

RCSLT Wales' response to considering future options for the NHS  
Wales bursary scheme January 2026

Section One: about you

**1. Are you responding as an individual, or on behalf of one or more organisations or professional bodies?**

Student not at university	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student at university	<input type="checkbox"/>
As an individual	<input type="checkbox"/>
On behalf of one or more organisations or professional bodies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**If you are responding on behalf of an organisation or professional Body,**  
please complete the information below and then move to **Question 7c**

Your name: Naila Noori

Organisation (if applicable): Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists  
(RCSLT)

Email address: [naila.noori@rcslt.org](mailto:naila.noori@rcslt.org)

**If you are responding on an individual basis, then please complete Section Two below.**

Section Two: about you, if you are responding on an individual basis  
Questions 2 to 5 are optional, but your answers will help us to understand experiences across different demographic groups.

**2) What is your age? (optional)**

24 or under	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 to 34	<input type="checkbox"/>
35 to 44	<input type="checkbox"/>
45 to 54	<input type="checkbox"/>
55 to 65	<input type="checkbox"/>
Over 65	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3) Which gender description most closely matches how you identify? (optional)**

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-binary	<input type="checkbox"/>

Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer to self-describe (please utilise space below)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please utilise space below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**4) Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth? (optional)**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

**5) What is your ethnic group? (optional)**

White - includes British, Northern Irish, Irish, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma or any other white background	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - includes white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and Asian or any other mixed or multiple background	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asian or British Asian - includes Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese or any other Asian background	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black, black British, Caribbean, African or any other black background	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - includes Arabic or any other ethnic group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6) In what capacity are you responding to this survey?**

Note: A Welsh-domiciled student is someone who ordinarily lives in Wales and meets certain conditions that make them eligible for student finance and “home fee” status in Wales.

An NHS healthcare student is someone studying to become a healthcare professional within the NHS. This includes a wide range of roles like Nurses, Midwives, Physiotherapists, Radiographers, Paramedics and others. A full list of NHS Wales courses eligible for NHS Bursary funding can be found at Annexe 1.

**6a) Are you currently a student studying at university? If no, please move to question 6e**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If yes, please respond to the following questions (6b; 6c; and 6d).

**6b) Are you Welsh-domiciled as defined above (i.e. ordinarily resident in Wales)? Please tick one box below**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6c) Are you studying in Wales? Please tick one box below**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6d) What are you studying? Please tick one box below**

Medicine	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Dentistry</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Professional Healthcare Course</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>If studying a Professional Healthcare Course, what are you studying:</b>	

**Current university students should now move to Section Three.**

**6e) If you aren't currently a student studying in university, please tick one of the boxes below that best describes your interest in the consultation.**

An individual sharing my personal views such as a patient, carer or member of the public [Move to Section Three]	<input type="checkbox"/>
On behalf another individual [Move to 7a]	<input type="checkbox"/>
A healthcare/medical/dental professional who has graduated within the last five years [Move to 7b]	<input type="checkbox"/>
A healthcare/medical/dental professional who has graduated more than five years ago [Move to 7b]	<input type="checkbox"/>

**7a) If you answered 'on behalf of another individual' in Question 6e, please write in below on whose behalf you are responding.**

For example, on behalf of your child studying A 'levels.

Move to Section Three

**7b) If you answered 'a healthcare/medical/dental profession' in Question 6e, what is your profession?**

Medical Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dental Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>

Healthcare Professional (please provide details below)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Move to Section Three

**7c) If you answered 'on behalf of an organisation' in Section One, on whose behalf are you answering the survey?**

Professional Body or Regulator	x <input type="checkbox"/>
Trade Union	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS Health Board or Trust	<input type="checkbox"/>
Higher Education Institution	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Care	<input type="checkbox"/>
School or Further Education College	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Move to Section Three**

Section Three: your views

**Question 8**

Healthcare professional students who receive the NHS Wales Bursary are currently asked to work in Wales for up to two years after they graduate.

This helps ensure we have enough healthcare professionals in Wales. If they don't stay, they may need to repay some or all the bursary.

**Do you agree with this requirement to work in Wales after graduation?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know/ Not Applicable

Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:

RCSLT Wales agrees in principle with the requirement for speech and language therapy (SLT) students who receive the NHS Wales Bursary to work in Wales after graduation. This position is supported by evidence from RCSLT Wales engagement with SLT students<sup>1</sup>, the wider SLT workforce in Wales<sup>2</sup> and SLT service managers, the majority of whom support a post-qualification commitment to work in Wales where public funding has supported training.

Respondents recognised that:

- the bursary represents a significant public investment;
- Wales faces long-standing shortages and unmet need for SLT services;
- a work requirement can support workforce retention and continuity of care.

Many respondents emphasised that the requirement is acceptable where there is a genuine opportunity to meet it, and where graduates are not financially penalised for circumstances beyond their control.

For the requirement to be fair, effective, and sustainable, it must be underpinned by realistic and timely employment opportunities; fair and flexible repayment terms where graduates are unable to secure work and improved alignment between bursary-funded training places, workforce planning, and funded NHS posts. Without these safeguards, the requirement

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<sup>1</sup> RCSLT Wales survey (December 2025) to current SLT students evidenced that 64.7% of those surveyed agreed with the requirement. (out of 36 responses).

<sup>2</sup> RCSLT Wales survey (December 2025) to the SLT profession in Wales evidenced that 93.2% agreed with the requirement. (out of 30 responses).

risks becoming punitive rather than supportive and may undermine confidence in the bursary scheme.

Demand for SLT services has increased significantly across health, education, and social care, with rising waiting lists reported by health boards and local authorities.<sup>3</sup> RCSLT Wales has consistently highlighted increasing complexity of need.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this demand, workforce growth has been insufficient to meet current or projected need, and recruitment challenges persist, particularly in rural and specialist services.<sup>5</sup>

This context supports the rationale for a requirement to work in Wales but also raises serious concerns when graduates are unable to find funded posts. Some graduates from SLT courses in summer 2025 (are we allowed to use statistics here?) who were in receipt of the NHS Wales bursary had not secured NHS Wales employment by December 2025. These graduates are now competing with the 2026 graduating cohort for a limited number of entry-level posts.

This situation highlights a disconnect between bursary-funded training and the availability of funded posts, rather than a lack of workforce need.

For graduates who have accepted the terms of the bursary in good faith, the inability to secure employment raises fundamental questions about the fairness of enforcing a work requirement, the appropriateness of current repayment provisions and whether the bursary scheme is sufficiently aligned with workforce planning and commissioning.

Under the current NHS Wales Bursary Scheme terms, graduates who do not meet the work requirement may be required to repay some or all of the bursary funding received. RCSLT Wales are concerned graduates cannot fulfil the requirement if suitable posts are unavailable, yet current repayment terms do not adequately reflect this reality.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Please see RCSLT Wales State of the Nation report January 2025 for further details - [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

The expectation to secure employment within a relatively short timeframe does not align with recruitment cycles, regional variation in vacancies, or delays in post funding approvals.

Repayment obligations in these circumstances risk placing graduates under significant financial and personal pressure and may disproportionately affect those from less advantaged backgrounds.

RCSLT Wales believes that repayment terms are not currently fair or flexible enough to account for job market conditions. We recommend:

- explicit exemptions from repayment where graduates can evidence reasonable attempts to secure suitable NHS Wales employment;
- greater flexibility in the timeframe allowed to meet the work requirement;
- transparent and accessible appeals processes;
- clear recognition of mitigating circumstances, including lack of vacancies, maternity leave, caring responsibilities, or health needs.

Without these safeguards, the repayment mechanism risks undermining trust in the bursary scheme and deterring future applicants.

### **Question 9**

Medical and dental students who receive the NHS Wales Bursary don't currently have to commit to working in Wales after they graduate.

This is partly due to the additional Foundation Training required by UK regulators. While implementing this would be complex and falls outside the scope of this question, we're still keen to hear your views.

**Do you agree or disagree medical and dental students should continue to be exempt from this work-in-Wales requirement?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know / Not Applicable

Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:

### **Question 10**

In Wales, healthcare courses are planned and funded through a national commissioning process. This process is further explained in Annexe 2.

As the education commissioner for the NHS Wales non-medical workforce, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) advises the Welsh Government each year of the number of healthcare training places required to meet current and future NHS Wales workforce need through the submission of the Training and Education Commissioning Plan. This includes both undergraduate and post graduate professional education. Health Boards and Trusts share their future staffing and training needs with HEIW. This helps HEIW plan and provide the right education and training to support NHS services in Wales. Once the Education and Training Commissioning Plan has been reviewed, agreed and has Ministerial approval, HEIW contracts with the education sector to deliver the training based on the numbers and budget agreed.

Some healthcare courses, and those not related to healthcare, are supported differently and may not receive the same level of funding. Instead, universities

offer these courses directly through the open market, based on demand and availability.

**Do you agree or disagree the current commissioning process is an effective way to plan and fund healthcare training in Wales?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know/ Not Applicable

**Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:**

RCSLT Wales recognises that the current commissioning process provides a structured and collaborative mechanism to plan and fund healthcare training. Engagement with SLT managers in Wales indicate that it is functionally effective within its current design, in that it aligns training numbers with short-term budget constraints and health board education planning cycles.

However, the process as it currently operates is not sufficiently effective in ensuring that SLT training capacity meets actual and projected service demand in Wales. Specifically, for SLT, commissioning has been too static and limited in scale. Further, it is heavily influenced by current budgets and immediate health board plans (IMTPs), which do not sufficiently account for future projected need, for example, workforce attrition, replacement demand, rural shortages, Welsh-medium clinician needs, or cross-sector service roles. This undermines its effectiveness over medium and long term horizons.

For SLT specifically, the number of commissioned undergraduate SLT places in Wales has remained low and relatively unchanged for several years. RCSLT Wales analysis documents 49 commissioned places each year since 2020, even after the commencement of a second SLT course at Wrexham Glyndŵr University with only 10 places. Commissioned places rose slightly to 55 in 2024/25.<sup>6</sup> We have long called for sustained increases to SLT training places to meet growing demand. There is interest from the profession in offering

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

innovative approaches to placements to support the expansion of student places.

By contrast, other Allied Health Professions (AHPs) have seen more significant increases in training places through HEIW planning processes (for example, dietetics +24%, occupational therapy +10% in recent education planning cycles), though SLT numbers have remained stagnant.<sup>7</sup>

We are also acutely aware that the lack of availability of other routes into the profession beyond the full-time, undergraduate course. In summer 2024, we undertook a survey with SLT assistants (SLTAs) across Wales to understand the degree of interest in undertaking training to become a registered SLT and views on current routes into the profession. Survey evidence shows many SLTAs would prefer “earn-as-you-learn” models such as apprenticeships indicating demand for more flexible and accessible pathways that the current commissioning process does not support.<sup>8</sup> This lack of alternative routes limits the commissioning process’s ability to expand capacity beyond a narrow full-time undergraduate model, a constraint not seen in other parts of the UK where diverse pathways have been developed.

Commissioning numbers are set well in advance, often finalised in February for admission in September of the same year. Training an SLT takes at least three years, and this means commissioning decisions made today influence workforce supply several years in the future.<sup>9</sup> While this long lead time is typical for workforce planning, it also means that short-term adjustments to urgent workforce shortages are challenging to implement, particularly when the commissioned numbers have stagnated for multiple years. This dynamic has been noted by RCSLT Wales and SLT managers as undershooting future needs, rather than aligning commissioning with long-term service demand projections.

## Question 11

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> <https://heiw.nhs.wales/education-and-training/education-commissioning-and-quality/commissioning/>

Students on most healthcare courses in Wales can currently access the NHS Wales Bursary (see Annexe 1 for eligible courses). We want Wales to be the destination of choice for our professional healthcare students along with those studying Medicine and Dentistry. The NHS Wales bursary provides financial support with tuition fees and living costs during training.

**Do you agree or disagree that offering something instead of the NHS Wales Bursary could be a better option for attracting and retaining healthcare professional students to Wales?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know / Not Applicable

Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:

RCSLT Wales does not agree that offering something instead of the NHS Wales Bursary would, in itself, be a better option for attracting and retaining healthcare professional students to Wales, including SLT students.

Engagement with SLT students and the wider SLT workforce in Wales indicates that the majority of respondents were neutral or unsure about replacing the bursary with alternative offers.<sup>10</sup> This neutrality reflects the continued perceived value of the current bursary, alongside limited awareness of clear or credible alternatives that would offer equivalent or greater benefit.

RCSLT Wales supports exploring additional or complementary incentives to strengthen recruitment and retention but cautions against replacing the bursary without robust evidence that any alternative would be at least as effective, equitable, and accessible.

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<sup>10</sup> 44.8% of SLTs (out of 30 respondents) and 29.4% of SLT students (out of 36 respondents) were neutral or unsure about replacing the NHS Wales Bursary.

Evidence from other UK nations and professions highlights risks associated with removing or replacing bursary-style funding<sup>11</sup>. The removal of NHS bursaries in England in 2017 and replacement with student loans was associated with reduced applications to some health professions and concerns about access for students from lower-income backgrounds<sup>12</sup>. Further, Parliamentary and professional evidence has highlighted that bursaries can support recruitment, widen participation, and encourage retention into public services<sup>13</sup>.

While direct comparisons must be made cautiously, this evidence indicates that removing non-repayable support can negatively affect both recruitment and workforce diversity.

RCSLT Wales recognises that targeted incentives, when designed carefully, can enhance recruitment and retention<sup>7</sup>. Examples from Wales include:

- financial incentives for GP trainees in underserved areas<sup>14</sup>;
- targeted dental workforce incentives, where a high proportion of trainees remain working in Wales after completion<sup>15</sup>.

These schemes are successful because they are targeted at areas of greatest need, are linked to funded posts and clear career pathways and complement, rather than replace, existing education funding<sup>16</sup>.

However, there are currently no equivalent targeted incentive schemes for SLTs, and no alternative pathways that would replace the bursary's function.

## Question 12

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<sup>11</sup> UK Parliament Health Committee (2018). Written evidence on the impact of removing NHS bursaries. House of Commons.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> UK Parliament Health Committee (2018). Written evidence on the impact of removing NHS bursaries. House of Commons.

<sup>14</sup> Welsh Government (2023). Targeted Incentive Schemes for healthcare workforce recruitment and retention. Welsh Government.

<sup>15</sup> Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) (2024). WERO Dental Incentive Scheme evaluation. HEIW.

<sup>16</sup> Welsh Government (2023). Targeted Incentive Schemes for healthcare workforce recruitment and retention. Welsh Government.

Most healthcare courses in Wales currently offer access to the NHS Wales Bursary (see Annex 1 for the full list). This bursary helps students with tuition fees and living costs while they train.

**Do you agree or disagree that all the healthcare courses listed in Annexe 1 should continue to offer the NHS Wales Bursary?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know / Not Applicable

**Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:**

RCSLT Wales strongly agrees that all healthcare courses listed in Annexe 1 should continue to offer the NHS Wales Bursary. This position reflects the essential role that non-repayable financial support plays in:

- recruiting students into healthcare professions,
- widening access and participation,
- supporting retention into the Welsh workforce, and
- sustaining pathways into professions experiencing long-term shortages, including speech and language therapy.

For SLT specifically, the bursary underpins the only two pre-registration training programmes in Wales, removing or reducing this support would risk recruitment, equity, and workforce sustainability.

Wales has well-documented workforce shortages across multiple healthcare professions. In RCSLT Wales analysis, SLT services face unmet demand in key areas including paediatrics, neurorehabilitation, dysphagia, and education-linked roles, and waiting lists have grown in recent years<sup>17</sup>.

Data from HEIW show that commissioning targets for AHPs including SLT have not kept pace with need, and vacancy rates remain a persistent pressure<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://heiw.nhs.wales/files/heiw-etp-2023-24/>

Continuing bursary support ensures that students can afford to train, thereby maintaining and expanding the supply of healthcare professionals needed to staff services. Healthcare degree courses, including SLT are long, intensive, and costly. Without bursary support students often rely on loans alone, many prospective applicants from lower-income or non-traditional backgrounds are deterred and mature students, carers, and those with dependants face disproportionate financial risk<sup>19</sup>.

Evidence from other UK contexts for example, nursing and allied professions, following removal of bursaries indicates that applications decline when non-repayable support is removed, particularly from under-represented groups<sup>20</sup>.

RCSLT Wales engagement with SLT students, qualified clinicians, and service managers shows that, many students cite the bursary as a key factor in choosing to study in Wales and some would not have applied (or would have deferred) without financial support. Further, mature learners and those with caring responsibilities are particularly reliant on bursary funding to make full-time study viable.

RCSLT Wales recognises that the bursary could evolve to better reflect student circumstances (e.g., flexible funding options, targeted additional support), but such alternatives should be complementary rather than a replacement for core bursary support (please see answer to question 13 for further details).

Lastly, to note, the continuation of bursary support for all courses in Annexe 1 aligns with Welsh Government objectives under: A Healthier Wales (to deliver a sustainable workforce), The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (supporting equitable access to education and careers) and health workforce strategic plans that emphasise recruitment, retention, and skill diversification.

## Question 13

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<sup>19</sup> [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> UK Parliament Health Committee (2018). Written evidence on the impact of removing NHS bursaries. House of Commons.

Students have different needs — depending on whether they are school leavers, career changers, or training for different NHS professions. We want to explore whether the bursary could offer more flexible options to suit different situations.

**Do you agree or disagree that the NHS Wales Bursary should offer more flexible financial support for students to reflect these different circumstances? For example, giving students a choice between non-repayable funding while they study, or a one-off payment (like a starting-your-career incentive payment) if they commit to working in NHS Wales after graduating?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know / Not Applicable

Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:

RCSLT Wales strongly agrees that the NHS Wales Bursary should offer more flexible financial support options to reflect the diverse circumstances of students training for healthcare professions, including SLT.

Engagement undertaken by RCSLT Wales with SLT students, SLTs across Wales, and SLT service managers demonstrates clear support for increased flexibility within the bursary scheme. While SLT managers agreed in principle that flexibility is needed, survey data from students and the wider SLT workforce identified specific preferred mechanisms, particularly those linked to longer-term retention in NHS Wales.

RCSLT Wales emphasises that flexibility should complement, not replace, core non-repayable support during study. Flexibility should therefore be additive rather than substitutive, offering students meaningful choice without increasing financial risk.

SLT students in Wales represent a highly diverse cohort, including:

- school leavers entering higher education for the first time;
- mature students and career changers, often with existing student loan debt;
- students with caring or family responsibilities;
- students required to relocate within Wales for training and employment.

SLT pre-registration programmes are full-time, intensive courses with substantial unpaid clinical placement requirements. These placements significantly limit opportunities for paid work alongside study. Wales currently has only two universities offering pre-registration SLT programmes, both delivered full time, with no part-time, apprenticeship or earn-while-you-learn routes available<sup>21</sup>. This context means that financial support arrangements are particularly critical for access, equity, and workforce sustainability within SLT.

RCSLT Wales engagement activities and surveys with SLT students in Wales, SLTs and SLT service managers, identified strong support for a more flexible bursary offer. Survey results showed that the most popular option among SLT students and SLTs was a student loan forgiveness scheme for graduates who commit to working in NHS Wales for a longer period<sup>22</sup>.

This approach:

- supports long-term retention, not just initial recruitment;
- is particularly attractive to career changers and postgraduate entrants, who often already carry significant student loan debt;
- aligns financial incentives with workforce sustainability.

Such a model aligns with Welsh Government priorities around retention, skills sustainability and value for public investment, as set out in *A Healthier Wales*.

The second most popular option was a relocation allowance to support graduates moving within Wales to take up NHS roles. There was less support for replacing the bursary entirely with a single alternative payment.

Relocation costs, including travel, housing deposits and short-term accommodation can be a significant barrier for graduates taking up posts in rural and remote areas, areas of higher deprivation and services experiencing the greatest workforce shortages. Relocation support would improve geographic distribution of the SLT workforce across Wales, reduce inequity between urban and rural services and support graduates to remain working in Wales rather than seeking employment elsewhere. Targeted relocation and

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<sup>21</sup> [https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> 47.3% of students (out of 36 respondents) and 47.1% of SLTs (out of 30 respondents)

incentive schemes have already demonstrated positive impacts in other Welsh healthcare professions, including dentistry<sup>23</sup>

This feedback indicates that students and the workforce value retention-focused incentives that recognise long-term commitment to NHS Wales, rather than short-term or one-off recruitment measures.

SLT service managers agreed that the NHS Wales Bursary should offer greater flexibility to reflect differing student circumstances, workforce pressures, and service needs. While managers did not specify preferred mechanisms, their responses strongly support the principle of a more adaptable bursary model aligned with workforce planning.

#### Question 14

We want to make sure students can easily find the information they need about the NHS Wales Bursary.

**Do you agree or disagree it's easy to access information and advice about the bursary right now?**

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know / Not Applicable

Please explain why you chose this answer [500-words maximum]:

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<sup>23</sup> <https://heiw.nhs.wales/news/successful-dft-wero-incentive-strengthens-dental-care-in-rural-wales/>

RCSLT Wales' engagement with SLT students, SLTs in Wales and SLT service managers indicates a neutral position regarding the ease of accessing information and advice about the NHS Wales Bursary. Most respondents selected "neutral" or "don't know", suggesting that while some information is accessible, there is room for improvement in clarity, visibility, and inclusivity.

Feedback from engagement highlights practical ways to make bursary information more accessible and inclusive, particularly for students with additional financial needs and under-represented groups. Feedback indicates that information can appear fragmented across multiple sources, eligibility criteria and application timelines can be difficult to navigate, prospective students may struggle to understand how bursary funding interacts with student loans, childcare support, and travel allowances.

This can disproportionately affect:

- first-generation students,
- mature students and career changers,
- students from low-income households,
- students from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds,
- students living in rural or remote areas.

SLTs responding to engagement were neutral overall regarding accessibility. However, when asked how to make the bursary more inclusive and accessible the majority opinion was to provide additional financial support for specific needs, e.g., childcare grants and travel allowances<sup>24</sup>. The second most common response was to increase awareness and outreach to under-represented groups (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities, rural communities, low-income households)<sup>25</sup>.

SLT students mirrored this pattern. Joint majority responses were to ensure the application process and information are easy to access and fully accessible and to provide additional financial support for specific needs, e.g., childcare grants, travel allowances. Second most popular response was to increase awareness and outreach to under-represented groups<sup>26</sup>.

This highlights that accessibility is not only about availability of information, but also about clarity, format, and proactive engagement.

Based on engagement feedback, RCSLT Wales identifies key opportunities:

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<sup>24</sup> Out of 30 responses

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Out of 36 responses

To Improve clarity and accessibility of information -

- Simplified, plain-language guidance for eligibility, application timelines, and repayment obligations.

- Accessible formats compatible with screen readers, visual summaries, and translations where appropriate.

- Clear explanation of interactions with student loans, travel support, and childcare assistance.

Targeted awareness and outreach -

- Proactive promotion to schools, colleges, community groups, and careers services.

- Specific engagement with under-represented groups (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities, rural populations, and low-income households).

- Collaboration with professional bodies, including RCSLT Wales, to reach current and prospective students.

Highlight additional financial support -

- Improve visibility of childcare grants, travel allowances, placement costs, and hardship funding.

- Provide clear guidance on eligibility and application processes for these supports.

A list of useful links can be found in Annexe 3.

### **Question 15**

**Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the NHS Wales Bursary, including your experiences where appropriate?**

Yes

No

If yes, please tell us more, [2500 words maximum]:

RCSLT Wales appreciates the opportunity to provide additional insight into the NHS Wales Bursary scheme. Engagement with SLT students, SLTs in Wales and SLT service managers indicates strong support for the bursary as a mechanism to reduce financial pressure and support workforce retention. However, the engagement also highlights gaps in financial coverage, flexibility, and opportunities for wider training pathways that could be addressed in future iterations of the bursary scheme.

When SLT students were asked to what extent the bursary covered essential living costs during study, a high proportion of SLT students said "not at all"<sup>27</sup>. When asked what additional financial support would help manage extra costs, the majority identified placement-related costs, such as travel.

When students could select up to three ways to improve the bursary, most responded to increase the non-means-tested grant (currently £1,000). The second most popular feedback was to provide flexibility for starting employment after graduation, e.g., extend the period allowed to take up suitable employment.

The disparity between students reporting that essential living costs are not fully covered and SLTs reporting that the bursary completely eased financial pressure (please see below) likely reflects timing and perspective differences. Students are currently managing high immediate costs with limited financial buffers, including travel and placement expenses. Practising SLTs are reflecting retrospectively, after completing their training, and may perceive that the bursary alleviated the most critical financial pressures, even if it did not fully cover all costs.

The majority of SLTs who received the bursary<sup>28</sup> stated it completely eased the financial pressure of managing living costs during their studies<sup>29</sup>. When selecting up to three improvements, most opted for providing more flexibility for starting employment after graduation, e.g., extending the time allowed to take up suitable employment. Joint second responses were to increase and improve communication about eligibility and conditions and to increase the non-means-tested grant (currently £1,000).

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<sup>27</sup> 53% of students (out of 36 respondents)

<sup>28</sup> 70% of SLTs surveyed (out of 30 responses)

<sup>29</sup> 61.8% of SLTs who received the bursary

These priorities demonstrate an emphasis on transition support, clarity, and enhancing existing financial support.

SLT managers highlighted the current absence of part-time or apprenticeship routes in Wales. Expanding bursary support to cover these alternative routes would support widening participation, recruitment of mature and career-changing students, retention in underserved areas.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. All responses will be anonymised.