



10th December 2009

NHS Bursary Consultation

Department of Health

Room 2N22

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Letter by Email: bursaryconsultation@dh.gsi.gov.uk

NHS Bursary Scheme: MHNA(UK) consultation response.

Mental Health Nurses Academics (UK) brings together representatives from all UK Higher Education Institutions engaged in mental health nursing research and education. This influential national group advises on issues related to mental health nursing and shares good practice and innovation on the field.

Members of the group are currently actively engaged in the NMC Review of Pre-registration Nursing (as expert members of NMC RPRNE advisory, generic and mental health field working groups). The group has a strong commitment to strengthening the competence (via generic and specialist mental health competencies) of the future graduate nursing workforce to meet the needs of mental health service users and carers.

Given the potential impact on the future recruitment and retention of pre-registration mental health nurses across the four countries of the UK, the MHNA(UK) group has also considered recommendations in response to the NHS Bursary consultation.

We believe that future financial support systems for NHS funded students must meet the following principles/criteria:

They should **ensure students can experience successful learning opportunities in order to fulfil EU and Professional body 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. Essential learning could be undermined 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.

They should be **simple to understand and easy to access**. It is essential that students can obtain clear and consistent information on financial support in appropriately accessible formats from a variety of sources.

The **principle of equity is paramount** and we recommended that it is applied:

- Between the four countries in the UK
- With other health care students
- Between diploma and degree nursing students (by removing the diploma/degree anomaly)

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Future finance support systems for NHS funded students **must take into account and target support towards the needs of (often older) students with dependants.**

Data indicates proportionally more mature students enrol for Mental Health and Learning Disability nursing programmes than for Adult or Children and Young People. We recommend that the findings and recommendations from a recent study (Prymachuk et al 2009 Nurse Education: factors associated with attrition. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 65(1):149 - 160) are considered.

The authors examined factors associated with attrition rates in pre-registration nurse education programmes and recommended that HEIs actively target the recruitment of mature students based on their findings that mature students are more likely than younger students to complete nursing programmes. Whilst the evidence for the link between attrition and financial hardship is not overwhelming it is noted that 'personal problems' (which could include financial problems) along with 'academic failure' seem to be the main external factors affecting non-completion of nursing programmes.

In relation to different levels of support depending on where students live and are studying it would seem reasonable to have different levels of support. This will provide targeted support for individual dependent on their circumstances and also correlates with the arrangements for HEFCE funded students. The differentiation of support for students should be dependent on whether they are:

- Living at home
- Living away from home outside London
- Living away from home in London

Based on the principles outlined above:

- **We believe the inequalities of current scheme (option 1) are unacceptable.** This option is not equitable and perpetuates the current disincentive to study nursing at degree level.
- **The majority of respondents within MHNA(UK) recommend OPTION 2b (a small non-means-tested bursary plus a larger means-tested bursary and access to the same non-means tested loan available to current NHS-funded students).**

We believe that these recommendations would best support the future mental health nursing workforce.

Yours sincerely,



Linda Cooper. Chair Mental Health Nurse Academics (UK). 10th December 2009.

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