

**UNION MODERNISATION FUND**

General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU)  
& Ruskin College – progressing trade union  
leadership and development

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## Introduction

The General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) is the UK's federal body for small, specialist trade unions and has within its affiliates a wide range of membership. From the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP), to the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), the organisation represents trade unions and professional associations in the majority of employment sectors. The GFTU currently has 32 affiliates with 320,000 members.

The main work of the GFTU is providing education and training for its affiliates, which is delivered via a registered charitable trust. The educational service provided accredited learning opportunities to 3,000 in 2006-2007 alone.

To deliver its programme, the GFTU works in educational partnerships with Ruskin and Northern College. This Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) project was delivered in partnership with Ruskin College, whose mission is to provide educational opportunities to excluded and disadvantaged people, to transform the individuals concerned and the communities, groups and societies they come from. The project also builds on new GFTU work on developing a Certificate in Trade Union Management with Northern College.

## Why this project?

Ruskin College and the GFTU already ran joint education partnerships. This UMF project built on and extended the existing partnership programme by addressing leadership development. In

doing so, it also provided staff development for the project team members.

## Aims and objectives

Judith Jackson, GFTU Head of Educational Services, describes the project's overall aims and objectives:

*'We wanted the project to develop existing and future leaders of the GFTU and its affiliated unions, who in turn will modernise and transform the unions' cultures and structures to include, develop and empower women, and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) leaders. We also wanted it to provide the engine for the longer-term transformation in the GFTU and affiliated unions, of existing union leaders and leadership practice, and of union leaderships from white, middle-aged males, towards a gender and race/ethnicity mix in proportion to the membership. This new leadership, in the longer term, will drive modernisation and change. The operating objectives of the research and development activities of the project were to investigate the position in GFTU unions in relation to proportional representation of, primarily, women and black and minority ethnic members in leadership roles; and to develop programmes to promote their development. Sustainability within the GFTU and for the wider UK union movement in the longer term was also a crucial objective.'*

## Methodology and outcomes

A cross-stakeholder Steering Group was put together, with Judith Jackson from GFTU as Project Leader. There were three main parts of the project:

- A participative research programme to investigate and identify key modern leadership skills, knowledge and related issues, including those of gender and diversity.
- Using the research findings, providing the basis for a prototype for a multi-part leadership development programme for UK trade unionists.
- Training a cadre of trainers to roll out the programme and continue to update it thus providing the groundwork for the development of a sustainable programme of TU leadership development.

## Research

Most of the research was carried out in year one and the development work in year two.

### GFTU Equality and Diversity structures and initiatives

The first phase of research looked into issues around gender and diversity among leaders in the union structures, as Judith Jackson explains:

*'We investigated where women and BAME members were in the structures of GFTU affiliates, and what initiatives had been taken on equality by affiliates. We asked affiliates for copies of their returns to the TUC 2007 Equality Audit rather than re-invent the wheel by asking them to do this again for the UMF project. The response to our requests were disappointing, though in the end we were able to access the returns through the TUC and the Labour Research Department,*

*which carried out the analysis for the TUC.'*

Findings were mixed. At the time of the research, NAPO had a woman general secretary but she retired during the project and her successor is a white man. The NUJ elected a woman deputy general secretary; ASPECT elected its first black vice president. The larger affiliates were more likely to have a better overall equality profile than the smaller ones (as might be expected). Data was better for gender profiles than for ethnicity. No information was available for a small number of unions. Overall, the unions that had a near proportional representation, or better, of their women members on the National Executives were:

ASPECT: Women as 55% of members, and 48% of NEC members

COMMUNITY: Women as 18% of members, and 22% of the NEC

Musicians' Union: Women as 25% of members and 21% of the NEC

NAPO: Women as 60% of members and 50% of the NEC

Positive action measures to encourage and support those from diversity groups were in place in half the GFTU unions. These are also the unions where equality and diversity representation is good, and they are considered to be in the vanguard of GFTU unions. The GFTU itself, at its May 2009 conference, agreed a rule change to provide one reserved seat for a woman, and one for a young member on the National Executive. However at the time of the research, only three affiliates could identify an officer with the explicit remit of equalities. A further two unions had other officers who had equalities as an additional responsibility.

### **Leaders and leadership: who are leaders, what is leadership?**

Phase two of the research looked at who leaders are and what is seen as leadership in GFTU unions.

Questionnaires were sent to 300 GFTU affiliate activists who had attended GFTU courses during 2006-7, and to senior trade unionists (national officers and NEC members). The response rate was just 37.6%, so questionnaires were also given to the 357 participants on all GFTU courses from September-December 2008. This response rate was also low, with only 81 (22.6%) completing questionnaires. Nevertheless, the total of 194 Standard questionnaires, a 29.5% response rate, and 29 'senior' questionnaires (but only seven women) enabled a useful analysis. Since the findings were so similar from these groups, it was decided to target the 169 equality representatives (ERs) who are involved in the GFTU UMF Equality Reps project. The response from this was disappointing too, with only 24 completed questionnaires returned.

A total of 243 questionnaires were returned from all three groups. Results showed:

#### **Leadership profile**

Those who responded to questionnaires, at all levels in the union were overwhelmingly heterosexual, able bodied, white men over the age of 40. This was even the case among the ERs, although there were slightly more women and BAME activists among this group.

#### **Did they see themselves as leaders?**

The majority did self identify as leaders, regardless of level, although there were two small, but important differences. Women were less likely to recognise themselves as leaders, especially those at more junior levels in their union (21% against 51% of

men), as were those in elected lay positions where a sense of grassroots participative democracy was evident.

### **What is trade union leadership?**

A range of questions was asked about leadership. One set was about the respondents themselves; a second was about what they thought their trade union looked for in a leader and a third was about what they thought trade union leadership was generally. They were also asked what they thought they were good at and what they found most difficult in their leadership role.

- **Most important**

Among the most important aspects of their activist/leader role there were some important differences, especially between the genders:

- Women were twice as likely as men to see an understanding of equality and diversity as important.
- ERs also saw this as the most important aspect and their main strength.
- Women were more likely to see campaigning and campaigns as key aspects of the role.
- Men were more likely to see negotiating and collective bargaining as a key aspect.

- **Main strengths**

As would be expected, the senior leaders of both sexes were oriented towards strategy and policy, with only one of the senior women seeing it as one of her main strengths. The ERs also listed strategy and policy as both important and a strength, whereas none of the standard or more junior level leaders identified this. Neither did they identify negotiating and collective bargaining as key strengths. Judith points out:

*'If the junior leaders are to progress in their union it will be important to*

*recognise these differences and how they can be incorporated into development programmes.'*

- **Difficulties**

Both men and women at all levels and in all three groups saw time pressures and workload demands as being the most difficult aspects of the role.

Women in all groups identified conflict as being difficult, and more junior women identified negotiating/collective bargaining as problematic, having already recognised the significance of this in their leadership roles. In all groups men were more likely to cite getting support from the members and junior leaders as a real challenge, and men were more likely to see persuading or getting others to listen as a difficult aspect of the role.

Racism and sexism were mentioned by ERs as two of the most difficult aspects of being a leader, issues which were not identified by the other two groups.

Public speaking was important, particularly for women, with those at junior level also finding it a difficult part of their role, and the senior women identifying it as an important skill.

- **Important skill sets for the union**

When it came to what they saw the union as expecting, there was considerable agreement, although the senior women identified project management as being one of the three most important skill sets, whereas it came very low down on the senior men's priorities. One of the few items neither men nor women in any group identified as being important was ICT skills. The most important skill set unions were seen to require of their leaders was identified by both men and women at all levels in all three groups:

- Negotiating/bargaining
- Understanding what the issues are for members

- Communicating (more women than men)
- Being up to date with what the union is doing for members
- Organising

Disappointingly, equality and diversity were ranked at the bottom of the skills set of the ERs' own trade unions. Also, equality and diversity were ranked low down on the list of most important knowledge and skills for the ERs themselves, even though it was seen as both important and as a key strength of ERs.

- **Up to dateness and political skills**

Equality and diversity were seen as low priority by men in both groups (although it was a priority of ERs). Women rated equality/diversity twice as highly as the men did, with a similar response for listening. Supporting the union's ruling political grouping was seen by men as three times more important than by women. When it came to political awareness, or 'savvy', there were some differences between the genders and levels. In particular, the only group that did not identify a proven record of industrial action was women at the junior levels. Among the ERs, 'being one of the boys' was seen as a high priority in career progression in their unions. This would indicate that women and those from BAME backgrounds find it more difficult to get into leadership positions. Being one of the boys took a much lower ranking in the responses from the senior leaders and from the standard group.

- **Support from the union**

Training was the top priority by far for men and women at all levels, whereas education was seen as less useful, except among ERs who valued education slightly more than training. Mentoring was highly valued by women at senior and ER level particularly, whereas men gave it lower priority, although at more junior

levels, men and women valued it much the same.

## Developing Trade Union Leadership programmes

The third part of the research stage looked at what people wanted in leadership development courses.

### Questionnaire responses

The questionnaire asked what the respondents thought about the content and type of leadership programmes, and also what development they personally were looking for. Says Judith: *'The views here very much reflected the priorities as reported in the findings about TU leadership skills and knowledge.'*

Respondents felt that main aims should be:

- development of leaders
- improving communications between management, staff and union
- encouraging union membership, especially among young people
- encouraging truth and equality
- personal development

Suggested format and delivery included:

- away for a week at a time
- full-time short courses over six months
- a modular programme
- case studies and examples, including of role models
- both educational and practical
- a mix of tutors
- diversity by race, gender, regions and union level
- speakers who are 'great leaders and negotiators' – role models

The content respondents suggested for any leadership programme reflected the qualities pinpointed for leaders – for instance, leadership,

trade union, social and 'people' skills, alongside individual skills development (personal empowerment, confidence, assertiveness and presentation), organising and managing skills, political and organisational skills. Respondents believed that leadership and group working, law, collective agreements and equality and diversity rights and issues should be among the knowledge that course participants should develop.

Respondents who were active in diversity groups (women, BAME, LGBT, disabled) saw the following as important:

- how to overcome the glass ceiling
- how to get support
- networking
- mentoring schemes.

### Pilot programme development

Materials were developed for each pilot and selections from respondents' suggestions were included in them, particularly in the key areas of leadership. For example, in the Part 2 of the 'Women' programme, the skills of negotiating were practised through a case study analysis of equal pay for work of equal value. There was also the opportunity to build on the evaluation from Part 1 in this second course.

Across all three groups surveyed by questionnaire, about half of those responding said they would like to take part in a leadership development pilot. There was little support for programmes specifically for women, BAME and disability groups. All but two said they would prefer a mixed leadership development programme, or didn't mind. The two who wanted a specific course wanted to see a strand for disability. Typical comments on the issue of positive action type programmes included: 'The agenda to unite diversity issues within the union has only led to greater separation and

has sought to weaken minority groups, not strengthen them'. Nevertheless, the project team decided to keep to the proposal to run pilots for specific diversity groups as well as mixed.

### **Leadership Development Programme**

A total of 44 participated in four pilot programmes, run by the project team. These were for:

- Men and women 'Standard' leaders/activists: February 2009, July 2009
- BAME leaders/activists: April 2009
- Women leaders/activists: June 2009. Stage 2, November 2009
- Training for trainers: October 2009

### **GFTU leaders and activists**

As part of the Leadership Development programmes, participants were sent the research findings prior to the courses and asked to carry out some analysis which was then discussed at each pilot. (Some of the participants had completed the questionnaire survey.) All were pleased to be involved in this way and several of their action plans built on the findings. Some were surprised to learn about their own unions and also pledged to inquire about the equality and diversity policies and practices of their unions.

### **Train the Trainers**

The final phase of the project was a programme to train trainers to help roll out this programme. The Train the Trainers pilot was aimed at trade unionists who had taken part in one of the UMF or GFTU leadership programmes and had expressed an interest in developing their own skills to roll out the leadership training in their own unions, with the support of full-time officials/education officers. Judith adds:

*'Throughout the project we aimed to involve current activists and leaders as an important source of experience in the field, and the piloting work has shown this to be a fruitful course of action.'*

### **Accreditation**

The programmes developed as part of the project have been accredited through the partnership between the GFTU, Ruskin College and the Open College Network (OCN). Learners gain credits for their study and are able to bank these to demonstrate evidence of learning. In certain circumstances, they can also access further learning opportunities through accreditation of prior learning (APL).

### **Evaluation**

On each of the pilots the delegates were asked to comment on and discuss the findings of the research. This was identified in course feedback/evaluation, and by tutors, as very helpful, informing delegates better about their own unions and enabling them to identify action points for the future.

### **Men and women, 'Standard' leaders/activists, Mixed**

Participants valued the fact that, through the research, they were now involved in the project. Those in grassroots, local activist/leadership roles especially were sometimes surprised at their own union's equality initiatives, or in some cases the lack of them, and some participants were keen to pursue these with their unions. The pilot programme was also seen as complementary to the Institute of Leadership and Management programme that the GFTU is piloting at Northern College. In addition, participants saw the need for on-going leadership educational opportunities, especially for young activists. They were also keen to engage in next-

steps activity, especially seeking mentors and mentees.

### **BAME**

Those on the BAME pilot cited the benefits of:

- the opportunity to network with other black activists
- the opportunity to challenge/scrutinise their own union's practices in relation to race equality
- a chance to focus on their personal learning/skills needs and to continue long and short-term planning/goals
- the value of have prior research on the specific issue of race and leadership. The tutor reported that the most challenging aspects of the course for the students were those that centred on the students' own reflections on their current status as leaders. They were also particularly keen to be involved in next steps action supporting the project outcomes.
- training for unions reps that includes leadership skills
- communication of the project outcomes among officers, activists and members
- adoption of methods that welcome difference in styles of activism
- introduction of positive action measures to increase gender/BAME activism/participation/leadership
- unions to be more open about the lack of diverse leadership
- ensuring that GFTU affiliates understand/respond to/action the issue of poor diversity in leadership.

The student group also committed to:

- attending a follow-on event if the project was able to fund this before the project end -

this would help networking and allow for review of action plans

- bringing along a mentor/mentee to a follow-on event
- attending a further BAME event – again bringing someone else along.

### **Women**

Similarly, the group attending the Women's pilot especially valued:

- the opportunity to network with other women
- examining gender issues in trade unions
- the range of leadership levels represented among the group – workplace, branch, regional
- the way the trainers made them think about their role and encouraged participation.
- useful explanations of leadership
- having the opportunity to identify and value their own abilities and qualities, gain confidence
- identifying the need for further training.

The student groups also committed to:

- attending Part 2 of the programme - this would help networking and allow for review of action plans
- bringing along a mentor/mentee to this.

### **Women Part 2:**

Women on Part 2 brought along mentees, who developed in confidence and contribution over the course. Building on the developments from Part 1 and in their action plans and reflective diaries, the women committed to:

- considering how they could develop a course to bring women, and BAME women, through into leadership positions in their own union/s
- going back to their union/s and encourage other women

- writing an article for their union journal about the programme
- finding a mentor/coach
- encouraging black women to take on Union Learning Rep positions
- standing for election into leadership positions.
- everyone who completed a questionnaire
- all those who participated in the Leadership pilot programme
- the UMF
- the Steering Group for this project.

### Train the Trainers

The Train the Trainers evaluations reported the programme as:

- an excellent chance to network and share experiences
- giving them the confidence to construct and deliver a leadership programme for particular groups in the union
- invaluable for the practical skills training
- a chance to evaluate their own knowledge and skills in training field and identify any further training needed.

Some of the participants were very keen to take these skills further through adult education teaching programmes, and advice was given for this. Participants showed a keen interest and understanding of where they could use the programme in the future.

### Dissemination

The research findings were included in pilot leadership programmes, were fed back to the GFTU's biennial conference in May 2009, and disseminated as a booklet for the National Executive meeting in November 2009. A presentation and report were given to the Ruskin Council in June and December 2009 respectively.

A booklet will be sent to:

- all GFTU Officers and Executive members and affiliates' officers and executive members
- Ruskin governors

It will also be available on the websites of the GFTU, Ruskin College and GFTU affiliates. These have links with the TUC, other UK trade unions and international trade unions.

### Lessons learned

#### **The momentum must be maintained by GFTU and affiliates**

The research has provided a valuable bank of data about leadership structures, deficits and initiatives of both the GFTU unions themselves and about the profiles, experiences and attitudes of leaders in affiliates at all levels. However, says Judith:

*'It is now up to the GFTU and its affiliates to develop programmes of leadership development and succession planning building on this work. The opportunities are now there for those vanguard activists and leaders who took part in the pilot programmes together with those at Ruskin College who are developing leadership programmes more widely, and the GFTU has already included Leadership courses in its 2010 programme to do this.'*

#### **Senior leaders need to show the way** – Judith explains:

*'There was a good and enthusiastic take up of the Leadership Development pilots, with a strong commitment especially from the BAME and Women's groups, to further leadership development - to train others, and for wider activities in the field, such as mentoring and encouraging other women to come forward. (Indeed, networks have been*

*established among all of the groups taking part.) But it was disappointing to find that among senior GFTU union leaders there was insufficient interest to recruit a viable course. This is important for the GFTU and its affiliates to note.'*

## Looking ahead

An aim of the research was to involve GFTU leaders at all levels in the work, partly to inform and partly to gain commitment to the leadership development work. This latter has been effective, especially in the discussions and feedback on the pilot programmes. Judith adds:

*'The research showed that women and BAME are not yet proportionately represented in leadership positions at all levels in GFTU affiliates or the GFTU itself. This reflects the wider situation within the UK union movement. Both the GFTU and affiliates are taking steps to address this issue. In this, we can use the leadership development approaches and programmes piloted through the UMF project. These have shown clearly, especially among women and BAME activists and leaders that there is a demand for such individual and collective development, and an enthusiasm to be part of taking forward such initiatives. The pool of trainers that has been developed for the leadership programmes can now provide the base for widening this, especially to include more BAME trainers. In addition, given the intersections between leaders and potential leaders from different diversity groups, and women, along with other GFTU/UMF work on ERs and the new project on Vulnerable Workers, the opportunities for making strong links between all these programmes come together in a timely way and should be taken forward, and further monitored and evaluated as a continuous development process. In addition, the GFTU's successful round*

*3 UMF project, focusing on the needs of vulnerable workers, will seek to strengthen build on the work of this project by offering ERs (a number of whom engaged with this project), the opportunity to gain training skills as they roll out an innovative workshop. This will enable trade union reps to identify the needs of vulnerable workers and negotiate change in the workplace.'*

## Conclusions

The work on the project has been productive and has met its objectives. Judith sums up:

*'It is difficult to measure the impact at this early stage. Modernisation is a slow process and this project is really about providing hard data on the leadership deficits for the GFTU and its affiliates and the opportunities for developing leaders using the pilot work on this project. The ultimate aim was to provide a flexible leadership development programme stemming from a common core, which is accredited and is available to trade unionists in the medium and longer term and after the end of the project – to be sustainable. We achieved our goals and are looking forward to using this work further in the future.'*

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