Negotiations to refresh the Agenda for Change agreement

The Agenda for Change (AfC) review is an opportunity to update and maintain the collective agreement for NHS staff.

The commitment to review arose from the resolution of the 2014/15 pay dispute in England. The remit of the talks enables involvement from all four UK countries. The talks are overseen by the NHS Staff Council, with the NHS Staff Council Executive leading the technical work and negotiations.

The initial focus of discussions has been on pay structure and progression. Employers and trade unions share a common aim in wishing to make the structure simpler so that it works better for staff and the service without disturbing the underpinning job evaluation scheme and bands. Both sides also recognise the need to re-structure the bottom of the current AfC pay scales to accommodate the new legal minimum pay rates that are likely to impact on the NHS from 2018/19. The parties are looking at how to revise the pay structure in a way which would limit overlaps between pay bands, reduce the number of points between the top and bottom points in each band and create more even spacing between pay points. The group is examining the cost implications of this, and different options for transition to such a structure.

Achieving jointly agreed changes to the AfC pay structure and progression arrangements within the 1 per cent annual increase determined by the government’s public sector pay policy is a difficult challenge. For agreement to be reached, employers will want to see consideration of wider terms and conditions issues, and trade unions will seek commitments to maintain the value of the overall AfC package, including unsocial hours payments. There are also significant capacity challenges in undertaking this work at the same time as reforming medical pay and contracts. However, both sides recognise the need to address capacity, supply and productivity challenges within the NHS workforce to support the delivery of high quality patient care, as well as the importance of maintaining AfC in recruiting, retaining and motivating NHS staff. Despite the challenges the NHS Staff Council is keen to explore the possibilities for positive change and agreement.