

**GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY  
DIRECTORATE**



To: All NI GDPs

Via Email

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**GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES: FINANCIAL SUPPORT 2021/22**

In March 2021, I wrote to you advising of the arrangements for financial support and PPE for General Dental Services (GDS) until the end of Quarter 1 2021/22. This reflected the significant impact the pandemic was continuing to have on the provision of these important services. Whilst we have collectively enjoyed the easing of some restrictions in recent months, it is clear that the adverse impact on GDS continues.

The purpose of this letter is primarily to provide you with an update on progress in relation to the continuation of financial support to the end of 2021/22 to address the continued impact on patient throughput and increased costs associated with Infection Prevention & Control.

**Financial Support Scheme & PPE**

My letter dated 24 March 2021 outlined the details of a top-up payment that was made to respond to issues around using the removal of the 20% abatement as a means of compensating GDS for increased PPE costs. Whilst this top-up payment addressed the issue from July 2020 until March 2021, it did not resolve the issue going forward; indeed the same inequitable funding of some practices will continue until a new arrangement is put in place.

In response, the Minister has already approved additional funding related to PPE for Q1 2020/21 and we are in ongoing discussions with the British Dental Association (BDA) in terms of how this is actioned. Discussions have been centred on using the

same top-up mechanism as before to address the issue and I will write to you as soon as possible advising of a final decision.

Discussions are also ongoing with the BDA on how to provide financial support for the rest of the financial year in a way that will reward and incentivise clinical activity of practices throughout Northern Ireland which, in turn, will benefit patients. I hope to be in position to write to you again in the coming weeks to advise of arrangements for the remainder of the year.

We receive regular reports on the lengths that many practices and GDPs are going to ensure that their patients are receiving the very best service possible, despite the obvious challenges the pandemic has presented. I would like to thank you and your oral health teams for your ongoing efforts.

The HSCB and Department however are also receiving increased correspondence from patients who are unable to see their dentist for some urgent and emergency treatment. These are issues we need to take into account as we consider the financial support arrangements going forward, to ensure that support is being provided as fairly as possible to those practices with the most activity. Discussions are also ongoing with the BDA in relation to this issue and the more immediate issue of financial support from July 2021.

Revisions to the FAQs related to the FSS can be found at the link below.

[GDS FSS FAQ V2.0 \(hscni.net\)](https://hscni.net)

### **Statement of Dental Remuneration**

I would like to apologise for the significant delay in relation to the implementation of the 2020/21 SDR uplift. This has primarily been as a result of needing to divert Departmental resources to address the financial support issues that have arisen in recent months as a result of the pandemic. However, particularly at this time, it will have caused additional uncertainty to practices.

I expect that the arrears due to GDPs from April 2020 - July 2021 will be paid in July.

### **HSC Staff Recognition Payment**

As you will be already aware, the Minister in January 2021 announced a £500 recognition payment for all Health and Social Care staff to show his appreciation for the commitment to work during the pandemic. Staff working in General Dental Service practices that provide a Health Social Care service, who meet the criteria of the scheme, will be eligible for the recognition payment. The Department has published a set of [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#) which provides more details on the scheme.

Work is currently ongoing to establish the best payment method and to ensure all eligible staff are included. The FAQs will also be updated as more details of the payment method are finalised. I would appreciate it if you could pass this information on to staff working in your practice so they are also fully informed about the scheme.

It is worth highlighting, that staff in different sectors may receive their payment in different months but please be assured if another sector receives their payment earlier than GDS this does not mean that you have been missed. It is likely that directly employed HSC staff will receive their recognition payment next month but this is solely due to the fact that their payment method is quicker to implement as all individuals and their working patterns are already known to the Trusts.

Finally, in light of the ongoing work needed to sustain general dentistry now and in the months and years to come, the Minister has asked me to establish a GDS Rebuilding Stakeholder Group. This group will involve representatives from the BDA and key officials from the Department and Board and will help formalise some of the engagement arrangements already in place. The purpose of the group will be to help address the ongoing and immediate issues facing the industry, but also looking ahead and helping to inform decision-making around the medium and longer term issues the pandemic has caused.

I trust you find this update helpful and thank you for your ongoing commitment and support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael O'Neill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being larger and more prominent than the last name "O'Neill".

Michael O'Neill  
**Acting Director of General Healthcare Policy**