**Skills for the Future: Equalities Briefing**

**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 workstation’ 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’

**Equalities findings**

The survey explored members characterises in relation to their experience of work, attitudes, participation in training and future training needs.

**Disability**

Members who considered themselves disabled generally reported **less positive experiences, attitudes and outcomes than those who did not consider themselves disabled.** This was particularly the case in terms of their experiences of work: they were among the most likely to believe their position would be made redundant within the next 3 years and that technological automation is putting public service jobs at risk.

Furthermore, among all characteristics, **disability was also associated with the highest propensities to be dissatisfied with their current job and/or or worried about the future of the world of work as it is likely to affect them**.

In terms of skills, disabled members were among the most likely to believe their skills were below (or above) those needed for their job and that lack of literacy and numeracy skills had discouraged them from progressing their careers.

However, **they were among the least likely to have undertaken any learning for their work and career**, and those that had learned for work were more likely than non-disabled members to have undertaken this training solely in their own time and were less likely to have gained a qualification or identify any of the positive impacts explored in the survey resulting from it.

**Disabled members who had not undertaken any work related learning in the last 12 months were more likely than non-disabled members to feel that training would have been useful** and were more likely than members with any other characteristics to feel that their employment prospects had been negatively affected by their lack of training.

Disabled members were however more likely than non-disabled members to access UNISON member learning and be active within the union.

**Age**

The survey reveals interesting but not wholly unexpected results by members age. Broadly, the **percentage of members expressing concerns about the future tends to rise with age**: older members are more likely than their younger colleagues to believe technological automation is putting public service jobs at risk and more likely to believe they are personally at risk of redundancy.

Older members were also more likely to feel ‘worried’ or ‘uninterested’ about their future and less likely to feel ‘excited’ or ‘confident’. This will be partly influenced by their greater likelihood of experiencing redundancies and other workplace changes over the last three years.

While the pattern of skills needs was fairly stable across the age groups, **younger members were more likely than their older colleagues to identify a need to develop all the skill areas explored in the survey with the notable exception of computer and digital skills**.

Members in the youngest age group (aged 16 to 26) were among those most likely to want to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and were the most likely to want to develop their management & supervisory skills and confidence & assertiveness skills. Members in the oldest age group (aged 50 and over) by contrast were least likely to think it useful to develop ANY skills but were most interested in developing their computer & digital skills. This is consistent with the higher proportion of older members believing that their computer & digital skills were lower than those needed at work.

The **vast majority of members across all age groups held positive attitudes to learning** although these tended to be slightly weaker among older members. This is reflected in slightly lower levels of participation in recent work or career related learning among older members although even among this group more than two-thirds (69%) had learned for work or career within the last 12 months.

**The proportion of learners achieving a qualification or reporting at least one of six impacts as a result of their learning falls with age**. This could point to difficulties in securing more specialised training for experienced workers since older members were also slightly more likely than their younger colleagues to feel that that the learning they had done was inadequate for meeting their skills needs.

Members‟ likelihood of being active in the union and accessing UNISON learning both tended to rise (marginally) with age.

**Ethnic origin**

**The main difference by ethnic origin in members experience of work was between those of Black/ Black British origin and all other groups**. For example, while members identifying as Black/ Black British were more positive than members from other ethnic groups about their own future at work and were less likely to believe they were personally at risk from redundancy, they were however, less likely to be satisfied with their current job and more likely than members with any other characteristic to feel that technological automation was putting public service jobs at risk. In terms of accessing training:

* Asian/Asian British members were among those least likely to have trained for work in the last 12 months and Black/Black British among the most likely. Furthermore, Black British members who had not trained were more likely than members with any other characteristic to believe that training would have been useful to them.

**While overall attitudes to learning were overwhelmingly positive across all ethnic groups, members from Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British minority groups were slightly less positive** than those identifying as Irish/White. Black/ Black British members were more likely than members with any other characteristic to believe than it was their own responsibility to update their skills.

* Both minority ethnic groups were more likely than the Irish/White group to have undertaken this recent training solely in their own time and were more likely to have gained a qualification or identify an impact from their learning.

Members from an ethnic minority group were more likely than Irish/White members to identify a need to develop a range of skills and were **more likely to report having been discouraged from progressing in their careers because of perceived deficiencies in these skills**. They were also more likely to be active within the union and have accessed UNISON member learning opportunities.

**Gender**

Differences by gender tended to be small, suggesting that other characteristics were generally a stronger predictor of members experience, attitudes and outcomes. However, the results suggest that **men are slightly more likely than women to have experienced change at work, feel personally at risk of redundancy and feel dissatisfied with their current job**. Despite this, men are more likely to feel ‘confident’ about the future than women. Women, by contrast, are more likely than men to feel ‘worried’ about the future of work as it affects them.

Men respondents were more likely than women respondents to have participated in recent work-related learning, were more likely to have done this solely in their employers’ time and were marginally more likely to have gained a qualification or identify a positive impact from training. However, they were also slightly more likely than women learners to feel that the learning was inadequate in addressing their needs. Men who had not undertaken any recent work-related learning were more likely than women in the same circumstances to feel that their employment prospects had been compromised by lack of learning.

Despite being slightly less likely to have undertaken work related training, **women were more likely to hold positive attitudes to learning than men** although the vast majority of both groups felt learning was important to their self-esteem and that they were ready to learn new skills to remain employable in the future.

In terms of the skills members believe they are deficient in and are interested in developing in future, men and women selected specific skills in fairly equal proportions so that the distribution was broadly consistent by gender. However, differences in the percentages responding that they wanted to develop each skill in future reveals that:

* Men are more likely than women to want to develop job specific, technical or practical skills and are slightly more likely than women to be interested in improving their literacy, complex analytical and physical or manual and job skills;
* Women are more likely than men to want to develop their numeracy and confidence & assertiveness skills.
* Men are more likely than women to be active within the union and to have accessed UNISON member learning opportunities.

**Transgender**

**Transgender members were more likely than members with any other characteristic to feel personally at risk of redundancy**. Despite this, they were slightly less likely than members who did not identify as transgender to feel ‘worried’, ‘uninterested’ and ‘confident’ about the future but more likely to feel ‘excited’.

In terms of their skills, transgender members were more likely to report that concerns about their literacy or numeracy skills had stopped them from progressing in their career or becoming more involved in the union. Transgender members were equally likely to have undertaken recent work-related training.

Respondents identifying as transgender were more likely to have trained solely in their employer’s time and were more likely to have gained a qualification.

Furthermore, **transgender members who had not undertaken any work-related learning in the last year were more likely than other members to feel that learning would have been useful to them but were less likely to have identified employer-related barriers to doing so**. Whilst the overwhelming majority of transgender members were positive about future training, they were marginally less positive than non-transgender members.

The percentage of transgender members interested in developing specific skills in future was similar to non-transgender members although the former were slightly more likely to be interested in developing their literacy, complex analytical and physical or manual skills.

**Sexual orientation**

Like gender, variation in the results by respondents’ sexual orientation tended to be fairly small. However, the results suggest that members describing themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual were slightly more likely than heterosexual or straight members to feel personally at risk of redundancy, dissatisfied with their current job, consider their ability in selected core skills above that needed for their current job, identify employer barriers to training and to feel that the learning they accessed over the last year was inadequate in addressing all their needs.

**Members identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual were more likely to have participated in learning for work and were more likely to have undertaken each form of learning** – especially off-the-job learning and self-directed learning – suggesting multiple episodes of learning over the last 12 months. This learning was slightly less likely to have been undertaken solely in employers’ time: a finding consistent with multiple episodes (and especially greater participation in self-directed learning) but was more likely to have resulted in a qualification or other impact. Given these results, it perhaps not surprisingly that members identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual were more likely than those identifying as heterosexual or straight to identify deficiencies in their skills and were among the most likely to agree that they were ‘ready to learn new skills to remain employable in the future’.

Interest in developing a broad range of skills did not differ substantially by sexual orientation although members identifying as lesbian, gay and bisexual were more likely than those identifying as heterosexual or straight to be interested in most skills but particularly: complex analytical skills, supervisory or management skills, confidence or assertiveness skills and job specific, technical or practical skills.

**Lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents were more likely than heterosexual members to be active within the union** and were more likely to have accessed UNISON member learning opportunities.

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 workplaces 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. (from Labour Lifelong Learning Commission)
* Focus on access to education for workers with low or no qualifications
* Focus on access to low level digital skills
* 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/

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