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## **PCS women join together to Inspire Inclusion**

Paulette writes about why unions must continue to fight policies that are unfair to women, and how women's networks are open to members and reps to work together to fight inequality.

I first joined PCS 23 years ago, after attending an induction session within two weeks of joining the civil service. This is evidence if any were needed of how vital it is for PCS local reps to be given the opportunity to meet new staff as soon as they start work.

As a working-class woman, the benefits of becoming a PCS member were obvious to me from the moment I joined the civil service. Over time this has led to me becoming increasingly more vocal and active, locally, regionally and with PCS national campaigns.

History has shown that too often whether through government ideology, departmental employee policies or due to poor work culture in the workplace, staffing policies have disproportionately impacted on women. Thankfully, with the efforts of unions, women no longer face the blatantly discriminatory practices earlier generations encountered. For example, the “Marriage Bar” policy that meant once a woman married, they could no longer work in the civil service. This policy operated in some departments until the early 1970s.

We have seen positive change, but women continue to face new challenges with departmental policies that negatively impact on women - including the suppression of pay which means that women are greatly affected by the cost-of-living crisis and the unevidenced 60% return to office policy which adds additional

expense and pressures with childcare. This demonstrates why unions must continue to fight policies that are unfair to women.

I know from the experience of being a trade union activist, and activist is the operative word, this can be empowering and act as a real leveler in the civil service. As I have become more involved with union activity, I have been fortunate to learn from some incredibly supportive and experienced reps, both men and women, who have inspired me to get more involved. As a result, I am better equipped to help defend the rights of the members I work with. The knowledge you gain from working with other union activists means that you will be better able to provide an effective challenge and hold the employer to account.

Since the launch of the London and south east women's network a year ago, it's grown from strength to strength, with so many positive and confident women committed to fighting for equality on issues affecting women - not just in the workplace but wider society. As we mark International Women's Day 2024, we join together to celebrate how we **Inspire Inclusion**, we do so knowing that for the other 364 days of the year we continue to give 100% to fight for equality for women and look to tackle all forms of inequality.

If you've recently joined PCS, like I did 23 years ago, or been a member for a while and always thought about getting involved, I would encourage you to get involved with your local women's network. If you are based in London and the south east you can find out more by emailing [londonse@pcs.org.uk](mailto:londonse@pcs.org.uk).

Contact the equality department at [equality@pcs.org.uk](mailto:equality@pcs.org.uk) to find out more about becoming involved in other regional and national equality member networks.