

MORE YOGA...

Rates of pay in yoga teaching can be a subject of intense discussion. Having such discussions is important and healthy. Recently I wrote an article about this. Following a face-to-face meeting with Shamir and Michelle – the owners of MoreYoga – I have amended, corrected and updated this article.

Shamir wrote to me: “thank you Norman for raising awareness for such an important issue. Low wages in the yoga world has sadly been endemic in our industry, as has limited opportunities to teach and lack of support for career progression from employers. Yoga teachers are often expected to pay large fees for training and development from their own pocket in order to progress their training and to develop their business. At MoreYoga we have been working hard to break the mould and offer our teachers much more than just a wage.”

Opened in London in 2016, MoreYoga’s slogan was “*be a part of the revolution*”. It is now “*We are MoreYoga. We believe in a better world.*” They have 27 studios throughout greater London, nearly 300 teachers on their books and offer about 750 classes a week.

MoreYoga emphasises its affordability for students, does charitable work (such as for Help Refugees), attempts to give teachers classes close to where they live and back to back classes (thus minimising travel expenses) and plans to offer ongoing training to teachers free of charge. MoreYoga gives discounts to people working in essential services – such as NHS staff, armed forces and emergency staff – and plans to offer discounted classes to people who receive Universal Credit.

Nearly all MoreYoga teachers are paid a flat rate of £30 per class (classes are one hour long). About 4% of their teachers are paid less: £25 per class if the studio has a capacity of less than 15; £20 if the teacher is in training. A small number of teachers are paid above the £30 figure. Some MoreYoga studios have a capacity of 30 students – and at times the classes are full.

Considering that MoreYoga teachers have to open and close the studio (there are no receptionists) plus the extra work of being self-employed (eg insurance, no work when ill), this means that teachers’ hourly rate can be less than £15. For the teachers in training, the hourly rate can be less than £10.

Low pay in the yoga world is not just limited to teachers. Some office staff at MoreYoga are paid £10.55 per hour which is the London living wage; the national minimum wage is £8.21. Yogahaven in London pay reception staff £8 per hour, with some of their teachers working on reception to make ends meet.

At Tribe Yoga in Edinburgh, with three centres and more than 200 classes a week, one teacher was paid £8.50 per hour and expected to teach 2–3 classes a day (2017 figure). Other teachers at Tribe Yoga are paid £18 for a one-hour class.

Sometimes our expectations get hammered by reality. These rates of pay ensure that *exclusion* is the rule rather than the yoga talk of inclusivity and diversity. These rates of pay mean that many teachers struggle to keep their heads above water. These rates of pay encourage a devaluing of skills. These rates of pay fuel exhaustion, burn-out and individualistic competition. These rates of pay can mean that the teachers are teaching 20 classes a week to financially survive – for virtually all teachers, this is unsustainable over the long-term. How can we be present as teachers when we are having to teach so many classes?

This is exploitation of people’s love for practising and teaching yoga. At time of writing – mid-October – MoreYoga had an offer of £1 for a month of yoga classes. This could be great for students (cheaper classes). Good for the studio (more students). Not so good for teachers (how is this valuing the work of teaching?). This might be a business model but it is tough for many teachers. After discussion, MoreYoga have agreed to remove this offer - which is a constructive step.

A suggestion is that those currently teaching at these places talk to each other and collectively ask for a pay increase. A suggestion is that teachers seriously contemplate: are such rates of pay sustainable? For those practising at such places, ask yourself: are you aware of pay and conditions for teachers? Is it ethical to pay money to such places?

This dive to the bottom has been enabled by the refusal of longer established studios to pay appropriate rates. For example, the per hour rate for yoga teachers at London-based Triyoga has stayed the same from when they opened in 2000 to now – 19 years later.

What seems to be carved in stone can be shifted with practices such as speaking truth and applying pressure. Standards and conditions need to be discussed. Ensuring sustainable rates of pay and elevating teaching quality are different sides of the same coin.

Rather than just rolling out a mat at the front of a class, maybe teachers might tell students about their rates of pay. Yoga centres depend upon teachers to do the teaching. Just as teachers depend upon centres to be open. Just as centres and teachers depend upon students to turn up. In this three-way dance, I believe that it is the teachers who are often the most squeezed. This is exploitative and unsustainable.

If you are teaching yoga and you would like to be involved in a collective voice for yoga teachers, please email yogateachersunion@gmail.com.

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October 2019

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