

PE1819/C

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport of 28 October 2020

Thank you for your letter of 30 September. The Scottish Government agrees that the issue of financial support for students undertaking a degree in paramedic science is worth further consideration. That is why, as the Committee has noted, we have made a commitment that it will form part of our planned education review for the Allied Health Professions.

The Committee enquired if workforce planning provided a compelling argument for bursaries, based on the findings that 95% of shifts are currently being covered by fewer paramedics, experiencing heavier workloads. It is important to note here that Accident & Emergency shifts are covered by ambulance technicians alongside paramedics and that Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) has stringent health and safety policies in place to protect all staff and help to ensure a healthy work/life balance.

It may be helpful for you to know that SAS is also in the process of carrying out a review of demand and capacity at a national level. This review, which involves working with internationally renowned emergency services modelling company ORH, will include a national shift review to amend rosters and ensure the Service is working as efficiently as possible within existing resources and will also determine resource requirements to ensure the Service can continue to meet ongoing increasing demand. This work is being carried out in partnership with all three trade union partners involved with SAS and the Government are committed to supporting this work.

The recruitment of newly qualified paramedics through Scotland's Institutes of Higher Education will, of course, support the resource requirements identified by SAS through their demand and capacity work and help to ensure they continue to achieve a high percentage of shift coverage. These three year courses are a popular option with initial enquiries suggesting that there are more than 5 applicants for each place. However, it is only part of the planning response needed to meet today's demands on the Scottish Ambulance Service. Other actions include the recruitment of ambulance technicians and already qualified paramedics, as well as the further development of the paramedic workforce which is seeing advanced paramedics trained with additional clinical skills to support the ambition to ensure more patients can be treated at home or in a community setting, and prevent unnecessary A&E admissions.

The Committee will understand the challenges the present pandemic presents to our economy and our health services therefore the Government must give serious consideration to any further continuous financial commitment. It is worth noting that paramedic students who complete their studies will have the opportunity to enter the NHS at Band 5 on a starting salary of £25,100, rising to Band 6 with a starting salary of £31,800 on completion of their first year transition programme, including completion of a portfolio benchmarked against the NHS Flying Start.

I can also assure the Committee that we are happy to engage with the campaigners on this issue and that an invitation has been accepted by the Minister for Public Health, Sport & Wellbeing, Mr Fitzpatrick MSP.

Kind regards

JEANE FREEMAN