

24th September 2015 - TEEU to call one day National Strike in Manufacturing Industry

The Technical Engineering and Electrical Union is in the process of serving notice of a one day national strike for November 2nd on manufacturing plants across the country where employers are refusing to pay student service charges for apprentices attending Institutes of Technology. These charges range from €913 to €2,750. The vast majority of apprentices only attend ITs on a part time basis and rarely use the services concerned.

"The TEEU has contacted IBEC on a number of occasions in an effort to address this issue", the union's General Secretary Eamon Devoy said today. "However, it has failed to engage on behalf of its members and consequently no resolution has been found.

"Not only are apprentices being asked to pay for services they do not use, as a cynical money raising device by the institutes, but the latter have introduced a ten per cent late payment fee, further adding to the burden of these very low paid workers, some of whom are the only breadwinners in their families."

Current legislation states that when the training authority provides courses, facilities or services for apprentices, any fees shall be payable by, and only by, the employer. Unfortunately many employers are refusing to pay this training levy, citing other payments they already make to the National Training Fund.

"Discussions between the TEEU and the Department of Education have failed to offset these charges, which were recently imposed by the Government through the Institutes of Technology nationwide", Mr Devoy added. "They are due to increase again by up to 40 per cent and fly in the face of the European wide Youth Guarantee Scheme to combat youth unemployment. They are effectively a tax on the training and consequently employment opportunities of young people."

If the dispute is not resolved by November 2nd, a one day stoppage will take place at all those companies which have failed to pay the charges. Mr Devoy has written to IBEC and the employers concerned to establish which firms are prepared to pay the student service charges. Any employer who does so will be exempted from industrial action.

Eamon Devoy, General Secretary. September 24th, 2015

TEEU plans major pay offensive and national strike to end apprenticeship levy

April 26th, 2015

The National Executive Council of the 40,000 strong Technical, Engineering & Electrical Union (TEEU) has decided to present an immediate five per cent pay claim on behalf of members in the Mechanical and Electrical Contracting Industries to the employers. It is also planning to call a one day national strike to have the levy on apprentices removed. The NEC took these decisions after condemning the Government's failure to implement the long awaited legislation to replace the Registered Employment Agreements system struck down by the Supreme Court in May 2013, and its failure to deliver on Collective Bargaining promised in the 2011 Programme for Government.

"The absence of new structures to facilitate pay negotiations in sectors such as construction and mechanical and electrical contracting, as well as the lack of protection for workers seeking union representation in other sectors is causing a massive build up of anger and frustration among workers who see themselves excluded from the boost in profits employers are enjoying as the recession ends", TEEU General Secretary Eamon Devoy said after the meeting.

He added that members were angry that the Student Services Charge on apprenticeships, introduced by the Government in the 2014 had not been removed. The rates are as high as €2,650 per course in some instances and had caused severe hardship, preventing some apprentices from completing their courses.

“Such a tax on Vocational Education is outrageous. Apprentices are employees not students, and are amongst the lowest paid employees in the state. Many of them are contracted to work below the national minimum wage level in order to acquire their qualifications. Now they are having this additional tax imposed on them, which will prevent many from completing their courses and blight their career prospects.

“Ironically this flies in the face of the Government’s own Youth Guarantee Programme, which is a major part of its strategy for getting young people upskilled and into the workforce with sustainable, high value added jobs. This is vital if we are to tackle one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe. The Government’s lack of foresight is a disgrace and if the present levy is left in place it will lead to industrial turmoil.”

The TEEU’s ‘Axe the Tax Campaign’ to end the apprenticeship levy has the support of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Initially a one day strike is planned for June. If it goes ahead it could have serious implications for the economy as a whole, particularly in the energy and manufacturing sectors. However Mr Devoy said that companies which are paying the levy on behalf of apprentices will be exempted from industrial action.

The TEEU has written to IBEC, the Construction Industry Federation and the Government in its capacity as an employer seeking meetings to discuss a resolution to this dispute. Only the CIF has so far responded and a meeting has been arranged for tomorrow (Monday).

23rd April 2014 OECD Report Shows Government wrong to impose levy on Apprentices says TEEU

The Technical Engineering and Electrical Union has welcomed the report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development assessing the Government’s Action Plan for Jobs, particularly its warning that more must be done to tackle youth unemployment. TEEU General Secretary Eamon Devoy said today that, “A major example of the lack of joined up thinking in this area is the continuing failure of the Government to remove student charges on young apprentices attending training modules at Third Level colleges.

“The charges can range from €833 to €1,433 and are a major imposition on these young workers, who earn less than the minimum wage starting off. In many cases it is preventing them from completing their courses and entering the workforce to achieve their full potential, or seek decent employment abroad. These charges fly in the face of the concept of a Youth Guarantee and are seen by all as a tax on training. No other European Country levies this tax on young workers or Apprentices.

“We met with the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn in early March through the good offices of Emer Costello MEP but talks with his officials have not progressed very far. The levy being imposed on apprentices is only worth €1.6 million and would be repaid many times over to the exchequer if these young workers were facilitated in completing their training and allowed to enter the workforce as fully qualified craft workers.”

Emer Costello has called on the Minister to reopen negotiations with the Union. “Now is not the time to put further hurdles in the way of young workers. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships, launched in July 2013, offers Ireland the chance to improve our apprenticeship system”, she said. “So does the Erasmus+ programme, which promotes exchange opportunities for up to 100,000 VET (Vocational Educational Training) students

across Europe each year.

"In this regard, I very much welcome the Apprenticeship Review launched by Ruairi Quinn in January, which rightly places the reform of Ireland's system within the context of these wider European developments. But I am very concerned about the introduction of fees for apprentices, which is counter-productive and fully support the TEEU campaign."

A recent Government 'Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland' stated that Ireland should fully capitalise on the availability of EU Structural Funds and Youth Guarantee funds to support the developments advocated in this report, learning from and contributing to best practice in Europe

Mr Devoy pointed out that, "The levy was removed from these apprentices in 2004 because it was accepted that they were not able to avail of the services they were being charged for in third level colleges, that they were not students but employees and were not eligible for student grants. I am now calling on the Minister, in the light of the OECD report to expedite the removal of this levy, if necessary in consultation with his colleague the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Employment, Richard Bruton."

There are currently 7,500 apprentices in training, many of whom face these charges.

Talks begin between Department of Education and TEEU over Student Service Charges for Apprentices (4th March , 2014)

The Department of Education and Skills is to enter talks with the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union to resolve the current dispute over charging apprentices for student services at third level colleges. This follows a meeting between TEEU General Secretary Eamon Devoy and the Minister Ruairi Quinn. Dublin MEP Emer Costello also attended the meeting after making representations to the Minister on behalf of apprentices along with Brian Nolan, the TEEU construction organiser.

After the meeting Mr Devoy said he was "hopeful that the anomaly can be removed whereby apprentices can be charged fees of over €1,400 a year for student services they cannot avail of, while at the same time they are being denied access to various grants that students receive. We have agreed to hold a series of meetings with the Department to find a solution to the problem."

He said the union appreciated the Minister's positive approach to the issue but it was still recommending to apprentices that they do not pay the charges while discussions continue. He added that the Minister would make himself available for further involvement in the discussions if required.

Labour MEP Emer Costello said she was "pleased that I was able to facilitate the TEEU in meeting with Ruairi Quinn this afternoon. This is an important issue for the young people involved. I am glad progress was made at today's meeting and I will continue to work with the Minister and the TEEU in finding a satisfactory outcome to this dispute."

The dispute began in January when the TEEU recommended to apprenticeship members that they not pay the fees. These have risen dramatically in recent years from an initial baseline of €50 to over €1,400 in some cases. Apprentices will not receive their qualifications until outstanding fees are paid. This in turn denies them access to work either at home or abroad.