

**To: All GDS Dentists
BY EMAIL**

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Dear Colleague

Response to GDPs Requests for Clarification on Redeployment and the Financial Support Scheme

We know that many of you have been in contact with the HSCB or BSO, either directly or through the BDA, with a number of queries in relation to the General Dental Services (GDS) Financial Support Scheme (FSS). We recognise that in these unprecedented times, uncertainty over what the future holds in terms of health and finances can lead to much stress and worry. We would like to reassure you that in designing the FSS and the operating model of the urgent dental care centres, the objectives are to ensure that as far as possible the essential oral health needs of the population are met, general dental practices are supported fairly throughout the outbreak and that the wider HSC is able to benefit from the high levels of skill and experience in the GDS workforce.

The purpose of this letter is to clarify as best we can, the key issues that have been raised to date. In setting out the explanations below, it should be appreciated that the FSS has had to be developed within an extremely challenging timeline which precluded the normal engagement and consultations taking place. As a completely novel programme, it is subject to ongoing review and reform to ensure we have a scheme that is as fair as possible to both GDPs and the taxpayer.

Individual Circumstances

The Department, Board and BSO are aware that calculating payments based on 2019/20 activity levels may cause concerns for those dentists whose recent GDS activity differed from the “average” for whatever reason.. When processing applications and reviewing previous payment data, the Board and BSO will take account of individual dentist’s circumstances, within the resources available, to ensure that the payments made under the scheme are reasonable and fair. This approach will be refined as the scheme progresses and you are welcome to forward additional information to BSO if that is necessary.

In cases where a dentist does not have a stable, reliable 12 month period of payment, historical data at BSO will be used to estimate a monthly average.

This would include those that may have had a period of sickness or maternity leave, have recently started a different working pattern, are new contractors, or have worked across different practices or DS numbers over the year. For eligible GDPs in these groups a monthly average will be used from the available data, but with the lowest month’s data excluded. Only paid claims will be included in the figures for the test period.

The scheme has been developed at a rapid pace and in exceptional circumstances with the main focus being to support the financial viability of as many GDPs as possible. In doing so the Department was faced with the choice between an approach which involved all the normal forms of consultation and appeals processes etc. and a scheme which could provide support in a timely manner. Although a streamlined approach has been adopted, it remains the intention to provide support to GDPs in a fair, reasonable and proportionate manner.

Redeployment

The intention of the redeployment programme is that in return for financial support, dentists and other staff agree to assist the wider HSC during the COVID-19 period. This proposal involves dentists applying their skills to support other services in primary

care, in particular community pharmacy and general medical practice. The proposed arrangement aims to facilitate dentists to work comparatively close to their home and to reflect their weekly historical health care commitment (in terms of hours worked) in as far as possible. Roles may vary across a number of different areas within community pharmacy and medical practice and these will be described in more detail in future communications. The roles will be within clinical competence and additional opportunities to train for additional competencies may be available (e.g. cannulation), however, these will be optional. Indemnity arrangements have been put in place under emergency COVID-19 legislation which will facilitate redeployment.

While the detail of the redeployment scheme has not yet been finalised, once agreed it will be shared with the profession. We appreciate that there will be dentists who will have exceptional circumstances regarding their ability to be redeployed and these will be taken into consideration on a case by case basis.

Finally, we want to thank the profession for the key role they have played during the HSC response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dentists have volunteered in large numbers to see unregistered patients, work in the UDC centres, donate oxygen and PPE to other HSC services and provide extended cover from their own practices. By your actions, not only have you helped to keep the delivery of essential dental services for patients in need, but also have helped to keep pressure off other parts of the service such as pharmacies, general medical practitioners and hospital emergency departments. This support is greatly appreciated by the wider HSC family.

Yours sincerely



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