



UNISON House
14 West Campbell Street,
Glasgow
G2 6RX

Michael Matheson MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care,
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Tel: 0141 342 2899

30 March 23

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Congratulations on your appointment to the post of Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, we look forward to developing the positive working relationship that we have enjoyed with Mr Yousaf and his predecessors.

We appreciate that you will need some time to meet your officials and familiarise yourself with the portfolio, we feel that the NHS in Scotland is at a pivotal moment and that it is therefore essential that UNISON Scotland as the largest and most diverse trade union in NHS Scotland writes to you early in your new role setting out our immediate priorities.

Firstly, whilst we are sure that you will be aware of UNISON Scotland and our significant membership interest in the NHS, we thought that it might be of value if we provided you with some simple background information:

UNISON Scotland Health Committee is a committee of lay shop stewards from every health board in Scotland representing over 50,000 NHS workers on all AFC grades including managers.

UNISON stewards hold 13 Employee Director seats across NHS territorial and special Boards including Glasgow, Lothian and Lanarkshire. The union also holds Chair or Secretary seats in Scottish Partnership Forum, SWAG and STAC.



Whilst UNISON acknowledges that some of our sister unions represent single specialities and that there are circumstances where a specialist conversation is required. We would point out that around a third of UNISON members in our NHS are nurses or midwives and we would remind you that it is important that the UNISON voice is heard in these matters. That said, the unions approach has and will remain focused on our belief that NHS Scotland is One Team as such we do not believe that any single occupation or profession is more important than any other and we need to work together for the benefit of all staff when we consider patient experience.

In respect of our immediate priorities please find below a five-point summary;

1. **NHS Scotland Pay** - Whilst we have agreed to a pay deal for 2023/24, it is important to note that there are non-pay elements within that deal (not least the commitment to work towards a reduced working week). We are clear that the previous Cabinet Secretary and First Minister understood and were supportive of the need to review key elements of the Agenda for Change agreement in order to ensure that we recruit, retain and reward the NHS workforce. Meeting this objective in coming discussions and pay rounds is critical if we are to tackle the significant challenges our NHS continues to face. It is therefore essential that the work already committed to is expedited efficiently and in the spirit in which we entered the agreement.

In the context of One Team, Scotland MUST quickly disassociate itself with the UK governments talk of separate pay scales for nursing, this approach is divisive, will lead to equal pay challenges and will not resolve the fundamental challenges we have recruiting, retaining and rewarding nursing staff.

2. **NHS Staffing Crisis** – The NHS in Scotland continues to face a staffing crisis across all grades. Excessive amounts spent on agency and bank staff highlights the nature of the crisis, but we believe the staffing crisis runs deeper than agency and bank spend.

It is telling that in recent months STAC have agreed an RRP for payroll staff; additional hours spend is up for domestics, catering, portering; there are delays in routine referrals for diagnostic interventions and in some areas, there is a three month back log on non urgent typing.

3. **Social and Primary Care** – Whilst we are sure that you are aware of our unions criticism of the NCS Bill, we feel that it is important to highlight the fact that the bill as written will do little or nothing to tackle delayed discharge. If the NHS in Scotland is to recover from the current (politically created) crisis it is essential that steps are taken to ensure that patients are safely but quickly supported to live in their own communities. Cuts to mental health services; addiction services

and other primary care services simply add to the pressure on our acute services and are the worst outcome for patients and staff. We believe that our government **MUST** act now to invest in high quality, public service social and primary care services.

4. **Pensions** – we wrote recently to your predecessor on the issue of pensions both in respect of:
 - a. the long overdue consultation on member contributions and,
 - b. the fundamentally unfair decision by government to reward highly paid people in the NHS by helping them avoid their tax liabilities.

At a time when there is no sign of an easing in the cost-of-living pressures, UNISON Scotland feels that decisions which could increase the cost of membership for the majority of our members and or see other members of the scheme financially rewarded for reaching eye watering financial thresholds is fundamentally unfair and will lead to the long term failure of the scheme.

5. **HCP C Fees** – we also wrote to Mr Yousaf setting out our objection to the recent announcement by the HCPC to increase registration fees by 20%.

UNISON Scotland believes that the nature of our devolution settlement gives you the ability to stop this unjust increase. We therefore call upon you to use your powers to refuse to enable this unfair and unjust regulatory tax on hard working and loyal UNISON members across our NHS and wider public services.

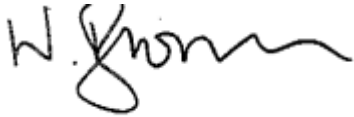
6. **The future of the NHS** – As stated we believe that the NHS is in crisis. Across Scotland NHS Boards are being asked to deliver more services with less financial resource. We note with interest that some opposition parties feel that structural reconfiguration of the NHS is the answer. We do not necessarily support that approach – however, we would be clear, we do not support the status quo either.

With a new First Minister and a new Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care there is a clear opportunity for Scots to work together and develop a consensus for our NHS.

That consensus must be grounded in the founding principles of our NHS, free to all at the point of need, with services provided by publicly employed workers working within public sector structures.

We started this letter speaking about relationships and so it stands to reason that we would welcome an opportunity to meet with you at our mutual convenience to start to build a working relationship, but also to discuss the matters we list above as our priorities and other areas of concern.

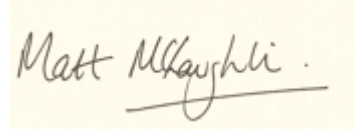
Yours sincerely



Wilma Brown

Chair

UNISON Scotland Health Committee



Matt McLaughlin

Regional Organiser

Head of Health -UNISON Scotland

Cc UNISON Branches/Health Committee