

CJTUS 01/2025



2nd June 2025

**PAY CLAIM FOR 2025/26
SUBMITTED BY Napo and UNISON TO Cafcass**

1. INTRODUCTION

This pay claim is submitted by NAPO and UNISON on behalf of staff working for Cafcass

The claim is set at a level that we believe recognises the following key points:

- Substantial increases in the cost of living over recent years have significantly reduced the value of staff wages under the impact of price rises running at a 40-year high.
- Appropriate reward is needed to sustain the morale and productivity of staff in their crucial role of delivering high quality services
- Appropriate reward is needed for the increased workload and stress placed on staff against a background of unprecedented changes in working practices
- Average earnings are still rising at relatively high levels across the economy, adding to the problem of rates running ahead of those received by Cafcass staff over recent years and increasing the likelihood of recruitment and retention problems in the long term.
- Cafcass must take a step towards redressing the pay imbalances that have grown between its family court advisors and social workers employed by local authorities.

2. SUMMARY OF CLAIM

We are seeking:

Either a 6% rise or a flat rate of £3,500 whichever is higher

Following consultation with our members at Cafcass the above amount is not outrageous, it is a genuine attempt to ensure that the pay rise is realistic but also allows for a slight amount above current inflation

3. FALLING VALUE OF PAY

The table below demonstrates the major fall in living standards suffered by staff over recent years.

	Cafcass pay increases	Rise in cost of living ¹ (as measured by Retail Prices Index)
2010	0%	4.6%
2011	Pay freeze	5.2%
2012	Pay freeze	3.2%
2013	1% unconsolidated	3.0%
2014	1%	2.4%
2015	1% consolidated at Band 4. 0.6% non-consolidated for other staff in post as of the 1 November 2015	1.0%
2016	0.9% up to Band 7 & 0.38% Band 8	1.8%
2017	1%	3.6%
2018	1.16%	3.3%
2019	1.5%	2.6%
2020	2%	1.5%
2021	Pay freeze £250 for those earning below £24K/annum	4.1%
2022	2.51%	11.6%
2023	4% plus non-consolidated £1,500	9.7%
2024	4.43%	3.6%

¹ Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation
Reference Tables, January 2024

This means that, while a wage keeping pace with the cost of living each year would have risen by 61.2% since 2010, pay in Cafcass has risen by just 26.59% which means that thousands of pounds have been cut out of the value of staff wages.

Recent years have seen the steepest rises in the cost of living facing workers in over 40 years - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023².

And inflation is still running at 3.6%, led by major jumps in housing costs - mortgage interest payments are surging by 15%³, private rent is rising by 9%⁴ - average household energy costs recently jumped by 10%⁵ and water charges rose by 8%⁶.

The latest forecasts for 2025 show no sign of inflation abating,⁷ as Treasury predictions now put the figure at an average of 3.9% over the year.

Recent figures also mask huge increases in many basic costs over the longer term – during the last decade and a half, staff have experienced the increases shown below⁸.

Expenditure Item	House prices	Bus & coach fares	Electricity	Gas
Price rise 2009 - 24	73%	93%	144%	92%

4. FALLING BEHIND AVERAGE PAY RATES

The ability of Cafcass to attract and retain staff in the long term will be damaged if the pay of its staff falls behind the going rate in the labour market.

The table below shows that pay settlements have not only been running behind economy averages this year, Cafcass’s pay rates have been growing steadily more uncompetitive over a sustained period.

Year	Average pay settlements	CAFCASS pay increases
2010	2.0%	0%
2011	2.5%	0%
2012	2.5%	0%
2013	2.5%	1% (unconsolidated)
2014	2.5%	1%
2015	2.2%	1% (max)
2016	2.0%	0.9% (max)

² Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, January 2024

³ Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation, January 2025

⁴ Office for National Statistics, Private Rent and House Prices UK, January 2025

⁵ Cornwall Insight, Forecast for Price Cap, November 2024

⁶ Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation, January 2025

⁷ HM Treasury, Forecasts for the UK Economy, February 2025

⁸ Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Tables, December 2024, for bus /coach, electricity and gas prices, HM Land Registry Index, House Price Index, November 2024 for house prices

2017	2.0%	1%
2018	2.5%	1.16%
2019	2.5%	1.5%
2020	2.3%	2%
2021	2.0%	0%
2022	4.0%	2.51%
2023	5.6%	4%
2024	4.5%	4.43%

Source: Incomes Data Research

While average pay settlements have seen salaries grow by 50.6% since 2010, Cafcass increases have only amounted to 20.5% across more than a decade.

Pay rates are set to fall even further behind, given that average earnings continue to grow across the economy at an average of 6%⁹.

5. LIVING WAGE BECOMING STANDARD MINIMUM PAY BENCHMARK

The Living Wage has become a standard benchmark for the minimum needed for low-paid staff to have a “basic but acceptable” standard of living.

Cafcass is now competing in a labour market where the Living Wage of £12.60 an hour outside London and £13.85 an hour in London has become an increasingly common minimum point in the pay scale.

5. A £15 AN HOUR MINIMUM WAGE

UNISON and Napo are among many trade unions that now call for a £15 an hour national minimum wage. This is widely recognised as the lowest wage needed to ensure workers can afford a decent standard of living. The claim we have submitted would raise the salary of Business Services Officers at Commencement salary band - the lowest pay in Cafcass- at £29,737. On a 37 hour week this works out at £15.45 an hour.

Having said this, it is also vital that pay for all grades rises above inflation. Trade union members on higher salaries have also reported struggling to make ends meet, claiming Universal Credit, using foodbanks, and otherwise being in poverty due to their circumstances.

6. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PRESSURES BUILDING

NAPO and UNISON are aware from the regular partnerships that there is a problems in Cafcass with Recruitment and Retention with staff able to achieve higher rates of pay in Local Authorities or as Agency workers.

⁹ Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Overview, February 2025

Recruitment and retention issues were directly attributed to pay in the 2024 Ofsted report. “recruiting and retaining practitioners in some parts of the country have become a challenge. A range of reasons contribute to this, but a significant contributor is the lack of pay parity with local authority salaries.”

The turnover of staff at around 15% for social work staff is compared below with social work and all staff turnover in 2022 and years prior where it was 12% and before that 9-10%, demonstrating a clear long-term increase in turnover as real terms pay has declined.

Board meeting	12 month social work turnover	12 month all staff turnover
May 2025	15.1%	
Jan 2025	14.8%	
Oct 2024	14.2%	
July 2024	15.2%	
April 2024	15.1%	
June 2022		12.1%
April 2022	12.2%	
May 2021		9.7%
Oct 2019		9.0%
Apr 2019		9.7%
Oct 2018	9.0%	
June 2018		10.3%
Mar 2018		11.3%

[Information obtained from Cafcass board meeting documents]

7. MORALE UNDER THREAT

Working against a background of tight budgets, staff have been facing greater workload pressures. The resulting increased stress puts the morale of the workforce at risk and poses a long-term threat to Cafcass’s ability to provide a consistent quality of service.

8. CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that all Cafcass staff have seen the value of their earnings fall considerably over recent years and evidence suggests that they are also falling behind earnings for comparable jobs.

Combined with these developments, the last year has seen intensified pressures placed on staff at the same time as greater job choices are opening up for staff in an improving labour market.

Therefore, this pay claim represents a very reasonable estimate of the reward staff deserve for their dedication, skill and hard work and the minimum improvement in pay needed to maintain workforce morale for delivering consistently high-quality services.

We also ask that pay discussions begin as soon as possible. The significant delays to implementing pay awards in previous years has had further impacts on our members. They have waited for months for pay increases while the cost of basic goods has risen. Back pay being paid has previously negatively impacted our members who receive in-work benefits, particularly impacting those on the lowest pay, single parent families, and those repaying student loans.

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