

**CASE STUDY:**

# CARDIFF UNIVERSITY



Cardiff University is a research-intensive university and the largest higher education institution in Wales. The University has 30,000 students and 7,000 direct employees, based at multiple sites in Cardiff city centre. It is a premium Welsh institution and one of the country's largest employers.

Cardiff University adopted the Living Wage in August 2014 and was the first university within Wales to become accredited as a Living Wage Employer. The decision to become accredited followed from a campaign amongst students and employees which emphasised the moral case for paying the Living Wage and argued forcefully that, in failing to do so, the University “was not meeting its social duty”.

Since it has become accredited, Cardiff University has acted as a Living Wage champion, supporting the Living Wage campaign and promoting it to other employers and within higher education. Paying the Living Wage has formed part of an attempt to act as a good corporate citizen and engage positively with the community in which the University is located.

## THE PROCESS

A decisive feature of the campaign for the Living Wage, which persuaded the University's leadership to respond favourably, was the use of video testimony from University cleaners about

the reality of living on a low income. This evidence was gathered by student campaigners and brought home to the Executive Board the constraints and indignities of life on the minimum wage.

Testimony was provided after the decision to pay the Living Wage had been taken, with those who received a pay increase testifying to the positive difference it had made to their lives. One woman wrote to the University and said that she was now able to pay for her granddaughter to go on school trips.

Another key feature of the process was strong support from the University's senior management. The University's Vice-Chancellor has been a highly visible supporter of the Living Wage and insisted that the University would not just pay the Living Wage to its own employees but should seek accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation. Subsequently, he has played a part in negotiations with the Welsh Government to guarantee the Living Wage for all employees within Welsh higher education.

The main trade unions have supported the Living Wage and the decision to become accredited has been warmly received by ordinary members of the University, employees and students alike. To quote one staff member: “I like the fact that I can say I work for a Living Wage Employer”.

Responsibility for obtaining and maintaining accreditation has been shared by the University's HR and procurement functions. HR has liaised with the Living Wage Foundation and made adjustments to the pay of a small number of directly employed staff whose pay was below the Living Wage. This adjustment has taken the form of a supplement to the grade rate that brings the pay of these employees up to the Living Wage.

The University's procurement team has dealt primarily with cleaning contractors whose employees have been the main beneficiaries of the Living Wage. The Living Wage was extended to the employees of contractors at the point at which contracts were due for renewal, with the University absorbing the cost of higher wages.

The University has even gone beyond the requirements of accreditation. It has informed employment agencies which supply temporary staff that they must be paid the Living Wage, a provision that covers students who work for the University through the Student Union's Jobshop.

## THE BENEFITS

- Improved recruitment and retention and raised morale amongst those employees who are directly affected
- The Welsh Government is a supporter of the Living Wage and keen to see it adopted throughout Wales. The lead role played by Cardiff University has been well received by Government, enhancing the University's reputation with a key stakeholder.
- The Living Wage has been included in University curriculum, become the focus of student projects and dissertations and inspired an annual State of the Campus action research exercise, combining research training with student engagement with current issues within the University.
- Wider involvement of the University in Citizens Cymru-Wales has flown from accreditation, boosting its community engagement activity. University researchers and educators have trained community leaders and worked with community organizations, campaigning for the

Living Wage in poorer parts of the city and region.

- The Living Wage has allowed low-income employees to save, arrange swimming lessons for children and make other small but significant changes to family life. About £500,000 a year has been transferred to low-wage workers through the University's Living Wage commitment.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND ADVICE FOR OTHER EMPLOYERS

The campaign launched by students and staff was vital in persuading the University of the need to pay the Living Wage. Senior managers admitted that they were not aware of the existence or extent of the University's low pay problem until the campaign and the testimony of low-wage workers brought it to their attention.

The support of key decision makers within the University's senior leadership team was also critical. The backing of the Vice Chancellor was vital in putting the principle into practice and ensuring the University became a fully accredited Living Wage Employer.

Finally, the decision to adopt the Living Wage reinforced other aspects of the University's strategy. It stemmed from an acceptance that the University should act as a good corporate citizen and that decent wages should be paid to University employees. Cardiff University is a premium Welsh institution and becoming a Living Wage Employer is one way in which it demonstrates its obligation to promote the well-being of its local community.