

## **PROBATION SERVICE PAY CLAIM 2025**

### **TIME TO RESTORE PROBATION PAY**

#### **1. Introduction**

This claim is submitted by Napo, UNISON and GMB/SCOOP on behalf of members working for the Probation Service

#### **The context to this pay claim**

The Probation Service trade union side is submitting this pay claim in the following context:

- The historically high period of inflation of the past few years - the cost-of-living crisis - which coincided with a rigid three year pay settlement leading to a big drop in real terms pay for probation staff on top of the already major pay erosion suffered since 2010.
- Probation pay has progressively fallen behind that of other employers in both the public and private sector. Experienced staff are leaving the careers they love in order to earn higher salaries elsewhere.
- Probation is in crisis. Excessive workloads and inadequate staffing levels have led to a failing service. The erosion of real terms pay has contributed to the loss of experienced and highly skilled staff.
- The Prison capacity crisis and various early release schemes have placed additional pressures on to the Probation Service. It's more important than ever to restore probation pay to stem the loss of experienced staff leaving due to unacceptable workloads and declining real terms pay.
- The government has instigated an Independent Review of Sentencing with one of its three guiding principles being to "expand and make greater use of punishment outside of prison." This means that a properly resourced and effective Probation Service will be critical to deliver the outcome of this review and acceptable pay for probation staff must be part of that investment.

All of these elements will be looked at in more detail in this pay claim.

## **2. Synopsis**

This claim is split into the following sections:

- The Claim
- The Dramatic Fall in Real-Terms Probation Pay
- Probation Pay Falling Behind Other Employers Since 2010
- Probation in Crisis
- The Prison Capacity Crisis
- The Independent Review of Sentencing
- Conclusion

## **3. The Claim**

We seek:

- A one year pay deal
- A 12% increase on all pay points
- A 12% increase on all cash allowances: London Weighting / Geographical Allowances etc
- A minimum wage in the Probation Service of £15 per hour
- The conversion of the current Regional Reward and Recognition funds into a single fund for staff retention purposes, to be the subject of collective bargaining.

## **4. The Dramatic Fall in Real Terms of Probation Pay**

Table 1 below shows the major fall in living standards suffered by Probation staff since 2010:

**Table 1**

	Probation pay-increases	Rise in cost of living (as measured by Retail Price Index) *
2010	0%	4.6%
2011	0%	5.2%
2012	0%	3.2%
2013	1%	3.0%
2014	0%	2.4%
2015	0%	1.0%
2016	0%	1.8%
2017	0%	3.6%
2018	0%	3.3%
2019	0%	2.6%
2020	0%	1.5%
2021	0%	4.1%
2022	3.2%	11.6%
2023	3.2%	9.7%
2024	3.2%	3.6%**

\*Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, figure is for 12 months to January of respective year

\*\*Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, November 2024 annual inflation (published December 2024)

While the cumulative value of total Probation staff pay rises from 2010 till 2024 has been 11%, the cost of living has risen by 81.2% over the same period.

The failure of pay to keep up with the rising cost of living has led to major cuts in living standards for Probation staff and their families since 2010.

Some pay bands and points have increased by more than this average and some have increased less. For illustrative purposes we can see what this means to a salary of £30,000 in 2010. With the total value of Probation Service pay awards this will now be worth £33,300 per annum. If pay had kept up with the rising of cost of living it would now be £54,360 per annum.

This represents a £21,060 per year cut in the real terms value of pay in this example.

In other words, to return pay back to its 2010 value, a 63.2% pay rise would be required.

These stark figures show the scale of loss of real terms earnings of probation staff since 2010.

Furthermore, the last decade and a half has seen enormous jumps in basic costs to our members (2009 – 2023)

- House prices by 65%\*
- Bus and coach fares by 93%\*\*
- Electricity by 180%\*\*
- Gas by 144%\*\*

\* Acadata National Historic Series

\*\*Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation Tables, January 2024

### **The Cost-of-Living Crisis**

As can be seen in Table 1 above, by 2021 the erosion of the real terms value of Probation Service pay had already become a big problem as the result of an almost continuous pay freeze other than the 1% increase in 2013. Over this period 43% would have been required to keep just to keep pace with prices.

2022 and 2023 saw the steepest rises in living costs facing workers in over 40 years: 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023\*. Inflation is still running at 3.6%\*\* , led by major jumps in housing costs, mortgage interest payments surging by 18%\*\*\* , private rent rising by 9%\*\*\*\* and average household energy costs rising by 10%\*\*\*\*\*

\*Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, figure is for 12 months to January of respective year

\*\*Office for National Statistics, Retail Price Inflation Reference Tables, November 2024 annual inflation (published December 2024)

\*\*\*Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation, October 2024

\*\*\*\*Office for National Statistics, Private Rent and House Prices UK, November 2024

\*\*\*\*\*Cornwall Insight, Forecast For Price Cap

## Inflation Forecast

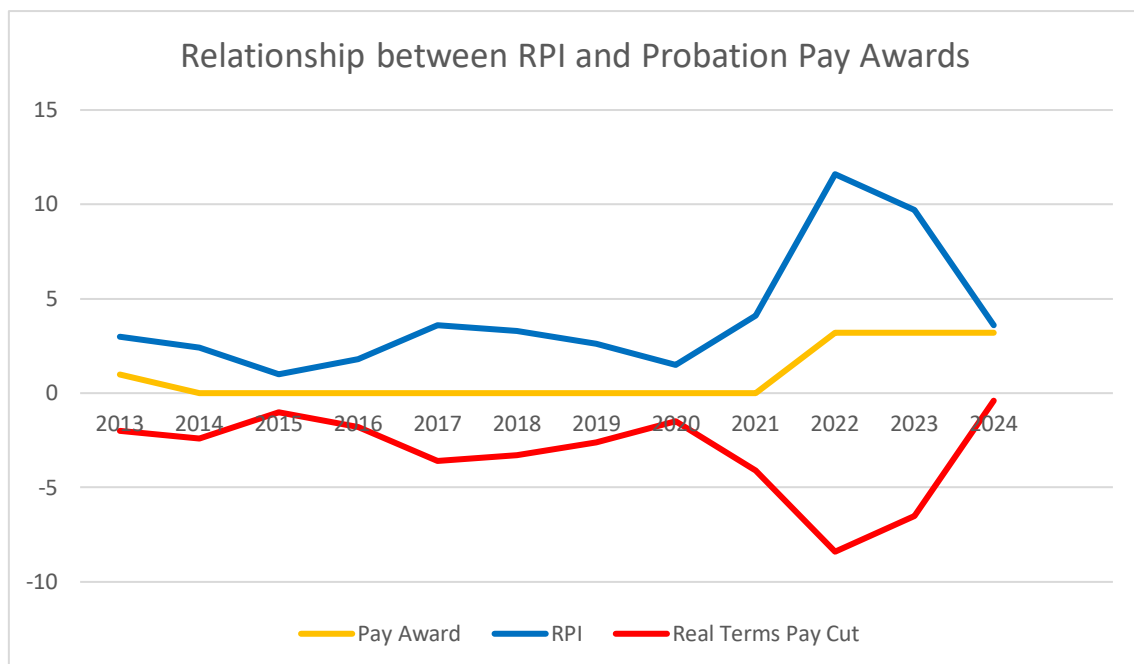
The Treasury average of independent forecasts states that **RPI inflation will average 3.3% over 2025 and then remain around that level over subsequent years. 3.2% in 2026, 3.4% in 2027 and 3.5% in 2028.** These annual rates show the rate at which pay rises would be needed for wages just to maintain their current value.

## Relationship between RPI and Probation Service Pay Awards (2010 – 2024)

Graph 1 below shows the relationship between the Probation Service pay awards and RPI inflation since 2010. RPI inflation is shown in blue, the Probation Service pay awards in yellow and the disparity between the two in red.

The Probation Service pay award has been lower than RPI inflation for most of the period in question.

**Graph 1**



As can be seen in this graph, at no point in the past 14 years has the probation pay award matched, let alone exceeded, the level of inflation. The closest was last year, 2024, with a 3.2% increase, 0.4% below the level of annual inflation published in December 2024.

This is a stark illustration of how probation pay has fallen behind living cost rises every year since 2010.

## **Restore Probation Pay**

The historically high inflation figures of the past few years, which remain stubbornly resistant to falling quickly, have turned growing unhappiness from our members at becoming poorer year on year, to a full-on cost of living crisis that demands an urgent response by HMPPS.

The three year pay settlement of 2022/2023/2024, which gave an average cost of living increase of 3.2% in each year, can now be seen clearly in the context of historically exceptional UK price inflation. For the 12 months to October 2022 RPI reached 14.2%, a level of inflation not seen for 42 years and a level that was not predicted at the time the three year pay settlement was agreed by members of the probation trade unions.

The continual erosion of real terms pay for well over a decade, coupled with the recent surge in prices for essentials such as energy, food and housing, mean that many staff are really struggling to find the money to get through each month. We look to HMPPS to demonstrate that they value Probation Service staff and recognise that it is now essential to begin to reverse the real terms cuts to pay and living standards that we have seen since 2010.

## **5. Probation Pay Falling Behind Other Employers Since 2010**

### **Pay Movements Elsewhere in the Public Sector and the Wider Economy**

Settlements in the year to November 2024 have averaged 5% across the economy, 5% in the private sector, 4.98% in the public sector and 5% in the voluntary sector.

Employers offering pay rises below these rates can expect damage to their ability to recruit and retain high quality staff.

The table below shows the latest average settlements over the last year across a variety of sectors.

**Table 2**

Sector	Average pay settlements
Across economy	5%
Private sector	5%
Public sector	4.98%
Not for profit	5%
<i>Source: Labour Research Department, settlements year to November 2024</i>	

The Bank of England Decision Maker Panel indicates that its latest survey shows that companies are expecting a 4.1% increase in wages over the next year.\*

\* Bank of England, Decision Maker Panel, October 2024

A longer-term perspective, shown in Table 3 below, reflects the huge cumulative impact of probation staff pay settlements lagging behind average pay settlements across the economy from 2010 to 2024. **This shows how average pay settlements across the economy have resulted in 51.5% growth since 2010 compared to 11% for probation staff.**

This cumulative gap in earnings growth since 2010 will not be closed without significant investment.

**Table 3**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Average pay settlements*</b>	<b>Probation Staff pay increases</b>
<b>2010</b>	2%	0%
<b>2011</b>	2.5%	0%
<b>2012</b>	2.5%	0%
<b>2013</b>	2.5%	1%
<b>2014</b>	2.5%	0%
<b>2015</b>	2.2%	0%
<b>2016</b>	2.0%	0%
<b>2017</b>	2.0%	0%
<b>2018</b>	2.5%	0%
<b>2019</b>	2.5%	0%
<b>2020</b>	2.5%	0%
<b>2021</b>	2.0%	0%
<b>2022</b>	4%	3.2%
<b>2023</b>	5.5%	3.2%
<b>2024</b>	5%**	3.2%

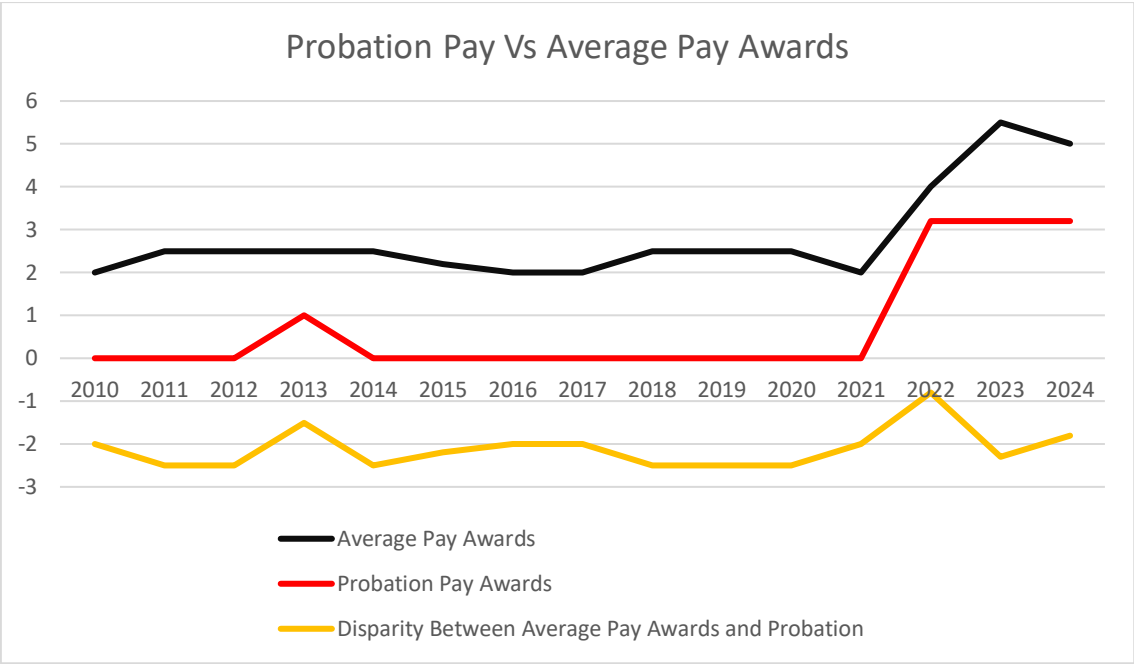
\* Source: Incomes Data Research.

\*\* Source: Labour Research Department, settlements year to November 2024

Graph 2, below, shows very clearly how probation pay has fallen behind average pay every year since 2010.



**Graph 2**



**How Probation Pay Awards Compare with Competitor Organisation Awards**

The following table below, helps explain why Probation Service staff may be tempted to take their skills elsewhere. Here is an historical comparison of probation pay point revalorisation since 2010 compared with the pay point revalorisation (compound) received by police staff, local government, health workers and prison officers.

**Table 4**

	<b>Probation</b>	<b>Police Staff</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>Health</b>	<b>Prison Officers</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2.58%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.2%*</b>
<b>2012</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.2%*</b>
<b>2013</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>2014</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>2017</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>1.7%**</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2.75%</b>
<b>2019</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>2.75%</b>	<b>1.67%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.75%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1.1%***</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4.75%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>2024</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>4.75%</b>	<b>4.03%****</b>	<b>5.5%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>32.7%</b>	<b>40.3%</b>

\* £250 for those below £21,000 – equivalent of 1.2% for a £20,000 salary

\*\*Source: Hansard: Lord Chancellor December 2017

\*\*\* £250 for those below £24,000 – equivalent of 1.1% for a £22,000 salary

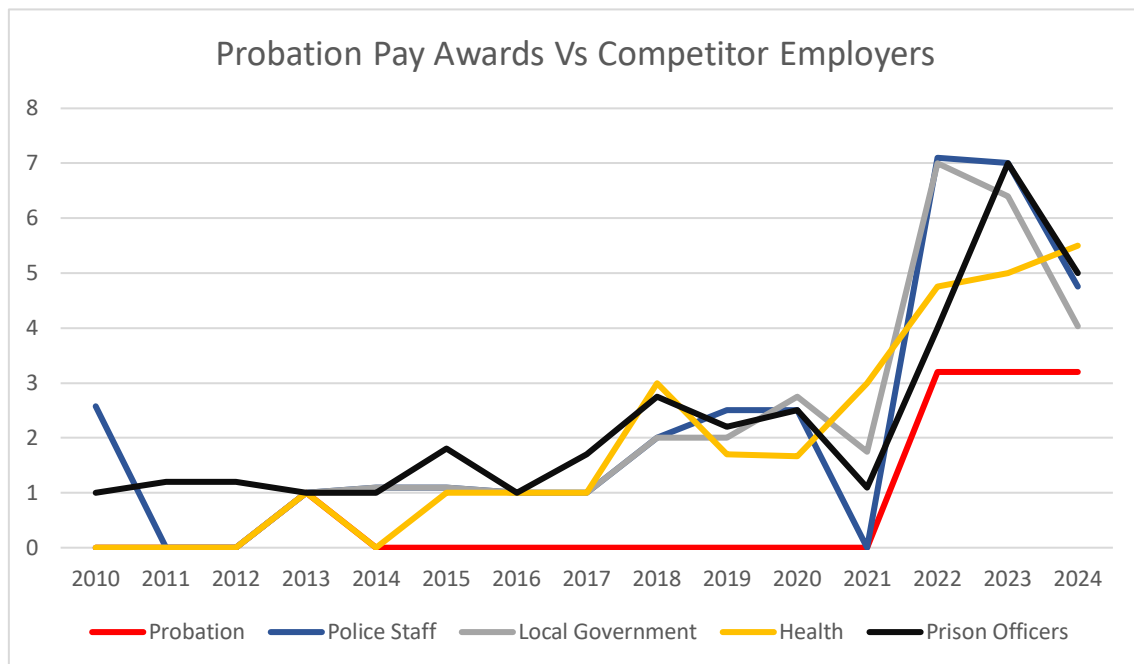
\*\*\*\* Average across NJC pay bands

As the cost-of-living crisis has hit workers in all parts of the economy, probation staff have fallen further and further behind. Between 2022 and 2024 prices, as measured by RPI, increased by 26.8%. Public sector competitor employers awarded the following amounts:

- Police Staff – 20%
- Health – 16%
- Local Government - 18.4%
- Prison Officers – 16.8%
- Probation – 9.9%

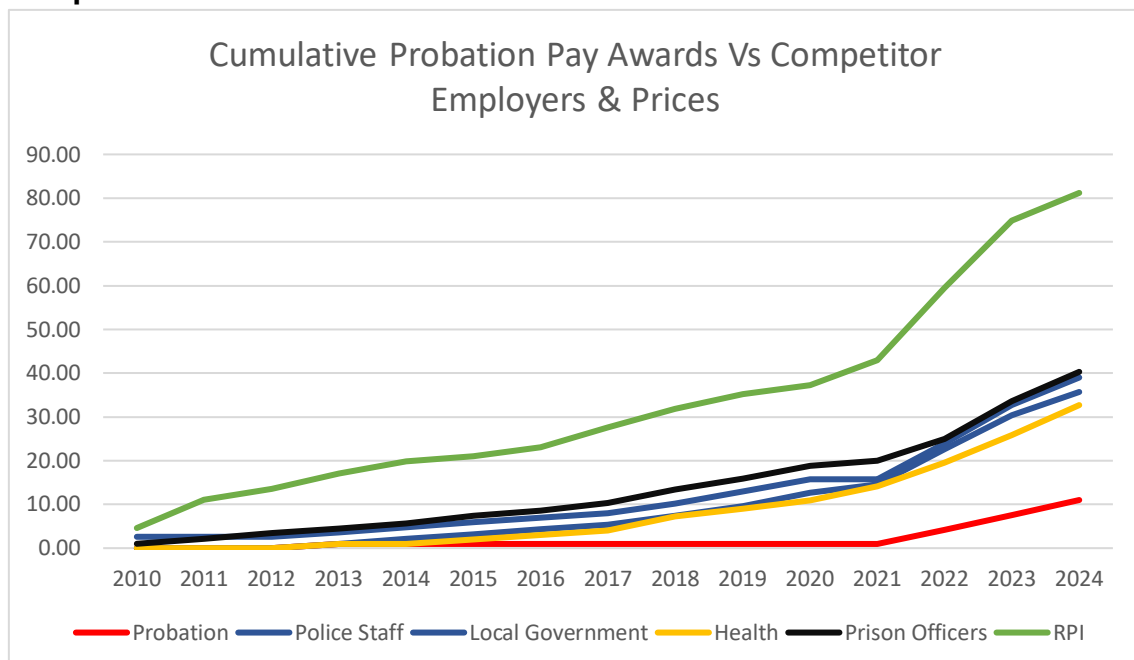
These figures show just how far probation has fallen behind other public sector employers in responding to the cost-of-living crisis through pay awards to staff.

**Graph 3**



Graph 3 shows the annual pay awards for probation since 2010 in comparison with other competitor public sector employers. It shows that during that period every single year probation staff either received the lowest or, occasionally, the joint lowest award.

**Graph 4**

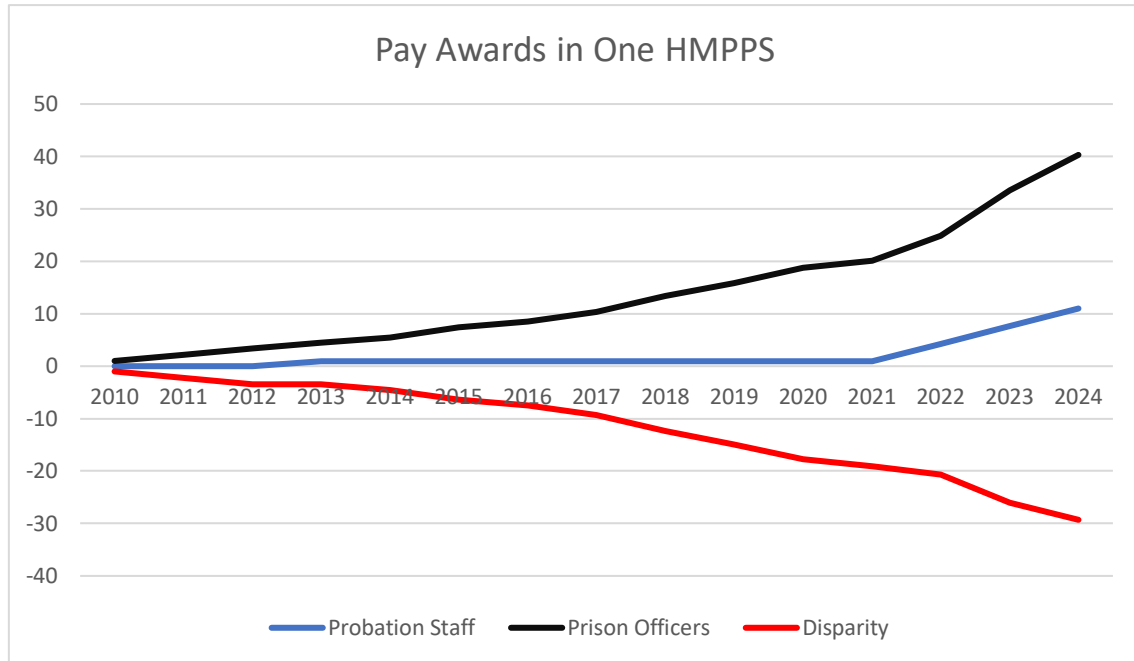


Graph 4 shows the same information as the cumulative values of pay awards since 2010. It also includes the rising prices with the inclusion of RPI. This gives a very clear visual representation of how probation pay has fallen further and further behind public sector competitor employer pay as well as the rising cost of living.

## One HMPPS?

Probation staff have consistently suffered from poorer annual pay settlements than their colleagues in the Prison Service. It is hard to take the rhetoric of One HMPPS seriously when there is such disparity. Graph 5 below shows this relationship.

**Graph 5**



It should also be noted that whilst prison staff received, without exception, larger pay awards year on year than probation staff, they also retained a system of geographical enhanced payments when geographical allowances were removed from the Probation Service as part of the price for the less generous three year pay award of 2022, 2023 and 2024.

## 6. Probation In Crisis

In September 2024 an investigation by The House magazine found every probation service in the UK is failing to meet minimum standards. It found some probation services have less than half the required number of staff.

Analysis of the last 33 HM Inspectorate of Probation reports up to that point, over two and a half years, found every service had received a failing grade, either 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'.

The House magazine found inspectors repeatedly identified understaffing and "unmanageable" workloads leaving services unable to perform basic tasks like

ensuring domestic abusers weren't contacting or threatening former victims, failing to safeguard children, and systematically failing to assess the risk to the public posed by former detainees.

Martin Jones, Chief Inspector of Probation, told the House Magazine "It's clear if you read the reports that the probation service is under huge strain. It's something that requires urgent attention from the government."

In light of the evidence presented in this pay claim showing how pay in the probation service has progressively fallen further and further behind that in the private sector, the rest of the public sector and rising prices, it is no surprise experienced staff are leaving the service.

The most recent HR Dashboard data provided by the Ministry of Justice to the probation unions shows that the number of recruits is almost entirely matched by the number of leavers. During the quarter of June to August 2024 496.4 joined but 493 left. Not surprisingly senior experienced staff were much more prevalent amongst those leaving the service. Of the 496.4 joining, 477.1 were NPS Band 2 or 3. Of the 493 leaving probation 144 were in NPS Bands more senior than 2 or 3.

These figures show that there is no significant progress being made to address the understaffing of the Probation Service but also an alarming process of experienced staff being replaced by the inexperienced.

A presentation was provided by the employer, titled 'Probation Capacity Measures: Reconsidering case allocation', that was considered by our Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) 'Probation Capacity' subcommittee on Thursday 28th November 2024:- *"There is a **significant and growing gap** in probation caseload demand against workforce continuing into future years, even with predicted levels of recruitment."* (slide 2, first bullet point).

A further presentation was provided by the employer titled 'Activity Weightings'. This presentation was considered by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) 'Probation Capacity' subcommittee on Thursday 12 December 2024:- *"initial modelling for Sentence Management is predicting a gap between current anticipated workload for 26/27 and revised anticipated workload"* (slide 2, second bullet point). *"C. 25%\* gap to current recruitment forecasts and planning"* (slide 4, note beside third bar of graph).

This starkly illustrates the huge challenge facing the Probation Service, now and in coming years, and the overriding priority to retain as many staff as possible. The statements by the employer support the repeated representations made by the Probation trade unions over recent years, in relation to the retention crisis facing numerous roles across regions and functions.

This pay claim would enable the employer to address the lack of supply of incoming staff by taking steps to meet the demands of existing staff in relation

to pay, a consistent key driver of attrition and wider dissatisfaction in the workforce. The Probation Service is in a dire state in this regard, and it is apparent there is a consensus that there remains a clear risk for this to become catastrophic in the very near future if action is not taken.

Whilst we await the publication of the Civil Service Pay Remit Guidance for 2025/26 it is the position of the trade unions that the current state of the Probation Service clearly indicates that a case can be made for this pay claim to be considered under the exceptional circumstances involved, should the claim fall outside of the remit.

We strongly argue that restoring pay for probation staff is a crucial element of addressing this retention problem and the staffing crisis the service is suffering right now.

## **7. Prison Capacity Crisis**

The present government inherited a prison system in crisis, running out of available prison spaces. Its new early release scheme, following on from the Conservative government's earlier ECSL scheme, has, so far, led to 1,700 prisoners released in September 2024 and 1,100 released in October. All of these early releases placing additional workload pressure on a probation service already at breaking point.

It is forecast that the system could run out of prison spaces again by July 2025 so the need for another early release scheme must be a very real possibility.

Section 6 of this claim, detailing the extent of the staffing and workload crisis in the Probation Service, uses the most recent data available to unions but covers the period prior to these releases which are only adding greater resource demands on a service already in crisis.

These measures have prioritised the prison crisis over the probation crisis. We strongly argue that urgent investment in the Probation Service is vital in order that it can adequately cope with the additional demands it faces. Investment in pay in order to retain skilled and experienced staff is a central element of that.

## **8. Independent Review of Sentencing**

In response to the rising prison population in England and Wales (it has doubled over the past 30 years), together with the failure of the number of prison places to match this expanding prison population, the government has launched an Independent Review of Sentencing, chaired by former Justice Secretary, David Gauke.

The aim of the Review is "a comprehensive re-evaluation of our sentencing framework" and will be guided by three principles which, in the words of the Review, are:

- sentences must punish offenders and protect the public
- sentences must encourage offenders to turn their backs on a life of crime
- expand and make greater use of punishment outside of prison

The Review's call for evidence explicitly makes reference to the central role that probation will play in delivering those principles. Any expansion and greater use of punishment outside of prison is very likely to place considerable extra demands upon the Probation Service.

Investment in probation will be necessary to deliver a more cost effective and successful future for sentencing with more focus on reducing re-offending and increased non-custodial sentences. Substantial investment in probation pay, to be able to recruit talented people and retain skilled and experienced staff, is a precondition to being able to fulfil the government's ambitions for sentencing in England and Wales.

## 9. Conclusion

This claim has laid out very clearly the challenges facing probation pay and its role in the understaffing and workloads crisis the service faces. Investment in staff pay, addressing the ability to both recruit talented and committed people whilst retaining skilled and experienced staff, is vital in order to be able to rebuild the effectiveness and capacity of the service. Only then will probation be able to play the central role in delivering the government's plans for ambitious change for the justice system in England and Wales.

To restore real terms probation pay to 2010 levels a 63.2% rise is required. This pay claim for a 12% increase to pay points and cash allowances is modest but would be an important start in restoring probation pay.

The existence of poverty pay in probation, exemplified by the national minimum wage overtaking the lowest pay point in 2023 and 2024, and soon to do again in 2025, is unacceptable in a modern public service delivered by a progressive government. Our claim for a £15 an hour minimum wage in the Probation Service makes sense morally as well as in terms of motivation and productivity.

Over the past 14 years, probation pay has fallen further and further behind rising prices and the pay of other workers. We have a new government which needs an effective Probation Service to deliver on its ambitions for the judicial system. Now is the perfect time for that new government to demonstrate the value it places in probation staff.

It's time to restore probation pay.