

# Bargaining on annual pay rises

UNISON Bargaining  
Support Group

Including the latest economic data to support  
pay claims and templates for local adaptation



## BARGAINING ON ANNUAL PAY RISES

### How can this guide assist me?

This document seeks to provide negotiators with the following material to assist in bargaining over annual pay increases:

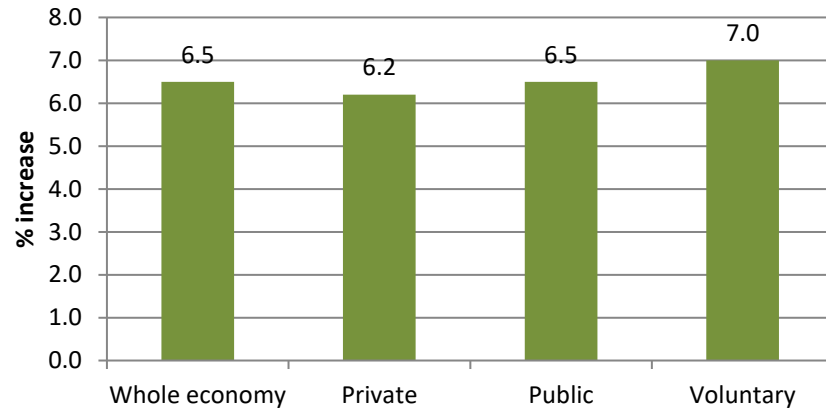
- An outline of the latest developments in key economic factors that shape pay claims, particularly:
  - Changes in the cost of living facing workers, which pay claims need to keep pace with if the buying power of wages is not to fall;
  - Pay settlement and average earnings growth figures, which can act as a benchmark for pay claims;
  - The context for pay claims in terms of the labour market, the National Minimum Wage, the Living Wage and other dimensions of the economy.
- Directions to model pay claims, which are likely to be of most value to branches representing staff working in private companies and community / voluntary organisations, who are not covered by the major national bargaining bodies in local government, the NHS and education;
- Advice on supplementing a claim through a staff survey and a model questionnaire that can be amended to suit local circumstances;
- Word versions of the model pay claim and model survey can be downloaded from the UNISON bargaining guides page at <https://www.unison.org.uk/bargaining-guides/>

## Contents of the guide

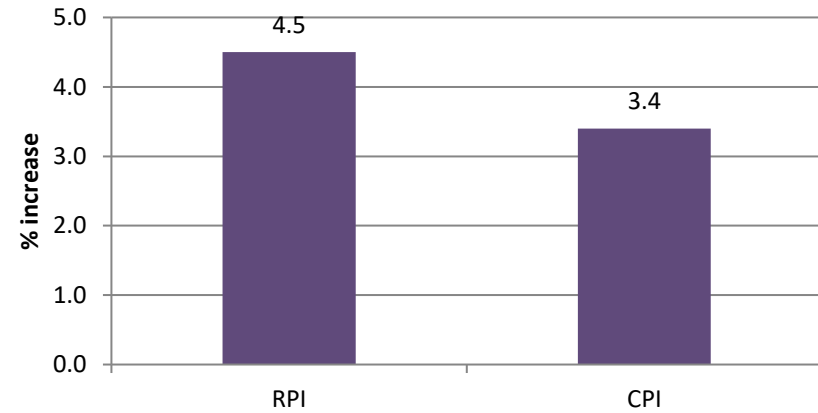
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## Latest headline figures

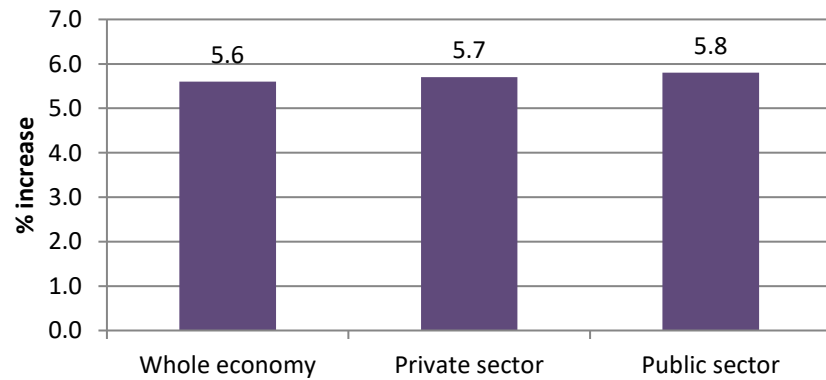
### Average pay settlements



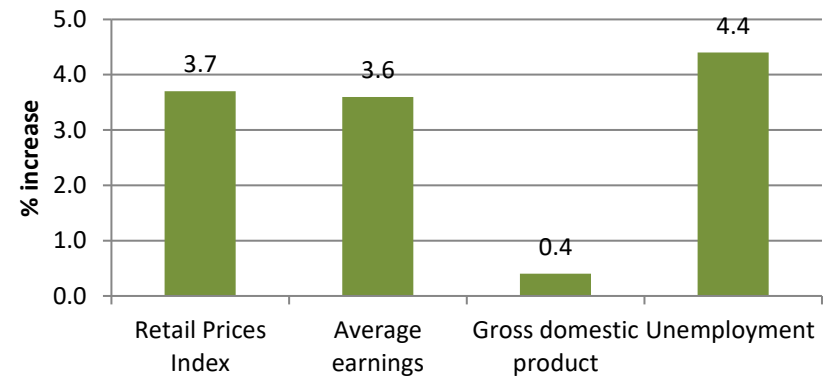
### Inflation rates



### Average weekly earnings



### Forecast rates for 2024

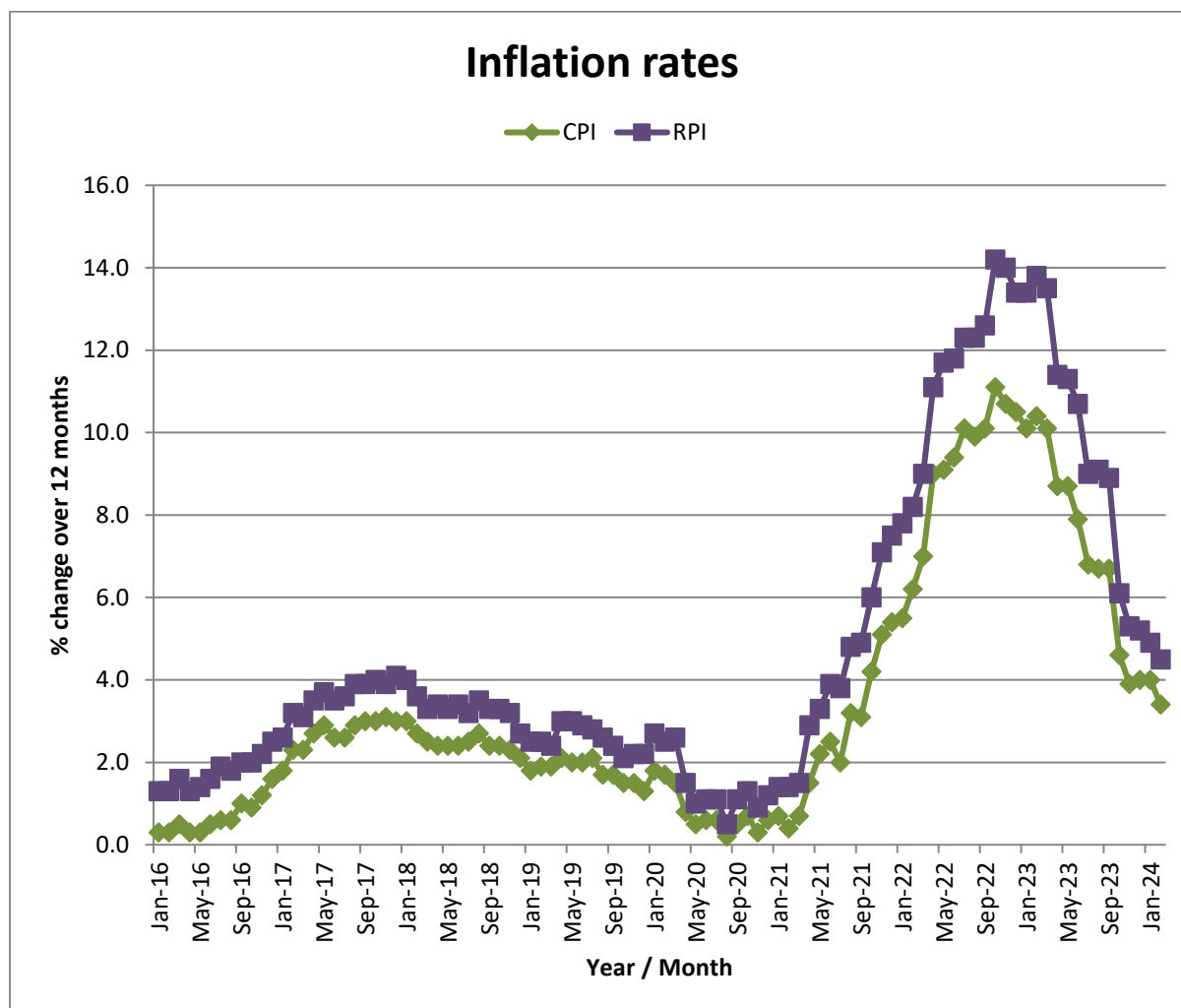


## Inflation as benchmark for pay claims

### Historical inflation rates

The most widely reported measure of inflation in the UK is the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). However, the most accurate indicator of changes in the cost of living facing workers is the Retail Prices Index (RPI) [for the reasons why RPI is most relevant, see note below].

Inflation exploded over 2021 and into 2022, hitting the highest rates seen across the economy in four decades. Over most of 2023, rates were in decline and by **February 2024 the RPI rate stood at 4.5% and the CPI rate at 3.4%.**



Source: Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation: February 2024, published March 2024

Between the start of 2010 and the end of 2023, the cost of living, as measured by the Retail Prices Index, rose by a total of 73.9%.

## Impact on real wages

The annual changes for full years since 2010 have been as below. The annual pay rises at an organisation can be set against these annual inflation rates to show the impact on the value of wages and examples of actual salaries can be used to show the impact in cash terms (if you need assistance in carrying out these calculations, contact Bargaining Support on [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk) ).

The RPI rate is the one that UNISON believes most accurately reflects the change in prices faced by workers. However, the CPI figures are also shown below as they may be useful in showing the scale of decline in wage value even if that figure is used.

Year	% Annual Growth in RPI	% Annual Growth in CPI
2010	4.6	3.3
2011	5.2	4.5
2012	3.2	2.8
2013	3.0	2.6
2014	2.4	1.5
2015	1.0	0.0
2016	1.8	0.7
2017	3.6	2.7
2018	3.3	2.5
2019	2.6	1.8
2020	1.5	0.9
2021	4.1	2.6
2022	11.6	9.1
2023	9.7	7.3

**The last two years have seen the steepest rises in the cost of living facing workers in over 40 years - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023<sup>1</sup>.** This has accelerated the decline in the value of wages as earnings have generally failed to keep pace.

Consequently, across the economy, the most recent data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings suggests that the real value of average UK pay packets has fallen by 24% since 2009, which equates to almost £11,000 in lost buying power. The average worker would have accumulated over £62,000 more had their wage kept pace with inflation.

The average public sector worker has seen the same decline of 24% since 2009, which means that 2023 wages were worth over £11,700 less than in 2009. The average public sector worker would have accumulated almost £65,000 more had their wage kept pace with inflation.

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation: December 2023

## Main factors affecting inflation

The changes in the price of components of the Retail Prices Index over the year to February 2024 are shown in the table below.

Item	Average % increase to February 2024
Alcohol and tobacco	9.5
Personal expenditure	7.7
Travel and leisure	5.7
Food and catering	5.5
Consumer durables	4.1
Housing and household expenditure	2.2
All goods	3.8
All services	4.2
All items	4.5

Source: Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, February 2024

Within these figures, some costs are rising significantly faster, with **mortgage interest payments leading the way in jumping by 36.5% over the past year.**

The Resolution Foundation estimates that **annual repayments for those re-mortgaging in 2024 are set to rise by £2,900 on average**<sup>2</sup>.

The price of housing remains one of the biggest issues facing employees and their families and though the rate of increase in house prices has slowed, private rental prices have seen **average monthly rent jump 9% over the year to February 2024**<sup>3</sup> and new tenancies now average £1,262<sup>4</sup> across the UK in December 2023 (for a country / regional breakdown of rents click [here](#) ).

The cost of childcare was revealed by the annual Coram Family and Childcare Survey published in March 2024, which found that the **average cost of a part time (25 hours a week) childcare place for a child under two in a nursery in Britain has risen 7.4%** to £7,569 per year, while **for a two-year-old that cost has jumped 6.2%** to £6,264 per year.

It is also worth noting that current rates can also mask dramatic increases in basic costs over a longer timeframe, as reflected in the figures below<sup>5</sup>

Expenditure Item	House prices	Bus & coach fares	Electricity	Gas
Price rise 2009 - 23	65%	93%	180%	144%

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press-releases/mortgage-crunch-deepens-with-15-7-billion-repayments-rise-now-on-track-to-bite-by-2026/>

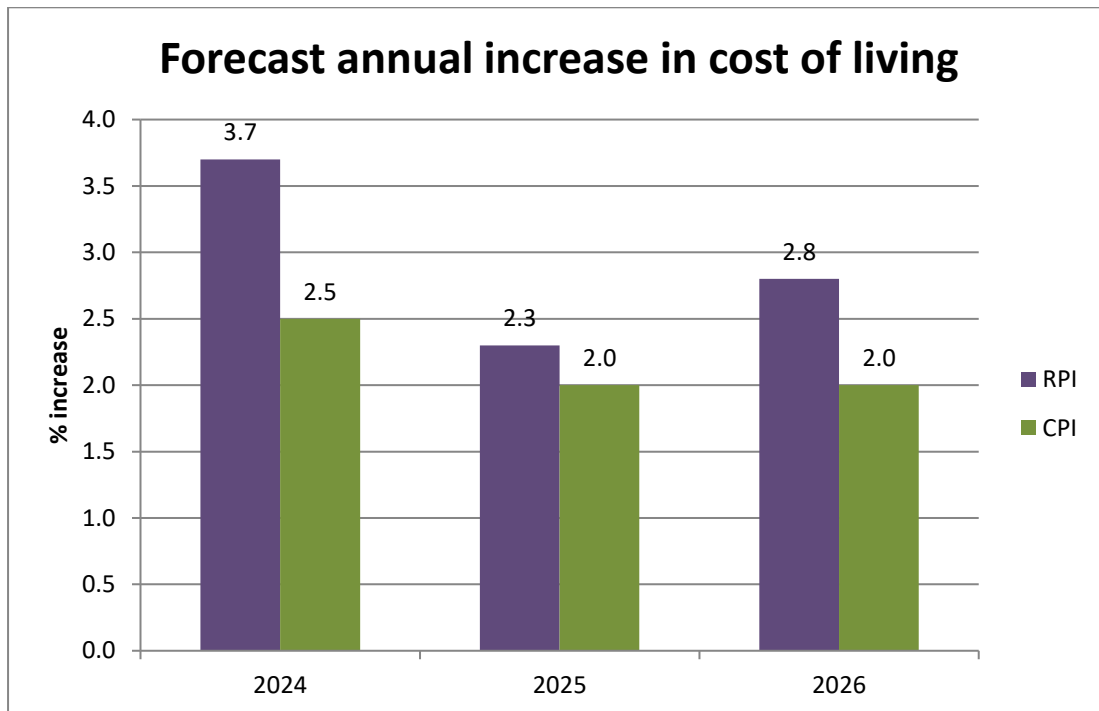
<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, Private Rent and House Prices UK, March 2024

<sup>4</sup> HomeLet Rental Index, February 2024

<sup>5</sup> Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Tables, January 2024, for bus /coach, electricity and gas prices, Acadata National Historic Series for house prices

### Forecast inflation rates

The Treasury average of independent forecasts states that **RPI inflation will average 3.7% over 2024**, before dropping back further in subsequent years, as per the pattern shown in the graph below. These annual rates show the rate at which pay rises would be needed for wages just to maintain their current value.



Source: HM Treasury Forecasts for the UK Economy, February 2024



## Reason for comparing wages to RPI

### The key arguments

UNISON believes that the Retail Prices Index (RPI) remains the most accurate measure of inflation faced by employees.

The most widely quoted figure for inflation in the media is the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). However, UNISON believes that CPI consistently understates the real level of inflation for the following reasons:

- CPI fails to adequately measure one of the main costs facing most households in the UK – housing. Almost two-thirds of housing in the UK is owner occupied, yet CPI almost entirely excludes the housing costs of people with a mortgage;
- CPI is less targeted on the experiences of the working population than RPI, since CPI covers non-working groups excluded by RPI – most notably pensioner households where 75% of income is derived from state pensions and benefits, the top 4% of households by income and tourists;
- CPI is calculated using a flawed statistical technique that consistently under-estimates the actual cost of living rises faced by employees. The statistical arguments are set out exhaustively in the report “Consumer Prices in the UK” by former Treasury economic adviser Dr Mark Courtney, which is summarised [here](#) and covered in full [here](#)

While we do not claim that RPI is perfect, we believe that it is a much better indicator than CPI. Estimates arising from Courtney’s analysis suggest that, of the 0.9 percentage point average difference between RPI and CPI inflation over recent years, 0.2 percentage points represented an over-estimation by the RPI, while 0.7 percentage points was down to under-estimation by the CPI.

### Widespread opposition to CPI

RPI was the virtually unchallenged measure of UK inflation for almost six decades following the Second World War. However, RPI has been under sustained attack by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) for almost a decade, since changes in the collection of clothing price data created a substantial difference in RPI and CPI for this very small element of the overall inflation calculation

Drawing on the work of economists whose theory offered some support to the UKSA’s arguments against RPI, the authority derognised RPI in its official status as a “national statistic” in 2013. Subsequently, the UKSA developed CPIH as its “most comprehensive measure of inflation” in 2017 (CPIH attempts to introduce housing costs into the CPI measure, though it uses the controversial rental equivalence method, which treats owner occupiers as if they were renting their property).

However, those steps faced overwhelming opposition whenever the UKSA put their proposals out to public consultation. UNISON and the TUC have joined with sympathetic economists in defending RPI. In addition, the Royal Statistical Society has consistently stated that CPI was never intended as a measure of changes in costs facing households. Rather, it was “designed in the 1990s for macroeconomic purposes” and its purpose is to act “as the principal inflation indicator for the Bank of England in its interest-setting rate role.”

The society sums up its position as follows:

“Why should the typical household accept an inflation index that: -

- fails to take account of, or does not track directly, one of their main expenditure items: mortgage payments and other costs of house purchase and renovation;
- gives more weight to the expenditure patterns of wealthier households than of other households;
- fails to take account of interest on loans for a wide variety of purposes, ranging from student loans to loans for car purchase;
- includes the expenditure of foreign tourists in the UK but not their own expenditure outside the UK;
- fails to include council tax.”

In 2019, the UKSA then faced a withering rebuke from the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee over its handling of RPI, most notably with regard to its failure to fulfil its duty to properly maintain the methodology for calculating RPI. As a result, the committee demanded that, “given RPI remains in widespread use, the authority should stop treating RPI as a legacy measure and resume a programme of periodic methodological improvements.”

And the committee directed a further blow at the credibility of CPIH, stating that it was “not convinced by use of rental equivalence in CPIH to impute owner occupier housing costs.”

These doubts gained further credence with the surge in mortgage interest payments over the last year. In February 2024, RPI put those costs as increasing by 36.5%, which chimed with the experience of millions of households faced with huge increases in monthly payments. And yet CPIH claimed that owner occupiers’ housing costs were rising by just 6%.

However, the UKSA has ploughed on regardless of all criticism and in late 2020 the government announced that it would accept its recommendation to change the measurement of RPI to that of CPIH – effectively abolishing RPI from 2030.

### **The continued use of RPI**

Though CPI is the figure quoted almost uniformly across the media when reporting inflation, RPI remains a common reference point for pay negotiations.

And beyond pay bargaining, RPI remains the government’s measure for uprating fuel benefit charges on company cars, air passenger duty, alcohol duty, gaming duty, regulated rail fares, student loan interest rates, tobacco duty and vehicle excise duty,

Across the private sector, it is extensively used wherever charges are made on a rolling contract basis. For instance, RPI uprating can be found among:

- Mobile phone tariffs charged by many major providers - iD mobile, O2, Virgin
- Annual reviews of property rental – historically, RPI has been a standard benchmark;
- Annual uprating of private sector pension payments;
- Contracts for ongoing services eg RPI is commonplace as the agreed uprating charge under Private Finance Initiative projects.

Some organisations, such as Barnardo’s and British Telecom, have pursued high profile court cases to reduce uprating of pension payments to CPI, but have found their arguments rejected. BT pursued its claim on the basis that RPI had become an “inappropriate measure” but the courts refused to accept that RPI was inappropriate for the purpose of the scheme.

## Pay settlements and average earnings as benchmark for pay claims

### Pay settlements

Pay settlements in the private sector have been running ahead of the public sector for the vast majority of the last decade. While the pay freeze was in place across the public sector (2011-12), the private sector was seeing average rises around 2.5%, and the private sector continued to outpace the public sector by at least double the public sector rate during the ensuing period of the 1% pay cap (2013-17). Since 2018, the gap started closing and over 2020 the public sector overtook the private sector for the first time in approximately a decade. However, over 2021 settlements saw the private sector lead restored as further limits were placed on public sector pay and since 2022 the rates have oscillated around approximate parity.

The table below shows the latest average settlements over the last year across a variety of sectors. **Settlements have averaged 6.5% across the economy, 6.2% in the private sector, 6.5% in the public sector and 7% in the voluntary sector.**

Pay claims should emphasise that employers falling below relevant rates can expect damage to their ability to recruit and retain high quality staff.

[To seek more detailed figures on pay settlements within a particular sector, contact Bargaining Support on [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)]

Sector	Average pay settlements
Across economy	6.5%
Private sector	6.2%
Public sector	6.5%
Not for profit	7.0%
Energy & gas	7.5%
Water & waste management	8.3%
Source: Labour Research Department, settlements year to March 2024	

Average pay settlements across the economy since 2010 are shown by the table below. The dangers of falling behind market rates over the long term can be demonstrated to employers as part of pay claims by contrasting the pay awards in an organisation against this economy average (for more detailed averages by sector, contact Bargaining Support on [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Average pay settlements</b>
<b>2010</b>	2.0%
<b>2011</b>	2.5%
<b>2012</b>	2.5%
<b>2013</b>	2.5%
<b>2014</b>	2.5%
<b>2015</b>	2.2%
<b>2016</b>	2.0%
<b>2017</b>	2.0%
<b>2018</b>	2.5%
<b>2019</b>	2.5%
<b>2020</b>	2.3%
<b>2021</b>	2.0%
<b>2022</b>	4.0%
<b>2023</b>	5.6%

Source: Incomes Data Research

The cumulative impact of this growth has been to raise average pay by 44.1% since 2010.

The Bank of England Decision Maker Panel indicates that its latest survey shows that companies are expecting a 5.2% increase in wages over the next year<sup>6</sup>.

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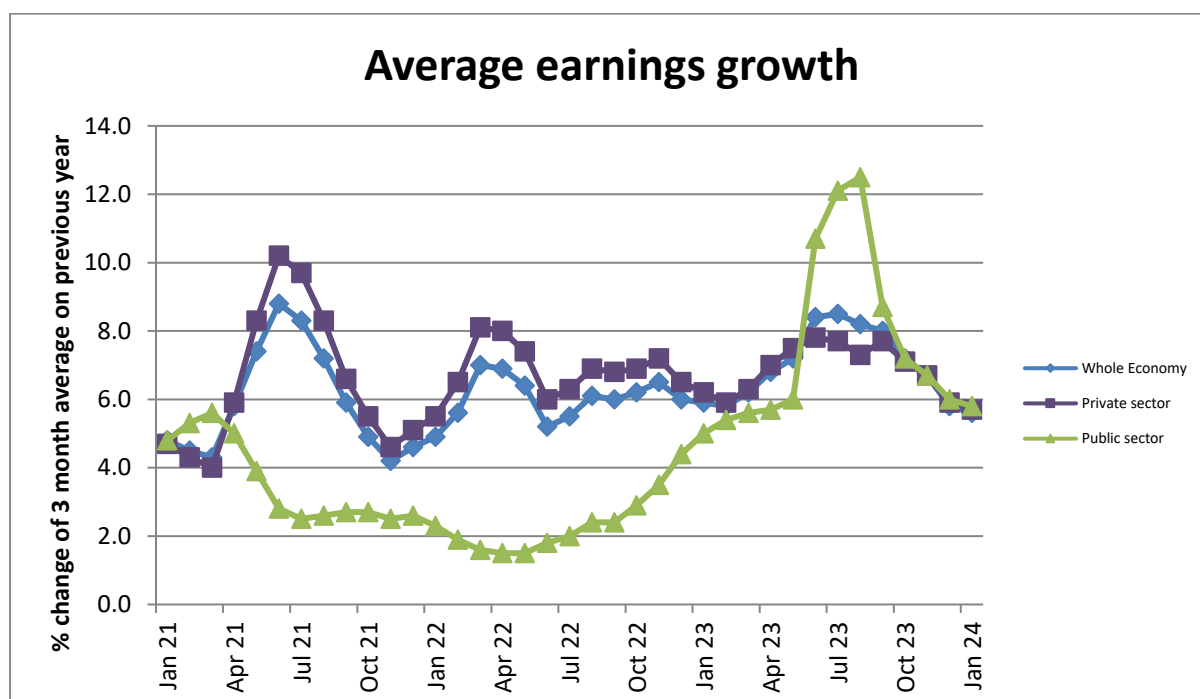
<sup>6</sup> Bank of England, Decision Maker Panel, February 2024

## Average earnings

The graph below shows trends in average earnings growth over the last three years.

Since 2021, average earnings growth has remained at relatively high rates and **average earnings growth across the economy hit 5.6% in January 2024**<sup>7</sup>. Prior to 2021, such average earnings growth rates hadn't been seen in around 14 years.

As in the case of pay settlements, a gap between public and private rates has been a persistent feature of the economy over the last decade. 2020 saw the first sustained period since 2010 when the public sector has been running ahead of the private sector. However, faster growth in the private sector reasserted itself strongly over 2021 and 2022, before a short-lived public sector spike in 2023 that has now dipped to approximate parity, with the **public rate at 5.8% in January 2024 against private sector earnings growth of 5.7%**.



Source: Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview UK, March 2024

The Office for Budgetary Responsibility's March 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook suggests that earnings growth will average 3.6% over 2024.

Greater detail on changes in average earnings is available by such factors as [occupation](#), [region](#) and [local authority](#). If you require any assistance in extracting required information from these tables, please contact Bargaining Support via [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)

<sup>7</sup> ONS, Labour Market Overview, March 2024

### **Note on comparisons between public and private sector**

The campaign by the government and much of the media to paint public sector workers as overpaid relative to private sector workers reasserts itself from time to time and was prominent in arguments put forward to support the introduction of another public sector pay freeze in 2021. Average earnings figures have often been used as the basis for making this false assertion.

The claim is usually based on a crude comparison of average pay that doesn't take account of the different type of jobs in the public and private sector. The last study by the Office for National Statistics that ensured the comparison was conducted on a like-for-like basis, taking into account region, occupation, gender, job tenure and organisational size found that the average public sector worker was paid 3% less than a private sector worker in 2019<sup>8</sup> and had been earning less in terms of gross pay (including overtime and bonus pay) every year since 2014.

Public sector workers only earn more than comparable private sector workers when pensions are added to the comparison, because of the private sector's widespread abandonment of defined benefit schemes.

Before public sector average earnings growth dropped well below the private sector rate in 2013, average earnings growth rates were also often used as a basis to argue that the public sector continues to see improvements in pay that are not matched by the private sector and particularly as a basis for attacking pay progression.

The flaw in these arguments is that the use of average earnings growth for comparisons does not simply reflect changes due to pay settlements and pay progression.

Changes in the average are affected by a multitude of factors that affect the composition of the public and private workforce. Any changes that swell the lower paid end of the workforce and/or reduce the proportion of higher paid employees, such as differences between the sectors in recruiting staff on part time or zero hours contracts, or redundancies that hit the most recent recruits hardest, will act as a downward pressure on the average.

The government's drive toward greater outsourcing in itself tends to lower private sector average earnings growth and raise public sector growth because of the marked tendency for outsourcing to focus on lower paid sections of the workforce.

Therefore, average earnings growth figures are a very approximate basis for judging actual changes in the pay packet of a worker in the public or private sector. Pay settlement data forms a much sounder basis for comparison as it eradicates the differences in workforce composition that affects average earnings growth comparisons.

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<sup>8</sup> ONS, Public and Private Sector Earnings 2019, September 2020

## Wider context to consider referencing in pay claims

### Labour market

The value of the UK economy (GDP) is predicted to show small annual growth of 0.4% over 2024.<sup>9</sup>

Recruitment and retention pressures on employers have been running at high levels over recent years.

The **unemployment rate** has been in decline from a peak of 8.5% in 2011 to **3.9%<sup>10</sup> in the three months to January 2024 (recent rates have been at the lowest level for almost 50 years)**

**Forecasts now put the average unemployment rate at 4.4% in 2024<sup>11</sup>, though outside of recent years this level would still be a rate only last consistently experienced in the mid-1970s.**

Meanwhile, the Office for National Statistics indicates that the **vacancy rate** across the economy was running at **2.9% in the three months to February 2024<sup>12</sup> (a rate not exceeded at any point in the two decades before June 2021).**

**The number of unemployed people per vacancy was running at 1.5 by January 2024 - a trough that has seen the lowest levels recorded in more than two decades and represents a dramatic decline from 5.8 in 2011.**

Sector analysis shows that human health and social work retains one of the highest vacancy rates across the economy at 3.7%, while the other sectors most closely aligned with UNISON membership show rates of 2.5% for public administration, 2.2% for education, 3.8% for electricity and gas and 2.8% for water supply.<sup>13</sup> The highest vacancy rate across the economy is in the traditionally low-paid sector of “accommodation and food services,” where shortages are reflected in a 4.5% vacancy rate.

The acute issues that have been facing the health and social work category are reflected in publications showing that the adult social care sector has a vacancy rate of 9.9% and a turnover rate of 28%,<sup>14</sup> while the NHS displayed a vacancy rate of 7.6% in England at December 2023<sup>15</sup>.

The impact of better wages and improved terms and conditions can be seen in the contrast between figures for local authority and outsourced social care staff. The mean hourly pay of local authority staff was £11.35 in 2023, compared to £10.34 in the outsourced sector. Consequently, the care worker vacancy rate was 8.1% among local authorities but 9.9% among the outsourced sector, while turnover was 15.4% among local authorities but 30.4% among the outsourced sector<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, February 2024

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, March 2024

<sup>11</sup> HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, February 2024

<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, March 2024

<sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, March 2024

<sup>14</sup> Skills for Care, The State of the Adult Social Care Workforce in England, October 2023

<sup>15</sup> NHS Digital, NHS Vacancy Statistics England, December 2023

<sup>16</sup> Skills for Care, The State of the Adult Social Care Workforce in England, October 2023

**The proportion of employers reporting “hard to fill” vacancies is running at 38%, with many of UNISON’s largest sectors experiencing above average rates – education at 52%, and public administration and other public sector at 50%<sup>17</sup>.**

**Turnover rates across the economy were also running at high levels in 2023, reaching 19.9% over the year, which was up from 14.6% two years before<sup>18</sup>.**

Data gathered on turnover and / or vacancy rates within an employer can be contrasted with these wider rates to illustrate a particular recruitment and retention problem. For more detailed figures on sector turnover rates, contact Bargaining Support on [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk).

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<sup>17</sup> CIPD, Labour Market Outlook, Winter 2023/24

<sup>18</sup> XpertHR, Labour turnover rates 2023



## National Minimum Wage

The legally enforceable National Minimum Wage (NMW) sets the floor for any pay scale. The minimum hourly rates set to come into force from 1 April 2024 and the change from the current rates are set out below.

Category of staff	Aged 21 and over	Aged 18 - 20	Aged 16 - 17	Apprentices
Rate from April 2024	£11.44	£8.60	£6.40	£6.40
% increase on 2023	9.8%	14.8%	21.2%	21.2%
Rate from April 2023	£10.42	£7.49	£5.28	£5.28

Therefore, employers with staff on the full adult NMW will have to deliver pay rises of almost 10% at the bottom end of the pay scale next year.

Almost all parts of the public sector apply their bottom rate to staff regardless of age. Therefore, the youth rates are hardly utilised, though the apprentice rate is adopted by some bargaining groups as a separate rate outside the pay scale.

UNISON's [National Minimum Wage guide](#) carries a thorough treatment of the issues and includes factors to consider within a pay claim, such as cascading increases up the pay scale and eliminating youth or apprentice rates if the organisation applies them.

## Living Wage

The Living Wage has become a standard benchmark for the minimum needed for low-paid staff to have a “basic but acceptable” standard of living.

**The rates**, announced annually by the Living Wage Foundation, **are currently £12 an hour outside London and £13.15 an hour in London.**

Studies supported by Barclays Bank have shown that Living Wage employers report an increase in productivity, a reduction in staff turnover / absenteeism rates and improvements in their public reputation.

Consequently, there are now over 14,000 employers accredited as Living Wage employers by the Living Wage Foundation, including almost half of the largest companies listed on the UK Stock Exchange and household names such as Aviva, Barclays, HSBC, Nationwide, Google and IKEA are among them.

Even where employers are not accredited, the Living Wage appears to have played a major role in shaping pay rates in tandem with recruitment and retention pressures. Aldi, Lidl, Sainsbury's, Marks and Spencer, Costa Coffee and Currys have all set a new minimum rate of £12 an hour over the last year, while Asda and Tesco have pushed their rates just above to £12.04 and £12.02 respectively. Amazon has raised its rate for frontline operations staff to between £12.30 and £13 per hour, depending on location.

Within the public sector, the Living Wage has now long been set as the minimum pay rate across all Scotland's public sector organisations and this was extended to social care workers in Scotland's private and voluntary sector from October 2016. Similarly, the Welsh Government has committed to achieving a Living Wage minimum in social care by 2024.

Pay claims can draw on the precedent of employers in a given sector who already pay the rate. These listings can be obtained from the Living Wage Foundation's searchable website <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/accredited-living-wage-employers> or contact Bargaining Support for help through [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)

Pay claims that include a Living Wage element can draw on the greater detail set out in UNISON's [Living Wage guide](#) on supporting arguments and the bargaining factors to consider.

## Appendix 1 - Model pay claims

Most UNISON members are covered by national public sector bargaining structures through which a central pay claim is made on behalf of all staff covered by that bargaining machinery.

However, pay claims are also necessary where public authorities are able to opt out of nationally agreed arrangements, where outsourcing has led to delivery of services by private and community / voluntary and in the utility sectors where private companies predominate.

To assist in developing a pay claim in these circumstances, a general model is set out below.

Separate model pay claims for local government NJC compliant and opted out organisations, as well as non NJC academies, will be available under the Resources section of the link below:

- [NJC: Council and school pay](#)

In the case of NHS contractors, a thorough set of materials, including a model pay claim and model letters, are available on this link

- [NHS contractor staff – Put NHS pay right for Us 2](#)

For housing associations, a model claim is available on this link

- <https://www.unison.org.uk/housing-associations-generic-pay-claim/>



**PAY CLAIM FOR [INSERT YEAR]  
SUBMITTED BY UNISON TO [NAME OF ORGANISATION]**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This pay claim is submitted by UNISON on behalf of staff working for [organisation].

The claim is set at a level that we believe recognises the following key points:

- Substantial increases in the cost of living over recent years have significantly reduced the value of staff wages and the rise in prices facing workers has been running at a 40-year high;
- Appropriate reward is needed to sustain the morale and productivity of staff in their crucial role of delivering high quality services;
- Appropriate reward is needed for the increased workload and stress placed on staff;
- Average earnings and pay settlements are rising at relatively high levels across the economy, adding to the problem of rates running ahead of those received by [organisation] staff over recent year and increasing the likelihood of recruitment and retention problems in the long term;
- Nobody should be paid less than the nationally recognised Living Wage rate, which has become a benchmark for the minimum level of decent pay across the UK and is now paid by large sections of the public services and many major private companies. [The claim may alternatively specify a minimum rate such as £15 an hour, which is UNISON's target for the National Minimum Wage]

## 2. SUMMARY OF CLAIM

We are seeking:

- A [\_\_%] increase on all salary points and allowances [If you are seeking an increase in line with a related public sector bargaining group, contact the Bargaining Support Group at [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk) for the latest figures]
- An additional increase in rates for staff at the bottom of the pay scale to bring their pay up to the level of the Living Wage. [The claim may alternatively specify a minimum rate such as £15 an hour, which is UNISON's target for the National Minimum Wage]
- [Any other additions to payments or improvement to conditions – UNISON guides on typical additional components, such as unsocial hours payments, vehicle allowances, reductions in hours, home working supplements, additional leave, workload controls, gender and ethnicity pay gaps can be found on the [bargaining guides](#) web page. This page also carries guidance on locational pay supplements and sets out arguments for their defence if employers attack supplements because of increased post-pandemic homeworking arrangements]

### 3. FALLING VALUE OF PAY

The table below demonstrates the major fall in living standards suffered by staff over recent years.

Year	[Organisation] pay increases	Rise in cost of living <sup>19</sup> (as measured by Retail Prices Index)
2010	[Insert pay rise]	4.6%
2011	[Insert pay rise]	5.2%
2012	[Insert pay rise]	3.2%
2013	[Insert pay rise]	3.0%
2014	[Insert pay rise]	2.4%
2015	[Insert pay rise]	1.0%
2016	[Insert pay rise]	1.8%
2017	[Insert pay rise]	3.6%
2018	[Insert pay rise]	3.3%
2019	[Insert pay rise]	2.6%
2020	[Insert pay rise]	1.5%
2021	[Insert pay rise]	4.1%
2022	[Insert pay rise]	11.6%
2023	[Insert pay rise]	9.7%

This means that, while a wage keeping pace with the cost of living each year would have risen by 74.9% since 2010, pay in [organisation] has risen by just [x%], resulting in the cutting of thousands of pounds from the value of staff wages [for assistance in calculations relating to this table, contact Bargaining Support on [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)]

The last two years have seen the steepest rises in the cost of living facing workers in over 40 years - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023<sup>20</sup>.

Inflation is still running at the substantial rate of 4.5%, led by major jumps in housing costs over the last year - mortgage interest payments surging by 37% and private rent rising 9%<sup>21</sup>.

Furthermore, the last decade has seen enormous jumps in the basic costs shown below<sup>22</sup>.

Expenditure Item	House prices	Bus & coach fares	Electricity	Gas
Price rise 2009 - 23	65%	93%	180%	144%

For the value of staff wages not to fall back even further, they must at least keep pace with rises in the cost of living.

<sup>19</sup> Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, December 2023

<sup>20</sup> Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, December 2023

<sup>21</sup> Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation, February 2024

<sup>22</sup> Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Tables, January 2024, for bus /coach, electricity and gas prices, Acadata National Historic Series for house prices

#### 4. FALLING BEHIND AVERAGE PAY RATES

The ability of [organisation] to attract and retain staff in the long term will be damaged if the pay of its staff falls behind the going rate in the labour market.

The table below demonstrates how [organisation]'s pay settlements have fallen behind economy averages over a sustained period.

Year	[Organisation] pay settlements	Average pay settlements
2010	[Insert pay rise]	2.0%
2011	[Insert pay rise]	2.5%
2012	[Insert pay rise]	2.5%
2013	[Insert pay rise]	2.5%
2014	[Insert pay rise]	2.5%
2015	[Insert pay rise]	2.2%
2016	[Insert pay rise]	2.0%
2017	[Insert pay rise]	2.0%
2018	[Insert pay rise]	2.5%
2019	[Insert pay rise]	2.5%
2020	[Insert pay rise]	2.3%
2021	[Insert pay rise]	2.0%
2022	[Insert pay rise]	4.0%
2023	[Insert pay rise]	5.6%

While average pay settlements have seen salaries grow by 44.1% since 2010, [organisation] increases have only amounted to [x%] across more than a decade, so [organisation] pay has lost more than [x%] of its value against average pay over the period. [for assistance in calculations relating to this table, contact Bargaining Support on [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)].

Pay rates are set to fall even further behind, given that pay settlements have been averaging 6.5%<sup>23</sup> and the Bank of England's most recent survey found that companies are expecting a 5.2% increase in wages over the next year<sup>24</sup>.

These pay figures reflect the relatively low unemployment rates and high vacancy rates that have fuelled turnover running at almost 20% in 2023 and demonstrates the scale of alternative areas of employment available to staff.

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<sup>23</sup> Labour Research Department

<sup>24</sup> Bank of England, Decision Maker Panel, February 2024

## 5. LIVING WAGE BECOMING STANDARD MINIMUM PAY BENCHMARK

The Living Wage has become a standard benchmark for the minimum needed for low-paid staff to have a “basic but acceptable” standard of living.

**[Organisation]** is now competing in a labour market where the Living Wage of £12 an hour outside London and £13.15 an hour in London has become an increasingly common minimum point in the pay scale.

Studies supported by Barclays Bank have shown that Living Wage employers report an increase in productivity, a reduction in staff turnover / absenteeism rates and improvements in their public reputation.

Consequently, there are now over 14,000 employers accredited as Living Wage employers by the Living Wage Foundation, including almost half of the largest companies listed on the UK Stock Exchange and household names such as Aviva, Barclays, HSBC, Nationwide, Google and IKEA are among them.

The precedent of the Living Wage, in tandem with recruitment and retention pressures, has also seen Aldi, Lidl, Sainsbury's, Marks and Spencer, Costa Coffee and Currys all set a new minimum rate of £12 an hour over the last year. Asda and Tesco have pushed their rates just above to £12.04 and £12.02 respectively, while Amazon has raised its rate for frontline operations staff to between £12.30 and £13 per hour, depending on location.

Within the public sector, the Living Wage has now long been set as the minimum pay rate across all Scotland's public sector organisations and this was extended to social care workers in Scotland's private and voluntary sector from October 2016. The Welsh Government has committed to achieving the same goal in social care by 2024.

[A listing of accredited Living Wage employers is published [here](#) and may be useful for developing a list of organisations that can put pressure on the employer by showing local or sectoral employers that are already paying the wage]

[For more detailed guidance if you wish to expand on arguments for the Living Wage, see the UNISON guide [here](#) – this includes further material on the damaging impact for employers of low pay, dispelling confusion with the government's “national living wage” and cascading benefits up the pay scale].



## 6. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRESSURES BUILDING

[Following the economic downturn triggered by the pandemic, recruitment and retention pressures are now beginning to reassert themselves on employers.

Therefore, if you can obtain figures for the organisation showing an increase in the vacancy rate (the number of vacant posts divided by the total number of posts in the organisation) or figures that are markedly worse than the 2.9% vacancy rate across the economy, set them out here.

Median turnover rates are estimated at 19.9% across the economy<sup>25</sup>, so if you have figures on turnover rates (calculated by taking the total number of leavers in a specified period - usually 12 months - and expressing the number as a percentage of the number of people employed during that period) that indicate the organisation is suffering higher than average turnover, insert them here. [For information on turnover rates in specific sectors, contact Bargaining Support at [bsg@union.so.uk](mailto:bsg@union.so.uk)]

## 7. MORALE UNDER THREAT

Working against a background of tight budgets, staff have been facing greater workload pressures. The resulting increased stress puts the morale of the workforce at risk and poses a long-term threat to **[organisation's]** ability to provide a consistent quality of service.

[Set out any evidence you can gather on the following factors:

- Increasing demands on the service;
- Reductions in staffing;
- Staff feeling greater stress;
- Staff suffering falling morale;
- The impact of these pressures showing themselves in rising sickness absence, higher staff turnover or declining service standards

It is in this area that a short survey of staff may provide the most valuable material to support the evidence. An amendable basic pay survey is set out in appendix 3 below]

## 8. AFFORDABILITY

The affordability of this claim is clear from the latest **[organisation]** accounts, which show a surplus of **[£\_]** for 2022/23, which is equivalent to a surplus of **[£\_]** for each employee.

Against this figure, the accounts suggest that a **[x%]** pay rise will cost **[£\_]**.

We also note the affordability of an **[x%]** pay rise for the chief executive, taking **[his/her]** total remuneration to **[£\_]**

[For the accounts of a private or community / voluntary organisation or assistance in interpreting accounts, contact Bargaining Support at [bsg@unison.co.uk](mailto:bsg@unison.co.uk)]

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<sup>25</sup> XpertHR, Labour turnover rates 2023

## 9. CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that all [organisation] staff have seen the value of their earnings fall considerably over recent years and evidence suggests that they are also falling behind earnings for comparable jobs.

Combined with these developments, the last year has seen intensified pressures placed on staff at the same time as greater job choices are opening up for staff in an improving labour market.

Therefore, this pay claim represents a very reasonable estimate of the reward staff deserve for their dedication, skill and hard work and the minimum improvement in pay needed to maintain workforce morale for delivering consistently high-quality services.

## Appendix 2 – Merits of percentage and flat-rate pay claims

Pay settlements can take the form of a percentage increase or a flat-rate increase. In making a judgement about whether to pursue a pay claim on a percentage or flat rate basis, branches should consider the following factors.

A percentage increase to salary can be viewed as fairer in the sense that all workers receive the same proportionate uplift in their pay packet. However, the cash value of that increase will be greater for higher paid staff than low paid staff.

For instance, a 1% pay rise for a worker on £20,000 a year translates into £200. A 1% increase for a worker on £40,000 translates into £400.

In contrast, agreeing a flat rate increase ensures that all staff receive the same cash uplift in wages, but that will mean a greater percentage for lower-paid workers than higher paid workers.

For instance, a £400 flat rate rise for a worker on £20,000 translates into a 2% increase. A £400 increase for a worker on £40,000 translates into a 1% increase.

In short, flat rate pay rises are more advantageous to lower paid workers than higher paid workers.

However, the other major consideration in evaluating these options is their effect on the pay scale as a whole and the differences in pay between jobs. This is particularly important if the pay structure has been established on the basis of a proper job evaluation procedure that seeks to recognise the different demands of job roles in the corresponding salary. Flat rate increases maintain the same cash value between jobs of differing demands and responsibilities, but reduce the percentage difference between them.

For instance, if a worker is on a salary of £20,000 and a supervisor on a salary of £30,000, a worker stepping up to a supervisor role would receive a 50% increase in their wage. If successive flat rate increases changed the pay structure so that a worker is on a salary of £30,000 and a supervisor on a salary of £40,000, stepping up would mean a 33% increase in their wage.

Settlements can often be based on a compromise between the percentage and flat rate. For instance, a flat rate is applied to a number of lower pay bands below a set pay threshold (e.g. all staff that earn less than £25,000), while a percentage applies to any staff above the threshold. The flat rate will normally be set at a level that delivers a higher percentage increase for lower paid staff than that for staff above the threshold. However, the percentage increase also ensures that pay rises at the top of the scale do not dwindle to a negligible percentage of salary.

### Appendix 3 - Strengthening claims through a staff survey

The model agreement above provides a framework for a claim that draws on broad national or sectoral information to make a case. However, to tailor the claim effectively to a particular employer, the most valuable information can often be drawn from members themselves.

Therefore, consider conducting a short survey to identify the key pay related concerns of members and generate data, quotes or examples that are likely to influence the employer.

However, surveys can entail some notable pitfalls that can be addressed by observing the following points:

- Start planning the survey in good time to develop the questions, allow a two or three week period for responses and sufficient time for result analysis before incorporating within the claim and lodging the claim at the appropriate point in the annual pay negotiation cycle.
- Try to keep the survey short so that it is not overly demanding on staff time and they are more likely to complete it. As a rough guide, it should take between five and 10 minutes to complete, which means between 10 and 30 questions.
- Requiring answers that are specific reduces the time necessary for analysis. For example, if asking “How would you describe morale?”, requiring responses of High, Moderate or Low will enable you to quickly establish from the results that, for instance, 64% of staff see morale as low. If the answer is left open, responses will have to be analysed one by one to place them in categories and provide usable percentages for a claim.
- However, there can be a place for open-ended questions as they can generate quotes and examples of value to a claim. For instance, supplementing a survey with a question such as “In what way has your experience of work changed over the last year?” may give you a telling quote that makes a point more effectively than a page of percentages.
- Profile questions can be considered at the end of surveys to enable the results to be broken down according to certain categories. You may want to assess the differing experiences of pay for different parts of the workforce, by breaking down responses by factors such as department, occupation, part-time/full-time status, income band, disability, gender, age or ethnicity.
- Ensure that the survey carries a preamble that emphasises to members that the survey is completely anonymous, makes plain the purpose for which the gathered data will be used and tells them approximately how long the survey will take to complete.
- Always make sure that the data you submit to the employer protects your members’ identities.

- The best method for protecting confidentiality and for reducing the time necessary to analyse results is to conduct an online survey. The recommended online survey service is set out below. However, if the survey is sent out to email addresses, care has to be taken that this is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations. Distribution should take place through UNISON's WARMS system (Web Access RMS), to ensure that the emails used for members are those that they have provided for such purposes to the union.
- Consider alternative ways to gain the benefits of an online survey without the restrictions of email distribution. For instance, you could place the survey link on social media if you are confident that it would be accessed by sufficient staff without notifying emails. Alternatively, you could seek to develop a joint pay survey with the employer (if that did not mean too many compromises on questions asked), which the employer could then distribute to staff.
- If you decide on manually distributing a hard copy survey, ensure that the survey can be returned as confidentially as possible. Like the examples above which do not rely on union email distribution lists, the advantage to this method is that it can go wider than UNISON membership if agreed with any other unions representing staff. In this way, it may both gather a wider section of staff views that carries more weight with the employer and assist in recruiting members by highlighting the role of the union in advancing staff terms and conditions.

## Online survey providers

When it comes to online survey providers, UNISON recommends Alchemer (formerly SurveyGizmo) because you can request the data be hosted within the EU, making it compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018).

There is a free version of Alchemer which will handle up to 100 responses before extra charges are applied. However, if you wish to explore the paid packages which allow for unlimited surveys and responses, while allowing for anonymity in those responses - pricing starts at £45 per month.

You can sign up for Alchemer here: <https://www.alchemer.com/> When setting up an account you need to make sure you choose the appropriate data centre to ensure that data is processed on the EU data centre.

The Alchemer support website carries these useful links:

- Tutorials: <https://www.alchemer.com/tutorials/>
- Building accessible surveys: <https://help.alchemer.com/help/survey-building-faq>
- Alchemer Support team: <https://help.alchemer.com/help/alchemer-support-hours>
- How to make voting anonymous: <https://help.alchemer.com/help/anonymous-surveys>

For every Alchemer account that contains UNISON member data, a branch elected official must notify their Regional Head.

When collecting personal data, the UK GDPR states:

- You must tell individuals what you are going to do with it;
- You must keep the personal data secure;
- You must only do what you have told individuals you are going to do with the data, you cannot use the data for other purposes once you have it.

When conducting surveys, ensuring the following are clear in the body of the survey will ensure that you meet the standards set by the UK GDPR:

- The purpose of the survey and that it is UNISON collecting the data;
- What data you are going to collect and what you are going to do with it. Only ask for information you need to meet the purpose, do not collect excessive data;
- If you are going to share the data with a third-party i.e. organisation outside UNISON;
- How long you will keep the data.

To ensure that participants know what their rights and have a general understanding of how UNISON uses their data, you must always include a link to the UNISON privacy policy - <https://www.unison.org.uk/privacypolicy/>

If you need any help making your survey compliant, please contact UNISON's Data Protection Team on [dataprotection@unison.co.uk](mailto:dataprotection@unison.co.uk).

## UNISON SURVEY

UNISON **[branch name]** is currently assembling a pay claim to put to **[employer's name]** for the annual pay rise from **[insert date]**. In order to ensure this claim is firmly based on your experiences and views, we would greatly appreciate it if you could spare the time to complete this survey.

The survey covers just 10 questions and would normally take less than five minutes to complete. All responses to this questionnaire are anonymous and will be treated as confidential. It will not be possible to identify any individual from information used for the claim.

## PAY

<b>1. Compared to 12 months ago, how do you feel your pay has changed relative to the cost of living?</b>	
I am better off	
I am worse off	
Neither better nor worse off	
<b>2. Are you dependent on any of the following additional payments to sustain your standard of living?</b>	
Unsocial hours	
On-call / stand-by	
Overtime	
Second job	
Other - please specify here	

## WORKING CONDITIONS

**3. Compared with this time last year, what would you say have been the changes to the following dimensions of working conditions in your working area or department?**

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same	Don't know
Workload				
Stress				
Number of staff				
Number of service users				
Quality of service				

**4. Has your increased workload resulted in?**

A detrimental effect on your job performance	
A detrimental effect on your personal life	
Little or no effect	

**5. In relation to your working life, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is extremely low and 10 is extremely high, how motivated are you?**

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	



<b>6. How would you describe morale in your workplace?</b>	
Very high	
High	
Moderate	
Low	
Very low	

<b>7. Compared to 12 months ago, how has morale changed?</b>	
Improved	
Worsened	
Remained the same	
Not sure/don't know	

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

<b>8. How seriously have you considered leaving your current position over the last year?</b>	
I have not considered leaving	
Not very seriously	
Fairly seriously	
Very seriously	

<b>9. Over the last year, how frequently have staff shortages occurred in your workplace?</b>	
Frequently	
Occasionally	
Never	
Not sure/don't know	

## PROFILE

<b>10. What income band does your basic salary fall in?</b>	
Less than £10,000	
Between £10,000 and £19,999	
Between £20,000 and £39,999	
£40,000 or over	
Prefer not to say	