



Rt Hon. Ann Keen MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

8 December 2009

Dear Ann,

Supporting our future NHS workforce: a consultation on the NHS Bursary Scheme

The Department of Health Review of NHS Student Support in England commands the joint support of the Council of Deans of Health, Dental Schools Council, Medical Schools Council, and Universities UK, and this letter highlights the specific aspects of the review that our organisations would like to see addressed soon. We support the aims of this review, in particular the need to ensure that any policy changes are evidence based and take account of cost-effectiveness, the need to attract high quality students from a diverse range of backgrounds, and the need to retain those graduates so that they contribute to the future healthcare workforce.

Our organisations have worked in partnership with the Department of Health to review the current scheme and to consider options for revised arrangements and some will also be responding to the above consultation. However, we are in agreement that the following recommendations should be met by this review:

- i. The future financial support system for NHS funded students should incentivise high quality students to enter and be retained within healthcare education.
- ii. The future financial support system for NHS funded students should look to ensure students can experience successful learning opportunities in order to meet the requirements and expectations in relation to their future roles. Unlike some other undergraduate courses, healthcare programmes require a significant time commitment that includes time spent on clinical placements.

For example: Nursing students are required to complete 2300 hours on practice placements. These students can also spend up to 45 weeks a year on their programmes, which reduces their time for paid work in comparison with other students.

Essential learning could be jeopardised if students are forced to rely on paid employment to finance their learning, or given waged status as a means of financial support which could lead to their ability to learn on placements being compromised.

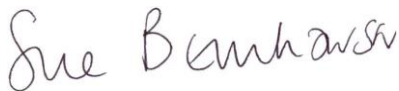
- iii. The future financial support system for NHS funded students should take into account the wider higher education student finance system as a whole and ensure that there is equity of funding within and between healthcare student groups. Certain inequities in the current system need to be addressed.

For example: Graduate students on medical and dental undergraduate programmes, who account for approximately 15% of the undergraduate medical and dental cohort, only receive the means tested bursary from their fifth year of study and do not have access to a student loan to cover their tuition fees beyond their first year. Consequently this group of students are left at a significant financial disadvantage relative to both their peers completing their first degree and those on graduate entry programmes.

- iv. The future financial support system should acknowledge the widening participation agenda in higher education and support the strong historical record of intelligent and informed recruitment processes within universities to widen access to healthcare programmes.
- v. The future financial support system for NHS funded students should be simple to understand and easy to access. Students must be able to obtain clear and consistent information on financial support in accessible formats from a variety of arenas.

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Department of Health to take this review forward.

Yours sincerely,



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