

NHS quango flights

Alex Wild

April 2018



Introduction

The NHS is widely believed to be facing serious problems with A&E waiting times in March the worst on record and myriad other high-profile challenges.

Given that public sector net debt stands at 82 per cent of GDP¹ and the deficit for 2018-19 is projected by the OBR to be £37.1 billion, no government remotely serious about repairing the public finances could afford to start increasing the NHS budget significantly as happened in the 2000s.

In response, NHS England has announced a raft of money-saving measures such as a renewed drive to stamp out prescriptions of wasteful and ineffective drugs.²

These measures are welcome, but as this note shows, there remains plenty of scope for savings across NHS bodies when it comes to travel costs.

It is worth noting that Simon Stevens, the Chief Executive of NHS England, has taken a principled stand when it comes to expenses. He does not claim for any bus, tube or taxi travel in London and does not claim hotel expenses or subsistence while travelling around the country on official duties.³

Key findings

Since 2015:

- Staff of NHS quangos have taken at least 16,866 flights at a cost of £6.5 million.*
 - 174 premium economy flights have been taken at a cost of £241,345
 - 716 business class flights have been taken at a cost of £2.2 million
- Public Health England took 121 business and premium economy class flights at a cost of £174,190
 - This includes 26 business class flights at a cost of £51,258
- At least 615 flights were taken by NHS quango staff that cost more than £1,000
- The most expensive flight was taken by NHS Blood and Transplant from Heathrow to San Diego: £6,231 in October 2017.
- The next most expensive flight was taken by Public Health England from San Francisco to Heathrow: £5,935 in May 2015.

*The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency paid for 4,585 flights at a cost of £2.2 million. They indicated that “the majority of these flights were made by MHRA inspectors carrying out inspections for which the costs were re-charged to the inspected parties as part of their inspection fee” but were unable to say which flights this applied to.

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/publicsectorfinance/bulletins/publicsectorfinances/february2018>

² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2017/07/medicine-consultation/>

³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/q3-1516-expenses.pdf>

Tables

Table 1: Flights by organisation

Quango	Economy		Premium economy		Business		First		Total	
	Flights	Spend (£)	Flights	Spend (£)	Flights	Spend (£)	Flights	Spend (£)	Flights	Spend (£)
NHS Business Services Authority	468	79,611	0	0	18	4,698	0	0	486	84,309
MHRA*	2,963	647,848	45	75,286	638	2,074,453	5	1,824	3,651	2,799,411
Public Health England	4,464	1,982,944	95	122,932	26	51,258	0	0	4,585	2,157,134
Care Quality Commission	1,354	185,976	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,354	185,976
Health Education England	1,145	264,163	24	26,672	16	13,926	1	153	1,186	304,915
Health Research Authority	191	24,801	0	0	0	0	1	87	192	24,888
HFEA	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response
Human Tissue Authority	47	4,106	0	0	0	0	0	0	47	4,106
Blood and Transplant	4,204	654,034	3	5,085	13	26,824	0	0	4,220	685,944
NHS Digital	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response
NHS England	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused	Refused
NHS Improvement	104	20,366	0	0	0	0	0	0	104	20,366
NICE	851	162,807	7	11,369	5	14,830	0	0	863	189,006
NHS Resolution	178	27,126	0	0	0	0	0	0	178	27,126
Total	15,773	4,027,821	173	241,014	716	2,185,989	7	2,064	16,669	6,456,889

*MHRA stated that “the majority of these flights were made by MHRA inspectors carrying out inspections for which the costs were re-charged to the inspected parties as part of their inspection fee” but were unable to say which flights this applied to.

NHS England refused to provide a response stating that extracting the requested information would take more than 30 hours and the information was therefore exempt. The original request was sent to NHS England on 11 January 2018 with their response refusing to provide the information being sent on 12 April 2018, 43 working days after the statutory deadline.

During this period, NHS England requested more time to comply with the request on 9 February, 16 February, 2 March, 16 March and 28 March.

Table 2: Business class flights

Body	Carrier	From	To	Price (£)	Date
Blood and Transplant	British Airways	Heathrow	San Diego	6,231.07	02-10-17
Public Health England	United Airlines	San Francisco	Heathrow	5,935.96	12-05-15
Blood and Transplant	British Airways	Heathrow	Sydney	5,587.45	04-11-16
Blood and Transplant	Virgin Atlantic	Washington Dulles	Heathrow	5,244.47	11-06-17
Public Health England	British Airways	Heathrow	Seoul	4,905.56	05-09-15
NICE	British Airways	Heathrow	Tokyo Narita	4,178.05	Not provided
Public Health England	British Airways	Heathrow	Cape Town	4,172.26	01-04-15
Public Health England	British Airways	Heathrow	Tokyo Haneda	4,070.96	xx.11.2015
Public Health England	British Airways	Heathrow	Tokyo Haneda	4,070.96	08-11-15
NICE	KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	Manchester	San Francisco	3,796.84	Not provided
NICE	British Airways	Heathrow	Cape Town	3,373.70	Not provided
Blood and Transplant	American Airlines	Washington Dulles	Heathrow	3,347.57	05-11-17
Health Education England	Unknown	Birmingham	Dubai	2,965.79	24-01-16
Public Health England	British Airways	Tokyo Narita	Heathrow	2,625.80	12-09-15
Public Health England	Air France	Heathrow	Beijing Capital	2,468.01	01-11-16
Public Health England	Brussels Airlines	Heathrow	Freetown	2,380.21	22-11-15
Public Health England	Qatar Airways	Heathrow	Surabaya	2,279.20	31-05-15
Health Education England	Unknown	Yangon	Manchester	1,906.66	10-01-18
Public Health England	Virgin Atlantic	Mexico City	Heathrow	1,866.80	10-12-15
NICE	Air France	Manchester	Tokyo Haneda	1,839.12	Not provided
Public Health England	Turkish Airlines	Heathrow	Bishkek	1,749.66	25-10-15
Public Health England	Turkish Airlines	Heathrow	Bishkek	1,749.56	25-10-15
Public Health England	Turkish Airlines	Heathrow	Bishkek	1,749.56	25-10-15
Public Health England	Turkish Airlines	Heathrow	Bishkek	1,749.56	26-10-15
Public Health England	Turkish Airlines	Heathrow	Bishkek	1,749.56	26-10-15
Public Health England	Lufthansa	Heathrow	Abuja	1,744.10	10-12-17
Blood and Transplant	Virgin Atlantic	London Gatwick	Orlando	1,662.62	25-10-16
NICE	Finnair	Heathrow	Philadelphia	1,642.05	Not provided

Body	Carrier	From	To	Price (£)	Date
Public Health England	Virgin Atlantic	Atlanta	Heathrow	1,540.55	28-03-16
Blood and Transplant	Virgin Atlantic	London Gatwick	Orlando	1,430.62	26-07-16
Blood and Transplant	Virgin Atlantic	London Gatwick	Orlando	1,430.62	26-07-16
Health Education England	Unknown	Manchester	Boston	1,103.43	21-10-16
Health Education England	Unknown	Kampala	Heathrow	1,096.06	19-11-16
Blood and Transplant	Virgin Atlantic	Manchester	Atlanta	1,049.12	25-09-16
Public Health England	Virgin Atlantic	Heathrow	Atlanta	1,030.06	11-02-15

Business class flights taken by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency were excluded from this table as it is not possible to determine whether or not MHRA was reimbursed.

Sources and methodology

- All data was gathered via freedom of information requests.
- Prices are inclusive of taxes.
- In instances where prices were given in non-sterling currencies, they were converted to pounds sterling using the appropriate exchange rate on the day on which the flight was taken. Exchange rates from xe.com were used.
- The response from Public Health England contained a number of improbably high fares, for instance a £1,687 fare from Southampton to Alderney. These have been considered to be group bookings, although other parts of the response suggested that each individual entry related to a single fare.