

# Union Stance on Sick Pay Parity and wages for outsourced staff

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## Union Notes:

1. There is an ongoing public health crisis in the form of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak [1].
2. The outbreak poses a non-negligible risk to vulnerable members of our community, particularly those with pre-existing health conditions and weaker immune systems [2].
3. The College has a sick pay policy for its staff, called the Sickness and Absence Policy, and it is above the legal statutory requirements [3].
4. The College outsources some services, such as cleaning, to external companies such as Noonan [4].
5. These companies are known for having workers on pay that is lower than the London Living Wage, and these workers are often on company policies that are different to normal IC workers – i.e. not on the Sickness and Absence Policy.
6. Outsourced IC workers are likely to be on a sick pay policy that is nothing more than the minimum legal amount, i.e. statutory sick pay at £94.25 per week, which is much less than average London rent, let alone total living costs. If they earn less than £118 per week, and it is possible that they do as they may be part-time workers, they are not entitled to any sick pay at all [5] [6].
7. These workers are often BAME and/or migrant workers, and are likely to have little in savings [7].
8. This incentivises unwell workers to show up to work so they can continue earning, even if symptoms have started to appear.
9. The College have the leverage to either request these companies to adopt the IC Sickness and Absence Policy for outsourced workers, or to bring them in-house and treat them as equal employees to any other IC workers.
10. Earlier this year, this happened at St Mary's Hospital under Imperial College Healthcare; after 9 days of strike action, a thousand cleaners, porters and caterers were brought in-house and onto NHS payscales and policies [8].

## Union Believes:

1. The disparity between different IC workers, depending on if they are outsourced or not, is unjust.
2. In light of the coronavirus outbreak, this disparity poses a significant risk for vulnerable students, such as those living in halls with pre-existing medical conditions.
  - a. Cleaners and other outsourced workers are more likely to come into work when the symptoms are not severe enough, and thus increase the chance of spreading the virus, while directly employed staff are more likely to stay at home due to their economic security and the Imperial College Sickness and Absence Policy.
  - b. The risk arises because of this disparity.
3. It is in the interests of both students, staff, and outsourced workers, for this disparity to be resolved as a matter of urgency.

4. As these workers are most likely being paid below the London Living Wage, contributing to little in savings and little economic security, this is a contributing factor for them being more likely to show up to work with mild or medium symptoms.
5. The College should use its leverage to ensure that outsourced workers are on the IC Sickness and Absence Policy, whether that be through negotiation with the outsourcing companies or bringing outsourced IC workers in-house.
6. The Union should be in favour of bringing outsourced workers in-house and on the London Living Wage.

#### **Union Resolves:**

1. To adopt a stance in favour of eliminating the sick pay disparity by bringing outsourced workers onto the Imperial College Sickness and Absence Policy, either by bringing those workers in-house, or at the very least, making the outsourced companies adopt the IC Sickness and Absence policy for these workers.
2. To lobby College and pressure them to see the above change through within 28 days, as it is a matter of urgency due to the ever increasing threat posed by the outbreak.
3. As a longer term goal compared to Resolves 1 and 2, the Union will lobby for all outsourced Imperial College staff to be brought in-house and paid the London Living Wage.

#### **References:**

- [1] <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- [2] "Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) are more likely to become severely ill with the virus."  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/common-questions/>
- [3] <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/administration-and-support-services/hr/public/procedures/sicknessabsence/Sickness-Absence-Policy.docx>
- [4] <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/estates-facilities/buildings/services/maintenance/cleaning/>
- [5] <https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>
- [6] <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/coronavirus-why-every-worker-should-get-sick-pay-day-one>
- [7] <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/oct/24/its-time-for-universities-to-finally-stop-underpaying-their-outsourced-workers>
- [8] <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/stmarysworkers>