



msc Medical
Schools
Council
For the future of medicine

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Mr Peter May
Department of Health
Permanent Secretary
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Dear Mr May

Medical students in financial difficulty

Over the last 12 months UK medical schools have become increasingly concerned about the financial pressures being placed on medical students. We are cognisant that the cost of living crisis the UK is experiencing is having an impact on people across the country.

Medical students are placed under additional pressure by the way the financing of their degrees is structured and implemented, in part through the Department of Health NI Bursary Scheme. This is particularly the case for students in their final year of study. Whilst the student loan system is transparent, the Bursary system is complicated and dependent on the student's country of domicile, the course they are taking (ie 4-yr graduate entry or 5-year) and whether or not they have a previous degree. Of note, under the NI Education Student Support Regulations (and at variance with England and the other devolved nations), NI domiciled students who are undertaking Medicine as a second degree are ineligible to receive standard funding for the duration of their studies, and that includes access to this Bursary.

All students are facing financial difficulties but the Department of Health NI Bursary Scheme creates an added burden. As an example, final year undergraduate medical students in Northern Ireland, on a standard five-year course, experience an approximate 54% drop in the maintenance funding available to them.

This puts students under increasing pressure to undertake part-time work in the latter parts of their course just to be able to cover their accommodation costs and food. This added pressure to undertake part-time work coincides with full-time clinical studies as the students prepare to transition into the health service as doctors to be ready to treat patients.

There are things that medical schools and universities can do to ease the financial pressures on medical students, such as ensuring that access to hardship funds is equitable. However, we believe

that the way in which funding works for final year students and graduate entry students (whether on a graduate entry programme or a standard 5 year course of study) needs to change.

Medical Schools Council supports the aims of The Doctors' Association and the Liveable Bursary Campaign (<https://www.dauk.org/liveable-nhs-bursary/>) and calls on the governments across the UK to take the following steps:

1. Grant immediate access to full maintenance loans for medical students in line with other healthcare professional courses for the duration of the degree programme.
2. Allow medical students to access appropriate financial support. We are aware that, in England, the NHS Learning Support Fund, which is available to other healthcare professional students, would enable all medical students to access a £5,000 non-means tested grant.
3. Review travel and accommodation expenses, so that fuel and accommodation reimbursements are reflective of the ongoing cost of living crisis.

Financial difficulties put additional stress on the student population who should rightly be focusing on preparing themselves to be effective doctors serving communities in NI and across the UK. It is particularly concerning that these issues are most acute at the point when students are just about to become fully fledged doctors. It is vital that this issue receives urgent attention by the NI government as well as the governments in the devolved nations.

A similar version of this letter will be sent to the Ministers for Health in England, Wales and Scotland.

Yours Sincerely



Professor Patrick Maxwell
Chair, Medical Schools Council
Regius Professor of Physic
Head of the School of Clinical Medicine, Cambridge



Professor Pascal McKeown
Head of School and Dean of Education, Queen's University Belfast

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Dubras', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Professor Louise Dubras
Foundation Dean of the School of Medicine at Ulster University