



Joint Trade Union pay negotiation team response to the full and final offer

Thursday 22nd May 2025

Dear University Negotiating Team,

We note your 'full and final offer' which we have read with dismay. Last year, we felt negotiations had become more constructive with management hearing members' distress and offering a sensible settlement even if it fell short of what we had sought and what the University could afford. We were all delighted to be able to end 3 years of continuous dispute over pay. This year we seem to have reverted to the pattern of previous years in which the pay settlement fails to keep pace with inflation and real pay continues to fall in value. Our disappointment is compounded this year, with the three non-salary components of the pay claim being so bluntly rejected.

We are also disappointed in the tone of your letter which we believe to be disingenuous. The JTU claim was indeed revised but, as you know, this was because the research commissioned for pay negotiations showed that the rate of inflation in London has been higher than in the country as a whole, thus increasing the gap in the value of real pay over the past 7 years. Our revised claim merely reflected the data you provided.

Further, your response fails to reflect that we were willing to negotiate. If 7.2% was unaffordable, while 2% meant cuts in the real value of pay, then we were prepared to seek a compromise. You, however, refused to move from your 2% initial offer.

As always, what is affordable is a choice: management has chosen not to invest in staff and to allow staff pay to decline in real terms. It is that simple. Moreover, conflating one-off payments based on subjective and non-transparent assessments by managers and contractual increment payments with a cost-of-living increase is not helpful to discussions. For example, you seek to justify the offer by making the false claim that average salaries at Imperial increased by 7.2% last year. College

accounts show that last year the average salary (total salary costs/FTE) increased by just over half that amount, 3.7%. Your calculation fails to account for the fact that recruits come in at a lower salary than leavers. It is neither the value for “all staff” as you claim, nor is it above the CPIH inflation for the corresponding period.

You promise there will be renewed efforts to improve workloads but we note that such promises have been repeated over the past few years without any noticeable improvement. Increases in student numbers, on the other hand, are concrete and affect staff across Imperial.

The arguments put forward make it clear that Imperial College management prefers to continue its strategy of investment in capital projects rather than staff. As with most years, the University enjoys a healthy surplus, and is not facing the crises of most other HE institutions. It continues to enjoy the benefits of the latest USS valuation which has significantly reduced the cost of the staffing budget. We agree that it is in everyone’s interest that Imperial thrives, but we must oppose any strategy that means this is at the expense of staff. The erosion of the value of pay over the past few years hurts, especially those who are lower paid.

In this context, we note that your offer:

- Does not maintain the value of pay and further increases the decline in real pay. It has already fallen 7.2% since 2018, despite last year’s settlement, and will soon be approaching 10%.
- Ignores inflation which is currently 4.1% CPIH (higher in London as the NIESR report makes clear) and expected to rise further. The gap between your offer of 2% with no lump sum to compensate for losses over past years and this figure is striking.
- Offers nothing in particular to the lower-paid. Our claim included a lump sum for precisely this reason.
- Is way below the level of offers being made in the public sector, including at least 3.6% for teachers and 4% for most NHS salaries.
- Cites benchmark comparisons that will always be highly dependent on the choice of comparators. For example, while the upper quartile of professors might be 2.8% above London Russell Group comparators, without the inclusion of QMUL, Imperial would be behind. That dependency is why we focus on the value of pay, a more consistent measure, reflecting how staff have been valued at Imperial.

- Will mean that staff will be working more for less pay.

The lack of serious consideration of the other elements in our claim is disturbing.

Our request for a working party on moving to a 4-day week would cost little. You claim that reducing the working week would be impossible; we are sure that employers said the same of the adoption of a 5-day week in 1948. If, as you believe, it is not feasible at Imperial College, then the JTU would have seen this and could have reported back to our members. If not, Imperial could have enjoyed the benefits of other employers now adopting it: higher staff satisfaction, lower rates of sick leave, improved retention of staff and greater productivity. Costs would be minimal and compensated by the benefits listed above.

We note that you have rejected our claim for an increase in annual leave although Imperial College lags behind many other universities. Post-92 universities all offer 35 days' leave; London comparators such as UCL, QMUL and Kings also offer more. We pointed out that the cost would be very low and the improvement in staff wellbeing would be enormous; you could not provide any evidence to the contrary although we did ask for data. Instead, you are offering a small increase in the number of closure days (just slightly more than 1.5 days per year on average). This will make very little difference in that it comes at times of year which are relatively quiet anyway and are useful for catching up with unfinished work before the start of a new term. We note that closure days are usually based around Christian holidays and so an increase here could exacerbate the gulf between entitlements for those who celebrate Christmas and Easter and those from other religious traditions. It offers no flexibility and does not increase annual leave at all. We remain to be convinced that it would offer a substantial improvement to staff wellbeing, certainly not one comparable to an increase in annual leave entitlements.

Similarly, we asked for up to 2 weeks of paid carer's leave for those who needed it. Your response – that people might take advantage of it - was, frankly, insulting to staff who display great dedication to Imperial and to students, often not taking leave even when they are entitled to it. Your counter-suggestion, that paternity leave be increased to four weeks from two, because other Russell Group universities offer more, will be welcome but we note that:

- this will mean while the person who gives birth / is primary adopter etc. will be entitled to 18 weeks' at full pay, the partner who has not given birth will be entitled to 20 weeks including shared parental leave. This seems unfair.
- Since most people giving birth are women and most of their partners are men, there is a risk that this measure will turn out to be indirectly discriminatory.
- It offers nothing to other carers
- Your offer of a working party on special leave in relation to Russell Group universities will be slow and reactive. Since Imperial aspires to be world-leading, we believe that the University should indeed lead, not play catch-up.

Since this is your full and final offer, as agreed, we shall put it to our members although you will not be surprised to hear that we are not in a position to recommend acceptance. We will get back to you when the consultations have ended.

The Imperial College Joint Trade Union negotiating team