



## Funding for medical students in England in 2012/13

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Support for medical students is rather different to support for most other higher education students. The whole student support system in England underwent a series of changes in 2012 and this note outlines the impact of these changes with regard to medical students and sets out the financial support available to medical students taking undergraduate and graduate degrees in medicine in 2012/13. The note also highlights some issues related to student support for medical students.

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## 1 Routes into medicine

Students wanting to become doctors must study for a degree in medicine. There are two main types of medical degree: a five or six year undergraduate degree<sup>1</sup> and an accelerated four year degree for graduates. Most students taking medical degrees do so as a first undergraduate degree. However competition for places on undergraduate medical degrees is high and many medical students apply for medicine as graduates having already completed a degree in another subject. Graduates can study medicine on an accelerated graduate degree, however competition for these places is also high and so many graduates take medicine as a second undergraduate degree.

Funding for students studying medicine varies depending on which route a student is following and this has created a funding system which can seem confusing and complicated.<sup>2</sup>

Information on funding for medical students is available on various websites:

- NHS Careers [Financial support for students on degree courses in medicine - NHS Careers](#)
- Details of the NHS bursary system are available at [NHS Student Bursaries](#).
- British Medical Association [Funding arrangements for medical degrees 2012-15](#)

## 2 Funding for the five/six year undergraduate degree

Students taking the 'standard' five or six year undergraduate degree are funded in the same way as all other undergraduate degree students in their first four years. Information on the standard student finance package of loans, grants and bursaries is available on the GovUK website at [Student Finance](#).

In the fifth and sixth years of their degrees medical students are eligible for extra funding. In 2012 medical students will continue to have their tuition fees paid by the NHS in their final years as in previous years. Medical students are also eligible to apply for a means tested NHS bursary of up to £3,128<sup>3</sup> and from 2012 all medical students are eligible for a new non means tested NHS grant of £1,000. Medical students may also apply for a reduced rate maintenance loan.

Information on the numbers of medical students receiving NHS bursaries since 1997 was given in a PQ on 2012:

**Chris Skidmore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) student midwives, (b) student doctors and (c) student nurses were in receipt of a bursary in each academic year since 1997-98; what the average bursary paid to each was in that year; and what the total cost was to his Department of bursaries paid to those students. [110250]

<b>Student doctors on degree courses</b>				
	<b>Number of bursary holders<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Average amount paid per bursary holder<sup>(2)</sup> (£)</b>	<b>Total amount paid excluding tuition fees (£)</b>	<b>Tuition fees<sup>(3)</sup> (£)</b>

<sup>1</sup> The standard medical degree is five years long but may be extended to six years if students do an intercalated degree.

<sup>2</sup> Discussed later in section 4.5

<sup>3</sup> NHS bursary amounts vary depending on where the student is studying and on the number of weeks of study

1997-98	—	—	—	—
1998-99	—	—	—	—
1999-2000	—	—	—	—
2000-01	14	2,120	29,687	n/a
2001-02	932	586	546,045	n/a
2002-03	4,153	1,386	5,755,069	n/a
2003-04	5,965	1,559	9,298,854	n/a
2004-05	6,694	1,709	11,439,462	n/a
2005-06	8,406	1,759	14,789,517	8,055,885
2006-07	9,249	1,865	17,251,889	9,075,960
2007-08	10,022	1,851	18,551,600	10,909,494
2008-09	10,640	1,754	18,658,860	12,798,778
2009-10	10,932	1,809	19,779,938	14,572,596

Medical students may also be eligible for other allowances such as practice placement expenses, extra weeks allowances and various dependants allowances.<sup>4</sup> Detailed information on funding for medical students is available in a Department for Health publication called [NHS bursary scheme new rules For students who start their course on or after 1 September 2012 First edition](#).

### 3 Funding for graduate medical students

Many students study medicine as graduates, information on funding for graduate medical students is available in a British Medical Association publication [Graduate medical student finance](#) and on the Money4medstudents website at [Medicine as a second degree: England](#).

#### 3.1 Graduates taking second undergraduate degrees in medicine

Successive governments have prioritised HE student funding towards students taking a first undergraduate degree and as a result the rules on support for second HE qualifications have become rather complicated. The rationale behind this policy is that public funds are limited and that resources are most fairly used by giving as many people as possible the chance to do a first undergraduate degree. Generally therefore students studying for degrees which are at an equivalent or lower level (ELQs) to one that they already have do not receive any public funding.

However, second degrees in a limited range of subjects, such as medicine and dentistry, are to some extent exempt from the general rules on ELQs. This means that medical students are eligible for a full maintenance loan in the first four years of a second degree in medicine (loans are not available for students taking ELQs in other subjects). Students are not however eligible for tuition fee loans or maintenance grants in the first four years, regardless of whether or not they have previously received public funding. From year five onwards, graduate medical students receive the same support as undergraduate medical students taking a first degree in medicine.

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<sup>4</sup> Dependants allowances include the Dependants Allowance, Parents Learning Allowance and the Childcare Allowance

### 3.2 Accelerated four year graduate entry course

Students on the four year fast track medical degree for graduates receive no funding for fees in their first year. From 2012 a new scheme is being introduced and students will pay the first £3,465 of their tuition fees (this is the same fee level as in 2011 plus a small inflationary rise), and students may take out a tuition fee loan to pay the remainder of the fees charged by the university. From the second year onwards the NHS will pay the first £3,465 of the fees and students can continue to access fee loans for the remainder.

In the first year of the accelerated degree students may take out a full rate maintenance loan and for years 2-4 this changes to a reduced rate loan. Students are also eligible for a means tested NHS bursary in years 2-4 and a non means tested NHS grant of £1,000.

#### Summary of student support for medical degrees

2012/13	2012/13
UNDERGRADUATE	GRADUATE
<p><b>5/6 year undergraduate degree</b></p> <p>Years 1-4: Student Finance England funding the same as for all other students</p> <p>Years 5-6: Fees paid by NHS Means tested NHS bursary up to £3,128 in London Reduced rate maintenance loan Non means tested NHS grant £1,000</p>	<p><b>Second undergraduate degree</b></p> <p>Years 1-4: Student pays full tuition fees, no tuition fee loan or grants available Full maintenance loan</p> <p>Years 5-6 :Same as for first undergraduate degree medical students in years 5-6</p>
	<p><b>Accelerated graduate entry degree</b></p> <p>Year 1: Student pays tuition fees up to £3,465, fee loan available for the balance of fees up to £9,000 Full maintenance loan</p> <p>Year 2-4: First £3,465 of fees paid by NHS, fee loan available for the balance of fees up to £9,000 Means tested NHS bursary up to £3,128 in London Reduced rate maintenance loan Non means tested NHS grant £1,000</p>

An outline of funding for postgraduate students was set out in a PQ on 12 May 2011:

#### Medicine: Education

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether graduate entry medical students will be required to cover the cost of their

tuition fees for the first year of study in academic year 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [55273]

**Mr Willetts:** Tuition fee support is currently not available for year one of a graduate entry medical course and this will remain the case in 2012/13. Graduate entry medical students can apply for a maintenance loan, supplementary grants and disabled students allowances for their first year from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and a reduced level maintenance loan for the duration of their course, but receive no other support. From year two of the course responsibility for providing support is shared with the Department of Health ([HC Deb 12 May 2011 c1348](#))

## 4 Issues

### 4.1 Transitional student support arrangements

The new financial arrangements apply only to students starting their degrees in 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15, arrangements for funding for students starting their studies in 2015/16 and beyond have yet to be announced.

#### Medicine: Education

**Shabana Mahmood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he plans to announce tuition fee funding and NHS bursary arrangements for students beginning medical degrees in the 2013-14 academic year; [101358]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills about the tuition fee funding and NHS bursary arrangements available to medical students beginning courses in the academic year 2013-14 onwards; and if he will make a statement. [101561]

**Anne Milton:** As part of the discussion on the interim solution for the funding of students beginning a medical course in 2012-13, the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley), and the Minister for Universities and Science, my right hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Willetts), asked their departmental officials to take forward joint work to agree the funding arrangements for 2013-14. This work is continuing and we plan to make an announcement in due course. ([HC Deb 26 March 2012](#)) c992

### 4.2 Impact of new fee system in 2012 on medical students

During debates on the raising of tuition fees many commentators voiced concerns about the impact of higher fees on students taking long courses such as medicine; a BMA press release on 6 December 2010 highlighted the problem of increasing debt among medical students:

#### Impact of the government proposals

The BMA is deeply concerned about the potential impact of increasing tuition fees to as much as £9,000 as currently proposed by the government:

The BMA estimates that if universities charge fees of up to £9,000, medical students could see their debts increase to almost £70,000. This figure only includes debts incurred from student loans and does not take into account overdrafts, credit cards and professional loans which many students depend on for additional support. Final debt figures, especially in London, could be significantly higher.<sup>5</sup>

A PQ was asked about the impact of higher fees on graduate medical students in 2011:

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<sup>5</sup> BMA "Medical student finance in England: Tuition fees and student debt" 6 December 2012

## Medicine: Education

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the effects of the implementation of the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 on the number of graduate entry medical students; and if he will make a statement. [55272]

**Mr Willetts:** The Department has made no specific assessment of the effects of the Higher Education (Higher Amount) (England) Regulations 2010 at subject level. We are working with the Department of Health to consider the impact on medical students. The Departments have a shared responsibility for providing student support for graduate entry medical students. (HC Deb 12 May 2011 c1348

Figures released by UCAS in December 2011 showed that applications to medicine and dentistry courses in 2012 fell by 3 percent from 2011 levels.<sup>6</sup> However a UCAS media release in October 2012 commenting on 2013 applicants for medicine and dentistry suggested that numbers of applicants this year have recovered to pre-2012 levels

'These figures for applicants to Oxford, Cambridge, medicine, veterinary and dentistry courses are encouraging. Not only are they up against last year but also on 2011. Although this is a subset of applicants for higher education at the highest levels of achievement, I remain optimistic about overall demand in the 2013 cycle.'<sup>7</sup>.

### 4.3 Support for graduates on the standard 5 year degree

Many students take medicine as a second undergraduate degree, and as has been outlined in the sections above, support for these students is less than for students taking medicine as a first undergraduate degree or as an accelerated graduate degree. The perceived unfairness of this situation has frequently been raised, but the issue is now more pressing as students in this position will have to self-fund very high rates of fees for four years and this could put many students off entering medicine. This issue has been raised by the BMA:

Although in these times of austerity it is good news that those entering medicine in the next two years will be no worse off than in previous years, it is very disappointing that Government has still made no provision for graduate students on 5 year undergraduate courses, who cannot access tuition fee loans and will have to self-fund the full cost of their fees in years 1-4.

The Medical Students Committee believes this effectively will price out many graduate students from considering medicine as a career, and we will continue to make the case for special arrangements for such students.

The arrangement will be reviewed in 2015 and a sustainable agreement for the future implemented<sup>8</sup>

### Mistaken payments of tuition fee loans to graduates

Some graduate students on the five year degree have experienced financial difficulties as a result of mistakenly being paid tuition fee loans by the Student Loans Company, this issue was discussed in an article in the *Student BMA* in October 2012<sup>9</sup>:

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<sup>6</sup> UCAS 2012 applicant figures - December

<sup>7</sup> UCAS comment on October applicant statistics

<sup>8</sup> <http://bma.org.uk/working-for-change/negotiating-for-the-profession/bma-medical-students-committee/tuition-fees-agreement>.

<sup>9</sup> Student BMA "BMA anger over loan error leads to reform" November 2012

THE BMA is fighting to secure the future of medical students whose university places are at risk owing to mistakes in issuing tuition fee loans.

Medical student leaders have met the SLC (Student Loans Company) to discuss the financial hardship suffered by students who were wrongly given tuition fee loans and had them withdrawn at short notice.

Some students have received demands to pay back several thousand pounds within a few weeks, leading them to consider leaving medicine.

The problem particularly affects graduate medical students on five- and six-year courses, who have to pay the first four years of their fees upfront but are not eligible for SLC loans for this.

Unclear advice from the SLC in previous years about whether students' previous courses of study amounted to 'equivalent-level qualifications' has meant that some students have mistakenly been given tuition fee loans.

Although the BMA medical students committee has been given assurances that the checking system has improved, it is calling for the SLC to honour loans that have been paid incorrectly.

It will be lobbying universities to be more lenient in asking for repayments, and is working with the SLC to get information about the issue to medical school deans.

The MSC is also developing online guidance, and is asking other websites to update their information.

MSC co-chair Will Seligman said he hoped new SLC measures would prevent errors happening in future.

[...]

SLC head of processing Mark Cassidy said: 'We have introduced a number of changes and improvements to help medical students apply for financial support.'

He said improvements included:

- A dedicated team of assessors to process all the post-graduate medical and dental applications
- Questionnaires that take SLC advisers through questions they need to ask students
- Regular refresher training for SLC student finance assessors
- Spot checks on medical students to ensure they have been correctly assessed.

#### **4.4 Reduced rate maintenance loan**

Undergraduate medical students in years 5 and 6 and graduates in years 2 to 4 of the accelerated course are eligible for a means tested bursary and a reduced rate maintenance loan. This arrangement can cause financial difficulty for some students because students who are not eligible for an NHS bursary due to their household income are still only eligible for a reduced rate loan. Students facing hardship can apply for an Access to Learning Fund, or an NHS Hardship Grant.

#### **4.5 Problems with the student support application process**

Many medical students have had difficulties applying for their student support and they say that that NHS bursary application scheme process is confusing. As a result of these problems the BMA is publishing guidance to help students:

##### **BMA to issue NHS bursary guidance**

THE BMA is developing guidance for students applying for financial support following concerns over the NHS bursary scheme process.

Medical students have complained of a series of issues with the bursary application system, such as not being properly informed of when to apply, an unclear online application form, and an expensive helpline.

The BMA medical students committee is writing a step-by-step guide to applying for NHS bursaries.

The scheme pays the tuition fees of undergraduate medical students from year five onwards, and the maintenance costs for eligible students. Graduate-entry students on fast-track courses receive partial funding towards fees from year two onwards.

Warwick third year Tom Lewis is writing the MSC guide after having applied for a bursary twice as a graduate entry student. He was stunned at the amount of supporting material required; this included his sister's birth certificate.

Mr Lewis said: 'The increase in tuition fees means that more medical students are relying on other sources of income to fund their studies. One of the main sources is the NHS bursary.'

'Students from around the country have said that accessing it is a complicated task and can be quite stressful.'

Universities supply the personal details of students to NHS BSA (NHS Business Services Authority), which administers the scheme. It sends letters or emails to students explaining how to apply.

Those who have already applied should also receive a letter or email before the start of the academic year, reminding them to reapply. However, some students report not receiving these reminders.

Students also report issues such as being asked to supply passports with their applications when they are overseas on electives, and say there are confusing terms on the application form.

MSC joint deputy chair James Warwick said: 'We must identify and work with the authorities to correct problems. There should be no major barriers to getting the money.'

NHS BSA said all continuing students received alerts to apply for bursaries by mid-July.

It said new students were invited to apply via email 'within days' of the bursary contact centre receiving notifications from universities of students on NHS-funded courses, and anyone who did not receive an email was dealt with swiftly.

The authority added that students had access to different support services, and the helpline number was changing from a 0845 to 0300 number to make calls cheaper.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Student BMA "*BMA to issue NHS bursary guidance*" October 2012