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**Q&A Reach plc industrial action ballot guidance**

**What’s it all about?**

NUJ members across Reach plc are UNITED in taking a stand against a pay offer that would represent a serious cut on an already very poor salary structure. Raging inflation in the last 12 months has put the already modest earnings of Reach journalists into sharp relief – especially given the intensive and sapping work they do.

This is your opportunity to take a stand. You are in good company with 1,000 other NUJ members and well over 130 new joiners to the Union in recent weeks. Let’s not waste this opportunity to show management that in this crisis second best will not do. Resounding support in this ballot for action is essential to send the clearest message to the company that you are willing to take a stand to support what is right and fair. Remember: YOU are the union. When management is in staff meetings with you talking about the NUJ; they’re looking at the NUJ.

**If the ballot is successful, am I expected to take strike action if I am a union member?**

Yes.If you are a member, we would expect you to be bound by the collective and democratic decision of the majority of members. However, it is up to the individual member and a decision for you to determine whether to support colleagues in their chapel in withdrawing their labour.

**Do I have to tell my manager that I will be taking industrial action?**
No, you are not obliged to tell your manager. Managers can ask you but, if asked you can simply say you do not wish to answer that question or that you are still considering your decision. If you're feeling pressured, please tell your local rep.

**What happens in a strike?**

If the strike starts outside your shift time you don't have to come into work until the strike is over. If the strike starts in the middle of your shift, we all walk out together.

**Would there be picket lines?**

Yes. We encourage members to join picket lines with their colleagues at the building housing their normal local management. These will be at entrances to buildings and the aim will be to politely request people do not enter and explain what the dispute is about. Frequently, when people understand that, they'll agree not to cross the picket line. Separate picketing guidance will be circulated if and when necessary.

**I can't go on strike because I'm a manager/there's a no-strike clause in my contract.**

Every person has the right to withdraw their labour. If anyone says your contract prevents you from striking, ask to see a copy to check what it says. If you have any questions, please talk to your local rep.

**Are all union members being called on to participate in the action – including managers? What happens if they don’t?** Yes, all members will be expected to take part in any industrial action that is called by the Union. It is part of a democratic process where all members have been included in the official ballot for action and Union carries out the wishes of members as a collective. We understand that this can feel awkward for some managers who are in the union but there cannot be discrimination used by the company against any manager taking part in action. In these sort of circumstances, members at any level of seniority understand that there is the important principle of solidarity and that any member who works during strike action, undermines the efforts of the rest of their colleagues. All members, whatever their seniority, will be supported by the union to ensure fair treatment by the company.

**Can non-members take part in strike action?**
Yes, but they will not get the protection of being a member of a union - encourage them to come under the union’s banner. If your employer tried to take action against you for taking part in the strike, the union can represent you, but only if you are a member.

**Is it too late to join the union?**

No. If you join you will be protected if you decide to take part in the strike. You can join quickly and easily online at [www.nuj.org.uk/join](http://www.nuj.org.uk/join).

**What about freelances?** We ask you not to accept a new booking for a strike day. Fuller advice for freelances will be circulated separately. *NB If you're on a fixed term contract you're an employee, not a freelance worker*

**Who decides if strike action is to be repeated / if further action is to be held?**

In the event of a clear mandate from the official ballot, a small group, called the NUJ Action Committee, made up of reps and officials, will come forward with what it believes to be options to make any industrial action as effective as possible with least cost to members. Any industrial action plan will be recommended to the Reach NUJ Group Chapel and ultimately authorised by the General Secretary and National Executive Council. If further action is decided on the company must be given 14 days’ notice of the new date(s). Further action can be taken any time in the six months after the result is declared.

**Do I have to co-operate in strike action contingency planning by the company?**

In the run-up to a strike, you must carry out your normal duties, but we'd ask you to question any instruction by managers to take on work that you consider unreasonable and that you wouldn't normally do. If the work is within the scope and remit of your job description, then to refuse to attend a meeting could be deemed as a failure to obey a reasonable request. In any case, you shouldn't be given an unreasonable or unsafe workload or tasks outside your area of competency. If you feel that you are being asked to do work in excess of normal requirements, you should raise this with your line manager in the first instance. If you are being pressured, contact your local rep immediately.

**Can my boss change my working pattern ahead of the scheduled strike days?**

It depends on what your contract says, but normal practices should apply in the run up to any action. You don’t have to accept changes that wouldn’t ordinarily happen.

**Ahead of any industrial action, I am being asked to do extra “timeless” material that can be used to fill a page or website at any time, can I refuse to do this?** You can and should refuse to do any work which you would not normally do but this will depend on your contract. You might usually do some of these types of stories, but if the number is disproportionate to what you would usually do, question this with your boss.

**If I go on strike, can I refuse to make up the backlog in work when I go back to work?** When you return to work you should continue to work as normal. If you are required to make up the backlog by working additional hours then you should ask for overtime / paid time off.

**Will I be required to take strike action if I am working away from home and / or abroad?** Yes, all members employed by an employing company within Reach Plc will be expected to take strike action. For further advice on this issue please contact your local rep.

**What happens if I am travelling back from working away on the first day of action?** You should complete your journey home but do not undertake any work duties for the duration of the strike days.

**Is it advisable to post comments about the industrial action on Facebook and Twitter?** No, it is not advisable as the NUJ has had examples of members facing disciplinary action for doing this. Head office will publicise the strike on your behalf.

**The company is very firm it can’t afford to pay more than 3%, why does the union think it can afford to pay us more?** Reach is a very profitable company that generates a lot of cash. It does have some big legacy costs, but it also has some very large costs expended last year now off the balance sheet in 2022 and has made massive savings from transferring the costs for many of its offices which are now shut on to staff working from home. As a company, it has no debt and has been able to increase payments to shareholders – and the pay packages of senior executives worth millions.

**I am a Local World employee and the enhanced redundancy terms would have made a difference to me. Why did the NUJ reject the last offer from the company?** The NUJ has been consistently pressing for the terms of Local World journalists to be brought up to the standards of those elsewhere in the group. Sick pay, maternity and paternity benefits have been improved to group standards and in 2020, the NUJ won a significant improvement in the redundancy pay for many at Local World and with a commitment by the company to look positively on reaching a ‘decency threshold’. The company clearly feels this is now possible but wants to tie this to keeping a poor pay structure for journalists and a pay cut 3% final pay offer. The Union believes pay for all can be improved as well as having a redundancy scheme in Local World that will better benefit some were they to be dismissed by the company through redundancy.

**We all work from home these days. How would a strike operate to ensure it is effective?** Solidarity is a powerful instinct in workers and union members will not want to undermine their colleagues by working normally on strike days. So, aside from picket lines outside the company’s offices, workers will be instructed to keep their work computers and phone off during strike days. Local chapels will also be encouraged to hold gatherings of members in-person where possible (or online/hybrid if not) and there will be other online rallies to engage members.

**I’ve heard I’ll lose our annual bonus if I go on strike, is that true?** The Reach Profit Share Scheme (PSS) is a discretionary, not contractual, benefit and the company can withdraw it if it chooses to do so. It has done this in previous instances of strike action within the company and may do so in future cases.

**I am worried about redundancies, will me going on strike put me more at risk of redundancy?** Businesses such as Reach make redundancies for business reasons and will do so if management think they have to cut back expenditure because their business model is not bringing in required levels of revenue. Redundancy is a legal process in which a company must act within the law and carry out certain duties. A worker cannot lawfully be picked for redundancy because they have taken strike action and there is specifically a 12-week protection against any dismissal arising from taking industrial action.

**We only have a few members in my local chapel and I worry a strike won’t make a difference, apart from singling us out. What should we do?** You are never alone when in the Union! The NUJ is balloting all 1,000 of its members in Reach as we are fighting for better pay throughout the company. And, if strike action is necessary, all members will be expected to withdraw their labour. This is a powerful lever on the company to come to the table with a better offer as the impact will be felt throughout the business. Where members are in a centre where there are fewer union colleagues, they will be encouraged to link up to other local NUJ chapels and branches.

**How much money would I lose by going on strike?**Any deductions of pay that may arise from industrial action being taken would be entirely a decision of the company. Management do not *have to* deduct any pay – if they do, it is an active choice by them to do so, including the amount deducted.

**Management are saying that the ballot and any industrial action will just make things worse. Shouldn’t we just accept things as they are?** It is inevitable that management make these types of comments when workers stand up for themselves and members should expect nothing less. Members throughout the group were clear in saying that last year’s 1% increase was an insult and the inflationary situation since is so exceptional something must now be done. The company’s 3% offer is way below the 8.5% claim submitted by the union in December but, even more importantly, it represents a massive pay *cut* with the latest Retail Price Index showing prices rising at 11.8%. The ‘jam tomorrow’ argument by management has failed to materialise and just doesn’t wash any more.

**There were talks at ACAS and a new offer tabled by management. Shouldn’t we just keep talking?** We are always open to meaningful negotiations and are still meeting normally with management on a range of issues. However, we need to see proper proposals which address the central issue on the ballot paper. What was put forward by the company, through the conciliation service ACAS, did not address the issue at the heart of the dispute: pay. When the company comes forward with a plan to solve the salary crisis for all, we will waste no time in negotiating the best settlement we can for members.

**Is my continuous service affected (management are saying it is)?** Taking industrial action doesn’t usually mean that your employer will say you’ve broken your period of continuous employment with them. This begins when you start working for your employer and ends on the day your employer uses to calculate your length of service. However, if you take industrial action, your employer will reduce your length of service with them by the number of days you were on strike. This can affect the working out of your pension and things like statutory redundancy pay.

**I’m excluded from the 3% increase because I’m a new starter. Can I take part in action?** Yes, the dispute is about our contention that our members want a substantive pay rise and 3% in this year’s annual negotiations is simply not enough. It is crucially about winning decent pay for all members in Reach. Most salaries do nothing to help members and their families tackle the cost of living crisis.

**Will the company apply any new pay increase to non-NUJ recognised parts of the business?** This is a group-wide pay dispute and the union is fighting for decent pay throughout the business. The non-recognised parts of the company are usually the worst paid. We have many members in these areas and the Union wants to make sure they don’t continue to get left behind by using the power of all our 1,000 members to drive things forward. We believe this will be a strong message to those not already in the Union about how a collective voice can bring results and will encourage them to sign up to our ranks. This will put the Union in a stronger position to then seek recognition from the company in those areas.

**I’m in the Mirror bargaining unit but I’m an NUJ member, can I take action?** Yes! There is no legal bar to NUJ members joining with their Union colleagues from throughout the group in the fight for better pay for all. The BAJ has historical bargaining rights at Mirror Group Newspapers but has caved in to accept the company offer. We believe we can do better for all our members.

**I’m not an NUJ member, can I take part in industrial action?** It is always better to be part of a collective voice and not risk being isolated. Trade unions have been successful for hundreds of years in winning improved terms and conditions, so it makes sense to be part of one fighting for a better deal. Not only will you enjoy all the benefits of membership, but you will have the full protection of the Union should anything go wrong at work. If you are not a member you do not enjoy the protection of the union if action is taken against you by the Company, should you decide to strike, you should always check your contract.

**Any more questions?** Don't be afraid to ask - you won't be the only one thinking it. Contact your rep or call the NUJ on 0207 8433700 or email publishing@nuj.org.uk

Stay updated by visiting <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/take-action-on-pay.html>

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August 5, 2022