

UNISON UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS BRANCH BULLETIN HIGHER EDUCATION SPECIAL



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HE Staff & Students: Feeling the Squeeze

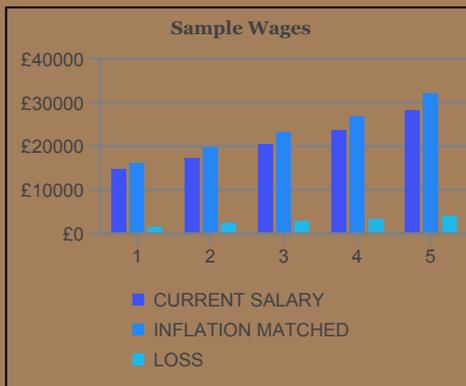
Since 2010 Universities have undergone some of the largest upheavals of any area of the public sector. The changing nature of funding and fees has seen great uncertainty across HE which has been used to justify restructures, pay cuts against inflation and increasing demands on staff. The squeeze on staff comes from the newly "business orientated" management style which has quickly gained prominence as the way to run Higher Education Institutions in the UK and also from increasingly challenging students who now, rightly, expect top level service for their ever-increasing tuition fees.

To take the first, and to many staff, the most important area of pay, UNISON has calculated that the last time university staff received a pay rise in line with the RPI (retail price index) figure of inflation was 2009-10, during the last Labour Government. Since the Conservative-led coalition and their full administration in 2015 university staff have lost thousands of pounds in real terms due to falling pay settlements.

Had pay rises *only* kept up with inflation, someone on the lowest pay point of £14,767 p.a. would now be earning £16,194. To some that extra money would be a family holiday, but to many on the lowest level of the pay-ladder it is the difference between eating and heating: it is no coincidence that UNISON is once again this year running a loan scheme for the purchase of school uniforms for members' kids.

In the next column is a table of sample wages; what they currently are, and what they would be if those salaries had kept up with inflation. The third column is the difference.

CURRENT SALARY	INFLATION MATCHED	LOSS
£14767	£16194	£1427
£17310	£19640	£2330
£20400	£23207	£2807
£23620	£26902	£3282
£28143	£32085	£3942



Of course, matching inflation wouldn't solve the problem of low pay and would in-fact increase the pay gap between better off and poorer workers. UNISON would like to see a progressive pay deal that recognises the lowest-paid workers in our universities. Matching inflation is no panacea but it would have been a start. In the last seven years all support staff and most academic staff have had to make do with an average of 1% p.a. while the pay of those at the top of the HE disappears over the horizon and heads for Never Land.

We should also consider students that are impacted by these unprecedented fees; fees levied by a generation who received their degrees completely free for the most part. The average cost of a single year tuition at a university in England (still free in Scotland for Scottish students) is now \$11,534. (the Student Loan Repayment Calculator uses dollars to ascertain fees around the world). This has shown that England is the most costly place to study in the world; ahead of even the USA.

Denmark, France, Norway, and Sweden maintain free education, while a nominal fee of less than £500 covers Germany, Belgium and France. All of which is an indictment of those running the fifth largest economy in the world and speaks to their unwillingness to accept that education is an investment by a country in its own future.

As things stand, before increased fees come in, and before there is any sell-off of student debt and a change in interest rates, the Intergenerational Foundation has conducted research to suggest **the average graduate will still owe £60,000 in tuition fees alone 30 years after leaving university.**

In the coming election the Conservatives have pledged to keep the public sector pay cap and raise tuition fees. Labour have pledged to remove the public sector pay cap and make higher education free for those who wish to study.

