

NHS ENGLAND – AGENDA FOR CHANGE STAFF

NEW STRIKE BALLOTS OPENING – FAQs

THE FIGHT GOES ON. VOTE YES FOR: FAIR PAY, SAFE STAFFING, AND TO SAVE OUR NHS.

Why am I being balloted? You are being balloted and in some cases re-balloted over the UK government's continued failure to improve its below inflation pay offer for 2022/23. The offer is simply not good enough. RPI inflation is still running high at over 11% and prices are not falling. You need a fair pay rise – not another pay cut. The government has underpaid you for many years. It's time to say ENOUGH. But this dispute isn't just about pay. It's about safe staffing too. Fair pay and safe staffing go hand in hand to save our NHS. When consulted, Unite members voted to reject the pay offer because it was an insult to your professionalism and dedication. Now we need you to vote YES again for fair pay, safe staffing and the very future of the NHS itself.

When will the ballot open? Unite is running disaggregated ballots (reballots) at some targeted NHS trusts and workplaces in England throughout the summer. If your workplace voted to reject the government's pay offer on a high enough turnout, your Unite reps will determine the balloting period locally, taking into account local issues. Your reps will contact you before the ballot opens so please check your emails, texts and post to keep up-to-date.

What am I being asked? Your ballot paper will contain one or both of the following questions: Yes or No, are you prepared to take part in strike action? Yes or No, are you prepared to take action short of strike action? This is what used to be called a "work to rule" and would mean working more strictly to your contract. Unite is strongly recommending you vote YES TO BOTH QUESTIONS.

How do I vote? This is a postal ballot. Ballot papers will be posted to your home. Make sure you put an X in the YES box for strike action and return your ballot paper in the enclosed self-addressed envelope before the ballot closes. Please double check you can vote by ensuring your membership details are up-to-date at: MyUnite.unitetheunion.org.

What happens if I vote YES for strike action? Strike action is a complete withdrawal of labour. First, a majority of Unite members in your workplace must vote in favour of strike action and 50% of those eligible to vote must have returned their ballot paper. Members working in an 'important public service' must also meet the double threshold, see below. Next, your Health National Industrial Sector Committee (NISC) – the Health NISC, will meet to decide the dates of any action, the form of the action, duration and pattern. Your NHS employer will be informed. This is a legal requirement. You will then be advised of your role in supporting the strike. However, this is entirely dependent on achieving the balloting thresholds.

What are ballot thresholds? Under the law, all industrial action ballots must reach a 50% turnout with a majority voting in favour of strike action. For members in 'important public services, such as the ambulance service, 50% must turnout and vote with at least 40% of all those entitled to vote, voting in favour.

What about patient safety? As committed professionals, we know you care deeply about the safety of your patients. So do we. Strike action will inevitably cause disruption, it wouldn't work if it didn't. But be assured, we will work with our sister health unions and employers locally to provide 'life and limb and emergency cover to ensure no patient or emergency procedures are put at risk during the strike.

I don't think I can afford to strike for better pay & condition? Can you afford not too? We understand the financial pressures you face. Strike action is a last resort. Unite always tries to negotiate and bargain for our members before moving to industrial action. When Unite's first ballot opened in November 2022, the UK government insisted it would not negotiate with health unions on pay. The winter of NHS strikes forced ministers to the negotiating table. You helped make this happen. Now is the time to keep the pressure on so that ministers know we're not backing down until we get an improved pay offer. A YES vote will show we are united and strong.

What is the strike fund? UNITE is on your side – We will not let this Conservative government starve our members back to work. We have a healthy strike fund and a pro rata strike payment of £70 a day to help you during the strike. Some conditions apply, more details will be provided closer to the time and members should contact your rep or officer if you have special additional needs.

Who is being balloted/ re-balloted? Unite members working for the NHS in England on Agenda for Change Contracts (AfC) in some targeted NHS trusts, workplaces and professions. The decision whether to ballot (reballot) or not, will be determined locally by your reps and regional officers, taking into account local issues including the likelihood or not of meeting the government's strict balloting thresholds.

Why aren't all NHS members in England being balloted? Unite is balloting (re-balloting) strategically to win. We want to make sure we get as many of our members over the strict balloting thresholds, so that we maximise our impact and win. Our targeted plan was developed and endorsed by the Health NISC, made up of members working in the health service like you. We believe that by targeting our resources in workplaces with strong membership density and in areas where we will have impact, we can deliver. But even if your workplace isn't being balloted now, we're in this together. Working for the same goal – to win the inflation busting pay rise NHS workers deserve. Talk to your Unite rep about how you can get involved to support the campaign.

Can members who are regulated take part in industrial action? Yes you can. The professional Codes or Standards do not prevent members from taking part in legal industrial action. The different registration bodies and regulators, recognise the right to strike. They will produce their own statements regarding Industrial action. Please check their websites. For more information talk to your Unite rep and see our guidance on Industrial Action for The Registrants in the Health sector, or contact one of the Unite in Health Professional team.

Can new joiners vote? Yes, your colleagues can join at any time up to and including the day or (days) of action and lawfully take part in the industrial action. This is a good time to encourage your workmates to join Unite. Get them to join online at www.unitetheunion.org/join or ask your rep for a supply of membership forms.

Are new joiners entitled to strike pay? Yes they can.

Why is it important that I vote? Every vote matters. Your vote is your voice. We must now stand united and build on the momentum we have achieved to stand together to tell the Conservative government that you are united against low pay in the NHS. Also because of the strict threshold rules a failure to vote will be counted as a 'no' vote.

Does it really matter if I don't vote? YES! Unreturned ballot papers are counted as a 'no' vote. We can't let this happen. Please use your vote and encourage your colleagues to vote too.

Is my vote anonymous? Yes. No-one knows how you voted but you. The ballot is run for Unite by an independent body called Civica Election Services (CES), formerly the Electoral Reform Society.

Postal ballot not arrived? If you have not received a ballot paper five days after the ballot has opened please email: healthsector@unitetheunion.org to request a replacement.

Are your Unite membership details up-to-date? Go to myunite.unitetheunion.org to double check.

How can I find out more? Talk to your Unite rep, and ask them whether there's a WhatsApp's group you can join. Check your email, texts and the post for updates of the ballot.