


Junior doctors vote unanimously in favour of strike action

23 February 2023  Helen Badger

Junior doctors across England have voted strongly in favour of strike action in relation to the dispute with the government over pay.

Members of both the British Medical Association (“BMA”) and Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (“HCSA”) will take strike action in March. Although members of the BMA previously took action in relation to a dispute over contract changes in 2016, it is the first time members of the HCSA have voted in favour of strike action.

Junior doctors had previously agreed a multi-year pay deal that saw an increase of 2 per cent for 2022/23 but that deal ends in March. In its report published in July 2022, the doctors pay review body recommended a salary increase of 4.5 per cent, over double the 2 per cent figure proposed by the Department of Health and Social Care. The review body commented that the current proposal put forward by the government was “likely not sufficient” to address issues such as recruitment, retention and motivation. Therefore, it is not surprising that 77 per cent of junior doctor members of the BMA turned out to vote, with 98 per cent voting in favour of action. Similarly, the HCSA reported a 75 per cent turn out with 97 per cent voting in favour of action.

The HCSA have confirmed its junior doctors will walk out on 15 March. The BMA have yet to announce dates for its action but have previously indicated that they would be calling for a full walkout of all junior doctors for 72 hours. They have also indicated that this would be their “first round of action” signalling that if no agreement is reached over pay, more action is likely to follow.

This latest round of strike action in the NHS will be unwelcome news for employers who are already grappling with walkouts by nurses, ambulance staff and physiotherapists as well as battling a staffing crisis. Further, the current dispute shows no signs of being resolved. On the contrary, the action by nurses and ambulance staff is intensifying as previous derogations are being reduced meaning more staff are included in the action (although it has just been announced that the RCN has agreed to pause action pending talks with the government).

Employers will therefore need to work increasingly harder to arrange emergency cover to ensure patient safety, which will undoubtedly mean cancelling non-urgent work. This of course compounds the issues of backlogs which many are still working hard to clear post the pandemic. Employers therefore need to take action now to put contingency plans in place and also be prepared that strike action looks like it could be the norm for the immediate future.

If you'd like to discuss how we can help with contingency planning, including sensitively worded communications to staff then please do contact us.

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