

Response to  
Office for Students  
consultation on  
implementing savings in  
academic years 2019-20 and  
2020-21

February 2020



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**The Royal College of Midwives**  
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### **The Royal College of Midwives' response to Office for Students consultation on implementing savings in academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21**

The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) is the professional organisation and trade union that represents the vast majority of practising midwives in the UK. It is the only such organisation run by midwives for midwives. The RCM is the voice of midwifery, providing excellence in professional leadership, representation, education and influence for and on behalf of midwives. We actively support and campaign for improvements to maternity services and provide professional leadership for one of the most established clinical disciplines.

The RCM welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and our views are set out below.

#### **1. To what extent do you agree with our proposed approach to securing savings in the academic year 2019-20?**

**Strongly disagree**

The proposed cuts in the recurrent teaching grant funding risks stifling growth in the midwifery workforce at a time when growth is essential to meet the ambitious objectives of the NHS Long Term Plan to improve safety within maternity care. Office for Students recurrent teaching grant funding has been essential to meet the additional costs of midwifery and other health courses. As such, cuts to this funding is likely to negatively impact on any growth in the provision of midwifery courses – threatening future workforce supply. This is entirely out of step with the Government's recent pledge to increase midwifery training places by 3000, in acknowledgement of the need to increase the midwifery workforce.<sup>1</sup>

#### **2. To what extent do you agree with our proposed approach to securing savings in the academic year 2020/2021?**

**Strongly disagree**

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<sup>1</sup> UK Government (2018) 'Women to have dedicated midwives throughout pregnancy and birth Plans to train 3,000 more midwives over 4 years and further investment in maternity support staff' Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/women-to-have-dedicated-midwives-throughout-pregnancy-and-birth>. Accessed 17 February 2020.

As discussed at Question 1, cuts to recurrent teaching grants funding threatens the midwifery workforce which undermines the strategic priorities of the Government.

In addition, we are concerned that the per capita cut in funding from the recurrent teaching grant for the high cost/high value medical and health courses, including midwifery, is higher than the 3 per cent referred to in the consultation document. It is inevitable that any cuts will act as a break on growth.

**3. Do you have any comments about any unintended consequences of these proposals, for example, for a particular type of provider or for particular types of student?**

No.

**4. Do you have any comments about the potential impact of these proposals on individuals on the basis of protected characteristics?**

No.

**5. Do you have any other comments about the proposals?**

The need to grow the midwifery workforce to deliver the Long-Term Plan is well understood and has been acknowledged by the Government. The proposals from the Office for Students undermine a concerted effort to deliver this workforce by reducing higher education providers' ability to expand midwifery course provision. In addition, the proposals do not appropriately protect higher cost and priority subjects, as requested by the Department for Education.

It should be noted that, based on data obtained from FOI requests sent to pre-registration midwifery education providers in 2019, we know that there is a continued downward trend in the number of midwifery teaching staff per institution, and there are now around 17 students to 1 FTE member of teaching staff – representing a significant downward trend from 2014/15 (13:1). Staff time in universities is also required to manage student placements. It is therefore not appropriate for midwifery courses to cut costs in line with the cuts proposed through changes in how courses are provided. As the Government has acknowledged, midwifery is an essential service and it is vital that we protect and assure the quality of the student learning experience.

**The Royal College of Midwives  
February 2020**