

Including Disabled and Neurodivergent members when taking strike action

Whilst taking industrial action can be difficult for anyone, it can throw up additional barriers for Disabled and Neurodivergent members. Therefore, it is important that any action being planned is as accessible as possible and facilitates full participation for all UCU members.

This approach will:

- improve the experience for all those taking part
- improve the effectiveness, visibility and reach of the action
- set a precedent for wider inclusive practice

This document has been developed with and by UCU Disabled and Neurodivergent members and expands on our Neurodiversity in the workplace guidance¹ and will be reviewed and updated to reflect best practice.

1. Communication

For some Disabled and Neurodivergent members, processing substantial amounts of information can be overwhelming. This can be equally difficult for members who are living with Long Covid and experiencing brain fog as a symptom. This is particularly true where the information is communicated with short notice and is subject to change both in writing and orally. An example of this could be:

Where an emergency branch meeting has been called and the room allocated for the meeting is large and cavernous, making it difficult for Disabled and Neurodivergent members to hear and follow conversations due to the inferior quality of sound.

¹ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12406/Neurodiversity-Guidance/pdf/Neurodiversity_A4_guide_January_22.pdf

To address this, UCU and its branches will aim to take the following steps:

UCU will aim to	Branches will aim to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain the decisions of the national negotiators including setting out the next steps for action. This can include but is not limited to, issuing information for balloting, timetables for next steps or national or local meetings ▪ Ensure that information is relayed as soon as is practicable setting out key decisions and actions ▪ Explain and/or provide guidance for members when responding to employers ▪ Avoid or explain acronyms when used ▪ Provide detailed information on picketing / rallies / marches including timings, delayed starts for marches for Disabled and Neurodivergent members as well as providing plans of routes etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that when notified of any potential industrial action, they undertake a mapping exercise to ensure that Disabled and Neurodivergent members are included in and from the start of the process ▪ Meetings called locally will be fully accessible as far as is possible. ▪ Notes arising from the meeting are shared following the meeting, as written information is better for processing ▪ Ensure that local information is shared via appropriate media, i.e., email, branch website etc. ▪ Encourage Disabled and Neurodivergent members to create email filters/folders in which messages relating to industrial action can be filed away and to use (where possible) private email address for communicating

2. Sensory overload

Disabled and Neurodivergent members may be sensitive to noise and other sensory inputs that may trigger anxiety and stress. This may mean that even with support and removal of

barriers, some Disabled and Neurodivergent members may not be as visible to take part in strike action as non-Disabled members, for example on picket lines. This should not be seen as they are not supporting the action. It is important for branches to consider alternative ways for Disabled and Neurodivergent members to show their support.

UCU and Branches will aim to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outline and explain the nature of industrial action ▪ Ensure no undue pressure is put on Disabled and Neurodivergent members to participate in activities such as picketing ▪ Identify a ‘quiet space’ for members to get away from the noise ▪ Encourage branches to think of alternative ways Disabled and Neurodivergent members can show their visible support for the action. For example, through social media or in newsletters

3. Action short of strikes

Being asked to take part in ‘action short of strikes,’ such as refusal to undertake certain tasks can be more difficult for Disabled and Neurodivergent members to carry out than striking. This could be because Disabled and Neurodivergent members may be unclear on exactly what the union is asking them to do or not to, and because of difficulties linked to refusing managers’ instructions to their faces.

UCU will aim to	Branches will aim to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explain in detail any action short of a strike ▪ Provide a script for members to respond to employers on why you are taking strike action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure that the branch website has full details of any action they are taking that is short of a strike and what that means practically

UCU will aim to	Branches will aim to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a FAQ sheet which addresses the main reasons for the action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be available to listen and support Disabled and Neurodivergent members in taking action short of strike

4. Informing your employer of industrial action

Disabled and Neurodivergent members may feel pressure from their employer to let them know if they intend to take part in any industrial action.

Disabled and Neurodivergent members must be supported where employers use tactics that can be seen as bullying or intimidating behaviour. UCU will inform the employer of the dates and types of action to be taken by members in advance.

UCU will aim to	Branches will aim to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform Disabled and Neurodivergent members that they do not have to tell their employer their plans with regards to industrial action Explain and/or provide guidance for members to respond to employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be available to support Disabled and Neurodivergent members if facing bullying or harassment

5. Financial support

The impact on finances will be worrying for any member taking industrial action. This is especially true for Disabled and Neurodivergent members.

Evidence shows Disabled people were among the hardest hit in society by the pandemic as highlighted in the Citizens' Advice report, 'An unequal crisis'² that found:

² [An unequal crisis - final \(1\).pdf \(citizensadvice.org.uk\)](#)

- 1 in 4 Disabled people (27%) are facing redundancy, rising to 37% for those people whose disability has a substantial impact on their activities
- 1 in 2 people who are extremely clinically vulnerable to coronavirus (48%) are facing redundancy

Add to this the current cost of living crisis, and the disability pay gap currently standing at 17.2%³, which equates to Disabled workers earning £3,731 less than non-Disabled workers, so the decision to take industrial action and its impact on finances has potential to cause further stress and anxiety for Disabled and Neurodivergent workers. This is especially true, as Disabled workers are more likely to be employed on insecure and casualised contracts.

UCU and Branches will aim to
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Inform Disabled and Neurodivergent members of the support available for those experiencing financial hardship and the process in which they can apply for that support.

Social model of Disability

UCU follows the social model of Disability which looks at the ways in which society is organised and the social and institutional barriers which restrict Disabled people's opportunities.

The social model sees the person first and argues that the barriers they face, in combination with their impairments, are what disables them.

Barriers, including attitudes and perceptions around disabilities can make it impossible or exceedingly difficult for Disabled people to access jobs, buildings, or services. Removing these barriers is the best way to include millions of disabled people in our society.

³ [Non-disabled workers paid 17% more than disabled peers – TUC | TUC](#)

Every effort should be made to ensure that the varying needs of Disabled or Neurodivergent members who are required to participate in activities associated with taking industrial action are included. **Watch our short film on the social model of disability [here](#)**

Use of capital D

The use of the capital D for the word Disabled throughout this document shows the importance to recognise how society continues to create barriers for people with impairments, and for those barriers to be removed. The capital D also shows that Disabled people have a shared identity and are part of a community that continues to fight for the rights of Disabled people, like other groups, such as Black people or LGBT+ people.