# School support staff in Wales face financial crisis amid rising living costs



In a concerning revelation, the financial struggles faced by school support staff in Wales have come to prominence, with many describing their situations as unsustainable. Recently, these workers gathered with the Low Pay Commission in a meeting facilitated by the public services union Unison, whose research exposes a stark reality: a significant portion are working additional jobs, relying on loans, or receiving benefits due to inadequate wages.

An alarming 98% of respondents in a UNISON survey indicated that their pay does not sufficiently cover the escalating cost of living, leading to severe compromises in their daily lives. Reports reveal that over two-fifths—46%—of school support staff have had to borrow money to make ends meet, with some even resorting to food banks to ensure they can provide basic necessities. Angharad Simpson, a school support worker from Blaenau Gwent, articulated the regrettable norm for many when she remarked, “Paying the bills is a challenge each month.” She added, “It shouldn’t be like this. We don’t enter the profession thinking we’re going to become rich; we just want to be fairly rewarded.”

The structure of payments for school support staff compounds these financial hardships. Unlike teachers and school heads, who are compensated over the full year, support staff receive remuneration that is spread across nine months, creating a significant gap during school holidays. This practice, while calculated as monthly payments, fails to address the realities of living costs during these periods. Sara Allen, chair of the UNISON Cymru school support staff forum, highlights the broader implications of this financial strain, noting a crisis of recruitment and retention in Welsh schools due to years of underfunding and pay awards that have failed to meet inflation.

Moreover, the survey from Unison underscores that many support staff are forced to dip into their own pockets for essentials that should be provided within educational settings, such as food and school supplies for students. The union insists that fair compensation is not just an issue for the workers themselves but is indicative of a failing system where the very individuals responsible for nurturing future generations lack adequate support.

Further studies echo these sentiments, revealing that the difficulties experienced are not isolated to school support staff alone. A separate UNISON survey, which encompassed over 6,000 public sector workers, found that 45% of respondents have seen their monthly expenses rise by as much as £400, leading to drastic measures such as skipping meals or pawning possessions. The cumulative effect of these financial stresses reveals an urgent need for reform, not just within the educational sector, but across public services in Wales.

As discussions regarding the minimum wage continue, the union hopes to establish a dedicated negotiating body for school support staff to address these issues comprehensively. The stakes are high: without proactive measures, the exodus of skilled support staff could further exacerbate the challenges faced within Welsh education, leaving both students and the system at a significant disadvantage.

In summary, the situation facing school support staff in Wales is precarious and reflects broader trends of undercompensation in the public sector. The call for fair pay and proper support is not just about addressing current financial struggles, but about investing in the essential workforce that supports education and, ultimately, the future of the next generation.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraph 2, 3
3. Paragraph 3
4. Paragraphs 2, 5
5. Paragraph 4
6. Paragraph 4
7. Not referenced

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/25175022.school-support-staff-wales-struggling-make-ends-meet/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/news/2023/11/cash-strapped-school-support-staff-in-wales-are-paying-for-pupils-essentials-says-unison/> - A UNISON survey of over 800 school support staff in Wales reveals that many are using their own money to provide food, clothing, and stationery for students, despite facing their own financial challenges. The survey highlights that 98% of respondents feel their pay is insufficient to cover rising living costs, with 17% having used food banks in the past year and 46% borrowing money to make ends meet. The union emphasizes the need for fair compensation and support for these essential workers.
3. <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education/im-teaching-assistant-pay-low-27113010> - A teaching assistant in Wales shares her struggle with low pay, stating that her wages are insufficient to cover basic living expenses, including heating her home during winter. The article highlights the broader issue of underpaid school support staff in Wales, with many workers seeking better-paying jobs due to financial pressures. The piece underscores the importance of fair compensation for teaching assistants and the impact of low wages on their well-being and job satisfaction.
4. <https://www.voice.wales/we-are-at-war-thousands-of-workers-in-wales-forced-to-skip-meals-and-pawn-possessions-unison-survey-reveals/> - A UNISON Cymru/Wales survey of over 6,000 public sector workers reveals the severe impact of the cost-of-living crisis, with many workers resorting to skipping meals, pawning possessions, and using food banks. The survey highlights that 45% of respondents have seen their monthly expenses increase by up to £300, and 28% by up to £400. The findings emphasize the urgent need for fair pay and support for public sector workers facing financial hardships.
5. <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/news/2021/11/schools-risk-support-staff-exodus-over-pay-in-wales/> - A UNISON survey indicates that over 45% of school support staff in Wales are actively seeking better-paid jobs due to rising living costs and persistent low pay. The survey reveals that 98% of respondents feel their pay is inadequate to cope with increasing prices, with many workers resorting to second or third jobs to make ends meet. The union warns of a potential exodus of support staff, which could negatively impact the education system.
6. <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/news/2024/10/school-staff-in-torfaen-given-compensation-over-missing-holiday-leave-says-unison/> - UNISON reports that school support workers in Torfaen, Wales, have been awarded compensation after an investigation revealed they were not receiving their full holiday leave entitlement. The compensation affects staff at 33 schools who have worked for more than five years. The union emphasizes the importance of fair treatment and recognition for school support staff, highlighting the need for accurate leave entitlements and compensation when discrepancies are found.
7. <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/news/2025/01/thousands-of-school-and-college-workers-in-wales-spared-registration-fee-rise-says-unison/> - UNISON announces that thousands of school and college workers in Wales will not face an increase in registration fees for the 2025/26 financial year. The Welsh government had previously ended its subsidy, but UNISON's campaigning has secured the continuation of the £15 fee for learning support workers. The union highlights the financial pressures on education staff and the importance of maintaining affordable registration costs to support the workforce.