

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee  
Wednesday 30 October 2024  
16th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

## PE2039: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement

### Introduction

**Petitioner** Amy Lee

**Petition summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to pay student nurses for their placement hours.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2039>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 20 December 2023.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Royal College of Nursing, and the National Union of Students.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Nursing Midwifery Council, the Royal College of Nursing, and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 22 November 2023.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 3,071 signatures have been received on this petition.

### Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**October 2024**

## **Annexe A: Summary of petition**

### **PE2039: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement**

#### **Petitioner**

Amy Lee

#### **Date Lodged**

3 August 2023

#### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to pay student nurses for their placement hours.

#### **Previous action**

Wrote to Ash Regan MSP. A member of her staff got back to me and provided me with the links to make my own petition.

#### **Background information**

As a student nurse, I feel we should get paid while on placement. We are supposed to be there for the learning experience to complete our electronic Practice Assessment Documents) and be supernumerary. However, during my last 3 placements I have been used as a spare member of staff, covering either for staff off sick or for staff not attending bank and agency shifts.

I was a clinical support worker before becoming a student nurse, taking a £1000 pay cut to better myself and study.

NHS paid student nurses during the Covid-19 pandemic, so I don't know why this can't continue. The longest placement we do is three months and they already use us in their working numbers which should not be the case. Doing a placement while also writing essays and preparing for exams is not an ideal situation to be in. This adds up to a 50+ hour week, and can lead to burnout, financial difficulties and poor mental health.

We get a bursary but this doesn't even cover some people's mortgages. Being paid for placement work would help to reduce the number of people dropping out due to financial difficulties.

## **Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2039 on 20 December 2023**

**The Convener:** We have two new petitions to consider this morning. I explain for those who might be joining us for the first time that, in advance of our consideration of all new petitions and in order to assist that consideration, we invite the Scottish Government and the Parliament's independent research body—the Scottish Parliament information centre—to give some comment on and information in respect of the petitions.

The first new petition, PE2039, lodged by Amy Lee, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to pay student nurses for their placement hours. The petitioner's experience on placement has been challenging: she states that she has been used as a spare member of staff to cover absences during her previous three placements. She also shares that she took a £1,000 pay cut to study nursing.

The SPICe briefing explains that, over the three-year nursing programme, students are required to complete 2,300 hours of clinical practice and 2,300 hours of theory before they are eligible for registration. The briefing also notes that applications to study nursing have fallen from just under 8,000 in 2022 to 6,450 in 2023. That is rather a dramatic drop in a very short space of time.

The Scottish Government's response to the petition states that it is not possible for student nurses to be employed as nursing staff before programme completion and entry to the nursing register. Regarding financial support, it states that eligible student nurses and midwives in Scotland receive the highest level of support across the United Kingdom.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

**Foyso Choudhury:** I visited nursing classes held at Edinburgh College's Sighthill campus. The programme leaders expressed concerns about students not taking up nursing and midwifery courses due to the lack of support. We need to make that career path more attractive. One of the points that was mentioned was the need for more financial support for student nurses. Paying student nurses for their placement hours would be a relief and would be beneficial because it would attract more students to nursing in the future. It is one solution to filling the gap in nursing vacancies, not only by helping students with financial support but by promoting nursing and midwifery as a valuable career choice in the long term.

**Maurice Golden:** As it is a new petition, we should write to stakeholders to seek their views on the action that is called for in the petition. We should ask specifically what the causes may be for the decline in applicants to nursing and midwifery courses. Those stakeholders could include the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Royal College of Nursing and the National Union of Students.

**The Convener:** Following Mr Choudhury's comments and Maurice Golden's suggestions of organisations for us to write to, do members have any other suggestions for action?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** I thank the petitioner, Amy Lee, and welcome the new petition. Does the committee agree to hold the petition open and to seek information from the bodies that we have identified? Once we have those responses, we will consider the position in due course.

**Members *indicated agreement.***

## **Annexe C: Written submissions**

### **Nursing and Midwifery Council written submission, 18 January 2024**

#### **PE2039/B: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement**

Thank you for your email dated 21 December 2023. You have asked us to provide evidence to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on Petition PE2039 relating to student nurses while on placement.

I have looked into the issues raised in the petition by reviewing our remit as the regulator of Nurses and Midwives in Scotland, and the regulatory position we would take on the question of paying students while they are on placement.

#### **Background**

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered Petition PE2039: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement; Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to pay student nurses for their placement hours, at its meeting on 20 December 2023. The committee wrote to us seeking our views on the action called for in the petition. We would like the following to be considered as evidence for the committee's consideration;

- Our regulatory remit
- Our position on paying students during their placements

#### **Our regulatory remit**

We hope the committee will find it helpful to outline our regulatory role in respect of the professionals on our register, and students applying to join the register.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council is responsible for setting Nursing and Midwifery education standards, and maintaining the register of Nurses and Midwives in the United Kingdom, and Nursing Associates in England. We also investigate fitness to practise matters when the conduct or competence of a professional on our register is called into question. You can read more about our regulatory role at [What we do - The Nursing and Midwifery Council](#).

#### **Our position on paying students during their placements**

We would gently advise the committee that the questions of student finances and pay matters (whether for students or registered professionals) is wholly outside our regulatory remit, and therefore not a matter upon which we are in a position to comment. The issues raised in this petition are matters for the relevant Scottish Government departments to address.

#### **Conclusion**

I would like to close by thanking the committee for inviting us to provide evidence on its consideration of the petition. I hope you have found our explanation of our

regulatory position helpful, although I appreciate that we have not been able to address the issues raised as directly as you may have wished.

## **Royal College of Nursing written submission, 1 February 2024**

### **PE2039/C: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement**

#### **The importance of supernumerary status**

All students undertaking pre-registration nursing programmes are required by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) to have supernumerary status while on clinical practice placements. This means that they must be additional to the workforce requirement and not counted as part of the workforce required to provide patient care. Supernumerary status is vital, as the purpose of clinical practice placements is to provide nursing students with a high-quality learning experience. This is why RCN Scotland does not support students being paid while on clinical placement.

However, we know that the quality of learning during clinical placements is being impacted by high levels of nursing vacancies and staff shortages, and that student nurses are exposed to the same pressures that are being felt by the wider health and social care workforce. In a 2022 RCN member survey, 46% of respondents in Scotland said that, on their last shift, nursing students were being counted as staff in terms of the numbers required to provide patient care.

The RCN is clear that all nursing students must be supernumerary when undertaking placements or protected learning as part of their education programmes and must not be included in the nursing workforce calculations or used as mitigation for workforce shortages.

As part of our work supporting the implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019, and the development of workforce planning tools, we are clear that the time needed for all elements of practice development, including mentoring, must be taken into consideration when defining the nursing workforce and calculating the nursing requirements and skill mix within teams.

#### **Nursing Student Finance: the true costs of becoming a nurse**

**While RCN Scotland does not support student nurses being paid while on clinical placement, we are clear that the Scottish Government must ensure that nursing students have appropriate financial support to allow them to prioritise their education, cope with the rising cost of living and complete their studies without falling into financial hardship.**

In June 2023 we published [Nursing Student Finance: the true costs of becoming a nurse](#). This report is based on a survey of over 1,000 RCN Scotland student members and found that nursing students across Scotland are facing serious financial pressures that are having a significant impact on their education, financial security and physical and mental wellbeing.

**Report recommendations:**

- **We're calling on the Scottish Government to implement a cost-of-living increase to the bursary, and associated allowances, and establish a regular review to make sure it rises in line with the cost of living.**
- The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and the universities need to agree a new clinical placement expenses process that enables students to claim during placements, improves access to advance payments, ensures prompt reimbursement and removes current barriers that may result in students falling into financial hardship. We are encouraged that our report, and a subsequent student member roundtable, has prompted action from the Scottish Government, Student Awards Agency Scotland, and universities to improve the clinical placement expenses process. This work is ongoing to update the guidance and refresh the processes in place.
- The Scottish Government and SAAS must also uplift the value of travel and accommodation expenses to reflect the rising cost of living.
- NHS boards must review and streamline the processes for nursing students to register with their local NHS board staff bank, resulting in prompt registration and availability for part-time paid employment separate from programmes of study or placement experience.

**Key findings:**

- 99% of respondents said their finances cause them some level of concern.
- 74% said this was having a high or very high impact on their mental health, and 48% on their physical health.
- 58% said this was having a high or very high impact on their academic performance.
- 66% have considered dropping out of their course due to financial concerns.
- Nursing students are experiencing financial hardship. 64% said they have had to cut down on food and 49% have had to delay paying bills.
- 76% reported their concern that the bursary only covers some of their living expenses.
- 57% said the cost of getting to clinical placements was a key reason for considering leaving their course.
- Students reported being financially stretched due to expensive travel and accommodation and experienced delays in being reimbursed. 22% reported typically waiting more than a month to receive reimbursement after submitting an expense claim, with a further 7% waiting more than two months.
- 72% were encouraged to submit clinical placement travel and accommodation expenses at the end of placement or later. Given that placements can be up to 16 weeks, if students have to apply at the end of placement and face

delays in payment, this is a substantial period of time between being out of pocket for travel and accommodation and being reimbursed.

- 90% have a job in addition to their nursing course, undertaking paid work alongside studies and clinical placement hours to supplement their income.
- On average, 25% were working between 11 and 15 hours a week, with a further 25% working between 16 and 20 hours a week, 20% working between 21 and 25 hours a week, and 10% working between 26 and 30 hours in a typical week.
- 25% reported the process took six months or more between applying and being able to work on an NHS bank.

Nursing is a fantastic career choice, full of variety and opportunity. It's a hugely diverse profession attracting people of all ages and from all walks of life, often as a second career. However, being a nurse should not be at the expense of personal wellbeing and financial security.

For the second year in a row, the number of places on nursing degrees have not been filled. The number of acceptances onto Scottish nursing courses for 2023 is 3,520; a significant shortfall of over 800 students compared to the number of places funded by Scottish Government. This means the gap between the number of registered nurses that are needed, and the number entering the workforce, is set to widen even further.

Ministers must take action now to grow the domestic nursing workforce given persistently high registered nurse vacancy rates and increasing demand. A fair financial package has never been more important to encourage more people to take the undergraduate degree route into a nursing career.

The Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce, a direct result of the RCN's campaigning, comes at a pivotal moment and is much-needed recognition of the nursing workforce crisis. A key theme of the Ministerial Taskforce is attracting more people into nursing as a career, and this presents a significant opportunity to take forward actions to ensure that current and future nursing students receive the support they need.

## **Petitioner written submission, 16 October 2024**

### **PE2039/D: Fair pay to student nurses while on placement**

My name is Amylee Dodds, and I am the petitioner for PE2039, which calls for fair pay for student nurses while on placement. This petition seeks to address the financial challenges and inequities faced by student nurses who, despite working full-time hours in demanding healthcare environments, receive no financial compensation.

#### **Information about the petition**

The financial burden on student nurses is a significant issue. Based on responses from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), and the Scottish Government, it is evident that financial concerns are widespread.



The RCN highlighted that 99% of respondents expressed some level of financial concern. Additionally, 74% reported that these concerns had a high or very high impact on their mental health, while 48% stated that it affected their physical health.

While the Chief Nursing Directorate mentioned the availability of the nursing bank as a form of financial support, this option is not entirely sufficient. NHS Lothian does provide opportunities for students to work through the staff bank; however, balancing placement requirements, university deadlines, and additional work hours is challenging. Student nurses often work 37.5 hours a week on placement, have essays and clinical skills days to attend, and are only allowed to work up to 15 hours per week on the nursing bank. This demanding schedule leaves little room for physical and mental wellbeing, causes social isolation from friends and family, and often results in students falling behind academically.

### **Challenges and solutions**

The current structure creates barriers for students to maintain their health and academic performance. Realistic solutions include increasing the student nursing bursary to reflect the rising cost of living or introducing a system where student nurses are paid a minimum wage or a Band 2 salary during placements. Placements typically range from 6 to 8 weeks, with the management placement extending to 14 weeks. Paying student nurses during these periods would not only provide financial relief but also incentivise students to continue their training without the added stress of financial instability.

### **Feasibility and realism of the petition**

Implementing fair pay for student nurses is both realistic and achievable. In other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, student nurses receive payment during placements, and similar models could be adopted in Scotland. Additionally, supporting student nurses financially aligns with Scotland's commitment to improving healthcare services and retaining skilled professionals. Investing in the wellbeing of student nurses will lead to a more robust and motivated workforce, ultimately benefiting the healthcare system as a whole.

### **Related work and initiatives**

There are ongoing discussions within nursing unions and student associations advocating for better financial support for student nurses. The RCN and other organisations have consistently highlighted the need for financial compensation to address the rising cost of living and the pressures faced by student nurses. This petition is a call to action for the Scottish Government to take concrete steps to support the future of nursing in Scotland.