



**NEW MOTHERS,  
PARENTS AND CARERS:  
SUPPORTING ACTIVISTS  
IN THE CWU  
GUIDANCE FOR BRANCHES**

## USEFUL CONTACTS

UNIONLINE Free Helpline for CWU members

Tel: 0300 333 0303

CWU Bullying & Harassment Helpline

Tel: FREEPHONE 0800 090 2303

Equality, Education & Development Department

CWU HQ, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London, SW19 1RX

Tel: 0208 971 7340

Email: [equality&education@cwu.org](mailto:equality&education@cwu.org)

## FOREWORD

In these challenging times, it is more important than ever for the CWU to retain and develop the fullest direct involvement of its members and further strengthen the growth of our trade union.

We recognise trade union activity can sometimes encroach on the time generally set aside for private life, creating individual problems and challenges for active members, particularly for those with caring responsibilities.

As a union we are proud of the vital role we play in challenging inequality in the workplace and promoting equality in the world of work. We are doing this by mainstreaming our operations and incorporating an equality perspective into our practices.

This booklet has been created for branches and representatives and provides information on what support is available for CWU activists who are pregnant or for those with parental or caring responsibilities. It covers:

- Identifying barriers to activism for pregnant activists, parents and carers.
- Keeping in touch: Keeping connected and keeping activists informed while on maternity/parental/carers leave.
- Childcare: What support is available to activists.
- Release entitlements.
- Promoting social model practices and reasonable adjustments for pregnant activists, parents and carers.

## IDENTIFYING BARRIERS FOR PREGNANT ACTIVISTS, PARENTS AND CARERS

### What are the barriers?

Barriers faced by pregnant activists or those with parental and caring responsibilities can often be due to the following factors:

- The unequal division of family responsibilities - this problem is all the more acute for women and single mothers.
- The male-dominated nature of the “trade union culture” - times of meetings, style of meetings, trade union jargon, etc.
- The labour market, - young workers, disabled workers, women and BAME employees are disproportionately more likely to be employed in part time work. This is likely to hinder their ability to carry out trade union responsibilities and hamper the retention of activists in CWU roles.

Removing barriers by changing cultures and labour market norms is challenging. Often change causes conflict as it means changing institutional practices. To overcome the challenges branches need to adapt practices and be more flexible – just because ‘things have always been done a certain way’ doesn’t mean that is the only or indeed, the best way.

## **KEEPING IN TOUCH: KEEPING CONNECTED AND KEEPING ACTIVISTS INFORMED WHILE ON MATERNITY/PARENTAL/ CARERS LEAVE**

Before a representative starts maternity, parental or carers leave branches are encouraged to arrange a meeting and agree the best way to keep in touch about important changes or other important union business. This includes arranging how the branch will keep in touch. For example, a representative may prefer to be kept in touch via email rather than by phone.

Branches must keep activists informed about:

- CWU Elections or other CWU opportunities. For example, nominations for CWU/TUC/Labour Conference delegation.
- CWU Events or Activities.

- Any changes which could affect their role.

Branches can also keep representatives informed about:

- National issues/CWU LTBs.
- Branch/ Regional/National news.
- Any changes to the running or leadership of the branch/union.

It is also a good idea to let representatives decide how much contact they want. For example, a representative may want to be kept up-to-date on branch committee discussions and outcomes but not on national or regional affairs. This should be agreed and facilitated upon request.

## **APPOINTING AN ACTING REP TO COVER MATERNITY/LONG TERM PARENTAL OR CARERS LEAVE ABSENCES**

Branches central committees can determine whether any short or long-term vacant position should be filled, taking account of the date, the amount of time a representative will be on maternity/parental or carers leave and any financial implications.

Branches who opt to cover the role temporary must ensure that the appointment or election process makes it clear that the cover is a temporary arrangement with a fixed ending date.

## **CHILDCARE**

The CWU recognise that without assistance, some representatives would struggle to participate in the democratic structures of the union. The CWU's Rule 6.8.2(d) covering the provision of childcare for trade union activity states:

*“Every year each branch shall produce a financial plan for the following year which shall... allocate sufficient funds to cover the provision of childcare costs where activists attend meetings, training events, briefings etc.”*

Therefore branches must ensure that there is a financial plan in place for childcare costs. Provisions for childcare facilities are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Any issues surrounding childcare should be raised in writing with the Senior Deputy General Secretary.

## TIME OFF AND RELEASE FOR TRADE UNION DUTIES AND ACTIVITIES

The Acas Industrial Relations Advisory Body has a legal duty under Section 199 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 to publish a Code of Practice that set the minimum standard of fairness that workplaces should follow and includes time off for trade union duties and activities.

According to the code, Trade Union representatives have a statutory right to reasonable **paid** time off from employment to carry out trade union duties and to undertake trade union training for example, negotiating terms and conditions, matters of disciplinary etc.

Union representatives and members also have a statutory right to reasonable **unpaid** time off when taking part in trade union activities. For example attending branch, area

or regional meetings of the union where the business of the union is under discussion.

For more information on release entitlements and the different examples of paid/unpaid release please see the ACAS code of practice accessible here <https://www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-time-off-for-trade-union-duties-and-activities/html#3.-time-off-for-trade-union-activities>

Activists requesting release can access the CWU's template form "applying for facilities and release with your branch" accessible here: <https://www.cwu.org/rebs/postal-resources>

<https://www.cwu.org/rebs/tfs-resources>

Please note you will need the reps resources password to be able to access the form. Please contact the Equality and Education Department to obtain access to the site.

## **REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND SOCIAL MODEL PRACTICES:**

The issues faced by activists with parental or caring responsibilities can make it challenging to actively participate in the union. Often activists will know what the barriers are and what support is needed. In the first instance branches should hold productive meetings to discuss what actions are needed. Where possible social model practices should be applied to remove barriers for all, creating equality and more independence, choice and control.

Here are some ways in which to develop good practice:

- Review access to participation and provide a commitment to ensure meetings and all other events are fully accessible and fit into activists work-life balance:
  - Times and locations of meetings – offer online Hybrid options so that all activists can attend and participate in meetings in person and online.
  - Avoid arranging meetings during school drop off and collection times or during religious holiday periods.



- For big meetings and events, depending on the number of activists requiring childcare, scope the possibility of facilitating a crèche or offer all activists the option of being accompanied by a family member or friend who is providing childcare or acting as a carer.
- Timetable meetings annually for the whole year. This will allow activists with parental or caring responsibilities the ability to plan for their attendance.
- Make sure minutes and decision documents are shared promptly and that activists are affording reasonable time to provide input and feedback.
- Encourage activists to participate in CWU education and development, in particular work with your regional secretary and ULRs to organise and offer training in the region. In some cases where there are enough participants, training on specific issues can be offered in branch localities.



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