

[Press release: Up to 5 million workers benefited from the National Living Wage in 2018](#)

The Low Pay Commission's 2018 Report, published today, finds that increases to the National Living Wage (NLW) raised the pay of up to 5 million workers this year.

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Chair of the Low Pay Commission Bryan Sanderson said:

That 5 million workers received higher pay rises in April than they would have done without the NLW shows how significant an intervention it has been in the labour market.

So far, the evidence suggests the NLW has been successful in raising pay without causing unemployment, but employers have had to adjust in various ways.

Our 2018 Report contains definitive analysis of the NLW so far, and the detailed evidence which underpins our 2019 rate recommendations.

As many as 5 million people benefited from the increase to the NLW in April 2018 – fewer than in 2017 but still a fifth of workers aged 25 and over. The 4.4% increase in the NLW pushed pay up faster than average not only for those on the rate, but also for the bottom 20% of earners (those earning up to £9 per hour). This is because employers have sought to maintain a gap between job grades, or have kept their pay rates above the NLW.

In total, 1.6 million people were paid at or below the NLW, equivalent to 6.5% of all workers aged 25 and above; roughly the same proportion as in 2016 and 2017. Almost two thirds of those paid the NLW, a million workers, were women.

Following the 2018 increase, more workers than ever before were paid at a

rate just above the NLW. 1.6 million people were paid between 5p and 50p per hour more than the rate, with almost half a million of these paid at £8 per hour. In 2017, 1.4 million were paid between 5p and 50p above the NLW, and a quarter of a million were paid £8 per hour.

The LPC heard from employers how they have had to adapt to NLW increases: accepting lower profits, increasing prices where possible, restructuring workforces and narrowing the gaps between pay bands. Stakeholders thought improving productivity would be the key to managing future cost increases.

However, the LPC's analysis and research did not find clear evidence of any negative effects on employment from the increased NLW.

The Government announced the NLW and National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates to apply from 2019 in this October's budget, accepting in full the LPC's recommendations. The NLW will rise to £8.21 in 2019, on course to its target of 60% of median earnings in 2020 (currently forecast to be £8.62).

The LPC's rate recommendations comprised:

	Current rate	Future rate (from April 2019)	Increase
NLW	£7.83	£8.21	4.9%
21-24 rate	£7.38	£7.70	4.3%
18-20 rate	£5.90	£6.15	4.2%
16-17 rate	£4.20	£4.35	3.6%
Apprentice rate	£3.70	£3.90	5.4%
Accommodation offset	£7.00	£7.55	7.9%

Notes:

1. The LPC's 2018 Report was published on gov.uk on Tuesday 27 November
2. The data used in the report is published alongside it.
3. The National Living Wage is the statutory minimum wage for workers aged 25 and over. It was introduced in April 2016 and has a target of 60% of median earnings by 2020, subject to sustained economic growth.
4. Different rates apply to 21-24 year olds, 18-20 year olds, 16-17 year olds and apprentices aged under 19 or in the first year of an apprenticeship.
5. Rates for workers aged under 25, and apprentices, are lower than the NLW in reflection of lower average earnings and higher unemployment rates. International evidence also suggests that younger workers are more exposed to employment risks arising from the pay floor than older workers. Unlike the NLW (where the possibility of some consequences for employment have been accepted by the Government), the LPC's remit requires us to set the rates for younger workers and apprentices as high as possible without causing damage to jobs and hours.
6. The Accommodation Offset is an allowable deduction from wages for accommodation, applicable for each day of the week. In April 2019 it will increase to £7.55 per day.
7. The National Living Wage is different from the UK Living Wage and the London Living Wage. Differences include that: the UK Living Wage and the

London Living Wage are voluntary pay benchmarks that employers can sign up to if they wish, not legally binding requirements; the hourly rate of the UK Living Wage and London Living Wage is based on an attempt to measure need, whereas the National Living Wage is based on a target relationship between its level and average pay; the UK Living Wage and London Living Wage apply to workers aged 18 and over, the National Living Wage to workers aged 25 and over. The Low Pay Commission has no role in the UK Living Wage or the London Living Wage.

8. The Low Pay Commission is an independent body made up of employers, trade unions and experts whose role is to advise the Government on the minimum wage. The rate recommendations contained in the 2018 Report were agreed unanimously by the Commission.

9. The nine Low Pay Commissioners are:

- Bryan Sanderson
- Professor Sarah Brown
- Professor Richard Dickens
- Kate Bell
- Kay Carberry
- Simon Sapper
- Neil Carberry
- Clare Chapman
- Martin McTague

[Press release: Tree-mendous photographs help save our oaks](#)

'Oak Sunrise' by professional photographer Alan Price has won a prize in the [International Garden Photographer of the Year \(IGPOTY\)](#) competition, run in partnership with [Action Oak](#).

[Action Oak](#) is a major campaign to protect the UK's oak trees from threats including pests and diseases. It is a unique collaboration of partners including charities, government, landowners and research institutions, dedicated to protecting oak trees for future generations.

The partnership has made good progress since its launch in May with priority areas for funding including research into the genetics of oak trees, the effects of climate change, drought on oaks, and pests and diseases.

The winning image, which has been unveiled during [The Tree Council's National Tree Week](#), captures beautifully why oak trees are such an iconic species and why we must do all we can to protect them.

Alan Price, winner of the Celebrating our Oaks' photography category said:

It was a misty winter morning when the first light of the sun illuminated the landscape, highlighting the bare and intricate form of this specimen oak tree.

Defra Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

I am delighted to announce the outcome of the very special 'Celebrating our Oaks' photography category and I would like to extend my congratulations to our worthy winner Alan Price for 'Oak Sunrise', a truly captivating image.

All the pictures submitted serve as wonderful reminders about why Action Oak was established in the first place; to protect our country's most iconic trees for future generations to be inspired by and enjoy.

A hardback book, titled 'Celebrating Our Oaks' and foreworded by Dame Judi Dench, has also been launched today and is [available to buy on the Woodland Trust website](#) or in Kew Garden shops. It features all of the winners of the photography competition plus exclusive contributions from celebrities including Joanna Lumley, Jon Snow and Alan Titchmarsh.

The proceeds from the sale of the book will be directed towards funding research and monitoring, via Action Oak, to help protect our oaks and ensure their place in the UK landscape for future generations.

A touring exhibition of a selection of photographs from the competition, plus a number taken by a range of celebrities, will be launched at Wakehurst Place in late January. The exhibition will then tour around the UK to locations including the Yorkshire Arboretum, Westonbirt Arboretum, and Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, throughout 2019. Please see the [Action Oak website](#) for dates and locations.

Curtis McGlinchey, Manager of International Garden Photographer of the Year said:

Alan's image epitomises the objective of the award and manages to depict both the majesty and vulnerability of the oak. Through use of sepia tones, mist, bright morning sun and a focus on one highlighted subject he successfully captures the juxtaposition of ancient natural strength and the fight for survival that UK oaks must now endure.

Head of Trees and Woodland Conservation at the National Trust, Ray Hawes said:

As an Action Oak partner, the National Trust is very pleased to

support “Celebrating our Oaks” which will help raise the awareness of the importance of these much valued trees and the vital work of the partnership in ensuring their future.

[News story: Graduate earnings remain high](#)

The vast majority of graduates with a degree are earning more at the age of 29 than those who do not go to university, it has been revealed today (27 November), following one of the biggest studies of its kind. The study shows that there continues to be a graduate premium, even as the number of students in higher education has grown.

The ‘Absolute Returns’ report, conducted independently by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, looks at earnings data up to the age of 29. The new data shows that female and male graduates are earning 28% and 8% more on average than their counterparts who opted for a different route of study after leaving school. As graduates’ earnings rise more quickly during their early and mid-careers, particularly for men, it is expected that returns will increase further once looked at over a lifetime.

The research, which will help policy makers, regulators and students understand the different outcomes from different courses and universities, also shows that a number of institutions deliver negative financial outcomes for approximately 4% of male and 0.4% of female students. That is to say, graduates from these institutions earn less than the average person with similar A Level grades who did not go to university at all.

There are several possible reasons for this:

- Students choosing to study courses that have a high social value when in employment, but not necessarily high wages
- Students opting to study subjects such as creative arts, drama and music with low proportions of people going on to earn high salaries.
- Students attending a university in a part of the country where wages are below the national average, who then stay in that area, adding to its economy, but not necessarily earning as much as they could elsewhere.

But there are still cases where students aren’t necessarily choosing the institution that will deliver the best returns for their course. The study shows how for some studying the same subject at a different institution – or indeed continuing their education at an alternative to university – could significantly increase their future earnings and career prospects.

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

I want to see our universities competing on the quality of what they offer, value for money and strong positive outcomes for their students so that every degree is worth the investment.

This landmark research proves that the graduate earnings premium remains robust, even as we have made higher education available to more young people than ever before. Higher education is delivering for students, the taxpayer and the economy, and will continue to do so as long as we focus relentlessly on quality.

The Office for Students, the new regulator we have set up to look out for students' interests, has the power to crack down on institutions delivering poor outcomes for students. I strongly support their work, and expect to see them use the full range of powers at their disposal to protect students' interests.

The graduate earnings premium could be even higher if all prospective students have the best information possible about where and what they study when making choices. The research we're publishing today, alongside other data like the Teaching Excellence Framework and our Open Data prize, will help make this a reality.

Many of the universities whose graduates enjoy high earnings premiums have strong links to employers and have built in work experience to help develop the skills that graduates need.

This must be built on even further. Our plans to expand Accelerated Degrees will boost the opportunities all prospective students have to access high-quality courses.

Value for money is recognised by the government as a crucial part of an investment in a degree, and that is why it is one of the key areas being looked at in the Post-18 Review of education and funding.

Financial outcomes are of course just one of the considerations that students have when choosing a university. The benefits of higher education are not limited to increasing a graduate's salary. For example, many people will wish to pursue public service, third sector careers or the arts which have a very high social value, but which aren't necessarily amongst the most highly paid. And the experience of higher education in itself can be valuable: in its exposure to new ideas, instilling a lifelong love of learning and the many social and health benefits graduates enjoy.

The Office for Students (OfS), the new regulator of Higher Education institutions, has a remit to drive quality and value for money for students. It has a range of levers to crack down on poor performance. Institutions breaching their registration conditions, may, in the most serious of instances, be deregistered.

The OfS is already using its powers to tackle institutions with poor student outcomes data, imposing additional registrations conditions on university including [London Metropolitan University](#) and [Bolton University](#) in response to

specific concerns.

Concerns were raised with Bolton over employment outcomes for PGCE students, while London Metropolitan were criticised over professional employment for undergraduates, and postgraduate progression. Both are now required to construct an improvement plan around their continuation and completion rates.

The publication of the IFS's research today is part of a government drive to shed light on student outcomes. It builds on the commitment to provide more and better information to prospective students, including historical earnings, employability, and teaching quality at universities.

The research published by the IFS is the second in the series of such publications exploring the value for money students receive from degrees. It follows the [first publication released](#) in June 2018, which compared university courses directly and revealed that studying the same subject at a different institution can significantly affect future earnings and career prospects.

This ground-breaking project arises from a 2016 HE White Paper commitment to better understand the benefits of higher education and how this varies by course in order to improve student information.

[Press release: PM promises deal to strengthen the Union](#)

Prime Minister Theresa May heads to Wales and Northern Ireland for meetings with producers, employers and political leaders, after agreement reached in Brussels.