



Joint NHS union reaction to RCN pay breach

The NHS unions are deeply disappointed that the RCN has taken the decision to back out of the collective position on NHS pay agreed by everyone in January and confirmed in a formal vote of the Staff Council staff side.

All 14 unions signed up to the collective call for an urgent NHS retention package, with an inflation-busting pay rise at its heart. This package, which aims to help the NHS hold on to increasingly disillusioned staff, formed the basis of the joint union evidence submitted to the NHS pay review body last month.

The submission set the key conditions by which unions would judge any pay outcome. Crucially, the retention package was designed to generate a 'unity position' after the multi-claim approach taken in the previous pay round.

All the unions had concluded that a shared position was an essential element of the campaigning power necessary to achieve a decent outcome on pay this year. The RCN had been strong advocates for a collective position and voted in support when the staff council decision was originally taken.

Sadly, the RCN has now breached this agreement by announcing a separate position for 2022-23, preventing Agenda for Change staff from speaking with one voice on pay this year.

It was a conscious decision of the joint unions not to put a number against an expected pay rise. Many unions had set figures last year when a negotiated approach was a real prospect and after months of government silence in response to calls to negotiate an 'early and significant' pay rise for health workers.

Even in that relatively stable economic situation, inflation jumped four percentage points between submitting evidence and receiving the eventual outcome. Given the current economic and political volatility, unions considered it risky to set a rate when forecasts differ wildly about how high living costs will rise throughout the whole pay year.

The retention package set out by the joint unions is an ambitious and credible proposal to halt the exodus of staff from the health service. In addition to calling for an inflation-busting pay rise, we want to see action to ensure staff are banded properly for the jobs they do and get fair reward for the additional hours they regularly work.

The unions also want to see staff protected from burnout and for recruitment and retention premia to be applied to the roles suffering the most shortages. The joint staff side is calling for this package of measures to be placed alongside a wage rise that absorbs costs and starts a programme of pay restoration.

The pandemic has amplified the value and mutual respect health workers have for their colleagues and led to recognition that our members are all part of the same team. So, in approaching the 2022-23 pay round, unions were keen to have a joint position to enable the strong campaigning necessary to achieve a decent outcome.

Inevitably, the decision of the RCN to pull away from the collective position will prevent it from being part of joint campaign activity on pay this year.

The 13 other NHS unions remain resolute behind the joint position and have vowed to work together for the benefit of all NHS staff. This includes providing a strong voice for health workers in the TUC's cost of living crisis campaign. They all deeply regret that the RCN won't be able to make the anticipated contribution to the campaign in support of the retention package, but will look to work collegiately with that union wherever possible.

It is only through working together in unity that we will achieve the best for our members and all those that rely on the NHS.

NOTE:

The NHS Agenda for Change unions signing this statement are:

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| 1. The British Association of Occupational Therapists | 6. GMB |
| 2. The British Dietetic Association | 7. Managers in Partnership |
| 3. The British Orthoptists Society | 8. The Prison Officers Association |
| 4. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy | 9. The Royal College of Midwives |
| 5. The Federation of Clinical Scientists | 10. The Royal College of Podiatry |
| | 11. The Society of Radiographers |

- 12. UNISON
- 13. Unite the union

Together they represent hundreds of thousands of health staff in all non-medical roles across the NHS