

P-06-1226 Remove barriers to entry to Social Work and encourage parity of esteem between Social Care and Health, Briefing Document – Petitioners to Committee, 17.01.22

Briefing document for the Petition's Committee from the MASW Bursary Campaign

The current Situation

The current workforce is an ageing one, with over 50% of the workforce over the age of 45 and 24% over 55¹. The average social worker in Wales is white, female, and 46. The female to male ratio is 5-1, 88% are white British, and 3% have a disability². The need to recruit new social workers is imperative. The most recent data shows over the two years between 2018-2020, 516 students entered the register, over a third at 154 being MA students.³ However, 20% of students left the register, with the majority citing personal and health reasons.⁴

The social work MA is a two-year full-time course; however, most students are forced to work part-time alongside a full-time course due to a lack of financial support. However, health students have historically and continue to benefit from enhanced levels of financial support. For example, our health colleagues benefit from a record £227,000,000 support for education and training.⁵ It isn't easy to ascertain exact figures, but a rough estimate would suggest NHS students receive five times the level of support as their social worker colleagues.

A typical NHS student will receive a bursary in the region of £33,000-£40,000 depending on household income. There is access to custom maintenance loans for students receiving the lower amount. Few NHS students qualify with significant debt, except for possible accommodation fees.

A typical social worker undergraduate receives a bursary for £7,500. They are expected to take on a student loan for tuition fees and maintenance loans to survive. A typical social worker undergraduate will qualify with more than £40,000 in debt.

Social work MA students receive a significant bursary of £13,000; however, this fails to cover tuition fees. There are Welsh Government regulations⁶ that prohibit MA students from accessing student finance and a bursary concurrently, even though NHS and undergraduates do. These regulations force social workers and their families into hardship and act as a real barrier

What needs to change?

1. Amend the regulations that exclude MA students from accessing financial support.
2. An equivalence of bursary between Social Care Wales bursary and the NHS (Wales) bursary to ensure parity is more than just words - it is not parity to require social work students to qualify with £40,000-£50,000 in debt to undertake a public health service role.
3. Ensure changes happen in a timely manner, to support the future social work workforce.

¹ Social Worker Workforce Planning 2019 (ADSS/SCW/WLGA)

² Social Care Wales- Social Worker Fact Sheet 2020

³ Fact sheet (SCW) Social work students on the Register 2019&2020

⁴ Fact sheet (SCW) Social work students on the Register 2019&2020

⁵ Record funding of £227m announced to expand NHS Wales workforce- WG Press Release 07/12/20

⁶ The Education (Student Support)(Post Graduate Master Degrees (Wales) Regs 2019

