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Unions help green UK workplaces

Employers must start seeing unions as crucial players in any moves to 'green' UK workplaces because when the two work closely together huge benefits result. This is the message from the TUC at the *Going Green at Work* Conference held at Congress house on Monday 15 March.

The conference saw the publication of the TUC's report on its 2008-2010 GreenWorkplaces project. Made possible via funding from the Government's Union Modernisation Fund, the TUC project has spent the past two years working closely with employers and unions to assess the impact of green union reps on the efforts of seven workplaces to cut their carbon footprints and become greener places to work.

Working with employers and unions at companies like BT and United Utilities, and organisations such as Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, Leicester City Council, National Library of Scotland, National Museums Liverpool, and the NUT, the TUC project has trained almost 100 new green reps who have been instrumental in changing the attitude of their work colleagues in all matters green.

Through various staff surveys, waste audits and environment committees, the green reps have encouraged their employers and colleagues to introduce, and adopt with enthusiasm, a range of green initiatives including 'bike to work' and 'switch off' (lights

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and equipment) schemes, the introduction of fair trade products in staff canteens, and huge improvements in the amounts of workplace recycling taking place.

Launching the TUC report, TUC Deputy General Secretary **Frances O'Grady** said: "This report shows that unions' green credentials have come a long way in a short space of time and sustainability in the workplace has become a priority for us all. Employers must start seeing unions as key to making the green difference, helping to nurture workplaces that are greener, cleaner and more energy efficient.

"With official figures suggesting that 20 per cent of carbon emissions come from UK workplaces, what happens in our offices and factories, schools and hospitals, shops and depots is crucial to the fight against global warming. And while there's no one-size-fits-all model, no off-the-shelf system that works for everyone, the evidence is clear - partnership working with unions can deliver spectacular results for employers.

"Green union reps can help find ways of cutting workplace energy use which means cutting energy costs, and at a time of high gas and electricity prices, the savings generated are considerable".

"Unions can also help change their colleagues' workplace habits, reaching those parts of the workforce their employers cannot. And what green tips employees pick up at work, they can also apply at home.

"Greening our workplaces is all about unions,

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workers and managers working together towards a common cause. And the spin-offs - whether it's higher levels of employee engagement, improved communications and information sharing, or more effective, accountable decision-making - can transform an organisation's culture for the better.

“By working together, we can slash emissions and make our workplaces greener and cleaner, showing how Britain can become a genuinely sustainable economy.”

Also speaking at the Green Workplaces conference was Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change Ed Miliband and a number of green reps and employers from the organisations who took part in the TUC's green workplaces project.

The report, from the TUC GreenWorkplaces project, “GreenWorks”, is downloadable on the TUC website at <http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/index.cfm?mins=604&minors=402> or you can order a copy from TUC publications: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/publications/viewPub.cfm>

Unions building links at BT

Union members at British Telecom are greening Adastral Park, BT's research and development headquarters near Ipswich through the TUC GreenWorkplaces Project. The park is home to 3,500 BT staff plus 500 non-BT employees and houses more than 30 companies. The whole site is responsible for over 45,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year and BT has a target to reduce CO2 emissions by 80% compared with those in 1996.

The main goal of the TUC's project at BT is to

involve the workforce in a bottom-up approach to reducing the Park's environmental impact, initially by engaging staff in site-wide carbon impact assessments covering energy, water and waste.

Nationally, BT has an extensive, largely top-down approach to managing environmental issues. To complement this approach, it has set up a network of “carbon clubs” that now have more than 1,000 members. Some of these clubs are union-led. The clubs are aimed at “bringing colleagues together to discuss climate change issues and help make a difference” at work, at home and in the local community.

Consultations between onsite Prospect (formerly Connect) and CWU reps, senior management and the TUC during November 2009 led to a union environment day and workshop at the end of the month, arranged to coincide with a “Connect week” and a range of union activities.

On union environment day, employees were able to visit the Energy Saving Trust's “energy doctor” for one-to-one advice and try out a driving simulator to practice eco-driving techniques. Union stands provided further green advice, books, plus an energy efficient light bulb and energy meter try-it-before-you-buy-it service.

The day-long training workshop began with a welcome and message of support from the Managing Director of Adastral Park explaining why

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Suffolk County Council offers advice to BT staff on how to Slim Your Bin at a union environment day at BT

he felt union involvement in environmental workplace issues was important for the business. This was followed by a presentation from a union member covering how BT's environmental strategy is governed, the company's environmental management system, its climate change targets and a list of key management contacts for every environmental aspect of the business.

Two key suggestions arising from the workshop were to formalise the environmental agenda to boost frontline employee involvement and to increase employee ownership through greater union participation. There was a general consensus among the group that BT should build on the existing carbon club structure, and solutions discussed included setting up an environmental forum linking the new bottom-up approach with the existing top-down one.

The first meeting of the Adastral Park environmental forum took place in mid-January and consultations will continue to negotiate its role and responsibilities with the site management team. This work complements that of the union health and safety reps who are operating in conjunction with both unions on site.

All staff who registered for the training have joined the forum, and carbon impact assessments are underway. Following a review by union environmental reps, a plan has been approved to replace 59 bottled water units with plumbed-in tap water chillers, avoiding the need to produce, deliver, store and lift more than 3,500 18 litre water bottles a year.

With support and training from the union, Andrew Cassy, Prospect (formerly Connect) environment rep has been able to expand his role and become the official site-wide sustainability champion on behalf of senior managers.

"I have found the union support and resources invaluable for my own personal development and awareness on environmental matters, which has directly fed into my employment activities. The full range of union resources have been used, from online information feeds, training events, local, national and even international conferences, green camps and booklets through to local branch representation and support."

Andrew Cassy, Prospect, formerly Connect, union environment rep, BT.

Union carbon club events and seminars will be held regularly. Meanwhile, Andrew was invited by the Department for Transport to address an international conference on "harnessing and building on the power of the people" in February. The first chance to share

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lessons learned at Adastral Park and introduce the work of the TUC GreenWorkplaces Project.

Why TUC welcomes green investment bank

Government plans to set up a Green Investment Bank (GIB) with £2billion initial funding will help drive further investment into low carbon energy. Renewables are likely to be the first to benefit. The TUC sees the GIB as essentially the funding arm for the Just Transition to a low carbon economy.

The TUC wants to see the same broad spectrum of stakeholders on the GIB board as the new Forum for a Just Transition, which has now started work. The Forum is co-chaired by BIS and DECC Ministers, and involves the CBI, TUC, Energy Intensive Users, the regions and other partners in advising and strategizing on what a fair, low carbon future would look like.

GIB will be busy. As Budget 2010 acknowledges, investment in new low carbon and renewable power supply needs to reach at least £120bn by 2020. Of course, not all of this funding will flow through the GIB. But as the Budget book said, by 2050, “every unit of economic output will need to be produced using an average one-tenth of the carbon used today” (Budget 2010, para. 7.3). This means massive new funding commitments, from renovating inefficient building stock and large and small scale renewable and low carbon energy to public transport.

Budget 2010 also announced:

- Cutting emissions from government

department by 30% by 2020 - a challenge for unions across the public sector.

- Halving company car tax for ultra-low-carbon vehicles provides a further boost to Nissan’s plans for electric vehicle manufacture in the North east.
- Biomass installations will benefit from further support under the Renewables Obligation.

Budget 2009 and the 2009 Pre-Budget Report have so far announced £1.8 billion in support for job-creating, low-carbon projects:

- £30 million for Mitsubishi to locate a new £100 million offshore wind R&D facility in the UK, and £18.5 million for developing offshore wind test sites in the North East.
- £50 million for marine energy, establishing the South West as a marine energy hub.
- £80 million for the UK’s nuclear supply chain, through a loan offer to Sheffield Forgemasters.
- £45 million to date of loans to SMEs to install energy efficiency technologies, with 1,400 firms receiving assistance so far.
- Up to £60 million has helped support a further 1,400 projects in a range of institutions such as hospitals, universities and local authorities.
- £20 million for the Low Carbon Technology Programme.
- £45 million for R&D for low-carbon aircraft engines.

Energy and climate change policy have entered the mainstream of Government industrial policy. It’s inevitable that successive Budgets and PBR would follow suit. Four years ago,

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when the PM was Chancellor, he spoke of future Budgets “counting the pounds as well as the carbon.” We’re not quite there yet. But the new green bank is among a set of initiatives in Budget 2010 credited with saving up to 51 million tonnes of CO2 emissions.

15% is what it says on the tin

Our seas are a massive, renewable energy resource. The newly-formed [RenewableUK](http://www.renewable-uk.com/) (formerly BWEA) <http://www.renewable-uk.com/> is calling on Government to invest a further £150-£200 million in two renewable technologies - wave and tidal energy.

Companies like Siemens and Vattenfall are keen to invest in wave and tidal power, in places like the Pentland Firth. The Government’s commitment to get 15% of our total energy from renewables by 2020 is surely acting as a driver for this. This means generating a third of our electricity supply from technology that only now being developed and built.

Are we investing enough to develop the technology and employment opportunities that go with it? No - despite the Government’s £60million backing of wave and tidal research and development in recent years.

The funds RenewableUK wants represent a small first slice of the £200 billion that Ofgem’s energy review (Project Discovery) called for, to replace “large parts of our ageing energy infrastructure”. This includes investment in riskier activities, the so-called “emerging commercial renewable energy”, like wave and tidal power and the massive new offshore wind turbines.

RenewableUK wants a new state-backed finance institution to ensure sufficient capital flows to the renewable energy sector. We’d

agree with that. But these investments are long-term. That’s why long-term, cross-party backing for our renewable targets, is essential. It creates confidence - not just for investors, but for anyone looking for a quality, skilled work.

TUC trade unions and the environment course

Three day accredited courses for union members available at the following locations:

April 6 – London ; April 21 – Bristol and Newhaven ; May 26 – Southampton ; June 7 – Plymouth ; June 10 – Plymouth ; June 10 – London ; June 25 – Derby ; July 5 – St. Austell, Cornwall .

For more information, and further dates and locations available up until December 2010 visit

<http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/courses/index.cfm/sb/14/>

To sign up for the course in Bristol on April 21 (it will be three consecutive Wednesdays, starting on April 21st, contact Andy Moss at TUC South West GreenWorkplaces Project on AMoss@tuc.org.uk