

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



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Dear Colleagues

These have been a truly unprecedented two years. We have faced challenges and pressures like never before and we have all had to make some incredibly difficult changes and take deeply uncomfortable decisions.

I want to take this opportunity, not only as Health Minister but as a citizen of this country, to thank you all and to thank you sincerely.

Last November, I announced I would be implementing the 3% 2021/22 pay award that had been recommended by the NHS Pay Review Body. Whilst it was obviously better than the 1% increase that was previously speculated, I also said that if I could find funding to deliver a greater award I would do so.

Having spent the last number of weeks and months exploring what funding I could make available, and after engaging with Trade Union colleagues, I am very pleased to be able to announce a further in-year pay award for HSC staff.

The details are:

- An additional 1.5% non-consolidated pay uplift for AfC Bands 1-3.
- An additional 1% non-consolidated pay uplift in AfC Bands 4-7 and for F1 doctors.
- And an additional 0.5% non-consolidated pay uplift for all other directly employed HSC staff.

In total this additional pay award will represent a further investment of £25m into our healthcare workforce. It is utilising funding I have within my Department and therefore is being implemented without additional funding from Treasury for pay. Whilst there are some processes that must be completed and approvals that must be secured, I hope that the award will be administered as quickly as possible. Please be assured, however, that the payment will be backdated in full to April 1st 2021.

Although we are hopefully through the worst of the Omicron wave in terms of case numbers, I am acutely aware that pressures remain immense across our health service. So whilst the public narrative will likely soon shift towards the longed for lifting of restrictions, I am fully aware that the demands on hospital and community services are likely to remain intense for some weeks yet. Those pressures are being exacerbated further by Covid-related sickness levels which reflect the ongoing high levels of transmission across the community.

The blunt truth is that our health service would not be standing at all, were it not for the superhuman efforts of staff. I sincerely hope you are never placed in that position again.

Whilst this additional funding is, in part, an acknowledgement of the particular challenges you have faced, I'm very aware that there could never be enough to truly repay you for the sacrifices of the last two years. I have tried to devise a scheme that best utilised the funding I had available and one which was deliberately slightly more generous to our lower paid workers

I can promise you that I will continue to fight with all my energy for better funding for health and social care and better wages for staff. That's my heartfelt pledge for the remainder of my time as Minister and for whatever comes next for me.

We also have to look ahead to what needs to be done after the pandemic. That time will come and we need to be clear about the extent of the rebuilding work required for our health service. It can be compared realistically to the task of reconstructing a country's ravaged infrastructure after a long war.

Despite all the challenges and uncertainties, I remain confident about the future. That's because I know that we are blessed with an incredible workforce, who deliver compassionate care every single day and who have carried Northern Ireland through the last two years.

So thank you again for all that you continue to do and once again I'm incredibly proud to be your Minister.

Best regards,



Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health