

Briefing



‘Keeping Courage Alive’

Summary of the Child and Women’s Abuse Studies Unit independent evaluation of the TUC’s pilot training programme.

Tackling Sexual Harassment: building preventative cultures in the trade union movement.

CWASU Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the research behind this evaluation. This includes key women in the TUC and TUC Education tasked with turning the idea of the pilot into a reality, the dedicated pool of women trainers who maintained their commitment to the work and each other despite the challenges facing the movement, and every person who participated in one of the pilot sessions and shared their opinions and experiences through the training survey or an interview. It is rare to work with a team of people so committed to making real change. Our hope is that the learning contained in this report will not only help actualise and embed that change but, crucially, help to sustain it.

The Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit

This evaluation has been completed by Dr Fiona Vera-Gray and Dr Sukhwant Dhaliwal from the Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit (CWASU) at London Metropolitan University. CWASU is recognised as a centre of excellence, with an international reputation for research, evaluation, training and consultancy. Established in 1987, we have close to four decades of experience in conducting independent feminist research that creates useful knowledge for policy makers, practitioners, survivors, supporters and activists. CWASU is the only research unit in Europe that integrates a focus on all forms of violence against women and child abuse and are known for our work on making connections between forms of gender violence as well as between violence against women and child protection.

For more on our research, our evaluations, and our approach see www.cwasu.org

TUC Acknowledgments

The TUC would like to thank Dr Helen Mott for all the work she has done with the TUC since 2020 and for the brilliant resources and her expertise which has enabled us to develop this pilot and training. We would like to thank the team at CWASU for their insight, support and thorough evaluation, the training is the better for it and the women involved have gained real value from their input.

We would like to thank the trainers for their patience, determination, commitment and of course their skills and expertise. As the evaluation makes clear it is them that have strengthened this work. And we would like to thank the affiliates and their staff and members who participated in the pilot sessions. It is not always easy to be the early adopters and to face challenges head on, but in doing so you have helped us develop something that can support the whole movement.

Introduction

Launched in 2021, the one-day training *Tackling sexual harassment: Building preventative cultures in the trade union movement* was developed by Dr Helen Mott, an academic expert in sexual harassment, together with key women in the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Education and Equalities sections. The training was based on sessions Dr Helen Mott had delivered to the TUC General and Executive councils in 2020 and 2021 following the publishing of the Monaghan report. Dr Mott was also working with some affiliates to deliver similar training. What became apparent from those sessions was that the training was invaluable but needed scaling up and making more flexible to meet the needs of the movement.

It was on that premise that the project team came together to develop training that would enable the capacity of the trade union movement to change the practices, policies and ultimately the *cultures* within the movement that endorse, encourage, and excuse sexual harassment. The pilot is just one part of a suite of work developed by the TUC to challenge sexual harassment, the motivation for which arose following several reports detailing the nature and extent of harassment in the movement. The work programme was designed to support the EC Working Group which was convened by the TUC to help drive joined-up action on sexual harassment across the trade union movement and ensure timely progress.

The project itself sought to make a shift in the union movement from harmful institutional responses which compound the negative impacts of sexual harassment, to an institutional climate characterised by transparency and proactiveness. This movement has been described as that from 'institutional betrayal' towards 'institutional courage' (for more see [Freyd, 2018](#); [Smidt, Adams-Clark, & Freyd, 2023](#)). This report outlines what has been learnt about the process of moving from betrayal to courage for unions taking part in the pilot project, reporting on key learnings and outcomes. The overall reflection on the completion of the pilot is that institutional courage requires key mechanisms to be in place to not just create but sustain it.

Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the pilot was to begin embedding cultural change in the trade union movement to build preventative cultures in relation to sexual harassment for trade union staff, officials and lay members. It had the following key objectives:

- Build the capacity of the trade union movement to effectively challenge and respond to reports of sexual harassment from within the trade union movement.
- Build capacity of the movement to deliver anti-sexual harassment and preventative culture training for the trade union movement.
- Develop an effective and sustainable training programme to build the capacity of the trade union movement internally.
- Embed the processes and actions that need to be taken to build preventative cultures into the movement.

The objectives outlined above were to be met through the recruitment of trainers from within the union movement to deliver senior leadership training on sexual harassment adapted from the original materials of Dr Helen Mott. Each trainer was required to deliver one session to a union during the pilot period, after which the training was to be evaluated and possibly rolled out more broadly across the union movement.

Key learnings

At the outset, the project had hoped for six trade unions to participate in the pilot programme. The evaluation has been able to track the progress of four participating trade unions, as well as complete interviews with two other trainees and analyse post-training survey data from 65 trainees. Taken together, the data identifies the following key learnings from the pilot across both process and outcomes.

- 1. Strong movement support:** Overall, the pilot was delivered with success in a difficult external context. The pool of trainers recruited for the pilot should be considered a particular strength and evidence of both the skill of project staff in selecting the right women and the expertise that exists in the trade union movement more broadly. The need of and support for the training within the movement was well-evidenced both by the huge response to the call for trainers and by the responses of union leaders who completed the training.
- 2. Agility and adaptation:** in the process of implementation, extreme weather, industrial action, scheduling difficulties, and limited resources for the project both within the TUC and within unions caused delays in anticipated deadlines and shifts in the numbers of unions participating and leaders trained. A key strength of the pilot was the ability to adapt quickly to unforeseen challenges, including by taking an iterative approach where emerging evaluation data was fed into and changed the development of the training. This approach has helped to maximise the positive outcomes of the training.
- 3. Creating opportunities for consolidation and connection:** trainees highlighted three aspects of the training that they found most valuable. These were: (1) the opportunity to underline and refocus on a work programme that is already under way, (2) the opportunity for a focused discussion on this with others from their union, and (3) hearing the experiences of female colleagues. Importantly these were less about the broad strokes of information on sexual harassment and more closely tied to the ways in which the training created a space for consolidation and connection.
- 4. Activities and action:** Where action plans had been devised these included the development of a statement against sexual harassment, pronouncements on codes of conduct at the start of trade union events, by-laws on tackling sexual harassment, climate surveys of staff, ways to centre staff experiences, new reporting pathways, risk assessments of trade union events, and a commitment to rolling out the training across the various layers of the trade union. There is a small amount of early evidence that women within trade unions are starting to feel more able to make a report and for it not to be brushed under the carpet.
- 5. Leading a change in trade union cultures:** all five trade unions tracked for the evaluation were able to cite ways in which their leadership had been vocal on tackling sexual harassment. One was specifically building the challenge of sexual harassment into a programme of work to address gender inequality and sexism across the union, and another had taken a more intersectional approach because of the knowledge and skills base of the General Secretary.

6. Staying on track: at the completion of the evaluation, all participating trade unions were at an early stage of implementing actions on sexual harassment. Trainees appreciated the space to reflect on what they had learnt and actioned since the training and supported a system of peer review to keep sexual harassment on the agenda and keep it moving forward.

Establishing the need

As illustrated by the background to the pilot, recent reports and campaigns have highlighted the ways in which the culture of the trade union movement can be considered a conducive culture for violence against women and girls. Both the Monaghan and Kennedy reports were particularly critical of the patriarchal structures and balance of power within trade unions, notably the power of male dominated regions and branches. These structures and their impact were acknowledged by inception project staff, pilot trainers, and senior leaders.

There is, for the most part across the whole movement, varying degrees of sexist cultures that still exist. Even in the unions where they're female dominated. We do reflect society so obviously our society being quite patriarchal, and we are just like another section of that, but I think our values would suggest that we would be much better than the average section of society and I think that difference is often quite minimal, if at all.

Key informant

*From men and women alike, just the culture of really patriarchal hierarchy, like younger women not being respected in the movement is very different to my working life. As someone that's interested in promoting the union membership amongst members of my workforce, I'm thinking if you are going into these spaces and being treated worse as young women than you are in your workplace, then that's not a very good advert for trade unions. **Pilot trainer***

We know from our own research about the experiences of our women members who are experiencing everyday misogyny, discrimination on the grounds of their sex. They're experiencing pay disparities to their disadvantage, they're more likely to find themselves on capability procedures than their male colleagues. They're less likely to access promotional opportunities, they're less likely to become active in the union, which is not surprising given their experiences in the workplace. Tackling the culture of misogyny and sexism has got to be key to unlocking this question of, "how do we renew our union?"

Trainee/Union Leader

Against this cultural backdrop, the movement also represents additional challenges to work against sexual harassment because of core institutional values.

Key aspects here that have been highlighted in this evaluation are the belief that unions are on the side of the right and the good, and defensive or oppositional modes of working typical of the movement, modes that can conflict with what is required to create a cultural shift within the workplace, namely more space for reflection and discussion.

Within the movement, really the whole point of the movement and something that I think functions as a kind of metaphor for solidarity, is strength in numbers. It's the idea of

power and fighting over power. So, certainly in the union I work with the most closely, aggressive masculine, patriarchal, fighty power relations are absolutely bread and butter. They're just woven through your organisation and in people's psyche's and in their cultures. That's a real problem, because the work of ending sexual harassment is about breaking down power structures and trying to level them, and actually the union movement is about fighting power with power.

Key informant

Key informants involved in the project's inception discussed how, within this broader cultural context and the movement's values, current responses to sexual harassment within trade unions were inadequate and inconsistent. This inconsistency was seen as existing both between individual unions and in relation to inconsistency in the movement at large between its external messaging and core principles, and the actual experiences of women within it. A large part of the issue here was the ways in which sexual harassment was seen as still being siloed within the movement as a 'woman's problem'.

I think in so many ways [some unions] are doing well, but again we come down to it being individual players, individual feminist actors who are helping that to happen, and I'm a bit sick of that being the case. And really that's the whole point of what we're trying to do with the training, stop that being the case, make it genuinely everybody's problem, so that you're not relying on your critical actors to get stuff over the line or to get sustainable progress made.

Key informant

One of the things that we talk about a bit in the training, and certainly conversations I have in the wider movement, when it's a context like the current one, all of the other stuff starts to slip because there isn't the people power and the resources to hand it over to somebody else to get it organised, it falls to the same people, I guess, to sort these things out.

Key informant

It is this sense of making sexual harassment everybody's problem that is partly behind the pilot's targeting senior leadership for training rather than union reps and lay members. This approach was a core element of the project from its inception and was supported by the findings of both the Monaghan and Kennedy reports.

We're talking about culture change and there is absolutely no point in talking to reps unless you've got that buy-in from the top... Don't get me wrong, I think there's loads of reps that would take this and absolutely run with it but only if their General Secretary is supporting of that and their officer. You have to change that culture.

Key informant

The recommendations from all the reports are that change must come from the top, and that's identified everywhere. The purpose of these sessions is to go to the top of those trade unions and give them this information and say, "This is for you, these are the reasons why, this is the research that supports what we're saying", so it is completely evidence based. Then the next steps are, "what are you going to do about it and how are you going to go about it in your trade unions".

Pilot trainer

It was also an approach that sought to directly support the move towards institutional courage in the movement by reducing the space for training to inadvertently lead to further experiences of betrayal.

You don't want to put people with less power in the trade union movement in a position where they get really excited by something and then they go to the leadership and the leadership doesn't respond in a positive way, because that's then another form of institutional betrayal and it just leads to more despondency.

Key informant

Trainers and trainee responses

Many of the recruited trainers referred to the conducive context of the union movement for sexual harassment as driving their desire to take part in the pilot, with some explicitly referencing the context of the Monaghan and Kennedy reports.

I felt this frustration about as women I feel we're going backwards. I almost feel certainly in some aspects of the trade union movement there's a view that equalities in relation to women is a done deal, tick box we can move onto something else. And I'm not saying we shouldn't address other areas of inequality, but I do think there is that mentality that we've done all we need to do around women's equality and women's self-organisation. For me, it felt like an answer.

Pilot trainer

I became a rep several years ago when sexual harassment in the movement was unchecked, as it is now, and experienced it, saw it. I have spent [decades] educating reps to try and make that difference. But when you see what's coming out, and the reports that came out of what went on in those unions, it just makes you a bit downhearted really that all the years you've been in education and it's still happening, it's still going on. That was one reason I applied.

Pilot trainer

These motivations also matched those of senior leaders who took part in the pilot suggesting that heightened focus on the movement as a conducive context for sexual harassment has conversely helped to create among some union members a conducive context for action.

It was long overdue, something that was very necessary and when the opportunity arose people grabbed it with both hands. Because we have, as an organisation we have had some issues in the past and faced quite lengthy, in some cases litigation, in other cases quite lengthy conflict. I think everybody wanted to try and do as much as they could and better educate and better arm themselves with a better understanding of recognising the problem and trying to deal with the problem.

Trainee/Union Leader

Most sessions were delivered online for the pilot, some were delivered in person, the response overall was positive.

From what I can recall I think everybody contributed in various ways and actually, the pedagogical style that was adopted by the two trainers... given it was delivered online, I was worried that are we going to get the kind of engagement, are we going to get the richness of dialogue and insight? Actually, I think the methodology that was used to deliver the online programme really did work and the feedback that I've had from colleagues who attended the training has universally been positive, they felt that it was very engaging, very relevant, very insightful.

Trainee/Union Leader

For my union we said two years ago that this was going to be an important area of work for us. So, it played very neatly to our agenda and our priorities that we were invited onto that pilot training around tackling sexual harassment. I'll say a bit more in a moment about what we've done since that pilot training, but it was very important that we had the opportunity to participate, and it certainly has added a further impetus to our work.

Trainee/Union Leader

The delivery was great. I felt like the content helped sharpen or refocus stuff in my mind, there wasn't anything massively new, but I don't know if that's because I feel more engaged in this, I don't know where it was pitched, but with any training like this, if it's not pushing you into areas where you haven't been before, it does help refocus and remind you of the stuff that you probably already knew, but it just brings it back to the front of your mind. Even though it didn't teach me anything massively new, it does help bring it to the surface and remind you of stuff you probably already knew, but you buried at the back of your mind.

Trainee/Union Leader

It's always valuable having the training and the discussion with women that work within this union because they obviously have a very different perspective on this stuff. Some of them will have had bad experiences in the past... You do forget sometimes that there's personal experience in this. Senior women also have not only set the culture and agenda as well, but they have also the scar tissue from having gone through this stuff.

Trainee/Union Leader

(The training) has helped to initiate a programme of work for us. It's led us to having a number of strategic conversations. I made the commitment at the end of the training course that we were going to have conversations within our National Executive, we're going to have conversations within our Staff Review Committee. I said that at the end of the training session. And with our Senior Management Team. And that's what we've done. And those conversations are now leading to an enhanced set of expectations for us in terms of our ongoing work... there's no doubt about it, the TUC training has prompted buy-in of my senior management team.

Trainee/Union Leader

From our point of view, a healthy democracy within the union depends, for example, upon our women members feeling that they are able to participate in the work of the union... the training helped to galvanise that work and spread the leadership for that work more broadly across our union. It's provided not only permission to be having that

conversation, but I think greater confidence amongst our leaders to be having the conversations about how we build a more inclusive culture and environment within our union.

Trainee/Union Leader

However, challenges remain:

I suppose what would've been helpful is having concrete things that I could've taken away and done to make sure ... reflecting on that for me, it probably just makes my life easier if someone gives me concrete things to go away and do rather than me having to think and just try and set the culture if someone goes, "Here's a list of five things, you understand what's going on, go and make sure these happen"... The training was grand, but I would probably make sure that there was a firmer commitment from the training that you were going to go off and do stuff, so that would've forced me to not have left it on the shelf like I have.

Trainee/Union Leader

The majority of people getting this training are men (and) I don't think they see the connection between putting their hand up and speaking in a meeting and dominating a meeting and speaking over women, they don't connect that to misogyny and sexual harassment... I didn't think (the training) started enough from (that context) where actually when you speak over a woman, that woman is likely to have been spoken over three times already that day. **Trainee/Union Leader**

It's very easy that women talk about equalities issues and women talk about maternity and paternity rights and rights at work, and men in the union talk about the hard-cutting industrial issues. And we don't address that enough. So, within our own activist base, that separation still exists, and it still exists in our staffing structures a little bit. Often the bargaining, negotiating, the industrial stuff is quite male dominated, and we need to think about appointments and how we challenge that.

Trainee/Union Leader

Carrying out the actions, designing a policy, implementing a policy fell to a small number of people within the meeting, if that makes sense. I understand everybody has to shoulder and adhere to a policy and steer a culture but in relation to somebody leaving that meeting and going, "Right, this is what we need to do," I think that would have only fallen onto three or four people within the meeting and so far, I haven't heard anything.

Trainee/Union Leader

I would say it was really good, well-delivered training that really provoked some good, open, transparent conversations about how bad we've been in the past, what we would aspire to do to improve things. But there wasn't any, there were not actions given, if you know what I mean.

Trainee/Union Leader

Recommendations

Taking these key learnings together, the evaluation proposes the following recommendations for further roll out of the training. These concern three areas of development: (1) developing the content of the training session, (2) developing the delivery of the training session, and (3) developing the capacity and sustainability of the project more broadly.

Content development

- 1. Explain how the movement got here:** trainees suggested the addition of slides and space to process the findings of the Monaghan and Kennedy reports. These slides could offer a history on how this training emerged and the context of a greater willingness for trade unions to hold a mirror up to themselves.
- 2. Ground more of the content in trade union contexts and values:** trainees would like to see more direct context setting that addresses the electoral democratic character of trade unions and the implication for power relations and for tackling sexual harassment. This could also help trainees understand the connections between sexual harassment, sexism and gender inequality within trade unions as these points are made clearly by Monaghan and Kennedy and is currently missing from the programme. In this way, the points on sexual harassment can more directly connect trade union values to action against sexual harassment.
- 3. Embed intersectionality:** data collected for the interim evaluation suggested that the current content on intersectionality in the training is not landing as clearly and deeply as it needs to. Following this, the evaluation team at the TUC established a training session with trainers to explore intersectionality both in the training itself and more broadly in relation to sexual harassment. The discussions from this training day are to be threaded into the training content. Future evaluations of the project should revisit whether and how the content on intersectionality is landing with trainees.
- 4. Decrease general awareness content and increase interactivity and action-planning:** both trainers and trainees discussed the need to readdress the balance in the sessions so that more time was given to the action-oriented conclusion and more space was provided for discussion. Senior leaders wanted more time on the action plan session so that they could have detailed conversations with colleagues about those actions going forward or alternatively have space to reflect on their ongoing programme of work in this area.

Delivery development

- 5. Enable greater flexibility for trainers to tailor delivery:** The main concerns raised by trainers and trainees regarding delivery were about the importance of adjusting the arrangements where necessary: to suit the current knowledge and discussions of the audience; to be able to organise the sessions according to the time available; and to adjust the script to bring through the trainers' voice and knowledge of the field and what they had gleaned of the trade union through pre meetings. Also, the importance of being able to choose whether the session would take place online or in person. The rollout should enable

more flexibility in how the training is delivered, tailoring the approach more closely to the needs of both trainer and the union.

- 6. Reflect on and monitor pitch and approach:** data from participating unions at times questioned whether the training is currently pitched right for senior leadership. All interviewees wanted the training mandated for all employees and lay members - evidencing its value - but also all interviewees felt that the training in its pilot form is more suited to reps and lay members because of its emphasis on awareness raising and wanted to be pushed a little further. However, unions participating in the pilot were also likely to already be prioritising work on sexual harassment and as such this need to be pushed may not be felt in unions where work is not already underway. The pitch of the training and how well it is meeting the needs of attendees should be monitored during the first year of rollout.

- 7. Engage the trainers with unions prior to delivery:** A core learning in the pilot was that the amount of work needed to bring unions onboard had been underestimated at the pilot's outset. To support bringing more unions onboard, as well as increase the possibility of tailoring the training more closely to its audience, it was suggested by some interviewees that a careful pre-meeting with the trade union prior to delivery would help gauge levels of awareness and ensure that the training was both pitched at the right level and could be adjusted so that it was specific to that trade union. Some trainees suggested that participating trade unions should be encouraged to undertake a climate survey of staff *before* the training session so that the training could be a space to reflect on those findings and this could feed into the development of an action plan, making the entire session more action oriented.

Sustainability and capacity

- 8. Ensure that rolling out the training is a priority for the TUC and affiliates including through sufficient resourcing.** The evaluation is clear that the level of work required for the pilot was underestimated and that more work will be needed to enable the project to be successfully rolled out across the union movement. As such we believe that for the training to be rolled out further and in a sustainable manner, the TUC and affiliates will need to ensure this remains a priority including through dedicated resource. The TUC should work with project staff and the EC working group to determine what actions are needed to embed the training and what resourcing is required to enable that.

- 9. Develop mechanisms for accountability and support:** The pilot has also found that the training might benefit from the addition of a peer-to-peer review system that offers an opportunity check in, accountability and support for participating leaders to act. Such mechanisms were felt necessary by trainees because given the pitch of the training at leadership, they felt their other commitments could easily displace the urgency and necessity of this area of work.

Since the evaluation...

As the evaluation notes, the TUC took an iterative approach to developing the training. Some actions we have undertaken during and since the evaluation are set out below:

- We ran an intersectionality session with all the trainers and CWASU to give trainers more understanding of and confidence to speak to intersectionality issues, and we have incorporated some additional materials including the findings from the TUC research on Black women's experiences into the training materials.
- We have had check in sessions with trainers and made clear that they are able to adapt and be flexible with how they deliver the training. This includes having a pre-meet with an affiliate to discuss what they want to get out of the training, who the audience is and so on. The trainer can then work with the affiliate to adjust the training. Though we are clear that there is a clear framework and pedagogy underpinning our approach, so it is important that all learning points are covered.
- We have set up a [dedicate webpage](#) with all of our TUC resources including more information on the [training and how to book](#).
- The General Council moved a statement at Congress 2024 reaffirming its commitment to building preventative cultures in the movement, including through practical actions such as training.
- We are looking at being able to award a TUC Education badge to anyone who completes the training. We will be able to award these retrospectively to anyone who has already completed the training.
- The TUC is looking to run some taster sessions to promote the training in the second half of 2025 and into 2026. We will share dates once they are confirmed. However, we strongly recommend unions enquire about running sessions themselves as this enables them to work with the trainer to ensure the sessions also account for individual union structures, progress and actions they may have already taken, and the power dynamics of people participating e.g. whether it is a leadership session or a line managers session or an officer's session for example. The responses from participants in the pilot demonstrated that part of the value of the training is creating the space to have honest discussions about challenges and moving forward.
- If you would like to find out more about the training, please either contact the TUC through our booking page or contact Nikki Pound directly on npound@tuc.org.uk.