

Steve Brine MP  
Chair – Health and Social Care Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

19 January 2023

Dear Mr Brine

**Re: Pay Review Body participation and reform**

I am writing to you following your recent comment that you hoped to hold an evidence session with the Chair of the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB) in the near future. We welcome the Committee's interest in potential reforms, and your probing questions on the matter to the Prime Minister at the December Liaison Committee meeting.

I wanted to set out GMB's position, ahead of any future evidence session the Committee may want to hold. Our senior lay members decided in December that we could not continue to participate in the NHSPRB in good faith. Ministers have repeatedly attacked our members for allegedly failing to 'respect' the claimed independence of the NHSPRB.

Our view is that the NHSPRB is no longer sufficiently independent of Government, and our continued participation in the process would lend legitimacy to a process that has been exploited to drive down our members' standard of living. We have therefore suspended our participation until substantial reforms are made.

In taking this step, it is important to consider the post-2010 history of the PRB, alongside the 2022/23 and 2023/24 pay rounds:

- Every NHSPRB recommendation since 2010 has been below RPI Inflation;
- In contradiction to the current rhetoric of non-interference in the Review Body process, Ministers dismissed even the modest 1 per cent consolidated recommendation in 2014/15, and subsequently entered into direct negotiations in 2018;
- Average NHS pay has fallen by 17 per cent in real terms since 2010;

- In recent years, the process has been seriously delayed as a result of late remit letters and Government evidence submissions. This has only reinforced the extent in our members' minds to which Ministers control the Pay Review Body process and outcomes.

In GMB's last submission, we warned that 'the reluctance of the Pay Review Body to challenge Ministers has damaged its standing in the eyes of our members.' This loss of faith has only accelerated as Ministers hide behind the Pay Review Body as they attempt to justify a further sharp cut in the value of our members' wages.

We can no longer take part in a process that has been subverted from its original purpose, and which is being used to defend an unprecedented attack on NHS workers' pay.

The functioning of the NHSPRB has substantially changed since its creation and that of its predecessors, including most immediately the Review Body for Nursing and Other Health Professions. The interaction between Ministers and the NHSPRB has proved inadequate to meeting recruitment and retention challenges (as evidenced by 133,500 vacancies in England alone), and it has not delivered pay rates that NHS workers can consider fair.

We would welcome the Committee's further examination of options for NHSPRB reform. In our view, potential options for reforming the process could include and are not limited to:

- Revisions to the Review Body's remit to place a stronger emphasis on recruitment and retention challenges, and making it clear that the NHSPRB has the right to challenge central pay policies where they are not delivering for staff and patients;
- A tripartite system for appointing the NHSPRB's members, under which the public sector funders, NHS trade unions, and NHS employers are represented;
- Standardised and reformed remits and timetables, which are laid before Parliament and subject to scrutiny – ending the potential for the remit to be altered unilaterally each year by Ministers.

I was glad to have the opportunity to represent GMB's members' views at the Committee's oral evidence session in December, and we hope to be able to contribute further as the ambulance delays and strikes inquiries develops.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Harrison', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Rachel Harrison**  
**National Officer**