Re. Statement of Dental Remuneration 2020/21

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 20 January advising the Department’s acceptance of a 2.8% uplift to fees and allowances for GDPs for 2020/21, as per the recommendations of the 48th DDRB Report. We also note the decision to retain RPI for this year, and not to move to CPI in acknowledgement of the financial pressures in general practice.

In response, we acknowledge that DoH has moved to follow the DDRB recommendation for 20/21, plus an additional small gesture on the inflationary index. We trust the backpay owing to April 2020 will indeed be expedited as speedily as possible following your conversations with BSO colleagues.

It remains a concern that applying the uplift in Northern Ireland is still taking considerably longer than in all other parts of the UK, despite some progress made on last year. Indeed, confirmation for 20/21 is being received as BDA are finalising our written evidence for the 21/22 round. Therefore, we would repeat our ask that efforts are made across government to be in a position to respond to pay uplifts within three months of the DDRB report being published in early Summer.

Despite this year’s modest uplift, significant and fundamental challenges exist with the GDS financial model that pre-date COVID, but have been exacerbated, and brought to light in stark terms by the pandemic. While we warned some time ago the significant pressures being faced in general practice in our ‘Sustainability paper’, including the need to reinstate commitment payments, quite simply Health Service dentistry is no longer a financially viable proposition in its own right.

We appeal to DoH for redoubled efforts to:
a) make up the very significant real terms reduction in Health Service earnings over much of the past decade -as a result of direct cuts including commitment payments, and the cumulative impact of years of below-inflation uplifts /nil uplifts at a time of significantly rising costs;

b) ensure Health Service dentistry in the GDS can not only survive -but thrive -in the COVID recovery period.

Combined with the worrying financial outlook, it particularly concerns us that morale within the general dental profession has gone from very low, to virtual collapse over the past year.

Quite simply, practitioners are extremely worried at the bleak financial outlook they see for the GDS going forward.

It is in this context then, that the collaborative work of the GDS Turnover Group that has been examining GDP earnings trend data becomes all the more crucial. While FSS funding has been and remains a vital lifeline in keeping the GDS from immediate financial collapse, more than ever there is a compelling case for additional government support to help health service dentistry be a sustainable proposition in the years ahead.

We look forward to working with you in progressing these critical issues in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours sincerely

Tristen Kelso
Director, BDA Northern Ireland