

PE1808/C

UNISON submission of 8 October 2020

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. We are the largest union in NHS Scotland and across social care as well having members delivering public services across many other areas of Scottish life. We therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute to the committee's work.

UNISON members jobs are vital all of the time – it is unfortunate that it has taken a crisis of this magnitude for that to become apparent. We would agree with the remark made at committee that “The whole situation since March has brought out glaring gaps in remuneration”. We are of course fully supportive of the principle of the petition. UNISON members are engaged in delivering the key services that have kept the country running during the coronavirus. The willingness of workers across public services to adapt and shift priorities and roles to ensure vital functions for their communities were maintained was an exemplary response by an under resourced and undervalued workforce.

There is scope for a substantial pay increase across public services (not least as it is the most effective way of injecting economic demand into local economies). It is our intention to progress the case for better, fairer pay through the collective bargaining machinery in those sectors where that is possible. The Scottish Government submission to the committee rightly points to the variety of pay settlements which have been negotiated in recent years. These have indeed been welcome, but do not compensate for a decade of pay freezes or below inflation rises which have seen a decline in living standards for workers across public services.

To deal with some of the specifics mentioned in the petition.

In Local Government, councils need to honour their commitment to consolidate the Scottish Living Wage into their pay structures. Also some jobs require to be re-assessed via job evaluation due to the long term impact on job content of covid (Home care is the most obvious example).

We were pleased when the health secretary agreed to reopen the 2018 to Mar 21 pay settlement. We look forward to negotiations to ensure we get pay into the pockets of our hard-working, dedicated NHS workers ¹.

As regards pay in the NHS going forward we believe that more progress can and should be made in 2021. The fairest and most proportionate way that this can be done this year is by applying a flat rate increase across the NHS rather than by way

¹ <https://www.unison-scotland.org/unison-scotland-achieves-agreement-from-health-secretary-to-pay-rise-for-nhs-workers/>

of a percentage increase.² This means that more money goes into the pockets of the lowest paid staff who most need it. Consequently we are putting forward a claim for a flat rate uplift of £2000pa for all NHS staff.

Whilst a substantial increase in remuneration across public services is deserved. There is no sector where action on pay is more needed than in social care. As the committee noted in its original consideration of the petition, pay in this sector is low and conditions are often very poor. The Scottish Government has put provision for all care staff to receive the Scottish Living Wage, but application of this by employers has been patchy. Zero hour contracts and other insecure working practices abound, with accompanying poor terms and conditions. It has taken emergency legislation to ensure workers across the sector receive proper sick pay. It says much about how this, overwhelmingly female, workforce is considered that this measure was introduced, not to provide decency in employment, but as a public health measure.

There is an obvious way of providing a substantial increase in remuneration, for this hard pressed and poorly paid workforce. That is for a system of national sectoral collective bargaining to be put in place. This was proposed, with our support, as an amendment to the Coronavirus No2 Bill. Whilst the amendment was not approved we were heartened by the Scottish Government's support for the principle of sector wide collective bargaining³. We hope that moves toward this will be made by the Scottish Government and would welcome any parliamentary support to advance this issue.

² <https://www.unison-scotland.org/pay-claim/>

³ <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12649>