

Joint Trade Union Survey



King's College London: London Weighting Allowance



KCL London Weighting: Joint Union Survey

UNISON, UCU and UNITE have jointly surveyed our members to ask for their views on both the current rate of London Weighting Allowance at King's College London and the £200 increase and LWA consolidation offer that has been proposed by management at KCL.

Respondents were asked to tell us their stories about what a significant increase would mean for them and their families and what the impact of years of a freeze on LWA has had. These open-ended responses were analysed and are reported here.

Number of respondents providing open-ended responses: 451

Cost of Living Crisis

The overwhelming theme that came out of the responses was that staff are experiencing a real cost of living crisis. Staff felt that LWA has not kept pace with the steep rise in the cost of living in London including travel, housing, energy and utility bills, childcare and food costs.

The cost of living in London was described as '**cripplingly expensive**' and one member even stated that they are living '**hand to mouth**'.

Staff often stated that they are '**struggling to make ends meet**' and find it difficult, or are completely unable, to save any money. This means that they have no money for any emergencies or unexpected costs. At worst, some staff are in debt, living off savings and have had to take out loans to cover their costs each month. Two quotes highlight what this means practically for staff at KCL:

'I do not buy presents for my children at their birthdays or Christmas because this would put a strain on their finances'

'I regularly buy reduced price food (because of the sell-by date) to make ends meet.'

One respondent spoke about a younger colleague who was losing money each month and couldn't support his family.

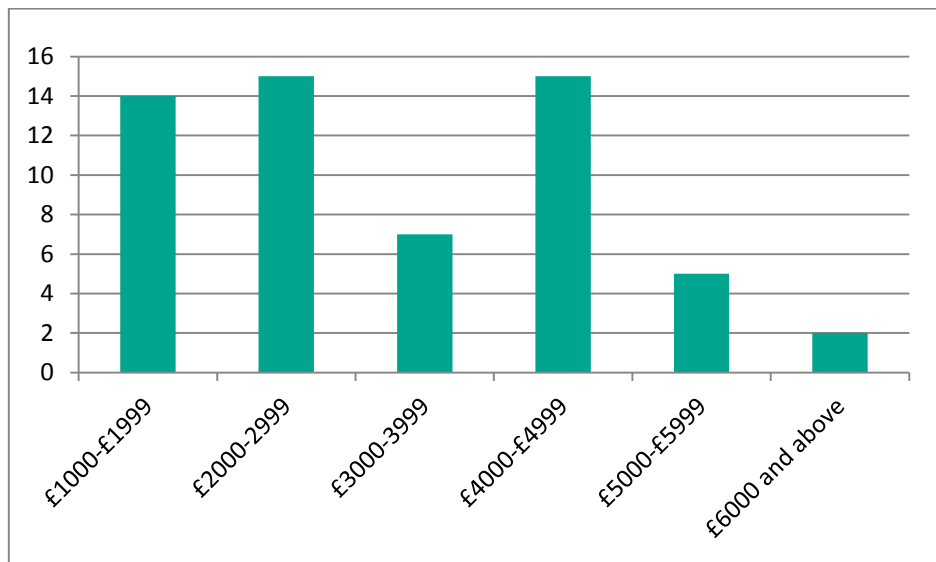
Staff consistently and explicitly stated that their standards of living were falling and had been falling for some years.

Travel costs

The greatest financial burden that our members highlighted as being a major contributing factor to the cost of living crisis, was public transport costs, which have **'skyrocketed'**. Some who **'simply can't afford to live in London'** had already moved out of London and are paying hefty travel fares. Even those who do live in Greater London stated that the travel costs into Zone 1 to work were a strain on their finances.

Our members reported spending between £1,000 and £6,000 per year on travel. Of those who gave details of their annual travel costs, **67%** spend over **£2,500** per year on their commute, which far outstrips the current LWA paid by King's. The graph below shows how much some of our members are paying for travel to work each year.

Public transport costs incurred by members for annual travel to work



The **'crippling impact'** of ever increasing travel costs has not only already pushed staff out of London to commute to King's, but the costs are now forcing staff to reconsider if they can stay at King's.

Those who have moved out of London to be able to afford housing are then hit with huge commuting costs and lengthy journeys. Even those who have stayed in London struggle with the travel costs and will often take the bus or walk to reduce costs. This often doubles or triples their journey time.

The survey also highlighted that some members of staff are incurring costs for travelling between University sites and are not being reimbursed for this.

Housing costs

After travel, housing costs were cited most often as the cause of the financial pressure of living in London. Many are renting poor accommodation and are unable to save for a deposit to buy their own home with full home ownership being **'consigned to dreamland'**.

Some staff described their living conditions:

'I'm living in a bedsit where I have a fold out bed and I pull it out from the wall each night.'

'The rent I pay (for a small studio) is half of my salary and I travel two hours each day to and from work.'

'I am living in shared accommodation with no central heating or hot water on tap!'

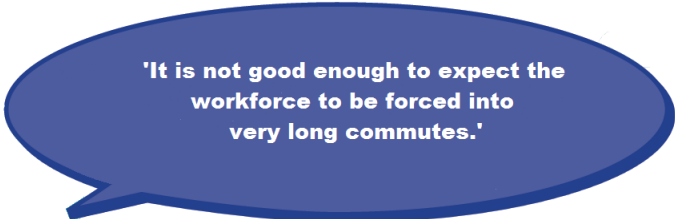
This is also putting a hold on some starting families:

'We would like to save for a house deposit and start a family but are unable.'

'We have given up the idea of having children as this would mean becoming the working poor, and would not like to bring a child into poverty.'

Those who have been able to afford homes in London are paying high mortgage rates and are unable to buy larger family homes without being forced out of the area they currently live in.

Staff wellbeing

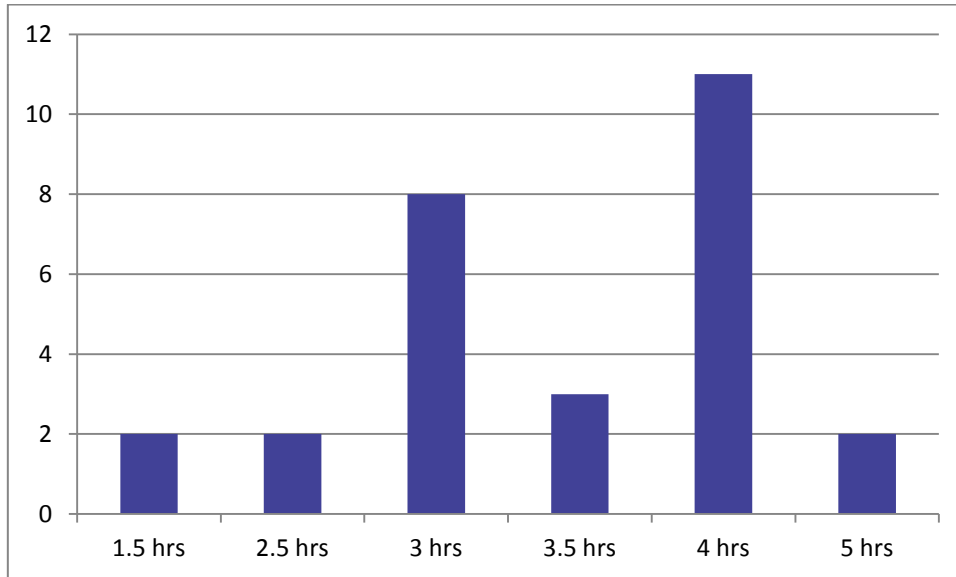


'It is not good enough to expect the workforce to be forced into very long commutes.'

Work-life balance

Those who had to move out of London to afford appropriate accommodation now face lengthy commutes. This is causing staff to feel like they have a poor quality of life and a poor work-life balance. Of the **28** members of staff who provided details of their commute, **24** reported spending three hours or more a day commuting (graph below).

Number of members commuting each day and duration of their commute



One member stated that their daily commute was *'draining the life'* out of them.

Mental health, wellbeing and quality of working life

The financial strain that staff are feeling is causing anxiety and in some severe cases, depression:

'I struggle every month and my debt levels increase every month causing me stress. I am clinically depressed and anxious.'

'As knowing there is no other way to compensate for the ever increasing living expenses becomes detrimental to my wellbeing which leads to anxiety, ill health, depression and other distressing conditions. Which is unnecessarily imposed, due to the lack of understanding of King's Senior Management.'

Some staff felt that King's was known throughout the sector as an organisation that treats its staff badly and one member felt that it is their responsibility to tell young associates to move away from academia because there isn't a decent work-life balance. Others felt that King's did not care about their wellbeing:

'I feel deeply alienated by the administration's callous and flagrant disregard for the quality of working life.'

Staff retention and turnover

There is concern among staff that the current level of pay and LW is not enough to retain and attract new staff and that there will be a '*talent drain*' from the University. Some departments are '*haemorrhaging talented and hard-working colleagues*'.

Staff stated that they are actively looking for another job (**66 in total**), with **16** of these explicitly stating that they are looking for jobs outside of London. One respondent stated that:

'Five members of staff have left in the last six months in large part because of the lower than average salaries.'

Staff linked staff turnover directly to LWA and felt that a substantial increase would also provide a necessary reward for staff loyalty:

'King's expects a lot from its staff, in terms of dedication, loyalty, many, many hours of overtime, evening work and a high pressured environment. Increasing the LWA means that staff like me are more inclined to stay at KCL rather than look at alternative institutions that pay more in London or work outside of London.'

Other more specific concerns about pay and staff retention were raised:

'I only break-even after returning to work from maternity leave – female staff retention issue.'

Fair pay

Remuneration

Basic pay was consistently raised as an issue and many had seen that their salary was lower than in other universities for corresponding job roles. Staff felt that King's is out of step with and paying less than other Russell Group Universities, including LSE, UCL and Imperial.

Many haven't had a pay rise for years and **59** respondents were stuck at the top of their payscale. This has resulted in a real terms pay cut for many and has been compounded by LWA not keeping up with the rise in the cost of living in London or inflation. Those who have moved up a spinal point recently stated that the uplift was eaten up by annual increases in rent, travel and everyday living costs.

One member stated that their payslip was referred to by them and their colleagues as '*the monthly insult*.' It was consistently felt that staff were not being rewarded fairly for the '*time, effort and dedication the staff consistently provide*.'

Comments about fair pay were clear in the survey responses:

'If KCL is not to become the base of the privileged, pay rates must be addressed.'

'It is not possible to trust King's on making fair decisions on pay.'

'Staff are being neglected in favour of vanity projects.'

'Working for a world class university should be reflected by wage package.'

As a result of the current pay situation, staff felt that they were not appreciated by King's and were undervalued and not rewarded for long service. Staff also spoke about increased workloads and working over-time which is not remunerated for.

Current LWA of £2,323

The current London Weighting Allowance was described as *'shocking'*, *'a joke'*, *'ridiculous'*, *'paltry'*, *'disrespectful'*, *'disgusting'*, *'unjustifiable'*, *'unrealistic'*, *'woefully insufficient'*, *'inadequate'*, *'unsustainable'*, *'incomprehensible'* and *'embarrassing'*.

Staff were aware of other London universities paying higher LWAs:

'Double in Greenwich'

'It is an insult to be receiving one of the lowest levels of LW there is.'

King's offer of £200 and consolidation

Members overwhelmingly rejected the offer from King's, stating that it is:

'Not acceptable when one considers that it [King's] is the 6th wealthiest university in the UK and yet consistently refuses to offer a London Weighing Allowance.'

The offer of £200 was described as *'an embarrassment'*, *'insulting'*, *'pathetic'*, *'ridiculous'*, *'unfair'*, *'offensive'*, *'demonstrates contempt for staff'* and is *'derisory'*.

'The VC would give £200 as pocket money to their child.'

'The offer means that King's value their staff less than other institutions do.'

Comparisons were made with other public sector employers and most commonly the NHS was highlighted as paying a decent LWA.

'Even the government pays £6000 in London Weighting.'