

Healthcare Education Reform (Eng): Government response to the public consultation

Overview

The Government's response to the consultation on education funding reform is principally focused on clarifying the offer to students (questions 1-10), giving the policy position on a range of important issues, from the scope of the reforms to placement travel and accommodation, childcare and postgraduate pre-registration.

The Government will issue a second response in Autumn 2016 focused on the system-level issues (questions 11-14), such as the future administration of placements and protection of small and vulnerable subjects.

Inclusion of other courses in the reforms

No other courses have been included in the reforms (so paramedic courses are not in) (p.10). Dental hygiene and therapy have been exempted for 2017/18 but there is an intention that 'in the long term... these courses reform to fit the standard student funding model' (p.17). We expect a separate announcement in due course on post-registration courses.

Postgraduate pre-registration courses

The Government received extensive feedback on the importance of adequate financial provision for postgraduate pre-registration courses. It is considering the possibility of making loans available for postgraduate pre-registration courses on a similar basis to undergraduate loans, something we and a number of other stakeholders had argued for (similar to PGCEs).

However, the decision on this has not yet been taken and so for 2017/18 postgraduate pre-registration courses will be commissioned based on 2016/17 numbers (p.11). Further details are promised in due course.

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21 July 2016

Purpose

This briefing sets out the key points from the Government's response to its consultation on education funding reform in England.

Relevance

The response contains announcements on a wide range of issues that the HE sector has raised within its consultation responses.

CoDH Contact

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Part-time students

The Government will continue to provide maintenance bursary support for a capped number of students, in light of the transition to new funding arrangements for part-time students that would leave them without access to maintenance loans (p.12).

ELQ Exemption

The response confirms the Government's commitment to provide an 'equivalent or lower qualification' (ELQ) exemption for the courses within the reforms, meaning that students can access a second set of loans. The response states that the balance of the second loan will be added to the first and the loans are paid off concurrently. The Student Loans Company will be providing further guidance on this and we will be seeking clarification on whether the 9% repayment is effectively apportioned between the two loans as was previously understood (p.16).

Placement travel and accommodation

The Government accepts the argument that health students have specific, unavoidable financial outlay in relation to placements.

In that light, the Government plans to cover the £303 excess on the BIS system for reclaiming travel expenses that it intends to apply to these students (currently used for a limited number of students). It also commits to providing funding for 'unavoidable costs incurred for temporary accommodation' (p.12).



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Childcare and maternity allowances

The Government has also accepted that childcare is often more expensive during the non-standard hours that many healthcare students are on placement. In this context, the Government will make available an extra childcare grant of £1000 per person. This does not affect access to other children grants through the HE system (p.12)

Government has decided not to replicate the twelve-month paid maternity leave period currently in place under the NHS Bursary system. It specifically asks that HEIs work with Student Finance England and students to give support to pregnant students to return after their maternity leave.

Other student support – hardship fund

The response recognises that some students may face exceptional hardship and will develop a specific fund for these circumstances, working with external organisations to design the system. More details will be published ahead of the 2017/18 implementation of the reforms (p.15).

Placements

This part of the consultation response sets out some parameters but possibly raises more questions than it answers. It states a commitment to stability and that HEE will retain the responsibility for 'commissioning the minimum number of placements for 2017/18'. It also states the universities will have their HEE-funded placements maintained at existing levels (p.13). This should provide some measure of stability and allow institutions to plan. However, it does not address some of the fundamental questions about placement tariff in a market-led system. The need for 'more comprehensive work' is acknowledged and more detail on the proposed options is promised for Autumn 2016. This therefore continues to be one of our major focal points.

'Small and specialist' subjects

The response notes the concerns raised on the impact of funding reform on small and specialist subjects, specifically naming podiatry, SLT and orthoptics. The Government 'will develop proposals to mitigate these risks' with more detail in the second response in the Autumn (p.13).



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Data monitoring

We highlighted in our response that understanding how the system is behaving through accurate, timely data is crucial to the success of the reforms. The response notes that a new group on data monitoring has been established to look across the health and higher education sectors, with representation from HEFCE, HEE, DH, DfE and the Treasury (p.17).