



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Inverness College



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean

Inverness College, University of the Highlands and Islands

Student Support Funds Policy

POL: PL/CS/2020/001

Lead Officer (Post):	Director of Finance
Responsible Office/ Department:	Admissions & Student Funding
Responsible Committee:	Board of Management F&GP Committee
Review Officer (Post):	Admissions and Funding Team Leader
Date policy approved:	30/06/2020
Date policy last reviewed and updated:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Date policy due for review:	01/03/2021
Date of Equality Impact Assessment:	01/06/2018
Date of Privacy Impact Assessment:	N/A

This policy covers the period 2020 to 2021.

For all our up-to-date policies, please visit the Policy homepage on our [website](#).

Accessible versions of this policy are available upon request.

Policy Summary

Overview	This policy is required to set out a regional approach to distribution of student support funds for (College Name) and all academic partners in the University of the Highlands and Islands.
Purpose	The policy will provide a framework for a consistent and coherent methodology for the awarding of student support funds.
Scope	This policy applies to all academic partners.
Consultation	This policy was formulated by a Policy Ownership Group, made up of practitioners from across the University of the Highlands and Islands network. Endorsement was received from Partnership Council, before the policy went through local consultation and approval by College Boards of Management and Finance and General Purpose Committee.
Implementation and Monitoring	Academic partners will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the policy. Analysis will be carried out of the policy's impact by staff from the Vice-Principal for Further Education's office.
Risk Implications	The policy reduces risk for the University and academic partners by creating a streamlined process and reinforcing the existing staff community of practice. Students will also benefit from a consistent approach across all partners.
Link with Strategy	This policy is linked to individual Access and Inclusion strategies and the Regional Outcome Agreement.
Impact Assessment	Equality Impact Assessment: June 2018 – No further action required.
	Privacy Impact Assessment: n/a

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to outline the principles underpinning the College's 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 within allocated budgets.
- 1.2 Funds are distributed in compliance with the funding regulations as determined by the Scottish Funding Council and Student Awards Agency Scotland. Where discretion is given to the College to determine eligibility, this policy specifies the rationale applied.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 Scottish Funding Council ("SFC") - SFC is the national, strategic body that is responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland's colleges and universities. SFC gives funding to colleges and universities with guidance on how the funds should be distributed to students.
- 2.2 Student Awards Agency Scotland ("SAAS") – SAAS is an agency of the Scottish Government giving financial support to eligible students doing a course of higher education in the UK. SAAS provides the University of the Highlands and Islands with funds and guidance for distribution of the Higher Education Discretionary Fund.
- 2.3 For the purposes of this policy, the following terms will be used:
 - 2.3.1 The Further Education Bursary will be referred to as the "Bursary Fund".
 - 2.3.2 The Educational Maintenance Allowance will be referred to as the "EMA".
 - 2.3.3 The College and University Childcare Funds will be referred to the "Childcare Funds".
 - 2.3.4 The Further Education Discretionary Fund will be referred to as the "FE Discretionary Fund".
 - 2.3.5 The Higher Education Discretionary Fund will be referred to the "HE Discretionary Fund".
- 2.4 Further Education courses are normally up to and including Level 6 on the [SCQF Framework](#). Higher Education courses are normally Level 7 and above.

3. Purpose

- 3.1 The College will utilise the current guidance to ensure fair distribution of the Student Support Funds.
- 3.2 The College aims to distribute Student Support Funds within the conditions of the respective national policies in a fair and consistent manner to assist students who demonstrate financial need. The College undertakes to maximise the use of available funds to ensure as many students as possible benefit through the qualifying criteria.
- 3.3 **Bursary Fund**
 - 3.3.1 As defined in the current SFC guidelines, available [here](#), the Bursary Fund may be offered where the student and their course meets eligibility criteria. There is no automatic entitlement to the Bursary Fund, even where eligibility is established.
 - 3.3.2 The Bursary Fund constitutes the following:
 - Maintenance Allowance
 - Dependant Allowance

- Study Expense Allowance
 - Travel Expense Allowance
 - Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance
- 3.3.3 Maintenance Allowance: the College follows the SFC guidance for this element.
- 3.3.4 Dependant Allowance: the College follows the SFC guidance for this element.
- 3.3.5 Study Expense Allowance: the College follows the SFC guidance for this element.
- 3.3.6 Travel Expense Allowance
- The College will determine the most appropriate and cost-effective route or mode of transport for Travel Expense Allowance.
 - Travel expenses will only be paid for students residing 3 miles or more from the college.
- 3.3.7 Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance: the College follows the SFC guidance for this element.
- 3.3.8 The attendance criteria for the Bursary Fund is based on the current SFC guidance. Where the guidance calls for institutional discretion to be applied, the process to be followed is agreed regionally and is available in the Attendance Appendix.

3.4 EMA

As defined in the current SFC guidelines, available [here](#), the EMA provides a weekly term time allowance for students normally aged 16-19 years old inclusive from low income households who are studying non-advanced courses.

- 3.4.1 The College follows the current SFC guidance.
- 3.4.2 The attendance criteria for EMA is based on the current SFC guidance. Where the guidance calls for institutional discretion to be applied, the process to be followed is agreed regionally and is available in the Attendance Appendix.

3.5 Childcare Funds (Further and Higher Education)

As defined in the current national policy and guidelines, available [here](#), Childcare Funds consist of two elements to help pay for formal or registered childcare expenses: the Lone Parents Childcare Grant and the Discretionary Childcare Funds.

- 3.5.1 The College follows the current national policy and guidelines for Childcare Funds.
- 3.5.2 The College may identify certain groups as priority for allocation of the Discretionary Childcare Funds element, based on assessment of need.

3.6 FE Discretionary Fund

As defined in the current [SFC guidelines](#), the FE Discretionary Fund is “primarily for emergency use and instances of financial hardship”.

- 3.6.1 The College follows the current guidance, available above.
- 3.6.2 The College distributes FE Discretionary Funds within allocated budgets in response to student need and circumstances.
- 3.6.3 The FE Discretionary Fund has priority areas for including, but not limited to:
- Housing and accommodation costs
 - Emergency aid for unforeseen and unmanageable circumstances
 - Students at risk of financial hardship due to substantially higher-than-average utility costs

3.7 HE Discretionary Fund

As defined in the current [SAAS guidelines](#), the HE Discretionary Fund is intended to “provide non-repayable assistance for students in financial difficulties in order for them to access and/or continue in Higher Education”.

- 3.7.1 Inverness College UHI follows the current guidance, available above.
- 3.7.2 The college distributes HE Discretionary Funds within allocated budgets in response to student need and circumstances.
- 3.7.3 The HE Discretionary Fund has priority areas for including, but not limited to:
 - Housing and accommodation costs
 - Students experiencing excessive travel costs, e.g. where the journey is greater than a reasonable commute
 - Childcare costs for part-time HE courses
 - Emergency aid for unforeseen and unmanageable circumstances
 - Students at risk of financial hardship due to substantially higher-than-average utility costs

3.8 Supporting Evidence

- 3.8.1 Students applying for financial support are required to produce documentary evidence in support of their application before an award can be considered.
- 3.8.2 Exception may be made for care experienced students who may encounter difficulty in providing documentation in support of their application, which could create or exacerbate financial hardship. In this case, confirmation of the student’s circumstances from a third party agency such as the local authority Social Work department will be accepted in place of the normal supporting documentation.

3.9 Eligibility

- 3.9.1 Eligibility criteria are in line with the relevant guidance/policy for each fund.
- 3.9.2 In addition, all applicants for student financial support will be checked for any outstanding debt to the college. Students with outstanding debt will be required to enter into a repayment agreement before additional funds will be released.
- 3.9.3 Where a student’s experiences an unforeseeable or unavoidable change to their circumstances during an academic year, the college may re-assess the student as appropriate.

3.10 Appeals and Grievances

- 3.10.1 Students are entitled to raise grievances related to the application of this policy and awarding of student support funds.
- 3.10.2 In the first instance, students should raise their grievance with college staff responsible for student support funds administration.
- 3.10.3 Should this not resolve the grievance, the student will be able to escalate the issue by means of an impartial review.
- 3.10.4 Further information is available in the accompanying Student Support Funds Procedures.

4. Scope

- 4.1 Financial support may only be offered if both the student and their course are eligible for support.

5. Exceptions

- 5.1 The policy identifies areas of discretion for colleges, and sets out priority areas for support. Ultimate authority for awarding of discretionary funds rests with the college, and decisions will be made in line with the policy and/or guidelines issued by SFC or SAAS.
- 5.2 As per the Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Determination there are different arrangements for students living in the local authority areas of Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands. These students should contact the college at which they intend to study for further information.

6. Notification

- 6.1 Staff members engaging with Student Support Funds should be familiar with this policy and all relevant SFC/SAAS policies.
- 6.2 Annual changes to SFC/SAAS policies will be cascaded to staff by line managers and hyperlinks in the policy updated to reflect the most recent guidance.
- 6.3 Any changes in SFC/SAAS policy or national legislation will be reflected in this policy.
- 6.4 The policy will be publicly available on the College's website, along with other current policies.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

- 7.1 The College's Director of Finance has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and the management of Student Support Funds
- 7.2 The College's Director of Finance is responsible for the approval of FE Discretionary Funds and HE Discretionary Funds.
- 7.3 The staff administering Student Support Funds are responsible for ensuring up-to-date local policies and SFC/SAAS guidance is followed.
- 7.4 The Admissions and Student Funding Team Leader is responsible for ensuring that all enrolled students receiving EMA support have a signed Learning Agreement.
- 7.5 The Admissions and Student Funding Team Leader is responsible for ensuring that student attendance information is passed to the SITS office for recording on the College SITS system to satisfy the conditions of the Bursary or EMA award.
- 7.6 Students are responsible for informing the College of changes to their circumstances, including voluntary withdrawal from a course.

8. Related Policies, Procedures, Guidelines and Other Resources

- 8.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with SFC and SAAS policies and guidance. Links are provided above in Section 3.
- 8.2 Student Support Funds Procedures.
- 8.3 Further Education Fee Waiver Policy.
- 8.4 [Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\) website](#)
- 8.5 [Student Awards Agency Scotland \(SAAS\) website](#)

9. Version Control and Change History

Version	Date	Approved by	Amendment(s)	Author
0	30.06.20	BoM	New Policy	Student Support Funds Working Group
1				
2				
3				
4				

University of the Highlands and Islands

Student Support Funds Policy: Attendance Appendix 2019-20

1. Overview

1.1 This appendix sets out the regional approach for Further Education funding attendance requirements. The guidance will be used by all colleges in the UHI partnership to ensure parity of experience for students and to limit risk for colleges.

1.2 The guidance below is based on Scottish Funding Council (SFC) [guidance](#), and adds further information for the areas where there is discretion available. The appendix fulfils the SFC [Fund Management and Audit Information](#) requirement that colleges should:

- Implement their own rules for measuring satisfactory attendance, participation and engagement
- Produce their own guidance for authorised absence
- Operate these rules and guidance consistently across the college

1.3 Attendance can be a critical part of being a student and courses are designed on the principle of students attending all classes. Attendance, punctuality and personal timekeeping are valuable transferable skills for progression in academic studies or for employment.

2. Guidance

2.1 The expectation set out by the SFC is for students to attend all their classes; this will be assessed through attendance monitoring. Student attendance will be expressed as a percentage of the overall classes attended.

2.2 Examples of authorised absences identified by SFC include, but are not limited to:

- Self-certificated absence because of illness. Medical certificates should normally be submitted for illnesses lasting for more than five working days.
- Religious holidays (but not other holidays).
- Work experience placements.
- Tutor agreed exam preparation.
- Attendance at children's hearing, court, meeting related to caring responsibilities or care needs, etc.
- Unexpected caring responsibilities, either for the student's child(ren) or an adult dependant, such as the illness of a child or dependant.
- Severe weather and transport breakdown.
- Attendance at a family funeral.
- Medical or dental appointments for either the student, or a child or adult who is dependent on the student. This can include non-emergency appointments if these cannot be arranged outside college hours, although every effort should be made to avoid clashes with classes.
- Fulfilment of an official position e.g. HISA representation
- Jury duty

As soon as a student becomes aware of an absence from the criteria above they should inform relevant staff via the College's official absence reporting processes.

Levels and patterns of authorised absences will be monitored to ensure the system is not abused.

2.3 Any absence that is not considered a valid authorised absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

2.4 Attendance Thresholds

2.4.1 Students should aim to attend 100% of their scheduled activity. Both authorised and unauthorised absences will affect a student's attendance percentage.

2.4.2 The reporting period is the duration over which attendance is calculated. The payment schedules are the frequency that payments are made for different types of support fund.

Reporting Period:

Payment Schedule

2.4.3 If attendance falls below 100% of scheduled activity for the reporting period local informal interventions may be used to engage with students in order to reinforce the benefits of attendance and help improve it.

2.4.4 If attendance falls below 85% of scheduled activity for the reporting period formal interventions will commence.

2.5 Where students have failed to maintain the required attendance threshold set out above, staff will consider whether the student has taken reasonable steps to engage with their studies.

Examples of appropriate student engagement include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining contact with relevant college staff, explaining the reasons for absence and the steps they are taking to engage with their studies.
- Keeping up to date with learning by obtaining lecture notes, online resources or other learning materials from college staff.
- Demonstrating that they have engaged in independent study to keep up to date with their learning.
- Handing in assignments or classwork in a timely fashion, unless there are mitigating factors.
- Continuing to meet their learning objectives.
- Engaging with the college in any other way which demonstrates that they are continuing to participate in their studies.

3. Attendance and Engagement Support Procedures

Stage 1

3.1 Students falling below the attendance threshold set out in 2.4 and not maintaining appropriate engagement will be contacted by staff in order to discuss strategies for improving attendance. Local systems can be used to inform this engagement. Students will be able to confidentially disclose any barriers to attendance or engagement they may be experiencing.

3.2 Students will be informed that should their attendance not improve and they are not meeting engagement requirements they are at risk of having student support funds they are eligible for reduced or withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed. An agreed timeframe for improvement and the student's understanding will be recorded on local systems, along with any evidence from Learner Support and Academic staff regarding attendance and engagement.

3.3 Students who do not participate in the Stage 1 process will have their funding withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed, if they are not achieving appropriate engagement and will be required to arrange a meeting with the appropriate members of staff in order to discuss having their funding reinstated.

Stage 2

3.4 If attendance does not improve, or improves and then declines within the same academic year, the student will be required to attend a formal meeting and agree an Attendance and Engagement Support Plan with staff.

3.5 Students who do not participate in the Stage 2 process will have their funding withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed, where they are not achieving appropriate engagement and will be required to arrange a meeting with the appropriate members of staff in order to discuss having their funding reinstated.

Stage 3

3.5 Students who have been through Stages 1 and 2 will not be invited to attend another meeting within the same academic year if issues continue or reoccur. **Instead, withdrawal or reduction of student support funds may initiate immediately if they are not achieving appropriate engagement.** The onus will then be on the student to engage with staff in order to agree a plan for improving attendance and engagement.

Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs)

3.6 Where a student has complex circumstances or health issues (including mental health issues) which may impact on their attendance, the College may exercise particular flexibility with regards to attendance. The College will agree attendance and participation plans directly with the student in these circumstances and this will be reflected in the student's PLSP.

PLSPs are created in partnership with a student in response to a disclosed need. Attendance may form part of the PLSP, but issues around attendance alone would not justify the creation of a PLSP. There is local support available for students to access if they have concerns around how their personal circumstances may be affecting attendance and engagement. For further information, the local Student Support team should be contacted and the Learner Support Policy consulted.

Legislative Responsibilities

3.7 All colleges in the UHI partnership have due regard to equalities legislation and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 when considering the position of students with protected characteristics and care experienced students. Colleges may exercise increased flexibility when considering attendance issues for groups of students impacted by this legislation (for example Care Experienced students, Disabled students, Student Parents and those on Maternity/Paternity/Adoption leave). In addition, colleges will be mindful of their corporate parenting responsibilities under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

4. Monitoring and Changes to SFC Guidance

4.1 Colleges will utilise local means of monitoring and reporting on attendance. This information will be used as appropriate for regional level reporting and analysis.

4.2 Annual changes to SFC policy will be considered by the Student Support Funds Policy Ownership Group and any necessary amendments made to the Attendance and Engagement Appendix.

Record of Further Education Attendance and Engagement Support

Record of Further Education Attendance and Engagement Support

Student Name	
Student Number	
College	
Staff Name	
Staff Position	

Details of Absence

Reasons for Absence

Plan and Timescale for Improving Attendance

Implications for Student Support Funds

Signed by Student / Has the student confirmed their understanding of the discussion?	
Staff Signature	
Date	