

Fighting for fair pay for NHS staff

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is UNISON doing about pay in the NHS?

Pay in the NHS has fallen well behind inflation and most staff have not seen an above inflation pay rise since 2009. The recent announcement that 60% of NHS staff will not get any pay rise and that only those on the top of their bands will get a 1% unconsolidated pay award has angered hard working NHS staff. At our annual health conference in April, UNISON members took the decision ballot our NHS members for industrial action. Since then you and other members have participated in a day of protest, lobbied MPs, filled in surveys and taken part in other campaigning activities.

2 What are we asking for?

If we get a YES vote we will be fighting:

- for immediate payment of the PRB-recommended 1% on all hourly rates and the Living Wage of £7.65 per hour minimum
- to break the planned pay freeze for 2015-16
- for a commitment to cost of living pay increases for the future

All of the NHS trade unions have agreed to campaign together to challenge pay and achieve the following:

Full implementation of the NHS pay review body's recommendations this year (i.e. a 1% rise consolidated into the hourly rates of pay of everyone) and to pay the Living Wage

An end to the pay freeze by committing to a cost of living increase for 2015

Deliver fair pay in future that:

- *provides consistency across the UK*
- *at least keeps pace with the cost of living*
- *guarantees the independence of the NHS pay review body*
- *begins to restore the value of NHS pay lost in the last five years*
- *and enables NHS staff to benefit from the return of economic growth and their efforts in delivering better productivity in health services*

These actions will require current and future governments to provide a sustainable funding settlement for the NHS that invests in quality services and a quality workforce for the benefit of patients.

In addition, the health unions are ready to discuss further measures to improve productivity in the NHS and keep the pay system up to date.



3. Haven't we already had a pay rise this year?

This is not a pay rise! In England, only those at the top of their pay scale got a 1% increase. This 1% was also unconsolidated meaning that it is a one-off payment which does not alter the hourly rate, so it will not count towards unsocial hours for evening, weekend or night shifts, nor will it be added to overtime, nor added to any supplements (such as high cost area supplements, local recruitment and retention premia, or on-call arrangements). This sum does not count towards pensionable pay and comes at the same time as increases to pension contributions are further affecting the take-home pay of NHS staff.

4. What will I have to do?

You will be sent a ballot paper with questions asking whether you are prepared to take strike action and/or action short of strike action. We are urging you to vote YES for both strike action and Action Short of Strike, but whatever your views, please use your vote. You need to complete both questions on the ballot paper and return it in the prepaid envelope.

5. When will I be able to vote?

The ballot period will open on 28 August 2014 and close at 10.00 on 18 September 2014. It is important to complete your ballot paper and return it as soon as you get it.

6. What is Industrial action?

Industrial action involves members of a trade union using their collective strength to fight for better pay and conditions at work.

7. What will the action look like?

The action you will be taking will be designed to involve as many members as possible - causing maximum planning difficulties with the minimum impact on patients. A YES vote will involve you taking action during a week in October – this is likely to start with a short stoppage (4hrs) followed by a defined form of Action Short of Strike.

8. So what is the difference between strike action and action short of strike action?

Strike action is where staff stop working for a period of time and completely withdraw their labour. Action Short of Strike (ASOS) can cover a range of activities, from working strictly to contractual hours to naming particular tasks which groups of members will not perform during the action. It is likely that ASOS will be designed around generic action like working to contractual hours or taking proper breaks – something that all members can participate in.

This is what we are planning, but we need a good turnout and a YES vote before we can take any action.

9. Won't strike action damage patient care?

We want to maximise the disruption to services but minimise the impact on patient care. UNISON's priority is to protect services for patients and protect pay, terms and conditions for hardworking NHS staff - this action is all about patient care.

Many NHS staff are demoralised and demotivated. This has a massive impact on the quality of care that patients receive. Recent high profile reports have identified the importance of good staff engagement and morale in delivering high quality patient care.

UNISON's evidence to the Pay Review Body showed that over half of UNISON members surveyed reported an increase in the number of patients they were looking after, with more than 60% reporting that they had taken on additional duties.

10. Do I have to vote?

It is really important that you use your vote, whichever way you chose to vote. We must send a really clear signal to the Government that NHS staff care about pay and that we will stand together to defend fair pay. A low turn out in this ballot might lead to further attacks on terms and conditions.

11. How can I use my vote?

UNISON will send you a paper ballot form to complete which you must return as soon as possible in the prepaid envelope. Under current legislation, this is the only way we can run a ballot for industrial action.

12. Do I need to make sure my details are up to date?

Yes, it is important to make sure we have the most up to date information about you including your job role and home and work addresses. Go to: <http://www.unison.org.uk/my-unison/welcome> to check and update your details

13. What if I don't get my ballot paper?

If you have not received your ballot paper by 3 September you can request one online at unison.org.uk/my-unison/welcome, or by calling UNISONdirect on 0800 0 857 857. Lines open Monday to Friday from 6am until midnight and 9am to 4pm on Saturdays. The ballot line closes at 12 noon on 15 September and this will be the last opportunity to request a ballot paper.

14. I have only just joined UNISON will I get a vote?

Yes, all members of UNISON who join before the ballot closes will be sent a ballot paper.

15. I am not a UNISON member – can I still take part?

Only members of trade unions who have balloted their members can take part in any industrial action. You should join UNISON and ask for a ballot paper so you can take part.

16. Will my employer know how I vote?

No, your employer will not know who has voted but will know the staff groups who will be involved in any action, and the type of action they will be taking.

17. Who is being balloted for industrial action?

All UNISON members working for NHS organisations will be included. We have included some other employers where they meet certain criteria. If you work for a private contractor in the NHS, check with your branch to see if your employer is included.

18. Are NHS staff who are on a professional register (e.g. NMC or HCPC) allowed to take strike action?

The law is clear on this – there is nothing in your professional code which prevents you from taking industrial action. We would not call you to take action which put your registration at risk.

19. How do I complete the ballot paper?

There will be two questions on the ballot paper. The first is whether you are prepared to take strike action; the second is whether you are prepared to take action short of strike action. You need to

place a cross in either the yes or no boxes for **each** question. Please do not mark the ballot paper anywhere else as this could mean will not count.

20. I would like to get more involved, what could I do?

One important role every member can play is to remind their colleagues at work to complete their ballot papers and not to waste their vote.

You can find out more about the ballot and NHS pay on the UNISON website
<http://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/health-care/key-issues/nhs-pay/home/>

Become a pay champion

UNISON would also like branches to nominate a rep or contact as a 'pay champion' to play a role in publicising the ballot and doing their best to make sure members use their votes. For the ballot to have a big impact, we need to have as many members as possible vote, so NHS pay champions have an important part to play.

To nominate your pay champion please complete this form
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5TWGSQ3>

21. Social Media

Please join our social media group. You can help by liking the UNISON Facebook page; following the Twitter account; sending relevant snippets to the Worth it Twitter account and re-tweeting our stuff. Links to both the Twitter and Facebook accounts are @UNISONOurNHS &
www.facebook.com/UNISONOurNHSOurfuture

22. Send us your personal stories

We are keen to have plenty of personal stories from members about the why they are voting yes to take action. Short comments from members can be added directly to the campaign webpage - longer pieces which we can use in publications and more detailed work can be sent to
health@unison.co.uk