



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

From Helen Whately MP  
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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP  
By email to: [george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk)

21 June 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 22 November to Matt Hancock about UNISON's *No Return to Normal* campaign. I apologise for the delay in replying, which has been caused by an unprecedented volume of correspondence throughout the pandemic.

I am incredibly grateful to all NHS staff who have stepped up throughout this pandemic. I understand the frustration and stress staff are experiencing and I am working to ensure they have the support that they need.

We have sought to reach multi-year pay and contract reform agreements with trades unions across the NHS workforce. It is important that the overall pay package recognises the hard work of staff, while allowing us to increase the NHS workforce.

In 2018, we announced multi-year pay and contract reform for NHS staff employed on the Agenda for Change (AfC) contract. This was agreed in partnership with NHS trades unions, including UNISON, and delivers year-on-year pay increases along with wider contract reforms over three years from 2018/19 to 2020/21.

By giving an uplift to NHS pay when uplifts in the wider public sector have been paused, the Government is acknowledging the extraordinary work of NHS staff, who have gone above and beyond throughout the pandemic. However, in doing so we must also acknowledge the huge strain that the pandemic has put on public finances.

It is important to stress that the affordability consideration set out in our written evidence does not prejudge the role of the pay review bodies (PRBs), which are independent advisory bodies made up of industry experts. Their recommendations are based on a comprehensive assessment of evidence from a range of stakeholders, including trades unions. They consider a wide range of factors, including the cost of living, recruitment and retention, affordability and value for money for the taxpayer, and wider public and private sector earnings.

We expect the independent PRBs to report shortly and we will then take time to carefully consider their recommendations before responding.

The range of benefits available to nurses and other NHS staff exceeds that available in many other sectors, and the value of the total reward package has been increasing in recent years. The total reward offer is not just about pay; it includes access to the NHS Pension Scheme, which is one of the best available, a generous annual leave allowance and many additional benefits, such as support for learning and development.

We will continue to work to make sure NHS staff have all the support they need and a better overall experience at work, both now and in the longer term. In July we published the NHS People Plan at [www.england.nhs.uk/ournhspeople](http://www.england.nhs.uk/ournhspeople), and NHS England and NHS Improvement is now working with NHS trusts to put it into practice.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', with a large, sweeping underline.

**HELEN WHATELY**