Getting women members active

ENCOURAGING PROPORTIONALITY IN THE CWU
Dear Colleague,

Since we launched the Building Tomorrow Together organising initiative in 2010, it has been tremendous to see the work being done at every level of the union in recruiting new Telecoms and Financial Services (T&FS) members and strengthening our representative structures.

A key objective of Building Tomorrow Together is to encourage greater proportionality in the CWU and as part of that it is vital we make the union more appealing to women and involve more women in union activity.

This booklet has been informed by feedback gathered from women members, branch representatives and Women’s Officers who have put forward their ideas on how the CWU could enhance its relationship with women.

Members told us they wanted to see more female CWU representatives and more communication on the issues that matter to women. They said that venues, times and safety are important considerations when making a decision on attending union meetings.

Women reps spoke of the benefits of holding social events focusing on women’s issues, and of the importance of women introducing women to union activism.

Women make up 24% of the CWU’s T&FS members, but they are under-represented in union roles. For example, only 10 out of 47 (21%) T&FS Branch Secretary positions are held by women, and only 8 out of 47 (17%) T&FS Branch Chair positions are held by women.

We need to seriously address the under-representation of women within our organisation and start to introduce new ways of encouraging more women to become active in the union.

We hope you will find this booklet a useful source of information and ideas for increasing our relevance to women and engaging more women in union activity.

Yours sincerely,

April 2014
Contents

2 Women in the CWU: Membership and activity
3 Women members survey
4 Branch survey on engaging women in union activity
5 Recruiting women into the CWU
5 Identifying new female activists
6 Difficulties for women in becoming active
9 Overcoming women’s concerns about getting active in the union
10 Encouraging women’s involvement in union activity
11 Sustaining women’s involvement
11 Mentoring
12 Planning tools
12 Building your team
12 Weekly 90-minute planning tool
14 Measuring success, impact and outcomes
15 Key tips for recruiting and involving more women in the CWU
16 Notes
17 Useful links
The CWU has thousands of women members and many women activists in the Telecoms and Financial Services (T&FS) sectors, including a number who hold senior union positions. However, we face a key challenge in ensuring that the demographics of our membership and our activists are properly representative of women in the workplace.

Large sections of the telecoms workforce are traditionally male dominated, so it is inevitable there will be a tendency towards a lower proportion of women in T&FS membership. But the workforce is changing with more women entering the telecoms and financial services sectors, particularly as a result of growth in contact centres.

It is vital that we build our relevance and appeal to women so that they see the value in union membership and are properly represented within our structures.

There is evidence that we are beginning to dispel the old myths about senior union roles being male dominated and a lack of opportunity for women in trade unions.

This booklet aims to help us build on the progress we have already made, so that the CWU can be more appealing to women and encourage more women into union membership and activity.

Much of the booklet is based on feedback received from our women members, branches, Women’s Officers and women Executive members through a series of surveys, focus groups and one-to-one conversations held during November 2013.

* Office for National Statistics 2013
A survey of our T&FS women members in November 2013 generated an excellent response with a total of 857 replies.

Some of the results were encouraging whilst some highlighted areas for improvement.

Women members said they would like to see better support from the CWU in a number of ways, including:

- More information about employment rights, such as maternity and flexible working rights
- Seeking better career opportunities for part-time workers
- Tackling the gender pay gap and supporting women’s career progression

Women members suggested a number of ways the CWU could enhance its relationship with women, including:

- Holding branch meetings at convenient times and suitable venues
- Regular, well advertised meetings to address issues such as childcare, part-time working, time management, stress management, finance and women’s health
- More female union representatives
- More mentoring support from union officials to help women activists develop in their role
- Regular opinion surveys by the local branch to ask for women’s views on current issues

- 60% would be or may be interested in attending CWU Women’s Conference
- 41% would like to know more about women’s meetings in their area
- 35% thought the CWU is quite strong or very strong at representing issues relating to women
- 53% thought the CWU was average at representing issues relating to women
- 12% thought the CWU was quite weak or very weak at representing issues relating to women
- 8% had felt put off by the CWU because they were a woman

60% 41% 35% 53% 12% 8%
BRANCH SURVEY ON ENGAGING WOMEN IN UNION ACTIVITY

A survey of T&FS branches in November 2013 on engaging women in union activity generated responses from 17 out of a total 47 branches.

Some of the results were encouraging whilst some revealed areas for improvement.

Respondents listed a number of things they do to help get women members active, including:

- Running a survey of women members to gather views and encourage participation
- Visiting workplaces to speak with members
- Contacting members through social networking sites and face-to-face meetings to encourage activism
- Offering members a range of involvement, from updating notice boards to undertaking union skills courses

Respondents cited a number of changes that could be made to help get more women members active, including:

- Campaigning on issues that are relevant to women
- Using women to recruit women into union activity
- Holding more events and meetings at lunchtime
- Encouraging women to get involved in women’s events at national level

76% advertise the details of their Women’s Officer to the wider membership

64% are active in regularly seeking to engage women in union activity

35% gave examples of action taken to attract women into being active within the union

17

ONLY 12% held a women’s meeting once a month or once every two months

53% did not hold any meetings specifically for women

ONLY 23% said their branch women’s committee holds events

29% did not have a branch women’s committee

64%

35%

76%
RECRUITING WOMEN INTO THE CWU

A determined and all encompassing effort to recruit women into the CWU is vital to growing our membership and to ensuring that our membership reflects the wider workforce.

**Identifying new female activists**

One of the first steps to involving more women in union activity is to identify new women activists or women who could become more active. Often individuals will stand out as potential activists if they are vocal and keen to promote the union's values, but sometimes the clues can be more subtle.

We must actively seek out and encourage those individuals who show an interest in union activity. This might be someone who:

- Regularly discusses workplace issues with colleagues
- Contacts the union regarding personal or workplace issues
- Talks to colleagues about joining the union and the benefits of being a member
- Has been represented by the union and is willing to talk to colleagues about the support they received
- Is keen to learn new skills and become a workplace contact
- Is already active on the branch committee but has not yet been asked or expressed a wish to progress further

**Tips for recruiting women into the CWU**

1. Holding one-to-one meetings in the workplace to explain the benefits of union membership
2. Keeping the CWU visible in the workplace via a notice board with up-to-date information on:
   - Workplace issues
   - Social events
   - The wider union
   - Events/courses
   - Union contact information
3. Designing a recruitment leaflet for women setting out 10 reasons why they should join
4. Women are not necessarily more effective at recruiting women into membership, but women are better at introducing women to activism
DIFFICULTIES FOR WOMEN IN BECOMING ACTIVE

There can be a wide range of obstacles to becoming active within a trade union. Some of these are common to both men and women, while others are unique to women.

Interviews were conducted with a range of women who hold different positions across the T&FS sectors, and the concerns set out below reflect some of their first thoughts when they started to become active in the CWU.

I have difficulty understanding the literature... What if I don’t understand what they are talking about?

I cannot attend an 8pm meeting.

How can I go away to training events?

I have children to look after.
I am not comfortable about meeting in a pub. What if I say something that shows my inexperience? If I am the only woman, will I be singled out? I am not comfortable about meeting in a pub.

Can I be a workplace rep instead of a Women’s Officer? I work part-time so I can’t get involved.
If we are to begin to engage more women in activity, it is important that we look seriously at addressing the issues that women have highlighted as barriers to their involvement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCERNS</th>
<th>TIPS FOR SOMEONE NEW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Evening Meetings in a pub**                 | • If you are unable to attend a meeting for the first time because of the meeting time or venue, send your apologies to the Chair and ask for a copy of the minutes.  
• It would also help to inform the branch that you wished to attend but that the venue and time created a barrier for you. This should assist in bringing about change to accommodate your needs in future. |
| **Work-life balance**                         | • Becoming a Union Rep doesn’t have to mean all your time is taken up with the job. A good work-life balance is a priority, and the union should allow you to give what time you can to union activity. |
| **Childcare**                                 | • Speak to your branch about what information and support they can offer with childcare when on courses and at meetings. |
| **Residential learning courses away from home**| • Contact your branch and explain why residential courses are difficult for you.  
• Speak to colleagues about whether this is also a problem for them.  
• Ask what alternatives might be available such as online distance learning courses. |
| **Being labelled with a particular role, such as Women’s Officer** | • It is important to make clear to the branch what you are interested in doing and the time you have available.  
• It is helpful to get a broad experience of the union and you can attend the Women’s Committee meetings without being a Women’s Officer, while focusing on workplace issues. |
| **Being thought of as inexperienced**          | • Attending a union meeting for the first time can be daunting and often new women activists are concerned that their inexperience will show through. Just remember that at some point everyone has been inexperienced and that people are happy to help and welcome a fresh point of view. |
| **A desire to focus on industrial issues and individual cases** | • Ask to attend courses and to sit in on cases. This might have to be done in your own time if release from work is a problem. |
| **Jargon and union language, rules and procedures** | • It will take time to pick up on the union’s specific jargon, rules and procedures, but never be afraid to ask.  
• Always expect to be spoken to in a respectful manner. |

**Work-life balance**

- Becoming a Union Rep doesn’t have to mean all your time is taken up with the job. A good work-life balance is a priority, and the union should allow you to give what time you can to union activity.

**Childcare**

- Speak to your branch about what information and support they can offer with childcare when on courses and at meetings.

**Residential learning courses away from home**

- Contact your branch and explain why residential courses are difficult for you.
- Speak to colleagues about whether this is also a problem for them.
- Ask what alternatives might be available such as online distance learning courses.

**Being labelled with a particular role, such as Women’s Officer**

- It is important to make clear to the branch what you are interested in doing and the time you have available.
- It is helpful to get a broad experience of the union and you can attend the Women’s Committee meetings without being a Women’s Officer, while focusing on workplace issues.

**Being thought of as inexperienced**

- Attending a union meeting for the first time can be daunting and often new women activists are concerned that their inexperience will show through. Just remember that at some point everyone has been inexperienced and that people are happy to help and welcome a fresh point of view.

**A desire to focus on industrial issues and individual cases**

- Ask to attend courses and to sit in on cases. This might have to be done in your own time if release from work is a problem.

**Jargon and union language, rules and procedures**

- It will take time to pick up on the union’s specific jargon, rules and procedures, but never be afraid to ask.
- Always expect to be spoken to in a respectful manner.
## GETTING ACTIVE IN THE UNION

The table below offers tips for new members and CWU branches in overcoming these barriers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIPS FOR A BRANCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The branch committee should look at when and where meetings are held to maximise attendance. Libraries, leisure centres or hotels if a bar is needed have been suggested as female-friendly venues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding two meetings on the same day to accommodate shift patterns might be of benefit to members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branches should ideally experiment with different options to establish what works best.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask members what works best for them and if a member continues to send in their apologies, ask them why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer guidance and support to new activists and work with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help new activists to manage their time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make allowances for activists who have commitments outside of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange childcare provision or activities for children during branch meetings and other events where possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide information about childcare provision, especially when advertising an event. This could be posted on a notice board or website alongside the event details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak to the T&amp;FS Regional Organising Committee Secretary and other branches to see if they are experiencing the same problem of low take-up of residential courses. If eight people are available to attend a course, it can be run locally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigate the possibility of providing online distance learning courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a woman expresses an interest in becoming active, she should not be automatically channelled into a particular role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask the individual about their interests and the time they have to commit, and use that as a basis to agree on a suitable role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognise how nerve-racking it can be for someone who attends a meeting for the first time. Welcome them, explain procedures and ask them what they thought of the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage their input without putting them on the spot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide appropriate training, support and mentoring for women activists to equip them for interfacing with employers and dealing with disciplines and grievance cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid jargon wherever possible and if you need to use jargon, explain what it means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help new members and activists to understand the union’s rules and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always be respectful in the use of language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENCOURAGING WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN UNION ACTIVITY

It is vitally important that we nurture and build on early signs of interest in union activity amongst women members.

Some ways to achieve this goal are:

- Advertise events/meetings on notice boards and include some information about childcare provision for those who may rely on it during the event
- Ask women members to get involved in recruiting new members
- Hold a ring around of current women members to talk about involvement and answer their questions
- Hold meetings directed at women, with a focus on women’s issues or women’s perspectives on industrial issues
- Hold social events with a focus on women’s issues, a guest speaker and food and drink away from work
- Hold family fun days where branch members bring their family to a venue such as a leisure centre, the members have their meeting and then all rejoin for food
- Use various communication methods e.g. email, phone and face-to-face to inform members about events/meetings
- Hand out flyers to women members – a personal invitation can be very helpful in encouraging someone to attend a branch meeting or event
- Make sure meetings are held in suitable venues and at convenient times of day
- Ask women members where would be a good place for a meeting and what would make them attend
- When women members attend a committee meeting for the first time, make them feel welcome and ask the branch Women’s Officer to introduce themselves
- Let members know they can still be involved in the union if they work part-time
SUSTAINING WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT

It is important that we not only bring more women into union activity, but that we do all we can to encourage women activists to remain involved for the longer term.

There are many ways to help sustain women’s continued involvement in union activity, such as:

- Offer women the role of Point of Contact, where they inform the branch of issues in the workplace on a weekly/fortnightly basis. This is an informal role which allows for a gentle introduction to union activity
- Delegate tasks and a certain amount of responsibility to women activists, allowing them to think independently and learn through experience
- Send women activists to events and training courses that meet their needs and interests
- Set up a mentoring programme to support women activists in their role (see Mentoring section on the right)
- Give guidance, constructive feedback and thanks to women activists for the role they play
- When asking activists for help with an activity such as mapping, explain why the task is important to the union
- Be aware of the time constraints faced by many women (See Weekly 90-minute planning tool on page 12)
- Invite women activists to attend meetings and events to broaden their outlook and expand their network of union and employee relations contacts
- Inform women about the various union roles and opportunities open to them as CWU activists
- Invite women activists to attend CWU Annual Conference. If the offer is declined, ask the individual whether there is anything the union could do to help make attendance possible

Mentoring

Why mentor?

Many women activists can point to a mentor, both male and female, whom they consider crucial to their development and success within their union role. Mentoring can therefore be a very effective method of increasing women’s activity within trade unions. It also plays an important part in succession planning and ensuring that knowledge and skills are passed on to the CWU activists and leaders of the future.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring provides new activists with a point of contact to call on when they need guidance or support in their role. The mentor is someone with greater knowledge who is committed to helping the mentee as they build confidence, skills and experience. The mentor and mentee can decide on their particular approach based on their circumstances, and it can be as formal or as informal as necessary.

Getting started with mentoring

Mentors should think back to when they started with the union and put themselves in the mentee’s shoes. Some new activists will be confident but others will be unsure of themselves at first, so there can be no set structure.

The most important thing is for the mentor and mentee to have a mutual understanding about the general terms of their relationship. If the mentee is unsure about how much time they can commit to union activity, the mentor should develop things gradually by setting small tasks and starting with meetings once a fortnight. A work plan can be set up and reviewed every three months.
**Building your team**

Building a team in a branch, women’s committee or workplace is vital to the success of any organising campaign. It is difficult to successfully organise women alone and a team will always work better.

Whether you are planning to build a women’s committee or exploring how to include more women on your branch team, the checklist below can help.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who will you approach to be in your team?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will you get more people involved?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where and how often will you meet to discuss progress?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What sort of activities/campaigns will you be engaged in?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What support will you need from the branch and colleagues?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you told the HQ organiser with whom you are aligned about your plans? How can they help?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Weekly 90-minute planning tool**

Getting women activists and reps to build sustained union activity in to their work and personal life isn’t always easy. Women have very different demands on their personal time or they may be working part-time.

The purpose of the 90-minute work plan is to create a robust pattern of activity which can systematically address regular communication requirements and the ‘bread and butter’ organising actions needed to deliver organised workplaces.

90 minutes per week is sufficient time to make an impact, whilst being manageable enough to sustain commitment without becoming a burden on personal or work life.

**Possible actions and tasks for women committing 90 minutes per week**

The idea is to agree a regular 90 minutes per week work plan including, for example:
- two calls per week to non-members
- two calls per week to members to identify issues and any new contacts
- send regular short emails encouraging people to join the union

The table below will help you plan your weekly 90-minute activity and talk to your branch or your mentor about your plans. The examples given are for illustration only. A blank version of this table is available for your own use on the Building Tomorrow Together web page at www.cwu.org/building-tomorrow-together.html

**Key monthly actions to consider**
- Email members with updates
- Email non-members with introduction/reasons to join the CWU
- Telephone two members to get more involved
- Telephone two non-members about joining the union
- Update contact info/mapping
- State outcomes and follow up from previous plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 1 (EXAMPLE)</th>
<th>WEEK 2 (EXAMPLE)</th>
<th>WEEK 3</th>
<th>WEEK 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15' Prepare plan</td>
<td>Telephone one member (state name)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15' Gather email addresses for non-members</td>
<td>Telephone one non-member (state name)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15' Email non-members in Joe Bloggs’ team</td>
<td>Liaise with workplace reps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15' Email members in same team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15' One-to-one meeting with non-member in Sally Smith’s team</td>
<td>One-to-one meeting with member in Joe’s team to discuss updating the CWU’s notice board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15' Gather personal email addresses for members</td>
<td>Liaise with organiser</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Target information**

1. State group of workers to target
2. State any reps/contacts in group
3. State any issues to be highlighted (current or new)
4. Briefly state outcomes from previous 4 or 5 weeks and include follow up in next plan

**KEY:**
- Email contact
- Telephone contact
- One-to-one contact
- General
MEASURING SUCCESS, IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

As we seek to recruit more women into the union and get more women involved in the union, it is vital that we are able to track the progress we make.

Branches should make a note of the number of women currently in membership, participants attending meetings, delegates to conference and workplace reps to provide a basis from which to build. This will allow us to see where gains are made so that we can establish where projects have worked well, enabling us to plan our time efficiently and channel our energy and resources effectively.

Membership information is available to branches on the online membership records system and any further information required can be sought through the CWU’s Membership Department at headquarters.

Branches and reps can share ideas, report on progress and seek support from the T&FS Regional Organising Committees which are held quarterly and which aim to assist in improving women’s activity in the union.

Organising success comes in many forms and will depend on the stated aims of your work.

For more assistance on your campaign start and end points talk to your local organiser.

It is also important that we are able to share our ideas and identify the initiatives that have worked well.

After looking at your branch statistics you may decide that you need to recruit more women, build a women’s network or increase participation in branch meetings from women.
KEY TIPS FOR RECRUITING AND INVOLVING MORE WOMEN IN THE CWU

1. Tell women what the union does and how it will benefit them
Use various communications channels including one-to-ones, workplace visits, leaflets, emails and social networking sites.

2. Hold meetings in venues and at times of day that will encourage women to attend
Suitable venues might include hotels, community centres or libraries. Convenient times might include lunchtimes or after normal office hours.

3. Organise around women’s needs
If we are consistent in addressing women’s concerns, we are more likely to attract them as members and inspire their long-term, active involvement.

4. Mentor
Mentoring is a proven and effective way to help build new union reps into long term activists and leaders.

5. Provide information about childcare support alongside details of union meetings and events, and arrange childcare wherever possible
Holding meetings at family friendly venues such as a leisure centre or library might help to meet childcare needs.

6. Hold meetings focusing on women’s issues at work
It is important to make women feel the union is representing their concerns.

7. Hold events focusing on women’s issues outside of work
This could be a social event away from work, and will help to build a broader network of women involved with the CWU.

8. Provide flexibility
Allow attendance at meetings via conference calls, or set up lunchtime meetings and set work that can be done at home. These and other techniques can help busy people participate more easily and effectively.

9. Invite women to attend the CWU Annual Conference as official delegates
This will give women activists a deeper insight into the union and should help to encourage their continued involvement.
Useful links

**CWU Building Together Tomorrow**
www.cwu.org/building-tomorrow-together.html

**CWU Women’s Advisory Committee**
www.cwu.org/12007/wac.html

**CWU Youth and Women**
www.cwuyouth.org/875/cwuyouth-amp-women.html

**UNI Global**
www.uniglobalunion.org/groups/equal-opportunities/news

**Mentoring**
www.mentors.ca/mentorideas.htm

**Women and Trade Union Leadership (WTUL)**
hosted.busman.qmul.ac.uk/WTUL/What_is_the_WTUL/16979.html

**Institute for Women’s Policy Research ‘Seven Strategies that Promote Women’s Activism and Leadership in Unions’**