

# UNION MODERNISATION FUND

**BIS** | Department for Business  
Innovation & Skills

**THE UNION MODERNISATION FUND:  
A GUIDE TO EMERGING LEARNING**

**TUC** 

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## Foreword

The Union Modernisation Fund (UMF) exists to promote transformational change within unions. This guide summarises the key learning points that were identified by the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change at the University of Leeds Business School (CERIC) in their evaluation of Round One of the UMF.

The CERIC report contains fascinating insights into the range of challenges that trades unions face as they respond to the rapidly changing economic landscape and embark on their modernisation journeys.

The UMF has acted as a catalyst for innovation and a range of projects have demonstrated how unions can use the creative space it provides to take risks, experiment with different ways of doing things and promote innovation. UMF projects have delivered significant change for many unions and benefits to members. This is good news, as unions seek to improve the way they work, provide a better service for members and make an effective contribution to constructive employment relations.

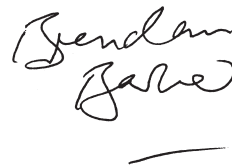
The purpose of this guide is to bring out the key learning points from the report and enable you to draw on the experiences of other unions. Successful unions can use UMF to improve their profile, grow their membership and face the future with greater confidence.

Government and the TUC commend this guide to you and hope that it will encourage a debate about the modernisation agenda. We are keen to encourage you to reflect on the lessons for your modernisation programmes.

We will be working hard to ensure that the lessons learned from UMF projects are effectively promoted and disseminated across the wider trade union movement and beyond.



**Lord Young of Norwood Green**  
**Department for Business, Innovation & Skills**



**Brendan Barber**  
**TUC**

**List of UMF Round One projects**

<b>Union</b>	<b>Project Title</b>
Accord, Connect and the Musicians Union	Transforming union democracy using internet systems
Amicus	IT for branches
Aslef	ASLEF membership and communications modernisation project
Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)	Membership and communications systems
BFAWU	Membership Diversity
British Dental Association (BDA)	Young member participation and engagement: Exploring the needs for today and tomorrow
Ceramic and Allied Trades Union (CATU)	CATU modernisation (2006-8)
Community and District Nursing Association (CDNA)	Developing the virtual union
Community and Youth Workers Union (CYWU)	Membership diversity project
Communications Workers' Union (CWU)	CWU – Reaching Out
Community	Creating capability: trade unionism in the community
Connect	Knowledge management system
Equity	Online talent directories
General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU)	Foundations for success: Supporting the growth and stability of small and specialist trade unions
GMB	Race and Diversity
Lloyds TSB Group Union	LTU technology modernisation project
National Union of Journalists (NUJ)	Equality for all: NUJ workplace and freelance equality representatives project
Nationwide Group Staff Union (NGSU)	Using the internet to activate and empower members
National Union of Teachers (NUT)	The online interactive centre for lay union officers and school and college NUT representatives (HEARTH)
Portman Group Staff Association (PGSA)	Creating full partnership working with Portman Building Society through a highly skilled and efficient employee rep committee

Union	Project Title
Prospect	Electronic information systems (EIS)
Retained Firefighters Union (RFU)	Local representatives' empowerment strategy
RMT	Web-based membership system and associated training
Royal College of Midwives (RCM)	Improving the communications between the RCM and its members
Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists (SCP)	Shaping the Future
Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)	Migrant Workers Support Unit
Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)	Developing and supporting workplace union equality representatives
Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)	Preparing opinion formers for information and consultation
Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA)	Increasing diversity: turning members into representatives
TUC	Developing an online support system for union professionals
Union of Finance Staff (UFS)	Interactive database project
United Road Transport Union (URTU)	Building for success: Supporting the growth and stability of a small and specialist trade union within the road haulage and logistics industry
USDAW	Developing the USDAW management model
Wales TUC	Equal at work: Trade union in Wales promoting equality and challenging discrimination
West Bromwich Building Society Staff Union (WBBSSU)	ICE (Integrate, communicate and embrace)

# The Union Modernisation Fund: A Guide to Emerging Learning

## What Can We Learn from the Union Modernisation Fund?

The purpose of this guide is to highlight the key learning points that have emerged from the recent independent evaluation of Round One of the Union Modernisation Fund (UMF), undertaken by the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change at the Leeds University Business School (CERIC)<sup>1</sup>.

The evaluation concluded that UMF has a valuable role to play in encouraging trade union innovation. There is much to learn from the report, published October 2009, which offers a valuable set of insights into the challenges experienced by UMF projects as they sought to deliver their objectives, and the different ways in which unions responded to these challenges. Often, even when things didn't go according to plan, useful lessons emerged. And sometimes the process of 'unlearning' particular behaviours or approaches to work can be as important as learning new ways of doing things.

If you have already been involved in a UMF project, perhaps as the project manager or in a support role, you will be aware of the benefits that the project has already delivered, or is expected to deliver in the coming months. But you may not be aware of the outcomes of other projects. And if you've not been involved in a UMF project

at all, then you may be largely unsighted on these benefits.

This guide aims to distill some of the key lessons learned through UMF1 and to help disseminate some of that learning across the trade union movement and beyond.

'The ReMoTe Access project was designed to improve two-way communications with members via a new web-based membership system. We wanted to change the way head office interacts with members at all levels, making remote access easier for our Branch and Regional Officials, most of whom are not office based.

The new system has been a great success. We have vastly improved communications with activists, officials and members, and are beginning to develop a much better understanding of members' needs in areas such as ethnic diversity and equal opportunities. As a result, we will be able to deliver more tailored services and deal with members' enquiries more efficiently. The project has led to a major transformation in how our members relate to the union as they get a faster, better quality service and can see the benefits of keeping us up to speed with changes in their circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> The CERIC final evaluation report was published by BIS in October 2009. It is available at <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file53055.pdf>. Professor Mark Stuart is Professor of Human Resource Management and Employment Relations and Director of the Centre for Employment Relations Innovation and Change at the University of Leeds. Professor Miguel Martinez Lucio is Professor of International Human Resource Management and Comparative Employment Relations at the University of Manchester. Dr Andy Charlwood is currently Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of York.

'The project not only met its objectives but has delivered significant cost savings; provided a very positive experience of the benefits of using project management techniques to deliver change; improved the confidence of officials using IT to improve the way they do things; and given us the impetus to modernise the way we work in other areas. Success breeds an appetite for further improvement and we look forward to the next stage of modernisation.'

*Peter Waters, Membership Manager, RMT.*

## The Purpose of the Union Modernisation Fund

The Department of Trade and Industry (as it was then) launched the Union Modernisation Fund in July 2005.

The aim was to encourage unions to modernise the way they operated and support innovative projects that helped speed unions' adaptation to the technological, economic and social changes taking place in the workplace. The Fund aims to support projects that explore the potential for transformational change within unions, and, through such innovative activity, provide a demonstration effect to the wider union movement. TUC recognises the value of the UMF to the union movement and has supported the initiative from the outset.

## The Rationale for Change

The UMF represents one of the few attempts in trade union history to create a shared environment for innovation and development. There have been three rounds of the UMF. All UMF1 projects are now complete. Some UMF2 projects have already completed; the remainder are expected to complete in the coming months. UMF3 projects are now commencing.

The Government believes that strong, modern unions have a vital role to play in meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing economy and the wider challenges of globalisation. Unions are key economic and social actors that can make a significant contribution to the well-being of the workforce as well as constructive employment relations and broader economic competitiveness. But the workplace is changing rapidly as new forms of information and communication technology create new opportunities as well as new challenges; the composition of the workforce changes, requiring a new approach to equality and diversity; significant changes in employment relations provide new challenges; new agendas on skills, learning and vulnerable workers emerge; and modern forms of management provide opportunities to change the way unions organise and structure their work.

'Britain is increasingly diverse. In order to improve our services, the GMB wanted to get closer to all our members and potential members. We used our UMF project, 'Race and Diversity', to achieve this by raising awareness through a cycle of training of our activists and officers, while encouraging greater participation of our members in the GMB.

We learnt a great deal about the experience of all our members and, accordingly, launched a new strategy, based on the principle of mainstreaming equality, called 'Equality through inclusion'. This has generated real benefits for the union and resulted in improved governance, increased membership, enhanced profile and examples of improved conditions of work. This project has, without a doubt, started a process of cultural change and contributed to the broader modernisation programme of the GMB.'

*Kamaljeet Jandu, National Officer for Equalities, GMB*



Unions face a number of structural constraints and organisational tensions as they seek to respond to this growing range of environmental challenges. To enable unions to be more responsive to the needs of their members and potential members, they need to be able to embrace change in a way which is appropriate to their organisational circumstances. The UMF has provided the resources and creative space for unions to experiment with change and the opportunity to take risks, free from the routine, daily organisational pressures that they face. It has allowed unions to reflect on different and imaginative ways of doing things that have the potential to deliver a broad range of internal and external benefits.

## Projects Supported Under UMF1

Funding totalling c.£3m was committed to over 30 projects, from a broad range of unions. The projects ran from January 2006 to June 2009 and focused on a number of priority themes:

- assessing the challenges and opportunities of union restructuring and mergers
- developing the professional competence of union officers.

'The CWU embarked on the Reaching Out project to help us respond better to the changing nature of the industries in which we organise, and the changes in our membership base. The aim was to generate new approaches to inform and develop new structures and methods of communication between the union and our members at a very grassroots level.

The UMF funding assisted us in piloting innovative ways of using ICT to support two-way communications and also to develop new training to help our members and activists adapt to new ways of working with technologies that were very new to our activists.

The project met all its stated objectives but was also a real catalyst in terms of spreading best practice and raising awareness in terms of better and, more effective ICT usage within our branches. We have continued to monitor and research the impact of the project and in a recent survey, 97% of Branches stated that they now use computers on a daily basis, and 84% consider computers be vital to their role. We have also seen a huge increase in the systematic use of mass text messaging to keep members instantly updated which was something we trialed as part of the original project. CWU use of social networking sites is another development of interest and 95% of activists surveyed now use Facebook as a medium for keeping in touch with members and colleagues, with 23% of our Branch Secretaries responding that they have a dedicated Branch Facebook presence.

In the longer term, the project provided a platform for change and has helped



inform major policy decisions such as developing more online training resources for our representatives, conducting regular online attitude surveys of members, implementing a union-wide new data management and records system and integrating ICT into many of our standard activist training courses. It has also reinforced the need to carry out regular research into the preferences of our members in terms of ICT and union communications, which in turn helps us to be more responsive, more efficient and therefore more effective.'

*Trish Lavelle, Head of Education and Training, CWU.*

and a clearer focus on our training and education needs.

Embedding the project's outputs in the broader operation of the union has been fundamental to its success. The project had a profound effect on the way the senior management team and regional officials work together, and provided the building blocks for better engagement with the Executive Council in delivering union objectives. We face the future with confidence and look forward to developing our UMF3 project, which, for us, is a natural progression from the earlier rounds.'

*Roy Rickhuss, National Officer, Community.*

## Round One Activities

The great majority of projects reached successful completion. The evaluation by CERIC concluded that UMF1 had been broadly successful and provided clear evidence that it has generated a high degree of potential for transformational change within trade unions. The UMF has allowed unions to trial new ideas, conduct research and map members' views, develop new roles and engage in debate about the change process.

'We are very happy with the outcome of our UMF1 project. It has played a significant part in helping Community senior officials and staff really engage in the ethos of the new union, following the merger of ISTC and KFAT. Via a tailored training and management development programme, UMF enabled us to look carefully at our structures, policies and the way we interact with outside bodies. We now have a greater understanding of community trade unionism; much better recognition of the need for change and diversity within the union membership;

The main, and potentially lasting, outcomes include improved communication structures and democratic processes within unions; greater understanding of the representational needs of potential members from diverse and ethnic backgrounds; new assets, resources and roles, such as the newly developed equality reps; efficiency improvements in union processes and structures; and new skills sets for project management.

It is evident that the UMF has stimulated an array of innovative activities within unions. This includes a wide-ranging research effort across unions and the implementation of new training programmes, for example, around diversity issues, communications and general management approaches. And new institutions are emerging through the roles of equality representatives and new partnerships with employers.

It is also evident that the process of modernisation is starting to be understood as broader than just the specific outputs or products of projects. The work of projects is raising deeper issues around the organisational culture of unions and how the

ongoing process of modernisation relates to cultural change.

A range of dissemination activities occurred across the life of projects as unions sought to promote key messages to internal as well as external audiences via, for example, the promotion of projects in union magazines, high profile launch events on completion, websites and workshops for external stakeholders. In parallel, there were also early signs of unions seeking to network and share information with other unions on, for example, issues around diversity and the challenges of dealing with IT contractors.

## Challenges on the Path to Modernisation

All UMF projects faced challenges of one sort or another at some point in the life of the project. This is normal in the project environment, as organisations seek to tackle ingrained ways of doing things, implement change programmes and test new ways of operating. The means by which difficulties are overcome, and the uncertainty generated by projects tackled, can, however, generate some very useful learning about how an organisation creates an environment which supports change and secures a broad level of ownership within a union, and which is sustainable over the longer term.

'When we set up our UMF project we knew that we had work to do to improve how we managed ourselves but we didn't really know what needed to change. With the help of the Work Foundation, we quickly identified the following shortfalls:

- strategic planning tended to be focused on new initiatives and not include more routine, day-to-day work
- our sole measure of operational performance was how many

members we recruited, and we ignored other aspects of our performance

- our management training was limited
- we had a hit and miss approach to project management
- there was no real link between the strategic planning and direction of the union with individual staff development reviews.

A series of task groups were established to address these concerns and over the course of the project we introduced a series of changes, which are now fully embedded and considered "normal working" by the whole organisation. At the heart of our new processes lies our "balanced scorecard", which allows us to plan strategically and assess performance against a wider range of measures than merely membership growth.

We are confident that we have a robust way of working that will see us well into the future. Some of the benefits we have already felt include: more effective strategic planning at every level of the union, better trained and developed managers, improved internal communications, new project management and staff review systems, and a range of performance measures that allow us to much more meaningfully assess how we are doing.'

*John McGarry, Executive and Administration Officer, USDAW*

The main challenges faced by projects included issues around:

- **internal communication and co-ordination**, e.g. who to involve in steering groups; how to identify lines of accountability and secure the support of the senior management team; and how to

mainstream new forms of communication into communications activities

- **the timeframes for planning work and its strategic implementation**, e.g. how to introduce project management disciplines and develop project management skills; and the importance of getting the start-up phase right
- **strained relations between project workers and traditional union officers**, e.g. how to integrate and assimilate a possibly new project management role within a traditional union structure and how to ensure appropriate status for external expertise brought in to deliver a project
- **tensions between ‘controlling’ projects and ‘buying-in’ expertise**, e.g. how to strike a balance between a ‘hands-on’ approach to project delivery and use of external consultants; and manage the related risks of either overburdening key officials or losing effective control of a project
- **pressures on trade union workloads**, e.g. how to manage personal pressures and multiple roles, and support project managers through projects
- **a lack of employer buy-in for key initiatives**, e.g. how to develop and sustain employer engagement, in the face of scepticism about the value of such engagement
- **the way that modernisation can challenge traditional unions’ systems and ways of operating**, e.g. how to engage with, and better represent, the needs of members; and how to tackle cultural barriers to change, linked to traditional attitudes to industrial relations
- **the extent to which unions were able to internalise lessons learnt and create new knowledge assets around such learning**, e.g. how to raise consciousness within the union of the work being done and sustain project outcomes

- **the ability of unions to disseminate project outcomes and retain archive learning as part of organisational ‘memory’**, e.g. how to share learning with other unions and facilitate access to reports, toolkits, etc.

But it was notable that these challenges – whether anticipated or not as part of the identification of project risks – did not derail the overall success of projects, and the way projects responded fed into the learning process of unions and, ultimately, the modernisation outcomes achieved.

‘The key strategic issue for the NUJ was how to make the union more relevant to an increasingly diverse membership. The project had two elements:

- a training package centred on diversity and work-life balance issues, aimed at equipping representatives with the knowledge and skills to become equality representatives; and
- the production of a ‘bargaining for equalities’ handbook, designed to raise awareness amongst officers and reps and mainstream equalities issues.

We were very pleased with the project. It delivered a new cohort of equality reps, by giving new impetus to members who had always been equality champions and helping us to meet members who had not been so active beforehand. There is more awareness on the part of workplace members about the importance of putting equality on the negotiating agenda and the usefulness of having a dedicated chapel committee member who takes on the role of the Equality Rep.

The toolkit continues to be a valued resource for members and there is continued interest in the equality rep role. The project helped us review how we communicate with our members; and the methodology required to deliver the project showed us that we need to

do more evaluation of what we do as a trade union and how our membership perceive that – rather than just assuming that we know what is ‘best’.

The project injected new life into the equality debate throughout the union. It has also engendered useful links with other trade unions, which has brought about shared knowledge and a source of colleagues who can be consulted for information and views.’

*Lena Calvert, Equalities Officer, NUJ.*

## Round 1 Outcomes

Some key lessons learned from the experience of UMF1 were identified by CERIC, including:

- that modernisation should not be seen in terms of quantitative deliverables and outputs, but how outputs feed into wider outcomes
- the modernisation process is about more than the six substantive themes of the UMF. It is also about the lasting improvements that may be made to capacity and frameworks of representation, communication and organisation that allow a modern trade union movement to respond in one way or another to the challenge of a more diverse, complex and uneven society
- the UMF has provided an important creative space for unions to experiment with new ideas, activities and approaches. As much as anything, the potential benefit of projects should be about creating a climate for learning within unions.

Given the fact that many projects had only recently completed, the longer term outcomes are as yet unknown. However, the potential appears to be significant. In many cases, unions have looked at how to capitalise on UMF projects and move forward to the next stage; and some have

used their positive experience of UMF1 to help develop successful bids under Rounds Two and Three. The key dimensions of organisational learning and potential longer term outcomes of the UMF for unions included:

- *new resources, assets and roles* – project outputs have created valuable toolkits, training and learning resources that have the potential to upgrade the skills and capabilities of unions, notably in terms of labour market diversity. This has been further enhanced by the investments in the nascent union role of equality representatives which has been further developed in UMF2
- *enhanced communications* – the widespread investment in new ICT technologies has significant implications for unions. At a simple level they represent a basic upgrading of the technological capacity of unions, but, more importantly, can contribute to the improved efficiency of union representation structures and the servicing of members. It is notable how ICT can contribute to improvements in the democratic and participatory basis of unions (notwithstanding the prohibition on use of e-ballotting for elections and possible industrial action), by allowing members to contribute through online forums and polls.
- *improved relationships with external contractors* – modernisation brings with it new relations between unions and the external providers of key services, such as research and ICT provision. Unions have had to learn to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of such relationships.
- *effective project management* – in many cases the skills needed to manage projects had been underestimated by unions. This was seen as a valuable lesson for unions. Increasingly, it is recognised that effective project management, and the accompanying skills and capacities to deliver this, feed



through into manageable workload and effective outputs – and help deliver key objectives.

- *evaluation and reflection* – there was a tendency at the start of projects to focus on core delivery activity and not all projects fully recognised the benefits of robust monitoring and evaluation from day one. However, as projects completed, unions reflected on their progress against objectives and the value of the project activities and started thinking about how to build on outputs and mainstream activities across the union. Such evaluation and reflection is seen to be an important part of the modernisation process.
- *networking* – whilst this was not as extensive as it could have been, project networks could probably not have been imposed artificially at the outset of the UMF. Nonetheless, over the life of projects, networks did emerge organically in relation to key issues, and unions started to realise the potential benefits of such networking for shared learning and the addressing of key challenges. A notable example emerged in terms of how to deal with the uncertainties, and in some cases conflicts, which arose with the contracting of new IT services. This proved to be particularly valuable for small unions.
- *mainstreaming and embedding change* – modernisation, transformation and change can be viewed somewhat cynically in union circles and perceived to have little to do with the core activities of unions. However, projects were not seen to detract from or substitute traditional union roles, ideals and functions. Indeed, there was emerging evidence of how modernisation projects could contribute more broadly to the effective realisation of core union concerns. In one case this resulted in a cultural shift in how the union builds and implements its strategic plan. In other cases, there is evidence of how the formation of new union roles, such as equality reps, could start to

contribute to wider union activism and organising efforts.

'We're very pleased with the outcomes of our UMF1 project: *Hearth* – a multi-functional website designed to provide an on-line forum and resource centre for our officers and reps. It has significantly improved communications and promoted engagement within the union as well as raising our efficiency and effectiveness.

It has also delivered some unanticipated, and very welcome, side-benefits, including use of the training element as a forum to hammer out ideas and strategies; the delivery of significant long-term cost savings; and the enrichment of the job functions of all those involved. We continue to build on the strengths of *Hearth* and use it as a platform for further change.'

*Phil Katz, Hearth Project Manager, NUT*

## Next Steps

CERIC identified a range of further resources and areas of support that might be developed in partnership between TUC and trade unions. These include:

- the development of templates for best practice project structures and processes (including, for example management of risk, use of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, etc.)
- the provision of further training on project management techniques
- the provision of advice on how to map and deploy resources
- the provision of advice on best practice handling of external suppliers and information sharing on outcomes
- the development of best practice advice on tackling cultural change (e.g. around the promotion of teamworking, greater transparency within unions and the development of more inclusive communications processes)

- the development of cluster groups or 'communities of practice' around particular types of projects or activities
- the mainstreaming of UMF outputs into TUC and other education and learning agendas.

In addition, for UMF projects to achieve their full potential, it is important that dissemination of project findings and outcomes is conducted in a way that ensures that the 'demonstration effect' is clearly communicated across the full range of trade unions. This is something that the TUC and trade unions are keen to develop in the current round of UMF.

The TUC's UMF3 project includes considerable scope for supporting networking between unions and TUC, and it may be that some of the dialogue arising from this activity addresses how elements identified above may be developed and delivered.

## **Sources of Advice and Guidance**

A simple checklist for delivering successful projects is attached at Annex A.

Sources of further information and training are listed in Annex B.

## Annex A

### A Checklist for Delivering Successful Projects

There is no single blueprint for the delivery of a successful project. The methods you use will depend on the size and complexity of the activity proposed. The key is to use common sense and adapt a standard project management methodology to suit the circumstances of each project.

A number of training packages are available if you want to develop your project management skills. Remember, project management is not inherently difficult – it has been developed to help you deliver your project successfully!

A number of points are worth considering before embarking on a project, including ensuring that:

- you have sufficient clarity on the project rationale, its objectives (which should be presented in 'SMART' format), the detail of the project delivery plan and the success criteria
- you have full buy-in to the proposed activity from senior officers
- sufficient resources are in place to deliver the project, and the right people, with the appropriate skills and knowledge, have a seat on the steering group
- you understand the common causes of project failure e.g. failure to define the objectives clearly, plan or control the project properly or secure senior management support
- you consider lessons from previous projects before commencing the activity
- you consider project management training for key participants
- you understand the different needs and motivations of internal as well as external stakeholders and plan project communications accordingly
- robust monitoring and evaluation processes are in place from day one
- a simple risk management strategy is in place from the outset; and that risks are reviewed regularly
- project outcomes are embedded in the structures, processes and culture of the union over the longer term
- the learning and good practice derived from the project is shared within the union as well as more broadly across the trade union movement.



## Annex B

### Sources of further information and training include:

- UMF1 and 2 case studies  
(available at: <http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/trade-union-rights/modernisation/page16097.html>)
- TUC Project Management training, which can be provided upon request.  
For more information please contact Martin Hegarty at [mhegarty@tuc.org.uk](mailto:mhegarty@tuc.org.uk)

There are also a number of commercial training providers of Prince2 or similar project management training courses; as well as easy-to-use guides available in good bookshops.

