

COUNCIL		
Report Title	Motion 2 in the name of Councillor Walsh to be seconded by Councillor Dacres	
Key Decision		Item No.
Ward		
Contributors	Chief Executive (Head of Business & Committee)	
Class	Part 1	Date: January 20 2016

“This Council believes:

The Government is in the process of fundamentally changing the Higher Education Funding settlement agreed by Parliament by increasing costs to students by the back door. The Government's planned increase in charges, and removal of Maintenance Grants to students from the poorest households will adversely affect the widening participation agenda. These changes are being implemented before the Higher Education White Paper has even been drafted.

Widening Participation isn't about saving a couple of seats at ivory tower institutions for a few exceptionally bright kids from the working classes. Proposals to increase Higher Education costs further and, more fundamentally, to vary the terms of a contract after it's been agreed by parties means a student can now never be sure how much they are going to repay. This will shake the confidence of any future student, particularly those who come from the poorest backgrounds.

The government has also introduced a cut of 24 per cent to the adult education budget this year, which will have had and will continue to have serious ramifications for Further Education provision in England. From IT literacy courses supporting adults aiming to upskill for the workplace, to arts courses providing a safe space for vulnerable adults, adult education provision helps many who missed out on qualifications at school to achieve, retrain, and re-join the workforce.

That whilst we support increasing the domestic supply of nurses and other healthcare professionals training and joining the NHS, the idea that this is achieved by removing NHS bursaries is a flawed one. Whilst we recognise there is only a finite resource available to government to support trainee nurses, there are other resource implications, beyond financial capacity, of increasing trainee nurse places by 10,000 by 2020.

Those representative bodies for the professions have also judged the Government's plans as ill-conceived. Janet Davies Chief Exec of the Royal College of Nurses said: "Removing their bursaries will have a serious impact on them [Nurses] financially and put the future supply of nurses at serious risk.". Carmel Lloyd, Head of Education at the Royal College of Midwifery said: "This is a change that has huge implications for both our student midwife members and an already understaffed maternity service”.

That as a local authority now involved in the London NHS Devolution programme, we must play an ever greater and more active role in NHS workforce policy.

“This Council notes:

Currently, students in England who started university from 2012 will pay 9% of everything earned above £21,000 a year (or £1,750/month pre-tax salary) once they graduate. In 2010, the Government promised that from April 2017 this repayment threshold would be increased each year in line with average earnings. It has now backtracked on the promise given to students, effectively hiking costs retrospectively. A move that, according to the Government, will mean more than two million graduates will end up paying £306 more each year by 2020-21 if they earn over £21,000.

The current government also plans to scrap maintenance grants for full-time Higher Education students in England from 2016, and replace them with more loans instead. Maintenance Grants support thousands of students from the lowest income households like those in Lewisham every year, and the Government's plan will saddle poorer students with yet more debt. The NUS estimates that 500,000 academically capable students rely on Maintenance Grants currently, and that the cuts mean that more than 40 per cent of students will now graduate with debts of up to £53,000 from a three year university course.

The Government plans remove £800,000,000 of bursaries for nursing students', midwives, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, podiatrists, radiographers, dietetics, ODP's and other students on NHS supported bursaries, replacing them with loans from September 2017, repayable by these students.

UNISON has calculated that a student nurse graduating in 2020 under this new financial regime could leave with debts over £50,000, yet be starting out in the workplace on a salary under £23,000.

This Council resolves:

To support the student nurses, The National Union of Students, and Trade Unions/Associations in the condemnation of this assault on Higher Education, widening participation and the NHS.

To respond to future Government consultations on the removal of NHS Bursaries and the Higher Education Green Paper calling for any changes to tuition fees, loan rates, or the selling off of the Student Loan Book to be debated and agreed by parliament.”