A WOMAN’S PLACE IS IN THE

A BOOKLET FOR WOMEN WORKING IN THE POSTAL INDUSTRY. PRODUCED BY THE POSTAL DEPARTMENT.
A WOMAN’S PLACE IS IN THE CWU

In the postal sector of the Communication Workers Union it would be fair comment to say that the majority of the workforce is male. There are some exceptions to this but in the sector as a whole this is the case.

Does this mean that there is no place for women in the CWU? No, it most certainly does not.

Women have a right to have their views and issues raised at every level of the organisation, and they do, but we need more women to play an active role in the union to ensure that this continues to happen.

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE POSTAL SECTOR

The first woman to be elected to what is now the Postal Executive (PE) was Jean Cooper; Jean was elected in 1992 but only served on the executive for a short period of time, as she left the business.

Next to be elected was Linda Roy in 1995 who served on the PE until 2002. In 2008, Linda was elected as Assistant Secretary Equal Opportunities.


Following that in 2002 two women were elected to the PE Jane Loftus and Kath Cronin. Kath served for a couple of years before leaving the business and moving on to pastures new.

Jane Loftus was elected to the position of Chair of the Postal Executive in 2007 and was the first woman to hold that position.

In 2005, Lesley McLean (who has now left), was elected to the PE, followed by Katrina Quirke in 2008 and Shelley Banbury joined the PE in 2014. All told there are now three women on the PE.

As you can see we do have some extremely capable women representing the CWU at national level.

Whilst that is good news for the women within the CWU there is still much to do, we need to ensure that we have women playing a role at every level of union, from the shop floor to field officials and on to the Executive.

However not every woman wants to operate at that level and it is not compulsory for women to do so.
INVOLVEMENT IN THE CWU IS WHATEVER YOU WANT IT TO BE

You will often hear Representatives in the CWU referring to the union position they hold and what their responsibilities are, however being active in the CWU does not mean that you have to hold a formal position if that is not what you want to do.

Being active is exactly whatever you want it be, for example, if there are a number of women in your office, unit, depot then you could set up a committee to discuss women’s issues and feed them in to the relevant Rep for action.

You could develop a CWU role in line with the rules of union and have a women’s representative to put forward the views of women at every opportunity within your branch.

The CWU is always looking for people to assist at all levels of the union; it could be as simple as putting up notices in your local office, unit, depot. Attending local CWU meetings, getting to know your Representatives and finding out what you can do to help out. Talk to other women in your workplace who are not members of the union and encourage them to join.

Being an active member offers the opportunity to meet other female members and officers who support the union.

Everyone who is involved with the CWU doesn’t come complete with an extensive knowledge of the union or indeed the business they work for. This is something which is developed over time by Education and Training courses or simply from just being interested. Taking advantage of Union Learning Courses can enable women to move on with their careers, develop new life skills or pursue a new interest.

Health and Safety. The CWU recognises that women face different Health and Safety issues and challenges, the Education and Training Department offers specific courses for women members and reps, to assist you in dealing with issues and campaigning to raise awareness.

REGIONAL WOMEN’S COMMITTEES

Each region in the CWU has a Women’s Committee. The women who attend the committee discuss all sorts of issues which affect women on a day to day basis not just in the workplace but in wider society. They also campaign on a range of issues. This committee is an excellent way for women to find out more about how the women’s movement in the CWU is developing.
**WOMEN’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

The Women’s Advisory Committee (WAC) is made up of women who have been elected to sit on that body. The WAC discusses national issues affecting women both in the workplace and wider society. The WAC is run by the Equal Opportunities Department. Any female CWU member can attend the WAC meeting as an observer, if you are interested in doing this – please contact your Branch Secretary.

As of August 2014 17.2% of CWU members in the Postal Section of the CWU are women. Whilst women do not want to take over – we do need to have our gender reflected in the CWU and our issues taken seriously.

CWU women need to look to the future – look at becoming involved – who knows the first female CWU General Secretary could be amongst us.

**CASE STUDY 1**

The approach I used to getting the female members involved in a women’s committee was straight forward, in the sense that I asked all the women working in the office to attend a meeting and asked them if they had any issues or required information in relation to their gender and their work, as a result meetings took place each month and I acted as a facilitator and only attended the meetings on request.

Information on attendance and child care was made available, female managers in attendance interviews, as well as female Reps trained in conduct are some of the issues that came out of the meetings. All these issues I then raised with the management locally and reached agreement on the approach that would be taken locally.

This worked well as the members could see results from the meetings, I would normally update the Women’s Committee at the very start of the monthly meeting then leave and wait to be told if they wished me to intervene on any issues.

After three meetings, I identified one of the women as a potential Women’s Officer, she has subsequently taken up that role and is trained on Royal Mail processes.

However the female members feel that they only need to call a meeting if an issue comes up and did not wish to just meet every month, this is disappointing and I am currently working with the Women’s Officer to reinvigorate the meetings and include a wider range of subject matter.

On the plus side it did strengthen the link with the union and it ultimately helped me recruit a new activist. This is from a male Branch Secretary who could see the benefit of having women involved in the CWU.
CASE STUDY 2: WOMEN’S OFFICER(S)

BACKGROUND
In the run up to the last Branch elections in November 2012, we became aware that there was some interest in the position of Women’s Officer.

We then found out that the interest came from members in different functions, and having spoken to the candidates, I actively encouraged them to stand for the position. At the close of nominations, we received three for the position, one each from Delivery, Distribution, and Processing.

I then pitched the idea to the Branch Officials and Committee that rather than hold an election, we simply run with three Women’s Officers (one from each function). The precedent had been set two years earlier with our election of Youth Officer, when we received three nominations and then agreed all three, again one from each function.

STRUCTURE
All Reps in the Branch are invited to the monthly Branch Committee meeting, and therefore all 3 Women’s and Youth Officers are invited to attend.

We have a monthly Branch Officials meeting, where ONE of the Women’s and Youth Officers attend. This is done on a rotational basis, with substitution allowed if someone is unable to attend.

We have yet to determine delegations to Women’s Conference (which may well cause a headache); and delegations to Annual Conference (although yet to be agreed) would be on a rotational basis, so that one Women’s Officer attends each year.

PROPORTIONALITY
We believe the election of new Reps generally breeds interest in the CWU in those workplaces, irrespective of gender. It is therefore difficult to quantify the effect of having three Women’s Officers as opposed to one.

However, it is noticeable that a recent Unit Rep vacancy in our largest Delivery office has been filled by a woman, which also happens to be the office from which our Woman’s Officer Delivery comes from.

This is also from a male Branch Secretary who is very proactive in promoting women within the CWU.
CASE STUDY 3: WOMEN’S COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

My first women’s committee was set up in the National Distribution Hub we put a notice on the board briefly detailing that we were setting up a women’s committee and wanted women to come forward a stipulation was that you had to be a CWU member through the notice board advert not a lot of women got in touch.

I felt the best way to move forward with the committee was to have somebody from Royal Mail (manager) to jointly run the committee with myself as this would help with any problems that may arise such as release.

The committee ran for over a year and Linda Roy came to the first meeting it was a good way for me to link with women from a unit I did not work in. Unfortunately, I had a disagreement with the manager who sat on the committee from Royal Mail’s side. This disagreement was nothing to do with the committee it was regarding a case with a female member in the unit and because of the breakdown between us the committee slowly fell apart.

SMMC WOMEN’S COMMITTEE (CURRENT)

Once we went into South Midlands Mail Centre which took in three areas: Northampton, Coventry & Milton Keynes. I felt the time was right to give a women’s committee another try and the fact that the Mail Centre manager at the time was a woman definitely made me think we could build a base for something stronger and more established.

Because of the experience I had before it was imperative for me to set the committee up around an agreement, one which sanctioned release especially for the night shift as release and committees is a constant argument. The second aim I had for the agreement was that whether I left my role or the Mail Centre manager or lead for the Royal Mail side left the committee it would still run and be a standalone committee and therefore it would never be under threat.

For further information since the committee was set up we have had 2 further Mail Centre managers one of which did not agree with the committee or the release but the agreement stood the test of time and we are still up and running.

The approach was completely different we wrote to every female member with a copy of the agreement we did team briefs and when we wrote out we sent out some key questions for women to fill in who wished to sit on the committee such as what ideas would you like to see achieved through the committee and what they thought that could be gained through sitting on the committee etc. I felt that if you couldn’t be
bothered to answer some key questions to become involved you wouldn’t be the right person for the committee.

This committee has always been jointly run with Royal Mail and the CWU at SMMC as we felt regardless of title when you enter the room for the committee you are a woman first and foremost and this approach has worked. Obviously due to operational needs the female managers have lessened over time but myself and the main lead have remained.

We now have an established committee which has now been running for over a year. I feel the biggest challenge now is getting women motivated and start moving the committee forward through their own initiatives.

Kate Hudson
South Midlands Postal Branch
We have agreed that there would be real value in setting up a Women’s Committee at South Midlands Mail Centre.

The aim of the Committee will be to promote women’s issues within the workplace and give a voice to an under-represented part of the workforce.

We will share more details about the actual purpose and structure of the committee at WTLL sessions over the coming weeks, but the plan is that it will meet four times a year and one of these meetings would be a meeting to join up the women’s committees from other Royal Mail units in the South Midlands area. As well as attending the meetings, we would like to invite the members to adopt the mantle of ‘advisor’ on their shift, championing women’s issues and being a point of contact should one be necessary.

We would like to invite two female frontline OPG’s from each shift and up to the same number of female managers to sit on the Committee which will be jointly chaired and co-ordinated by Kate Hudson (CWU Women’s Officer) and Anna Sargent (MCM). As a first step to filling these positions, we will be seeking expressions of interest over the coming weeks via a WTLL session on your shift, so watch this space if this is something you think you might like to get involved in. Recognising the difficulties of attending sessions like this when you are on nights, full shift release will be given to the night shift members to attend and to be able to fully participate.

One of the joint aims of the CWU Women’s Officer and the MCM as part of this agreement is to bring women through and to promote and encourage women to participate. Our aspiration is that we help to enable all women at South Midlands Mail Centre to achieve their full potential, wherever that may take them. Joint development will play an important role as will providing a support network for women to progress. To help achieve this it has been agreed that a CWU Women’s Advisor will be situated on each shift. As a link to the CWU Women’s Officer they will not be a CWU shift representative but will be able to act in an advisory capacity and a liaison between the CWU Women’s Officer and the Mail Centre.

We look forward to appointing members and convening the first meeting. There is much to be done and achieved together!

Kate Hudson
CWU Women’s Officer
29 MARCH 2012

Anna Sargent
SMMC Plant Manager, Royal Mail

29 MARCH 2012
Q1: How long have you been active in the CWU?
I have been an activist of the CWU for 13 years.

Q2: What was it that made you want to play a part in the CWU?
I fell into the role of representation. It wasn’t something I had planned to do. My Unit rep was going on leave and he asked me to fill in for him, so it just went from there really. I guess it was because I like things to be done fairly. Working in a male dominated environment can be difficult being a woman. I was 1 of 3 women working in an office of 60 men, so I recognised early on that women’s voices can get lost. I felt I needed to get involved in the CWU as there was no visual representation of women in my office. Some issues you just don’t feel comfortable talking about with the opposite sex.

Q3: Tell me what positions you hold in the CWU?
I currently hold the Area Health and Safety Reps role, Women’s Officer and rehabilitation officers position for the West London Postal Branch. I also sit on the Women’s Advisory Committee (WAC).

Q4: Have any barriers been put in your way to becoming active?
I’ve only really faced one barrier which happened years ago. I was standing for the Area Safety Reps position. At the time I was pregnant with my first child and was contemplating standing down from the election because I was going to be a new mum. I was approached one day by a now, ex-senior branch representative and told I could not stand for the position because I was pregnant and would be taking maternity leave shortly. I was outraged and disgusted. The comment made up my mind for me and gave me the drive to just go for it. Needless to say, I won the election and have now held the position of ASR for nine years. Thankfully, I have a very supportive branch, which dealt with this matter speedily and have been supportive ever since. Anything I want to stand for or wish to pursue they are always happy to support and encourage me. However I am aware that there are other women who are not as fortunate as me and face many barriers, it’s a bit of a postcode lottery, which is why we have women’s committees to identify the barriers, so we can tackle them and smash them down.
Q5: What advice would you give to women wanting to be more involved with the CWU?

I would advise women who want to get involved to talk to some of the women on the Regional and Advisory Committees about how to become more involved (details can be found on the CWU website). I think women sometimes doubt themselves and hold themselves back. I want to tell women to not doubt themselves and their capabilities and just go for it. It doesn’t matter how much time you can commit to trade union work, you can do as little or as much as you want, even if it’s just a case of expressing opinions and ideas. The CWU has been a second family to me, I have made so many friends and they have so much to offer activists. I left school with little education, the CWU have given me the opportunities to gain qualifications I would have never dreamt of achieving. Not only have I gained qualifications at GCSE and A level, I am now currently studying for a BA Hons degree through the CWU scholarship scheme. You wouldn’t get that education free anywhere!

Q6: Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

I am not the type of person to have a five year plan. I am not a career opportunist. I just know the difference between what’s right and what’s wrong. I stick by the union’s principles of equality, fairness and respect and if it means me having to step up to another level in the union to enforce these principles, then I have no problem doing this. If I have to break through ceilings to bring other women and minority groups through, then pass me a hammer. Women and minority group’s interests are just as important as anyone else’s and there must be a level platform for our member’s voices to be heard.

Q7: If you could change one thing in the CWU what would it be and why?

I would love to see a union that is reflective of its membership at every level, especially in industrial and mainstream representation. Not many women hold IR positions and I would love to see more change here. We need to remind ourselves of the core objectives of what unions do – They raise workers interests and improve pay, terms and conditions. It is reported that minority groups now make up greater proportions of front line membership. The only way the CWU can really highlight what the workers interests are, is by having a union that is reflective of its members – “every voice counts”.

The CWU welcome all women who would like to be more active – to find out more please contact:

Lynn Browne email: lbrowne@cwu.org
M: 07753 776364 T: 020 8971 7283
The TUC (Trade Union Congress) was established 146 years ago this year. Francis O’Grady became the first woman General Secretary in late 2012, an astounding 144 years before a woman achieved that position. When interviewed by the Observer in 2014 she said “If all you see at the top is men, that means when you come across a woman further down the chain, you don’t have to show her respect because in your mind, she’s not going anywhere. If I get that kind of reaction, I give them a glare, which means, “Back off!”. But that’s a very male way to behave and why should I have to do that?”. On being appointed as the first woman General Secretary of the TUC, Francis said: “We like to take our time”.

Here is an extract from the same article:

During the Second World War, most women were at work against the wishes of the trade unions. Traditionally, unions argued that men needed to earn a “family wage” sufficient to keep a wife and children and this should not be undercut by women claiming male skilled jobs and equal pay; a woman’s place was in the home. Employment was – and still often is – segregated. Men then were employed in heavy industry, women in the low paid business of care, secretarial and admin work in the service sector.

Trade unions are an important component in a democratic society, but for decades they did not serve women well. Strikes and negotiations were a beer-and-sandwiches job almost exclusively conducted by and for “the brothers”. Meetings were at night, when most women were at home engaged in ironing shirts and childcare. “I’m all right Jack” was the slogan while, with honourable exceptions, the men paid scant attention to the needs of Jill, often the sole breadwinner in the family. The image of the average trade unionist was a white, working-class and blue-collar bloke: male, pale and stale.

Today, the average British trade unionist is a young, degree-educated, white woman working in the professions. Women have become vital to the survival of unions. Research indicates that while black and ethnic minority women are more likely than any other groups to join a union, they are even more severely under represented at leadership level.

The future of the unions is definitely female but, in 10 years time, will the sisters rising up have been neutered – or will their fire still be burning bright?. The future is in our hands, let’s take on that challenge: Educate, Agitate, Organise!
A WOMAN’S PLACE IS IN THE
HERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS TO BUILD UP WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE CWU

➤ Shifting the balance of power in the workplace

There’s no doubt that the environment in which trade unions find themselves has changed dramatically in the past decade and will continue to change – it’s a moving feast. So for example, the economic situation that we’re currently experiencing could very well endanger progress towards equality. So we need to make sure that when it comes to collective bargaining we have strong workplace density and a good level of organisation so that we can mobilise our members. In order to be able to do that we need to have...

➤ High levels of active members

There is no substitute for getting more members involved. Educating lay members on how unions work and how we can work together to improve Terms and Conditions – it’s about our members understanding they have a role to play in all of this – and it gives our members ownership of union campaigns. So it’s doing away the notion that the union is a 3rd party. It ties our members in to our successes as well as our failures.
Winning on issues for the members collectively

Mobilising members around issues keeps the union strong and vibrant at a local level and helps to remove the servicing culture whereby members join out of self interest and instead join because of strong collective solidarity.

Organising can take many different forms:

Workplace Organising

Organising is not a one size fits all – we have to adapt our strategies to suit our needs.

One of the big issues that we face in RM DOs is the Industrial Relations framework agreement – which stipulates that only one person, i.e. the Rep, can interface with the DOM – a lot of our members have taken a step back and built up more of a reliance on their Reps, who are often left feeling isolated and over worked. So that’s why we have set up the ‘Meeting the Challenge Project’ to build a committee structure in DOs to help support Reps in the workplace.

So when we talk about ‘Building the CWU’ there are three key things that sit at the heart of any campaign and they are:

Mapping the workforce

You’ve probably all come across mapping and know what it is but just in case you haven’t – mapping is a strategic tool that we use to help us plan and provide us with a picture of the areas that we need to focus attention on when recruiting members/generating activists and ensuring there are union contacts across all parts of the business.

This information gives us an accurate picture of the type of workplace we are dealing with and directs our organising and recruitment activity.

If you haven’t seen a map it is a very good visual tool-it gives you a breakdown of the workplace and members and helps us to detect patterns.

Setting up workplace committees

Anybody can be involved in the committee and it is about sharing responsibility – the idea is no task is too small – it’s about getting people involved because all members have a role to play in our success, but we need to find the right people when it comes to recruitment and encouraging other members to get involved.

And again that’s where the mapping can come in very handy, because quite often the members will tell us who they would like to see active on the committee.
➤ **Mobilising around issues**

This is looking at day to day local issues that directly affect people on the ground. The issues can be something small and often quite easy to fix – the main thing is that it is deeply felt, widely felt and winnable. For example, the vending machine not working – can be a real gripe for people.

➤ **Mapping workplace in terms of male/female ratios**

It’s not just about identifying non-members, mapping accurately tells us how many women we have in any given workplace, whether they are agency, part-time, what hours or shift patterns they work etc. So it’s very useful in terms of detailed data analysis that we wouldn’t have otherwise.

➤ **Highlights level of proportional representation at committee/ Rep level**

We want our structures to represent the workers we represent and again this absolutely tells us how well we’re doing in terms of getting more women involved.

➤ **Monitoring data – attendance at meetings etc. Helps with identifying practical barriers from preventing members from getting involved**

We can extend our maps to include all kinds of information – so for example membership participation, whether that’s getting involved in a collective action or attending meetings and it makes us think much more about practical barriers that may prevent women from coming along or getting involved.

➤ **Involves women in targeted recruitment initiatives**

Because mapping is about taking a strategic approach, we look for the best and most suitable person to speak to non-members in their workplace. So we’ll actively go out and ask more women to get involved as opposed to waiting for people to put themselves forward or to let somebody else do it – who may not be the best person for the job.
WORKPLACE COMMITTEES

➤ Provide flexible options for involvement

Women often refuse to take up Reps roles because they’re unsure about whether they can dedicate the time needed for the role. The reality of it is women in the main still have the bulk of additional home and caring responsibilities.

➤ Address women’s true priorities in the workplace

Having women actively involved means that issues that might not otherwise come up because women don’t want to raise them in case they seem insignificant or because they are gender specific, at least this gives them a forum to discuss these matters. The committees are designed to be representative – so if only 30% of your workforce is women issues might fall off the agenda because it’s seen as a minority concern.

➤ Highlight the importance of women’s contribution

Because we don’t have many role models in the movement, it’s important that at grass roots level we actively seek out women’s views and welcome their contribution as positive and worthwhile.

➤ Provide opportunities for women to strategise together

It’s also about providing a safe environment for women to come together and to help plan and implement strategy in their workplace. We often talk about empowering women and this is a brilliant way to do just that.

➤ Give women more experience so they can take on formal roles

We want to get women to take up formal roles within the union and this provides an ideal opportunity to build women’s experience and confidence.

➤ Create women’s networks across the wider union

Being involved in the union in this way allows women to network across sites. Quite often people who take up formal roles are the ones who get involved in the wider union but we want to build a grass roots network to enable more women to get involved and come together.

MOBILISING AROUND ISSUES – SO AGAIN:

➤ Encouraging Women’s integration in trade union activities

It’s obvious, if women are more visibly involved it is more likely to inspire other women to get involved and generate a long-term commitment to the union.
➤ **Puts women’s issues on to the bargaining agenda**

We quite often find that women’s issues are side lined and discussed and debated at women only events – but if we want the employer, and to be honest, the union, to take these matters more seriously we need to get them higher up on the bargaining agenda.

➤ **Helps to build awareness, confidence and organisational skills**

The fact is the old adage ‘male, pale and stale’ is still out there because there is a shortage of women coming through, so by building awareness and developing women’s skills so they have the confidence to get more involved we can start to challenge those types of stereotypes as well.

➤ **Propose more campaigns and materials specific to women’s needs**

Again, it’s about making sure that gender specific issues are discussed and debated, but this also allows us to put forward the woman’s perspective on these issues, and to have a say in how we make the CWU locally and nationally more friendly and supportive of women’s concerns.

➤ **Prepares women for posts of union responsibility**

Placing women in leadership roles within the union promotes women’s activism and establishes respect for female authority. Once we get women into these roles they can serve as role models to other women, which will help to signify the union’s commitment to women’s issues, as well as allowing us to help mentor new female activists coming through.

Why is this important? Well unions are good for women. You’ll quite often hear the statistic that unionised workers earn on average 18% more than non-unionised workers, but for women that gap is actually nearer to 23%.

➤ **A number of international studies have shown that far more women are likely to join when unions better reflect gender diversity across their structures.**

Because it means that women have:

➤ **A range of colleagues who they can speak to and know where to go for confidential help or to discuss workplace issues.**

Not just the one – often – male Rep in their workplace.

➤ **Crucially, as a result of this the CWU wants to increase women participation.**

By the end of 2019 – 30% of Regional & NEC positions to be occupied by women. By the end of 2023 – 25% of National Officer Positions to be occupied by women.
VOTES FOR WOMEN
MILICENT GARRETT FAWCETT

WOMEN'S HEALTH
ELIZABETH GARRETT ANDERSON

FAMILY PLANNING
MARIE STOPES

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION

MIDLAND REGION WOMENS COMMITTEE

WORKING FOR WOMEN ACROSS THE MIDLANDS