

Centre for Critical Research in Nursing & Midwifery briefing on the proposal to replace student bursaries for nursing with a student loan

The Department of Health released a policy paper on 9th December on this topic. This is their summary:

“From 1 August 2017, new nursing, midwifery and allied health students will no longer receive NHS bursaries. Instead, they will have access to the same student loans system as other students. We intend that students studying nursing, midwifery and the allied health subjects as a second degree will also be able to get student loans.

The change will only affect new students starting their courses from 1 August 2017.

We plan to run a consultation in early 2016 to ask how we can successfully deliver the reforms.”

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-bursary-reform/nhs-bursary-reform>

Nursing organisations have responded in mixed ways. The Council of Deans (CoD) is the organisation that represents the heads of UK university health faculties providing education for nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions. The CoD argues **for** the changes because it believes that it will allow the NHS to be more flexible in the number of nurses it employs as it expects the changes to create a larger pool of students to draw from as currently nursing courses are highly oversubscribed i.e. there are more applicants than places available which results in suitable applicants being turned away. CoD also points out that students will be financially better off during their course with a student loan than with the current bursary system. There have been suggestions that the NHS may write-off the debt of students who go on to work in the service for a particular number of years – but this has not yet been confirmed but this may change during the consultation period.

<http://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/2015/11/the-2015-spending-review-changes-to-nursing-midwifery-and-ahp-education-background-information-for-students/>

The Royal College of Nursing and Unison are **against** the proposal arguing that it is likely to put off students from poorer backgrounds who do not want to accumulate debt and so threaten to reduce the number of nurses in training and hence reduce the size of the future nursing workforce. It has been suggested that students could end their course with up to £65,000 debt to repay. Currently students start to repay this loan when they earn around £21,000 per year so the repayments would affect Band 5 nurses. It has been estimated that they would be repaying approximately £5.25 per month from their salary. There is a petition against the proposal here: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/113491>

Some of those involved in nurse education argue that the limited availability of practice placements will not allow the expansion of student numbers that those who argue for the scheme anticipate.

The Department of Health proposals may change during the consultation period and in response to campaigns against it.



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<http://www.mdx.ac.uk/our-research/centres/centre-for-critical-research-in-nursing-and-midwifery>