



Cardiff Students' Union  
Undeb Myfyrwyr Caerdydd

# Placement Travel Report

## Introduction

Students have been under significant pressure in recent years with strains on their welfare and finances as a result of COVID-19 and the Cost-of-Living crisis. The financial strain in particular has been investigated by the National Union of Students, and we have summarised their findings in this report.

One of the pressures on medical students is the placement travel model as outlined in the Clinical Placements Travel Policy, a long-standing issue that pre-dates these pressures but contributes to them. We chose to carry out a survey to gain a better understanding of the issue and identify ways in which the policy can be improved, to help alleviate these pressures on students. We have summarised our findings and used the responses to form a set of recommendations to the School of Medicine (and, if necessary, the University).

The Relationship Agreement between the University and Students' Union states that we "share a commitment to developing and improving the student experience." This document has been produced with the aim of furthering that objective in partnership, drawing on data from the student community to inform the future of travel arrangements for clinical placements. We look forward to discussing this feedback with you to that end.

Best wishes | Cofion gorau,

Alex Meers, Vice President Heath Park Campus  
Oliver Silgram, Cardiff Medsoc President 23-24

## Current Policy Summary

The current Clinical Placements Travel policy 2023-2024 outlines the Cardiff University School of Medicine's policy for any reimbursement for travel required during clinical placements. Due to the structure of the C21 course, and the differing levels of clinical placements required, the document outlines the separate reimbursement entitlements of students for Phase 1 (Year 1 and Year 2); Year 3; Year 4; Year 5.



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In the introduction, the policy states that (applicable to all students):

*“Students will be invited to register for transport provided free of cost by the university prior to each block. If students fail to register for this transport, they shall be expected to make their own way to placement at their own cost. Due to the environmental impact and financial cost to the university, students who register for transport but fail to appear for it on two occasions without giving a minimum of 5 days working notice before the date of travel will have a professionalism issue raised and submitted to the Professionalism Committee by the Year Director. Should this occur more than twice, future transport will not be available to individuals, and they will be expected to make their own way to placements at their own cost. Transport registration and actual traveler numbers will be monitored.” (1)*

If *“too few students request transport to make it financially viable, students will receive a notification from the placements team informing them of this and the transport options available to them.”* Students will not be reimbursed if they opt for public transport when the university provided transport is running. (1)

Consolidated, for each cohort of students the current policy for 2023-2024 which vary from the general policy is:

### **Phase 1: Year 1 and 2 (Preclinical Years)**

- Clinical Skills Placements:

*“Transport is provided for Clinical Skills for all hubs: Princess of Wales, Cardiff and Vale, Keir Hardie and Gwent Southeast Wales Hub.” (1)*

- GP South Wales Placements:

*“Students located at GP Placements in Cardiff and surrounding areas have to make their own travel arrangements and will not be reimbursed for this. For those outside of Cardiff, the school provides a coach free of charge to and from their allocated hub. If your GP is not within walking distance of your hub a taxi will be arranged to and from your hub and GP Placement.” (1)*

### **Phase 2: Year 3 and Year 4**

- CD1 in the community (Year 3):

*“Students can request reimbursement for travel to placements with the exception of those with placements in Cardiff and Vale.” (1)*



- Oncology Project and Patient Pathway (Year 3):

*“No travel or reimbursement will be provided by Cardiff University for this part of the course. Students should seek reimbursement through the NHS Bursary claim route if eligible.” (1)*

- Carer Stream (Year 3):

*“The cost of travel to and from hospital placements or university teaching venues cannot be claimed.” (1)*

- Away Placements in West and North Wales (Year 3 and Year 4):

*“Students will travel to North Wales on the Sunday before placements start. If placement falls either side of Christmas, then an additional return journey will be offered. Students who have not chosen to use the transport provided by the School of Medicine will be unable to claim for reimbursement of their travel costs via Cardiff University.” (1)*

- Transport from allocated hub to placements within their health board as per timetable (Year 3 and Year 4):

Transport, such as taxis, will be provided to and from the hub to the placement site and paid for by the hub.

- Out of hours teaching (Year 4):

*“If students are required to attend hospital out of hours teaching (after 5pm and on weekends), and so miss the university bus, it will be noted by the hub undergraduate officer and it will be possible to claim travel reimbursement for these occasions. Should your name not appear on the Hub UG Office list, reimbursement will not be granted.” (1)*

### **Phase 3: Year 5**

All students entering their fifth year of study will either be self-funding their studies as a postgraduate or international student, or in receipt of the NHS bursary. Henceforth, no transport is provided to placements by Cardiff University for all Year 5 students. *“Costs of transport to placement can be reimbursed via the NHS Bursary scheme if the total cost of a student’s daily return travel from their normal accommodation to their practice placement site exceeds the cost of their usual daily return travel to university.” (2)*

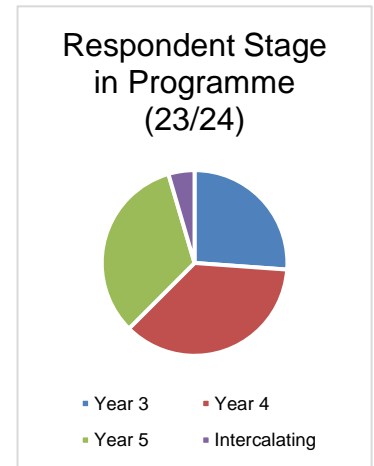
Please note, this summary of the current Clinical Placements Travel Policy does not include information pertaining to C21nW students.



## Our Survey

To collect data on students' views on the policy, a survey was developed by Cardiff Medsoc and VP Heath Park, Alex Meers. It was promoted extensively by Cardiff Medsoc. We are confident this reached a representative sample of medical students due to the exceptional proportion of Cardiff medical students that are society members. This is reinforced by the distribution of respondents' stage in the programme, which has a slight skew towards later years (as expected given greater experience with the system).

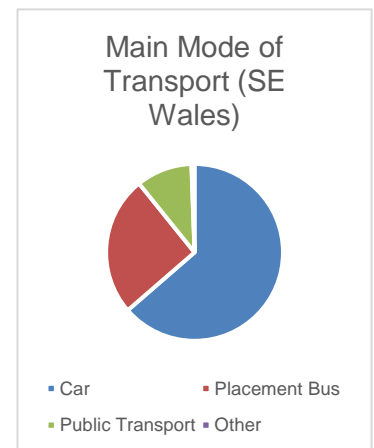
A total of 176 students completed the survey over a period of 1 month and 7 days: 46 Year 3, 64 Year 4, 58 Year 5, 8 Intercalating Students during the 2023-2024 academic year.



Responses to the question "What is the main mode of transport that you use to get to and from placements in Southeast Wales?" showed that almost three quarters (74.4%) of respondents did not regularly get the medical school placement bus, with a high proportion (63.6%) driving or sharing a car.

The question "What is the main mode of transport that you use or plan to use to get to away placements in West Wales and North Wales?" yielded a similar distribution as that for the equivalent question in Southeast Wales.

We also asked respondents who do not use the placement bus in Southeast Wales to clarify the factors that contribute to that decision. We provided some pre-selected comments to determine which common complaints were most prevalent in practice. The most common responses were:



- Departure time from UHW (118 instances)
- Departure time from placement hospitals (131 instances)
- Flexibility and cancellation policy (116 instances)
- Additional distance from home to UHW (79 instances)
- Length of travel time (57 instances)

Respondents also had the option to specify how much they were spending per week on travel by car or public transport, again in Southeast Wales. As these fields were optional and free text, many did not give a clear figure or specified a range. There were 76 numeric responses for cars and 27 for public transport, when taking the midpoint of a specified range. This gave a mean cost of £34.11 per week in petrol costs and £26.96 for public transport.



We chose not to ask further questions around specific issues in North Wales and West Wales because of the significant variance in individual circumstances – we are not confident that this survey would have had sufficient reach to determine meaningful conclusions from the resulting data.

To include a measure of student satisfaction in the current system overall, we asked “Do you think the medical school currently provides adequate transport options for placement?.” With 91% of respondents answering “No”, we would argue that students feel there is a clear need to improve this policy.

We concluded the survey with a handful of open text questions to determine general concerns about the policy and gather suggestions on how it could be improved. The results of these questions have been used to inform our recommendations, but we are willing to share the data if this would be of benefit.

## Contextual Data

The National Union of Students in Wales released a report in June 2023, detailing the findings of a survey they conducted earlier this year. Their survey aimed to investigate the impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis on students, and we believe their findings provide valuable context to the current pressures facing students. (3) Some key relevant points include:

- 57% of students work alongside their studies; for medical students this is hardly ever an option, due to the commitments of the programme and considerable time spent out of Cardiff. (3)
- Almost all students worry about finance to some extent; with medical students more likely than most to experience poor mental health, this provides yet further strain of student welfare. (3)
- Worrying over the cost of living is the most prevalent reason for those who are considering, or already have, withdrawn from their programme. (3)
- 32% of students are unable to pay rent, and 36% are unable to pay bills. (3)
- Students most commonly have £100 or less remaining after housing costs; it is of note that this equates to around 3 or 4 weeks' worth of independent placement travel on average. (3)

The findings of this survey are shocking and highlight how strong an issue the Cost-of-Living crisis is for students. The significant pressure it places on students, exacerbated by the limited funding available to students towards the end of the MBBCh, makes now a crucial time to take action in breaking down financial barriers to education.

## NSS Data

The cost, inconvenience, and difficulties students faced as a result of transport to and from placement was also covered within students free-text comments in the 2022 and 2023 National Student Survey (NSS) and is therefore likely to contribute to students' overall satisfaction.



It is clear that the placement experience of students has a significant impact on their overall university experience and their views on the university. Whilst it is understood that not all that experience is the responsibility of the University or School, it is important that the University looks to resolve those elements within their control.

## Recommendations

In light of the data presented above, we recommend that the School of Medicine:

1. Reimburses students for costs incurred due to independent placement travel (including by car and public transport).
2. Reviews mileage rates to consider current fuel prices, in light of inflation rates and the cost-of-living crisis.
3. Introduces a system for expressing interest in car-shares to placement hospitals in South Wales (Cardiff and Vale, Cwm Taf, Aneurin Bevan and Swansea Bay University Health Boards), with flexibility in further public transport reimbursement where car-share drivers are unavailable due to illness.
4. Continues and improves the existing bus service by:
  - a. Ensuring it is economical for the university and environmentally friendly based upon the number of students using this mode of transport. Given the low uptake, we would recommend that minibuses are the most practical solution.
  - b. Improving the quality of communication around cancellations.
5. Conduct further research into:
  - a. The uptake of existing placement buses/coaches, using existing data on signup rates, usage, and registered students.
  - b. The student perspective on placement travel in North and West Wales (Powys Teaching Health Board, Hwyl Dda and Betsi Cadwalader Health Board), to gain a further understanding of underlying issues and potential improvements.
6. Reviews travel arrangements for:
  - a. GP placements in Cardiff and Vale, as many locations (such as Barry) are not walkable.
  - b. The Oncology Project and Patient Pathway, as most third-year students will not be in receipt of the NHS Bursary.
  - c. International students and self-funding postgraduate students, who generally aren't eligible for the NHS Bursary.
7. Improves communication and transparency around the Clinical Placements Travel Policy to make arrangements clearer to students.
8. Extend the reimbursement of return travel for students on placement in North Wales for more than 4 weeks by at least 1 additional journey to assist in combating isolation and maintaining connection with Cardiff and the University.

We acknowledge that one or multiple of these recommendations may be out of scope for the School of Medicine and ask that each is considered, as each can be considered a step forward for students. In cases where finances are a limiting factor, we are willing to work in partnership to find a solution with the University.



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## References

1. Cardiff University School of Medicine. 2023. *Clinical Placements Travel Policy 2023-2024*. Available at: <https://cf.sharepoint.com/teams/PlacementTravelCampaign/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fteams%2FPlacementTravelCampaign%2FShared%20Documents%2FGeneral%2FClinical%20Placements%20Travel%20Policy%202023-24%2Epdf&parent=%2Fteams%2FPlacementTravelCampaign%2FShared%20Documents%2FGeneral&p=true&ga=1> [Accessed: 24 September 2023].
2. NHS Business Services Authority. 2021. *Guide to Travel and Dual Accommodation Expenses for NHS Bursary students and universities*. Available at: <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/2021-09/Guide%20to%20Travel%20and%20Dual%20Accommodation%20Expenses%20for%20NHS%20Bursary%20students%20and%20universities%20%28V1%29%2009.2021.pdf> [Accessed: 24 September 2023].
3. National Union of Students. 2023. *NUS (National Union of Students) Wales Cost of Living Report Summer 2023*. Available at: [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/669/attachments/original/1692109057/NUS\\_Wales\\_Cost\\_of\\_Living\\_Report\\_Summer\\_2023.pdf?1692109057](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/nus/pages/669/attachments/original/1692109057/NUS_Wales_Cost_of_Living_Report_Summer_2023.pdf?1692109057) [Accessed: 24 September 2023].

