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Please join the new Branch Facebook Group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1077256209678817>



More information and news

can be obtained from these websites.

UCU National Website:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk>

AgeUK: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

68 is too late: www.68istoolate.org.uk

National Pensioners Convention (NPC):

<http://npcuk.org>

Follow your branch:

Website: <http://www.ucu-em-rmb.org.uk>

Twitter: @ucu-em-rmb

Please join the new Facebook Group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1077256209678817>

Branch Meeting

Tuesday 21st February 2022, 10.30am

The Dickens Room
The Mechanics Institute
3 North Sherwood Street
Nottingham, NG1 4EZ

At 11.30:
Mike Scott

Keep our NHS Public



1. UCU Rising

UCU Rising: Strike Action Resumes

The HE disputes on pay, working conditions and pensions continues.

It was announced on 3rd February that UCU members in higher education have voted to overwhelmingly reject UCEA's latest 5% pay offer. The offer made by UCEA was 5%, equating to another significant real-terms pay cut. Over a decade of low pay awards from employers has caused staff pay to fall 25% behind inflation. Over 30,000 members voted in an electronic ballot held over four days with 80.4% supporting the union's position of rejecting the employers' offer. More details of the offer can be found at www.ucu.org.uk/article/12775/

With no acceptable offer on the table, at the time of writing, members will now continue strike action from Thursday 9th February. The plan of action determined by HEC, following its meeting on 12th January, involves 18 days of strike action, which commenced on 1st February.



The full dates of strike action are:

- Week 1 - Wednesday 1st February
- Week 2 - Thursday 9th and Friday 10th February
- Week 3 - Tuesday 14th, Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th February
- Week 4 - Tuesday 21st, Wednesday 22nd and Thursday 23rd February
- Week 5 - Monday 27th and Tuesday 28th February and Wednesday 1st and Thursday 2nd March
- [No action on week commencing Monday 6 March]
- Week 6 - Thursday 16th and Friday 17th March

- Week 7 - Monday 20th, Tuesday 21st and Wednesday 22nd March

All the HE institutions in our region are participating in the action, with the exception of Nottingham Trent University.

The East Midlands Retired Members Branch will be visiting one or more picket lines during February and March. We will no doubt be supporting the small Open University branch in Nottingham. We will circulate details about when and where we will be joining out working colleagues.

Other actions that retired members can take include:

- looking online for a full list of the institutions involved: www.ucu.org.uk/article/12474/
- finding and joining your nearest picket line via the picket line map at www.ucu.org.uk/article/12625/ but note that not all branches will be mounting full pickets on all days, so check before you travel too far
- using social media to support national, regional and local actions, starting with our own Twitter and Facebook accounts, listed at the end of this newsletter
- checking out the action from Wednesday 1st February, including the massive joint unions (NEU, UCU, PCS and many others) rally in London and the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland rally in Edinburgh, as well as images and videos from the many picket lines. See www.ucu.org.uk/article/12634/
- reading the updated main FAQ and various sub-FAQs from www.ucu.org.uk/article/12469/
- contributing to the Fighting Fund: see www.ucu.org.uk/fightingfund

Please note that action short of a strike (ASOS) began on Wednesday 23rd November 2022 and continues to be LIVE; this includes:

- working to contract
- not covering for absent colleagues
- removing uploaded materials related to, and/or not sharing materials related to, lectures or classes that will be or have been cancelled as a result of strike action
- not rescheduling lectures or classes cancelled due to strike action
- not undertaking any voluntary activities.

The union also announced a re-ballot of members in both the pay and working conditions dispute and the USS pensions dispute to begin in the week commencing 20th February. The full re-ballot timetable and practicalities will be confirmed very soon.

Rob Kirkwood

2. Vocational Education and Training

Sir Keir Starmer's revolution in vocational education and training.

Starmer's speech to the CBI on 22 November 2022 was widely reported as the Labour leader telling businesses that the days of "cheap labour"¹ would be over, should Labour come to power at the next general election. Some prominence was also given to his warning that "...our common goal [i.e., Labour's and the CBI's] must be to help the British economy off its immigration dependency..." He assured the CBI, however, that a future Labour government would not only be "pro-business", but "proud of being pro-business" and that shutting down immigration altogether would be "anti-growth and anti-business". He would therefore keep a points-based immigration system. His government would be fiscally conservative and reduce debt, and it would care "...as much about raising productivity everywhere **as we have done in the past about redistribution.**" (emphasis added) The point is sufficiently vague to suggest simultaneously that redistribution is a thing of the past and that raising productivity and redistribution will go hand in hand. Raising productivity, Starmer suggests, will require getting older people off NHS waiting lists and back into work and to support those with mental health issues as they are "a drag on the economy". He also wants to create a "modern childcare system" but does not elaborate on this. In order to raise productivity and wage-levels, more money ought to be invested "in workers who are already here." The Labour leader therefore claims that it is necessary to transform the way "how our country **trains** people." (emphasis added) This will be achieved through "short courses". There will be a training levy, unspecified and unexplained, but, Starmer avers, the CBI "need more control over what training your levy can buy..." Even the adult skills budget will be devolved to them.

¹ All quotations from the speech are taken from the version available at: <https://labour.org.uk/press/keir-starmer-speech-to-the-confederation-of-british-industry-conference-2022/> unless a different reference is given.

What Starmer therefore proposes is, in short, getting what Patel kept calling economically inactive groups back into the labour market (the sick, older workers, parents with small children), an employer-led immigration system² and an employer-led vocational training (hereafter: VET) system. It is the latter which will be analysed here with a view to establishing as to whether his ideas actually amount to a transformation and as to whether they can achieve the ends he claims to pursue.

Some labour migration to the UK certainly obviates the need for training. Doctors, vets, nurses coming from outside the UK are a case in hand.³ Starmer promises to lay on the "biggest training programme since the creation of the NHS," but if he wants to be fiscally conservative, it is not clear how this would be funded. The shortages in the NHS are also only in part due to insufficient training: terms and conditions, and retention of staff have surfaced as key issues. Even if Labour were serious about making more places for study available, this would still require capacity and infrastructure building first and would therefore take a while before showing results. Training sufficient numbers cannot, therefore, replace the staff lost after Brexit and Covid in the short term and the NHS at least will remain reliant on staff coming from outside the UK for the foreseeable future.

If the NHS, and the care sector, too, is an example of Britain relying on staff trained elsewhere, and therefore in effect importing trained people, the same cannot be said as easily about other sectors of the economy. This raises the question as to whether industry perceives the skills gap quite in the same way as Starmer. One would assume that if the skills gap was so important to them, they would take the initiative and do what companies do in other industrialised nations and train their staff (which also tends to improve retention), but we will return to this momentarily. Starmer does not explain why this skills gap exists and who is responsible for it, but the implied answer is the VET system which is why it needs to be transformed.

² For why what various British governments keep calling a points-based immigration system is, in effect, an employer-led system, see Sumption, M. and Walsh, P.M. (2022) 'Why Keir Starmer is embracing a points-based immigration system', at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/podcasts/podcast-borders-belonging/brexit-uk-australia-points-immigration-keir-starmer/>

³ Kirby, T.: *Our NHS: A Hidden History* (UK, 2021), first broadcast on BBC 1 on 15 July 2021

Starmer seems to suggest that more, and more relevant, training, delivered through short courses, leads to greater skill, which leads to higher productivity and higher wages through career progression. The people best placed to identify training needs are “businesses”, i.e., the owners, CEOs, HR Directors, one assumes, and they, therefore, should be in charge of VET. There will be a levy, it would appear, but some unspecified “you” (addressed to the CBI conference) will decide how to spend the money and on what. The one point we can make about the whole line of reasoning is that it appeals to common sense notions of VET in this country, but that it is unsupported by research and that it shows little understanding of how VET developed (or not) since the Fisher Act of 1918. For the purposes of this discussion, however, the starting point for a quick sketch will be the Industrial Training Act 1964. The stated aims of this Act sound reasonably similar to what Starmer claims a government led by him would achieve:

- Enable discussion on the scale of training to be better related to economic needs and technological developments.
- Improve the overall quality of industrial training and establish minimum standards.
- Spread the cost more fairly.⁴

Similar to what Starmer suggests for his transformation, the Industrial Training Boards created by the Act had representatives from employers and unions (but not the State) and were financed by a levy. Pemberton argues, however, that the ITBs ultimately failed because the State did not get involved and neither the employers nor the crafts unions showed much interest in them. Dintenfass, writing nearly a decade earlier than Pemberton and addressing the issue of Britain’s industrial decline, offers a possible reason for this lack of interest.⁵ Exploring various reasons offered for why Britain fell behind its competitor nations, he examines in Chapter 3 the issue of training and skills. He arrives at the conclusion that: The persistent insufficiency of places in Britain’s secondary schools, colleges, and universities and the poverty of resources devoted to subjects of industrial relevance have meant that the British work-force, **from the top to the bottom**, has been less well trained than [sic] the work-forces of other industrial nations.” (37, emphasis added). It is important to emphasise the point that the lack of training does not just apply to operatives at the bottom or managers in the middle, but also to the

very people Starmer thinks want their workforces to be trained and know how to do this. Dintenfass’ volume is, of course, dated, but the discussions regarding VET in England and Wales tend to be very repetitive and cyclical. If Dintenfass is right, however, then handing responsibility for VET to industry will not lead to the outcome Starmer envisages.

Starmer’s approach is not, however, as novel as he seems to be implying. It shows clear echoes of the Industrial Training Act 1964. It is also reminiscent of some aspects of New Labour policy. Alison Wolf was commissioned by the Coalition Government to review vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds and she reported in 2011. By definition, therefore, she examined vocational education under Blair and Brown. Keep, reviewing the report,⁶ starts with the observation that asking an educational researcher to undertake this task, made a welcome change from the New Labour years when such inquiries were led by employers “...with the explicit assumption that they would bring unique forms of private-sector expertise and wisdom not available to those inside education or its related research community.”⁷

He also argued in effect that much of the New Labour activity regarding VET was actually an ideological displacement, which represented structural issues as amenable to individual action:

...if many of the real reasons why vocational study does not lead to the expected outcomes are located within the labour market and its wage and progression structures, then on its own another round of ‘reforms’ within the education system may not have much impact on the real barriers to progress. (318)

He goes on to state what should be obvious, i.e., that “...developing good quality vocational education, of itself, will not magic into existence significantly more good quality jobs.” (319) Starmer, offering himself for ‘partnership’ with employers, seems, however, strangely reluctant to address labour market issues beyond implying that keeping foreigners out will increase wages and suggesting that getting older and ill people into the labour market will increase productivity through short training courses. There is also no acknowledgement that the labour market and the conditions under which people labour may have something to with illness, both mental and physical.

⁴ Pemberton, H. (2001) ‘The 1964 Industrial Training Act: a failed revolution’, paper presented at the Economic History Society conference, Bristol

⁵ Dintenfass, M. (1992) *The Decline of Industrial Britain: 1870-1980*, London: Routledge

⁶ Ewart Keep (2012) ‘Where next for vocational education?’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 33:2, 315-322

⁷ Keep, 2012, 315

An earlier paper by Gleeson and Keep⁸ examined the unspoken assumptions underlying New Labour's policy-making regarding VET. They argued that

... [since Callaghan's 'Great Debate' speech in 1976] ministers have stressed the need for education to deliver what they assume labour markets want, and employers have gradually been accorded a greater and more privileged say in a range of educational policy making. (44)

They also question the assumption, made by Starmer, too, that skills are important for the success of employers as many businesses make money from the low-skill, low-wage economy. The deficit view of education entrenched since 1976 finds no equivalent in a deficit view of employers who constantly complain about the lack of suitably qualified workforce but don't see a need to train that workforce themselves.

Gleeson and Keep state that "...it is noteworthy that, to date, there is not a single target that focuses explicitly on levels of employer commitment, spending, investment activity, or the VET outcomes generated therefrom." (48) They conclude that "[e]ven when given the chance for direct control of curriculum and/or assessment system ... many employers have simply ignored what was offered and then criticised the result." (57) If their analysis is correct, Starmer's transformation of VET by handing it to employers will exacerbate the problem, not ameliorate it. Employers, it would appear, just like blaming the state education system for their own continued failures.

This leads to a last, but much broader point: Starmer refers to short courses and training (rather than education). As VET in this country is still predominantly an under-resourced route for the education of other people's children, those not considered 'academic', the view of the purpose of VET tends to be very narrow. Keep argues that comparable countries implicitly favour Dewey's conception of vocational learning (320), a view shared by Brockmann *et al.*⁹ who compared English, German, and Dutch VET systems.

⁸ Gleeson, D. and Keep, E. (2004) 'Voice without accountability: the changing relationship between employers, the State and education in England', *Oxford Review of Education*, 30:1, 37 – 61.

⁹ Brockmann, M., Clarke, L. and Winch, C. (2008) 'Knowledge, skills, competence: European divergences in vocational education and training (VET)—the English, German and Dutch cases.', *Oxford Review of Education*, 34: 5, 547–567

England, they claim, has "...a strongly demanded system [which] ensures the production of narrow sets of 'skills' and minimal underpinning knowledge suited to a predominantly low-skilled labour market." (550) Maybe that is the real, but unacknowledged, reason for the productivity gap. A real transformation of the VET system would require at least a double cultural revolution, very different from what Starmer proposes. First of all, VET would have to stop being seen as a second-best route of education, but that would require vocational education instead of training and proper paths of progression, i.e., changes in the labour market and business practices. As a society, we would also have to acknowledge that the reason as to why 'academic' knowledge is considered superior to other forms of knowledge, is because of how class reproduces itself in this country. Second, politicians would have to acknowledge that employers do not possess some arcane, superior knowledge regarding the needs of the economy. There may be a skills gap at the bottom, but the experience of the last four decades suggests that maybe the bigger skills gap holding back Britain is at the top.

Harry Ziegler

3. The curious tale of the VET and the dog's breakfast

The ideological straightjacket that is hampering meaningful investment in vocational education and training (VET) has been critically analysed in Harry Zeigler's contribution. I aim here to examine the particular impact on apprenticeships in recent years.

As Harry points out, the neo-liberal approach adopted by recent governments lessens state planning and intervention whilst placing the onus on employers, with their apparent talent for devising schemes that have real educational and vocational value. With just a little bit of regulatory oversight, and with funding generated by a training levy on those self-same employers, we were promised an organic flowering of vocational excellence. Out with those trendy educationalists, and in with those on the front line of economic development, namely employers in the 'real world' who understand what it takes to develop an effective workforce. All that is needed is a bit of a nudge. The key thing for the DfE was that control would be back into the hands of employers". (see

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1744749/employers-not-using-apprenticeship-levy-as-intended-ofsted>

The Conservative Party considered that it had provided that nudge with the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017. A slightly surprising tax on employers, and perhaps a welcome one from our perspective. But, of course, it is not the typical way of a Tory government to ask employers to fork out 0.5% of their hard earned profits without giving them something back - and what they gave them was the benefit of most sensible people's doubts, namely that they would be pretty good at this sort of thing.

Despite the obvious need, the number of apprenticeships starts in fact fell from a pre-levy 560,000 in 2017 to around 320,000 by the end of the decade and a paltry 200,000 in 2021, albeit pandemic affected. Less than half of those are young people. More disturbing has been the misuse (abuse?) of the levy. Indeed Ofsted's damning 2017 report on apprenticeships stated that it continued to be concerned about the 'rebadging of existing training schemes' to utilise levy funds, as well as the broader quality of providers. Many employers have become apprenticeship providers since the introduction of the levy in 2017 in order to administer their own schemes in the context of very loosely defined standards and maximise their returns from the funding. The report also identified 'early warning signs of a dilution of quality', a 'lack of operational capacity' and also 'weaknesses in governance and scrutiny.' In one cited example, the flagship LearnDirect had its funding pulled after Ofsted revealed that a staggering 70% of apprentices on its schemes failed to reach the minimum standards for the programme.

One might normally expect that such a damning review would result in a hefty level of intervention. A similarly negative report on a primary school would surely have had serious repercussions, but five years on it seems if anything has changed it has been for the worse. Indeed, as the BBC reported last November only 53% of apprenticeships are actually being completed. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-63762317> The educational think tank ESDK reported in 2020 that the key reasons for this appalling level of attrition were the lack of a genuine training offer, poor quality and lack of

effective management. Maybe these employers aren't so gifted or as trustworthy as our politicians, sadly including Starmer, would have us believe. Indeed, as ESDK shows, very many employers have been getting away with offering little or no off the job training whilst still claiming the funding from the levy.

<https://www.edsk.org/publications/runaway-training/>

Whilst the government has committed to increased scrutiny of the use of the levy in the light of its shortcomings it has also stated that it will take until 2025 to inspect all schemes. This is therefore an admission that quality control of such relatively laissez-faire approach to spending of public funds has been, and will continue to be, woefully inadequate. Most readers will recognise this as being redolent of the kinds of problems that were inherent in the YOPS and YTS schemes of the 1980s, or, more recently, the largely unregulated waste of billions of pounds of public monies in the pandemic response. YTS and YOPS were a weak and arguably cynical response to mass unemployment and a gift to employers on the hunt for the cheapest possible labour. The minimum apprenticeship pay rate for 2023 is a mere £4.81ph. Under the current framework, apprenticeships do not even need to commit to the achievement of a formal qualification, even at advanced level, thus degrading the educational element and FE involvement.

EDSK's Jan 2020 report identifies three ways in which employers have rushed to take advantage of funds. Firstly, lower-level training, such as supermarket checkout work being 're-badged', or as the National Audit office puts it; 'some employers use apprenticeships as a substitute for training and development that they would offer without public funding.' Secondly, companies have been claiming monies for management and professional level training they would have otherwise been doing. Thirdly, the higher education sector has quickly realised that it can access the levy monies by rebadging existing high level graduate training programmes such as MBAs and Senior Leadership programmes, as well as their professional development training even at Doctorate level. As funding is doled out on a first-come first-served basis larger, more

energetic employers are proving to be far more adept at finding ways to access monies, while only 9% of smaller employers (under 50 employees) were running programmes in 2019 and only 76,000 under 19s started a scheme in that year.

Thus, opportunities for young people have been falling while there has been redirecting of funds towards adult-oriented training that already existed. Indeed The 2020/21 data reveals that over 25s accounted for 50.3% of starts, a steadily increasing trend. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2020-21#dataDownloads>- FE Week reported on Feb 2nd that this trend is continuing into 2022/3 with a 6% fall in apprenticeship starts so far this year, although higher level apprenticeships continue to rise. There is nothing wrong in principle with supporting and encouraging higher level professional development, of course, but the effective result is that monies are being diverted to existing training rather than providing additional labour market opportunities. Meanwhile the accompanying pre-apprenticeship Traineeship scheme aimed at 16-24-year-olds has been underperforming to the extent that the government is now minded to pull it altogether. <https://feweek.co.uk/apprenticeship-starts-fall-6-in-first-quarter-of-2022-23/> Levy funding is insufficient to do the expensive job of properly training young people and those with disabilities, whilst there is too much of it being made available to fund schemes that largely already existed.

In compiling this report, I found detailed data on disabilities hard to find. Official data reveals that 12.3% of apprenticeships were started by learners with declared learning difficulties in 2021/2. The data set does not differentiate achievement rates for this cohort. One report by Cognissant however, revealed in 2017 that the experience of, for neurodivergent apprentices and those with disabilities is usually less than positive resulting in very high drop-out rates. The picture emerging here is one of poorly supported employers with a lack of expertise running unstimulating and poorly organised programmes. <https://cognassist.com/insights/improve-apprenticeship-retention-rates/> Whilst there are undoubtedly many excellent schemes out there it is difficult to imagine these same problems not being significant in the case of other physical and

learning difficulties, especially given the need for significant support and guidance from the key charities and practitioners, as well as the costs of bringing in reasonable adjustments.

The British post-Brexit pandemic-ravaged economy urgently needs a planned, well-funded, long term strategy, with lifelong learning, and therefore FE, at its core. It needs to address the urgent transformation towards zero-carbon. It needs to be fully inclusive. Instead, we have ended up with a dog's breakfast based on the whims of employers and their abilities to extract maximum short-term value for themselves.

Paul Wilkinson

4. Pension age rise to accelerate?

The current retirement age of 66 will increase to 67 in 2028 and the next scheduled rise to 68 is due in 2046. However, ministers allegedly want to bring forward the change to 2035, affecting those who are 54 and under today. The Chancellor is said to be keen to make the announcement as part of his Budget, but the issue is a sensitive political topic for the Conservatives, who traditionally rely on older voters at the polls. As Whitehall officials look for inventive ways to secure public finances, raising the pension age has been dubbed a 'big bazooka' move that will raise tens of billions of pounds. Liz Truss had previously described the option as a "silver bullet".

However, officials are said to be attracted to the idea of linking an older pension age with growing life expectancy. That might not be the best idea since life expectancy has stalled over the past few years and is now in marginal decline.

According to the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures, there are a record 1.2 million job vacancies in the UK, with the number of inactive workers rising by 630,000 since the start of the pandemic. This increase has been driven in no small part by an increasing number of Brits taking early retirement.

Both Messrs Sunak and Hunt have issued inspirational calls for people to return to work and to work until older. Yet government entreaties alone will not suffice to convince these early retirees to return to the labour market. Employers need to change internal attitudes and recognise the benefits that older workers can bring to their organisations. This means offering flexible working, predictable rotas and redeployment to less physically demanding work. At present only 4

in 10 employers are even prepared to nod at these easements.

A new report from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) found that employers are significantly less open to hiring older workers than bringing in younger talent. In fact, the survey of more than 1,000 managers working in UK businesses and public services found that less than half of managers (42 per cent) would be open to hiring people aged between 50 and 64 to a large extent. For those over 65, the number drops even further, with only 3 in 10 expressing openness to hiring those close to state retirement age or older. A staggering 1 in 5 said their organisation was not open to hiring those over 65 at all. Rishi just has to turn up the inspiration about “Britain Needs You” and address it to the right target.

The record job vacancies cannot, however, be filled by rhetoric. Three out of five of those who are classed as economically inactive due to long-term sickness are aged 50 or over, according to a report from Rest Less, a group which offers advice and support to older people. There are 1.6 million over-50s out of work due to long-term sickness, a 20 per cent increase in the three years from July to September 2019 to July to September 2022.

More than one in three economically inactive 50 to 64-year-olds are out of work due to long-term sickness, according to the study, based on official data. Rest Less’s analysis showed that for 50 to 64-year-olds, the main reason was long-term sickness or disability, followed by retirement and then looking after family. Recent Research from the IFS revealed that increasing the SPA from 65 to 66 led to a more than doubling of the rate of poverty among 65-year-olds, from 10 per cent to 24 per cent.

The Government concentrates on Life Expectancy statistics but resolutely ignores Healthy Life Expectancy. But the HLE explains why so many older people are not in a position to return to work. The Cridland Pension Age Review made some telling points. Life expectancy at birth for men in the centre of Blackpool it is just 67.5 years. This, the committee, concludes, means many will die without receiving a state pension. The social gradient in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between rich and poor areas is stark. The Blackpool HLE is reduced to 47.6 years. Further increases in the state pension age could push it to the point where many working people die before qualifying for the pension!

[Julian Atkinson](#)

5. Big Issue Issues

As a fairly frequent buyer of “The Big Issue” newsletter/magazine over many years, I have found it an interesting and informative read highlighting important current issues. Items last month tackled global scientific progress by explaining how nuclear fusion (not fission) may one day lead to “a near limitless supply of clean energy” but it also of course reported on housing problems and solutions from the UK and elsewhere such as in Sweden, living in camper vans in the USA, rescue of abandon animals in Ukraine and being a grandmother Big Issue seller in Taiwan, among other reports.

Editor Paul McNamee asks if the Conservative government are intent on breaking the strikers and makes positive suggestions that might help to make life better for those most in need, such as hugely increasing free school dinner provision and allowing asylum seekers to work rather than locking them away.

I sometimes buy from a young woman seller outside my local co-op or from inside among the newspapers and magazines, and always find the articles thought provoking as well as the sale hopefully helping the seller. Apparently, vendors will soon get to keep more of the proceeds from each sale.

[Rowena Dawson](#)

6. The Social Care Crisis

The crisis in adult social care was recognised in 2009 when the then Heath Secretary Andy Burnham called for a joint approach by the political parties. This understood that the high cost of any solution and the time scale for implementation required a consensus between the political Parties. This became impossible to achieve as a small but influential section of the Conservative Party was theoretically trying to achieve a smaller state and was antagonistic towards public sector spending. The Dilnot Commission reported in 2011 after being commissioned by the Coalition Government in 2010. It proposed a cap of about £35,000 on the amount people should have to pay for long-term social care over their lifetime. This only covered “hotel” costs such as feeding and residential bills. Whatever weaknesses there were in the scheme it was an improvement on what existed. We are now coming up to the 12th anniversary of the report and it has still not been implemented. The costs of improving the care sector are large and are consequently dodged

The coalition government set the cap much higher at £72,000, and it has been repeatedly delayed ever since; in part because local authorities simply could not afford it. In the meantime, the crisis has worsened while the Government has kicked the issue further and further down the road. The latest plan had an implementation date of October 2023. Personal care would not cost more than £86,000 over a lifetime. Anyone with assets between £20,000 and £100,000 would be eligible for some means-tested support but will make contributions from their personal wealth. To no one's surprise that date has been altered to 2025.

Tory ministers play up the Health and Care Act of 2022 as a historic shift in "how health and care services work together". But before there are any big plans about sweeping change, the current crises need to be eased by quickly paying people more, and putting a collapsing system on a stable footing. Contrary to what we hear from both major Party leaders there is no way out of this crisis that does not involve large amounts of money, spent year after year, and a plentiful supply of care workers.

More than one in ten NHS beds in England is occupied by patients who no longer need hospital care. The president of Royal College of Emergency Medicine argued that as many as 13,000 NHS patients – who account for up to 13% of hospital beds – are "medically ready to leave hospital, but have to stay because there is nowhere else for them to go". The current offer of a one-off payment of £200M to provide places for fit people taking up hospital beds has a response from the care sector of "Where are the care workers that would be needed?" Stable and continuing money for the care sector would actually save money for the NHS.

The Homecare Association is challenging government to:

- Provide substantial investment in homecare to enable improved pay and terms and conditions of employment for homecare workers; transformation of commissioning and purchase of homecare by public organisations; and adoption of innovation and technology to improve outcomes.
- Provide immediate emergency grant funding to help cover increased fuel costs incurred by care workers in delivering homecare.
- Develop a credible 10-year workforce strategy for social care, aligned with the NHS People Plan.

There is a crisis in even assessing people for their level of need and, therefore, even being given domiciliary care. The latest figures have emerged from a count carried out by ADASS, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, through its members in local councils across England. On the count date, a total 294,449 people were awaiting the first assessment of their care and support needs, of whom 73,792 had been waiting more than six months. A further 37,447 people who had been assessed as needing a service were waiting for it to begin or for their first direct payment to arrange it for themselves. And 210,106 people receiving a service or payment were overdue for a review under the terms of the Care Act. In all, 542,002 people were awaiting assessment, review or the start of a service or direct payment – an increase of 37% on an equivalent count in November 2021.

The Care and Quality Commission reported that more than two million annual hours of home care could not be delivered because of an insufficient workforce. Both domiciliary and care home staff are leaving their jobs for better paid employment. This is a major reason why it is presently difficult to fill staff vacancies 'Unfair To Care 2022' a new report commissioned by Community Integrated Care, has revealed that social care workers are undervalued by more than £8,000 compared to their exact NHS equivalents. It was also revealed that with current rates it will take over 23 years to arrive at equal pay. Therefore, without urgent action the crisis is set to escalate for more than a generation. The report revealed that social care support workers would need a 41% pay rise – i.e. £8,036 – to have parity with their direct equivalents within the NHS, Band 3 Healthcare Assistants. Currently there is an all-time high of workforce vacancies at 10.7%.

The real plan that is needed is one that guarantees significant and continuing monies that can sustain well paid and highly trained care workers. Local councils need more money so that they can pay for adequate social care. The privatised system has failed together with Governments who procrastinate about addressing the real costs of social care. There might be a solution to the financial difficulties of adult social care. The House of Commons Committee for Public Accounts has recently divulged that in the last financial year the HMRC failed to collect £42bn in taxes. Happily, most of these tax avoidance bolt holes are British possessions.

[Julian Atkinson](#)

7. Chesterfield and District TUC

Report from Chesterfield & District Trades Union Council, February 2023

In our previous report for the November newsletter of 2022, we had referenced the range of strikes the Trades Council has been supporting, and we are pleased to report that 2023 has commenced with even more momentum within the movement. The strikes by paramedics and nurses have seen our Trades Council banner, and those of trade unions and campaigning groups, providing solidarity on the picket lines, and there has been great support from passing vehicles hooting their horns at all of these strikes. As the cost-of-living crisis intensifies, whilst huge levels of profits are made by companies such as Shell, a growing recognition of the widening disparity in our society is more noticeable than ever and provides an opportunity to link up strikes and struggles.

Even though we already have draconian anti-trade union legislation, the Tory government is hell-bent upon trying to restrict union activity even further in the face of this increased strike activity. The fact that an increasing number of unions have organised effectively to get the vote out and to achieve the necessary ballot threshold for strike action has made them rush to introduce new legislation. Therefore, the TUC organised day of action on 1st February against the government's increasing attacks on public sector unions via the introduction of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, was an important stand to take on a day when up to half a million workers were on strike. We organised a local 'Support the Strikes: Defend the Right to Strike' march and rally with approximately 300 people in attendance, which was fantastic for a mid-week event in our small market town, called at relatively short notice. The march around town made it a loud and vibrant demonstration of solidarity for strikers and the right to strike. The 'Pay Justice Now' banner at the front of the march was a clear and visible declaration of our demands and was well-received by people watching. There were a large number of colourful banners and placards in attendance and it was wonderful to have the support of the East Midlands Retired Members branch and banner. There was also strong support from local people who came out to clap, and a good, positive article about the event published in the *Derbyshire Times* in which James Eaden, President of the Trades Council, pointed out the

basic facts that working people are being made to pay for the crisis in our society and deserve a decent pay rise, demands that are straightforward and modest in the face of the cost of living crisis. Large marches and rallies across the country that day provided a clear demonstration of growing working-class activity but which needs to be built upon to resist the attacks on ordinary people in the face of increasing wealth for a tiny minority.

The event marked the first day of strike action in education for the NEU and the start of 18 days of action by UCU in higher education, as well as the start of action by PCS workers in the Department of Work and Pensions. Both NEU and PCS workers had contingents joining the march straight from their picket lines which brought added vibrancy to the event.



After the march returned to New Square, there were a number of speeches including Rob Johnston of TUC Midlands, a co-host of the event, and from a range of unions: the RCN, NEU, PCS and UCU, together with a parent alongside her children speaking in support of the NEU strike. One key message was of solidarity between the different groups of workers on strike and the importance of unions linking together and escalating action to demand pay justice. Jeannie Robinson from Stand Up To Racism pointed out the importance of supporting refugees and linking all strikes and struggles together against attempts to divide us in whichever form they take. Our resident musician, Simon Ball, concluded the rally by leading us through a reworded version of 'A Message to You Rudy', retitled as 'A Message to You Rishi'. We are sure that the late Terry Hall of The Specials would have approved!

This event, like the many held across the country, provides a growing sense of how the working class is coming together against the ravages and impact of over a decade of austerity and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, to demand fair pay and decent working and living conditions. It was a fantastic day but it needs to be the start of increased and sustained action across all sections of the movement. Our next Trades Council meeting on Monday 6th February follows on shortly after this event for us to build further support and solidarity for ongoing and future strikes. In addition, this year's May Day on Monday 1st May will be an even more important focal point for the trade union movement. The annual event will provide an opportunity to bring together a new swathe of younger workers currently galvanised by the current strikes, with experienced activists, where we can share our experiences and help each other in the tasks ahead. The East Midlands Retired Members Banner has been a stalwart on our annual May Day gala and we look forward to seeing it again on 1st May.

James Eaden and Alister Mactaggart

8. UCU Retired Members Branch

See how to join our Branch Facebook group, as detailed in the information section on Page 1.

Our branch has been meeting since 2008 and now has well over 300 members. Our aims are listed below. We meet three times a year, often in places of interest to make part of a day out. Meetings focus on important issues for UCU pensioners and provide a chance to talk with other retired members.

A termly newsletter with articles of interest to retired UCU members is e-mailed to all branch members for whom we have addresses and to UCU branch secretaries in the East Midlands and to other RMBs.

Please let us have your personal e-mail address and let us know if it changes.

RMB Roles and Functions

- To represent the interests of retired members within the union.

- To represent the interests of retired union members within the wider union and pensioner movements.
- To provide a forum within the union for retired members to come together to consider and debate matters of mutual interest.
- To provide a resource of collective memory, advice and expertise in support of the union, in particular to those still in active employment.
- To provide active support, where appropriate, by involving the broadest section of the branch in support of the wider interests of the union and its members, including support for those still in active employment.

**For more information
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