

JTU 28/2024



12th April 2024

RE-OPEN THE PAY AWARD!

Back in June 2023, the trade unions submitted a claim to the Probation Service to re-open the current 3 year pay award considering the cost-of-living crisis. We had been told during the negotiations over the 3 year pay offer that re-opening the pay award in this way would be possible.

The claim we made back in June last year was for an additional:

- 12% increase on all pay points effective from 1 April 2023
- Unconsolidated (one-off) payment of £2,500
- Increase in the value of all Probation Service cash allowances of 12% effective from 1 April 2023.

SQUEEZE ON LIVING STANDARDS GOES ON

We believed and still believe that this is a very reasonable but urgently necessary claim. The reasons we believe a re-opener pay claim is justified include:

- The unprecedented squeeze on living standards caused by large increases in prices, particularly essentials like energy, housing, and food
- The cumulative value of Probation staff pay rises from 2010 to 2023 is only 7.6%
- The cost of living has risen by 81.5% from 2010 to 2023
- Just to get back to 2010 real-terms wages Probation staff would need a 68% pay rise
- Probation is suffering a staffing crisis causing ever greater workloads and stress. The increasing number of leavers is "likely attributable to competition in the labour market" according to the HMPPS' own analysis.

The Probation Service took many months to respond to the claim to re-open the pay award and eventually the unions met with the Justice Secretary in November last year. He said that it would not be possible to re-open the pay talks, but that could the unions give him some ideas that might resolve the pay situation. We stuck to our original claim to re-open the pay talks.

IS ANYTHING ON OFFER?

No. Despite the unions' best efforts, the Probation Service has not come up with anything concrete to improve all members' pay. We have a last-ditch opportunity to press the employer for action when we meet with the two Director Generals on 23 April.

LOWEST PAID STAFF SHORT-CHANGED

The third year of the 3 year pay award came into effect on 1 April. The Probation Service has written to all staff to remind them of what this entails, including a % increase on the value of all pay points on 1 October 2024, but not for staff on the lowest pay point of pay band 2.

Here's what didn't happen. On 1 April last year and 1 April this year the Probation Service was forced to increase the lowest pay point in pay band 2 to comply with the national living wage. But instead of using the new national living wage salary figures as the baseline for the % increases that all other staff got on 1 October last year and will get on 1 October this year, the Probation Service basically banked the national living wage increases and said, 'job done'.

In summary, we believe that the employer should have increased the new living wage salary figures by the same cost of living rise which they have applied to all other pay points on 1 October 2023 and will do again on 1 October 2024. It is with great regret that we must report that the employer has refused to do this.

This has short-changed the lowest paid staff in the organisation and is very damaging for the reputation of an employer which is already struggling to retain staff in pay band 2 jobs.

PRISON SERVICE MARKET FORCES PAYMENTS EXTENDED

Members who were previously getting market forces payments will remember that these were withdrawn by the Probation Service as part of the 3 year pay offer. The unions were told at the time that these payments were also going to be phased out for prison service staff.

Except, they haven't been phased out for prison staff – they have been extended! HM Treasury recently approved the extension of market supplement payments for Band 3 prison officers in qualifying sites until 31 March 2025.

While the pay round process for 2024/25 is ongoing, the market supplement payments to Band 3 prison officers across 19 prison establishments of £2,000 for 'Red' sites and £3,500 at 'Red Plus' sites will remain in place.

When it comes to the prison staffing crisis, money can be found to pay staff more. When it comes to the probation staffing crisis, the cupboard is bare. It seems very clear where HMPPS priorities lie. The unions have raised the gross unfairness of this with the Probation Service. So far there has been no response.

WHAT NEXT?

If we can't make progress on pay issues in the very near future, and having been very patient with the Employer so far (our claim to re-open the 3 year pay deal was submitted in June last year) we will be coming to members very soon to ask for your views on potential action to move matters forward.



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