

## Midlands TUC Update

June 2015

### From the Regional Secretary

Many in our movement were shocked at the outcome of the recent election. Whilst nobody could predict the result, a working majority for the Tories was never forecast by any of the polls.

Obviously the challenges we now face in light of that election result have changed our focus. Our influence at a national level will be diminished, as it always is with a Tory Government. But the message from the national leadership of the TUC, through Frances O'Grady, is one of real determination to ensure the voices of working people are heard.

We will continue to be a campaigning organisation for all of our affiliated organisations. We will fight against the upcoming attacks on workers' rights through further legislation on strike ballots, the attacks on facility time and check-off. This movement survived before this Government arrived and it will be here a long time after it has gone.

What we must also do at a Regional level is to make sure that we have an influence across the Midlands and to make sure that we make a difference to working lives.

Take our recent launch of the *Employment Standards Charter* along with Derby City Council, Unison, Unite and GMB. A fantastic piece of work committing a local authority, a major city within our Region and a big employer, to be a Living Wage Employer, to only offer contracts that are secure and long term, to actively encourage trade union membership, to reduce the use of

consultants and minimise the use of agency workers and not use any firm associated with 'blacklisting'. That is what Derby City Council will do internally as an employer and externally it will use its procurement process to spread the *Employment Standards Charter* to those seeking to bid for contracts so that decent employment rights are a part of Derby in the private sector as well.

We are developing this work with Derby City Council and it is our intention to extend this across the Region where we have working relations with sympathetic local authorities. That is where we can still make a difference, and coupled with the potential of the City/Regions agenda being pursued by this Government, this gives the trade union movement a real opportunity to be at the heart of any decentralisation and devolution.

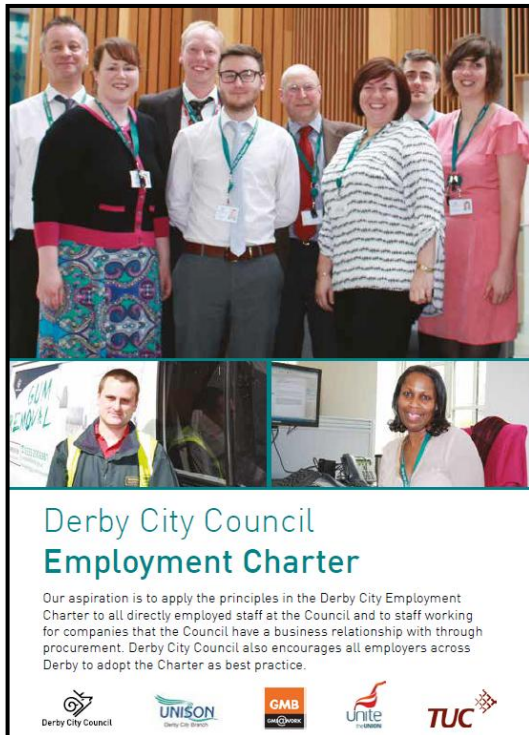
When we held our Regional Council in Derby to launch the *Charter* it was said that we had a real opportunity to create the first 'Union City' in the UK based on the principles within it, if we pursue the words and turn them into action. Our vision and ambition should be to take City after City, town after town, in the Midlands Region and make them Union Cities

We are determined to do that, as we are determined to continue to make a real difference to the lives of working people.

Lee Barron



## Derby City Employment Standards



**Derby City Council Employment Charter**

Our aspiration is to apply the principles in the Derby City Employment Charter to all directly employed staff at the Council and to staff working for companies that the Council have a business relationship with through procurement. Derby City Council also encourages all employers across Derby to adopt the Charter as best practice.

Logos for Derby City Council, UNISON, GMB, unite, and TUC are displayed at the bottom.

1. We will pay at least the living wage to all employees and support Derby to become a living wage city.
2. We are committed to providing fair employment contracts and stability of employment to all employees.
3. We actively support trade union membership amongst our employees and recognise trade unions for the purposes of employee representation and collective bargaining.
4. We will provide an environment that creates workforce training opportunities to support everyone.
5. We will work to minimise the use of agency workers and ensure agencies we engage use professional methods and follow fair employment practices.
6. We will actively support and encourage our employees to take up volunteering opportunities across the city.
7. We will ensure we have policies and procedures in place which support employees to achieve work-life balance.
8. We will not award any contract to any company found guilty of blacklisting workers.
9. We will strive to be as self-sufficient as possible and minimise the usage of external consultants by developing the skills and capacity of our own employees. We will seek value for money when using consultants whilst ensuring that they also follow fair employment practices.
10. We will seek to offer a wide range of employee incentives.

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The Midlands TUC was proud to launch Derby City Council's Employment Standards Charter at our Regional Council on Saturday May 16<sup>th</sup> which was hosted at the Derby City Council House.

Hearing first hand from the Derby City Council workforce about their involvement in the development of the Charter and their enthusiasm for the on-going work of the Employment Commission at the Council was hugely uplifting.

Despite challenging economic circumstances, Derby City Council has led the way forward by launching their Employment Charter. Derby City Council is one of only a handful of authorities in the country to do so.

The Charter demonstrates a commitment to the workforce in a number of key areas, including paying a Living Wage.

The Charter is a commitment to both staff of the Council and the City. The Council is re-assessing its employment priorities and will be working with other employers in the city to improve living standards and adopt this ground breaking Charter.

Employers will be asked to pledge their commitment to working towards meeting the Charter in a twelve month plan and will be supported by the Council to meet it. The Council will be tackling the issue of fair treatment, including eliminating zero hours contracts. Whilst the delivery of the Charter in Derby will not happen overnight, there is clear will to deliver in order to support decent living standards for the citizens of Derby and staff of the Council.

Councillor **Ranjit Banwait**, Leader of Derby City Council said: *"The Charter is everything we aspire to and believe in. The Council will lead the way forward in economic recovery and make sure our staff have access to fair employment"*

*policies and act as a role model for other employers within the city. We want to be an employer of choice."*

Councillor **Lisa Eldret** said: "Austerity should not mean a race to the bottom. Times are tough, but that does not mean we cannot seek to bring in jobs, fair treatment and decent living standards. Families should be able to rely on the Council to work on their behalf. It is about re-assessing what is important and demonstrating the values we want other employers to follow."

The Midlands TUC will now be holding a workshop at Congress House to showcase the positive work at Derby and will be working with affiliates to spread the Charter concept across the region.

With the devolution agenda set to gather pace in the coming years, initiatives such as the Charter offer a real means of effecting meaningful change and influence, something the Midlands TUC will be striving to do.



## Dying To Work Campaign



The Dying to Work campaign was formally launched at the Midlands TUC Regional Council at Derby City Council on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Some 70 delegates from trade unions from across the Midlands came together to raise the profile of the campaign and pledge to promote the Dying to Work campaign.

People often say that some things are right and left. Well this is not. This is about right or wrong. Too many people are being put in the appalling situation of fighting for their right to work whilst coming to terms with their terminal illness.

### Our Campaign

The 2010 Equalities Act does offer some protection for terminally ill employees. However, the act still allows employers to dismiss a terminally ill employee if they fail a capability assessment with 'reasonable adjustments'.

The Dying to Work campaign would like to see terminal illness recognised as a 'protected characteristic' so that an employee with a terminal illness would enjoy a 'protected period' where they could not be dismissed as a result of their condition.

Such protection would give every person battling terminal conditions the choice of how to spend their final months and the peace of mind to know their job was protected and the future financial security of their family was guaranteed.



### Potential effects of losing your job following a terminal diagnosis:

- **Reduced income and loss of financial security.**
- **Loss of stimulation, dignity and normality associated with being in employment.**
- **Undergoing an inevitably stressful and upsetting HR procedure.**
- **Loss of 'Death in Service' and 'Life Assurance' payments to family members and loved ones.**

## CASE STUDY

The following is a real-life account from a GMB member who has been diagnosed with terminal breast cancer. Her identity has been protected due to the on-going case.

"Back in June 2012, I knew something was wrong. I went to the doctors and I got diagnosed with terminal breast cancer. I didn't even take any days off until nearly a year later when I hit a wall of complete exhaustion."

"I visited my GP, he gave me a sick note for a couple of weeks and I sent this into work. At this point, it had never occurred to me that they wouldn't support me."

“For the first time I began to feel anxious because I now understood that they were trying to get rid of me”

"When I returned to work, I asked to meet with HR. Over the course of the meeting she questioned my capability to do important aspects of my job, incorrectly claimed they had made adjustments for

me and told me that the company had already been kind enough to pay my salary whilst I attended my hospital appointments. Finally, she told me that she had done a lot of research into the benefits I would be entitled to if I wasn't in work."

"For the first time, I began to feel anxious because I now understood that they were trying to get rid of me. I was upset but giving up was not an option. I thought this is not right, not fair and incredibly wrong! I feel strong and determined to use the time I have left to do my utmost to get the law changed to protect terminally ill people. People think the protection is there but I'm categorically saying it isn't!"

### Support the campaign

#### Send a letter to your local newspapers

Local newspapers are a great way to communicate with your local community.

#### Write to your MP

Politicians will respond to an issue if their postbag tells them that an issue is particularly important to constituents.

You may also wish to lobby your MP in person at their local surgery.

#### Motions

Union branches and local authorities will have debates, so use our model motion to help raise this issue with union members and at local authorities.

All of the model letters and motions are available to download from the special campaign website: [dyingtowork.co.uk](http://dyingtowork.co.uk)



## Mental Health – more honesty please

*(This article, by the Midlands TUC's Rob Johnston, first appeared on the TUC's Stronger Unions Blog on May 18th)*



Last week was [Mental Health Awareness Week](#), and it is right that we do some serious thinking because it is clear that our approach to mental health is sadly lacking, which leaves us all more vulnerable as a result.

Mental health has certainly risen up the workplace agenda in recent years, with increasing numbers of workers reporting anxieties, depression and stress. Union reps are working daily to support colleagues, too often for employers who fail to recognise the centrality of mental health to a safe, healthy workplace.

Given the increasingly precarious nature of work and an ever more atomised, competitive society this is perhaps unsurprising. Moreover, with the proposed deep cuts to public services to come in the next few years, we have a ticking time bomb. Mental health services are increasingly stretched with demand going up. We simply have to grasp the nettle.

So what is mental health? It is widely known that hundreds of thousands of people in the world of work are suffering at the moment. But suffering from what? Depression? Anxiety? Low mood? Psychosis? The types of problems are

multiple, the experiences of each unique to every individual. And remember that we all have mental health in the same vein that we all have physical health. Sometimes we are well and sometimes we are not so well.

It is often said mental ill-health is not like a broken bone – a hidden illness. This is undoubtedly true. But what is often overlooked is that the diagnosis of a physical health issue is relatively easy – we all break a bone in the same way and our bones will mend the same way. But with mental health we are all different. For example, some people with depression are unable to get out of bed, unable to move; whilst others are able to carry on, to disguise the depression. But both can be equally debilitating and yet, because the outsider cannot know the mind, thoughts and feelings of the individual, it is easy to judge and cast aspersions.

We have to accept that the person with dark depression who 'appears' happy and contented could just as easily end up committing suicide as the person unable to get out of bed.

The recognition of mental health as unique to the individual has to be the starting point if we are to understand how we can help support people in the workplace and to stop putting people into particular illness boxes. This is not an academic debate to try and unravel the nuances of labelling or differing approaches to mental health.

Rather, this is a plea to radically reconsider our understanding and approach to mental health if we are to address a genuinely deadly crisis. More people commit suicide each year than die on the UK roads. A statistic that should spur us all to seek ways to improve understanding.

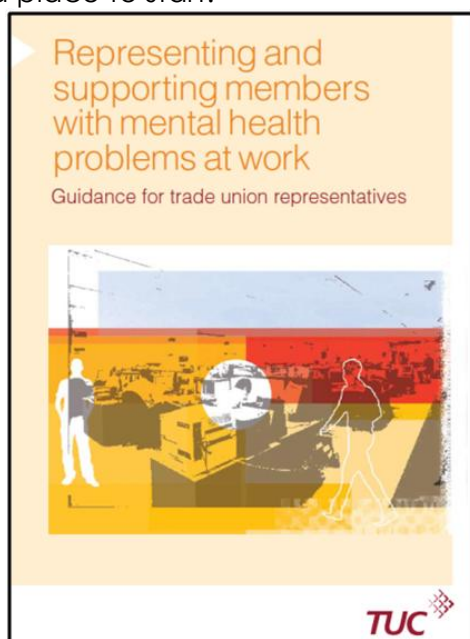
Despite the fact that mental health problems are a killer, result in countless lost

days at work, destroy lives and affect us all, why is it that mental health has for too long been the Cinderella service in the NHS?

It really is a scandal that waiting lists for mental health services are so long. When a person is in crisis they need help immediately, not an indefinite waiting list that could mean many months to simply talk to anyone let alone access support.

We would not accept such huge waiting lists for physical health, why do we seemingly accept such waiting lists for mental health? We simply have to provide the funding that mental health services need.

Looking beyond statutory services, it is also time that employers did more to recognise the importance of mental health in the workplace. Employers could be doing more to work with unions (who are often the people facing the realities of poor mental health daily) to improve policies that make it easier for people to be open about their health issues. The TUC's [Representing and Supporting Members with Mental Health Problems at Work](#) is a good place to start.



### Time for radical honesty

Too often we hear platitudes and words of sympathy about mental health from people at the top. Yet we hear painfully little from voices at the top saying "you know what, I get screwed up too, I have my anxieties, I get down."

The dominant management culture still exudes a typically male definition of strength. Hence power-dressing and concepts of 'strong' leadership. Perhaps genuinely strong leadership would involve more humility and honesty about one's own insecurities?

Just imagine how our workplace culture would be radically different – and healthier – if 'leaders' could openly admit their frailties, insecurities and worries? Wouldn't this feel more human?

It really is too easy for people and organisations to state 'we need to tackle stigma'. Indeed, I have lost count of the multiple well-meaning newspaper articles that have been written in recent years calling on us to tackle stigma. But, as the cliché goes, actions speak louder than words. Just check out the awful headlines following the German Wings tragedy about the depression of Andreas Lubitz. Is it any wonder that people are afraid to open up?

What's more just think of the words in everyday use that simply add to the problem. *Fruitcake, mad, crazy, nutter, loon, schizo, loopy, nuts* to name but a few. The reaction to the Prime Minister's description of UKIP members as 'fruitcakes and loons' is illuminating. David Cameron was ridiculed for being disparaging about the UKIP members, yet his use of stigmatising language was never commented upon. If the language had been sexist, racist or homophobic, the Prime Minister would have rightly been condemned. But lazy, unthinking language

that reinforces negative attitudes to mental health simply passes unchallenged. Again, I ask, is it any wonder that we all hide our insecurities and worries?

For my own part, I am comfortable acknowledging the physical illnesses that have afflicted me over the last couple of years. I have no qualms telling people about the two sets of medication that I now have to take for life, or about the early onset of osteoarthritis. However, I am reluctant to even tick a box on an equalities form to reveal that I have had some difficulties with my mental health. I don't feel safe. This is not healthy.

During the first draft of this article I penned a few anecdotes about my own experience. Yet counsel from people close to me, added to my ongoing doubts and worries about how people would respond, mean that I have self-censored. This speaks volumes. Perhaps one day I will be able to be fully open about some of my past issues and ongoing insecurities. But not yet. This is just my small, incomplete, partial contribution in the call for honesty I suppose?

But please don't read this as '*bloke x survives mental health episode, recovers and imparts wisdom to others*'. That, I think, would be misguided, miss the point, and paradoxically help fuel the ongoing societal deceit about concepts of strength and weakness. My experience was unique to me. And my ongoing mental health will be unique to me.

My – and your – mental health is on a continuum. Sometimes we go up, sometimes we go down – sometimes very down. But the important point to remember is that we all exist on this continuum and we are always moving around it. So whilst our individual experiences are unique we are all common, we all have mental health, we

are all human.

Quite simply we need to care for each other and to look after one another, for we will spend more time on the positive side of our mental health continuum when we have the right support in our workplaces, homes and communities. And, I sincerely believe, a more emotionally honest and open culture, both in the workplace and wider society, would deliver tremendous benefits for us all.

So let us start by asking ourselves, and telling each other, about our own insecurities – something I am painfully trying to do, however incomplete. For by being open and honest we can start to truly tackle stigma, and move us towards a place of greater emotional and mental resilience.

Here's to a future of radical honesty.

## Birmingham Pride



The 2015 Birmingham Pride Parade was held on Saturday May 23<sup>rd</sup> and was led by the original members of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), who recently returned to public prominence with the film PRIDE. They were also joined by hundreds of trade unionists from across the Midlands.

Following the parade, the Birmingham LGBT centre hosted a showing of the original film made by LGSM "All out! Dancing in Dulais".



It was an honour that the Midlands TUC and hundreds of trade unionists from across the Midlands joined LGSM in leading the 2015 Birmingham Pride parade. The support of LGSM in the miners' strike is a moving story of solidarity. It is now 30 years since hundreds of miners joined the London Pride march. The miners who went on the London Pride march were reciprocating the solidarity LGBT people had shown throughout the 1984/85 miners' strike. The miners never forgot this solidarity and went on to support the campaigns for LGBT rights that have now been passed into law.



And this history is instructive, for we today need similar solidarity in order to give hope, belief and support to working people who are now facing hardship and difficulties, fighting for better pay, safer workplaces, decent jobs and greater equality.

### “Fairness at Work: Lessons from Corby”

The TUC has produced the short film ‘Fairness at Work: Lessons from Corby’ with Usdaw, Corby employer RS Components and leader of Corby Borough Council Tom Beattie. [The film can be viewed on the Mids TUC website here](#)



The film profiles the Agencies Code of Conduct, a set of standards to guarantee decent treatment for agency workers, created by Corby Borough Council, the former Corby MP Andy Sawford with local unions and businesses. RS Components has signed this code of conduct.

The film shows that migrant and local workers at the company have both secured good conditions as well as opportunities for learning through Usdaw's negotiations with RS Components. These include a learning agreement which provides English language training which helps migrant workers to integrate into the workforce and skills for local workers which helps them progress in the company.

The TUC will be working with unions and employers to promote this film. We hope this encourages more businesses to sign up to the Agencies Code of Conduct and more workers to join a union to tackle exploitative agency contracts and get fair conditions at work for all.





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This film was produced as part of the TUC's Migration Messaging project which ran in Corby – as well as Southampton and Manchester – for the last year to promote progressive messages on migration. The publication can be viewed here: [Connecting communities, building alliances.](#)

## Industri Energi – Norwegian delegation visit the Midlands



At the end of April, a delegation from the Norwegian trade union, Industri Energi, visited the Midlands.

Industri Energi has 60,000 members and is one of the biggest in Norway. The union organises oil and gas, electro-chemical production, plastics and several other areas. The delegation came to the Midlands to discuss organising and the challenges facing working people in the UK and how we can both learn from each other.

The delegation were keen to come to the Midlands to find out more about some of

the challenges facing unions in the UK and some of the strategies pursued in recent years.

UNITE showed the delegation the JLR plant at Solihull as an example of a successful unionised manufacturing company in the Midlands.

UNISON arranged for the delegation to meet with the leader of Birmingham City Council, Sir Albert Bore, to discuss the impact of spending cuts upon local authorities and the opportunities and challenges presented by the devolution agenda now emerging in the UK.

The delegation also met with members of the Midlands TUC Executive at a drinks reception to share ideas and knowledge of the challenges facing unions today.

Finally, the delegation attended and spoke at the Wolverhampton May Day rally.

We are grateful for all the support of unions and trade councils for making the visit such a success. Thank you.

## International Workers' Memorial Day



Workers' Memorial Day is an important date in the calendar. It is a day for reflection. A day to reflect on the loss of loved ones who went to work and never

## Midlands TUC Update

returned home. And a day to reflect that thousands more will lose their lives in 2015 as a result of simply doing their job.

The Midlands TUC marked Workers' Memorial Day by holding a Health and Safety Conference to examine the challenges that workers face today and joined the commemoration at St Philip's Cathedral in Birmingham. The purpose behind Workers' Memorial Day has always been to "remember the dead: fight for the living" and unions held events across the Midlands to remember all those killed through work and to campaign to improve safety in the workplace today.

Over 20,000 people die every year because of their work, with most of these deaths being related to exposure to dangerous substances. This year the theme for Workers' Memorial Day was "removing exposure to hazardous substances in the workplace".


Hazardous substances are found in almost every workplace in the UK and many workers have no protection against the possible effects, despite the fact that tens of thousands of workers have their health destroyed by asthma, dermatitis, lung disorders and cancers because of exposure.

## 2015 Chainmakers Festival


Plans are progressing for the 2015 Chainmakers Festival.

It has been confirmed that this year's festival will feature a street festival being held on Cradley Heath High Street on 12<sup>th</sup> July.

Market stalls will adorn the High Street, and music and street theatre will also feature, on two stages – the Macarthur and 1910 stages.



**THE WOMEN  
CHAINMAKERS FESTIVAL  
AND SATURDAY NIGHT  
AT THE CHAINMAKERS**  
11 AND 12 JULY, 11AM TO 6PM



Stalls, face painting, circus skills, funfair, music & comedy from 'The Fizzog's', Period theatrical re-enactments - including Lynn Morris as Mary Macarthur


Plus speeches from:  
**Michelle Stanisbreet** NUJ General Secretary  
**Diana Holland** Assistant General Secretary UNITE

**THE WOMEN  
CHAINMAKERS'  
FESTIVAL 2015**

**SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE CHAINMAKERS**  
SATURDAY 11 JULY, 7PM  
Hollybush Alehouse, 53 Newtown Lane, Cradley Heath, B64 5EA

**SPEECH WORD AND COMEDY**

- Brendan Hawthorne
- Ron Popple
- Heather Wasteie
- John Langford
- Ian Henery



**SUNDAY FESTIVAL**  
SUNDAY 12 JULY, 11AM TO 6PM  
Cradley Heath High Street, Sandwell, B64 5HJ

<p><b>MACARTHUR STAGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Blackhounds</li> <li>- Flat Stanley</li> <li>- Empty Can</li> <li>- VX and her MsChiefs</li> </ul>	<p><b>STREET THEATRE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lynn Morris as Mary Macarthur</li> <li>- The Black Country Players</li> <li>- Uniquely Simple Comedy</li> <li>- Fizzog's</li> </ul>	<p><b>1910 STAGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bev Pegg</li> <li>- Brett Huckfield and Marie Timmins</li> <li>- John Langford Band</li> <li>- Cosmic Jerks</li> <li>- Alex Vann</li> <li>- Tom Martin</li> <li>- The Laners</li> </ul>
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**THE WOMEN  
CHAINMAKERS'  
FESTIVAL 2015**

Leaflet design Homer Creative

## Tutor shares best practice in Europe



Colin Nolan, the Trade Union Education course co-ordinator at Central College, Nottingham, has been selected to work with the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) in Brussels.

Colin has been working with a team from Italy, France, Portugal, Romania and Sweden to develop other trade union educators to work at a 'European level'. This training will give them the skills necessary to deliver courses for delegates from across the European Union.

In November Colin spent a week at the UN International Labour Organisation's staff college in Turin. He worked on the ETUI's annual conferences in Madrid 2013 and Sofia 2014 and will be working on the 2015 conference in Berlin.

Colin said: "I did the 'Eurotrainers' training as a participant in 2010 and 2011 and was the first person from the UK to complete both part 1 and part 2. It is a great honour to be asked by the TUC to represent them on this team.

*There are more than 50 TUC education centres in colleges across the UK and for me to be asked to join this European team is a reflection of the excellent reputation that the Central College team has with the TUC Education department's national leadership."*

## Nottingham Trade Union Education

The Trade Union Education Centre in Nottingham is building on the success of a course, especially for women reps, that ran for the first time in November 2014.

Helen Nolan from the centre said "The feedback from the first course was so good that we couldn't wait to get started again. The second course is now underway with women from various unions and industries in the Nottingham, Leicester and Lincolnshire area. It's not easy for women to get time off to attend a course that deals with matters specifically related to women trade unionists, so hopefully their organisations recognise their hidden potential".

Running once a week for a whole day (five weeks in total) the participants have plenty of time to investigate, discuss and organise around issues such as:

- Job segregation and Equal Pay
- The 'social norm' of women carers
- Women leaders
- Violence against women
- Unions and organising women

A rep from Severn Trent Water commented on her experience of the November course:



*"The impact of this course has been great for me. I've more confidence in my own style of leadership and so feel better able to represent members. I've more confidence in my views on women in the workplace and feel better able to support women with their work/life balance issues, e.g. making use of company policies and practices to support family and 'lifestyle choices'. I know the course is making a difference because people look gobsmacked at the suggestions I make when I know they are doable."*

Nottingham Trade Union Education encourage any women that might be interested to get in touch on 0115 950 8154 or the email below. In future the course will also be available online, so if you're interested please call.

[helen.nolan@centralnottingham.ac.uk](mailto:helen.nolan@centralnottingham.ac.uk)

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## Keeping in touch

Published by TUC Midlands Region, 24 Livery Street, Birmingham, B3 2PA.

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