

Dear Chair,

Date

12.05.23

Industrial action in the NHS

For the attention of

Steve Brine MP

Chair, Health and Social Care

Select Committee

Many thanks for the invitation to give evidence to your committee on 9 May. I was grateful to have the opportunity to share the views and experiences of employers across the NHS and I do hope committee members felt this provided helpful insight.

I am writing as there are two things I wanted to follow up on to bring to the committee's attention.

The first is to clarify something for the record. In the second panel session on 9 May, the General Secretary of the RCN said that the first panel had questioned the effectiveness of Agenda for Change. However, I didn't speak to this question and NHS Employers believes that it is possible to improve and evolve Agenda for Change to meet the needs of the NHS, its staff and patients. This was done in 2018 when government investment allowed NHS Employers to agree an increase in starting salaries for our key graduate entry pay band (Band 5), and again in the 2023 pay offer when the government agreed to increase pay for the lowest pay point of the framework.

There is no doubt that changes to Agenda for Change are needed. In particular, NHS Employers would like to see the framework improve pay progression for all graduate entry roles (across all professions, the largest of which is nursing), and improve the incentives for promotion for these roles, particularly to support enhanced clinical practice.

The second point is around the most recent nursing strikes which I did not have an opportunity to speak to during the session.

We spoke about the importance of having agreed derogations in earlier strike action. Employers across the NHS were very disappointed that in the action from 30 April to 2 May, there was no set derogations for the most acute services.

While we are grateful that the RCN eventually agreed to some exemptions around urgent and intensive care, the absence of formal derogations at a national level meant that over the May Bank Holiday, local flexibilities had to be sought close to or on the day of the strike. This added to the significant task of preparing for strike action within NHS Trusts and employers across the NHS were very worried about the impact on patients and staff remaining at work on strike days.

Similarly, the no derogations approach of the BMA Junior Doctors Council we have seen in their strike action to date also assumes that their vital work will be covered by other more senior doctors and staff which may way not be the case.

In earlier incidences of industrial action, the national derogations were a significant help to NHS leaders as they planned for strike action and put plans in place to minimise any potential impact on patients. NHS Employers sincerely hopes that in the case of any future strikes, this earlier approach can be resumed.

Yours sincerely,



Daniel Mortimer
Chief Executive, NHS Employers