Working at Waterstones:

Staff profiles
This book contains 40 staff accounts of working at Waterstones stores across the UK.

It has been paid for and published by more than 11,500 staff, authors and customers who are calling for the Real Living Wage for all Waterstones employees.

All staff names in this book have been changed to the names of the staff member's favourite author, to protect their identity.
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Worker 1:
Ruth Park

I would love to do this job for the rest of my life, but I simply can't afford to see this as a career until I'm able to afford to live at least reasonably comfortably.

A living wage would mean that I might not have to worry about whether I can afford to eat for the last 2 weeks of the month. It would mean I could start to save meaningfully and actually be able to do things other people my age are doing (getting mortgage, learning to drive). It would improve my mental health if I don't have to worry constantly about money.

A colleague left Waterstones last year after 13 years, still on the same wage as a new starter. She was offered a job with a publisher because of her experience and enthusiasm, and that's someone Waterstones lost because she never felt valued.
Worker 2: 
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Being paid a real living wage would make more of a difference than I could ever explain. It would reduce the financial stress that comes with everyday life, it will help with paying my bills, mortgage, and give me more of a buffer for any unexpected costs that might come up. I could actually start saving for my wedding, which as of yet I have been unable to do. My fiancé and I have been engaged for 5 1/2 years and, sadly, not being able to have saved enough for a wedding has meant that my grandfather can no longer be with us when we finally do tie the knot as he died last year.

One of my previous colleagues moved from a job with Waterstones to one at a local library because she would be paid more and on less hours too. One of the managers at Waterstones constantly compares how jobs at supermarkets are better paid than those at Waterstones even though we at Waterstones must have specialist knowledge of the industry and of bookselling. Plus, the pay for managers is so appalling I don't think there would be any benefit of becoming a manager as it would mean a higher work load for not much increase in wage.
Worker 3: Leo Tolstoy

I've recently had to give serious thought to quitting. I love my job, and I would be bereft to leave, but I cannot stay if the pay does not increase. Last month I went to a recruitment agency who told me I'd put the nail in my own coffin by staying at Waterstones for so long after graduating from university (4 years), and I'd be lucky to get a receptionist job now. Just yesterday I received a rejection letter from an entry level, trainee HR assistant role at the local council, they wouldn't even interview me. I feel trapped.

2 years ago our lead bookseller made the decision to leave. She had moved from her hometown in order to get her Lead promotion at our store, and was living alone in a bed sit. She had a Masters in 17th century English literature, was charismatic, bright and bubbly, the perfect Waterstones employee. She had to quit and move back in with her parents at the age of 26, having spent all her savings on unexpected bills that she had no extra money in her monthly budget to cover. She still describes the job as the best she's ever had, but says she wouldn't do it again.
I live in Brighton, our location allowance was taken away a few years back (before I was in this store). I have colleagues who have watched the min wage catch up to their pay and it's awful. Being on the normal min wage means I'm living pay-check to pay-check each month, if wage went up I'd be able to afford to eat more each month. I've actually lost weight and my mental health has declined greatly due to having to choose whether to spend much on food or not. My life is here, I can't leave. It'd make a huge difference as I'd be able to go out more, travel home to see my family more. My phone charger stopped working once and I got worried about buying a new one, that's how bad this is. I might even be able to afford the mental health counselling I desperately need.

One of my housemates is an ex-bookseller. We worked in Chichester together (another expensive place) and partially due to pay had to leave, he was living in a rotting house at the time because that’s all he could afford. Food was an issue and it was the only thing he ever bought for himself to get by, he never bought new clothes or nice things, it was food, bills, rent, that's it.

Another housemate of mine is a current manager in my area, he’s on £20k a year and living in Brighton,
also commuting to his store so his extra money goes to tax and travel. He can barely afford bills, he only eats reduced food and meals because he can’t afford to live on what he’s been offered, they wouldn’t give more, he’s a manager of a store and he can’t afford to live.

A colleague of mine worked in Brighton for 13 years as an expert. Her wife was a manager but even with both their wages they couldn’t keep their small apartment and afford to live so they had to move up north. She’s currently looking for another job.

Recommending books, discovering new ones, reading to help your knowledge and give better service (and help wonderful authors), these are really great parts of the job. Unfortunately it can be difficult to see it positively as that when we don’t earn enough. It makes giving great customer service a real challenge when you feel undervalued and overworked. There’s potential for great careers out of bookselling, but it isn’t worth it if you cannot afford to eat or pay rent.
At the moment I'm still dipping into my savings every month just to pay rent and basic living cost in London. I originally came to Bookselling as stop-gap, part-time job between other work. I've now been with the company for over a year and I love my job. If I could, I would do it for the rest of my life! But as it stands, there's no way I can afford to live in London or plan for my future with the amount we're paid. I'm facing the sad reality of having to consider another job to pay the bills.

The anger at James Daunt's response is mostly because 90% of the booksellers I know go above and beyond any sort of job description. We work extra hours, often without overtime or asking for them in lieu. We run extra activities like bookclubs and events. We read and research on our own time. I can't think of a single bookseller who doesn't care deeply about books and what they do. It is an insult to be told that we need to work harder in order to be paid more.
I love working for Waterstones and take my job as a Lead Bookseller very seriously and aspire to be the best I can be. But due to the pay I am having to look elsewhere for a new job. I'm currently spending time and money outside of work to help put on events in our children's section that I don't get reimbursed for in either pay nor time. I have a medical condition that means I would benefit greatly from less working hours but unfortunately can't afford to as even dropping a day would mean I'd be unable to pay my bills.

I know at least 5 members of staff who have left for pay related issues. One member of staff with a PHD actually left to work at a well known supermarket because the pay is better. I myself have applied for a basic level job that pays 2k a year more for 7 hours a week less work. Mr Daunt expects us to add to the company with our passion for books and unrivalled knowledge. But the reality is staff are being worked to extreme stress levels and breakdowns as they can't afford to take the time they need and the workload expected is far beyond what they are paid to do.

It's a career I've always wanted and could see myself spending my life working my way up. But recently my opinion has changed due to the lack of pay.
Worker 7: Naomi Klein

With living wage, I would have the money and time to actually buy books and read them which is integral to my job role. By the end of the month I am scraping the bottom of the barrel and any time I have off is spent worrying about what this means for me financially.

Bookselling and booksellers are not only the backbone of Waterstones, but of the publishing industry. We facilitate the careers of those who publish the books and those who write the books.

We are on the frontline of this. We are expected to have vast book knowledge. As well as vast publisher knowledge. As a children's bookseller I am also expected to (and enjoy) organising and running children's events. None of this is reflected in my pay.
Worker 8:
William S. Burroughs

When I first started at Waterstones I didn’t intend to stay long, it was a post-University job, meant to help me pay my bills as I figured out where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. Well what I figured out, was that I genuinely loved the job. I love the product, and the people you work with are great, I never go to work feeling like I wish I didn’t have to go. I do want to think that Waterstones is a great career, after all what could be better than a career in books? But I do think that the company needs a real hard look at the way it does things, on paper it does have career progression but in reality it does not. It is hard not to be disheartened knowing that most supermarkets pay their new employees more than we get paid after working for the company for 5+ years.

When I complain to people about the job, the most common response is, 'It’s only retail, what do you expect?’ Well it’s not only retail, it is a specialist job. And not only is it a specialist job, it is community-centric one. We help schools and libraries, we put on events, we encourage reading, and thus the importance of learning, and freedom of information. The items we sell are important in making both the individual and society better.

James said in his interview that he would only have to start paying the very bottom tier or employees extra in order to pay the living wage - that is completely
wrong - senior booksellers, which the majority of booksellers are at, in the 2018-2019 tax year received an hourly pay of £8.30 per hour, and in the 2019-2020 tax year this is going up to £8.70. This is below the living wage. Lead/expert booksellers (assistant managers in all but name) were also previously paid around £8.90 in the previous tax year, going up to £9.30 this coming April. So to say that it would only be the bottom tier is absolutely ridiculous. We are not being asked to be 'showered in gold' we only want to be able to live some semblance of a normal life.

James Daunt says time and again that the company must come first, but the only way that we have managed to drag the company out of debt and into profit was by the booksellers - we are after all the ones who actually put things through the tills. So to say that we are rewarded with a stimulating job, when in 2016 the directors were rewarded with a stimulating £2 million bonus, is a slap in the face to anyone who has dedicated years to the company on the shop floor.

A real living wage would mean I would not have to be careful of every penny I spend in order to not go into serious debt. I live on my own, I can barely afford my food, utilities and rent, let alone anything that might be considered a luxury item.
Worker 9: 
Emily Dickinson

I left in 2017, taking a £9,000 pay raise in an entry-level job in another industry. I came back because this is what I love, and I trusted that I would be able to work my way back up to a certain level quickly. That said I quickly ate through a chunk of my savings, as after rent, bills and travel (and books) I had nothing left over.

Bookselling is a craft, and done well it can make a significant contribution to a culture and practice that feels ever more at risk.

As an employee with a higher salary, living wage wouldn’t effect me directly, but it would mean that I could recommend Bookselling as a viable career to a larger, more diverse group of people. At the moment, like entry-level publishing, it requires a certain background and level of privilege to endure the lean early years as a Bookseller.

Developing promising new Booksellers is the best part of my job, but as much as I would love them to stay in the company, how can I make a compelling case to stay when they could find a better paid graduate job?
Worker 10: Ta-Nehisi Coates

I'd like to see a pay rise freeze on anyone earning 25k (maybe 30k in London?) or more as they should be quite comfortable, until the real living wage is the minimum wage pay in the business. As someone this would apply to, I'd be very happy to support and champion this.

I'm not on minimum wage, but believe it's right for staff to get the real living wage. For me, it would make me I'm proud of my employers' remuneration policy.

I've worked my way up the ladder to management and I love books. I earn enough to be comfortable, but not flush, and I see that as a trade off for working with a medium I love. But, I remember the days of bookseller wages well and survived on credit cards and throwing everything at progression to try and move on quickly. Not everyone wants that risk and you should be able to live as a bookseller.
Worker 11:
Elizabeth Smart

The real living wage would mean I would be able to stop worrying about having enough money to buy some milk at the end of the month. Nobody's asking for a "road paved in gold"; we're asking to not having to choose between shoes and food at the end of the month.

The example I can give of someone who stopped working at Waterstones because of the pay is myself. I made promotion a couple of times, and even then I was still paid under the living wage. It's the fact that stores at forced to operate near-constantly on a skeleton crew. I was running a two-story, regular size busy London store on 4 staff a day. It got to the point where I had panic attacks because of the stress. The pay just makes you feel so incredibly undervalued.

Here we were: brilliant, dedicated, incredibly knowledgeable, and astonishingly well-read people and we were treated like we were completely expendable. Waterstones utterly exploits the fact they employ people who love what they do. The pay situation was demotivating, and frankly offensive.
Worker 12:
Virgil

As one colleague has voiced, having to make a decision between "food or bus fare" is a thought-pattern many of us are well acquainted with. Furthermore, it would give some more credence to viewing this company as a career rather than a temporary step before finding more appropriate employment.

I work in an area where in the last 12 months we have lost upwards of 7 senior/lead/junior bsm staff from the company, all of whom now have jobs in sectors such as publishing/housing/broadcasting. We attract highly skilled and dedicated people, but our pay structure means we simply can't keep them in the business when significantly better opportunities are available elsewhere.

No matter how much you love a job, paying the bills comes first. Losing temps and Booksellers is bad enough, but when we start seeing a drain from all the more senior roles that's when the shops really begin to suffer.
Worker 13:
Philip Pullman

Most booksellers who have left have usually left to search for better pay. Often this does not mean leaving retail, just moving into selling something they feel much less passionate about - there are numerous clothing and food retail companies that will pay their staff living wage or more!

We want to sell books because each and every one of us LOVES books - we genuinely want to push a good book into someone's hands and see them come back eagerly asking for more when they finish it. It's a passion led job but sadly we also need money to live, and if the only people who can afford to work for minimum wage are those who live at home or are of a social class where money is less of an issue then your book recommendations are not anywhere near as accurate or far reaching as they could and should be!

A career suggest something you could build a life on, save money on, have a home and social life. A job you could have for a lifetime. None of this is possible with minimum wage where it's practically impossible to save a penny every month, especially in London.
I actually had to leave my first full time Waterstones position because I simply couldn't afford to pay my rent and keep myself fed and healthy. I then had to move back in with my dad in a new town where I knew no one. Being a bookseller means everything to me, I don't want to have to leave Waterstones again, but if things don't change, and change fast, then I will have to. I'm only able to survive as a bookseller now because of the support of my partner.

A real living wage would stop me having to choose between bills and food. It would mean being able to stay with Waterstones long term. It would restore the pride and sense of loyalty that has been eroded by endless broken promises and delays.
Worker 15:
Mary Shelly

Being paid the living wage would mean that I can actually afford to get to work every day. It would mean that I don't have to find extra ways to make money on the side to be able to afford more than basic survival, and it would mean that I could live on my own instead of living with my parents, as the wage I am currently making prevents me renting a flat. It would simply mean that I am being paid for my expertise in the book selling field, so I would also feel more valued in the company, which we all deserve considering that jobs inside Waterstones are highly sought after and require specialised skills and knowledge to be successful at.

All of the people from the original team I was hired to work with have now left, but all of them agree on the same thing - the amount of work we are expected to do in this job is not worth the money. It all boils down the fact that the specialised knowledge we require, the long hours that we work and the large workloads we deal are enough to drive anyone to leave the company after a certain amount of time.

I used to see it as a great option for a career as I first entered the company, but after years of experience I can only see it as another role in retail.
Worker 16:
Fyodor Dostoevsky

I have known many people who have gone on to other jobs to make money - not even jobs that they would actually enjoy! They are always sad to leave, and when I ask them why they shrug and say 'money'. Waterstones is always losing good booksellers due to low pay.

Living wage would make a difference to me and my colleagues, some of whom have been at the company for 10+ years and not seen any pay rise, despite being excellent at their jobs.
Worker 17:
Neil Gaiman

When I first started, I thought it could be a career. After being there two years I soon came to realise that it wasn't a viable option. Looking into expert/lead bookselling and even management options, the pay just isn't one that can support me sufficiently for the duration of a career. The fact that I got an internship that pays vastly more is very telling.

A real living wage would make me more proud of my role. Right now it feels as though it is just a regular sales assistant job - which it isn't. It requires so much skill and knowledge, and people skills, and is just as mentally taxing as any other "real job." Our pay should reflect that!
Worker 18:
Salman Rushdie

I should be able to get the bus to work instead of walking when the weather is bad.

I should be able to branch out and have something different than the cheapest can of beans on toast.

I should be able to support Waterstones even more and buy books without being concerned about money.

I should be able to visit my family.

I shouldn’t go into my overdraft every single month.

Every person I’ve known has left has left because of money. They all love the job but feel undervalued, overworked, and underpaid.
Worker 19:
Ernst Hemingway

With a real living wage, I would be able to give up the extra second job that I have which starts at 3am some mornings and means that after I finish at Waterstones in the evening I have worked a 14-15 hour day. I also have problems affording transport and rent on this wage and whilst I need to do things like visit the dentist, I have actually put this off for years as I cannot afford it on the low wage I am on.

I sincerely doubt my ability to continue working for so little money for much longer. I have too many expenses I’ve put off or avoided. And even lead bookseller/career progression pay offers little incentive when I would know that I would be continuing to work with other booksellers who would continue to have the same financial predicaments as me.

I know several staff members who stopped working at Waterstones as they wanted to examine the possibility of starting families or applying for mortgages and found it would be impossible for them, particularly in London, on such a low pay scale.
Worker 20:
Alan Moore

Everyone I know who has left in the last two years that I have been working here has cited money as the reason. We all love the work but it doesn't feel like a career option because you can't support yourself or a family on this wage. I have also considered leaving for the same reason. The lowest paying entry level job at a publisher would pay twice as much.

I know that realistically I could not live on this wage forever. I am lucky enough to be able to live at home for the moment, but one day I will have to make a serious decision about my future. I love this job but it is not worth living in poverty for, and even at this early stage in our careers I am noticing the difference in resources between myself and my friends in other jobs.
Worker 21:
JRR Tolkien

I'm currently looking for other work because the Waterstones pay rate isn't feasible for me in the long term. I can't save for a mortgage, go on holiday, get driving lessons or a car. There's no long term career for me at Waterstones because I simply can't invest in my future. And that's a real shame because I love my job and I know I'm good at it.

The low wages make it impossible to invest in your future - I can't save for a house or a car or a holiday. I have enough money to cover my rent and bills and basic essentials - there's little left over for small luxuries. You're living month to month and this takes a real toll on your mental health.

I get three buses to get to work, so a real living wage would help towards costs of travelling to work and help to cover bills. I currently have maybe £50 a month left over for myself once I've paid my rent and bills and travel.
I can't afford to try and make a career here. I have worked for the company for 2 1/2 years, in two different areas. In that time I have never been able to survive without my parents help.

This time next year, I am meant to be getting married but I am barely scraping by as it is, so that seems more and more unlikely. I'd like to be able to save a bit, have a cushion if something goes wrong. I love my job, but I can't afford to carry on here much longer.
I started as shop security over 10 years ago as I had always wanted to work in a bookshop. Within months I was both bookselling and acting as security, and eventually progressed to a full bookseller, then lead, then as BSM, though I am still waiting to be paid in line with other BSMs.

I love books and it is a pleasure to help people find them, or introduce them to new ones, to run events for kids and seeing the joy they get from books. I have seen the company change so much over the years, mostly for the better, but the level of work expected of a bookseller/lead/BSM has increased immensely and the wages however have not changed accordingly.

I work 2 jobs just to make ends meet. An increase would help pay off debts and enable me to cut back on my second job. Several staff have gone on to other jobs as there’s better pay with less pressure.
Worker 24:
Oscar Wilde

I’m nearly 8 years into my 'career', I am on the same wage and doing triple the work. So no, bookselling is only a career if you have someone rich supporting you.

My colleague in the children's department recently left. After she left, her responsibilities were passed on to me as well as my own, but I was given no extra pay, time, or support to do this. I then had a nervous breakdown from the stress.

A real living wage would let me pay my rent and eat all month.
I have a colleague who has worked for the company for over 10 years and has a teenager. Numerous times over this time she has almost been at the food banks door. This is completely unacceptable for any member of staff, but especially for one who has worked their ass off for so long for Waterstones.

I know 5 people who have left because of money, and have considered it many times myself. James has said that he doesn't want to raise wages overall as it's unfair on 'career booksellers', but those of us that are 'career booksellers' see no benefits from the loyalty and hard work we've shown over the years.

Unless you are a high ranking manager there is very little gap in how much you're paid per level already. For example, if I was promoted to expert - which requires lots more knowledge and effort - it would only be an extra 66p per hour. There doesn't seem to be much incentive to me.

We are some of the most specialist staff and this is far more than a 'sales assistant' job, we are booksellers, and that should mean something.

The fact he said "we reward them as well as we can with pay, but we mainly reward them with a stimulating job" is such an insulting comment. We enjoy our jobs but that's like someone telling us we should just be happy to have a job at all.
Worker 26:
Isaac Asimov

A woman at my store left a little over three months after I started and at first I struggled to understand why she left - she was clearly talented, her customers would come back and ask for her time and time again, she regularly made customers with at least one (usually two) extra books than they were planning on purchasing and had an excellent knowledge base about the stock level in the shop. She was regularly tasked with jobs above her pay-grade (I am seeing that this is normal within Waterstones), regularly tasked with managerial responsibilities and yet only taking home minimum wage. She tried to get a pay rise to the senior bookseller rate (about 20-30p extra at the time), but was blocked time and time again.

Working freelance and other jobs to make ends meet. The job is skilled, and demands far more than a minimum wage should reasonably demand. It is becoming increasingly difficult to keep good morale in the workplace - the feeling of being unappreciated is felt across the company and has been said time and time again on WATSON (the waterstones internal network)
Worker 27:  
James Baldwin

Everyone that works at my store is currently looking elsewhere for jobs with higher pay. It's soul destroying because we all love our jobs and our shop immensely but we feel under appreciated by such low pay. People on a supermarket checkout make more an hour than us.

Rather than scraping by each month we should be able to start living rather than surviving. The price of living is constantly increasing but our wages at Waterstones remain the same.

Hard to progress through the levels, so much is expected of you for such little pay I'm not sure it's worth it.
Worker 28:
Doris Lessing

I do see bookselling as a career, and I love it so much. I do events as well as run the children's section and have been with Waterstones for almost 10 years. I just don't see it as a viable career for myself anymore as I'll never be able to afford to buy a house or even rent somewhere without really struggling to afford food. Our staff exhaust themselves with how hard they work because we care, about books and each other. Our store is actually very profitable too, but we get no reward for it.

I run the children's section in my shop and my full time expert actually left on Friday as she handed her notice in after finding an entry level admin job. Part time staff always want to stay but as there's never any hours as overtime is banned, they end up leaving and we lose brilliant booksellers. I myself am going to college in September for a change in career as I've been promised a salary (which would make up for all the unpaid overtime I do), for the past few years.

I'm a full time lead bookseller and get paid £8.96 an hour. Since purchasing a car in December 2017, I've relied heavily on a credit card. I live in the middle of nowhere so need a car to be able to get to the train station to be able to commute to work. The living wage would allow me to be able to (albeit slowly) pay off my credit card and start saving again.
Worker 29:
Deborah Levy

I have an MA, teach creative writing (in my spare time - evenings and weekends) and have worked for Waterstones for 8+ years. I know my shop inside and out.

Since I've been at Waterstones, staff levels have already been significantly cut - in my store, by about 40%.

I'm looking for a different job, because Waterstones doesn't pay enough. If I stayed, it would make a fair bit of difference, certainly. I can barely save *anything*. I'm always watching how much I spend on food and drink. So this would change.
Worker 30:
Truman Capote

Living wage would strengthen my commitment to the company, and mean I might not check job sites every day. It would also allow me to keep buying the books that broaden my knowledge and improve my credibility as a bookseller, without sliding deep into debt.

Our shop has lost several top performers recently, prompted to leave by the low pay, thus dealing a blow to the rest of the workforce and damaging morale/encouraging others to reluctantly consider a future outside Waterstones.

I am optimistic it can be a career, and those who progress should be given suitable pay rises. If evidence mounts to the contrary, I and others will not hang around.
Worker 31:
Vladimir Nabokov

Not having a real living wage means I'm always choosing between rent and living life outside of work. I really love my job but I've had to use up a large portion of my savings because my pay doesn't cover the costs of basic modern living.

I know at least four previous colleagues have left because their pay was too low for them to sustain themselves and/or the "pay progression" was not available to them despite being extremely competent booksellers who had been with the company for more than two years.

Whilst I think bookselling at Waterstones certainly could be a career path, with the current level of pay, it's not sustainable to expect someone to survive on less than a living wage until they can progress up to a hopefully better one. How can someone expect to be able to progress in the company if they can't afford to stay with it long enough to do so?
Worker 32:  
William Shakespeare

I used to see Waterstones as this beacon in retail. You get to work with BOOKS! That's why I applied and why I was thrilled to accept my position. But ever since I have realised that Waterstones does not care about its staff whatsoever. Everyone in the shop is a team, and while the shop manager is always on our side, it is obvious the people above the shop care about nothing but profits. I'm not dumb, I understand that the point of a business is to make money, that will always be the case. But Daunt and others up with him always treat bookselling and working for Waterstones like more than a retail job, and they expect the level of commitment that is a step up above other retail jobs. But at the same time they do not accompany that with any real reward.

The saddest thing about denying a living wage, is that it would make a difference to everyone who works at Waterstones. For every one of us who comes into work every day, who go through extreme measures to find what every single customer is looking for, who comes in early and stays late, who works unpaid hours over Christmas because the shop wouldn't run otherwise, we could all go home knowing that at least we're appreciated enough to get paid enough to live.

I know many people who have considered leaving, or who have had to take another job on the side just to pay bills and be able to live.
Worker 33:  
Gabriel García Márquez

I am treated at work as though this is a career. I am encouraged to be part of the buying process - curating sections etc. Unlike some other retail jobs, we are expected to have a wealth of expert knowledge and do work in our own time (reading things that will help us at work, books of the month etc, also researching publisher news). At present, bookselling is not feasible for me as a career - pay just isn't enough to live on.

A real living wage would take some of the pressure off just living. Currently, I am scraping by on rent and bills each month. Each and every month, I run out of money and am forced to go into my overdraft to buy food. It would be nice to break this cycle.
Worker 34: Zadie Smith

Having been in the company for five years and worked in three large shops, I have seen countless employees forced to leave Waterstones due to the low pay. I would estimate there have been at least 20 people that I knew personally, some were very close friends of mine. It's a real loss to the company as they were all enthusiastic, knowledgeable booksellers who enjoyed and were good at their jobs but simply could not afford to live in London on a minimum wage income.

I am a senior bookseller, have worked in the company for five years, and am not even paid one pound more per hour than I was when I first joined five years ago. As of the new financial year, without a pay rise, my wage will be just 50p per hour above minimum wage.

The only people I see staying in the job long-term tend to be older people who already own their own homes. Young people and students are fine to stay in the job until either they leave university and stop receiving their loan, or they want to move out of their parents' house and discover they cannot afford the cost of living on this wage alone. I myself will have no choice but to leave the job in the next year or so if the pay remains as low as it is.

A wage I could live on would let me actually entertain the idea of seeing this as a long term job, rather than something to make ends meet until I find something else I enjoy that pays me the wage I need and rightfully deserve.
Worker 35:  
F. Scott Fitzgerald

The knowledge required of booksellers by the company and by its customers is something not expected of any other minimum wage retail job. It's a job that I believe requires a lot of passion and dedication, even just at bookseller level and I would like the pay to reflect this.

Currently I'm just about managing and living pay check to pay check; being afforded the real living wage would allow me to perhaps start saving for a future in which owning a house, a car etc would be a real possibility for me!
Worker 36: Haruki Murakami

I had to leave Waterstones because the pay wasn't enough to keep me in a comfortable financial position. There wasn't a single month during my 12 months with the company that I didn't run out of money at least a week or so before pay day on the 20th. I watched so many people leave because the pay was unacceptable. The level of work that was required did not match the pay that we were given!

I don't see it as a career because the job is incredibly unrewarding, primarily because of the pay. It is unacceptable for James Daunt to say that "there is a progression within the company" the pay rise is minimal, the expectation is high and, especially for women, the promotions just aren't there without a struggle.
Worker 37: 
C. S. Lewis

A real living wage would make a fantastic change - I would feel invigorated to work harder as I would feel appreciated and valued as a person and not feel expendable. I would be able to live without having every meal planned out in advance, I'd be able enjoy life and have a social life without having to eat super frugally for a week to do so.

The thing about Waterstones is that despite the fact it's retail, it feels like so much more - it's enjoyable and though it's true we could make more money working at Aldi or Asda, we shouldn't have to sacrifice doing something we love and are good at just because the company isn't moving with the times and paying people what they deserve. I am applying for other things with the main reason for leaving Waterstones is that I can't afford to live without just barely scraping by.
Worker 38:  
Sally Rooney

A living wage would relieve stress. Allow me to purchase clothes that would present myself better, allow me to pursue interests helpful to my work, enjoy holidays.

I know 6 people for whom pay was a significant factor in leaving. They have all gone on to higher paid work where they feel more valued and receive other work related benefits.

There are levels to progress through Waterstones and that it is a profession requiring many skills and drive to do well in. But the wage means that a lot of staff don't feel valued enough to stay.
Worker 39: Plato

I enjoy bookselling and working with my colleagues, but at my branch, 3 of the staff (that's all of us) had been diagnosed with mental health stress-related issues. Missives from head office make you feel like you are being shouted at, that you're worthless, incompetent and easily replaced.

In Germany, bookselling is treated like a career alongside librarianship. In the UK we may as well work at Claire's Accessories and still receive the same pay and career prospects.

My colleagues left all the time to 'get something better'. This was generally to have a tedious job in administration but paid better.
Worker 40:
John le Carré

A living wage would let me afford more than just food, rent and travel. At the moment I have no money left over each month after paying my bills.

If pay doesn't increase before the end of the year I'll be leaving in September. Everyone I know who has left over the last 12 months has left because they found a job that pays better.

It can't possibly be a career when it pays poverty wages and even the highest rate of bookselling pay is below the living wage.
Petition:

To James Daunt – Director, Waterstones Booksellers Limited

Paying all your Booksellers a starting Living Wage of £9, or £10.55 for the Greater London area, will have a positive impact on the lives of Booksellers, their performance in the role, and the success of the bookselling industry.

Working for a rate of pay that is below the Living Wage results in Booksellers who are stressed, preoccupied and who have little spare time and energy to devote to buying books, reading them, and keeping up with news and trends in the industry – all of which activities are undertaken outside contracted hours, and which many staff consider to be (and are encouraged to view as) integral to their role. 
Please pay all your Booksellers a minimum Real Living Wage of £9, or £10.55 in Greater London.

Sincerely,

8,833 staff and customers of Waterstones