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A Sept. 28 Strike Could Halt Europe’s Largest Grain Whisky Distillery

Unite said about 100 workers will stage walkouts through Oct. 15 at Diageo’s Cameronbridge plant, a key Scotch supplier.

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A strike at Diageo’s Cameronbridge distillery in Scotland is set to begin on Sept. 28 and could disrupt production for nearly three weeks at one of the most important sites in the company’s Scotch whisky supply chain.

Unite, the union representing workers at the plant, said about 100 of its members will take part in staggered walkouts from Sept. 28 through Oct. 15. The union said those workers account for half of the distillery’s roughly 200 employees and that it expects the action to bring production to a halt during the period.

The stoppages have not yet started, and the full effect on output remains uncertain. Diageo could still use contingency measures to limit disruption. No estimate has been released for how many liters of grain whisky, how many customer orders, or how much revenue could be affected if the strike goes ahead as planned.

The risk is significant because Cameronbridge is the largest grain whisky distillery in Europe and a key supplier for some of Diageo’s best-known blended Scotch brands, including Johnnie Walker and Bell’s. A prolonged shutdown at the site could affect production schedules, logistics, and inventory planning across parts of the business, even if the immediate effect on retail sales is softened by existing stocks of already matured whisky.

Unite announced the planned industrial action on Sept. 17. Trade publication Harpers Wine & Spirit Trade News also reported the planned walkouts. The union described the action as a serious escalation and said it believes production will stop during the strike window.

The planned action covers 18 calendar days, though the stoppages are described as staggered rather than a single continuous shutdown by the entire workforce. That means the exact operational impact will depend on how the strikes are organized across different shifts and functions inside the distillery. Even so, with union members making up about 50% of the workforce, any prolonged absence across core operations could create pressure on output at the site.

Cameronbridge plays a central role in Diageo’s Scotch whisky system. Grain whisky from the distillery is used in blends that are produced and shipped in large volumes in the U.K. and international markets. Because blended Scotch relies on a steady supply of grain spirit as well as malt whisky, disruption at Cameronbridge can affect planning well beyond the distillery itself. The company would have to manage not only production at the site but also transport, warehousing, blending schedules, and stock

allocation if the strike interrupts normal operations.

The immediate commercial effect may be less severe than a shutdown in another type of drinks facility because whisky production and sales operate on longer time frames. Mature stock already in warehouses can act as a buffer, especially for products that have already completed aging and are ready for blending or bottling. That could reduce the short-term impact on store shelves and near-term shipments. Still, a stoppage at a large-scale grain whisky plant can create problems further down the line if production losses are not recovered quickly.

The dispute comes as Diageo’s Scottish business remains highly profitable, though its earnings declined year over year. According to the figures cited in the report, Diageo Scotland recorded profit after tax of £595 million in 2025, down from £736 million in 2024. That is a drop of £141 million, or 19.2%. Those figures provide financial context but do not measure the potential effect of the planned strike. No direct link has been made between the decline in profit and the current labor dispute.

At this stage, much remains unknown. Neither Unite nor the published reports have quantified the volume of production that could be lost, the number of delayed shipments that could result, or whether any customer deliveries would be affected. There has also been no public estimate of how quickly the company could restart normal operations if production is interrupted for the full period.

The timing matters for Diageo because Cameronbridge is not a small local facility. It is a major industrial operation in Scotland and an important part of the wider Scotch whisky industry in the U.K. Any disruption at the plant draws attention because of the scale of the site and its place in the supply chain for globally distributed brands. Even when final consumer sales are protected in the short term by inventories, internal planning can become more difficult when a large distillery faces labor action.

The union’s statement has raised the prospect of a near standstill at the site, but that remains a forecast rather than a confirmed outcome. Until the walkouts begin, the practical effect will depend on worker participation, the structure of the stoppages, and any response from Diageo. The company may seek to maintain essential operations or reduce the impact through temporary operational adjustments, though no detailed

contingency plan has been made public in the information released so far.

For now, the key fact is that a strike involving around 100 Unite members is scheduled to begin at Cameronbridge on Sept. 28 and continue in stages until Oct. 15. If it proceeds and the union’s expectations are met, one of Europe’s most important grain whisky distilleries could see production halted for much of that period, creating operational pressure across Diageo’s Scotch whisky business in Scotland and the wider U.K. market.