**UDA value variation highlighted by Tories**

The shadow health secretary, Andrew Lansley, claimed that the wide variation in pay for UDAs shows the system is not working.

He said: "It must be hugely frustrating for many dentists to know that others just down the road are being paid so much more for doing very similar work.

The contract the government has introduced for NHS dentists needs a complete overhaul if we are to turn things around. We need to give our NHS dentists a better system in which to work if people are to get the dental care they need.

That's why a Conservative government would scrap Labour's flawed UDA system and introduce a fairer system for dentists and patients."

John Milne, chair of the BDA's General Dental Practice Committee, conceded that the value of units of dental activity does "vary according to the historical earnings and activity of practitioners, the provision of specialist services and the oral health needs of each PCT's population."

He said: "These factors lead to a variation in values, although the national average is around £25."

He added that "the main flaw with the current dental contract is the way it is centred on targets, rather than providing high-quality care to patients. It's important now that the conclusions of Professor Steele's review are consulted on and piloted so that a new system can be developed that works for patients and practitioners alike."

Derek Watson, chief executive of the Dental Practitioners Association, said: "The idea that dentists can be paid different amounts for carrying out the same courses of treatment is based on the assumption that costs vary and that different dentists do different amounts of treatment in the same course (and will continue to do so)."

"The amount of work in each course has now stabilised at the lowest common denominator and costs do not vary enough to justify one dentist earning ten times more than another dentist for a UDA."

He criticised the process of tendering, claiming "it is no substitute for the free market as it is slow, inefficient and frequently unfair."

A DH spokesperson said: "The dental contract is working – the number of dentists working in the NHS is growing and more people have seen an NHS dentist in the last year."

"PCTs have control over how much they pay for a unit of dental activity – it is only right that this can vary depending on local challenges and needs."

Some figures may also reflect the income guarantee which helped to keep dentists in the NHS when the dental contract was introduced in 2006."