

Public sector pay and the NHS

The government on 25th November announced a pay pause for the public sector for 2021-22, excluding the NHS. The eight Pay review Boards that make independent recommendations on pay for almost half of the 5.5m workers in the public sector will be guided by this Ministerial policy. The thinking was influenced by the hit to earnings experienced by large sections of the private sector from lockdowns and closures, the cost bulge incurred by the public sector to offset some of the pandemic damage, and the fact that at April 2020 median weekly earnings were at £647 in the public sector compared to £567 in the private sector. The skill, training and ages of public sector employees are not the same as the private sector average which partly explains this divergence. The government said the lowest paid should be exempted from the freeze and get some rise. Local government will need to make its own judgement about what is appropriate and affordable for their own staff.

Some are writing in to say there should be a higher rise for NHS workers than the 1% the government is suggesting as the uplift for the various NHS pay rates. I agree that those NHS staff who responded with so much energy and dedication to the demands of treating CV 19 and handling the dangers of the pandemic deserve more than the nation's thanks and applause at a time of general pay restraint. The right way to resolve this is for the Pay review Bodies for the NHS and for doctors to review the evidence. The Unions are putting in submissions for higher rises than the government has suggested for the Pay review bodies to consider.

The Pay Review Bodies provide independent advice based on a fuller understanding of current pay, the rewards for different categories of staff and the national context of pay for comparable activities. They will know the details of the junior doctor's four year settlement in 2019. They will have before them the system of increments for experience that many health staff can enjoy, and the general context of promotion and training opportunities. NHS pay for any individual year on year is not just reliant on a percentage increase in the basic rates. I wish them well in coming to a good judgement on this difficult question. Whilst the government does not have to accept a Pay Body's recommendations I would expect this government to give very serious consideration to the conclusions of these Pay reviews, given their sensitivity and the public mood. Anyone who feels strongly about this issue can of course write in to the Review Body if they think they have something useful to assist them in coming to their conclusion.