

# Physician Associates. To pay or not to pay for study?

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**Last week I was at the University of Reading addressing a room full of enthusiastic graduates considering a career as a Physician Associate. Many were already working in the health service and were under no illusions about it being glamorous and well paid.**

They had done their research, knew the demand for Physician Associates was greater than the available workforce so a job was waiting.

**No persuasion needed then you would think. For the course I'd agree with you, they were raring to go. Where to go, where to take the two year course, was a different ball game.**

When it came to question time the bone of contention was why wasn't the University offering free places? Why come to Reading and pay £9,000 per year to study when there are better offers elsewhere?.

For example the University of Manchester offers the following for all 65 students

*"No course fees and a salary during the course; Year 2 provides elective period and opportunity to develop skills working abroad (travel*

*bursaries may be available); develop skills in our dedicated Medical School with first class facilities; integrated training in prescribing safety (in anticipation of prescribing rights ) and communication skills; provision of iPads with access to range of online resources essential during placements: on passing the national examinations etc you will spend a further two years in clinical practice applying for a range of funded posts with primary and acute care NHS providers across the North-West .*

## **At the University of Birmingham**

*HEWM funds £9,000 fees per year for home students including those starting on 12 January 2016; £2,000 bursary contribution towards accommodation and travel costs Those interested in doing their clinical placements in a) Yorkshire/Humber area eligible for additional £5,000 bursary per year*

*towards travel and accommodation costs across the 2 years or b) Powys area eligible for additional £10,000 per year bursary towards travel and accommodation across the 2 years.*

**Yorkshire/Humber/Powys** *bursaries may be competitive depending on numbers applying so may involve additional interview..*

**Newcastle University**

*HEENE supports students on Physician Associate course with education bursary £7500 for each year of study.*

**Plymouth University** *opportunity to apply for limited number of places with fee sponsorship through local NHS Trust partners.*

**St George's, University of London**

*Competitive scholarships (£3,000) awarded to 'strong' candidates. With the exception of St George's funding is from Health Education England or the NHS and the obvious disparity between the various seats of excellence is grossly unfair .*

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(Patient Leader)

Reading also has extremely high accommodation costs so Graduate students could be adding £30,000 plus to any debt from their original degree costs.

The shortage of doctors means demand for Physician Associates to fill gaps in both primary and secondary care is growing. Once qualified, students often end up working where they studied so the Thames Valley could lose out unless it is on a par with the other areas.

The recently formed Faculty of Physician Associates within the RCP hold a two day London conference at the end of September prior to the launch of *Physician Associates week* to raise awareness of, and highlight, the contribution Physician Associates are making to the provision of healthcare in the UK.

**Top of the list for discussion must be 'A National standard policy regarding bursaries, grants and inducements for students on the Physician Associate course.'**