Mobilising in contact centres
A CWU TELECOMS & FINANCIAL SERVICES GUIDE
Dear Colleague,

For many workers starting a new job in a contact centre will be their first experience of engaging with a trade union. Of course, encouraging them to join the CWU is a priority but this is only the first step. Engaging these new members and our existing members in the struggle for dignity and respect in the workplace is the key to ensuring we have a strong membership base to combat the many challenges we face in the 21st century.

Contact centre workers can face some of the most difficult working conditions in the country with unsocial hours, low pay and contractual insecurity – contracts that are often temporary or with no guaranteed hours. The environment can be highly pressurised, intense and stressful with workers subjected to increasingly severe performance management regimes.

Our union has been hugely successful, particularly within our recognised sector in securing decent pay, terms and conditions for our contact centre members. Our experience and success is testimony to the fact that we can raise industry standards. However, new challenges are always just round the corner. Issues don’t disappear, they just change on a regular basis as companies seek new and innovative ways to increase profitability at the expense of our members.

This booklet draws on the experience of members and branches on how best to recruit, retain, engage and develop our fellow workers in the ever evolving contact centre industry in both the recognised and non-recognised areas of Telecoms & Financial Services (T&FS). Of course, we are doing well in many areas of organising our members, but to be as strong as we need to be, we need the full support from our branches, workplace representatives, activists and members to meet the challenges ahead.

We look forward to rising to this challenge and working with all of you to implement some of the methods, techniques and ideas outlined in this latest edition in our BTT series of booklets on T&FS Organising.

Yours sincerely,

February 2015

This booklet draws on the experience of members and branches on how best to recruit, retain, engage and develop our fellow workers in the ever evolving contact centre industry (...)

Andy Kerr
Deputy General Secretary, T&FS
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Workers in contact centres make up at least 15% of our Telecoms & Financial Services (T&FS) membership. Members covered by the CWU work in all sorts of contact centres – banking, customer service, technical support, and charity donations to name but a few.

A recent T&FS survey of contact workers in union membership received over 1200 responses and provided us with some enlightening information.

So what did the survey tell us?

- Members, if presented with increased and varied avenues to activity, are more likely to get involved.
- There is a healthy interest in activity from our membership base in both recognised and non-recognised sites.
- While members may not seek or be able to commit to a formal or elected union role, they are willing to contribute to, and participate in, union organising efforts.
- Ensuring we maintain, where possible, access to induction is very important for recruitment at our recognised sites.
- Encouraging one-to-one recruitment at non-recognised sites could significantly increase membership numbers.
There is a desire among members for the T&FS constituency and branches to strike a balance between modern and traditional communication techniques (see survey stats below).

Overall, the results from the members’ survey are telling us that involvement is the key for the T&FS constituency and branches to see success in the future. We need to engage members and suggest the various routes to involvement in the CWU in order to create a vibrant, dynamic and active membership which is the bedrock of organising success.

The results show us that in some cases traditional union involvement may not be the best way to get contact centre workers on board. Organising contact centre workers requires innovation combined with a traditional approach to achieve greater success.

Activity can be short or long term, formal or informal, local or national dependent on the members themselves and to what level they want to take their involvement.

Throughout this booklet we will explore in more detail how to generate involvement by building teams and organising around issues. We will also consider how to maintain involvement by engaging with members and how to create new avenues of involvement for our members to explore.
Within our industrial sector the T&FS constituency has many contact centre organising opportunities available but how do branches and Regional Organising Committees decide which contact centres to organise when there are so many and when we have finite resources?

Clearly if we have members in a centre (a brownfield site) then we have a start, but what if those members do not want to get active, should we then focus our efforts elsewhere?

It may seem a bit harsh but if we have tested members’ interest in activity and they demonstrate no desire to get organised then there is no harm in targeting another site. Before we make any of these decisions there are a number of small steps to take.

**GREENFIELD**

1. **Visit the site**
   - Visit the site you are thinking about organising to check shift patterns/entrances/access etc
   - Turn up at site and simply talk to workers there. The workers’ reaction to union presence will soon tell us if we can pursue some organising and recruitment work there or not
   - From our conversations with workers at the site we can decide what union literature is most appropriate for the first leaflet drop. Membership forms? Issue based information? Branch contact details?
   - Take a look at our resources page in the T&FS section of the CWU website for a range of CWU leaflets and postcards

2. **Test interest**
   - Contact members to establish shifts, good leafleting days, reaction from members
   - Contact members and hold a one-to-one with them to understand if they want to get involved with organising their workplace

3. **First contact**
   - For any number of reasons we may not have paid much attention to workers at a site so we may have to work on re-introducing the union to these members
What is a workplace map?

A map is a representation of a landscape – something we use to get from A to B – and in practice a workplace map is no different. When we create a workplace map we put together a picture of the workplace landscape and plan a route to help us advance from one position to the next. A workplace map can for example, inform what actions we take, what issues we campaign on or what areas we target for recruitment to build our strength or guide us towards recognition. In essence a workplace map of a contact centre is a vital component in helping us to achieve any objectives we might set ourselves.

How to go about mapping

If you are at the very beginning of a mapping exercise in your contact centre, the task can seem quite daunting – hundreds of workers to map, lots of different shift patterns to factor in, and other union work to do. It doesn’t have to be that way.

The key is to start small, one area, one shift, one group of workers. The point is to use the technique and assess to what extent it helps in organising, recruitment and developing members. Here are a few other tips to assist you.

### TIPS

1. **Use information stored at headquarters or online access to membership. Speak to your branch about obtaining information**

   The first thing to do is obtain an up to date membership list. This can form the basis of your mapping spreadsheet and will tell you who has joined the union and who is still to join.

2. **Break down the areas you will map**

   Don’t try to map everything at once. Break your mapping exercise into manageable chunks such as by team, shift or department.

3. **Use your team**

   Get members involved in mapping. For example, send out a short survey to gather member information for your map or ask them to provide names of colleagues in their team or department.

4. **Think about what areas you need to map first**

   Prioritise your mapping intentions. Decide before you start what you will map first, second, third etc. For example, map members/non-members and job titles first, complete this and move onto the likelihood of joining the union. Link your mapping objectives to your plan for leafleting, meetings and doing one-to-ones.

5. **Think about where you can find information**

   Be creative about how you gather information. Obtain lists of names from shift schedules, lottery syndicates and training programmes.

### HOW TO DO IT

- **Use information stored at headquarters or online access to membership. Speak to your branch about obtaining information**

- **Break down the areas you will map**

- **Use your team**

- **Think about what areas you need to map first**

- **Think about where you can find information**
IDENTIFYING NEW ACTIVISTS

Our workplace activists and reps are the most powerful and persuasive means by which we recruit and retain members.

Many of our members don’t join for protection but because they actively want to be involved in creating this change.

The more active members and reps we have, the greater our leverage becomes when trying to create positive change for our members.

It is important when identifying new activists that we look out for key attributes that they have, both as individuals and in their relationships with their co-workers and their employer. It is equally important to understand what we mean by activism and being an active member.

Identifying and engaging with workplace leaders and key persuaders is crucial when trying to strengthen the union in a contact centre. Key tips are:

1. Look out for workers who are not scared to voice an opinion to management.
2. Identify current members who participate in giving the union feedback via surveys and social media.
3. Look out for people who are able to influence and persuade others to become more favourable towards the union.
4. Listen to other members’ impressions of people and their standing in the workplace.

The best way to get members’ involvement is to ask them what their interests are and then see how the skills they possess can support what it is

MEMBERS CAN:

- Distribute union literature
- Ask others to join the union
- Keep a notice board up to date
- Tell people what the union is doing
- Bring a friend to a meeting
- Start a facebook group
- Ask friends what they think about an issue
- Get colleagues to complete a survey or petition
- Provide information on where they work for the workplace map
we are trying to achieve. Even thinking about the terminology we use can be the difference between a member getting more involved or not.

When we consider the myriad of jobs required to ensure the union functions effectively at a local level, most don’t require any training nor huge amounts of time. However, they are all vital to ensuring that the union is seen as an active and relevant part of the workplace.

When identifying new activists key things to remember are:

- Engage with all our members. They want to feel valued and have the opportunity to make a contribution
- Observe members’ behaviours, skills, attitudes, values and personalities
- Encourage members to get involved in campaign activities
- Set small, easily accomplishable tasks to test commitment
- Identify members who are willing to challenge the norm
- Determine to what extent they and their views are respected by their co-workers
- Set members SMART objectives
- Recognise members who can work as part of a team without stifling others
- Allow activists the opportunity to identify their own training needs

SMART objectives

| SPECIFIC | Make sure goals are expressed in terms that everyone can understand. |
| MEASURABLE | Tracking and measuring your progress will be helpful in making sure your campaign is on the right track and letting you know when you need to make changes. |
| AGREED | Make sure the activist buys-in to what needs to be done and that tasks are consistent with the wider campaign. |
| REALISTIC | Don’t bite off more than you can chew. You may run the risk of people becoming disillusioned if progress is too slow. |
| TIME-BOUND | Without a clear timetable our goals become meaningless. Make sure you set a realistic time within which to achieve goals. |
Developing Activists - What’s Right for Them?

There are a variety of useful training courses offered by the CWU that can assist with the development of new activists. Often there is no time to wait until a formal union course is available. Shift patterns can prevent members from going on courses or the lack of a recognition agreement means members simply cannot take a few days off for union training. As such, we need to consider what we do about developing our active members so that they progress at an appropriate pace and to provide as many people as possible with development opportunities.

## Activity

### Mentoring

Mentoring can be formal or informal. Informal mentoring can work by giving regular advice and creating a relationship where a developing activist can come to us comfortably for guidance. Formal mentoring uses a development plan, agreed between both parties, where contact is defined and specific objectives included. Both styles have their merits but the key is to ensure everyone is clear on what they are doing.

### 20-Minute Coaching Sessions

If time is a challenge then short, informal coaching sessions to discuss planned actions and progress can be very effective. In the 20 minutes you can, for example, practise a couple of one-to-one conversations, write and send a mass email to members or maybe update your mapping. Sessions can take place face to face, over the telephone or by using Skype.

### Smart Tasking

SMART tasks should be measured and small enough not to intimidate a new activist but build their confidence. The very nature of SMART tasks make them short-term and therefore easier to complete. See page 7.

### Creating Small Groups of Members (Working Parties and Focus Groups)

Using working parties or focus groups can help achieve our campaign goals and be used to develop activists. Members who have either declared an interest in a specific area of activity or have agreed that they need experience in an area can be placed into smaller more focused team environments. A member can benefit from participating in a compact team and build up confidence by reaching the goals the working party have been tasked with.

### Using Your Local Regional Organising Committee (ROC)

Each CWU region has a T&FS Regional Organising Committee operating within the area. The purpose of the ROC is to discuss organising activities and objectives within T&FS branches and the regions they sit in. This is a good arena for developing members, allowing them to meet, to share ideas, and learn from more experienced colleagues about what their organising objectives can achieve.
IDENTIFYING WORKPLACE ISSUES

Talking to our members and their colleagues is the first step in identifying workplace issues facing contact centre workers.

Some common examples include:
- Lack of respect and dignity
- No input in management and business decisions
- Unfair treatment or favouritism
- Unrealistic targets creating undue stress
- Wages and benefits lower than the industry norm

One-to-one communications, phone conversations, social media or membership surveys are some of the ways to help us identify the problems that our members face and wish to address.

We can think of issues as falling under one of two categories: soft issues and hard issues.

**Soft issues** are seen as an irritation by members. They regularly have an impact on members’ roles or working environment but don’t stop them, in the main, fulfilling their responsibilities.

**Hard issues** have a significant effect on members’ employment and work-life balance.

By looking at members’ issues in this way we can evaluate how likely members and non-members are to support any challenge.

Gathering support to take on soft issues, particularly in the early stages of any union-building campaign, can show workers that acting collectively can result in positive change. This in turn makes it much more likely that employees will then be willing to challenge the hard issues which will take longer and need a greater level of support to resolve.

The Addeco case study (page 20) provides a great example of organising around soft and hard issues.
Other key things to consider when identifying and organising around workplace issues are listed here.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY POINTS</th>
<th>TIPS/QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER</th>
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| WHO CARES ABOUT IT? | • Is the issue widely and deeply felt?  
  • How many people care about the issue and how important is it to them? |
| IS IT WINNABLE? | • What are the chances of success?  
  • If not completely winnable, is the issue partially winnable? |
| WHAT ARE MEMBERS AND WORKERS PREPARED TO DO ABOUT THE ISSUE? | • Plan activities that will be supported |
| HOW WILL SUCCESS BE MEASURED? | • Do we need to completely achieve our goal to have a win?  
  • What will members see as a success? |
| IS IT VISIBLE? | • How will the campaign be visible to members and potential members?  
  • If the issue is resolved, how will it change the workplace for the benefit of our members?  
  • Will members associate the win with the union and working collectively? |
| WHO HAS THE POWER TO MAKE THE DECISION TO CHANGE CURRENT PRACTICE? | • This is important because we often take on issues that the management or local employer has no power to change  
  • Who is the person that would make the decision to change things? |
| WHO SHOULD CAMPAIGN ON THE ISSUE? | • This is an opportunity to ask members and activists to do things  
  • Is there anything they can do e.g. gather a survey or draw up a petition? |
| WHAT COULD NEUTRALLY IMPACT ON OUR CAMPAIGN? | • How might management and the wider business react?  
  • How might our members react to any intimidation from management?  
  • What effect could non-members have?  
  • Are we in a position to support our members if the company does become aggressive? |
**ORGANISING CYCLE**

**MAPPING**
- SWOT (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)
- What does our workplace look like (e.g. members, non-members, part-time, full-time, casual, activists)

**OBJECTIVES**
Where do we want to be?
- SMART (Specific, measurable, agreed, realistic or relevant and time-bound)

**ANALYSIS**
Where are we now?
- Are they WIDELY felt?
- Are they DEEPLY felt?
- Are they WINNABLE or PARTLY WINNABLE?

**ORGANISATION**
Developing activists, networks and organising committees
- Find and develop activists, give them small tasks to begin with
- Build activists networks
- Create organising committees: Agenda, what’s new, last tasks, next tasks, strengths and weaknesses, give recognition

**ISSUES**
What issues will help us build workplace organisation?
- Inoculate against the bosses (what are they likely to do?)
- Capacity to escalate action
- Action targeted at the decision makers

**EDUCATION**
How do people learn to be union?
- Systematic contact through one-to-ones and networks
- Use surveys, flyers leaflets and social media to educate about being union

**EVALUATION**
Where are we now?
- How have our maps changed?
- Have we used our OPPORTUNITIES to build STRENGTH?
- Have we reduced our WEAKNESSES and overcome our THREATS?

**ACTION**
Anything that workers can do collectively
- How have our maps changed?
- Have we used our OPPORTUNITIES to build STRENGTH?
- Have we reduced our WEAKNESSES and overcome our THREATS?

**PUBLIC, EFFECTIVE, CREATIVE**
- Inoculate against the bosses (what are they likely to do?)
- Capacity to escalate action
- Action targeted at the decision makers

**ORGANISING = ISSUES + ACTIVISTS**
A well-organised sustainable contact centre will have regular communications between members, activists and branches.

The workplace map you develop (see mapping tips page 5) can be used to develop a communication network to make sure that the union is able to gather the views of members as well as distributing information either via handouts or word of mouth. The map can make sure that there are contacts in all parts of the workplace that can be relied upon to gather information or get it out to members. In addition, these same networks can target non-members with materials about the issues that they may face and promote the benefits of acting collectively to challenge those issues.

The importance of effective communication

How we communicate with members will have a strong bearing on their perceptions of the union – its role, its relevance and its effectiveness. It is important to get the balance right. Members rightly want to hear from the union about what it is doing, but it is also important to give members the opportunity to communicate with the union. It’s important for the union to hear from members about what’s going on in the workplace broadly rather than just from individual members when they have an issue they want the union to help them with.

Before decisions are made on what methods of communication we are going to use we need to look at our target audience. Think about the concerns and needs of our audience. Communications aimed at members should be different from that aimed at non-members. Keep in mind that our materials will be seen by someone other than your intended audience.

Generally, union members and their colleagues want communications that are:

- **Positive, proactive, forward looking, friendly**
  Most union members and potential members are not attracted by communications that are negative, reactive or backwards looking.

- **Authentic – no jargon**
  Union members respond – like most people – negatively to clichés. The union movement is rife with jargon, most of which can be impenetrable to ordinary union members and non-members.

- **Not adversarial or victimising**
  Most workers like their jobs and want to feel proud of their work. While they can come into conflict with their employer from time to time, they don’t like to be constantly disagreeing with them. Positive, pro-active messages maximise communications impact.

- **People focused**
  Members need to be at the centre of all our communications. Campaigns and communications need to be about them and targeted at resolving their issues. Members also need to be able to participate in creating their own communications and have input into the message being given.

- **Professional and of a high standard**
  When using any form of communication it is critical that they should have a professional standard of design, be clearly written, and always be consistent with union policy and strategy. Consider whether there are existing members who have the skills to help.
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<tr>
<th>COMMUNICATION CHANNEL</th>
<th>WHAT TO DO</th>
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| LEAFLETS AND POSTERS  | - Show the union’s presence in the workplace  
                        - Get messages across easily and quickly  
                        - Advertise meetings, union campaigns and successes |
| MEETINGS              | - Plan collective actions/responses  
                        - Share ideas and make decisions  
                        - Gauge members’ feelings on issues  
                        - Create sense of collective |
| ONE-TO-ONE CONTACT    | - Recruitment of members and activists  
                        - Get information from members and potential members  
                        - Opportunity to inform about the union and its activities |
| NEWSLETTER            | - Publicise issues  
                        - Celebrate successes  
                        - Illustrate union activity in the workplace |
| SURVEYS               | - Identify and test strength of feeling about issues  
                        - Identify campaign priorities  
                        - Demonstrate two-way communication |
| EMAIL                 | - Distribute union information quickly and easily |
| NOTICEBOARD           | - Contact details  
                        - Celebrate successes  
                        - Show that the union is present in the workplace |
| INDUCTIONS            | - Promote the union as a key part of the workplace  
                        - Address misconceptions  
                        - Recruitment |
| SOCIAL MEDIA          | - Talk to specific groups across multiple sites and companies  
                        - Create a safe environment via closed user groups  
                        - Hear views of members with whom we don’t normally have contact  
                        - Link members up with each other |
GETTING MORE PEOPLE INVOLVED AND BUILDING YOUR TEAM

Contact centre organising cannot be fulfilled by one person alone. Including as many people as possible in the effort to organise a contact centre is the fundamental to making progress.

1. **Who will you approach?**
   Try to approach union members from a variety of age groups, backgrounds, genders and workplace departments.

2. **What tools can I use to build the team?**
   Running surveys to look at issues and areas of interest from members can help identify new members to get involved in your organising campaign. Creating small working parties to look at specific elements of your plan such as communications or recruitment can also be beneficial and establish a common goal for them to work towards.

3. **When will you approach them?**
   Start by approaching people who have shown an interest when they have a few minutes to talk. Prepare your one-to-one carefully so that you are clear about what you want them to do.

4. **What skills will strengthen your team?**
   Think about the variety of skills you will need to create a well-rounded team. People who are good talkers, people who are good listeners, people who have influence, people who are good at social media, people who are good at record keeping.

5. **What should I do if I cannot find people with these skills?**
   Don’t worry about this – your team will not be built overnight. The most important people to find are those that are interested in getting involved and staying involved. If you notice a skills gap in your team then talk to your local organiser or branch about union training for team members.

6. **What if some people do more than others?**
   Every little helps and we have to remember that there may be some team members who have a lot of personal responsibility outside the workplace. This does not mean they cannot contribute, it simply means we have to know what our team members can do and when they can do it.

7. **How will the team communicate with each other?**
   Discuss with your team the best ways of keeping in touch formally and informally. For example, you might set a monthly off site meeting with your team to discuss progress and ideas but keep in touch in between times by group email. The most important thing is to establish a habit of regular progress reports from the team.

8. **How will you keep your branch involved and updated on progress?**
   Think about how you will keep your branch updated on progress, issues and ideas as you move forward.
You may be asking yourself the question: “I have built my team – why do I need to form a network of members as well?”

Teams have a goal driven role, they are skill based and have decision making responsibilities. A network is built around the wider membership, is less formal (but no less dynamic) and is often the place where we will find people to develop and bring into our team.

A CAN is a Communication Action Network. CANs are very useful in organising contact centres where we have no agreements in place (see Appendix 1, Adecco case study – Organisation).

Member groups and networks play a fundamental role when we are organising contact centres. They:

- are made up of points of contact that can provide and circulate information about the union, about training, about successes etc
- give members a sense of purpose because they work in tandem with and to supplement the workplace organising team
- rebut anti-union messages from management which are more easily spread in a contact centre
- demonstrate the positive nature of unions being about many people working together as opposed to one person being the lone union voice
- are able to identify and approach non-members about joining the union and can send various people to talk to non-members
Multi-site communication action network

Within the CWU T&FS constituency we use a national team structure to good effect to bring together members and activists from our multi-site contact centres. However, where we are organising non-recognised sites or if we have recognition in only one site we have to approach things differently.

More often than not the contact centres will hold a work’s forum on each site, and if multi-sited, will use some kind of national platform to appear as though they are consulting with their employees locally, nationally and internationally.

Some contact centres we are targeting may be further along their organising path than others. If we are building momentum on site then we can harness this growth to boost organising efforts in a sister location. If we think about a structure similar to that outlined on the previous page but apply it to more than one site or business we can create a multi-site CAN.

Instead of the focal point being an individual the focal point becomes a group of people such as our Regional Organising Committees. The ROCs then become a place where people from varying contact centres can come together to share information on issues, check with colleagues about policy changes, swap recruitment ideas and develop multi-site newsletters. Using the same structure outlined in the previous page but by identifying a point of contact from each site will lead towards a multi-site CAN.
No matter where or why we are organising – in a union recognised contact centre or organising towards recognition – it is vital that we create a union presence. But what do we mean by union presence?

A union presence is the combination of all the efforts we make to promote the CWU, recruit to the CWU, campaign for the CWU and represent CWU members. It is important that the union presence we create is consistent, planned and clear to members and non-members. Managers in contact centres can have access to our members and non-members and, as a result, are able to instil an anti-union or union busting message on a regular basis. We can resist these actions and build our union by maintaining our presence.

When looking at union presence we need to consider shift patterns, the varying teams in the contact centre, physical layout of the workplace and our membership map. By using the maps we have created (see section on Mapping) we can decide what vehicles we will use to create a union presence and measure its impact and monitor the messages that are more successful than others.

There are various ways we can create presence, some more obvious than others, but it is important to remember that getting plenty of people involved in this activity can allow members to make a small contribution to the organising efforts in their workplace. The very act of involving plenty of people in this activity shows a workforce that the union is about people, that everyone is welcome to become active and that the union is about them and their workplace.

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Contact centre initiatives

The success of union presence is measured and demonstrated by our recruitment and retention levels and is very important to our contact centre activity. We are all aware that attrition levels in contact centres can be very high so by undertaking regular, SMART actions as outlined in this booklet we can really make a difference.

During 2014 the T&FS constituency undertook a month of contact centre activity (CCAM) which was exceptionally successful and brought about an increase of 500 new members in recognised and non-recognised sites.

We don’t have to treat CCAM as an annual event. If we make our events and presence more regular we can consistently grow our membership and strengthen our union. Here are some examples of T&FS literature available for you to use:
No-one has ever said that organising a contact centre is an easy process. It can, however, be a very rewarding experience for the members and branches involved as they build relationships with one another, make gains for the workplace and see their union grow over a period of time.

Union members and branches can face a number of obstacles when starting out or during a campaign. Some of these obstacles will occur as a natural part of the organising process and some will occur through union avoidance tactics adopted by employers.

Is the climate one of fear? Does the climate invoke sympathy towards the union or the employer? By considering the climate we can adjust our tactics, our communications and our objectives to better suit the environment in which we are campaigning.

**Dealing with fear and misinterpretation**

We have all experienced people who are fearful of joining the union or who misinterpret union intentions.

A planned inoculation process describing to members and non-members likely employer actions will always help with this problem.

Predicting employer tactics builds confidence in the union. A robust communication plan will assist with the possibility of misinterpretation of both employer and union intentions. Ensuring clarity of union actions and involvement from members leaves little to misinterpret.

**Avoid gate keeping**

Gate keeping is not an unusual occurrence. As members become more invested in their campaigns, they can become defensive about their achievements and protective of their responsibilities. If this happens it can result in other colleagues becoming disengaged, issues being missed or people not joining because they perceive the campaign to be a one-person show.

**Dealing with apathy**

Avoiding apathy by members and activists alike can be a difficult thing when organising in a contact centre.

There is an expectation that things are going to build quickly and that long standing issues will be resolved positively just because membership increases. It can be difficult to keep morale high and momentum up. By setting small achievable goals this can show members and, in particular activists, that actions equal results. See *Adecco case study* – overleaf.
The organising cycle

Analysis

What did the workplace look like?
The activists identified the main issues on-site and mapped current members and non-members. Activists also identified areas of STRENGTH e.g. where we already had active members, where there was good membership density, and where there was a good understanding of employee issues and areas of WEAKNESS (e.g. where we had few or no members, no activists, and no understanding of workers’ issues).

An organising committee was set up to look at key aims and to set measurable tasks (e.g. recruitment and identifying potential activists from ‘weaker’ areas). This was composed of activists who had initially approached either a branch official or a CWU organiser.

Issues

The committee quickly identified issues that would help build workplace organisation, issues which were widely felt, deeply felt, and at least partially winnable. Although pay was seen as being the big collective issue on-site it was also understood to be the most difficult to resolve. As such, as well as organising our efforts around this issue it was also decided that we should look for some smaller issues that were winnable. Issues such as the use of long-term secondment roles, problems with booking holiday leave, and health and safety concerns in the building. By identifying and challenging these latter issues, the committee was able to show members tangible results arising from collective action.

Organisation

The committee identified that there were a number of different groups of employees on-site (part-time, long and short-serving, varying contracts and roles)
and in order to be successful we needed to make sure that each of these groups were represented in the campaign. The committee identified a group of workers known as Quick Start to target for recruitment. This group was mainly short-term employees on temporary contracts. They had experienced colleagues being laid off by the employer during quiet periods and then reinstated when business had improved. As such, these workers were concerned about joining the campaign for recognition and were even reticent about becoming union members. It was agreed that the best way to deal with this was to look at like-for-like recruitment techniques. Some members in this area were invited onto the organising committee and tasked to identify the key issues affecting this group of workers that we could challenge together. This meant that employees in this area could see that they were represented by other members who understood their issues first hand and who ensured that their issues would be supported by the wider membership.

Committee and rep elections took place with places reserved for each area of the business. This meant that all members had a direct voice into the campaign.

Education

Various methods of education were used throughout the campaign, both formal and informal, with reps and members as well as with non-members. Reps went through formal union courses, initially on organising, giving them necessary skills such as one-to-one recruitment, mapping and issue-based organising, as well as an understanding on how to run an organising campaign. Staff were supplied with verbal and written information (emails, posters, leaflets etc) on how collective bargaining works, what its benefits are, and how a formal recognition process works. One-to-one contact between members and non-members was fundamental to the massive increase in membership density that was achieved in a short period of time. Well informed members talked to their colleagues using our regularly updated mapping information and recorded the outcomes. This gave members a feeling of being part of something bigger and allowed them to see tangible success in terms of membership growth.

Where there was a need for us to challenge the company on its actions this was led by the branch and union organisers outside the building using leaflets and surveys so that there was no retribution aimed towards reps and activists.

Action

By undertaking a number of collective actions across the site (surveys identifying collective issues, election ballots for reps, petitions on the need for recognition) we were able to quickly prove that a collective union voice could get results that individuals alone were not able to achieve.

Individual members tasked with recruiting colleagues on a like-for-like basis resulted in a huge surge in membership.

It was also essential that we targeted the right people in the organisation at the right time and predicted what responses we may get. They started by challenging low level issues with local management before moving onto senior regional and national management when negotiating formal recognition.

Evaluation

In less than 12 months we had seen a huge surge in membership from approximately 10% to over 70%. Throughout the campaign the organising committee had set itself clear and achievable aims not only in terms of membership numbers but also increasing the number of active members in every area of the contact centre and developing a full working map of the site.

There was a member led structure in the workplace, with leaders who were representative of the membership. There wasn’t an over reliance on one or two individuals, indeed activists from the site were involved at all levels, fulfilling all roles necessary for a successful campaign.

By systematically building on our strengths and identifying and resolving our weaknesses we were in a position in November 2010 to write to the company and open formal negotiations on union recognition.

A voluntary recognition agreement was signed with the company in January 2011.
# Recognised contact centre health check

## Reps and Points of Contact
- All shifts are covered by a rep or Point of Contact (POC)
- Every avenue is explored to ensure that Reps and POCs are representative of the membership
- Clear and agreed tasks are set on a regular basis
- Reps and POC are brought together regularly to discuss and review branch projects and decide on next steps

## Membership
- Engage on a regular basis using surveys, questionnaires and focus groups
- Develop a style of engagement that makes it easy for members to engage
- Investigate the impact of various communication platforms to ensure the best possible results in getting your message out
- Measure impact of engagement with a view to improving the percentage of members willing to engage

## Potential Membership
- Who are they? Any patterns; sites, shifts, part-time or full-time, demographics?
- Construct a plan with Reps and POC to engage potential members. Allocate tasks and set timescales
- Measure the impact of plan
- Bring team together to discuss execution of plan, results and next steps
## Non-recognised contact centre health check

### POINTS OF CONTACT
- Regular contact with individual POC to support and encourage them
- Every avenue explored to ensure that POC are representative of the membership and potential membership
- Clear and agreed tasks are set on a regular basis either as individuals or in groups
- POC are brought together regularly to discuss and review branch projects and decide on next steps

### MEMBERSHIP
- Engage on a regular basis using surveys, questionnaires and focus groups
- Develop a style of engagement that makes it easy for members to engage
- Investigate the impact of various communication platforms to ensure the best possible results in getting your message out
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### POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIP
- Who are they? Any patterns; sites, shifts, part-time or full-time, demographics?
- Construct a plan with POC to engage potential members. Allocate tasks and set timescales
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- Bring team together to discuss execution of plan, results and next steps
Contact centres are well known to be high pressure, low pay working environments. The CWU is striving to address this and improve pay and conditions for our many contact centre members across the country.

This Charter sets out a number of principles which the CWU is campaigning for throughout UK contact centres:

**Pay and benefits**
- Pay levels to appropriately reflect skills, responsibility and worth of the job
- Bonuses and commission should not form part of core income
- Premium pay for evenings, weekends or public holidays
- Equal opportunities and training
- Regular, portable, accredited training for all employees
- Skills, training and career structures to support meaningful career progression
- Priority to retain and retrain existing staff in new technologies or products

**Working time and workload**
- Minimum 12 hours rest every day and 48 hours continuous break every week
- Staff to have a say in their hours and shifts
- Limits to the number of weekends worked in a given period
- Staff to work their contracted hours and not be required to work unpaid overtime
- Sufficient numbers of staff to meet customer demand

**Family and other responsibilities**
- Policies to enable staff to properly combine work and responsibilities outside of work
- Maternity pay and adoptive pay above the legal minimum

**Health and safety**
- Protection for workers to avoid eyestrain and voice and hearing loss, including visual display risk assessments and ten-minute screen breaks at least every two hours
- Ergonomic design of workstations
- Adequate light, ventilation, air filtering and heating systems
- Proper recognition for the issue of stress in contact centres
- Policies and training to deal effectively with third party harassment

**Objectives**
- Sufficient time allowed on calls to adequately serve the needs of customers
- Targets based on high quality customer service and not solely on quantity of calls
- Objectives focused on serving the needs of customers and only selling products that customers need and want

**Monitoring systems**
- Agreed policies for call monitoring only allowed when the purpose is known and understood
- Proper timely feedback

**Workers representation**
- The right to organise into unions without hindrance or deterrent
- No discrimination against worker representatives
Useful links

**UNI Contact centre charter**

**UNI Global organising for contact centres**

**CWU T&FS resources**
http://www.cwu.org/59640/resources.html

**CWU T&FS Building Tomorrow Together**
http://www.cwu.org/building-tomorrow-together.html

**Organise! Contact centre organising**
http://rogermckenzie.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/moroccos-call-centre-workers-get.html

**TNI Contact centre organising**