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An exploratory qualitative investigation of course-fee funding for students on a full-time MSc pathway in Medical Ultrasound

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Abstract

Background: Students reading for a full-time MSc in Medical Imaging (Ultrasound) are graduates from a variety of demographic backgrounds, many with family commitments. Unlike other UK healthcare courses, students are not entitled to a bursary nor assistance with course-related costs. In previous years, a lack of financial support has been cited by prospective students as the chief reason for not accepting an offer of a place on the course. Course fees for students in the cohort beginning January 2023 were fully-financed by a key external agency to improve recruitment and retention on this pathway. This study explored the financial challenges experienced, and whether such funding enabled students to accept their place on the programme.

Method: Semi-structured online interviews were undertaken with full-time medical ultrasound students (n=7) prior to starting clinical placement. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) identified three global themes which describe participants' experiences.

Results: Three themes emerged from the data analysis. These were: (a) Enabling students to study: Full course-fee funding made it financially feasible for some participants to accept their place on the programme. Additionally, it reduced the necessity for students to undertake paid part-time work, allowing more time to focus on their learning; (b) Study-life balance: Reduced part-time working helped to support family-life and student mental health; (c) Ongoing financial challenges: Despite the positive outcomes of course-fee funding, students experienced continuing difficulties associated with increasing living costs.

Conclusion: The intervention has had positive outcomes on enabling students to study and supporting students in their family-life and mental health.

References

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019) "Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), pp. 589–597.