Dentists look to get a 0.21 per cent increase in earnings following a recommendation of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Pay.

The Dental Practitioners Association, claims that as the Retail Prices Index is currently 5.2 per cent—anything less than this is effectively a pay cut.

Jim Donaldson, chairman of the Dental Practitioners Association (DPA) said: ‘The DDRB seems to assume no responsibility for difficulties in NHS access.

Year after year we have tried to explain to them that dentists are motivated to either join or leave the NHS based on comparison with similarly skilled groups and also the disparity in terms and conditions between the public and private sectors.

Pay is a vital element of the NHS package, yet year after year it is cut in real terms.

The new contract is sufficiently unattractive and uncertain without this further clear signal that financial penalties are to be imposed year after year by below-inflation awards.

While Brian Levy, president of the DPA said: ‘With the RPI at 5.2 per cent, this recommendation can only be viewed by NHS dentists as another pay cut. This will further reduce our members' ability to accept and treat NHS patients.'

Derek Watson, chief executive officer of the DPA, claimed that the Review Body is 'hopelessly confused about how to set wages to retain dentists in the NHS'.

He added: ‘Four years ago they used the doctors' increase. Three years ago they used the average Earnings Index. Then they used the Hospital and Community Health Services sector where dentists are salaried and have their expenses fully reimbursed. This year they have under-credit even that award. No wonder high street dentists are choosing to do less NHS work!

The government has broken its promise to provide a comprehensive dental service to the nation in return for the high levels of tax and national insurance paid.

The British Dental Association (BDA) echoed the DPA's concerns.

The 0.21 per cent rise is based on a formula that, taking estimated decreased expenses into account, suggests GDPs will actually see a 1.5 per cent increase in net incomes.

However John Milne, chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee (GDPc), said: ‘Sadly, the basis of the formula which suggests that the increase may amount to 1.5 per cent in real terms does not take account of the effect of the devaluation of Sterling and its effect on the prices of equipment and materials that are largely manufactured overseas.

These expenses, and dentists' ability to access the finance necessary to meet them, are both adversely affected by the recession.

He added: ‘We appreciate that a measure of financial restraint is necessary in the current economic climate. Clearly, economic prudence is essential for everyone.'

However he added: ‘But it's also important to remember that high street dentists are running businesses that provide vital healthcare to millions of people.

Those businesses must be properly funded so that they can invest in their premises and equipment to deliver the highest quality care to their patients.'

The problems many patients have faced accessing NHS dentistry in recent years have been well documented.

Mr Milne claimed that the ‘solution to those problems is to build confidence in the future of NHS dentistry by properly supporting our current NHS practitioners, and sending a positive signal to newly qualifying dentists about the future of NHS dentistry.

He said: ‘This settlement will do neither of those things.'