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## **SOULBURY OFFICERS' SIDE PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE CLAIM 2026**

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*This pay and conditions of service claim is submitted by the Officers' Side of the Soulbury Committee national negotiating body, comprising the Association of Educational Psychologists, the National Education Union and Prospect.*

Our unions collectively represent educational improvement professionals, educational psychologists and managers of young people's & community services employed by local authorities.

The work of Soulbury Officers is absolutely vital to our education service, but Soulbury Officers have seen their pay cut significantly in real terms against inflation over a long period. The competitiveness of Soulbury pay has been damaged. Major recruitment and retention problems have developed as a result of the failure to properly value Soulbury Officers.

Our members have expressed their concern not only at the damaging pay outcomes, but at the major problems in the conduct of the annual negotiations. Despite sending the previous joint union pay claim in June 2025, there was no formal response from the Employers' Side until October 2025 then further delays before the Soulbury Committee meeting in January 2026. Our members' pay increase was delayed by some six months. This cannot happen again.

These negotiations must take place with the aim of successful resolution in time for our members to get their pay increase in September 2026. That is why we are sending this claim in March this year and are calling for meaningful negotiations including meetings of the Soulbury Committee in May-June at the latest. The unions are showing goodwill and positive commitment to a successful resolution by sending the joint union pay claim even earlier this year. We call on the Employers' Side to respond by ensuring that they engage properly with the negotiations in the early summer.

The key points of our claim are as follows.

- (1) A pay increase of at least RPI inflation plus 5% on all pay points and allowances, which will begin to address the substantial real terms cuts to Soulbury pay.
- (2) Discussions to continue on the SPA system and London Area Payments, as agreed in the pay agreement for 2025.

## **SOULBURY PAY**

*The joint union pay claim is supported by the available evidence on recruitment and retention, trends in pay comparability for Soulbury staff and the impact of below inflation pay increases.*

### **The pay increase needed**

An increase of at least RPI inflation plus 5% in the value of all Soulbury pay scale points and allowances from 1 September 2025 is vital in order to reverse the pay cuts inflicted on Soulbury Officers and to ensure that they are properly valued.

### **The recruitment and retention problems**

The latest Soulbury workforce survey<sup>1</sup> was carried out in June-July 2024. The survey revealed significant vacancy levels. Many posts had to be readvertised. The survey showed that 71% of respondents had experienced difficulties when recruiting over the previous 12 months. This was a significant increase compared with the 63% of respondents who reported this in the previous survey of 2018. The further real terms cuts since July 2024 are likely to have exacerbated these already serious problems, which result in significant spending on agencies as well as damage to our education service.

### **Pay in real terms**

The real value of Soulbury officers' pay has been cut significantly since 2009. This dismal pattern continued with the latest pay increase of 3.2% from 1 September 2025, which was another significant cut against the Retail Prices Index (RPI) inflation figure of 4.5% in September 2025.<sup>2</sup>

The latest Treasury average of forecasts available at the time of writing<sup>3</sup> estimated that RPI in the fourth quarter of 2026 will be 3.2%. This edition was published in March, before the crisis in Iran and the Middle East pushed inflation expectations significantly higher.

The pay of Soulbury Officers in the 2020s has been cut hugely against inflation. The RPI index increased by 39.55% between September 2019 and September 2025, but the increase in Soulbury pay was barely half of this. Soulbury pay increases have been below RPI inflation every single year since 2021 – pay cut after pay cut, year after year. Reversal of this dismal pattern is long overdue. The outcome is that Soulbury pay has dropped by 14.2% in value against RPI inflation since September 2019. Reversing these pay cuts must be the focus of the pay negotiations.

### Pay comparability with employees generally

While the pay increases of Soulbury officers have been suppressed, average earnings elsewhere in the economy have continued to grow. Pay growth in the wider economy according to the latest data available at the time of writing, with annual growth in total earnings at 3.9%.<sup>4</sup>

### Pay comparability with appropriate professional comparators

For education improvement professionals, the Officers' Side continues to believe that the importance of being able to recruit from senior levels of the teaching profession for many Soulbury roles means that pay comparisons with that group are relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> [Soulbury officers pay and workforce: Survey of councils, July 2024 | Local Government Association](#)

<sup>2</sup> [RPI All Items: Percentage change over 12 months: Jan 1987=100 - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Forecasts for the UK economy: March 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Average weekly earnings in Great Britain - Office for National Statistics](#)

The examples below demonstrate the pay gap which has developed between pay for Educational Improvement Professionals (EIPs) and the pay of school leaders, which increased by 4% from 1 September 2025. If this gap continues to widen, it will be even more difficult for councils to recruit from senior levels of the teaching profession.

**Soulbury EIPs**

Minimum (point 8) - £52,761

**Soulbury Senior EIPs**

Minimum (point 13) - £60,269

**Soulbury Lead EIPs**

Minimum (point 20) - £69,598

**Head teacher Groups<sup>1</sup>**

Group 1 - £58,569 (L6) to £77,924

Group 5 - £78,702 (L18) to £107,131

Group 7 - £91,158 (L24) to £130,274

*1 Values of pay points taken from joint teacher union advice on reference pay points and the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document for the current school year.*

Pay for school leaders in Wales is higher than in England, for example, point L6 in Wales is £59,597, L18 is £79,288 and L24 is £91,836. This increases the pay gap referred to above for Soulbury officers who work in Wales.

When children with complex needs and their families and schools are struggling, it is our members who are there to help. The solution is simple: investing in the Soulbury workforce through improvements in pay, terms and conditions.

There is a growing disparity between pay for Educational Psychologists (EPs) within local authorities, and the salaries offered to teacher leaders and senior staff within multi-academy trusts. This mismatch devalues the specialist expertise of EPs, makes alternative career pathways more financially attractive and contributes to the loss of experienced professionals from local authority services. A review of Soulbury pay scales is necessary to restore parity with comparable leadership roles in education.

For EPs, the greater range of salaries within the teachers' pay range could mean that psychology graduates will be tempted by the opportunity for higher pay within the teaching profession rather than opting to take much longer to train as an EP for lower financial rewards. Another appropriate professional comparator is with clinical psychologists employed and paid under the NHS Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scales.

Most psychology graduates will look carefully at the training routes and pay structures of both careers before committing themselves to the 3 years' doctoral training necessary in order to become an EP. When members do train, an increasing number are staying in local authorities for three years, then leaving to do locum work. Reasons include higher salaries and cost of living.

A recent survey of AEP members (March 2026) indicated that only 48% of respondents are working exclusively in Local Authorities, with 51% actively considering locum work. The main reasons these members cited is the opportunity to earn a higher salary and address the struggle to meet rises in the cost of living.

In line with these changes to working trends, the demand for EP services has increased sharply.

- 93% of local authorities report demand exceeding available EP capacity.
- 78% of EPs report increasing workloads, with 76% stating they do not have enough time to complete their work.
- Demand has been driven primarily by increased statutory assessment work following SEND reforms.

This demonstrates a system operating beyond sustainable capacity. EPs employed under Soulbury terms and conditions are seeking a fair and sustainable pay settlement that reflects the increasing demands, responsibilities, and strategic importance of the profession.

The SEND reforms set out in the recent Schools White Paper propose positioning EPs as 'Experts at Hand', which we welcome. Workforce planning is already underway and will require an increase in the number of funded training places, as well as a retention of qualified, experienced EPs to meet the ambitions of the White Paper.

Government investment (£26m in EP training and £200m in SEND) highlights the importance of the profession in solving the crisis. However, without competitive pay and conditions, this investment will not deliver sustainable workforce capacity.

The recruitment and retention crisis is well-documented. Local authorities face:

- Persistent vacancies.
- Heavy reliance on agency staff at a significantly higher cost to public expenditure.
- Increased workloads for existing staff, contributing to burnout and attrition.

Without a competitive and attractive pay structure, these challenges will intensify, undermining service delivery to children and young people.

EPs are among the most highly trained professionals in the education system, yet current pay structures do not reflect this level of expertise and place them significantly below comparable leadership roles in multi-academy trusts. This disparity not only undervalues the profession but also deepens recruitment and retention challenges that continue to undermine both local authority services and national SEND priorities.

Role	Typical Salary Range	Pay spine
Educational Psychologist (main scale)	£43k – £66k	Soulbury A 3 to 8
Senior / Principal EP	Up to £90k	Soulbury B 3-11
Headteacher (average range)	£58k – £143k	Group 1-5
MAT CEO / Executive Leader	£120k – £500k+	Highest-paid MAT CEO salaries <b>exceed £500,000</b> Significant numbers receive <b>£150,000+ salaries</b> in large trusts (sector reporting) Recent analysis shows: Pay rises of <b>£10k–£30k in a single year</b> for some MAT CEOs
Clinical Psychologist	£35,392 to £66,000.	Band 6-8
Senior Clinical Psychologist	£70, 417 to £108, 077	Band 8c & 8d
Head of Service	£99, 891 to 114, 949	Band 8d and above

# SPA SYSTEM AND LONDON AREA PAYMENTS

*The unions welcome the commitment to have discussions on a without prejudice basis to review the SPA system and London Area Payments. Nevertheless, we note that no progress has been made to date towards the vital improvements needed to the SPA system and London Area Payments.*

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## SPA System

The review of the SPA system should continue to consider the following:

- The joint Soulbury guidance on SPA points to ensure clarity and consistent application.
- Removing the requirement for Soulbury officers to apply for SPA points.
- The criteria for the third SPA point.
- The portability of SPA points.

Additional SPA points are critical to:

- Recognise advanced skills, leadership, and specialist contributions.
- Support career progression within the profession.
- Incentivise retention of experienced practitioners.

Expanding access to SPA points will strengthen workforce stability and reward professional excellence.

## London Area Payments

The current London Area Payments for Soulbury Officers are £3,803 for Inner London, £2,509 for Outer London and £970 for the Fringe Area. These pay levels compare very unfavourably with the London and Fringe Area pay premia for teachers. As with other aspects of Soulbury pay, this undervalues Soulbury Officers and hinders recruitment and retention. In addition to application of the pay increase this year of at least RPI plus 5%, we call for investment to correct the value of London Area Payments compared to teachers.

- For teachers in Inner London, the pay premium is between some £7,400 to £11,400 (classroom teachers) and just under £10,000 for leadership group teachers.
- For teachers in Outer London, the pay premium is around £5,000 for classroom teachers on the Main Pay Range (MPR) and some £4,000 for Upper Pay Range (UPR) classroom teachers and leadership group teachers.
- For teachers in the Fringe Area, the pay premium is between some £1,500 for classroom teachers on the MPR and some £1,400 for UPR classroom teachers and leadership group teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order to properly value, recruit and retain Soulbury Officers, the damage to their pay since 2009 must be repaired. Local authorities have a responsibility to make the additional investment needed in this vital workforce. To start the process of reversing the pay cuts for Soulbury Officers, a pay increase of at least RPI inflation plus 5% in September 2026 is essential. A fair and forward-looking settlement is essential to ensure that Soulbury Officers can continue to deliver high-quality services in schools, settings, and communities, and meet the needs of children, young people and families.