Re. Statement of Dental Remuneration 2020/21 & DDRB recommendations 2021/22

Dear Michael,

We note the recent publication of the Statement of Dental Remuneration 2020-21 and associated MDS 745. Whilst the MDS sets out the changes to the listed determinations, GDPs are yet to receive written confirmation that the 2.58% uplift will be applied to FSS payments in the same manner, to be backdated to 1 April 2020.

With FSS still forming a major component of GDP support it is imperative that clarity is provided, and a communication is issued to GDPs as soon as possible confirming the 2.58% uplift to the FSS and how this will apply, including the process for backpay monies to be paid and information included on the schedule.

We want to ensure practitioners have all the information and tools they need to ensure a smooth transition to the 2020-21 scale of fees and all the associated practice management, software and reporting elements that exist alongside that.

We also note that within the 2020-21 SDR under ‘Claim for allowance’ Number 5 Item 3 that it is stated, ‘Only 3 on-line session may be claimed per year (April – March).’ Based on previous conversations with your DoH colleagues we are of the understanding that, given the difficulties in attending in-person CPD sessions, up to 6 on-line sessions may be claimed for the period listed. Can you provide written confirmation that this is the case, providing further certainty for practitioners at this time.

You will also be aware that the Doctors and Dentists pay review body (DDRB) recently made its recommendations for a 3% pay uplift for 2021-22, as contained in the 49th DDRB report. We would urge the Department to provide the profession with clarity on the 21-22 pay offer to apply to
Northern Ireland, including engagement with us on the expenses component at the earliest opportunity.

As highlighted in our January letter earlier this year it remains a significant concern that applying the uplift in Northern Ireland takes considerably longer than in all other parts of the UK.

Northern Ireland continues to remain conspicuously silent where both England and Wales have formally responded, and Scotland are on course to do so shortly. Indeed, this year it was mere days that separated the issuing of the 2020-21 SDR and the 2021-22 DDRB report recommendations, despite the Department’s acceptance of a 2.8% net increase to fees and allowances for GDPs for 2020-21 on 20 January this year.

Therefore, we would repeat our continued ask that efforts are redoubled across Executive departments to be able to respond to the pay award process within three months of the DDRB report being published. Despite the 2020-21 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.

It is in this context then, that the collaborative work of the GDS Rebuilding Stakeholder Group becomes 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 need to ensure that health service dentistry is a sustainable and attractive practitioner proposition in the years ahead.

We look forward to hearing from you in relation to progressing these important issues in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours sincerely

Richard Graham
Chair, NI Dental Practice Committee