

THE VOICE

WINTER 2021



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with our Openreach
field engineers

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GET IN TOUCH...

CWU HQ – all enquiries
150 The Broadway,
Wimbledon, London
SW19 1RX T: 020 8971 7200

In most cases your branch should be your first point of contact. Details are on your membership card.

Harassment Helpline
0800 090 2303

Have you changed your address, workplace or hours?

Please inform CWU about any changes to your membership details. There are three different ways to update your membership details:

Option 1 – Log into the members' only section of the CWU website (www.cwu.org), using the username and password you have previously been sent, and change your own details.

Option 2 – Contact your branch secretary with your new details.

Option 3 – Contact CWU HQ on 020 8971 7447 or email your new details to membership@cwu.org and we will make the necessary changes.

Please help us help you – keep your details up to date.

UNIONLINE

YOUR TRADE UNION LAW FIRM

CWU Legal Services: UNIONLINE
0300 333 0303

UNIONLINE is the CWU's very own law firm offering members and their families a fast route to free, comprehensive legal advice.

To register a claim or for any legal advice call UNIONLINE on 0300 333 0303

More information at www.unionline.co.uk

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CWU DEATH BENEFIT

In accordance with the terms expressed in CWU Rule 4.111 Branches are advised that from the 1st October 2021 the CWU Death Benefit payment will be increased to £884.

Any enquiries regarding this should be addressed to the Senior Deputy General Secretary's Department on telephone number 020 8971 7237, or email address sdgs@cwu.org



“The latest from Dave Ward, your General Secretary

You have been magnificent – in 2022 let's all build bigger & better

As we approach the end of the year, our union faces some huge industrial and political challenges. Everybody across our union will recognise that the current political, economic, and social environment is one of the most difficult in the history of the Labour movement, and it is imperative that the trade union movement steps up to this challenge. Decisions taken at our recent special general conference place the CWU in prime position to do just that, alongside continuing to fight for our members in workplaces across the country.

I know that members from across the CWU are continuing to feel the bite of the intensification of work and are feeling a building of pressure as the Christmas period approaches. Matched with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, record levels of in-work poverty and our public services pushed to crisis point, our post-Covid situation looks more like a wreck than a recovery.

This should be a 1945 moment for our country, where eight decades on from the Attlee Government laying the foundations of the Welfare State, a new social settlement is created for our members and all working people who made incredible sacrifice throughout the pandemic. Instead, our country is stalked by poverty, hunger, a crumbling social security system, and a government that claps key workers but refuses to offer them a pay rise.

Our task as a union is to rebuild trade union power to rebuild collectivism itself. If we are unable to deliver change in our workplaces and in our communities, then nobody will. Politicians in Westminster will not do it for us – we, as trade unionists, must do it ourselves. That is what the campaign for a *New Deal for Workers* is all about. It isn't just a slogan, or a set of demands, but an historic project to bring together the trade union movement and leading community organisations in this country in a way that has never been achieved before. This is about doing things in the here and now, not waiting until tomorrow.

‘Recruitment Month in February is an exciting opportunity for us to work together, collectively, as one union.’

In the New Year, the CWU will embark on a massive one-union recruitment campaign to build the CWU. We are the strongest industrial union in the country, nobody engages with their members better than we do, but now we need to be the best at recruiting members as well. The *Recruitment Month* in February offers us the chance to do this work together, collectively, as one union. It is an incredibly exciting opportunity that I hope branches and members will work with us on to further the cause of the CWU.

I want to thank every single CWU member for their determination and their spirit over the course of the past two years. You all deserve huge credit for the way that you have all withstood huge pressures at work and home to provide the services that have literally kept this country connected. It is, after all, our members who have given us, along with all other key workers, the platform to shift the balance of forces in the world of work back towards working people. After decades of our labour being classed as ‘low-skilled’ or simply ignored, even this Government has been forced to acknowledge the vital role that working people play in society.

Whilst we know that there are many challenges ahead of us, there are also an abundance of opportunities. I look forward to us meeting those opportunities together, and wish all our representatives, members and your families a great Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Dave Ward.

Dave Ward
GENERAL SECRETARY

2022 New Year Resolution, first-class communications for YOU

With ambitious plans to develop new areas and strengthen what we do already, our head of comms Chris Webb tells *The Voice* of his hopes and aims for the coming year...



‘We’re here for one purpose only – to serve CWU members and bring them the top-quality communications service that they deserve,’ Chris begins. “So, our central aim is to provide what our members need and go to where our members are. That’s the central principle, the foundation of all this.

“Member-led and member-focussed communications.”

And you, our CWU members, like the rest of society today, are increasingly looking for interesting and engaging content on a wide variety of media, selecting what you want to watch, listen to, and read, on the most convenient or practical or accessible platform you choose at any given time.

Chris continues: “As a communications department, we have to respond to that reality – and keep responding as people move on from one technology to another. That’s why, five or six years ago, we overhauled our website and made sure that the CWU had a strong presence on social media and video – we changed the way we campaigned.

“And we all saw what a massive difference it made – successful campaigns, which engaged and mobilised members right across the UK.”

None of this happened easily however, changing our communications strategy and operations entailed training staff in specific new roles, developing team skills in videoing in particular – and producing content for these platforms on a regular basis.

And, at the same time, building on Chris’s member-led philosophy, training, advice and encouragement was regularly offered and given to branches to develop their own local networks.

Things have moved on, however, as he explains.

“Over these five or six years, technology has shifted forward again. We continue to make full use of those once ‘new media’, but we stepped forward again when we launched *Affiliate the CWU app* and have started to build our CWU profile on Spotify and Apple Podcasts – because these platforms are increasingly where people are going for their information.

“Just a short few years ago, podcasts were a fairly new arrival, in some respects quite a ‘niche’ forum,” says Chris. “But today, they represent perhaps the fastest-growing medium – and unlike some of the other new media, podcasts are enjoyed right across the age-range.

“So that’s why we’re making a particular effort in 2022 to develop our podcasting. We’re going to be putting together regular bulletins, reports, features and discussions on this platform.”

One of the most ambitious aims Chris has for 2022 is to introduce regular news-magazine-style broadcasting – a ‘CWU Newsweek’.

Appealing direct to *Voice* readers, he says: “Members, we’re going to come to you – we’ve got a mobile studio for location broadcasting, we’re developing a *Workplace Live* feature, and we’re also going to invite studio guests to come and speak to us as well as answering your questions.

“We haven’t decided what to call it yet, but our aim is to do this once a week and to report on the real stuff that’s going on out where you are, what you’re up against every day, the real hard grind out there on the frontline.

“CWU members have been magnificent this past 18 months or so, keeping Britain posted and keeping the UK connected – we want to help ensure you get the recognition you all deserve for the amazing jobs you all do.”

But our head of comms insists that the broadcasts “won’t be all industrial issues. We also want to know about those smaller stories of kindness and helping in our communities – tell us about your charity work or maybe a local community initiative you’re planning to take part in.

“And also, we’re going to have a lot of fun with this too – everyone knows CWU members have the best sense of humour in the whole UK, so let’s show that side of our great union as well.

“*The communications team can’t wait – so have a great Xmas everyone and we’ll see you in the New Year!*”

‘And if you haven’t seen it yet, watch out on CWU platforms for this year’s CWU Xmas Advert – it’ll make you smile!’



Working hard to protect jobs, pay, terms & conditions

As the year draws to an end, our BT members should be reassured that we've been working hard to negotiate the various strands of the *Future of Work* agreement. These discussions haven't been easy, and I'm sure many members are keen to know what's happening. Essentially there are a number of strands that need to be worked through; the work streams are the foundation of our future relationship and we absolutely need to get these right to ensure we are defending job security and protecting pay, terms and conditions.

Firstly, we need to create a pay and grading structure that's simple, consistent and transparent that allows for better career pathways, alongside resolving unagreed pay points. We're also discussing how we create opportunities for members to reskill and be redeployed for future jobs, where existing jobs require more technical skill or have moved to new locations – this will minimise redundancies.



In a third work stream we are discussing the redundancy guides, and crucially ensuring our members' jobs are protected through pay and pension protection should they choose to change roles. On that front – assuming executive agreement – we are close to signing off this element of the overall agreement.

Overseeing all of this is a governance team who meet weekly to ensure we are making progress and keeping on track with our objectives. Eventually each strand will need to flow through to the lines of business to ensure they are being enacted upon in a systematic way.



Overall, we are confident that the final agreement will increase job security and implement a fairer grading and pay structure, as well as ensure our members can retrain and reskill for future roles within BT.

We'll keep members updated when we can and will ballot members on key aspects prior to final agreement.

With pay negotiations on the horizon for many of our members in BT, Santander and Telefonica, the CWU negotiating teams will be in for some tough bargaining to keep pay rises in line with inflation. Rising prices, mainly due to the price of gas and oil as well as a shortage of goods, will affect many of our members, particularly those who are on low wages who will feel the impact more keenly. The CWU will be negotiating hard to persuade companies where we have recognition for

'We are confident that the final agreement will increase job security and implement a fairer grading and pay structure.'

collective bargaining rights, that our members have been the unsung heroes throughout the pandemic and should be rewarded for their efforts in their pay.

Pressure from the workforce always assists negotiators, so if you have any comments or wish to help us stress to your employers the need for a decent pay rise this year, we are urging you to get in contact with your workplace rep or to write to your branch.

It's been another tumultuous year in terms of the pandemic. Whilst we aren't yet out of the woods, everyone deserves some rest and recuperation, so I am wishing you all a restful and enjoyable break over the festive season and let's hope we all have a more prosperous and calm 2022.

Andy Kerr

**DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY
(T&FS)**

'Number of sticking points' remain as national negotiations continue

Talks that have dominated the industrial relations agenda in BT Group following the company's belated agreement to seek a negotiated settlement to the multiple grievances that triggered the union's *Count Me In* campaign of resistance last year were nearing their defining moment as *The Voice* went to press...

With it still too early to say whether the final outcome will mark a new dawn in the CWU's relationship with the company – or the resumption of hostilities that both sides drew back from in July in a last-ditch bid to avert the first BT-wide industrial action since 1987 – detailed discussions to address the final sticking points look set to go right to the wire.

It is now precisely a year since members across the whole of BT Group – including Openreach and EE – delivered the starkest possible message in a consultative ballot that they were prepared to strike if necessary to halt an unprecedented company assault on job security, terms and conditions.

The extraordinary 97.9 per cent YES vote they registered in a 74 per cent turnout not only exceeded but smashed the onerous legal threshold that would have applied in a statutory industrial action ballot. As such an unequivocal warning shot had been fired that, unless bosses changed tack on a vicious programme of compulsory redundancies, site closures and attacks on pay and grading, the company was on a direct collision course with its workforce.

Remarkably, it still took the first half of this year for that message to properly sink in, with gung-ho management teams in some lines of business apparently blind to the very real possibility of a full-scale industrial relations meltdown.

Serious talks finally got underway over the summer, however, following a belated Group-led agreement to a moratorium on any further redundancy or site closure bombshells.

Over the past few months significant progress has been made in many areas, notably including:

- The negotiation of a set of guiding principles to maximise the potential for voluntarism in future situations where staff surpluses arise
- The company's agreement to move from the position of arbitrary change to one of negotiation with regards to the *Better Workplace* site rationalisation programme
- A major new focus on reskilling and redeployment, which the union believes has the potential, if properly implemented, to take much of the heat out of the challenges posed by technological transformation over the coming years.



• A review of the grading structure under which the union is determined to resolve a myriad of unagreed grading issues and pay points while simultaneously pressing for a pay increase for all CWU-represented grades next year that is fully consolidated and pensionable.

Deputy general secretary Andy Kerr explains: "Compared to the situation we faced last December I'm infinitely more confident than I was that management has recognised it's in everyone's best interests that BT Group faces up to massive industry-wide transformational challenges in cooperation with its employees, rather than in conflict with them.

"Assuming we can satisfactorily address a number of sticking points that still remain, a draft deal will be placed before members early in the New Year – but the urgent priority now is to push this deal over the line, and that requires a spirit of compromise on both sides."

'Compared to the situation we faced last December, I'm more confident than I was.'
Andy Kerr

Full Ts&Cs restoration for Supply Chain members

Around 30 Supply Chain employees based at BT's Magna Park distribution hub have seen the retrospective restoration of terms and conditions (Ts&Cs) that were wrongly removed when they opted to remain with BT rather than be TUPE'd into probable redundancy.

In a significant win that rights an injustice dating back to the start of the year, the union successfully argued that members who had previously serviced a stock distribution contract for Allvotec should have retained their full Ts&Cs when applying for similar roles at Magna Park rather than risking a highly uncertain transfer to the company's Swindon site some 94 miles south.

At the time, Supply Chain bosses were adamant that, although those accepting directly comparable new roles within Magna Park would maintain their existing pay levels, they would have to accept *Workforce 20:20* Ts&Cs relating to the length of the working week, leave allocation and sick pay.

That stance has now been reversed following a breakthrough last month in talks on a situation stemming from Supply Chain's

decision to outsource test and refurbishment work from its site in Northallerton, Yorkshire.

With it clear from the outset that none of the 11 team member grade employees impacted wanted to move with their jobs to the new company, CDTI in Fife, the CWU fought for alternative roles to be made available for those wanting to stay at Northallerton.

CWU assistant secretary Tracey Fussey explains: "Once management conceded that these members' Ts&Cs should remain entirely unchanged, the company's earlier stance in the Magna Park situation was unsustainable.

"As such, we've not only secured a fair outcome for our test and refurbishment members in Northallerton, but also righted a previous wrong."

Tracey Fussey
CWU assistant secretary



Winning the peace is harder than winning the war

Just over a year ago postal workers were facing the distinct possibility of Royal Mail Group being fragmented starting with Parcelforce, the USO being down-dialled, terms and conditions being attacked and eroded and thousands of job losses.

It was because postal workers stood together that the national *Pathway to Change* agreement was concluded. This provided a different vision for the future, one based on growth of new products and services, a 24/7 operation, improvements to terms and conditions and renewed commitments around trust, as well as improving the working environment.

The agreed amount of change that has taken place in 2021 has been significant and possibly unprecedented over such a short period of time. But it was hugely important that we delivered on what we agreed, all eyes were on us, especially from the external community who are always waiting for a reason to break up this Great British institution in the interest of filling their own bank accounts.

interventions such as revisions-snagging and faster recruitment processes to meet the resourcing challenge.

What must also be recognised is that we have done all this during a pandemic and, like many key workers, our members have been tested to the full. No one anticipated the pandemic going on this long, people are exhausted, and a morale trap has potentially developed. It is hard to imagine at the moment that anything will be the same again and the constant daily operational challenge is demoralising. But we will come out of the other side of this, and we must ensure that the future normal is consistent with our mutual interest agreement. A fair day's work for a fair day's pay, and manageable workloads that allow us to provide the great public service which has historically made postal workers loved by the nation.

As a leadership we must keep our eye on the prize, we must continue to take our vision of reinventing Royal Mail Group for the next generation forward and create decent jobs for the next generation of postal workers. Change will be a permanent feature



Of course, our challenge was further complicated by having to commence deploying the agreement from a standing start, no run in and no opportunity to upskill local reps on the revision procedures. This makes the achievement of over 1700 revisions within six months across all our functions even more incredible, especially when you consider that our previous best was 137 in a year.

Against that backdrop, it is no surprise that some of the revisions have, when implemented, fallen and need adjustments. This is very common in normal circumstances, but when revisions are done on such a huge scale, the problems appear magnified. So, we are now going around and applying

in our quest and ensuring that we have negotiated change and not imposed change is essential to achieving lasting benefits in terms of pay, the 35-hour working week, better attendance patterns of no more than four-day weeks and continued progress to improve workplace culture.

'Postal workers have always been key workers and we salute you and thank you for everything you do.'



In terms of our new pensions scheme from the *Four Pillars* agreement, we now have Royal Assent for the legislation required and have agreed the approach for a new trustee board. We expect this new wage in retirement scheme for all members to be implemented in 2022.

Pride still matters and the sense of pride has been hard to hang on to during this extremely challenging year, but you also should be very proud of what you have done and what you will continue to do keeping the UK connected in every address in the country with total equality.

Postal workers are a very special breed and actually have always been key workers, we salute you and thank you for everything you do.

I would like to wish all CWU representatives, members and your families a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Terry Pullinger

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY (POSTAL)

Leading Royal Mail's Workplace Cultural Evolution

Delivery offices in Ware, Hertfordshire, and the North Yorkshire town of Leyburn were among units selected for the workplace culture programme, as were Bridgwater in Somerset and Whitechapel in East London – as well as Leeds VOC...

The participating workplaces were picked – jointly by the CWU and the company – according to their Trust Survey responses or previously existing or ongoing difficulties, while another factor was the need to include rural, suburban and urban units.

The Voice was invited to project launches at Ware and Leyburn, where CWU postal executive member Mahmood Ali and Royal Mail head of IR Jane Long explained the initiative to the assembled workforce.

The project brings in independent mediators, who invite everyone in these units to attend either group or one-to-one sessions. The feedback generated is strictly anonymised and then written up as a report, which is then analysed jointly by the union and management and used to inform decisions for the way forward.

At Leyburn and Ware, Mahmood's and Jane's speeches were followed by lively 'Q&A' sessions in which members of the workforce asked their questions and voiced their opinions.

Leyburn has 13 duties and 20 staff in post and the initial feedback there suggested a degree of scepticism about the initiative, with references to previous surveys not having led to necessary changes being made, along with other issues around breaks and workloads.

During the launch discussion, postwoman Lynn Moss commented that "this unit ran at its best during Covid" and, speaking to *The Voice* more recently, she explained that there was "a real closeness to each other" during that crisis period, which had felt "a bit like when they talk about the old war-time spirit."



Mahmood Ali
CWU postal executive

'The real positive about the culture project is that it shines a light on the underlying issues and provides an opportunity to work together and resolve them.'

'We've started with five units. There's already been real progress at Whitechapel and Bridgwater, and Leyburn and Ware are mid-process really, while the project at Leeds starts in the New Year.'

'Going forward into 2022, in Phase Two, we want to spread this initiative to around 30 more units.'



"The work had to be done and we did it," she said, adding that she "gets on OK" with the office manager and that he has "turned it around here in a good way."

"But sometimes he seems a bit military and I wish he'd be more informal."

Danny Weston – the recently elected CWU unit rep – told us that he has had some differences with the manager, but adds that "to be honest, a big part of the problem is that so many different managers have come through."



Danny agrees with Lynn that members worked exceptionally hard during the pandemic, saying: "It was bedlam. But with our office they're all great. When the pressure's on, they'll knuckle down and do the job."

However, he adds that "some people don't want the overtime, but it seems they feel obliged – which is unfair" and suggests: "If we could put up something on the notice board asking volunteers to put their names down for overtime that would be loads better, instead of putting people on the spot."

"There are a couple of changes I'd like to see – and I hope this culture project will bear fruit."

At Ware, a medium-sized suburban office with 90 staff in post and 52 walks, the discussion at the launch included comments about the suitability of the design of the office, under-staffing and recruitment difficulties and high staff turnover.

CWU unit rep Del Hawkins took up several points with Jane and Mahmood during the debate, voicing many of the daily issues members here face, but particularly focusing on practical suggestions which could improve matters and CWU committee member Jo Osborn, who spoke to *The Voice* after the meeting as well, expressed concern about the switch to online inductions during the Covid period.

As a workplace coach, Jo said that she felt new recruits did not benefit as much from remote training and that "we want this brought back to the unit and face-to-face."

When we caught up with Del and Jo again a couple of weeks later, they and the majority of the workforce had met with the independent mediator and were awaiting further developments and Jo, who is also CWU Eastern No.4 Branch women's officer, told us that work pressures continued to be a major factor, with the office regularly struggling to complete, saying: "At times we're snowed under here."

Del spoke about some solutions that he had pressed for and that were starting to come in, including the introduction of a night-sorting shift, part-timers made up to full-time and the prospect of dedicated parcel routes being established.



Some much-needed changes had been delayed due to a recent change in management, but with a new area manager – "who seems really pro-active, which is a good thing" – Del was more optimistic than he had been previously.

PAY, TRAVEL TIME, CONTROL... AND FIBRE TRANSITION

The Voice was invited to visit CWU regional and branch reps in the North East, South West and Northern Ireland to meet and speak with some of our Openreach field engineers about the many challenges they are facing at this time...



North East:

As the Yorkshire rain falls, Openreach engineer Nicole Moon and her colleague are busy fault-finding at a pole on the outskirts of Bradford.

On the job for over three years now, Nicole tells *The Voice* that she volunteered to become a CWU West Yorkshire Branch rep just before lockdown began and is now hoping to be able to attend the union's training courses.

"I love this job and I really enjoy the work – even out in the rain like today – but there are some things that are unfair, like the travel time for example. I have to give them up to one hour a day and it impacts more on me than others because I live outside the patch where I work," she explains.

"I think the travel time system should be equal for everyone, or at least give new recruits the opportunity to become equal with longer-serving colleagues after a time."

One question she says that she "always gets asked" is how male colleagues treat her as one of very few female Openreach field engineers and "the fact is, they're a great bunch to work with."

"My view is that if we women want to be taken seriously, we have to take ourselves seriously – do the job as well as possible, work hard and be keen to learn. And also speak up when it's needed, which I do."

The practical issue of uniform is more of a problem, Nicole says, explaining that "it takes a lot longer for me to order and get the kit I need – hey guys, we tend to be smaller and differently shaped than men!"

Further north, we meet up with CWU safety rep Gary Hawes at Rothbury Telephone Exchange – one of many smaller such buildings destined to be axed when fibre-optic cabling has fully replaced copper.

"When the fibre-build is fully complete, only the big main exchanges will remain and the network will 'loop' most of these smaller places out."

"But places like this are important for field engineers – especially in a rural area like this – where they can come for their breaks and to use the facilities etc," he tells us.

As union safety rep (USR) for North East Branch, Gary is determined that his members will continue to have this right and he regularly keeps an eye on these buildings to ensure they are being maintained – also keeping the field engineers' facilities app regularly updated.

Joining him on his union duty around his branch area, we meet several engineers out on jobs – such as Mark Davison in the coastal town of Blyth, who has just completed a fibre provision from the pole to the premises.

Mark explains how he has got used to handling fibre cable with greater care – particularly when cleating down walls – given its propensity to shatter due to its glass composition. And he also mentions the potential risk from 'splinters' – tiny glass shards piercing the skin – adding that this is why he wears gloves when cutting the cable.

In Bedlington, Darin Marshall is working at an underground joint repairing a

customer fault and speaks his mind about various issues of concern to him, highlighting the exceptional commitment shown by his fellow Openreach workers during this past period and voicing the unhappiness of many at the 2021 pay settlement.

"We want a better deal and we've got to go for and get a proper cost-of-living increase – and also make up the ground we've lost on pay," he insists.

Gary tells us that those comments echo the feelings of many, if not most members and that he is hoping that Darin will agree to become a CWU rep.

"We need more reps to come forward and he's exactly the kind of outspoken person our union needs – and Darin's also widely respected for the excellent job he does as an engineer too," Gary comments.

Ian Bell, the CWU Openreach co-ordinator for the North East who invited us up to his region, unfortunately fell ill with Covid, but thankfully, he was well on the road to recovery when we spoke with him more recently.

"Within my region, members have reported PTT and the lack of a pay rise this year as being serious issues for them," he told *The Voice*, and added that "PTT is a major issue creating an unfair two-tier workforce. Negotiations on how this can be removed continue with company, and our Openreach national team are determined to secure a resolution."

"The new agreement between the CWU and the company ensures there will be a negotiated pay rise next year and, as our members have continued to deliver as key workers during the pandemic, we'll be expecting the pay rise to recognise that hard work."



Northern Ireland:

Northern Ireland is a long way towards full-fibre provision, with approximately 75 per cent of premises now having this option available.

Chris Brown is the union's Openreach co-ordinator over here and he explains that, as well as fibre deployment, Northern Ireland is also in the midst of a major recruitment programme, with nearly 200 apprentices having been taken on over the past 18-to-24 months.



And we meet two of these newer engineers – Jonny McCormick and Adele Harte – when we join Chris on his CWU field rounds, in the County Down area on the day we spent with him.

Jonny – working at a cab near Ballynahinch – has been with the business for a year and a half, while Adele – on an installation in Newcastle – started in June, both of them having come from completely different previous jobs – a former mechanic and dental assistant respectively – and both tell us that they are enjoying the job and learning new skills.

"About 17 per cent of our new recruits are women in this current phase," says Chris, who adds that the vast majority of new recruits now are focused on learning fibre-cable skills and that the engineering function here operates with separate fibre and copper patch leads. "One thing that is good in Northern Ireland – as distinct from most of the rest of the UK as I understand it – is that we still have locally-based control," he continues.

"So, the people giving out the jobs, the key desk-based contacts for our field engineers, all know the area and mostly are people who have been field engineers in the area themselves in the past."

Jeff Kirk has been an engineer for 11 years and works on copper-based duties, which he says he would prefer to remain on. He's just arrived at a customer fault in Drumaness and, like many engineers, the point he wants to make is about pay.

"The last one was disappointing, and we need a decent pay rise," he insists. Jim O'Neill and a colleague are fibre-fault finding near the town of Gilford and while they

starters about the union, what it's all about and why they should join," she says.

"We try to get them to sign up there and then the response is very positive – for many of them, certainly the younger ones, it's often the first time they've heard about the CWU or unions altogether."

There was a lot of support for the union's *Count Me In* campaign over here, continues Denise, adding that the halt in the activity for the negotiations was received with disappointment among many members – although there is determination that the current national talks must reach a satisfactory settlement.

Other major concerns are ongoing job security and pay – "we've got to make sure we get a fair pay deal," she insists, "with inflation rising, our members' wages have got to keep ahead."

Chris agrees that pay must be a top priority going forward and that members will be determined to keep up with the cost of living.

However, Personal Travel Time, which is a big issue in most of the UK, is much less of a problem in Northern Ireland, due to smaller overall geography and the relatively shorter distances between locations.

"Overall, I'd say relationships with management are quite good. We do have our issues from time to time, but we find that we can almost always resolve them locally."



South West:

“Members in our region were frustrated by the pause in the *Count Me In* campaign,” says South West CWU Openreach co-ordinator Paul Clark, adding: “As well as the solidarity aspect, our field engineers appreciate how those *Better Workplace* changes impact negatively on them as well.”

“Control and planning roles have traditionally been opportunities for promotion and career development, but the *Better Workplace* re-organisation takes those opportunities away.”

“And also, having those jobs performed locally, and by people who have previously served in the field, is far more helpful,” he points out.



I’d be struggling to find a box and the local control, who was an ex-engineer, would know the patch well and would often know exactly where it was.”

And Martin believes that the recent period has proven that there is no operational need for desk-based work to be relocated, saying: “Even if the company wants to get rid of buildings, we don’t see why our desk-based members can’t work from home – and keep this function local.”

PTT (*personal travel time*) is a major grievance among engineers in this region too. Martin says it is “the biggest issue, certainly among our TMNE2 members. I was doing some recruitment today and it comes up time and time again.”

Connor told us that for him, “PTT is an issue,” explaining that “if I’m working a long way from home, I might not get home until 6pm, but I’m only paid until I close a job.”

“It should be fair for all of us.”

He and Liam both started work for the company within the last four years and so both are affected by the PTT procedures operating under the Workforce 20:20 contractual system, whereas Mark, who joined in 2004, is on the previous system which does not automatically require 60 minutes travel. But all three believe the situation to be unfair and that it should be equal for all.

As he heads from the town of Wellington to his next job in West Buckland, Liam tells us: “As CWU rep for young members in our branch, PTT is one of the major concerns that I hear complaints about – although it varies from patch to patch and some managers seem to be fairer than others in how they operate it.”

“But it does need to be properly resolved and made fair for all – definitely.”

And of course, as everywhere else, engineers are determined to achieve a cost-of-living pay rise in the forthcoming wage round, something that Paul describes as “absolutely imperative.”

“Our members were deeply unhappy at the non-consolidated deal that was basically imposed this time round – there’s nobody who has said they’re happy with it.”

“We’ve got to make sure we achieve an increase that meets the rising inflation rate and get a resolution on travel time, as well as a fair deal for our desk-based members,” he insists.”

Fibre transition is very advanced across this region, continues Martin, who explains that the programme is “pretty much complete throughout Cornwall” and “in the main towns and cities of Devon and Somerset, although some of the rural areas are still to be done.”

On the day that we spent out with Liam and his colleagues, the jobs we visited were in those rural areas, where the copper-cable to the premises had not yet been replaced and they told us that they were keen to be trained in fibre work – as well as expressing some apprehension as to future work volumes and job security going forward.

“It’s odd for people on copper work at the moment – we want to get fully trained up on fibre,” said Liam.

Martin says that this is going to happen, and explains: “The company has said they’re expecting to have everybody fully multi-skilled, so they could do all of the roles, fibre and copper as well, within the next two to three years.”

And he adds that, once the programme is 100 per cent complete nationwide, the next big job will be “pulling the copper cable out.”



Davie Bowman
CWU national officer
for Openreach

“I believe the comments from our representatives and members reflect the frustration felt by thousands of others and they should be assured that the national team and wider union are doing everything we can to deal with those. Personal Travel Time has been an injustice for years, it’s simply not fair and needs to be removed.”



This was something that engineers remarked on when we visited the area, meeting Liam Clarke, CWU young workers rep for the Somerset, Devon & Cornwall Branch, and his colleagues Connor Russ and Mark Palfrey.

Speaking as they worked at a pole in Culmstock, Devon, hoist operator Mark voiced his disagreement with the company’s decision to move these operations away from the Exeter area, saying: “I like the idea of having local engineering support and control” and Connor agreed, making the point that “if we have our control local, there’s the local knowledge. It’s better.”

Somerset, Devon & Cornwall Branch secretary Martin Evans tells *The Voice* that, “local control was really good for me back when I was starting out on the tools – it was great to have that support. For example,

Enhanced career pathways in FND boost promotion opportunities

Members across Openreach Fibre Network Delivery (FND) are set to benefit from new enhancements to previously transformed promotion opportunities for TMNE2 engineers that have already seen several hundred achieve £3,000-plus pay rises since 2019...

Introduced two years ago this month, the skills assessment framework – brokered by the union to address discrepancies in the way promotion from the lower to higher TMNE2 pay points had previously been handled in the formerly separate ID and BCD business units – has already transformed the career progression landscape across FND.

And further improvements are now coming onstream, explains Davie Bowman, CWU national officer for Openreach, who told *The Voice*: “There’s a lot more build activity taking place now, so the national team has worked hard to develop a new career pathway which recognises the fibre build activities carried out by our members, providing clarity on the additional skills people need to achieve the uplift.”

“We’ve also refined what happens for people who work on repayments work – namely the people in the field who do the complex work that the repayment project engineers (RPEs) plan. For these activities, a brand-new, web-based training package and buddy checklist has been developed.”

The revised approach came into effect in November and, as a direct result of the

agreement, around 300 team members are already in the process of progressing to the higher TMNE2 pay point, over and above the 160 who were already scheduled to progress under the previously agreed system.



On top of that, it is expected that around 250 further team members will progress to *Advanced Engineer* level in the next four months.

The pay rises in question are significant. The spot rate for a *Workforce 20:20* TMNE2 grade engineer on the higher pay point is £28,911, plus a 10 per cent bonus, compared to £25,775 plus 10 per cent bonus for those on the lower pay point.

Davie concludes: “From the outset, this has been about getting more money in the pockets of our TMNE2 members – and it’s really important that those on the lower pay point understand exactly how the career

pathway system works, because that information may well inform decisions that could significantly speed up their career development.”

In a message to members in this category, Davie says: “CWU branches across the country are on standby to assist individuals who believe they already meet the existing or new criteria to progress to *Advanced Engineer* but have not been contacted by their manager. So, if you believe you’re in that situation, speak to your local rep without delay.”

“The CWU national team also strongly encourages anyone who wants to upskill to have regular career pathway conversations with their managers, because these approaches should be logged with a view to ensuring that nobody gets missed out.”

“If, after a couple of conversations, nothing has happened and you feel you are being overlooked, speak to your local branch as a matter of urgency.”

Parallel breakthrough in SD to benefit 3,000+

At the end of November, agreement had just been reached with Openreach Service Delivery (SD) on improved career progression opportunities that are similar to those benefitting members in Fibre Network Delivery (FND) which are reported above.

But while the talks in SD took a little longer to reach their positive conclusion than the ones in FND, the enhancements to career pathways that have been achieved will benefit even greater numbers.

CWU Openreach National Team chair Fiona Curtis explains: “Openreach has committed to provide an opportunity for all current engineers in UK Operations, Network Engineering Design and Fibre to

the Premise to receive the relevant training to advance over the next two years.

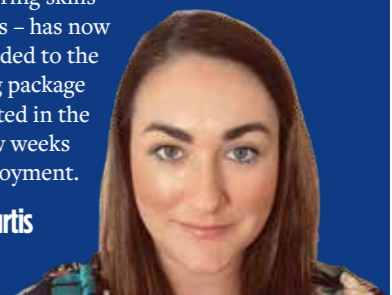
“This means that all engineers currently in SD will have an opportunity to progress to *Advanced Engineer*, if that is what they want, and that is a massive step forward.”

National officer for Openreach, Davie Bowman continues: “The agreed plan will see circa 3,100 members upskilled in the next two years. This is a major achievement by the CWU, and the National Team is sure this will be welcomed by all those impacted.” The difference the deal will make to individuals in practical terms is significant, because it fast-tracks progression from the lower TMNE2 pay point of £25,775 plus 10 per cent bonus to the upper paypoint of

£28,911 and 10 per cent on-target bonus – a pay hike of just over £3,000.

One significant change contributing to the fast-tracking of career progression, moving forward, is that the health and safety training module – which has to be completed as a precursor to the advanced engineering skills modules – has now been added to the training package completed in the first few weeks of employment.

Fiona Curtis



BUOYANT UK PARCELS MARKET IS GOOD NEWS FOR MAIL CENTRES

Next May's planned opening of the new North West Parcels Hub in Warrington does not put any existing mail centres under threat of closure, insisted CWU assistant secretary Davie Robertson, when *The Voice* spoke with him at the end of November...



Commercial forecasts predict ongoing annual growth in the UK parcels sector of around 6 per cent year on year he explained, as he took time out from a busy autumn schedule to update us on the Royal Mail pipeline and prospects for 2022 and beyond.

“Based on current volumes and those commercial forecasts, the current mail centre estate appears to be secure and should remain so,” said Davie. “In fact, many sites may become capacity-challenged in the coming years even with the introduction of the parcel hubs.

“Although the North West Parcels Hub is designed to have a throughput of around 40,000 items per hour and the Midlands Parcels Hub, opening in Spring 2023, will have a 60k hourly throughput, the vast majority of parcel traffic will continue to circulate through the mail centre/regional distribution centre (RDC) network.”

Within the processing estate, current and ongoing investment in automation provides further evidence of this positive vision of a future built on growth, Davie continued, saying: “Royal Mail has already committed to the deployment of 33 parcel sortation machines (PSMs) in three phases and the programme is being expanded with the expectation that between 50 and 60 PSMs will be deployed across the MC/RDC Network.”

While the commercial indicators are positive, this does not mean that the opening of the hubs will be without challenges for the sites in the catchment area, which will lose parcel workload to the new facilities.

“In the short term, there is the potential for a workload shock and we have concluded a national framework agreement to guide discussions on the transition of workload to the hub,” Davie told us. “It is imperative that a people’s plan is agreed for each site and that this plan controls the movement of work and we’ve secured commitments that agreed plans must ensure that all sites have sufficient workload to ensure the retention of attractive duty patterns and earnings packages.”

Midlands Parcels Hub – scheduled to open in 2023 – will be in Crick, Northamptonshire, which is approximately 50 miles away from Home Counties North (HCN) Mail Centre in Hemel Hempstead, where Davie recently invited *The Voice* to join him at a briefing of processing and distribution reps.

Area processing rep Colin Ince welcomed Davie and said that his visit was “a good opportunity to focus on processing concerns for the future of large parcels.

“We could be losing up to 8,000 yorks of traffic a week to either Crick or a hub in the south and my concerns are with how we deal with surplus of staff and the job losses,” he said.

HCN employs approximately 530 processing staff and around 150 in distribution – as well as a similar number of delivery workers operating out of here.

In the immediate period, however, issues raised within the NW Hub catchment area will be fully addressed by the Catchment Area Joint Working Groups, which are set up specifically for this purpose.



“Of course you can only fill the hubs once and in the period after deployment future growth volume will revert to the mail centre network” said Davie. “If growth continues as forecast, the current processing sites will rebuild workload beyond current levels in future years.”



‘If growth continues as forecast, the current processing sites will rebuild workload beyond current levels in future years.’

Driver training initiative welcomed

Davie also met and addressed the HCN and Greenford Mail Centre distribution reps immediately afterwards, but in this meeting, the questions focused on issues affecting drivers – in particular, what is being done to address the current severe shortage of qualified medium goods vehicle (MGV) and large goods vehicle (LGV) personnel.

And compounding the current situation, a looming demographic crisis is just around the corner, with one-third of Royal Mail’s LGV drivers aged 60 or over and approaching retirement age – and the average age in both this category and among MGV drivers in the mid-50s.

The new *Driver Academy* approach, recently agreed between the CWU and the business, sets in place a range of measures to address this – and also to provide real career opportunities for existing members of staff in non-driving roles.

Driver Career Path, due to commence in the New Year, will deliver upward of 500 training places to internal Royal Mail Group candidates – “as long as they already have a normal car-driving licence and meet the criteria in our national agreements they’ll be eligible to apply,” said Davie, adding that this will enable the vast majority of future driver vacancies to

be filled internally.

An *LGV Apprenticeship Scheme*, open to external candidates over 21 with two years’ driving experience, is to be piloted initially on a small scale, but if successful will be rolled out more widely. This initial activity draws on Government funding and utilises external training providers. However, to ensure that the academy approach is sustainable moving forward, activity will enhance the *Advanced Driver Coach (ADC)* role to ensure that future *Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (DCPC)*, occupational and even driving licence acquisition training can be delivered internally.

Commenting on this, area distribution rep Kelli Joyce said: “This is hugely important and super news in my opinion as distribution rep. There’s a lot of interest in driver training and I’ve had quite a few people making enquiries to me on this already. It could be a very good opportunity for a delivery postman or postwoman for example.”

In concluding the meeting, Dave noted: “At a time when the market for external driver resource has never been tighter, this initiative turns the focus on internal driver development and should provide real opportunities for our members across RMG to progress to professional driver roles, which has to be good news.”



Calling ex-coders, can you help the Postal Museum tell your story?

Our friends at the Postal Museum in London are currently researching the development of the postcode and will be celebrating its history in an exhibition from April next year. The museum is keen to tell as much of the story as possible and is interested in hearing from anyone who once operated some of the earlier coding machines and would be prepared to talk on camera about their experience.

In 1955, the Single Position Letter Sorting Machine (SPLSM) – otherwise known as Elsie – was introduced as the first successful British sorting machine, following pre-war experimentation with a Dutch machine. The Postal Museum will be exhibiting its SPLSM in the exhibition and would love to bring the machine to life by including a film showing it in operation and include short snippets of interviews with those who were involved in the coding story.

It might be that the museum is unable to trace anyone directly involved with the SPLSM, but perhaps you operated the First Generation or Second Generation coding

desk and would be willing to share your experiences with the museum. If so, please do get in touch with them using the details below.

They cannot, at this point, promise to use material from everyone who gets in touch but they would be delighted to hear from people who played a part in the story of coding, operating machines, or involved in the development of the postcode more generally.

Head of collections at the museum Chris Taft told *The Voice*: “I’m really excited to be involved with this project, which we all think is going to be of great interest of the public.

“If there are any readers out there who worked on these very early machines, then we’ll be delighted to hear from you. And please get in touch.”

Contact: chris.taft@postalmuseum.org



Grading review agreed for BT Supply Chain drivers

Longstanding demands for a review of the grading of HGV drivers in BT Supply Chain have finally been given the green light amid mounting management concerns that the company will struggle to retain experienced drivers in the face of a deepening driver shortage.

While union calls for a proper reassessment of appropriate remuneration levels for HGV drivers pre-date the current worldwide pressure on the haulage industry that was triggered in part by the Covid pandemic – and exacerbated in the UK by Brexit and a massive backlog of HGV driver tests – the company has now bowed to market forces that are resulting in textbook wage inflation for those with scarce skill sets.

With rival logistics companies already actively poaching drivers from lower-paying organisations, Supply Chain confirmed in the autumn that it is shoring up its logistical resilience by creating 48 new permanent roles across its transport business.

Simultaneously, the company announced a range of new temporary allowances for all HGV class 1 and 2 drivers of a special £100 per week supplement – a monthly payment of £433.33 – with van drivers receiving a £50 weekly supplement (£216.67 pcm).

Bosses are currently insisting, however, that the allowances are time-limited, that they are based on “current market conditions” and that, following a quarterly review, if and when it is determined that the supplements will end,

drivers will be given three months notice of the cessation.

Recently elected CWU national officer for Supply Chain, Tracey Fussey, said: “Whilst the national team welcomes the creation of additional permanent roles across the business, we do not believe that the



introduction of a temporary driving allowance is an acceptable solution to a longstanding grading issue for HGV drivers in BT Supply Chain.

“The Road Haulage Association has determined a shortage of more than 100,000

drivers in the UK, out of a pre-pandemic total of about 600,000, and a consequence of the shortage is that wages for some drivers within the haulage and logistics industry have been increasing with drivers demanding more money and companies fighting over the same pools of workers with incentives and retention bonuses.

“The CWU’s national team has robustly represented that the step taken by Supply Chain to deal with the immediate challenge via the introduction of a temporary allowance is not an acceptable solution.

“We firmly believe a permanent solution is required which remunerates our members correctly – hence the reason we’ve secured from the company a commitment to carry out a formal grading review.

“We’ll will be keeping members and branches fully updated as talks progress,” Tracey concludes.

‘A long-term solution is required which remunerates our members correctly.’
Tracey Fussey

CWU secures full Ts&Cs protection for relocated BT HQ workers

Robust intervention by the CWU on behalf of ISS security guards, who had initially been told they would have to re-apply for their jobs to secure guaranteed employment at BT’s new London HQ, secured a swift management clarification.

But it took longer to secure similar guarantees of continuity of employment and terms and conditions for scores of housekeepers and front-of-house staff, who faced the upheaval of separate TUPE transfers following the shock announcement that ISS had not been successful in its tenders to replicate those functions at the company’s new ‘One Braham’ headquarters.

However, during the final stage of BT’s phased exit from its historic Newgate Street head office – intervention by the CWU secured the categorical assurances that impacted members needed.

CWU national officer Tracey Fussey said: “It’s regrettable it took a determined final push by the CWU to achieve confirmation that every single one of the protections for transferring staff contained in TUPE law had been followed through in full – but I’m pleased to say that the seamless transfer of the previously outsourced BT Facilities Services members to their new employers is now finalised.

“The housekeepers involved now form a recognised bargaining unit in the Peartree

contact cleaning company – which we look forward to working with in the future – while the front-of-house staff join our existing bargaining unit in CBRE, with only the security guards at One Braham remaining with ISS.

“All have transferred to their new place of employment with their terms and conditions entirely unchanged.

“Crucially, this includes the guarantee that the Real Living Wage will remain the baseline pay for everyone on the BT contract, and that the compensatory payments the CWU secured for those who lost free BT Broadband – as a result of their disputed outsourcing by BT Facilities Services – will continue to be paid.”

Reunite with Royal Mail to save Post Office network

After campaigning virtually non-stop in recent years against Crown Office closures and franchising, CWU assistant secretary Andy Furey tells *The Voice* that the Post Office’s ‘totally illogical’ separation from Royal Mail must be reversed...

Following the act of political vandalism by the 2010-2015 Coalition Government in separating the Post Office from Royal Mail, we’ve campaigned, lobbied and argued at public meetings and held high-street petitioning and yes we’ve had several individual victories,” says Andy.

“But the harsh fact is we now have just 114 Crown Post Offices across the UK, whereas we had 373 before it was split away from Royal Mail – this has been the root cause of our problems in a nutshell.

“No other postal service in the world has divorced its delivery and retail operations – and there’s a good reason for that. It’s because separating the two is totally irrational.”

A six-month moratorium on any further closures or franchises has been in place since June and the union hoped this would enable them to discuss and agree with the Post Office leadership a new long-term strategy and vision to protect the remaining network and build its commercial viability through a positive programme of growing its existing revenue streams, while also developing new products and services.

“Our general secretary Dave Ward has made strenuous efforts in this period to speak with senior politicians and with other political leaders, particularly at the level of Metro Mayor, as well as lending the full weight of the whole CWU to our direct discussions with the Post Office,” says Andy.

“But yet sadly, despite all of the hard work put in by the senior leadership of this union – and despite the wide cross-party political



support that our positive vision for the Post Office has won – here we are, nearly at the end of 2021 and unfortunately no agreement is in place with the company.”

The moratorium is scheduled to come to an end at the close of the year and, although an extension would be welcomed, Andy tells *The Voice* that this “would need to be a means to an end. While of course an extension to the moratorium is preferable to a resumption of the closure programme, our fear is this could just be a case of ‘kicking the can down the road’.

“We will, of course, continue to work as hard as possible to achieve a national agreement for our members, as we need to protect their jobs. In today’s environment, it is crucial for our country to defend vital community services. And it goes without saying that we’ll also continue to fight and lobby and hold public meetings and organise high-street petitioning if necessary.

“But ideally, the fundamental solution is to reunite with Royal Mail,” he asserts.

“And look what’s actually starting to happen in one or two towns where a closed Crown Office was historically attached to a delivery office. There have been examples of Royal Mail making, or seeking to make, use of those buildings as much-needed extra space for its mails operation, in the guise of a customer callers’ office.

“It’s not outlandish to speculate that these could become places where customers can access Royal Mail’s new products and services – and one can certainly see how these could evolve into, in essence, perhaps restored Crown Offices in all but name.

“Doesn’t this show, once again, how completely illogical the 2012 separation was?”

“As a postal service retail outlet serving the UK public, the appropriate business arrangement for the Post Office network is full integration with Royal Mail – the UK’s public-service postal delivery provider.

“As the saying goes: it ‘ain’t rocket science.’”

Fighting for our postmasters – for justice and a fair deal

While the future of our Crown network continues to be the subject of intense negotiation and political lobbying, the union is also stepping up efforts on behalf of our growing postmaster membership.

CWU National Postmasters Branch secretary Mark Baker tells *The Voice* that the legal action being taken by the union in pursuit of official ‘worker status’ is expected to commence at an Employment Tribunal in February.

“The case itself, in terms of the decisions handed down in other cases, such as

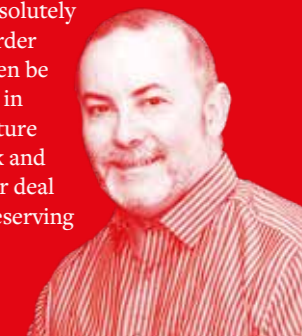
Uber, and the evidence in our claim, is a compelling one” he explains, adding: “I don’t want to tempt fate here, but on our side we feel confident in our case.

Against the backdrop of the Horizon Scandal* – which, as well as exposing the disgraceful behaviour of the Post Office senior leadership, also revealed the utter failure of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters to support its own members – there is a feeling that the case for formal recognition of the CWU too is fully justified.

“As an independent and free organisation, we want official collective

bargaining rights for our union among postmasters as well as the legal granting of worker status,” insists Mark.

“This is absolutely necessary in order that we can then be more effective in shaping the future of our network and getting a better deal for our well-deserving postmasters.”



Last month, renowned journalist Nick Wallis published his first book *The Great Post Office Scandal* all about the Horizon affair. Read the interview he recently gave to *The Voice* on Page 29.

DELIVERY UNDER PRESSURE: ROYAL MAIL NEEDS TO SPEED UP RECRUITMENT

With nearly 1,200 delivery revisions having taken place during the spring and summer, the union's outdoor secretary Mark Baulch was busy this autumn visiting offices across the country, speaking with reps and members and working hard to iron out problems and issues...

It's been said many times that this programme of revisions has been extremely ambitious," says Mark, "but getting them done was a key part of our *Pathway to Change* agreement and was a straightforward quid-pro-quo for the hour off the working week.

"That's an important member benefit this union has delivered, as well as other important aspects of *Pathway to Change* – job security and pay, whilst dealing with the transition of workload between letters and parcels.

"But another massive gain has been the number of people made up from part-time. Almost 2,000 members have been brought up, contractually, to being full-time employees. And we've also now got a changed recruitment policy by the business, who, until recently, had a policy of only employing new starters on 25-hour contracts instead of filling roles to the actual agreed level of hours.

"Now they're taking people on full-time and the debate now is about how to speed that recruitment process up, get new entrants through the door and retain them."

A total of 1,181 duty revisions had been completed and deployed by the end of November, with a further 34 partly deployed in phases, and 68 units set to deploy in the New Year.

Of the 1,181, the majority were of the so-called 'tabletop' variety – a relatively straightforward updating – and 298 revisions

were 'structural', i.e. full duty revisions.

Not surprisingly, as an issue affecting the largest group of our CWU membership, this process has generated a great deal of feedback and Mark has visited many delivery offices over the past period, meeting reps and members and talking through the issues people are facing – as well as facing the membership on CWU *Facebook Live*.

"There have been a whole lot of complaints, that's for sure, many of which should be laid at management's door," he says, "but as I've said, as a union, we're in the

dialogue with them to review the revisions process along with the approach to structural revisions.

"A common complaint is that both members and reps have reported not being listened to and a feeling that this process has been done 'to' them rather than 'with' them – this has, in many cases, led to unsatisfactory outcomes. However, there is a post-implementation review (PIR) procedure, which is there to address serious failings and I've been encouraging reps to make use of this facility."

Other issues include frame layout, labelling and design problems, issues around high capacity trolley routes (HCTs) and the re-organisation of duties after the creation of dedicated parcel routes (DPRs) – of which approximately 1,100 have been created across the business as of the end of November – and the sequencing of these redesigned walks.

"But," Mark continues, "one thing

that has become apparent, from visiting units as well as hearing reps' feedback, is that we have a real staffing shortfall right across the business and recruitment is a core reason for much of the difficulty being experienced, compounding the problems of the revisions."

It takes approximately a minimum six weeks from initial application to starting employment and there are necessary processes that need to take place – background checks due to the trusted and specific nature of the job, as well as the normal



candidate suitability selection – but Mark is concerned by reports of delays of several months in recruitment and has pressed the company to tighten up these timescales.

"We've currently got vacancies running at 6.7 per cent across the company. And clearly this is having a massive impact on the daily struggle for individuals to complete and the unit to clear. We've been warning the company for years that they need to recruit full-time staff or to the right amount of hours necessary, but it's only recently that they've moved back to sensible recruitment.

"Nobody wants the company to cut corners or drop its recruitment standards, but it shouldn't be taking four months, that's ridiculous. We do need more of a sense of urgency here – and although the *Friends & Family* initiative has improved things recently, we'll keep pressing."

Both of the units that *The Voice* visited with Mark this autumn – Ely in Cambridgeshire and Wembley, in West London – have entered the post-revision PIR process amid serious staff shortages, with reps and members alike fighting hard to get the job done in the aftermath of structural revisions that have highlighted some serious problems.

Dave Bharrat, CWU rep at Wembley, and Harrow & District Branch secretary, told us that "we've got 104 staff in post here, 20 of them are part-time, but we're currently carrying 14 vacancies, and in this area there's a lot of growth.



"As part of our PIR, there's going to be a re-sign/re-pick in the New Year," he continued, "although one good thing that's come out of this is 30 part-time roles lifted up to full-time, with most of our remaining part-time members also having their contracted hours increased."

Dave adds that Wembley Delivery Office now has eight DPRs, which operate later hours and deliver mainly in the afternoons and that there is also a night-sorting shift here – explaining why this office, at 8am, is quieter than most units tend to be at this time.

Members of staff we speak to are mostly critical of the revision, with a common point being made about re-organised routes having increased delivery spans and a struggle to complete.

In Ely, unit rep Garry Mackenzie reports that their revision reduced the number of walks from 61 to 54, with four DPRs being created – and a further four or five scheduled for introduction the week after our visit.

"We've maintained 'Wallington weeks' here – a popular duty pattern in delivery – and the start times and early finish on Saturdays," says Garry, "and we've achieved uplifts for our part-time people.

"But there have been serious problems here with the planning side of things – frames are much fuller, delivery spans have increased, and the sequencing is a major issue.

"I'm really glad Mark has come up here and seen what we're up against and our area delivery rep and divisional rep are here today for our PIR meeting."

Walking around the Ely office, it is hard to find anyone

What's a delivery revision?

For readers not familiar with the postal industry, delivery revisions are carried out in order to adjust the work of a delivery office to take into account the changes in that locality and the ever-changing mail volumes, mails diversity and mix.

One part of a town may experience rapid population growth over a period – making that delivery duty too large for one postwoman/postman to complete. Equally, the numbers of businesses or residents in a specific locality – therefore, the number of delivery points – can also decline for a variety of reasons too.

The mail mix – the proportion of letters relative to parcels and packets – has changed dramatically, parcels and packets growing exponentially with the growth in online shopping and, therefore, home delivery. And this drives the need for different solutions, working arrangements and equipment methods.

Delivery offices themselves, too, change over time. New units are built, or old buildings close down and merge with neighbouring Royal Mail units.

So, revisions happen for all these reasons – and the *Pathway to Change* agreement commits to annual revisions in all delivery units. In theory, it's a process to make delivery duties more equal and fairer on staff and to keep the service efficient and reliable for our customers... in theory...

with a positive view of the recent revision, but as at Wembley, there is strong support for the unit rep and an appreciation of the extremely difficult job they do on behalf of the members.

In his comments about the two visits, Mark tells *The Voice*: "We've got two extremely hard-working reps here who are under a lot of pressure and it's good to see they've both triggered the PIR process so that in both these units, there is now a plan in place – or a plan being put together – to put right what's gone wrong."



WE'RE READY FOR THE BIG CHALLENGES OF 2022



November's Special General Conference enabled the whole CWU to come together and collectively shape our direction on all fronts for the year ahead...

Stepping up our fight against racism, honing our union's political intervention, developing a one-union recruitment strategy and pushing forward in our campaign for a *New Deal for Workers* were the biggest issues debated and decided at last month's three-day event.

Opening proceedings, our general secretary Dave Ward spoke for everyone when he expressed the hope that this would be the last time we would be forced to hold such events online.

He went on to summarise the key themes of the conference agenda, explaining why these are the top-priority subjects, and then had some strong words of praise for our members and reps.

"CWU members have done an unbelievable job and built a platform to completely reevaluate the world of work going forward and how workers are appreciated," he said, adding: "I also want to thank our reps on the frontline – they've almost become counsellors to our members during these tough times, so thanks to you all."

"We're the best union, part of a movement that can grow again, and now is the time to make the right choices on how we shape the future."

Taking anti-racism into workplaces and communities

First item on the agenda was anti-racism, with an NEC proposition appropriately moved by our head of equality, education & development Kate Hudson, who began by saying how proud she is of the CWU at all levels for its "no-nonsense approach" and for "fighting for the things that matter."

"This is the time to create real change," she told delegates. "By working collectively, we will break down barriers together and build real positive change. And most of all, we need to educate. Education is the key to change."

The motion, which sought to commit the union to a range of practical steps to tackle racism and all forms of injustice through the power of our collective strength, was seconded by Amarjite Singh, who leads on the NEC for the union's black and minority ethnic postal members.

Amarjite emphasised the importance of active and public campaigning and the urgent need to "work with the grassroots, and make sure our members understand what racism does to people and make sure racism is challenged at every point."

"It's important that every branch takes this seriously and it's for all of us to take responsibility and create an atmosphere in which people are happy to work," he added.

After adopting this resolution, conference moved onto a second motion on supporting active anti-racist organisations, moved by Jason Richards of South East Wales Amal Branch, and seconded by Birmingham Amal Branch's Sajid Shaikh, who described himself as "an old veteran of anti-racist struggle" and suggested that "our anti-racist education needs to go into schools and colleges to engage with younger people."

Janice Richardson, Eastern No.3 Branch, expressed her support for the proposition and set conference a challenge when she asked: "Are you actually going to walk the talk rather than talking the talk?" And Capital Branch delegate Pagett Lewis, while also supporting the motion, made the point that he and other members did not like the term 'BAME' – an acronym formed by the words 'Black And Minority Ethnic'.

Telling conference that he preferred the term 'people of colour', Pagett urged: "Don't call us 'BAME' – we're not all the same."

In her reply to the debate, Kate Hudson thanked delegates for adopting the two resolutions and for their many and varied contributions.

Specifically in response to the question raised about the use of the 'BAME' acronym, Kate said that organising discussion forums to talk about the use of this term and other terminology is one of the action points highlighted in the CWU Anti-racism Framework booklet which the CWU is committed to.

"A lot of people have said to me about the use of the word 'BAME'," she continued, adding: "We are going to have a discussion around this and about what replaces this."

Hammering out our new political strategy

The next major subject for conference was our union's political strategy, conference backing a series of measures proposed by Dave Ward plotting a new course for the CWU, linking our branches and regions with community protests, and supporting Labour politicians who are making a difference and rebuilding a collectivist culture.

The policy aims to build positively on our Labour Party affiliation and takes an active approach to fighting back against injustice and winning for the people, explained our general secretary as he formally moved the proposition.

"This isn't about just staying in Labour, it's about genuinely trying to forge a new way forward," said Dave, and, citing comments made by Deji Olayinka from UTAW Branch in an earlier debate, he added: "It's about, as Deji said, building a new social movement."

Our general secretary continued with references to "working in a more structured way" with the Welsh Labour administration, with Labour metro mayors in England and with Labour local authorities who are "getting elected and making positive changes for people in their communities."

"It's about helping our regions and branches link up with communities and organisations that share our values and to build collectivism."

"And if we can do this, we can help shape a direction for our whole movement to follow."

As well as directing CWU support and resources to Labour politicians who are showing, in practice, that they are sharing our values, the new direction also includes a CWU Working-class Candidates Programme, which aspires to get more of our members to put themselves forward as Labour Party candidates.

This aspect of the policy is part of an aim to return to the days when a far larger proportion of Labour MPs came from working-class backgrounds, as Dave said in his speech: "We want to move back to working-class people representing working-class people."

'We need to build collectivism in society and across the world of work like never before.' Dave Ward

Recruiting, organising and building

CWU head of recruitment and organising Ray Ellis moved a detailed strategy motion from the NEC aiming to launch a high-profile national campaign in February 2022.

This will have the “objective of producing a significant immediate increase in membership, while also embedding an ongoing culture of recruitment and organising across all branches and structures within the CWU,” he explained.

The NEC motion was backed and a later motion, calling for a new training package to teach recruitment methods to reps and moved by South Central Postal Branch secretary Chad Croom, also won approval. Speaking in favour of this motion, Scotland No.1 Branch delegate Mel Gorrie talked about the difficulties reps can face in this area of their work and said: “Something needs to change and I think this might be the answer to it.”

Kate Hudson also supported the South Central Postal motion on behalf of the NEC, agreeing that it is necessary to upskill our reps and activists. In her capacity as our union’s head of education and development, she said: “I want to assure Mel that my team has already sat down with Ray and talked about how we can put recruitment and organising at the root of everything we do and I also thank Chad for putting this on the agenda pad.”

Conference went on to unanimously endorse a proposition instructing the NEC to campaign within the TUC for a national rally and demonstration next Spring in support of the *New Deal for Workers* campaign.

“We need to start preparing for this and building support,” urged Dave Ward in his speech moving this motion, adding: “We’re Going to win by building collectivism.”

Successful conference - now for action

Conference passed a whole range of other motions too, 22 in total covering issues such as mental health, the need to outlaw so-called ‘fire & re-hire’, social and health policy, and wider subjects impacting on society as a whole.

After our president Jane Loftus brought proceedings to a close, Dave Ward thanked her and others for their efforts to make the event a success and then gave his closing remarks to delegates.

“Our movement has been a little bit disorientated and we’re going to need to do something different. As well as the motions we’ve debated, it’s about offering a new leadership in how we tackle these problems.

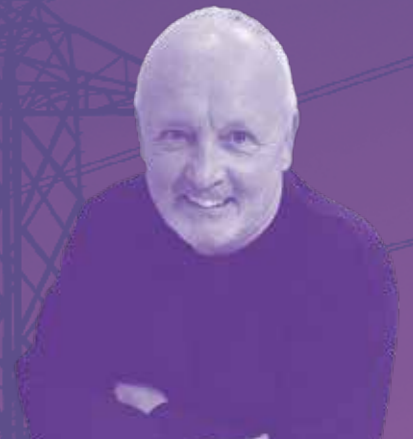
“We need to build collectivism in society and across the world of work like never before.

“Carrying motions is always good and now we’ve got a strategy and a direction – let’s go out and make change happen.”

‘This is the time to create real change. We will break down barriers together and build real positive change.’ Kate Hudson

Nationalise the UK energy sector – put people before profit

November’s economic figures pointed to a tough winter ahead – with the BBC reporting year-on-year domestic gas and electricity prices up 28.1 per cent and 18.8 per cent respectively*. Here, our senior deputy general secretary Tony Kearns addresses this crisis...



‘Nationalisation is the answer,” insists Tony, as he explains that the sharp price increases followed the Government’s decision to allow energy regulator Ofgem to relax statutory consumer price controls.

While it is true that the energy industry’s wholesale costs have risen sharply on world markets, responding to this by allowing the private companies who run the sector more freedom to increase household bills was, he says: “Morally wrong and protects these businesses’ profits at the expense of the poor and vulnerable.

“Nobody’s talking about cutting shareholder dividends, they’re not talking about giving up profiteering, all they’re doing is passing their costs onto the consumer and making people’s lives worse.”

Tony says: “We’ve got to bring this sector back into full public ownership – and then we can start to put people first. These kind of shock increases would not happen if the sector was publicly owned, because then they would be run for the public interest, not private profit.”

Imports account for almost one-third of the UK’s energy supply**, making us more vulnerable than many countries to the variations of world markets, and a return to ‘net’ self-sufficiency – which was, mostly, the case between 1980 and 2004 – could help to protect against future shocks to households. But here again, our SDGS points out that “a strategy of leaving it to private companies just won’t do the job.

“Domestic energy generation by wind and other renewables is increasing, but nowhere enough in terms of scale or speed. “Expanding renewable energy to the extent needed requires enormous investment and private companies just won’t put that kind of financial resource into such a long-term project. It’s obvious that massive state intervention is needed – and of course it’s the right thing to do.

“But it becomes the wrong thing to do if our Government is just going to use public money to develop the infrastructure and then hand the whole business over to the private companies to keep on making their profits.

“UK energy must be renationalised – so that public investment can develop these new industries and so that the benefits can be enjoyed equally by all the people.”

Voice readers will know that Tony has strong views on the need to reduce pollution to improve quality of life, as well, of course, on the need to de-carbonise in the midst of the threat posed by climate change – and public ownership of UK energy is an essential step towards both of those goals, he insists.

“Having a debate about nuclear or hydro or gas or coal or renewables is an interesting debate, but you’re not going to make any real progress in that debate unless energy is in the hands of the people, publicly owned – because what you will come up against are energy companies making millions of pounds in profits and giving it to shareholders and directors.

So, bring it back in public hands – then we’ll debate the energy mix.”

Our SDGS is highly critical of the current Conservative Party administration, describing Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Government as “not truly representative of the people.

“What big business has done is put its own people into government. Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak et al are placed in those positions by big business, they’re funded by big business, and they govern in the interests of big business.”

November’s monthly economic figures saw consumer prices (CPI) up to a 10-year high of 4.2 per cent, while the retail price index (RPI) hit 6 per cent and overtook overall UK wage rises (up 5.8 per cent***), after several consecutive months in which year-on-year pay had increased faster than inflation.

For millions of people across the UK, this sharp hike in the cost of living came on top of the Government’s Autumn Budget decision to raise National Insurance contributions by 1.25 per cent from April 2022.

And Tony cites Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s Autumn Budget as evidence for his critique, saying: “At a time when many thousands of people have been forced to visit foodbanks, millions are having to pay increased energy bills, and everyone is facing rising inflation – what was Mr Sunak’s and the Tory Government’s response?”

“He attacked the triple lock on pensions, cut the tax rate for banks, and increased the tax burden on ordinary people through the hike in National Insurance.

“He didn’t deliver for the people. He delivered for the banks, for the big business, for the wealthy and the powerful.

“People will continue to be made poorer whilst this Government continues to deliver for a wealthy few,” Tony warns and points to the CWU’s *New Deal for Workers* campaign and our union’s rallying call for a “return to collectivism” as the best way to resist Tory attacks and build a serious movement for change.

“As our general secretary Dave Ward says, there must be a serious approach from the trade union movement, community groups and the Labour Party to come together, to form an effective opposition and build a real coalition of forces into a powerful force for progress.”

*Inflation: UK prices soar at fastest rate for almost ten years’ BBC News online 17.11.21 by Daniel Thomas <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59316544>

**BEIS ‘UK Energy in Brief 2021’ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1032260/UK_Energy_in_Brief_2021.pdf

***ONS ‘UK Labour Market Overview November 2021’ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/november2021>

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This is Real Labour in Power – this is what we want to get behind

Following on from the new political strategy decided by last month's Special General Conference, our general secretary Dave Ward sets out examples of what the best kind of Labour politics can achieve...

Labour's growing crisis could not have been made clearer than by two articles running on one Sunday this November.

In a Sunday Times piece on the 21st, a journalist for the Murdoch press mocked former shadow chancellor John McDonnell's commitments to nationalising the rail and water industries. His successor-but-one, Rachel Reeves, was quoted as saying that "we're definitely not going to talk about that," and that Labour is now a "pro-business party."

On that same day, the Guardian announced that Welsh Labour's national leadership had struck a deal with Plaid Cymru.

On his blog, Labour left-winger and member of Labour's national executive committee Darren Williams wrote that the agreement had been "overwhelmingly endorsed" and that: "The agreement included moves to establish rent controls; the extension of free school meals to all primary school pupils; childcare for all two-year-olds; creation of a National Care Service; limits on second-home ownership; a replacement for council tax; the creation of a publicly owned construction company and an energy company; changes to the Senedd's size and electoral system, including a statutory guarantee of gender balance; and measures to promote the Welsh language."

This deal comes off the back of Labour winning 30 seats in the Welsh Senedd back in May, while the Labour Party's Westminster leadership, dedicated to being as uninspiring as possible, was being bruised in by-elections from Hartlepool to Chesham & Amersham and Batley & Spen.

It is not hard to identify what sustains Welsh Labour's popularity. Under Mark Drakeford's calm and unassuming leadership, Wales has not only weathered the pandemic much more admirably than its English neighbours under direct Tory rule, but it has also shown itself to be markedly more progressive than Westminster Labour.

Under Mr Drakeford, Wales has the most generous childcare offer in Britain, fracking is banned, student nurses still get to keep their nationally-scrapped bursary and the bedroom tax is not implemented. Pensioners get free prescriptions, while children get free school meals should they need it, the railways have been taken into public ownership and right-to-buy has been abolished.

While there has always been a strong tradition of maintaining what is often described as 'clear red water' distinct and separate from Westminster politics, the contrasts could not be clearer, when Westminster Labour is dominated by former bankers, double-jobbing corporate lobbyists and shameless advocates of outsourcing and war.

This is why, in that same month, our Special General Conference voted to support a new political strategy. In short, the new strategy means turning off the tap to Westminster. For far too long, members decided, the political class in Labour have taken their money for granted. As a result, less money and general support will go to the national Labour Party, as a warning that Labour MPs cannot expect a something-for-nothing culture from working-class people.

Instead, the financial and moral support of the CWU's combined membership will be redirected towards politicians, institutions

and movements who have our backs. This includes Labour MPs, council candidates and other regional politicians who share the collectivist ethos of this union, and will defend and advance those interests. But it also includes various administrations offering real change in the here and now.

Mark Drakeford's Wales is one example. But we, the CWU, also intend to support other Labour administrations intervening to improve the lives of people they represent. While Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham gained a great deal of popularity for standing up for his region against paltry offers of financial support from the Tories, he also gained great support from voters for announcing he was bringing Greater Manchester's privatised bus services – notorious for their shoddy services and poor workers' rights record – into public hands. Similarly, West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin swept to power in May's local elections by pledging to bring buses back into public ownership.

'It is not hard to identify what sustains Welsh Labour's popularity. Under Mark Drakeford's calm and unassuming leadership, it has shown itself to be markedly more progressive than Westminster Labour.'

In the North West of England, the ascension of Labour Left politicians into positions of authority has provided brilliant results. In Preston, a central Lancashire former mill city with a population of 144,000, local socialist councillor Matt Brown has led the council since 2018. After having turned away corporate property developers from the city, Brown's leadership has seen Preston Council adopting a Community Wealth Building approach. Its principles are simply put. The money the local community puts into the local economy should go back to the local community.

Guiding on from this principle, the city – which is one of the most deprived areas in England – has sustained itself. Unlike many former 'Red Wall' areas, the city still maintains a bustling high street, a rich array of community institutions like pubs and markets, and the city seems to be full of ambition.

This ambition is reflected in the council's work. At the time of writing, it is building its own city-centre cinema. Worker-owned co-operative enterprises are flourishing with the council's active assistance, the council helps facilitate the work of community groups in planning things like holiday markets and free school meal initiatives. It is setting up an Uber-style co-operative taxi service for workers to self-manage and cut out the middleman and is in the middle of establishing a workers' education centre, overseen by local trade unions.

As a result of Preston Council's investment, the city has successfully resisted the Tory electoral pressure found in other 'Red Wall' areas, holding on to all seats in May. So too did Salford. Under the leadership of Paul Dennett – like Brown, a longstanding socialist and vocal Jeremy Corbyn supporter – the original 'dirty old town' has established its own development company which has raised enough money to build thousands of new council houses – the largest operation of its sort in nearly 60 years. It has heavily invested in co-operatives, aided and organised mutual aid groups, and is currently trying to secure the Living Wage for privately employed carers – with the hope of bringing care services in-house in the near future.

Even in Scotland, where reports of Labour's death are regularly heard, Joe Cullinane's leadership in North Ayrshire has shown what can be possible. In an article for Tribune magazine back in February, he wrote: "We start from the principle that our job as Labour politicians is not to manage the status quo more effectively than our opponents – rather, we must rip it up and create

something better." Cullinane has fought the disempowerment of local government – and the complacency of Westminster Labour – by embarking on radical initiatives that try and alleviate period poverty, champion young people and their mental health, and create investment to build council houses.

All of these initiatives have not only fought the super-rich and the greedy who seek to exploit and rip-off our communities, but also against the timidity of national Labour and its perceived 'wisdom'. Despite being successful – and being immensely popular with the sort of people Labour need to rebuild itself and eventually win national power – these initiatives are being actively ignored by a Westminster clique far more interested in jobs for the boys than making people's lives better.

This is why in the future, the CWU is going to be offering stronger support to the initiatives mentioned here. These are politicians who are seeking out ways to break down barriers for working people, and to help improve their lives. These examples of enacting real change might fly over the heads of Westminster Labour, which provides far too little leadership at the moment.

But these examples of *Real Labour* in power should be what voters think about when they're considering how they vote – and if the Labour leadership won't promote these ideas out of spite, then it is up to our movement as a whole to fill that void.

Dave Ward.

'The financial and moral support of the CWU's combined membership will be redirected towards politicians, institutions and movements who have our backs. Labour MPs, council candidates and other regional politicians who share the collectivist ethos of this union, and will defend and advance those interests, as well as various administrations offering real change in the here and now.'



LOOKING INTO THE EYES OF THE FUTURE*

The CWU's first national face-to-face event since 2019 was held in Newcastle during the autumn, when young members from every corner of the UK came together for a weekend of discussion, debate and making and renewing friendships...

On arrival, delegates wore their pink CWU against racism T-shirts in a united show of opposition to prejudice and the union's determination to keep fighting for equality. They proudly stood for a group photo and were welcomed to the city by event chair Quincy Raymond (Tyne & Wear Clerical Branch), her co-host Alex Whitehouse (Newcastle Amal Branch) and CWU North East Region secretary John Woodhouse.

The atmosphere was warm and enthusiastic at the evening's informal buffet, with many catching up with people they had not seen for well over a year, while others were attending their first CWU event and were quickly introduced to fellow young members from branches all over the country.

An early night was followed by an early start the next morning, when our general secretary Dave Ward formally opened proceedings with a typically thought-provoking speech which gave extremely useful guidance and advice without ever patronising his audience.

"It's often said that you are the future of our movement and that's true – but you are also the 'now' of our movement too," he began, emphasising from the start that many of our young members are already in representative positions in their respective workplaces and dealing with daily issues on behalf of their members.



After a wide-ranging speech touching on all of the key industrial and political tasks facing our union in this period, Dave concluded with a specific target to those present, challenging them to "work with others, building relationships in your workplaces and branches and see if each one of you can come back to this event next year with another five young activists."

A busy Saturday then got under way, with some guests from the TUC – Helena Hammock, Anthony Hayes and Joe Wheatly – giving an informative presentation on campaigning. They gave a particular focus to some of the excellent work they have been doing fighting against poverty pay and insecure employment.

Next up was former North West Durham MP Laura Pidcock, who is now working with the anti-austerity campaign *People's Assembly*. About five minutes into her speech, Laura put up a slide on the projector behind her with the giant words:

"WHAT IS THE POINT?" and asked each table in the room to discuss the question and feed back their responses.

It was an innovative way to actively engage her audience and it certainly sparked some lively debates around the room, with a nominated person from each group giving a summary of their discussions, and issues ranged from the workplace to politics and wider society. Perhaps the most memorable of these comments came from Lili Savage of Northern Ireland Telecoms Branch, who expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of attractive political options for young people in Northern Ireland and sparked laughter and applause when she said: "Sinn Fein and the DUP are two cheeks of the same arse!"



Mayor of North Tyneside Jamie Driscoll then talked of how he had stood for candidate selection and then for public election and set out the philosophy that individuals themselves need to be the agents of change, saying: "You want change. You replace them. You stand. Get yourself on the pitch."

After lunch, a panel consisting of CWU Openreach National Team member Fiona Curtis, NEC postal member and Royal Mail delivery rep John Carson, and T&FS executive members Andy Mercer and Carolyn Findlay led the *Young Workers in Elected Roles* debate.

Co-chaired by Quincy and Alex, this session was aimed at inspiring delegates to stand for representative posts within the union and panel members each spoke of their own experiences to encourage others to come forward.

"The most important thing is don't give up," advised Fiona. "Some people get disgruntled after not getting elected, but you have to work hard at it and prove that you know your stuff. That's how you can gain confidence and win the trust of fellow workers and members."

Sunday morning began with *Mock Conference* – a motion being proposed by each table of delegates and all done in strict accordance with CWU standing orders. Jo Shaftoe and Paddy MacGill in attendance to ensure compliance, and advise of procedures.

And the final part of the weekend was led by deputy general secretary Terry Pullinger (Postal) and his T&FS counterpart Andy Kerr, who hosted separate Q&As for delegates from each constituency.

What was striking about both of these industrial sessions was the detailed nature of the questions, reflecting the fact that a larger proportion of attendees at this year's *Young Workers Event* are workplace representatives. Terry was questioned about delivery revisions, annual leave, pay and Royal Mail's workplace culture, while in the other room young BT and Openreach workers were quizzing Andy on pay, job security and company re-organisation.

"Terry told his audience that he was very pleased to be speaking with them and commented that "when I look out at you all, I'm looking into the eyes of the future" and, in reply to a question asking for the best campaign he felt he had been involved with, he cited the 2017/18 *Four Pillars*.

Talk of campaigns in the T&FS session centred on *Count Me In* and updating the room on the current state of national negotiations, Andy said that, if and when agreement was reached between the company and the union, "the deal will go to ballot."

***'It's true that you are the future of our movement – but you are also the 'now' of our movement too.'* Dave Ward**

LGBT+ in sport – no longer invisible, no longer silent

Writer, film-maker and Norwich City fan Juliet Jacques on the struggles of lesbian, gay, bi and trans sportspeople...



Over the last 20 years, LGBT+ inclusion in sport has become an increasingly prominent and complex issue. Just before the turn of the century, Justin Fashanu, the world's first openly gay professional footballer, committed suicide: his life was complicated but homophobia was a factor in his decline and death, and for years, his was a cautionary tale against sportsmen (in particular) coming out. In 1999, Liverpool footballer Robbie Fowler received no punishment for directing homophobic abuse at Chelsea's Graeme Le Saux during a match, and no top-level male footballer has since come out as gay, at least not during his playing career.

Homophobia and transphobia have long pervaded all levels of sport, affecting every gender and sexuality (Le Saux, for example, was not gay, but bullied for being insufficiently macho). Women's sports have traditionally been more accommodating towards lesbians and bisexual people – tennis champion Martina Navratilova came out as early as 1981, and despite considerable opposition, transsexual player Renée Richards was able to play in the women's US Open in 1976, and later coached Navratilova to two Wimbledon titles. By contrast, the drive to create a more hospitable climate for gay men to play and watch sport has largely come from grass-roots organisations, made up of people with experiences of feeling excluded from teams by a culture that, unless it explicitly made them welcome, was homophobic by default.

As well as setting up national and international tournaments for LGBT+ people and teams, these campaigners have worked to create a safer environment for professional players to come out, allowing them to act as

role models. Welsh rugby star Gareth Thomas publicly talked about his homosexuality in 2009: there are still few openly gay sportsmen but this was encouraging, as was German international footballer Thomas Hitzlsperger coming out in 2014, shortly after his retirement. Backed by Paddy Power and Football v Homophobia, the campaign to get top-level footballers to wear *Rainbow Laces* to show their support for LGBT+ players continues to grow, with backing from England star Rio Ferdinand amongst others, and this year's *Rainbow Laces Day*. Recently, rising Australian A-League footballer Josh Cavallo came out, publicly supported by Gary Lineker, Gerard Piqué and others, and despite concerns about social media abuse of players, the climate seems to be slowly improving.

The issues are somewhat different for trans and non-binary participants, given the challenge they pose to sport's long-term segregation of men and women. Richards won the right to play in the women's Open in a Supreme Court case against the US Tennis Association; fears that she had a 'natural' advantage over other women were allayed when she lost in the first round in straight sets. This year, US skateboarder Alana Smith and Canadian footballer Quinn, who identify as non-binary, took part in women's competitions at the Tokyo Olympics, but neither hormonally altered their bodies and shifted from one category to the other like transsexual woman Laurel Hubbard, who represented New Zealand in the women's weightlifting.

Hubbard was allowed to compete after an International Olympic Committee decision in 2015 to allow transgender athletes to enter women's competitions if their testosterone fell below a certain level. Critics said that people who had gone through male puberty retained

advantages such as increased bone and muscle density, but Hubbard failed to complete three snatch lifts and came last in her group, suggesting anxieties that transsexual athletes might dominate women's competitions (and may even transition for that purpose) were based more on sexist stereotypes about the physical inferiority of women than lived reality.

However, after controversies when Hubbard won regional competitions, and with more people coming out as trans, the International Olympic Committee is reviewing its guidelines, and the UK Sport Councils have revised theirs. This guidance sets up a conflict between 'inclusion' and 'fairness', encouraging bodies to find 'balance' between them and 'safety', especially for contact sports. LGBT+ groups argue that inclusion and fairness should not be in opposition, but even if it doesn't admit that a degree of physical disparity between competitors has always been part of sport's appeal, the review acknowledges a solution that pleases everyone is unlikely.

Clearly, there is much still to be done to allow trans people to participate in sport without others objecting to their inclusion under their chosen gender. This refers not just to the rule changes, but to the breaking down of transphobic and homophobic attitudes that remain a barrier to all LGBT+ people – and, in truth, any man who doesn't fit into traditional models of masculinity – taking part in sport. More than ever, lockdown showed us the importance of keeping fit for our mental health, so it is vital that everyone who wants to take part feels able to do so.

Juliet Jacques has written three books, the most recent of which, Variations, was published in June. She's currently working on a film about the life of early 20th-century independent socialist MP Victor Grayson.

Equality & inclusion at work, in our communities and wider society

CWU Rules Revision Conference back in April voted to double the number of NEC equality leads to two for each of the four strands. For this edition, we spoke with our two LGBT+ leads and one of our disability leads and we look forward to interviewing our other NEC equality leads in 2022...



Jason Reynolds says that it was the union's *Redesign* programme that inspired him to step forward for election to the role of LGBT+ lead on the national executive council (NEC) representing T&FS members.

"I wanted to be part of helping to build on the union's *Redesign* reforms – and in particular to strengthen our equality work across the regions," explains the Capital Branch vice-chair.

"We want members engaged and involved throughout the CWU family and also, to have new faces coming through, stepping up into these equality roles at regional and local level, and challenging us NEC leads.

"Wherever you sit within the LGBT+ community, it's important that we all work together. We've all had struggles to be heard and respected and we're in different stages of those struggles."

Jason pays tribute to those who fought and won major victories for lesbian, gay, bi and trans rights in the past and acknowledges that, "as a society, we've come a long way. It has got better and it is getting better. But of course, challenges remain, and there's always the danger of things sliding back."

Homophobia, bi-phobia and trans-phobia still exist in society and he insists that "we need to remain ever-vigilant, as a movement and as a society, that we don't slide back.

Jason is a football enthusiast – an Arsenal supporter – but he also criticises the sport as being "in some respects, one of the last bastions of homophobia." and he strongly backs LGBT+ campaign group Stonewall's *Rainbow Laces* initiative.

"It's something I'd like us to actively support within football and through our branches," he says.

'We've come a long way forward on equality - we need to remain ever-vigilant that we don't slide back'.



Sarah Pitt says that the *Rainbow Laces* campaign will have succeeded when football becomes an environment in which gay men feel able to come out.

"We don't know if there are any gay footballers in top-flight men's football at the moment, but if there are, my view is that they're most likely too frightened to come out," she said.

"I support West Ham, and I can see how there could be hostility or ridicule initially from fans towards an openly gay player – although I also think that there would be strong solidarity as well and that the environment would rapidly change for the better from that point on."

Sarah works in the callers' office of the giant Cambridge MPU – one of Royal Mail's largest units – and belongs to the union's Eastern No. 4 Branch, as well as representing postal members as LGBT+ lead on our NEC.

"I really see my role as being educational and helping reps and members – helping members so when they either come out or transition, that they have a good experience and helping reps so they know how they can help with this," she says.

"I want the union to be the place they feel can turn to for support."

We've got seven regional LGBT+ leads – which is really good considering these roles have only been in place for a couple of years – and so we've still got three regions with a vacancy.

"So, if you're in North West, South East or Scotland and if you're interested in this role, please get in touch."



Mark Anthony Bastiani is in his second 'term' representing members with disabilities on the NEC, although his role now specifically focusses on our postal members and, when we spoke with him, he was looking forward to developing a working relationship with the union's postal executive committee (PEC).

"Hopefully, I'd like to be able to update the PEC on my work several times a year and perhaps answer their questions and discuss some issues if possible," he says, adding: "This has been under discussion with our DGSP Terry Pullinger and CWU head of equalities, education & development Kate Hudson."

Mark spoke in support of an important motion at last month's Special General Conference on hidden disabilities and he told us that he felt that it had been "very well-received.

"A few people got involved in the debate, the motion was passed unanimously and now we're planning the work we're going to do around it."

Mark, who works out of Barnes & Mortlake Delivery Office and belongs to London South West Postal Branch, says that he wants to "get the message across to everyone that we're able to be as productive as anyone else."

"Just because you have a disability, it doesn't mean you can't achieve your goals – it just means you need a reasonable adjustment."

Mark has a stammer and gives his own situation as an example, saying: "Delivery workers have a set amount of time to knock on a door and speak to a customer, get the IEM signed for and hand it across – I have a reasonable adjustment that gives me a little bit longer on the doorstep.

"It's very important that members with a hidden disability declare it – so that an appropriate reasonable adjustment can be made."



Lennox Children's Cancer Fund

Making a positive difference to the lives of children with cancer

Helping children with cancer and supporting their families

So many of our members are involved in great charities supporting so many good causes. We try to highlight at least one in every edition and for our pre-Christmas issue, we feature an organisation that supports children going through the trauma of cancer and provides their families with vital practical help and assistance...

A cancer diagnosis is quite possibly everyone's worst fear, but for a child it must be absolutely terrifying, which is why the work of the Lennox Children's Cancer Fund is so important and why the CWU is proud to give this charity our support," says our general secretary Dave Ward.

"As union members and representatives, the phrase 'we've got your back' says everything about our fundamental values of solidarity and support – and it's also the theme of a campaign launched by Lennox CCF to provide some immediate comfort to a child diagnosed with this awful illness."

The charity's *We've Got Your Back* packs – containing fluffy socks, a cuddly toy and a blanket, as well as practical items such as

a phone charger, travel mug and toiletries for the child and parent – were launched in response to feedback from families in this situation finding themselves immediately whisked off from their local hospital to a principal treatment centre as soon as they receive their diagnosis.

"This happens so quickly that the child and parents are totally unprepared," explains Vicky Nash, the charity's family support manager, "and our *We've Got Your Back* packs – which also contain crucial advice and information for mums and dads signposting them to the other support services the charity provides – are designed to help overcome those problems.

We want to be able to provide these backpacks to every one of the 150 children in the UK who are diagnosed with cancer every month."



Care & crisis grants and emotional support for hard-pressed families

The charity, which was founded in East London back in 1992 by Vincent Fitzmaurice, also helps with a whole range of difficulties that families coping with such a situation encounter, including emotional support, respite breaks and help with care and crisis grants.

Being a parent of a child with cancer takes its toll both financially and emotionally – and Lennox CCF makes every effort to help in both these respects too.

It can assist with one-to-one counselling and support to other family members, including siblings who need sensitivity and understanding of the upheaval they are going through as well.

And financial impacts on the family budget can often be significant, with the mounting costs of regular travel to and from hospitals, and overnight stays can be necessary if the hospital is far from home.

Many parents have to take time off work and some even have to give up their jobs to spend more time with their child.

Since 1996, Lennox CCF has offered families the opportunity to apply for care and crisis grants to help meet these costs and also help to organise respite breaks to give families a much-needed break from their ordeal and some quality time together.

In the lead up to the festive season, the charity has been running a special appeal asking people to donate cash, toys and gifts to be delivered to children's cancer wards and ensure every one of these children has their own Christmas gift.

Explaining why the CWU has taken the decision to back this charity, Dave Ward says: "This is such important work and it's so important that Lennox CCF is able to continue doing it and to develop it further.

"People will no doubt say that these services can and should be provided by the NHS and our local authorities – and of course that's a fair point. We do take up these kinds of issues politically and push and campaign for far more Government investment and support for our social and community services supporting children in need and families of those children.

"But in the meantime, our NHS is under huge strain, the women and men on the frontline of the health service are providing the frontline medical care and doing an heroic job – and so are the women and men running this wonderful charity.

"So, if you can this Christmas, please consider giving a donation to Lennox Children's Cancer Fund – and let's tell them loud and clear:

"We're the CWU and we've got your back!"

**To donate visit: justgiving.com/lennox
To find out more visit: lennoxccf.org.uk**



© Jenny Smith Photography

How Britain's biggest miscarriage of justice was exposed

When local radio presenter Nick Wallis heard the words: 'I've got a story to tell you' from a local cab driver back in 2010, little did he know that the cabbie's tale revealed a scandal of such magnitude that it would shake the Post Office to its very foundations...

Then working for BBC Radio Surrey, Nick had light-heartedly responded on-air to a message from a cab company looking for business by asking the company: "Will your drivers come on and tell us some great stories?"

"The man who came back to me was Davinder Misra – and yes indeed, he certainly did have a story – his postmaster wife Seema had just been sent to jail after being convicted on the basis of data evidence from the Post Office's Horizon IT system."

Voice readers and CWU members will be aware of the long campaign for justice for more than 700 postmasters who were prosecuted between 2000 and 2015 due largely due to this deeply flawed software system.

The last couple of years have seen significant court victories, high-profile debates in Parliament and the recent launch of a judge-led Inquiry into the whole affair ordered by the Government.

But back in 2010, the Justice for Sub-postmasters Alliance (JFSA) was in its infancy and there had been little reporting of the subject in mainstream media, and Nick recalls how he listened with amounting sense of incredulity to Davinder's story of how his wife had been treated.

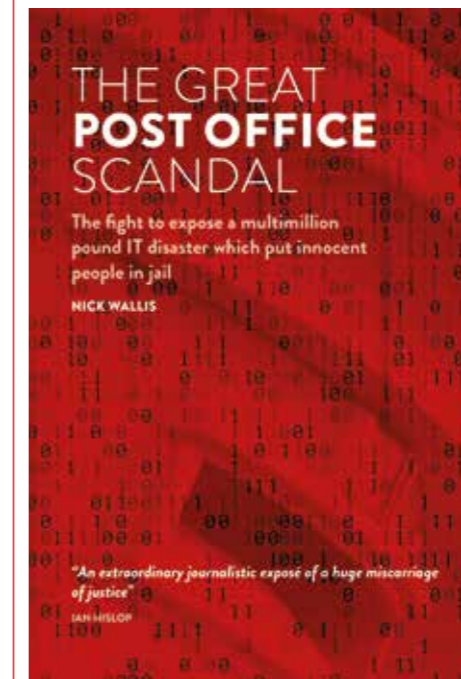
"He was adamant that this was down to a crazy computer system at the Post Office and he told me about JFSA, who'd been campaigning for about a year at that time and he put me in touch with Alan Bates, who ran the show, and gave me chapter and verse on everything that was wrong with the system.

"Alan had been campaigning pretty much by himself since 2004 and the JFSA was formed in 2009."

Nick tells us that, after hearing all about the Horizon affair, he felt "astounded that there wasn't anything in mainstream BBC about this at all. So, I took it to my boss and she said it sounded like something that our investigation unit needed to be on straightaway.

"Then three months later, we screened our first broadcast we did it as a joint radio and TV investigation for BBC Surrey and BBC Inside Out South."

Nick stresses, however, that he was not the first to report on the scandal. He gives that credit to Computer Weekly's Rebecca Thompson, who wrote what he describes as "a seminal piece of journalism on Horizon in 2009, which basically blew the lid off all of this."



Thanks to the tireless work of investigative journalists and campaigners, the Horizon scandal gradually began to receive more attention, being picked up in mainstream press and television, but it was the resounding court victory in 2019 that really made a difference.

Nick had followed the case avidly every day and filed reports on proceedings and he recalls feeling it could go either way.

"The claimants, the postmasters, seemed to be running a coach and horses through everything the Post Office was saying, but everything was in the balance until the judgement came. But when that came through, that was the moment – the first time that anyone in authority had publicly turned round and said: 'There is a serious problem here'."

That judgement, in his view "opened the floodgates" and led us to the current situation, in which all of the momentum – legally, politically and morally – is very much now on the side of the postmasters.

Nick's book – his first – tells the whole story of the Horizon Scandal, from those almost accidental beginnings right up to the more recent developments and has been praised for its pacy and engaging style as well as its substantive content.

Private Eye magazine editor Ian Hislop has called it "an extraordinary journalistic exposé of a huge miscarriage of justice," while renowned author and playwright Dame Joan Bakewell says that the book has "the power of a great thriller" and that it "lays bare the lies and deceit that have ruined so many lives."

Nick himself tells *The Voice* that, for him, "it's been the biggest privilege of my career to be able to follow this story. It's brought me in contact with some of the most genuine, hard-working people I've ever met."

But he is scathing in his criticism of the Post Office for their "craven inability to realise moral responsibility" and of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, who he describes as "not a union but effectively a department of the Post Office, controlled by the Post Office and funded by the Post Office."

Unions need to be independent of companies in order to serve their members properly, he says, adding that "the Post Office should recognise the CWU as a representative body for postmasters."

The Great Post Office Scandal by Nick Wallis is available for purchase direct from Bath Publishing and the CWU Postmasters Branch has arranged for a discount for all CWU members. Please visit the publisher's web site bathpublishing.com and use the discount code CWU2304

10 per cent of all proceeds from this publication are being donated to the Horizon Scandal Fund, a new charity set up to help the victims of the scandal.

'It's been the biggest privilege of my career to be able to follow this story.'

COMPETITION TIME

Firstly, a big thank you to Lenny Crook of North Lancs & Cumbria Branch for being such a great sport and letting us use his photo – as well as for completing the arduous Longmynd Hike in Shropshire back in September for CWUHA.

Now, onto the competition. Several of you suggested Lenny was looking for the nearest pub – and a few others thought he may have been ‘caught short’ and was looking for a tree! – while a comparison of the Longmynd Hike to the new Royal Mail delivery rounds

certainly stood out among the many entries.

But, with this being our pre-Xmas Edition, we had to give the prize to Joseph Hughes, retired member from our North East Branch, for his: **‘I’m walking backwards for Christmas!’**

Well done Joseph, thanks to everyone who entered and a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all! **Now, what do you think our general secretary Dave Ward is saying here? Please send your suggested caption to voicecompetition@cwu.org**



WARD SEARCH

Congratulations as well, to the Wardsearch ‘Goodie Bag’ Winners. The first 10 correct solutions – with the bonus word – were received from...

- Dennis Newman, Eastleigh
- Vincent Bibby, Aldershot
- Gael Cockayne, West Yorkshire
- Carl Bradshaw, Leicester
- Rhianna Pinnock, London
- Sian Wilson, Falmouth
- Teresa Ribeiro, Middlesex
- Christine Moulding, Tyne & Wear
- Joanne Blackwell, East Sussex
- Suryakant Deolia, Surrey

...and the bonus word was ‘Osgood’

CAPTION COMPETITION



O S I M W D V Y J Y P A N K H U R S T Y
 L R Y E E K N T I T R F S M A J I H I N
 K E J G W N S Q K U P G U Q B L X W C S
 D K X A S B A C N N P Z G W X Q H B T D
 W Y Y R E S X M C N K Z O K U T P R R W
 L F W H L P Q B P C M R O B A Z T M E I
 X H T W Q Q T V O A N W Y X Z P L L Q G
 R F Y N I K R A L W H C A P Q D E S A I
 K L M T D X N I Q H S C N I C J U K M O
 S S F G I G L X M F V L Q M R B N U H V
 C D V G I B H Z G Z A O R K U P Z O O Y
 W O S B U J D Z V M A V D I J L B N J L
 X U D R N X D K D B R E F V G E D P G B
 B J N P X T Y L E R P L R D B H A U G D
 G E H K E D A C V B Z E O S I J C N H A
 T N A K B F E X S B X S S F F E B T H N
 S F J T Q A P K K R U S T U T S R T A B
 P C L M B S W V G F Z N P V U W M E E M
 M R O B O U D I C C A A C H X V B K Y O
 Y Y E A S Z E T R Z R H X R I H F B P L

Could you be a Top-Ten winner this time? Try to find these 12 names of Great British Rebels in the grid – and The Editor’s bonus word.

Take a photo of your solution, send to voicecompetition@cwu.org and the first 10 correct solutions, with the correct bonus word, that we receive will win the Goodie Bag! **Best of luck folks!**

- Lilburne
- Boudicca
- Frost
- Reid
- Kett
- Tyler
- Cade
- Chapman
- Larkin
- Loveless
- Desai
- Pankhurst

BONUS QUESTION:
 “What historic strike can you match Chapman to?”

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SOLIDARITY

THE CWU STANDS WITH ALL WORKERS IN DISPUTE. THOUSANDS OF UNION MEMBERS ACROSS THE UK ARE TAKING ACTION TO DEFEND THEIR JOBS, TERMS & CONDITIONS



These include:

***Weetabix workers
fighting fire & rehire***



***London Underground workers
fighting forced changes to
their terms & conditions***



***University lecturers,
researchers, librarians
& technicians fighting to
protect their pensions & jobs***

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IS OUR FIGHT**



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