

**UNION MODERNISATION FUND –  
ROUND 2**

**PUBLIC AND COMMERCIAL  
SERVICES UNION (PCS), IN  
CONJUNCTION WITH WALES TUC  
AND COLEG GWENT- MENTORING  
WOMEN REPS**

**Case Study written by PCS**

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# Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), in conjunction with Wales TUC and Coleg Gwent- Mentoring women reps

## Introduction

In 2005 a PCS report 'Count Me In' examined diversity within PCS organisation structures. The report concluded that women were poorly represented in all union representative/decision making processes.

As a democratic trade union, PCS believes that in order to be truly effective on behalf of its membership, it is essential that membership diversity is reflected within its organisational structures and decision making processes. There was, therefore, a need to increase the diversity of union reps to reflect the diversity of the membership. Policy decisions taken by its annual conference in 2004 enshrined this within its organisational and equality strategies. Sian Wiblin, Negotiations Officer, explains:

'The equalities agenda is a growing and evolving one. The implementation of two new public sector equality duties, coupled with the proposal to put equality reps on a statutory footing, places new demands upon union reps. There is a need to mainstream equality issues into the negotiations agenda and to work in partnership with employers to deliver tangible benefits for members and staff. In order to mainstream equality, PCS needs to ensure diversity among its reps. PCS Wales is proud of our efforts to promote equality. We have equality forums representing differing equality strands. Our women's committee was formed in 2001 and continues to be the only regional women's committee within PCS. All forums advise and report directly to the PCS Wales committee, the senior decision making body in Wales.'

### PCS facts and figures (May 2008)

- Nationally, women comprise 60% of PCS membership.
- Three quarters of PCS members are female.
- 52% (314) of all PCS reps in Wales are female.
- 65% of these are workplace reps.
- Just over a third hold a union position at branch level, with 6% holding the key post of branch secretary.
- 5 reps in Wales have identified themselves as being of ethnic origin.
- 12 have identified themselves as having a disability.
- 18 are aged under 27.
- Out of 77 branches in Wales only eight have an equality officer. Four of these are women.
- A further four branches have a women's officer.
- Despite it being a requirement under the PCS model branch constitution, only three branches in Wales have a branch women's advisory committee.

## Why this project?

The need for a mentoring project was identified by the PCS Wales women's committee in 2004/5. A sample survey indicated that women reps were concentrated either as local office reps or in the lesser key branch level posts. Anecdotal evidence suggested there was a glass ceiling as well as gatekeepers in some branches. A mentoring programme was devised, through which the women's committee would mentor less experienced women reps. A two-day training course for mentors was provided by the WEA. Sian continues:

'Because of local financial constraints, training had to rely heavily on existing regional educational training provided by PCS and the TUC to ensure that travel and subsistence costs were funded centrally. This was supplemented with mentoring on an individual basis, with funding met by the Wales women's committee. This placed severe financial constraints on meetings and the geographical area from which we were able to draw participants. Our proposed Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) programme was more ambitious. It focused around an accredited course at a much higher skill level for both mentors and mentees, developed and delivered by our project partners. Without the ability to buy in support, PCS Wales would not have been able to run any further mentoring training. Equally, we believed that accredited training would be of more interest to employers, who would have to provide day release for their staff. Indeed, a sample telephone survey of employers in Wales demonstrated that, in principle, there was support for this project. If we are seriously committed to breaking down barriers for women reps in Wales it was essential that we had outside expertise and sufficient funding to ensure that there are no barriers to participation because of

financial constraints in meeting travel and subsistence.'

The union's UMF project would develop the skills and talents of a network of new women reps through a process of mentoring. It would also provide accredited training and personal development through confidence building and communication skills. Mentoring and leadership skills would enhance and develop existing skill levels among current women reps. Adds Sian:

'In Wales we have a thriving women's committee which provides both a development opportunity and a direct link into the decision making process through its role as an advisory committee to the Wales committee. Our UMF project would feed into both our organisation and equality strategies. It would encourage and provide support and key skills for women reps to become more active at local level and to progress higher up the union's organisational and decision making structures. It would also enable us to develop a network of highly skilled women reps. This project would not have gone ahead without funding from the UMF. PCS Wales does not have the in-house skills required to develop, accredit and deliver a training programme of this kind. We needed therefore to look to outside providers to assist us.'

Specifically, the project set out to:

- train and develop 20 women mentors and 20 mentees within Wales as part of an ongoing programme to increase the participation of women reps at branch and senior levels within PCS Wales
- by doing so, assist in mainstreaming diversity issues within the bargaining agenda.

Measurable outcomes were identified as:

- the training and development of 20 senior women reps in accredited mentoring and leadership skills
- the accredited training and development of 20 new or nearly new women reps with additional skills such as confidence building, active listening, in addition to the representation skills currently available to reps
- the development of a network of skilled and confident women reps equipped to participate fully in the decision making process and to assist in placing diversity issues firmly at the centre of the negotiations agenda.

Mentors would be expected to be reps of at least two years' standing and to have a proven record in representational and negotiation skills (demonstrated via attendance on trade union education courses and/or practical experience). Mentees would be new or nearly reps (perhaps members of some years' standing now seeking more involvement with union activities).

## **Methodology and outcomes**

The project was developed with the assistance of the PCS Wales women's committee and unanimously endorsed by the Wales committee, the senior decision making body within PCS Wales. PCS were partnered by the Wales TUC and Coleg Gwent.

### **Advertising the courses**

Information for mentors and mentees applying for the course, alongside a detailed synopsis of the course and its outcomes (for employers), was issued through the normal PCS educational advertising methods via branch secretaries and union learning reps. The PCS Wales committee also played an active role in identifying

potential applicants and information was circulated to all equality forums, the organising committee and the education database. The PCS national magazine 'View', sent to every member, and 'Activate', sent to all branch organisers, carried a synopsis and contact details for further information. Many of the potential mentors were individually targeted by the project officers (for example, the women on the PCS Wales committee and on the women's committee). The mentee course was also targeted at the PCS youth network.

Additionally, the project manager addressed the Wales committee, the Wales women's and the Wales pan-equality seminar, as well as speaking to a number of group and branch meetings. Information was also available in the PCS Wales reception area and in its committee rooms.

### **The training**

#### **Mentoring skills training**

Mentoring training was delivered by Coleg Gwent over three one-day modules for senior women reps within PCS Wales, with learning outcomes taken from the TUC Passport to Progress at OCN accreditation level 3. It encompassed the ability to understand and review the skills needed for an effective mentoring relationship, to evaluate the mentor's own role within the mentoring programme, to demonstrate at least three mentoring techniques (like listening and questioning, motivating, enabling), and to relate mentoring techniques to specific situations and goals.

Adds Sian:

'From the outset, it was felt important that the training was designed to equip participants with transferable skills that could be used within their workplace. It was also felt that accreditation at a high level would help in not only attracting participants but in

demonstrating tangible benefits to the employer, who would be asked to provide paid day release.'

Eighteen women completed the course and achieved accreditation at OCN level 3. Many of these mentors were existing members of the PCS Wales women's committee. Says Sian:

'Interestingly, the majority of those reps at first considered themselves to be candidates for the mentee training - they did not perceive themselves as having pre-existing skills which could be developed to equip them for the role of mentor. When asked on day one of the training by the tutor why they were on the course a number of them said it was because the project officers had asked them to. Having completed three days of training, on day one of the leadership skills training the responses to the same questions were markedly different, focusing on the benefits that mentoring could bring.'

Once trained, it was intended that mentors would begin a programme of mentoring new or nearly new women reps. This programme commenced in October 2008 and ran through to April 2010.

### **Mentee training**

Accredited at OCN level 2, mentee training was provided by Coleg Gwent and run over 10 days, including three days' introductory training in the role of a trade union rep and trade unions, followed by confidence building, active listening and communication skills. For example, outcomes under confidence building included recognising factors that affect expectations and capacity of union members; considering aspects of themselves they would wish to change; and working out ways of bringing about change on an individual and collective basis. Communication skills were focused on developing their ability to take part in discussions individually and in groups,

presentational skills and running meetings.

Nearly 30 expressions of interest were received to become mentees, with half of them ultimately applying for the course (the rest having other commitments or problems with duration or travel time, nevertheless hoping to attend if another course were run). Sian adds:

'Only one person was refused permission to attend by her employer. The employer stated that they had sufficient trained union reps, so did not see the need for further training. These existing union reps, apart from the applicant, were all male. The project manager met directly with this employer but to no avail.'

The 15 mentees who enrolled were allocated mentors but for various reasons (such as relocation) five dropped out. Of the 10 who completed the course, all achieved accreditation at OCN level 2.

As the course progressed, Sian explains, it was noted that there was a natural break within the 10-day programme:

'The first three days focused on basis rep training, after which the course moved into combining trade union skills alongside communication skills, active listening and confidence building. We therefore reissued notices for application to the course in December 2008, inviting women reps who had already completed basic rep training to apply, and two more participants joined the course in January 2009.

### **Leadership skills training**

Mentor training was complemented by further training in leadership skills. This was developed and run by the Wales TUC and the Institute of Leadership and Management. The leadership element ran over two days

and examined and promoted the potential of leadership in the role as mentor. Liaison with Coleg Gwent

Fifteen participants completed the two days training, with three completing just one day. Follow up work with these three was carried out to ensure that they would be eligible to go forward for accreditation, and all 18 were successfully accredited at OCN Level 3.

### **Joint training**

Three training days with all mentors and mentees brought together were held at the beginning, middle and end of the mentee training. Mentors were expected to agree a programme of regular contact with their mentees, and contact sheets and a diary were produced to ensure consistency of the programme and also to help the project manager with ongoing risk assessment. Individual action plans were developed between mentor and mentee for the duration of the programme, assessment of which was also ongoing. Strict confidentiality was agreed between the mentor and mentee during this process, although the project manager was available for consultation with either party at any stage during this process. Mentors also contributed to the development of a toolkit, which would ensure consistency in the mentor/mentee relationship across the programme.

### **Sustainability**

A key objective of the project was sustainability, with both the mentoring and the leadership skills unit devised with the intention of being taught in conjunction with each other or by themselves as a stand alone unit. It was agreed to develop a tutor handbook to support this process. Each course was accredited within the framework of TUC Passport to Progress at OCN Level 3.

### **The mentoring/mentee process**

ensured that the course complemented the previous unit and prevented duplication of content.

Mentors/mentees were allocated through a combination of factors covering geographical location, union background and interests, and skills and experience. All were consulted to make sure that they were comfortable with their allocation. After the initial introductory session, a few organised their own 'swap' to another mentor/mentee, based on mutual interests or geographic location. Says Sian:

'A decision was made during the planning stages of the project to try and avoid mentors/mentees being allocated from within the same branch/employer unless both parties were comfortable with this arrangement. This was based on the anecdotal evidence of glass ceilings within branches and key officials acting as gatekeepers. It was also felt that if there were any local difficulties being experienced, it could be difficult for a mentee to be able to discuss this frankly with their mentor and receive an impartial perspective if they were from the same branch/employer unit.'

### **Outcomes**

Key performance indicators identified in the bid were as follows:

- **Completion of the course by 40 participants and the accreditation process** - A total of 25 mentors and mentees completed the course and were awarded accreditation.
- **Development of networking arrangements continuing to provide guidance and support after the formal process has been completed** - Networking arrangements are already in place and will be developed further in spring 2011.

- **Annual monitoring of individual action plans** - Monitoring commenced in June 2010 and will be an annual process each June until 2015.
- **Annual monitoring of the diversity composition of reps in Wales to ensure that the**

**union continues to build on achieved gains** - Monitoring is normally carried out in May of each year, following annual elections to branch positions as determined under the PCS national constitution.

## Benefits

The Mentoring Women programme will have a far-reaching impact, not just on mentors and mentees but also on the wider membership and the union's diversity practices. What's more, the adaptability designed into the programme will support its wider dissemination. For instance, the programme has been designed to be delivered as three separate components or as a whole – flexibility that will help ensure its continuation. Already, the Wales TUC has incorporated the leadership skills section into its annual work programme, running it on an inter-union basis, and has also run it as a bespoke course for individual unions. The Wales TUC has also run the leadership course three times as part of its core education programme, and run a leadership module as part of its women's summer school – something it intends to continue. Unite have commissioned the leadership course twice, and UNISON have also expressed an interest.

'Both the leadership and mentor training have had a very positive influence on me as an individual and in the workplace. As I work for staff support networks I've found that it's given me more confidence to deal with issues that arise in that I tend to look "behind" them and question more. It also prompted me to apply for a national PCS women's officer position and I feel confident that I could offer them an informal mentoring service too should they want it.'

**Mentor**

The rapid development of the mentees is illustrated by the number who attended the 2009 PCS annual conference. Sian explains:

'When the mentee course started in 2008 it became apparent that one of the training days clashed with PCS annual conference. The majority said that they had no intention of going to annual conference; only one mentee said that they were going forward for election. Shortly before annual

conference, however, all but one said that they had put themselves forward as a candidate and all had been successfully elected. All reported greater confidence in their role as a union rep and in speaking up at meetings.'

There are also examples of mentees' increased confidence

'One mentee has been promoted, one has become the local rep for her office in addition to pre-existing duties as health and safety rep - and in doing so defied concerns that she was "taking too much on". One, who at the time of starting the course held no union position nor had undergone any training, has now also trained as a union learning rep.

Of the two mentees who were branch secretary or chair at the time of enrolling on the course, one has gone on to further TUC training and attended the TUC national women's summer school (activities she said she would not previously have considered). The other has been elected as departmental trade union side secretary and also to represent PCS on one of the Wales TUC equality committees, attending the Wales TUC annual conference this year. One reports that, as a result of the confidence and knowledge gained during her training, she has developed plans that have resulted in an increase in branch membership, gender balance on her branch executive committee, and an improvement in branch communications. One mentee is standing for election to the PCS Wales committee, and another for its organisation advisory committee. Some of the mentees have also agreed to address events such as the PCS Wales women's summer school and the women's committee seminar, speaking about the course from a personal perspective.'

'Keep up the good work. The more women who can benefit from this training and support, the more representative of society and our workplaces the trade union movement will be.'

Mentee

## Lessons learned

Problems experienced during the mentor/mentee process were very few:

- The major issue that occurred during the programme was at the point where accreditation was sought for both mentor and mentee skills. Sian continues: 'In order to achieve accreditation, it was necessary for the taught element to be evidenced with written work. The written work submitted was not deemed to be sufficient to achieve accreditation at the required level. This situation arose as the tutor had not required the mentees to complete the relevant evidence as the course had progressed. To overcome this, the project was extended to 31 May 2010, interviews with a sample from both cohorts were held, and a further training day was scheduled. Mentees were required to complete workbooks, and mentors to submit their own written evidence following workshops. The additional work enabled the mentoring element to be accredited at OCN level 3 as originally envisaged. However, it was felt that the additional evidence that accrediting the mentee element at OCN level 3 required was too great, and that the course fitted into OCN level 2. It was also felt that given the level of expertise of the mentees at the commencement of the course, that OCN level 2 was a more reasonable expectation of achievement from this cohort. The course, therefore, will continue to be run at OCN level 2.'
- A number of both mentors and mentees expressed difficulties in contacting each other, which the project manager endeavoured to sort out.
- One mentor left for new employment and so the mentee was reallocated. One mentee informed her mentor that she did not feel she needed regular contact, but that she could be relied on to contact her mentor when she felt the need. This mentee completed the course and felt very comfortable with this arrangement. However, the mentor was very disappointed but respected the mentee's decision.
- Two mentors raised issues about facility time, when branch officials were not sympathetic to providing sufficient time for them to act as a mentor, believing that any mentoring should be directed within their branch. This was resolved in that one mentor pleaded pressure of work and requested not to be allocated but to act as 'back up' provision if necessary. The other was allocated a mentee and was able to deal with any resultant difficulties herself.
- During both the mentor and the mentee training, it soon became apparent that both cohorts had very quickly bonded together as a unit. Once the mentor training had finished, many of the mentors felt they no longer had regular contact with each other and missed this relationship. The mentees arranged their own support network amongst each other, in addition to their formal relationship with their mentor. Several comments were made that monthly contact between mentees was insufficient. An entry on Facebook was set up to facilitate easy contact between all mentors and mentees.
- An ongoing risk is that a minority of mentees have reported that they get little or no support or encouragement to get involved in their local branch. Says Sian, 'The project officers are aware of mentees in this position and will have regular contact to ensure that the skills, talents and enthusiasm that these mentees have developed are not lost. Arrangements for continued contact between each mentor and mentee have also been made, although with the programme formally having been completed, these arrangements are down to each individual pair to determine.'

## Looking ahead

- 'Sustainability was a fundamental principle running throughout the project. Two core elements were identified: to build on the current project by continuing to offer training and mentoring to senior and new and nearly new reps; and to continue to support the existing mentor and mentees via contact and networking arrangements.'
- The mentor and mentee sections will be rolled out to other unions in Wales.
- The programme will also be submitted to the PCS national education department, who have taken a close interest in the development of the course and been supportive throughout the programme.
- PCS Wales will run the mentee section for new and nearly new women reps in spring 2011, following the 'AGM season' at which union reps are elected for the forthcoming year. The course will be available both for those who are standing as reps (and would be available irrespective of whether they are elected as reps), and for those who would be interested in standing as a rep at a future date.
- PCW Wales has been successful in gaining monies from the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF). Sian explains: 'Part of this bid was to extend training aimed at women reps, and discussions are being held on additional skills for senior women reps, focused on but not exclusive to the mentors.'
- Networking arrangements already exist between the mentor and mentee participants; PCS Wales pan-equality reps' networking arrangements will also be open to any mentor or mentee.
- As project manager, Sian has been involved in a collaboration of different women's groups in Wales, chaired by Chware TEG, to develop a mentoring programme for women in business aimed at middle and/or senior managers. A pilot project is being developed and it is hoped that this will be available for launch in the autumn of 2010.
- Sian is also involved with the Wales TUC, which is currently examining a possible mentoring or 'buddying' programme, aimed at providing support for women reps in Wales - particularly in those unions which have low female density, with senior active women reps providing support on a cross-union basis for those women who are relatively isolated within their own union. Sian adds: 'It is likely that what emerges from these discussions will not be as ambitious as the PCS Mentoring Women scheme but will draw on it in part. Additionally, the Wales TUC women's committee intends to set up a Facebook entry which will be open to any female union rep in Wales, to facilitate informal networking arrangements and support.'

## Conclusions

Sian is delighted with the outcomes from the programme and the enthusiasm that it has met - for example, the programme was promoted at the Wales women's TUC conference in November 2009 and received a great deal of interest:

'The objective of the programme was to increase the participation of women reps within key decision making roles, both at local branch and more senior levels, and through doing so ensure that our representative structure more closely represents the diversity of our members. PCS Wales believes that we have taken strides towards this objective. Given the size of both cohorts, it would be unreasonable to expect significant change but we have undoubtedly taken firm steps towards this.

Most of the mentor cohort were experienced reps, some already active at senior levels within PCS Wales. Their enthusiasm and support for the programme have been tremendous, and a number of them are converting the skills they have developed via the formal programme to provide support for new reps within their own branch. The project officers always envisaged that the mentors would do well - what was unexpected was the strong and continuing support network that developed among the cohort. The achievements of the mentee cohort have exceeded our expectations. It was also apparent that there was tremendous loyalty felt by all towards the programme. Many expressed the view that they were doing this not only for their personal gain but for other female reps to be able to benefit from future running of the course, to develop more active women reps both at local and senior levels of the union.'

Sian sums up:

'The skills and enthusiasm that both cohorts developed, and the uses to which they are now being put, have clearly demonstrated the need for this programme and how successful mentoring can be in breaking down gender barriers and increasing the diversity of union reps. PCS Wales is committed to continuing this programme, and to examine its suitability to expand into other areas where we need to increase our diversity profile, such as young people. We need to train up more mentees in order to change our gender and our youth profile, and ensure that today's mentees go on to become tomorrow's mentors.'

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