



# Welsh Government consultation: Student Support Arrangements

## Council of Deans of Health written submission - September 2019

Cyngor Deoniaid Iechyd Cymru/The Council of Deans of Health Wales is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. The Council of Deans of Health represents 84 UK university faculties engaged in education and research for nursing, midwifery and allied health professions. Our seven member institutions in Wales work together with policy makers to help shape the education and research of the future healthcare workforce in Wales.

### Key messages

- The Welsh Government should continue to provide financial support to those studying healthcare programmes in recognition of the unique nature of these courses and their importance to the future health and social care workforce and to population health, wellbeing, and prosperity.
- Any student support system must be sufficient, enabling and fair. A comprehensive support package to help students meet financial responsibilities should remain available under all systems.
- The Council believes it is reasonable that any package of support provided to healthcare students in addition to the standard student support package is dependent on individuals committing to working in Wales post-qualification, for an appropriate time period. However, it is essential that students continue to have choice in their funding support arrangements as not all will want to commit to working in Wales post-qualification.
- The consultation asks respondents to assess different student support options. Option 2 is our preferred option.
- Any changes to student funding will require comprehensive and consistent communication to minimise the risk of any decrease in applications.

### Responses

#### Student support arrangements: engagement questions

1. The NHS Bursary Scheme's intention is to act as an incentive to encourage people to train and work in Wales, in your view, is the NHS Wales Bursary Scheme, in its current format achieving this and why/why not, please state here.

The NHS Wales Bursary Scheme currently does act as an incentive for people to train and work in Wales. The Welsh Government should continue to provide financial support to those studying healthcare programmes in recognition of the unique nature of these courses and their importance to the future health and social care workforce and to population health, wellbeing, and prosperity.

Additional incentives could be implemented to further incentivise individuals to study and develop healthcare careers in Wales (please see response to question 5).

2. Our previous consultation provided a clear indication of support for the continuation of the NHS Wales Bursary Scheme. In your view (in ranked order) what do you think are the most important aspects that should be highlighted to attract people to study, train and work in Wales?

- Improving employment opportunities
- Achieving a qualification and pursing an interest in the subject
- Receiving a Bursary to cover tuition fees
- Good maintenance package to cover living costs

Individuals will have different motivations for studying healthcare programmes. In the context of Wales, both the NHS Bursary and maintenance package act as strong incentives for individuals to apply to healthcare programmes. The fact that healthcare students achieve a registered qualification with the strong prospect of a job on completion are also powerful incentives. It is important for the Welsh Government to continue to highlight the value of healthcare careers and the diverse pathways available to graduates in Wales after registration.

Based on the previous consultation we have narrowed the responses received to the following two statements, which do you think acts as an incentive to study, train and work in Wales?

**Higher maintenance package to cover living costs but the need to pay for tuition fees which only need to be repaid once students reach a certain threshold**

We are unable to support this option. Students in Wales should have their student loans paid upfront by the NHS

**NHS Bursary to cover tuition fees which does not need to be re-paid but with a lesser maintenance package to cover living costs**

This statement does not appear to reflect any of the four options outlined. If we have understood the proposals correctly, our preferred option 2 would deliver NHS-paid tuition fees and a higher maintenance package to support living costs. Please let us know if this is not correct.

A comprehensive support package to help students meet financial responsibilities should remain available under all systems.

3. If you have been, or now are, in receipt of an NHS Wales Bursary, what influenced your decision to study and commit to working in Wales?

N/A.

**4. Based on your experiences, what barriers are there that prevent individuals from studying/training and working in Wales?**

Financial concerns can affect student recruitment and retention. Healthcare programmes often attract applicants who are older than average university students. These individuals may have dependents and other financial responsibilities. Financial realities can create a barrier for these learners, including clinical/placement costs and childcare costs. Healthcare programmes are different from general higher education courses due to their irregular hours and length and intensity across the year, which often prevent students undertaking paid part-time work during term time and holidays.

A further barrier is lack of knowledge about the significant number of healthcare professional career options available, particularly in the smaller and specialist allied health professions. Simultaneously, negative and gendered stereotypes of healthcare careers have become prevalent in media coverage in recent years. These need to be challenged.

**5. What could we as the Welsh Government do to eliminate these barriers?**

The Welsh Government should commit to the continuation of the NHS Bursary to cover the tuition fees and placement costs of these healthcare programmes (as outlined in option 2) and ensure maintenance support increases in line with the cost of living.

Support for students on healthcare courses should be at least equivalent to the standard student support package *on a weekly basis* and take account of the duration of the programme across each year. The current NHS Bursary system includes extra weeks' allowances to recognise this feature, and this should be continued in any future system. It is unclear whether this is the case in the case studies given.

Although the main student funding system provides generous allowances for childcare, parent learning allowance and adult dependent support, it does not include a basic child dependents' allowance. In England, when students moved from the NHS Bursary system to the main support system, the Government there listened to the challenges of covering childcare for healthcare students during non-standard hours and chose to make an extra (non-means tested) childcare grant of £1000 available to every student with children. This does not affect access to other child-related grants through the main higher education system. The Council would recommend the Welsh Government examines the introduction of this support for students with children in Wales.

The NHS Business Services Authority in England administers an exceptional support fund of £3,000 per student per year as part of its support for students experiencing hardship. This is something the Welsh Government could also implement. It is also important to ensure all costs related to clinical placements are reimbursed to students promptly.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) has outlined plans in its draft workforce strategy to develop a recruitment campaign for healthcare programmes and establish a national health and social care careers service. These measures should better inform potential applicants about

the diversity of healthcare professions available in Wales. The Council is fully supportive of both initiatives and would like to engage with this work where possible.

6. Below are the four options that emerged from the last consultation, what in your view are the benefits/ risks of each of the options:

*Healthcare students receive the standard maintenance support package through Student Finance Wales. An NHS Bursary would cover the funding of full tuition fees up to a maximum and an additional funding element costs for clinical placements – this will not be subject to an agreement regarding post-qualification employment*

The Council does not support this funding option. We believe it is reasonable that any package of support provided to healthcare students above the standard student support package is contingent upon individuals committing to a post-qualification employment period in Wales. This option presents risks in terms of workforce planning for the healthcare workforce in Wales and could potentially affect recruitment in the other nations of the UK.

It is also unclear what is meant by the use of the term ‘tuition fees’ in these options, as universities do not charge a ‘tuition fee’ for these courses but are commissioned under special arrangements by the Government. Universities must be appropriately reimbursed to ensure high quality and sustainable education provision. A Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned costing study for nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions highlighted that these subjects are high cost.<sup>1</sup> We expect this to be similarly the case in Wales. The Office for Students (OfS) currently provides a teaching grant to universities in England to provide healthcare programmes with additional funding.<sup>2</sup> This is a policy currently not implemented in Wales.

*Healthcare students receive the standard maintenance support package through Student Finance Wales. An NHS Bursary would cover the funding of full tuition fees up to a maximum and an additional funding element for additional costs for clinical placements – subject to agreeing a post-qualification employment period.*

The Council believes this would be the best funding option amongst these proposals. It is reasonable that providing students with additional support to the standard student support package is dependent on individuals committing to work in Wales post-qualification, for an appropriate time period. The Council supports the current two-year tie in for students opting for the NHS Bursary.

It is essential that students continue to have choice in their funding support arrangements, as not all students will want to commit to working in Wales post-qualification. Students unwilling to

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319115440/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/prereg\\_costs/](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180319115440/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/prereg_costs/)

<sup>2</sup> Office for Students, 2018, *Guide to Funding 2018-19*,

remain in Wales post-qualification should still receive the standard student support package through Student Finance Wales.

*Healthcare students receive the standard maintenance support package and partial funding of tuition fees (e.g. 50%) through Student Finance Wales. An NHS Bursary would cover the remainder of the tuition fee and an additional funding element for additional costs for clinical placements – subject to agreeing a post-qualification employment period.*

The Council does not support this funding option. This funding option may discourage applications to healthcare programmes in Wales, assuming that healthcare students would fall partially under the standard student support system for fees. More information is also needed about the exact amount of funding that would be covered in this system and how it would be implemented.

*Healthcare students receive the standard fee support package through Student Finance Wales. An NHS Bursary would cover living costs and an additional funding element for additional costs for clinical placements – subject to agreeing a post-qualification employment period*

The Council does not support this funding option. This funding option may discourage applications to healthcare programmes in Wales, as it would increase the financial burden faced by healthcare students. Healthcare students in Wales should have their tuition costs met. It is also unclear to what extent the NHS Bursary would cover living costs, which is particularly important as nursing courses, for example, are generally around 44 weeks a year in duration and therefore longer than standard higher education programmes.

7. We are gauging interest in running workshops to discuss these questions and related questions, please circle if you be interested in attending a workshop? This is likely to take place early September.

Yes.

For more information contact:

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