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WINNING THE BALLOT – A TWENTY-POINT BRIEFING FOR REPS AND ACTIVISTS



Scotland

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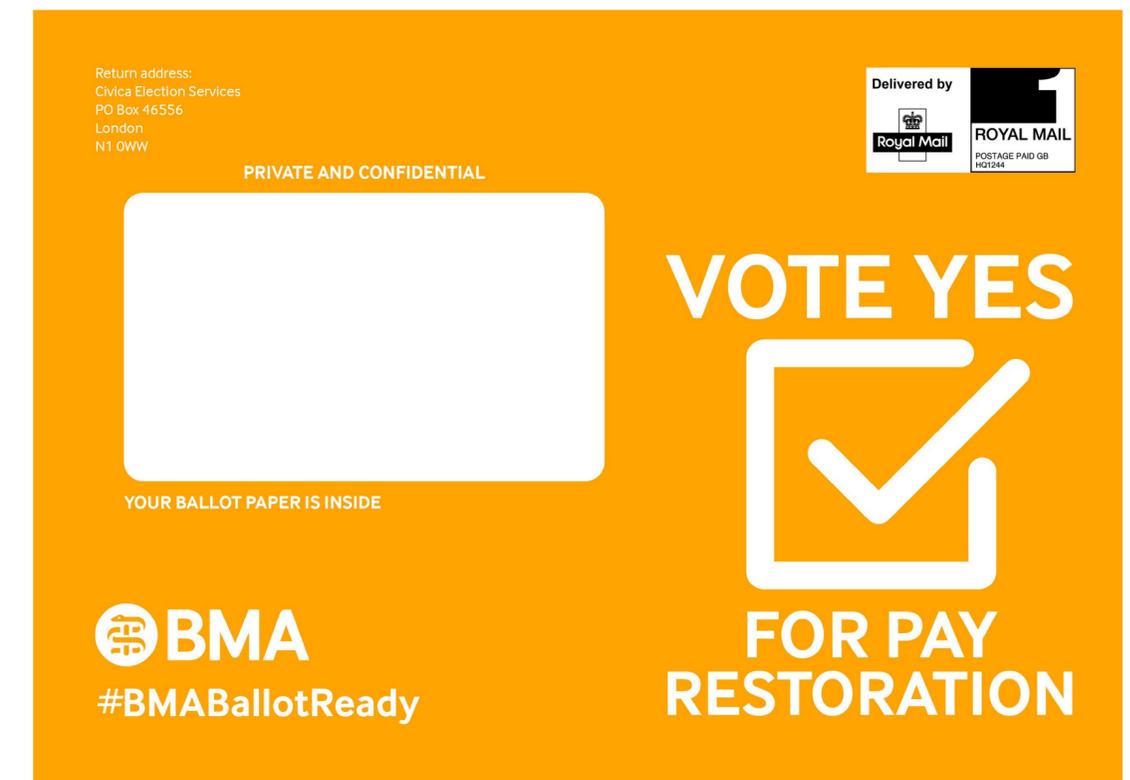
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Understanding ballot basics

1. Strike action is when employees withdraw their labour. Unions can only organise strikes legally if they have won support for the action in a postal ballot in which at least 50% of members have voted.
2. In BMA Scotland's case, we are seeking full pay restoration for junior doctors who have seen their pay fall by more than 23% since 2008. Given the failure of the Scottish government to respond positively to this demand, our strike ballot begins on 29th March 2023 and runs until 5th May, 2023.
3. Every member who we believe is eligible to vote will be sent a ballot paper to the address that we have for them on our database. The envelope in which the ballot paper will arrive has been designed to stand out:

4. By law the ballot has to be run for the BMA Scotland by an independent scrutineer. This company are called Civica and they have responsibility for ensuring that ballots are sent out; replacements and new ballots are issued; and that once the ballot closes the vote is counted properly.



Turnout – winning is not enough

5. Most strike ballots result in large majorities to take action but in many cases, these strikes cannot take place because the ballot fails to reach the legal turnout required of 50%. Our job as reps, activists and staff is to ensure we get the turnout we need so that members can strike if that is what they vote for. While we have a central staff team who will be texting members throughout the ballot and regional teams who will work hard to support grassroots activity, all the academic research shows that it is regular, local contact with members that makes the difference. With every single vote counting, whatever you can do – big or small – will make a difference.

6. To positively influence turnout, we first need to organise ourselves. BMA Scotland has called for our supporters in each health board to form local campaign teams to contact members direct to educate them about the need to strike and critically to remind them to vote before the ballot ends.



Activity drives turnout – how ballots really work

7. Most strike ballots follow the same trajectory:

- an initial period of high-volume voting often by our most enthusiastic members
- a middle period of smaller turnout 'spikes' when those who need reminding to vote or who have been undecided return their ballots; and
- a final period of high volume 'last minute' voting from people who have left it late

8. Thinking about your Department or immediate workplace you can probably identify people who support the campaign and who are likely to fall into all three of these categories! The key to the ballot campaign is to make sure we are focused on maximising the vote from each of the three groups.

9. So, for your campaign plan, cut the ballot roughly into three periods of two weeks each and give each period a broad theme as above.

– **EARLY ON** you are looking to focus on the fact that the ballot has opened; to remind people of what the campaign is about; tell them to look out for the ballot in the post; and encourage them to post it back quickly.

– **IN THE MIDDLE** as well as continuing to remind members to vote you want to be dealing with any common worries or concerns that people have and helping members get replacement papers etc.

– **TOWARDS THE END** you want to be 100% focused on reminding members to vote before it is too late. In this final period, it is important to focus on turnout - 'we need your vote to get over the line'.

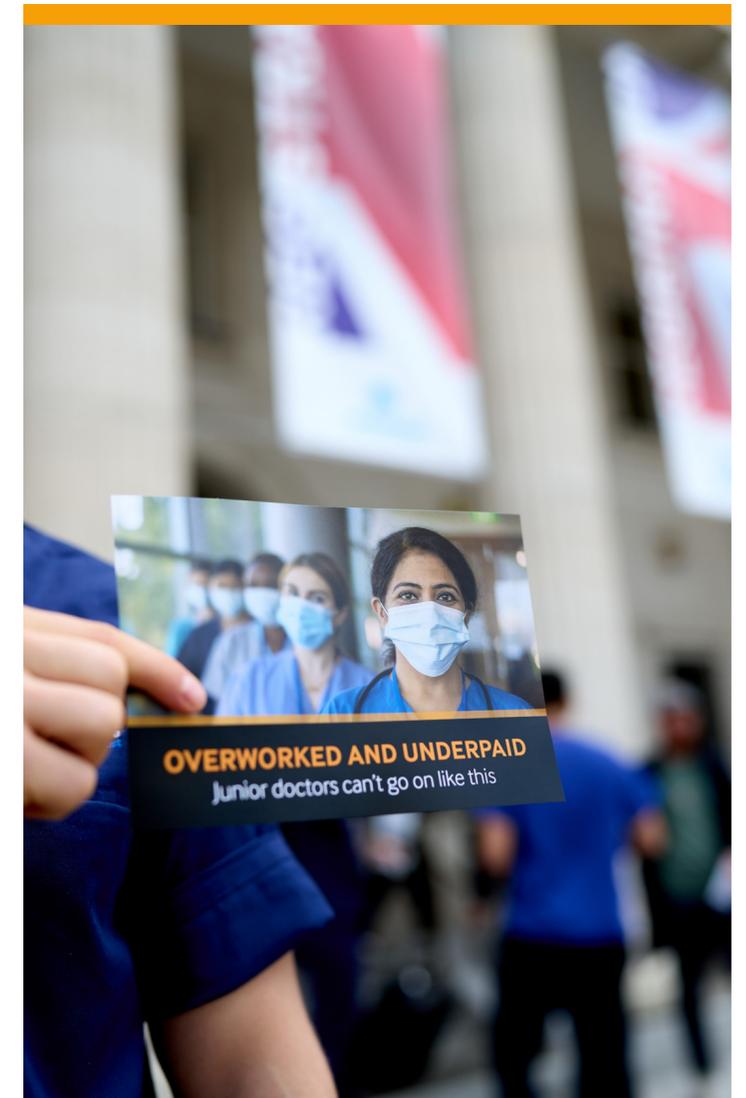
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10. If you don't know where to start or are feeling overwhelmed with the task ahead, head first to where you are likely to find the largest concentrations of members/voters. If you are looking for a campaign plan to adapt, you can use this sample template:

WEEKS OF THE BALLOT					
Pre-Ballot	1 (29 March-5 April)	2 (6-13 April)	3 (14-21 April)	4 (22-29 April)	5 (30 April - 5 May)
<p>Local message 1: – Check and update your details. Place of work and postal address are essential</p> <p>Other: – Use Whatsapp etc to ask Reps and Activists. Email changes to doctorspay@bma.org.uk</p> <p>Also: – 121s – Ward walks – Meetings – Social media</p>	<p>Local message 1: – Look out for your ballot, we need 50% to give a mandate to strike</p> <p>Other: – Use Whatsapp etc to ask Reps and Activists to: Contact departments and report back to staff on % who have voted</p> <p>Also: – 121s – Ward walks – Meetings – Social media</p>	<p>Local message 2: – We've voted, have you? Help us win by sharing that you've voted.</p> <p>Other: – Continue Rep report back – Ask LNC & JDS Chairs to message all JDs to ask them to vote yes</p> <p>Also: – 121s – Ward walks – Meetings – Social media</p>	<p>Local message 3: – Every vote counts, return yours today – Do you need a replacement ballot paper?</p> <p>Other: – Hold ballot Q and A meeting – ask who has/hasn't voted and why and address concerns.</p> <p>Also: – 121s – Ward walks – Meetings – Social media</p>	<p>Local message 4: – Two weeks to go, if you've voted, remind others to do the same. – Remind members that 1st May is last day to vote</p> <p>Other: – Ask Reps to follow up on their department, focus on replacement ballots and report back on % voted</p> <p>Also: – 121s – Ward walks – Meetings – Social media</p>	<p>Local message 5: – Last week of voting – Remind members that 1st May is last day to safely post ballot paper</p> <p>Other: – Ask Reps to communicate the one weeks to go message</p> <p>Also: – 121s – Ward walks – Meetings – Social media</p>

Throughout the ballot encourage members to post online and to Whatsapp groups when they have voted – preferably a picture of them voting

11. As you can see the key early task in the plan is to ask members to establish who has and hasn't voted in their department and beyond and then feedback and keep following this up. You can support this activity with communication, meetings etc but we need this intelligence on the ground to know how well we are doing. You can report to the campaign manager, or direct to the SJDC chair on: chair-SJDC@bma.org.uk.



After the ballot it is too late to wonder ‘what if’...

12. Literally nothing is worse than missing the turnout threshold by a handful of votes. It means that even if 99% of participating members vote for strikes, we can’t do a thing! In this context, it is important to recognise that every piece of local and national activity you and colleagues helps create the conditions for increased turnout. For many members, remembering to vote is just one of a hundred things they must do. Our job is to make it as difficult as possible for them to forget to vote by creating an effective barrage of communication during the ballot period.

13. Ultimately, how well we do will depend on you and your colleagues. Research shows that after the initial excitement of week one, the spikes tend to be caused by local or national activity/communications so you should find as many ways to remind people locally on as many different platforms as you are able. Here are a few of the more obvious ways in which you can talk about the ballot:

- 121 conversations (these make all the difference);
- mass and 121 emails;
- department or health board level meetings;
- WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram;
- leafleting outside

Make voting visible

14. In all your communications, encourage members to proudly share the fact that they have voted. They can do this simply by telling colleagues and encouraging them to vote or – even better – by posting a picture of themselves on twitter etc posting the ballot back and sharing with others.

15. Similarly, when you hold meetings or have sessions with groups of doctors, start by asking members to put their hands up if they have voted; and ask a couple to say why. Then ask those who have voted to return to their department and ask others to do the same. Peer pressure is powerful so make use of this key group to encourage others to 'do their duty' and return the ballot.

Lost ballots, new ballots and late ballots...

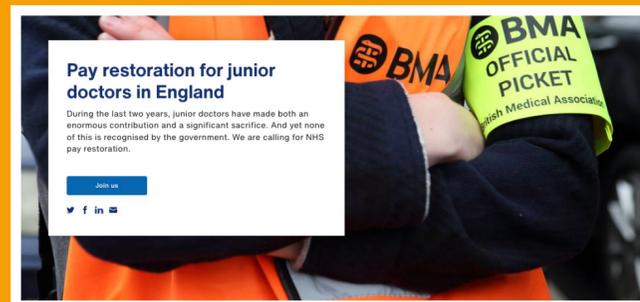
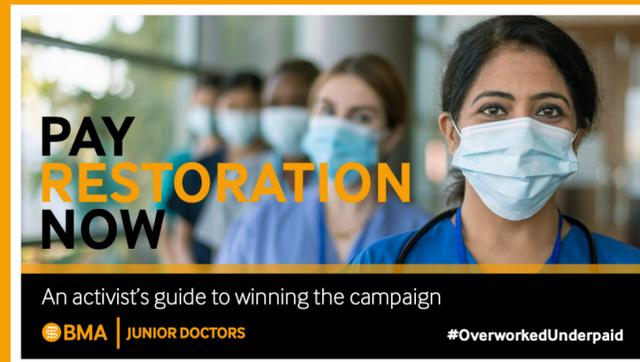
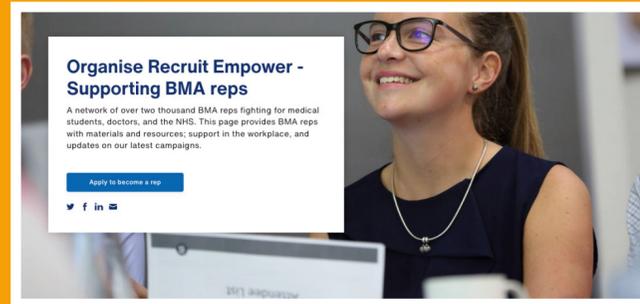
16. Speedily identifying members who have lost their ballots is critical. After a week of the ballot, to allow for the post, we will open a replacement ballot procedure. This is for people who are eligible to vote but who have not received their ballot or have mislaid it. When you meet people in this category you should ask them to email doctorspay@bma.org.uk to get a replacement.

17. The last day non-members can join and still get a vote will be confirmed very soon. If you are talking to non-members encourage them to join now to guarantee they get a ballot.

18. As the ballot comes to a close, we will be asking every member to have returned their ballot by 1st May 2023. This is the last 'safe' day to post your ballot and be certain it will be counted. Members who unfortunately miss this deadline for any reason should still keep posting their ballots right up to 4th May 2023 – there is no loss from trying and it might make all the difference. By the end of the campaign, if we are doing it right members should be on the cusp of being sick of being reminded to vote or to encourage others – once they get to that stage, we will know that the ballot is widely known about, and that members are likely to remember to vote.



Final tips to get over the line



20 . Finally, here are a few final assembled tips to help get you over the line:

- Ensure that any events you run are focused on (1) voting and (2) dealing with objections
- if members are reluctant to vote, find out why and address their issues in your communications.

- Use your LNCs – ask them to help you by emailing round a message of support to every JD; or speaking at your meeting; or even joining you on a ward walk (we will reinforce this by asking LNCs from the centre too to provide direct support to juniors during the ballot).

- Given the limited time available, it usually pays to keep it simple. Give activists and supporters simple, achievable jobs such as initially: to make contact with everyone in your department; ask them if they have voted and report back via WhatsApp. This ‘job giving and reporting back’ should be the primary use for the established WhatsApp groups, driving engagement and encouraging members to take on small jobs that lift turnout.

– When you encounter enthusiastic voters, never miss the opportunity to give them simple jobs to do (could they WhatsApp colleagues to find out if they have voted) and ask them to let you know how they got on.

– In ballot time, members making objections are doing us a great service by telling us what others may be thinking. If you encounter more than one person who says they are concerned about an issue, put together a communication aimed at addressing or engaging with their worry and ping it out locally.

– All the research shows that linking national issues to members' situation on the ground drives part of the vote. Positioning a strong vote at your hospital as being important not just for pay but also to help build the union locally to tackle our problems will bring in some members who may have doubts about our national position.

– It is good business to keep reminding members that unless we get to 50% turnout we cannot strike – their vote really counts. Nurses in England missed the threshold in some places by a handful of votes and now cannot act in those workplaces.

– Don't be a prisoner of the data but do try to go to the big places you are most worried about, not just those who know and feel comfortable talking with.

– Make people feel like part of a winning team – in your comms and 121 conversations tell members about the numbers who have already let you know they have voted and ask them to add their name to the list.

– Make voting feel like some kind of civic duty to be undertaken with pride – encourage members to share pictures of themselves posting their vote on social media but also with friends and colleagues.

Any
questions,
queries,
advice etc
about the
anything in
this booklet
email
gmackie@
bma.org.uk

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– Reminding people to vote is fine
– please don't be embarrassed to do this on repeat. If they say they have already voted, thank them and quickly ask them to contact others to encourage them.

– Members are your main focus
– only they can vote but if you encounter enthusiastic non members make sure you have our join weblink to hand(QR below). We will add new members to the ballot on several occasions during the voting period.



– Have as an easy reference the method to get a replacement ballot so you can share it with members. I have run campaigns where thousands have needed these and people who seek a replacement are more likely to be motivated to vote – especially if you check up on them a few days later.

– Have an early warning system for your activists so that the first person to get their ballot paper tells others it has arrived – this will enable you to time your initial local communications and activity for when members are receiving their papers – encouraging members to vote as soon as possible.

– Enlist the help of supportive consultants or SAS staff – could their support for the ballot help swing a department behind action?

– Lastly, keep going right until the final possible time to post votes – focus on how it will feel if we win the vote but miss turnout narrowly.

Any questions, queries, advice etc about the above give me a shout at gmackie@bma.org.uk

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