



14th July 2023

Mr Peter May
Permanent Secretary, Department of Health
SENT BY EMAIL

Dear Peter

As Chair of the BDA Review Body Evidence Committee (RBEC), I am writing to seek clarification on the situation in Northern Ireland, following the Prime Minister's public indication to accept the DDRB's recommendation of a 6% pay rise for doctors and dentists for 2023-24.

As Westminster has accepted 6% for doctors and dentists in England, we are seeking urgent clarification regarding the situation in Northern Ireland.

You will of course recall the open letter sent in May by the chairs of our hospital, community and general dental practice committees to share our grave concerns in respect of the budgetary outlook for 2023/24, and the implications any further cuts could have on the dental system, on patient care and on the dental profession.

If, as proposed by the budget, that the DDRB's recommended pay rise for the UK is not affordable in Northern Ireland, it goes without saying that such a growing pay gap will have untold detrimental effects on both dentists and patients. Even as it stands, the 6% increase is effectively a pay cut given that CPI inflation stands at 8.7%.

As proposed in the health budget for NI, additional in-year funding will in effect not be available for pay uplifts here, rather it will be prioritised to settle the £297m debt. NI already has a shameful track record of delivering late pay uplifts. The possibility of no uplift would have a devastating impact on recruitment and retention and the financial sustainability of practices. In hospitals, Dental Core Trainees (DCT) already have a pay gap of up to 25% compared to other UK nations.

For struggling general dentistry practices, to not have the pay uplift translated onto Item of Service fees as in previous years, will be a further blow in addition to the end of the RSS 10% uplift, inflation and rising staff costs – further impacting the delivery of health service dentistry, access issues and health inequalities.

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While we welcomed the opportunity to meet with you last month, and had a frank and fair discussion about the challenges facing dentistry, we were already concerned about the harsh reality of no pay uplift for 2023-24 – across all services.

We now need to know – as a matter of urgency – where we stand in respect of a pay uplift for our members in 2023-24 – given the ‘affordability’ issue facing the Department.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Peter Crooks'. The signature is written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a long, thin horizontal line that extends to the right.

Peter Crooks
Chair - RBEC