

NO BACK DOOR PRIVATISATION

A number of health trusts are planning to create private companies to provide estates and facilities services in the near future.

What that means is that those services currently provided in house will be provided by a separate company employing staff who currently work for the NHS. The trusts say that one of the benefits is that they can focus more on delivering healthcare, ignoring the fact that all staff are part of one NHS team that helps patients.

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UNISON believes that this is privatisation by the back door and that the long-term protection of pay and pensions for those transferring to the new company is weak.

But most worryingly the trusts plan to employ new staff on less favourable non-NHS contracts with no access to the NHS Pension Scheme. We know from experience that this will have an impact on transferring staff as all it takes is one change to the way the company operates and staff could find themselves on a non-NHS contract too.

We also believe that although many trusts are talking about estates and facilities staff now, if this goes ahead there will be nothing to stop them transferring other non-clinical staff over in the future.

The trusts claim that when this goes ahead they will be saving money through paying less VAT than they currently do, in spite of Department of Health advice that wholly owned subsidiaries should not be used as a method of avoiding tax.

We actually believe that the major saving will come from employing new starters on lower pay and worse terms and conditions which undermines the national pay agreement in the NHS. UNISON will therefore continue to challenge these proposals.

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