Dear Mr Hancock,

You will be aware of the disappointment within the dental profession with the failure to honour this year’s recommendations of the DDRB. This year’s staged pay award, has reinforced the profession’s view that the DDRB is no longer fulfilling its original purpose and needs to be reformed.

The DDRB was originally created following the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Doctors’ and Dentists’ Remuneration in 1960. The commission stated that such a body was necessary in order to give the medical and dental professions “some assurance that their standards of living will not be depressed by arbitrary Government action”, as well as achieving “the settlement of remuneration without public dispute”. Over time we believe the DDRB has been forced to depart from these aspirations and it now is in danger of losing the confidence of the profession.

Today, the BDA has issued a joint statement with the BMA calling for fundamental reform of the pay review process for dentists and doctors, on the basis of the following principles:

1. Restitution of the DDRB’s independence and return to its original purpose.

2. Revision of its terms of reference to narrow the DDRB’s focus purely on pay uplifts rather than making recommendations on wider contractual matters.

3. Clear timetables for submission of evidence and publications of the report, and an undertaking that government(s) must not fetter the parameters of the DDRB’s recommendations.

4. Re-establishment of the undertaking that government(s) will respect and implement the DDRB’s recommendations.

In recent years NHS dentists’ pay has been eroded at a pace unprecedented in other parts of the public sector, with average taxable incomes of both practice owners and dental associates down by 35 per cent in real terms over the last decade. Costs facing individual practitioners for regulatory compliance and professional registration have gone up by 1,000 per cent in the same period. While dentists understand the pressures on public budgets and have done their best to do more with less, this long-term erosion of their incomes threatens the sustainability of NHS dentistry. We see increasing problems with recruitment and retention of NHS dentists in many parts of the country, and data released last month shows that morale amongst NHS
dentists is at an all-time low, with nearly two-thirds of practice owners and well over half of dental associates admitting that they often think about leaving the profession.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Mick Armstrong

Chair, British Dental Association