

Unions working across Europe to help customer service professionals

Meetings were organised across the country during Action Month by the CWU of Ireland - with back up from Organising Support Groups.

In Spain UGT telecoms helped organise in Madrid an open house seminar for call centre workers on October 7 as part of a Call Centre Day.

Health and working conditions were discussed and publicity distributed.

Croatian telecom union HST - hosts to last year's UNI Telecom World Conference - put the spotlight on call centre workers.

So too did Amicus-MSF who took the campaign one step further with a visit to students at Brighton and Sussex Universities.

It wasn't just a meeting of polemics, it was a very practical visit - many students work part time in call centres and financial institutions in the area to pay their way through college.

The global financial giant American Express is a big employer locally.

"Many students work in call centres and find it difficult to juggle work and study - and they sometimes suffer from stress," reports the union.

As well as recruiting new members the union hopes to keep in touch through the student magazine and monthly advice surgeries.

In France thousands of people signed a petition calling for a European charter for call centres - a fast growing industry that touches on the Finance, Telecom, IBITS, Media and Postal sectors of UNI.

Press conferences were held and further campaigns, spreading beyond a month are promised.

■ Also in France Telecom a joint employer-union institute has published a survey of call centre skill-sets and development - "Call centres and new ways of working, the example of France Telecom".

The survey spotlights the need to prepare for continually changing skill requirements as call centres evolve.



Targeting support in Germany

Germany's united services union - ver.di - launched its fidi.direct project to provide call-centre specific care and support for employees and to lobby employers.

It provides a free newsletter (Login), regular information, seminars and talks.

There's also a special homepage on the ver.di website (www.call-centre-in-ver.di.de).

The site has raised a lot of interest and offers something new each week with plans to extend information and solutions on health risks in call centres.

A reorganisation of the website and at least six more seminars are promised for 2004.

Hotline for call centre workers in Australia

More than 100 call centre workers contacted a hotline set up by ACTU, the Australian trade union centre.

Hundreds more were visited as unions put a week-long focus on customer service professionals.

A key task of the hotline was to help workers know their rights and entitlements.

From 'below par' call centres many of the calls were, understandably, anonymous.

They were all put in touch with a union to help them improve their wages and conditions at work.

Bullying and excessive monitoring of workers was a common theme.

"Too many" toilet breaks forced one woman to tell her boss that she was pregnant before she even got a chance to tell her family!

"There was a lot of community support for the operators and the community is aware

that the jobs are difficult and that operators are under a lot of pressure," reports Belinda Tkalcevic.

Unions in Australia have already had an impact with a new contract call centre industry award (with pay rises of up A\$1,000).

They are now pressing the New South Wales and South Australia governments to sign up to a minimum standards code for call centre operators - to bring them into line with other states.

There are more than 350,000 people working in call centres in Australia.

In some centres the key is bringing bottom level pay up to more acceptable standards.

But other issues are also important - including over-monitoring, an issue singled out by affiliate CEPU who met workers over free morning tea with information packs and bulletins.

66 new members - the results of COWUMA's campaign in Malawi



In Madrid an open house seminar for call centre workers on October 7