

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
Minister
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
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Belfast
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By email: Private.Office@health-ni.gov.uk

21st May 2025

Re. Seeking urgent clarity

Dear Minister

This letter follows earlier correspondence to you from Ciara Gallagher, Chair of NIDPC dated 12th March, to which we have still not yet received a response.

It is deeply concerning that we are now well into the 25/26 financial year, and general dental practitioners still have no clarity on what the financial arrangements will be for Health Service work undertaken.

We appeal for maximum transparency, clarity and tangible support from you at this time of immense challenge for dentists as a result of a failing contract.

Specifically:

- 1. GDS 25/26 Investment proposals:** when do you expect to be in a position to share with us the outcome of this process, namely what additional package of funding measures are being put in place during this financial year aimed at stabilising General Dental Services in the short-term?
Among the range of supports being considered, there is growing consternation within the profession that the '30% enhancement' to fees is now a misnomer since those codes have been exempted from subsequent DDRB uplifts, at odds with treatment of all other codes. This must be redressed.
- 2. National Insurance mitigations:** when will we be consulted on the proposed methodology being considered for allocation of the £2.5m to GDS, and how quickly can supports be rolled out?
- 3. Cost of Service Review:** what assurances can you give that this important work will be expedited and treated with the highest level of urgency by officials?

On governance and co-production arrangements, when will our representatives have the opportunity to review the draft tender specification? When will an Expert group be established to regularly review and oversee progress as this work gets underway?

4. DDRB 25/26: we note the DDRB 2025 Report was submitted to all four UK Governments on 29th April. When do you anticipate being in a position to honour your previous commitment that pay awards will be regarded as a priority *at the outset* of the process, and not at the end of the financial year?

Moreover, we still await an MDS being issued for the DDRB 24/25 uplift, and have received early concerns that arrears payments may have been applied inaccurately.

Due to contract failure, the principle of universal access to dental services for all has been deeply eroded, and even now may be irretrievable as the exodus of practitioners away from Health Service dentistry is well and truly underway.

Practices need enhanced bridging support until payment reform and a rebasing of fees happens following Cost of Service review. They need this to unlock GDS activity, to maximise patient outcomes and to safeguard practice sustainability.

If an alternative scenario plays out whereby some within the Department who view the GDS budget as easy pickings to offset other pressures, then they must be answerable when access to Health Service dentistry here collapses completely, and much more costly emergency arrangements have to be put in place.

I look forward to your early reply.

Yours sincerely



Tristen Kelso
Northern Ireland Director

Cc: Mike Farrar, Interim Permanent Secretary
Caroline Lappin, Chief Dental Officer
James Murphy, GDOS

Encs. Correspondence from Ciara Gallagher, Chair NIDPC, 12th March