

Thursday, 03 September 2020

To: Mr Robin Swann MLA
Minister
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT4 3SQ

Re. DDRB/CDS/Private dentistry

Dear Minister

DDRB 2020/21

Following on from previous correspondence with you and your officials on this issue, I note that as of yesterday, a Public Sector Pay Policy has now been set. I would be grateful if you can provide us with an update on anticipated timescales for a determination to be made in relation to a pay uplift for dentists, now that a pay policy is in place, and following the publication of the 48th DDRB Report in July which recommended a pay uplift of 2.8%.

We note in its 48th Report, the Review Body shared the view that, *'the delays to the pay award process in Northern Ireland continues to be unacceptable'*. Moreover, they recognised that delayed uplifts, *'undermines the credibility of the pay determination process amongst the remit group, and is likely to have a negative impact on morale'*. You will be aware that we have been pressing for more timely pay uplifts to be applied over recent years.

We welcome recent assurances you have given to endeavour to expedite this process. Now that the pay remit is in place, we would urge you to do everything in your power to make good on that commitment, particularly at this extremely difficult time for dental practitioners.

CDS

It concerns us that, to date, there is still no clarity on the introduction of a temporary rate for additional hours worked by CDS dentists during the COVID period. We understand that this issue currently sits with Department of Finance.

As with DDRB, the nature of resolving pay issues here is unnecessarily convoluted, detached and ultimately damaging to morale. To date, I have had no response to my email to Chris Wilkinson of 27th August requesting an update on this issue for the Northern Ireland Salaried Dentists Committee in advance of its meeting scheduled for 8th September.

We would once again ask for your intervention to press for a resolution to this issue.

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Private dentistry

We thank you for previously writing to your Ministerial colleague Diane Dodds, Minister for the Economy on behalf of Private dentistry, and reference to a 'Business Support Programme'.

Can you provide us with an update on conversations that have subsequently taken place between DoH and DfE in relation to additional support for private dentistry, and where this key issue now sits.

In emphasising the important of additional support for mixed/private dentistry, we note the recent work carried out by Jason Wong, Office of Chief Dental Officer (OCDO) in England, and the publication of the *Investigation into the resilience of mixed NHS/Private practices following the first wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

While England focused, this report is relevant to Northern Ireland. It acknowledges the particular challenges facing mixed/mainly private practices, that practices with a majority of revenue from private dental care are at greater risk having not benefitted relatively from continuing NHS payments since April 2020 -which is the essence of the case for additional support measures from the NI Executive. It also asserts that the risk will need to be managed with national level backing for the dental sector as broader COVID-19 support measures are withdrawn.

We commend to you the recommendations contained in the Report, including: business rates relief to apply to all dental practices; an extension of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for the dental sector, and eligibility for other grant funding for the dental sector.

I would urge you to continue your efforts in making the case to NI Executive colleagues for an additional support package for dentistry, and the clear public interest in doing so.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely



Tristen Kelso
Director, BDA Northern Ireland