

REPORT

Student Paramedics on the Poverty Line



[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

Foreword

The Pay Student Paramedics Student Survey was concluded on 26 August 2020. The response received consisted of BSc Paramedic Science Students studying or soon to begin studying in Scotland.

Pay Student Paramedics would like to thank the 80 students who took the time and contributed to this survey.

“The physician must be able to tell the antecedents, know the present, and foretell the future — must mediate these things, and have two special objects in view with regard to disease, namely, to do good or to do no harm.”

- Epidemics

Contents

Definition of Poverty	1
Key Findings	2
Students surveyed	3
Background	4
Finances	6
Employment	10
Student Finance	13
Tuition fees	17
Placement	19
Working Time Directive 2003	20
Conclusion	22

Definition of Poverty

Poverty is defined by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) as when an individual's resources required to live are below their minimum needs¹.

The JRF classifies poverty into three main classifications:

- MIS (Minimum income standard)
- 75% MIS
- Destitution

Individuals living above the MIS are able to afford a decent standard of living. Those with an income below the MIS are defined as, “getting by day-to-day but under pressure, difficult to manage unexpected costs and events”. Individuals who fall below the 75% MIS are deemed as not having enough income often falling substantially short of a decent standard of living with a high chance of not meeting their needs. Finally, individuals who are unable to afford to eat, keep clean or stay warm and dry are classed as destitute.

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/our-work/what-is-poverty>

Key Findings

The evidence obtained from the Student Survey made it very clear that many student paramedics are living below the poverty line with many classified as destitute. Furthermore, the evidence found that many students are often working in excess of The Working Time Regulations 2003, which means that many students are at risk of 'burnout'. Meanwhile, some students are having to rely on food banks to feed themselves, sleeping at family and friends houses and some students working various jobs just to make ends meet.

Students surveyed

We anonymously surveyed 80 students from the five universities offering BSc Paramedic Science in Scotland. Of those responses received two omissions have been made due to errors whilst completing the survey.

Background

The Scottish Government has rightfully taken great pride in creating and gradually improving the Nursing and Midwifery Student Bursary (NMSB) over the past few years. They have brought it to a point where it now stands at £10,000 per year of financial support, none of which is repayable. This allows student nurses and midwives to enter their new career path debt free. We believe student paramedics should also receive this kind of excellent support.

Student Paramedics have an almost identical course structure to Nurses and Midwives - 50% placement doing full time shifts alongside registered professionals entirely unpaid. These long hours make it near impossible to work alongside study. Those who do work earn little as employers often see us as 'unreliable' due to the unsocial hours that we need to work.

This is the biggest argument used to justify the increases in the NMSB. It applies to student paramedics as well. Trying to balance work, life and studying can be near impossible. Student

paramedics are very likely to suffer from burnout and high levels of stress, a bursary would significantly ease this pressure.

When we surveyed students we invited them to provide their own comments in relation to their current situation. Many students vocalised their concerns in relation to their finances and the inability to cover essential bills such as food and rent. Mature students highlighted their concerns about meeting their children's needs nevermind their own.

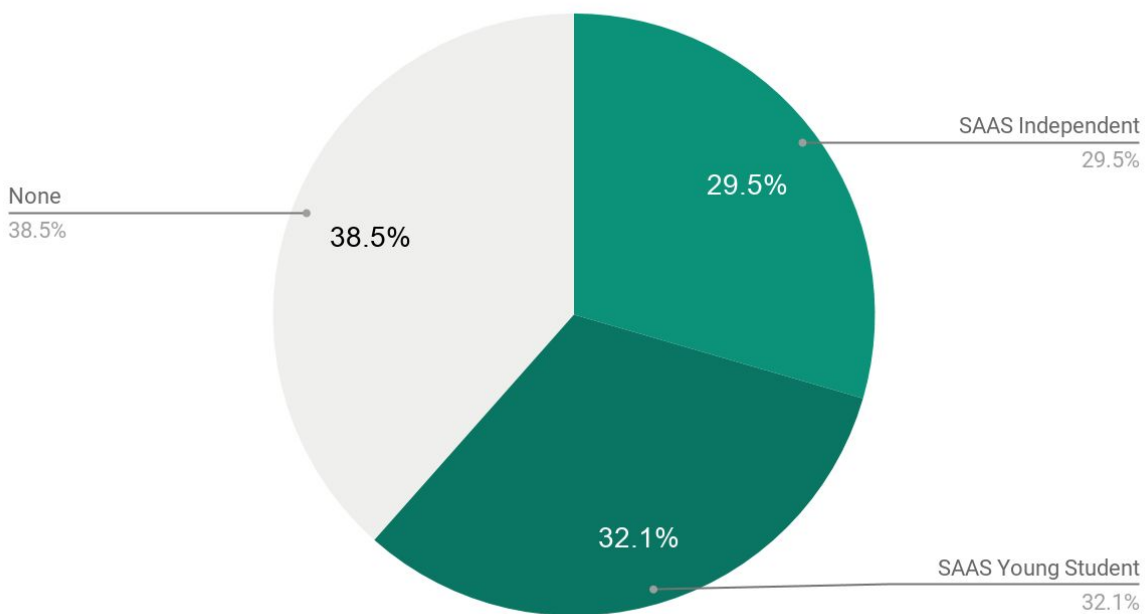
Some students highlighted that despite working various jobs they still find themselves reliant on food banks to feed themselves and stressing about transport. Various students raised that they are let go from their place of employment or are forced to leave due to their employer not being able to accommodate placements. Additionally, students drew attention to the fact they feel that they do not have time to take care of their own physical and mental wellbeing advising that they fear the risk of burnout.

In summary all experience and reason points to the need for the creation of a bursary for student paramedics.

Finances

We asked students that responded to our survey what type of bursary support they receive whilst studying at university.

Bursary Funding



The SAAS Independent and Young Student Bursary are only worth £1,000 and £2,000 respectively. This is funding that is available to all students. What our findings show though is that 38% of students do not receive even this small amount of extra

funding.

Furthermore, we asked students if they received any financial aid from family or friends. Of the responses, 70.5% of people said that they do not receive any form of financial support from family or friends whilst only 29.5% of students do receive financial support from family and friends.

Finances (cont.)

We asked survey respondents to identify with statement based questions adopting a yes or no response model. Respondents were asked to respond to the following question set:

- I struggle to make ends meet between pay periods.
- I am able to handle unexpected major expenses.
- I am concerned that the money that I have won't last long.
- I struggle to feed myself and my dependents.

This aspect of our survey found that:

- 82.1% of students surveyed struggle to make ends meet between pay periods.
- 83.3% of students surveyed advised that they are not able to handle unexpected major expenses (i.e. car repair).
- 94.9% of students surveyed advised that they are concerned that the money that they have won't last long.
- 67.9% of students surveyed advised that they struggle to feed themselves and dependents (if applicable).

Each of these statistics on their own show a major problem. Together they present a situation in which student paramedics are under constant mental pressure regarding their ability to get by, something that can only negatively impact performance and patient outcomes.

Student poverty seems to be evident whilst studying Paramedic Science in Scotland meaning that students are often faced with financial hardship. Financial hardship has been highlighted in various reports as a barrier to higher education which often has a direct impact on academic attainment, motivation and a sense of belonging ².

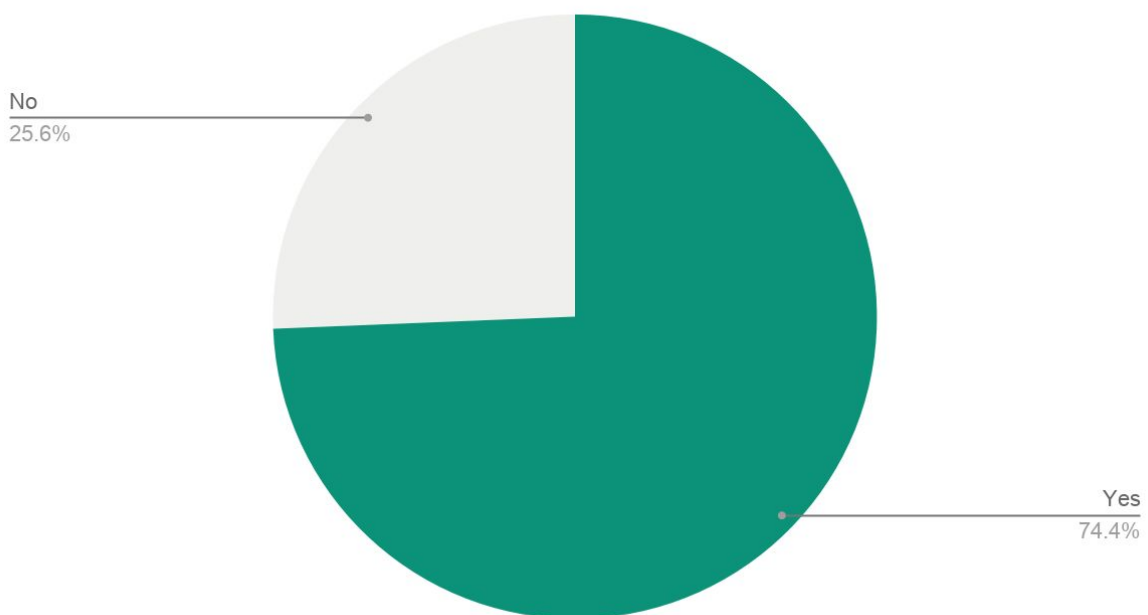
²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/909623/Impact_of_the_student_finance_system_on_disadvantaged_young_people.pdf

Employment

We asked students who responded to our survey if they were currently employed.

Are you currently employed?



We asked students who responded 'yes' additional questions relating to their employment status. Students were asked to identify what type of contract they currently hold with their employer.

Employment (cont.)

46.6% of students advised that they are currently working permanent contracts, 27.6% of students advised that they are working temporary contracts with 25.9% of students advising that they hold a bank/sessional contract.

It was found that students working across all contract types worked on average (mean) of 27.7 hours per week. We identified from the limited range of students surveyed the most common weekly hours worked ranged from 16 hours to 40 hours.

We also asked students to advise if they have been able to or will they be able to maintain the same employer they are currently employed with. Of the students surveyed 50% of students responded yes and 50% of students responded no.

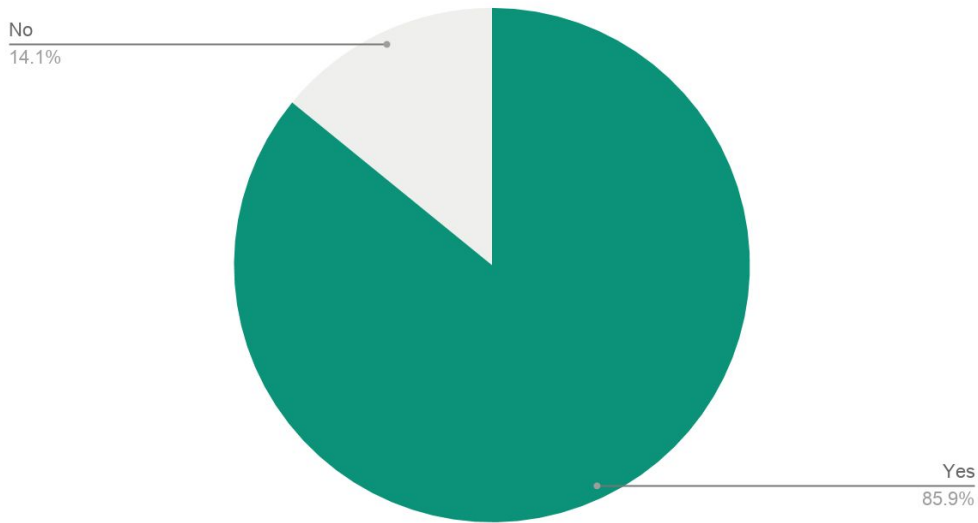
Under normal circumstances students often have the flexibility to work part time during the typical academic term. However, this is not possible for student paramedics due to placement

commitments. These additional commitments result in student paramedics only receiving approx. two weeks study leave before returning to study. This therefore makes student paramedics less attractive to employers due to their lack of flexibility with many students facing job insecurity or losing their job due to placement commitments.

Student Finance

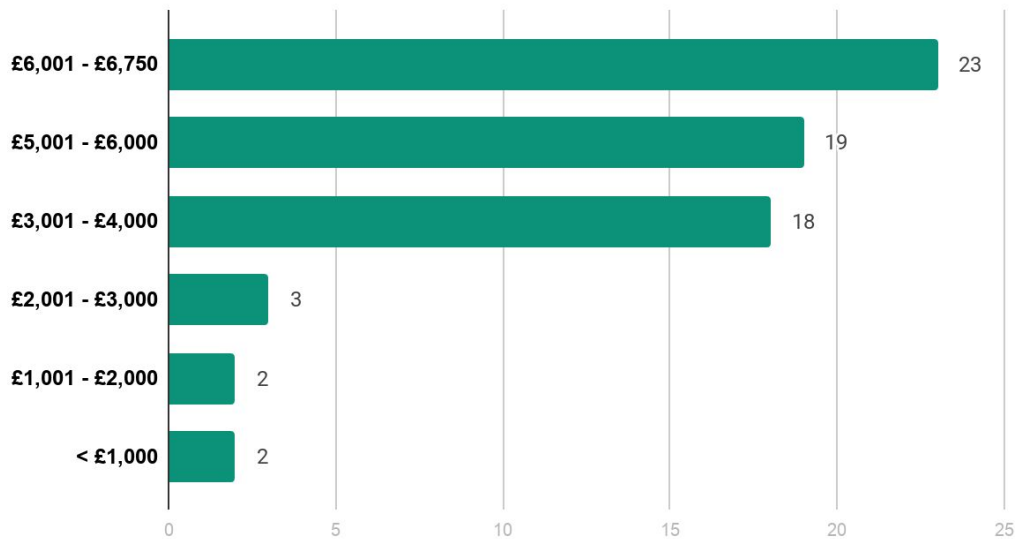
We asked students who responded to our survey if they were currently in receipt of a student loan.

Do you receive a student loan?



We asked 67 students who responded that they receive a student loan, how much student loan they are entitled to.

How much student loan are you entitled to?



Student Finance (cont.)

Student paramedics are heavily dependent on financial support with many not able to sufficiently support themselves.

Let us look at the best case scenario in which students receive a loan of £6,750 per year, this breaks down to £562.50 per month. This is then subject to fixed expenses such as rent and bills etc. The figure for rent costs will be that of a shared room in a property³ - something that is not the case of all student

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/private-sector-rent-statistics-2010-2019/>

paramedics as many are older with children, living in larger and more expensive properties.

Glasgow (Glasgow Caledonian University) - £403

Edinburgh (Queen Margaret University) - £460

Stirling (University of Stirling) - £345

Aberdeen (Robert Gordon University) - £359

Paisley (University West of Scotland) - £332

DISPOSABLE INCOME AFTER RENT

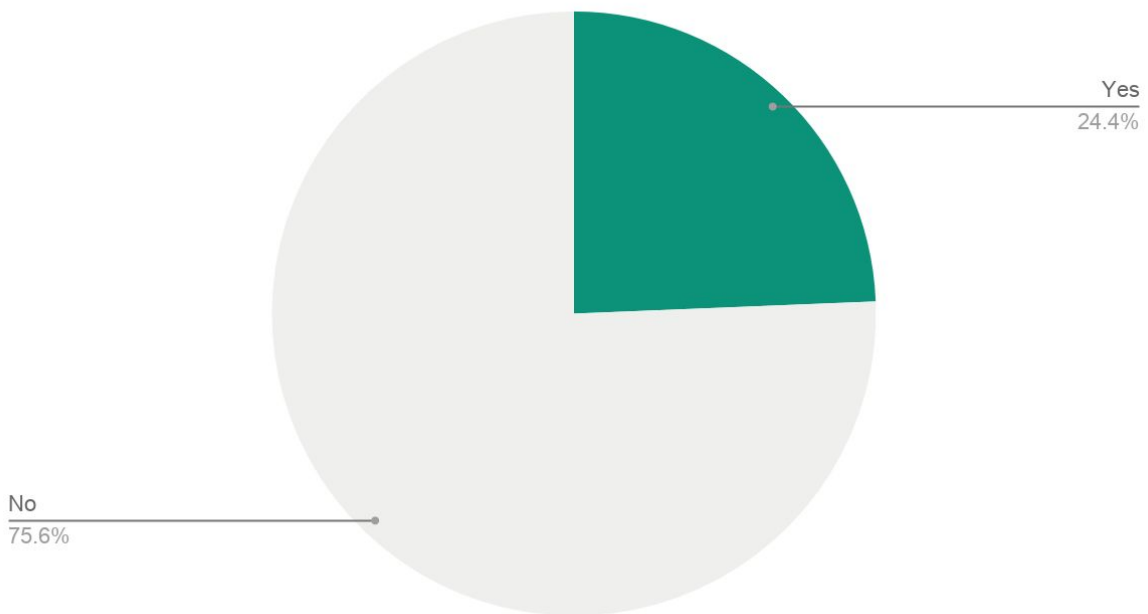


This will leave students with between £26 and £58 per week, if they don't receive don't bursary or are unable to gain paid work. These numbers speak for themselves and are a signifier of a finance system which is not working.

Tuition fees

We asked students who responded to our survey if they pay their own tuition fees.

Do you or will you pay your own tuition fees?



24.4% of students advised that they will pay their own tuition fees. 89.5% of students advised that this is due to BSc Paramedic

Science being their second degree. 10.5% of students advised that this is due to them not being a non-Scottish student.

Placement

We asked students who have undertaken placement about the average weekly time spent on placement.

The data collected ranged that on average (mean) students work 44.25 hours per week whilst on placement. The longest placement hours undertaken on a weekly basis on average was 84 hours (7-12 hour shifts) and the shortest placement hours reported was 24 hours per week.

The strain this can take on someone is well noted as with the tragic case of [Dr Lauren Connelly](#). We are not aware of any fatal incidents related to over work in regard to Student Paramedics in Scotland. We do not have to wait until a disaster strikes before action needs to be taken.

Student paramedics are required to complete approximately 2,500 placement hours over three years to complete their degree, all of which are entirely unpaid.

Working Time Directive 2003

What is Working Time Directive 2003 ⁴?

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) provides advice on working time directives in the UK. Put simply, the Working Time Directive (WTD) is a statutory instrument which protects employees by limiting the maximum number of hours they are permitted to work in the workplace.

Why is Working Time Directive important?

When workers exceed WTDs it significantly increases risks in the workplace⁵. Medical and nursing students/staff raised similar concerns in relation to WTDs to the UK Government in 2017 ⁶. The letter highlighted that, 'with health and care services under increasing pressure, it is not in the interests of staff or patients to move away from these safeguards'.

⁴ <https://www.acas.org.uk/the-maximum-hours-an-employee-can-work>

⁵ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/only-the-overworked-die-young-201512148815>

⁶ <https://www.bma.org.uk/pay-and-contracts/working-hours/working-time-regulations/letter-to-the-prime-minister-about-working-time-regulations>

Of the 78 responses surveyed, 52.6% of students advised that between hours spent on placement and their place of employment their working week exceeds the 48 hour limit set by the Working Time Directive 2003. Furthermore, 87.2% of these students advised that they fear the risk of burnout.

Conclusion

Data in this report was collected online due to Covid-19 therefore only students who engaged with the request to complete the survey have been included in this sample. We are aware that some students rely on computer labs for internet access and therefore would not have the ability to complete the survey.

The Pay Student Paramedics Student Survey found that many students are living below the poverty line with some students reporting they were fearful of how they will be able to feed their children before feeding themselves. This level of poverty indicates that these students are living in a position of detitution.

In today's Scotland with a government dedicated to tackling poverty, reducing inequality and building a fairer and more inclusive Scotland we feel that the Scottish Government must take action to stop student paramedic impoverishment and establish parity between Paramedic students and Nursing and Midwifery students who have an almost identical course structure however don't incur additional costs before attaining employment such as their category one (C1) license enhancement and private medical examinations.

Both programmes have basic costs covered for them such as occupation health, uniforms and disclosure checks. However, students studying nursing and midwifery receive 400% more support when compared to a young student and 900% more support when compared to an independent student. Refer to Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of the differences of funding available to both respected areas of study.

Impoverishment opens up individuals to a vast array of associated risks and vulnerabilities. This report makes it clear that many student paramedics are exceeding Working Time Directives simply to make ends meet. This not only increases pressure on students however often means that the interests of students, staff and patients move away from safeguards.

The Scottish Government and the First Minister have previously stated that funding for Student Paramedics will be considered as part of a wider review into the Allied Health Professions. As the facts in this report outline though student paramedics can't afford to wait. For many the undetermined delay will mean deeper worries about finances, continued overwork and an ongoing struggle to meet ends meet.

It is in the best interest of student paramedics welfare and Scotland's future to invest in student paramedics. This investment of supporting student paramedics would directly improve the sustainability and preparedness of our ambulance workforce. In doing so protecting it for future generations whilst making the occupation more accessible to those individuals from deprived backgrounds.

[THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

Appendix A.

Support Comparison

Support Available	Nursing/Midwifery	Paramedic Science	Repayable?	Equal?
Tuition fees paid - first degree	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Tuition fees paid - second degree †	Yes, all years.	Yes, capped at two years.	No	No - Paramedic students currently need to pay tuition for their third and/or fourth years if this is their second degree.
£10,000 bursary p.a. for first and second degree students †	Yes, for three years. Reduced to £7,500 for fourth year if fourth year is required.	No	No	No - Nursing and Midwifery students get given a total of £30,000/£37,500 non repayable bursary.
Lone/Single parent grants	Yes - up to £2,303 p.a.	Yes - up to £1,303 p.a.	No	No - Nursing and Midwifery students potentially receive £1,000 extra.
Dependant's Allowance	Yes - up to £3,640 p.a. & £577 for additional dependants	Yes - up to £1,303 p.a.	No	No - Nursing and Midwifery students can potentially receive more than double that of a student paramedics.
Childcare Allowance	Yes - up to £2,466 p.a.	No	No	No - self explanatory.
Independent Student Bursary	No	Yes - up to £1,000 p.a. subject to total household income being below £20,009. Only for students aged 25 or older.	No	No - Nursing and Midwifery students have the £10,000 bursary instead of this so are better supported during their studies.
Young Student Bursary	No	Yes - up to £2000 p.a. subject to household income. Only available to students under the age of 25.	No	No - Nursing and Midwifery students have the £10,000 bursary instead of this so are better supported during their studies.
SAAS Living Costs Loan	No	Yes - up to £6,750 p.a. subject to household.	Yes, with interest.	No - combining the SAAS loan with bursaries results in Paramedic students receiving less support and have increased debts.

† - if first degree was not an Allied Health Professional (AHP) degree