



## **BASW England Student & NQSW – Group statement on student bursaries**

### **Member feedback and recommendations**

**The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK with offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. With over 20,000 members we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, while also securing the well-being of social workers working in all health and social care settings.**

This statement is based on feedback from members of the Student & NQSW group. Outlined below are the views from members of the group in relation to student bursaries. The following comments represents a collation of views in relation to the social work student bursary with a summary of key themes.

### **Student bursaries – member feedback**

“...I wanted to share that my experience has been rather positive, however I know for others at my university it has not. Two black female students in my year group shared that they had to drop out from the year above as they were not able to get the bursary due to their academic ranking, and then not being able to afford the fees without the bursary.”

“I think this is poor the course is significantly made up of white students as is the university. I believe this process could be really discouraging for students and create further marginalisation in a university setting and prevent a diverse course/profession. I also think this once again feeds into discrimination and racism on a much larger scale.”

“Additionally, I noticed at the beginning of last year there was a major delay on getting the bursary for my year group as we had to wait for all students to enrol. I am aware that the university was trying to recruit students up until 3+ weeks into the term this meant waiting for those students to enrol for us to receive our bursary. ..I think there is a lack of acknowledgement from the university and department staff as to how vital and urgent the money is for students to survive essentially and complete the course. ”

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“It was a hot topic at university, spoken about during the summer and between years with little clarity from university or NHS bursaries. Individuals had to seek their own information by contacting NHS bursaries which was not helpful and often created mixed messages.

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Regular communication from the source may have been helpful. Redoing the application in third year seemed a bit time consuming. The allocation mechanism seems inconsistent across universities. Ours was based on academic skill, if you failed an assignment in 1st year it was presumed you were ineligible for it which became the case. It was then judged from your marks and attendance. This caused a lot of stress and worry for students, as the university did not make it clear who was awarded. Additionally, it caused friction and what felt like a competitive nature between the cohort. It did not feel like an equal or fair way to share the bursary.”

“I noticed how the only black student on our cohort did not receive the bursary. Overall, once the bursary is allocated its smooth running and helpful. However, if it is not allocated in full and prior to its allocation there is a lot of miscommunication around it.”

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“During my student experience in the second year, there were not enough bursaries to cover the whole cohort. The university used a number ranking system which was based on academic ability from year one. If you were ranked with a number that was 30 or below you got the bursary if you didn't you not only didn't receive it for your second year but you would also not receive it for your third year.”

“This caused a lot of anxiety and added pressure for the people who did not. Also a lot of people in their first year are adjusting to academic writing and I do not feel that this is a true reflection of their academic potential, and I would imagine that this is why these results do not go towards the final achievement although they are used to ensure you can progress onto the second year. Some people had no choice than to drop out as a result.

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“I am experiencing an issue with the requirement to physically complete and deliver the application form for the continuation of the bursary. As a single father in social housing I have limited finances. NHSBSA have made no way of sending digitally. I have had no printer ink from the beginning of lockdown and HP and amazon have been out of stock. After calls to NHSBSA they have confirmed they would kindly post the form. I am yet to get it.”

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“Firstly, the basics need addressing. This is simple: everyone should have a fair shot of having a bursary. When even that is not in place, the other discussions are superfluous.

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..” I don't get any childcare support from SFE so the whole bursary goes on paying for my son to go to nursery full time over placement and then I work to cover the rest of the year when not on placement. MA students can apply for bursaries to help with childcare, but BA students cannot, and this led to me nearly having to leave the course. I could only stay because I loaned money from my parents to cover petrol costs which I will pay back after placement (I am fortunate they could spare £50 a month!). Some on placement got petrol costs covered but I did not as they said the bursary covers it- but for me it went on childcare. Yet some students got the same £4,800 no childcare costs and petrol covered. It seems inconsistent and sort of 'potluck' depending on your placement if you get extra support and

childcare costs are no considered even though full time placement requires full time childcare costs.

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“Bursary allocation at my university was on a supposedly academic scoring and needs basis. As this was deemed 'Confidential', we were not to discuss who got and who did not. However, students do not understand the word 'Don't' so word got out.

Of the 8 bursaries which were allocated, only 1 Black student got it.

I self-funded as I did not want to add onto the debt I already owe Student Finance. As a single mother with 3 grown up children, I did not qualify for any hardship fund.

I was on my 100 day Placement when I was failed on day 63. The case was referred to a Fitness to Practice level 1, then escalated to a [FtP 2](#). The hearing at this stage ruled against the university and deemed me Fit to Practice. I have gone through the ringer with my university on this course.

Despite the above ruling, the university were reluctant to find me a placement place. Without completing my 200 day placement, I would not qualify as a social worker. Their argument was that placement providers were reluctant to offer me a place following my issues at the first placement. The university had awarded me an MA in Health and Social Care, and given me a ceremony date. I declined this, I had started the Complaints procedure, contacted the Office of The Independent Adjudicator. I was willing to fight this case and expose the discriminatory practice towards black students at this uni.

The uni then decided to rescind the award, found a placement place which is 60 miles away from my uni. I can not work because of placement, I did not get a bursary, which means I have to beg for fuel money.”

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“The basic grant i.e. tuition fee payments, travel and parent learning allowance are not taken into consideration as income. However, any maintenance grants and adult dependants' allowance are taken into consideration at the rate of £1 for £1. If the maintenance grant/ adult dependant allowance were earnings instead of grants the deduction would be 63p for every £1. I am currently on placement 'working' like any other member of the team, but I am classed in the eyes of Universal Credit as studying.”

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“I could not have done my degree without some sort of bursary, but I would have happily taken less if it would mean that all students could have had it. The idea of people's uni continuation, financially, being dependent on an ongoing league table of performance is contrary to our inclusive and supportive humanistic social work values.”

### **Summary of key issues**

- The process of bursary distribution can be divisive amongst students (academic ranking) and can be indirectly discriminatory
- Some students rely on the bursary as their only source of income and any decision delay with awarding a bursary or with a bursary payment for whatever reason can have a significant impact and negative repercussions for the student

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- There is a lack of clarity about eligibility and differences in distribution of bursaries. Also, there is significant variation across the Higher Education Institute sector and individual education provider settings
- There is a lack of consistency and national variation for students receiving various allowances - dependent upon placements
- Students who receive state benefits i.e. Universal Credit are impacted greatly and any income from allowances and grants can be deducted from their benefit award on a ratio of up to £1 to £1

### **Recommendation**

BASW England Student & NQSW Group recommends:

- That a means-tested bursary is available for all social work students to apply for via their education provider and funded via central government
- The bursary application process should be more accessible e.g. audio, digital and paper-based

### **Emma Grady (Chair of the Student & NQSW group)**

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