

UK offers public sector workers pay rise as doctors strike

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People hold placards as they attend a protest by junior doctors, amid a dispute with the government over pay, at University College London Hospitals in London. REUTERS/May James

London, July 14 (RHC)-- The United Kingdom has offered millions of public sector workers pay raises in a bid to end strikes triggered by a cost-of-living crisis, as thousands of junior doctors walked off the job in protest for five days.

Britain's government decided to accept recommendations for pay increases, Treasury Chief Secretary John Glen said on Thursday, giving doctors and teachers at least 6 percent increases.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government announced its decision, having considered the recommendations of a series of independent pay review boards. The pay increases are below the current 8.7 percent inflation rate but are aimed at bridging the gap following a bout of huge industrial unrest across Britain over falling real wages.

Junior doctors will now get a 6 percent pay uplift and a lump-sum pay increase of 1,250 pounds (\$1,633.25), while teachers would get 6.5 percent. He also announced pay increases for police (7 percent) and armed forces (5 percent). Glen said there would be no new borrowing or spending to fund the increases although teachers' pay rises would be funded by a reallocation of the existing education department budget.

The development came as Britain's state-funded healthcare service faces what is being described as its longest-ever strike as tens of thousands of doctors in England commenced their latest walkout. So-called junior doctors, those who are at the early stages of their careers in the years after medical school, started their strike at 7 a.m., with many of them making their case for a 35 percent pay rise in picket lines outside hospitals across England.

The British Medical Association (BMA), the doctors' union, has asked for the rise to bring junior doctors' pay back to 2008 levels once inflation is taken into account.

Meanwhile, the workload of England's 75,000 or so junior doctors has swelled as patient waiting lists for treatment are at record highs in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Today marks the start of the longest single walkout by doctors in the NHS's history, but this is still not a record that needs to go into the history books," said BMA leaders Dr Robert Laurensen and Dr Vivek Trivedi. They urged the government to drop its "nonsensical precondition" of not talking while strikes are announced.

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