

# Organised for change

**Representing members in a company constantly in flux requires a strong, organised branch. Corus staff branch secretaries Ian Crichton and Lynne Vickers reveal the challenges they face to be effective for their members**

Community has over 70 staff branches around the country representing middle management, security, supervisory and technical employees, and office based administrative employees. While they share the challenges common to all branches, by nature of their membership, they have unique issues to contend with.

'That's why we recently met with all staff and managerial branches in our main companies to gain a better understanding of their particular concerns,' explains Roy Rickhuss, Community Assistant General Secretary. 'Over the

next year, we'll be working with these branches to address their issues, improve their effectiveness and encourage their members to ensure their views are heard.

'Having well-organised staff branches is vital to the union. Whenever we are in discussion with companies we need to be doing so from a position of strength. It's important for companies too, especially those like Corus, whose major restructuring has affected staff at every level. Strong branches can help them manage that change.'

Lab technician Simon Ellis and quality manager Lynne Vickers at Swinden Technology Centre.



## BRANCH FACT FILE

**Name:** Teesside Middle Management Branch

**Company:** Teesside Cast Products, near Redcar – producing slab and semi-finished product.

**Branch Secretary:** Ian Crichton, since 1991

**Representing:** operational and shift managers, supervisory and sales staff.

**Members:** 220

**Reps:** 4

'Over the last few years, our branch has played a fundamental role in helping Corus set up new processes, management packages and steering groups at this site, all against a background of restructuring. None of that would have happened if we didn't have a solid and effectively organised branch.

'Because our industry is in constant flux, to effectively represent our members we need to have a good working partnership with the company. We have a branch negotiating team that meets with management regularly to put claims to them and discuss any issues. These are the usual branch issues – disciplinaries, grievances, performance-related pay – however, we do face our own challenges. Most predominant are those related to meeting operational targets; the intense competition of our industry puts pressure on individuals to perform and they need proper representation. Our challenge is to try and resolve these middle management difficulties but not to the detriment of other union members or the company. To do that, it's important we work closely with the other site branches and management.

'We are one of Community's biggest middle management branches. This strength in numbers makes us effective in terms of our influence and profile within the company, and keeping membership high is a challenge for our branch team. Graduates and workers from outside the industry are now filling many jobs – and it is those people we are seeking to attract. In addition we are working with management to create salary and promotional structures that encourage people to move up the ladder and stay with the company, and the union.

'Locally, around 10,000 jobs within the area depend on the success of the Teesside Cast Products Initiative. We need to continue to be effective as a branch if we want to make a constructive contribution to that success.'

## BRANCH FACT FILE

**Name:** Swinden Laboratories Staff Branch

**Company:** Swinden Technology Centre, Rotherham.

**Branch Secretary:** Lynne Vickers, since 2000

**Representing:** technicians and researchers working on product, applications and environmental research for transport and construction sectors.

**Members:** 52

**Reps:** 5

'Like other Corus branches we've seen many changes in the last few years. I think the key to weathering those and future changes, is our ability to provide solid representation and to communicate effectively with our members, our union and management.

'In our branch we have a high rep-to-member ratio, and a committed team – myself, Scott Dyball (Works Rep), Mark Raffo (Health and Safety Rep) plus committee reps Simon Ellis (Branch Chair) and Ken Burnett. They support me and attend meetings when I'm not available so members know one of us is always there for them.

'Our main focus is on representing members at disciplinaries, grievances and Pay for Performance (PFP) reviews and appeals. As our members' jobs aren't production based, measuring their performance is complex and sometimes contentious. We are also working with Human Resources to look at the current job evaluation system. This makes it difficult for technicians to progress onto management and we'd like to change that.

'Good working relationships are key to branch effectiveness. We work with the HR department on many matters; they are also our inroad to new staff during induction days. We have a joint consultative meeting with management every few months to discuss site issues and members' concerns. We also work closely with Peter Lewis, secretary of the site's Management Branch to share information, and with regional office staff.

'To be effective as a branch, your members need to know what's going on. All our members have email access at work so we can update them on an 'as soon as we know, you'll know' basis. To keep our branch healthy we carry out an annual audit to see what we're doing well and where we could do better. We are currently working to recruit more members, especially to encourage younger people to join our committee. They are the future of our branch.'

## Calling all staff branches

If your staff branch needs help to recruit new members or if you know of staff in your workplace who would benefit from joining your branch, please contact your regional office, (numbers on the back page of this magazine). Also available in the New Year, a new staff recruitment leaflet and poster. for your workplace.