

29 February 2024

# **Activate: Reps in Unity Square pulling out the stops for the national campaign**

Pop-up stalls, samosa sales, building-wide drop-in sessions, surveys and WhatsApp groups are some of the ways activists in Nottingham are working together to drive up engagement in the national campaign and survey.

The regional government hub in Unity Square is home to reps from various groups - HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Legal Aid Agency (LAA) and Land Registry - who have been busy collaborating to support each other and all PCS members within the building.

Last year, this joined-up approach was sparked when reps in these departments were added into a WhatsApp group to share key messages and begin talking about how to organise together. Since then, time and resources have been shared, impressive outreach has been done, and the tendency for reps to work in isolation has been eliminated.

Fostering a sense of a community in the Unity Square building, these dedicated reps have used departmental events like regional inductions and equality events, as well as one-off activities such as samosa sales, to speak face-to-face to current and potential members.

And by running joined-up recruitment stalls and building-wide drop-in sessions for members to ask questions and raise issues, they have massively increased the union's visibility in the building.

Cara Nurse, assistant branch secretary of the Revenue and Customs East Midlands branch, says: "We use these opportunities and captive audiences to ensure members details are up to date on PCS digital, including having the latest home and email addresses."

## **Talking to members about the consultative survey**

One recent example of outreach focused on the ongoing consultative survey.

Last week, reps from DVSA, HMRC and LAA set up a pop-up stall at the entrance of the Bakewell Café in the building to talk to members about the importance of the consultative ballot – recruiting several new members along the way.

They also recently delivered a session to more than 50 new starters in the building to discuss not only the importance of union membership but also the consultative process, asking these members if they had received and responded to their email to have their voice heard.

“The key thing for us is that our members know us, that they know we are with them and not just names on paper,” Cara explains.

## **Members feel they are part of something bigger**

This face-to-face approach has paid dividends: running several events like these over the past year in support of the national campaign has made “members feel they are part of something bigger”.

Several members who Cara has never spoken to her in the workplace have – after seeing her front-and-centre in these workplace activities under the banner of PCS – approached her to ask about the consultative ballot. Through this collaborative working with other reps in the building, members are beginning to associate PCS with the building and the building with PCS.

Matthew Bennett, branch secretary for MoJ Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire branch, tells us that, to increase engagement with the consultative survey, he and his fellow reps in the LAA encouraged members to attend a recent PCS live event hosted online by Fran Heathcote and Martin Cavanagh, used their LAA Nottingham members WhatsApp group to highlight the survey locally, and ensured that the national campaign formed a large part of the discussions at the recent branch AGM.

These are some of the ways that reps have sought to increase engagement with the ongoing consultative exercise. But the national campaign does not stop there.

## **Getting ballot-ready**

This consultative survey is a temperature check of how members feel before the next possible step in our national campaign: a statutory ballot.

For Rowena Cooke, branch organiser with the Revenue and Customs East Midlands branch, getting ballot-ready means planning days to leaflet members and reviewing memberships lists to ensure they have the correct members in the branch records and, if members are found to be on the wrong list, transferring them to the appropriate branch.

Crucially, her branch has been making contact with members who have provided no postal address, email or phone number to make sure everyone has their say in the next steps of the campaign.

“We have also sent out a survey to members where we asked if they would like help getting onto PCS Digital and we had a large number of members that asked for this help,” she adds. “This in turn will help our members ordering replacement ballot papers without having to contact a rep when the time comes.”

For his part, Matthew believes that his branch’s approach last year is a great blueprint for ensuring a high turnout in any statutory ballot in 2024.

What gave the branch such a brilliant turnout in last year’s ballot was not just messaging but also, he explains, “the way we get the message out – the combination of mass communications and individual”.

Last year before the statutory ballot began, he supported a roadshow event that HMRC colleagues had arranged in the building foyer and spent several weeks leafleting outside the building. He leafleted on occasion with HMRC and DVSA colleagues but sometimes alone, “always with a bright yellow PCS high-vis jacket on.”

This type of groundwork ensured that members were kept to date on the campaign and that they knew how well supported it was across the building and not just within their office floor or employer group.

### **Recruitment opportunities**

Getting branches ballot-ready does not only mean getting the messaging and outreach to current members right: it also means using the campaign as an opportunity to recruit.

Last year’s national campaign inspired many members to become PCS reps. And this was no different in Matthew’s branch.

A larger rep base has, according to Matthew, allowed the branch “to do much more with the survey and ballot this year”. For example, they’ve restarted branch meetings which hadn't been happening and have plans to further collaborate with reps in other employer groups in the building to “co-ordinate their approach in a way that wasn't possible last year”.

**What advice would Matthew give any reps in a building with multiple employer groups?**

He recommends contacting PCS reps in the other agencies or employer groups. If there aren't PCS reps from other departments on-site, you can look into whether there are other branches represented in your building by speaking to colleagues locally or your own group to identify the branch officers.

“Comms tools like MS Teams, Slack, WhatsApp won't work for everyone,” Matthew adds, “but where they are a good fit for the work patterns and practices having a group chat is massively helpful for linking up and ensuring shared information is passed on quickly.”

Although in practice trade union-side house committees and health and safety committees “aren't always set up” in buildings like Unity Square, they really should be, so “PCS reps should work together to make sure that happens”. If there is resistance to create these structures, he adds, “there's nothing to stop reps from all departments having their own meetings and working with those from the majority building occupier to make sure issues get raised”.

For Rowena, and all of her fellow activists in this building, the benefits of this type of collaboration to the future of the national campaign are obvious: “We have shown all members and staff at Unity Square that, despite being different branches, we are all working towards the same goal.”