PAY REVIEW BODY UNDER FIRE FOR PANDERING TO GOVERNMENT WHEN MAKING ITS PAY RECOMMENDATIONS LAST YEAR

Nursing unions demand an end to local pay experiment

By Graham Scott

NURSING UNIONS have demanded a substantial national pay award for nurses in 1997, just days after chancellor Kenneth Clarke announced any rise would have to be paid for by cuts.

The unions, known as staff side, published their joint evidence to the nurses' pay review body this week. As usual, it does not include a specific claim, but urges the RB to recommend an award which would end low pay and the government's local pay experiment.

The evidence compares nurses' pay with that of social workers, teachers, police officers and junior doctors, and claims a D grade nurse would need a rise of at least 14 per cent to come into line with a newly qualified social worker.

The RB's independence is also questioned by the unions, who say it must 'reassert its independence' when it reports early next year. The unions suggest the RB's eight members simply implemented government policy last year.

Launching the evidence, staff side chair Maggie Dunn said local pay had been 'an unmitigated disaster'. Roger Kline, HVA director of labour relations, said if the RB listened to government evidence, which calls for a zero national award next year, most nurses would receive no rise at all.

Chris Cardwell, staff side secretary: pay review body has acted shoddily

But the prospect of nurses receiving a substantial rise next April was dealt a blow by the chancellor last week when he said no extra money would be provided to fund pay increases.

Mr Clarke, presenting the Treasury's evidence to the RB, said any pay award would have to be 'offset, or more than offset, by efficiencies and other economies'. And pointing to falling inflation, he added: 'Pay recommendations for 1997 should be set at lower levels than this year to reflect the changed economic context.'

The four main nursing unions – the Royal College of Nursing, Unison, the Royal College of Midwives and the Health Visitors' Association – also published their own separate evidence this week.

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Tyneside trust hit by one day strike action over 0.75 per cent pay offer

ABOUT 1,200 nurses and ancillary workers on Tyneside held a one day strike on Monday over a 0.75 per cent local pay offer.

The action by Unison members at Newcastle City Health care trust, which runs the Newcastle General and St Nicholas hospitals, is the first industrial action in this year's protracted pay campaign. The workers provided emergency cover.

Speaking from one of the five picket lines Unison's Clare Williams, said: 'We want to resolve this round the table but if management don't come back with a decent offer there'll be another strike. 'Our members feel insulted, angry and very undervalued. To be offered 0.75 per cent on top of what they earn is an insult, especially when you've got trust managers who are earning huge salaries,' she added.

RCN regional officer Susan Russell said that RCN members would not do any work normally carried out by Unison workers.

The trust's offer is on top of the 2 per cent national award made in April. Unison has dismissed it as 'derisory' and is demanding an increase in line with the higher rises being offered by other North East health trusts.

A trust spokesperson said they were 'saddened' by the action: 'We're disappointed they've decided to do this at a time when we are trying to work with them to reach a mutually acceptable deal which we think will particularly help lower paid workers.'

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