



A Fairer Start

A survey of apprentices
in Scotland's public services

November 2016

The logo for UNISON Scotland. It features the word "UNISON" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with a stylized white wave graphic above it. Below "UNISON" is the word "Scotland" in a white, italicized serif font.

UNISON
Scotland



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Introduction

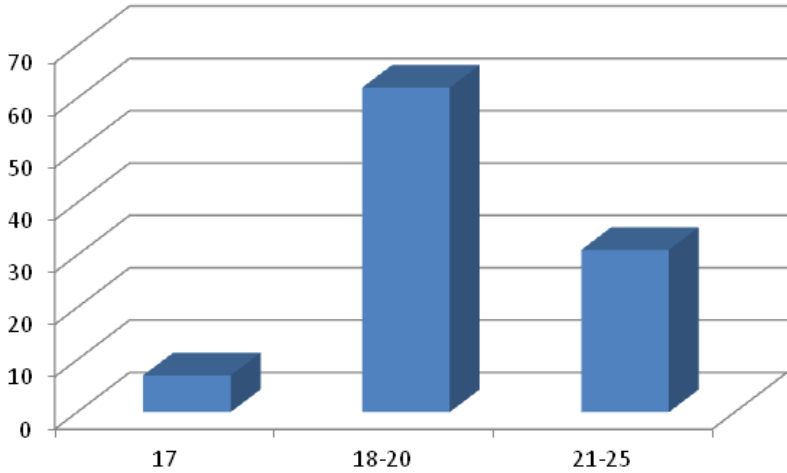
This survey is part of UNISON Scotland’s Damage series: a series of surveys looking at the impact of the age of austerity on services and those who deliver them. *A Sure Start* takes a closer look at the issues facing apprentices working across Scotland’s public services.

UNISON Scotland has been looking at the experiences and prospects of our members who are currently, or have recently been, apprentices in different areas across our public services. This was supplemented by a range of information from employers obtained through freedom of information requests.

The picture this reveals is a patchwork of achievement and failure – enthusiasm and disappointment. A general satisfaction with the training being received is punctuated with individual instances of reportedly poor standards. A number of excellent examples in breaking down gender stereotyping in the workplace contrasts with a desperately bad overall picture. More directly concerning for trainees themselves is the level of uncertainty as to whether having completed their training they will receive a permanent contract – or any contract at all.

We surveyed UNISON members who are, or have recently been, apprentices. The gender breakdown was a 50/50 split, with an age breakdown falling within the age range that would be expected (see fig 1). We asked them a variety of questions as to their experience and perception of their prospects.

Fig 1 age of apprentices surveyed



To supplement the data supplied by our members we used Freedom of Information (Fol) requests to try and build up a picture of apprenticeships in public services.

Given the size and diversity of employers contacted, there was a wide range of results from zero to hundreds (see table). This, however, reflects more than simply an issue of scale – the figures indicate a variety of different approaches to workforce planning and strategy. Some employers almost ignore the Modern Apprenticeship model completely, and only define as apprentices the longer more traditional craft apprenticeships. Whether this reflects an outlook which places less emphasis on skills in work, or an attitude that Modern Apprenticeships are deemed an inadequate model, is outwith the scope of this brief survey but surely deserving of further attention.

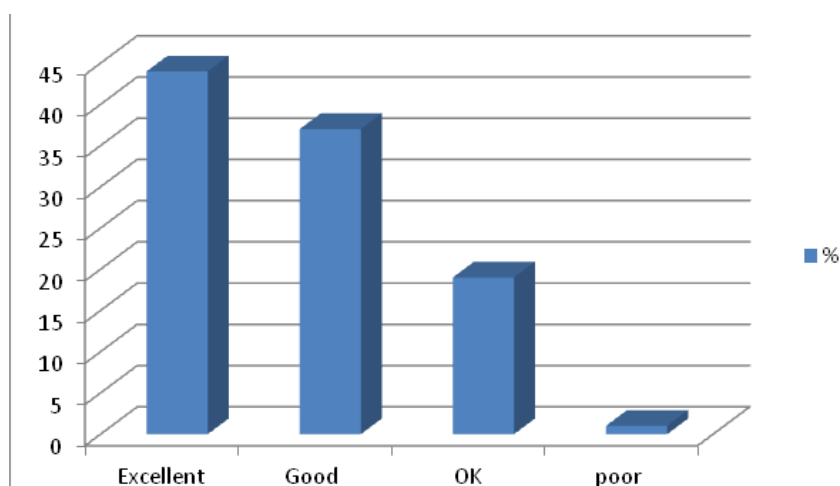
One inescapable conclusion is that, if this sample of employers is representative, apprentice recruitment is not happening at a sufficient rate to either: alter the ageing demographic of the workforce in public services; or replace the numbers leaving the workforce through voluntary redundancy or early retirement.

Organisation	Apprentices	Organisation	Apprentices
Aberdeen City Council	204	Aberdeenshire Council	44
Argyll & Bute Council	20	Borders Council	37
Clackmannan Council	85	Dumfries & Galloway	260
Dundee City Council	78	East Ayrshire Council	60
East Dunbartonshire Council	27	East Lothian Council	23
East Renfrewshire Council	82	Edinburgh City Council	109
Falkirk Council	208	Fife Council	214
Glasgow City Council	204	Highland Council	84
Inverclyde Council	64	Midlothian Council	41
NHS Ayrshire & Arran	6	NHS Borders	3
NHS Dumfries & Galloway	63	NHS Fife	4
NHS GGC	101	NHS Forth Valley	14
NHS Grampian	7	NHS Lanarkshire	42
NHS Lothian	7	NHS Orkney	5
NHS Shetland	2	NHS Tayside	37
North Ayrshire Council	286	North Lanarkshire Council	383
South Ayrshire Council	236	Orkney Council	17
Renfrewshire Council	104	Skills Development Scotland	34
West Dunbartonshire Council	42	West Lothian	2
Western Isles Council	78		

Quality of training

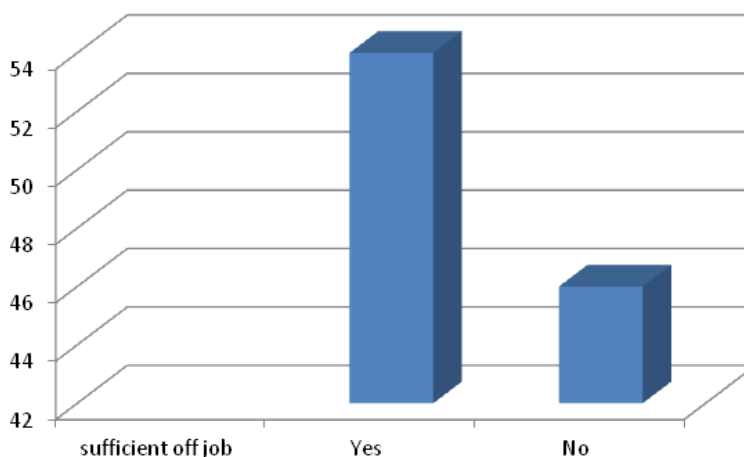
Most of our respondents were happy with the training they were receiving / had received (see fig 2). Within this, however, there were concerns and individual instances of severe disappointment. And indications about completion rates from employers were uniformly very high.

Fig 2 How good would you say your training has been?



With 81% of those undergoing, or having recently been through, an apprenticeship describing their training as excellent or good, there is clearly a high degree of satisfaction. There were some fairly widely held (even amongst those generally very pleased with their training) suggestions about where programmes could be improved. Respondents said experience of a wider range of roles would be useful in gaining experience and, on some courses, a degree of mentoring would be helpful.

Fig 3 Sufficient off-the-job training?

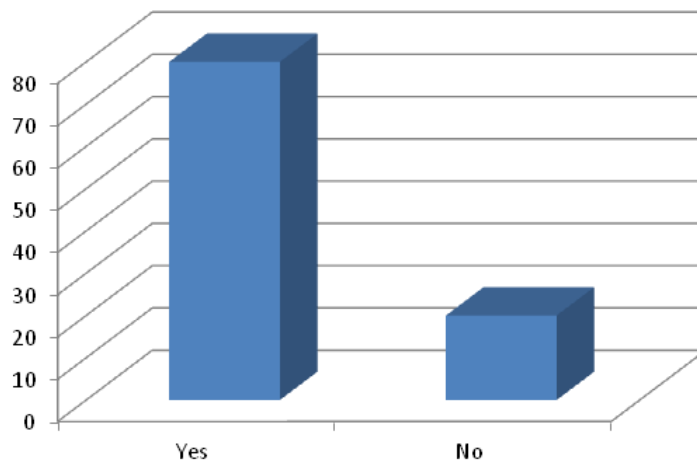


Where there was a greater degree of dissatisfaction was in the off-the-job training component. Here almost half (46%) of those we surveyed felt that there should have been a greater degree of off-the-job training. This at least in part reflected an interest in developing a skill set which would take them beyond the requirements of their immediate job prospects. It was outwith the scope of this survey, but exploration into what extent this factor has been constrained by cuts in further education in recent years would be interesting.

Staying power

The UNISON members who responded to our survey had all completed their apprenticeship. Two thirds of those who responded to our survey said that they had been kept on by their employer. But this of course reflects a self-selecting group – still in employment, with the same employer. Even within this group, however, as many as 20% said the role they had now was not one that they had been training for. That figure begins to give an indication of what appears to be a serious issue for those undertaking apprenticeships in public services – insecurity.

Fig 4 Former apprentices who completed course and kept in same job



The track record of employers in providing employment for apprenticeship schemes is patchy but generally poor. Whilst a small number of employers in public services have very good records with a near 100% record of transferring employees to permanent contracts upon completion of apprenticeship, figures of 30% or less are much more common. As can be seen in the following table

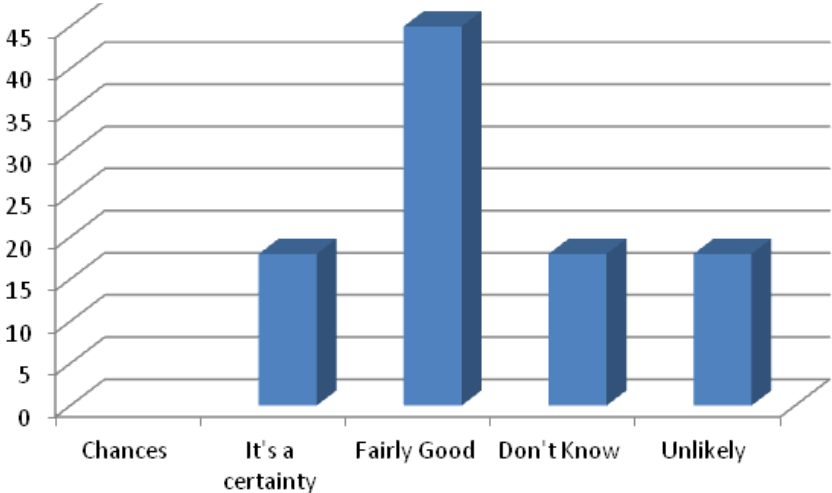
Organisation	Apprentices %	Organisation	Apprentices %
Aberdeen City Council	100	Aberdeenshire Council	32
Argyll & Bute Council	25	Borders Council	66
Clackmannan Council	60	Dumfries & Galloway	26
Dundee City Council	18	East Ayrshire Council	10
East Dunbartonshire Council	83	East Lothian Council	29
East Renfrewshire Council	34	Edinburgh City Council	41
Falkirk Council	24	Fife Council	49
Glasgow City Council	25	Midlothian Council	24
Inverclyde Council	14	NHS GGC	100
NHS Ayrshire & Arran	100	NHS Borders	66
NHS Dumfries & Galloway	40	NHS Fife	75
NHS Grampian	7	NHS Lanarkshire	66
NHS Tayside	75	NHS Orkney	75
NHS Shetland	100	North Lanarkshire Council	17
North Ayrshire Council	75	Renfrewshire Council	78
South Ayrshire Council	36	Orkney Council	17
Western Isles Council	59	Skills Development Scotland	50
West Dunbartonshire Council	34	West Lothian	31

The picture may not be quite as bleak as some of these figures suggest as some employers routinely give completing apprentices temporary rather than permanent contracts (for example North Lanarkshire Council does this with all apprentices), which may be offered at a later stage. That said, operating on such a basis might well be interpreted as a lack of faith in their own capacity to deliver adequate training. It also suggests a willingness on the part of the employer to put their own capacity for flexibility ahead of providing a secure start for young people whose skills they have been investing in developing.

The very high rates of retention on the part of some employers are generally associated with either very small overall numbers or a bias toward craft apprenticeships. Indeed some employers appear to be avoiding the wider Modern Apprenticeship scheme, only taking apprentices in what might be considered ‘traditional’ occupations. This, as discussed below has an impact on the nature of the workforce.

Respondents to our survey were more optimistic than the figures appear to give them cause – although this may reflect a belief in being kept in employment rather than obtaining a permanent position . But even here at least 35% fell into either the ‘don’t know’ or ‘unlikely’ category.

Fig 5 Chances of job after completion of course



That said, it is difficult to be absolutely precise here – some routinely offer fixed-term contracts at the end of the apprenticeship. These may, in time, lead to permanent positions. What is certainly clear is that there is neither a consistency of approach across employers nor even over time. The rates kept on vary widely year on year with some employers. It is also the case that on completion some employees will opt for further study rather than employment which can push retention figures down. These complicating factors should not serve to obscure a situation where in at least ten local authorities less than a third of those completing apprenticeships are offered permanent work. A disparity exists between the nature of contracts issued – those employers whose apprenticeship programme is geared more toward ‘craft’ apprenticeships are most often those who say they routinely keep finished apprentices on.

Different for girls?

Public services have been one of the driving forces of female equality in our society. Public services are a major employer for women. Trade unions in public services, UNISON in particular, have engaged in countless battles to translate the idea of 'equal pay for work of equal value' from pious theory to pounds in purses. The results of this inquiry however gives a clear indication that gender segregation in the workplace is still a real problem and one that on the basis of our data shows no sign of changing any time soon. The percentage of women employed on apprenticeships varies widely between organisations as can be seen by the following table representing data from the last three years.

Organisation	Female apprentices %	Organisation	Female apprentices %
Aberdeenshire Council	77		
Argyll & Bute Council	45	Borders Council	33
Clackmannan Council	34	Dumfries & Galloway	54
Dundee City Council	38	East Ayrshire Council	47
East Dunbartonshire Council	48	East Lothian Council	43
East Renfrewshire Council	64	Edinburgh City Council	61
Falkirk Council	50	Fife Council	43
Glasgow City Council	43	Highland Council	8
Inverclyde Council	45	Midlothian Council	12
NHS Ayrshire & Arran	33	NHS Borders	3
NHS Dumfries & Galloway	78	NHS Fife	0
NHS GGC	59	NHS Forth Valley	93
NHS Grampian	0	NHS Lanarkshire	66
NHS Lothian	18	NHS Orkney	5
NHS Shetland	50	NHS Tayside	64
North Ayrshire Council	59	North Lanarkshire Council	60
South Ayrshire Council	57	Orkney Council	88
Renfrewshire Council	44	Skills Development Scotland	56
West Dunbartonshire Council	11	Western Isles Council	81

As with much else in this field, the raw data serves to conceal as much as it reveals. A strong pattern exists of women taking up apprenticeships in administration or care while being almost completely absent from training in 'craft' apprenticeships. The very occasional counterexamples (women seem to be an increasing part of the workforce in stonemasonry for example, but from a very low base) merely throws up just how pervasive the pattern is. Indeed it is difficult to overstate the case. To give just two, absolutely typical, examples from local authorities:

Local authority 1

<u>Vocation</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Business administration	83	37	46
Horticulture	6	6	0
Motor vehicle mechanic	1	1	0
Procurement	2	2	0
Construction	12	12	0

Local authority 2

Vocation	Total	Male	Female
Business administration	6	2	4
Horticulture	3	3	0
Customer service	4	1	3
ICT	2	2	0
Joinery	1	1	0
Plastering	1	1	0
Plumbing	1	1	0

It would of course be unfair to lay all of the blame for this at the feet of individual employers – this is at least in part a reflection of a gender stereotyping that begins long before young women are making job applications. This, however, does not exempt employers from the need to do what they can to tackle it. Not least because this raises its own equality issues - if not equal pay, then of equal earning power. The ‘craft’ apprentices monopolised by young men generally lead to higher levels of qualification and earning power.

A fairer start

The young men and women training in our public services appear to be happy with their choices and pleased at the opportunities being given them. And to a greater or lesser extent all of our futures depend on them. They deserve the best that can be done for them so that they can do their best for us. If it is unfair that public services in general are paying a price for a financial crisis that they did not cause – it is doubly unfair that those who were quite literally children at the time are seeing their possibilities restricted today.

Whilst there are examples of good practice – the NHS scores highly here – generally the track record of providing permanent employment after apprenticeships finish is very poor. Apart from the obvious unfairness to the trainees, it represents a very poor use of resources. Recently trained workers should be valued for their potential rather than seen as a pool of temporary workers easily hired and fired according to the dictates of ‘organisational change’, ‘more efficient working’ or the multiple other euphemisms currently in vogue to describe cuts.

It is of course UNISON’s belief that job insecurity should not be a feature of people’s working lives in the public services (if people still need the service – then there is a job there to do). But rather than conditioning a new workforce into the idea that employment is a shifting and uncertain thing a culture of precarious work could be tackled at source. Making firm commitments to its trainees will provide both encouragement and facilitate future workforce planning.

If insecurity is one of the major issues for apprentices then tackling gender segregation is an urgent task – but whilst this will require action by employers (and those rare examples of where there is progress should be studied to see if there is good practice which can be replicated) the real work tackling this will need to be done in schools and by a pro active career service outlining a greater range of options than are currently perceived to be available. The young workers in our public services are demonstrably keen and enthusiastic about their future in return they deserve a fairer start.

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