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Activate: Humanising the national campaign helps us to get the vote out

At HMRC Belfast, activists are using a variety of tactics to get the vote out, including leafletting, face-to-face conversations, members' meetings, social media, Call Hub, and the Organising Hub.

Cathy Darcan, a HMRC group executive committee member and Northern Ireland branch disability rep, has been a rep for over 20 years.

For the past few weeks, her branch has been proactively managing members' records, contacting all members whose contact details appear incorrect and updating their records to "make sure that everyone who is entitled to a say in the ballot gets that chance".

"We've always been a branch that has prioritised speaking to members directly so that we understand members' concerns and members feel listened to," she adds, noting that Call Hub helped the branch meet the 50% threshold last time around.

The branch is regularly using the Organising Hub to record progress made and "come up with new ideas to reach more members", but it also places an emphasis on leafletting because, in Cathy's words, "nothing has more impact than speaking to members, and non-members, face to face and discussing with them the union's position and what the ballot is about".

Humanising the campaign

Yet no matter the method, the key is to make sure members understand the national campaign. To achieve this, Cathy and her branch have taken to simplifying the issues into key point issues.

"Speaking to someone and finding out what matters to them is the best way to engage anyone in a campaign, because it allows you to make the campaign

relevant to them and encourages them to vote,” she says. “Humanising the campaign allows people to see why it’s so important for them to vote.”

The key messages her branch has been sharing are about securing a fair pay rise, pension justice and job security. But this messaging is most impactful, she explains, “when we’ve shown members that they have earned these rights”.

“When we have demonstrated how the erosion of pay has impacted their pocket, for some amounting to a near 20% pay cut in real terms, but for others up to 60% erosion in the pay in their pockets. Adding real context to the issues raised makes these real for people.”

National campaign

Throughout the life of the national campaign, Cathy and her branch have been engaging members.

They’ve installed a branch email address so members can actively engage with the branch, set up a WhatsApp group for reps and volunteers who want to actively help the campaign, and revitalised members’ meetings on Zoom.

Zoom in particular has increased attendance and “revolutionised how we work as a branch, allowing us to reach a wider and more diverse section of our membership”, including those who would “normally not be able to attend face to face meetings, due to caring responsibilities, work commitments or health needs”.

Outside of the campaign, the branch has also been organising training events that are relevant to members on the ground, covering topics such as disability, addiction, mental health, neurodiversity, and engagement cafes. They’ve also been running a monthly recruitment stall, “where we’ve been able to speak to members and non-members to address their concerns”.

This long-term and multifaceted approach to engaging with members will, she argues, outlive the current campaign, paying great dividends for members, activists and the union.

“As a branch we’ve been engaging members throughout the national campaign, before the campaign began, and are determined to continue long after the campaign,” she vows.