



TUC

● **Employment Rights Bill is now an Act**

After 17 months and delays from Tory Lords, the government's employment rights bill, with the biggest package of workers' rights in a generation, passed through Parliament and received the Royal Assent on 18 December.

Trade unions hailed a “generational shift” for workers’ rights after Tory peers conceded at the 11th hour on the legislation, which the government had promised to pass by Christmas. Earlier unions agreed to remove day-one rights to unfair dismissal from the package of reforms, in return for the lifting the compensation cap, to get the bill through parliament in time to start implementing some new rights from April. Currently, awards to former employees who successfully bring a claim are limited to either their annual salary or £118,223, whichever is lower.

The legislation covers flexible working, sick pay from day one, a ban on "exploitative" zero hours contracts with rights to guaranteed hours and reasonable notice of shifts, and an end to fire and rehire practices in most circumstances. It also grants paternity and parental leave from day one, and strengthens workplace trade union rights

Even on measures where compromise had to be made, in particular unfair dismissal, there has been a significant improvement - cutting the period for protection from two years to just six months. This takes effect from 1 January 2027.

However, this is by no means the end of the story. Much will need to be thrashed out in how these rights will be implemented, and more battles will be fought over equal pay, health and safety and more which will be dealt with by government devised codes of practice and secondary legislation.

The **TUC** general secretary, Paul Nowak, welcomed the legislation saying: “Unions and workers have long campaigned for these vital rights. Together, we have broken a decades-long economic status quo defined by insecurity, weak rights and poor pay. Finally, working people will enjoy more security, better pay and dignity at work thanks to this bill.

“It’s now vital that workers start feeling the benefits of this legislation in their lives as soon as possible. That means the legislation must be implemented in full, and at speed – with watertight secondary legislation to ensure there are no loopholes for bad bosses to exploit.”

The legislation applies to England, Scotland and Wales, but not Northern Ireland where employment and trade union laws are set by Stormont. New employment rights legislation is due to come before the Northern Ireland Assembly early in 2026.

More union views at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/deadlock-broken-employment-rights-bill-passes>

<https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2025/12/parliament-passes-the-employment-rights-bill/>

<https://www.usdaw.org.uk/latest-news/employment-rights-bill-passed/>

<https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2025/december/employment-rights-bill-no-more-delays-in-delivering-workers-rights-unite>

Other News

● Action at Airedale Hospital

Airedale NHS microbiology workers responsible for carrying out diagnostic tests took strike action from 18 – 25 December over being underpaid and over worked.

Unite members say that Airedale NHS Foundation Trust has failed to address the fact that the workers are on the pay band below what they should be for the work they carry out. The trust has also agreed to undertake extra work for another trust that the microbiology workers will have to carry out, increasing the number of call outs during nights and weekends. As a result, out of hours rotas have been changed without consultation or regard to current workloads.

Commenting in the run up to the action, **Unite** general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Airedale trust’s leadership are treating these workers appallingly. Not only are they being underpaid but now the trust expects them to take on out of hours work on top of their already considerable workloads. These workers are absolutely right to strike and they have **Unite’s** complete support.”

Industrial action will intensify if the dispute is not settled.

● **Strike ballot launched at Northumbria University in pay & pensions row**

Staff at Northumbria University will be balloted for strike action in their fight against plans to pressure them to leave the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS).

The industrial action ballot opened on Monday 15 December and will close on Friday 23 January, with potential action in the New Year, when teaching takes place. It comes after **UCU** members overwhelmingly passed a motion of no confidence in the university executive team, including the vice-chancellor, in a packed branch meeting in November.

Management wants to move staff onto the Universities Superannuation Scheme, which could leave them significantly worse off. Those who refuse will have their pay frozen, effectively punishing employees who wish to remain in TPS and locking them into years of real terms pay cuts.

Northumbria's management is attempting to save £11 million through these cuts to pay and pensions. **UCU** said the proposals amount to an attack on long-term retirement security.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady said: “Threatening strike action is a last resort for our members but telling staff they must choose between their pay or pension is not a tenable option. Our members are rightly furious about this attack on their retirement security and should not be forced to pay the price for decisions made by a university management that is rushing through a process which has no place in higher education. It needs to rethink these plans and work with us, or face both serious reputational damage and disruption on campus.”

More at: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/14281/Strike-ballot-launched-at-Northumbria-University-in-pay-and-pensions-row>

● **News from Other Colleges**

Meanwhile Staff at Runshaw College in Leyland have overwhelmingly voted to accept a pay offer of 7% and pull out of the England wide college strike action.

The win, coming after York College **UCU** settled its dispute in December, means the union has now settled at 20 colleges since launching its ballot in October.

The deals leave 31 colleges left in the dispute over fair pay and conditions, with strike action set to go ahead on Wednesday 14, Thursday 15 and Friday 16 January 2026.

UCU is urging management at the 31 colleges to come back to the table and make fair pay offers that help close the pay gap between school and college teachers so it can call off the strike action.

UCU - alongside sister unions **NEU**, **GMB**, **UNISON** and **Unite** - is calling for a [New Deal for FE](#), including pay parity with schoolteachers, national workload agreements and a binding national bargaining framework.

● **Performers demand protection from AI**

Actors working in film and TV have voted 'Yes' by a landslide 99.6% to refuse to be digitally scanned on set in order to secure artificial intelligence (AI) protections in an indicative ballot held by **Equity**.

The result was announced by General Secretary Paul W Fleming on 18 December, at **Equity's** headquarters in London's Covent Garden.

The ballot turnout was 75.1%, with eligible voters made up of **Equity's** membership working in film and TV – 7,732 actors, stunt performers, and dancers who have worked on a Pact-Equity agreement since they were last negotiated in 2021. It is the first time this whole section of the union's membership has ever been balloted.

As it is an indicative ballot, it is not binding and does not legally cover **Equity** members to take industrial action – for that, a statutory ballot is needed. Instead, this decisive result proves the strength of feeling among performers who want to protect their AI rights, and have indicated they are prepared to refuse to be digitally scanned on set to do so – a form of action short of strike.

Equity is writing to Pact (the UK screen sector trade body for independent production and distribution companies) with the results and demand they come back to the negotiating table with a better deal on AI. If Pact refuses to enshrine the AI protections the union is seeking in the agreements, **Equity** will hold a statutory ballot for industrial action.

More at: <https://www.equity.org.uk/news/2025/performers-prepared-to-take-industrial-action-over-ai-in-landslide-99-vote>

● **A first - UNISON elects ‘a lay member’ as general secretary**

Andrea Egan (pictured below) from Bolton been elected as the next general secretary of **UNISON**, the UK’s largest union. She replaces Christina McAnea who has served as general secretary since 2021. She will begin her five-year term on 22 January 2026.

The results declared on 17 December was: Andrea Egan 58,579 (59.82%) Christina McAnea 39,353 (40.18%). The turn-out was 7 percent, 3 per cent less than at the 2020 election.



Andrea, the first lay member to be elected to win the post, said: “I’m honoured to take up the post of general secretary at **UNISON**, and I’m grateful for the trust placed in me.

I will work tirelessly to transform this union, but I cannot do it alone. Because this isn’t about me as an individual. It’s about ordinary **UNISON** members taking charge collectively.

“We are going to need everyone – members, branch reps, grassroots activists, and our staff – pulling together. Then we can transform our union, and with it the lives of public sector workers across this country.”

She began her working life as a residential care worker, supporting vulnerable children. She went on to be a social worker, becoming fully qualified 15 years ago.

Andrea first became a union steward 30 years ago and went on to be elected as assistant secretary, joint secretary and now the secretary of **UNISON** Bolton local government branch.

First elected to the union’s national executive council in 2017, she became president of **UNISON** in 2022. During that time Andrea supported the implementation of **UNISON**’s first race discrimination panel, gave support to the launch of trans-ally training and championed the union’s disabled workers’ passport.

More at: <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/2025/12/andrea-egan-to-be-next-unison-general-secretary-election/>

● Resident doctors strike action spreads – to Scotland



The scene outside Leeds General Infirmary 17 December

photo by Leeds KONP

Resident doctors in England took 5 days of strike action from Wednesday 17 December after they rejected the government's latest offer to resolve the long-running dispute over pay and jobs. They returned to work at 7.00am on Monday 22 December.

Meanwhile, Scotland's resident doctors are to go on strike for the first time in a dispute over pay. Their union **BMA Scotland** had accused the government of reneging on a commitment to restore pay to 2008 levels.

With 92% voting in favour, strike dates have been set for 07:00 on Tuesday 13 January to 07:00 on Saturday 17 January 2026. The union has called on the Scottish government to return to the negotiating table and present an offer the **BMA** believed could be put to members, otherwise the strike will go ahead.

Updates at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/resident-doctors-plan-strike-unless-pay-offer-improved>

● Strikes at Shelter off as workers accept new working hours deal

As previously reported in the November edition of TU News, Christmas strikes by workers at housing charity Shelter have now been averted after **Unite** members voted to accept an offer from the charity.

Around 550 staff members had voted for [strike action](#) in a dispute over pay and conditions.

Now industrial action will no longer go ahead after workers overwhelmingly accepted a new offer of a shortening of the working week from 37 hours to 35 hours, which equates to over a five per cent pay rise. They will also receive two extra days of annual leave, with both improvements effective from 1 January 2026.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "This result shows once again that Unite is delivering for workers up and down the country. Our members should be applauded after they stood together to ensure they received better an improvements in conditions."

● **TikTok faces legal action over moderator cuts**

TikTok is being accused of threatening safety workers with redundancy, days before they were due to vote on forming a union and is now facing legal action by the **CWU**. The workers (known as content moderators) are responsible for content moderation which involves taking down dangerous and illegal content from the platform.

More at: <https://workplacejournal.co.uk/2025/12/tiktok-faces-legal-action-over-unlawful-union-busting-in-london/> and <https://news.sky.com/story/tiktok-faces-legal-action-over-moderator-cuts-13485485>

● This edition of TU News was prepared on 21 December 2025.