

December 2017



Dear UNISON health member

Important update about your pay

On your behalf, UNISON submitted a pay claim for an award in 2018/19 that matches inflation, plus an extra £800 payment for all staff. We worked with 13 other health unions to submit the claim in September and we also asked for additional funding for reforms to the NHS Agenda for Change pay framework to make it better and fairer.

Last month the Westminster government delivered its Budget and in it the Chancellor announced that he would be willing to find additional funding for reforms to the NHS pay structure, subject to certain conditions. Since that announcement we have been hard at work to secure a meaningful break-through on pay after the long years of NHS pay cuts that you have all suffered. The NHS Pay Review Body process was delayed considerably but is now underway and, along with the other health unions, we have submitted evidence to it in support of our pay claim. At the same time we have started talking to the government and to NHS employers about what the Budget announcement might mean, and what strings might be attached to any extra money for pay rises and reforms.

UNISON has very clear priorities for reforming the pay structure including ending low pay and making sure that there is a genuine Living Wage at the bottom of a reformed pay structure. We also want to improve starting salaries, remove overlaps between pay bands and make it quicker for you to get to the top of bands. But we are well aware that in trying to achieve what we want, we will come up against additional priorities that other parties in the talks will want to pursue.

We are talking about a pay structure that covers over a million NHS staff represented by 14 trade unions. In addition, there are four separate health departments in the four UK countries that we will need to engage with and the politics around how any outcomes would apply in each country are outside our direct control. So, as you can imagine, negotiations on a pay reform package will not be quick or easy to do. But this is the first opportunity we have had in a decade for this kind of discussion with government and employer representatives about long-term improvements to the Agenda for Change pay structure. So we think it is worth putting the work in if we can have serious talks. We will enter these in good faith using all our professional negotiating experience. As negotiators we will be guided throughout by elected UNISON representatives who, like you, work in the NHS and reflect your views and concerns.

If we think that the talks are not going to work because the other side is making too many unreasonable demands, we will let you know and talk to you about what our next steps should be. But if we feel we can make progress we will keep talking until we have got a full picture of the kind of deal that might be possible. This means that you might not hear much detail until the end. But I want to assure you that once we have that full picture we will give you all the information you need to understand how any package would affect you and your colleagues. You will have the opportunity to have your say before anything is agreed. If all goes well we hope that we can get to this stage by early March.

We know how tough pay restraint has been for you – we are determined to do everything in our power to get the government to pay up now. NHS staff deserve nothing less.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Gorton'.

Sara Gorton
UNISON Head of Health