

17 April 2024

# **Activate: Social media strategies are key to ballot turnouts**

From The Pensions Regulator in Brighton to DWP Glasgow, activists are using social media platforms creatively to organise their workplaces and maximise turnout in the ballot.

Liz Macintyre, a local rep in Springburn Jobcentre, has impressed with her use of WhatsApp to get the vote out across several DWP Jobcentres in Glasgow.

Although she started using WhatsApp and a Facebook private messenger group before the pandemic, the emergence of lockdowns made the platforms more popular, proving an “invaluable way of contacting members with up-to-date bulletins and advice”.

“Members could see the value in this and many more members contacted me at that time,” Liz says. “I ended up with quite a large group covering other Glasgow Jobcentres.”

Describing herself as “not very digital-savvy”, she nevertheless went ahead and took advantage of this influx of members into her group chats.

DWP Jobcentre colleagues from across Glasgow rely on these chats because Liz condenses important information into short, impactful bullet points. Although she also sends bulletins out, members tell her they often rely on these key points – which are sent out on a regular basis – to keep updated about the national campaign.

For example, she sent a message on the day before the ballot papers arrived to advise members to look out for them. She also screenshotted the leaflet for DWP from the PCS Library and put this in the chat to give members more information as to why they should vote Yes.

“Members say they are better informed as to the current position with the national campaign,” Liz says. “They know what they are being asked to do and know when they need to do it.”

## **The Pensions Regulator**

At the start of the long-running dispute at The Pensions Regulator (TPR), a WhatsApp group was set up to update members on strike action and picket attendance.

But Molly Cooke, the media/comms officer in The Pensions Regulator branch, saw how other unions had effectively used Facebook and Instagram. Narratives about the strike, which Mollie and others wanted to counter, were circulating around the TPR office.

“Those of us on the committee got together to create a content strategy, including what we were going to post each day, who to begin following and new possible content to be collected and created,” she says.

They used as many functions as possible on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp to “broadcast more about the strike”. On WhatsApp, this meant using the broadcast feature to send announcements to members; on Facebook and Instagram, PCS activists “posted on the timeline/grid, posted stories, followed people of interest/other unions, engaged (commenting, liking, sharing) with other content”.

Supporting Mollie with ramping up this digital presence has been branch co-chair Matthew Evans.

He went about creating engaging videos and animations for Instagram and Facebook, not least “[mythbusters](#)” – “videos of committee reps talking directly to members to dispel myths that had started circulating around the office” – as well as [animations](#) which “set out exactly what we wanted to achieve through strike action and a video in which we shared stories from some of our members”.

### **Positive response**

Members responded positively to this varied and interactive social media campaign. Mollie noticed that members responded particularly well to “mythbusters” and light-hearted content, including Halloween picket line costumes, [Christmas story time](#), the introduction of our mascot “Perseus the Pig”, and picket line pooches.

But has there been a correlation between the huge jump in membership (over 100%) and the branch’s digital strategy? Mollie and Matthew believe there is.

“We have definitely seen an uptake in members engaging directly with our union branch and following our social media platforms online,” Mollie says.

“I also believe that the content that we uploaded to social media, specifically our mythbusters, helped members to more confidently combat the alternative narratives about the strike action that were propagating throughout TPR.”

For Matthew, the WhatsApp group in particular has “really helped build solidarity and a sense of community”, leading to increased member confidence and even set up a separate WhatsApp group for members to discuss challenges they are facing in relation to hybrid working.

In the ongoing strike ballot, they have been posting stories and timeline/grid posts, and have consistently reminded those on the WhatsApp group to ensure that the TPR turnout is as high as possible. This includes running a poll on the WhatsApp group to determine the turnout.

“It isn’t always quick and easy to create meaningful engaging content but the results are well worth the effort!” adds Matthew.