



Student Support Funds Policy

Incorporating:

**Further Education Bursaries
Education Maintenance Allowance
Further & Higher Education Childcare Funds
Further & Higher Education Discretionary Funds**

Date of Most Recent Review: August 2016
Date of Next Review: August 2019
Responsibility: Student Finance Officer

Please ask if you, or someone you know, would like this document in a different format or language.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to outline the principles underpinning the College process of assessing and distributing Student Support Funds.

The overarching aim of this policy is to ensure that as many eligible students as possible have access to funds.

Funds are distributed in compliance with the funding regulations as determined by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and where discretion is given to the College to determine eligibility, this policy specifies the rationale applied.

Available funds are limited and are allocated on a first-come first-serve basis.

Exception may be made for care leavers who may experience difficulty in providing documentation to support their circumstances thus face financial difficulty. In this case, confirmation from a third party agency such as the local authority Social Work department of the student's circumstances will be accepted in place of the normal supporting documentation.

When referring to "Funds" in this policy, unless specified under a fund heading, this relates to Further Education Bursaries, Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), Further and Higher Education Childcare and Further and Higher Education Discretionary Funds.

The Funds (excluding the Higher Education Discretionary Fund) are allocated annually to the College by the Highlands and Islands Further Education Regional Board.

The Higher Education Discretionary Fund is allocated to the College by the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) as stated within the UHI Discretionary Fund Policy.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the most up-to-date SFC regulations for the allocation of the relevant funds. These policies and other related internal policies are listed at Appendix 1.

2 Responsibilities

The Student Finance Officer is responsible for annually reviewing this policy to ensure compliance with the most recent SFC regulations and other related internal policies. The policy will also be fully reviewed every three years taking into account value for money and environmental impact.

The Student Finance Officer is also responsible for ensuring:

- the policy and its associated procedures are equality impact assessed;
- appropriate and prompt implementation of this policy within the performance targets agreed (Section 10);

- all processes and procedures are reviewed annually;
- all documentation and claims are up to date and audit compliant;
- promotional literature is available and effectively distributed to applicants;
- compliance with the current SFC regulations;

The Student Finance Officer and the Student Funding Advisor provide accurate and professional funding advice.

Student Services staff are responsible for:

- providing guidance on the Online Funding Application process;
- confidentially copying and storing funding application documentation.

Assistant Directors are responsible for ensuring academic staff advise the Student Finance Section of course requirements.

The Learning Support Officer is responsible for maintaining a register of equipment purchased from the funds.

3 Promotional Materials

The college website will provide information on Student Support Funds. Applicants will also receive, or have access to, the “Let’s get your funding sorted” booklet.

4 Eligibility

Eligibility criteria for each fund are detailed in the relevant SFC/SAAS national policy. Where this allows for College discretion, this is detailed in this policy.

4.1 Outstanding Debt

In addition to the national criteria, all students will be checked for any outstanding debt to the College. Students with outstanding debt will be required to enter a repayment agreement prior to any further funds being released.

4.2 Change in Circumstances during the academic year

Eligibility for funding is based on the student’s age and family circumstances at the start date of the course.

Where there is a foreseeable change in the student’s circumstances or the student experiences an unavoidable change to their circumstances, the college will undertake to re-assess the student as appropriate.

The College will not however change the student's category from EMA to FE Bursary, Parentally Supported funding as this part funding would need to be considered in future FE Bursary Applications. This is to potentially protect future funding between the ages of 18 and 24.

5 Application Process

Applications for funds is via a single integrated online system to ensure that all students only have to make one application. The online application process links with other College information systems and only asks for additional fund-related information.

Support to complete the Online Funding Application is available in the Student Services Centre.

6 Bursaries

Payment will be made by BACS transfer fortnightly, payable in arrears.

Fortnightly payment of bursary funds is dependent upon acceptable levels of attendance during that period. Students must notify Student Services of any absence and a College decision will be taken on whether the acceptable level of attendance has been reached, taking any appropriate mitigating circumstances into consideration. For further detailed information on this please refer to the Student Attendance Policy.

6.1 Allocation of Funds

The College allocates bursary funds in line with the National Policy for Further Education Bursaries. The National Policy, in certain areas, allows the College to award Bursary funds at its discretion to ensure the best use of public funds. The College has undertaken to utilise this provision in the following areas:

6.2 Study Costs Allowance

Assistant Directors are responsible for ensuring that relevant teaching staff submit details of their course study costs to the Student Finance Office in April each year.

6.3 Travel Costs Allowance

Students will be paid for the most economical method of public transport.

6.4 Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance

Where appropriate, Learning Support staff assess individual student support needs via the Personal Learning Support Plan (PLSP) process. This process will identify and record the

service or equipment required and Learning Support staff will notify the Student Finance Office of the costs involved. Where equipment is purchased, the Learning Support Officer will, by means of an equipment register, be responsible for determining whether the item should remain the property of the College or the student on completion or withdrawal from the course.

7 Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

Payment will be made by BACS transfer fortnightly, payable in arrears.

7.1 Allocation of Funds

The College allocates bursary funds in line with the EMA Business Model and EMA Guidance. The EMA Business Model and EMA Guidance allows the College, in certain areas, to allocate EMA at its discretion to ensure the best use of public funds.

An EMA will be distributed only on receipt of a signed Learning Agreement and on confirmation of the student's enrolment.

8 Childcare and Discretionary Funds

Payment will be made by BACS transfer fortnightly, payable in arrears or, by exception a one-off emergency payment could be made.

8.1 Allocation of Childcare Funds

The College undertakes to allocate Childcare funds in line with the National Policy which highlights target groups under-represented in education and allows the College to prioritise funds according to need within budgetary constraints.

Childcare Funds are specifically for registered or formal childcare provision for children and dependent on a student's circumstances. The fund will cover costs for timetabled attendance and reasonable travel time between the student's home, childcare provider and the College.

The College has identified the following groups as priority need:

- Lone Parents who are in receipt of Bursary Maintenance Allowance or who have not been awarded this because of the provision for them to claim or continue to claim Income Support.
- Families where the cost of childcare would place them in undue hardship. Determination of these circumstances will be achieved through a Household Income

and Expenditure Statement. Family income thresholds will be reviewed annually and advised to students in the “Let’s get your funding sorted” booklet.

8.2 Allocation of Discretionary Funds

The College undertakes to allocate Discretionary funds in line with the National Policy which, in certain areas, allows the College to allocate funds at its discretion as detailed below.

The Discretionary Fund is used primarily to assist students with rent/mortgage costs where they do not have access to Housing Benefit and who do not have adequate funds to cover these costs.

Accommodation costs to assist single adult students and students in a couple-relationship where the excessive burden of accommodation costs are not covered within the scope of the Local Authority Housing Benefit.

Emergency aid for unforeseen and unmanageable circumstances.

Assistance for other forms of hardship will be considered on application based on individual circumstances.

Unmanageable financial circumstances that would prevent a student from undertaking or remaining in full time education are expected to be reduced and resourced through income from part time employment. Students are advised to consider carefully their financial circumstances before undertaking full time study, as assistance will not be given for loans and/or prior accumulated debt.

The College reserves the right to pay funds to a third party dependent on the nature of the funding request.

Funds will be allocated on receipt of appropriate documentation supporting the student’s circumstances e.g. Income and Expenditure Declaration, Mortgage or Tenancy Documentation and Council Tax Documentation, Childcare Contract.

9 Appeals

Students are informed of their right to appeal against the outcome of any application in relation to Support Funds within the Notification of Award issued on their Hub account.

An appeal must be submitted in writing via email or the Re-assessment/Appeal facility on the Student Hub to the Student Finance Officer. Any appeal must be submitted within ten working days of receiving the outcome of the application and must clearly state the grounds for the appeal.

The Student Finance Officer will acknowledge receipt of the appeal, and undertake to reply via the Hub within fifteen working days.

If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal they must submit their case in writing to the Assistant Principal (Support and Student Services) within ten working days of the outcome of the first appeal again giving a full justification.

The Assistant Principal (Support and Student Services) will acknowledge receipt of the appeal and undertake to reply within ten working days. This decision is final.

During the course of an appeal, it may be that the Student Finance Officer identifies alternative funding streams to assist the student and will advise them accordingly.

10 Performance Targets

Students will receive notification of their awards within twenty working days of the receipt of their application and supporting documentation.

All supporting evidence must be provided before any award can be determined.

Appendix 1

Related Policies and Sources of Information

Internal

“Let’s get your finding sorted”

“Award Letter Explained”

“Terms & Conditions of Award”

Student Attendance Policy

Course Fees Policy

Student Induction Policy

Student Disciplinary Policy

Student Confidentiality Policy

UHI Academic Standards and Quality Regulations

UHI Deceased Protocol

Student Advice, Personal Development Planning and Guidance Policy

External

Sector Student Support and Fee Waiver Grant Policies

SFC, Student Support Funds Audit Guidance

Scottish Government, EMA Business model

Scottish Government, EMA Guidance

Scottish Government, EMA Audit Requirements