



**RCN Policy and International Department**  
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# Student Bursaries, Funding and Finance in England

An update on the proposed changes to student nurse bursaries and the RCN position

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## About the RCN

With a membership of around 430,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, 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.

In the 25 November Spending Review and Autumn Statement, the Chancellor announced 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 changes will affect students starting their courses from 1 August 2017.

The Government believes that this reform will enable universities to provide up to 10,000 additional nursing and other health professional training places this Parliament. It also argues that the move to loans will give health students access to 25% more financial support which would ultimately ensure that there are enough nurses for the NHS. The RCN has significant concerns regarding these claims.

Bursaries are a vital financial support



These proposals will saddle future generations of student nurses with even more debt and financial pressures and unless nurses pay improves significantly, many graduates will never be in a position to pay their loans back.

The ring-fence to nursing student funding has been removed and a precious link between the NHS and its nurses is potentially at risk, making it harder to plan for the future workforce.

There are still significant 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.

The RCN has concerns about how the implications for practice education, placement availability and support will be managed.

This decision was made with no consultation or evidence gathering and the RCN believes that there has been very little consideration of other options for future nursing students.

If the political decision is not reversed the design of the new system will be critical if it is to mitigate against the significant risks identified in this paper. In such circumstances the RCN would of course actively engage in the detailed negotiations.

The RCN will be responding to the proposals in England, as well as seeking to ensure that the Governments for the devolved Countries do not make the same mistake. The RCN is pleased that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland has already confirmed that it has no plans to change the financial support which it currently provides to healthcare-related students.

## **Risks and Challenges**

### **Impact on workforce planning**

The Government have claimed that they are aiming to increase the size of the nursing workforce and have committed to self-sufficiency regarding the future supply of the nursing workforce. The Government have a fundamental responsibility to secure the supply of a professional and multi skilled nursing workforce to deliver care to the population. However the current proposals will ability to plan, and deliver, the health care workforce of the future and represents a significant shift to a free market approach away from a planned one. In addition to ensuring the right numbers of nursing staff, undermining national planning will also weaken the ability to grow the workforce that is required to deliver new services, such as those being developed under the Five Year Forward View and achieve parity of esteem between physical and mental health services.



### **Impact on clinical placements**

It is unclear how the arrangements for funding clinical placements will work in the future if additional places are made available but the budget is not increased. There are also significant questions about whether there will be a sufficient number of placements across a range of clinical settings for more students and if there will be enough mentors to support students in clinical

