

**GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY
DIRECTORATE**



To: Tristen Kelso / Richard Graham
BY EMAIL

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COVID-19: FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES

I am writing in reply to your letter dated 8 April 2020 in respect of the application process for the NI General Dental Practitioner (GDP) Financial Support Scheme.

This scheme has been developed over a very short period of time, in exceptional circumstances, and our primary focus has been on putting arrangements in place to ensure that the April support payments can be made on time. As Michael O'Neill had advised in his email dated 7 April 2020 to Iain Hoy, it was not possible to provide the Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee (NIDPC)/ British Dental Association (BDA) with the opportunity to comment on the application form in advance, due to time pressures.

However, this was in the context that much of the detail had already been set out in my previous correspondence to GDPs of 20 March 2020 and 3 April 2020. I am sorry that you still have concerns in spite of the urgent change that was made to the abatement factor for capitation payments in response to the issue you raised on 7 April 2020. I am happy to report that there has been a good response in respect of the number of applications to the scheme, reflecting the importance of the support to GDPs.

The input and insight of the profession is important in the development of dental policy with meaningful contributions to be sought from the NIDPC/BDA as the scheme develops and as more information becomes available. Now that the scheme has been initiated, there would be expected to be greater scope to consult in advance with the NIDPC/BDA in respect of subsequent changes and clarifications to the scheme. In particular, around payments to

certain categories of GDP whose average monthly payments in 2019-20 are not stable or are not considered to be a reasonably proxy for the payments they would have expected to receive in 2020-21, in the absence of the pandemic. The Department will then make a decision fully informed by the views of the NIDPC/BDA. I want to assure you that we are, and have been, committed to the spirit of the scheme throughout, which is to support the General Dental Service during an exceptionally difficult time.

To this end, a conference call is to be arranged with you in the near future. Michael Donaldson will host on the HSCB conferencing facilities and will be in touch with further details as soon as possible.

Yours Sincerely

Paul Montgomery

**PAUL MONTGOMERY
DIRECTOR OF GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY**

cc: Michael Donaldson, Acting Chief Dental Officer