

Written evidence submitted by Mrs Jessica Sainsbury

Robert Halfon, MP

Chair of Education Select Committee

20th July 2020

Dear Robert,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I am writing to you as a final year nursing student completing my degree course on an extended paid clinical placement in the middle of a pandemic, and as Chair of the Royal College of Nursing Students Committee. I want to share my personal experience and the challenges that I have seen my fellow students face due to the removal of the bursary in 2017 and the lack of government grants.

I started the course in 2016, as part of one of the last cohorts in receipt of the nursing bursary. Whilst I have been extremely lucky to have not had to pay tuition fees and receive a monthly bursary, I have felt the weight of financial burden during my studies. From the early days when my youngest child was in full time nursery at a cost of more than £50 per day, five days per week, to more recent times where I maintained regular part-time employment on top of my full-time degree. I didn't work because I wanted to, I worked because I had to pay my mortgage and bills. My situation is not unique, and not the worst by far, but I have seen first-hand the impact of the removal of the nursing bursary has had on our future workforce.

Not only have I seen a drop in the number of mature students applying to study to be a nurse, I have seen my peers struggle financially to the point of exhaustion, because they are simply working too many hours to make ends meet, or have had no choice but to step off the course.

I have seen students in tears because they've had to decide between putting fuel in their car in order to get to a practice placement which is miles away from their home or buying food for the week ahead. They chose the fuel and hoped that the practice area would take pity on them or have some shared snacks available. Sometimes they would visit food banks.

I have been informed that students local to me have had to hire camping pitches because they can't afford the initial outlay of two rental properties. They were sent to a practice placement too far away from home to easily commute. While they can claim back additional rent, they still must pay out initially. They couldn't afford to do this so camped instead. Imagine working a fourteen-hour shift, for free, and then sleeping in a tent before getting up the next morning and doing it all over again. I have seen students attend a full day of lectures straight after a night shift because that was the only way they could fit in paid shifts in order to afford to live. They didn't want to skip lectures and miss vital learning. These are just a few examples of the financial struggles of nursing students who are simply trying to get through their courses and become registered nurses.

I hope this provides helpful context for your inquiry. The RCN Students Committee would be pleased to meet with you and your Committee members to share our experiences and outline the aims of our #fundourfuture campaign.

Yours sincerely,

Jess Sainsbury

Chair of RCN Students Committee

July 2020

