

Petitioner submission of 22 February 2024

PE1993/H: Reform the financial support for social work students on work placements

We thank the Committee for continuing to look into the issue of bursaries for social work students on placements in third and fourth years. We appreciate being given sight of the Minister's response to the Committee.

Of most concern is the review into the options available for undergraduate students on placement which has been referenced in the Minister's response and in letters to us from civil servants on 30th August and 15th September 2023.

In a letter on 30th August, the OCSWA set out that: "The review of practice learning finance commissioned by the SSSC was due to report in August but has been delayed; however the review has so far met with various stakeholders, including SASW, SWU and representatives of your campaign. Emerging insights have been shared with Scottish Government and are informing wider work on social work education improvements – we will share any conclusions with you in due course."

We understand that the wheels of Government can sometimes move slowly, but this review was commissioned in June 2023 and evidence was submitted over the summer, so we are unable to understand why it was not able to be published in time for the 2024/25 Budget cycle.

We would now urge MSPs on the Committee to put down written questions in Parliament to formally request the review findings be made public.

If the review is still somehow delayed, we would urge MSPs to formally request that the "emerging insights" which the Minister has been privy to be published instead and a deadline for publication of the review is confirmed.

What is most concerning to us is that the overall tone of the Minister's response is to pass the buck.

He states that OCSWA "continue to review support for social work students including consideration of bursaries for third and fourth year undergraduate students on work placements."

At the end of the day, the Minister and the Government will need to make funding available to enable this policy to happen and it is unfair to try and palm off decision making onto others.

We would urge MSPs on the Committee to call the Minister to give evidence in person on this issue and to ask him to explain why the Government is allowing a straightforward policy decision to drift.

Every day that the Government fails to make a decision, the situation for social work students gets worse.

Universities are continuing to refer social work students to discretionary funds to live on day to day - which in themselves are running out due to the pressures being put on them.

A [damning report by the Scottish Association of Social Work](#) highlighted further challenges for students on placements.

New data from the Social Workers Union due to be published shortly reveals that over half (52%) of Scottish social workers are thinking of leaving the profession, which will place even more burden on the next generation of social workers.

As we have stated from the outset we are not asking for special treatment, merely for equality with other students who work on placements in the public sector and are paid for their work.

It seems unbelievable that in 2024 local authorities are still exploiting social work students as a pool of unpaid labour to help deliver vital public services as the students themselves are struggling to survive in an ongoing cost of living crisis.

We once again thank the Committee for taking this issue seriously and we would be happy to meet with the Committee if this would be useful.