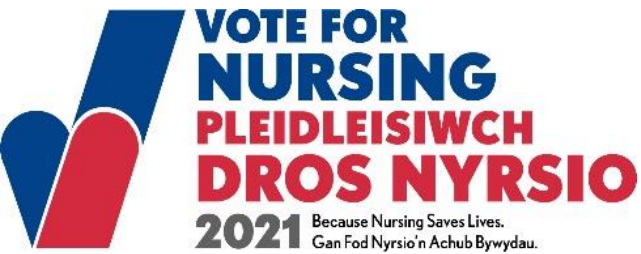




Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol
Cymru
Royal College of Nursing
Wales



Pre-registration Education



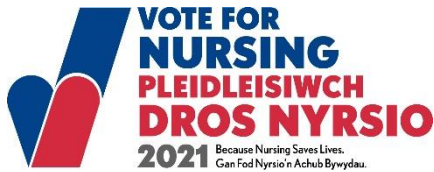
Executive Summary

The position paper intends to highlight the influencing priorities and positions of Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Wales on key educational areas in the pre-registration/undergraduate nursing degree.

Issues of higher education, access to continuing professional development (CPD) and commissioning of specialist post-registration education are outside of this paper's remit.

This paper is important, as the initial preparation that leads to qualification as a nurse is the infrastructure on which all other issues related to nursing are built, including: scope and standards of nursing practice; recruitment; retention; staffing numbers; specialisation; and career structures.

In May 2021, the population of Wales will elect a new Welsh Government. In readiness of this, RCN Wales has launched a manifesto calling on call political parties to Vote for Nursing. To find out the latest news, please [click here](#).



Policy Principles

1

RCN Wales will promote, by raising public awareness and political influencing, the necessity of the nursing degree and support the continued provision of high-quality nursing education

2

RCN Wales supports widening means of access for students to the nursing degree programme. This includes a national apprenticeship model, distance learning and part-time learning

3

RCN Wales believes nursing students in Wales should be supported financially by the Welsh Government and should have access to flexible methods of support, including the NHS bursary and other financial aids, as one size does not fit all

4

RCN Wales recognises the need to ensure the financial and professional sustainability of nursing as a flourishing teaching and research field in the higher education sector



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Introduction

RCN Wales works to ensure that the public in Wales receive the highest quality of nursing care in every setting in which it is delivered.

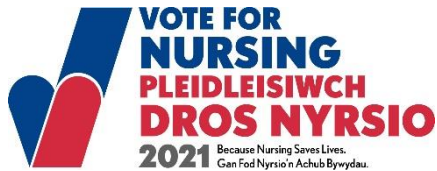
The role of the nurse is constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of patients, their families and carers. Education, which begins with the pre-registration course, is fundamental to achieving a highly skilled, motivated and engaged profession which strives constantly to improve patient care.

The degree programme is imperative for teaching students to develop the intellectual skills of problem-solving, research skills, reflection and continuous learning that together form the required professional judgment to apply to knowledge and clinical practice.

Research in 2014, conducted across nine European countries, found that a better educated nursing workforce reduced unnecessary deaths. Every 10% increase in the number of bachelor degree-educated nurses within a hospital is associated with a 7% decline in patient mortality.¹

To support and sustain access to the nursing degree programme for students there must be financial support and flexibility of access in place. Everything that can be done to promote the highest quality of education provision must be done. This position paper provides a series of recommendations for the Welsh Government, NHS Wales, local health boards and relevant bodies.

¹ NHS, 2014. *Patients are safer with better-educated nurses*, <https://www.nhs.uk/news/medical-practice/patients-are-safer-with-better-educated-nurses/#:~:text=Researchers%20found%20that%20an%20increase,7%25%20reduction%20in%20death%20rates>, accessed November 2020.



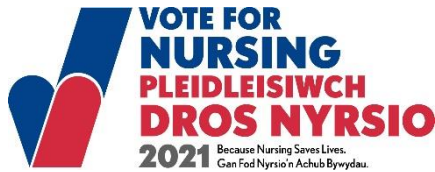
Section 1 Promoting the necessity of the nursing degree and ensuring the continued high quality of nursing education

The nursing degree

Qualifying as a nurse means undertaking an undergraduate degree programme (BSc Hons Nursing). Currently each nursing student must have evidence of having completed 2,300 hours of study, 2,300 hours of clinical practice and they must have fulfilled all academic and clinical competency requirements. They must also have signed a declaration of good health and good character from the university prior to becoming a registrant of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

The degree programme is imperative for students to develop the intellectual skills of problem-solving, research skills, reflection and continuous learning that together form the required professional judgment to apply to knowledge and clinical practice.

The perceptions of the public, decision-makers and politicians are often at odds with the reality of the nursing degree. False assumptions that the degree does not teach practical skills or that it is “too academic” for most applicants are commonplace.



These damaging misperceptions are often linked to unexamined assumptions about nursing not requiring intellectual thinking and nursing practice not being based on research or evidence. This feeds the view of decision-makers that nurses are not required for policy making nor do they require a high level of pay. These views are challenged robustly by the RCN Wales.²

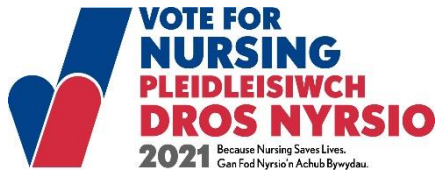
To promote the necessity of the nursing degree and ensure the continued high quality of nursing education it is imperative that the commissioning process is improved to meet the demand of the changing demographic of the public and to provide a workforce for the future.

To ensure the continued high quality of nursing education beyond the degree, it is important that the change in the NMC curriculum and assessor/supervisor programme is embraced and evaluated to ensure the workforce is receiving the highest quality of education.

The student experience during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Welsh Government and NHS Wales have needed to take unprecedented measures to ensure there is capacity to treat COVID-19 patients.

² Royal College Nursing Wales, 2019. Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016: Perceptions of Patients and Patient Organisations, <https://www.rcn.org.uk/wales/get-involved/safe-and-effective-care>, accessed November 2020.



For the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, second and third year nursing students in Wales could *opt* to extend their clinical placement, for example to a maximum of 80% of their time (retaining 20% for academic time) by providing frontline care. If they did so, they were paid at a band 3 or 4 level, depending on their completed time on their degree programme.

During this period their degree was not suspended – instead the university, NHS Wales (and the NMC as the professional regulator) have recognised the time spent working clinically as counting towards the required clinical placements hours for the degree. In addition, students with six months or less until qualification were offered the option of spending the last part of their programme in placement.

This process has been designed, led and nationally implemented by NHS Wales Shared Services, which is part of Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW). The beneficial intention of this process is clear: it is an attempt to ensure that nursing students will not need to work more to “catch up” with their degree work, and Wales will not suffer from a cohort of “missing nurses” once COVID-19 subsides.

However, in practice, this process was poorly implemented and creating more confusion, anxiety and distress than necessary.

RCN Wales received a high volume of calls from anxious and worried students. RCN Wales also received direct feedback from our nursing lecturer members who also found the implementation process flawed and confusing.



The RCN is also aware that some nursing students experienced delays in the issuing of contracts which, in turn, led to delays in payment. This caused hardship for the students affected. RCN Wales asked Shared Services to look into this issue as a matter of urgency. Nursing students overwhelmingly aided the Welsh COVID-19 response, despite confusion over policies and guidance.

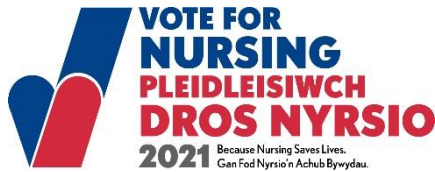
Nursing students assisted in the treatment of patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. It is important to consider the health impact, especially on individuals' anxiety, that this may have had on these students.

Nursing students should be offered a debrief to discuss their own individual unique experience during the COVID-19 response.

It is important to consider the COVID-19 effect on prospective nursing students. The recruitment to nursing degree courses in Wales has continued. However, there may be implications regarding A-level students and Access students who will now have predicted grades which may have an impact on offers made, or entry criteria being reached in some cases.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should ensure that no student has suffered educational or financial detriment as a result of their assistance in the response to COVID-19, and it should ensure any maintenance loan debt is waived.



ACTION

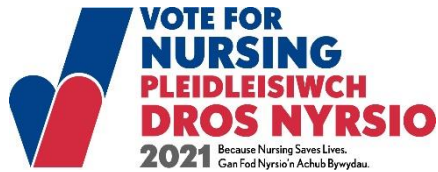
Nursing students must be supported to resume their studies, and therefore sufficient human resources must be available in both the academic and clinical settings.

Online learning

Online learning lets an individual study remotely without regular face-to-face contact with their tutor. An online learning undergraduate nursing degree primarily consists of engaging with online interactive activities such as audio and videos. Tutorial support via a virtual learning environment is also provided and students are still required to undertake practical clinical work.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was an increased use of online learning. The March/April 2020 cohort of nursing students in Wales had inductions virtually and have had their courses adjusted accordingly.

The same is planned for the September 2020 cohort. Swansea University stated that it is not planning on reopening its campus until November 2020 and this may even be extended to January 2021.



ACTION

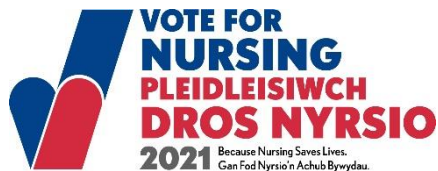
HEIW should ensure that universities are supported in their transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to blended learning after the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACTION

The Welsh Government and nursing schools should launch a review of the use of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to evaluate its success. This should include a student perspective of the use of distance learning.

ACTION

Going forward universities must be supported in developing a blended approach to nurse preparation education programmes.



Nurse education as a profession

Nurse education as a profession provides a nurse with the opportunity to deliver pre-and post-registration education in a university setting.

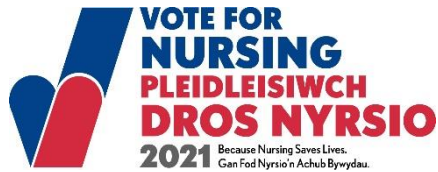
To succeed in the role, a nurse lecturer is required to be on the NMC professional register and have worked in areas where students would have gained practical experience.

Nurse lecturers are required to develop the curriculum; deliver lectures, seminars and tutorials; grade coursework; mark exam papers; visit students on placements; and provide pastoral support. Administration tasks, such as student administration, induction programmes and involvement on committees and boards, also take up a considerable amount of time.

Some nurses choose to move to a university full time; however, there are sometimes opportunities for joint appointments between clinical practice and universities.

These provide nurses with the opportunity to maintain their clinical role whilst managing an appropriate academic workload. This allows individuals to maintain clinical credibility and to teach nursing students the most up-to-date information.

Research opportunities often pose a barrier to the CPD of nurse lecturers. Universities require academic staff to conduct research with the aim of adding to a body of knowledge, raising the profile of nursing, getting published in national and international scholarly books/journals and dissemination via conference presentations. This, in turn, raises the profile of the department and the university.



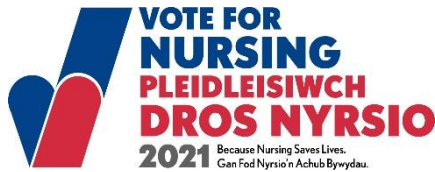
Not only does this add to existing competing priorities for a nurse lecturer, the opportunities available for a nurse lecturer to conduct research are highly competitive and limited.

For a nurse lecturer to conduct research it is necessary to seek external funding for projects. It is important that the art and science of nursing is appreciated by research councils to ensure that nursing research is not secondary to medical research.

The demand to conduct research not only extends the existing conflicting professional priorities of a nurse lecturer, it also adds stress to personal commitments as well. Snelgrove and James (2011) conducted research into graduates' perceptions of research. Their findings highlighted that there were considerable organisational and motivational barriers to nurses conducting research.³ The main barrier was a lack of time, with research taking a low priority in the busy work life of a nurse. Participants felt they often had to reconcile work with family needs and, with research being a low priority, it was often overlooked.

Having been identified as a barrier at the early stages of a career in nursing, it is important to note that this barrier continues throughout nursing careers, and nurse lecturers also endure conflicting personal and professional priorities.

³ Snelgrove and James, 2011. 'Graduate Nurses' and midwives' perception of research', *Sage Journals*, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1744987110387484>, accessed November 2020.

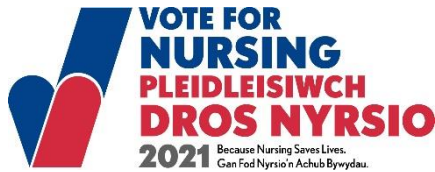


To accommodate nursing research within academia it is important that there is a cultural and organisational shift. Undertaking research should be considered an integral part of developing the profession and it should be promoted early on in nursing education and careers. Currently, there is a lack of infrastructure for nursing clinical research within Wales whereas clinical academic careers having a long history in medicine; combining clinical and academic work is a common practice for doctors internationally. These posts are considerably less common within nursing, midwifery and allied health professions. As the traditional nursing role is seen as providing care and being the patient advocate, and nursing research often portrayed as having no direct impact on an individual patient, clinical nursing research is often not appreciated to its full potential.

To establish this shift there should be an expansion of clinical academics in nursing, midwifery and allied health professions. A clinical academic is a clinically active health researcher. They work within health and social care to provide care while, in parallel, researching new ways to delivering better outcomes for the patients they treat and care for.⁴ There are numerous benefits of research – for patients, the service and the individual – as a result of clinical academic roles. These include improve clinical outcomes, increased treatment options, increased evidence-based care, effective utilisation of resources, increased reputation, income generation and increased engagement with staff.⁵

⁴ National Institute for Health Research, 2016. Building a research career handbook.

⁵ AUKUH Clinical Academic Role Development Group, 2016. *Transforming healthcare through clinical academic roles in nursing, midwifery and allied health professions: A practical resource for healthcare providers organisations,*



The dual role also allows the clinical academic to combine their clinical and research career rather than having to choose between the two. The Welsh Government, Local Health Boards and HEIW should embrace the role of the clinical academic as a means of expanding research capabilities in nursing, midwifery and allied health professions.

ACTION

HEIW and universities should work together to ensure the desirability and number of joint appointments and visiting nurse lecturers is increased.

ACTION

The Welsh Government and universities should create opportunities for clinical research for nurse lecturers to improve continued professional practice.

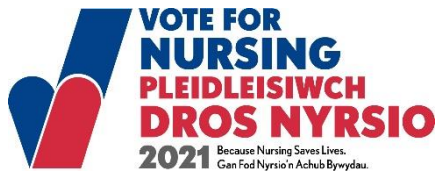
ACTION

The Welsh Government, Local Health Boards and NHS Wales should promote and support the role of the clinical academic in nursing.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should increase the number of nurse consultants as part of their role is to conduct clinical research.

<https://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2325/aukuh-transforming-healthcare.pdf>, accessed November 2020



ACTION

Research and funding councils, boards and committees should give fair and equitable consideration for nursing research applications.

ACTION

Research and funding councils, boards and committees should ensure nurses are part of the decision-making process.

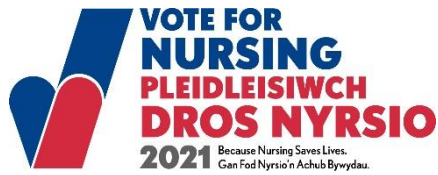
ACTION

The Welsh Government, local health boards and NHS Wales, together with funding bodies, should financially seek to support these roles.

Responding to curriculum changes and ensuring the quality of the education

The NMC introduced changes to the standards of education in 2018. The All Wales Pre-registration Nursing and Midwifery Group are leading on the 'Once for Wales 2020' national approach for implementation. The RCN Wales has a seat on this group.

The Once for Wales 2020 national approach will be fully implemented in September 2020.



ACTION

First and foremost, the Welsh Government, the All Wales Pre-registration Nursing and Midwifery Group and stakeholders must allow time for the curriculum changes to flourish whilst simultaneously monitoring the progress and responding to workforce inquiries.

ACTION

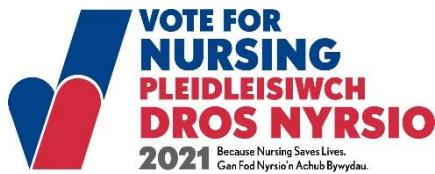
The COVID-19 impact should be considered, and support provided to Local Health Boards to ensure the curriculum changes are successfully implemented and fulfilled.

ACTION

Local Health Boards, the All Wales Pre-registration Group and other key stakeholders should ensure the smooth transition of new supervision and assessment arrangements across Wales.

ACTION

The All Wales Pre-registration Nursing and Midwifery Group is to continue to take a national approach that includes key stakeholders and partnerships to co-produce and monitor new programme elements, curriculum content and governance of practice learning and support mechanisms.



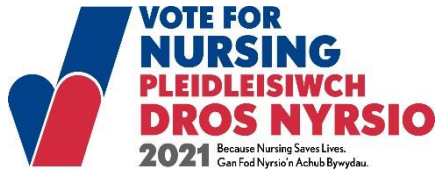
Assessment/supervision arrangements and quality assurance

The new NMC curriculum has replaced 'mentors and sign-off mentors' with 'practice supervisors, practice assessors and academic assessors'.

RCN Wales is a strong supporter of mentorship and clinical supervision as a way of supporting the workforce. Clinical supervision should be the means by which the workforce continues to understand and realise their personal and professional obligations and commitment to creating a positive, compassionate culture of care.

It is necessary that all practice supervisors and assessors receive appropriate preparation and support to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge and experience that is relevant to the student/trainee and area of practice they are supervising. For a practice assessor/supervisor to fulfil their role it is important that they have sufficient time to make clinical education supervision a priority.

The quality of practice learning environments for students should be a joint health board level and Approved Education Institution (AEI) priority. Regular reporting to the health board should include placement metrics and data on assessor/supervisor compliance with NMC standards. Reports should refer to the National Student Survey and local analysis of nursing student placement evaluations, including concerns raised by students about both the quality of care and their assessor/supervisor.



ACTION

The quality of practice learning environments for nurses should continue to be a joint responsibility for health boards and AEs.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should seek to establish a mechanism to enable participation in community and social care placements.

ACTION

AEs, together with HEIW, should evaluate NMC changes to the assessor/supervisor process and make recommendations for future models.

ACTION

The All Wales Pre-Registration Nursing and Midwifery Group, in collaboration with HEIW, should continue to develop guidance that prepares assessors and supervisors for their role. This could draw on existing guidance from the Royal College of Nursing Education Forum (2017).

Welsh language in higher education

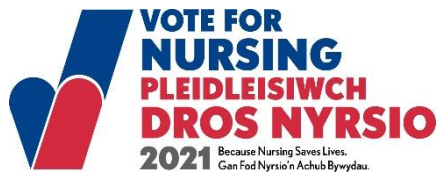
In order to provide quality health and social care in Wales, a bilingual workforce is desirable.



The language care is delivered in is integral to the experience of care (for example for dignity and compassion), the quality of clinical care and health outcomes for the patient. The importance of the language of care to health outcomes can be seen in fields such as speech therapy and counselling, but it is equally important where health care professionals are relying on speech for communication with the patient and family in making an assessment, explaining a treatment or medication regime, or seeking to gain consent for a course of action.

Over 26,000 nurses and health care support workers in Wales are members of RCN Wales. A third of these members speak Welsh. For our members to feel confident speaking Welsh professionally, and supporting colleagues to do so, nursing education through the medium of Welsh and the availability of educational resources in Welsh must be increased. This would increase professional fluency and confidence and benefit the workforce and the patient. It is therefore viable, desirable and reasonable that HEIW should utilise the commissioning process to deliver the skill required to deliver care in the Welsh language.

The NHS Wales National Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTPs) should already, according to the Welsh Government guidance, be setting out the needs for Welsh language skills in their workforce. This need should then be reflected in the education commissioning process. The goal should be to increase opportunities to study through the medium of the Welsh language as part of the degree course or wholly through the Welsh language.



Support should also be provided for higher education providers that offer Welsh language provisions. This would ensure the continued professional sustainability of the Welsh language in nursing higher education

ACTION

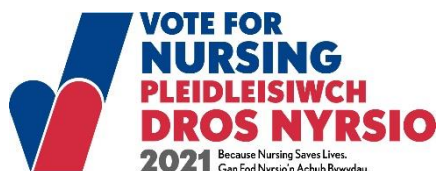
HEIW should utilise the commissioning process to deliver the skills required to deliver care in the Welsh language.

Simulation and digital technology

Digital technology is central to improving the quality of patient care, whether this is through e-health or health informatics.

Nursing care is evidence-based, with nursing professionals needing to keep abreast of contemporary research, including emerging data collecting technologies. Nursing leaders need to be involved in working with system developers to ensure new systems are designed and implemented with an recognition of the nursing need.

It is well established that simulation technology is vital to the development of nursing education. In a clinical simulation setting the first responsibility of the educator is to the student. By removing the patient from the simulated environment, the student can practise, make mistakes and learn in a safe and controlled environment with no adverse patient effects. The student can record, code and watch their simulation with a member of the education team to discover their strengths and weaknesses.



Scotland is leading the way in simulation education with a national simulation centre and a mobile simulation suite. The use of simulation has been proven to increase the confidence and skills of the clinical workforce.

There should be greater access to simulation across Wales for all nursing students and health care professionals. It is important that simulation is available across Wales to ensure there is a consistency in educational opportunities. There would need to be consideration for the location of any simulation centre or mobile suite to ensure consistency in availability and access.

ACTION

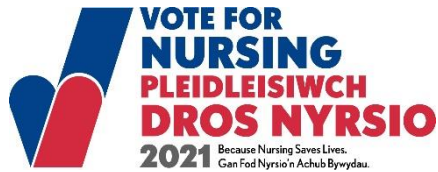
Simulation education is to be made available for all nursing students across Wales.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should establish a national simulation centre, including a mobile simulation suite, to ensure nursing students and professionals across Wales can access the best education available irrespective of geographical barriers.

ACTION

The Welsh Government, in partnership with the All Wales Pre-Registration Nursing and Midwifery Group review how digital technology is used within nurse education, with a focus on whether the current pre-registration curriculum is adequate to meet the demands of the future workforce.



Widening access to clinical placements

Clinical placements are an intrinsic part of the nursing degree. Placements provide the unique opportunity for nursing students to acquire various skills, values and behaviours by delivering high quality, safe patient care throughout their education journey.

RCN Wales strongly supports the move to ensure a diversity of clinical placements are available for nursing students in primary, community and social care. Expanding clinical placement capacity would enable higher education providers to increase student numbers.

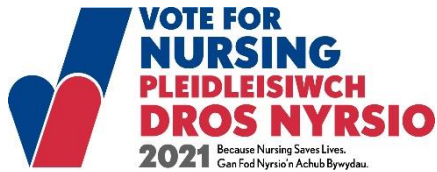
Diversifying clinical placements would open a plethora of additional opportunities for nursing students, including improving health and wellbeing through social prescribing and occupational health placements.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should launch an all-Wales review of placement capacity with the intention of maximising and diversifying placement opportunities.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should commit to expanding placement opportunities in primary, community, care home, and social care environments, and also in other independent and third sector organisations.



Section 2 Widening access for students to the nursing degree programme

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships enable the student to work and be paid whilst studying for the nursing degree part-time. This is an attractive option for many. However, at the moment there is no clear apprenticeship route for nursing in Wales.

Alternative routes exist for those already employed as health care support workers by NHS Wales but there is often only a limited number of funded places.

Apprenticeship maximises the potential of the workforce and allows the apprentice to engage with experienced staff members who can pass on skills, knowledge and behaviours.

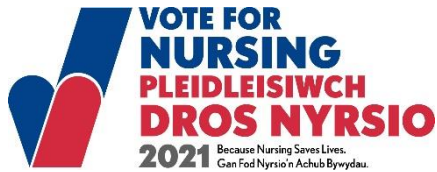
Wales should examine ways to widen access to the nursing profession through a national approach to apprenticeships, offering direct access to this model for individuals to apply, including supported arrangements in care homes.

ACTION

Having a dedicated nursing apprenticeship pathway in Wales and increase the number who can access this route into

ACTION

Enabling direct access to the apprenticeship, in other words, offering employment as a healthcare support worker a part of this package.



ACTION

There should be a national framework set out by the Welsh Government to support these developments.

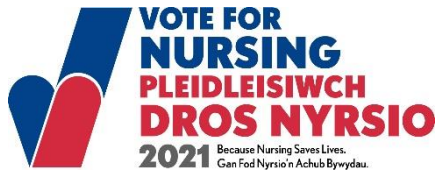
Prince of Wales Nursing Cadet Scheme

The RCN Prince of Wales Nursing Cadet Scheme was developed in 2017 and launched in 2019. The Scheme aims to prepare cadets for life, by providing them with crucial skills, tools and ambition to succeed. The scheme further aims to prepare a cadet for a potential career in nursing and health care.

The programme, championed by RCN Wales, combines 105 hours of guided learning, including learning modules and a clinical observational placement within their local health care region.

The cadet scheme has been piloted in Wales in conjunction with the Army Cadet Force Associations in Wales.

After a cadet is successful in the scheme, Welsh universities have committed to offering a guaranteed interview to successful cadets to study nursing, and local health boards offer the cadets a guaranteed interview to work as a bank health care worker.



The two and a half year programme, prides itself on widening access to nursing. The scheme encourages 16-25 year-olds, a demographic that is often missed by the traditional three-year university degree course, into roles within the NHS and into health and social care.

The scheme has the possibility to greatly aid the retention of the NHS workforce whilst providing the younger generation with a meaningful opportunity to contribute to the NHS, and to the wider society.

ACTION

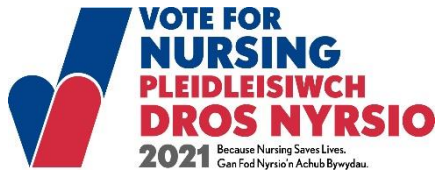
The Welsh Government should champion the Prince of Wales Nursing Cadet Scheme as an equal opportunity to access a career in nursing.

ACTION

HEIW should work with RCN Wales to ensure the scheme is providing cadets with contemporary evidence-based best practice.

ACTION

Local health boards should widen access to clinical placements for cadets and should provide opportunities in community and social care settings.



Section 3 Ensuring excellent financial support and flexibility for nursing students

Support for nursing students

The average age of a nursing student is 29 and they are far more likely to have caring responsibilities than other students. An RCN survey found that 31% had dependent children, 10% were single parents and 23% were caring for a sick, disabled or elderly relative.⁶

The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales (2016), dubbed 'the Diamond Review', recognised that students who are parents face particular challenges if their children are below or at school age.⁷ The Review noted the social and financial challenges for students who are parents, and recommended that the Welsh Government, via the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, work with universities and the National Union of Students to ensure appropriate financial support to help student parents to combine their study with their family responsibilities.⁸

⁶ Royal College of Nursing, 2018. Consultation response to the UK Department of Health, 'changing how healthcare education is funded'.

⁷ Welsh Government, Dimond, 2016, *The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales*, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/higher-education-funding-final-report-en.pdf>, accessed November 2020.

⁸ Welsh Government, Dimond, 2016, *The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales*, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/higher-education-funding-final-report-en.pdf>, accessed November 2020.



The Diamond Review recognised the need to give students flexibility to manage their finances and, for some students, overcome financial difficulties associated with higher education. This comes in the form of a holistic funding system, with a move away from a course fee and more toward living costs, with real living wage support.⁹

Nursing students are different from other students. As expressed above, nursing students are more likely to have caring requirements and require financial support. Furthermore, for the younger nursing student, financial challenges present themselves in the form of living independently for perhaps the first time in their lives. A nursing student may be required to rent a house for a full year due to the nature of the course, whereas other students would only need to rent a house for the academic year before returning to their permanent home. Nursing students should be granted higher financial support to reflect the course requirements and to support their living costs.

The NHS bursary is provided by the NHS Student Awards Services. Students studying on certain courses that lead to registration as a health care professional can apply to the NHS for funding to help with tuition fees and living costs. Through this, nursing students will have their tuition fees paid in full by the NHS. This does not have to be repaid.

⁹ Welsh Government, Dimond, 2016, *The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales*, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/higher-education-funding-final-report-en.pdf>, accessed November 2020.



If students commit to working for NHS Wales for two years, they receive a non-means-tested bursary of £1,000 and can apply to receive a means-tested grant and other means-tested benefits. They can also apply for a student loan from the Student Loan Company.

There are benefits to the NHS Wales student bursary from both the student and NHS perspective. It ensures that nursing students have a link to NHS Wales from the very start of their studies, thus streamlining the process. The bursary not only encourages and incentivises people to study in Wales but creates a relationship between the applicant and the Welsh NHS which makes it more likely that the student will stay in Wales. When the UK Government abolished the student nurse bursary in England the number of applicants for nursing courses in England plummeted by 30%.¹⁰

However, nursing students in Wales still struggle to make ends meet with the bursary. Nursing students are unique. In their studies as they must complete a minimum of 4,600 hours of theory and placement learning over the course of their degree and study for 45 weeks a year. This leaves little time to take on additional employment, which RCN members have reported doing, to support themselves financially. Transport costs can also be a burden.

Therefore, increasing the bursary to a fully funded maintenance grant, or increasing access to additional (but optional) maintenance loans maybe more helpful to many nursing students in the long run, enabling them to access additional funding and allowing them to focus fully on their studies.

¹⁰ Royal College of Nursing, #FundOurFuture Nurses, <https://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/student-funding-fund-our-future>, accessed November 2020.

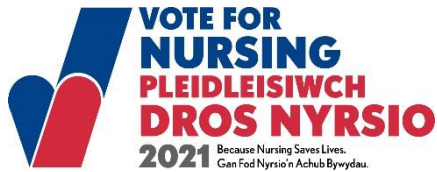


It is important that Wales not only attracts applicants but also makes it sustainable for them to complete their studies, without dropping out due to financial restrictions.

There are other options if a nursing student does not want to opt for the NHS bursary. Whilst the bursary does provide a student with a link to the NHS from the very beginning of their course, it is static. The amount provided to the student does not change with inflation. This means that the bursary needs to be constantly re-evaluated and renegotiated in line with inflation and living costs.

The bursary should automatically change with inflation. This would reduce the need to re-evaluate and renegotiate terms of the bursary, which would be a benefit for the Welsh Government and NHS partners.

It should also be pointed out that Wales is not reaping the full benefits of the decision to retain the bursary. Since 2016, the Welsh Government has confirmed this decision for one year or for two years at a time. In July 2019 the Welsh Government announced a further round of 'engagement' on the future system only to hold back the process till 2021 (after the next election). This uncertainty means that potential students in Wales are confused and disheartened. Moreover, the university planning their finances cannot be certain of the future system. This is having a negative impact as departments fail to invest in nursing and consider making cuts to provision instead.



ACTION

The Welsh Government should commit to confirming future nursing support arrangements for the next decade to provide stability to the system.

ACTION

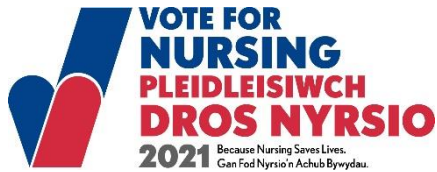
The Welsh Government should increase the amount of money awarded via the NHS Wales Bursary Scheme so that it more adequately covers living costs.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should make available additional maintenance funding on a loan basis which students can apply for if they wish to do so.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should ensure students have access to unambiguous information, including examples of all avenues of support for students, and also how and when these would be paid back, so that students may make an informed decision as to the best options.



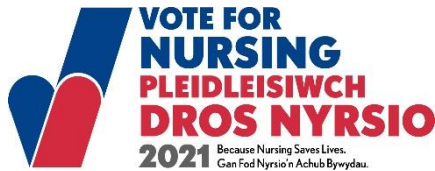
Section 4 Ensuring financial and professional sustainability of nursing in the higher education sector

The commissioning process

The Welsh Government commissions nursing student places through the education commissioning process led by HEIW. RCN Wales is clear that having a national body such as HEIW responsible for this process has a clear benefit for patient care. However, the RCN has also been clear that the process should be transparent and involve stakeholders appropriately. The process at present is entirely unclear. The January 2020 the commissioning numbers, for example, were released by the Welsh Government and not by HEIW.

HEIW and Social Care Wales have provided a national workforce strategy for health and social care, but this has not been signed off by the Welsh Government. RCN Wales provided comments on the strategy.

Having a clear, transparent process for stakeholders to contribute evidence would increase confidence in the process and outcomes, and would increase the quality and robustness of the outcomes and their relationship to the needs of Welsh health and social care.

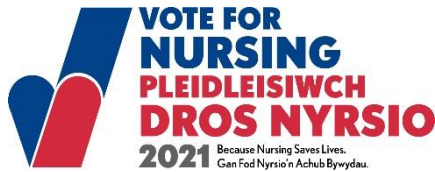


The national commissioning process does ensure there is a known and stable supply of nurses into the Welsh health care system. However, it is possible that there could be a further mechanism to encourage pre-registration nursing provision in Wales. This would benefit the health and social care system and provide another avenue of funding for the sector. Glyndwr University currently offers non-commissioned places to nursing students. It would be worth exploring whether, in the future, universities could offer a mix of commissioned and non-commissioned places.

Clinical placements are limited in supply. It is possible that there would not be sufficient clinical placements to make this expansion viable. However, the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has found itself in the bizarre position of wishing to take all commissioned students and all non-commissioned students in its area into clinical placements, but has been prevented from doing so by HEIW.

ACTION

The Welsh Government/HEIW strategy sets out a transparent process for education commissioning with clear roles for stakeholders, which must include higher education institutions, professional bodies and trade unions, and come under scrutiny by the Senedd.



ACTION

The possibility of increasing non-Welsh Government commissioned nursing student places in Wales and supporting them with access to NHS clinical placements needs to be explored.

Ensuring financial sustainability of the higher education sector

Welsh universities have expressed financial difficulties even before student applications to Welsh universities fell during the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2019, Cardiff University's financial report indicated that the University had a total deficit of £117.4 million and an operating deficit of £6.9 million. The University explained that the large gap between its operating deficit and overall deficit was as a result of the one-off pressures in the year, including £6.5 million for a voluntary severance scheme, as jobs were cut, and a £92.9 million pay-out for the Universities Superannuation Scheme pension costs and a 2017 national re-evaluation of the scheme. In the same year Swansea University estimated a deficit of £47 million¹¹ and Bangor University estimated a £19.8 million deficit.¹²

¹¹ Swansea University, 2019. *Operating and financial review 2018–2019*, <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/Operating-and-Financial-Review-2018-19.pdf>, accessed November 2020.

¹² Bangor University, 2019. Final Financial Statement 2018-2019, <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/finance/news/final-financial-statements-2018-19-42510>, accessed November 2020.



COVID-19 has exaggerated the financial difficulties experienced by Welsh universities. The financial implication of COVID-19 on Welsh universities is not yet known; however, it is expected to be very significant. The importance of the contribution that international students' fees make to universities' research capabilities, teaching and innovation has been expressed by Members of the Senedd in the Welsh Parliament. Kirsty Williams, Minister for Education, explained that the financial shortfall following a significant drop in international student numbers will be far greater than the budget of the devolved governments can deal with, which is why Wales is looking to work with the UK Government on this issue.

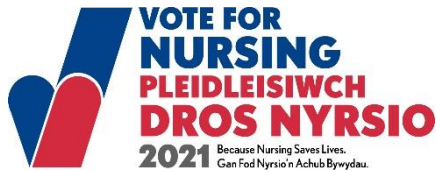
The financial sustainability of the higher education sector in Wales is extremely important to the continued education of the current and future nursing workforce.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should work with Welsh universities to determine the full financial impact of COVID-19 on the sustainability of the higher education sector.

ACTION

The Welsh Government should work with the UK Government to mitigate the financial impact of COVID-19 and ensure the sustainability of the higher education sector in Wales.



About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

The RCN is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union of nurses, representing around 435,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, healthcare support workers and nursing students, including over 26,000 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community.

The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.