

**Position Statement by International Graduate Entry Nursing Network on Proposals to end the System of Bursaries for Students in Pre- Registration Nurse Education in England**

Proposed changes to the bursary system of funding nurse education in England outlined in the Chancellor's Spending Review and Autumn Statement of 25 November 2015 has prompted the Graduate Entry International Nursing Network to produce this position statement.

The review announced that from 1 August 2017 bursaries currently paid by the government to fund nurse education in England will be replaced by student loans and the cap on the number of student places for nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects will be abolished. The government have stated that the changes will free up £2b spent on nursing tuition fees, the removal of the cap on nurse education places at UK universities will enable many more students to be educated to registered nurse status and provide more funds (albeit through a student loan) to individuals wishing to apply to nurse education.

Both the Royal College of Nursing and Student Nurse Forums have criticised the changes stating that they will be detrimental to those from lower socio economic backgrounds and those wanting to undertake a career change. It is pointed out that the average age of nurses in pre-registration nurse education is 29 years, amongst the cohort of Graduate Entry pre registration nurses this is likely to be much higher.

This cohort of students have prior loans associated with first degrees and many have expressed horror at this new development stating that the proposed changes would have precluded them from studying due to the necessity of taking on more debt and the inability to work part time due to the need to fulfil 37.5 hr weeks working in practice and the extended academic year associated with nurse education. In addition this cohort of nurses being more mature and consequently more likely to have family and caring responsibilities are less able to manage the financial consequences of losing a bursary in tandem with the loss of previous earnings. The present bursary system also supports student nurses with accommodation and transport costs associated with attending distant practice placements and it is not clear whether this support will be continued.

For the nursing profession the plans represent a move from a workforce planning model to free market approach which will undermine national planning and is inappropriate due to the complex nature of health care delivery. We decry the short sighted response from the Council of Deans of Health and Universities UK who have welcomed the removal of the cap on nurse education places and see the changes as potentially ensuring that universities are paid more to educate student nurses, education which they claim at present runs at a loss. Rather the changes have the potential to greatly reduce the number of nursing applicants to university, especially from mature and graduate entrants.

Health care providers and mentors in practice who support student nurse education have doubted the capacity of placement providers to cope with the increased numbers of students supposedly resulting from the removal of the cap in student nurse numbers.

The removal of the cap on places is intended to lead to more nurses and a reduction of health care's reliance on agency nurses and nurses from overseas, however many agency nurses are educated in the UK and therefore are part of the existing workforce pool.

In this current climate many health care trusts are considering sponsorship schemes for student nurse education, with the proviso that sponsored individuals commit to working for

the sponsoring trust for a certain period of time post qualification. However the doubts around whether such agreements are legally enforceable may mean that trusts shy away from this investment. Recent years have seen increased mobility within the profession, nurses no longer train near to their homes and make their careers within their local area, this is an old fashioned view of nurse education. Nowadays, like all graduates, nurses are able to market their skills and expertise within a global marketplace, so it is naïve to suppose that offering small incentives will limit their scope, nor should this be desirable for the nursing profession which benefits from a diversity of experience to ensure its development. Rather, UK health care providers should become more mindful of their terms and conditions of employment to ensure they are attractive enough to recruit and retain good quality staff.

We condemn the removal of the bursary system for funding nurse education as a retrograde step which has the potential to weaken the quality of registered nurses into the profession in England. It especially has the real potential of deterring the more mature and highly educated graduate entry students from applying due to the extreme financial pressures they will experience.