

Are you ready for the changes to nursing education in England?



KAREN OUSEY
*Clinical Editor, Wounds UK,
Reader in Advancing Clinical
Practice, School of Human and
Health Sciences, University
of Huddersfield, Clinical
Associate Professor, Australian
Catholic University*

I hope you all managed to relax and have recharged your batteries for 2016. I would like to use this first editorial of the year to speak about the proposed changes to funding for health education in England.

All of us will have undertaken our health education and training either as part of a School of Nursing, based in a hospital, or as a university-based course, none of us will have taken out a loan for our education; rather we will have either been 'paid to learn' as an apprentice or will have received a grant with fees being paid directly to the University from the NHS. You may or may not be aware of the changes that have been suggested in the funding of English pre-registration nursing, midwifery and Allied Health Profession (AHP) education. This will include all 4 fields of nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, podiatry, radiography, dietetics, orthoptics, operating department practice, and prosthetics/orthotics—in essence any course that leads to a professional registration.

The 2015 spending review (Gov, 2015) stated that the current funding system for health students of providing grants will be replaced by student loans and will abolish the cap on the number of student places for nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects. At present, each university has a cap on numbers of students they enroll each year (agreed with NHS partners and NHS England); by removing this cap the Government believe that universities will be able to provide up to 10,000 additional nursing and other health professional training places over the course of this parliament. The spending review states that by removing the cap, there will be less reliance on expensive agency staff. The changes are due to be implemented 2017/18, where new students on nursing, midwifery and AHP pre-registration courses in England will take out maintenance and tuition loans like other students rather than getting an NHS grant. As with other

students, once the health student has graduated and earns above £21,000 they will commence repaying the loan. It should be noted that at present this does not affect students in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, however, we can assume this will cause a great deal of debate in the three countries following the English changes.

I urge all practitioners in England to read the spending review to understand the changes and to access the Council of Deans Website (<http://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/>) where you can see the discussions surrounding these proposed changes. It is also important that colleagues from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are aware of these alterations as it may well lead to similar plans for health education in your countries in the future. Professor Dame Jessica Corner of the Council of Deans (2015) has said:

"We have a workforce crisis in health and social care and we're still educating fewer students than the NHS needs. Carefully implemented, this should allow universities in partnership with the NHS to increase the number of training places and also improve day to day financial support for students while they are studying."

You may be reading this and thinking 'why should this concern me as a registered practitioner'? When the cap is removed there will be potential for you receiving more pre-registration nursing and healthcare professionals entering your workplace; these students will require support and mentoring and this will in itself impact on capacity to support these students. Mentors are an essential support mechanism for students to make sure they are able to integrate theory into practice effectively, develop safe clinical skills and learn the realities of clinical practice. The Council of Deans, NHS and Universities are exploring mature student participation, issues for professions that struggle with student recruitment and the importance of placement funding and capacity.

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REFERENCES

- Council of Deans (2015) *University Bodies Give Initial Backing to Health Education Funding Reforms*. Available at: <http://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/2015/11/university-bodies-give-initial-backing-to-health-education-funding-reforms/> (accessed: 16.12.2015)
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