

BMA Scotland Picket Supervisor Guidance

Thank you for signing up to be a picket supervisor. Without you, and colleagues like you up and down the country, we wouldn't be able to hold our picket lines and demonstrate our unity and strength in our current dispute.

This guide is designed to help you understand the basics around picket lines, supporting demonstrations, and what being a picket supervisor means. This should help you in the fulfilment of this role and give further guidance on how you can access support and advice from our union if you feel you need it.

WHAT IS A PICKET LINE?

A picket line is a group of workers who are on strike, who gather outside their workplace to protest or 'picket'.

The picket line applies pressure on the employer to meet the demands of the workers, such as better pay, improved working conditions, or other benefits.

The core purpose of the picket line is:

- To encourage other workers, respectfully and politely, to not cross the picket line, and instead to join the strike – in this case, this would be targeted at other resident doctors.
- To engage with, and provide information to, the public on the dispute and why the strike is taking place. Again, this is to be undertaken respectfully and politely.

WHAT ARE THE RULES ABOUT PICKET LINES?

Each individual striking worker who is picketing is a 'picket'. There is no legal limit to the number of pickets. However, it is essential that the number of pickets does not give rise to a risk of fear and resentment among other employees. Guidance provides that, to avoid this, the number should not generally exceed six. However, the overriding consideration is whether there is a risk of fear and resentment among other employees.

Members are also able to visit picket lines.

It would also be unlawful to obstruct the highway, cause a nuisance or behave anti-socially.

Pickets will identify themselves with armbands provided by the BMA.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A PICKET SUPERVISOR?

The Picket Supervisor's role is to ensure the smooth running of the picket line. Whilst it's impossible to prepare you for every possible eventuality, as a brief outline you will:

- Be present on the picket line or be readily contactable and able to attend at short notice. The term 'short notice' is not defined, and a picket supervisor can supervise more than one picket line. In practice, provided that the picket supervisor is contactable by mobile phone and is supervising a set of picket lines in one location, such as a single large acute hospital, this requirement should be met.
- Ensure the pickets are aware that they must be identifiable by wearing the BMA issued armband.
- Ensure the pickets are aware of their purpose and to undertake their roles respectfully and politely.
- Ensure the pickets do not block access to the employer's site for members of the public or patients.

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- Ensuring picket visitors and supporters know where they can stand and demonstrate their support for the striking workers.
- Act as the primary point of contact for the picket line, for the BMA regional staff supporting you and, in the very unlikely event the situation arises, for the police and employer.

It is important to note, as picket supervisor, you are not responsible for the actions of others. Whilst you are the primary point of contact for the picket line(s) you are supervising, you will have a direct line to your assigned member of BMA Scotland staff to provide you with the advice and support you need.

WHO CAN BE A BMA PICKET SUPERVISOR?

Whilst pickets (individuals picketing) can only be striking workers who work at the workplace in question, the picket supervisor can be anyone who is a member of the BMA, or a member of BMA staff, so long as they are familiar with the provisions of the Code of Practice on Picketing available here. No experience is necessary.

For example, a GP trainee who does not work at hospital X can still volunteer to be the picket supervisor there, so long as they're a BMA member and familiar with the Code of Practice on Picketing.



[UK Government Code of Practice on Picketing.](#)

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO PICKET SUPERVISORS?

Before strike days, you will be provided with:

- A letter confirming the picketing at the workplace is approved by the BMA (this is presentable to either the police or a member of the employer's management upon request).
- A copy of this guidance and the Code of Practice on Picketing available here.
- Your local BMA Scotland contact's direct mobile number.

On strike days, you may well have a member of BMA staff attending your picket as a visitor, however, if not, you can call your local BMA Scotland contact for any advice or guidance you may want or need.

If you are ever in doubt, or worried about something, just give your BMA Scotland contact a call – they have your back!

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PICKET LINE AND SUPPORTERS VISITING A PICKET?

Others may attend the picket line to demonstrate support and solidarity with the striking workers. However, they will not be considered an official picket or provided with an armband; they are considered picket visitors and supporters and should not approach resident doctors looking to cross the picket and attend work; only the official and identifiable pickets should be undertaking this role.

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Picket visitors can be other striking workers in the dispute or supportive workers from the same or other industries, community members, celebrities, family and friends of striking workers or even politicians. They may bring food and supplies to the picketers and show solidarity by joining them in chanting slogans or holding signs.

Picket visitors and supporters can and should hold placards, chant, and play music or instruments, whilst remaining welcoming and engaging to allow others to join in and express their solidarity with the striking workers.

It is important to note that medical students cannot be pickets but can visit picket lines as supporters.

WHERE TO PICKET?

The ideal locations for the picket lines are at entrances and exits to the workplace, where doctors who may be intending to attend work would enter the building, enabling the pickets to engage with them and try to convince them to join the strike instead.

Whilst we do not have the legal right to locate a picket line on the employer's property, it is possible to ask for permission to do so in advance – If you think that the best or safest location for a picket line would be within the boundary of the employer's property, you and your local BMA representatives will need to ask permission from the employer in advance of any action.

Employers will be keen to ensure picket lines do not impede patient access, for example, and may equally be happy to agree a location which is on their property to enable this.

If we do not have permission to place a picket line on workplace property, it should be positioned on public property just outside the entrance or exit – in this scenario, care should be taken to ensure that a picket line does not spill onto the employer's property.

Other considerations:

- A picket line must not block the entrance/exit or the public highway including roads and pavements.
- If a picket line is positioned on the pavement, care should be taken to ensure that people can still pass safely on the pavement without having to walk in the road for example.
- Care should be taken to ensure that patient access to entrance and exits is not impeded including any disabled access.
- Picket lines should not impede essential services such as deliveries.
- Those on the picket line should be reminded to always take care of their own safety and be aware of their surroundings – particularly if the picket line is near a busy road or vehicular entrance, for example.

Determining the location and arrangements with the employer is not the picket supervisor's role alone. Local BMA representatives and your BMA Scotland contact can and should assist in your preparations and discussions with your employer where you feel it necessary.

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WHERE CAN PICKET VISITORS AND SUPPORTERS DEMONSTRATE THEIR SUPPORT?

Visitors and supporters of the picket line should be located as close to the picket line as they can safely be positioned to demonstrate their support.

Like the picket lines themselves, these demonstrations of solidarity and support cannot be placed on the employer's property without their consent/agreement prior to the action – If you think that the best or safest location for hosting the visitors and supporters would be within the boundary of the employer's property, you and your local BMA representatives will need to ask permission from the employer in advance of any action

Other considerations:

- Picket visitors and supporters must not block the entrance/exit or the public highway including roads and pavements.
- If picket visitors and supporters are positioned on the pavement, care should be taken to ensure that people can still pass safely on the pavement without having to walk in the road for example.
- Care should be taken to ensure that patient access to entrance and exits is not impeded including any disabled access.
- Picket visitors and supporters should not impede essential services such as deliveries.
- Picket visitors and supporters should be reminded to always take care of their own safety and be aware of their surroundings – particularly if the picket line is near a busy road or vehicular entrance for example.

It is important to note, as a picket supervisor, you are not responsible for the actions of others, but you may be approached by a member of employer management or a police officer to ask to assist in addressing any issues, such as an inadvertent blockage or location issue. Whilst you are the primary point of contact for the picket line(s) you are supervising, you will have a direct line to your BMA Scotland contact to provide you with the advice and support you need.