



Levelling up skills after coronavirus

**The role of trade unions and social
partnership in workforce training**

October 2020

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Executive summary

This report explores the links between trade unions and workplace training, and the potential benefits of social partnership in the skills system. We set out how moves to building a social partnership approach could help deliver the government's aim of levelling up skills and prosperity across the UK after the coronavirus crisis.

Social partnership is defined as having a working relationship between trade unions and employers, with the aim of improving the prosperity of the company and its employees. It refers both to cooperation at an employer level, and to institutional arrangements for dialogue at a national level, sectoral or local level.

In chapter one, we set out why boosting skills matters after the pandemic. The crisis will have a profound and lasting impact on our labour market, and rapid advances in technology will continue to transform the skills that employers need in the future. Workers with lower levels of qualification are particularly likely to be impacted by these changes in the labour market. In this context, helping people to adapt and to keep their skills up to date will be increasingly important. In addition to helping people to navigate a changing labour market, improving the skills of the workforce will be vital to increasing productivity, which has stagnated over the last 12 years, contributing to a lost decade of wage growth.

Chapter two highlights some of the challenges with the current workforce training system. We face a persistent basic skills gap, with one in six adults lacking basic literacy. The UK suffers from low and declining employer demand for training; investment in continuing vocational training is just half the EU average, and it has fallen significantly in recent decades. The latest data shows a sharp drop in the number of employers providing training, and a further

drop in the level of spending on training per employee. There are concerns that investment in skills may decline further as a result of the pandemic; the number of apprenticeship down by 46% on last year. Beyond the levels of investment, there are stark inequalities in access to training; workers with a degree level qualification are four times as likely to receive job-related training as those with no qualifications. In addition to the quantity and distribution of training, there are also concerns around the quality of training.

In chapter three, we explore the extensive evidence from the UK and other advanced economies linking trade unions to good practice in training. The presence of trade unions is associated both with a higher incidence of training and higher employer investment in training, both in the UK and internationally. Trade unions are associated with a more equal distribution of training, and they are effective at engaging workers with lower levels of qualification in training. Finally, trade unions are associated with a more strategic approach to training. This shows that there is a strong practical case for worker voice and a solid evidence base for social partnership in adult skills and apprenticeships.

In chapter four we develop a typology to understand the role of social partnership in the training system. We set out the role of unions across four areas:

- **Engaging adults and delivering training** – trade unions can help to create a positive learning culture at work, supporting workers to engage in training. Unions also play an important role in delivering training in many advanced economies. In the UK, the Union Learning Fund has a strong record of supporting workers with low or no qualifications to return to learning, and to progress. While evidence suggests it delivers significant benefits for workers, for employers, and for the economy, the government has suggested that its

funding will not be renewed next year.

- **Shaping training strategies at an employer level** – in many workplaces, both in the UK and other advanced economies, trade unions help to shape training strategies. Unions can give workers a voice in this important aspect of workforce policy, and can support both higher levels of investment, and a more even distribution of training.
- **Designing training content and ensuring quality** – trade unions play an important role in designing qualifications and quality assurance in many advanced economies. In England, the apprenticeship system is employer-led, but provides no voice for workers. This risks creating an imbalance, with an incentive for employers to provide training which is narrow and job-specific, rather than providing a wider introduction to an occupation and a sector.
- **Shaping the training system at a national level** – in many advanced economies, trade unions and employers play an important role in overseeing the skills system through labour market institutions. This can provide a long-term vision for the system, drive a common commitment to skills, and ensure that the interests of workers are represented. There has been some progress on this agenda in England with the creation of the National Retraining Partnership, but its membership and remit are narrow, and its funding is limited, and its future is uncertain. Beyond labour market institutions, a number of countries have embraced a social partnership approach to improving the quality of work, and responding to changes in the world of work driven by rapidly advancing technology.

In chapter five, we set out a series of urgent recommendations to embed social partnership in order to give workers a voice in the system, and support the levelling up of skills across the UK as the economy

recovers from the coronavirus crisis.

- In order to engage more adults in upskilling, government should **continue to invest in the Union Learning Fund**, and ensure that union learning is a central part of its drive to level up skills, boost productivity, and adapt to a changing world of work after the pandemic.
- Government should introduce a **duty to consult on workforce training** for large employers. This would require employers to consult their workforce – either through a recognised trade union or through an information and consultation forum – on a workforce training strategy. For levy paying employers, access to levy funds could be conditional on consulting their workforce. In the public sector, government should model best practice by engaging unions in the design and development of training strategies.
- The system for **designing, approving and quality assuring training should be reformed to give workers a voice**. Where they have sufficient density in a sector, trade unions should be represented alongside employers on the apprenticeship trailblazers which design the content of training. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should also be reformed – with unions represented as well as employers.
- Building on the National Retraining Partnership, government should **establish a National Skills Partnership** – a new social partnership body to provide a long-term vision for the skills system as we rebuild and reskill after coronavirus. With representation from government, employers, trade unions and skills experts, this advisory body should have both a broader membership and a more ambitious remit. It should be tasked with levelling up skills across the country after the pandemic, and designing the National Skills Fund that is currently under development.

Chapter 1:

Why boosting workplace training matters

In this chapter, we set out two key reasons why workplace training is becoming increasingly important.

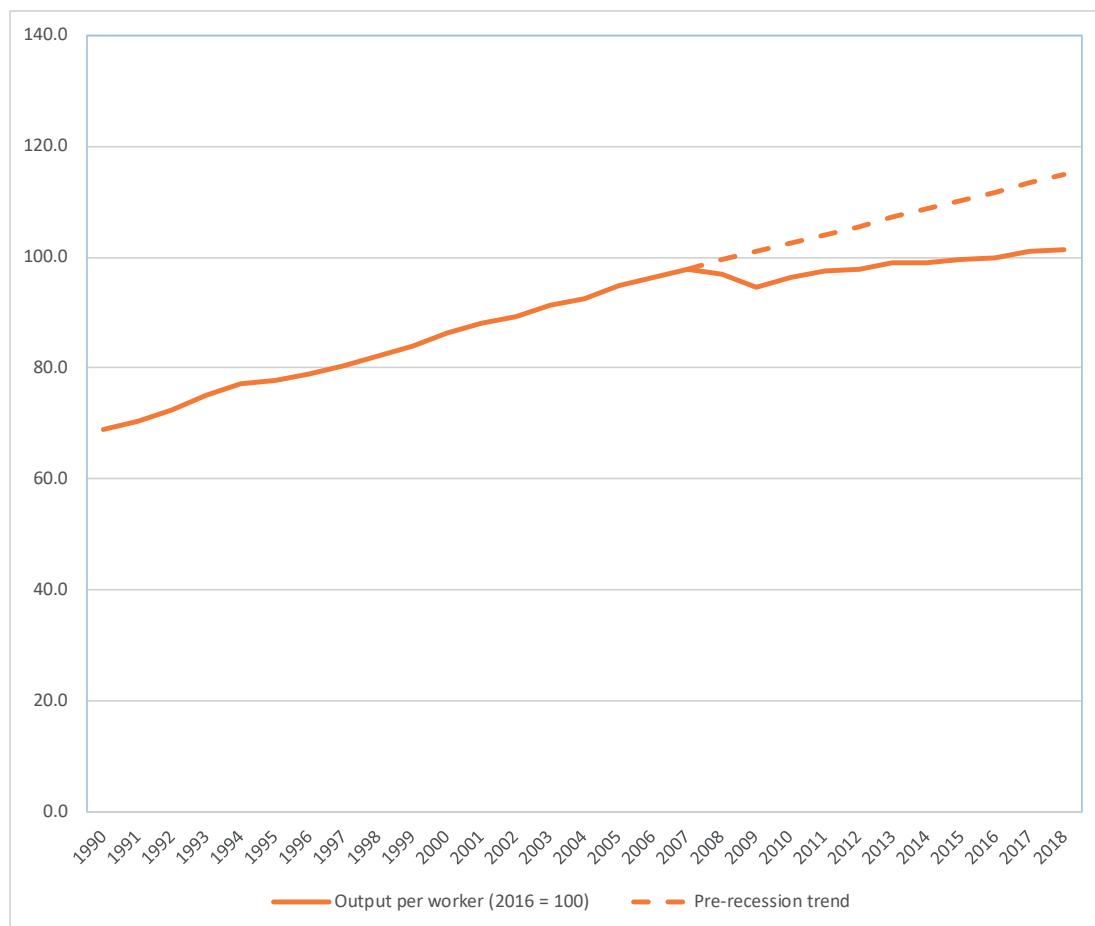
Boosting productivity

The UK has seen an unprecedented stall in productivity growth since the global financial crisis. Productivity growth has averaged just 0.3 percentage points a year between 2007 and 2018, less than a fifth

of the rate seen over the preceding two decades. Productivity is now 12 % lower than it would have been had it continued to increase in line with the pre-recession trend.

Figure 1: Productivity growth has stagnated over the last decade

Output per worker, whole economy UK, index: 2016 = 100



Source: [ONS 2019a](#)

The stall in productivity growth has led to the UK falling further behind other advanced economies. In 2016, productivity in the UK was over 20 % lower than in Germany, France and the United States ([ONS 2018](#)). This means that the average worker in these countries now produces

more in four days than the average worker in the UK does in five. The stall in productivity growth has contributed to a lost decade of wage growth. Average weekly earnings have only just recovered to the level reached before the crash in 2008 ([ONS 2019b](#)).

Adapting to changes in the labour market

The UK is going through a period of profound economic transformation.

In the short term, the coronavirus pandemic has led to significant disruption, and to large scale job losses in many sectors. Emerging evidence suggests that there may be a greater impact on workers with lower levels of qualifications, and that the pandemic is likely to lead to lasting changes in the labour market, and in the skills needs of employers (L&W 2020).

In the medium term rapid advances in technology – which some have dubbed the fourth industrial revolution – will lead to significant changes in employer demand for labour and skills.

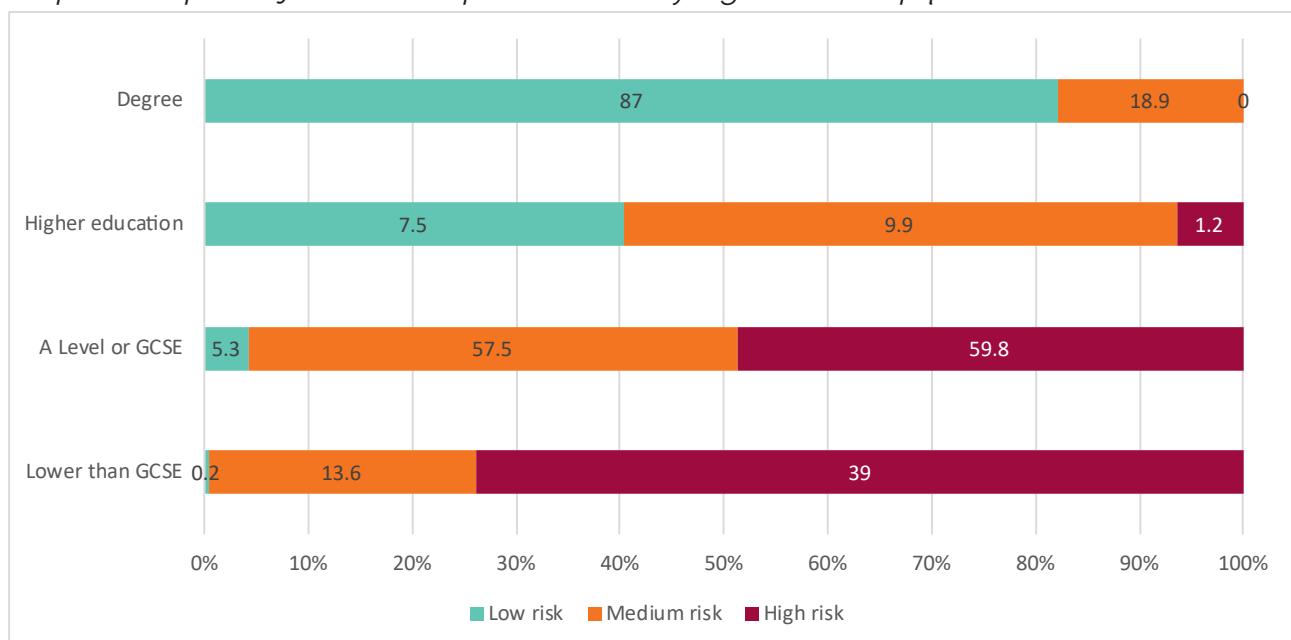
Some have argued that technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data and

advanced robotics could lead to many jobs being automated, with human labour replaced by technology. Recent analysis by ONS found that in 2017 7.4 % of jobs in England (1.5 million) were at high risk of automation, with a further 64.9% (12.9 million) at medium risk of automation (ONS 2019c).

As with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Workers with lower levels of qualification face a higher risk of job loss as a result of from automation. As figure 2 below shows, nine in ten (87 %) workers with a degree level qualification are in a job at low risk of automation, compared to just one in twenty (5.3 %) workers with an A Level or GCSE as their highest level of qualification, and one in 500 (0.2 %) workers without a GCSE level qualification.

Figure 2: Workers with lower levels of qualification are more likely to be in a role at high risk of automation

Proportion of main jobs at risk of automation by highest level of qualification (%)



Source: ONS 2019c

In addition to the jobs which are eliminated, many more will be profoundly changed by advances in technology. Rather than being replaced by robots or AI, workers are more likely to have to work

alongside new technology. This will mean that the skills system will need to support many more adults to adapt, and to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

Chapter 2:

The challenges with the workforce training system

In this chapter, we highlight some of the longstanding challenges with the skills system in the UK.

Basic skills gaps

The UK has long suffered from a persistent challenge with low adult literacy. Just over one in six (16.4%) working age adults in England are at or below level 1 in literacy. This means that 5.7 million working adults in England would struggle to fully understand the instructions on a bottle of aspirin (ONS 2019d) (OECD 2019).

One in four (24.2%) working age adults in England – equivalent to 8.4 million people – are at or below level 1 in numeracy (ONS 2019d) (OECD 2019).

Lack of digital skills is also a widespread problem. In total, an estimated 11.7 million adults (22%) lack the basic digital skills needed for everyday life (Lloyds 2020).

Literacy, numeracy and digital skills[KK7] [JD8] are the foundations for future learning, and they are increasingly vital in the labour market, yet millions of workers struggle with these basic skills.

Low and declining employer investment in training

The UK has seen a significant decline in the volume of employer-provided training in recent decades.

The volume of training per worker in the UK declined by 44% between 1997 and 2009, and by a further 6% between 2009 and 2011, following the global financial crisis ().

A recent study by Green and Henseke explored the evidence on the volume of training in the UK over the last decade, using three large national surveys. All

three showed a significant decline in recent years (Green and Henseke 2019).

A recent study by Green and Henseke explored the evidence on the volume of training in the UK over the last decade, using three large national surveys. All three showed a significant decline in recent years (Green and Henseke 2019):

- The Quarterly Labour Force Survey shows that the average time spent on job-related training over a four week period fell from 2.1 hours in 2011 to 1.9 hours in 2018, a decline of 10%;
- The Employer skills Survey shows a decline in the volume of employer-funded training of 5% between 2011 and 2017;
- The Skills and Employment Survey showed a decline of 18% in the number of days in which on-the-job instruction took place between 2012 and 2017;
- The UK Household Longitudinal Study shows a decline of 19% in the annual volume of formal training.

In addition to the decline in the volume of employer-provided training, there appears to have been a significant decline in the levels of employer-investment in training in recent years. Green and Henseke find that employer investment in training per worker fell by about a fifth between 2006 and 2017 (Green and Henseke 2019).

More recent data from the employer skills survey – the largest study of employer provided training in the UK – shows a large decline in the number of employers providing training, and a further fall in employer investment in training. In the 2019 survey, just 61% of employers said they had trained their workforce in the last year, down from 66% in 2017, and the

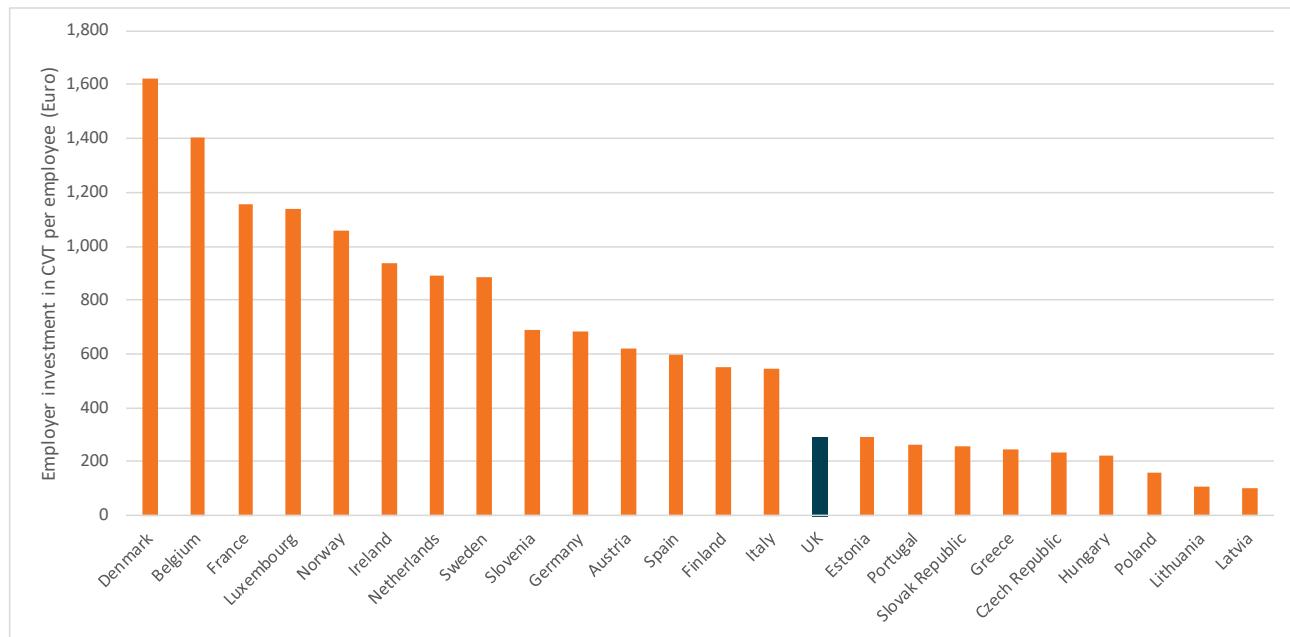
lowest level ever recorded in the survey. Employer investment per employee has also been falling, from £1,700 in 2015, to £1,600 in 2017 and £1,500 in 2019 (Winterbotham et al. 2020).

There are concerns that employer provided training may decline further as a result of the pandemic. The number of apprenticeship starts has plummeted since outbreak of the crisis, with the number of starts so far in 2019/20 being down 46% on the same period the year before (DfE 2020).

Employer investment in skills in the UK is low compared to other advanced economies. The latest EU-wide survey of continuing vocational training (CVT) showed that employer investment in the UK was half the EU average.

Figure 3: Employer investment in continuing vocational training in the UK is half the EU average

Employer investment in continuing vocational training per employee in the EU (Euro), 2015



Source: [Eurostat 2015](#)

The decline in employer provided training has contributed to a sharp drop in adult participation in learning. The adult participation in learning survey shows there has been a decade of decline in the number of adults taking part in any form of learning, with the number of learners falling by 10 percentage points between 2010 and 2019 ([L&W 2020](#)).

Whilst lifelong learning has never been more important, the level of employer

investment in the UK has fallen behind other advanced economies, and levels of adult participation in learning have plummeted. Boosting employer investment in training will be vital as we seek to recover from the economic crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic.

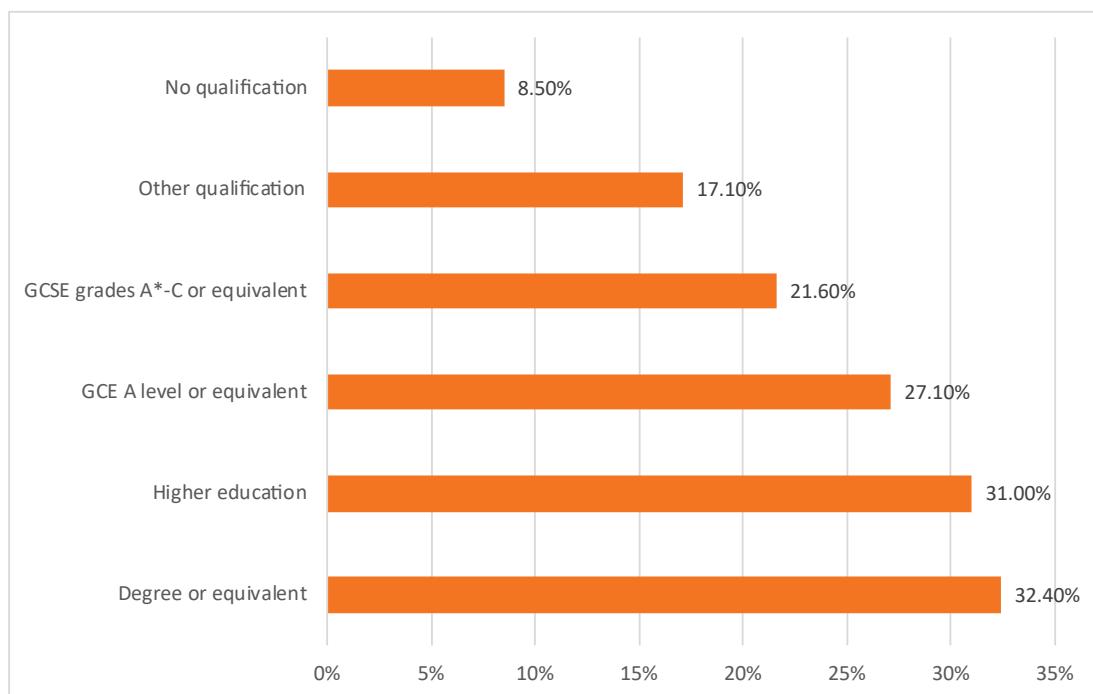
Unequal access to education and training

There are significant inequalities in access to education and training among adults in the UK. At present, the adults who could most benefit from access to training opportunities are the least likely to take part.

As figure 4 below shows, adults with higher levels of qualifications are significantly more likely to take part in job-related training.

Figure 4 – Adults with degrees are four times as likely to take part in job-related training than those without qualifications

Proportion of employees who participated in job-related training or education in the last three months, by highest qualification achieved, UK, 2017



Source: [ONS 2019e](#)

Inequality in access to workplace training appears to have been growing in recent years. Green and Henseke find that in two large scale surveys, workers with low or no qualifications have seen the largest proportionate declines in the volume of training (Green and Henseke 2019)¹:

- Between 2011 and 2018, there was a 20% decline in the volume of training for workers with a low level of

qualifications in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, double the decline seen by the workforce overall;

- Between 2010 and 2017, there was a 40% decline in the volume of training among workers with a low level of qualification in the UK Household Longitudinal Study, compared to a decline of 35% among the workforce as a whole.

¹ In the UKHLS, the 'low qualification' group includes adults who do not have a qualification at A Level or equivalent level. This includes adults whose highest qualification is at GCSE level, those with 'other' qualifications, and those with no qualifications.

10 In the QLFS, 'low qualifications' refers to adults whose highest qualification is less than a GCSE at level A*- C, those with other qualifications, and those with no qualifications.

Inequalities in access to job-related training contribute to wider inequalities in access to learning. Learning and Work Institute's adult participation in learning survey shows that adults in higher social grades (AB) are twice as likely to have taken part in some form of learning in the last three years as those in lower social grades (DE). Similarly, adults who stayed on in education until age 21 or above are twice as likely to participate in learning as those who left school at or before age 16 (L&W 2020).

The Social Mobility Commission has described this as the 'virtuous and vicious cycle of learning', whereby adults with low or no qualifications are less likely to take part in education or training than those with higher levels of qualifications (SMC 2019).

Quality of training

In addition to the quantity of training, there are some concerns about the quality of employer-provided training.

It is difficult objectively to assess the quality of training provision over time. Green and Henseke attempt to do so by examining the duration of training and the proportion of training that is towards recognised and accredited qualifications. Using the Employer Skills Survey, they find that the proportion of training that is certified to nationally recognised qualifications has declined in recent years, and that the proportion of training which is merely for induction or health and safety has been on the rise. They also find that there has been an increase in the proportion of training which is of short duration (Green and Henseke 2019).

Looking specifically at apprenticeships, in addition to seeking to boost the quantity, the government has taken a number of measures to improve the quality of apprenticeship training. These measures include the introduction of a minimum 12 month duration for apprenticeships, and a requirement for at least 20% of an apprentices' time to be spent in off the job training. The government has also introduced apprenticeship standards to replace the existing frameworks in an effort to improve quality. Designed by employers, these new standards set out the specific skills and knowledge that apprentices must develop on their programme.

However, there has been some criticism of the new system. There have been suggestions that many apprenticeship standards are narrowly-focused on a specific job, limiting the opportunity to develop wider transferable skills (CIPD 2018). Others have argued that many apprenticeships standards are not for skilled roles, but for entry-level posts that do not require sustained training, and do not offer the opportunity for meaningful progression (EDSK 2020).

Evidence of the value of trade unions

Having explored some of the challenges with the skills system, in this chapter we examine the evidence, both domestic and international, linking trade unions to the incidence and quality of training at a workplace. We show that trade unions are associated with higher employer investment in training, more equal distribution of training, and a more strategic approach to training.

Increasing employer investment in training

First, there is strong evidence linking trade unions and collective bargaining to employer investment in training.

While overall, the UK suffers from low employer investment in training, a number of national surveys suggest trade unions have a positive impact on workplace training.

There is evidence that unionised employers provide more training. The latest Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) showed that unionised workplaces were more likely to be 'high trainers', where at least four in five employees had done some off-the-job training. Over half (54%) of unionised workplaces were high trainers, compared to just one in three (37%) of non-unionised workplaces (van Wanrooy et al 2013). Using the UK Household Longitudinal Survey, Green and Henseke have shown that training volumes were on average a fifth (19%) higher at workplaces with union representation or a staff association than at employers with neither (Green and Henseke 2019).

In addition to this relationship at the organisational level, there is evidence of a link at an individual worker level. Using WERS, Stuart et al find that employees were significantly more likely to have received higher levels of training (5 days a more per year) if their employer recognizes a union, consults or negotiates with unions over training, or has union learning reps (Stuart et al 2015). Using the same survey, Forth et al find that 12 employees in the private sector are 5

percentage points more likely to receive off the job training if they have an on site union representative at their workplace (Forth et al 2016).

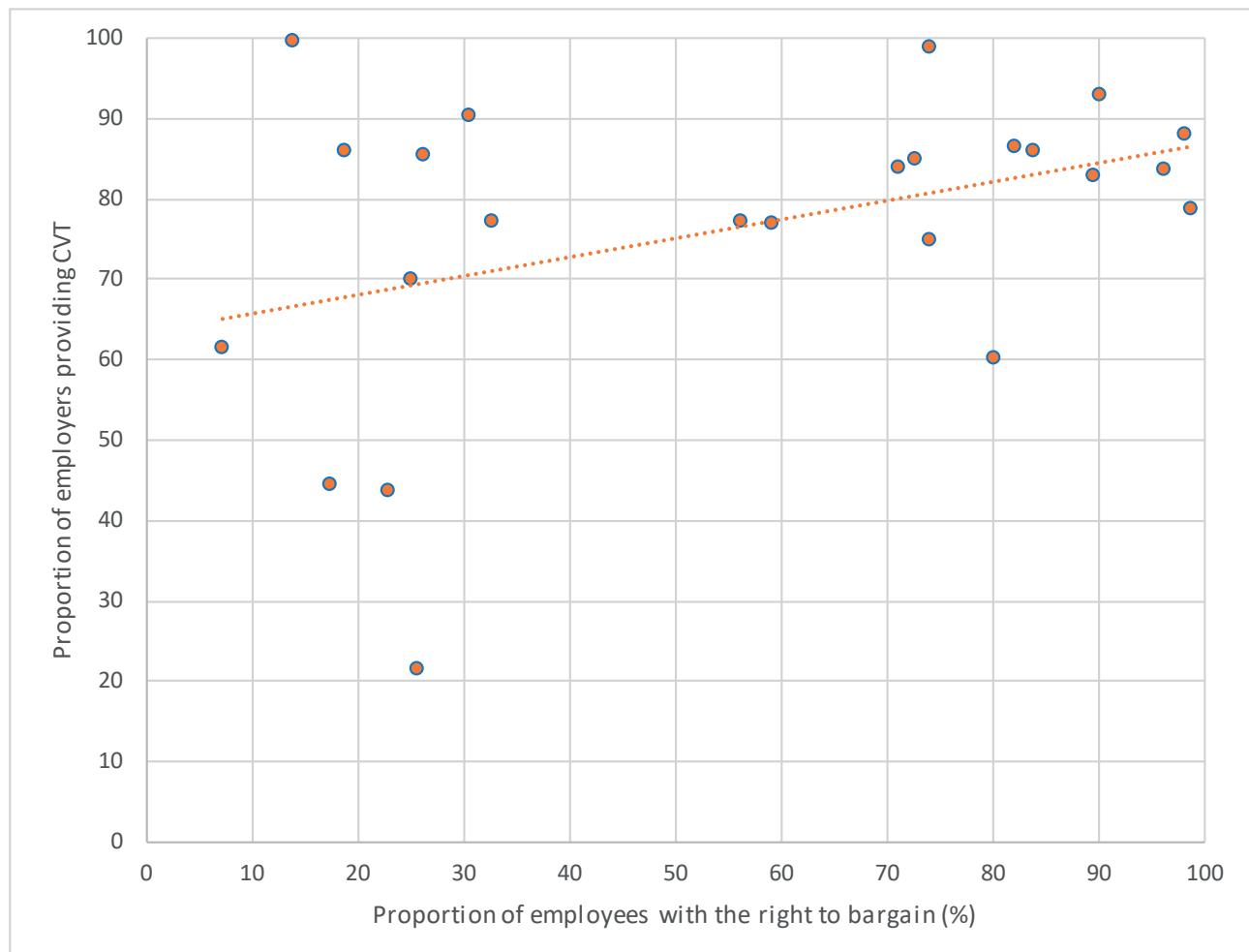
Stuart et al also find a link between trade unions and workplace training in the Labour Force Survey. Their analysis shows that over the period 2001 – 2013, union members were a third more likely to receive training than non-union members. The research isolates the impact of union membership using regression analysis, which shows that controlling for other factors, union members were 1.34 times more likely to access job-related training over the last three months than non-union members (Stuart et al 2015).

In addition to the domestic evidence, there is evidence to suggest a link between trade unions and employer investment internationally. As OECD has found, the presence of any type of voice arrangements is positively associated with workers' access to training (OECD 2019b).

Using data on collective bargaining coverage and trade union density from OECD and data on continuing vocational training (CVT) from Eurostat, it is possible to explore the relationship between trade unions and workplace training across the EU. Figure 5 below plots collective bargaining coverage against the proportion of employers who provide CVT for European countries. It shows there is a moderate positive correlation; in countries where there is greater coverage of collective bargaining, more employers provide training for their workforce.

Figure 5: More employers provide training in countries with higher levels of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining coverage (2016-18) and the proportion of enterprises providing continuing vocational training (2015)



Source: [OECD 2019c](#) and [Eurostat 2015](#), $R = 0.40$

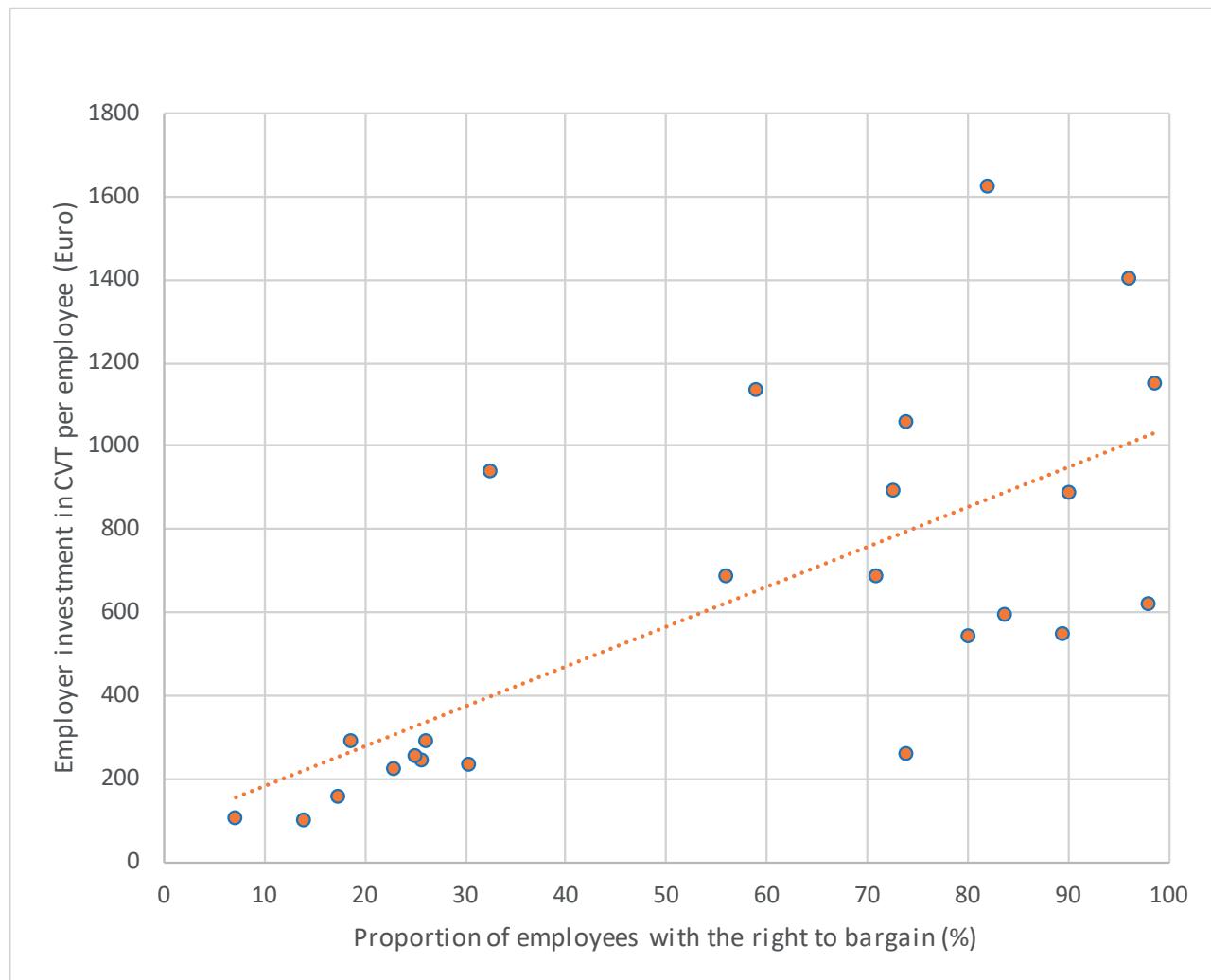
In addition to the moderate correlation between the extent of collective bargaining and the proportion of employers providing training, there is also a strong correlation between collective bargaining coverage and employer investment in CVT. In the seven EU member states with high levels of

collective bargaining, the average spend on CVT per employee is €923. This is nearly double the EU average of €585. In the eight EU member states with low levels of collective bargaining coverage, including the UK, the average spend was just €209, less than half of the EU average.²

² High levels of collective bargaining is defined as having at least 80% of employees covered by a collective agreement. Low levels of collective bargaining coverage is defined as having less than 30% coverage.

Figure 6: Employer investment in continuing vocational training is higher in countries with higher levels of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining coverage (2016-18) and employer investment in continuing vocational training per employee (2015)



Source: [OECD 2019c](#) and [Eurostat 2019](#), R=0.70

In addition to the correlation between collective bargaining coverage and employer investment in training, there is also a correlation between union density and employer investment in training. Countries with higher levels of union density tend to have higher levels of employer investment in CVT ($r = 0.64$).

The link between trade unions and employer investment in skills, seen both at a UK and international level, is likely due to the impact of trade unions on workers' bargaining power and wages. Through strengthening the bargaining power of workers, trade unions help

workers to achieve higher levels of pay. Union members benefit from a 'wage premium' which stands at around 5%, controlling for other differences between union members and non-union members ([Bryson and Fourth 2017](#)). Through increasing pay, trade unions and collective bargaining could help to incentivise employers to invest in human capital in order to boost productivity.

This link between the presence of trade unions and the volume of training, visible both domestically and internationally, is of importance given the low and declining levels of employer investment in the UK. Trade

unions could play a key role in boosting employer investment in skills as part of the economic recovery after the coronavirus crisis.

Ensuring more equal distribution of training

In addition to the link between trade unions and the *level* of employer investment in training, there is also evidence to suggest a link between unions and the *distribution* of training investment.

As we highlighted above, in addition to low levels of employer investment in training in the UK, there are significant and growing inequalities in the access to training. Employers are far less likely to invest in training workers with lower levels of qualifications (ONS 2019e).

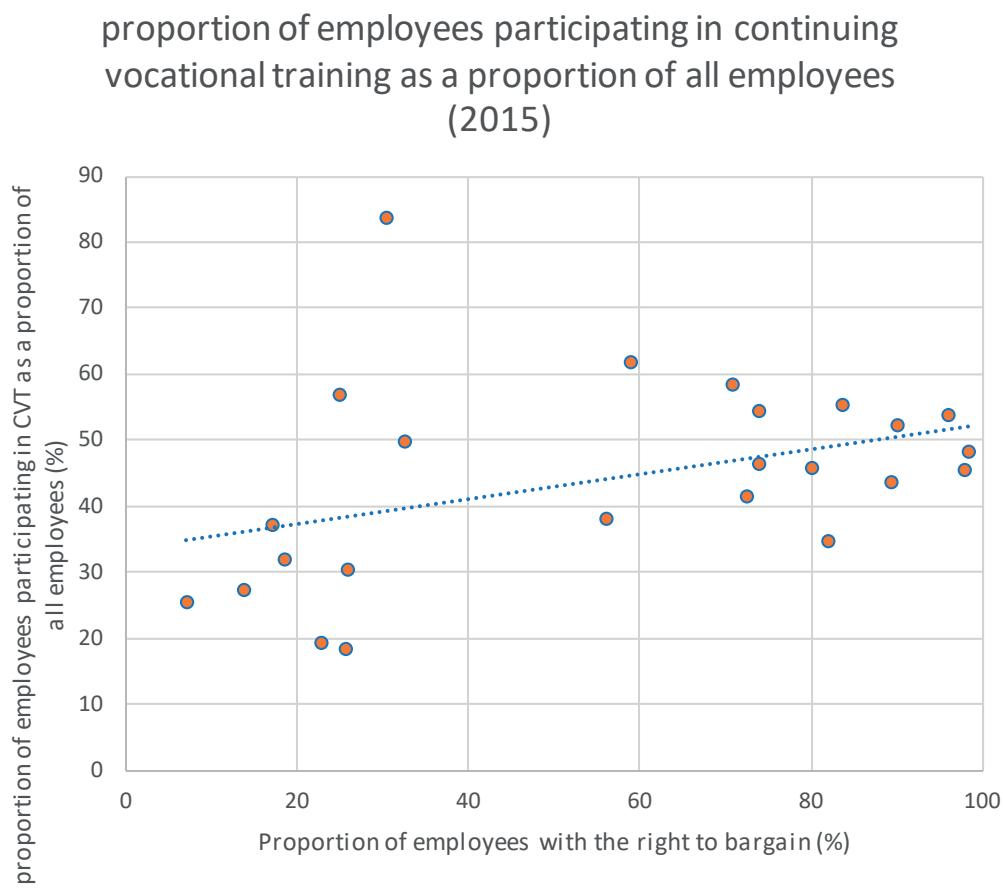
There is some evidence from UK surveys that suggests that the presence of trade unions is associated with a more equal distribution of training. Hoque and Bacon found that while there was no consistent relationship between either union density or the presence of a union learning representative and the volume of training in the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Study, there was greater equality in the distribution of training in workplaces which had a union learning representative, compared to other workplaces (Hoque and Bacon 2008).

Studies by Heyes and Stuart and Hoque and Bacon have found that there was more equal access to training in organisations with union learning reps (Hoque and Bacon 2008) (Heyes and Stuart 2002). Stuart et al have also found that where managers negotiate over training with trade unions, they were 16% more likely to report that the largest occupational group at their workplace received a high level of training (Stuart et al 2015).

In addition to the UK picture, there is evidence to suggest an association between the role of trade unions and the distribution of training internationally. There is a moderate correlation between collective bargaining coverage and the proportion of employees taking part in vocational training. As figure 7 below shows, in EU member states with higher levels of collective bargaining coverage, employee participation in CVT tends to be higher.

Figure 7: Participation in continuing vocational training is higher in countries with higher levels of collective bargaining coverage

Collective bargaining coverage (2016-18) and proportion of employees participating in continuing vocational training as a proportion of all employees (2015)



Source: [OECD 2019c](#) and [Eurostat 2015](#), $R = 0.39$

Again, the link between trade unions and the distribution of training – seen both at the UK and international level – may be related to bargaining power. Through strengthening the bargaining power of workers, unions may help to contribute to a more even distribution of training. This is particularly important for the UK given the highly unequal distribution of training at present.

Engaging workers with low levels of qualifications

The UK faces a persistent challenge with a lack of basic skills among adults, and workers with lower levels of qualifications are far less likely to access training.

There is evidence to suggest that trade unions, and union learning, can help to engage lower skilled workers in training.

An evaluation of the Union Learning Fund has shown that union learning is highly effective both at engaging with workers who have low or no qualifications, and in supporting them to progress ([CERIC 2016](#)). It found that half (47%) of learners who had only an entry level, or level 1 qualification were supported to gain a higher level of qualification, and over two in three (68%) learners with no qualifications were supported to achieve their first qualification. Four in five (79%) learners with no qualifications said that they would not have taken part in learning had it not been for the support of the union.

A similar impact of union learning is visible in other advanced economies. In an OECD study, Meierkord and Verhagen found that engaging with social partners including trade unions can help promote a positive learning culture, which can break down the barriers to participation for adults less likely to access training ([OECD 2019d](#)).

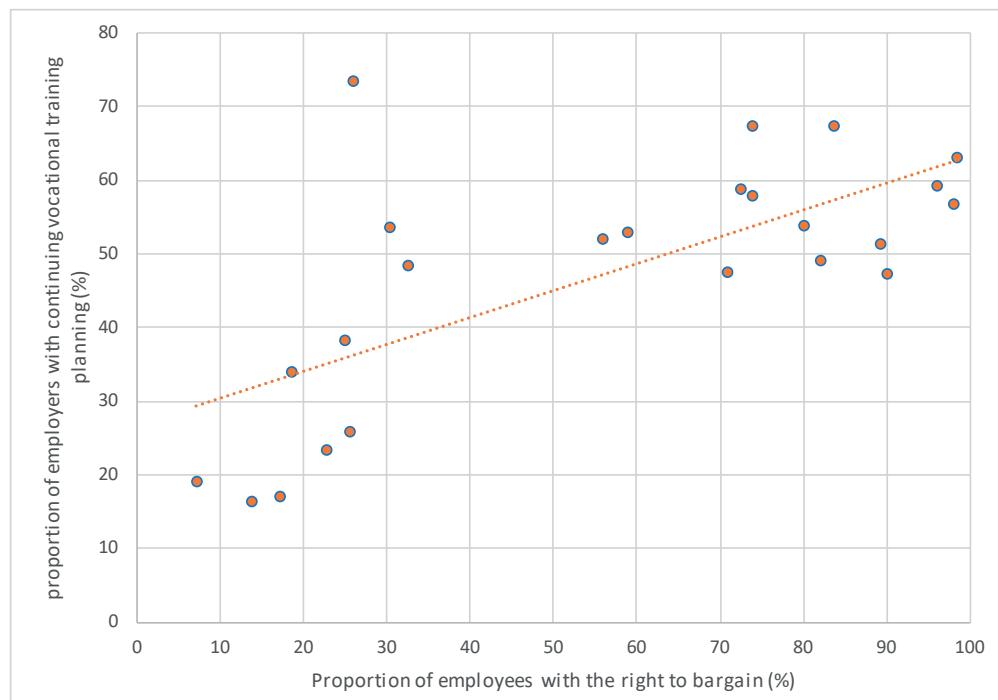
The effectiveness of trade unions at engaging workers with lower levels of qualifications was recognised in a recent Industrial Strategy Council report (Industrial Strategy Council 2020).

[IM9][JD10]

The success of trade unions in engaging workers with lower levels of qualifications in training may be due in part to being seen to be a trusted and supportive actor, who is on their side. Workers may be more willing to disclose skills gaps or basic skills needs to union learning reps than to employers. This impact is particularly important given the UK's persistent challenge with a lack of basic skills, and the significant inequalities in access to training.

Figure 8: Employers are more likely to have formal arrangements for training in countries with higher levels of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining coverage (2016-18) and proportion of employers with continuing vocational training planning



Source: [OECD 2019c](#) and [Eurostat 2015](#), R = 0.69

Recent research by the Industrial Strategy Council highlighted the role trade unions can play in informing training strategies at the employer level. They argued that while employers should understand the skills they need to stay productive and competitive, trade unions 'understand employees' longer term needs and are well-positioned to develop and deliver training that also includes transferable skills' (Industrial Strategy Council 2020). The presence of trade unions, and the formal engagement of unions in dialogue around training could help to deliver a more strategic approach to training, as part of a wider workforce strategy.

Supporting a strategic approach to training

Finally, there is evidence to suggest a link between trade unions and a more strategic approach to training and development, as part of a wider workforce strategy.

As figure 8 below shows, in countries with higher levels of collective bargaining coverage, employers are much more likely to have formal arrangements for continuing vocational training. Such formal arrangements include a specific person or unit responsible for organising CVT, having a training plan, or a budget for CVT.

Chapter 4:

Understanding the role of trade unions and social partnership

In this section, we explore the role of trade unions, collective bargaining and social partnership in the skills system. Drawing on evidence from England, from Scotland and Wales, and from other advanced economies, we set out a typology of the involvement of unions in learning, highlighting their role across three key areas; engaging adults and delivering training; shaping training strategies on a workplace level; designing training content and ensuring quality; and shaping the training system at a national level.

Trade unions, social partnerships and skills – a typology

Social partnership is defined as having a working relationship between trade unions and employers, with the aim of improving the prosperity of the company and its employees (OECD 2019).

In exploring the role of trade unions and of social partnership in the skills system, it is helpful to set out a typology, characterising the areas of activity. Below, building on the work of Byhovskaya and Collier, we define the role of trade unions across four broad areas (TUAC 2020):

Figure 9: A typology of union involvement in the skills system



Below, we highlight the role of trade unions in each of these four domains. For each section, we explore the current role of trade unions in the England, before highlighting approaches in other nations of the UK and in other advanced economies.

Engaging adults and delivering training

First, social partnership in skills can involve trade unions both engaging adults in learning, and actively delivering training.

Trade unions in the UK play an important if under-recognised role in this area. The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established in 1998 to support trade unions in England in promoting learning at work. The ULF is provided by Department for Education and managed by unionlearn, the learning and skills arm of the TUC. The ULF supports the work of a network of union learning reps in workplaces across the country who focus on supporting learning and development across a broad range of areas – both for their members and for the workforce as a whole.

The Union Learning Fund in England

There is strong evidence of the **economic impact** of the Union Learning Fund. An independent evaluation found that for every £1 invested, there was a return of £12.24, with £7.24 of this went to the worker taking part, and £5.00 to the employer. Based on this, the Union Learning Fund is estimated to deliver a net contribution to the economy of over £1.65 billion (Crews et al 2018).

Union learning is particularly effective in **engaging adults with low or no qualifications**. 12% of union learners had no formal prior qualifications, compared to an average across unionized workplaces of just 3%. Similarly, 22% of union learners were in operative roles, compared to an average of just 5% of the unionized workforce. Union learning was also found to be particularly successful at engaging older workers (Stuart et al 2016).

Union learning is effective at **supporting adults with low or no qualifications to gain qualifications**. Overall, one in five learners (19%) who participated in union learning achieved a higher level of qualification. Among learners whose highest qualification was at entry level, or level 1, half (47%) achieved a qualification at a higher level through union learning. Among those with no

Source: Stuart et al 2016, Crews et al 2018

Similar schemes exist both in Scotland and in Wales. In Scotland, the Scottish Government invests £2.3 million in Scottish Union Learning, which is managed by STUC. This provides both a development fund, which is used to build union capacity in relation to skills and learning, including through union learning reps, and an adult learning fund, to which unions can bid for funding to deliver courses.

qualifications, two thirds (68%) went on to achieve a qualification (Stuart et al 2016).

The evaluation of the Union Learning Fund found that seven in ten (70%) learners – and eight in ten (79%) of those with no prior qualifications – said they would not have taken part in learning without the support of their union. In addition to engaging workers in learning, there is evidence that this can **stimulate further demand** for learning. Three in four (77%) of learners said they had become more enthusiastic about learning, and two in three (68%) saying they were more enthusiastic about learning (Crews et al 2018).

There is also evidence of a **positive impact for employers**. Three in four (77%) of employers say that engagement in union learning has a positive effect in their workplaces. Half (47%) thought that staff were more committed as a result of taking part in union learning, with a similar number (44%) saying that employment relationships had improved (Stuart et al 2016). The government recently announced their intention to cease funding for the Union Learning Fund in England, and instead invest the funding in opportunities at colleges (Parliament 2020).

In Wales, the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) is provided by the Welsh Government to Wales TUC. It aims to support workplace learning activities in unionized workplaces, and to support partnership working between unions and employers.

Trade unions play a vital role in both engaging adults in training and in delivering training directly in many advanced economies.

Recent OECD research highlighted the role of trade unions in engaging learners – particularly those with lower levels of qualifications. Meierkord and Verhagen found that the involvement of trade unions can promote a positive learning culture at work, which can help break down the barriers to participation for adults less likely to access training. The report also highlighted the importance of union-provided learning, and emphasised the need to make greater use of the capacity of unions to develop and deliver training in the future (OECD 2019e).

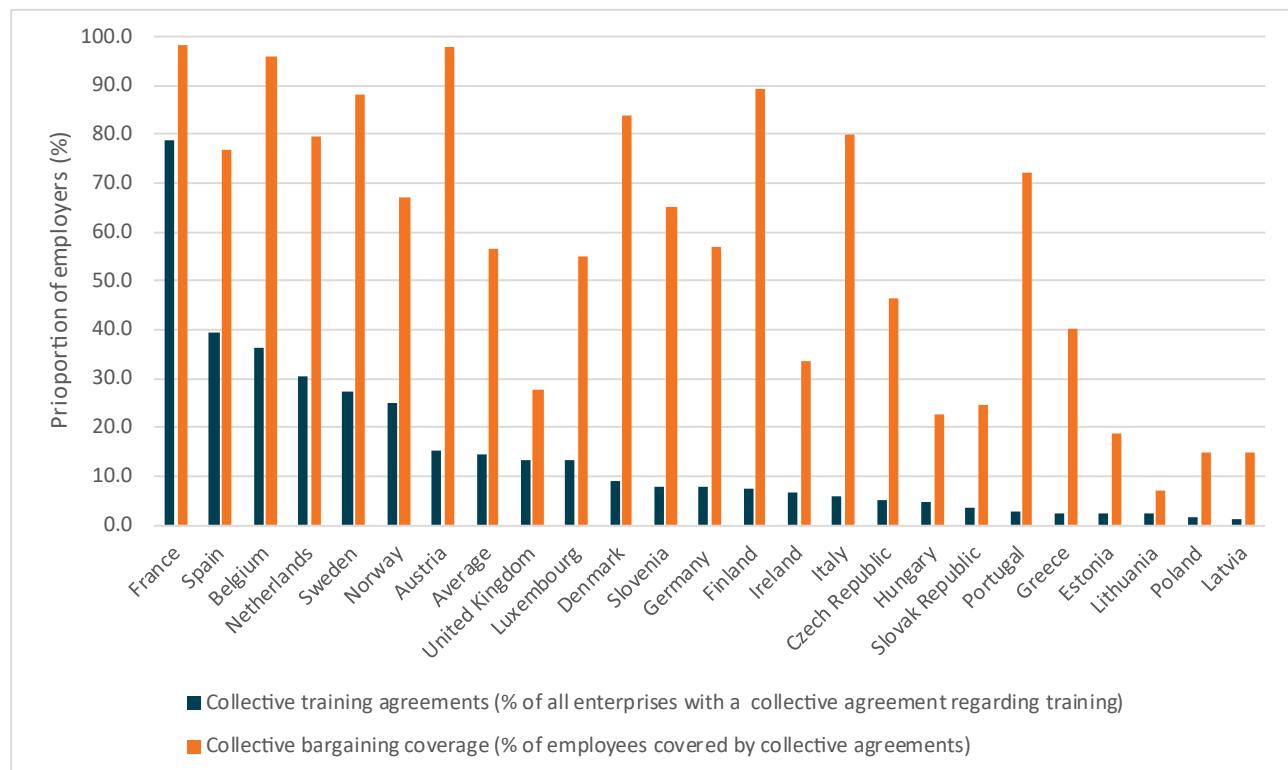
Shaping training strategies at a workplace and sectoral level

Second, social partnership in the skills system can involve dialogue between trade unions and employers around training strategies.

In addition to supporting workers to participate in learning, in many workplaces trade unions play an active role in informing and shaping the training strategies of employers. As figure 10 shows, while collective bargaining coverage in the UK is half the OECD average, the proportion of firms covered by a collective training agreement in the UK, is only just lower than the OECD average (13.4 % and 14.6 % respectively).

Figure 10 – Many organisations in the UK are covered by a collective training agreement

Number of firms covered by a collective agreement including training provisions, 2010 - 2015



Source: [OECD 2019b](#)

Trade unions tend to be more involved in shaping training strategies at larger organisations in the UK. Looking at organisations with over 250 workers, at over one in four, unions are involved in decisions around objective setting (29%), the form or type of training (28%) and the content of training (27%) (OECD 2019b).

OECD research has highlighted the potential benefits of involving worker representatives at all stages of the policy cycle, from the identification of problems that require attention, to the development and management of training programmes as well as their monitoring and evaluation (OECD 2019n).

There are a number of potential benefits to a social partnership approach when it comes to developing training strategies at an organisational or sectoral level.

First, involving trade unions can help give workers a voice in this important aspect of workforce policy. In addition to the principle-based argument – that workers should have a say over an area which has a significant impact on them – involving workers in dialogue around training can improve the quality of decision-making, by ensuring that strategies are informed by their understanding of the training needs within an organisation.

Dialogue with trade unions around training at a workplace level can also help to ensure training opportunities are distributed more equally. As highlighted above, workplaces with union learning representatives tend to have more equal access to training opportunities (Hoque and Bacon 2008).

Designing training content and ensuring quality

Third, social partnership in the skills system can involve unions and employers playing a central role in designing training content, and providing quality assurance.

In the UK, the system for ensuring the quality of training provision is employer-led. As part of their recent reforms to the apprenticeship system, government introduced apprenticeship standards which are designed by groups of employers – known as 'trailblazers'. These are then signed off by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which describes itself as being an employer led non-departmental public body (IfATE 2020). By making the system employer-led, the intention of the reforms was to ensure that apprenticeships delivered the skills that employers need.

However, there are concerns around the quality and value of some apprenticeship standards, and the extent to which they are providing the broad knowledge and transferable skills that they should. The government's own definition states that 'an apprenticeship is a job that requires substantial and sustained training, leading to the achievement of an apprenticeship standard and the development of transferable skills' (HMG 2013). However, concerns have been raised that many of the new apprenticeship standards are for entry-level roles which do not require sustained training (EDSK 2020), and many are narrowly-focused on a specific job, limiting the opportunity to develop wider transferable skills (CIPD 2018).

In a system where large employers are required to pay a levy, and where they can only redeem the funds to invest in apprenticeship training, there is an inevitable incentive for employers to seek to badge training as an apprenticeship in order to make it eligible for levy funding. This may include training which does not meet the established definition of an apprenticeship, and training which is excessively job- or employer-specific, rather than providing workers with a broader introduction to an occupation and an industry. In this context, with employers both designing apprenticeship standards, and an employer-led body signing off the

standards, there is an inevitable risk to quality.

While the current system is focused on employer involvement, it provides no voice for employees. This is in contrast to

the approaches taken by most advanced economies, where social partners – including trade unions – are involved in quality assurance at a variety of different levels.

Social partnership and quality assurance in Denmark

The training system in Denmark is overseen by 11 continuing training and education committees. The committees are industry-based, and they are jointly owned by the social partners, with half of the membership drawn from employers within the industry and half drawn from unions.

One of the core responsibilities of the committees is to develop training courses for their industry; both for initial vocational training for young people joining the labour market, and for continuing vocational training for existing workers.

The councils work closely with employers, unions and vocational education providers to design the content of the training, as well as to set out the approach to assessment.

As part of their approach to quality assurance, the committees collect data on satisfaction from a survey of participants in training, as well as from a sample of companies who have sent their employees on training courses. The committees use the results to identify quality issues, and to improve provision.

Source: OECD 2019e

Social partnership and quality assurance in Sweden

Social partners are extensively involved in quality assurance in the vocational training system in Sweden.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan) – is made up of representatives from trade unions and employers. Its aim is to ensure that higher vocational education provision is of high quality, and that it meets the needs of employers and learners.

The agency is responsible for deciding which programmes qualify for funding, designing the content of training, and promoting quality improvement. The agency conducts inspections to ensure quality standards are adhered to. This includes inspection of both providers and of work-based training, including observational visits, interviews with students, tutors and teachers, and coordinators. The agency also handles complaints about courses or programmes.

Source: Kuczera 2013, OECD 2019e

Social partnership and quality assurance in Scotland

In Scotland, trade unions are involved in every step of governance relating to apprenticeship development and approval.

Technical expert groups (TEGs) – which responsible for designing apprenticeship frameworks and reviewing existing frameworks – include representation from both employers and trade unions. This gives unions an opportunity to shape both the competencies required for apprenticeships in the sector in which they operate, the qualifications that should be included, and the method of assessment.

The Apprenticeship Approvals Group is responsible for signing off both new apprenticeship frameworks, and reviewed frameworks. The aim of the group is to ensure that apprenticeships meet the needs of employers and provide the highest quality of learning for individuals. The board includes employer members, Scottish Government, Scottish Trade Union Congress and Scottish Union Learn among others.

The Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board is responsible for overseeing the system and providing recommendations to government. Again, Scottish Trade Union Congress is represented on this group.

Source: [AAG 2019](#)

Recent OECD research highlights the importance of union involvement in shaping training content. While the involvement of employers in designing provision is vital in order to ensure that it matches their skills needs and is recognised and valued, trade unions can help represent the longer term needs of employees including through ensuring that training is sufficiently broad and transferable (OECD 2019d). Similarly, the Industrial Strategy Council has highlighted the role of trade unions in developing and delivering training that helps to deliver transferable skills, and that meets the longer term interests of employees (Industrial Strategy Council 2020). A social partnership approach to the design and quality assurance of apprenticeships and wider training provision could help protect and improve the quality of training. Involving trade unions – alongside employers – in the design and quality assurance of apprenticeships and other training provision, could help provide

a check and balance in the system. While employer involvement can help to ensure that training is focused on their skills needs, union involvement could help ensure that training is broader and transferable, providing a grounding in an occupation and a wider industry, rather than being narrow and firm- or role-specific.

Shaping the training system at a national level

Finally, social partnership in workforce training can include trade unions and employers having a formal role at a national level in the labour market institutions that oversee the skills system.

In England, while there has been a strong focus on employer involvement in the skills system, there has been relatively limited involvement of trade unions as part of a broader approach to social partnership.

There has been some progress more recently with the introduction of the National Retraining Partnership. The partnership, which includes the Department for Education, HM Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions, alongside the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC), is responsible for developing the National Retraining Scheme. This new programme aims to help adults retrain into better jobs and be ready for changes in the economy, including those brought about by automation (DfE 2019). There has also been a degree of social partnership in the response to the coronavirus pandemic, with the TUC and member unions working with the government to shape the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and other key policy areas.

However, the remit of the National Retraining Partnership remains relatively limited, focusing only on developing the National Retraining Scheme, which itself has a relatively narrow focus and limited funding.

The CBI recently called for the National Retraining Partnership to be broadened both in membership and in scope. CBI has called for the Department for Business Enterprise and Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Culture Media and Sport to join the partnership to ensure that all departments with an interest in skills and the labour market are included, so that government is 'pulling in the same direction'. CBI has also called for the remit of the National Retraining Partnership to be broadened, so that it focuses on broader upskilling and retraining policy, and with the responsibility for developing a new lifelong learning strategy to join up government policy and support upskilling and retraining (CBI 2019).

Compared to other advanced economies, and indeed to other nations within the UK, England has relatively limited formal arrangements for social partnership in the skills system. As table 1 below shows, most advanced economies involve both trade unions and employers in the skills system; whether that be in defining and managing the system, or in a consultative role.

Table 1: Compared to most advanced economies the UK has limited involvement of social partners in education and training

Social partner involvement in governance of education and training systems

The social partners define and manage the training system	The social partners contribute to the definition of the training system	The social partners have a consulting role	The social partners have no formal role
Austria Denmark Germany Iceland Italy Netherlands	Belgium Canada (AB and BC) Finland France Japan Luxemburg Mexico Norway Poland Slovenia Switzerland Turkey	Canada (QC) Czech Republic Estonia Greece Ireland Israel Latvia Lithuania New Zealand Portugal Slovak Republic Spain Sweden	Austria Hungary United Kingdom United States

Formal arrangements for social partnership in the skills system are not unique to countries with high levels of trade union membership or collective bargaining coverage. In countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Austria for example, where union density is in line with or even below that seen in the UK, the social partners are responsible both for defining and managing their highly effective vocational training systems.³

Many advanced economies have long-established institutions – either at the national or regional level – which are based on social partnership, and which provide strategic oversight over the skills system. As set out above, the remit of these institutions vary, with some being directly responsible for defining and managing the skills system, whilst others are consultative bodies, providing advice for government.

The Commission des Partenaires du Marché du Travail in Quebec

Skills policy in Quebec is largely overseen by the Commission des Partenaires du Marché du Travail (CPMT). This provincial consultation body brings together representatives from businesses, trade unions, education, community organisations and government.

The CPMT aims to improve the efficiency of the labour market, through improving policies around employment and skills. The body guides workforce development and employment interventions,

particularly those aimed at improving the fit between training provision, the skills of the workforce, and the needs of the labour market. It contributes to the development, recognition and promotion of skills, to meet the immediate and future needs of the labour market.

Below the CPMT, there are regional bodies and sectoral bodies, which are focused on supporting skills development at the local and industry level.

Source: CPMT 2020

There are a number of potential benefits in having social partnership in the labour market institutions overseeing the skills system.

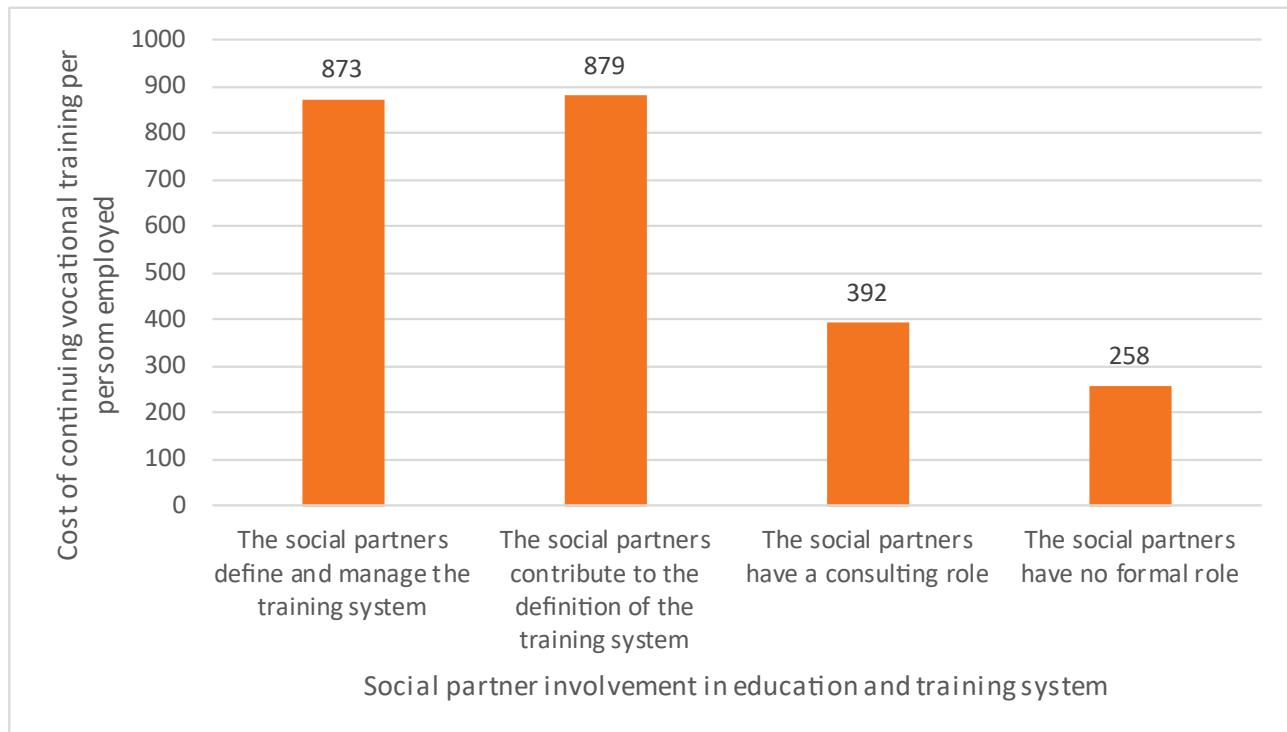
First, a social partnership approach can bring a broad range of perspectives, ensuring that the training system is informed by both the views of employers and workers, and that it balances the interests of both. A social partnership approach can also help to bring consistency and long-termism to skills policy, which has suffered from being disjointed with frequent and significant policy changes (CBI 2019).

Finally, a social partnership approach could help to increase demand for and investment in skills. As figure 11 shows, in European countries where social partners are extensively involved in the training system, employers tend to invest more in training their workforce. Employer investment in the two European countries with no formal role for social partners (the UK and Hungary) is lower than in countries where the social partners have a consulting role, and far lower than countries where social partners help to define and manage the training system.

³ Union density is 26.3% in Austria, 16.5% in Germany and 16.4% in the Netherlands, compared to 23.4% in the UK (Eurostat 2019)

Figure 11 – Social partnership in training is associated with higher levels of employer investment in training in Europe

Employer investment in continuing vocational training per person employed, selected countries⁴



Source: [OECD 2019d](#) and [Eurostat 2015](#)

Building on the evidence of such approaches across advanced economies, OECD recommend that governments should aim to collaborate with employer representative bodies and trade unions, and involve them in the elaboration and implementation of the adult learning policy agenda ([OECD 2019d](#)).

In addition to having formal institutions based on social partnership to oversee the skills system, many advanced economies have taken a social partnership approach to preparing for and responding to technological change and the future of work.

OECD has highlighted how social partnership and union-employer dialogue can be particularly effective in anticipating and responding to changes in the labour market driven by new technologies;

'Collective bargaining and social dialogue can help workers to make their voice heard in the design of national, sectoral or company-specific strategies and ensure a fair sharing of the benefits brought by new technologies and more globalised markets' (OECD 2019b).

As set out above, in England there has been some involvement of the social partners in anticipating and responding to changes in the world of work through the National Retraining Partnership. However, the partnership is in its early stages, its membership and remit remains relatively narrow, and the budget of the National Retraining Scheme is modest.

In other advanced economies, social partners have been more extensively involved in both anticipating the changes in the labour market, and in agreeing how to respond to them.

Responding to the future of work in Germany – Work 4.0 and the National Skills Strategy

In 2017, the German Federal Minister of Labour and social affairs (BMAS) produced an influential green paper, Work 4.0, which set out how technology would transform the world of work, and how government and social partners would respond. In introducing the subsequent white paper – which was developed with the involvement of the social partners – the Minister responsible – Andrea Nahles – set out her view that '*co-determination and social partnership offers the best foundation for Germany to become a pioneer in shaping decent work in the digital age.*'

Following the development of Work 4.0, the social partners in Germany developed the National Skills Strategy. The strategy recognises that technological advances will lead to profound changes in employer demand for labour and skills. It argues that boosting continuing vocational education and training, and a 'new skills culture' are seen as crucial in both helping people to respond to these changes, and maintaining Germany's competitiveness.

Source: [BMAS 2017](#) [BMAS 2019](#)

The strategy aims both to support people to keep their skills up to date with technological change, to support people to upskill in work, to help people to address basic skills needs or to retrain, and to help employers to meet their skills needs.

The strategy sets out broad objectives agreed by the social partners, under which fall specific commitments and initiatives. In addition to agreeing the overall strategy, trade unions are involved in leading on several of the actions, including working together with employers to understand how the transformation in the world of work will impact on workers.

The partners involved in the National Skills Strategy have committed to continuous dialogue as they implement the strategy. The partners will meet every six months, with the first meeting taking place in November 2019, to monitor progress in implementing the strategy, and a joint report on progress will be released in 2021.

Future Skills Council – Canada

The Future Skills Council has been established in Canada to explore how emerging technologies and other trends will shape the world of work.

The council is exploring emerging skills gaps, transferable skills and competencies across different sectors, new skills development approaches and technologies. It has been tasked with developing a shared vision and a strategic

plan to respond to rapidly changing skills demand, and to share best practice.

The council is responsible for advising the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour on national and regional skills development and training priorities. The Future Skills Council includes membership from employers, education providers, and trade unions in Canada.

Source: [BMAS 2017](#) [BMAS 2019](#)

Chapter 5:

Social partnership and the skills system – Recommendations for policy

In this chapter, we set out recommendations for the future of the workforce training system that build on social partnership after the coronavirus crisis. These changes would help to give workers a voice in training, both in their workplace and nationally, and they would help level-up skills across the UK after the pandemic. Building on the typology set out in chapter 4, we set out recommendations across four areas: engaging adults and delivering training, shaping training at a workplace level, designing training content and ensuring quality, and shaping the skills system at a national level.

Engaging adults and delivering training – The Union Learning Fund

There is good evidence from a number of advanced economies of the impact unions can have in engaging learners – particularly those with lower levels of qualifications – and in creating a positive learning culture at work (OECD 2019d). Engaging more adults in learning and training will be increasingly important after the coronavirus crisis, as we seek to adapt to a very different labour market.

Over the last twenty years, the Union Learning Fund has proved effective in engaging workers in learning. It has shown itself to be particularly effective in engaging with workers with low or no qualifications, in supporting them to boost their qualification levels, and in raising demand for future learning. These are the workers who tend to be less likely both to access employer provided training and lifelong learning in general, and who tend to be more vulnerable to future changes in the labour market as a result of technological change.

The Union Learning Fund has also shown to represent good value for money. For every £1 invested, there is a return of £12.24, with £7.24 going to the worker participating in training, and £5.00 to their employer (Crews et al 2018).

Despite this evidence, the government has announced its intention to withdraw funding for the Union Learning Fund from April 2021.

Government should reverse the planned cut, and continue to invest in the Union Learning Fund. Union learning should be a key part of the approach to levelling up skills after the coronavirus crisis, and adapting to a rapidly changing labour market.

Shaping training at a workplace level – A duty to consult on training

Employers in the UK do not invest enough in skills, and the investment we do see is distributed unequally. Those workers who could most benefit from opportunities to upskill are the least likely to access job-related training.

The apprenticeship levy is a welcome effort to boost employer investment in training in England. However, rather than increasing investment in young workers joining the labour market, or upskilling workers with low levels of qualification, there is a trend toward levy paying employers using their levy funds on higher and degree apprenticeships, with many of these going to already highly qualified employees. This trend may have been accelerated by the coronavirus crisis, with a greater decline in apprenticeship starts among younger workers and at level 2.

Both domestic and international evidence suggests that where employers engage with their workforce through trade unions, investment in skills is higher. Evidence also suggests that dialogue around training with worker representatives can help ensure more equal access to training.

However, only 13% of organisations in the UK currently have a collective training agreement.

In order to support a levelling up of investment in skills across the workforce after the coronavirus crisis, government should introduce a duty to consult on workforce training for large employers with 250 or more workers.

Consultation could be carried out either through a recognised trade union where there is one present, or through an information and consultation forum where there is no recognised union.⁵ Access to apprenticeship funding for levy-paying employers could be made conditional on consulting the workforce.

Introducing a duty to consult on workforce training could have a number of benefits:

- Dialogue around training between employer and employees may help **increase investment** in skills;
- Employers would be likely to make **better decisions** around investment in training, as they will be shaped by employees' understanding of skills gaps and training needs;
- Employers would be more likely to **invest in the skills of the wider workforce**, rather than just investing in already well qualified and highly skilled workers.

In addition to a statutory duty to consult, government should model best practice in consulting with workers around training and development in the public sector. Rapidly advancing technology will transform both the delivery of public services in the coming years, and the skills needs of public sector workers. This will require ongoing opportunities for public servants to upskill and retrain.

While the UK has seen a decline in trade union membership in recent decades, membership in the public sector remains high, with a majority of employees being a trade union member (BEIS 2019a).

Government should actively engage trade unions in the design and delivery of training and development strategies in the public sector.

Designing training content and ensuring quality – Reforming trailblazers and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

In addition to boosting employer investment through the introduction of the levy, the Government's recent reforms to the apprenticeship system aimed to put employers in control of the system, with the intention that it would better meet their skills needs.

Under the new system, apprenticeship frameworks have gradually been replaced by new apprenticeship standards. Apprenticeship standards are designed by 'trailblazers' – groups of employers from the sector that come together to set out the content of training. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education – which is responsible for approving apprenticeship standards – describes itself as being 'an employer led non-departmental public body', and its board is made up of employers and educationalists. While the current system is focused on employer involvement, it provides no voice for employees.

Government should reform the trailblazer system and the Institute to give workers a voice in the design of workplace training. In sectors with union density of over 10%, trailblazers should be required to include trade union representatives from the sector, to help shape the content of the apprenticeship being developed. The

⁵ Under the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations, introduced in 2005, employees are entitled to request the creation of an information and consultation forum, for employers to employees about issues relating to the organisation.

Institute should become a social partnership body, with both employers and trade unions represented. [JD18].

Involving trade unions both in the design of apprenticeship standards, and on the Institute, would have a number of benefits. Giving workers a voice in the system would help to act as a check and balance, ensuring that apprenticeships not only respond to the skills needs of employers, but that they also provide a broad introduction to an occupation, and the transferable skills that young people need to get the best start in their career.

Shaping the system at the national level - A National Skills Partnership

In recent years, the UK has lacked a single strategic body to provide oversight over and a long-term vision for the skills system. Most advanced economies involve employers and trade unions in shaping the skills system, so that it works for both employers and workers (OECD 2019d). Such an approach is not unique to countries with high levels of union density and collective bargaining coverage.

The creation of the National Retraining Partnership represented some progress here, but its membership and remit were narrow, it lacked the funding it needs to make a difference, and its future is uncertain. There is support from social partners in the UK to go further still, and to expand the focus of the partnership (CBI 2019).

Building on the National Retraining Partnership, government should establish the National Skills Partnership – a new social partnership body to provide a long-term vision for the skills system in England as we re-build following the coronavirus crisis.

The **National Skills Partnership** should be tasked with levelling up skills across England, and supporting the shift towards a high skill, high productivity and high pay economy. This should include a focus on boosting employer investment in and utilisation of skills, improving the quality and consistency of training, and reducing inequalities in access to training.

The National Skills Partnership should oversee the development of the National Skills Fund. This fund, worth £3 billion over the next five years, aims to provide match funding for individuals and SMEs for high-quality education and training, with a proportion reserved for strategic investment in skills. The National Skills Partnership should also take a lead in anticipating and responding to the changes in the labour market being driven by rapidly advancing technology.

Membership should include:

- **Employers** including senior representatives from CBI and other employer bodies;
- **Trade unions** including senior representatives from TUC and major trade unions;
- **Government** including the Secretary of State for Education, and ministers from the Department for Business Enterprise and Industrial Strategy.

The National Skills Partnership should report annually to Parliament, setting out current and future demand for skills, levels of employer provided training, the distribution of employer provided training, and the quality and impact of training. The Welsh and Scottish governments should consider setting up similar bodies to oversee their skills system.

Beyond institutional involvement at the national level, trade unions should be

involved in the governance of the skills system – and of wider industrial strategy – at both a local and a sectoral level.

At the local level, this should involve engaging trade unions in Skills Advisory Panels (SAPs). These bodies aim to pool knowledge on skills needs, to address local challenges, and to adapt to changes in the local labour market (DfE 2018).

Currently, SAPs include employers and providers, but there is no representation from trade unions. Government should amend the guidance on the governance of SAPs to encourage the involvement of unions; either through the TUC, or through unions representing important local sectors.

At the sectoral level, this should involve engage trade unions in the development and implementation of sector deals.

Sector deals are partnerships between government and industry on sector-specific issues to boost productivity, innovation and skills (BEIS 2019b). At present, sector deals are developed by employers within the sector. Government should require unions to be involved in the development of sector deals in sectors where there is sufficient union density.

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Appendix 2 – Methodology

This report explores the link between trade unions and workplace training, and explores the potential benefits of social partnership in the skills system. As skills is a devolved matter, the report focuses primarily on England, though it draws lessons on the approach to social partnership in Wales and Scotland

The report is based on:

- a literature review of existing evidence;
- secondary analysis of available data;
- interviews with social partners in England, Scotland and Wales, and with academics;
- interviews with social partners in a number of advanced economies.⁶

⁶ Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany



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