

# MAYOR OF LONDON

# LONDON ASSEMBLY

## **Ben Gummer MP**

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**Date:** 29 JUN 2016

Dear Ben,

We are writing jointly in response to the Government consultation on proposed changes to healthcare education funding.

We note the Government's plan to end NHS bursaries for training nurses, midwives and allied health professionals from September 2017<sup>1</sup>. The bursaries will be replaced with student loans<sup>2</sup>. We also note there is a nurse vacancy rate of 17% in London compared with 10% in England<sup>3</sup>. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has calculated that 10,000 nurse vacancies remain unfilled in the capital<sup>4</sup>.

Student nurses and midwives are unlike other students. Often they are 'mature students' with dependents and spend 50% of their time in clinical placements as part of their qualification. This reduces their ability to access paid employment while in training.

The Chancellor's claim that replacing bursaries with interest-bearing loans will free-up 10,000 new places for nurses is based on the demand for places under the current system<sup>5</sup>. The current applicant to place ratio is an argument in favour of the Government financing more nursing bursaries, not an argument for the introduction of loans.

Research has not been conducted into how the introduction of fees will impact upon the application rate for nursing places. The Government does not know if the introduction of fees will exacerbate the NHS nursing shortage. There is a high risk that a loan system will be an obstacle to people from poorer backgrounds and those changing careers later in life. Midwifery, in particular, attracts a large number of mature students already saddled with debt from a first degree<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health, *NHS Bursary Reform*, 7 April 2016

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Royal College of Nursing, *Safe Staffing Review 2015*, 6 January 2016

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Jenkin, Will scrapping nurse bursaries help or worsen NHS staffing crisis?, *Guardian*, 07.12.15

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

It is reasonable to assume that London will be impacted heavily by the decision to end the bursary system, due to the higher cost of living in capital. This was illustrated by a recent survey which found four in ten nurses employed in the London may leave by 2021 because of the cost of housing<sup>7</sup>. Further, given that housing costs vary considerably across London, the proposed loan system is likely to impact upon the capital unevenly, with some hospital trusts struggling more than others to recruit these essential front-line NHS employees. As a consequence, the removal of NHS bursaries may have a profound impact on the already startlingly high level of health inequalities in the capital and there will be a negative impact therefore on access to healthcare in London<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, we believe recruitment and retention of nurses, midwives and allied health professionals in London will be made harder by the scrapping of student nurse bursaries.

We believe that the decision to scrap bursaries is driven by a desire to save money in the short-term and that, over the long-term, costs will be higher for the NHS both financially and in terms of UK trained workforce working in the NHS<sup>9</sup>.

We call on the Government therefore to put an immediate halt to the proposals to end NHS bursaries until a long term and viable option has been identified which promotes the value of graduate and university degree educated health professions. We also call on the Government to consult properly and openly on how to improve the support available to nursing students, recognising the unique aspects of nursing degrees, and to increase the number of nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals in London's NHS.

We look forward to the Government's early response to this important consultation.

Yours sincerely,



**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London



**Tony Arbour AM**  
Chairman of the London  
Assembly



**Dr Onkar Sahota**  
Chair, London Assembly  
Health Committee

Cc: Julie Screatton, Director, Health Education England (London and South East)

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<sup>7</sup> Royal College of Nursing, *40% of London Nurses to leave over housing costs*, 28 April 2016

<sup>8</sup> Public Health England, *Health inequalities in London*

<sup>9</sup> The long term cost to the NHS will be higher because (1) cost of agency nurses filling gaps caused by poor recruiting and early retirement and emigration of a low morale workforce.