

**A Unions21 Debate**

# **Delivering for Young Workers**

**Unions21**

## **Acknowledgements**

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Other titles in our Debate series:

*Making the Point*

*The Generation Game, Does Age Matter*

*Resilient Unions*

*The future for union image*

# **Unions21**

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# Introduction

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## **Sue Ferns**

Chair of the Unions21  
Steering Committee

## Breaking the Barriers to Membership

A subject that has long concerned unions, and therefore Unions21, is how we recruit the next generation of members.

Recent joint TUC/Unions21 commissioned focus group research<sup>1</sup> uncovered a number of distinct and clear barriers that prevent young people from joining the union movement. These were categorised into four main themes:

- ▶ **Lack of awareness** – i.e. low visibility and/or understanding of unions.
- ▶ **Lack of 'push factors'** – e.g. many young people stated that they were happy with their workplace and did not feel they had come across any issues which might lead them to need a union's support.
- ▶ **Lack of 'pull factors'** – e.g. young people found it difficult to articulate anything that would attract them to join a union. Unions were widely seen as being impotent to affect change or improve working conditions.
- ▶ **Repellent factors** – e.g. cost of membership is off-putting for some, particularly for those young people who find it difficult to perceive of any tangible benefits for joining a union. Some young people find it difficult to identify with union members. Unions being seen as militant, old fashioned, bureaucratic and aggressive, turns young people off. Furthermore, there is a fear of isolation in being the only person in the workplace who might join a union.

The papers that make up the rest of this debate piece offer fresh thinking on how we address these four themes with a focus on achieving benefit for young people in a time of cuts and economic stagnation.

Michael Wheeler focuses on USDAW's successes in making gains and communicating to young people the relevance of the union to their lives. Adrian Prandle and Paul Campbell see ATL's ability to offer opportunities for professional development as key. Dannie Grufferty from NUS and Councillor Richard Watts from Islington Council explain how many of their organisations' values and objectives for young people are shared by unions, and offer ideas for improved joint-working. Dannie Grufferty makes a timely argument for a student TUC card.

Each of the authors gives an insight into how they believe young people are being adversely affected by the policy decisions of the government and the unique role unions can play in limiting the damage and providing an alternative.

This debate piece has opinions and best practice of interest to unions, but also to government, and is particularly relevant to the development of policy around Ed Miliband's aim to restore 'the Promise of Britain' that sees each generation better off than the last.

These opinions are not endorsed by Unions21, but are published by us to encourage the much needed, sensible and realistic debate that is required if the trade union movement is going to prosper.

Please read and consider this publication, forward it to others connected to the trade union movement and debate the content within your own organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> Young People, Unions and Recruitment <http://www.unions21.org.uk/download/208>

# Chapter 1

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## **Michael Wheeler**

Research Assistant within  
the USDAW Research &  
Economics Department

## Usdaw in the retail sector

Usdaw represents over 400,000 members in retail and associated sectors. Approximately 20% of Usdaw's membership is made up of young people with around 10% of our reps being 26 or under. Traditionally, the retail sector has employed a large number of young people, often working part-time to earn money to support themselves through their education. Whether working part-time or full-time, retail is often a young person's first experience of the world of work.

These young workers often have particular needs, both individually and as a group, which are sometimes at odds with the rest of the workforce, for example flexibility rather than stability, but often their needs are the same, such as a desire to be well rewarded for their time and labour.

## Unions and young people

Organising amongst young people presents several challenges for unions. The first challenge that we face when organising and recruiting young people, is becoming relevant to their lives, educating them about 'push factors' and providing 'pull factors' which when taken together present a solid case for union membership.

Because work is not always the focus of their lives, in the way it might be for an older person working full-time and supporting a family, many of these young people do not see a trade union and the work we do as particularly relevant to them. It is the creation of this relevance that is absolutely key when it comes to organising and recruiting young people. It is not enough to actually be relevant to their lives, the important thing is being seen to be relevant to them, in their eyes. It is this hurdle that must be overcome in order to successfully recruit and organise young people.

Usdaw has worked hard to identify the issues facing young people in work. One thing we found was that if you asked many young people whether they had any issues at work or if they felt they were being badly treated by their company many of them said no. However, if you asked them about specific

rights, breaks, paid overtime, holidays, etc, it became clear that they did have problems at work, they just didn't know enough about what they were entitled to in order to realise that they were being exploited and to recognise these as 'push factors' towards union membership.

The same holds true if a union manages to negotiate improvements either locally, company wide, or through lobbying parliament. If young people don't know what they get or are currently entitled to, they aren't going to be particularly impressed by any improvements that are delivered. The upshot of this is that when trying to demonstrate to young people that the work we do in the trade union movement is relevant, it is an important first step to include an element of education, especially when initially reaching out to young people in workplaces which perhaps have a low union presence.

## An evolving situation

Looking to the future situation regarding young people, the Conservative-led Coalition has introduced numerous policies which individually and cumulatively will have a large impact on the choices that young people make about their education and their future and will also have ramifications for them, and their priorities, in the workplace.

With more young people facing financial difficulties if they decide to continue with their education due to measures such as the scrapping of EMA and the increase in tuition fees, some are going to decide that the cost is too high. Unions must be prepared for an influx of young people to the workplace who lack higher qualifications not because of academic reasons but because of financial ones.

Also, Unions need to be aware of the increased financial pressures facing their younger members who have chosen to continue studying whilst working part-time. For some of these students, balancing their study time with the financial pressures facing them will lead to them walking a knife edge between continuing along the path they have chosen or dropping out of education altogether.

## **Making work pay**

When delivering for young members, Usdaw has adopted a two-pronged approach, one which will put us in a good position to deal with the issues facing the new generation of young people entering the workplace whilst best representing the needs of our young members currently in the workplace.

First, we need to ensure that those young people who continue down the traditional educational path are well supported.

As a starting point, this means that, especially in light of cuts to EMA, work needs to pay for young people. Students need to be paid a rate that makes supporting themselves and their studies from part-time work viable. Union negotiators need to ensure that the basic rate of pay for young workers is as high as possible to enable students to support themselves from as few hours as possible, especially in sectors such as retail which attract a large number of part time young workers.

This does not just mean a focus on a high core pay award, but also more targeted measures such as increasing or abolishing youth rates. The abolition of youth rates is an item that negotiators can make strong moral and practical arguments in favour of.

Usdaw has had success in this area, with negotiations resulting in both Tesco and Sainsbury's abolishing their youth rates and Morrisons raising theirs to 88% of the adult rate. If properly used as the foundations for organising work, successes such as these provide demonstrable 'pull factors'.

But pay is not the only way in which students can be supported whilst working. Usdaw's approach when working with companies to represent the interests of our members has been to ensure that employers have a range of policies to support the needs of students in their workforce. These policies include a variety of flexible working options, study leave at exam times and term-time store transfers. It is the aim of our negotiators to ensure that young people are not put in a position where they are forced to choose between continued learning or continued financial security.

An important aspect of any negotiating and campaigning work done on behalf of young people in areas like those just mentioned is to capitalise on and publicise this work. To bring young people into the union, these negotiating areas and successes must be used as issues to organise around. This goes back to the importance of making the work of unions relevant to young people. It is not enough to do the work, we need to be seen by young people to be working for them.

For example, the abolition of youth rates in Tesco, resulting in workers being paid the same rate for the job regardless of age, was used as the basis for a youth focussed recruitment drive utilising organisers and in-store reps, particularly our young in-store reps as it was felt that peer contact of this nature would create a positive impression of the union.

As the principal tool for use during this period, we designed a leaflet to specifically target young workers in Tesco. This narrow target audience allowed the message inside to be tailored to a great degree, we were not just talking about Usdaw benefits and achievements; we were talking about the benefits of joining Usdaw for young people working in Tesco and our achievements on their behalf.

This leaflet targeted young people through design as well as content, seeking to make itself appear attractive and relevant through visual means. It used a distinctive design that was notably different from standard Usdaw materials and also incorporated an integrated membership form, something which the research done by Unions 21 on *'Young People, Unions and Recruitment'* has since identified that young people particularly appreciate; a 'one-stop-shop' approach with all the information and everything needed for them to take the next step and join the union in one place.

## **Creating opportunities**

Despite our efforts to make work pay and to support young people who work whilst studying, there are inevitably those who are put off from continued education for a number of reasons. With

the increased financial pressures young people are likely to face, this number is only likely to grow, with financial rather than academic considerations playing a greater and greater role in the decision.

It is important that these young people are not written off once they enter the workplace. Shop Stewards, Union Learning Reps and union organisers have a vital role to play in promoting learning opportunities in the workplace with the key being to make these opportunities attractive and accessible.

Through doing this, unions have a great opportunity to demonstrate their relevance to the lives of young people. With a visible workplace presence doing productive and valuable work in providing individuals with personal development opportunities, we are not only providing a direct benefit to members but also combating some of the negative associations with unions that the research done by Unions 21 on 'Young People, Unions and Recruitment' has shown that they have.

In order to achieve these aims, Usdaw has a dedicated Lifelong Learning team who, working with our national network of Union Learning Reps, deliver numerous initiatives for our members all around the country. These include:

- ▶ Setting up over 60 'joint site learning committees' to facilitate, organise and promote educational opportunities at individual sites.
- ▶ Opening 53 on-site learning centres in partnership with employers in order to provide easy access to learning resources for people who might not otherwise have them.
- ▶ Signing 'provider partnership agreements' with over 30 colleges, ensuring that our members have access to quality education provision and numerous course choices.
- ▶ Training over 800 Union Learning Reps to promote and facilitate learning within the workplace.
- ▶ And working to make learning affordable through joint company/union learning funds

and financial incentives for members wishing to study through the Open University.

It is measures and initiatives like these, already making a huge contribution to the lives of our members, that Usdaw believes will play an important part in combating the damage being done to young people's life chances. By providing opportunities for personal and professional development such as these, we are practically demonstrating the positive effect of union work in the workplace, increasing our relevance to their lives in their eyes, and providing young people with 'pull factors' towards union membership.

### **Key Principles**

When approaching the recruiting and organising of young people, trade unions need to ensure that their work continually raises their visibility to young people and increases general awareness of what it is that trade unions do and why they are important in the workplace. Relevance to the lives of young people is the key to trade unions making successful inroads into recruiting and organising them but it must be remembered that without visibility and awareness of our work, we will never truly succeed, as young people are the judges of whether we are relevant to their lives.

As trade unionists we must also keep in mind the effect that the Coalition Government's policies are having on young people and the consequent effects these will have on our approach to young people in the workplace. In order to be successful in reaching out to young people failed by this government, the key principles need to be providing workplace support for students continuing with their studies and workplace accessibility to learning opportunities for non-students. If we can succeed in both of these areas, it will go a long way towards mitigating the effects of Coalition cuts and avoiding the creation of another lost generation, whilst simultaneously practically demonstrating to young people the relevance of the work of trade unions to their lives.

# Chapter 2

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## **Adrian Prandle**

Education Policy Adviser  
at ATL

## **Paul Campbell**

Vice-Chair of the ATL  
Future Steering Group

**Young, professional, and proud to be in a union: how policy-making and organising around ‘professionalism’ can reach out to young workers.**

**Introduction**

“Cuts affect real people.” “Cuts are not the cure.”  
“No ifs, no buts, no cuts.”

You will likely agree with some, possibly all, of those statements, seen on banners during the TUC-organised *March for the Alternative*. Yet Unions21 research<sup>2</sup> shows that young people – despite a sense that the vulnerable should be protected and the rich should pay more tax – don’t trust anyone on the big economic issues, view fairness as a relative concept, and feel powerless amidst change emanating from Whitehall. Put simply, their views are formed softly around a multitude of ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’.

Cuts are seen as a reality, rather than a preventable terror. The lack of confidence in being able to influence public discourse is coupled with a “willing acceptance” of their employers’ reaction to the nation’s economic circumstances and workplace issues more generally.<sup>3</sup> This is having a profound impact on the movement’s ability to attract a new generation of trade unionists.

The research into young people highlighted four themes that prevent young people from joining a trade union:

- ▶ Lack of awareness, visibility and/or understanding
- ▶ Lack of ‘push factors’
- ▶ Lack of ‘pull factors’
- ▶ Repellent factors

It is essential for trade unions to understand that young people specifically are facing tough times, but equally important to grasp their perspective on this context and to be able to adapt. There is a need

to convince the public of a positive vision for trade unions in twenty-first century Britain – positivity that crashes through the barriers currently between unions and young people.

We write with the perspective of both member and of official at ATL, the education union. Up front and centre in ATL’s offer to young people and new teachers is the opportunity to be an enhanced professional, and the union’s policy work in education, with ‘professionalism’ at its heart, is helping deliver that. ATL’s positive message that policy-makers can benefit from understanding and respecting the capabilities and expertise of the profession is backed by resources and support that help young workers find their way through a teaching career. Or as a past rep recruitment campaign slogan put it, *Join Up, Join In, and Get On*.

The nation’s approach to work-life balance, to our employers, and to work and what we get out of it, needs reassessing. Though only a starting point, other unions can learn from ATL’s policy development and organising focus on professionalism and specifically the *ATL Future* section’s model for attracting and retaining young members.

**A is for Austerity – where lies the future of state education?**

At the same time as young people suffer reduced opportunities in education and employment prospects, the people teaching them face full-scale attacks to their profession.

Recent changes and austerity measures in the public sector have seen dramatic shifts in opportunities and equality in access to education and employment for young people in the UK. Consider the trebling of tuition fees, the removal of the education maintenance allowance, the closure of Sure Start centres, the decimation of local authority education support services and youth service provision, the closure of careers advice centres whilst plans for a replacement are nowhere to be seen, the abolition of the Future Jobs Fund and the fact that almost one million 16 to 24-year-olds

2 Lopata, R (2011), *Young people, unions and recruitment: Initial findings*, Unions21/Community Research/TUC

3 *ibid*

are not in employment, education or training, and the UK is not looking a good place to be young.

Reduced engagement in future learning is becoming a reality for young people. On the one hand, university places are being cut, fees are being increased and FE courses are being abandoned. On the other hand, apprenticeships are scarce and the labour market is deteriorating, particularly for the young for whom unemployment has been stubbornly stuck at over 20 per cent for the last few years. This combination means that the incentive and support for young people to engage and achieve their life goals is fast diminishing. Young people are less inclined to engage in education and dedicate three years to a degree, taking on board all the associated debts, if there are no jobs at the other end. And there are long-term risks to fixing inequality if a generation of young people are turned off education and learning from an early age.

Those working in education face huge threats to the career they chose. The fatal cocktail of a funding crisis mixed with policy driven by different values is tearing apart state education as we know it. The expansion of the academies programme and introduction of free schools takes competition and marketisation in education to another uncomfortable level: schools become isolated units in this fragmentation of the system, with no local collaboration between teachers, national pay and conditions undermined, and fairness eradicated for young people. Political, not professional, decisions are being made on the curriculum as ministers forget about the expertise teachers can offer and instead seek to impose their own version with 'traditional' subjects promoted, knowledge prioritised above skills development, and a dangerous two-tier split of academic and vocational education emerging that is making an unfair hierarchy of the different talents young people have. And as teacher training moves away from HE institutions, pupils' learning will be impacted by practical training not underpinned by educational theory.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, young – or aspirant – teachers are getting hit twice, both in education and then in work. Improving the education system and improving working life in schools go hand in hand: better education for young people is good for staff, and improving the experience of education staff also benefits young people and their learning.

Where unions can stand up for professional development, they can demonstrate to workers that they don't need to suffer a 'willing acceptance' of the approach from their employer – whether that is the state or the private sector. But framing this as a positive message about being an enhanced professional is key.

### **Policy as a crucial part of a union's work**

Good policy work is integral to delivering for members. It reflects their experience and professional interests, can lobby for and achieve change that improves working lives, and it can change the world – in a narrow or its widest sense. It can and should be fuelled by a union's membership, and unions of all colours should aspire to offering thought leadership. Unions able to characterise how the future may look can help the youngest workers entering a new job.

Though policy development includes material issues such as pay, it should look further – for ATL this means not just protecting members, but caring about the children they are helping every single day, and seeking to ensure the education system does all it can and must. Education policy is important to ATL as it affects all members very directly as workers. But, as Tom Wilson, Director of Unionlearn, has argued, it is central to unions' fight against poverty and unfairness. Union learning should embrace both delivery and policy. Learning and organising are mutually supportive and increasingly integrated and 'strategies for union growth and revitalisation must include union learning.'<sup>5</sup> And of course, learning develops people as professionals and as individuals.

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4 For more see ATL (2011), *The future of state education: how everything you value is disappearing*

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5 Wilson, T (2010), *The future for union learning*, Unions21

Policy is part of a union's two-way relationship with members. Collective strength is provided by policy work that empowers members with knowledge. Gary Reddin, a school rep for ATL, says "Being a rep ... means I have a better knowledge of what's happening in the education world." And other workers like unions that understand their work – it was the second highest marker of excellent or good union performance in survey data produced for Congress in 2010. Survey respondents earning between £300 and £400 per week were the most likely to be impressed by this.<sup>6</sup>

For ATL, policy development is driven not just by experience but by values.<sup>7</sup> Policy work is a response to members' individual and collective belief in education as a tool for social justice. This is shared by the majority of the profession, whether unionised or not. And for young workers in particular, this driver for entering teaching is very fresh in the mind. Early career optimism is best capitalised upon with positive messages.

Elsewhere this manifests itself in different ways: a journalism union seeking to influence employers' policies towards skills development amidst a fast-changing online media landscape; a construction workers' union seeking to influence public procurement policy; a football union seeking to influence course content for coaching badges to maximise opportunities of a prolonged career in football for players from all levels of the game; a union that represents scientists articulating their professional experience and expertise to policymakers in the Department for Energy and Climate Change, or indeed across Whitehall.

### **What is professionalism, and why is it a good**

It is important that unions should not fall into the trap of thinking 'professionalism' is something

solely for white collar occupations. Rather, it is a recognition of the experience, knowledge and capabilities that can be brought to a job. And it is an articulation of those not just to employers, but to policy-makers too. In education, we face a constant battle with government to have members' talent, expertise and judgment acknowledged and utilised by government ministers who believe to know better. Young teachers potentially have decades of political encroachment ahead of them: collectivism can stand against it.

In setting out ATL's view of teacher professionalism, we can see characteristics transferable to other places of work and careers:

- ▶ Teaching should be a deeply knowledgeable, reflective, flexible and innovative profession
- ▶ Teacher professionalism is about exercising judgement – on curriculum, assessment and pedagogy (the art or science of teaching)
- ▶ The teaching profession is based on a high degree of knowledge:
  - Of learning
  - Of subjects and relationships between them
  - Of pupils, as individuals, and their interests
  - Of political, economic, technological, social and environmental and cultural contexts
- ▶ The teaching profession draws on theoretical understanding and knowledge in order to adapt teaching practices and methods to pupil need
- ▶ Teachers need to balance professional values against responsibilities to the organisations in which they work: balance proper autonomy against proper powers of government
- ▶ Teachers need to build relationships with pupils, families, communities and other professionals
- ▶ Teachers have the responsibility to debate about education practice

'Professionalism' is a good – for society, for employers, for government as well as for unions and their members. Though it uses a narrower definition of 'professional' than we would advocate, Spada's

<sup>6</sup> Unions21 (2010), *The future for unions – What do workers think?*

<sup>7</sup> For more on how ATL makes policy, see Bousted and Moloney (2009), *Making the point – how do unions make policy with impact?*, Unions21

state of the nation report on professionals is clear that the professions play 'a big role in the development of meritocracy because of their emphasis on knowledge-based skills rather than social class.' And that they are 'a potential source of ethical role models via promulgation of professional standards, ethics and morality in business, government, and civil society.'<sup>8</sup> The trade union movement should be firmly behind such a role and such influence for its members, present and prospective.

In a tricky economic and educational climate and highly competitive jobs market, young workers – whether school leavers or graduates – seek security in their employment and they seek progression. Unions valuing members as professionals and making strong and public arguments around the importance of professionalism can play a role in achieving not just economic benefits but the career development that young workers desire.

### **ATL Future and the importance of capitalising on opportunities**

ATL, through ATL Future, is committed to ensuring the involvement of new professionals in the life of the Association and the wider education world. ATL Future represents the views of students and newly qualified/probationer teachers across the UK and each of the devolved nations through a steering group made up of student and newly qualified teachers. It campaigns on issues that affect young people and impact on new professionals and plays an active role in leading and contributing to educational discussion, from education policy to the experiences of those new to the career. This is illustrated through publications, professional development seminars and involvement in the education debate at a local and national level.

ATL offers free student membership for those training in the UK to be teachers, lecturers or education support staff. Those on graduate teacher programmes are also eligible. Membership is free

in the early stages of their career too: if you qualify in 2011, you will receive free membership until 2013 and half price until 2014 – a gradual move towards paying full fees three years after qualifying as an education professional.

In essence ATL Future is recognition of what students and young professionals want from ATL. But we're also going directly to where they are to get them signed up. The circumstance of having so many prospective members in one place, when they start their teaching courses, is an opportunity of unions' dreams. Though in other sectors a university presentation or stall at freshers' fairs may not be possible, capitalising on any good opportunities of a similar nature should be a high priority. ATL does this by building relationships with institutions and course lecturers, it has a listening audience because of the cost-free membership, and it captures their imagination with a targeted offer to these (mainly but not exclusively) young people and a collection of useful learning resources, freebies and union paraphernalia.

The willingness to welcome members who are not (yet) in the world of work is an approach taken in common with other teaching unions, but perhaps not far enough explored by the wider movement. The potential for cooperation between the TUC and NUS, argued elsewhere in this publication, is worth further thought.

### **Pull factors: The 'get on' professional development offer and dedicated services for young members and new professionals**

ATL, through ATL Future, is the only education union to provide student and newly qualified / probationer members with a dedicated website and newsletters to suit the needs of professionals at the early stage of their career.<sup>9</sup>

There are no losers from ATL's strong commitment to ensuring all education professionals, at all stages, have access to high quality and tailored professional

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8 Spada (2009), *British Professions Today: The State of the Sector*

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9 See [www.new2teaching.org.uk](http://www.new2teaching.org.uk)

learning and development opportunities to support their personal development and professional practice. To support this, ATL Future offers professional development opportunities through dedicated publications and regional seminars across the UK. Topics include: understanding and responding to challenging behaviour; assertiveness in the classroom; and job interview techniques. ATL Future also provides an open space for dialogue, discussion and peer support from like-minded professionals who are in the same position and at the same stage in their career and training. Often, ATL Future members play an active role in the planning and facilitating of such seminars, and gain a lot out of them themselves. And these unique opportunities are entirely free to those students and newly qualified teachers who take advantage of the free membership with ATL at the early stage of their career.

ATL's partnership with Edge Hill University offers further study at Masters level for a heavily discounted price. This goes some way to addressing the Unions21 survey finding that young workers are less likely than others to report opportunities to develop their skills.<sup>10</sup>

ATL Future members have the opportunity to work with government and employers to influence education policy – and this continues throughout active involvement with the association. Members' areas of interest or expertise (and the fresh perspective of young members and new teachers) can be harnessed by regional networks and the working groups which shape ATL policy and positions.

## Conclusion

Though the focus groups with young workers throw up some tough and ongoing challenges for the union movement, ATL's approach goes some way to addressing the barriers preventing young people from joining up and joining in.

- ▶ Going to where potential members are and telling them about what ATL can specifically offer them counters any lack of awareness, visibility and understanding of education unions
- ▶ Articulating the damaging impacts of government's education policy can resonate with young workers who, to increasing degrees, will have experienced negative changes both as a pupil and as a teacher. Seeing this through the lens of fair and equitable state education being under fatal threat can act as a 'push factor' for workers driven by a belief that they can make a difference.
- ▶ Both free introductory membership and seeing the ATL Future section run by young members removes 'repellent' factors young people have raised.

Most of all though, the union movement needs to understand properly the need for 'pull factors' in attracting new members. In tough times more than ever it is important for unions to be able to articulate a positive message. For ATL, this has meant:

- ▶ Connecting young workers with government through strong policy work based on the shared professional value that education can be a tool of social justice and equality, very fresh in the minds of new teachers
- ▶ Valuing members as professionals and making strong and public arguments around the importance of professionalism, which play a role in achieving the career development that young workers desire
- ▶ Making a dedicated and attractive offer to young workers through ATL Future that provides peer support with demonstrable value to both organisation and members, and a central focus on professional development to help young members 'get on'.

If Ed Miliband is serious about restoring 'the Promise of Britain' that sees each generation better off than the last, then education and working life will be central to his plans. Trade unions, in turn,

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<sup>10</sup> Unions21 (2010), *The future for unions – What do workers think?*

# Case study

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**Sharon Elliott**

Communications  
Officer of BECTU

## BECTU and internships

The rise of the internship throughout the UK economy and no less in media and entertainment is a call to arms. We can't sleepwalk into the creation of an underclass, largely chasing unpaid work, which will have, *no*, is having, a destabilising effect on paid employment in our sector.

Cuts in government funding, in theatres for example, will only make employers more likely to exploit low cost or free labour. Our branches are being urged to challenge this creeping and dangerous development; we have collective agreements; we have to use them. Whilst we continue to serve and support union members we also need to ramp up our efforts to reach non-members too. In fact, if we don't challenge the exploitation of the young, the union's mid and long term future is bleak.

BECTU's recent public campaigning on behalf of new entrants has its roots in the 2005 *TV-Wrap* campaign, a brilliant and sustained effort to expose the exploitation of new entrants in independent production for television. Conditions characterised by low pay or nil-pay, excessive hours and broken promises were rife and *TV-Wrap's* challenge to the ethics of tv production dominated the trade press for weeks. The furore created, led by established professionals and BECTU members ashamed at the sector's treatment of the young, led the then business secretary to ask the sector skills council, Skillset, to work with the industry to agree guidelines on work experience. These were published in 2007 and have since been overtaken by a more comprehensive set of guidelines backed also this time, by CCSkills (the sector skills council for the performing arts) and the Arts Council. This latest guidance, published in 2010, contains some excellent advice and information. Now the challenge is to encourage employers and workers on a placement to use it.

In 2009, BECTU backed a tribunal case brought by Nicola Vetta, an art department assistant, who had accepted an expenses-only engagement on a film. The case established that expenses-only engagements are illegal and that where someone is employed to work, then payment, at least in line with the national minimum wage is payable in addition to payment for accrued holiday. For some reason some employers, and not all of them small-scale operators, think that their love of media and the arts somehow exempts them from working within the law. The success of the Nicola Vetta case has been followed by a winning case brought by the NUJ. We hope to see many more successful challenges, better still we want to see an increase in the offer of paid traineeships and apprenticeships.

The exploitation of new entrants is a huge problem which demands systematic attention. And as we keep up the pressure, we also draw inspiration from organisations, like Intern Aware and the NUS, led by young people who are encouraging their peers to say no to exploitation at work. In August 2011, BECTU launches a new website for new entrants – [www.creativetoolkit.org.uk](http://www.creativetoolkit.org.uk) – with the backing of the last round of the Union Modernisation Fund. The site will deliver a clear message: new entrants are not alone, they have a raft of rights and a lot of support in the economy and by working together we can ensure that their creativity isn't squandered but channelled towards proper career development.

must think hard about how they can broker such progress, and how they can build popular, sustainable support for what they do.

Focussing on what young workers want to get out of their profession is a way of putting 'pull factors' at the heart of a union. Strong policy work can demonstrate a commitment to members' career and motivations, not just the member's interests in the here and now. And easy ways into trade unionism, through dedicated sections like ATL Future, can provide the practical support for professional development that demonstrates tangible benefits that can answer young workers' aspirations.

# Chapter 3

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## **Dannie Grufferty**

Vice President Society &  
Citizenship of the National  
Union of Students

## Introduction

Today's generation of students faces a hostile set of social and economic circumstances. These are a combination of the erosion of opportunities that were available to the previous generation, such as support for further and higher education, and new challenges such as a dire jobs market and an increasing expectation to undertake unpaid work. The trade union movement is at the forefront of protecting workers of all ages. But while young workers always bore the brunt of poor workplace conditions and low pay, and are now bearing the brunt of the recession and cuts, few are members of a trade union. Now is time for a radical reassessment of the partnership between NUS and the unions. At the heart of this is the virtuous circle that by working together, unions can become more relevant to students and more students will become union members.

## Bearing the brunt of the cuts and recession

The impact of the recession has hit young people extremely hard. Perhaps harder than any other group. With the dramatically increasing costs of an aging population, the missing bottom step on the elusive and exclusive 'housing ladder' and the growing impact of climate change, my generation is clearly going to have to work longer, for less, in a less stable world.

The recession, and the massive public spending cuts the Conservative-led coalition Government argue should follow, have hit us fast and hard.

The abolition of the education maintenance allowance will make it difficult for many young people from poor backgrounds to remain in post-16 education – something that the symbolic change in the school leaving age to 18 will do little, if anything, to alleviate.

Those that struggle on to remain in education will have less time and resources with which to reach their potential. The three-fold rise in tuition fees will lead many to question whether they can afford to progress on to higher education. Those from 'non-

traditional' backgrounds are even more likely to consider university a risk too far – a personal tragedy for those students, and a national embarrassment.

For those who make it through all of this, the graduate job market is in an abysmal state – with 83 applicants competing for every graduate job, up from 69 in 2010.<sup>11</sup> Graduates who wish to pursue particularly competitive careers such as in politics or the media, increasingly see unpaid and often long-term 'internships' as the only way to get a foot in the door – meaning that, in effect, these career paths are available only for those able to work for free for an indefinite period of time, and whilst paying for accommodation and living costs.

## The withdrawal of financial support for study in further and higher education

Young people are angry not just at the policies, but at the way in which they have been made. The education maintenance allowance was an incredibly effective scheme, which not only helped to encourage and support participation in post-16 education for young people from poor backgrounds, but also improved their educational outcomes. And, given that allowance payments are based upon 100 per cent attendance and punctuality, EMA acted as an excellent motivator for participation from students, including many who have traditionally been seen as being 'hard to reach'. As such, retention rates of those on EMA are very high. 95% of young people eligible for EMA at City and Islington College completed their course (compared to 90% of those not eligible for EMA). Data from Lambeth College showed that students receiving the EMA were more likely to stay the course (90 per cent compared with 75 per cent of other students) and more likely to pass (94 per cent compared with 81 per cent).

Beyond all of this, an Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) study of the scheme found that, even looking at only the narrow economic benefits of EMA – the higher

11 <http://www.agr.org.uk/content/Figures-show-increase-in-graduate-vacancies-and-boost-in-starting-salaries-for-first-time-in-2-years>

wages that its recipients would go on to enjoy in future would likely exceed the costs in the long run.

Despite all the evidence of the effectiveness of the scheme, the Government simply bulldozed through with their intention of abolishing it – citing an NFER report which suggested that 88 per cent of EMA recipients would have remained in college without the money, and so claiming that was an overly high "deadweight cost". Never mind the numerous additional benefits associated with the scheme, or the numerous alternative reports which suggested the NFER report to be flawed. Thomas Spielhofer, who led the NFER study, subsequently said in an Education Select Committee session: "You can interpret that in different ways. You can interpret it quite negatively, and say that for 88% that was wasted money, but I don't actually see it that way, I think it has been misinterpreted in that sense", before going on to express his frustration that the change in government policy had been based on his research, which only looked peripherally at the issue of EMA.

Enforcing a policy change which unfairly hit the young, and poor young people in particular, is a cause for anger and frustration – but the utter failure to engage with the numerous arguments against the proposal, risks not just angering, but also alienating a generation of young people.

The same stubbornness and failure to engage was seen with the rise in the tuition fee cap – the policy itself was opposed by many, but the rush to push through the rise before Christmas, before any of the wider reforms had been set out or even determined, left the government giving an unhealthy lesson to young people that their voice was not welcome in the debate.

### **Towards a better partnership: the relevance of unions to students**

The partnership of the NUS and unions is born out of common values, but also common interest. As students took to the streets to protest last year the leader of Unite, Len McCluskey, said unions should help students find a "wider echo" for their

concerns. He said trade unions had to work with the "magnificent" students' movement to build a bigger anti-cuts campaign.

Trade unions have a very significant role to play as those best positioned to challenge the cuts on behalf of all workers. Their history of putting the poorest and most vulnerable first makes them natural allies of young people against the unjust manner in which they are being hit in general – and poor young people in particular.

The union movement is able to articulate an alternative approach, based on education and employment as the best routes to economic recovery and growth. Working with unions NUS can amplify the voice of young people and create a bigger campaign for student financial support.

Trade unions also have the resources to challenge illegal practices such as the use of unpaid or expenses only 'interns' which contravenes minimum wage legislation. To be relevant to students this work needs to continue. Ever higher numbers of graduates are competing for ever-fewer graduate jobs and we need unions to fight the 'race to the bottom' in wages and working conditions this mismatch in supply and demand can create.

For NUS it is worrying that at a time of growing need for strong unions to defend young workers Unions21 research shows students to be particularly disengaged from the trade union movement. Unions are a powerful tool to support and defend our young people, and yet many simply do not see membership as 'for them'. Re-engaging young people – making unions both look and feel relevant – is therefore a challenge that we must meet together.

The Unions21 research showed that young people's positive associations with unions included the words: Togetherness and Democracy. The importance of collectivism is something that resonates with young people at a time when they are under attack. We have students' unions because we recognise the importance of a collective voice on campus, for example when fighting rent hikes, cuts to sports and society funding, or cuts in

library opening hours. We have a National Union of Students because we recognise this to be the case nationally when fighting Government funding cuts, when opposing tuition fees and when arguing for better student support. To ensure that in the context of cuts and recession the 'wins' available amount to more than damage limitation unions and NUS need to jointly remake the case for one of the values that unites us: Collectivism.

But we can't just address this through winning the battle of ideas; we also need practical action.

### **Resourcing the organising of both unemployed young people and students working part-time**

As Councillor Richard Watts argues elsewhere in this publication, unions need to do more to support young people in getting their first job, rather than waiting until they have one. Given that the greatest challenge young people face is getting on a career path, this is support that is much-needed, and would do much to improve the perceived relevance of unions.

When students and young people find work it is more often casual, unskilled and relatively low paid. A growing number, around three quarters of undergraduate students studying full time, undertake paid employment either during term time or during the holidays with more than 40 percent employed in the wholesale, retail and motor trade and almost twenty five percent employed in hotels and restaurants.<sup>12</sup>

Unions21 focus group research showed that young people in these jobs believe they have no rights and that the support provided by trade unions is therefore not relevant.<sup>13</sup> Unions21 YouGov survey results show that young workers aged 18–24 are most likely to consult parents or friends outside work or to look on the internet, whereas established

workers aged 45–54 are twice as likely to turn to a union for advice.<sup>14</sup>

There is a need to reach out to unemployed young people and working students so that they do not become the 'never members' of the future. In thinking about how we set about this unions might look at more joint campaigning work with NUS on issues like improved rights for temporary and agency workers and more work on campus with trade union societies. They might look to the example of university outreach programmes: Not everyone will eventually join but the cost of not resourcing them leaves another generation disengaged.

### **The future: Towards a joint NUS/ union card?**

When NUS published its joint report with the TUC, 'All Work and Low Pay' less than 7 percent of full time students were members of a trade union, falling to just 4 percent amongst those aged 18 to 25. As the financial pressures on students increase, NUS is keen to ensure full time employed students are union members and also able to engage with their students' union. We need to think of ways young people can be embraced jointly into the student and trade union movements.

The Unions21 focus groups highlighted costs of subscription as a significant 'repellent factor' and also recorded the confusion young people felt about which union to join, or if they were eligible to join at all. But the young participants suggested NUS could have a unique role in introducing students to trade union membership. Spin-off benefits of union membership were consistently highlighted as a strong potential lever towards joining. Commercial partnerships and relevant product discounts were considered to be highly persuasive because they were understood by young people who value the NUS card.

Part of any new approach to reaching out must involve how we can give more students an opportunity to experience the benefits of union

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12 Streeting W, The Generation Game, Does Age Matter, Unions21 <http://www.unions21.org.uk/download/149>

13 <http://www.unions21.org.uk/download/208>

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14 <http://www.unions21.org.uk/download/152>

membership. In thinking how we set about this the TUC and unions might look at Scotland's Unionlink which started 2005 to provide students with a union card and some of the benefits of membership.<sup>15</sup>

Unions might look to the recently launched Apprentice Card – offering apprentices access to the same benefits and discounts offered through the NUS card, and creating funds for expanded support for apprentices through a new National Society of Apprentices.

The development of a national 'student TUC/union card' could enfranchise a whole generation of young workers at the time they need it most.

As described by Campbell and Prandle earlier in this publication, students can join teaching unions for free, and the chance they remain a union member for the rest of their career is high. We would hope that a 'student TUC/union card' could replicate this success.

Potentially, the majority of Britain's population will have been a member of NUS at some point in their lives and for such a huge number of people to be given the opportunity of trial union membership in future is an inspiring prize.

To create a new generation of engaged student trade unionists, any such initiative needs to be combined with traditional workplace organising – getting bread and butter activities right – ensuring those new members can participate in their branch, that their membership means more than just a card in their wallet, and that interests are taken seriously and represented. Structures need to exist so that their voices can be genuinely heard through the democratic processes of the union, rather than as an afterthought or sideshow.

Young people are facing an incredibly tough time at the moment, and too many do not see unions as relevant to them. Our challenges can, and must, be jointly met.

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15 STUC e-brief Sep 2005 <http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/import/6/e-brief2%20Sept05.pdf>

# Chapter 4

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## **Cllr Richard Watts**

Executive Member for  
Children and Families,  
Islington Council and  
a member of Unite

Of all of the victims of the Tory-led Government's ideologically driven austerity programme young people have probably been the worst hit. For ambitious young people from a deprived background, it is now harder to study, harder to get a job, harder to find a house, harder to find productive things to do and harder to keep out of trouble. It is as if the Government has systematically gone through every area of their life and reduced or removed the help and support they used to enjoy.

This article argues that local authorities and unions have a joint interest in working to protect young people and a partnership between unions and councils would have significant benefits. I propose eight ideas for how this partnership could develop, which are numbered in the article.

Young people have borne the brunt of the Government's cuts. Academic success has been made more difficult because of the introduction of higher tuition fees and the abolition of the Educational Maintenance Allowance. Funding for Further Education has been cut and the funding for Higher Education has been dramatically reduced. At the same time the Future Jobs Fund has been cancelled and cuts to the Connexions Service make getting into work harder. The shrinking of the size of the public sector will also cut off the chance for career advancement for many young people, exacerbated by the economic slow down that the cuts are causing.

Families with older children have been hardest hit by changes to child benefit. The new housing benefit cap will hit families who need larger properties, forcing many of them to move and disrupt education, work and family relationships.

Youth services across the country are being hit hard as local authorities retrench to concentrate on their statutory duties. The grants to Councils to help teenage parents, disrupt gangs, reduce substance abuse, reduce youth crime and support young people with mental health problems have all been cut and un-ring fenced, allowing some authorities to stop them altogether. Despite the Government's rhetoric about 'early intervention', funding for long-term preventative work has been slashed.

We could be facing another 'lost generation' of young people who never join the workforce or engage with society, similar to that created by Margaret Thatcher's austerity drive in the 1980s. Youth unemployment is at a record high with one in every five young people out of work, rising to a horrific one-in-three young people unemployed in some areas. In Islington, around four out of every ten children live in a household where no-one works. Many young people in places like Islington are the third generation of their family who has never held down a decent job.

Against this background, it is no real surprise that Unions 21 found that many young people see unions as pointless. Despite some interesting work to develop community unionism, unions are still primarily a part of the workplace, and for many young people the workplace, and its features (such as unions), is utterly irrelevant to them.

The sobering truth for trade unionists like me is that young people are getting hammered but, the research suggests, simply do not think that trade unions can be of any help to them.

Progressive local councils are working to try to support young people, despite the Government's cuts unfairly hitting the most deprived areas hardest. A partnership between local authorities and trade unions to support young people into work can both show that unions can make a positive difference to young people and establish a loyalty from those that they help.

The key challenges that local authorities face in getting young people established in work are:

- ▶ Getting young people ready for the workplace
- ▶ Breaking down barriers to work
- ▶ Turning jobs into careers
- ▶ Protecting services for young people

Unions have an opportunity to show their relevance to young people not just through effective representation but by using their experience, networks and skills to tackle each one of these challenges:

## Getting young people ready for the workplace

The major challenge faced in getting many young people from workless homes into jobs is that they lack the knowledge of how to behave in the workplace that others take for granted. Basic skills such as customer service, conflict resolution and communicating may not come easily. Although it sounds obvious, if no-one tells a young person that they have to turn up to work on time and in appropriate clothing every day then how do they learn? Other problems are caused by a young person being the only worker in their household; for example, one young person in Islington gave up their first job because his Dad threatened to throw him out of home because “his blinking alarm clock keeps waking me up”. Except he didn't use the word “blinking”.

- 1) **Union Mentors:** Unions have, in their ranks of officials, a large number of people who are skilled at negotiating for their members. Could unions use this resource of people to appoint mentors for young people new to the workplace? These mentors can both teach young people the unwritten rules of the workplace and help negotiate difficulties either with employers or family members that they may face as a result of breaking the cycle of worklessness. Mentoring is a proven way of supporting young people into work and unions can use this successful technique to build relationships with young people.
- 2) **Union reps working with young people:** Unions could also train more workplace reps to understand the specific challenges faced by young people new to the workplace and TUC Education courses currently include help on ways of communicating with, and organising, young people. Representing young people who have issues with timekeeping can be difficult and reps can both try to protect their young member's job while also making clear to their members what is expected of them so expanding this training programme is important. Many employers are reluctant to take the risk

of employing young people from a difficult background and it would help build confidence if a union rep was there to help manage the process of integration into the workplace.

## Breaking down barriers to work

The euphemism that many people are “a long way away from the workplace” is common when discussing worklessness. Translated into English this means that many young people face multiple difficulties finding a job. Alongside the issue of many young people's lack of readiness for work, a range of other barriers exist that stop young people getting into work.

- 3) **Union Childcare:** For young parents, childcare is the key barrier. Research by Usdaw has found that most childcare is expensive and designed around the needs of people working nine to five, rather than the more unorthodox hours needed for many entry-level jobs in sectors like retail and catering. Unions and councils working together to provide affordable and flexible childcare could be a viable way of increasing childcare aimed at supporting people with relatively low paid jobs. Councils can provide organisation, venues, support with safeguarding and trained staff. Unions can provide the reliable stream of users that any childcare provider needs. By sharing the costs between the Council, union and parents childcare can be made affordable for all three.
- 4) **Union Careers Advice:** Despite strong opposition from unions led by Unison careers advice has been decimated by the Tory-led Government. There have been massive Government cuts to the Connexions Service and its promised replacement turns out only to be a website and phone line that offers little personalised support. Many young people will not get the advice they need about what jobs and education opportunities are available or what kind of qualifications they need to get into certain areas of work. A number of different voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises are beginning to fill the void but

the coverage is patchy. For example, Future First builds a group of alumni around a school who can advise its students and provide opportunities for them. Unions can provide similar support where members can advise young people on what it takes to get into a particular field of work. Unions could even adopt a school and work with its students to help them into careers and give them access to experienced workers and good employers, building their work with the Employment and Education Taskforce. Similarly, Union Learning Reps could advise young people not in unions on the availability and value of work-based learning courses. All of these ideas would show young people unions can be of practical help to them.

### Turning jobs into careers

Once young people are in work it can be a major challenge to keep them there. Many young people start in relatively low paid jobs but then do not progress and fall out of the labour market after a few years. Supporting them with continued training and education is vital if an entry level job is to become the start of a career that allows a young person to develop and fulfil their potential. This is a major plank of union learning. Many unions are finding that young people are keen to join and become active once they realise the help that unions can give them to get more and better training from their employers.

**5) Union apprenticeships:** Unions can play a key role in supporting and even creating apprenticeships. Unionlearn (the TUCs Learning and Skills arm that supports unions' own work on learning) is working with unions to help persuade employers to create more apprenticeships. Last year this resulted in over 1,500 new apprenticeships.

**6) Supporting learning in the workplace:** The work of Unionlearn and workplace Union Learning Reps have given trade unions a wealth of experience in supporting people to learn in the workplace. Unions are already building up the learning services they offer to members, as well as persuading employers to invest more,

and more fairly, in training. With massive cuts to FE colleges blocking traditional routes to learning for many young people, this role has never been more important.

**7) Unions supporting wider learning:** The union movement could build on the current work in some unions to sponsor courses for young members, providing help with fees for higher level vocational qualifications such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Foundation degrees. Similar to corporate sponsorship of students, unions could ask for a commitment to a length of membership or a level of activism in return for a bursary. More affordable would be for unions to negotiate with employers and broker agreements with Colleges and Universities to provide courses and continual professional development for their members, paid for by the employer.

### Protecting services for young people

Getting young people into work is vital but only part of the picture. Young people need a range of other services, from positive things to do to support and advice if they are getting into trouble. Services for young people have been hit very badly by the Government's cuts, including those funded through local councils. It is right and proper that unions should fight for their members affected by cuts and some Councils have managed the cuts imposed upon them in an appalling way. Tory authorities like Bromley have cut most of their children's centres while Southampton has sacked all its staff and forced them to reapply for their jobs. Unions are right to stand up for their members against such cuts.

**8) Support members to reform youth services.** However, unions and Labour councils should be working together to save services and protect jobs. This will mean delivering services in new ways and asks unions to take a constructive approach to new ideas that are in the public interest. I've been struck by how creative front line staff are being in developing ideas that save money while continuing to serve the public. For example, union members in a number of local councils such as Lambeth are

# Case study

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## **Jack Hopkins**

A Councillor in the  
Borough of Lambeth

## Apprentices in Lambeth

The 'Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea' Opportunity Area is the second biggest regeneration area after the Olympics, bringing 16,000 new homes and 25,000 new jobs, a tube extension, the American Embassy and a range of other skyscrapers, completely changing the face of an area. With Lambeth College, one of the Country's leading Further Education Colleges for construction training, there is a huge opportunity to get apprenticeships and work placements for local young people.

The local partnership between Lambeth College, the Council and the employers has gone from strength to strength and we are already well on track to surpass the 100 apprenticeships in 100 days challenge we set ourselves (although not all of these are in construction). As a union member I wanted to make sure the unions could get involved and for my young people, going off into the world of work for the first time, there was clarity about their rights and where they could go for support.

My first problem was that they were confused about which union to join – most of the students study a range of things and do not know what industry they will end up in. The second is that unions are generally organised around the workplace which meant that it was hit and miss whether individual students joined a union, mostly dependent on whether they worked closely with a rep. The third was the subs needed to be a union member, considering an apprentice can get paid as low as £2.50 an hour. Now with the Educational Maintenance Allowance withdrawn, rates were for many I spoke too, a leap of faith too far.

I approached UNITE, the GMB and UCATT as each has a stake in construction and trades industry. Each had a different story to tell and each a different approach, all were happy to help. Some had programmes for apprentices; one worked in a nearby FE College, and would be willing to visit the one in my area if I organised it. However there was no strategy to coordinate efforts locally to organise young people, something I felt was needed to establish the next generation of trade unionists.

From my experience in Lambeth, I see the potential for unions to organise more successfully where their reps and paid officials are given the freedom and resources to adapt their approach to local circumstances. In our case, a plan that grasped the opportunity of new jobs being created, targeted organising to a location outside the workplace when there wasn't a strong local rep (in this case the college), and waived subs for an initial period, could have made the difference.

Lastly, I support the argument made elsewhere in this publication for a 'young persons' TUC/ union card', young people don't generally know where they want to work, so why would they join a specific union? Membership needs to follow young people wherever they work and keep them trade unionists for life.

developing cooperatives or trusts to deliver services for young people that will be able to secure charitable funding to top-up local authority spending, protecting services and jobs. These people need help and support to develop and run these new kinds of services and ensure that the right values are kept at the heart of service delivery.

The research evidence about young people's attitudes to unions is concerning. If trade unions are going to reverse the long term reduction in their membership and influence then winning a new generation of members is self-evidently vital. I have outlined a number of ideas that will allow unions to both play a key role in avoiding another lost generation of young people, while allowing them to prove their worth to young people. Research for Unionlearn suggests that young people are keen to engage with unions if they believe they will benefit from it. After all, the loyalty a union will buy from a young person if it helps them into work and develops their career will guarantee a member for life.



# Unions21

## INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTER APPLICATION

Unions 21 is a progressive 'think tank' which exists to provide an open space for debate on the key challenges for unions and the world of work. We are funded by contributions from trade unions and those who work with trade unions and we work through publications, meetings, conferences and seminars with politicians, academics and the media as well as trade unionists. Supporters come from across employment sectors in the UK and include more than 20 trade unions, both TUC-affiliated and non-affiliated, with a combined membership of 1.5 million members.

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