

# UNION MODERNISATION FUND

**BERR**

Department for Business  
Enterprise & Regulatory Reform

**PREPARING OPINION-FORMERS FOR  
INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION**



# T&G – Informing staff and members using UMF funding

The phased introduction of the EU Information and Consultation Directive is leading to changes in workplace organisation and union/company relationships. The Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G) used UMF funding to prepare its officers and leading representatives for the introduction of the Directive and its consequences.

The project covered the following key areas:

- The design and development of courses and course material to meet the demand from officers and the membership
- The delivery of a number of seminars to the officers and active membership on information and consultation
- The identification of clear outcomes in terms of collective bargaining and union organisation
- The right to improvement of treaty and service in partnership, beginning with employers, as a result of these seminars

## Project themes

The main themes for the project were to improve the understanding of modern business practice by full-time officers and their representatives, so that the union would be better placed to work constructively with partners to improve business performance. In particular, the project was designed to equip full-time officers and leading senior shop stewards for their roles and for their implementation of the Information and Consultation of

Employee's Regulations. Jim Mowatt, Director of T&G Education and Development, adds:

*'A priority theme was to improve two-way communications between unions and their members and to increase participation in the union. We also wanted to improve the ability of the union to respond to the increasing diversity of the labour market and to supply services geared to the needs of a diverse membership. Developing the professional competence of union officers was key. Another focus was our Disabled Section members.'*

## Methodology

### Courses

The courses proposed in the UMF bid were built on the success of a springboard course for senior shop stewards, which the union ran in Eastbourne in January 2006. Says Jim:

*'Arising from that we identified sectors where the Information and Consultation Regulations could be used to full effect, concentrating initially on the bus industry. We ran a national course, based in Bristol, for senior shop stewards throughout the bus industry in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, with a view to developing tutoring capacity in each of the regions to take*

*forward the courses on Information and Consultation. This proved a success in that in some regions the Bristol course was used as a template and springboard, from which we brought people from the regions down for a course in our Eastbourne conference centre in Sussex. In November 2006 we pulled our full-time officer core in the North together in Darlington and a very successful course was held there. Our largest concentration of members is in London and the South East within the Passenger Transport section, so we also ran two very well supported courses in the London regional centre. It was increasingly evident that the best approach for getting the maximum out of our Information and Consultation courses was to concentrate on industrial sectors, which is why we ran our most successful course for the senior shop stewards in the white meat industry across all four countries of the United Kingdom. This has proved to be a successful template for the future and flowing out of that sectoral approach we have migrated that practice across the whole of the union.'*

Designed to work across the union's entire spectrum, the courses began in January 2006 and are still running now. Participants range from targeted groups of senior shop stewards to full-time officials and the whole of the education team nationally and regionally. The success of the Passenger Transport sectoral courses in Bristol and London led to a request from Stagecoach, for whom T&G ran a course on Information and Consultation for senior shop stewards there:

*'An encouraging feature is that none of these courses was a one-off affair. In fact, they've rather proved to be a springboard for future activity. For example, we have a signed agreement with HDNL to run courses throughout 2008 on Information and Consultation.'*

Thanks to its promotion by T&G officials, the focus on information and consultation is now one of the top priorities among the membership.

## Lessons learned

The project has been a steep learning curve, as Jim is the first to admit:

*'We did encounter difficulties. The most galling factor was that the regions each had a different appetite and priority for the work. Therefore, our activity was concentrated in the southwest and southeast, but with national projects covering all regions and certain sectors (such as white meat, disabilities, HDNL, and BP Logistics). We are working to rectify this in that we have adopted as a matter of policy, arising out of our experience with this UMF project, that there should be national minimal standards and that they should be agreed centrally and implemented regionally. We also found that all too often employer enthusiasm at senior level, particularly HR, was tempered by manufacturing and distribution imperatives, i.e. "business comes first". The other output which was mildly disappointing was the production of the supporting materials, as the T&G Campaigns and Communications Department were swamped by the merger frenzy with Amicus during this period. Nevertheless, this is something that we can address in the near future.'*

There were some problems with progressing the project because of other priorities – one reason for the project being extended from 12 months to 18 months – as Jim explains:

*'Perhaps we were too ambitious, as we committed ourselves to take 250 workplace representatives (from T&G and from USDAW) plus over 300 front line managers through our programme to understand, undertake, and implement brand new structures based upon the Information and Consultation Regulations. We were also victims of our own success. Where we identified the demand and met that demand, it then triggered an even greater demand. We encountered initial start up difficulties too, generated by the previous Director's sudden departure. And added to this were my underdeveloped project management skills: having taken the reins over mid-gallop, I had not had the benefit of the DTI's seminar on project management; otherwise, different decisions would have been made and the allocation of resources would have been skewed towards tighter controls. Eventually, however, when I assumed control as Director, I created the steering group as part of the national education team and had separate meetings as discrete agenda items at those quarterly meetings. These shortcomings have been identified and worked on: in our Round Two UMF bid there is a designated project manager, financed out of the bid money. This will ensure no repeat of the governance problems we had with our Round One project.'*

## Benefits

The benefits of using UMF funding to develop the project have been considerable, as Jim explains:

*'T&G's successful UMF bid provided the union with the chance to develop activity in this area much faster and on a more comprehensive basis than would otherwise have happened. The T&G has a massive regional and national education programme. Maintaining our educational programmes regionally and nationally requires keen husbanding of resources. This project allowed us to do that as well as to explore areas which we would not have been able to do otherwise. Moreover, we experimented successfully with a number of manoeuvres such as getting a web-based forum off the ground, and running courses across companies within sectors – for example, the aviation security sector. Without the project, these would not have been attempted and achieved.'*

All the project objectives have been successfully reached, namely:

- to reach all TGWU officials to raise the awareness of the issue;
- to greatly extend the range of active membership education to reach members in all regions well beyond the pilots, and
- to extend and improve TGWU publications in the area of information consultation and understanding business activity.

Jim continues:

*'The delivery has proved challenging, demanding, but rewarding. In our three project objectives we have unequivocally achieved our ambitions. I am convinced that*

*our integrity has seen us through the tunnel of uncertainty and that through our work on the project, we now enjoy a stronger relationship with those companies we worked with. The project proved that the transformational potential was indeed enormous. In addition to the EU Information Consultation Directive defining a statutory requirement on companies of a certain size, this project will lead to new structures across a great number of workplaces. It has transformed union/company relationships and far from intensifying conflict, has done rather the reverse. It has led to longer-term partnership approaches being established based on greater shared information and trust. In companies such as BP Logistics, the white meat sector and HDNL, we can boast that this was a strategic step change in HR and industrial relations. Indeed not only did this project prove very appealing to those companies; through 2007 a number of other companies have come on board with the same approaches that we created in the project and have achieved considerable success.'*

## **Looking forward**

It is recognised within the union and the companies they deal with that information and consultation will have a higher priority in the future. Jim sums up:

*'As the contours of collective bargaining change from being adversarial to being that of "working together", the need for a pragmatic exchange of information and systems through which to consult on are now recognised. The officials, stewards and managers with whom we worked on this project want to continue our partnership*

*arrangements in the future. Working successfully with a company has proved an attractive proposition for their competitors. Therefore, we clearly have targets for the future, both with companies and industrial sectors. Our national programme, which is a residential facility, has already hosted a tranche of courses on Information and Consultation, for example our Change at Work courses, our Globalisation courses and our Sustainability courses. And there is an acknowledgement by our General Executive Council that we ought not to hide our light under a bushel but to think how we can positively disseminate the learning that has been accumulated over the life of this project. We are looking at launching an event at the TUC or having a workshop in which we can share joint arrangements, primarily with those unions with which we have collective bargaining. We have a nest of union journals which are very useful vehicles through which to get our message on to the shop floor and offices, laboratories and depots where our 800,000 members are employed. And midway through the life of this project we formally merged with Amicus to form Unite – the Union. We have an ambition to migrate the lessons we have learned through this project within the T&G into the much larger Unite – the Union, with its 2 million members.'*

For further information, contact Jim Mowatt:  
Tel: 0207 611 2629  
jmowatt@tgwu.org.uk



