



‘Mentoring PCS advocates has been fascinating’

Home Office Midlands safety rep and branch organiser Trevor Harris has been helping develop the advocates in his own branch and, since doing PCS Academy’s mentoring training course this summer, also been mentoring two new advocates in the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

Training to become a PCS rep in the latter stage of his Border Force career was like an “epiphany” and gave him a “new lease of life”, and he’s keen to share his passion with other members who want to get involved as advocates, Trevor told Activate:

“We have advocates in our branch at Birmingham Airport, where I work. Some of them are really keen and we’ve been coming up with a strategy to encourage them and support them and get them to do more for the branch. We also want to recruit more.

On top of that I was also asked to mentor a couple of new advocates in a branch in the MOD. There doesn’t seem to be too much of a branch presence in their workplace at the moment and they have had to deal with some

negativity, so I have been supporting them with that.

We have talked about them focusing on the future and what the union is doing, and trying to build the membership.

It’s little things like making sure they set up a union noticeboard at work and sending them leaflets that they can give out, so they can recruit people. Also, we talk about finding out what the barriers are to people joining PCS. It’s been fascinating really.

I have encouraged them to look at their internal policies on trade union engagement, so they know what they are entitled to, for example in what scenario they can – or shouldn’t – use their work email address for union work and the fact that they have the right to have a union noticeboard at work.



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Thousands of PCS Advocates have volunteered to help out in their branches since the union started the programme in 2015 and they have been doing fantastic work – with hundreds going on to become full reps – but the concept is still quite new. There’s plenty of support for branches who want to make the most of this role, with PCS Academy courses and advocate leads providing help.

[Click here for more ideas](#)

**Click here to
register as an
advocate**



'The Mentoring Programme is very important to ensure the future of the union'

"I have been a Mentor for a few months now. I have had some experience of informal when we have had new reps on the Branch. So after some encouragement from fellow reps I decided to do the training. After the training was completed we were each allocated advocates.

I was allocated two advocates to mentor. Unfortunately due to Covid we haven't been able to meet up which would have been preferable. However we speak regularly for a catch up, an opportunity to see how they have been getting on and for me to answer any questions and give them pointers.

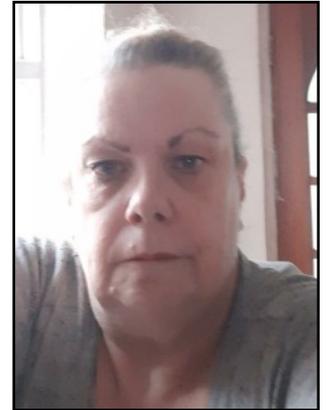
The Mentoring Programme is very important to ensure the future of the union. When a member shows an interest in becoming more involved we should be actively encouraging that. In the past due to time constraints or lack of resources that hasn't always happened.

As some Branches start to lose experienced reps through retirements or office closures there has never been a more urgent need for advocates and reps. I would urge experienced reps to undertake the training. I find it very satisfying to see the advocates beginning to forge links in their own branches and feeling confident enough to engage members.

I hope that the advocates have found the mentoring programme helpful advice that they spread the word as well.

We are stronger together."

Rose Touati



"I joined as a PCS Union Advocate so I can become more actively involved as a member of the union. I have been provided training to become an Advocate, and I have joined an Advocate WhatsApp group where Advocates discuss common themes/issues which help me feel more connected to the Union.

I have been assigned a mentor Rose Touati who has been a great support to me as an experienced Union rep. She calls me fortnightly to offer advice on how I can become more active as a Union member in my own department. She has signposted me to Union branch members best positioned to assist further in local and personal issues I have raised. Through Rose, I have learned ways of approaching and raising issues appropriately to senior staff, and who to ask for support from the Union if needed. Rose has also invited me to attend and observe the Town Committee meetings so I can experience how localised issues are identified and discussed at the more senior level amongst the Union. Rose has been a rep for 21 years, and I feel this is of great personal benefit as I look to train as a Rep and become more actively involved with the Union."

Lucy Williams





← From the front page

They are both members who have come from other careers and joined the MOD later in life. They got involved with PCS because they wanted to give something back. I weighed up the backgrounds of the advocates and agreed to monthly check-ins – they can always call me if there is an issue in between those times. If the advocates had much less workplace experience, then I would have opted for a weekly catch up.

Because of Covid that has meant talking on the phone, to see how it's going and check what support they need. At some point it will be good to go there and meet face to face.

I do think the advocate role is a good idea. The more we do as branch officials to publicise and promote that, the better it will be."

110 New Advocates so far!

The work being carried out with members, advocates mentors and reps across the Midland Region is second to none. Branches are reporting that they are finding the close work between Mentors Advocates and FTO's extremely positive.

Our network of fully functioning Advocates and Mentors are directly contributing to the Union's objective of building our organising strength by increasing density in workplaces, advocates and reps in branches, diversity and member participation.

There is an active group chat for advocates and mentors which is a productive and time efficient resource. We are currently working in unprecedented times, Covid-19 offers new and unpredictable challenges to our way of working, PCS is always on hand to adapt to these challenges and support our members.

If you're thinking of becoming an Advocate or already are and want to be included in the group chat, contact us to discuss this further on: Clairem@pcs.org.uk or Dianes@pcs.org.uk and finally, don't forget to sign and share the Pay Petition! <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/328754>

In Solidarity
Claire Morris, Midlands PCS Organising Officer



Regional Secretary Column

Andrew Lloyd

Pay Petition – I suppose we've got two MPs to thank for us getting passed the 100,000 signatures. The two MPs, one good one and one terrible one; Jeremy Corbyn who went to facebook to sign our petition, and then tweeted it out to his 2 million followers. The other Rishi Sunak, I probably don't need to explain his role!

Some more good news, membership has increased by over a 3,500 net gain since January this year. Better than that we continue to recruit new advocates and activists, and in the Midlands region offering these mentors. By the end of the year we will have trained over 200 new advocates and their mentors, which is amazing, hopefully a number of the new advocates will be standing for positions in forthcoming AGMs.

I rarely cover the role of **Midlands TUC** in my column, but this time I wanted to draw peoples attention to the work that has been done around the clothing industry workers in Leicester. The sweatshop clothing 'factories' in the city were highlighted as a consequence of the extra lockdown. As a consequence, Lee Barron, ably supported by our own Chris Willars (through his role with Leicester trades council) ran a campaign that led to involvement of the Leicester Mayor. It has meant that major retailers will no longer use sweatshops where workers are exploited not just in terms of their wages but also because of their conditions. Additionally union access has been granted by a number of major factories. Well done Chris.

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What is a PCS Advocate?

PCS Advocates are members who actively support the union and want to get involved. It is the next step along for members interested in union activity. Your role as an advocate will be to help build the strength of the union where you work.

PCS is not just for emergencies, but about building a union culture and identity in every workplace. Members who want to become an advocate can meet with one of our reps or a full time officer to discuss the role, and will be provided with a handbook containing more details, tips and advice.

There's a range of ways that advocates can help out, based on how much time you can give.

Making the union visible – as well as updating noticeboards you will receive materials and union images and use these to encourage other members to display at their workstations. Your role is to make it clear to new starters (and managers) that this is a place where the union is part of the workplace.

Workplace campaigns – your branch might want to find out what workers are concerned about where you work, and then take action.

Monthly equality events – almost every month there's a major equality event, whether that's LGBT History Month, International Women's Day or Black History Month. Advocates can help promote these by getting tailored materials and posters, run information events or invite speakers.

Social events – union culture isn't just about tackling problems, but can also be less formal. Why not set up a game of rounder, organise a coffee morning or a pub quiz?

You can register as a union advocate, or get more information, by:

- completing our **simple online form**
- contacting your local branch representatives and letting them know that you would like to be registered as a PCS advocate
- contacting the PCS organising department at: organising@pcs.org.uk
- speaking to one of our organisers on 020 7810 2691
- contacting your PCS regional office who will register your interest



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Finally in this edition of the regional newsletter, I want to pay tribute to my colleague and one of my best mates, **Kathy Prendiville**. Kathy is retiring just after Christmas. Kathy has been working for PCS for 18 years, starting off as a TUC Trainee organiser, and now DFT Group secretary. She is universally liked, and loved by every rep and member she encounters and represents. She



has been brilliant in every role she has had for PCS, but also fantastic for the wider trade union movement. Nicknamed by some at PCS as 'trendy prendy', she has been a mentor to most that have worked at the regional office, a surrogate mum to some, but to all a loyal friend. She has been the 'heartbeat' of the office for so long. She will not get the chance to work in our new office, but we will allow her to visit occasionally!

