

**UNION MODERNISATION FUND –
ROUND 2**

**COMMUNICATION WORKERS
UNION (CWU) : THE DEBUT
PROJECT**

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Communication Workers' Union (CWU) – the DEBUT project

Introduction

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) is the biggest union for the communications industry in the UK, with 250,000 members. CWU represents members in postal, administrative, financial and telephone companies, including Royal Mail Group and BT, o2, Virgin Media, Orange, ComputaCenter and Santander. Members' expertise ranges from engineering, computing and clerical, to mechanical, driving, retail, financial and manual skills.

Why this project?

The CWU has a strong equal opportunities remit, committed to delivering equal opportunities to members. However, this department, in conjunction with the education department, identified that the union's equality reps were not being supported as well as they might be – nor was the full value of their role being appreciated in terms of their potential contribution to positive industrial relations.

The CWU submitted an application in 2008 to receive matched funding from the Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) for the DEBUT (Deconstructing Equality Barriers through Union Training) project. Their intention was to produce an all-encompassing and fully interactive online equality toolkit, supported by a DVD, which would enable equality officers to have a better understanding of all aspects relating to their job. Linda Roy, National Equality Officer, explains:

'We wanted the toolkit to cover aspects such as discrimination law, maternity rights, flexible working

regulations and any other areas of equality that we felt would be beneficial to have good knowledge on. It was to prove a key turning point in the development of our equality reps. In addition; the project would allow the creation of a DVD which used animation to highlight a variety of scenarios that an equality rep could find themselves dealing with. Importantly, it also touched on the importance of encouraging equality reps through the ranks of lay membership into the rep structure of the union. What's more, the CWU made it very clear that it wishes the toolkit to be used extensively throughout the trade union movement in the hope that it will help equip and empower equality reps, not just from our union, to deliver sound support and advice on equality issues.'

Methodology and outcomes

Methodology

Personnel structure

A steering group was set up, with representation from the finance, communications, IT and research departments, and met regularly throughout the project to oversee the project's progress. A second steering group consisted of the chairs of CWU's six equal opportunities advisory committees, effectively covering expertise on every one of the union's equality strands. Thus, throughout the life of the project the union was able to 'equality proof' to the best of their ability.

A project worker was recruited to drive the work forward, responsible for initial extensive research, compilation and presentation of material.

Initial consultation

At the start of the project, the equality officers were consulted about what they would like to see in an online equality toolkit. Seventy-five equality officers responded, and their details were captured on a purpose built database. Says Linda:

'We wanted to gain the views of the equality officers at the very beginning of the project. This consultation also served to inform how the project was to develop and to establish which issues were most pertinent to our union's equality officers.'

In addition, internal CWU departments were consulted, including legal, employment law, education and training, personnel and facilities, communications, IT, research and information and the general secretary's office.

Research

A methodical and thorough trawl was completed of all the CWU education and training department's existing equality course materials – 'a vast array of very useful information, which details how each course is delivered and its content'. In addition, the resources of government providers were explored, including the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and what is now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), to build a clear picture of how useful these organisations could be in supporting various areas of an equality officer's work. Linda continues:

'We looked at useful publications, information, best practice guidelines and legal advice. The idea was for parts of the toolkit to have direct links to these organisations and their websites, which would encourage equality officers to engage with the organisations themselves, alongside the other approaches they used.'

Signposting our reps to the right people and support groups was also an important part of the online toolkit, as where the union is not able to offer direct support for a particular area it still gives guidance on where to go for help and support.'

Finally, the research extended to investigate what other unions have been producing around equality issues and to support the role of equality officer. Linda adds:

'This was very important as we wanted to learn from what had gone particularly well for other unions in this field and ensure we incorporated anything that might improve on our own material. The GMB equality resource was of great help in this respect. Our toolkit was customised to suit our equality officers and CWU's needs as an organisation as a whole.'

Production

The initial trawl of information was edited and marshalled into categories particularly pertinent to CWU. Each page was designed by a professional designer before CWU's IT and communications departments built the final toolkit online.

The DVD production was put out to tender and ultimately made by Leeds Animation Workshop in the form of a three-minute animation which gives a flavour of the kinds of issue equality reps might face.

Keeping the union updated internally

Clear communication was key to keeping everyone onboard with developments. Throughout the project, there was extensive liaison with the advisory committees:

'Verbal, visual and written feedback was provided to them all. There were opportunities for them to input and ask

questions and to help shape the toolkit's design. Presentations were also given to every single advisory committee and reports were made to the various regions around the country. We also attended the various briefings that were held by the UMF at the TUC's Congress House. These helped us network with other UMF stakeholders.'

Outcomes

The union achieved every milestone set out in their original bid for funding. Despite being behind schedule at the end of the first year of the project, by the spring of the second year they were 'almost back on schedule, thanks to everyone's efforts'.

The content of the toolkit was completed by late summer 2009, along with the supplementary DVD. A celebratory launch party was held on 21 September 2009, at which BIS were also represented. An 'online toolkit corner' was set up at the event so that delegates had an opportunity to test the toolkit live. The toolkit is now live for all to access on the CWU website and is revised on an ongoing basis in response to regular content checks – for example, to include information after the adoption of the Equality Bill, to bring content up to date.

Dissemination

Throughout the lifetime of the project, the CWU have been proactive in ensuring that the details of the DEBUT project and its progress have been disseminated widely, including articles in The Voice (distributed to all 250,000 members) and the various equality publications (DRUM, Women's Talk, Disability in Focus and OutTalk), and letters to branches.

One of the significant achievements of the project was the organising and delivery of a fringe meeting at the CWU annual conference, attended by

more than 80 delegates - well over half the branches of the CWU:

'This was arranged specifically for the purpose of updating people on the progress being made. It was the second large gathering arranged in a short space of time, as the equality officers' forum held a couple of months earlier had dedicated a comprehensive presentation on the DEBUT project.'

The meeting was attended by the CWU General Secretary, Billy Hayes, who welcomed the progress made and underlined the union's commitment both to pushing the equality agenda forward and to supporting its equality reps. A seminar was also organised for equality officers, as Linda explains:

'The equality officers' seminar was an incredibly successful day, with the best part of almost 100 people in attendance, almost exclusively equality reps. They were given a comprehensive presentation by both the project worker and the national equality officer. Afterwards the session was opened up for an extensive Q&A session.'

Lessons learned

A number of lessons were learned:

- **Recruitment** - The project ran into problems straight away, as Linda explains: 'We ran a recruitment process for a project worker and despite an element of interest in the temporary position; we were not able to recruit. The situation was reviewed with our personnel team and it was agreed to reword the job description to make it more upbeat and to extend the targeted audience with a much larger potential pool. We subsequently re-advertised and were fortunate enough to have a very healthy flow of interest

in the position and were able to appoint a project worker. This meant, however that the project started with a four-month delay.'

- **Budget** - The management of the project was scrutinised very closely at all times. Says Linda, 'on the one instance where spend did go very slightly over (on the production of the DVD), this was communicated immediately to BIS and authorisation was given for the necessary adjustment to be made.'
- **Follow-up** – Linda concludes, 'If we had to do anything differently, I would suggest factoring in consideration of a more comprehensive post-completion road-show, as this would support the project's extensive roll out to its potential stakeholders.'

promoting equality and with the assistance of BIS we have been able to underline our commitment to this cause. We hope both the toolkit and the DVD will provide inspiration to budding equality reps across the trade union movement, and an insight for businesses into what constitutes good practice on equality-related issues.'

For further information, contact

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Conclusion

Overall, the project was seen as 'a valuable resource which will enhance the role of equality officers and provide valuable training'. Linda sums up:

'The CWU is very clear in terms of its own commitment to promoting equality for everyone wherever possible. The matched funding provided by the UMF has undoubtedly acted as a catalyst to help us speed up our commitment programme immeasurably. It has allowed us the opportunity to produce two first class, durable products and maintain our position as one of the leading unions in promoting equality in the workplace. The CWU fully expects that the legacy of this achievement will be evident for years to come. The toolkit is not something that has been created just for today's equality reps – it will be around for the equality reps of tomorrow. It's regarded as a working resource, updated as and when needed. The CWU has always had a proud reputation in relation to

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