

# Officer Pay and Working Conditions Position Paper

## Containing data from the USI Officer Pay and Packages Survey 2022

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## USI President 2022-2023

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# Introduction

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is the representative body of 374,000 students across the island of Ireland, and is an entirely student-led organisation. We are comprised of further and higher education member students’ unions across the island, both North and South, and seek to protect and enhance education, the rights of students, and the ability of all to access third-level education.

This position paper is a direct follow-up to the USI Officer Pay and Packages Survey 2022 which was aimed at sabbatical (or full-time) officers in USI’s Member Organisations with a view to collecting data on the current rate of pay and working conditions of students’ union officers. This paper will outline the results of the survey and contrast the current working conditions and pay rates of sabbatical officers with best practice across the sector.

# Survey Outline

The USI Officer Pay and Packages survey was sent to all member organisations within the Union of Students in Ireland. The survey was intended to collect data on the average pay of sabbatical officers within USI’s member organisations, as well as look at any additional expenses offered to officers during their term. Working conditions of officers – including contracts, average working hours and total days of annual leave were also collected. The results of the survey will be presented alongside USI’s view on the best practices for ensuring that students’ union officers are paid fairly and equitably and are not subject to adverse working conditions.

While this survey was sent to all of USI’s member organisations, feedback was significantly lower from the NUS-USI region, with only one member organisation responding to the survey. As a result, we have unfortunately had to take the NUS-USI region out of our final analysis on a regional level. The feedback from the NUS-USI region is still utilised throughout the collected data on a national level. Moving forward, the USI President will work with the NUS-USI President, utilising the data analysis contained in this position paper to develop a similar NUS-USI specific paper outlining officer pay, packages and working conditions.

The survey had a 75% response rate from students’ unions falling solely under the USI jurisdiction. With a proposed action of this position paper being to ensure the continuation of a collection of data around students’ union officer pay and packages, we would aim next year to have a 100% completion rate from students’ unions falling solely under the USI jurisdiction.

# Sabbatical Officer Pay

## Minimum Wage

The minimum wage in Ireland is €11.30 an hour, which would result in an annual salary of €22,916. This is the minimum amount that employers in Ireland are legally allowed to offer employees, however discrepancies exist when an employee is under the age of 20.

* Employees aged 19 are entitled to 90% of the minimum wage: €20,624 annual salary at €10.17 hourly rate of pay.
* Employees aged 18 are entitled to 80% of the minimum wage: €18,333 annual salary at €9.04 hourly rate of pay
* Employees aged under 18 are entitled to 70% of the minimum wage: €16,041 annual salary at €7.91 hourly rate of pay.

Given that the role of a sabbatical officer within a students’ union is typically occupied by undergraduate students, officers could be paid below the standard National Minimum Wage on the basis of their age, however, as the role filled through an annual election, the pay of sabbatical officers should at the very least be in line with the standard National Minimum Wage as there is no guarantee that the elected officer would be under the age of 20 years old.

### Survey Findings

Results from the USI Officer Pay and Packages survey found that 3% of students’ union sabbatical officers are currently paid below the standard National Minimum Wage. It is worth noting that in all cases of officers being paid below minimum wage, the sabbatical officers were given a contract at the beginning of their term. All cases of sabbatical officers being paid below minimum wage were found in Students’ Unions where there is only a single sabbatical (full time paid) officer role.

### Regional View

* No unions surveyed in the Dublin region offer a pay rate of less than minimum wage.
* 4% of surveyed students’ union sabbatical officers in the Southern Region are paid below the legal minimum wage.
* 6% of surveyed students’ union sabbatical officers in the BMW Region are paid below the minimum wage.

### USI Position

All sabbatical officers should be paid above the standard National Minimum Wage and the legal requirement to the National Minimum Wage must be adhered to in all sabbatical roles.

Actions:

* The USI President, with assistance from the Regional Vice Presidents’ should ensure that sabbatical officers (particularly those in single sabbatical officer unions) are educated on their right to the standard National Minimum Wage at the beginning of their terms.
* The USI President should make contact with unions that noted a pay rate of below minimum wage and assist these officers with escalating this issue to the Workplace Relations Commission.

## The SU Living Wage

USI recognises that workers deserve to be paid a living wage. The Living Wage is currently €13.85 per hour – or a gross per annum salary of €28,162.62. The Living Wage is calculated on a weighted basis, examining the difference in costs for those living in Dublin, those in cities, those in towns and those in rural areas. According to the 2022-2023 figures the Dublin Living Wage is €33,348.74, the Cities Living Wage is €25,824.94, the Towns Living Wage is €27,858.40[[1]](#footnote-2), and the Rural Living Wage is €25,011.56.

While the Living Wage is weighted according to population size residing in the different jurisdictions of Dublin, other cities, towns, and rural areas, in actuality, the Living Wage for students’ union sabbatical officers is expected to be higher than that outlined by LivingWage.ie. This is due to the fact that every students’ union surveyed would be located in an area that is either a town, a city or Dublin and as a result, the figure for the Rural Living Wage is wholly irrelevant to sabbatical students’ union officers.

The total number of sabbatical officers in USI’s Southern Region, BMW Region and Dublin Region is 80. This is split across towns, cities and Dublin as follows;

**Figure 1: Percentage of sabbatical officers distributed in Dublin, other cities, and towns.**

* 28 sabbatical officers in the Dublin Region (35%)
* 23 sabbatical officers in cities (28.75%)
* 29 sabbatical officers in towns (36.25%)

Taking this weighting into consideration leads to the significantly higher figure of €29,195 as the living wage for sabbatical officers in students’ unions working a 39-hour work week.

### Survey Findings

**Figure 2: Lowest, highest and mean pay of SU sabbatical officers**

The USI Officer Pay and Packages Survey 2022/23 found that only 23% of students’ union sabbatical officers are paid the standard Living Wage.

83% of students’ union sabbatical officers are paid below the SU Living Wage of €29,195.

Salaries of sabbatical officers range from €31,496 to €20,475. The average salary of a sabbatical officer is €26,207. This puts the average salary at 10% lower than the SU Living Wage.

### Regional View – Dublin

**Figure 3: Dublin lowest, mean, and highest sabbatical officer pay in contrast with the SU Living Wage and the Dublin Living Wage.**

Sabbatical officers based in the Dublin region have significantly higher expected expenses due to the rising cost of accommodation. Living Wage Ireland release annual figures specifically aimed at capturing the expected cost of living in Dublin, and outlining what workers should be paid in order to cover these costs.

* The Dublin Living Wage is €33,348.74. No sabbatical officers within the Dublin Region are currently offered the Dublin Living Wage.
* Only 17% of sabbatical officers in the Dublin Region are paid the SU Living Wage of €29,195.
* Taking into consideration that many officers based in the Dublin region may be commuting from outside of the city of Dublin to work, it is also worth noting that only 17% of sabbatical officers in the Dublin region are paid the Town Living Wage of €27,858.
* Salaries in the Dublin region ranged from €22,920 to €31,202. The average salary of a sabbatical officer within the Dublin region is €26,247, which is 10% lower than the SU Living Wage and the lowest regional salary.

### Regional View – Border, Midlands, and Western Region

**Figure 4: BMW lowest, mean, and highest sabbatical officer pay in contrast with the SU Living Wage, Towns Living Wage and Cities Living Wage.**

Sabbatical officers based in the Border, Midlands and Western Region are primarily based in towns, however there are two Students’ Unions in Galway[[2]](#footnote-3) that are classified as city unions.

* Only 6% of sabbatical officers in the BMW region are paid the SU Living Wage of €29,195. This is the lowest regional percentage of officers paid the SU Living Wage.
* 29% of sabbatical officers in the BMW region are paid the Town Living Wage of €27,858.
* 35% of sabbatical officers in the BMW region are paid the Cities Living Wage of €25,825.
* Taking into consideration that many sabbatical officers based in the BMW may be commuting from rural areas, it is also worth noting that 82% of sabbatical officers are paid the Rural Living Wage of €25,011.
* Salaries in the BMW region ranged from €21,060 to €30,362. The average salary of a sabbatical officer within the BMW region is €26,518, which is 9% lower than the SU Living Wage.

### Regional View – Southern Region

**Figure 5: Southern lowest, mean, and highest sabbatical officer pay in contrast with the SU Living Wage, Towns Living Wage, and Cities Living Wage.**

Sabbatical officers based in the Southern Region are primarily based in cities (Cork, Limerick, and Waterford) however there are other Students’ Unions based in towns.

* Only 30% of sabbatical officers in the Southern Region are paid the SU Living Wage of €29,195. While this is the highest regional percentage of officers paid the SU Living Wage – it is important to note that all officers paid the SU Living Wage or Above come from two unions.
* 43% of sabbatical officers in the Southern Region are paid the Town Living Wage of €27,858.
* 78% of sabbatical officers in the Southern region are paid the Cities Living Wage of €25,825
* Taking into consideration that many officers based in the Southern may be commuting from rural areas, it is also worth noting that 78% of officers are paid the Rural Living Wage of €25,011.
* Salaries in the Southern Region ranged from €31,496 to €20,475. The average salary of a sabbatical officer in the Southern region is €27,415, which is 6% lower than the SU Living Wage.
* The Southern Region were found to have the highest average salary, but also the widest range – with both the highest paid sabbatical officer and the lowest paid sabbatical officer from the Southern Region.

### USI Position

All sabbatical officers in Students’ Unions should be paid the SU Living Wage of €29,195.

**Actions:**

* The USI President to promote this position paper as a lobbying document for Member Organisations who are entering into pay deal renegotiations.
* The USI President, with assistance from the Regional VPs, should ensure that annual data surrounding pay and packages is collated so as to keep abreast of the average pay of Students’ Union officers.

## Disparity Between Officer Pay within a Union

In 43% of students’ unions, all sabbatical officers are offered the same rate of pay. In unions where a pay disparity exists, it is primarily seen that the President of the students’ union is offered a higher rate of pay than other sabbatical officers. There were also two instances where a students’ union offered three different rates of pay to officers – the highest to the President, the second highest to the Deputy/Deputies, and the lowest to other sabbatical officers.

The highest pay disparity was 16% and the lowest pay disparity (where one exists), is 1.9%. This means that where the highest pay disparity exists, the President of the students’ union is paid 16% more than the other sabbatical officers in that union, and where the lowest pay disparity exists, the President of the students’ union is paid 1.9% more than the other sabbatical officers in that union.

### Regional View – Dublin Region

* The Dublin region showed that 60% of unions surveyed having a disparity between the rates of sabbatical officer pay within the union.
* The highest pay disparity in the Dublin region is 16%, while the lowest is 1.9%.

### Regional View – Southern Region

* The Southern region showed a disparity between the pay of sabbatical officers within a union in 20% of Member Organisations surveyed. The Southern region has the lowest amount of unions with a pay disparity.
* The highest pay disparity in the Southern Region is 11%, while the lowest is 5%. Both figures come from the same union where three bands of pay rate are offered.

### Regional View – Border, Midlands, and Western Region

* Disparity between the rate of pay of officers exists in the highest concentration in the Border, Midlands, and Western Region, with 80% of unions showing a disparity between the rate of pay of officers.
* The highest pay disparity in the Border, Midlands and Western Region is 11%, while the lowest is 5%. Both figures come from the same union where three bands of pay rate are offered.

### USI Position

USI’s current pay disparity is 4%, where the President and Coiste Gnó are paid at increments 5 and 6 of Grade III of the Salary Scales for Clerical and Administrative Staff of Institutes.

Utilising an existing industrial scale could allow students’ union sabbatical officers to benefit from national pay agreements which when renegotiated tend to reflect changes in the cost of living.

Significant pay disparities, where there are not clear constitutional or contracted differences in the duties of sabbatical officers can cause conflict within teams. Matching salaries to existing industrial scale increments provide a more concrete method for rationalising an existing pay disparity and help to ensure that major pay disparities between officers do not exist.

## Weekend Working Allowance

Currently, the USI offers a Weekend Working Allowance for officers who must engage in work during the weekend. The USI Schedule of Expenses outlines;

“When a **business event** is held at weekends, if pre-approved by the President, USI will provide a payment of €30 per day, or a maximum of €40 for two days. The President must be satisfied that a person will be actually working for more than two hours. Simply attending a brief event is not sufficient to warrant the payment.”

### Survey Findings

The USI Officer Pay and Packages survey found that 27% of students’ unions allow sabbatical officers to claim a weekend working allowance for work undertaken over the weekend.

### Regional View

* 25% of sabbatical officers in the Dublin region can claim a weekend working allowance.
* No sabbatical officers surveyed in the BMW region noted that they could claim a weekend working allowance.
* 40% of sabbatical officers surveyed in the Southern region could claim a weekend working allowance.

### USI Position

Sabbatical officers should be able to claim pay for unavoidable weekend work. Until such a time as the majority of sabbatical officers receive pay for weekend work, USI should make every effort to avoid hosting training or democratic events during the weekend.

Actions

* The USI President to ensure that the scheduling of democratic and training events for sabbatical officers do not take place over the weekend.
* The USI President, with assistance from the Regional Vice Presidents, to ensure that up to date data on sabbatical officers’ ability to claim weekend working expenses is collated annually.

# Contracts

## Receiving A Contract

All employees working for a regular wage or salary automatically have a “contract of employment” with their employer. This contract sets out the rights and responsibilities of both the employee and the employer. Legally, employees do not have to receive their whole contract in writing, however all employees should receive a “written statement of terms of employment”. Employees must get the core terms of your employment, in writing, within 5 days of starting their job. The core terms of employment include;

* The full names of the employer and employee,
* The address of the employer,
* The place of work, or where there is no fixed or main place of work, a statement stating that there are various places, or you are free to set your own place of work,
* The date the employment started,
* The job title, grade, or nature of the work,
* The expected duration of the contract,
* The rate or method of calculating your pay, and the “pay reference period” (whether you are paid weekly, fortnightly or monthly),
* What the employer reasonably expects the normal length of your working day and week to be,
* The duration and conditions relating to the probation period (if there is one),
* Any terms or conditions relating to hours of work, including overtime.

### Survey Findings

The USI Officer Pay and Packages Survey 2023 found that 53% of students’ union sabbatical officers were offered a contract at the beginning of their terms in the students’ union. Of those that received contracts, 12.5% of students’ union sabbatical officers noted that their contract did not outline their expected working hours per week.

### Regional View:

* 75% of sabbatical officers within the Dublin region received a contract upon starting their term in office.
* 40% of sabbatical officers within the BMW region received a contract upon starting their term in office.
* 40% of sabbatical officers within the Southern region received a contract upon starting their term in office.

### USI Position

USI offers all officers beginning roles within USI the “written statement of the terms of employment” in the form of the USI Terms & Conditions of Officership. These Terms & Conditions are subject to the approval of the USI Governance Committee.

USI believes that all students’ union sabbatical officers should receive written statement of the terms of employment when beginning their term in office.

**Actions**

* As SUT is the first event hosted by USI and is aimed at giving incoming students’ union officers a broad look at their roles and responsibilities, the USI President should inform those attending of their right to a written statement of their terms of employment.
* Where students’ union officers do not receive a contract, or written statement of their terms of employment, the USI President, in collaboration with the Regional Vice Presidents, should seek to assist the students’ union in developing a Terms & Conditions of Officership document for incoming sabbatical officers.

## Official Working Hours

The role of a students’ union sabbatical officer is rarely contained to just the typical working hours. As many students’ unions organise evening or night events, there is often the expectation that students’ union officers will be able to work whenever needed over the course of their year long term. Typically, a sabbatical officer would be defined as a “full-time” role, however, there exists disparity between the contracted working hours of students’ union sabbatical officers, as well as the actual working hours undertaken by sabbatical officers.

### Survey Findings

**Figure 6: Distribution of the number of SU Officers and their outlined working hours per week.**

Official working hours of students’ union officers ranged from 32 hours to 40 hours per week. The average working hours of a students’ union officer was 38.08 working hours per week.

### Regional View

* The range of sabbatical officer working hours in the Dublin region was 35 hours to 40 hours per week. The average working hours of a sabbatical union officer within the Dublin region was 37.9 hours per week. This was the lowest regional average working hours per week.
* The range of sabbatical union officer working hours in the BMW region was 32 hours to 40 hours per week. The average working hours of a sabbatical officer within the BMW region was 38.2 hours per week.
* The range of sabbatical officer working hours in the Southern region was 35 to 40 hours per week. The average working hours of a sabbatical officer within the Southern region was 38.8 hours per week. This was the highest regional average working hours per week.

## Overtime Work

Taking into consideration that sabbatical frequently engage in work outside of their typical working hours, the USI Officer Pay and Packages Survey asked officers to rate how frequently they worked more than their outlined or contracted working hours per week. This was done on a scale as follows:

* Always (every week)
* Almost always (3 weeks per month)
* Often (2 weeks per month)
* Occasionally (1 week per month)
* Rarely (less than 1 week per month)
* Never

### Survey Findings

**Figure 7: Results of the distribution of the number of sabbatical officers who responded to the question “During an average month, how often do you work more than your contracted/official working hours?”**

* 16% of sabbatical officers noted that the *often* worked more than their contracted/official working hours (2 weeks per month)
* 16% of sabbatical officers noted that they *almost always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours (3 weeks per month)
* 68% of sabbatical officers noted that they *always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours (every week)

### Regional View

* 23% of sabbatical officers in the Dublin region noted that they *almost always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours. 77% of sabbatical officers in the Dublin region noted that they *always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours.
* 16% of sabbatical officers in the BMW region noted that they *often* worked more than their contracted/official working hours. 68% of sabbatical officers in the BMW region noted that they *almost always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours. 16% of sabbatical officers in the BMW region noted that they *always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours.
* 13% of sabbatical officers in the Southern region noted that they *almost always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours. 87% of sabbatical officers in the Southern region noted that they *always* worked more than their contracted/official working hours.

### USI Position

There is a worrying trend of sabbatical officers self-reporting a significant amount of work outside of their contracted working hours. Students’ unions should be diligent in keeping track of additional hours worked by sabbatical officers.

**Actions:**

* The USI President should prepare a template timesheet to be distributed to Member Organisations to encourage the structured capturing of additional hours worked by students’ union sabbatical officers.

## Time Off in Lieu Policies

Time off in lieu policies (or TOIL policies) are a structured method for ensuring that employees are not consistently working more than their contracted number of hours per week. TOIL policies are intended to give employees additional time off “in lieu” of overtime pay for additional work outside of their working hours. However, employers must still abide by the Working Time Regulations Act 1998 which sets a maximum of 48 hours in a working week – including overtime.

### Survey Findings

**Figure 8: Students’ unions with and without TOIL policies**

The USI Officer Pay and Packages Survey found 47% of students’ unions do currently have a TOIL policy, while 53% of students’ unions reported that they did not have a TOIL policy.

### Regional View

* 50% of students’ unions in the Dublin region have a TOIL policy.
* 20% of students’ unions in the BMW region have a TOIL policy. This is the lowest regional proportion of students’ unions with a TOIL policy.
* 60% of students’ union in the Southern region have a TOIL policy. This is the highest regional proportion of students’ unions with a TOIL policy.

### USI Position

USI currently operates a TOIL policy for all officers in the Coiste Gnó. Hours worked outside of the official working hours of 09:30-17:30 are tracked through our HR portal and approved by the USI President. The USI TOIL policy is approved by the USI Governance Committee.

USI believes that a TOIL policy should be in place for students’ unions where officers are typically working outside of, or more than their contracted/working hours per week. This is to ensure that we do not see a significant rise in what is colloquially known as “officer burnout”.

**Actions**

* In addition to the template timesheet, the USI President to circulate a draft TOIL policy that can be utilised by Member Organisations. This draft TOIL policy should be based on the USI TOIL Policy 2022/23.

# Trade Unions

## Sabbatical Officer Trade Union Membership

While students’ unions have historically been associated with the trade union movement and workers’ rights – there is no specific trade union to deal with the issues that sabbatical students’ union officers may encounter during their term in office. However, general trade unions that provide assistance to workers regardless of their occupation.

### Survey Findings

* No students’ unions noted that *all* sabbatical officers within their union were members of a trade union,
* 6% of students’ unions noted that *some* of their officers were members of a trade union,
* 53% of students’ unions noted that *none* of the officers were members of a trade union,
* 40% of students’ unions reported that they were unsure if any of the sabbatical officers were members of a trade union.

### Regional View

* 75% of students’ unions surveyed in the Dublin region noted that none of the sabbatical officers were members of a trade union, with 25% unsure.
* 40% of students’ unions surveyed in the BMW region noted that none of the sabbatical officers were members of a trade union, with 60% unsure.
* 40% of students’ unions surveyed in the Southern region noted that none of their sabbatical officers were members of a trade union, with a further 40% unsure. 20% of students’ unions surveyed in the Southern region noted that some of their sabbatical officers were members of a trade union.

### USI Position

Given the worrying trends of officers continuously working longer than contracted hours, the high number of students’ unions where officers who are not given a written terms of employment – trade union memberships should be promoted to all sabbatical officers. A knowledge of workers’ rights is pivotal to the role of a students’ union officer.

**Actions:**

* The VP for Campaigns, with assistance from the USI President to develop partnerships with general trade unions with a view to running registration drives aimed specifically at ensuring that sabbatical officers within USI’s member organisation have the opportunity to learn more about the benefits of trade union membership and apply for membership if they wish.
* The USI President, with assistance from the Regional VPs to assist sabbatical officers who are not members of a trade union with seeking advice on issues they are facing in the workplace, utilising USI’s partnerships with trade unions.

# Proposed Actions of the USI Officer Pay and Working Conditions Position Paper

The USI President, with assistance from the Regional Vice Presidents’ should ensure that sabbatical officers (particularly those in single sabbatical officer unions) are educated on their right to the standard National Minimum Wage at the beginning of their terms.

The USI President should make contact with unions that noted a pay rate of below minimum wage and assist these officers with escalating this issue to the Workplace Relations Commission.

The USI President to promote this position paper as a lobbying document for Member Organisations who are entering into pay deal renegotiations.

The USI President, with assistance from the Regional VPs, should ensure that annual data surrounding pay and packages is collated so as to keep abreast of the average pay of Students’ Union officers.

The USI President to ensure that the scheduling of democratic and training events for sabbatical officers do not take place over the weekend.

The USI President, with assistance from the Regional Vice Presidents, to ensure that up to date data on sabbatical officers’ ability to claim weekend working expenses is collated annually.

The USI President should inform those attending SUT of their right to a written statement of their terms of employment.

Where students’ union officers do not receive a contract, or written statement of their terms of employment, the USI President, in collaboration with the Regional Vice Presidents, should seek to assist the students’ union in developing a Terms & Conditions of Officership document for incoming sabbatical officers.

The USI President should prepare a template timesheet to be distributed to Member Organisations to encourage the structured capturing of additional hours worked by students’ union sabbatical officers. In addition to this template timesheet, the USI President to circulate a draft TOIL policy that can be utilised by Member Organisations. This draft TOIL policy should be based on the USI TOIL Policy 2022/23.

The VP for Campaigns, with assistance from the USI President to develop partnerships with general trade unions with a view to running registration drives aimed specifically at ensuring that sabbatical officers within USI’s member organisation have the opportunity to learn more about the benefits of trade union membership and apply for membership if they wish.

The USI President, with assistance from the Regional VPs to assist sabbatical officers who are not members of a trade union with seeking advice on issues they are facing in the workplace, utilising USI’s partnerships with trade unions.

1. The Towns Living Wage is significantly higher than the Cities Living Wage as a result of the expected extra transport costs being in excess of the extra amount one would expect to pay for accommodation within cities over towns. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Atlantic Technological University Galway-Mayo Students’ Union and University of Galway Students’ Union [↑](#footnote-ref-3)