

4 April 2024

ONS members vote for strike action over mandatory return to the office

The new policy has been imposed on staff, when previously there had been no requirement to spend a specific amount of time in offices, following the move to home and hybrid-working.

PCS members in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action over their management's insistence that staff be physically present in the workplace for at least 40% of their working time.

The policy was announced in November 2023, before which time there had been no requirement for staff to spend a specific amount of time in offices, following the move to home and hybrid-working at the start of the Covid pandemic. There had been regular reassurances that these arrangements would remain in place and ONS staff followed this model in good faith and built their lives around it.

ONS workers were told that from January 2024 they would need to spend a minimum of 20% of their time in the workplace, increasing to 40% from April, meaning considerable disruption, especially for staff with childcare and other caring arrangements.

PCS and our sister unions, Prospect and FDA, challenged the need for the new policy, arguing that the post-pandemic arrangements at ONS have been an example of best practice in flexible and sustainable ways of working - reflected in the awards and recognition won by the organisation. Management presented no evidence-based business case for their U-turn and have refused the unions' request to consider a more gradual and flexible transition.

73.45% of members voted in favour of strike action, and 83.84% for action short of strike, on a turnout of 50%. PCS has now written to the employer to seek urgent talks to resolve the dispute.

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