The impact of improved pay and conditions on low-paid urban workers: the case of the Royal London Hospital

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Executive Summary

- This research report is concerned with low-paid workers and their survival in London, one of the richest cities in the world.
- The key aim of the research was to measure the impact of improved pay and conditions on low-paid urban workers, using the domestic staff at the Royal London Hospital as a case study.
- During negotiations for a PFI deal at the hospital, and in order to comply with the 'retention of employment' arrangements associated with PFI deals, almost all domestic staff (excluding some managerial and supervisory staff) were transferred to the NHS in the Summer of 2005.
- This provided the opportunity to study the direct impact of better pay and conditions on a group of workers in the public sector whose hourly pay had risen from £5.25 to £7.50 (including London Weighting).
- The evidence gathered provides strong support for the idea of the 'living wage'.
- 87.3% of workers indicated that their life improved as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to buy food for themselves increased from 41% to 85.2% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to buy clothes for themselves increased from 36.8% to 80.7% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to pay for their housing increased from 43.1% to 70.7% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- Significant measurable improvement was also achieved with regard to holidays, socialising and insurance of house/flat contents.
- The study revealed that about 2/3 of surveyed domestic workers at the Royal London Hospital had children. The proportion of workers with children who felt that they had enough money to buy food for their children increased from 37.5% to 80% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- The proportion of workers with children who felt that they had enough money to buy clothes for their children increased from 36.6% to 73.2% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- The proportion of workers with children who felt that they had enough money to pay for schooling of their children increased from 27.5% to 75% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- 45.9% of surveyed workers had outstanding loans or debts. 60% of these workers indicated that they will be able to clear their loans/debts as a consequence of the new pay and conditions.
- The findings showed strong support for UNISON amongst the workers and a high level of willingness to get more involved in the Living Wage Campaign.
- The new pay and conditions already translated into a higher commitment of workers to their workplace, thus potentially reducing staff turnover.
- Despite this overwhelmingly positive impact of the new pay and conditions, however, the study also highlighted some areas of concern.
- Despite the fact that the new pay level exceeded the official ‘living wage’ level, the evidence suggests that in many instances this was still not enough and the research showed continuing financial stress amongst workers.
- A shortage of money to purchase food was indicated by as many as 14.8% of surveyed workers. This proportion rose to 19.3% with regard to clothes, 29.3% with regard to housing, 48.4% with regard to holidays, 53.3% with regard to socialising and 74.6% with regard to insurance.
- A shortage of money to purchase food for their children was indicated by 19.5% of workers with children. The proportion of workers indicating a shortage of money to purchase clothes and to cover school-related expenses for their children was 26.8% and 25% respectively.
SECTION 1
Introduction: The research questions

This report is about low-paid urban workers and their survival in London, a leading global city. More specifically, the report is about the impact of the ‘living wage’ on the lives of low-paid workers providing vital services in London. To our knowledge, this is the very first time that an attempt to measure the impact of the ‘living wage’ has been made. The research findings presented in this report provide unique insights into the real impacts of the ‘living wage’ with potentially significant policy implications. This introductory section first provides a brief introduction into the situation facing low-paid urban workers in global cities and highlights the importance of a ‘living wage’ for low-paid workers in London. It then presents the research questions that guided the research and introduces the research that was done. Finally, the section outlines the structure of the remainder of the report.

1.1 Global cities, low-paid workers and the ‘living wage’

Growing inequalities and income polarisation in prosperous global cities like London has long been a matter of concern (e.g. Sassan, 2001; Hamnett, 1994, 1996, 2003). More recently, the issue of workers at the bottom of the income ladder has been attracting increasing attention from academics (Wills, 2001, 2004; Evans et al., 2005; May et al., 2006; Datta et al., 2006; IPPR, 2006) and policy-makers (GLA, 2005). It has been argued that during the recent decades a combination of factors led to the increased incidence of low pay in several segments of the economy. Economic restructuring, technological changes, privatisation, the weakening power of trade unions and the move towards subcontracting all contributed to the downwards pressure on wages in lower-skill occupations. This is particularly true for routine service jobs such as cleaning, catering, or security services found in both public and private organisations. Hospitality, retail, business support services and healthcare are among the sectors most affected. The pressure on wages unfolding against a background of dramatic increases in the cost of housing, childcare, transportation and living expenses, translates into deteriorating standards of living for many service workers. While this is true for the low-paid workers in the UK in general, the situation is perhaps most exacerbated in London, a leading global city.

Indeed, as a result of the processes described above, a paradox has emerged in the UK's capital city. One the one hand, there are thousands of urban workers providing key services that are vital for the functioning of the city-region and its increasing prosperity. As Evans et al. (2005, p.6) put it, these are the workers “who keep London ‘working’”. On the other hand, these very workers receive remuneration that is below economically sustainable and socially acceptable levels. In other words, workers who are critical in producing a prosperous London, find themselves trapped in poverty, unable to sustain themselves or their families.

The plight of low wage workers is compounded by deteriorating working conditions. In many instances, low-paid workers have minimal or no rates of overtime pay, no London Weighting, no sick pay, no company pension and no compassionate leave (see Wills, 2001, 2004; Evans et al., 2005). Many workers find themselves working unsociable hours while others are not receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. In many workplaces, fewer workers are employed to complete the work, and they have to use poor quality equipment with little opportunity for training and career development.

The negative effects of recent trends are particularly significant in places like hospitals where the quality of services offered may be directly dependent on the well-being of those who provide them. Here, the paradox of the recent labour market restructuring is at its most absurd. Those in hospital care may well be serviced (in terms of key support services such as catering and cleaning) by domestic workers who themselves come to work when they are sick, because they have no access to sick pay. The moral, ethical and public health issues involved are enormous.

In the aftermath of privatisation and the subcontracting of key public services, cleaning, catering and security are provided by private contractors that offer poor pay and conditions for their employees. A survey in East London conducted in 2001 highlighted the widespread problem of poor pay and conditions for both public and private sector employees (Wills, 2001). Health sector institutions were amongst the most severely affected, due to the proliferation of private contractors in cleaning, catering and security services. At that time, a ‘living wage’ for London
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1.3 The aims of the research project
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In
2001; for current rates see GLA, 2005). The vast majority of workers
surveyed were found to be paid much less than this level.

This research report relates to work that was conducted at the Royal London Hospital,
Whitechapel. In 2001 domestic workers at this hospital were employed by ISS Mediclean and
paid only £4.12 per hour. They were offered only an extra £1 an hour for overtime at weekends,
minimal holidays, no London Weighting, no pension, no sick pay or compassionate leave (see
Wills, 2001, 10). Due to the nature of the restructuring, workers found themselves in a much
weaker position to protect their rights. The arrival of private contractors had been associated with
the emergence of a ‘two-tier’ workforce, high staff turnover and reduced commitment. This
situation made it more difficult for the union to organise and reduced the likelihood that workers
would stay and fight to improve their working conditions. To survive, such workers need either to
work longer hours or to take on additional jobs, in order to compensate for the low pay. The
additional jobs that these workers are doing are also marked by poor conditions. In this way,
labour market distress is reinforced with detrimental implications for the workers and society at
large. The Living Wage Campaign has been conceived to break this vicious circle.

1.2 The expectations of the ‘living wage’
In the early days of the Living Wage Campaign organisers from the East London Communities
Organisation (TELCO) had to calculate a ‘living wage’ for the city. The Family Budget Unit
conducted research to identify an hourly wage that would allow a family to survive with a ‘low cost
but acceptable’ standard of living (see Family Budget Unit, 2001). In 2001 this figure was
calculated at £6.30 an hour, at the time when the national minimum wage (NMW) was only £3.70
an hour. At the time of writing, these figures are £6.70 an hour for the London ‘living wage’ and
£5.05 for the NMW. Using the latest figures, the Greater London Authority suggest that as many
as 400,000 workers fall into the gap between the minimum wage and the ‘living wage’ (GLA,
2005).

Campaigners argue that the introduction of a ‘living wage’ for workers such as these would have
positive implications for them, their families, their employers and the wider community. Obviously,
the key benefits of a ‘living wage’ are related to workers themselves. It is expected that improved
wages and conditions would ensure that workers have enough financial resources to pay for a
healthy palatable diet, warmth and shelter. It is also expected that the ‘living wage’ would have
positive impacts on workers’ children or other dependants. In addition to the direct benefits of
higher income, however, one could imagine that workers on the ‘living wage’ could afford to work
fewer hours, thus releasing some of their valuable time to spend with family and friends. More
generally, one could expect that the social integration of workers and their families would improve
once the burden of poverty wages is addressed. Thus, by reversing the trend of ‘social dumping’,
the ‘living wage’ can also benefit communities. In addition to this, one can imagine that better
working conditions would also translate into a greater commitment of workers to their work and
their employer, and the reduction of staff turnover. By reducing staff turnover, the ‘living wage’
would benefit both the workers and the employers. A more stable and committed workforce also
offers better opportunities for trade union campaigning.

1.3 The aims of the research project
Under the weight of the win-win arguments presented above, it is not surprising that the idea of
introducing the ‘living wage’ has been gaining currency. The change from (what are in fact)
‘poverty wages’ to ‘living wages’ for low-paid urban workers could be seen as a logical step. Yet,
until now, there has been no firm empirical evidence to demonstrate what direct impact such a
change would have on the lives of low-paid workers and the wider community. The research
project reported here is the first step in addressing this gap. This research by the Department
of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London was conducted for UNISON, The East London
Communities Organisation (TELCO) and London Citizens. The key aim of the research project
was to ascertain what impact improved pay and conditions has had on the lives of low-paid urban
workers and their families. To our knowledge, this is the first time in the UK that the impact of a
‘living wage’ has been studied. While, inevitably, the research has its limitations (see below), it
nevertheless offers valuable evidence and unique insights into the impact of improved pay and
conditions.
The Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel, London, presents one of the first opportunities to study the impact of improved pay and conditions on workers. During negotiations for a PFI deal at the hospital, and in order to comply with the ‘retention of employment’ arrangements associated with PFI, almost all domestic staff (excluding some managerial and supervisory staff) were transferred to NHS employment in the Summer of 2005. Under the new PFI deal led by Mowlem, domestic services are to be managed by Acumen, but until the PFI is signed, ISS Medican remained in this role. The transfer involved approximately 300 workers moving onto NHS terms and conditions (as negotiated in ‘Agenda for Change’). As a result, domestic staff saw their hourly pay increase from £5.25 to £5.88 with an additional £1.69 London Weighting. These workers also had access to sick pay, improved holiday entitlement and better overtime pay at weekends (Interview UNISON representative, 7th October 2005).

This situation thus provided a unique opportunity to measure the impact of the ‘living wage’ (and in this case, above the ‘living wage’ which was set at £6.70 at the time of the research) on the ground. In Autumn 2005, a team of researchers and students from Queen Mary, University of London, conducted an ‘action research’ project at the Royal London Hospital. Through face-to-face interviews using a questionnaire, data was collected from nearly 70 domestic workers providing cleaning and support services at the Hospital.

The key research questions related to the overall perceptions of workers towards (a) the improvement of pay and conditions itself and (b) the actual impact the improvements had on their lives. The impact on worker’s lives was measured through a series of selected concrete indicators such as the purchase of food, clothes, housing/rent, insurance, socialising and holidays. We were interested to know whether there were any discernible changes in worker’s ability to pay for these key elements of living after the improvement in pay and conditions. We were also interested to see if the improved pay and conditions translated into a better deal for worker’s children in key areas such as the purchase of food, clothes and school-related items.

In addition we explored the impact of the ‘living wage’ on hours of work. We asked whether the new pay allowed workers to work less hours than before (and therefore potentially allowing them to spend more time with their families, friends and/or communities). Additional lines of inquiry covered areas such as current problems at work, knowledge and attitudes towards union organising, and future career plans.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured in the following way. The research methods that were deployed to explore these questions are described in Section 2. In addition, this Section outlines the problems and challenges encountered during the research. Sections 3 and 4 present the findings of the study. Section 3 focuses on the quantitative evidence gathered during the study. Section 4 explores the qualitative evidence. Section 5 then summarises the key findings and discusses the policy implications. It argues that the improved pay and conditions have had a significant and beneficial impact on the lives of workers and their families. However, despite this overwhelmingly positive assessment, there remain areas for concern. While the adoption of a ‘living wage’ is an important and necessary step in offsetting the worse excesses of low paid work for the majority of workers, it needs to be recognised that, in many instances, it may still not be enough to secure the well being of all workers and their families.

SECTION 2

The research methods and practice

This section describes and justifies the research methods that were used to explore the research questions outlined above and highlights a number of important limitations and problems encountered when conducting the research. The main research activity consisted of face-to-face interviews with low-paid workers using standardised structured questionnaires. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative evidence (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was designed in close consultation with UNISON officials during the period of September and October 2005. It was subsequently piloted with two domestic workers at the Royal London Hospital in early October 2005 and the final version of the questionnaire included five main parts. Part I aimed to establish the employment background of interviewees. Part II was designed to explore the impact of the new
pay and conditions on workers’ lives. Part III aimed to explore workers’ roles in, and attitudes towards, UNISON and the Living Wage Campaign. Part IV was designed to summarise workforce characteristics and Part V offered an opportunity to explore any additional issues through an open-ended question.

The final version of the questionnaire was used in face-to-face interviews with domestic workers at the Royal London Hospital on 21st October 2005. Two groups of domestic workers were targeted. The first one consisted of more than 50 employees working on a day shift. The interviews with this group of workers took place during their lunchtime break. The second group consisted of about 20 workers in the afternoon/evening shift. A special break was arranged for those workers willing to take part in the research. While UNISON members were targeted for these interviews, non-members also attended. It is important to mention that both interviewing sessions at the Royal London Hospital required the consent and approval of the managers on the site. This was achieved thanks to the negotiating skills and persistence of UNISON representatives who also arranged appropriate venues for the interviewing. In addition to successfully negotiating with their managers, these UNISON representatives also convinced their colleagues to take part in the interviews. Without their help, intervention and effort, the research would not have been possible.

While the bulk of the evidence was collected via face-to-face interviews, the research team also collected several self-completed questionnaires. The process of self-completion was used during the lunchtime interviewing session when potential interviewees outnumbered the available interviewers. Most interviewers were drafted from amongst the second-year university students from the Department of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London. The data collection and analysis formed part of their course GEG246 Geographical Research in Practice, providing a hands-on experience in their research methods training. In addition to interviews administered by students, however, a number of interviews were also conducted by academic staff and PhD researchers who were assisting with teaching from the Department. In total, 63 face-to-face interviews took place and 6 self-completed questionnaires were received by the research team. Alongside this, a small number of additional, specially-tailored, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with UNISON officials and representatives (from the Royal London Hospital, the London Chest Hospital and UNISON’s national office). The aim of these latter interviews was to gain both background information on the issue of the ‘living wage’ in the NHS more generally, and the situation at the Royal London Hospital in particular.

The analysis of the material gathered from the responses of workers proceeded in two ways. Quantifiable material was used to create a database for analysis using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). In its final form the research database consisted of 66 usable entries and this represents approximately 20% of domestic staff at the hospital. The results of this quantitative analysis are presented in Section 4. The qualitative material from each interview/questionnaire was also analysed by the interviewers and the research team, by hand.

In practice, the research was necessarily limited in a number of ways. As an action research project, it was designed to meet the goals of the local UNISON branch, the national union and the Living Wage Campaign. As the first hospital in the UK to secure ‘living wages’ for domestic staff, leaders from the union and the Living Wage Campaign were keen to evaluate the impact of higher pay, and wanted the research to provide hard evidence to support the work they were doing. In addition, however, the research was also designed to form a key part of research training for undergraduate students at the Department of Geography, QMUL. Thus, the research needed to be vigorous but also fairly straightforward. In addition, time was limited and most of the interviews had to be conducted on one day during the domestic workers’ lunch break or evening shift. These constraints obviously had an impact on the design, depth and conduct of the research.

In an ideal world, the research would have been conducted in one-to-one settings where the encounter was not limited by time, or the presence of other people in a large and noisy group meeting. In addition, the fact that most of the workers were born outside the UK meant that language caused a barrier in a number of the encounters. Again, in an ideal world, these interviews would have been conducted with the assistance of translators, but the pressures of time, finance and staff resources did not make this possible. Finally, the student interviewers were very inexperienced in the conduct of research and this is likely to have had an impact on the quality of the interview material collected.
As might be expected, the research process was also affected by the ongoing situation facing workers at the hospital. Domestic workers at the hospital were owed back pay that had accrued from Spring 2005, and even though we were interviewing in the Autumn at a time when the pay and conditions had improved and workers had been brought back in-house, there was still a considerable amount of frustration about the back pay. In addition to this, there was a degree of ambiguity about the current pay being received due to the payslips that workers were receiving (Interview with UNISON representatives, 7th October 2005). Therefore, while workers did report that their salary went up considerably, many were not sure about their exact hourly rate. This situation may have impacted on the interview data in two ways. Firstly, the unresolved back pay may have meant that the financial benefits of the new pay was still to be fully realised. Secondly, the frustration and confusion may have coloured workers’ views about the new pay and conditions. These circumstances have been considered in analysing the research data, which is presented in the next two sections, below.

SECTION 3
Research findings: The Numbers

This section focuses on the quantitative evidence gathered during the study. Following the structure of the questionnaire the section first gives an overview of the employment background of respondents, before examining the quantifiable responses they made about the impact of the new pay and conditions. Then, the analysis of responses with regard to workers’ involvement in UNISON and the Living Wage Campaign is presented, followed by a summary of the personal background of the respondents.

3.1 The employment background of respondents

- **Job title.** Out of 65 valid responses, 58 workers (89.2%) described themselves as ‘domestic’ or ‘cleaning’ staff, four as ‘housekeeping’ staff (6.2%) and 3 as ‘kitchen’ staff (4.6%).

- **Work category.** Out of 65 valid responses, 31 workers (47.7%) were full-time employees and 34 workers (52.3%) were part-time employees at the Royal London Hospital.

- **Employment status.** Out of 61 valid responses, a minority of 14 workers (23%) claimed that were transferred from NHS when privatisation occurred and the majority of 47 workers (77%) maintained they started working for the contractor.

- **Employed by NHS.** Out of 65 valid responses, all but 2 workers stated they work for the NHS now (96.9%).

- **Opinion about the NHS.** Out of 60 valid responses on the question of being happy, indifferent or displeased with being brought back in-house to be employed by the NHS, the vast majority of workers indicated they were ‘happy’ (53 workers, 88.3%) and a small minority stated they were ‘indifferent’ (7 workers, 11.7%). There was no-one who answered that they were ‘displeased’ – would rather stay with a private contractor’.

- **Main paid job.** Out of 66 valid responses, 53 workers (80.3%) stated that their present job at the hospital was their main job. Only a minority (13 workers, 19.7%) stated that the job at the Royal London Hospital was not their main job.

- **Other jobs.** Despite the high numbers of workers reporting part-time employment, as many as 80% of workers (52 out of 65) did not have any other job. Only 12.3% of workers indicated that they had one other job and 7.5% of workers had two or more other jobs.

This data indicate that for the majority of domestic workers at the Royal London Hospital, their employment there is either the main and/or the only source of income. Any change to pay and conditions will therefore be of critical importance to them and their families.

3.2 The impact of the new pay and conditions

3.2.1 **Overall satisfaction with the new pay and conditions**

The opening question in Part II of the questionnaire required workers to indicate their level of overall satisfaction with the new pay and conditions (on the scale of 6, from ‘very unhappy’ to ‘very happy’). In total there were 65 usable responses to this question and the results show an overwhelmingly positive picture, illustrated in Figure 1.
As illustrated, only one person (1.5% of respondents) indicated that he/she was ‘very unhappy’ about the new pay and conditions. Four workers (6.2%) said they were ‘not happy’ and three workers (4.6%) were ‘indifferent’. On the other hand, 16 workers (24.6%) were ‘moderately happy’, 20 workers (30.8%) were ‘happy’ and 21 workers (32.3%) indicated they were ‘very happy’ with the new pay and conditions. Thus, in total, 57 workers or 87.7% of those sampled were positive in contrast to just 12.3% (8 workers) who were indifferent or rather unhappy.

### 3.2.2 Satisfaction with specific elements of the new pay and conditions

The subsequent question aimed to dissect the level of satisfaction with each of the elements of the new pay and conditions. The data collected are summarised in Table 1 and Figure 2. As indicated, the overwhelming majority of workers were happy with each aspect of the new pay and conditions. At least 70% of the sample were happy with each aspect of the new package, the highest level of satisfaction being associated with being part of the NHS team, holiday entitlement and pay. Lower rates of satisfaction with London Weighting and compassionate leave may reflect some confusion about these arrangements amongst the staff concerned.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Very happy</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Moderately happy</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Not happy</th>
<th>Very unhappy</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total sample</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pay itself</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>26.2%</td>
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<td>Holiday entitlement</td>
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<td>Sick pay entitlement</td>
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<td>Compassionate pay</td>
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<td>3.1%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of the NHS team</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>26.60%</td>
<td>56.30%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.3 Overall level of impact

Workers were then asked to indicate the perceived overall level of impact of the new pay and conditions on their lives (on a scale of 5 grades: ‘my life has got worse’, ‘no change’, ‘improved little bit’, ‘improved a fair bit’, ‘improved a lot’). Out of 63 usable responses, 19 workers (30.2%) indicated that their life ‘improved a lot’, 15 workers (23.8%) ‘improved a fair bit’ and 21 workers (33.3%) ‘improved little bit’. Eight workers (12.7%) indicated that there was ‘no change’. Nobody suggested that his or her life ‘got worse’. Thus overall, there were 55 workers (87.3%) who indicated some degree of positive impact arising from the new pay and conditions, as opposed to 12.7% indicating no change (see Figure 3).

3.2.4 Impact on selected aspects of life

In addition to the overall level of impact, however, the research team also explored the impact of the improved pay and conditions on selected aspects of life. The basket of indicators included food, clothes, housing/rent, insurance, socialising and holidays. The overall positive impact was reflected in each of these categories, although with varying intensity. Workers were much more able to afford food and clothes, but the new pay had less impact on the affordability of housing,
holidays, socialising and very little impact on the purchase of home insurance. The responses for each of these categories is reviewed below using simple frequency calculations but the full data set is illustrated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Impact of the ‘living wage’: Affordability before and after the introduction of the new pay and conditions**

![Figure 4: Impact of the ‘living wage’: Affordability before and after the introduction of the new pay and conditions](image)

**Food.** Food is a basic human need and the ability to pay for it is vital condition for survival. The argument of the ‘living wage’ campaigners is that income below the ‘living wage’ may not be enough to cover basic human and social needs and that this can be rectified by increasing wages to a ‘low cost but acceptable’ level. Our research was an opportunity to test this claim. Indeed, the questions in this part of the questionnaire were designed to compare the situation ‘before’ and ‘after’ the increased pay. The findings in terms of the ability to pay for food are quite revealing. Based on 61 usable valid responses, it emerged that ‘before’ the new pay was introduced, there were only 25 workers (41%) who felt they had enough money to buy food for themselves. The evidence gathered shows that after the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation changed dramatically. The number of workers who indicated that they now have enough money to buy food for themselves rose to 85.2%, while the number of those indicating difficulty in covering the cost of food declined to 14.8%.

**Clothes.** The data analysis based on 57 usable valid responses shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, there were only 21 workers (36.8%) who felt they had enough money to buy clothes for themselves. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation changed substantially. The overwhelming majority of workers (46 or 80.7%) indicated that they now had enough money to buy clothes for themselves. Only a minority of 11 workers (19.3%) indicated otherwise. Therefore, just like in the case of food, the introduction of the new pay and conditions brought a dramatic shift of balance in favour of those workers who can now afford to pay for their clothes.

**Housing.** The data analysis of the affordability of housing shows similar results. Based on 58 usable valid responses, the data show that in the past there were only 25 workers (43.1%) who felt they had enough money to cover housing-related expenses. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation changed substantially. The large majority (41 workers or 70.7%) indicated that they now had enough money to pay for housing / rent. A minority of 17 workers (29.3%) indicated otherwise. Again, a shift of balance in favour of those workers who can now afford to pay for their housing/rent is clearly evident. However, it should be noted that, rather worryingly, even with this positive shift there were still nearly 1/3 of workers for whom housing remained unaffordable.

**Holidays.** The data analysis based on 62 usable valid responses shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, only a tiny fraction of workers (7 workers; 11.3%) who felt they had enough money for holidays. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation did change and a slim majority (32 respondents, 51.6%) indicated that they did now
have enough money for socialising. Meanwhile, 30 workers (48.4%) indicated that they still did not have enough money for holidays.

**Socialising.** The data analysis based on 60 usable valid responses shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, there were only 12 workers (20%) who felt they had enough money for socialising. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation did change, but not enough to bring about a dramatic reversal. Only 28 respondents, i.e. less than a half (46.7%) indicated that they now had enough money for socialising. A majority of respondents (32 workers; 53.3%) indicated they still did not have enough money for socialising.

**Insurance.** The data analysis based on 59 usable valid responses shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, there were only 4 workers (6.8%) who felt they had enough money to buy insurance for their house/flat contents. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation did change, but not dramatically. Only about _ of respondents (15 workers or 25.4%) indicated that they now had enough money to buy home insurance. The vast majority of respondents (44 workers; 74.6%) indicated otherwise.

**3.2.5 The impact on selected aspects of life of workers’ children**

In addition to the direct impacts on the workers, we were also interested in the impact of the new pay and conditions on worker’s families. More specifically, we were interested to explore the impact of pay for buying food, clothes and schooling for their children. The results of this part of the research are summarised in Figure 5. Again, they show that the increased pay had greatest impact on the affordability of food for children. The data also show very strong impacts on the affordability of clothing and schooling costs as well.

**Figure 5: Impact of the ‘living wage’ on workers’ children:**

*Affordability before and after the introduction of the new pay and condition*

Food for children. The analysis is based on 40 usable valid responses from workers with children. The data shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, only over a third of these workers (15 workers; 37.5%) felt that they had enough money to buy food for their children. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation did change dramatically. An overwhelming majority (32 respondents, 80%) indicated that they now had enough money to buy food for their children. Meanwhile, 8 workers (20%) indicated that they still did not have enough money to buy food for their children.

Clothes for children. The analysis is based on 41 usable valid responses from workers with children. The data shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, only over a third of these workers (15 workers; 36.6%) felt that they had enough money to buy clothes for their children. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation did change dramatically. A large majority (30 respondents, 73.2%) indicated that they did now have enough
money to buy clothes for their children. Meanwhile, over one quarter of workers (11 workers; 26.8%) indicated that they still did not have enough money to buy clothes for their children.

**Schooling for children.** The analysis is based on 40 usable valid responses from workers with children. The data shows that before the new pay and conditions were introduced, less than a third of these workers (11 workers; 27.5%) felt that they had enough money to pay any costs associated with their children’s schooling. After the introduction of the new pay and conditions, the situation had been reversed. A full _of respondents with children (30 respondents, 75%) indicated that they did now have enough money to pay for their children’s schooling. Meanwhile, one quarter of workers (10 workers; 25%) indicated that they still did not have enough money to pay for their children’s schooling.

The above figures show the positive impact that the ‘living wage’ has had on key expenses related to children. In each of the aspects surveyed (children's food, clothes and schooling) dramatic reversals of fortunes were recorded. However, there remains a relatively important group of workers (and their children) who were still not earning enough. It is possible that this situation is exacerbated by the personal loans and debts that some workers have.

### 3.2.6 Impact on personal loans and debts
With regard to personal loans and debts, the key data were collected through a couple of simple questions. Given the sensitivity of the issues, the results need to be treated with caution, mainly because of the possibility of under-reporting. The results nevertheless show an interesting and clear pattern. The question “Do you have any outstanding personal loans or debts?” received 61 responses. While 54.1% (33 workers) stated they did not have such loans or debts, there were 28 workers (45.9%) who claimed the opposite. In other words, nearly half of the surveyed workers admitted they had outstanding personal loans and debts. The second question, “Do you think you will be able to clear your debts now you are getting more pay?”, was answered by 30 workers (strongly correlating with the number of those with loans/debts). The majority of them (18 workers, 60%) indicated they would be able to clear their loans/debts while being on the ‘living wage’. However, 4 workers (representing 13.3% of those who answered this question) indicated that they would not be able to do so, and 8 workers (26.7%) stated that they didn’t know. These figures give an indication of both the importance of the issue amongst the workers and the potential impact that the ‘living wage’ is likely to make to lifting the burden.

Perhaps most worrying, those with debts were disproportionately concentrated amongst those workers with children. Indeed, the analysis of available data showed that there is a higher incidence of debts/loans with workers with children. Among 26 workers that had children, 61.5% indicated that they have debts/loans and only 38.5% stated otherwise. Overall, among 20 workers with debts/loans, 80% have children and 20% do not, showing a disproportionate impact of the burden of loans and/or debts depending on the family situation.

### 3.2.7 Impact on working hours
The impact of the ‘living wage’ in terms of working hours is considered crucial for both workers and wider community. The assumption is that the new pay and conditions can allow workers to reduce the number of hours worked. The results from the survey, however, based on answers from 60 employees, is mixed. A large majority of respondents (41 workers; 68.3%) indicated that they worked “same hours” as before. Only 4 workers (6.7%) stated that the introduction of the new pay and conditions was associated with the reduction of hours they worked. On the other hand, a full quarter of workers (18 workers; 25%) indicated that since the introduction of the new pay and conditions they worked more hours than before. It is likely that some workers are simply taking advantage of a better hourly rate and overtime pay to work more hours. It is often not very easy to change working hours, and working time will also depend on the availability of overtime. If overtime is available, however, it is likely that basic earnings would have to rise a great deal in order to have a negative impact on the hours of overtime worked.

### 3.3 Workers’ roles in, and attitudes towards, UNISON, TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign
In Part III of the questionnaire, worker’s roles in, and attitudes towards, UNISON, TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign were surveyed. Almost all workers were planning to remain in the union while they workers at the hospital and only one worker (out of 36 respondents to this question) indicated an unwillingness to remain in the union. Forty-five employees answered the question on their preparedness to get more involved in the union. Over 2/3 of them (31 workers; 68.9%)
indicated a willingness to get more involved, compared with 31.1% (14 workers) stating the opposite. Out of 58 workers who answered the question, only 22 knew that UNISON was part of TELCO (37.9%). Despite this lack of knowledge, however, workers gave a rather positive endorsement of UNISON’s involvement in TELCO. Out of 50 workers who responded to this question, 36 agreed with the statement that UNISON’s membership in TELCO was a good thing (72%), while 14 workers (28%) stated that they didn’t know. Interestingly, the workers had a rather limited knowledge of the Living Wage Campaign. Out of 59 workers, only 22 had heard of TELCO’s Living Wage Campaign (37.3%) and even fewer workers had participated in the campaign. Only 6.4% (3 workers out of 47) stated that they had been involved in the campaign at the Royal London Hospital or elsewhere. Despite this, however, as many as 79.5% of respondents indicated that that they would like to get more involved in the campaign (31 out of 39 workers).

While this can be seen as a positive signal, the actual level of involvement may depend on several other factors including time, opportunity, other responsibilities and staff turnover. Perhaps as a response to the improved pay and conditions, as many as 94.4% of respondents (51 out of 54 workers) indicated that they plan to continue to work at the hospital for the long term and only 5.6% disagreed. Such figures bode well for the organisation of the union, and the potential for employer-led investment in skills.

3.4 The personal background of workers

Gender. The two-thirds of the workers partaking in the study were female (47 workers out of 62; 75.8%). One third of the respondents were male (15 workers; 24.2%).

Age groups. Four age group categories were created to capture the age composition of the respondents. The following split of age groups has been detected (out of 58 respondents): age group 18-34: 31%; age group 35-44: 27.6%; age group 45-54: 27.6%; age group 55 and over: 13.8%.

Ethnic background. The analysis revealed a picture of a diverse workforce in terms of ethnic background. In the order of the decreasing incidence, the following ethnic groups were present (out of 57 valid responses): Black African 43.9%; Black Caribbean 22.8%; White Other 7%; Asian Indian and Asian Bangladeshi 3.5% each; White English, Mixed White & Black Caribbean, Mixed White & Black African and Mixed White & Asian 1.8% each. Outside these ethnic groups, a further 12.3% of respondents indicated ‘Any Other’ ethnic origin including groups such as Turkish, Latin American, Moroccan, Thai, Phillipino and Mauritian. Despite this diversity, two ethnic groups clearly stand out as pre-dominant. Indeed, Black African and Black Caribbean combined represented exactly two-thirds (66.7%) of the surveyed workforce.

Country of birth. A great diversity was also present in terms of the country of birth. From this it is clear that only tiny minority of these workers were born in Britain (3.3%) while the vast majority (96.7%) were born outside the country (59 out of 61). The respondents were most frequently born in Africa (45.9%; half of them in Ghana and Nigeria; other countries of origin included Morocco, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Ethiopia) and South America and the Caribbean (26.2%, over 2/3 of them from Jamaica). Broadly defined, Eastern Europe (including Turkey and Russia, but most frequently Lithuania) accounted for 9.8%, followed by India, Pakistan or Bangladesh (6.6%) and other Asian (6.6%). Only one worker was born in Western Europe (1.6%). Although it is a truly global workforce, three countries alone (Ghana, Nigeria and Jamaica) were the birth countries of over 40% of the sample.

Nationality. Only 15.5% of the workers held British nationality (9 workers out of 58). The majority of workers were non-British nationals, having nationality of countries in Africa (37.9%), South America and the Caribbean (22.4%) and broadly defined Eastern Europe (8.6%). Other nationalities present were from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (6.9%), other Asia (5.2%) and Western Europe (3.4%). Combined together, the non-nationals represent 84.5% of the surveyed workforce.

Education. Despite doing a low-pay job, the workers surveyed at the Royal London Hospital, were relatively well educated. Indeed, 47.3% of respondents had completed secondary school (26 out of 55 workers), 21.8% had post-secondary vocational education and 14.5% had university education. Only 9.1% of workers specified primary school as their highest achieved education, while 3.6% admitted that they ‘never went to school’.
Beyond these basic indicators of personal backgrounds, the study also revealed some interesting facts with regard to worker's participation in religious and community organisations and the number and location of their dependants.

**Participation in religious and community organisations** was measured through self-identification as an 'active member'. In terms of participation in religious organisations, just over the half of respondents (51.7%; 30 workers out of 58) indicated that they were active members of a religious organisation. Among those who gave details of their religion organisation, membership of various Christian denominations was dominant. In contrast, participation in community organisations was much less evident. Indeed, only 5.7% of respondents indicated that they were active members of a community organisation (such as an ethnic-based group, club or association). Active participation in TELCO, London Citizens or trade unions did not feature in the responses.

**Workers’ dependants.** In terms of workers' dependants the following information was collated from the responses:

- 50 workers responded to the question about the number of children under age 16 they were responsible for in the UK. In total 44% of workers (i.e. 22 out of 50) had one or more dependants under the age of 16 in the UK. Those with 1 child accounted for 26% of respondents, those with 2 children accounted for 12%, and 6% of respondents had 3 children.
- 44 workers responded to the question about the number of children under age 16 they were responsible for outside the UK. In total 38.6% of workers (i.e. 17 out of 44) had one or more dependants under the age of 16 outside the UK. Those with 1 child accounted for 11.4% of respondents, those with 2 children accounted for 15.9%, those with 3 children 9.1% and 2.3% of respondents had 4 children they were responsible for outside the UK.

**SECTION 4**

**Research findings: Voices of workers**

This section summarises the key qualitative evidence about the impact of the ‘living wage’ on the workers at the Royal London Hospital. The main impacts on life, both positive and negative ones, will be explored before offering accounts on more specific impacts. The issues of debts, working hours and future work plans will be highlighted in particular. In addition to this, the section will offer workers’ views on UNISON, TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign.

### 4.1 The main impacts on life: Positive aspects

Interviewees identified a wide range of positive changes, including greater financial security, respect, job satisfaction, and more time for leisure and family. One interviewee described how the new pay meant ‘money for transport, clothes and food … and I can pay for school and children’s pencil case, books now …’. This particular worker’s view of work had also altered, ‘you know … I feel like coming to work now … because I am getting good money for my work … not like before’ (Interview 51).

An improved ability to provide for children was a common theme. In the case of one worker, it made quite a big difference. ‘My pay now is nice because I have some money to send to my children in Ghana. I didn’t have this before’ (Interview 9).

Many respondents also commented on the improved atmosphere. One interviewee felt ‘a new sense of belonging’ to the NHS due to coming back in-house (Interview 54). The same interviewee felt they were now working ‘for a more important and responsible employer’. For another respondent the improvement was even more dramatic. This worker said they ‘used to wake up and feel sick’ before the new conditions, but that now they ‘feel proud to work’ (Interview 13).

The workers interviewed not only appreciated increases in pay, but improvements in other benefits as well: ‘The impacts are positive. There is a pension scheme which is helpful. Also holidays have increased and we are given sick pay. We are generally treated better at work and
informed of the changes that affect us. There has been a general improvement of life.’ (Interview 57).

Many respondents also said that having more money and holidays allowed more time for leisure and family. One interviewee said ‘I have more time for my family as I have no overtime’ (Interview 8) while another commented that they now have ‘more time in life’ to do other things (Interview 33), and that the new pay has enabled them ‘to do more things in my life than before’.

Many workers said that as a result of the new terms and conditions they are now more committed to their jobs. One worker said that they are very pleased to work for the NHS as he/she can see a better future with improved working conditions (Interview 32). Another worker felt ‘much better working for the government … it’s a positive thing because you’re contributing to society. Also the pension scheme is much better’. (Interview 4).

When talking about how their lives had improved, interviewees frequently referred to money. One interviewee stated how they now received £103 as opposed to £76 that they were receiving before for the same hours (Interview 36). The extra money workers are earning is being spent in a variety of different ways.

Several workers also mentioned that they were pleased they are paid weekly under the new contract rather than the previous arrangements when they were paid fortnightly.

One interviewee said their life ‘had improved in general’ and the new pay and conditions had allowed their budget for living expenses to become ‘less stricter’. With enough money for food and socialising, the interviewee was able to use the extra money for other things rather than worrying about housing costs (Interview 54).

Another interviewee commented that their housing situation had improved: ‘I used to share a one-bed flat with another person, now I have enough for a one-bed flat on my own’ (Interview 60).

Other interviewees also said they now have more money to spend on basic necessities. One interviewee stated how they could now afford more food and clothes due to the new pay and conditions (Interview 32). Another said that they too had more money to buy extra food and that the increases in pay also made it easier to afford household bills (Interview 21). More interviewees stated how the pay increases enabled them to buy better quality food and clothes than previously (Interview 14).

For some workers, capital goods are now more attainable. One interviewee stated that they had now been able to purchase a computer (Interview 38) and another interviewee said, ‘next week I’m going to buy a washing machine, I couldn’t do that before, I can afford to save now too’ (Interview 15).

Another interviewee is now able to participate more fully in their social environment: ‘The increased income has made buying gifts and presents for family and friends more a reality than a dream. New clothes and shoes are affordable and watching a movie at the cinema’ (Interview 26).

Another way in which the pay rises have helped is that several interviewees reported now being able to save. Several workers saw this as a route into further education. One interviewee stated that ‘I am now able to save some money to be able to afford to go to college’ (Interview 61). This interviewee hoped to achieve a qualification in physiotherapy and thus get a better job in the long term. Another interviewee reported that they were now able to build up some general savings (Interview 4).

4.2 Main impacts on life: Negative aspects

Many interview respondents felt that the pay could still be improved, as they still did not have enough money to support a reasonable standard of living. One interviewee stated how ‘more could be done’ to improve the pay and conditions so that they could spend more time with their family at the weekends instead of having to work long hours (Interview 34).
Another interviewee stated, ‘the pay could be better for the hours and work that we do’ (Interview 61). This illustrates how workers still feel undervalued for their skills and the services they deliver in the hospital. One interviewee stated that there had been no change to their daily life and that they have decided to work more hours since the new pay and conditions to help pay off the debts they had accumulated. After paying the bills, they said ‘there is nothing. I just manage’ (Interview 5).

One interviewee mentioned that they cannot afford dental care. This interviewee stated that they have severe pain in their teeth, but still cannot afford to go to the dentist as it costs too much, even for a check-up (Interview 2).

There was also some unhappiness about the transition to the new terms and conditions. According to one worker: ‘At the moment life is more stressful due to the change – not knowing exactly where we are with pay and when we will receive back pay’ (Interview 61). Another worker was unhappy about reductions in overtime working since the new terms and conditions were introduced: ‘Working with the NHS cuts off our working time. More working time means we can bring more money to home to support our family. We are still living in poverty as before because of the reduction of working time’ (Interview 28).

Several workers felt that they were yet to be accepted by other staff as part of the NHS workforce. One worker said there remained a ‘divide in the workplace between the cleaners themselves and other hospital workers’ (Interview 54). Another worker was unhappy that staff had not received any new uniforms as their current uniform still had the ISS logo stitched onto it. They felt it was impractical to only have one uniform and they felt unhappy with the way they looked, particularly as the ISS uniform gets domestics ‘no respect’ (Interview 5).

4.3 Impact on debts and loans

Some interviewees refused to answer the questions relating to debt and several were quite angry being asked such personal questions. Others responded that they did not have any debts. Many workers, however, did state that they had debts. For this group the effects of the new pay and conditions have been positive.

Some interviewees described how under the new pay and conditions, they were able to keep up with small debt repayments more easily. One interviewee stated how their current wages allowed them to ‘pay what I owe from credit card purchases’ when they needed to (Interview 54). Another stated ‘Yes it’s a lot easier to pay the instalments’ (Interview 22).

One interviewee, who has an outstanding personal loan of £10,000, felt that under the new pay and conditions they are now in a better position to make the repayments (Interview 32).

Workers with debts were eager to get overtime to assist them with debt repayments. One worker said they wanted ‘to do extra work to pay back quickly’ (Interview 50). Another worker who has credit card debt was unsure as to whether they would be able to make the repayments more easily, and they would have liked to work more overtime at the weekends but felt that the system for distributing extra hours is unfair and that they often do not receive the opportunity to do more hours (Interview 36).

4.4 Impact on working hours

For most interviewees, they continued to work the same hours as before the introduction of the new pay and conditions. Some have found that increases in pay means they are able to work less. One interviewee works one day less than before because they are now able to make the choice to take a day off to study (Interview 53). Another interviewee stated how they now work less hours than previously ‘because the pay is better, I can spend more time with my family’ (Interview 8).

Some workers have increased their hours, however, for a variety of reasons. One worker started working more when the contract was brought in house (Interview 9) while another is finding their university course ‘less strenuous’ this year and chose to work additional hours because the increased pay was ‘a morale boosting incentive’ (Interview 60).
One worker said, ‘I do lots of overtime even though the pay has increased’ (Interview 57). Other interviewees mentioned a desire to work full-time because of additional benefits. One interviewee wanted ‘to work more hours which is very important’ (Interview 29). However, the availability of overtime and full-time work remains an issue. Some interviewees expressed how they prefer and even need to work over-time, but are not always able to attain it. Another interviewee stated that when they work additional hours ‘for extra pay but when they give you the money they reduce how many hours I have done and give less money. Sometimes for two weeks they didn’t allow no more hours’ (Interview 50). A second group of workers expressed a desire to work full-time rather than their current part-time hours. One interviewee said, ‘I would like to do more hours and want to change to full time hours’ (Interview 62) Another worker stated, ‘I would like to work more hours, like a full-time job’ (Interview 29).

4.5 Involvement in UNISON

The majority of workers were members of UNISON. Those who are members expressed a variety of reasons for their membership, including increased job security, representation, and a sense of empowerment.

The most common reasons given for union membership were job security and representation. One worker described the union as a ‘support network’ (Interview 23). Another interviewee stated that ‘they solve problems for you’ and you ‘never know when a problem arises’ (Interview 31). For one worker membership was a good thing because it can ‘help’ workers, as well as ‘listen to them’ (Interview 39). This view was echoed by another worker who joined the union in order ‘to come together as one voice, we talk and they listen’ (Interview 15). Union members did not necessarily anticipate any problems in the immediate future but felt that being a member of UNISON means they ‘get help when they are in trouble’ (Interview 32). The union, then, was seen to have made a concrete difference. While one member said they thought the union had ‘power’ (Interview 36) another stated: ‘they are good because they fight for you. Not a lot was done before and [the union] can help if need be but no one’s looking for trouble’ (Interview 22).

Other workers expressed the view that union membership give them an opportunity to voice their opinions and to get active in the workplace: ‘I joined UNISON because it provides me with a lot of benefits for me …it gives me the right to express my views’ (Interview 4) Another worker said they joined UNISON because ‘I had a lot of ideas to improve conditions’ (Interview 47). A number of workers stated that UNISON communicated well and provided them with news about their jobs (Interview 26). Several workers expressed an interest in becoming more involved in UNISON and one worker said they joined ‘to help and show my support for the campaign’ (Interview 55). One worker said they had been involved in campaigning and trying to persuade colleagues to join the union (Interview 16). Another worker said they would like to be more involved because ‘they have helped me and I would like to do the same for future employees’ (Interview 62). Workplace issues were not the only form of activity that members were interested in. One worker wanted to get more involved with the union because ‘I enjoy the social aspect’ (Interview 60).

Financial hardship was the main reason for non-membership. One worker said they were ‘still operating on quite a tight budget, I cannot afford the extra expense’ (Interview 54). This particular worker did want to become involved in the union as they felt their involvement was beneficial to workers, but they were concerned about covering the expense. A number of other workers also expressed an interest in joining the union. One interviewee who was not a UNISON member expressed an interest in joining ‘maybe decide to join next year, I don’t really know about this very much’ (Interview 11).

4.6 Involvement in TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign

Many interviewees had not heard of TELCO before the interviews took place, the majority were interested in hearing about the Living Wage Campaign, but were positive about the coalition between UNISON and TELCO. One worker said that UNISON membership of TELCO was a good thing as ‘it gives us the right to express our views and improve the workforce’ (Interview 4).

One interviewee said that they would like to get more involved in the TELCO Living Wage Campaign because ‘it is a good agenda’ (Interview 7), while another felt that it provided another way of developing support for workers, particularly as living in London on low pay is very difficult. One interviewee stated, “It would be good to get involved…life in London is expensive” (Interview 54), another said they would like to get more involved because ‘I would have more access to ask
someone for help'. (29). Several workers also wanted to be more involved 'to better conditions and help others' (Interview 60).

Time was an important reason given by many workers for not becoming involved in TELCO’s Living Wage Campaign at the hospital or elsewhere. One worker said that they were not involved because they had no free time and due to language barriers. Another worker said, ‘I would like more information about the work of UNISON and TELCO, how to join and about the organisations. This should be more available for all the workers throughout the hospital. There is not much information available at the moment' (Interview 53).

### 4.7 Other comments

Many workers saw their future in a hospital or caring environment. The impression given by the majority was one in which working for the NHS would be a very positive outcome. For example, one interviewee said they saw their future as “staying with the NHS” (Interview 5). Potential future work plans included training to become nurses, care assistants and health and support workers. Another worker expressed a desire to move into NHS administration as it offered more money. For several workers, their future work plans involved moving from part-time to full-time work in their current jobs. Other future work plans included accountancy, self-employment, jobs with better pensions, and migration to home countries.

Many workers expressed general satisfaction with their jobs, but would like more pay and more hours. Pay rates were important to several workers. One interviewee expressed the view that £7 per hour (before London weighting) would be a more appropriate rate of pay. Whilst another called for a higher wage, ideally £10 and went on to say that they are ‘treated like dogs’ by the management and that they ‘need to treat them with respect’ (Interview 24). This view contrasted to other responses. Another worker said, ‘No pressure here compared to my other job. Get sick pay, benefits and pension. Want more hours’ (Interview 17). And another said they were ‘very happy with the NHS, they treat us very well, pay very well and are very kind. Everything’s fine with work’ (Interview 22).

However, one interviewee did comment on the lack of “contact points” for the domestic cleaners (Interview 54). When needing help with work related questions and issues, he found it hard to find “the right people to talk to and the right answers”. This may demonstrate the lack of communication between management and staff, and how this may lead to possible frustrations for the workers.

### SECTION 5

#### Conclusions

This research report is concerned with low-paid workers and their survival in London, one of the richest cities in the world. The key aim of the research was to measure the impact of the improved pay and conditions on low-paid urban workers, using the domestic staff at the Royal London Hospital as a case study. It is the first time the impact of the ‘living wage’ has been empirically studied. The evidence gathered provides a strong support to the ‘living wage’ idea, while also highlighting some areas of concern.

#### 5.1 Positive impacts

On the positive side, the evidence presented pointed out the **significant improvement of lives** of the surveyed workers both in general and with regard to specific aspects of life. Key findings could be summarised as follows:
- 87.7% of workers were satisfied with the new pay and conditions;
- 80.1% of workers were satisfied with the wage side of the new pay and conditions;
- 89.1% of workers were happy to be part of the NHS team;
- 87.3% of workers indicated that their life improved as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
- The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to buy **food** for themselves increased from 41% to 85.2% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
- The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to buy **clothes** for themselves increased from 36.8% to 80.7% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
• The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to pay for their housing increased from 43.1% to 70.7% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
• The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to pay for the insurance of their house/flat content increased from 6.8% to 25.4% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
• The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money for socialising increased from 20% to 46.7% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
• The proportion of workers who felt that they had enough money to go on holidays increased from 11.3% to 51.6% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;

The study revealed that about 2/3 of surveyed domestic workers at the Royal London Hospital had children. In terms of impact of the new pay and conditions on these workers’ children, the findings are as follows:
• The proportion of workers with children who felt that they had enough money to buy food for their children increased from 37.5% to 80% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
• The proportion of workers with children who felt that they had enough money to buy clothes for their children increased from 36.6% to 73.2% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;
• The proportion of workers with children who felt that they had enough money to pay for schooling of their children increased from 27.5% to 75% as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;

The study also revealed some interesting findings about debt burden among workers:
• 45.9% of surveyed workers had outstanding loans or debts;
• 60% of these workers with debt indicated that will be able to clear their loans/debts as a consequence of the new pay and conditions;

The findings with regard to impact of the new pay and conditions on the working hours were more mixed:
• No general trend towards the reduction of hours worked was detected. Large majority of workers (68.3%) continued to work the same hours as before.
• Only 6.7% of surveyed workers indicated that they worked fewer hours following the introduction of the new pay and conditions;
• On the other hand, and contrary to expectations, 25% of workers worked more hours.

The study also offered some insights into the attitudes of workers towards the union organisation, TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign. In terms of the membership of the UNISON, the evidence suggests a high level of support for their trade union. 97.2% of surveyed workers are willing to stay with the union while working at the hospital and interviews revealed deep appreciation and satisfaction with the work of UNISON at their workplace. In terms of TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign, the picture has two sides. On the one hand, the responses revealed a relatively low awareness of both TELCO and the Living Wage Campaign among workers. Only 37.3% of workers knew about the Living Wage Campaign and only a small fraction of the workers (6.4%) were involved in the campaign so far. On the other hand, the survey and interviews revealed a high level of willingness to get more involved in the campaign, as expressed by 79.5% of workers. This situation presents campaign organisers with both challenges and opportunities.

Importantly, the study showed that the new pay and conditions already translated into a higher commitment of workers to their workplace. Indeed, 94.4% of domestic workers would like to continue to work at the hospital for the long term. In addition to the improved pay and conditions, the move in house meant that many workers feel a new ‘sense of belonging’. More generally, workers responses reflected an improved atmosphere (notwithstanding remaining problems at work echoed by some workers). It remains to be seen if this new positive atmosphere will translate into lower staff turnover, but the above indications provide a reason for optimism. If materialised, the reduced staff turnover would benefit workers, employers and patients alike.
5.2 Areas of concern

Despite this overwhelmingly positive impact associated with the implementation of the new pay and conditions, the study also highlighted some areas of concern. Indeed, despite the fact that the new pay in fact exceeded the ‘living wage’ level, the evidence suggests that in many instances this was still not enough. Indeed, for 12.7% of the workers, the new pay and conditions brought no general improvement of life. Many workers continue to have a difficulty in making the ends meet. A shortage of money to purchase food was indicated by as many as 14.8% of surveyed workers. This proportion rose to 19.3% with regard to clothes, 29.3% with regard to housing, 48.4% with regard to holidays, 53.3% with regard to socialising and 74.6% with regard to home insurance. These figures serve as a reminder of a continuing financial stress amongst workers, despite the improved pay and conditions at work. It is also important to note that those workers who have to look after children (i.e. nearly 2/3 of all respondent workers) were more likely to be in debt and although there were very significant improvements in their ability to pay for food, clothing and schooling costs, the situation remained unsatisfactory for a significant minority of the sample. As many as 19.5% of workers were still unable to pay for the food they wanted for their children, 27% struggled with clothes and 25% with schooling expenses.

5.3 Policy implications

The evidence presented in this report is related to a single case study in particular circumstances. However, it can be reasonably argued that the study is a good snapshot of challenges of low-paid workers that are similar to challenges shared by many hundreds and thousands of workers in the capital city. At a time when there is a growing political will to implement the ‘living wage’ across Greater London (see GLA, 2005), our case study offered a unique ‘sneak preview’ into what such a process may mean for the workers on the ground. The key finding of this research is that the improved pay and conditions had very positive impacts on the lives of workers and their families. The evidence gathered in this report provides robust support for the ‘living wage’. Based on this, one could argue that even a relatively small increase in wages for workers at the lower end of the income spectrum may translate into a dramatically improved ability to pay for basic living expenses. In this sense, the ‘living wage’ is delivering the expected outcomes.

Having said this, it is important to recognise that the implementation of the ‘living wage’ is not a panacea that will solve all problems related to the problem of low pay. Indeed, as we have seen, even securing a wage rate above the ‘living wage’ level may not be enough to guarantee desired improvements in basic living standards for all workers and their families. Housing remains a particular problem for workers and their families living in London. Moreover, the data indicate very low levels of household insurance that increase workers’ vulnerability to crime.

In conclusion then, it can be argued that the adoption of ‘living wage’ is an important and necessary first step in offsetting the worse excesses of low paid work. It is clear, however, that the costs of housing and child support remain important issues for low paid workers in London. The ‘living wage’ needs to be a central plank in a set of anti-poverty measures for London that also includes affordable housing, child care provision and training/development. Our research indicates that paying a ‘living wage’ can make a dramatic impact and it has benefits for workers, employers and the wider community.
References


Appendix 1: The questionnaire
The Royal London Hospital: The impact of improved pay and conditions

Questionnaire Survey (final)

• The purpose of the research is to find out about the impact of your new pay and conditions.
• We would like to reassure you that the survey is ANONYMOUS and CONFIDENTIAL (no information will be released to employers or authorities).
• You do not need to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and you are free to terminate the interview at any time.
• The survey questionnaire will take about 40 minutes to complete.
• Your participation in the survey is very important.
• Are you happy to start?

Please, fill in the following:

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<th>Date of Interview:</th>
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<td>Interviewer(s): 1.</td>
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QUESTIONS

PART I
Employment Background

1. What job do you do at the hospital? [e.g. domestic] __________________________
2. Do you work full-time or part-time?
   - [ ] Full-time
   - [ ] Part-time
3. How many hours do you work per week? ________
4. When did you start working here? (month/year) __________________________
5. Were you transferred from the NHS or did you start working for the contractor?
   - Transferred from the NHS [ ]  Started working for the contractor [ ]
6. Are you now employed by NHS?
   - Yes [ ]  No [ ] (if no, go to Question 9)
7. If you are employed by NHS, how do you feel about it?
   - [ ] I am pleased to be with NHS
   - [ ] Indifferent (I don’t care)
   - [ ] Displeased (I would rather stay with a private contractor)
8. Why? _________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________
9. Is this your main paid job?  
   Yes ☐  No ☐

10. How many other paid jobs do you have?
   ☐ 0 (none, this is the only paid job I have)
   ☐ 1
   ☐ 2 or more

**PART II**

The impact of the new pay and conditions

We know there have been problems with implementation, but now you are on *Agenda for Change* pay and conditions. We want to know how this affects you and your family.

11. Overall, how happy are you with the new pay and conditions that you get now?  
   [tick one box only – the one that describes your feelings most accurately]
   ☐ very happy
   ☐ happy
   ☐ moderately happy
   ☐ indifferent
   ☐ not happy
   ☐ very unhappy

12. How happy are you with each of the elements of your new pay and conditions?

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<th>Not happy</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Moderately happy</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Very happy</th>
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<td>sick pay entitlement</td>
<td>compassionate leave entitlement</td>
<td>London weighting</td>
<td>being part of the NHS team</td>
<td>other (please specify) __________</td>
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We are trying to understand how the new pay and conditions have impacted on you, your family and your life.

13. Overall, how much has your life improved as a consequence of the new pay and conditions?  
   [tick one box only – the one that describes your feelings most accurately]
   ☐ Improved a lot
   ☐ Improved a fair bit
   ☐ Improved little bit
   ☐ No change
   ☐ My life has got worse
14. **Why?** What are the main impacts (if any) of the new working terms and conditions on your life? (Please give as much detail as possible):
15. Under the **old** pay and conditions, did you have enough money to buy **food for yourself**?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Other / Comments ____________________________________________________________

Has your situation now improved, do you have enough money to buy food for yourself now?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Other / Comments ____________________________________________________________

16. Under the **old** pay and conditions, did you have enough money to buy **food for your children**?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] N/A (I don’t have children; go to Question 17)

Other / Comments ____________________________________________________________

Has your situation now improved, do you have enough money to buy **food for your children** now?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Other / Comments ____________________________________________________________

17. Under the **old** pay and conditions, did you have enough money to buy **clothes** for yourself?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Other / Comments ____________________________________________________________
Has your situation now improved, do you have enough money to buy clothes for yourself now?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

18. Under the old pay and conditions, did you have enough money to buy clothes for your children?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ N/A (I don’t have children; go to next Question)

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

Has your situation now improved, do you have enough money to buy clothes for your children now?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

19. Under the old pay and conditions, did you have enough money to pay for your housing / rent?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

Has your situation improved, do you have enough money to pay for your housing / rent now?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________
20. Under the **old** pay and conditions, did you have enough money to buy **insurance** for your house/flat contents?

☐ Yes
☐ No [I didn't have insurance]

Other / Comments ________________________________

Has this situation improved, do you have enough money to buy **insurance** for your house/flat contents now?

☐ Yes
☐ No [I still don't have insurance]

Other / Comments ________________________________

21. Under the **old** pay and conditions, did you have enough money for **socialising**?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________

Has your situation improved, do you have enough money for **socialising** now?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________

22. Under the **old** pay and conditions, did you have enough money to go on **holiday**?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________

Has your situation improved, do you have enough money to go on **holidays** now?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________
23. Under the *old* pay and conditions, did you have enough money to cover expenses related to *schooling* of your *children*?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] N/A (I don’t have children; go to Question 24)

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Has your situation improved, do you have enough money to cover expenses related to *schooling* of your *children* now?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________

24. Is there anything else you could not afford before, but is now more accessible or affordable thanks to the *new* pay and conditions?
25. Do you have any outstanding personal loans or debts?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you have loans or debts, do you mind telling us how much you owe? £ _____________

Do you think you will be able to clear your debts now you are getting more pay?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don’t know

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

26. Now, with the new pay and conditions, do you work less hours than before, more hours than before, or the same hours as before?

☐ Less hours
☐ More hours
☐ Same hours

Other / Comments ________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you work less hours, how many less hours do you work per week? _______ hrs/week

Why do you work less hours? _________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you work more hours, how many more hours do you work per week? _______ hrs/week

Why do you work more hours? _______________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments? _________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
27. Do you have any other comments about how the new pay and conditions have affected you and your family?

PART III
Your work and your role in UNISON and the Living Wage Campaign

28. Do you have any particular problems at work at the moment?
   [ ] No  (go to Question 29)
   [ ] Yes

   If there are problems,
   a) please tell us about them: ____________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________________

   b) what do you think needs to be done to deal with these issues? ______________
      ____________________________________________________________________
      ____________________________________________________________________
29. When did you join **UNISON**? (month / year) _____________________

30. Who asked you to join? ________________________________

31. Why did you join?
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

32. Do you plan to stay in the union while you are at the hospital?
   Yes ☐ If so, why? _______________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

   No ☐ If not, why not? ___________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

33. Would you like to get more involved in the union at the Royal London hospital?
   Yes ☐ If so, why? _______________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

   No ☐ If not, why not? ___________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________

34. Do you know that UNISON is part of **TELCO** (The East London Communities Organisation)?
   Yes ☐
   No, I didn’t know that
   I have never heard of TELCO

35. Do you think that membership of UNISON in TELCO is a good thing?
   Yes ☐ If so, why? _______________________________
   ____________________________________________

   No ☐ If not, why not? ___________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ☐ Don’t know
36. Have you heard about TELCO’s Living Wage Campaign?

☐ Yes
☐ No

37. Have you been involved in any of TELCO’s Living Wage Campaign activities at the Royal London hospital or elsewhere?

Yes ☐
- If so, what did you do?
  ________________________________________________
  ________________________________________________
- Why did you decide to take part?
  ________________________________________________
  ________________________________________________

No ☐
- If not, why not?
  ________________________________________________
  ________________________________________________

38. Would you like to get more involved in the Living Wage Campaign, and if so, why?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

39. Do you plan to continue to work at the hospital for the long term?

Yes ☐ If so, why? ________________________________________________
No ☐ If not, why not? ________________________________________________
☐ Don’t know

40. What are your future work plans? ________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
PART IV
Personal background

41. Male ☐ Female ☐

42. How old are you? __________

43. How many children under age 16 are you responsible for in the UK? __________

44. How many children under age 16 are you responsible for outside the UK? __________

45. Do you have any other dependants?
☐ Yes, in UK (how many) __________
☐ Yes, elsewhere (how many) __________
☐ No

46. Who do you share your home with?
[tick all that apply]
☐ Parents
☐ Spouse/partner
☐ Children
☐ Other family
☐ Non-family (e.g. friend)

47. Which country were you born in? __________________________________

48. What ethnic group do you belong to?

| White: | English ☐ | Scottish ☐ | Welsh ☐ | Irish ☐ | British ☐ | Other ☐ |
| Asian: | Indian ☐ | Pakistani ☐ | Bangladeshi ☐ | Asian British ☐ |
| Black: | Caribbean ☐ | African ☐ | Black British ☐ |
| Chinese: | Chinese ☐ | Chinese British ☐ |
| Any other: ☐ (Please specify) | ____________________________ |

49. What is your nationality? ____________________________
50. Are you an active member of a religious organisation?
   Yes ☐ Which one / where? ____________________________________________
   No ☐

51. Are you an active member of any community organisation (ethnic group/club/association)?
   Yes ☐ Which one / where? ____________________________________________
   No ☐

52. What is your highest completed level of education?
   ☐ Never went to school
   ☐ Primary school
   ☐ Secondary school
   ☐ Post-secondary - Vocational
   ☐ Post-secondary - University
   ☐ Other; Please specify ____________________________________________

PART V
Miscellaneous

53. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time! We appreciate your co-operation.

This research is being conducted by the Department of Geography at Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, E1 4NS. Any queries should be directed to Jane Wills or Martin Sokol (Tel.: 020-78825400).
Appendix 2: Reflections from the student researchers

Most students found the research process interesting and enjoyable and a good means to enhance their interviewing skills. Many stated how it provided them with practical experience in gathering information, as well as contributing towards an important debate surrounding low-paid workers in London.

One student stated:

“As I have been studying Telco’s work, carrying out the interview and meeting workers gave me an insight into what is really going on in terms of low wage labour”.

Another opined:

‘Interviewing cleaners at the Royal London Hospital was a unique opportunity to learn about their struggles to make a decent living simply because of their job title’ (Student 17).

Several students expressed how the interview process had influenced the way they perceive the role of a cleaner and the workers who carry out this role. One student stated:

‘It was an invaluable and humbling experience, speaking to someone who has obviously come to the UK to earn some money to possibly enable her children, mother and younger sisters to have a better life’ (Student 9).

Another reflected that ‘hearing the problems directly from the cleaners was extremely touching and made us all realise how hard they work’ (Student 57). Yet another student mentioned that ‘I got to learn about the life of a cleaner which was actually quite sad as I did not realise that things i.e. I-Pod, DVD that I take for granted would be luxury items to them’ (Student 31).

Many students also mentioned how it provided them with practical experience in gathering primary data. One student stated how the one-to-one interview experience enabled her to capture the feelings of her respondent, to hear vocal expressions and reflect on their body language. She felt this was important for both the interviewer and the respondent, so that they could both feel at ease with one another and so as to be sincere and respectful with the questions and answers.

Another student said: ‘I enjoyed participating because it enabled me to gain more skills from the experience as well as being part of a real research project. It was also a subject that has a lot of meaning to me as my mother is a cleaner and her wages are not the best either’ (Student 16).

One student indicated that they had become more motivated to become active in community organising:

‘I really enjoyed taking part in the interview, being able to see how the participant’s life has changed just by making a few minor adjustments to the working terms and conditions has really inspired me to be more active in terms of community based organising’ (Student 15).