
* The highest proportions of members gaining qualifications from work-related learning were in Cymru/Wales (37%) and Northern Ireland (36%). Learners in Scotland (28%), the South West, South East and Eastern regions (all at 31%) were least likely to have acquired a qualification from their work-related learning.
* The West Midlands (60%) was the most pessimistic region of the UK.
* Members working in Northern Ireland were less likely than members living in other regions to report workplace change although the majority (74%) had witnessed at least one form of workplace change.
* Redundancies were most commonly reported in Greater London (29%), Northern region (29%) and West Midlands and less commonly in Northern Ireland (8%).
* By region, the highest levels of job satisfaction were found in Cymru/Wales (59%) and Northern region (59%) and the lowest in Greater London (50%). Dissatisfaction was highest in the West Midlands (23%) and lowest in Cymru/Wales (17%).
* Differences across the regions were such that members living in Greater London (58%) and West Midlands (57%) were most likely to feel the training would have been useful and workers in the Northern region (48%), Yorkshire and Humberside (49%) and the East Midlands (49%) the least likely.

**Devolution & the Adult Education Budget**

The devolution of the Adult Education Budget may be the start of a move towards better localised decision-making and control of skills provision. Devolved budgets could work to enable experimentation within particular sectors and geographies and this will give opportunities to unions and others seeking to support learning in the workplace – if they themselves are able to respond locally. At a local level it may well be possible to link economic development, industrial strategy, business development and support, innovation, inclusive growth, fair work, improved pay and job quality, progression and skills. The importance of the role of trade unions within local and regional activities is therefore increasing and will pose challenges for linking UNISON lobbying and skills support, which may have resource implications as delivery and priorities become differentiated.

Actions

Internal

* LAOS to continue to develop appropriate member learning and activist training and materials that reflect the future needs of members in the changing working environment and that our learning and training courses, materials and resources are offered in accessible formats so that our entire membership is able to participate fully.
* Create briefings for and consult service groups, SOG’s and regions based on member need and the findings of the survey.
* Renewed focus on current UNISON policy to promote member learning and the role of the ULR and encourage greater participation by branches and regions in union learning
* Proactively target and commit to the recruitment of 5,000 ULRs over the next 5 years, and ensure that ULRs and learning is integral to UNISONs organising objective.
* Continue to work with Exeter University to drill deeper into the survey findings and to set up focus groups where appropriate, this will have a cost element of possibly up to £20,000, this will be part funded by ULF monies.
* Renewed focus on campaigning for learning agreements in all work places by embedding learning at work strategies firmly in our bargaining agenda.

**External**

* + Work with employers and other trade unions to introduce a right to paid time off for training. (Labour Lifelong Learning Commission)
* Focus on access to education for workers with low or no qualifications
* Focus on access to low level digital skills (including access to Governments Digital Skills Entitlement from Sept 202)
* Specific rights and concessions for agency, zero hours, part-time and outsourced workers
	+ Campaign for the Adult Education budget low-wage threshold to

be increased to match the salaries of Band 2 NHS staff allowing more low paid workers to access free adult education.

* Campaign for a national skills strategy that embraces lifelong learning at work which fundamentally adopts a culture of partnership working between stakeholders including Government, employers, trade unions, and providers that also incorporates combined authorities and LEPs.
* Work with the TUC, other unions and public service employers to influence the scope and use of the Apprentice Levy.

The above actions will be explored with the Policy Unit, Labour Link and Service Groups and may require GPF funding

More information

You can find the full report and summary here: <https://learning.unison.org.uk/2019/11/14/skills-for-the-future/>

For further information please contact learningandorganisingservices@unison.co.uk

**Tables**

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| **Within the last three years, have any of the following changes occurred in your workplace?** |
|
|   | Change in the way work was organised (%) | New computer or automated equipment introduced (%) | Other new equipment was introduced (%) | Reduction in the number of people doing same work (%) | Redundancies (%) | Job was outsourced (%) | None of above (%) |
| Eastern | 69 | 48 | 31 | 45 | 24 | 3 | 14 |
| East Midlands | 65 | 43 | 25 | 46 | 23 | 3 | 17 |
| Greater London | 67 | 44 | 26 | 46 | 29 | 5 | 14 |
| Northern | 67 | 45 | 30 | 47 | 29 | 5 | 15 |
| North West | 65 | 43 | 27 | 44 | 21 | 3 | 16 |
| Northern Ireland | 52 | 39 | 23 | 33 | 8 | 2 | 26 |
| Scotland | 66 | 42 | 25 | 46 | 14 | 2 | 16 |
| South East | 66 | 46 | 27 | 46 | 24 | 3 | 16 |
| South West | 68 | 48 | 31 | 48 | 25 | 4 | 13 |
| Cymru/Wales | 62 | 42 | 25 | 42 | 24 | 2 | 19 |
| West Midlands | 68 | 45 | 28 | 48 | 29 | 4 | 15 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 65 | 45 | 28 | 44 | 23 | 4 | 16 |

**How likely is it that your position could be made redundant within the next three years? (%)**

**To what extent do you agree that technological automation is putting public service jobs at risk?** (%)

**Have your skills or confidence in literacy or numeracy ever stopped you from applying for a promotion? (%)**

**Have your skills or confidence in literacy or numeracy ever stopped you from taking on responsibilities? (%)**

**Have your skills or confidence in literacy or numeracy ever stopped you from applying for a training course? (%)**

**Have your skills or confidence in literacy or numeracy ever stopped you from becoming more involved in the union? (%)**

**What was your reason for learning?**

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| **What types of learning have you undertaken? (for those that have trained in the last 12 months)** |
|
|   | Attended training away from your workstation (%) | Received on the job training (%) | Taught yourself from a book/manual/video/computer/DVD/internet (%) | Taught yourself by trying different approaches or trial and error (%) | Accessed an online course (%) | Taken a class at college or adult education centre (%) | Other (%) |
| Eastern | 68 | 52 | 44 | 28 | 56 | 15 | 11 |
| East Midlands | 65 | 50 | 39 | 26 | 55 | 15 | 11 |
| Greater London | 64 | 50 | 40 | 28 | 52 | 20 | 10 |
| Northern | 65 | 55 | 40 | 24 | 56 | 16 | 10 |
| North West | 64 | 53 | 39 | 26 | 56 | 16 | 9 |
| Northern Ireland | 67 | 53 | 38 | 24 | 56 | 18 | 9 |
| Scotland | 69 | 48 | 44 | 29 | 47 | 14 | 10 |
| South East | 67 | 53 | 43 | 29 | 55 | 13 | 10 |
| South West | 69 | 52 | 44 | 28 | 56 | 13 | 10 |
| Cymru/Wales | 68 | 50 | 40 | 26 | 52 | 20 | 11 |
| West Midlands | 63 | 52 | 41 | 25 | 53 | 14 | 9 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 66 | 54 | 41 | 28 | 55 | 16 | 10 |

**When did you undertake training? (all trained for work or careers ONLY in the last 12 months)**

**Did this learning result in a qualification? (all trained for work or career ONLY in the last 12 months)**

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| **Reasons for, and impact of, of job-related learning** |
|   | I asked for it (%) | My employer suggested it (%) | It has helped me enjoy my job more (%) | It has helped me improve the way I work (% | Essential to my prof. registration (%) | Ongoing CPD (%) | It made me look for a better job (%) | I was given a better in my organisation because of the training (%) | I received a pay increase as a result of the training (%) | I feel that my job is more secure because of the training (%) | Any Impact (%) | None of the above (%) |
| Eastern | 36 | 38 | 21 | 49 | 29 | 63 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 56 | 7 |
| East Midlands | 34 | 37 | 22 | 51 | 28 | 60 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 57 | 7 |
| Greater London | 37 | 38 |   | 53 | 29 | 61 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 12 | 61 | 6 |
| Northern | 34 | 40 | 21 | 48 | 28 | 62 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 54 | 6 |
| North West | 32 | 40 | 21 | 49 | 28 | 60 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 55 | 6 |
| Northern Ireland | 28 | 40 | 25 | 56 | 47 | 57 | 8 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 63 | 5 |
| Scotland | 35 | 38 | 19 | 49 | 35 | 62 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 53 | 6 |
| South East | 37 | 38 | 22 | 52 | 29 | 62 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 57 | 7 |
| South West | 34 | 40 | 19 | 49 | 30 | 60 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 56 | 6 |
| Cymru/Wales | 35 | 40 | 19 | 49 | 30 | 60 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 10 | 56 | 6 |
| West Midlands | 31 | 40 | 21 | 47 | 30 | 58 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 54 | 7 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 34 | 40 | 21 | 51 | 26 | 61 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 58 | 6 |

\*\* ‘it has helped me enjoy my job more’ for Greater London - there was a error in the data for the final report so this result has been omitted

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| **Were any of the following a factor in not undertaking any training or education connected with your current job?** |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | Did not want training (%) | Employer not willing to provide training (%) | Training not currently offered (%) | Limited opportunities & not enough space (%) | Training for specific grades only (%) | Limited time due to personal commitments (%) | Did not need additional training (%) | Training would not help you get better job (%) | Limited time due to work commitments (%) | Any personal reason (%) | Any employer reason (%) | None of the above (%) |
| Eastern | 1 | 35 | 28 | 24 | 19 | 13 | 7 | 13 | 26 | 20 | 82 | 12 |
| East Midlands | 1 | 37 | 31 | 25 | 15 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 26 | 18 | 82 | 14 |
| Greater London | 3 | 32 | 26 | 22 | 19 | 16 | 10 | 11 | 23 | 27 | 77 | 14 |
| Northern | 4 | 28 | 29 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 9 | 14 | 26 | 25 | 77 | 13 |
| North West | 2 | 31 | 28 | 24 | 18 | 12 | 8 | 11 | 25 | 21 | 80 | 15 |
| Northern Ireland | 2 | 27 | 28 | 20 | 19 | 12 | 8 | 8 | 23 | 19 | 73 | 19 |
| Scotland | 2 | 29 | 31 | 27 | 19 | 14 | 6 | 13 | 26 | 21 | 82 | 12 |
| South East | 2 | 32 | 29 | 24 | 15 | 13 | 7 | 13 | 23 | 20 | 81 | 11 |
| South West | 2 | 33 | 28 | 28 | 18 | 13 | 8 | 11 | 22 | 21 | 79 | 14 |
| Cymru/Wales | 1 | 31 | 35 | 27 | 16 | 11 | 6 | 10 | 21 | 17 | 81 | 12 |
| West Midlands | 2 | 31 | 32 | 24 | 20 | 11 | 6 | 12 | 26 | 16 | 82 | 12 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 3 | 33 | 27 | 24 | 15 | 12 | 9 | 10 | 27 | 21 | 80 | 13 |

**Learning is important to my self esteem**

**I'm ready to learn new skills to remain employable in the future (%)**

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| **Skills members want to develop in the future** |
|
|   | Literacy,reading orwriting skills(%) | Numeracy, maths skills (%) | Computer, digital skills (%) | Complex analytical skills (%) | Supervisory or management skills (%) | Physical or manual skills (%) | Confidence or assertiveness skills (%) | Job specific specialist , technical or practical skills (%) | Would not be useful to develop ANY skills (%) | Other (%) |
| Eastern | 16 | 20 | 67 | 27 | 46 | 8 | 39 | 35 | 4 | 2 |
| East Midlands | 19 | 23 | 65 | 30 | 46 | 8 | 41 | 31 | 6 | 3 |
| Greater London | 22 | 26 | 70 | 37 | 51 | 9 | 43 | 30 | 3 | 2 |
| Northern | 17 | 21 | 63 | 25 | 43 | 8 | 40 | 27 | 6 | 2 |
| North West | 18 | 22 | 67 | 26 | 46 | 8 | 40 | 28 | 5 | 2 |
| Northern Ireland | 21 | 23 | 62 | 18 | 49 | 15 | 48 | 30 | 4 | 2 |
| Scotland | 14 | 14 | 66 | 23 | 49 | 9 | 41 | 30 | 5 | 2 |
| South East | 16 | 20 | 69 | 29 | 46 | 7 | 39 | 33 | 4 | 2 |
| South West | 16 | 20 | 67 | 27 | 47 | 8 | 41 | 34 | 4 | 2 |
| Cymru/Wales | 18 | 21 | 68 | 27 | 47 | 9 | 40 | 29 | 4 | 2 |
| West Midlands | 18 | 22 | 68 | 27 | 45 | 9 | 39 | 30 | 5 | 3 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 16 | 21 | 66 | 28 | 45 | 8 | 39 | 30 | 5 | 2 |

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| **What UNISON member learning opportunities have been accessed?** |
|
|   | Return to Learn or Women’s Lives course (%) | Weekend workshops (%) | One day workshops (%) | e-notes (%) | Open University CPD workshops (%) | National Extension College courses (%) | e- careers courses (%) | Learning grants or bursaries (%) | Other (%) | None of above (%) | Don’t know (%) |
| Eastern | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 5 | 83 | 3 |
| East Midlands | 2 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 76 | 5 |
| Greater London | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 84 | 5 |
| Northern | 1 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 0.4 | 1 | 6 | 79 | 5 |
| North West | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 84 | 5 |
| Northern Ireland | 2 | 4 | 12 | 3 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 68 | 7 |
| Scotland | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 1 | 3 | 85 | 4 |
| South East | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 4 | 86 | 4 |
| South West | 1 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 84 | 3 |
| Cymru/Wales | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 1 | 3 | 84 | 4 |
| West Midlands | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 80 | 5 |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0.4 | 1 | 4 | 82 | 4 |