

# UNION MODERNISATION FUND

**BERR**

Department for Business  
Enterprise & Regulatory Reform

**COMMUNITY – CREATING CAPABILITY  
TO MANAGE TRANSFORMATION**



# Community – creating capability to manage transformation

## Introduction

Community was born from an amalgamation of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) and the Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades (KFAT) in 2005, becoming fully operational from 1 January 2006. Drawing in community members alongside workplace members, Community aims to be the first trade union to answer people's concerns both at work and in the community where they live.

Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) funding has enabled the union to develop the necessary competences to implement the community-based services in its strategy and, in parallel, to improve its management of traditional trade union services. Dr John Lloyd, until recently Head of Policy and Strategy at Community, explains:

*'Conventional unions, which are restricted to the workplace, are faced with the prospect of decline as the structure of British industry constantly changes. We all have to face the reality of falling trade union effectiveness. At Community, we knew that something had to be done. We want to help our members, their families and their neighbours where they live as well as where they work. We were convinced that the sort of work we can do effectively in the community would spring from the skills we have learned in campaigning on a wide range of issues in the workplace – legal help in every type of domestic and personal issue; advice and guidance on health and safety issues such as pollution fears and domestic hazards; lifelong learning opportunities to ensure people have the skills they need for the industries and services of tomorrow, delivered through our training company, Communitas; political representation to make cases to, say, local authority departments, medical tribunals and social services; and equalities support for disabled people, pensioners, women, ethnic minorities and young people alike in the community.'*

**Community also aims to introduce new services, including:**

- a not-for-profit **employment agency**, extending the union's commitment to re-training to helping to place newly skilled members, particularly with employers who feel exploited by the high mark-up of conventional agencies – thus helping members find work and also extending the supply of key workers throughout the industry;
- **childcare and care for the elderly** that is safe, affordable and professional;
- **support for the police and schools** to address problems of disaffected youth, extending the union's existing drug and sports initiatives;
- using **Corporate Social Responsibility** guidelines to persuade employers to share the union's social agenda;
- concentrating their **international work** on supporting unions in the metals, textiles and footwear industries of emerging world economies to ensure similarly high standards.

## Why this project?

In order to achieve their ambitious vision, Community needed to create the capability internally to drive the transformation forward. The UMF project therefore aimed to build the union's competences to such a level that it would be able to manage the implementation of its strategies, via a training/development programme delivered in collaboration with an external provider. National Officer, Roy Rickhuss, says:

*'We fully understand that culture change in unions is long overdue if we are to represent our modern members as they are and not as they were or as we would like them to be. We recognise that our structures, our decision-making and our very language sometimes cuts us off from the members we claim to represent whose working lives have changed beyond all recognition. We of course hold our values dear – solidarity, concern for the underdog, international awareness – but we must also trim our services towards the increasingly professional and individual world of work so many workpeople now live in.'*

The project was designed to improve the union's understanding of the global and national economy and the management needed by full-time officers to implement its vision.

*'The project has helped Community's officers, lay leadership and senior staff to understand how the world of work has changed. That understanding will inform our approaches to those new industries thrown up by the global economy as well as make clear to us the trends and challenges presented to the union by changes in our traditional apparel and steel industries. We are also conscious that these changes mean we have to modernise our offer to ethnic minority and women workers in particular in order for us to remain representative by organising in under-represented sections of the diverse modern workforce.'*

*Roy Rickhuss*

## **Methodology and outcomes**

The project was delivered in partnership with Henley Management College. Community's central project management team oversaw the project's development to ensure that it stayed on track and milestones were achieved. A smaller project management team had joint representation from the partner organisation and senior union managers.

### **Educating the union – Henley Management College**

The Henley programme was designed specifically to meet the union's needs, the key 'creating capability' events involving three courses at different locations, with speakers predominantly from the Henley Management College. Community's General Secretary wrote to all participants to prepare them for the issues to be covered.

Against the background of the ISTC/KFAT merger, the programme set out to deal mainly with strategy as opposed to tactics, culture change, teamwork and marketing as key management skills in creating the capability for Community to face its future.

*'The programme has supported a brand new way of introducing change within Community in pursuit of enabling us to deliver the practical benefits outlined in our strategy. We now have a three person implementation team, who are responding to the learning from the Henley experience.'*

*Roy Rickhuss*

As well as the General Secretary and both Assistant General Secretaries, all eight of the union’s regional secretaries, ten of the regional officials, all head office heads of department and organising officers, representatives of the union’s training company and a senior staff administrator attended. Participants were briefed on change in organisations, change in individuals at work and the need to work in new teams in the new union, along with the fundamental importance of marketing.

The programme focused at one stage on what the union should do next and where delegates would like to see it in five years’ time. Future-facing responses were also stimulated by looking at the question ‘What are the taboos within the union – what don’t we talk about that perhaps we should?’

The union’s leadership was so impressed with what the programme offered to the first group of delegates that it was decided to offer the learning to 37 colleagues and not the 26 originally planned for, so three events were held in all.

**Outcomes**

Four main themes emerged for consideration in transforming the union:

- securing buy-in across the union for the adoption of community activity as well as conventional trade union collective bargaining purposes;
- misunderstanding about the relationship between head office and regional offices and how the functions within the union interact;
- the need for a new system of appointing full-time officers, to avoid the current bias towards being ‘pale, male and stale’;
- everyone understanding the importance of encouraging a faster endorsement of employee diversity throughout the union.

After the events, the union set up a strategy implementation team to put into practice the outcomes agreed through the ‘Henley experience’. In early 2007, the data from the Henley programmes were discussed across the union, culminating in an evaluation event attended by more than two thirds of the original project participants. Suggestions included learning more about working in teams and improving the relationships between different parts of the union, along with the importance of marketing the union and improving communications, both internally and externally. ‘Community trade unionism’ also needed to be defined clearly by the union. The importance of self-examination, methods of measuring and evaluating progress and getting staff and external stakeholders on board with changes were also highlighted.

**Benefits**

The project has met its objectives and Community are very pleased with the outcome. The benefits have been considerable, with wide-reaching implications:

- stimulated by the UMF round 1 project, the union has intensified its change programme. Community has altered its regional administration and the relationship between regions and the national centre to reflect a flatter management structure. This gives new job titles in a more managerial language to flag up openly the change in culture that seeks to deliver new services to members alongside the traditional collective bargaining role;

*‘No one is embarrassed now to discuss ‘management’ issues, and the programme for the UMF2 project will extend this new language, culture and skills for the lay NEC of the union.’*

- the process has convinced most people in the union of the elevated importance of trade union management skills as a crucial part of the union's responsibility to its members;
- Community's UMF experience has produced new structures and the promotion of women to key jobs in the union, breaking down the gap between 'full-time officials' and 'staff', and opening up the union to the wider community. The union now employs professional marketing and strategy advisers to carry these processes forward;
- renewal of IIP status as part of these processes has placed emphasis on personal development so that, in John Lloyd's words, 'no one can say the UMF experience was a one-off jolly';
- the project allowed for the first time self-critical examination of the union, its leaders and each participant, setting out to 'replace deference with debate as we re-invent ourselves'.

*'Our UMF experience has helped the union achieve its intention to spread its resources widely between workplace and the community. Our confidence has grown and our independence been underpinned by the whole process. Now we will extend that strength and conviction to our lay NEC colleagues in UMF2 to bring lay and professional people together in pursuit of our distinctive community unionism agenda.'*

*Roy Rickhuss*

The UMF project has also provided significant 'soft' outcomes.

Says Roy Rickhuss:

*'We have learned not to laugh behind our hands at what some might have seen beforehand as exclusively 'management' concepts. We can now engage with the language and change processes initiated by the study of institutional culture, marketing and communications development. And this experience allows the union to enter greater national debates with employers, government and academia on an equal basis. No longer do we consider that such matters are not for us. We now seek to establish the difference between strategy and tactics as we develop our union and ourselves.'*

*'Not only can we now embark on the provision of exciting new services in the community; we are also much better placed to improve the post-merger integration, financial and staff management issues in the union's more conventional work. We have been able to use the methods and materials produced originally for the officers in the project to inform training for the first executive committee elected under Community's rules.'*

## Looking ahead

The project has meant that Community can now set new standards for what its members and its external stakeholders expect of the union's officers and staff:

- the union education programme and improved understanding of globalisation issues will allow the union to transfer the learning and the networks built up during the process to inform the union's education output – vital if Community's activists are to consult with employers as equals in an ever more complicated world industrial picture;
- the experience of fulfilling UMF project management requirements was a positive one, which benefited the union and which will help unite the two former unions within Community. It will enable them, as one union, to develop the new services within the community that will distinguish the union from others, setting an example for trade union renewal in other industries, to the benefit of the UK.

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*'Funding from the UMF has allowed us to develop these necessary competences much faster than if we had to rely on our own resources. We will be able to develop the skills of every level of the union's officers and senior staff, using the UMF project as the most public way of focusing all our officers and staff on this vital change management process. The UMF project has meant we can now see a genuinely new type of trade union in Britain. Community will continue to represent members effectively in industry, and add competent representation on a range of issues for our members in the wider community.'*

*Roy Rickhuss*







