



The Royal College of
Midwives

Response

Response to the Low Pay Commission consultation on the National Minimum Wage

September 2012

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The Royal College of Midwives' response to Low Pay Commission consultation on the National Minimum Wage.

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is the trade union and professional organisation that represents the vast majority of practising midwives in the UK. It is the only such organisation run by midwives for midwives. The RCM is the voice of midwifery, providing excellence in representation, professional leadership, education and influence for and on behalf of midwives. We actively support and campaign for improvements to maternity services and provide professional leadership for one of the most established clinical disciplines.

The RCM welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and our answers to the consultation topics are set out below.

The Royal College of Midwives
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General Comments

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Low Pay Commission’s consultation on the National Minimum Wage.

The RCM primarily represents members who are midwives, student midwives and maternity support workers. While the majority of our members are employed by the NHS we could start to see more midwives and maternity support workers employed by different organisations following the Health and Social Care Act.

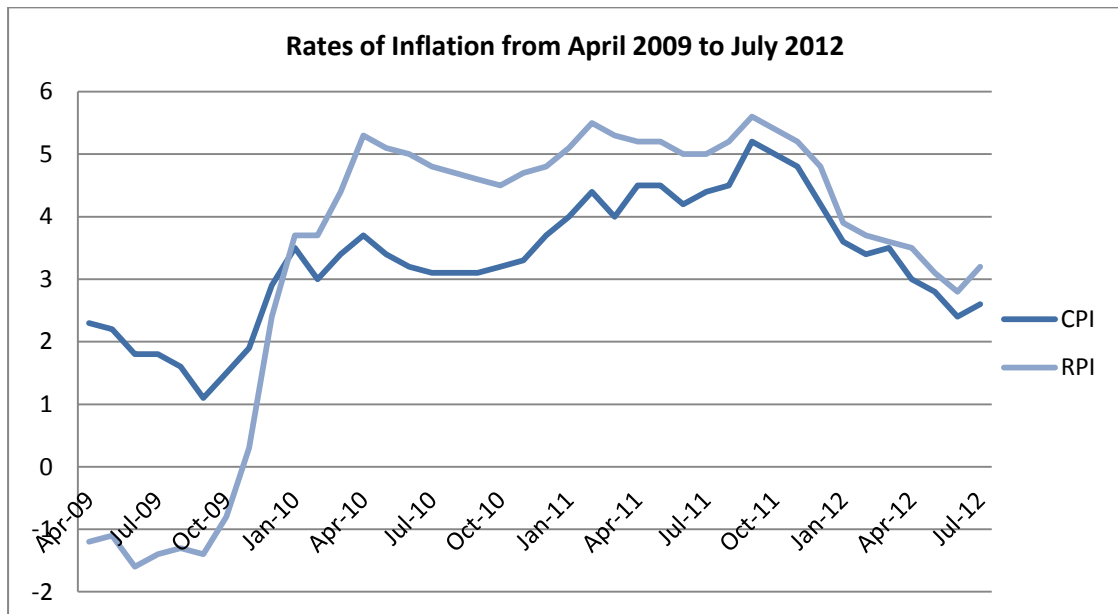
The RCM is supportive of the national minimum wage and is supportive of increases in the minimum wage that are in line with the rate of inflation to ensure that the lowest paid workers are protected from a fall in the value of their earnings and so it always pays to be in work.

In the NHS midwives and maternity support workers are employed under terms and conditions known as Agenda for Change. The starting salary for a full time midwife is £21,176 and the starting salary for a maternity support worker is £14,153. A full time worker in the NHS will work 37.5 hours a week.

These positions are both above the national minimum wage, however, the starting salary for a maternity support worker is very close to the national minimum wage and there is not a vast level of pay progression for support workers in the NHS meaning that they tend to stay on a low wage for their career. Therefore, our response shall focus on our maternity support worker members.

Level of the National Minimum Wage

Over the past few years there has been a steep rise in both RPI and CPI inflation. Since the beginning of 2010 inflation has risen steeply to over 5% and stayed at fairly high levels since then.



Figures from the Office of National Statistics

While the RCM appreciates that some responses to this consultation will use the recession as an excuse to attempt to keep the national minimum wage as low as possible we would argue that the high rates of inflation at the present time should result in an increase in the minimum wage thus keeping the wage at the same value.

Moreover, the national minimum wage should be increased in line with inflation to ensure that lower paid workers have money to spend in the economy which will help the current economic stagnation and create jobs. By increasing minimum wage this will also have a positive impact on the Government benefits payments as lower paid workers become less dependent on benefits to bring their minimum wage up to a living wage.

Salaried Hours Staff

As stated above, in the NHS midwives and maternity support workers are employed under terms and conditions known as Agenda for Change. The starting salary for a full time midwife is £21,176 and the starting salary for a maternity support worker is £14,153. A full time worker in the NHS will work 37.5 hours a week and both are salaried positions.

The salary for maternity support workers is already fairly low and we have seen a decrease in the value of pay following the Government's pay policy for public sector workers, which has been a pay freeze for the past two years for those earning more than £21,000 per annum and a £250 uplift for those earning less than £21,000. There will then be a pay cap of 1% for the next two years.

The Government's pay freeze started in April 2010 when RPI inflation was at 5.3% and CPI inflation was at 3.7% which had sharply risen in the six months before. Since that time inflation has stayed very high with only one month (June 2012) that RPI inflation has been less than 3% and three months that CPI inflation has been less than 3%. This has resulted in a dramatic drop in the real value of NHS workers pay.

As part of the Joint Trade Union's evidence to the NHS Pay Review Body's evidence that we will be submitting in October 2012 a survey was conducted of Trade Union members in the NHS to investigate their feelings about working in the NHS and their pay. The survey has found that the Government's pay policy is having a negative impact, with 70% of maternity support workers reporting that they are worse off compared to twelve months ago.

In addition to the value of pay for NHS workers decreasing the RCM has real concerns over the number of hours staff are working. The survey finds that 75% of maternity support workers said they 'sometimes' or 'frequently' worked in excess of their contracted hours and 8.3% of maternity support workers said they 'always' work in excess of their contracted hours. 44.1% of the maternity support workers said their additional hours were all unpaid.

12.4% of maternity support workers said they worked over 8 extra hours each week with 38.2% of maternity support workers reporting that they worked between 2 and 8 extra hours a week.

Therefore, while the salary of a maternity support worker is above the minimum wage with regards to their contracted hours by working additional hours unpaid due to staffing shortages we are unable to accurately assess if they are being paid above minimum wage for the actual hours they work.

The RCM believes that the official guidance on the national minimum wage rules for salaried staff is easy to understand and operate but we would support measures to be put in place to stop salaried workers being forced to work in excess of their contracted hours unpaid.

Apprenticeships

The RCM is a supporter of Apprenticeships and has published our own guide and toolkit about Apprenticeships in Maternity Services. Our guide was supported by both NHS Employers and Skills for Health. We argue that Apprenticeships are an excellent way of developing the skills and knowledge of Maternity Support Workers.

The RCM argues that apprenticeships are more than just a means of formally training employees. They provide a wide range of work-related skills and knowledge including team working, problem solving and communication skills. Therefore we would like to see the Government encourage more employers to use Apprenticeships as a means of developing their existing staff and bringing new staff into their organisations. We would also like to see the Government encourage people to take up Apprenticeships by ensuring that the level of wage is attractive and higher than it currently is.

Summary

The RCM has welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Low Pay Commission's consultation on the National Minimum Wage.

The RCM is supportive of the national minimum wage and is supportive of increases in the minimum wage that are in line with the rate of inflation to ensure that the lowest paid workers are protected from a fall in the value of their earnings and so it always pays to be in work.

The RCM believes that the official guidance on the national minimum wage rules for salaried staff is easy to understand and operate but we would support measures to be put in place to stop salaried workers being forced to work in excess of their contracted hours unpaid.

The RCM is a supporter of Apprenticeships and would like to see the Government encourage more employers to use Apprenticeships as a means of developing their existing staff and bringing new staff into their organisations. We would also like to see the Government encourage people to take up Apprenticeships by ensuring that the level of wage is attractive and higher than it currently is.