

25 November 2024

Stephen Boyle, Chari - NHS Pay Review Body,
Office of Manpower Economics
Level 3, Windsor House.
50 Victoria Street,
London
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Ref: British Dietetic Association (BDA) Pay Review Body Submission Document on NHS Pay 2024

Dear Mr Boyle,

1. Introduction

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) submits this evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB) in support of an above-inflation pay increase for dietitians. Representing over 11,000 dietitians across the UK, the BDA advocates for fair pay, improved working conditions, and recognition of dietitians' essential role within the NHS. Dietitians are qualified and regulated health professionals who provide evidence-based nutritional care, manage chronic diseases, and promote preventive health strategies. These roles are crucial in addressing the UK's growing healthcare challenges, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

Over the past decade, the BDA has consistently campaigned for improved pay and conditions for dietitians, recognising the increasing pressures they face as healthcare demands rise. Despite these efforts, dietitians have experienced stagnant wages, exacerbated by inflation and rising living costs, which have eroded the value of their pay. This submission builds on the BDA's historical commitment and emphasises the need for urgent action to secure fair compensation for dietitians in the NHS.

2. The Economic Impact of Investing in Dietitians

Investing in NHS staff is not a short-term cost but a strategic, long-term investment. Research from the Health Foundation shows that every £1 invested in NHS staff generates £4 in broader economic benefits. Dietitians are central to preventive healthcare strategies, particularly in managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and obesity. By delivering targeted interventions, dietitians improve patient outcomes and reduce hospital admissions, leading to long-term cost savings for the NHS.

For example, data from regional initiatives in England demonstrate that dietitian-led diabetes management programmes have reduced hospitalisations by 15% over three years, resulting in savings of over £2 million annually. Similar outcomes have been observed in cardiovascular care, where dietary interventions led by dietitians have lowered the incidence of complications, translating into significant healthcare savings. The BDA's Specialist Working Groups, particularly those focusing on diabetes and cardiovascular health, have

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been instrumental in developing these programmes, showcasing the direct impact of dietitians on healthcare efficiency.

Dietitians' contributions are not limited to clinical settings. They also play a vital role in public health initiatives, such as obesity prevention campaigns and maternal health programmes, supporting government priorities. Evidence from similar healthcare models in the EU further illustrates that increasing investment in dietetic services correlates with improved health outcomes and economic growth. The UK government has an opportunity to follow this evidence-based model, ensuring dietitians are adequately compensated to sustain and expand these critical services.

3. The Workforce Challenge: Recruitment and Retention of Dietitians

The NHS faces a severe staffing crisis, with over 121,000 vacancies reported in England alone. Dietitians, integral to many healthcare services, are particularly affected. The BDA's latest survey indicates that recruitment and retention challenges have led to shortages in dietetic services, impacting patient care and service delivery. A significant proportion of dietitians report that current pay levels are inadequate, forcing many to seek opportunities outside the NHS or even leave the profession altogether.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan sets ambitious recruitment and retention targets. However, without competitive pay structures, these targets remain unrealistic. An above-inflation pay rise for dietitians is essential to reverse the real-terms decline in wages caused by inflation. This pay rise is crucial not only for enhancing job satisfaction but also for ensuring that skilled professionals remain within the NHS, reducing reliance on costly agency staff.

Furthermore, the BDA's Specialist Working Groups have highlighted specific areas where the shortage of dietitians has had a critical impact. For example, dietitians specialising in mental health report increased caseloads and burnout due to understaffing. Similarly, those working in paediatric care face long waiting lists, which compromise the quality of care provided. Addressing pay disparities is vital to retaining these specialists, ensuring continuity of care and preventing further disruption to essential services.

4. Dietitians' Contributions to Government Priorities

The BDA's recommendations align closely with the government's focus on building a resilient and sustainable NHS workforce. Dietitians contribute significantly to the UK government's public health goals, particularly in areas such as obesity reduction, diabetes prevention, and maternal health. The BDA's Specialist Working Groups play a crucial role in developing and implementing these initiatives. For example, the Maternal and Early Years Group supports interventions that improve prenatal nutrition, reducing complications and long-term healthcare costs.

By providing targeted support and ensuring fair pay for dietitians, the NHS can maximise the potential of this workforce, aligning their efforts with the government's "Levelling Up" agenda. Dietitians' work also extends to reducing health inequalities, as their interventions are particularly impactful in lower-income and marginalised communities. Investing in the dietetic workforce supports these communities, leading to better population health outcomes and aligning with broader government objectives.

5. The Case for an Above-Inflation Pay Increase

The BDA urges the NHSPRB to recommend an above-inflation pay increase for dietitians in the 2025/26 pay round. The cost-of-living crisis has severely impacted NHS staff, with inflation eroding the value of

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wages across the board. Dietitians, along with other Allied Health Professions (AHPs) who require specific qualifications and expertise, are currently undercompensated. This not only undermines the value of their skills but also contributes to the recruitment and retention crisis.

The psychological impact of wage stagnation cannot be overlooked. Survey data from the BDA shows that 67% of dietitians report feeling undervalued, with many citing pay as a primary reason for considering leaving the NHS. In addition to a general pay rise, the BDA advocates for targeted funding to support career progression within the Agenda for Change framework. This funding would enable dietitians to advance without financial disadvantage, addressing one of the primary barriers to retention.

To achieve pay parity, it is essential to ensure that dietitians' pay scales reflect their skills, responsibilities, and contributions. The BDA's Specialist Working Groups have recommended creating a structured pathway that aligns dietitians' pay with that of similar NHS professions. This approach promotes equity and recognises the specialised skills dietitians bring to the healthcare system.

6. Projected Impacts of Implementing a Fair Pay Strategy

Implementing the BDA's recommendations will yield significant benefits for both the NHS and the wider economy:

- **Improved Retention and Recruitment:** By providing fair pay, the NHS will reduce vacancies and stabilise the dietetic workforce, ensuring safe staffing levels and continuity of care. This approach minimises the need for agency staff, reducing costs.
- **Enhanced Productivity and Wellbeing:** A well-compensated dietetic workforce is more motivated and productive. Research shows that improving pay directly correlates with reduced absenteeism and higher job satisfaction, leading to more efficient service delivery.
- **Long-term Economic Benefits:** By investing in dietitians, the NHS can enhance its preventive healthcare efforts, reducing the incidence of diet-related diseases and subsequent hospital admissions. The Health Foundation estimates that this could save the NHS billions over the next decade, contributing to a more sustainable healthcare system.

7. The Role of the BDA and its Specialist Working Groups

The BDA's Specialist Working Groups provide expertise in various areas, including diabetes, mental health, renal care, and paediatrics. These groups play a pivotal role in developing best practices and evidence-based interventions that improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare costs. By collaborating with BDA specialist professionals, the NHS can align its workforce strategies with expert insights, ensuring that dietitians are supported and empowered to deliver high-quality care.

The BDA is committed to working alongside the NHSPRB, unions, and policymakers to develop a comprehensive pay strategy that recognises the value of dietitians. We recommend using the expertise of BDA specialist professionals to guide the implementation of these recommendations, ensuring that the pay structure reflects the evolving demands and contributions of dietitians.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The BDA calls on the NHS Pay Review Body to recognise the critical role dietitians play in delivering high-

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quality healthcare. To address the current challenges and align with the government's priorities, we recommend the following:

- Implement an above-inflation pay rise for all dietitians.
- Allocate specific funding for career progression within the Agenda for Change framework.
- Commit to a timetable that restores NHS pay to competitive levels over the next five years.
- Collaborate with the BDA other NHS Staff Council unions, to develop a comprehensive pay strategy for the NHS workforce.

By implementing these recommendations, the government can ensure that the NHS remains a world-class healthcare provider, equipped to meet the needs of the UK population now and in the future. Failure to act will only exacerbate existing workforce challenges, leading to further costs and compromised care. It is time to invest in dietitians, recognising their value and ensuring their place within a sustainable NHS.

References

1. Health Foundation, Economic Impact of Investing in NHS Staff - Referenced for the economic benefits of investing in NHS staff, including cost savings and productivity improvements.
2. BDA Specialist Working Groups Reports (2023) - Utilised for specific insights into dietitian-led programmes, such as diabetes management, mental health, and maternal health.
3. NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (2023) - Cited for setting the context of recruitment and retention targets and the need for competitive pay structures.
4. NHS Vacancy Statistics (2024) - Used to highlight the scale of staffing challenges within the NHS and the impact on dietetic services.
5. BDA Survey Data on Dietitian Retention and Pay (2024)
6. EU Healthcare Models and Dietetic Workforce Studies - Appropriately used to compare and support the UK model's effectiveness.
7. Health Foundation Estimate on Preventive Healthcare Savings

Yours sincerely,



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