

Northern Ireland: 170,000 Workers to Gain from Minimum Wage Reform

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Up to 170,000 people in Northern Ireland are expected to benefit from a new UK Government pay initiative aimed at eliminating age-based disparities in the National Minimum Wage. The move is part of a broader plan to introduce a single adult wage band, ensuring equal pay for equal work.

The Low Pay Commission (LPC) will take a central role in advising on the next stage of reforms, which aim to close the gap between younger workers aged 18-20 and those currently earning the National Living Wage. These recommendations, submitted each October, guide minimum wage rates that come into effect the following April.

A previous adjustment to the LPC's remit resulted in a record uplift in apprentice and youth wages, along with a £1,400 annual increase for full-time workers on the National Living Wage. Approximately 3 million workers across the UK benefited from that change.

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner described the latest move as a key element of the Government's "Plan for Change", saying, "Delivering a good, fair wage is a non-negotiable priority. We are on the side of workers in Northern Ireland, and our plan to Make Work Pay is already delivering one of the biggest pay boosts on record."

The updated LPC remit requires consultation with workers, unions and employers on introducing a single adult pay band. This would mark the end of age-based wage differences, which critics say unfairly penalise younger workers doing the same jobs.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves also highlighted the importance of fairness, noting, "When working people are properly rewarded, businesses thrive and the economy benefits. We are committed to ensuring wages reflect the cost of living, while remaining affordable for businesses."

TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak welcomed the decision, stating that boosting pay for low-income workers supports local economies. "Ending outdated youth rates is the right move. When low-paid workers have more money, they spend it locally, helping high streets and communities," he said.

As the LPC prepares to report its next recommendations, the Government has reaffirmed its intention to include the cost of living in future wage decisions, with the next update set to apply from April 2026.