



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Consultation on the Review of HSC Student Bursary Schemes

May 2012

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Alternative Formats

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About This Document

This consultation document is being circulated to key interest groups, the Health and Social Care sector and other government departments. It is also available at:

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/consultations.htm.

The Department is committed to effective consultation on this draft paper and will make every effort to respond to the views expressed during the consultation process. Your response will help shape the proposed policy and contribute towards future policy direction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2012 the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety initiated a review of the current Health and Social Care Bursary schemes on offer to students studying the following courses:

- Nursing and Midwifery
- Medicine
- Allied Health Professionals – includes students in physiotherapy, radiography, speech and language therapy, podiatry, occupational therapy, dietetics,
- Social work

The aim of the review is;

- To begin to harmonise the current DHSSPS-funded student support scheme to make it fair and equitable across the professions which it supports.
- To secure value for money in provision of bursaries.

The Department sought the views of a steering group comprising representatives from the Department, education sector, and staff side for each of the professions. The Department took the views of the steering group and other factors into account in proposing its policy changes.

During the course of this review we have examined the level and type of student support accessible to health and social care students. We have also examined current labour market and economic conditions and supply/demand factors for the HSC workforce.

The Department has concluded that there is scope to make examine the level of support offered in the first instance, but that the effects of any change on workforce supply will need to be closely monitored. We also acknowledge that the current bursary scheme is complex with historical anomalies and that a stepped-change approach is required.

To this end, the Department intends to continue to look creatively at the HSC Bursary scheme, to examine the potential for harmonising the level of financial support on offer and introducing means-testing across all professions. We anticipate a second phase of this review to meet this objective.

The proposal presented in this consultation is a first step towards harmonisation by reducing the level of funding by £890 per annum to the Nursing and Midwifery non means tested award from 2012/13 and beyond, and removal of the one-off book and uniform allowance, which is singular to nursing and midwifery students (£190 per student, non-recurring). This reduces the annual non-repayable entitlement from £6055 to £5165. Readers should note that this does not imply that there will be no further reductions to the bursary schemes on offer to health and social care students in the future. The annual cost to the Department of healthcare bursaries is (ca. £17.9m), and we have viewed this reduction as Step1 of a continuing process. Readers should also note that the proposals in this document have no effect on the entitlement to additional allowances such as those for students with dependants and disabilities as the Department continues to be committed to the principle of widening participation.

The Department welcomes your views on the proposals.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) is reviewing the current arrangements for providing financial support to health and social care students. Health and Social Care students are entitled to a variety of financial support arrangements which includes tuition fee support, bursaries, access to fee loans and maintenance loans.

Scope of the Review

This review will focus on examining potential changes to the bursary element of the scheme for the following professional groups:

- Nursing and Midwifery
- Medicine
- Allied Health Professionals – includes students in physiotherapy, radiography, speech and language therapy, podiatry, occupational therapy, dietetics,
- Social work

The review does not include an exploration of the rules on eligibility for support. Nor does it include proposals to alter the additional allowances and expenses currently payable to students such as the Disabled Students Allowance, Parental Learning Allowance or Dependants Allowance.

The arrangements for student support in England, Scotland and Wales are not within this review. Neither does the review cover payment of tuition fees for Health and Social Care students, however this does not preclude further examination of this area in the future.

Key Principles of the Review

- To continue to promote widening participation to address discrepancies in the uptake of higher education opportunities between different social

groups

- To take account of the reform that has taken place in the wider student support environment
- To acknowledge the potential workforce implications of changes to the Bursary Scheme
- To give recognition to the differences in respect of education and training across different disciplines

In preparing this document the Department was assisted by a Steering Group comprising staff side and departmental representatives from the relevant professions and the education sector. We thank them for their contributions and welcome their views through this consultation.

2.0 WHAT ARE HEALTHCARE BURSARIES?

The Department aims to attract high calibre people from all sections of the community to train as healthcare professionals. In line with other parts of the UK a range of bursary support schemes is available from the Department to students on courses that will lead to registration in qualifying healthcare professions.

A Healthcare Bursary is a non repayable funding award allocated to students undertaking a health and social care related course of study. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has financed schemes since the 1980s.

The bursary schemes in NI currently provide financial support for around 3500 students who are completing HSC-funded pre-registration healthcare education. The overall cost is in the region of £17.9m per year.

There are currently 2 types of bursaries:

- Means-tested bursaries currently provided for AHPs and medical and dental fifth year students
- Non means-tested bursaries, currently provided for nurses and midwives and social work students

There is an additional £1.35m paid out in allowances across healthcare students which seek to help ease the financial implications of personal circumstances such as disability and childcare costs.

The Department also spends in the region of £25m on tuition fees for the students it supports.

3.0 CONTEXT – SETTING THE SCENE

Healthcare Bursaries have been in payment for over thirty years and since that time many factors have changed including;

- The economy
- The labour market
- The nature of training – e.g. nursing has changed from an apprenticeship model to a 50% academic/50% clinical placement course
- The reform and modernisation of student support across the UK, whereby the student bears more of the costs of higher education than in recent times
- Service Delivery with advances in technology and science

3.1 Economic Factors

In the context of limited resources it is essential that they are allocated on a fair and equitable basis in line with priorities and on a basis which secures value for money.

3.2 Labour Market

The labour market has changed significantly over the past 15 years. In Northern Ireland over 50% of school leavers enter university and for healthcare courses the 'application to commissioned places' ratio is favourable with significantly more applicants than places. For example in the 2010/11 academic year there were in excess of 6 applications for every AHP commissioned training place.

The HSC is the largest employer in Northern Ireland with 65,000 employees across the sector. The HSC workforce has contracted by 1.0% (headcount) since 2007.

There is likely to be limited growth and turnover in the HSC over the funding period to 2014/15. At present there is modest oversupply in some professions and commissioning will take account of this. Indicators are that no additional supply will be necessary. A synopsis of the current demographics for the professions under consideration in this review is presented below.

➤ **Nurses and Midwives**

There are approximately 16,000 nurses and midwives excluding support staff. 39% of nurses and midwives are under 40. This decreases to 29% for midwives alone. Vacancy rates (for posts which organisations are actively trying to fill) are low at 1.6%.

➤ **Social work**

There are approximately 3500 social workers in the HSC, with 38% under 40. The most recent vacancy rates are around 2.1%.

➤ **Allied Health professions**

Allied Health professionals, encompass dieticians, occupational therapists, orthoptists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, radiographers and speech and language therapists. There are approximately 3465 employed in the HSC with an overall vacancy rate of 3.6% Over 50% of the workforce are aged under 40 ranging from 56% in the case of orthoptists to 72.9% of the dietetics workforce.

➤ **Medical Staff**

There are approximately 3,817 (3,571.4 whole time equivalent) medical staff in the HSC which is broken down as:

- Consultants – 1,449 (1365.9 WTE)
- Junior Doctors – 1,803 (1,775.6 WTE)
- Other grades including SAS, Trust grade etc – 565 (429.9 WTE)

Upon graduation trainee doctors will compete for a Foundation place. Within NI there are 252 F1 places. Doctors compete within a UK market.

The figures above demonstrate that demand and supply is relatively balanced at present.

3.3 Reform and modernisation

Of the students entering university around 7% undertake courses which attract a healthcare bursary. Students undertaking courses, including health related courses, which do not attract Departmental Bursaries are entitled to student support which includes repayable maintenance loans and fee loans as well as means tested grants (Annex A). According to the Push Guide to student finances and recent surveys, the average debt of a 2011 student starting is approximately £26,100. In contrast, HSC students supported by the DHSSPS receive between £12,000 (social work students) and £18,000 (nursing and midwifery students) in non-repayable bursary support over 3 years of study. This does not include the cost of tuition fees paid by the DHSSPS, can amount to in excess of £18,500 for some students e.g. nursing and midwifery and allied health professional students.

3.4 The nature of training

Whilst curriculum changes are an ongoing feature to keep abreast of technological and scientific breakthroughs the length and nature of training for the majority of healthcare students has not changed. Medical students continue to undertake five years of undergraduate study, with considerable clinical contact from year 3 of study. Social Work and Allied Health Professionals' courses are of 3 years duration and involve placements in the appropriate setting. Nursing and Midwifery training has changed from an 'apprenticeship model' where the bursary acted as trainee salary to an all degree profession with 50% academic work and 50% clinical placement over the 3 years.

4.0 THE NEED TO REVIEW

The Bursary scheme was initially introduced at a time when it was difficult to attract students to train as healthcare professionals and since then a range of different schemes have developed across the professions, each with their own specific rationale for being introduced, and for the level and type of funding support offered.

The current Bursary scheme is now complex, with various historical inconsistencies in the support offered.

There is therefore a long term need to harmonise the schemes and determine whether the funding is fair and equitable across professions. There is also, however, an immediate need to review whether the current arrangements remain justified across the health and social care professions i.e. whether the rationale for continuing to financially support health and social work students is valid.

As the tax payer ultimately bears the cost of the bursary schemes, they must continually demonstrate the best value for money possible, balanced against fulfilling the purpose for which the schemes were created – to attract a diverse range of high quality students to train as healthcare professionals, based on their ability to learn rather than their ability to pay.

In an effort to keep the Bursary scheme affordable in the current financial climate, this review will investigate whether changes in the level of Bursary offered to health and social care students would impact significantly on future workforce supply.

Any proposals contained in this review will only affect new students entering training from 2012/13 onwards. The current students in training will not be affected as the Department recognises it owes a duty of care to these students and must not adversely change support arrangements mid-course of study.

The Department anticipates that there will be a second phase of the review to examine the feasibility of future harmonisation of HSC student support, for example, the introduction of means testing across all healthcare student groups.

5.0 THE BURSARY SCHEME AND ASSOCIATED FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The current Bursary scheme is complex, as outlined earlier and is not uniform across the various professions it supports. The following paragraphs aim to explain how the Bursary scheme supports current students in training, taking the earlier principles of the review into account. This section also highlights some of the variations across the professions currently.

5.1 Nursing and Midwifery

Nursing and midwifery students are entitled to a basic Bursary of £6055, full tuition fee support and access to additional 'other' allowances based on eligibility (see Section 5.5), for each year of a three year course. This is the highest non repayable award of all the groups supported. Each nursing place commissioned by DHSSPS costs in the region of £37,500 per student in fees and bursary combined.

The Department notes however that nursing and midwifery courses have a high clinical element and students are required to work a 24/7 working pattern on clinical placement. This restricts the students' ability to access part time work to support their income. The NMC Standards for Pre-registration Nursing Education (September 2010) require 4600 hours across 3 years, of which 2300 hours is in practice settings.

The course is 45 weeks a year over 3 semesters, 37.5 hours per week when on clinical placement, reflecting a 24 /7 pattern of care.

The Bursary is currently non means-tested and this excludes students from accessing any other form of student loan, under the current Student Support Regulations.

As currently offered, the Bursary plus the additional allowances support students from diverse backgrounds, such as mature students and those with dependants, to access training and complete the course.

5.2 Allied Health Professionals

Allied Health Professionals in training currently receive a means tested Bursary up to a maximum of £2355. Although this is significantly less than nursing and midwifery colleagues, this course does not have the same placement demands and requirement to work a 24/7 working pattern. The system of means testing aims to support those students with the greatest need in line with the principle of widening participation. Approximately 2/3 of students in training receive some level of Bursary and the remaining 1/3 do not qualify based on the current thresholds for means

testing.

The cost to the DHSSPS in respect of tuition fees for Allied Health professionals is in the region of £24,500 per student over the three year course of study. When the bursary is added the overall cost to the Department, per student place commissioned can be up to £31,500 per student.

AHP students can also apply for reduced rate loans (repayable). Full tuition fee support is also provided as is access to additional 'other allowances' based on eligibility.

5.3 Fifth Year Medical and Dental

Support is provided for Northern Ireland domiciled undergraduate medical and dental students in their fifth and later years of study at Higher Education Institutions in the UK. Student support for the first four years of the course is provided by the Department of Employment and Learning. DHSSPS provides support for fifth year students in recognition of the greater length of their course compared with other students in higher education.

The amount payable is means tested and is comparable to that paid to allied health professionals. Students can also apply for reduced rate loans (repayable). Full non-repayable tuition fee support (in the region of £3700 per annum) is also available from fifth year, as is access to additional 'other allowances' based on eligibility.

These students can also apply for reduced rate loans (repayable).

The fifth year undergraduate medicine course is 43 weeks long. This includes:

- 37 weeks contact. Contact time is 9-5 five days per week.
- 2 weeks self directed learning
- Of the 37 weeks 29 are clinical and 8 are non clinical.

Future Policy Direction

The four UK countries have now adopted different arrangements in relation to student fees i.e. tuition costs. For example, the Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland recently announced that fees would remain at current levels (including inflation) whereas HEIs in other parts of the UK have increased student fee costs, in some cases up to £9000 per annum. Consultees should note that the Department intends to cap the fee support available for NI domiciled students at the rate which applies in Northern Ireland. It is anticipated that this will come into effect from 2016 and will therefore apply to medical and dental students entering study in 2012 and beyond.

5.4 Social Work

Social work students receive a non means tested incentive scheme payment of £4000 per annum plus £500 towards expenses related to work-based learning. Social work students who are domiciled in NI, undertaking Degree in Social Work in NI, registered with NISCC and are not employed as a Regional Social Work Trainee, qualify for the bursary. The course is 3 years long for the undergraduate route and 2 years for the relevant graduate route. Part time students receive £750 per module (a maximum 4 modules per academic year). This includes a contribution towards expenses related to work-based learning.

Social work students can also access maintenance loans and fee loans as the course has been granted an exemption under the Student Support Regulations, however these are repayable. Fees for Social Work students are in the region of £10,000 for a 3 year course of study.

The Bursary is therefore helpful both to support mature students who may have dependants, and to offset the cost of fees for social work students.

Approximately 50% of the course is direct supervised practice or Individual practice development.

5.5 'Other Allowances' payable

The range of 'other allowances' payable to students and funded by DHSSPS varies by profession but can typically include;

Dependants Allowance (means tested)	
Spouse or first child	£2275
Each subsequent child	£540
Parents Learning Allowance (non means tested)	£1125
Contribution towards childcare costs	£1245 max
Initial Expenses Allowance (one-off payment Nursing and Midwifery only)	
Book Allowance	£80
Uniform Allowance	£110
Disabled Students' Allowances	
Specialist Equipment Allowance	£5161 (whole course)
Non-Medical Help	£20,520 (per annum)
General Allowance	£1724

6.0 CONSIDERATION OF OPTIONS AND ASSESSMENT OF RISKS

As one of the aims of the review is to examine harmonisation in the level of funding on offer to health and social care students via the HSC Bursary scheme, the Department must give due regard to the associated risks of any proposal to reduce the levels of support.

The Department considers that the main risks are:

- the potential reduced supply of undergraduates
- possible impact on age and gender differentiation into profession perhaps discouraging those with financial and caring responsibilities

However, any assessment of risk must take into account an assessment of the likelihood of occurrence. The Department considers the HSC workforce demographics to be the key factor in respect of the issue of reduced supply.

As outlined in Section 3.2, the HSC workforce has contracted in recent times and indicators are that the supply will meet demand over the next three to four years.

Notwithstanding this, the Department acknowledges that healthcare undergraduate programmes for nursing, midwifery, allied health professions, medical and dental and social work have unique demands not experienced in other non health-related areas of study and that a level of financial support must continue, if we are to continue to attract a diverse range of high calibre students to train as health and social care professionals. It is justifiable however to consider that reducing the levels of the current Bursaries provided by DHSSPS will not adversely impact supply to such a degree as to lead to immediate undersupply.

It must also be noted that the Department intends to continue paying the tuition fees for the healthcare students it currently supports. This costs in the region of £20,000 to £24,000 for nursing and midwifery and AHP students and £3700 for Fifth Year Medical and Dental.

In respect of the second risk identified by the steering group i.e discouraging those with dependants to train as healthcare professionals, the Department has completed a preliminary screening and, based on the evidence available, concludes that a full EQIA is not required. If consultees consider that this decision is not correct they are asked to provide details including any supporting evidence, via the consultation questionnaire.

7.0 PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

The Department has thoroughly considered the rationale for paying a Bursary to each of the professions and accepts that the Bursaries play an important part in supporting students to enter and complete training in Health and Social Care professions. However, as outlined above the Department intends to begin harmonisation of the bursary arrangement by examining the level of support currently on offer. A number of proposals such as means testing for all health and social work students and a range of potential options around the level of support to the Nursing and Midwifery, AHP, Fifth Year Medical and Dental and Social Work Bursary schemes have all been examined and discussed with stakeholders in the steering group. Their views have been noted.

With such a complex scheme in place the Department acknowledges that a stepped-change approach would be required and as the initial step we are consulting on a proposal to make changes to the Nursing and Midwifery non means tested Bursary

for the immediate future, including the 2012/13 year and beyond.

The Department gives a commitment to Nursing and Midwifery colleagues and students, and indeed all health and social care students that it will continue to look creatively at the HSC Bursary scheme to examine the potential for harmonising the level of financial support on offer and introducing means-testing across all professions. The Department also intends to monitor the effects of the reduced level of support from this Bursary and reserves the right to increase it in the future, should workforce supply requirements dictate such a move.

The table below describes the proposals and should not be interpreted as separate options but rather one overall proposal.

Table 1 – Reduced level of support in non means tested Nursing and Midwifery Bursary

Means Tested Allowances and non means tested Parents Learning Allowance	No change
Non means tested Bursary	Reduce by £890 from £6055 to £5165 per annum
One off payments for Book Allowance (£80) and Uniform allowance (£110)	Remove

In formulating their response to this consultation, consultees should note that the proposed changes outlined above mean that the cost to the DHSSPS of a commissioned Nursing and Midwifery place could reduce from approximately £37,500 over the course of study to approximately £35,000.

Annex A – Financial arrangements for students in Northern Ireland

Type of help available	Repayable Y/N	Details
Student Loan for Tuition Fees	Y	The fee you are charged, but no more than £3 575 , in this academic year. This loan is repayable upon graduation; however graduates will only start making contributions once they earn over the £15 000 thresholds.
Maintenance Grant (or Special Support Grant)	N	<p>A Maintenance Grant is available for students who started their course in September 2010 or later. The maximum amount of support available is £3,475 a year, and how much a student gets will depend on their income and that of their household.</p> <p>Students who are eligible to receive a Special Support Grant will not be eligible to receive a Maintenance Grant.</p>
Student Loans for Maintenance	Y	<p>This loan is to assist with students living costs such as accommodation, food, clothes, travel etc. Interest on the loan is linked to inflation only, so what students repay will be worth what they borrowed.</p> <p>If a student is entitled to a Maintenance Grant, they may also receive a Maintenance Loan but the maximum amount of loan they can receive will be reduced.</p>
Bursaries from Higher Education Institutions	N	<p>Northern Ireland institutions that charge maximum fees have to provide extra financial help to students who receive the full £3,475 Maintenance Grant or Special Support Grant.</p> <p>In Northern Ireland any university or college charging full fees will have to provide a bursary of £329 to students who are entitled to the full £3,475 Maintenance Grant or Special Support Grant. Many universities and colleges also give bursaries to students who are eligible for some of the Maintenance Grant or Special Support Grant.</p>
Student Loan for Tuition Fees	Y	The fee you are charged, but no more than £3 575 , in this academic year. This loan is repayable upon graduation; however graduates will only start making contributions once they earn over the £15 000 thresholds.

<p>Maintenance Grant (or Special Support Grant)</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>A Maintenance Grant is available for students who started their course in September 2010 or later. The maximum amount of support available is £3,475 a year, and how much a student gets will depend on their income and that of their household.</p> <p>Students who are eligible to receive a Special Support Grant will not be eligible to receive a Maintenance Grant.</p>
<p>Extra help if you have a disability</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are available for students who have a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. They can apply at any time before or during their course, and how much they can get does not depend on income or that of their family. They will not have to repay this help. The following help is available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A specialist equipment allowance of up to £5,266 for the whole course. • A non-medical helper's allowance of up to £20,938 each year. • A general disabled students' allowance of up to £1,759 each year. • Extra travel costs you have to pay to attend your university or college course as a result of your disability.
<p>Extra help if you have children or adult dependants</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>The Childcare Grant is available for full-time students with dependent children in 'prescribed' childcare. They can receive 85% of actual childcare costs in term times and during holidays, up to £148.75 a week for one child, and up to £255 a week for two or more children. How much help a student get depends on their income and that of their dependants (including your husband, wife or partner). Students will not have to repay this grant, however they cannot get this grant if in receipt of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit from HM Revenue & Customs.</p> <p>Students who have a partner (including a partner of the same sex) or another adult, usually a member of the family (but not any of your children), who depends on them financially, may be eligible for this help. They could receive up to £2,695 a year, depending on their income and that of the adult dependants. Students will not have</p>

		to repay this help.
Support funds and extra Help form your College/ University	N	<p>This is available through the college and provides help for students on lower incomes who may need extra financial support for their course and to stay in higher education.</p> <p>More specifically the fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can meet course and living costs which are not already being met from other grants; • can help if students are in financial hardship; • can provide emergency payments for unexpected financial crises <p>The following groups of students are a priority for help from the Support Funds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with children, especially lone parents. • Other mature students, especially those with existing financial commitments. • Students from lower income families. • Disabled students who are not in receipt of DSA. • Students who have been in care. • Students from Foyers or who are homeless. • Students in their final year who are in financial difficulty.