



The NHS Pay Review Body – why GMB is suspending its participation

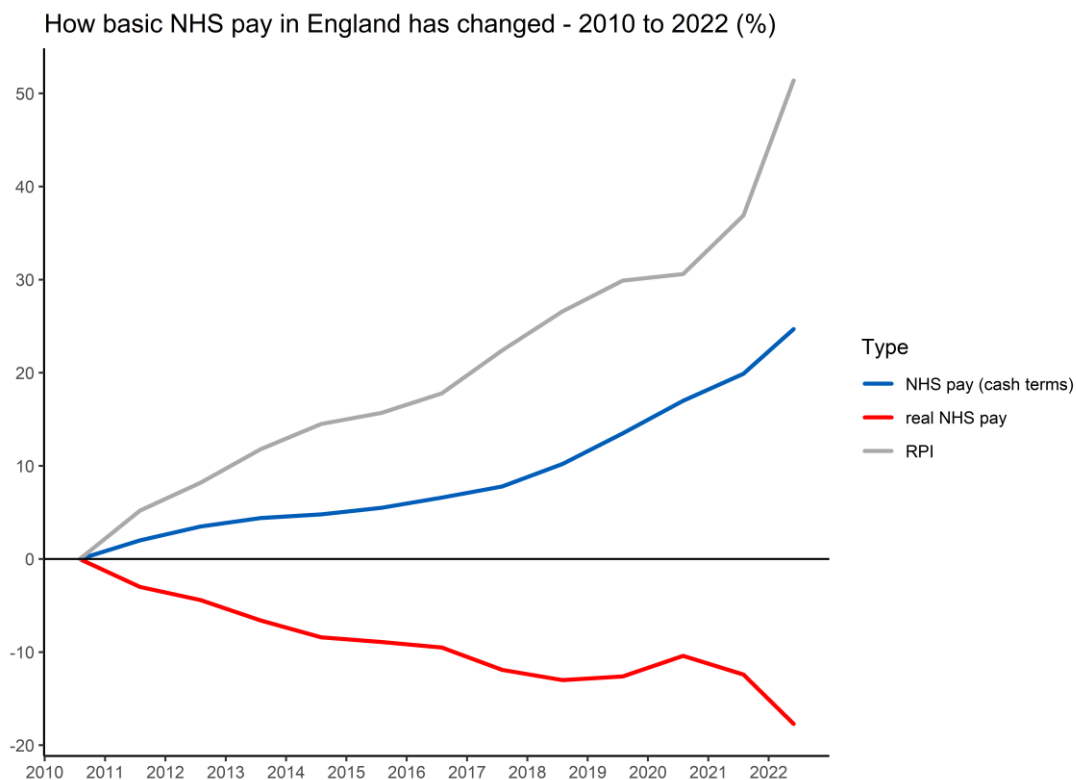
GMB's National NHS and Ambulance Committees have decided that we will not participate in the NHS Pay Review Body process this year, and that our efforts will instead be directed towards campaigning for reform. We are writing to you to explain why.

Ministers' defence of the pay policy that is driving NHS workers to the picket lines starts – and sometimes ends – with the 'independence' of the Pay Review Body. But GMB's members have lost faith in the process, which is why we are suspending our participation.

On 12 December, Health Minister Will Quince [said](#) that 'it was important that both sides respect that independent body.' In reality, the Government has substantial power over the Pay Review Bodies which it has asserted to the full since 2010 – with devastating consequences for NHS workers.

NHS pay since 2010

Average NHS earnings have fallen by more than **17%** since in real terms since 2010. Average NHS earnings increased by more than inflation in just two years out of the last twelve years.



Source: GMB analysis of NHS digital and ONS data

The consequences for patient care are severe. The NHS in England has [133,500 vacancies](#). 30,000 operations were [cancelled due to staff shortages last year](#). Staff turnover [rose by almost 19%](#) in 2021/22 compared to the year before.

The Pay Review Body has become a mechanism for enforcing – [in the words](#) of Nicholas Macpherson, the Treasury’s Permanent Secretary between 2005 and 2016 – a ‘public finance strategy [that] rests on imposing the biggest real wage cuts in living memory.’

To understand how this has happened, we need to look at the way the Pay Review Body is structured – and how it needs to change.

The PRB and the Government

Ministers often talk about the ‘independence’ of the Pay Review Bodies. They rarely talk about the limits on that independence that are imposed by Government.

As part of the Pay Review Body process, Ministers and Government:

- Set the Review Bodies’ [annual remits](#) – including the financial limits within which they are expected to work
- [Appoint and remunerate](#) the Pay Review Body’s members – unions have no role in this process, and appointments from an employer background outnumber those from a workforce background
- Provides the Pay Review Bodies’ secretariat – the Office of Manpower Economics is a non-departmental public body that is funded by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Department.

The Treasury has made it [clear in the past](#) that it would not fund pay increases above set limits – which were between 0% and 1% from 2010 to 2018. The Pay Review Bodies showed limited willingness to challenge wider Government pay policy even as workers’ real-terms losses mounted.

Nor is it true that Ministers themselves have ‘respected’ the Pay Review Bodies recommendations. When Jeremy Hunt was Health Secretary, he [rejected](#) a recommendation for a consolidated 1% increase, on the grounds that it was ‘unaffordable.’ In recent years, Ministers have been consistently [late](#) in their submission of remit letters and evidence, leading to delays in payments.

Pay Review Body reform

In GMB’s last submission, we warned that ‘the reluctance of the Pay Review Body to challenge Ministers has damaged its standing in the eyes of our members.’ This loss of

faith has only accelerated as Ministers hide behind the Pay Review Body as they attempt to justify a further sharp cut in the value of our members' wages.

We can no longer take part in a process that has been subverted from its original purpose, and which is being used to defend an unprecedented attack on public sector workers' pay (including the approximately half of public sector workers who are not covered by a Pay Review Body).

Awareness of the flaws in the Pay Review Body system are growing. The Labour Party has [said](#) that it is open to 'looking at revising the remit of the public sector Pay Review Bodies to make sure our public services can recruit and retain the workers they need.' But Ministers continue to insult our members' intelligence by telling them to believe that experts have independently recommended that they endure twelve years of pay cuts.

GMB, as one of the NHS unions and the largest union in ambulance services, is suspending its participation in the Pay Review Body until substantial reforms are made.

Examples of potential reforms include:

- Putting the Pay Review Bodies on a statutory footing, with clearly defined timetables and responsibilities.
- Enhancing their remit and making it clear that Ministers pay policies should be challenged where they will lead to heightened recruitment and retention challenges.
- Establishing a genuinely independent appointments process, with representation for Government, unions, and employers.

We will be consulting our members about the exact changes that we want to push for over the year ahead.

The future

The credibility of the Pay Review Bodies is under greater strain than at any point in their fifty year history. Our members want to participate in a meaningful process, but the trust has been lost.

Ministers can choose to end this dispute if they urgently change their course, stop hiding behind the Pay Review Bodies, and enter into negotiations. Otherwise, they will only add to the workforce pressures that are leading to record patient care delays and driving NHS workers to the picket lines.