

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

11 September 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Public Health Provision in England

We write as trades unions and professional organisations on behalf of our members, professional public health staff and science, technology, engineering and mathematic (STEM) specialists working in Public Health England, English local authorities and the NHS. Following your announcement last month regarding the future of all our public health services in England, we agreed it was vital you had an understanding of the shared priorities for the staff we represent and who deliver the many essential public health functions. We are sure that you share our belief that it is essential that staff are reassured and supported at this time and can focus on the vital public health work they are undertaking.

We ask for an acknowledgement that delivery of strategic public health functions needs to be the responsibility of publicly accountable public health bodies. As the nation deals with the current pandemic some reorganisation may be necessary as lessons are learned. However, we are alarmed by the creation of the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) without properly consulting expert staff and without a clear plan for the future of large swathes of PHE.

We urge you to ensure that we have an adequately resourced national public health system (including laboratories) with sufficient capacity, resilience and access to data, research and analysis over the long-term to address all domains of public health effectively – health protection, health improvement and health care public health. Commitments to world-leading services must be matched by funding if they are to be taken seriously by staff and the public.

We seek a binding commitment to the independence of the National Institute for Health Protection and public health professionals and their vital ability to speak truth to power and to the public at a national, regional and local level.

We trust you agree that public health professionals will perform to the best of their skills and abilities through having the best possible professional leadership, and that the national leadership of any public health organisation should include people with qualifications and experience in public health and relevant sciences. If the NIHP is to succeed it is vital experts in the STEM professions are properly recognised and valued within the new organisation. Similarly, while engagement with the private sector will be important, this should not come at the expense of maintaining and developing public sector science capacity and in-house expertise nor circumventing professional regulatory arrangements.

We ask for a commitment that you will ensure the organisational structures of public health will not compromise the training and professional development programmes within it and, ideally, improve and enhance them.

We urge you to enhance the crucial ability for staff to move between organisations and systems with an assurance that all NIHP staff should be on consistent, national terms and conditions of service

relevant to their area of activity and specialism, such as equivalent to those in the NHS or Civil Service as appropriate, and which are recognised across the public service sector. Staff mobility between allied sectors is essential for acquiring knowledge, skills and experience as well as retention of skilled staff at all levels to maintain a world class public health system.

Finally, we ask for an undertaking that there will be an open and transparent consultation process on the transition to NIHP marked by a commitment to collaborate with trades unions and professional associations. We also ask for a commitment that the outcomes will minimise disruption to staff moving to the Institute or other bodies with reassurances that there will be no compulsory redundancies as a result and that this is not just organisational change designed to further cut public health services and provide an opportunity for outsourcing to the private sector.

We look forward to your positive reply.

Yours sincerely,

PHE Staff Side Trade Unions

cc. Baroness Harding
Michael Brodie



Signature

Signature

Signature



Signature

Signature

Signature



N. L. Smith



Jim Rortell