

# PCS Women

Campaigning for women in PCS

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## Get active, get advocating

Women make up 60% of the PCS membership, but this figure is not reflected in the number of PCS activists that we have registered – with only 42% of union positions held by women.

The direct debit campaign has seen women members taking a conscious decision to stay with PCS and women activists playing a crucial role in the campaign to get members signed up.

So why aren't women members taking a step forward and becoming more active in PCS? There could be a variety of reasons.

They've never been asked. As with joining the union, one of the most common reasons for not doing so is that no one has invited them to do so. Sometimes assumptions are made that "oh she won't want to get involved because she's got kids" or "she 'only' works part time so she won't be interested". But has anyone ever explained what union activity involves, what personal development and rewards it brings or asked what they would be prepared to do? Women attend meetings, vote in union ballots and sign up to direct debit so why wouldn't they want to do more?

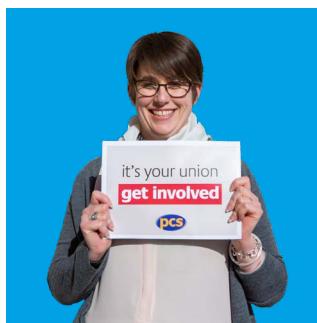
Women can be perceived as not having time but have they been told about what is involved and that there are choices about what to do? In the past, unions have expected all reps to do personal cases, be competent public speakers and be able to hold their own with management. We haven't previously looked at what skills members actually have and used those skills in activism. For



**“ The direct debit campaign has seen women members taking a conscious decision to stay with PCS and women activists playing a crucial role to get members signed up**

example, if women members cannot attend meetings they may be able to be a contact point in their team, be willing to distribute materials or enjoy building a website or designing a poster.

Women are sometimes labelled 'not prepared to travel'.



With advances in technology there is no longer an expectation that everyone has to congregate in the same place for a meeting. Video and telephone conferencing and Skype can be used – encouraging participation and saving money. Union activity is far wider than just attending meetings but they are essential to our democratic structures so women should be there.

The new union advocate role will build a new form of activism where members who do not want to take a formal union role but do want to do more for the union can become union advocates. Tasks could include:

- Encouraging colleagues to



attend union meetings and to participate in ballots

- Speaking positively about the union and making sure colleagues have up-to-date information
- Encouraging non-members to join the union or members to sign up to direct debit in areas where subscriptions are still paid from salary.

At national seminars and elsewhere, women have told us that they would prefer union work to be allocated as smaller tasks rather than one or two people doing everything.

Training, support and mentoring can be provided to help women members build their skills for activism either regionally or in branches.

PCS has some fantastic women role models – from national president, Janice Godrich to our local branch reps. Such women show the way and are vital as mentors for future women reps as we try to change our union's profile. Becoming more representative of our membership is a key aim in our organising strategy and we need all our women members to take up this baton.

Find out more visit [pcs.org.uk/getinvolved](http://pcs.org.uk/getinvolved)



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## News and events

### National women's forum

At their August meeting, forum members welcomed the new chair, Cheryl Gedling, and were given a demonstration of the new PCS document library. Current priorities were discussed, including the direct debit campaign, the union learning fund project, ADC motions, International Women's Day 2016 and plans for the 2016 TUC Women's conference in March.

### 4 October demo

PCS women members were significant in number at the 4 October anti-austerity rally and demo in Manchester that was jointly organised by the TUC and People's Assembly to coincide with the Tory Party Conference in the city. Protesting under the slogan "No to austerity, yes to workers' rights" they sent a loud and clear message to the government that their austerity regime has failed and that PCS demands policies that benefit the majority and not just the rich few.

### Black History Month 2015

Our PCS theme for BHM is collective action for race equality. A new website from the University of Leeds, 'Striking Women', celebrates the Asian women workers at Grunwick and Gate Gourmet who stood up for their rights. Find out more by visiting:

- [leeds.ac.uk/strikingwomen](http://leeds.ac.uk/strikingwomen)
- [blackhistorymonth.org.uk](http://blackhistorymonth.org.uk)
- [pcs.org.uk/equality](http://pcs.org.uk/equality)

### 13 October rally to scrap the trade union bill

Join a PCS-backed London rally on 13 October that calls for the scrapping of the trade union bill.

The vindictive Tory bill aims to hit unions' ability to organise collectively in the workplace. The rally at 6pm in committee room 10, House of Commons, organised by the TUCG, will hear that the right to strike is a fundamental human right and a key part of any democratic society. Our general secretary Mark Serwotka is speaking at the rally. "This is not an attack on trade unions, it is an attack on society as a whole, as we know that weaker unions means greater inequality," he said.



# Gender equality

Public Services International (PSI) is a global trade union federation dedicated to promoting quality public services in every part of the world. PSI champions human rights, advocates for social justice and promotes universal access to quality public services.

Gender equality is at the core of the PSI work programme. Two thirds of PSI members are women; it has a strong legacy to promote and defend women workers' rights as well as defending and strengthening quality public services for all working women and men.

One of the priorities of the PSI World Women's Committee is the elimination of violence against women. Rosa Pavanelli, general secretary of PSI explains that "Public sector workers are well placed to promote and enforce laws and rules that advance gender equality and protection against violence and harassment. Quality public services are often the only shield and support for women in this situation. Violence against women creates

**“Gender-based inequalities continue to deny women a say in the decisions that affect their lives”**

inequality, affecting the well-being of current and future generations. Violence and the threat of it deprive women of their basic human rights."

The United Nations reports that 70% of women in the world are faced with some form of violence in their life and all too often they are blamed or punished themselves. Gender-based inequalities continue to deny women a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Domestic violence is the most prevalent form of violence that affects women, and forced marriages of young women and girls, rape and spousal killings are still meted out on women every day with impunity. Discrimination and hate crimes linked to sexual orientation are also widespread around the globe.

PSI believes strong commitments from states are needed to end violence against women, together with efforts to break the silence and mobilise against discrimination and violence in our workplaces and societies. Trade unions can help progress this by including measures in collective agreements that pressure governments to enforce laws, provide the necessary resources to assist victims, and train judicial authorities and the police to deal sensitively and effectively with issues of violence against women and girls.

Ending violence against women is a matter of life and death. PSI is calling on all its affiliate members, men and women, to make a pledge to end violence against women and girls at each of their workplaces around the globe.

PCS is affiliated to PSI and plays a key part as one of the third largest affiliates in the UK and Irish Constituency. For more information click on [www.world-psi.org/en](http://www.world-psi.org/en)

# Interview: Janice Godrich

As part of the government attacks on civil service trade unions many reps who had been given full facility time have returned for at least half of their working time to the workplace. PCS Women took the opportunity to interview national president Janice Godrich about her recent experience.

**Q** What have been the biggest challenges you have faced throughout your time as national president?

**A** There have been two really. When I was first elected in 2002 I faced an attempt to overturn the democratic election of Mark Serwotka our general secretary, which caused a huge outcry by members and reps. The matter was eventually decided in the High Court which ruled in Mark's favour. Both Mark and I initially had to offer our homes as financial security so it was a trying time.

Secondly, the ongoing challenge to defend our members and public services from attack by successive governments. We have acted to block their worst intentions. The constant misinformation about our members' jobs and conditions requires us to be vigilant at all times.

**Q** What difference has the ending of your full facility time had on the way you manage your role as national president?

**A** Having full facility time as national president was unusual; previously I always had to combine my official work with PCS duties so I'm used to working in this way. I was determined not to let it affect my commitment to members and while clearly I do more in my own time now I'm pleased that I have been able to achieve this. On the plus side, I'm based in an office 10 minutes from my home so I get to spend more time with my two kittens Mirren and Skye.

**Q** What has been the greatest challenge you have faced in returning to the



workplace and how have you coped with that challenge?

**A** After being absent for a number of years the thing that I was most worried about was getting back into the various IT systems. However it must have been deeply engrained in me – after about a week I was cooking with gas. I work alongside some great people who really helped and I have great support at PCS HQ, so combining both roles really hasn't been a problem. The PCS branch is well organised and I've enjoyed doing some local members' meetings, too.

**Q** What are the main differences you have noticed since returning to the workplace? Are changes largely better or worse?

**A** I'd have to say worse unfortunately, mainly because of the pressure of work and the pressure on public services generally. Being back has reminded me of how hard

**“** Being active within PCS – It's challenging, exciting and stretches your boundaries

our members work each day and the challenges we all face. Everyone's priority is keeping up to date with the immediate tasks, leaving little room for development and training – points we as a union have consistently raised.

However, it's great to see how many members have signed up to direct debit. This confirms that people see the union as their vital defence at workplace level.

**Q** What do you believe are the most significant challenges for women in the workplace and what can be done to overcome them?

**A** The biggest challenges remain those that we have been facing for decades,

as they still aren't resolved – equal pay, decent affordable childcare and eldercare, good career development for part-time workers and assistance with life changes, such as the menopause. The austerity agenda means we need to be even more determined as equality issues are put on the backburner by employers during these times.

**Q** What will be the biggest impact on women if the trade union bill becomes law?

**A** Losing the ability to defend our pay and conditions by industrial action if needed will be a disaster for both women and men in PCS.

**Q** What can be done to encourage more women to become active within PCS and what advice would you give to aspiring activists?

**A** People become active when they see the union campaigning on the issues that affect them, so we always need to consult our members on what these are.

Women still deal with the majority of caring responsibilities and work part time so putting these issues to the forefront is important. Saying that, major issues like pay and jobs cuts are equally vital so action on these demands must continue.

I would always say to anyone don't hesitate to get involved. My involvement has given me far more than I've put in. It's challenging, exciting and stretches your boundaries.

I love seeing young women speak in public for the first time and however nervous they are the sense of achievement they feel afterwards is fantastic.

# Government policy impact

What will the changes in the political landscape in 2015 mean for women?

## Women in Westminster

Westminster now has its highest number of women members of parliament ever – but still only 191 of the total 650. This is 29.4%, up from 22.6% after the 2010 election. This compares to 35% of women members in the Scottish Parliament; 40% in the National Assembly of Wales; and 22% in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

In the larger parties women make up 20% of Conservative MPs, 42.7% of Labour MPs and 25% of SNP MPs.

There are seven women in the cabinet out of a total of 22 ministers (32%). Eight further ministers attend cabinet meetings, three of whom are women. Nicky Morgan, secretary of state for education and MP for Loughborough, has responsibility for women and equalities.

Jeremy Corbyn, the new leader of the Labour party, has appointed 16 women to his shadow cabinet – just over half of the total.

## New select committee for women and equalities

A new parliamentary committee has been set up to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

The committee has begun an inquiry considering how far, and in what ways, trans people still have yet to achieve full equality; and how the outstanding issues can most effectively be addressed. It is seeking views about its future work programme.

Committee chair Maria Miller said: "The committee has a very broad remit, covering age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. We are keen to hear views on specific issues which the committee should consider in its future work, and



we welcome ideas from everyone."

To find out more visit [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/)

## More austerity and hostility to unions

A Conservative government means more brutal austerity, continuing pay caps and more cuts to public services and jobs. Our rights are under attack by the Trade Union Bill and proposals to review human rights legislation may follow.

In responding to the election outcome, Mark Serwotka said: "It is truly shocking that the Tories have won a majority after running a campaign of fear and division, but Labour failed to offer a convincing alternative. The rise of the SNP shows there is a real appetite for policies that represent clear opposition to austerity and offer hope. The unions must step up the fight against Tory cuts and come together to defend jobs, living standards, our NHS and our welfare state".

## No equality impact analysis of budget plans

Before the election the Women's Budget Group (WBG) showed that the Conservative manifesto contained nothing that would take forward the

creates fewer jobs for women.

The Fawcett Society said: "The chancellor is giving with one hand but taking away with two in a low benefits, low wages economy. Tinkering with tax breaks and investing in physical infrastructure ignores the fact that the poorest people, who are mostly women, will still struggle to live. The government has shown it is not serious about progressing real equality for women. Dictating family size through tax and benefits is also the thin end of a dangerous wedge."

The TUC women and recession report published in April gives a broader picture of the effect that austerity has had on women. The findings include:

- Women working full-time earn about 9% less an hour than men, but women working part-time earn nearly 38% less.
- Women make up the majority of those paid less than the living wage and more women than ever before are in part-time work because they can't find full-time work.
- Single mothers face greater obligations to look for work and are at greater risk of having their benefits taken away. More single mothers are now in work but frequently they are stuck in low-skilled and low-paid jobs which they have little chance of progressing from.

Find out more about the in-depth budget responses:- <http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WBG-Budget-2015-Briefing.pdf>

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/2015/07/giving-with-one-hand-taking-away-with-two-the-2015-budget/>

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/equality-issues/gender-equality/equal-pay/impact-women-recession-and-austerity>

# Living and working in 'Austerity Britain'

Two members talk to PCS Women about the harsh realities of living and working in Cameron's Austerity Britain

## Rebecca's experience

"I used to be proud to work in the public sector. It's difficult to feel proud when you rely on loans to get by. I fall just over the line income wise so do not receive tax credits. My daughter stayed at school until sixth year. She did not qualify for education maintenance allowance. Despite showing talent in sport and dance we had to stop her taking part as I could not afford the session fees.

We've taken out the maximum student loan and bursary to enable her to attend university. They don't cover accommodation costs never mind her living expenses or fares home. She works part time which impacts on her study time. I have no idea how I will afford books. I regularly borrow from my 80-year-old mother just to get through the month which is pretty degrading. I used to take on part-time jobs but at 57 I can't run around a bar or restaurant after a day at the office.

I entered into the government debt management scheme as I cannot meet my debts. I had to ask for help for a replacement cooker and washing machine from the civil service charity and PCS benevolent fund. I aim for the reduced items in the grocery store and have become a dab hand at finding bargains just at their sell by date that I can freeze or use to conjure up imaginative meals.

I have a mortgage on a property with negative equity. My home is gradually falling to bits as I can't afford repairs. I have a damaged roof taped with polythene and a bath that has sunk through the floor with dry rot on floorboards. I ignore my heating in favour of a onesie and extra blankets.

I haven't quite reached the food bank stage yet: no doubt my



income would be just over the line for that too.

Working in the public sector used to be seen as "a good job with good conditions". Not anymore. I am disgusted at the way we are told we should be grateful to have a job rather than getting paid a decent wage for carrying out our job to a high standard."

## Hannah's story

"Until recently, my partner and I both worked, earning around £30,000 each. Although we've always lived within our means and haven't enjoyed many luxuries, our life has been pretty comfortable. We were able to pay our bills, buy food and clothes while also saving a little money. No foreign holidays or expensive cars, but we enjoyed a good life. Most of our savings were ring-fenced to allow us both to return to education, a long-term plan.

We were both confident we'd be able to get by, not as easily as before but, with careful planning and only one of us going back to

**“Working in the public sector used to be seen as “a good job with good conditions”. Not anymore**

university at once, our earnings and savings would cover us for a few years. The reality is much harder.

My partner is doing a masters and has struggled to find a part-time job with fixed hours (everything is minimum wage, zero hours and no structure). We are living on my salary alone. We knew we'd need to tighten our belts but they are so tight now that it's difficult to breathe.

Bills keep rising, we fear the inevitable increase to our mortgage and simple things like filling the tank with petrol, going out for dinner and helping my partner's elderly mother (surviving on a state pension in an island community where food, petrol and heating costs considerably more than on the urban mainland)

have now become difficult.

Our savings are dwindling fast. I'm at the maximum of the scale for my grade, so with no pay rise, increasing pensions contributions and the future increase to national insurance, I fear we will struggle to get out from under the weight of debt that is looming. When she completes her masters, my partner will be looking again for work in the public sector, so even once she starts working we will still be trapped by public sector austerity: driving salaries down and hours up.

My situation isn't unusual. I earn just under £2,000 a month, considerably more than colleagues at lower grades. If life is hard right now because of a short-term change in circumstances, I can only imagine how hard the lives are for staff earning half as much as me each month, those who have small children or rent in the private sector. It's bleak."

The names in the article have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

# Pro-choice abortion options must be retained

PCS upholds the protections in the Abortion Act 1967 and resists attempts to reduce choice for women who want to terminate their pregnancy. ADC 2007 agreed to affiliate to Abortion Rights, a national grass roots pro-choice campaigning organisation.

We have therefore been concerned about recent moves that threaten current rights, such as the harassment of women outside a London clinic by the group Abort67, creating fears of closure and causing distress for staff and women using the clinic.

## Serious crime bill

In February an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill was defeated in the House of Commons following a campaign by the TUC and pressure from the PCS parliamentary group. The amendment sought to restrict access to abortion based on foetal sex selection.

## PCS resists attempts to reduce choice for women who want to terminate their pregnancy

The TUC highlighted that although this practice is commonplace in some countries, there is no evidence of a systematic practice of gender-based abortion in the UK and that before legislating to change the Abortion Act, MPs needed to know the facts. Where there are instances, understanding these women's experiences better and finding ways to support them would be preferable to ill-conceived legal changes.

PCS sent briefings produced by the TUC equality department and Abortion Rights to our parliamentary group to highlight the misinformation about this proposal. This led to the amendment being defeated

by 292 votes to 201 with 60% of the PCS parliamentary group turning out to uphold freedom of choice.

## Devolution of abortion policy and services?

Further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament may include abortion policy and services. Command paper 8990 "Scotland in the United Kingdom: an enduring settlement", published in January, included this as an issue for consideration.

This could be an opportunity for Scotland to advance the pro-choice approach but it might also allow anti-abortion groups to seek to make the law more restrictive.

At its meeting in August our national women's forum agreed to discuss issues in relation to possible devolution of abortion to Scotland at its next meeting with a view to reaching a PCS policy recommendation.

## SUPPORT ABORTION RIGHTS

Members and branches can show support and raise awareness by:

- Lobbying MPs not to bend to anti-choice pressure
- Publicise the information available on the Abortion Rights website
- Use the Abortion Rights resources as a basis for an event for International Women's Day
- Invite Abortion Rights to speak at a union meeting
- Becoming an individual member
- Offer your time as a volunteer.



You can find more information, including on campaigns in Scotland and Northern Ireland, at [abortionrights.org.uk](http://abortionrights.org.uk)

# Get involved in learning

The UnionLearn Fund team is working closely with the PCS equality department to help tackle under-representation and to integrate equality in learning on organising, bargaining and campaigning.

While 61% of PCS members are women, they make up only 44% of workplace reps, 41% of BEC members, 36% of GEC officers and 33% of annual delegate conference delegates. These figures show that the representation of women becomes progressively smaller in higher democratic structures in our union. Other under-represented groups such as LGBT, disabled, young and black members show a similar picture. Women like you can have a positive

## Women need to make their voice heard and learning can be an important step towards this

impact on changing these profiles.

Black women, part-time workers (who are mainly women) and those with caring responsibilities are being given a disproportionately higher number of 'must improve'

performance box markings. Austerity measures have hit women harder than any other group. Women need to make their voice heard and learning can be an important step towards this.

Every workplace should ideally have a union learning rep (ULR). ULRs help members find learning opportunities, organise learning at work days and negotiate learning initiatives with management. Learning reps are entitled to reasonable time to carry out their duties and the ULF team organise training to support reps in this important role.

PCS ULR Louise Kowalska took up an opportunity to do a masters degree at Oxford's Ruskin College. Louise told us

how much she enjoyed the course, saying: "there can be few experiences when you lose a social life, forego holidays, and manage on a minimal amount of sleep for two years which you do not wish to come to an end".

Research shows that one of the six pillars that prevent or delay the risk of Alzheimer's and dementia is mental stimulation – the other five are an active social life, regular exercise, healthy diet, stress management and quality sleep. PCS Learning can help you get a better balance in all these areas.

To find out how you can become a ULR speak to your branch secretary or contact Ritu Chabra, PCS Learning officer with responsibility for equality at [ritu@pcs.org.uk](mailto:ritu@pcs.org.uk)

# Flexibility boosts equality

The trade union movement has successfully fought for the introduction of most of the positive policies in the workplace, particularly those that tackle discrimination and promote equality. We understand that women have interrupted career paths, mainly as a result of caring responsibilities at different points in their lives. PCS has negotiated flexible working policies which have been of major benefit to women employees, allowing them to maintain and progress in their careers and also manage their work and their lives. In the civil service, the government's austerity agenda has cut jobs, and made changes that reduce our rights and our terms and conditions. This is making it harder for members to access flexible working and career breaks.

Last year detrimental changes in central guidance to departments on career breaks were made without adequate consultation with the unions. PCS highlighted the damaging impact these changes would have on women, black and disabled members. The recent



**“ Consultation and negotiation with unions ensures better policies are introduced showing the value that unions bring to the workplace**

publication of updated guidance vindicated our view. The changes now include discretionary flexibility for departments to offer career breaks for up to five years where it is for caring,

rather than the previous two-year limit. The entitlement to return to work after breaks for caring responsibilities has been increased from 12 months to two years.

This small victory clearly demonstrates that consultation and negotiation with unions is vital in ensuring better policies and shows the value that unions bring to the workplace.

PCS has welcomed the commitment from the civil service to improving diversity and inclusion and the intention to return to being an exemplar employer through the Removing Barriers to Success programme. However, We have clear evidence that requests for flexible working are being increasingly turned down for “business needs reasons” as managers face mounting pressures from job cuts and restructuring.

We have called on the civil service to ensure that such barriers are removed, so that women can access flexible working when they need to. Action not words will show women that the latest civil service initiatives are helping them to balance their work and family life so that they can remain in work and make progress throughout their careers.

# The erosion of child benefits

All families with children are feeling the effects of changes to child benefit since 2010 – especially those on low wages. The financial repercussions of these changes will continue over time leaving families struggling to make ends meet.

The previous government eroded the value of child benefit and recent announcements reveal the Tories' intention to reduce it even more over the next five years. By the next general election a family with two children born before May 2010 will lose a cumulative total of over £3,000. Erosion has taken place in various ways. The calculation for annual up rating child benefit is now based on

**“ By the next general election a family with two children born before May 2010 will lose a cumulative total of over £3000**

the consumer price index (CPI) measure of inflation rather than the retail price index (RPI) which tends to produce a lower figure for inflation. Over time the base for the calculation is

lowered and increases are worth less and less.

Between 2011 and 2013 the child benefit allowance was not increased at all. In 2014 and 2015 the increase was capped at 1%. It will be frozen again in 2016 and 2017.

Additionally, since January 2013 higher rate taxpayers have had child benefit withdrawn through the tax system. Those earning up to £60,000 have their entitlement linked to their earnings. Extra tax paid is paid for every £100 of income above £50,000.

These cuts have not been made in a vacuum. The value of wages is decreasing whilst the costs of food, energy, travel,

housing and child care are all increasing. Child tax credit – a means tested benefit – has also been cut. Since 2010 this has been up-rated in accordance with CPI not RPI and capped at 1%. It is gradually being replaced by Universal Credit – far less generous for some groups, in particular disabled children. While a severely disabled child has the same overall entitlement, a less severely disabled child loses out by more than £1,600.

More cuts are planned. PCS calls for no further child benefit freezes, the lifting of the 1% cap and the restoration of child benefit as a universal benefit available to all.

# Vote yes for the political fund

The PCS Political Fund allows us to campaign politically and effectively lobby politicians. We are legally obliged to hold a review ballot every 10 years to renew our mandate and the latest vote runs from 19 October–11 November.

PCS members voted to set up a political fund in 2005 because for unions to campaign politically, the law requires that they set up a political fund. We established a parliamentary group of cross-party MPs in Westminster and other groups shortly followed in Holyrood and Cardiff Bay.

Politicians make decisions that affect the lives of union members at work and at home. With austerity already having a disproportionate impact on women (the World Economic Forum now ranks the UK 26th for gender equality, just below Moldova) and the welfare reform and work bill set to further increase inequality, it is in all our interests to be able to influence those decisions.

**“It’s important that we keep the political fund so we can continue to campaign politically for a fairer and more equal society”**

## Our successes

- Stopping the privatisation in the Land Registry by campaigning and lobbying MPs to support members' industrial action
- Securing cross-party support for the campaign against cuts at Kew Gardens
- Influencing the political agenda and policies of parties and government. We are not affiliated to any political party and lobby all representatives in the assemblies and parliaments of the UK. As a trade union, we organise in workplaces, negotiate with employers and use every industrial and legal means we can to defend ourselves.

## PCS POLITICAL FUND BALLOT 2015



**BALLOTING FROM 19 OCTOBER – 10 NOVEMBER**

But with the government politically committed to austerity, we are seeing more job losses, office closures, privatisation, welfare cuts and cuts to public services which all result from political decisions by ministers and MPs; and now the trade union right to strike is under political attack.

All of these policies will impact on women for generations to come, whether it be women who work in the public sector facing pay restraint and job insecurity, or the thousands of women with caring responsibilities

crippled by changes to benefits. Women in the past have fought for equal pay and won important legislation. However, the gender pay gap remains at 19% and there is clearly a long way to go to achieve gender equality.

It's important that we keep the political fund so we can continue to campaign politically for a fairer and more equal society, to influence political decisions and to have a strong voice in parliament.

Find out more: [pcs.org.uk/campaigns](http://pcs.org.uk/campaigns)

# Farewell from Pam Cole

National equality officer **Pam Cole** bids a fond farewell to PCS

Sadly, I shall be leaving PCS at the end of October after 14 years. Women's equality has been a central part of my work throughout, and for the last year I've had the privilege of being secretary of the national women's forum.

**“I have been constantly impressed by our skilled, committed and determined members and activists”**

My first piece of work in 2001 was the joint employer and union equal pay reviews in the civil service. Last month I wrote our response to the government's consultation on



reporting the gender pay gap. A stream of commissions, reports and guidance has made clear what needs to be done but the political will to do so has been lacking. Achieving our goals can be a long slog, but only collective action can ever get us there.

Women make up more than half of our membership and should be visible in every part of the union. I have been constantly impressed by our skilled, committed and determined members and activists. To subvert a well-known slogan – you aren't just women, you are PCS women.

I wish you all success for the future.

**Pam Cole, national equality officer**

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## Design

PCS communications