



Craig Whittaker MP

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NHS Bursaries and Health Education Funding Reform

Thank you for contacting me about changes to the health education system.

Government Whips, of whom I am one, do not, by convention, sign Early Day Motions as doing so is likely to breach the Ministerial Code's rules on collective responsibility. I can comment, however, on the issues you raise.

I would like to set the question of postgraduate bursaries in the wider context of the changes the Government is introducing.

I believe that nurses, midwives and allied health professionals (AHPs) are vital to our valued NHS and so everybody with the qualifications and commitment to undertake these degrees should have the chance to do so. The current system prevents this as the cost of training nurses, midwives and AHPs is largely borne by the NHS. In effect there has been an artificial cap on the numbers in training, limited to only those numbers needed as a minimum to meet NHS workforce requirements in line with Health Education England's annual workforce plan.

These limits currently prevent two in every three people who want to pursue nursing careers from doing so. The Government is committed to increasing the number of training places for home-grown nurses, midwives and allied health professionals, with those in training getting around 25 per cent more financial support while they study. This is a huge advantage to the NHS, which has had to rely on expensive agency nurses and staff from overseas in order to compensate for a lack of UK-trained professionals.

In order to deliver more nurses and health professionals for the NHS, a better funding system for health students and a more sustainable model for universities, it is necessary to move health students' grants and bursaries onto the standard student support system – in line with all other degrees. This change will apply to all students who began their studies from August 2017, and not to previously existing students.

The Government recognises that nursing students in particular often have unique circumstances. Following a consultation on these reforms, the Government will be providing extra funding to help cover additional expenses like travel and more support for students with children. Ministers will work with the Royal College of Nursing, hospitals and other partners in taking this forward.

These changes will also create up to 10,000 more training places by the end of this Parliament and the Government is also running a campaign to get experienced nurses back to work.

After lengthy public consultation, it was decided to maintain a limited number of postgraduate bursaries for the 2017 to 2018 academic year which will meet the full costs of

the course for postgraduate students starting in 2017/18. This will be a transitional arrangement to secure the longer term workforce supply and the intention is for these courses to eventually fit the standard student funding model. This transition was announced in July 2016, and was intended to maintain workforce supply before new changes took effect.

You may be interested to know that whilst the Government is reforming the funding for nursing degrees, it is also introducing a range of affordable routes into nursing for those who do not wish to become full-time students. The new nursing degree apprenticeship scheme offers a paid route into nursing. This course will train and educate students to full Nursing and Midwifery Council registered nurse status, whilst offering employment at an NHS trust. So far, these courses are only available in particular areas in England, but I am confident that they will provide many people with an accessible and fulfilling route in nursing. Furthermore, an extra 5,000 nursing associates will be trained in 2018, and 7,500 in 2019. The nursing associate is a new role which offers a work-based route into nursing for new or existing health and care staff.

Student contributions to university costs have changed on three previous occasions, and every time there has been an immediate dip in application rates followed by a steady rise. I know that Ministers are confident nursing courses will follow a similar trend and are certain we will have all the student nurses the NHS needs by September. I understand that the Government will work with the university sector to ensure that applicants are aware of the benefits on offer in undertaking a nursing degree course.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whittaker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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