NORTH, WEST AND HEBRIDES
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Student Support Funds Policy

POL -NWH-008

Lead Officer (Post):	Head of Student Experience
Responsible Office/ Department:	Student Experience
Responsible Committee:	Finance and General Purpose
Review Officer (Post):	Student Services Manager
Date policy approved:	08/12/2025
Date policy last reviewed and updated:	08/12/2025
Date policy due for review:	08/12/2028
UHI Single Policy / UHI NWH Policy:	UHI Single Policy
Public face / College internal facing only	Public facing
Date of Equality Impact Assessment:	12/08/2025
Date of Privacy Impact Assessment:	Data Protection Officer has approved that no DPIA is required

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 UHI North, West and Hebrides 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 the Regional Outcome Agreement.
Impact Assessment	Equality Impact Assessment: August 2025 – 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 and the separate UHI North, West and Hebrides Student Support Funds Procedure 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 Education Maintenance Allowance, Further Education Bursaries Fund, FE Childcare Fund and the Further Education Discretionary Fund 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 (which includes the Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery Discretionary Fund and the International Student's Emergency Fund), the College Further and Higher Education Childcare Fund and the University Higher Education Childcare 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" (which includes the Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery Discretionary Fund and the International Student's Emergency 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 Student Support - Scottish Funding Council 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

3.3.4 Maintenance Allowance: The College follows the SFC guidance for this element.

3.3.5 Dependant Allowance: The College follows the SFC guidance for this element.

3.3.6 Study Expense Allowance: The College follows the SFC guidance for this element.

3.3.7 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 2 miles or more from the College.

3.3.8 Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance: The College follows the SFC guidance for this element.

3.3.9 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 and Engagement Appendix.

3.4 **EMA**

As defined in the current SFC guidelines, available Education Maintenance Allowance Guidance 2025-26 - Scottish Funding Council 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 and Engagement Appendix.

3.5 **Childcare Funds (Further and Higher Education)**

As defined in the current national policy and guidelines
https://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications/childcare-funding-for-college-students-2025-26/
Further Education , 2025-26 Higher Education 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 https://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications/fe-student-support-discretionary-funding-ay-2025-26/

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 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 Higher Education Discretionary Funds Guidance, 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" and draws specific attention to the needs of students from vulnerable/disadvantages backgrounds.

3.7.1 The College 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 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 and young estranged 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 **Re-assessment, Appeals and Grievances**

3.10.1 Students are entitled to request a re-assessment/raise a grievance related to the application of this policy and awarding of student support funds.

3.10.2 In the first instance, students should request a re-assessment/raise their grievance with college staff responsible for student support funds administration. Should this not resolve the concerns; the student will be able to escalate the issue by means of an impartial review.

3.10.3 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 Head of Student Experience has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy and the management of Student Support Funds.

7.2 The Student Funding Lead 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 Student Funding Team is responsible for ensuring that all enrolled students receiving EMA support have a signed Learning Agreement.

7.5 The lecturers and Learning Development Workers are responsible for ensuring that student attendance information is passed to the Student Funding Officer to satisfy the conditions of the relevant Student Support Fund 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 College Fee Waiver Policy AY 2025-26 - Scottish Funding Council

8.4 Scottish Funding Council (SFC) website

8.5 Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) website

9. Version Control and Change History

Version	Date	Endorsed by	Amendment(s)	Author
0	Nov 2018	Partnership Council	New single policy.	Student Support Funds Policy Ownership Group
1	Feb 2021	Partnership Council	Formatting changes and grammar corrections; 3.8.2: 'young estranged students' added; 3.10: Clarity added around informal steps before formal process initiated; 7.5: made more generic for local contextualisation.	Student Support Funds Policy Ownership Group
2	Dec 24		Rebranded and contextualised for UHI North, West and Hebrides	Student Services Manager
3	Nov 25		Minor amendments updating links etc	Student Services Manager
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