



College of Operating Department Practitioners

At the CODP CUE Forum held on 3rd December 2015 at Birmingham City University, attendees considered the impact of the Chancellors Spending Review Autumn Statement 2015 in relation to replacing grants (NHS Bursary) with maintenance and tuition loans for ODP pre-registration programmes in England. Below is a summary of the collated results of the SWOT analysis undertaken by the attendees.

Strengths of the Current System

Attendees identified that under the current system, with course fees paid by the NHS and having access to the NHS Bursary scheme, a student may complete their pre-registration programme with relatively little debt. The 'means tested' NHS Bursary enables additional allowances for some students for example childcare allowance, together with the reimbursement of travel expenses when a student attends clinical placement.

Attendees noted that NHS Trusts also benefit from the current system in that Trusts receive funding from commissioners (LETB's) for the placement of students within their operating departments and with Widening Access Schemes available, Trusts may be able to apply for secondment monies from the commissioners.

Weaknesses of Current System

Attendees identified that the current system is a drain on NHS resources especially when the NHS is experiencing financial challenges. The NHS Bursary payments may be insufficient for the financial needs of some students (means tested therefore some students receive more than others). The amount of money a student can access through student loans is also limited. Given this, some students acquire part-time jobs however working in the evenings or at weekends can adversely impact the student's progress on the course.

Attendees also stated that some students may only apply for healthcare profession courses because tuition fees / costs are paid by the NHS and that this could be perceived as a 'cheap' way of getting a degree. Attrition rates may also be higher as there is no commitment by students to finance their programmes.

Attendees identified that there are regional variations for the funding of ODP pre-registration programmes by the LETB's, some commission a three year degree programme where as others will only commission a two year diploma programme. Commissioned numbers may also be restricted for financial needs and hence the number of student ODP places may not meet current workforce needs.

Opportunities of the Proposed System

Attendees identified that under the proposed new system of funding, Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) less constrained by the NHS commissioners, may have more freedom in the type of programmes they deliver. This could permit therefore a move to more three year degree programmes and increases in student numbers including international students. Additional income for the institutions could be used to improve resources, quality and raise the profile of the ODP programme.

With students paying their own tuition fees attendees considered that this may result in a more motivated and committed candidate applying for an ODP programme who is less likely to withdraw from the programme therefore attrition rates could fall. Candidates may also be more informed about student loans rather than bursary system. Attendees also highlighted



that NHS Trusts may develop recruitment incentives in order to attract staff for example, if someone agrees to work for the Trust for a given amount of time their loan could be partially or fully repaid by the Trust (loan abatement schemes).

Threats of the Proposed System

Attendees identified that under the proposed system, there may be a decrease in the number of candidates applying for ODP programmes, in particular mature students who have existing financial commitments, candidates from low participation neighbourhoods and candidates who may already have a degree and may therefore be ineligible for a further student loan. Attendees also identified that the fear of debt that students would be faced with at the end of their studies may put off candidates applying for the course.

Attendees discussed how would clinical placement areas be paid for the placement of students? If numbers were to grow, where would placement capacity come from? Which organisation would monitor and co-ordinate placement capacity? The proposed new system is for England only, would this have adverse consequences for HEI's in Scotland and Wales?

Conclusion

There is to be a full consultation by the Government on the implementation of the health education funding reforms, as usual in these cases, the devil will be in the detail. The Council of Deans of Health web site provides very useful and up-dated information on proposed reforms and the link below gives details of the proposal background together with an appendix of how the two systems (NHS Bursary / maintenance loan) compare financially for a student.

<http://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/2015/11/the-2015-spending-review-changes-to-nursing-midwifery-and-ahp-education-background-information-for-students/>

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