

Jenny Leow (Trainee occupational health therapist)

I'm a student occupational therapist. George Osborne announced plans to axe the NHS bursary in November. Currently student nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals don't pay fees and receive a bursary to help their maintenance costs. The government has instead proposed a system of loans which will likely leave healthcare students in up to £50,000 of debt when they graduate. Graduates will be expected to pay £900 per year as soon as they start their first jobs.

This is an absolute disgrace. Allied health professionals will be affected: occupational therapists, radiographers, physiotherapists, dietitians, speech and language therapists. All these students whose aims are to care for those in need will be forced to pay to do so by axing the NHS bursary.

This is my second degree. The prospect of more debt on top of the debt I already have for my first degree would have made it absolutely unthinkable. The average age of a student nurse is 29: they are more likely to have dependants and financial responsibilities. Axing the bursary will also disproportionately affect poorer and working class students. So those who train will become those who can afford to, not those who necessarily want to care.

This would be an incredible disservice to our patients and the NHS.

Some say the system of loans is what all other students have to use. Firstly, I believe that no student should have to pay for education. Especially those in the caring professions and actually work in the NHS for up to 50% of their courses: you would be paying to work, which does not sound fair. The government cannot be trusted to stick to the terms of any loan. The government would be able to dictate their financial circumstances for the rest of their lives.

The government continues to tell us that the NHS bursary needs to be axed because there is no money. I would argue that the money is there; it's just for the wrong people. The government will take away funds from doctors and healthcare students but they are happy to renew Trident at a cost of £160 billion. They won't touch the bankers who caused the financial crisis or make big business like Google pay a fraction of the tax they owe.

The junior doctors have shown the way we need to defend our health service. But the government with the Trade Union Bill intend to take away our right to organise collectively and strike. They are doing this because they know the power of the strike can stop them in their tracks. That's why as well as defending our health service we need to fight tooth and nail against this Bill.

It's clear to us that the attacks on the junior doctors and NHS students are part of an ongoing strategy to devalue and defund the NHS so we will accept privatisation. We are not going to do that. We all need to stand together to defend our NHS.