

**From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



Professor Patrick Maxwell
Chair of the Medical Schools Council

clare.owen@medschools.ac.uk

Castle Buildings
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ

Tel: 02890520559

Fax: 02890520573

Email: peter.may@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:

Our ref: PM
SCORR-0415-2022

Date: 6 March 2023

Dear Patrick

Thank you for your correspondence of 29 November 2022 in relation to the financial support available to medical students across the UK. I apologise for the lengthy delay in responding to you.

As you will be aware, the financial support available to medical students varies across the regions of the UK depending upon where the student is ordinarily resident. Policy reflects the resources available to each administration and their assessment of workforce supply priorities. As a consequence, different levels of support are provided to students.

The Education (Student Support) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 preclude students who already hold a primary degree awarded by an institution in Northern Ireland or Great Britain, from obtaining fee loans or maintenance grants for a second primary degree. Students are eligible to receive a maintenance loan, according to individual circumstances. This approach is based on the principle that the financial resources available should be targeted at primary degree level, thereby allowing a greater number of students to experience third level study.

The evidence continues to show that medical courses in Northern Ireland are very heavily oversubscribed each year and that the overwhelming majority of students see their degree course through to completion under the current support arrangements. Given that the resources available to the Department are severely constrained, and there are many competing priorities, I do not consider that the diversion of funding to increase the support provided to Northern Ireland students undertaking medicine as a second primary degree is appropriate.

Departmental colleagues are in regular contact with both Queen's University and Ulster University to ensure that medical students are able to access any support which they may be entitled to.

The Department has been taking forward other ways to provide support to medical students with the current cost of living pressures. This has included supporting the development of pilot projects in three HSC Trusts in NI to test the feasibility of student-led choice for travel versus accommodation while on clinical placement. This has focussed on developing more effective arrangements that can be provided within the current funding envelope. Uptake of these pilots has been very successful and feedback very positive.

The Department will continue to seek to develop this initiative with stakeholders.

Yours sincerely



Peter May