

Debate Pack
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E-petitions debate: Pay and financial support for healthcare students

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1 Background

Detailed information on the financial support available to nursing and healthcare students, as well as an overview of the numbers of students over time, is available in the Commons Library briefing [Medical, dental, and healthcare students: UK numbers and student support arrangements](#).

1.1 Financial support for nursing, healthcare, and paramedic students

Abolition of the NHS bursary

Since 2017, new undergraduate students starting courses in nursing, midwifery, and allied health profession (AHP) programmes in England have been ineligible for the NHS Bursary. The bursary previously included:

- free tuition;
- a non-means tested grant of £1,000 per year;
- a means-tested bursary to help with living costs of up to £3,191;
- extra allowances for courses that run for longer than 30 weeks and 3 days each academic year;
- additional funding related to clinical placement expenses.

Students who qualified for the NHS Bursary could also apply for a reduced rate maintenance loan from Student Finance England.

Following a [2016 consultation](#), the UK Government abolished the NHS bursary for nursing and healthcare students, and they were instead made eligible for the standard student finance package of tuition fee and maintenance loans.

Student finance

Nursing, midwifery, and allied healthcare students in England are now primarily funded by the [standard student finance package](#) of:

- a tuition fee loan to cover the cost of fees;
- a maintenance loan to help with living costs;
- additional support for some students depending on their personal circumstances (for example, if they have childcare responsibilities);

- the [long courses loan](#) for courses exceeding 30 weeks and 3 days in an academic year.

Since 2017, students starting a second degree in nursing and other healthcare subjects have also been [eligible for the standard student support package](#), while paramedic students studying for their first degree became eligible in 2018.

NHS Learning Support Fund

As part of the 2016 funding reforms for nursing and healthcare students, the Government also introduced the [NHS Learning Support Fund \(LSF\)](#), which initially just provided supplementary funding to parents and those in exceptional hardship.

Since September 2020, nursing, healthcare, and paramedic students eligible for the standard student support package have also received an additional £5,000 training grant through the NHS Learning Support Fund. It currently includes:

- a training grant of £5,000 per academic year;
- a specialist subject payment of £1,000 per academic year for students on degrees that struggle to recruit, including mental health and learning disability nursing;
- parental support of £2,000 per academic year for students who have at least one dependent child under 15 years, or under 17 years if registered with special educational need;
- help towards additional travel and accommodation costs related to clinical placements;
- an exceptional hardship fund of up to £3,000 per academic year.

University Support

In addition to the above publicly funded support, universities also have discretion to provide additional financial and holistic support to healthcare students. Some universities have chosen to provide additional support in order to ease financial pressures on students in an effort to improve retention rates and the student experience.

In August 2023, the University of East London wrote an article for Wonkhe about its support package for nursing students.¹ The article highlights that those studying nursing or healthcare course tend to be female mature students with dependants, as demonstrated by the University of East

¹ [We have the NHS workforce plan. What next?](#), WonkHe, 31 August 2023

London's own nursing course student population, which is 88% female and 88% mature students.

The article recommended “flexible learning and generous financial support” as a necessary measure for course completion.² The University of East London, for example, offers £1.5 million in bursaries and £1.2 million in hardship funding. Many universities offer hardship funding, but the article's authors also highlighted the University of East London's holistic package of measures, such as free car parking, free weekly breakfasts, grocery vouchers, free essential products (like period products), and a consolidated timetable to reduce travel time.³

1.2 Support while on placement

Placements are an important part of nursing and healthcare courses because they provide supervised training that allows students to gain the necessary skills and experience to meet education outcomes and work in clinical settings. There have long been [calls for students to be paid while on placement](#), with many students having to work part time alongside their required 2,300 clinical hours to support themselves.

The UK Government has said student nurses [receive financial support to train](#), and are not treated as paid members of staff (they are considered ‘supernumerary’). This is done to ensure “[safe and effective care](#)” for patients. The Government has said:

Students on clinical placements are treated as ‘supernumerary’ so that there are protections in place to ensure that, while student nurses are in training, they are not replacing trained professionals required for safe and effective care...

To safely and effectively practise as a registered nurse once qualified, it is essential that most practice learning is undertaken in direct care of clients, within a framework of supervision by registered nurses, midwives and other registered healthcare professionals.

This is also the view of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (the independent regulator for nurses and midwives in the UK), which has said [students must be considered ‘supernumerary’ to ensure protected learning time](#):

Students in practice or work-placed learning must be supported to learn and practise skills safely. In order to have the student at the centre of learning, we specify that students must have some form of supported or protected learning time.

² “[We have the NHS workforce plan. What next?](#)”, WonkHe, 31 August 2023

³ “[We have the NHS workforce plan. What next?](#)”, WonkHe, 31 August 2023

For nurses, and midwives this means that students must be considered ‘supernumerary’, meaning that they are not counted as part of the staffing required for safe and effective care in that setting.

Temporary paid placements during the Covid-19 pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, opt-in paid student nursing placements were introduced in March 2020 and January 2021 as a temporary measure to help with the emergency response to the pandemic. But [the government said it was always clear this was a temporary arrangement](#).

Increase in travel and accommodation support

On 1 September 2023, the Department for Health and Social Care announced travel and accommodation support through the NHS Learning Support Fund would increase.⁴

Students studying on nursing, midwifery, and allied health courses (and medical and dental courses) can now claim up to 50% more for travel and accommodation expenses incurred whilst studying, including on placements.⁵ Prior to this announcement, the expenses rates for those on the NHS Learning Support Fund had remained static since 2017.⁶

The 50% increase in travel and accommodation costs will include:

- car travel expenses: from current 28p to 42p per mile
- commercial accommodation such as a hotel or bed and breakfast: from current £55 to up to £82.50 per night
- non-commercial accommodation, including staying with a friend or relative (but not parents): from current £25 to up to £37.50 per night.⁷

1.3

Childcare support for nursing and healthcare students

More information is available in the Commons Library casework article [Childcare support for students](#).

⁴ Department for Health and Social Care, [Healthcare studies more affordable as financial support increased](#), 1 September 2023

⁵ As above

⁶ As above

⁷ As above

Free childcare entitlements

In England, the free childcare offer comprises:

- [15 hours of free childcare](#). All three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 570 hours of government-funded childcare a year, often taken as 15 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year.
- [30 hours of free childcare](#). Some three- and four-year-olds may qualify for a further 570 hours of funded childcare. To be eligible, a person, and their partner if they have one, must usually expect to earn the equivalent of a weekly minimum of 16 hours at the [National Minimum Wage or Living Wage](#) (currently £8,670 a year for parents aged over 23).
- Some [disadvantaged two-year-olds are also entitled to 570 hours](#) of government-funded childcare a year.

The government has [announced plans to extend the 30 hours entitlement](#) to children from working families aged 9 months to three years. The government has [said the objective of the 30 hours free childcare](#) “is to support parental participation in the labour market, which is why the offer is conditional on work.”

Students, including nursing and healthcare students, are generally not eligible for the government’s 30 hours of free childcare entitlement because they do not meet the income requirements. In March 2023, Open Democracy reported [some nursing students had considered leaving their courses](#) because of financial pressures related to childcare costs.

Student finance

Full-time undergraduate students with children under 15, or under 17 if the child has special educational needs, may be eligible for a [Childcare Grant](#) towards their childcare costs from Student Finance England. The maximum Childcare Grant for the 2023 to 2024 academic year is:

- up to £188.90 a week for one child, or up to 85% of their costs (whichever is less)
- up to £323.85 a week for two or more children, or up to 85% of their costs (whichever is less)

The [Parents’ Learning Allowance](#) is additional funding for eligible full-time students with children that can be used for everyday costs of study, such as books, study materials, and travel.

NHS Learning Support Fund

Students on certain pre-registration undergraduate or postgraduate healthcare courses, including midwifery and nursing, may be eligible for

[Parental Support](#) from the [NHS Learning Support Fund](#) of £2,000 per academic year. Students cannot receive both the student finance Childcare Grant and NHS-funded Parental Support at the same time.

1.4

Petitions committee survey

Prior to the postponed debate on Monday 11 September 2023 on pay and childcare for healthcare workers, the Petitions Committee conducted an online survey that asked about the cost of living, placement hours and expenses, second jobs, being treated as supernumerary, course workload, and parenting.⁸

The survey received 2,135 responses, of which 71% of respondents were current healthcare students and 7% were former healthcare students. The survey respondents were overwhelmingly female (92%) and 34% stated they came from a disadvantaged background. 45% of respondents who were healthcare students were parents, and 35% of former healthcare students said they had been parents during their course.⁹

Cost of living

Most survey respondents stated they were struggling with the cost of living, with 79% of respondents responding that it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford leisure and recreation, including entertainment and holidays, and 58% responding that it was 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to afford energy, including gas and electricity. 19% of respondents said they had visited a food bank and 26% said they were considering using a food bank.¹⁰

Financial support and part-time working

Many healthcare students who had responded to the survey had received financial support in the form of a Training Grant (83%), a Subject Specialist Payment (10%) or an Exceptional Support Fund grant (1%). 71% of healthcare students who were parents said they'd received a parental support payment of £2000.¹¹

⁸ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

⁹ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹⁰ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹¹ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

Most survey respondents (85%) disagreed that current financial support was adequate for healthcare students' courseload and needs.¹²

A slight majority of healthcare students also stated they had a paid job alongside their course and placements (51%). Those that had a part-time job mentioned long hours which affected their mental health and a lack of flexibility with placement shifts which made having a regular paid job difficult.¹³

Those that didn't have a part-time job said this had led to financial issues but said that having an additional job was "not possible or safe" given their course workload.¹⁴

Supernumerary status

74% of respondents who are healthcare students on placement worked 30-40 placement hours per week, and 21% worked over 40 placement hours per week.¹⁵

Regarding the supernumerary status of students on placement, both healthcare professionals (40%) and healthcare students (60%) who responded to the survey said that placement students were not treated as supernumerary in practice. Reasons cited for this were the shortage of healthcare professionals and the fluctuating demands on healthcare workers leaving wards or teams short-staffed in times of crisis.¹⁶

Some respondents said having to make up for staff shortages has reduced the chance for learning opportunities on placement. 91% of respondents said they 'strongly agreed' that healthcare students should be paid for placement hours.¹⁷

¹² Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹³ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹⁴ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹⁵ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹⁶ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹⁷ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

Parenting

Healthcare students who are also parents cited various difficulties such as the inflexibility and short notice of placements in arranging childcare, as well as paying for such childcare over the lengthy period of study.¹⁸

Respondents also mentioned the lack of work-life balance and having to work part time on top of studies to qualify for tax-free childcare and afford essentials.¹⁹

1.5

Nursing apprenticeships

Currently, approximately 9% of nurses qualify through apprenticeships. The [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#) includes an ambition to increase this to 20% by 2028/29.

Like student nurses, apprentice nurses contribute to patient care during the period of their training and gain a qualification at the end. However, they also earn a salary while training. From April 2023, [apprentices are entitled to the apprentice rate of £5.28](#) if they're either aged under 19 or aged 19 and over and in the first year of their apprenticeship. Apprentices are entitled to the minimum wage for their age if they are both aged 19 or over and have completed the first year of their apprenticeship. For those aged 23 and over, this is £10.42.

All parents, including apprentice nurses, who earn the equivalent of at least 16 hours a week at national minimum/living wage (just over £167 per week or £8,670 per year for those aged 23 and over), and under £100,000 adjusted net income per year, [will be eligible for 30 hours free childcare](#).

1.6

UK comparisons

Higher education, including support for students, is devolved. England is the only part of the UK where nursing and other healthcare students must pay for their own tuition (generally through student loan repayments). The governments of Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland fund the tuition fees for eligible students.

Scotland has the most generous living cost support. The [Paramedic, Nursing, and Midwifery Student Bursary \(PNMSB\)](#) includes a £10,000 grant for the first

¹⁸ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

¹⁹ Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students, reported to the House on 5 September 2023, [HC 73](#)

three years of a course and £7,500 for the fourth year, as well as a single parents allowance (£2,303 per year), childcare allowance (£2,466 per year), and dependents allowance (£3,640 for first dependent child, and £557 for each other dependent child per year).

Wales is the only part of the UK that ties eligibility for student support to a commitment to working in the NHS following graduation (for a maximum of two years). Students who cannot make this commitment are eligible for the standard student finance package of tuition fee loans and living cost funding instead.

On 1 September 2023 the Health Minister for Wales announced that eligible healthcare students (those who have committed to working in Wales for two years upon graduation) will [receive the NHS Wales Health Bursary which covers tuition fees and living costs](#), as well as access to the full amount of maintenance loan. This will be available for healthcare students in the 2024-25 academic year.

2

Press material

[One in five UK medical students 'may drop out'](#)

Times Higher Education (subscription required)

30 October 2023

[Bribing healthcare students with long term debt relief won't stop them leaving](#)

WonkHE

28 September 2023

[Healthcare students get a cash "boost" - as long as you're prepared to redefine the word](#)

WonkHE

3 September 2023

[We have the NHS workforce plan. What next?](#)

WonkHE

31 August 2023

[Ditch fees and pay for placements: a nurse-led workforce plan \[subscription required\]](#)

Nursing Standard

31 March 2023

[Spring Budget 2023: Hunt's free childcare won't help student nurses](#)

Open Democracy

15 March 2023

[Who will pay for Hunt's 'free' childcare hours?](#)

The Spectator

17 March 2023

[Childcare would help cure NHS staff crisis \[subscription required\]](#)

The Times

7 March 2023

3

Parliamentary material

Nursing Courses: Reduction in Applications

19 September 2023 | Vol 832 c1328

Asked by: Lord Hunt of Kings Heath

My Lords, I am very grateful to the Minister, but I think he would accept that any drop-off in applications is something to worry about, alongside the current drop-out rate for student nurses in the UK of around 24%. On that basis, surely the NHS workforce plan in relation to nursing is simply not sustainable. If the Minister does accept that, is there not a case for looking at writing off debt run up by student nurses through tuition fees if they commit to working in the NHS for a length of time?

Answered by: Lord Markham

We are delivering on a number of routes to recruit nurses. Obviously, the graduate route is one route, which, as mentioned, is above pre-pandemic levels; apprenticeships is another route, which is proving very successful; and associates is another route again. So there are many routes in, and the result is that our applications are 20% up on pre-pandemic levels. We set ourselves a target of recruiting 50,000 more nurses by the end of this Parliament and we are currently on 45,000, so we are going to hit it.

Nurses: Training

10 July 2023 | UIN 192386

Asked by: Damien Moore

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department has made an assessment of the potential merits of the restoration of the nurse's bursary.

Answering member: Will Quince | **Department:** Department of Health and Social Care

The Student Loans Company provides the primary funding support package for students in further education. Student loan repayments are unlike commercial loans, with built-in protections, including repayments linked to income and not based on interest rates or the amount borrowed, and with outstanding loan amounts written off after 30 years. Student loans are subsidised by the taxpayer, this is a conscious investment in the skills and people of this country.

In addition to this, eligible nursing students have access to supplementary funding support via the NHS Learning Support Fund, which offers a non-repayable grant of £5,000 per academic year plus additional grants and supports depending on their circumstances.

Apprentices: Childcare

10 July 2023 | UIN 192386

Asked by: Helen Hayes

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate her Department has made of the number of apprentices (a) studying for roles in health and social care and (b) other roles who are working parents and will not be able to access the expanded 30 hours free childcare offer in 2024-25.

Answering member: Claire Coutinho | **Department:** Department for Education

The department does not hold the data on how many apprentices will be unable to access the expanded free hours offer in 2024/25.

In the Spring Budget 2023, the government announced a number of transformative reforms to childcare for parents, children and the economy. By 2027/28, the government will expect to be spending in excess of £8 billion every year on free hours and early education, helping working families with their childcare costs. This represents the single biggest investment in childcare in England ever.

The announcement included the expansion of the 30 hours free childcare offer, through which eligible working parents in England will be able to access 30 hours of free childcare per week for 38 weeks per year from when their child is 9 months old to when they start school. The key objective of this measure is to support parental participation in the labour market, which is why the offer is conditional on work.

To be eligible, as with the existing 30 hours offer, parents will need to earn at least the equivalent of 16 hours a week at the national minimum/living wage, and under £100,000 per year. This means that parents can be eligible if they earn from just over £167 per week or £8,670 per year from April 2023. This offer aims to support working families with the cost of childcare and to support parents back into work or to work more hours should they wish to.

All parents including apprentices who earn equivalent of at least 16 hours a week at national minimum/living wage, and under £100,000 adjusted net income per year, will be eligible for this offer. If they are unable to meet this threshold, they will remain eligible for the universal 15 hours of free early education, which is available to all 3 and 4 year olds regardless of family circumstances.

Further information on the childcare offers available to parents can be found at: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk>.

Childcare: Students

09 December 2022 | UIN 104182

Asked by: Grahame Morris

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will extend the 30 hours free childcare provision to student (a) midwives, (b) nurses and (c) paramedics.

Answering member: Claire Coutinho | **Department:** Department for Education

The government is not currently planning to extend 30 hours free childcare. The department recognises the value of parents continuing in education and provides a range of support for students in further or higher education to support them with childcare.

Support available to students includes the Childcare Grant and Parents' Learning Allowance. These schemes are available for full-time students with dependent children, including student nurses, midwives and paramedics.

For additional financial support to help with childcare costs, since September 2020, all eligible nursing, midwifery, paramedic and other allied health profession students have received a non-repayable training grant of a minimum of £5,000 per academic year. Eligible students with child dependants can also access a further £2,000 per academic year.

Additionally, all parents are eligible for the universal 15 hours of free early education which is available to all three and four-year olds, regardless of family circumstances.

Working parents of three and four-year-olds may also be eligible for an additional 15 hours of free childcare if they earn the equivalent of 16 hours a week at national minimum/living wage and under £100,000 per year. Students who participate in paid work in addition to their studies and meet the income requirements will be eligible for the additional hours.

Parents who meet these income criteria may also be able to receive support from Tax-Free Childcare, which can be worth up to £2,000 per year for children aged 0-11, or up to £4,000 per year for disabled children aged 0-16.

Further information on the childcare offers available to parents can be accessed at: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>.

The department remains committed to improving the cost, choice, and availability of childcare, and we continue to look at ways to make childcare more affordable and to encourage families to use government-funded support they are entitled to.

4

Further reading

[Waste not, want not: Strategies to improve the supply of clinical staff to the NHS \[PDF\]](#)

Nuffield Trust
September 2023

[Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee on pay and financial support for healthcare students](#)

Petitions Committee
HC 73
5 September 2023

[Healthcare studies more affordable as financial support increased](#)

Department of Health and Social Care
1 September 2023

[Childcare support for students](#)

House of Commons Library
21 April 2023

[Medical, dental, and healthcare students: UK numbers and student support arrangements](#)

House of Commons Library
15 March 2023

[Nursing Student Finance: The true costs of becoming a nurse \[PDF\]](#)

Royal College of Nursing Scotland
28 June 2023

[Early years funding \(England\)](#)

House of Commons Library
28 December 2022

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