

**From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Dear Eilish

Thank you for your letter, dated 22 March 2023, requesting an update in relation to a number of queries, including GP Indemnity.

In respect of GP Indemnity costs, the Department of Health (DoH) has been working to review the arrangements for clinical negligence indemnity cover for GPs in Northern Ireland (NI).

As part of this process a range of options, from the status quo to a state backed indemnity scheme such as that adopted in England and Wales, are currently being assessed via the business case process. This process is necessarily very detailed, given the potential costs and risks associated with the options for the GP indemnity model.

We will be continuing to work on this issue in the coming period, however, it is important to note that given the potential cost to the public purse of some of the options, it is likely that a final decision may require Ministerial agreement.

To try to address the issue of GPs leaving NI, the DoH has invested funding into implementation of a new scheme known as “Attract, Recruit Retain scheme”. This scheme has been introduced by the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG in the Department) to assist in increasing the numbers of GP Partners and salaried GPs remaining in N Ireland and joining practices across the region.

The scheme will provide funding to assist with a number of costs and to provide a payment known as a Golden Hello payment for new GPs becoming partners or salaried GPs. GPs recruited under this scheme will be required to stay employed in the GP Practice for a minimum of 5 years.

As noted above, funding has also been provided to assist with some of the following costs:

- Relocation costs
- Recruitment costs
 - Additional management costs
 - Costs incurred for applying to NI GP Performers List
 - Costs towards recruitment of International GPs.

SPPG will consider funding Indemnity costs for GPs recruited via this scheme, should sufficient funding be available.

SPPG has amended the process for ROI GPs who wish to practice in NI. Applicants to the GP Induction Scheme who have completed training in the ROI will not be required to sit the knowledge test if they have successfully completed the Irish College of General Practitioners examination within the last 2 years from the date of their application to the Performers list.

In recognition of the increasing demand for Primary Care services, the DoH has continued to invest in our GP workforce and has increased the number of GP trainees by over 70% from 2015 levels. This includes increasing the number of GP training places in NI to an all-time high of 121.

It is important to note however that the increase in demand for Primary Care services cannot be met solely by increasing the number of GPs, rather this is part of a wider programme of work to help improve patient access to services in Primary Care. Other elements include the wider roll-out of Primary Care Multi- Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) as well as the introduction of Advanced Nurse Practitioners and additional General Practice Nurses, all of which are making a difference to how services are delivered in Primary Care and contributing to improved patient outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Peter May