



Joint Negotiating Committee *for* Youth and Community Workers

Staff Side Pay and Conditions Claim 2026

Submitted by Unite, UNISON, NEU and UCU

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Summary of Claim

The Staff Side's headline claim:

1. **For a substantial pay rise of 10% to ensure that lowest paid youth worker wage remains significantly above the minimum wage of £12.71 an hour.**
2. **To confirm the specific wording to be included in the JNC National Agreement ("The Pink Book") to reflect the JNC's commitment to maintaining Youth Workers as a degree-led profession. Also to reflect the importance of the Level 6 qualification and its parity with other professions in accordance with the commitment given in the LGA's Youth and Community Workers – Pay 2025 letter dated 23rd September 2025.**
3. **37 hours a year mandatory CPD to address and identify skill gaps within the service and to support workers dealing with increasingly complex challenges faced by young people.**
4. **To address work-life balance and time off in lieu by:**
 - a. **Each working week (that does not include a residential) containing two consecutive days that are designated as non-working days. Any TOIL accrued for residential work should be separate from these designated non-working days.**
 - b. **Reducing the standard working week for full-time youth and community workers to 35-hours, with sufficient time for planning and admin, and with a further commitment to work towards a four-day week without loss of pay.**
 - c. **Opportunities should be created for workers to reduce the number of evening sessions worked with twilight sessions on a regular basis to improve work life balance.**
 - d. **A twilight session is defined as a single session of work commencing after 3.30pm and will be recognised as fulfilling an evening session requirement. Workers will not be required or expected to undertake an additional evening session on the same day.**
 - e. **Sufficient protected time must be built into the working day following a twilight session to ensure that any safeguarding concerns, welfare issues, or significant events arising during the session are recorded, reported, and responded to in a timely manner.**

1. Rebuilding our youth services

- 1.1 After many years of campaigning to rebuild our youth services, the Staff Side welcomes the commitments set out within the National Youth Strategy, particularly the recognition that *“strengthening the workforce”* must form a central pillar of the government’s long-term vision for young people. This is a crucial and overdue step toward rebuilding the sector after years of underinvestment, cuts and instability.
- 1.2 The ambition for *“half a million more young people to be given access to a trusted adult outside their home”*¹ represents a significant commitment to supporting young people’s wellbeing, resilience, and transition into adulthood. This objective has the potential to transform outcomes for many young people, particularly at a time when increasing numbers face social, emotional, and mental health challenges.
- 1.3 Such an ambition can only be realised through the development and retention of a professional, stable, and properly rewarded workforce. It is therefore welcome that the strategy acknowledges that high-quality youth provision depends upon a skilled and sustainable workforce.
- 1.4 The Staff Side believes it is essential that the concept of a *“trusted adult”* is not reduced to a substitute for qualified youth and community workers or used to justify lower-paid and less secure forms of employment. Trusted relationships with young people are built through professional expertise, sustained engagement, ethical practice, and specialist training. For this reason, the expansion of youth provision must be underpinned by JNC-qualified professionals who possess the knowledge, experience, and safeguarding competencies required to meet the increasingly complex needs of young people.
- 1.5 The Staff Side further welcomes the government’s intention to *“rebuild the role, capability, and leadership of local authorities in the youth sector”*² and to enable more strategic, place-based decision-making. Restoring the capacity of local authorities will be critical to ensuring youth services are responsive to local need and capable of delivering consistent, high-quality provision. A strengthened local infrastructure, combined with a properly supported professional workforce, will be fundamental to achieving the long-term ambitions set out in the National Youth Strategy.
- 1.6 Restoration of decent pay and conditions for youth and community workers must be at the heart of the National Youth Strategy. This will be impossible without proper sustainable funding and investment. The Chief Executive of UK Youth made a plea in 2025 for the National Youth Strategy to *“be the moment to turn the tide on one and a half decades of under investment”*³. In February this year YMCA analysis reveals that local authority funding for youth services saw its biggest annual cut since 2016 in between 2024 and 2025.⁴ YMCA’s annual report into youth service funding showed *“that councils in England spent £419 million on services for young people in 2024–25, a sharp year-on-year*

¹ https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/NYA_Pathways-to_Practice_A_Consultation-Outcomes-Report-on-the-Future-of-YouthWork-Qualifications.pdf Section: “Our 10-Year Plan”, Page 12, Paragraph 2.

² https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/NYA_Pathways-to_Practice_A_Consultation-Outcomes-Report-on-the-Future-of-YouthWork-Qualifications.pdf Shift 1: “From national to local”, Page 8, Paragraph 3.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/25/labour-spending-less-youth-work-tories-did-analysis>

⁴ <https://ymca.org.uk/local-authority-funding-for-youth-services-sees-biggest-annual-cut-in-almost-a-decade-new-ymca-analysis-reveals/>

fall that comes at a critical moment for national policy on youth provision". They go on to report that over the previous 14 years, local authority funding for youth services in England had fallen by 76% in real terms, (£1.3 billion) since 2010–11 and in Wales by 29% over the same period.

- 1.7 The commitment outlined in the National Youth Strategy to provide young people with *"somewhere to go, something meaningful to do, and someone who cares about their wellbeing,"*⁵ supported by over £500 million of investment, is therefore strongly welcomed. This investment signals an important recognition of the value of youth services in supporting communities and improving life chances. To maximise the impact of this funding, it is vital that investment reaches the workforce itself through fair pay, improved conditions, professional development, and secure career pathways capable of attracting and retaining skilled practitioners.
- 1.8 This investment must be accompanied by a long-term financial commitment to the sector. The sustained cuts to youth services over recent years have had serious and far-reaching consequences, particularly for disadvantaged young people who often rely on youth work as a vital source of support, guidance, and opportunity. Such damage will take several years to repair.
- 1.9 The evidence consistently demonstrates that youth work delivers significant social value. It provides safe and inclusive spaces where young people can build confidence, resilience, relationships, and practical life skills⁶. Many young people describe youth work as life-changing, and in some cases lifesaving, helping to combat loneliness, improve wellbeing, and offer meaningful support through difficult circumstances. This is especially true for young people with multiple challenges in their lives.⁷ At a time of rising mental health concerns, increased school absence, and growing exposure to harmful online influences and extremism, youth work offers a trusted, preventative, and non-judgemental form of engagement.
- 1.10 Research strongly supports the benefits of investing in youth services. Studies have linked the closure of youth centres with increased youth crime⁸, higher school suspension rates, poorer educational outcomes, and rising knife crime⁹. Evidence from the Institute for Fiscal Studies¹⁰ found that young people affected by youth club closures performed worse academically, while also showing that every £1 invested in youth services can generate up to £8 in voluntary social value. Supporting a young person through youth work costs significantly less¹¹ than the long-term costs associated with involvement in the criminal justice system¹².
- 1.11 Despite this, youth work remains a non-statutory service and is frequently vulnerable to cuts, even though the resulting social and economic costs far outweigh any short-term savings. The Staff Side believes the sector now requires sustained reinvestment, stronger partnerships between statutory and voluntary providers, and renewed commitment to recruiting, supporting, and fairly

⁵ https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/NYA_Pathways-to_Practice_A_Consultation-Outcomes-Report-on-the-Future-of-YouthWork-Qualifications.pdf Executive Summary, Page 4, Paragraph 1.

⁶ The contribution of professional youth work to the personal development and social participation of socially vulnerable youngsters: A Dutch longitudinal cohort study, Sonneveld, J., Metz, J., Manders, W., Schalk, R., & Van Regenmortel, T. 2020

⁷ Building understanding of the value of youth work, Dr Tania de St Croix . 28 April 2022.

⁸ Newton, A., May, X., Eames, S., Ahmad, M., Economic and social costs of reoffending analytical report Ministry of Justice

⁹ The Impact of Youth Centres on Crime research: <https://carmenvillallera.com/research>

¹⁰ <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/how-cuts-youth-clubs-affected-teen-crime-and-education>

¹¹ The social cost of youth work cuts: Preventing youth offending through youth work 2023

¹² Irwin-Rogers, K., Muthoo, A., Billingham, L (2020) Youth Violence Commission Final Report

rewarding JNC-qualified youth and community workers in order to ensure every young person has access to high-quality support.

- 1.12 In light of the government’s renewed recognition of youth workers as “*essential professionals*” within the National Youth Strategy, there remains a strong case to put the service on a statutory footing and to recognise JNC-qualified practitioners as key or critical workers as was done during the Covid-19 pandemic. Staff side recognises that this political decision may be beyond the scope of the JNC claim but hopes that the sector will continue to support this aim going forward. Formal recognition would not only acknowledge the sector’s societal contribution but also support recruitment and retention by extending access to practical benefits such as housing support and preferential financial arrangements in areas where rising living costs make workforce sustainability increasingly difficult.

2. Chronic real terms pay cuts

- 2.1 Since 2009, youth and community workers have experienced a sustained and significant decline in the real value of their wages when adjusted for inflation and the rising cost of living. This decline is not only causing deep impacts on their financial wellbeing but also devaluing their profession and qualifications.
- 2.2 The long-term decline in pay has been exacerbated by recent economic shocks that have driven the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Many are now struggling to meet basic household expenses as youth and community workers have seen household costs, rent, mortgage repayments, energy bills, and childcare, food prices and other essentials far outpacing JNC pay awards. As a result, many workers are facing real hardship, with some forced to rely on food banks, take out costly loans or take on second jobs to make ends meet.
- 2.3 Table 1 illustrates that, when examined in detail, many of the factors contributing to increases in the RPI are linked to essential everyday costs, including transport, clothing, and housing. In addition, longer-term trends demonstrate that food prices continue to remain significantly higher than they were during the previous decade.¹³
- 2.4 Housing¹⁴ costs also continue to rise fast in many parts of the county with the Office for National Statistics reporting that “Average UK private rent increased by 3.4% in the 12 months to March 2026 (provisional estimate. Average UK house prices increased by 1.2% in the 12 months to February 2025.

¹³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/costoflivinginsights/food>

¹⁴ ONS Private rent and house prices, UK: April 2026

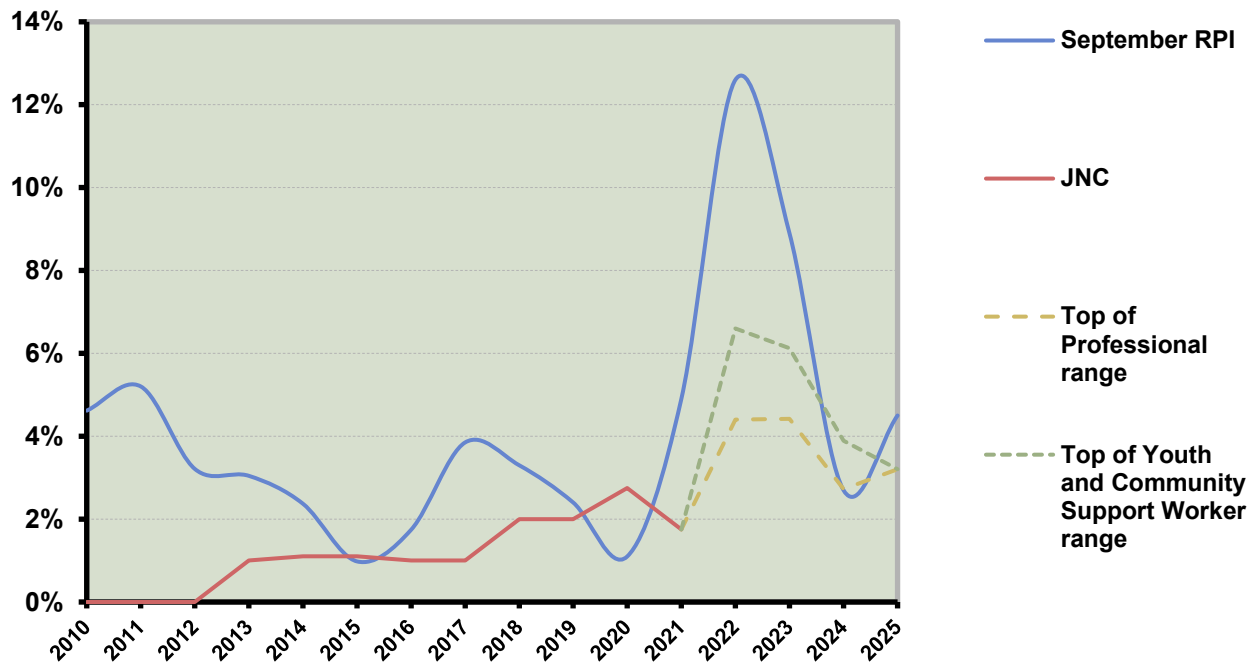
Table 1: 8 of the 14 groups in the RPI basket of goods increased by 4.1% or more March 2026

Broad Categories	% annual increase
Fares and other travel costs	8.0
Tobacco	6.0
Fuel and light	5.5
Catering	5.3
Leisure services	5.2
Clothing and footwear	5.0
Food	4.7
Motoring expenditure	4.7
Housing	3.6
Household services	3.3
Personal goods and services	3.3
Alcoholic drink	2.3
Household goods	1.7
Leisure goods	0.7

Source: ONS April 2026

2.5 Figure 1 shows that, for most of the last decade, inflation has consistently outpaced JNC pay awards, while temporary dips in inflation in 2020 and 2024 did little to close the gap over the longer term.

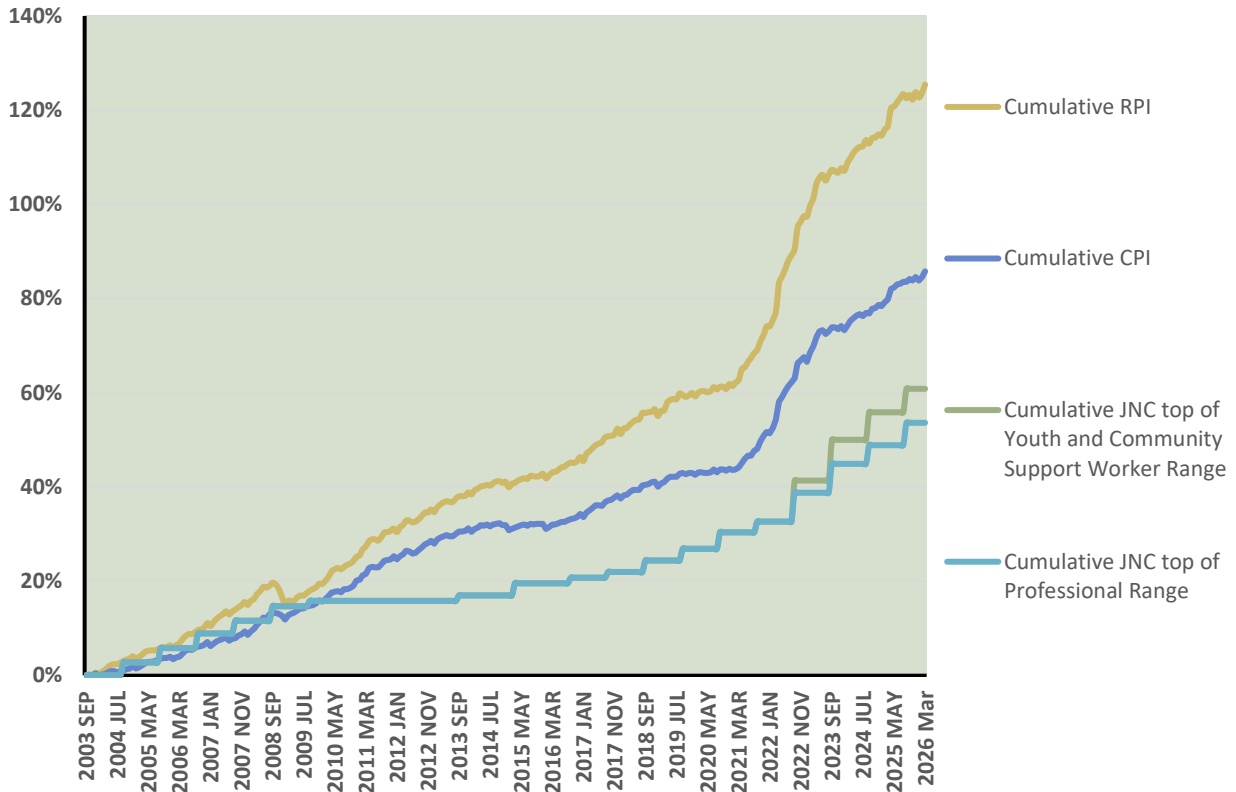
Figure 1: JNC rises compared to RPI inflation (September 2011 – 25)



Source: ONS

2.6 Figure 2 shows the cumulative increase in JNC earnings have diverged starkly from RPI and CPI since 2009/10.

Figure 2: Cumulative loss of earnings from the JNC compared to RPI and CPI



Source: ONS

2.7 These year on year real-terms reductions in pay, have left youth and community workers significantly worse off each year with substantially less purchasing power. If salaries had risen in line with RPI inflation¹⁵, many workers would today be receiving thousands of pounds more each year - not as an improvement in living standards, but merely to preserve the value of their income.

2.8 Table 2 highlights the scale of this decline by illustrating the widening gap between current pay levels and the salaries workers would need to match inflation. These figures represent more than statistical shortfalls: they reveal the concrete consequences of austerity policies and the failure of employers to protect workers’ livelihoods, financial stability, and family wellbeing.

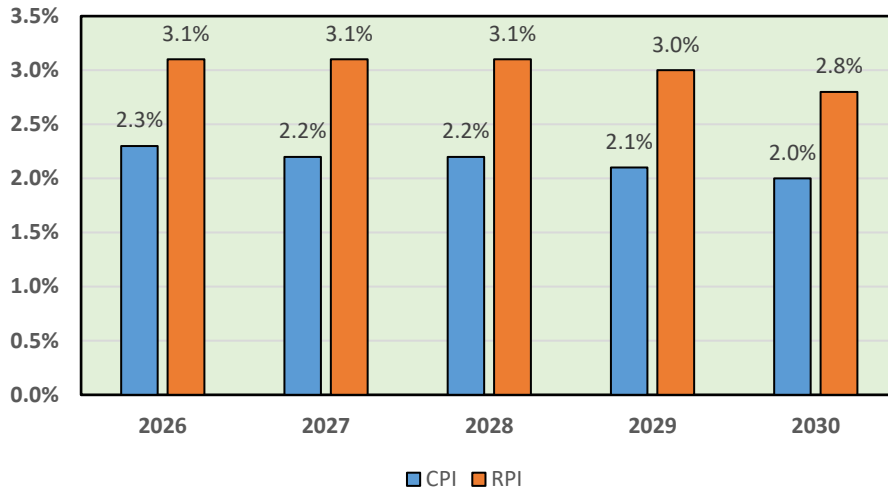
¹⁵ The Staff Side considers the Retail Price Index to be the appropriate measure of inflation. The Government still refers to RPI as its preferred measure when considering student loans, private pension uprating and index linked gilts and bonds. RPI is still widely used as the preferred measure in private sector pay settlements. Significantly, unlike other measures, the RPI includes housing costs, which are clearly a major component of workers’ expenditure.

Table 2: Pay Scales – Loss of earnings since September 2009

		Pay Spine Sep-2009	Pay Spine Sep-2025	Pay Spine if it had matched RPI inflation between September 2009 and 2025	Loss of earnings 2009 – 2025	Real terms loss % 2009 – 2025
Youth and Community Support Worker Range	1	£14,143	-	£26,677	-£1,097	-7.8%
	2	£14,733	-	£27,790	-£2,210	-15.0%
	3	£15,324	-	£28,904	-£3,324	-21.7%
	4	£15,917	-	£30,023	-£4,443	-27.9%
	5	£16,509	£25,580	£31,139	-£5,559	-33.7%
	6	£17,100	£25,919	£32,254	-£6,335	-37.0%
	7	£17,697	£26,225	£33,380	-£7,155	-40.4%
	8	£18,291	£26,924	£34,501	-£7,577	-41.4%
	9	£19,047	£27,817	£35,927	-£8,110	-42.6%
	10	£19,636	£28,516	£37,038	-£8,522	-43.4%
	11	£20,591	£29,644	£38,839	-£9,195	-44.7%
	12	£21,525	£30,745	£40,601	-£9,856	-45.8%
	13	£22,489	£31,885	£42,419	-£10,534	-46.8%
	14	£23,485	£33,066	£44,298	-£11,232	-47.8%
	15	£24,166	£33,869	£45,582	-£11,713	-48.5%
	16	£24,875	£34,708	£46,919	-£12,211	-49.1%
	17	£25,574	£35,533	£48,238	-£12,705	-49.7%
Professional Range	18	£26,279	£36,364	£49,568	-£13,204	-50.2%
	19	£26,975	£37,189	£50,881	-£13,692	-50.8%
	20	£27,673	£38,016	£52,197	-£14,181	-51.2%
	21	£28,461	£38,945	£53,683	-£14,738	-51.8%
	22	£29,352	£39,997	£55,364	-£15,367	-52.4%
	23	£30,219	£41,023	£56,999	-£15,976	-52.9%
	24	£31,091	£42,053	£58,644	-£16,591	-53.4%
	25	£31,968	£43,091	£60,298	-£17,207	-53.8%
	26	£32,847	£44,128	£61,956	-£17,828	-54.3%
	27	£33,726	£45,165	£63,614	-£18,449	-54.7%
	28	£34,613	£46,216	£65,287	-£19,071	-55.1%
	29	£35,496	£47,258	£66,953	-£19,695	-55.5%
	30	£36,377	£48,301	£68,615	-£20,314	-55.8%

2.9 It is essential that workers’ pay does not decline further in real terms as living costs are expected to continue rising. The Treasury’s summary of city and independent forecasts expect RPI to remain at a median of 3.1% throughout 2026 and 2027¹⁶. The full 5-year forecasts are shown in Figure 3. These forecasts are now likely to be unreliable as the figures pre-date the impact of the war on Iran and resultant global instability that is expected to drive significant rises in food and fuel prices.

Figure 3: Forecast annual increase in cost of living (RPI and CPI)



Source: HM Treasury Forecasts for the UK Economy, February 2026

2.10 This cost-of-living crisis is expected to continue to worsen as the recent conflict in the Persian Gulf has added significant uncertainty into economic predictions. The disruptions to global oil and gas supplies, as well as fertiliser and other related commodities is likely to add significant costs to food, logistics and transport costs. Pay specialists Incomes Data Research reported in March that their panel of economic experts, including leading economists from the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR), were all predicting that this would have an upward impact on inflation in the coming months¹⁷ and may lead to interest rates rises as a result¹⁸.

2.11 The Staff Side therefore considers it imperative that immediate steps are taken to prevent any further decline in pay and to support workers facing sustained cost-of-living pressures. Resolving this problem is vital not only in the interests of fairness, but also to ensure that youth and community work remains a sustainable and appealing profession. Failure to act will intensify existing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff across the sector.

2.12 In light of the persistent disparities in pay throughout the sector, it is equally important that tangible progress is made toward tackling pay inequality, in line with commitments reached during earlier negotiations. The Staff Side welcomes the opportunity to continue engaging through the JNC over the next year to develop practical measures on this issue.

2.13 **The Staff Side therefore calls for a substantial pay rise of 10% to ensure that lowest paid youth worker wage remains significantly above the minimum wage of £12.71 an hour.**

¹⁶HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, February 2026

¹⁷ IDR Viewpoint, 11 March 2026.

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/cpwjw9dg2vjt>

3. Pay comparators

- 3.1 As the National Youth Agency has acknowledged there remain widespread concerns about the ability to recruit and retain youth and community workers, despite a public consensus on the need for youth and community services. This is symptomatic of wider recruitment and retention issues across local government particularly for professionally skilled staff like youth and community workers, due to the pay of staff falling behind the going rate in the wider labour market.
- 3.2 National Youth Agency (NYA) research¹⁹ in 2025 showed that years of austerity has pushed youth work out of secure public sector employment and it is now predominantly delivered through the voluntary sector (69%), and as a result there is a significant shortage of professionally trained practitioners. A lack of stable career pathways deters new entrants, further deepening the workforce crisis.
- 3.3 The report pointed to a predominance of low pay and unstable jobs, with a quarter (25%) of youth work jobs now paid below the national living wage, and nearly a third (29%) being temporary or zero-hour contracts. The average salary of a youth worker has fallen over £15,000 below the UK national average.
- 3.4 A gap between public and private rates has also been a persistent feature of the economy over the last decade and a half. Table 3 below shows how average pay settlements compare with JNC pay awards. Between 2010 and 2019, JNC pay awards fell significantly behind average pay awards across the whole economy. There was some improvement after this period, specifically in 2020, 2022 and 2024 – but this has not been enough to recover the cumulative loss endured between 2010 and 2019.

Table 3: Average pay settlements VS JNC pay awards, 2010-2025

Year	IDR average settlements	JNC top of the professional range
2010	2.0%	0.0%
2011	2.5%	0.0%
2012	2.5%	0.0%
2013	2.5%	1.0%
2014	2.5%	1.1%
2015	2.2%	1.1%
2016	2.0%	1.0%
2017	2.0%	1.0%
2018	2.5%	2.0%
2019	2.5%	2.0%
2020	2.3%	2.8%
2021	2.0%	1.8%
2022	4.0%	4.4%
2023	5.6%	4.4%
2024	4.5%	2.7%
2025	3.6%	3.2%

Source: Incomes Data Research

¹⁹ <https://nya.org.uk/youth-work-workforce-crisis-urgent-action-needed/#:~:text=Workforce%20in%20Crisis,further%20deepening%20the%20workforce%20crisis.>

3.5 Despite some relative improvements in recent years for public sector workers as a whole, this has often masked differences in pay rises for specific public sector agreements, with local authority agreements mostly worse than other public services (e.g. the NHS and Police). As Table 4 shows, in 2025 the local authorities pay rises (3.2%) were significantly below those achieved in the NHS, for teachers and other public services such as police and civil servants, while those already announced for 2026 appear to be continuing that trend.

3.6 It should be stressed that in none of these cases were the pay rises sufficient to recoup the losses felt over the previous 16 years of pay cuts, even where they were above inflation.

Table 4: Public Sector pay awards 2025 and 2026

2025 deals higher than the JNC (3.2%)	% Increase	Anniversary date
The Welsh Government	5%	01/04/2025
Armed Forces	4.5%	01/04/2025
National Crime Agency	4.4%	01/08/2025
Police	4.2%	01/09/2025
Police Staff Council	4.2%	01/09/2025
Prison Service (England & Wales)	4%	01/04/2025
School Teachers (England)	4%	01/09/2025
School Teachers (Wales)	4%	01/09/2025
NHS Doctors and Dentists	4%	01/04/2025
NHS Agenda for Change (England)	3.6%	01/04/2025
NHS Agenda for Change (Wales)	3.6%	01/04/2025
Senior Civil Service	3.25%	01/04/2025
2026 deals higher than 3.2%		
Members of Parliament	5%	01/04/2026
NHS Doctors and Dentists (Salaried Dentists)	3.75%	01/04/2026
NHS Doctors and Dentists	3.5%	01/04/2026
Prison Service (England & Wales)	3.5%	01/04/2026
NHS Agenda for Change (England)	3.3%	01/04/2026

Source: Incomes Data Research

3.7 Unsurprisingly this difference has meant that youth and community worker pay has fallen behind many of the professions most comparable. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) 2025 provisional results record the median annual gross pay of youth and community workers²⁰ as £27,711 and the mean as £26,894. The median pay of a full-time youth and community worker was £32,654 and mean was £33,239, while for those working part-time the median annual pay was £14,595 and

²⁰ ASHE 2025 Provisional data, Table 14.7a Annual Gross Pay, SOC 3221

mean was £14,979. A quarter of all youth and community workers are recorded as earning £18,293 or less and 80% earning £36,518 a year or less.

3.8 The ASHE 2025 occupational data give the median pay for all social workers²¹ as £42,708 and the mean at £41,623. The median for full time social workers is £44,550 and mean is £44,898. For teachers, the ASHE 2025 occupational data states that the median for all teaching and educational professionals²² is £43,119 and mean is £42,893. For full time workers the median is £47,479 and mean is £48,803.

Table 5 Joint Union Teacher Pay Scales for Qualified Classroom Teachers (from 1 September 2025)

	England	Wales *	Inner London	Outer London	London Fringe
	01-Sep-25	01-Sep-25	01-Sep-25	01-Sep-25	01-Sep-25
Main Pay Range	£ p.a.	£ p.a.	£ p.a.	£ p.a.	£ p.a.
1 (minimum)	£32,916	-	£40,317	£37,870	£34,398
2	£34,823	£33,731	£42,234	£39,851	£36,373
3	£37,101	£36,441	£44,238	£41,935	£38,627
4	£39,556	£39,249	£46,339	£44,128	£41,075
5	£42,057	£42,339	£48,952	£46,800	£43,545
6 (maximum)	£45,352	£46,595	£52,300	£50,474	£46,839
Upper Pay Range					
1 (minimum)	£47,472	£48,304	£57,632	£52,219	£48,913
2	£49,232	£50,095	£60,464	£54,151	£50,668
3 (maximum)	£51,048	£51,942	£62,496	£56,154	£52,490

*Pay rates in Wales are not set as pay ranges but as a specific national teacher pay scale

3.9 A comparison with classroom teacher pay rates for 2025/2026 (with Table 5 outlining the joint union-recommended pay structures²³) shows that these are broadly aligned with the JNC professional range. However, teachers who hold management responsibilities typically earn above these levels. It is also important to highlight the markedly higher London Area Allowances available to teachers compared with those under the JNC (see Table 6).

Table 6: Annual London Allowances

Teachers Main Pay Range	Inner £ p.a.	Outer £ p.a.	Fringe £ p.a.
1	£7,401	£4,954	£1,482
2	£7,411	£5,028	£1,550
3	£7,137	£4,834	£1,526
4	£6,783	£4,572	£1,519
5	£6,895	£4,743	£1,488
6	£6,948	£5,122	£1,487
Teachers Upper Pay Range			
1	£10,160	£4,747	£1,441
2	£11,232	£4,919	£1,436
3	£11,448	£5,106	£1,442
Youth and Community workers (JNC)	£3,721	£2,445	£954

²¹ ASHE 2025 Provisional data, Table 14.7a Annual Gross Pay, SOC 2461

²² ASHE 2025 Provisional data, Table 14.7a Annual Gross Pay SOC 23

²³ <https://neu.org.uk/pay-scales>

3.10 The Staff Side believes that an increase of 10% on all rates of pay and on allowances would help to reduce the pay differential between youth and community workers and other comparable professions.

Table 7: Staff Side Claim

		Pay Spine Sep-2025	2026 claim: 10% on all grades	
Youth and Community Support Worker Range	5	£25,580	£28,138	
	6	£25,919	£28,511	
	7	£26,225	£28,848	
	8	£26,924	£29,616	
	9	£27,817	£30,599	
	10	£28,516	£31,368	
	11	£29,644	£32,608	
	12	£30,745	£33,820	
	13	£31,885	£35,074	
	14	£33,066	£36,373	
	15	£33,869	£37,256	
	16	£34,708	£38,179	
	17	£35,533	£39,086	
	Professional Range	18	£36,364	£40,000
		19	£37,189	£40,908
		20	£38,016	£41,818
		21	£38,945	£42,840
22		£39,997	£43,997	
23		£41,023	£45,125	
24		£42,053	£46,258	
25		£43,091	£47,400	
26		£44,128	£48,541	
27		£45,165	£49,682	
28		£46,216	£50,838	
29		£47,258	£51,984	
30		£48,301	£53,131	
31		£49,005*	£53,906	
32		£50,162*	£55,178	

* Discretionary points

Work-life balance and time off in lieu

- 4.1 The Staff Side has been raising concerns about excessive workloads for youth and community workers for a number of years now, with long hours, and rising stress levels the norm in the sector. The JNC framework was originally established to support staff in managing their time effectively, ensuring adequate rest, work-life balance, and the capacity to deliver the high-quality services that communities need and deserve. This framework has been put under severe pressure due to the sharp decline in staffing resulting in ever heavier workloads on those staff who remain.
- 4.2 TUC analysis has repeatedly highlighted that public sector staff are disproportionately working excessive amounts of unpaid overtime. 3.5 million people did unpaid overtime in 2025, putting in an average of 6.8 unpaid hours a week. For those workers, that's equivalent on average to £8,100 a year of wages going unpaid for work done - contributing an estimated £31 billion of unpaid overtime²⁴.
- 4.3 The Staff Side is clear that reliance on goodwill and unpaid overtime is unsustainable. All hours worked must be properly paid, including evening and weekend duties, with appropriate compensation or TOIL provided.
- 4.4 Over a decade of cuts totalling more than £1 billion²⁵ has hollowed out the youth service. Workers have absorbed redundancies, expanded responsibilities, and excessive workloads in order to sustain services.
- 4.5 This culture of long hours is damaging both staff wellbeing and service delivery. Evidence links excessive working hours to stress, depression, anxiety, fatigue, workplace accidents²⁶, low morale, and high staff turnover²⁷, ultimately reducing effectiveness and productivity²⁸.
- 4.6 The latest Health and Safety Executive analysis of the Labour Force Survey²⁹ found that 1.9 million workers reported work-related ill health in 2024/25, including 964,000 cases of stress, depression, or anxiety—well above pre-pandemic levels. The most affected sectors include health and social care, education, and public administration, where youth work is heavily concentrated.
- 4.7 As awareness of these risks grows, many organisations are exploring more sustainable working models. The Staff Side therefore reiterates that unpaid hours must not become the default and that workers must be fully compensated for all labour undertaken.
- 4.8 This trend is harming not only individual workers, but also the quality of youth services overall. When staff cannot plan their time, rest adequately, or maintain balance in their lives, service delivery suffers—and so do the young people they support.
- 4.9 Reducing working hours can lower unemployment, increase productivity, reduce carbon emissions, and improve overall well-being. Some local authorities have already reduced their working week

²⁴ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/tuc-uk-workers-put-ps28-billion-unpaid-overtime-last-year>

²⁵ <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/news/article/youth-services-cuts-exceed-1bn-in-a-decade>

²⁶ http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/hsl_pdf/2003/hsl03-02.pdf

²⁷ <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/352.pdf>

²⁸ <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8129.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overview.htm>

below the JNC hours to 35 hours without negative impacts on services. Many employers have gone further, with over 200 UK companies having committed to a permanent four-day working week without reducing employee pay³⁰. Companies moving to this model argue that the traditional five-day work week is outdated and that a four-day week can enhance work-life balance, increase employee satisfaction, and maintain productivity.

4.10 The move is particularly popular among younger workers, with many prioritising mental health and well-being. South Cambridgeshire District Council became the first local authority to trial the 4-day week (with no loss in pay). That trial produced significant savings for the council, particularly on retention and recruitment. In July last year they voted to adopt the four-day week on a permanent basis³¹.

4.11 The Staff Side is therefore calling for a comprehensive package of measures to address overwork and stress. These changes are essential to improving the wellbeing of youth and community workers and to restoring a sustainable, resilient youth service.

4.12 **The Staff Side calls on the employers to address work-life balance and time off in lieu by:**

- a. **Each working week (that does not include a residential) must contain two consecutive days that are designated as non-working days. Any TOIL accrued for residential work should be separate from these designated non-working days.**
- b. **Reducing the standard working week for full-time youth and community workers to 35-hours, with sufficient time for planning and admin, and with a further commitment to work towards a four-day week, without loss of pay.**
- c. **Opportunities should be created for workers to reduce the number of evening sessions worked with twilight sessions on a regular basis to improve work life balance.**
- d. **A twilight session is defined as a single session of work commencing after 3.30pm and will be recognised as fulfilling an evening session requirement. Workers will not be required or expected to undertake an additional evening session on the same day.**
- e. **Sufficient protected time must be built into the working day following a twilight session to ensure that any safeguarding concerns, welfare issues, or significant events arising during the session are recorded, reported, and responded to in a timely manner.**

³⁰<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/jan/27/two-hundred-uk-companies-sign-up-for-permanent-four-day-working-week>

³¹ <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/employment/395-employment-news/61647-council-becomesfirst-to-permanently-adopt-four-day-work-week>

4. Professional Standards

- 4.1 Following the conclusion of the National Youth Agency (NYA) consultation into the qualifications framework it is welcome that there is now a clear commitment to maintain *“Level 6 as the highest level of professional recognition in youth work”*³².
- 4.2 That same report stated³³ that *“the new framework will aim to: — Secure the future of youth work as a profession. — Address critical workforce shortages by growing the pool of trained practitioners and professionals.”*
- 4.3 The National Youth Strategy specifically identifies 'Strengthening the Workforce' as a core action. However, the government's ambition to provide 500,000 more young people with access to a 'trusted adult' is unattainable without a professionalised, stable, and fairly compensated workforce. We must ensure that 'trusted adult' does not become a euphemism for cut-price, non-professional roles, but instead refers to JNC qualified professionals.
- 4.4 From the NYA's 2025 research we know that since 2021, 4,500 practitioners have left the sector linked to funding cuts. This led to challenges for employers looking to recruit into new job roles. This trend was further confirmed by data from youth and community courses that highlight that they are now struggling to recruit people to train for the youth and community worker profession.
- 4.5 The JNC has a crucial role in regulating and standardising youth work qualifications, and the maintenance of the Level 6 qualification is essential to maintain the high standards of the profession and appropriately remunerate those working with vulnerable young people reflecting this qualification.
- 4.6 Given the Government's commitment through the National Youth Strategy to rebuild our youth services, it is vital that the JNC structures are supported to ensure a youth work qualifications framework, that upholds the highest standards and recognises the professional status of youth work, and ensures that young people receive the quality support they deserve.
- 4.7 The Staff Side maintains that a strong and comprehensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework is essential to maintaining the quality, effectiveness, and professionalism of youth and community work.
- 4.8 Youth services are operating in an environment shaped by increasingly complex challenges affecting young people. Among the most pressing is the continuing adolescent mental health crisis, intensified by the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic. Periods of isolation and loneliness deprived many young people of important social interactions that support resilience, confidence, and coping skills. At the same time, the rapid expansion of social media has increased young people's exposure to harmful material, contributing to rising levels of anxiety and depression, as well as greater access to damaging ideologies, including forms of toxic masculinity and violent misogyny.

³² https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/NYA_Pathways-to_Practice_A_Consultation-Outcomes-Report-on-the-Future-of-YouthWork-Qualifications.pdf Section: "Consultation Findings", Page 14, Paragraph 4.

³³ https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/NYA_Pathways-to_Practice_A_Consultation-Outcomes-Report-on-the-Future-of-YouthWork-Qualifications.pdf — Executive Summary, Page 5, Paragraph 1

4.9 The Staff Side believes that establishing a mandatory entitlement of 37 hours of CPD each year for all youth and community workers would promote ongoing professional learning and ensure practitioners are equipped with current knowledge and best practice approaches to supporting young people. Such a commitment would strengthen the sector's ability to respond to emerging challenges while reinforcing the long-term quality, resilience, and sustainability of youth services.

4.10 **The Staff side is therefore calling for:**

- **To confirm the specific wording to be included in the JNC National Agreement (“The Pink Book”) to reflect the JNC’s commitment to maintaining Youth Workers as a degree-led profession. Also to reflect the importance of the Level 6 qualification and its parity with other professions in accordance with the commitment given in the LGA’s Youth and Community Workers – Pay 2025 letter dated 23rd September 2025.**
- **37 hours a year mandatory CPD to address and identify skill gaps within the service and to support workers dealing with increasingly complex challenges faced by young people.**

5. Conclusion

5.1 The Staff Side has made a compelling argument for a significant real-terms increase in pay for youth and community workers, pointing to acute difficulties in attracting and retaining staff across the sector. Without prompt intervention from employers to halt the ongoing decline in earnings, these vital services risk further weakening.

5.2 An across-the-board pay increase of 10% would mark a meaningful move toward restoring pay levels after years of erosion.

5.3 Beyond pay, the claim puts forward progressive proposals to improve working hours arrangements and provisions for time off in lieu under the JNC framework. These measures aim to promote better wellbeing and work-life balance, ultimately supporting higher standards of service delivery.

5.4 The claim also emphasizes the importance of safeguarding professional standards within the sector, alongside ensuring access to ongoing professional development so that workers are equipped to meet the evolving needs of young people.

5.5 Youth and community workers play a vital role in supporting local communities and wider society. They are skilled, dedicated professionals, and the proposal to jointly advocate for their recognition as key workers seeks to reinforce the respect and value they merit.

5.6 In view of these considerations, the Staff Side is seeking full and constructive negotiations covering every aspect of the claim.