



# theACTIVIST

Issue 87 February 2021

## GMB News From Around The Region

“Low-paid support staff kept schools open, often covering for teachers without increases in wages.”

Rehana Azam  
National Secretary



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## CALLS FOR SUBSTANTIAL PAY RISE FOR COUNCIL AND SCHOOL WORKERS

GMB, along with two other local government unions, have this week submitted a pay claim, which they say begins to redress a decade of cuts and recognises the key role played in the pandemic by school and council staff.

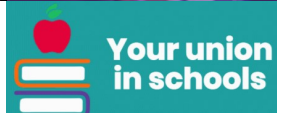
We want to see a 'substantial' pay increase from this April with a wage rise of at least 10% for all council and school support employees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The pay of the lowest paid workers would go above £10 per hour, lifting them above the real living wage of £9.50 per hour (outside London).

GMB, Unison and Unite – which represent 1.4 million council and school employees – say only a significant pay award can begin to tackle ten years of savage local authority cuts and pay restraint. Staff working in local government have seen up to 25% wiped from the value of their pay.

Council employees include refuse collectors, library staff, teaching assistants and care employees – key workers who help communities to function. The Covid crisis has been a reminder that local authorities are vital to the communities they serve especially during the past hugely challenging year.

**Rehana Azam, GMB National Secretary, said:** “Our members put themselves in harm's way to protect the public. They stepped up during a public health crisis, now employers and ministers must step up and address the pay crisis in local government and schools.

“Low-paid support staff kept schools open, often covering for teachers without increases in wages. This pandemic has shown the best of our public service workers. Their dedication must be recognised through a substantial settlement that begins to deliver pay justice.”



### WORK IN A SCHOOL? COMPLETE OUR FEEDBACK SURVEY

Anyone working in education knows that despite Government rhetoric schools are not closed.

There are more pupils in schools than during the first lockdown. Support staff are working more hours and taking on more responsibilities.

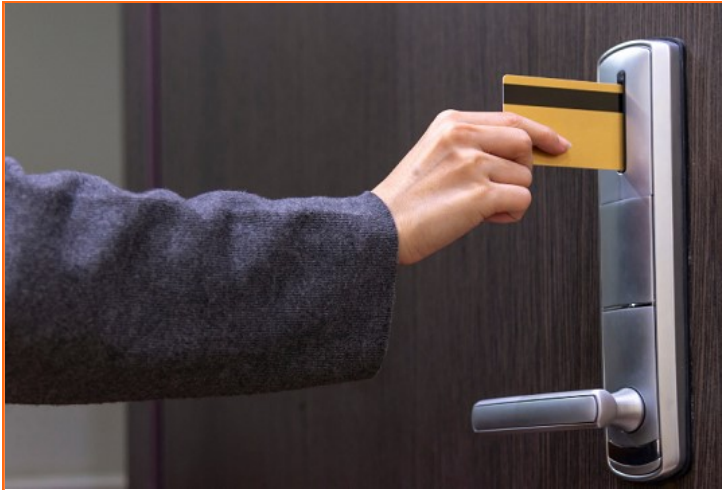
[Schools in lockdown  
FEEDBACK](#)

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## QUARANTINE HOTELS: HEALTH SECRETARY MUST GIVE WORKERS PROTECTION TO AVERT FRESH OUTBREAKS

GMB, the union for security staff, has written to the Health Secretary demanding workers at quarantine hotels have a thorough workplace testing regime in place and a guarantee of full pay for any period of self-isolation.

[In a letter to Matt Hancock](#), the union warns proper risk assessments must be carried out to avoid the recovery being 'hampered by new variants spreading amongst the community'.

Quarantine hotels opened their doors to travellers from 'red list' countries this week but the GMB is yet to have assurances around thorough workplace testing, full pay for staff to self isolate or risk assessments to properly assess whether staff are working safely.

A recent outbreak of Covid in Victoria, Australia [has been linked to a Quarantine Hotel](#).

**Nadine Houghton, GMB National Officer, said:** "We have seen clear examples from Australia's quarantine hotels where the virus has spread amongst guests and staff who have had no direct interaction with each other when doors into the hotel halls have been opened.

"Without proper safeguards, ministers risk jeopardising the UK's recovery from Covid with new strains running riot through communities."



## ARCADIA COLLAPSE SEES HISTORIC LEEDS BURTON'S FACTORY SHUT WITH 400 JOBS LOST

While administrators and Philip Green waltz off with millions, workers pay the price as the historic Burton's factory is set to close with 400 jobs lost amid the collapse of the Arcadia fashion empire.

The factory in Leeds has been in operation since 1922; most recently as a distribution centre for Arcadia stores, including Dorothy Perkins and Burtons.

But after more than 100 years and despite BooHoo's purchase of the Burton brand, the facility now looks set to close.

**Jake O'Malley, GMB Organiser, said:** "To see 400 hard-working people lose their jobs while the likes of Phillip Green and the administrators waltz off with millions is repugnant.

"A century of history and hundreds of good jobs down the pan – while Phillip Green is living it up on his private yacht and the administrators pick the bones of the business clean.

"GMB will fight tooth and nail to make sure workers get what they deserve from this mess."



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## UNIVERSAL LEARNING OFFER

GMB Union launches its improved all members **Universal Learning Offer**: It includes access to the Career Tech Challenge and the GMB Members' Learning Passport – a new and exciting initiative focussed on redundancy support and membership retention aftercare package. To view the offer, follow the link below:

[Click here](#)  
**LEARNING OFFER**

In Yorkshire and North Derbyshire region all members have access to the above learning platforms. These courses are aimed at assisting members in gaining new skills through the vehicle of training and education.

The retention tool of the GMB Members' Learning Passport will enable members, who sadly are faced with losing their employment, retain their membership sponsored by the promotional offer for a period of six months. This enables them to remain a GMB member and participate in the Career Tech Challenge.

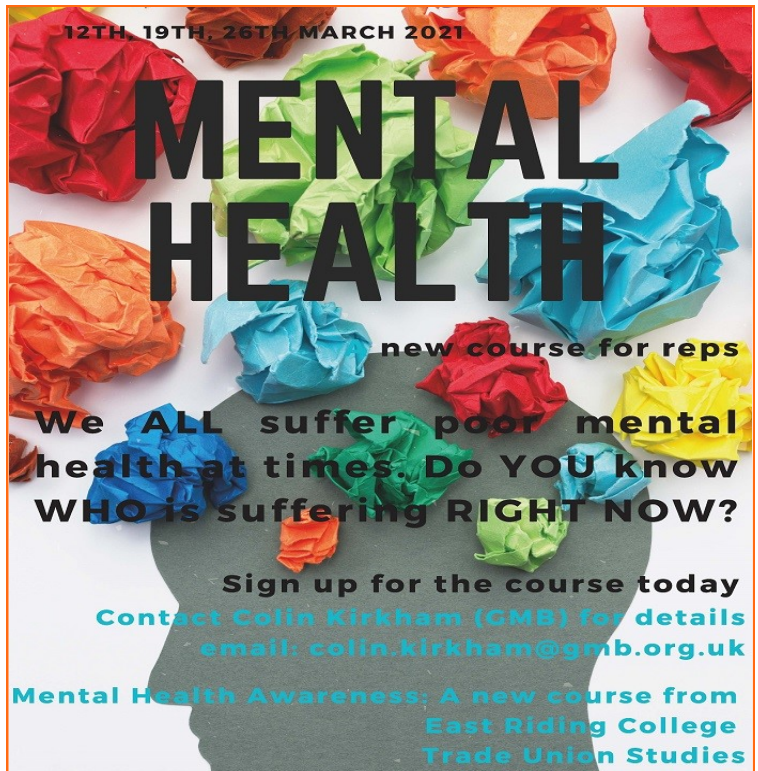
To view the Learning Passport terms and conditions please visit the [regional website](#) or alternatively get in touch with your full-time officer, especially if you or any of your members are facing loss of employment and want to remain a member of GMB.

**Latest Inflation: January 2021**

**RPI: 1.4% CPI: 0.7%**

 **GMB Yorkshire and North Derbyshire Region**

 **@GMBCampaigns**



**12TH, 19TH, 26TH MARCH 2021**

# MENTAL HEALTH

**new course for reps**

**We ALL suffer poor mental health at times. Do YOU know WHO is suffering RIGHT NOW?**

**Sign up for the course today**  
**Contact Colin Kirkham (GMB) for details**  
**email: [colin.kirkham@gmb.org.uk](mailto:colin.kirkham@gmb.org.uk)**

**Mental Health Awareness: A new course from East Riding College Trade Union Studies**

## COURSES: ORGANISE AROUND REDUNDANCY & MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

We have put together two short courses for reps, working in conjunction with TUC East Riding College. The maximum number of places is 16 to ensure good delivery of the course as these will be run virtually. If you would like to attend one of the courses, please contact Victoria Austin by email: [victoria.austin@gmb.org.uk](mailto:victoria.austin@gmb.org.uk)

Please confirm your interest by no later than **Friday 5 March for the Mental Health Awareness Course** and no later than **Friday 9 April for the Organising Around Redundancy Course** so that it gives us enough time to arrange the enrolment and online classroom. We are expecting 3 further courses to come through shortly and will provide further details in due course.



**East Riding College GMB UNION ORGANISING AROUND REDUNDANCY**

**16th, 23rd, 30th April 2021**  
**Chance of redundancy?**

**Know the facts**  
**Support YOUR members**  
**Sign up for the new Redundancy course for reps**

- What the law says
- Your rights
- Your members' rights
- Redundancy pay
- Consultation
- Selection pools
- Discrimination and victimisation

**Everything you need to know as a rep.**

Organising Around Redundancy: A new course from East Riding College Trade Union Studies  
Contact Colin Kirkham (GMB) for details  
email: [colin.kirkham@gmb.org.uk](mailto:colin.kirkham@gmb.org.uk)

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## SUPPORT OUR CAMPAIGN TO GET PAY JUSTICE FOR MEMBERS AT AGH SOLUTIONS

Please support our pay harmonisation campaign, led by K40 Branch activists, by signing the petition, sharing with your members and encouraging their support.

**Background:** Employees at AGH Solutions Ltd, a private wholly-owned subsidiary of Airedale NHS Trust responsible for facilities management, estates and procurement services, are currently on unequal pay rates despite doing the same job.

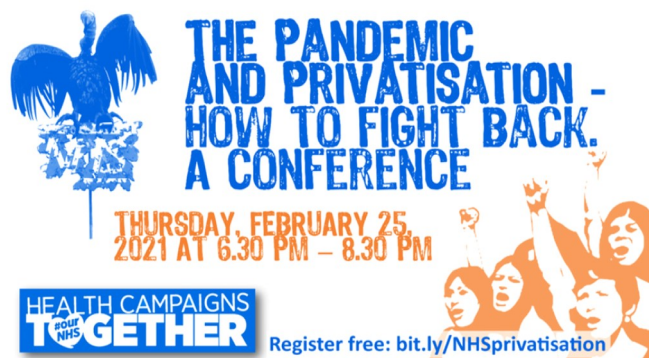
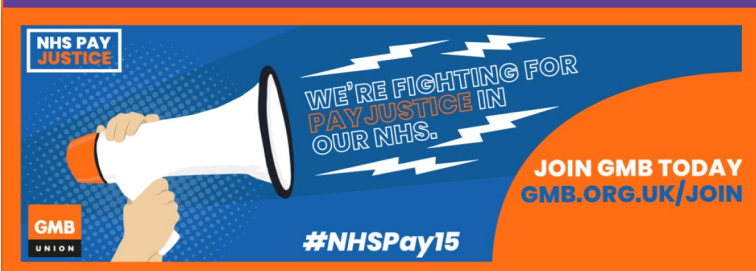
Workers who were transferred (TUPED) over from the Airedale NHS Trust into AGH Solutions (AGHS) in 2018 remain on the NHS 'Agenda For Change' (AFC) contract, while many new starters are paid on lower pay rates. For the majority of workers on the AGHS pay Grade A, this means they receive nearly £1.00 per hour less in basic pay than the rest of their colleagues employed under the NHS AFC contract on Band 2. If you factor in unsocial hours pay on the weekends and nights the wage gap widens much further.

To outline the pay difference, a domestic employed on the NHS contract receives a basic rate of £9.89 per hour. If they work between 8pm-6am or on a Saturday they get paid £14.14 per hour, and if they work on a Sunday they get paid £18.29 per hour. In contrast, a domestic employed on the AGHS contract only gets paid £9.00 per hour no matter when they work.

The purpose of this petition, our campaign and the GMB dispute at Airedale Hospital is to end the pay disparity for the majority of workers employed on AGHS pay rates and stop the race to the bottom in our NHS.

**Commenting, Rachel Dix, GMB Organiser, said:** "GMB will continue to stand-up for key workers. This pandemic has highlighted the tremendous debt of gratitude we all owe our frontline NHS heroes, and at Airedale, with this campaign, we can begin to repay that debt."

[Sign our petition](#)



## HEALTH CAMPAIGNS TOGETHER INVITE YOU TO THE PANDEMIC AND PRIVATISATION

An online conference on **Thursday 25 February**, 6.30pm - 8.30pm. Register **FREE** at Eventbrite:

[Click here to register](#)

The pandemic has been a goldmine for private contractors and management consultants.

But while the private sector (not least Tory ministers' chums and donors) celebrates their new-found riches, the fiascos of failed private services have been exposed to millions.

We will hear short introductions on various topics before **breaking into workshops** to consider and discuss priorities and various lines of argument to reach out to the wider, uninformed public.

Privatised test and trace systems have become a byword for failure, just as poor standards of hospital cleaning epitomised the failures of the first outsourced contracts in the 1980s.

The question is how health unions and campaigners can pool their knowledge and work together to develop the right publicity and information to show the folly and expose the waste and inefficiency of privatisation and outsourcing.

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**VENTILATION, VENTILATION, VENTILATION**  
By Hilda Palmer: Hazards Campaign

## VENTING: Hands, Face, Space

**We all know the mantra. But you can't stop breathing and if workplace air is going nowhere and is chock-full of coronavirus, you'll still be at risk. Hilda Palmer of the Hazards Campaign explains the critical importance of ventilation and why it is necessary to clear the air.**

Coronavirus is in the air. It spreads like smoke in tiny aerosol particles exhaled by infected individuals with every breath. The prevention three amigos of 'hands, face, space' deals with contact and droplet risks - but does not address transmission of virus-laden airborne aerosols. A microscopic, invisible virus-carrying cloud – that can get you at a distance. It is likely to be the most important mode of transmission.

This isn't just theory - [infectious disease experts, aerosols scientists and epidemiologists](#) have established the risk of aerosol transmission in Covid-19 case studies, sentinel cases, super spreader events, cluster outbreaks and laboratory experiments. It was months before the UK government, Public Health England and the UK government's SAGE scientific advisory panel conceded the airborne transmission risk ([Hazards 151](#)).

And specific guidance from the workplace safety regulator the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was late and remains weak and unenforced.

The consequence has been hundreds of workplace clusters each week, some seeing hundreds of workers test positive and some die [see: Covid-19 deaths at 3.4 times the rate for all other work fatalities].

## EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

SARS Cov-2, the coronavirus responsible for Covid-19, infects a person when it is inhaled (droplet and airborne transmission) or gets into the mouth and nose via touch (fomite transmission). Droplets in spit or exhaled can evaporate to become smaller aerosols, and spread further. Aerosols can fill a room and linger in the air for seconds to hours, often after the infected person has left. They fall out of the air, are deposited on surfaces and can be recirculated by air currents.

[Virus concentrations can build up in indoor areas](#) that are poorly ventilated, where workers breathe shared air for hours at a time. Aerosols persist longer in colder, drier air, an added occupational risk in jobs like food processing.

Face masks can help, but good ventilation is critical to reducing the viral load in the air. Lower loads reduce the risk of infection and the severity of infection. Effective ventilation removes stale air and brings in cooler, drier air containing more oxygen, less carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and water vapour and fewer microbes.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in indoor air provides a useful indication of how well the ventilation is functioning. Carbon dioxide increases from 0.04 per cent to 4 per cent in exhaled breath. Outside air contains 300-400 parts per million (ppm) carbon dioxide near ground level. Indoor air at 600 to 800 ppm carbon dioxide indicates a relatively well-ventilated room. Over 1,500 ppm means very poor ventilation and action is needed. A minimum of six air changes per hour is recommended.

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Well designed and maintained ventilation systems can be an important factor in preventing Covid from spreading indoors by increasing clean air flow and maintaining indoor conditions (temperature and humidity) that discourage virus survival. [Poor ventilation, recirculation of shared air and poor maintenance](#) of air conditioning systems can all increase transmission in workplaces.

There is no one silver bullet that is 100 per cent effective to prevent infection from coronavirus in near- and far-field aerosols. But a combination of [good ventilation, 2 metre minimum distancing and PPE all](#) contribute to overall protection.

This is doubly important as it now seems clear most people who are infectious will be exhibiting no symptoms. In the absence of routine, effective and comprehensive workplace testing, this means infected individuals will inevitably end up at work.

## VENTILATION RULES

An infectious person may exhale 100,000 to 10 million virus particles an hour, so effective ventilation is essential to infection prevention. UK guidance was slow to recognise this.

It was as recently as 26 November 2020 when the [UK business department BEIS issued updated workplace guidance](#), with an 'objective' recommending "ventilation to mitigate the transmission risk of Covid-19."

## ASSESSING THE RISK

Ventilation systems can be as simple as opening windows and doors to complex centralised Heating Air Conditioning Ventilation systems (HACV).

Find out the type of ventilation system in your workplace, how well it is performing in removing stale shared air and bringing in fresh air.

The employer should provide safety reps with [information about the workplace ventilation system](#) – is it providing the recommended air flow, is it maintained properly, are the correct filters in use and replaced and maintained frequently? Ask for monitoring and maintenance data, including CO<sub>2</sub> levels.

Checking the ventilation system to make sure that the system is properly configured, maintained, and cleaned, that proper filters are installed, that everything is working properly, that there is an increase in the amount of outdoor air, and that there is constant air movement which can reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

However, just having a ventilation system installed in a building is not enough. Workplace risk assessment must consider all the factors affecting the risk of inhaling near- and far-field aerosols.

## KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER ARE:

- **Location** Outdoors less risk, indoor workplaces higher risk, increasing with factors below.
- **Occupancy** Halving occupancy is equivalent to doubling the ventilation rate. Remember, though, that aerosols can linger for minutes or hours, so previous occupancy levels may create lingering risk.
- **Infection levels** Research suggests that around half of coronavirus transmission could be from people with no symptoms (asymptomatic).
- **Proximity** 2 metres physical distancing is a rough minimum distance to avoid inhaling high concentrations of near-field aerosols or being sprayed with droplets.
- **Duration** The longer spent in a space with poor ventilation, the higher the risk.
- **Activity** Aerosols are exhaled when breathing and talking. Loud talking, singing, aerobic activity result in more potentially virus-loaded aerosols being exhaled.
- **Environment** Cooler, darker and drier conditions assist aerosol spread and persistence; higher temperature and humidity shorten the survival time of the virus.
- **Air flow** The lower the air flow the higher the risk. Doubling the ventilation rate per person can halve the infection risk.
- **Masks** Face masks use can reduce the amount of virus in the air and is particularly effective if they are used 'properly' and by all occupants of the room.

## SAFETY REPS' CHECKLIST

- Do risk assessments consider ventilation requirements?
- Have safety reps been consulted on the Covid risk assessments?
- Is the ventilation system effective and maintained?
- Is the air flow at least 10 litres per second per person with a minimum of six air changes per hour?
- Is the ventilation system set for 100 per cent outdoor air to prevent recirculation, turned on 2 hours before occupation, and automatic CO<sub>2</sub> sensor switching off or set to 400ppm?
- If there is no ventilation system, does natural ventilation create an unhealthy or uncomfortable work environment (temperature, noise, pollution) or pose a risk of spreading infection?
- Are areas with inadequate ventilation taken out of use or are alternative methods to reduce risk used (eg reducing occupancy, use of upper room UV disinfection, portable HEPA air filtration units)?
- Are rooms subject to periods of no occupancy to allow contaminants to dissipate?
- Are rooms cleaned regularly to reduce recirculation of any virus deposited on surfaces, adsorbed on dust?
- Is the relative humidity too low and the air too dry?

For full Hazards article [click here](#) and for GMB online brief [click here](#).

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## POLICE STAFF PRIZE DRAW BOOSTS STRONGER COMMUNICATION WITH MEMBERS

Following a hard year due to the pandemic, with members having to work in difficult circumstances, W80 Police Staff Branch endeavoured to close 2020 on a positive note, so held a prize draw just before Christmas.

The prize draw enabled us to touch base with our membership, update the map of our workforce, and to encourage all to confirm current contact details.

We combined the draw with a survey to get a better understanding of where our members work within West Yorkshire Police. There are a vast array of roles across our support staff, spread between many departments and locations throughout the region. Mapping is vital for us if we are to build the union and target specific employees with communications tailored to their area of work.

GMB Secretary, Sam Rogers picked the name from a hat, witnessed by GMB Organiser Rachel Dix and Branch Secretary, Paul Rhodes - virtually of course. The lucky winner was Vikki Mace who won an Amazon Echo Dot.

**Commenting, Paul said:** "Vikki said she was surprised to win but very pleased. Vikki works within our communications centre, dealing with emergency calls. Her team have worked very hard throughout the pandemic, providing a vital service to West Yorkshire residents.

"Our GMB team are working closely with management to make sure that the health and safety of Vikki and our colleagues is never compromised. Despite initial teething problems we have a constructive working relationship with our employer and continually seek to improve safe working systems and practices.

"We intend to hold the draw again and at regular intervals to keep our membership data up to date."



## IN SYMPATHY: COLIN THISTLETON

It is with regret that we inform you of the death of Colin Thistleton, who was a GMB officer at the regional office in Leeds in the 1980s before moving to our York office, where he worked for a number of years.

Colin sadly passed away at the age of 89 after many years of ill health. He will be fondly remembered by those who knew him and worked with him. Our deepest condolences go to Colin's family and friends.

## BADGE OF HONOUR

Are you an avid trade union badge collector? Would you like to show off your collection with other like-minded badge collectors? Then why not join the Trade Union Badge Collectors Society.



The Trade Union Badge Collectors Society was formed in the early 1980s by a group of union activists and officials.

Trade union badges form a central part of the rich visual culture of the labour movement that also encompasses trade union banners, emblems and membership cards.

The first issue of Trade Union Badge Collectors' News bulletin was produced in 1984 and has recently been relaunched. The aims of the newsletter and society are collecting, cataloguing, and researching trade union badges and related items.

**For further information visit their website:**  
[www.tubcs.wordpress.com](http://www.tubcs.wordpress.com) or to join the society contact Steve Baguley by email on the following address: [Stevebaguley@gmail.com](mailto:Stevebaguley@gmail.com)

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