

## UNISON campaign for a £2,000 pay increase for health and social care staff

*“No nurse goes into the role for the money. But a £2k pay rise would really help us nurses feel that our hard work and dedication is appreciated.”*

**Eimear. Staff nurse.**

Everyone working in health and social care deserves a pay rise. That is why we are asking the government to give all staff a pay rise of at least £2,000.

A £2,000 increase to every pay point would mean:

- A pay rise of over £1 per hour for all staff
- A fair and equitable rise, reflecting the contribution of all staff through 2020 and beyond
- A minimum of £10.23 per hour – taking the AfC pay floor back above the real Living Wage
- A Band 5 starting salary of nearly £27,000

HSC staff report that this pay increase would make them more likely to remain working in the health and care systems, improve their morale, and that they would spend more in their local economy.

This is a fair and realistic claim, one that could easily be implemented by the Northern Ireland Executive, and one that is strongly supported by UNISON members working in the Health and Social Care.

### UNISON

UNISON is the largest trade union in the UK and the largest trade union in the NHS with around 500,000 members working in health and care roles. Our members carry out virtually every role in the NHS apart from medicine and dentistry. We have particularly large membership in nursing, the ambulance service, medical secretaries and similar roles, and operational support roles. In broad terms our membership reflects the distribution of roles across the health and social care.

We are a campaigning, democratic and organising union; our approach to this pay round has been led at every stage by our senior committee for workers in the health sector and informed by regular large-scale consultations with our members working in the NHS.

This document is presented to the NHS Pay Review Body in response to the remit issued by Robin Swann, Minister of Health, on 18 January 2021. While we understand that timing of announcements from the Northern Ireland Executive is heavily dependent on announcements from HM Treasury, and we want an expedited process, we note our disappointment at the very late notice that the Northern Ireland Executive gave in issuing a remit.

UNISON first presented this pay claim to the Prime Minister in August 2020. Confirmation of additional funding for NHS pay in England would provide the certainty needed to proceed with meaningful discussions about pay in devolved administrations. We continue to call on the Prime Minister to speed up this process and announce funding for an early and significant wage increase without any needless further delay.

UNISON has adopted the position set out in this document on a UK wide basis. We consulted members across the whole UK when developing and adopting the claim. Detailed figures in this document on the experiences of staff have been given for Northern Ireland only. The views and experiences of members working in other administrations were gathered in the same exercise and are provided in separate responses to remits or equivalent processes.

## Background to this pay claim

*“We have worked so hard through this pandemic. If industrial action is needed to get £2,000 then I am prepared to take it.”*

**Orlaith. Play specialist.**

In November 2019 through January 2020 members UNISON Northern Ireland health service family took widespread and sustained industrial action. Members voted in overwhelming numbers for strike action in relation to a failure to resolve issues of pay for Agenda for Change staff in Northern Ireland. The two months of mass industrial action right across Northern Ireland, ranged from overtime bans, withdrawal of flexibility, and withdrawal of labour. Our largest occupational group of members who took strike action on multiple occasions were our nursing members.

On picket lines every day the media was present from news organisations from around the UK, including Sky, C4, ITV and BBC. Support was sent to picket lines from across the UK, and it is clear the message carried back to UNISON members across the UK is that when the government fails to act in good faith and good time, then industrial action will make sure NHS staff are taken seriously.

We have stated elsewhere that pay and reward is an important issue for NHS staff and the last few years of industrial relations in Northern Ireland has demonstrated this. The achievements and benefits of

hard-won pay reform negotiated by trade unions on a UK-wide basis are off-set by repeated failure to act over time. This lesson must be heeded, not just by the Northern Ireland Executive but by UK Government and other devolved administrations.

The reflections of our members on the last pay round provided the context for the drafting of our current pay claim.

Even before the dispute over pay parity had been resolved in Northern Ireland, as far back as autumn 2018, we began working with UNISON members in the NHS on our approach to a 2021 pay settlement through our national and regional structures, UNISON conferences, and other forms of engagement. In February 2020, nearing the end of the three-year agreement, we conducted a membership consultation to evaluate our approach to the 2018 reforms and to ask members how they wished us to approach the next pay round.

There was strong support from members for the pay reforms we had secured in the 2018 agreement. We asked UNISON members in the NHS, *“Thinking about the current 2018-2021 pay deal, not just the parts that directly affect you, how do you feel about the following elements?”*

Aspect of pay reform	Net support
Immediate increase for the lowest paid staff to set a new minimum above real Living Wage	88%
Breaking the pay cap	85%
6.5% pay increase and a 1.1% lump sum for staff at top of bands 2 – 8c over three years	85%
Removing overlaps between pay bands	83%
Closure of band 1 and upskilling roles to band 2	79%
Quicker progression to the top pay point of bands 2-7	78%
Higher starting salaries for new recruits	66%

The 2018 proposals for reform, and subsequent industrial action that was taken to achieve those reforms in Northern Ireland, normalised workplace conversations about pay and reward in the NHS. We asked members in what way they had engaged with the pay reforms, both in terms of conversations and decision making. Large numbers of members had engaged in the process.

Activity reported by UNISON members in the NHS	Percent
I read UNISON information about the pay proposals.	77%
I used the NHS pay calculator	68%
I spoke to colleagues at work about the proposals	65%
I read information on the NHS pay website	59%
I voted in the UNISON consultation	54%
I read information from my employer about the pay proposals	46%
I got information from other sources, including social media	30%
I attended a briefing or information session provided by my employer	8%
I did none of the above	5%

Members were also positive about the process of reform itself – even though it took a major campaign and prolonged industrial action in order to implement them fully in Northern Ireland. A majority of members (76 percent) said that the process was “a more transparent way to make changes to NHS pay,” with slightly smaller majorities of members agreeing that “the process produced a fair outcome” (60 percent) and that they felt “more involved in the process than in previous pay years” (55 percent).

Members were also clear that they wanted the approach to the next round to be more straightforward. We asked members, “Thinking about the UNISON pay claim for the April 2021 pay year, how important is it to you that we include the following elements in our pay claim?”

	Net support
An above inflation uplift to all pay points	94%
Extra measures to raise the minimum rate in the NHS to £10ph in 2021	88%
Keeping it simple - ask for one headline figure	75%

## Drafting and consulting on the UNISON pay claim

An overwhelming majority of UNISON members support the specific claim of £2,000 for all NHS staff, as well as the principles that underpin that claim.

Our lead committee for NHS staff met during spring/early summer 2020 to consider the findings of the consultation exercise from February 2020 and concluded:

- There was significant appetite among NHS staff for an active conversation about improving NHS pay, and a desire for staff to be involved in that process
- There should be a simple, headline approach to the next NHS pay round
- It continued to be a high priority to ensure NHS pay stayed ahead of increases to the Real Living Wage, maintaining the principle achieved in the 2018 reforms

We considered many different approaches. Our lead committee agreed to consult on a draft pay claim of an increase for £2,000 on every pay point on the basis it was the best way of meeting calls to:

- Make a simple claim which felt fair to all
- Achieve a minimum pay rate of over £10 per hour, clear of the Real Living Wage
- Secure a significant pay increase for all staff without widening the gap between the lowest and highest earning staff

In early summer 2020 we consulted members on the specifics of this draft pay claim. Nearly 35,000 UNISON members responded across a full range of occupations and pay bands, giving us confidence that the findings reflect the wider UNISON membership working in the NHS.

A large majority (87 percent) of UNISON members favoured an NHS pay rise paid as early as possible, not waiting for the usual 1 April settlement date.

A majority of members (70 percent) favoured of a flat rate approach to pay increases, with consistent support across all occupations and pay bands. A large majority (84 per cent) of UNISON members backed a £2,000 pay claim, saying an increase of that size would make a meaningful difference to them.

## Current experience of NHS staff

*“A £2,000 pay rise would help us to feel we are recognised for our hard work during this pandemic.”*

**Natasha. Healthcare assistant.**

2020 has been an extremely difficult year for NHS staff. In whichever way we engage with NHS staff, whether through our committee meetings, surveys, or speaking directly with members, we hear very similar stories.

To investigate these experiences more deeply in December 2020 we conducted an in-depth survey asking UNISON members in the NHS about their experiences of working in the pandemic, their household finances, and their views on working in the NHS. The results provided here are for members working in the Northern Ireland only.

It is clear that working in health and social care in Northern Ireland has changed as direct result of the pandemic. Over a third of UNISON members (40 percent) have worked on a Covid-19 specific ward or area at some point, and a fifth (20 percent) of members have been redeployed due to the pandemic.

Even for staff who have not physically changed work location, work has changed dramatically. Two thirds (66 percent) of UNISON members report having to learn and use new work skills as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We also asked members if they have worked from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Have you worked remotely/from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic?	Percent
Yes – as a result of my own risk factors	4%
Yes – because my workplace/work area was shut down	2%
Yes – my work area remained open but guidance was to work from home where possible	13%
No	81%

## NHS staff finances

*“A £2,000 pay rise [would] help bring our earnings in line with the cost of living, especially since we have worked through an extremely difficult year.”*

**Christine. Staff nurse.**

We asked NHS staff about the cost of working, as well as more general questions about their household finances and financial health. The pandemic has changed work in very different ways for different groups of NHS staff but almost all report increases in the cost of working, as well as increases to usual household costs.

A majority of NHS staff (62 percent) report that they are worse off this year.

Overall, compared to 12 months ago, how do you feel your pay has changed relative to your cost of living?	Percent
I am better off	3%
I am worse off	62%
I am about the same	31%
Don't know	5%

Additionally, a significant number of staff report accessing financial support, guidance or products. Over four in ten (41%) have asked for financial support from family or friends, and over 1 in 10 staff (11 percent) report using a debt advice service. Of greatest concern, there is use of foodbanks, pawn shops, and predatory financial services, with 10 percent of HSC staff reporting using payday loans.

Thinking about the money you spend in order to be able to work, how do you feel the cost of the following has changed over the last 12 months?				
	Increased	Neither increased nor decreased	Decreased	Not applicable
Food and drink while working, or while travelling to or from work	81%	11%	1%	7%
Commuting - private vehicle	78%	13%	3%	6%
Laundry of items used at work	77%	10%	1%	12%
Personal stationary supplies used for work	38%	18%	0%	45%
Commuting - public transport	34%	8%	4%	54%
Furniture (for example, to support working from home)	24%	14%	0%	62%
Personal IT equipment used for work	26%	17%	1%	56%
Car parking for work purposes	26%	20%	3%	51%
Childcare	32%	10%	0%	59%

Thinking about your other household expenses, how do you feel the cost of the following have changed in relation to your income?			
	Increased	Neither increased nor decreased	Decreased
Energy and water bills	90%	9%	1%
Transport	75%	21%	4%
Mortgage/rent	47%	51%	2%
Food	97%	3%	0%

Have you done any of the following this year?	
Type of support, advice or product	Percent
Used a payday loan company	10%
Asked for financial support from family or friends	41%
Used a food bank	5%
Downsized/moved to a less expensive home	4%
Remortgaged your home	6%
Used a debt advice service	11%
Pawned possessions	7%
Made a new claim for benefits/universal credit	6%
None of the above	46%

In parallel to our work on pay we have continued to investigate and respond to our members' experiences of issues such as staffing levels and wellbeing. A quarter of respondents to our survey on health and wellbeing earlier in 2020 stated that the pandemic had placed either themselves or their family under financial difficulty. Of these, 81 percent stated this had negatively affected their mental health.

Our findings show several factors have contributed to financial strain this year, with 29 percent of respondents identifying a job loss in the household. Additionally, almost half (48 percent) of all survey respondents stated they had not coped well mentally during the pandemic with reasons why including fear of getting sick, increased exposure to unwell patients and feeling isolated contributing factors.

For many of our members, their NHS salary needed to go further in their households. We asked, “Compared to 12 months ago, how does your NHS salary relate to your total household income?”. We also asked a follow up question on the cause of that change.

Compared to 12 months ago, how does your NHS salary relate to your total household income?	
	Percent
No change	31%
My salary makes up a larger part of our household income	52%
My salary makes up a smaller part of our household income	17%

Looking in detail at staff who reported that their NHS salary made up a larger proportion of their household income we found that for over half (57 percent) this was a result of changes to the earnings of others in their household.

What has caused this change? (Segment, “salary makes up a larger part...)	
	Percent
Changes to my earnings	43%
Changes to the earnings of others in my household	57%

## Retaining staff in a crisis

*“As a support services worker we have done so well in keeping the virus out of our wards. We have lost colleagues in this pandemic and £2,000 will never make up for that loss however it will at least show the government is listening.”*

**Martine. Domestic.**

The vacancy crisis in the NHS is well understood. However, without action, we risk losing the staff we already have – exacerbating problems and creating an even larger recruitment challenge. We asked UNISON members to what extent they considered leaving the NHS. While 55 percent said they had not considered leaving, over a quarter of staff (29 percent) reported either fairly or very seriously considering leaving.

Are you considering leaving your current position in the NHS within the next year?	
	Percent
No, I am not considering leaving	55%
Yes, but not very seriously	16%
Yes, fairly seriously	21%
Yes, very seriously	8%

Of those staff considering leaving, we asked about their intentions. 80 percent said they would leave the NHS if good jobs were available elsewhere, with half (54 percent) reporting they will stay in the NHS until the current pandemic crisis has ended. Of greatest concern, about a quarter of staff considering leaving (22 percent) report that “whatever happens [they] will leave the NHS.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?			
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I'm thinking about leaving my current role but want to stay in the NHS	56%	19%	25%
I want to leave the NHS but stay in the wider health and care industry	36%	34%	30%
Whatever happens I will leave the NHS	22%	53%	24%
I am going to move to Bank/Agency working	39%	30%	32%
I want to bring forward my retirement plans	42%	24%	35%
I will stay in the NHS until the current pandemic crisis has ended	54%	37%	10%
I would leave the NHS if good jobs are available elsewhere	80%	13%	6%
I am eligible for retirement and want to take it	16%	37%	47%
The current crisis makes me want to leave as soon as possible	42%	36%	22%
I feel I need to leave the NHS to progress my career	38%	35%	27%

## Impact of positive action on NHS pay

*“The UNISON pay claim for £2k is the right claim. It will make me feel valued and appreciated as a health worker.”*

### **Mary. Radiography assistant.**

NHS staff feel strongly about pay. There are high levels of dissatisfaction and anger about how NHS staff have been treated. This is true across the UK, but strength of feeling is particularly high in Northern Ireland given recent circumstances.

There are also very high levels of expectation that the Executive must take positive action on pay, with a strong risk of further discontent if that does not happen. The challenge of this combination cannot be over-stated. Inaction, or positions taken in bad faith, inequitable treatment or even simply poor communication risk making this situation much worse.

**We have been asking for a pay rise of at least £2,000 for all NHS staff but we have yet to hear any more detail on the Northern Ireland Executive's plans for NHS pay. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I do not pay attention to the Executive's approach to NHS pay	22%	17%	61%
I feel like the Executive values NHS staff	7%	12%	81%
I worry about how I will balance my household budget if pay does not improve	87%	11%	2%
Given their strong words on valuing the NHS, I expect the Executive to improve our pay	75%	6%	19%
The Executive approach to NHS pay makes me question my future working in the NHS	66%	27%	7%
I feel angry at how the Executive treats NHS staff	90%	8%	2%

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I feel like NHS pay is an important issue for staff in my workplace	99%	1%	<1%
I would consider publicly protesting about the Executive's inaction on NHS pay	87%	11%	3%
I would consider taking industrial action if it was needed to force the Executive's position	86%	10%	4%
The Executive's approach to pay make no difference to how I feel about work	29%	24%	47%

However, as always, HSC staff are open minded and practical. When asked to consider the possibility of positive Northern Ireland Executive action on pay and reward, most staff responded positively. Staff report that a pay increase of £2,000 would address issues of value, morale, retention, and household finances.

<b>If the Northern Ireland Executive did agree to fund UNISON's pay claim for a £2,000 increase for all HSC staff what would that mean for you?</b>			
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
It would make a meaningful difference to me	97%	2%	1%
I would feel recognised and valued for the work that I do	94%	4%	2%
It would boost my morale	97%	3%	1%
I would feel assured that the Northern Ireland Executive was helping Health and Social Care	93%	4%	3%
It would make me feel more confident I can afford to stay in my current job	92%	7%	2%
I would spend more in my local shops and hospitality businesses	94%	5%	1%
I would help me balance my monthly budget	97%	3%	<1%
It would ease my financial worries	93%	7%	1%
I would feel confident continuing to work in health and social care	91%	8%	1%
I could repair or replace an essential domestic item like a washing machine or boiler	86%	13%	1%
It would make little or no difference	9%	10%	81%

## Specifics of the claim

Our claim is for a £2,000 consolidated increase to the value of every pay step point in the pay framework outlined in Annex 2 of NHS terms and conditions of service.

The increase in value should be reflected in adjustments to all national allowances and supplements.

In addition, we would expect this pay rise to be reflected in the pay, terms and conditions of other workers in health care, including workers in wholly owned subsidiaries, private contractors, and other staff not directly covered by national NHS pay, terms and conditions of service.

## Structure of NHS pay following a £2,000 consolidated increase to all pay points

	Entry		Full rate
Band 2	£20,005	2 years	£21,337
Band 3	£21,737	2 years	£23,142

	Entry		Full rate
Band 4	£23,892	3 years	£26,157

	Entry		Intermediate		Full rate
Band 5	£26,907	2 years	£28,970	2 years	£32,615

	Entry		Intermediate		Full rate
Band 6	£33,365	2 years	£35,176	3 years	£39,890
Band 7	£40,890	2 years	£42,894	3 years	£46,503

	Entry		Full rate
Band 8a	£47,753	5 years	£53,668
Band 8b	£55,168	5 years	£64,001
Band 8c	£65,751	5 years	£75,664
Band 8d	£77,914	5 years	£89,754
Band 9	£93,004	5 years	£106,927

