

The work of our union's President Tracy Clarke and Vice President Keren Bender has been welcomed around the country. And it demonstrates once again how Community is taking the lead among UK unions.

Women at the top



For the first time in our union's history we have a woman President, Tracy Clarke (pictured right) who is employed at Courtaulds UK in Belper, Derbyshire. Not only that, our Vice President is a woman too – Keren Bender (pictured left) who, after over 30 years at the Llanwern plant, now works as a learning development officer at Port Talbot steelworks in South Wales.

The union is encouraging women to take leading positions in their communities. 'So we in Community are leading by example,' Tracy says.

How do the men in our union, who make up nearly 80% of our membership, feel about having women in positions of leadership? 'Well, wherever I've gone whether it's to a steelworks, textile plant, betting shop, shoe factory or wherever we have members, I have received nothing but the warmest of welcomes,' says Tracy.

Tracy, a hosiery worker and formerly a KFAT member, is not only the first woman President of our union but is the first President to serve a full term after the merging of the unions that make up Community.

'It took a while for everything to click into place after the mergers but in the last 18 months everything has gone so well. The fact that we shared the same values and outlook on giving members the very best service possible, has bonded us together.'

With work and her union commitments Tracy's life is full of overflowing but she finds time for other interests such as horse riding.

'I am thoroughly enjoying my presidential year as we move our union firmly into the 21st century. I'm especially reaching out to young people, telling them

that unions are not all about fighting and picketing but can play a vital part in the quality of life of individual workers. I say to young people, 'Look, we're about creating a better future and you are the future!'

Tracy says she couldn't fulfil all her presidential duties without the support of her fellow Executive Council members and her management at work. 'I'm really grateful to Phil Sharrocks and his management team,' she declares. 'Relationships at the factory have been excellent during the last three to four years because the management really listens to the workers. They don't just bring in a load of graduates who have never packed a pair of tights in their lives!'

Our Vice President Keren Bender followed her father's footsteps into the steel industry. He was a crane driver who moved from Ebbw Vale steelworks to Llanwern when that plant opened in Newport. Keren is equally enthusiastic and optimistic about the future growth of Community.

'The radical modernisation of our union has been breathtaking. I am immensely proud of what Community is achieving.'

Keren also has a great deal of support in South Wales for her political aspirations. She was Labour's candidate in Blaenau Gwent for the Assembly in Wales. She works to promote Labour in the area, and is an experienced mentor of women who wish to have a role in public life. 'In the bid to improve all our lives we need to be active in our unions and in party politics. I've seen all the good things that our union has been able to secure over the years and I'll do whatever I can to help give families better lives.'