

# Beyond the bursary



Invest in the future of the NHS

September 2016

## UNISON activist briefing

### Everything you need to know about lobbying your local MP

#### WHAT'S GOING ON?

The Government's plans to scrap NHS bursaries will leave student nurses, midwives and allied health professionals with over £52,000 worth of debt. The fear of debt will discourage many people from becoming healthcare professionals, exacerbating the current recruitment crisis. This will have disastrous repercussions for patient safety. There have been some signs that the Conservative Government has misgivings about the policy but as of now they are still planning to go ahead with it.

It is therefore a good time to put pressure on MPs. If you agree this policy doesn't make any sense, get behind the campaign and tell your MP what you think by joining the national NHS bursary constituency lobby day on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016. This is the best opportunity we have to change the minds of unsympathetic or unaware MPs, and ensure friendly ones continue to oppose the scrapping of NHS bursaries actively. At the end of this document are some topics you could discuss with your MP.

Please make sure you read the section of this guide called 'talking to your MP' before you get to the meeting. This is your chance to show your MP that scrapping NHS bursaries will have a really detrimental impact on everyone who lives in their constituency. We have provided some key specific bits of information that we think could persuade or challenge Conservative MPs.

#### WHAT IS LOBBYING?

Lobbying is about raising issues with, and seeking to influence, elected representatives – Councillors, MPs and Peers. It can take many different forms, e.g. sending letters, signing petitions, face to face meetings, and organised protests and rallies, to name a few. It can be done by anyone - grass roots activists and members of the public. Lobbying of MPs can take place in Parliament when it is sitting, or in a MP's constituency.

We want to get as many people as possible lobbying their MPs in their constituencies on the issue of scrapping NHS bursaries on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2016.

#### WHY SHOULD I LOBBY MY MP?

Your Member of Parliament is your representative in Westminster, where new laws are made and Government policy is scrutinised. They deal with bigger issues, like national Government policy on schools, hospitals and transport. It is their job to voice your concerns, as one of their constituents, in the House of Commons. Your MP can ask questions in the House of Commons for you, write to Ministers (senior members of the Government) on your behalf and sponsor and vote for new legislation.

# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

It is important that you, your colleagues, friends, neighbours and family contact your MP about your concerns regarding the abolition of the NHS bursary. The more people an MP has contacting them on the same issue the more likely they are to do something about it.

Not that many people write to their MP, so those that do make an impact. Your MP wants your vote – the least they should do is listen and respond to your concerns. They don't have to respond to your letter but they are shooting themselves in the foot if they don't. If they don't reply to you, write to them again, express your disappointment, and ask them for a response. But most do reply to all letters and many will meet.

## WHAT IS AN MP 'SURGERY'?

You can lobby your MP in your local area by arranging to go along to one of their constituency 'surgeries'. Most MPs hold surgeries – many hold them every week, some hold them once a month. The surgeries are an opportunity for MPs' constituents to raise personal or political concerns and seek their MP's help with their issues.

MPs often use local party offices, church halls or rooms in pubs or community centres as the venues, with a number of surgeries possibly being held at different venues around a constituency. They are traditionally held on Fridays or Saturdays when MPs have returned from sittings of Parliament in London. Some MP surgeries are drop-in sessions operating on a first come, first served basis, whilst others require a pre-arranged appointment.

It's therefore best to give your MP's office a call beforehand to check whether you need to make an appointment. Call them as far in advance as possible because if an appointment is required, they tend to get booked up weeks ahead of a surgery. If it is a drop in session, turn up early to ensure you have the opportunity to see your MP and enough time to raise your concerns.

## MEETING YOUR MP

### **Step 1: Find out who your MP is**

If you are not sure who your MP is you can find out by:

- Checking out [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com). Simply type in your postcode and it will tell you which constituency you're in, who the MP is, and how to contact them.
- Calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 quoting your address and postcode.

### **Step 2: Make an appointment with your MP**

The easiest way of making an appointment is simply to call up the constituency office or email. MPs receive piles of letters, so you may not get a timely response if you write. If you phone ask to speak to the MP's diary secretary, explain to him/her that you are a constituent and that you would like to meet with your MP, and briefly explain the reason for the meeting. You however may be asked to put your request in writing.

# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

Ask to make an appointment to meet them at the surgery on Friday 21st October if they have one then, or at the next available opportunity (please note that MPs are usually only around for local meetings on Monday mornings and Fridays as they need to be in Westminster the rest of the week). If your MP is a Minister, it is still best to contact them at their constituency office rather than their Ministerial department.

If you are a student you can target the MPs who represent the constituency where your university is located, and the constituency where you live during term-time (if it's different), and also your home constituency. This is because as a student you have a right to be registered to vote in both your college and home constituencies.

### **Step 3: Register your attendance at the NHS bursary lobby day**

When you have arranged a meeting with your MP, please register your attendance for the lobby. The reason we ask for you to register before the event is to ensure that all MPs are being targeted. We can work out where there are gaps and try to fill them prior to the lobby.

Register your attendance by visiting <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/bursarylobby>

### **Step 4: Prepare for the meeting**

Before you meet with your MP it is important that you have familiarised yourself with the arguments, and have done a bit of research on your MP.

You can investigate:

- What party is your MP a member of?
- Are they a back-bencher?
- Do they always vote with the party?
- In May 2016, did they vote against the opposition motion to call on the government to drop its plans to remove NHS bursaries?

These questions should tell you a bit about your MP and about what arguments they care about. Again, [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) is a useful website to find out all this information.

If you are seeing your MP along with other constituents, agree on roles between yourselves. You could have, for example: a facilitator, who introduces everyone, coordinates the contributions and summarises; people to introduce the various different aspects of the issue; a note-taker who listens to the MP and records the discussion, especially notable comments.

### **Step 5: The meeting**

Assume that your MP won't know too much about the issues you raise. Make sure you clearly set out who you are, identifying yourself as a constituent. Use the tips below to get your message across in a clear, courteous and concise manner.

# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

- Thank the MP for seeing you and establish how much time you have to talk to them
- Outline the background to the issue
- Tell your MP how and why it impacts on you – use examples if you can
- Tell your MP how it affects your area – use examples if you can
- Be specific about what your MP can do to help and what exactly you are asking them to do, e.g. to write to Philip Dunn MP, Minister of State at the Department of Health; to sign Early Day Motion 294; to seek a parliamentary debate on the issue.
- Ask your MP to keep in touch and update you on what they do following your meeting.
- Make sure you give your full name and address.

## **Step 6: After meeting your MP**

- As soon as possible after the meeting, send a letter or email of thanks to your MP. In your letter you should also summarise what was said. This will remind them of the issues you discussed and any actions they have said they will take.
- Send a copy of the above letter or email to [j.randall@unison.co.uk](mailto:j.randall@unison.co.uk) along with any reply you receive. This will ensure we can gauge the views of MPs and concentrate our lobbying efforts in the future.

## **Top Tips**

- Don't worry! Be confident in putting across your argument and case – remember that you are the expert as you have personal experience of the issue. MPs have to keep up to date on a huge range of issues – chances are you will know more than them on the issues you really care about.
- Use personal stories and examples in your argument. This is likely to have more of an influence on your MP.
- Be clear about what you expect your MP to do following your meeting and that you would like a response/update from them.

## **TALKING TO YOUR MP**

Remember your MP is paid for by your taxes, they are accountable to you and you are well within your rights to ask them any questions (politely).

If your MP is a Conservative this is a real chance to make them realise the negative impact of scrapping NHS bursaries. If they are not Conservative they are likely to be supportive of us but you can tell them about these issues and ask them to talk to Conservative MPs that they know.

The Government's plans to scrap NHS bursaries will leave student nurses, midwives and allied health professionals with over £52,000 worth of debt. You know that the fear of debt will discourage many people from becoming healthcare professionals, exacerbating the current recruitment crisis. This will have disastrous repercussions for patient safety.

In talking about this proposal the Government has focused on how the changes will increase training places – a claim which we dispute – so your MP may not realise all the other negative consequences scrapping

# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

NHS bursaries will have on workforce planning and patient safety. This is your chance to tell them that scrapping NHS bursaries will impact the people they have been elected to represent, the people who they need to vote for them in 2020 if they want to keep their job.

Ask your MP to push for the withdrawal of the Government's proposals and to replace it with an open consultation with all interested parties about the way forward, but one which can't involve huge debts for students and no extra income for Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

Below are some issues we suggest you raise with your MP.

## ***Students and graduates will be worse off***

While students may receive more funding during their studies, students and graduates will be financially worse off in the longer term because their total debt will have increased significantly making it harder for them to meet the ever growing cost of living.

- Following the removal of the NHS Bursary and their replacement with repayable loans, London Economics say a representative student undertaking a full-time degree in nursing professions will see their total debt (comprising maintenance and tuition fee loans) increase from approximately £6,930 to approximately £48,788 on graduation.
- While a newly qualified nurse may only repay £90 in the first year, this figure will increase as they go up the Agenda for Change pay points. The scrapping of NHS bursaries will equate to a pay cut of over £900 per annum (or 3%) for a nurse on a mean average salary (£31,080) – the amount a nurse will earn per annum for almost 75% of the repayment period.
- The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Intentions after Graduation Survey 2014 showed that when looking at the undergraduates who intended to go into postgraduate study, those who defined as BME, disabled and mature were less likely to actually enrol in such study. Fear of debt and other financial considerations were cited as the principal reasons individuals were deterred from study in the previous year's research on this topic.
- Moving to a debt-only model will likely increase the extent that healthcare students work part-time and the hours they work, as they will seek to reduce their exposure to debt. Working over 16 hours per week is associated with poorer attainment, and this will be all the more acute given the intensity of healthcare courses.
- Increasing student debt has been shown to delay the chances of a graduate buying their own home. Scrapping NHS bursaries will throw graduates' home ownership plans into jeopardy.

# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

## ***Fewer healthcare professionals, not more***

Far from encouraging 10,000 additional training places by 2020, cutting NHS bursaries will discourage many people from becoming a nurse, midwife or allied health professional because of the fear of debt.

- According to London Economics, the 71% increased costs that students and graduates will bear will result in the nursing, midwifery and allied health professions being less attractive, and will in all likelihood reduce education participation by 6-7% - equivalent to more than 2,000 students in the first year.
- The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts said in its report *Managing the supply of NHS clinical staff in England* that 'the changes could have a negative impact on both the overall number of applicants and on certain groups, such as mature students or those with children'.
- The NHS Pay Review Body in its 29th report said that 'the removal of bursaries for student nurses could also have a disruptive impact on supply or the quality of supply' and that 'the removal of the incentive of the bursary could have an unsettling effect on the number and quality of applications for nursing training places'.

## ***Patient safety will be put at risk***

The expected decline in numbers entering nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions in higher education will exacerbate the current recruitment crisis in the health and social care sector putting patient safety at risk.

- Scrapping NHS bursaries will have a negative impact on the health and social care sector's capacity to meet demand. If nursing numbers are reduced, this will result in beds being closed in hospitals. For example, Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust was forced into significant bed closures after CQC inspectors raised concerns about staff ratios in January 2016.
- With fewer newly qualified nurses, the existing health professionals will be expected to work longer hours and take on more patients in order to do more with less. This is likely to lead to an increase in the occurrence of 'never events' (i.e. serious incidents that are wholly preventable). More 'never events' will mean more legal claims made against the NHS for clinical negligence.

## ***Higher Education Institutes will be worse off***

The government's proposal states that it will ensure sustainable funding for universities. However, because of the decline in student numbers and the need to finance access bursaries under the Office for Fair Access guidance, universities will be worse off financially.

- London Economics found that HEI will be worse off by approximately £57-£77 million per cohort. Approximately half of this decline will be as a result of the decline in student numbers. However, there will also be a reduction in HEI revenues as a result of the fact that a proportion of any tuition fee received by HEIs (approximately 15% above £6,000) will now be 'handed back' to students via



# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

the Access agreements that HEIs sign with the Office for Fair Access.

- If fees and funding support is entirely portable, Higher Education Institutions' income streams are likely to be substantially more volatile in the future. Some universities may decide to stop running some health related courses altogether if they are unsustainable.

## ***No cost savings to the Exchequer***

Contrary to the government's claim that scrapping NHS bursaries will save the Treasury money, there will be no cost savings to the Exchequer because most nurses will not earn enough to repay the entire loan and the decline in numbers entering nursing will increase Agency staffing costs.

- Given the fundamentally different characteristics of both students and graduate earnings of nurses, midwives and allied health professionals, London Economics say the cost savings to the Exchequer are more likely to be approximately £88 million per cohort than the £534 million stated by the government.
- However, combining the expected decline in numbers entering nursing, midwifery and the allied health professions in higher education with increased Agency staffing costs to cover staffing shortfalls, London Economics estimated that there will be an additional £100.3 million cost incurred by Trusts per cohort – wiping out any potential cost savings.

## ***It's not supported by the public***

A YouGov poll of 1,656 adults, undertaken between 13 and 14 June 2016, found that there was very little public support for removing NHS bursaries and replacing them with tuition fees and loans.

- More than three-quarters (77%) of voters who took part in the YouGov survey believe the government must carry on paying the tuition fees of student nurses and others studying to become NHS health professionals. Seven in ten (72%) survey respondents who voted Conservative in last year's general election are of the same opinion.
- Seventy two per cent of survey respondents also want the government to continue funding the NHS bursary for nursing, midwifery and other health students. This gives financial help towards living costs. Sixty eight per cent of people who voted Conservative in the 2015 election want the government to continue supporting NHS students in this way.
- Survey respondents were also asked if they thought student nurses should be paid for the time they spend working in hospitals on their practical placements alongside qualified staff. Seventy one per cent – and more than two-thirds (67%) of those who'd voted Conservative a year ago – thought they should.
- A third (34%) of those who thought that student nurses should be paid for the part of their degree that is spent working in a hospital or clinic felt they should be paid the government's national living wage (currently £7.20 an hour for anyone over the age of 25).

# Beyond the bursary

Invest in the future of the NHS

- A quarter of survey respondents who felt student nurses should be paid believed they should receive the Living Wage Foundation's living wage of £8.25 an hour (or £9.40 in London). Three in ten (31%) thought student nurses should be paid more than this living wage but less than their newly qualified nursing colleagues.