

25 April 2024

PCS members to begin industrial action at ONS

The action short of a strike from 8 May will take the form of non-compliance with the mandatory return to the office directive.

PCS members in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will begin action short of a strike on 8 May over the organisation's introduction of a mandatory workplace attendance policy.

Members voted overwhelmingly for strike action and action short of strike [in a ballot that closed on 2 April](#), in response to an instruction that staff spend at least 40% of their working time in an office, with effect from the start of April.

This decision represented a sudden reversal of the previous flexible hybrid working policy. The new policy threatens serious disruption, especially for staff with childcare and other caring responsibilities, and those who live a considerable distance from their designated office. Mandated office attendance removes the flexibility and trust that was promised to staff by senior leaders, which staff shaped their lives around, for the sake of meeting an unnecessary attendance percentage.

Following the ballot, PCS wrote to the National Statistician to seek urgent talks, but management has refused to discuss the issue further. On 16 April, ONS threatened to remove further flexibilities for staff by also dictating which days an employee must spend in the office.

The industrial action will take the form of non-compliance with the new policy. PCS is asking members to manage their working arrangements according to the previous policy of maximum flexibility, attending the office when it suits them and their team/working requirements.

If the action does not have the desired effect, the union has the option of escalating the dispute and initiating strike action.

Grant Williams, the PCS ONS group president said "We are a highly skilled and capable workforce, and we deserve to be treated as such. We have shown for

several years that we can successfully manage hybrid working in a sensible, considered, and personalised way to achieve our aims.”