

Secretive SNP Government urged to come clean over Jason Leitch's 'unorthodox' pay deal

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The Scottish Government has been told to release details of under-fire [National Clinical Director Jason Leitch's](#) “unorthodox” contract arrangements, including his salary and financial interests.

He became the face of the Covid pandemic in Scotland alongside [Nicola Sturgeon](#), appearing regularly on the First Minister's daily televised briefings and the BBC radio football show *On The Ball*.

However, calls are growing for him to resign or be sacked after the UK Covid Inquiry revealed damning evidence about his “flippant” attitude to record-keeping and his disparaging comments about opposition MSPs.

Now it can be revealed that despite working for the Scottish Government since 2007, he is not a government employee. Instead, he remains on secondment from [NHS Tayside](#) – meaning his salary and financial interests are not disclosed alongside other senior civil servants.

Giving evidence to the inquiry's hearing at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre on Tuesday, he made no reference to these unusual arrangements when it was put to him that he had a “unique role”.

Prof Leitch replied: “I think the title is unique but the role isn't quite so unique... The closest English comparison is probably the medical director of NHS England, but it is not a direct comparison because I work for the government, we don't have a separate NHS structure like they would have in England.”



Professor Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director for the Scottish Government, arriving at the UK Covid-19 Inquiry hearing (Image: Jane Barlow/PA Wire)

In fact, campaigners have been trying to discover more about the medic's contract for a number of years with numerous freedom of information requests submitted to the Scottish Government.

Asked for details of his remuneration, officials said in November 2023: "The National Clinical Director is employed on standard NHS Consultant terms and conditions by NHS Tayside and works for the Scottish Government under a Service Level Agreement."

And in October 2020, an attempt to discover his financial interests received the following response: "Professor Leitch is not a Scottish Government employee and not required to register his personal financial interests with the Scottish Government, although may choose to do so."

'Yet another attempt to keep the public in the dark'

[Scottish Conservative](#) chairman Craig Hoy MSP said: "Jason Leitch's unusual employment arrangements will raise eyebrows among the public. As a high-ranking SNP government advisor – and one we know played a huge part in government decisions during the pandemic – it is vital that Professor Leitch is subject to the same transparency requirements as other civil servants.

"Yet this unusual arrangement seems to allow him to dodge public scrutiny over his taxpayer-funded salary and any potential conflicts of interest. After Covid Inquiry evidence showed [Jason Leitch deleted Covid WhatsApp messages as a 'pre-bed ritual'](#), the public will inevitably question whether his unorthodox employment arrangement is yet another attempt to keep them in the dark."

In previous interviews, Prof Leitch has told how he was working as a dental surgeon in the west of Scotland in 2005 when he was offered the chance to attend the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in the USA.

This not-for-profit private healthcare firm now plays a huge role in the NHS in Scotland, while [Prof Leitch is a regular at IHI conferences](#) around the world – most recently in Orlando, Florida, in December 2023.

He said the experience “turned my career on its head” and after completing a Masters at Harvard he returned home to join the Scottish Executive alongside the incoming SNP health secretary – Nicola Sturgeon.

His biography on the [gov.scot](#) website states: “Jason has worked for the Scottish Government since 2007.”

It is not clear at what point he began working for NHS Tayside and there appears to be no record of the secondment or details of his salary and interests in NHS Tayside’s annual reports and accounts.

Campaigners from the Action for a Safe and Accountable People’s NHS (ASAP-NHS) group have now written to Holyrood’s health committee calling for it to examine “Jason Leitch’s ‘divided loyalty’, his frequent jet-setting and his acceptance of hospitality, which raise conflict of interest questions about relationships and obligations, which might have arisen”.

When the Scottish Sunday Express asked for details of Prof Leitch’s salary, we received a carbon copy of the previous FOI response: “The National Clinical Director is employed on standard NHS Consultant terms and conditions by NHS Tayside and works for the Scottish Government under a Service Level Agreement.”