



PCS National Branch Briefing

To: All PCS Branch Secretaries, Branch Organisers, Branch Learning Co-ordinators, Union Learning Reps
cc: All staff

23 February 2017

O&L/BB/03/16

Civil Service Apprenticeships Agreement

This briefing updates all PCS branches with the latest news on:

- National Trade Union Committee and Cabinet Office Agreed Principles
- The role of branches and Union Learning Reps in supporting apprentice members
- Activities for National Apprentices Week 6-10 March 2017

Dear Colleagues,

The civil service unions and the Cabinet Office have reached an important agreement on Agreed Principles for all workers recruited into the Civil Service under the Government's apprenticeship scheme. With up to 30,000 apprentices scheduled to be taken on by 2020 across the UK Civil Service, recruiting apprentices to union membership and offering support for these members is a priority issue for PCS.

Key points of the Agreement

The Agreement can be found at Annex 1 to this briefing, and detailed advice for PCS reps negotiating at departmental or local level will be issued shortly as a national BB. Major improvements for apprentices have been secured by PCS including fair pay, job security and redundancy avoidance

The Principles afford PCS some notable opportunities, including;

- at departmental level employers should engage with unions over workforce planning (paras 9 & 39)
- unions have access locally to recruit via apprentices' inductions (para 40)
- employers should give branches details of new starters to allow this (para 40)
- Union Learning Reps have access to apprentices to provide learning and development support (para 39)
- employers should engage with the unions on selecting apprenticeship training providers (para 28)

What branches should now do

1. Report back to organising@pcs.org.uk in an email marked "Apprentices" to inform us where any apprentices are being recruited in your branch. The Cabinet Office is unable

to provide this information to the unions centrally. Some Groups may want to collate this information and report this back as department-wide data, so that the GEC has input into a Group organising plan for apprentices.

Please advise the Organising Department of any apprentices

- workplace location, and numbers at each location
- type of work they are doing e.g. “surge”, fast-track, or specific roles/grades

2. Ensure your branch has a PCS ‘slot’ on local **induction** sessions – PCS Organising & Education will shortly circulate some resources to assist branches.

3. Ask every apprentice to [join PCS](#)

- There is 6 months free membership as long as the apprentice has not had free membership previously
- Allocate a branch rep to speak to each apprentice face-to-face in offices as well as via group inductions. Remember the first few days after starting is always the best time
- Follow them up shortly after speaking to them initially. Some potential members may want a couple of days to ‘think about it’.

4. Ask any apprentices in your branch who join PCS to **get involved** e.g. as an advocate ([bite-sized training](#) be run in your branch)

5. Ask apprentices 27 years old & under to join and get involved in the [Young Members Network](#) and/or any appropriate equalities networks.

The organising department is looking to set up an Apprentices Forum for young members to hear views from apprentices about issues at work. If any of your members are interested in joining this forum ask them to contact us at organising@pcs.org.uk

6. Branches in London & the South-East and Eastern regions should encourage members to attend the joint PCS Young Members-Unionlearn training day on Apprenticeships in TUC Congress House, London on 10 March. For more details contact src@pcs.org.uk

Other regions will aim to hold similar events in 2017

7. Promote [National Apprentices Week \(NAW\) 6-10 March 2017](#). Encourage apprentice members to help us promote the campaign by taking a picture with our Unionlearn “speech bubbles” with a message about how the union is helping them as an apprentice. Contact the [Learning Organiser in your PCS regional office](#) to join in this activity. We will be able to use the pictures in PCS and TUC publications to promote the trade union role in supporting apprentices. Please note that, whilst apprenticeships is a ‘devolved’ issue, there will also be co-ordinated Scottish and Welsh NAW’s on 6-10 March.

8. Encourage any apprentices in your branch to sign up for the [Facebook group](#)

The role of the Union Learning Rep

PCS has again successfully bid for Union Learning Fund [ULF] money to support our learning agenda across the three separate TUCs of England, Scotland and Wales. ULF (England), SULF (Scotland) and WULF (Wales) manage ‘pots’ of central government money which are available to trade unions who engage with the learning project, on the basis of the mutual benefits for employers and workers of a higher-skilled workforce.

The Apprenticeship targets laid down by the administrations in Westminster, Cardiff and Edinburgh are a daunting prospect for many employers. The continued existence of government-supported Union Learning Funds are an acknowledgement that trade unions are in a unique position, because of our close relationships with our members, to play a huge role in helping workers access high quality apprenticeship training. Apprenticeships is one of the central priority themes of our 2017-18 PCS learning projects.

All employers must ensure a minimum of 20% of an apprentices time is spent in off-the-job training. ULRs are trained to identify and support quality vocational training.

Branches (via their Branch Learning Co-ordinators where they exist, otherwise, through the guidance of Branch Secretaries and Branch Organisers) should convene meetings of their Union Learning Reps (ULRs), or ensure ULRs are invited to Branch Executive Committee meetings, to discuss full integration of Learning & Apprenticeships into the Branch's organising plans for 2017.

Branches should wherever possible give a leading role to their learning reps to:

- Recruit apprentices to PCS
- Work with your Branch Organiser to map apprentices across your workplaces
- Get apprentices involved in the union e.g. in the Young Members Networks, or as PCS Advocates
- Provide learning and development support to apprentices
- Participate, with other appropriate branch or group officers, in any discussions with the employer on the selection of training providers, including making recommendations of union-friendly providers where appropriate
- Report back any support they give to members to their PCS Learning Organiser as 'outcomes' – this is vital for us to continue to access ULF funding. Guidance and templates for ULR's report backs to Learning Organisers in England are [here](#). There are separate arrangements for ULRs in [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#).

If your Branch doesn't have ULRs or a BLC please do encourage members to come forward as learning reps and gain ULR training. Contact your [PCS Regional Office](#) for details on training and advice for learning issues.

Further Guidance

The PCS Organising & Learning Department, and our ULF projects, will issue more detailed guidance in the coming weeks for ULRs, including advice on approved providers and the Apprenticeships levy.

John McNally
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