

TSSA staff's ballot for strike action – your questions answered.

What were the ballot results?

GMB members in TSSA were balloted for industrial action consisting of a strike and for action short of a strike (ASOS).

Turnout: 85.7% - 30 out of 35

Strike: YES 28 (93.3%), NO 2

ASOS: YES 28 (93.3%) NO 2

Why don't you just sit down and talk to each other? Why let it go this far?

We have asked, repeatedly, for the General Secretary, President and Treasurer to honour our existing Avoidance of Dispute Procedures, by meeting us at ACAS for non-binding arbitration. This would still be our preferred route to solving the real and serious issues at hand. However, the leadership has refused or simply ignored this request.

Our members have taken the very difficult decision to vote for strike action because, with the leadership of TSSA refusing to meet us at ACAS, we have no other option.

The General Secretary has claimed that the GMB union are using an in-house agreement to block staff recruitment. Is this true?

GMB members are not seeking to block the appointment of new staff. All we want is for our existing transparent procedures to be upheld, which is not happening.

We would welcome recruitment to fill the 9 existing Organising vacancies, which could do much to increase our ability to recruit and organise in the workforce.

When the General Secretary emailed GMB Reps on 16 November 2023 to state that the TSSA Executive Committee had approved recruitment of three new vacancies (Campaigns and Media Role, Stakeholder and Engagement Role, Legal and Governance Role) on an interim basis of six months, we asked for job descriptions so that we could consult over the grading and pay for the roles. This is the same as we would do for any new job role and is in line with our established collective bargaining procedures. Further, it ensures that there is no potential for discrimination.

Five months later the General Secretary has yet to provide us with job descriptions. Had she come to us with the job descriptions at any point in the last five months we would have been happy to consult so that the roles could move forward to advertising. What we couldn't do is sign off on roles without any information on their grading, pay or duties, or how these new roles fit in within a Staffing and Operational plan (which we have also never seen).

Existing roles do not need negotiation over grading and pay, so over the last six months the General Secretary could have recruited to fill a number of roles, including 9 Organiser vacancies, and roles in the Membership services, and Comms teams. She has not done so.

She has, however, advertised for a part time Political Officer, and appointed an interim HR Manager role (twice in three months, without following any agreed recruitment procedures). She has also appointed a part-time, temporary Assistant General Secretary, (changed from a full time to part time post without explanation) advertising that post in the week before the Christmas shut down with just a two-day window for staff to apply while half the staff were already on leave. Just this week TSSA has advertised for a new Assistant General Secretary.

It is simply not true to say that the GMB is blocking recruitment. We are just insisting that the creation of entirely new roles follows our existing transparent processes.

How about the General Secretary's claims that the dispute has been fabricated as part of a takeover plot by the GMB, or to distract from other problems within the GMB?

These false allegations seem designed purely to distract from the very real problems at the heart of this dispute.

Our dispute existed last autumn, well before the latest allegations about the GMB came to light. Our General Secretary is well aware of this. We are disappointed that she has chosen to misrepresent our dispute and make false allegations to the Guardian rather than meet us at ACAS.

The accusations of bullying are well-founded, detailed, and were being investigated by the whistleblower service, Howlett Brown, until the EC and GS terminated their service without a replacement lined up. The President has been aware of the bullying allegations against Ms Eslamdoust, for months, but chose not to follow TSSA's procedures for managing bullying grievances.

The GMB withdrew from merger talks with TSSA in April 2023 and has no desire to change the status of our current relationship.

The idea that the GMB is making staff manufacture a dispute in order to force a merger is insulting to our members who are experienced trade unionists and more than able to make their own decisions.

Why haven't you met with the EC to discuss your concerns directly?

We have not received any invitation from the EC. We are open to meeting with them and would welcome the opportunity to explain our issues to them. If the EC requested a meeting with the GMB that has not been conveyed to us by the GS or AGS, this is a worrying reminder of the previous Cortes regime when the EC and staff were kept apart from each other.

Three GMB Reps sit on the Change Management Oversight Group, with two EC members and the GS. As part of this group, we have repeatedly expressed concerns that culture change had stalled in the last 6 months and has now in fact regressed.

In addition, since the publication of the Kennedy and Conley reports in February 2023 (14 months ago), the EC have never met with the whole staff once.

We have, however, met with delegates from the EC, including the President and Treasurer, in meetings trying to resolve this issue on several occasions. In addition, the president has been copied in on all the correspondence about issues we have sent to the GS since last December.

The General Secretary says that nothing has been raised through the agreed internal processes? Why not?

The GMB reps have raised collective concerns through the established bargaining machinery at meetings in November, January, and twice in March, and also in correspondence, since November 2023, to no avail.

Individuals have also raised concerns through the internal and external whistleblowing services. Two staff are currently off work sick with work-related stress, which is itself an indicator of problems in the workplace.

Claims that there is no bullying or harassment

The General Secretary is aware of complaints about bullying, and a culture of fear, within the TSSA. They have been raised repeatedly in formal negotiation meetings between November and March.

In addition, one member of staff submitted a complaint under TSSA's bullying policy against the General Secretary to the independent investigator Howlett Brown in December last year. This was after a vindictive and targeted bullying campaign against this member for a period of months.

At the beginning of this year the contract with Howlett Brown was terminated without any consultation with the GMB reps or any consideration of the consequences to staff with active complaints and queries.

This decision has caused our member additional distress and anxiety seriously affecting their health and wellbeing without any clarity or certainty regarding the status of their complaint, who will be investigating it and when. During this time the General Secretary has gone out of her way to damage the professional reputation of the member, repeatedly criticising and denigrating them.

To date no alternative independent provider has been appointed which is in direct contravention of the Kennedy report.

Bullying of a trade union rep

One of our Trade union representatives has been subject to hostile behaviour and bullying by the General Secretary, since last November. This has included sending an intimidatory email to the rep, circulating that email to every member of the staff body, and repeatedly lying about him and denigrating him to other staff, in what appears to be an attempt to destroy his reputation.