Thank you for your letter of 10 May 2018 regarding Mental Health and Learning Disability nurses working in the NHS, and the announcement made on 9 May 2018 to offer ‘golden hellos’ to postgraduate students that take up employment in hard-to-recruit disciplines.

I note you welcome the proposals and have a number of questions about the £10,000 golden hello payment to postgraduate students in specific hard-to-recruit disciplines, which I announced on 9 May 2018. As I am sure you appreciate, we are looking to engage with stakeholders on this and I have asked my officials to undertake some further detail on the proposals and how best they can be implemented. That work, which covers a number of your questions, is ongoing and my officials will be able to discuss this with you in further detail and they will be in touch with you following this letter.

These payment incentives offer £10,000 to future postgraduates who successfully complete loan-funded courses starting in the 2018/19 academic year and then go on to work in specific fields of the health and care sector including mental health, learning disability and community, including district nursing.

You also reference the reforms of pre-registration education. Providing access for pre-registration healthcare students eligible to the standard student support package has removed the artificial cap placed on available training places constrained by government finances and helped secure the future supply of nurses and other health professionals for the NHS by:

- enabling more applicants to gain a sought after place; no longer is there an artificial cap on the number of places that universities can offer because of limited funding;
- typically providing a 25% increase in living cost support for healthcare students; and
• putting universities in a stronger financial and competitive position so they are able to invest sustainably for the long term.

We have made provision for pre-registration postgraduate healthcare students to access undergraduate maintenance and tuition fee loans. This is a more generous package of support than the Postgraduate Master’s Loan available for the wider student population, specifically because we have an interest in ensuring the workforce supply of the NHS.

Furthermore, the Department has made provisions so that new pre-registration postgraduate nursing, midwifery or allied health professional students starting courses on or after 1 August 2018 may be eligible to apply for financial support from the Learning Support Fund, the same package that is available for undergraduate students.

This offers specific and targeted support for students with at least one dependent child; and travel and dual accommodation expenses for a clinical placement and students experiencing extreme financial hardship can also apply for additional support through the Exceptional Support Fund.

Your letter also references the Nurse First initiative and the recruitment of nurses in its first year. The accelerated postgraduate nursing programme (previously titled Nurse First) was a pilot programme established to explore options for innovative entry routes into the nursing profession.

As a pilot the programme was limited to 40 places focussed on Learning Disability and Mental Health nursing as the branches facing the greatest difficulties in recruitment. Interest in the programme from both Higher Education Institution (HEIs) partners and students was very high and the full 40 places available were filled with students commencing their studies in September 2017. NHS England are continuing to work with HEIs to evaluate the pilot and use learning from this to inform future postgraduate nursing programmes.

The Institute for Apprenticeships have recently confirmed they will consider amendments to the nurse degree apprenticeship to allow for the use of a Level 7 qualification. This means we should see apprentice nurses training for a postgraduate nurse degree qualification, providing another valuable work based learning route for those wishing to enter a career in nursing and allowing employers to grown their own workforce.

Yours sincerely,

STEVE BARCLAY