



RCN briefing ahead of Finance for Student Nursing Adjournment Debate 14th December 2015

With a membership of more than 430,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors,

the UK parliaments and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

Background

All students in England on university courses in nursing leading to registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) are currently eligible for financial help from the NHS while studying. Funding is available from the NHS Business Services Authority and the Student Loans Company.

The Chancellor announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2015 a transformation of the funding system for health care students, by replacing grants with student loans and abolishing the cap on the number of student places for nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects.

The RCN has significant concerns regarding Government claims that this reform will enable universities to provide up to 10,000 additional nursing and other health professional training places this Parliament. The RCN also questions the Government's claim that the move to loans will give health students access to 25% more financial support.

The RCN's Position



There are still a lot of question marks about how the system will actually work, however, the RCN is certain that anything that makes people worse off or deters them from becoming nurses, would be a big loss to our society.

50% of their time is spent in clinical practice working directly with patients and their families and they have a longer academic year.

These proposals will saddle future generations of student nurses with even more debt and financial pressures, and unless nurses pay improves, many



Impact on clinical placements

It is unclear how funding for clinical placements will work in the future, whether there will be sufficient number of placements across a range of clinical settings for additional students and if there will be enough mentors to support students in clinical practice. This could mean that the training for some students is limited in terms of the specialisms they experience and the support they receive.

Pay and impact of debt on future career

The RCN is deeply concerned that there is a risk of people being put off from applying to nursing degrees, because of concerns over debt. There is no certainty that the changes will increase nursing supply and put more money in the hands of nursing



RCN reveal that the difference has been over-stated, particularly for mature students and those with dependants.

Next Steps

There are still a lot of question marks about how the system will actually work. Any move towards a loans and fees based system would pose significant risks that have the potential to diminish any likely benefits. The RCN believes that any change must genuinely result in an increased number of entrants from diverse backgrounds.

The design and implementation of a new model must be shaped by full consultation with stakeholders and allow time for concerns to be properly addressed. The programme must also be subject to regular monitoring and systematic evaluation, including exploring any unintended consequences of reform. The process for evaluation should be transparent and enable Government, as well as stakeholders, to quickly identify any falls in the number of applications.

There are significant risks of this change to funding model, which has the potential to impact directly and detrimentally on patient care and the provision of comprehensive health services. For this reason, it is imperative that its impact is fully assessed, thoroughly tested and systematically evaluated.

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