Government to decide dentists’ pay and contract values

The coalition government will be making all decisions on NHS dental pay and contract values for the next two financial years, after it told the dental pay body it is no longer needed.

The government has told the chairman of the Doctors’ and Dentists’ Review Body (DDRB), that it will play no role in determining the remuneration of independent contractor general dental practitioners (GDPs) and general medical practitioners (GMPs) in England for the financial years 2011-12 and 2012-13.

In a letter, Andrew Lansley, Secretary of State for Health, said: “I have decided that, based on financial and economic position and the continued need for reductions in public sector expenditure that it will not be necessary for the DDRB to make any recommendations on the need for any earnings or contract uplifts for independent contractor GDPs and GMPs in England.

The government will make the decisions on any gross uplift, based on the efficiency assumption that we wish to apply and the evidence on non-staff expenses. He added: “I have therefore concluded that there is no requirement to ask DDRB to play a role in the remuneration of independent contractor GDPs and GMPs for financial years 2011/12 or 2012/13. We believe we have everything necessary from your past recommendations on the formulas to take forward discussions with relevant professional bodies. We remain determined to secure continued efficiencies from the investments in independent contractor GDPs and GMPs and therefore will reach our decisions based on the progress we can make in those negotiations.

The letter was sent to the chairman of the Review Body, Ron Amy, Susie Sanderson, chair of the BDA Executive Board said: “Dentists are aware of the financial pressures behind the already-announced pay freeze for NHS workers earning more than £21,000 a year that have led the government to instruct DDRB not to make recommendations about earnings for GDPs for the next two financial years.

“GDPs are facing soaring expenses and the impact of those on contract values must be properly considered. The BDA will be supplying evidence on this to government that will underline the very real challenges dental practices face. It is important to note that the government’s intention to apply efficiency assumptions to its calculations of contract values amounts to a pay cut and isn’t helpful.”

Derek Watson, chief executive of the Dental Practitioners Association, also expressed his concern: “It was announced in the budget that the government has imposed a two-year pay freeze on public sector employees earning over £21,000 a year which would have included most dentists. This would have left the Review Body open to make an uplift recommendation based on expenses. The government has now closed this door by saying that it will also estimate expenses.”

The government will now need to negotiate directly with professional dental associations such as the BDA on how contract values should be raised to reflect the increase in expenses.

In Scotland, after intervention by the BDA, the government has reconsidered the way it is implementing this year’s DDRB pay award. The BDA’s Scottish Dental Practice Committee (SDPC) argued that the DDRB had taken the expenses element of the pay award into account and that the pay increase should apply to the whole item of service rather than just the expense element. The Scottish government have agreed that the uplift for independent GDPs should be 0.9 per cent applied to the whole item of service.