**NHS needs £280m or the government will be breaking minimum wage laws**

The government will need to inject £280m into the NHS by the end of the decade, or ministers will find themselves in breach of their own minimum wage laws, warn unions representing health service employees in the UK today (Friday).

In their annual submission to the NHS pay review body, the unions say that because the pay of health workers has failed to keep pace with inflation, within five years the lowest paid employees will be earning less than the minimum wage.

The national living wage – essentially the minimum wage for workers over the age of 25 – is currently £7.20 an hour. But with the government insisting on a one per cent pay cap across the NHS, the wages of those on the lowest pay scales – hospital porters, cleaners and healthcare assistants – will fall below the legal minimum by 2021, say the unions.

As NHS pay is now different in the four devolved nations, Northern Ireland’s lowest paid health workers will fall below national living wage rates next year, in England and Wales it will happen the following year, and in Scotland by 2021\*.

The health unions say the Department of Health should comply with the minimum wage by boosting the pay of low-paid staff, not by taking money from the one per cent pay ‘pot’ for the rest of the NHS workforce. As plans stand, everyone earning above around £17,000 would have their rise docked to fund the Government’s minimum wage pay promise.

Instead, ministers must focus on injecting the additional money for the lowest earners, and then deliver annual across-the-board pay rises for everyone, says the unions’ submission.

The unions are also calling for a return to UK-wide pay scales, saying that staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland deserve to receive the same pay rates as health workers on the equivalent grade in Scotland.

**Chair of the NHS trade unions Christina McAnea**, said: “Agenda for Change – the NHS pay framework – has served staff well for many years, but sustained government attacks on health workers’ pay pose a threat to its future.

“Capping NHS pay at such low levels is giving hospital trusts across the country a huge headache as they struggle to hold on to experienced staff, who can earn much more working for agencies. Limits on NHS pay are also deterring many people from taking up careers in the health service.

“The government must come up with the cash to increase the pay bands of the lowest paid or it will be breaking its own wage laws. If the NHS is continue to deliver the best possible care for patients, its workforce must feel valued and motivated – and that has to start with fair pay.”

**Notes to editors:**

The 13 NHS unions involved in the submission to the NHS pay review body are British Association of Occupational Therapists, British Dietetic Association, British and Irish Orthoptic Society, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Federation of Clinical Scientists, GMB, Royal College of Midwives, Royal College of Nursing, Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists, Society of Radiographers, UCATT, UNISON, Unite.

The link to the submission is here

\* Both Wales and Scotland have, over the past few years, made policy commitments to deliver pay in line with the Living Wage Foundation rate (higher than the Government legal mininums).