

Media Release

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Attention: Education and
Political reporters
For Immediate Release**

Student Loans a Factor in Junior Doctor Shortage

The New Zealand University Students' Association (NZUSA) and the New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA) are calling on the government to introduce a universal student allowance and reduce student fees in light of the junior doctor shortage reported in today's *Dominion*.

"The junior doctor shortage highlights the consequences of student debt. Putting huge amounts of debt onto the shoulders of graduates encourages them to leave the country and take their skills with them," said NZUSA Co-President Andrew Campbell.

"Reducing the costs of tertiary study is the most effective thing the government can do to ensure that a public health crisis is avoided. The government is currently reviewing the student loan scheme and students want to see in that review a commitment to fee reductions and a universal allowance," said Campbell.

"New Zealand is a relatively low wage economy and we simply can't compete with other countries in wages, however we can reduce the incentives to leave. If we don't want doctor shortages then we need to reduce the costs of study," said Campbell.

"This government needs to look at both short term and long term strategies," said NZMSA President Cindy Towns. "Whilst there is a need for long term planning there is a growing crisis that needs immediate attention," said Towns. "Average debts of over \$60 000 are sending medical students away to service their loans instead of contributing to the New Zealand medical workforce".

"There are actions the government can take now to avert further shortages, such as increasing the trainee intern grant," said Towns. "Trainee interns are final year medical students who receive a grant in recognition of their contribution to the medical team. However, this grant has not be adjusted since it was introduced, yet during this time fees have increased ten-fold," said Towns. "After medical fees are paid, a trainee intern receives \$2.57 an hour," said Towns.

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New Zealand University Students' Association (Inc)

Te Rōpū Akonga o ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa

“Increasing the grant would act to directly reduce the loan burden of students who will, the following year, become junior doctors,” said Towns. “Medical students are indebted and disillusioned. Targeting a population of about 300 trainee interns is a cheap and immediate means for beginning to address these issues and the ramifications they have for the New Zealand medical workforce,” said Towns.

ENDS

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