Joint Unions Pay Claim 2025/26

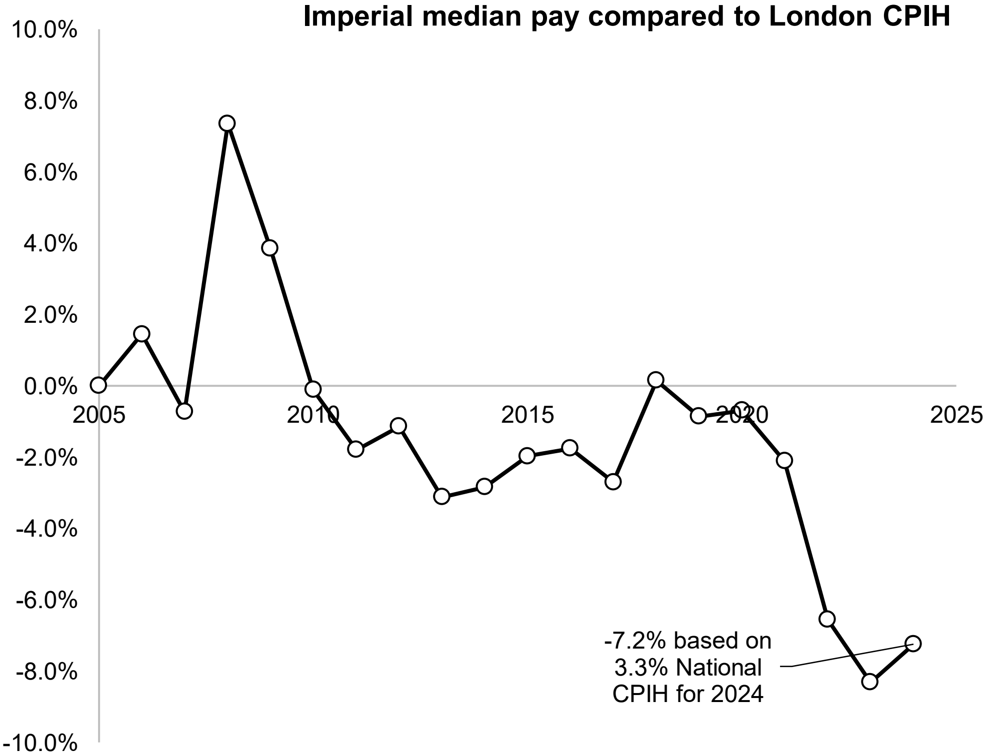
Revised 7/5/2025

In previous years the Joint Trades Unions have focussed our pay claims on maintaining, at a minimum, the value of pay at Imperial since we left national bargaining in 2005. We also conducted a survey (open to both members of the Joint Trade Unions and staff at Imperial). From this we were able to gain understanding of staff perspectives on pay and benefits. It is clear from the survey results that staff are feeling ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and, indeed, a large number are considering alternative employment. The latest London CPIH figures indicate why so many staff are contemplating moving.

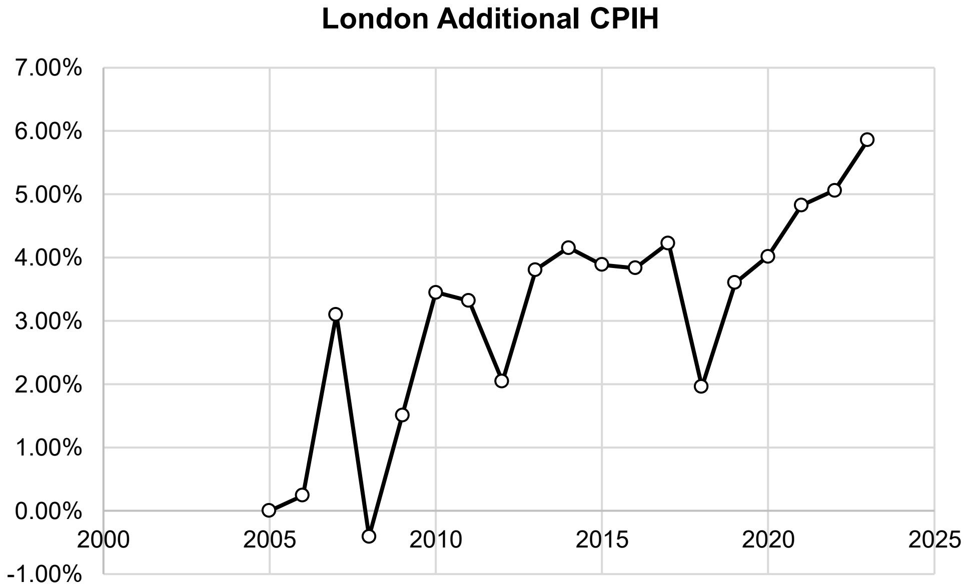
Context

2025 Cost of living

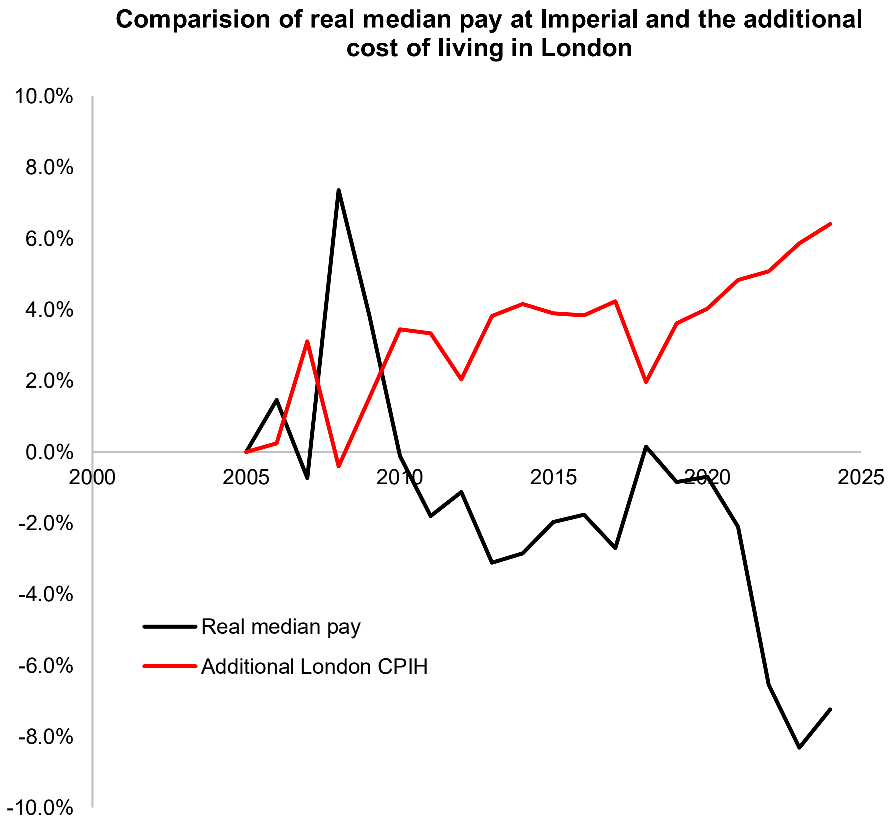
In the figure below we show the update of the value of pay at Imperial compared to 2005, based on the estimated London CPIH at the end of 2024. We estimate this based on the established relationship between London CPIH and national CPIH between 2005 and 2023 (see appendix 1). It should be noted that only a small proportion of the erosion of pay that occurred in 2022 has been made up in the settlements of the last year.



The detriment is 2% above that stated in the initial pay claim as a result of the updated values of the London CPIH for 2021, 2022 and 2023. In particular, London CPIH has increased by 2% compared to national CPIH in this period, as shown below.

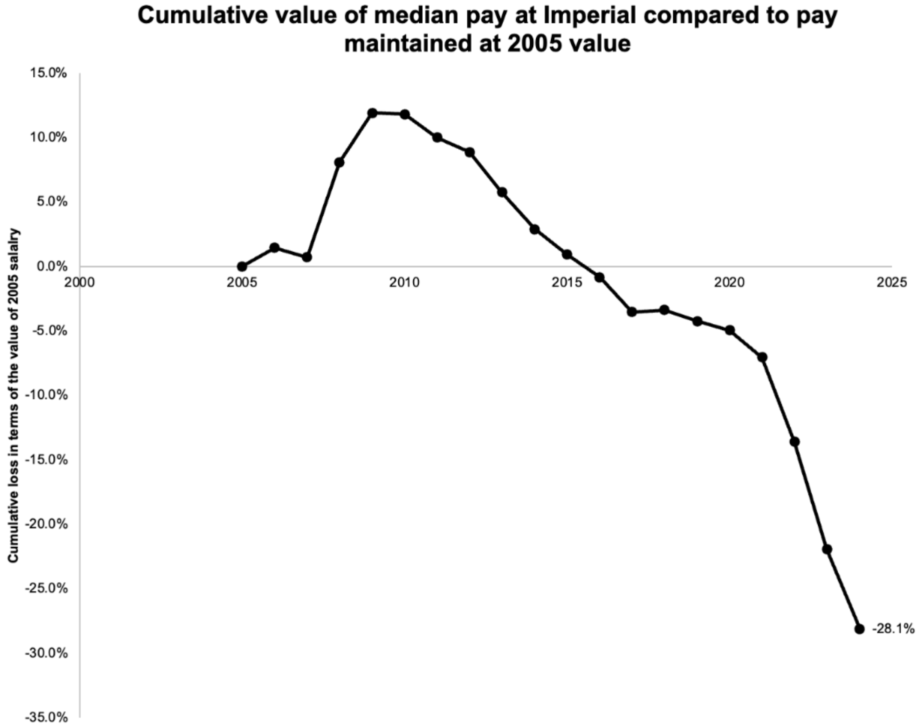


If the two plots above are combined, we see that the decline in real pay at Imperial can be explained in good part by the failure to compensate for the additional costs of living in London:



It is ironic that one of the prime reasons to move to local pay bargaining - that it would give Imperial the ability to set pay to reflect its own unique position - has failed to provide those that work at Imperial protection from the particular financial pressures that they face because they work at Imperial. It is also clear that last year's pay rise, which was accepted by staff, represented only a small move in restoring the value of pay towards 2005 levels. It would take another 6 years to restore pay to 2005 levels on that basis, with the cumulative loss of more than 5 months' salary over that period.

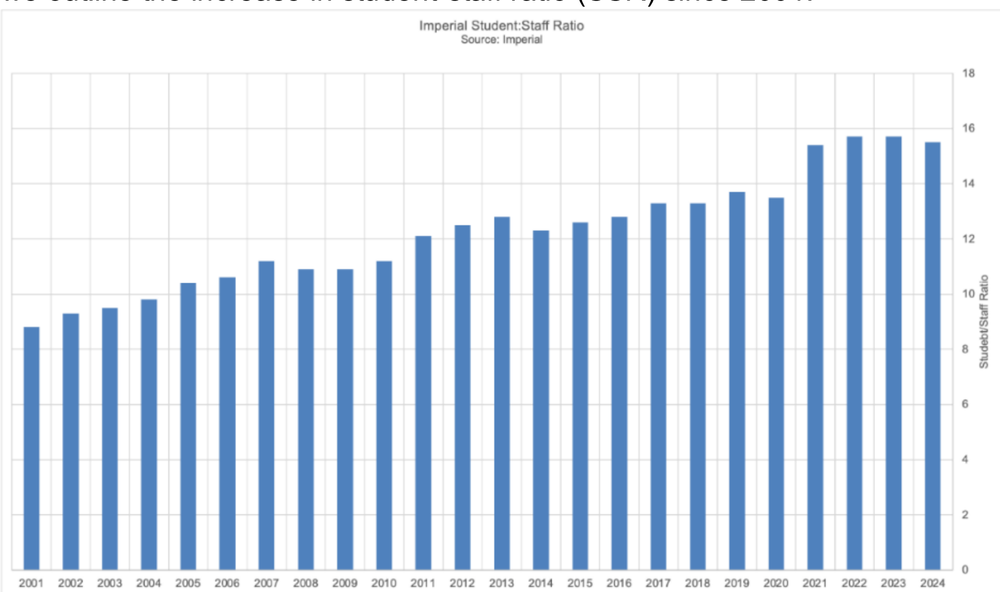
Another way to look at the effect of inflation is the cumulative effect on pay, that is the integral of the real median pay increases since 2005. This is shown below.



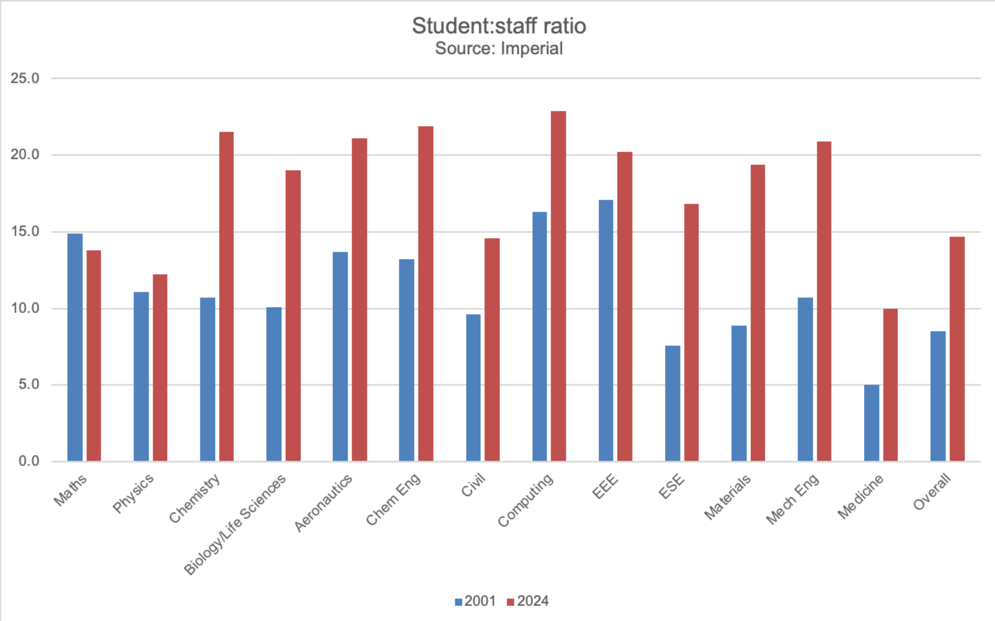
At the current value of 2005 salary of £61k, this represents a cumulative loss of £17k. Even if pay from now on was brought to 2005 levels, a lump sum would be required to compensate for past loss of earnings.

Workload

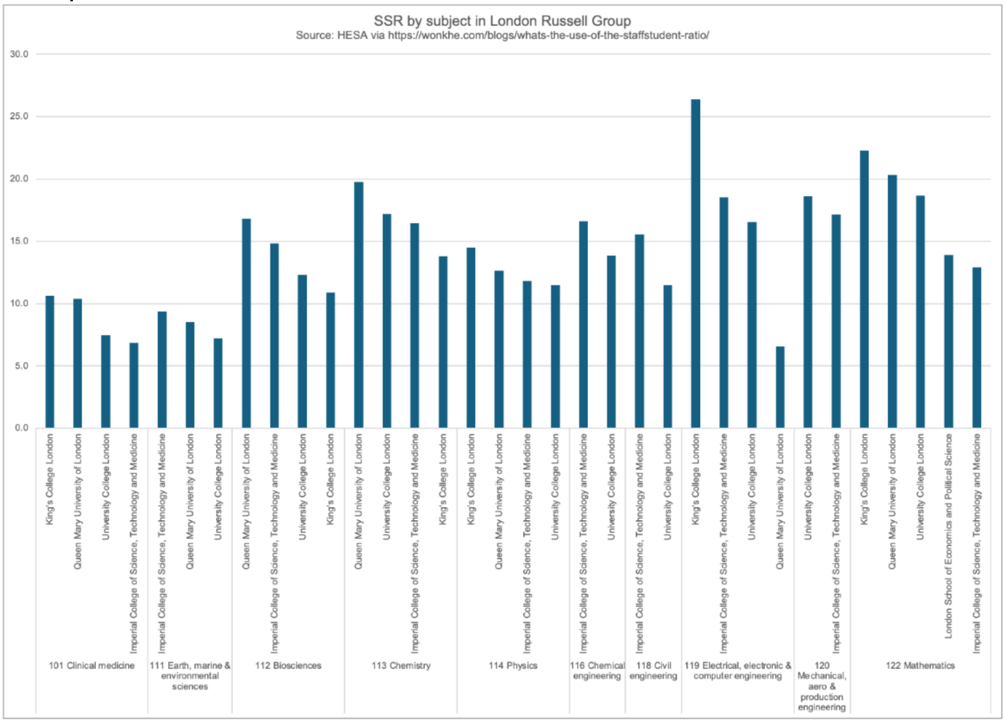
Staff numbers have not kept up with the increase in student numbers, below we outline the increase in student-staff ratio (SSR) since 2001.



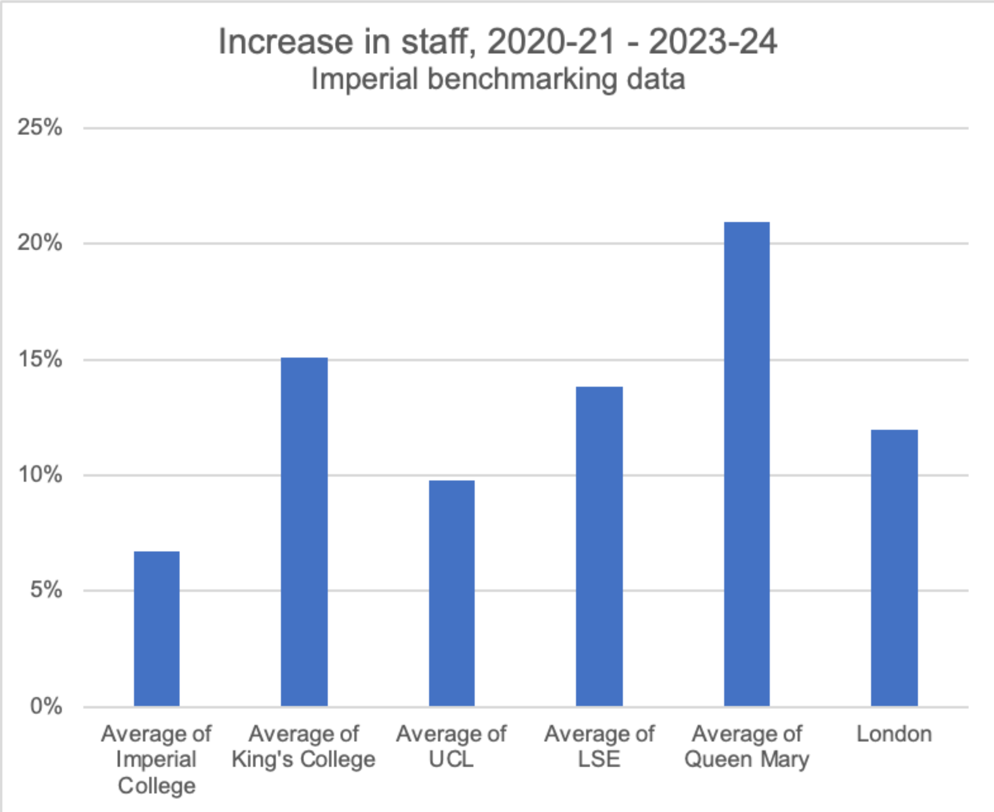
This figure shows the increase since 2000-2001 with a 70% increase since 2005. This reflects the increased workload staff have faced while the value of their pay has fallen. The following figure shows that these increases vary across College, but Maths is the only department that has seen a slight drop in SSR.



Imperial does not generally have the lowest SSR's of the London Russell Group:



Imperial has seen the lowest staff growth in the London Russell group over the past four years:

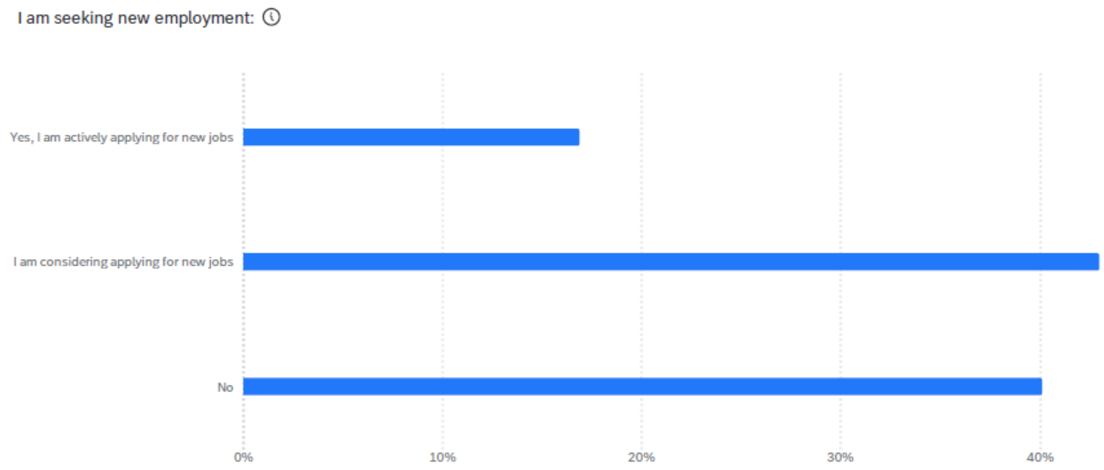


Against this, Imperial has climbed to an unprecedented second place in the QS rankings this year.

Affordability
Imperial should be in a unique position to respond to the unprecedented financial pressure that staff are currently suffering, not seen in the last 20 years. College finances were very healthy in 2024. This is evidenced by College looking for a very significant expansion in the next 5 years, in contrast to much of the rest of the Higher Education sector. This is, therefore, an opportunity to make up to staff the loss of pay they have suffered.

We note that no rationale has been offered so far as to why significant growth in student numbers will lead to reduced financial risk in the future. To the contrary, we see that other UK HEs face poor financial circumstances precisely because they have been unable to achieve anticipated growth. In contrast, consolidation through investment in our existing resources, both in staff and in the estate, appears to be the most prudent way to mitigate the potential effects of the external risks we face.

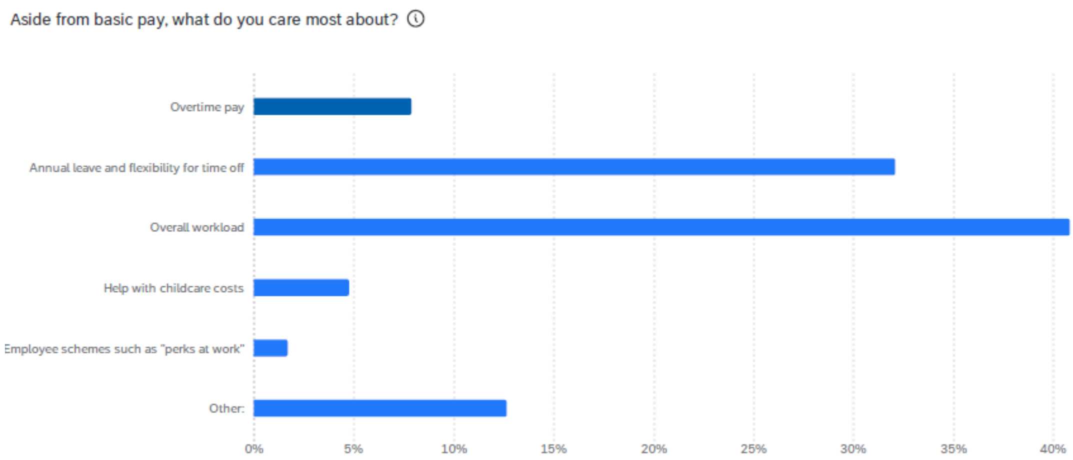
Survey results
Our survey which covered staff in all three unions and had a significant return of several hundred members showed that staff are still struggling, with 60% agreeing that concerns over finance had affected their work, and 70% agreeing that this had affected their well-being. 60% of respondents were also actively seeking or considering other employment:



This is backed up by text comments:
Over the last nine years I have been a Senior Lecturer and Reader at Imperial and I have seen my pay fall relative to colleagues at other universities and especially in industry, whilst costs such as food (on campus) and travel have increased above inflation. Whilst I love working at Imperial I can not afford it in central London and I am actively looking for other employment around the UK.

My salary is not keeping up with average London costs of living, especially the housing costs. With my current salary, I have no choice but to keep living in a house in disrepair (leaks, rats) just to make ends meet, which is severely impacting both my mental and physical health. Currently I can't afford any better accommodation.

The survey asked additional questions around working conditions and benefits. A recurring theme was workload, which many of the respondents felt was, after pay, the priority:



It should be noted that “Perks at Work” is only considered a significant benefit by a small minority of those surveyed. Respondents were particularly keen on working towards a 4-day working week and an increased annual leave allowance.

Q5 - In the upcoming pay negotiations with management, what are the additional areas that you would want the reps to focus on? (choose up to 3) - Selected Choice	Percentage
Four-day work week	57%
Additional annual leave	48%
Monetary increase to the employee schemes	47%
Improved maternity, paternity and parental leave packages	18%
Enhanced (paid) carer's leave	13%
Other	19%

Claim

In the context of the value of pay at Imperial, affordability and staff concerns as revealed in the survey of our members, our claim has four elements.

1. **Pay Claim**

Given both the long-term erosion of pay that staff at Imperial have suffered, and the healthy state of College finances, our pay claim consists of two parts

- a 7.2% pay increase
- a £2000 lump sum

The lump sum will particularly benefit those on lower incomes who have been disproportionately affected by recent inflation. It also provides very partial compensation for the £16k loss in median salary as a result of the erosion of pay from 2005 levels.

These are clearly affordable in terms of both current and anticipated College finances. Our pay claim is modest: management should regard it as shocking that pay has fallen back in value given the increases in staff productivity, with student-staff ratios more than 70% higher than 2005. There is now an opportunity for those who work at Imperial to be properly compensated.

Taken together, the figures show that it is down to the extra efforts of staff at Imperial that it finds itself in a comparatively strong financial as well as academic position. Any cut the value of pay as a result will, at best, severely damage staff morale at Imperial. To do this to mitigate the undoubted risks of significant further growth in student numbers would be reckless, even absent the external risks we know we face. Rather, the hard work staff have done to bring us to this position should be properly recognised and rewarded. To do otherwise can only undermine not only staff, but College as a whole.

2. **Annual leave**

Imperial employees receive 25 days' annual leave plus up to six closure days in addition to public holidays. While this is more than the statutory minimum, it is not generous in HE. In post-1992 universities employees receive either 30 or 35 days annual leave in addition to closure days and public holidays; increasingly in pre-1992 universities, the norm emerging is for 30 days' leave. In London, King's College, Queen Mary, SOAS, City St George's, LSE and UCL and all post-1992 universities all provide more than Imperial, either in days of annual leave or as closure days. Among respondents to our survey, increasing the level of annual leave was the second most popular goal.

Since for many employees productivity would rise to cover the additional days of leave, it is unclear that increasing annual leave allowances would carry substantial financial implications for College.

The joint trades unions are therefore asking:

- that annual leave rises from 25 days to 30 days as from 1 August 2025.

3. Paid carer's leave

Since April 2024, employees have had the statutory right to take up to one week's carer's leave in any calendar year to attend to the needs of a person (or people) dependent on them because of disability, illness, injury or old age. The leave may be taken as any multiple of half a day up to a full working week as long as the correct notice is given.

While this flexibility is welcome to those with dependants, its utility has been severely curtailed by the absence of a statutory right to pay during this period. Most employees cannot afford to take carer's leave, especially as the effects of the cost-of-living crisis are still significant. This is particularly true in Greater London where costs are so much higher. It also has a differential impact on women and older employees who are more likely to be responsible for dependants. Offering only unpaid carer's leave therefore has an effect on gender pay gaps and hits older workers harder.

Imperial can certainly afford to provide employees with pay during this period and to extend it to up to two weeks for those who really need it. Since take up is unlikely to be extensive, the overall cost is unlikely to be problematic for Imperial College; at the same time the reduction in stress and worry for many employees will make College a much more pleasant working environment.

The joint trades unions are therefore asking:

- that the statutory minimum carer's leave is extended to two weeks where needed and is paid leave;
- that the College advertises its availability to employees.

4. Four-day week

The current pattern of a five-day week is over 100 years old now and is outdated. A growing number of employers are investigating reductions in order to improve productivity and improve employee satisfaction. A number of pilots have been conducted since Covid, reporting: clear rises in productivity (the link is well established: Germany, with one of the lowest average working hours in Europe, also has some of the highest productivity rates); fewer absences; lower 'churn' of staff; greater employee satisfaction, especially among women; dramatically lower rates of burnout among staff and much lower rates of workplace stress. The results were so clear that in the 2022-23 pilot, 92% employers participating decided to continue. Recently, the Guardian reported another 200 employers are participating: https://www.theguardian.com/money/2025/jan/27/two-hundred-uk-companies-sign-up-for-permanent-four-day-working-week

The advantages for Imperial are obvious given high levels of reported workplace stress. In our survey of members and non-members at Imperial, a significant majority (57%) reported that a four-day week was an important issue for them; it was the most popular issue by a long way.

The JTU are therefore asking:

- that we establish a small working party with members from HR and the JTU to discuss how this will be effected.
- that we agree to negotiate a move to a four-day working week without loss of pay for all who work at Imperial.

Appendix

Source: NIESR, ONS with projection by log-log regression, IC JTU