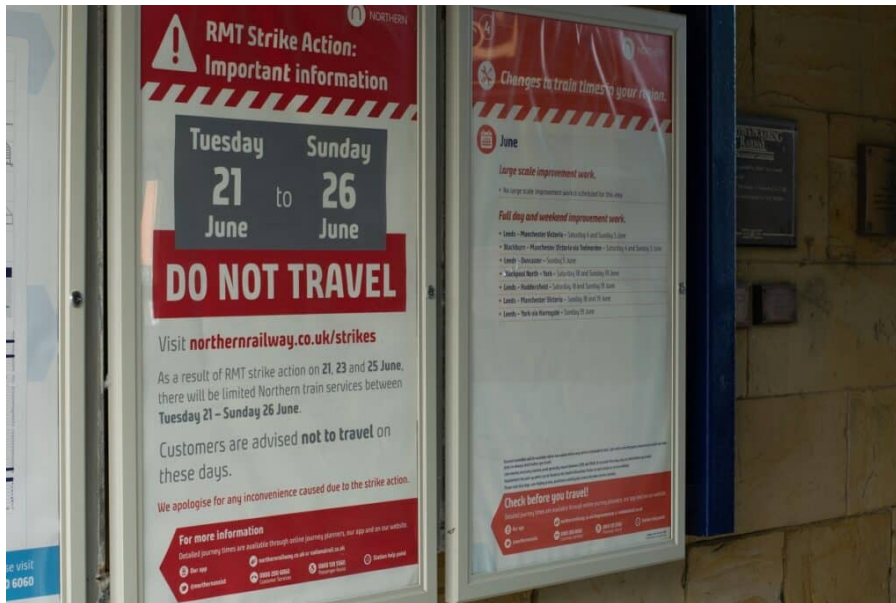


Government acts to make it easier for businesses to use temporary staff to help ease disruptions caused by strike action

4 years ago



A change in the law enabling businesses to supply skilled agency workers to plug staffing gaps during industrial action has been unveiled by the government today (Thursday 23 June).

Under current trade union laws employment businesses are restricted from supplying temporary agency workers to fill duties by employees who are taking part in strikes. This can have a disproportionate impact, including on important public services, causing severe disruption to the UK economy and society – from preventing people from getting to work to creating challenges for how businesses manage their workforce.

Today's legislation, repealing these burdensome legal restrictions, will give businesses impacted by strike action the freedom to tap into the services of employment businesses who can provide skilled, temporary agency staff at short notice to temporarily cover essential roles for the duration of the strike.

Removing these regulations will give employers more flexibility but businesses will still need to comply with broader health and safety rules that keep both employees and the public safe. It would be their responsibility to hire cover workers with the necessary skills and/or qualifications to meet those obligations.

It would also help mitigate against the impact of future strikes, such as those seen on our railways this week, by allowing trained, temporary workers to carry out crucial roles to keep trains moving. For instance, skilled temporary workers would be able to fill vacant positions such as train dispatchers, who perform vital tasks such as giving train drivers the signal they are safe to proceed and making sure train doors

aren't obstructed.

During this week's strikes, that role has had to be carried out by train managers who could have been better used in more safety critical roles, such as guards. This legislation would allow that, as well limiting the impact future strikes have on hardworking commuters and the economy.

The change in law, which will apply across all sectors, is designed to minimise the negative and unfair impact of strikes on the British public by ensuring that businesses and services can continue operating. For example, strikes in public services such as education can often mean parents have to stay at home with their children rather than go to work, or rail sector strikes stopping commuters getting to work or to other businesses.

Subject to parliamentary approval, these changes are made through a statutory instrument and are set to come into force over the coming weeks and will apply across England, Scotland and Wales.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

"Once again trade unions are holding the country to ransom by grinding crucial public services and businesses to a halt. The situation we are in is not sustainable.

"Repealing these 1970s-era restrictions will give businesses freedom to access fully skilled staff at speed, all while allowing people to get on with their lives uninterrupted to help keep the economy ticking."

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

"Despite the best efforts of militant union leaders to bring our country to a standstill, it's clear this week's strikes did not have the desired impact due to more people being able to work from home. However, far too many hard working families and businesses were unfairly affected by union's refusal to modernise.

"Reforms such as this legislation are vital and will ensure any future strikes will cause even less disruption and allow adaptable, flexible, fully skilled staff to continue working throughout."

The government has also announced today that it is raising the maximum damages that courts can award against a union, when strike action has been found by the court to be unlawful. The caps on damages, which have not been changed since 1982, will be increased. For the biggest unions, the maximum award will rise from £250,000 to £1 million.