Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 29 April about access to the NHS Learning Support Fund (LSF) for students training to be paramedics.

In 2015, when the Government announced the move from bursaries to loans for nurses, midwives and some allied health profession students, it was recognised that some allowances paid by the Student Loans Company were not as generous as grants paid under the NHS Bursary scheme. Therefore, to aid the transition of the move from bursaries to loans, the LSF was developed. The current funding envelope for the LSF was agreed for the period of the current 2015 Spending Review.

At the time, the route into paramedicine had various education and funding models which did not include access to an NHS bursary. Therefore, it was not part of the funding reforms and paramedic students have not been eligible to access LSF funding.

The LSF was implemented in 2017 to ensure course sustainability so that subjects previously funded through NHS bursaries continued to offer some non-repayable funding for the unique characteristics of these courses – such as placement length, clinical placement requirements and student demographic. The LSF is applicable only to those courses which, at the time, were within the scope of the education funding reforms in 2017.

On 21 March 2018 the Health and Care Professions Council decided to no longer accept new applications for approval of paramedic programmes that are delivered below degree level and paramedicine became an all degree subject, with students accessing loans and allowances from the Student Loans Company. In line with the general student population and depending on personal circumstances, students can
access funding for all their tuition fees and a maintenance loan of between £7,300 and £11,300 a year.

Students studying a full time higher education course and accessing student finance dependent upon their household income can claim non-repayable travel grants to attend clinical placements. This also applies to pre-registration paramedic education and training programmes.

There are no immediate plans, within the current Spending Review period, to review the professions that can access the LSF.

The Department is aware of concerns about financial support and is working with Health Education England to consider the impact on paramedics in training as well as considering the changes that would need to be made to resolve the matter. We will also be working closely with the Department for Education and the Office for Students throughout this process.

Any additional professions we would want to consider including in the LSF due to changes in their course attributes such as paramedic training would need to be considered by and approved by Ministers based on advice from both policy and financial officials and likely fall as part of the forthcoming Spending Review considerations.

Yours ever,

STEPHEN HAMMOND

Always happy to chat