



Forestry Commission
Group



Members' Guide

TO THE PCS FORESTRY COMMISSION GROUP

Introduction

As trade union members we all value being part of a strong union, and that depends on three things:

- A high proportion of staff being members of the union
- Having enough of us willing to help out and being actively involved in the union's decision making processes
- All of us being actively engaged in helping to resolve workplace issues.

As a PCS member in the Forestry Commission, you are a member of the **PCS Forestry Commission Group**; and this short guide has been produced to help you understand how the group works, and how you can make it work for you.

However, I believe that the most important point is that the union is not your representative or a person at the end of the phone, but all of us, including you. If we want the union to be strong and successful then we all have an important part to play.

Allan Mackenzie
GROUP PRESIDENT



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Further Information

If you would like any further information about any aspect of PCS then either:

- Speak to your workplace contact,
- Visit www.pcs.org.uk
- Or call the FCTU office on 0131 314 6195.

How it's organised

Most of us in the FC work in fairly small offices with just a few dozen or less colleagues; about two-thirds of whom are likely to be a member of a union. Nearly all FC offices of this size will have a **PCS Workplace Contact**; a colleague who has volunteered to act as a link between the PCS members in your workplace and the rest of the union. They may also cover other locations such as any smaller outstations.

Your Workplace...

Workplace contacts play a number of different roles such as:

- Recruiting new members,
- Circulating information,
- Collating local views on an issue,
- Maintaining a union noticeboard,
- Providing basic advice.

If you have a question that you would like answered or a work-related concern that you would like help with, then a good starting point is your workplace contact. If they can't help you, then they should know someone who can!

If you don't know who your workplace contact is, then either ask a colleague or contact the unions' office in Silvan House on 0131 314 6195.

If you would like to know more about what PCS is doing, or would like to get involved, then you could: speak to your workplace contact or branch secretary, attend a branch meeting, or visit www.pcs.org.uk.

How to get involved

Although the union has some full-time reps who deal with some of the specialist issues such as pay negotiations and representing members at employment tribunals, the bulk of union work is done by individual members and volunteers—like all of us.

Much of the work of the union can be divided into small easy tasks which will not take up much time and can be tailored to suit your interests. If you are interested in getting involved in the work of the union, then there is a wide variety of activities and roles which you might like to consider:

- If you can only have a few minutes per week, then perhaps you could act as a workplace contact, or assist your contact by keeping the noticeboard up to date, or collating views on a current topic of concern. ▶▶

...Get Active

Focus on... Peter Fullarton

Based at Tay Forest District, has been a PCS workplace contact for seven years.

“I usually spend about half an hour a week doing union stuff; mainly either circulating newsletters around the office, chatting to colleagues about what the union is doing. I do enjoy being a workplace contact, it enables me to keep up to date with what the union is doing, and I get quite a sense of satisfaction from doing a little bit to help out.”



- If you are interested in helping others, then one of the most rewarding roles can be to help and support other members who might, for example, have become involved in disciplinary action or a grievance. Full training and support can be given to help you undertake this role.
- If you would like special training in health and safety paid for by the union and attended during work time, how about volunteering as a H&S rep?
- If you prefer working 'behind the scenes' and are able to attend a few meetings per year, then perhaps you could volunteer to take the minutes at branch meetings, or help organise some campaigning work.
- If you are interested in organisational change, then how about working with the other unions to liaise with managers on the local or regional staff council.

However much time you have available and whatever your interest, there's a role for you in the union. If you would like to know more then please speak to your workplace contact or your branch secretary.

Other Local Reps

As well as having local workplace contacts, the group also supports other networks of local reps that cover a number of specialist areas. Some of these are:

Health & Safety

H&S reps are trained by the union to give advice on H&S concerns, such as remote working or office practices, as well as to help prevent and if necessary help investigate accidents.

Personal Cases

One of the most involved, yet rewarding areas of union work, personal cases reps support members involved in disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Harassment & Bullying

In the last staff survey some 16% of staff in the FC said that they had been subject to harassment or bullying behaviour at work in the preceding two years. Our reps have been specially trained to help and advise—their details are available on the intranet or from the FCTU office at Silvan House (see page 3).

Getting PCS to work for you

If you have an issue, or concern which you would like some help with then the best place to start is by speaking to your workplace contact; if they can't help you directly, then they will be able to put you in touch with the best person who can. If for some reason you cannot speak to your contact, then you should speak to your branch secretary.

It is important to remember though that as both of these individuals are volunteers, their role is to advise and assist you in resolving the issue, not to take on the issue and resolve it on your behalf.

Some of the steps that you can take to help them to help you are:

- Be clear what your issue is.
- If you think that the issue might affect others, then speak to them first and try and agree a joint approach.
- Do a bit of research yourself: many work related issues can be resolved by looking in the Staff Handbook or Staff Notices on the intranet.
- Perhaps talk to your local manager about your concern. Most managers are union members as well and will be more than happy to try and help out with reasonable requests and concerns.
- Where applicable, try and be clear in your own mind how you would like the issue resolved: what would be a satisfactory outcome?

Members at Alice Holt marked the 2006 Ban Bullying at Work Day with a special noticeboard display, and arranged a drop-in session for any members with concerns.



Your Branch

Your workplace is grouped with a number of others to form a union branch. There are seven branches covering FC workplaces; three in England, two in Scotland, and one each for Wales and Silvan House. Your branch is run by a **branch executive committee**, comprising of a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and about six other volunteers who are elected by the branch members at the annual general meeting (AGM).

Branch & Group

The branch is responsible for;

- organising local meetings,
- campaigning on local issues,
- assisting branch members involved in disciplinary and grievance procedures,
- recruitment and maintaining membership records,
- and electing representatives to;
 - the Group Executive Committee,
 - the annual PCS national conference,
 - work alongside the other unions in discussions with FC management.

Your Branch Organiser

As well as the key posts of chairperson, treasurer and secretary, one of the most important roles is the **branch organiser**. Another volunteer; their role is to help support you, your colleagues and the workplace contact with any local campaigns or recruitment drives that you may wish to organise.



Your Group

The work of the seven branches is coordinated through the **Group Executive Committee**, or GEC, which comprises fifteen members, two elected by each of the seven branches and a Group President elected by a postal ballot of all group members. The GEC meets three times per year, and is responsible for:

- Negotiating national agreements with FC managers, such as pay deals and changes to the Staff Handbook.
- Campaigning on FC wide issues.
- Supporting members and reps who are involved in complex discussions with managers.
- Supporting the work of the branches.
- Organising an annual **Group Conference**, which determines the group's strategy for the coming year.

Focus on... Donna Macpherson

Based in Silvan House, Donna is helping to organise a **Young Members' Network** in the FC.

"When I first joined the union I felt that it could do more to encourage and support young members so I decided to help set up a network for young members in the FC.

Last year PCS produced a national charter of issues of particular concerns to young members, including; low starting pay, having to wait ten years to get full annual leave entitlements, and fighting the increased use of short-term contracts in some departments.

The PCS Young Members' Network is open to all members aged 27 and under, and I would encourage everyone to join. If you would like more information then please speak to your workplace contact or email or ring me at Silvan House."



Campaigns

One of the main reasons that many people join PCS is because it is active in working and campaigning both to protect individuals as well as promote social equality. Some recent examples are:

- In 2006 we mounted a campaign within the FC against the imposition of an unfair **pay award**. The campaign was successful in ensuring that future awards did not unfairly discriminate between different groups of staff, and saw the biggest rise in our membership for many years.
- Since the last staff survey we have worked to provide support to the 16% of FC staff who have suffered from **harassment and bullying** at work, and to ensure that our Values are respected throughout the FC.
- In 2004 the government announced that our pension age would be increased to 65 and that this was 'non-negotiable'. PCS immediately joined other unions and after one of the best supported campaigns in recent times was successful in changing the government's mind and protecting our pensions.
- PCS is the only union strong enough to campaign against government plans to cut 100,000 jobs from the Civil Service. The **Protect Public Services** campaign aims to ensure that the Civil Service remains capable of delivering high quality public services and to protect us against politically driven job cuts and out-sourcing.



Equality and Diversity

PCS is committed to promoting equal rights and opportunities for all members and in addition to all of the support available at the local, branch and national levels, it also runs specialist groups that provide support for members who are black, disabled, or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

If you would like to find out more about any of these groups, then please contact the FCTU office at Silvan House (see page 3), or visit the PCS website at www.pcs.org.uk.

Working with the other unions and FC managers

Although PCS is the largest union in the FC some staff are members of other unions, and PCS works with these unions through a partnership called the **Forestry Commission Trade Unions (FCTU)**. The main role of the FCTU is to coordinate the work of the unions, particularly where this involves discussions or negotiations with FC managers.

At a local level this might be done through **local staff councils**. These typically cover individual units, such as a forest district, and may involve your workplace contact, (or a representative from the branch executive committee) along with representatives from the other unions, meeting with (for example) the FDM to discuss local issues such as workloads, reorganisations or local health and safety issues.

However most of the work of the done by the FCTU happens at a broader level through six **National Organising Committees (NOC)**—one each for; Scotland, England, Wales, Forest Research, Forestry Business Units and Silvan House. You can help elect PCS reps to the appropriate National Organising

Working Together

Committee at you branch Annual General Meeting. The role of the NOC is to agree joint union policy on a range of issues within its area, including organisational changes, and issues such as health and safety. Where appropriate members of the NOC also discuss and negotiate changes with senior managers (such as the country director) at a **Regional Staff Council**.

At a GB level PCS works with the other unions through the **FCTU Council**, and meets with the FC Executive Board at the **Departmental Staff Council**.

Other Useful Contacts

If you need to contact the PCS then the best place to start is via your local workplace contact. If you don't know who your local contact is, then please speak to the secretary for your branch:

Silvan House	Gillian Grant	0131 314 6163
North Scotland	Brian Duff	01463 791575
South Scotland	Joyce Rammell	01387 860264
Wales	Tim Harland	01639 710221
North England	Debbie Clough	01904 448778
South & West England	Rob Spence	01594 810983
South East England	Liz Richardson	01780 444920

Alternatively please contact:

FCTU Office,
Forestry Commission,
Silvan House,
231 Corstorphine Road,
Edinburgh EH12 7AT.

Tel: 0131 314 6195

email: unions@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

or

PCS Membership Services
Tel: 020 7924 2727



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