

Petitioners submission of 2 March 2023

PE1993/B Reform the financial support for social work students on work placements

Further to the Scottish Government's response to petition PE1993 we would request that the committee considers the following additional new information when debating the issues (scheduled for discussion on 22 March 2023).

While we welcome the engagement of ministers so far, we do not feel that they have entirely understood the concerns we have raised and the depth of the problem social work students face.

It is our view that social work students work just as hard as their colleagues on nursing, midwifery and paramedic courses. Social work students have real-life case loads during their courses, actively contributing to the safeguarding of the most vulnerable in society. There can be no room for doubting the hard and demanding work social work students do on the front line as part of their courses.

The general student support available to social work students IS NOT, in our view, equitable to that received by students on these courses as implied by the government. Over 4 years, the bursaries for nursing, midwifery and paramedic students total £37,500. For social work students the basic support available is between £20,400 and £32,400, mostly in the form of a repayable loan and depending on the household income.

The additional support (e.g. Disabled Student Allowance, dependents allowances etc) are available to both sets of students. The only difference seems to be the care experienced bursaries which sadly nursing, midwifery and paramedic students are not yet entitled to.

We find it slightly surprising that we should have to point out the obvious, that a loan is not the same as a bursary - especially to undergraduates from non-privileged backgrounds.

We appreciate that nursing and midwifery students undertake placements throughout the whole course, while social work students do so in third and fourth years.

This is why the petition only requests bursaries for social work students in these final years. To be clear, we would propose that social work students in first and second years would still access the regular undergraduate support as there are no long-term front-line placements in these years.

We welcome the government's comments about reform for postgraduate funding, but would like to see a timetable for change set out and further dialogue on this issue.

We would be happy to speak further about the issues raised and provide any further clarifications which may be useful to the committee.