

# UK govt, junior doctors reach deal after days of strikes

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Britain's government and the trade union representing junior doctors have sealed an agreement on resolving a contract dispute that has prompted 10 days of strikes this year, mediators ACAS said Wednesday.

"ACAS confirms the agreement... which, subject to a referendum of relevant BMA (British Medical Association trade union) members, forms the basis for a new contract in 2016," it said in a statement.

The breakthrough was welcomed by Prime Minister David Cameron's government and junior doctors' representatives, who said it was "the best and final way" of resolving the dispute.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) said that the full details of the new contract would be published at the end of this month.

In April, junior doctors held two days of all-out strikes which included emergency care for the first time in the history of the state-run National Health Service (NHS), representing an escalation of previous stoppages.

Cameron's government is seeking to reform junior doctors' contracts, a move ministers say is needed to ensure the quality of care for patients is as high at weekends as during the week.

But junior doctors complain of underfunding and understaffing in the NHS, while they had also voiced concerns about how much they should

get paid for working on Saturdays.

Junior doctors are medical graduates with years of experience who work full-time in the NHS but have not yet completed their professional qualifications.

## **'Definitive step forward'**

The breakthrough came after 10 days of talks called in a bid to resolve the row, which had been growing increasingly bitter.

"We welcome this significant agreement which delivers important changes to the junior doctors' contract necessary to deliver a safer seven-day NHS," said Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

"This deal represents a definitive step forward for patients, for doctors and for the NHS as a whole."

The breakthrough was also hailed by Johann Malawana, the chairman of the BMA's junior doctors' committee.

"This represents the best and final way of resolving the dispute and this is what I will be saying to junior doctors in the weeks leading up to the referendum on the new contract," Malawana said.

The referendum is expected to be held in mid to late June.

Under the deal, Saturdays and Sundays will be paid at a normal rate between 9am and 9pm, with extra pay for overnight work seven days a week.

The taxpayer-funded NHS, established in 1948, is one of Britain's most respected institutions, providing medical care largely free at the point of

delivery.

While it has been protected from austerity cuts under Cameron, experts warn it still faces increasing financial strain due to factors like rising treatment costs and an ageing population.

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