

Social Work Bursaries
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To whom it may concern,

BASW England Student & NQSW Group – Statement on student bursaries

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 22,000 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 letter has been coordinated from the BASW Student and Newly Qualified Students group.

In September 2020, the group [published a statement](#) to outline concerns regarding the discriminatory process of bursary distribution amongst student social workers. Sadly, no action has been taken with regards to this statement – the recommendations remain unheeded, and students continue to suffer the consequences of a system rooted in inequality.

The issues we continue to raise, and require an urgent response to, include the following:

- The lack of clear and accurate advice around bursaries, as well as the limited financial support, is creating barrier into social work education for individuals who experience challenging socio-economic circumstances - thus impacting the diversity of practitioners and skillsets that can be recruited into the profession. Those who claim benefits such as universal credit are uniquely disadvantaged, with every £1 they receive from the bursary being deducted from their bursary.
- There is no clarity around eligibility criteria for the bursary, and it seems each university institution is flexible to decide their own criteria, considering the courses are regulated. This has resulted in a post-code lottery system, with all students in some parts of the country being eligible regardless of circumstances, whilst others are assessed based on grades or attendance. The latter is particularly unfair given the context of the pandemic and is potentially discriminatory toward those who have dependents or other caring responsibilities.
- It is unclear as to why the structure of the social work bursary is different to that say of other allied health professionals. Social workers have not been given equal recognition as key workers throughout the pandemic, and this lack of consistency contributes to a sense that this profession, despite being critical, is not valued to the same extent.

- Social work is grounded on values of equality, diversity, inclusion, and holistic approaches. In order to ensure students are in a position to take the very best learning from their studies and to full integrate themselves into experiences that can enhance their learning, they need to be provided adequate financial support to do this.
- Social work should be a profession for all, just like the communities we seek to work with. [Social Work England's Professional Standard 1](#) states: "Promote the rights, strengths and wellbeing of people and families". With this in mind, the fact the social work bursary is not available to any first-year students on a degree programme and the fact there is only a capped amount of bursaries available for years 2/3 creates a lack of wellbeing for the people and families undertaking this training to support others.
- The student bursary has not been increased for a number of years, despite inflated costs of living and the impact of austerity. This ought to be revised as a priority.

Requested actions:

- BASW urges that further guidance – rooted in our [code of ethics](#) of social justice, anti-oppressive practice, and human rights, is published as soon as possible.
- Please also respond to the above points with clarity as to what action will be taken, and by when, to address the issues raised, including the recommendations we made in our 2020 statement.

For further information, please contact england@basw.co.uk

Yours sincerely,

BASW England Student and NQSW Group

cc: Social Work England