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A recent TUC report shows women effectively work for 47 days of the year for free compared to men but the unions are fighting back

According to a report by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) women have effectively been working for free for the first month and a half of the year compared to men. And to make matters worse moves to close the gender pay gap won't be successful until 2056 if progress remains at its current rate.

The disparity between average wages for men and women is 12.8%, or £2,548 per year, according to TUC analysis of official pay data. It is widest in the finance and insurance industry, at 27.2%. In the leisure service sector it was only 1.5%.

The gender pay gap measures the difference in salaries paid to men and women in the same industries. Employers with more than 250 UK staff must report pay data.

Even in industries where woman make up a majority of the workforce, such as education and health and social care, the gender pay gaps are 17% and 12.8%, respectively.

TUC general secretary Paul Nowak said: "Women have effectively been working for free for the first month and a half of the year (47 days) compared to men.

"With the cost of living still biting hard, women simply can't afford to keep losing out. They deserve their fair share".

He sees the recent Employment Act as an "an important step forward for pay parity" but said the government needed increase access to paid parental leave so "mums and dads can better share care".

Meanwhile in December the Guardian reported that the **GMB** announced that 30,000 equal pay claims had been settled with six local councils for average of £30,000. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/dec/27/equal-pay-settlements-for-female-council-workers-pass-1bn. The report also highlighted the **GMB** and **UNISON'S** "historic" victory for thousands of employees of Birmingham city council and Birmingham Children's Trust after a four-year campaign which led to a settlement agreement worth about £250m.

The **GMB** said that a further 40,000 equal pay claims were still outstanding across 26 local authorities, including the six where deals have already been done, which will probably run into hundreds of millions of pounds.

The other local councils with pending claims were Dundee, Fife, Renfrewshire, West Dunbartonshire, Argyll & Bute, Brighton, Southampton, Bristol, Swansea, Cardiff, Knowsley, Sunderland, Coventry, Cumberland, and Westmorland.

NHS Unions express disappointment – will they take action?

On 12 February the government announced that NHS staff in England and Wales are to get a 3.3% pay rise from April 2026. The award covers around 1.5 million health staff, from nurses and midwives to physios and porters – the entire workforce apart from doctors, dentists and senior managers.

The BBC news web site https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c6274rjr311o reported that the increase was higher than the Department of Health and Social Care had initially put forward to the independent pay review body. They subsequently said it had accepted the recommendation of 3.3%, as did the Welsh government. The award also applies to Northern Ireland.

However, a number of health unions said they were disappointed with the award.

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) general secretary Prof Nicola Ranger, said it was below the current level of consumer price index (CPI) inflation of 3.4%, which measures how prices have risen in the past year. (The latest RPI measures 5.3%.)

"A pay award below the current level of inflation is an insult. Unless inflation falls, the government is forcing a very real pay cut on its NHS workers. This knife-edge game-playing is no way to treat people who prop up a system in crisis."

She said she would wait to see what the rest of the public sector and doctors received before deciding what to do.

Last year the **RCN** reacted angrily after resident doctors in England got 5.4% compared to nurses 3.6%, calling it grotesque.

"Nursing staff will not tolerate the disrespect of other years, when we were bottom of the pile," added Ranger.

Helga Pile, head of health at **UNISON**, said: "Hard-pressed NHS staff will be downright angry at another below-inflation pay award. Yet again, they're expected to keep delivering more while effectively being given less, as pay slides behind living costs."

Rachel Harrison, **GMB** National Secretary said: "**GMB** welcomes the efforts made to ensure NHS workers will receive their pay increase when it is due, in April.

"The first time this will have happened in years. But this award is just not enough to make up for more than a decade of pay cuts under the Tories. NHS workers deserve more and **GMB** will fight for that at the long overdue agenda for change structural talks we have now been promised. **GMB** reps will now meet to discuss the pay award and determine next steps." https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/nhs-pay-award-timely,-but-just-not-enough

The government has given no indication when the announcement about doctors' pay would be made – it is thought the pay body that makes recommendations about pay for them has yet to deliver its report to ministers.

It is currently in talks with the **British Medical Association (BMA)** about the pay of resident doctors. **BMA** members recently voted in favour of extending the mandate for strike action, giving them another six-month period for walkouts. Meanwhile the **GMB** is set to ballot more than 400 BMA staff after rejecting a pay offer made during talks with Acas. The union said that the revised offer still fell short of their claim and in many cases represented a real term pay cut.

Action in Great Manchester wins pay victory

Strikes by more than 200 Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) workers have ended with a pay victory, **Unite**, said today. The workers, who undertake vital roles including ticketing, passenger assistance and information services for the bus network, voted to accept the deal following intensive negotiations. The deal includes a pay increase of at least 3.2% backdated to April 2025 for all staff, plus a non-consolidated payment of £1,000. Workers on lower bands will see pay rise to at least £15.10 an hour, resulting in wages increases of between 6.4% and 11.1 %. Pay for all staff will increase again from April 2026 by least 3%. The deal also sees increases in standby payments, shift pattern improvements and new recognition and facility time agreements. The workers began striking in October and took 18 days of industrial action in total.

Northumbria University lecturers hold 10 strike days over pension changes

UCU members are striking against plans to force staff out of the Teachers' Pension Scheme by freezing pay for those who refuse; action includes 19 February and five dates from 2–6 March 2026. The action comes after 80% of UCU members who voted backed striking, on a turnout of 60%.

More at: https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/14401/10-strike-days-begin-this-week-at-Northumbria-University-over-pension-robbery

University of Sheffield International College staff strike on five February dates over pay and conditions

UCU members at Study Group's University of Sheffield International College walked out on 16, 18, 20, 24 and 26 February over a zero pay award and workload issues; staff are seeking a 12% rise and improvements to leave and paid marking time.

Study Group is a global provider of private education, typically generating annual revenues numbering hundreds of millions. In their most recent detailed accounts filed in late 2025, Study Group UK Limited reported an operating profit of approximately £25-30 million. Historically, Study Group has maintained high profit margins in the UK, frequently exceeding 15-20%.

Teachers indicative ballot opens

The National Education Union (NEU) launched an indicative ballot on 28 February asking members if they would be prepared to strike over their pay, workloads and school funding.

Daniel Kebede **NEU** General Secretary said: "Schools are running on empty. Expecting schools to fund a 6.5% pay increase over three years from existing budgets is simply not possible….Chronic underfunding from successive governments has led to the severe crisis in the country's schools…."

An **NEU** survey of members in January found nearly 8 in 10 schools did not have enough funding to meet basic provision for pupils.
https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/school-funding-most-schools-cant-afford-basic-provision

The ballot runs until 17 April.

Maintenance workers vote on action

Over a thousand local authority craft workers on the red book agreement will be balloted for strike action after receiving an unsatisfactory pay offer. The dispute comes after the Local Government Association (LGA), which handles local council workers' pay, put forward a full and final below RPI offer of 3.2 % for 2025 without any negotiations.

It also decided to remove apprentices from the national agreement and put a new entrant on the same pay scale as a craft operative, which is a qualified position.

Unite has made several attempts to negotiate with the LGA, which is refusing to honour the disputes process by constantly rejecting offers to come to the table including the union's suggestion that **Unite** sits on a number of competency groups for craft workers; and would bring this knowledge and support to these discussions.

The red book agreement covers local authority craftworkers who are primarily involved in housing maintenance work, such as plumbing and heating engineering.

Workers at the following councils will be balloted initially over the issues: Durham, Leeds, Stoke, Dudley, Southwark, Newham and Bristol. Balloting started on 19 February and closes on 26 March. More councils could follow.

The LGA is also seeking to impose National Joint Council job evaluation, which **Unite** believes could be used unfairly, will result in cuts in pay and dilute the level of service delivered to the public.

NHS workers conclude three days of strike action - but more could follow

Airedale NHS microbiology workers responsible for carrying out diagnostic tests at the West Yorkshire hospital took three days of strike action from 9 – 11 February in a dispute about pay and additional work.

The **Unite** members who carry out the diagnostic tests say that Airedale NHS Foundation Trust has failed to address the fact that they are on the pay band below what they should be for the work they carry out.

Unite says that the situation has been further aggravated by the Trust agreeing that the microbiology workers should undertake extra work for another Trust, 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.

For the Trust's management, Mark Harrison director for integrated pathology solutions said: "Our commitment is to resolve this dispute remains and we will continue to work in partnership with **Unite** to do so."

Cumbrian packaging workers balloted for strike action

Workers at a Cumbria packaging firm will vote on strike action after rejecting an 'insulting' pay offer.

More than 100 workers at Futamura, in Wigton, turned down the company's 1.2% pay offer by a majority of 94%. **GMB** is seeking a 3.8% pay increase, in line with inflation, to ensure members do not suffer yet another real-terms pay cut.

The union has engaged with conciliatory service ACAS to help bring the company back to the table.

Michael Hall, **GMB** Regional Organiser, said:

"This 1.2 % offer is nothing short of an insult. **GMB** members have spoken loudly and clearly: enough is enough. Futamura workers deserve a fair pay rise that simply keeps up with the cost of living. The company should be listening — not digging in. **GMB** has been patient and our members have been patient. But Futamura has refused to make a fair and reasonable pay offer."

Leeds Council passenger transport (SEND) workers resume rolling strikes over safety

Around 80 **Unite** members providing Leeds City Council passenger transport for children with special educational needs and disabled/vulnerable adults took strike action on multiple February dates over safety concerns, including lack of equipment and risk assessments. Strikes were paused after an offer, but resumed from 4 February.

Birmingham bin workers vote to extend strikes into September

Bin strikes across Birmingham are set to continue for at least seven more months after workers voted to extend industrial action into September. They are striking because Birmingham City Council has fired and rehired both loaders (former Waste Recycling and Collection Officers)) and drivers onto contracts that reduce pay by up to £8,000.

Job & Talent agency refuse workers have also voted to continue striking amid claims of "bullying, harassment and the threat of blacklisting" at the council's refuse department, the union added. Both sets of workers have voted to extend their industrial action mandate.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "Our members are more determined than ever to achieve a fair settlement, and they have **Unite**'s unwavering support. The council needs to get back around the table now because strikes will not end until we have a fair deal for Birmingham's bin workers."

There have been no negotiations over ending the dispute since May last year, after the council reengaged on a "ballpark deal" agreed with council chief executive Joanne Roney.

Unite remains fully open to return to negotiations to resolve the dispute, however the council refuses to even meet. Instead, the council took the decision to brutally fire and rehire the workers to force them onto lower pay rates.

More at:
https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2026/february/birmingham-bin-workers-vote-to-extend-strikes-past-may-elections-and-into-september

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