

16 November 2023

# **Strike ballot: transport secretary 'throws DVSA under bus'**

More than 1,900 PCS members at Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency across England, Wales and Scotland are being balloted for strike action.

PCS members who carry out driving tests and approve people to be driving instructors are in a dispute with management over plans to reduce the backlog of tests. The so-called 'driver services recovery programme' is being driven by the political ambitions of Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport. The programme poses significant safety risks to test candidates and examiners, as well as the erosion of staff's terms and conditions. It completely fails to address the root causes of the backlog.

The secretary of state announced his intention in October to bring the average wait for a driving test down to seven weeks by 31 March. This requires staff to cover 150,000 tests above capacity. The chief cause of the backlog, apart from Covid, is the booking website which allows third party purchase and re-sale. Tech companies block-buy block test bookings and then cancel blocks of tests when they haven't sold enough slots to meet their profit margins.

Further to this, management has imposed weekend working on new staff ('cluster contracts') which has seriously damaged retention and recruitment. Dangerous lone working practices have also increased owing to pressure from managers and an overtime scheme that rewards working in inadequately staffed test centres. This has already seen a hospitalisation. PCS has consistently raised these issues and more besides with managers and will now ballot members for further strike action. PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka says:

"Staff at DVSA are being pressured to risk their own safety as well that of people taking their driving tests. This is alongside a wholesale attack on their conditions, all in the name of a cheap political gesture. The secretary of state's plans will not even work, let alone tackle the causes of backlogs. Instead, individual lives and the agency as a whole are being made to pay the price for grievous managerial failings.

“Mark Harper needs to look at the actual causes of problems then look himself in the face. Members should vote to strike for the good of their customers as well as themselves. Let politicians face up to their own problems, not throw public services under the bus.”

A postal ballot runs from 16 November until 13 December, members will decide whether they will take further strike action against these imposed changes to terms and conditions, working practices and job roles.

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