



Changes to unsocial hours payments – tell us what you think

Changes have been proposed to the way pay is calculated if you are off sick. **Ambulance staff** receive payments for unsocial hours under Annex E of the Agenda for Change (AfC) agreement. Employers think the recent changes to AfC sickness payments automatically change Annex E. UNISON does not. UNISON is asking for your view on proposals to reduce Annex E payments during sickness.

This means that if ambulance staff are sick during a shift that includes unsocial hours they would lose their unsocial hours uplift for those hours.

If this affects you UNISON wants to hear your views.

UNISON's view

It is UNISON's view, and that of the other NHS unions that the Annex E payments are a regular supplement, rather than hour by hour enhancements described in the retrospective scheme. This means that if the employers wanted changes this would have needed specific negotiation before it was included in the recent agreement to change sick pay for other NHS staff. We do not accept that the changes made to the Handbook have automatic implications for unsocial hours payments made under Annex E.

The employer's view

The employers maintain that the principle of removing unsocial hours for periods of sickness absence should apply to staff paid under Annex E and have now proposed a methodology for how this deduction could be made.

UNISON does not agree that this deduction can happen automatically but have agreed to consult members on the proposal. This has led to the employer's delaying the implementation date to give us time to consult you about what you think.

Your view

UNISON, along with other unions, in the ambulance service, has agreed to consult members on this proposal.

We want to see an England-wide approach to this issue rather than allowing local flexibilities. But if we do not accept this proposal, employers could impose deductions to payments during sick pay.

This is why we need to know your views before we decide how to respond.

Background

Annex E is a “prospective” system of unsocial hours payments, used mainly in the ambulance service. Under this system a percentage supplement is made to pay, reflecting the working pattern and proportion of unsocial hours. This differs from the “retrospective” system that applies to other NHS staff where an agreed “per hour” enhancement to plain time hourly rates is applied.

In February, the NHS Staff Council agreed a package of England-only changes to Agenda for Change which included changes to the calculation of pay during sickness absence.

It was made clear that the lowest paid staff (on pay spine points 1 to 8) and those with work related injuries would be exempt.

The NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook was updated to reflect these changes.

Employers believe that the changes must also apply to Annex E because it was not excluded.

During the negotiations UNISON has been making the following points:

- Annex E payments are a flexible regular supplement NOT an hour by hour calculation.
- Introducing an hourly rate for sickness deductions sets a dangerous precedent.
- Ambulance staff have high sickness levels, which means this could significantly reduce take home and pensionable pay.



When should you vote?

Your branch will be talking to you about the employers proposals and how they affect you. They will be asking you to vote on whether you accept or reject. The consultative ballot closes on 23 August, so there is plenty of time for you to make your views known. Please make sure you vote as this will help us when we are in talks with the employers.

Where can you get more information?

A formal NHS Staff Council briefing and FAQs are available from your branch, or the UNISON website (unison.org.uk).

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