


NHS pay deal – is this the end of the dispute?

29 March 2023  Gemma Lynch

Last Thursday, it was announced that the government and Agenda for Change unions have reached a deal in respect of the current dispute over NHS pay (although this does not include junior doctors who have separate pay frameworks).

The key features of the deal are:

- A 5% consolidated pay increase for 2023-24, which is flat across all except Band 1 and the bottom point of Band 2, which will receive 10.4%.
- A one-off non-consolidated award equal to 2% of salary for 2022-23.
- An additional one-off, non-consolidated payment, “NHS backlog bonus” (the percentage of which varies according to pay band).

In addition to the deal on pay the government also committed to:

- Working with employers and unions to identify ways to tackle and reduce violence against NHS staff.
- Make the suspension of pension abatement rules introduced during the pandemic, permanent.
- Introduce measures to ensure safer staffing levels in hospitals.
- Writing to the RCN about improving recruitment, retention and professional development for nursing staff including consideration of a separate pay spine for nursing staff exclusively.

The offer applies to all directly employed NHS staff on Agenda for Change contracts. Unions will now need to consult with their members, who will be asked to vote to see if they agree to accept the offer (which is expected to take approximately three to four weeks). However, in the meantime unions have agreed to pause any further industrial action, pending the outcome of the ballot.

All Agenda for Change unions including the Royal College of Nursing and Unison are recommending acceptance of the pay offer, except Unite, who will instead present it neutrally to their members.

Whilst the news of a pay deal will no doubt be welcomed by employers who have been dealing with the impact of strike action, it has been reported in the press that a cross-union group, “NHS Workers Say No” have commenced a campaign encouraging members to reject the pay deal. The group have sent out leaflets and created WhatsApp networks aimed at persuading members to vote against the deal.

Given that the deal is a considerable way off the 5% above inflation rise originally asked for by the unions, rejection by members could be a real possibility. This may be further compounded by the fact that RMT members at Network Rail accepted a deal which amounted to an uplift on salaries of between 14.4% for the lowest paid grades to 9.2% for the highest paid (see [HERE](#)).

Key contact

Gemma Lynch
Legal Director



Gemma.Lynch@brownejacobson.com

+44 (0)330 045 2631

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