

Review of Summer Support for Students - Final Report

June 2023

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Ministerial Foreword

As the Minister with responsibility for Higher and Further Education, I am pleased to introduce the findings and recommendations of this review.



In May 2021, we committed to begin a review of the future of student summer support. As a first step, we provided an additional £20 million to support students over summer 2021 and established a Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group in August 2021 to inform the Review of Summer Support for Students.

As a government, we recognise the need to deliver a long-term

sustainable solution for supporting students over the summer months. This report details interim recommendations, progress to date and the next steps to achieving our long term goal of tackling inequality. I am pleased to confirm that the majority of the recommendations have been implemented, including; the creation of a dedicated page on the [Student Information Scotland website](#) providing guidance and links to helpful resources to support students over the summer; and the launch of a 12 monthly payment option for Higher Education students in receipt of the Care Experienced Bursary.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group and other stakeholders who contributed to this important piece of work. Your collaboration and feedback has helped steer this review and ensure that its findings and recommendations represent the needs of students studying across higher and further education in Scotland.

I would especially like to thank the students who gave up their time to share their experiences as part of the student engagement workshops. Your insights were invaluable in helping to shape the final recommendations on how the support available to students over the summer can be improved in the short, medium and long-term.

Graeme Dey, MSP

Minister for Higher Education, Further Education & Veterans

Introduction

The [First Steps 2021 document](#) committed to commence a review of the future of student summer support. This commitment followed the recommendation from the 2018 independent review of student support to allow flexibility for students around when they would receive financial support.

Currently, student support payments are paid during term time and do not extend into the summer months. To introduce this form of financial support to students over the summer would require for these payments to be provided over a 12 month period. These payments would also need to be set at a higher rate if students are to see an increase in their monthly income.



It is imperative that we implement a long-term sustainable solution to support students over the summer period with due consideration to the current cost of living crisis and in the context of developing policy for reform across the post school education, research and skills ecosystem.

As part of the 2020/21 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to introduce a range of substantial reforms to student support, including:

- a commitment that the total student support package reaches the equivalent of the Living Wage over the next three years;
- undertaking a 2 year programme to give students in receipt of the Care Experienced Bursary the option to receive their current funding in 12 monthly payments. We will use the findings of this to determine whether it should be extended to the undergraduate package from 2024/2025.

The introduction of a 12 monthly payment option combined with a package of support equivalent to the living wage would provide students with an improved financial support package for the duration of their studies, including over the summer. However, further consideration is also needed on how the current student support system operates to ensure that it is supportive and equitable in delivering for the people of Scotland.

Whilst this is the long-term goal, the Scottish Government recognised the need to review the support available to students over the summer more generally. This review sets out the steps taken to build an evidence base on the needs of students over summer, the mechanisms currently in place, and interim solutions for implementation whilst working towards the longer-term goal.

Background

As student support payments are not provided over the summer break, both students in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) generally rely on employment opportunities during this time. FE students often remain eligible to claim social security benefits over the summer period. This is also the case for some HE students, depending on their circumstances, such as those who are responsible for a child.

Students who experience financial difficulties over the summer months may be able to access Discretionary Funds which are administered by their college or university. Discretionary Funds (also known as hardship funds or emergency funds) are intended to provide non-repayable assistance to students in financial difficulties so that they are able to access and/or continue their course of education. This support is available to both FE and HE students until the end of July each year, however the onus is placed on colleges and universities on how they manage and administer these funds. Individual colleges and universities will determine if there is a need to retain funds over the summer if they expect there will be a demand from students in need of support over that period.



Anecdotal evidence from members of the Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group suggests that the funds are often being used as a top-up to student support payments where there is a shortfall between student income and expenditure. Most institutions use the fund proactively to prevent students from entering hardship. In doing so, some colleges and universities set up recurring monthly payments to students. They also determine how much to award each individual student applicant which has raised concerns that students face a 'postcode lottery' when applying for support.

In June 2021, the [Scottish Government announced an additional £20 million in summer hardship support](#) which was administered to students via their college and university Discretionary Funds. This additional funding brought the total support for students since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to more than £96 million. A proportion of these funds were made available to students up until 31st July 2021, with a further proportion being carried over to support students for the duration of the 2021/2022 Academic Year (AY). HE Discretionary Funds have now returned to the standard (pre-COVID) level for the 2022/2023 AY. Members of the Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group raised concerns that returning to normal budget levels may present a significant challenge for colleges and universities in managing their funding allocation for the full academic year, which would include over the summer months.

The Scottish Government set up the Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group (SSSEG) in August 2021 to work collaboratively on the topic of student summer support.

The Review of Summer Support for Students has been conducted in consultation with Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS), Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Colleges Scotland (CS), Universities Scotland (US), NUS Scotland, the Further Education Student Support Advisory Group (FESSAG), National Association of Student Money Advisors (NASMA) and Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG). The Group was chaired by the Scottish Government and the [Terms of Reference can be found at Annex A](#).

Early discussions with the SSSEG members indicated that support for students over the summer should extend beyond the financial aspect and include support such as money management, job opportunities and mental health advice. [Full details of the topics covered in relation to summer support for students are available at Annex B](#).

As a result, the Review of Summer Support for Students focussed on three key themes:

- **Financial Support** – reviewing the current financial support available to students over the summer months (including Discretionary Funds and benefits)
- **Timing of Payments** – the longer term aim to make student funding available over 12 months, in conjunction with the commitment to provide support equivalent to the living wage over the next three years
- **Holistic Support** – a package of support that extends beyond financial support to include employment opportunities, communications, financial management and aspects of mental health support.

Consultation and engagement

To gain an initial high-level insight from students on the financial support available over the summer, the Scottish Government conducted the Student Summer Support Survey. The online survey focused on students studying courses in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE), in between term-time and specifically over summer 2021. The [results publication detailing the outcomes of the Student Summer Support Survey](#) were published on 28th June 2022.

The findings from the survey were used to form the basis of the discussion topics at Student Engagement Workshops which were conducted throughout May 2022. The purpose of these were to gain an in-depth understanding of student experiences of financial management over the summer and to look collectively at the mechanisms needed to improve the support available to students.

The survey and engagement workshops were developed in consultation with the SSSEG. The results and feedback obtained from these are detailed in the sections below.

Student Summer Support Survey

The Student Summer Support Survey ran from December 2021 – January 2022 and received responses from 758 students across Scotland.

Key topics covered in this short survey included:

- student employment over summer 2021,
- student accommodation costs over summer 2021,
- applying for support from college/university Discretionary Funds, and
- access to benefits over the summer months.

A summary of the high-level findings can be found in the below infographic:

Student Summer Support Survey

758 valid responses were received to an online survey about the financial support received over the summer months (June to September 2021).

Students invited to take part were:

- FE and HE college students
- Undergraduate and Postgraduate students at university

Financial Support

57% of respondents struggled with financial support/income over the summer **more than** they did during term time

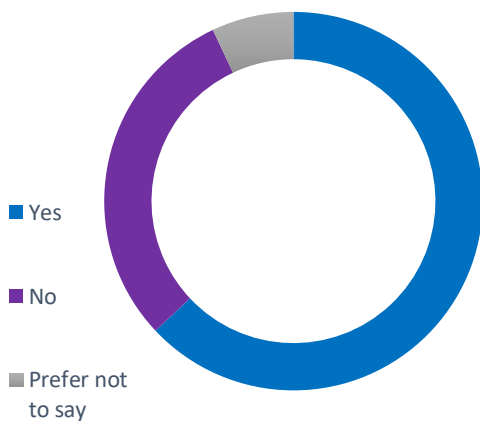
Rent and Accommodation Costs

67% of respondents to the survey said that they paid rent/accommodation costs over the summer of 2021

59% of these paid the same amount as they did during term time

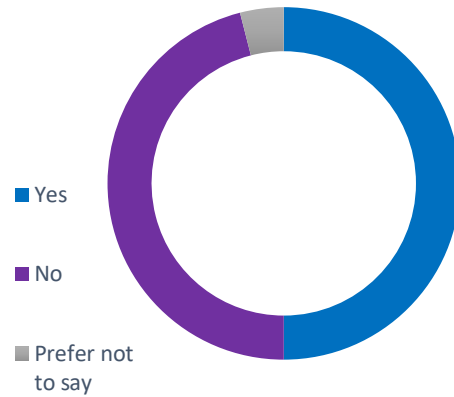
Hardship Experiences

63% of respondents experienced financial hardship over the summer of 2021



Employment

50% of respondents were in paid employment over the summer of 2021



The **most common reason** for not working over the summer, or only being employed for part of the summer 2021, was a **lack of employment opportunities**

Access to Benefits

48% of respondents said that they were not eligible for benefits over the summer months of 2021

25% of respondents did not know if they were able to access financial support from benefits for living costs and/or housing costs over the summer months

77% of **HE college respondents** experienced financial hardship

67% of **degree university respondents** experienced financial hardship

55% of **FE college respondents** experienced financial hardship

54% of **postgraduate university respondents** experienced financial hardship

As the survey was available to students to access on the Student Information Scotland website and the link was publicised by stakeholders, the survey sample was self-selecting. Therefore, the survey findings are not representative of all students in Scotland, and the results cannot be generalised to all FE and/or HE students, or the wider student population as a whole. Although the sample size is small, the full report does explore how this compares with the overall Scottish student population by level of study. The survey results publication provides an initial high-level insight into students' experiences of finance over the summer of 2021 and provided a platform from which to explore this issue further.

Student Engagement Workshops

Following on from the high-level results emerging from the survey, the Scottish Government conducted Student Engagement Workshops throughout May 2022 to obtain more in-depth information on student financial experiences over the summer. These workshops were comprised of students from FE and HE and included specific groups of students who were identified as most vulnerable in regards to support over the summer. This included students with care experience and student parents.



The Student Engagement Workshops focussed on four areas to be discussed with students in more detail as identified by the Student Summer Support Survey:

1. Financial Support
2. Discretionary Funds
3. Benefit Interaction and Entitlement
4. Communication and Awareness

Below is a summary of the key points and themes identified from the discussions that took place. Feedback from students has been grouped under the headings noted above.

Financial Support

1. Financial Costs

- Feedback from the workshops was that typically students incur the same financial costs over the summer as they do during term-time.
- Students also reported that they incur additional childcare costs over the summer as their children are not attending school or nursery. Some student parents

reported that they also pay to keep their child's place at nursery over the summer so that they can return in August.

- It was noted that some students are faced with council tax payments over the summer, particularly those who are not classed as a continuing student or those who are articulating from one course to another.
- Some students reported that they try to save throughout the year to manage their finances over the summer whereas some advised they are able to claim Universal Credit for this period.



2. Courses and Placements

- Students participating in the workshops reported difficulty in finding a balance between conducting a placement for their course over summer and working part-time to support themselves.
- Some students are required to resit part of their course or examinations over the summer which is also difficult to balance with employment
- Some courses are not eligible for a reimbursement of placement expenses and therefore the student has to subsidise these costs themselves.
- Some courses continue over the summer break (e.g. Medicine) and the study costs will therefore continue over this period.

3. Employment

- Some students reported that jobs specific to the summer period are difficult to come by and often employers will not take students on for fear of them leaving after the summer has ended.
- It was noted that the job market is competitive as students begin to look for work or to increase the number of hours they work over the summer period.

- Most students in the workshops agreed that parenting and caring responsibilities are difficult to balance with work and often limit student employment prospects over summer.
- Some students reported that they are unable to gain experience from volunteering as they need to find some form of employment in order to support themselves over the summer.

4. Timing of Payments

- Discussions were had around the 12 monthly payment option being made available to care experienced students from 2022/23 AY. Most students welcomed this approach and agreed that they would find it helpful if they were provided with this option.
- Some students reported that they think this approach would make it easier for them to budget and would welcome this option even if there was no monetary increase to their student support package.

“Applying for benefits and discretionary funding is a stressful process and neither are guaranteed. It would just make more sense to provide students with year-round financial support instead of passing on the problem to another body or to the student.”



Discretionary Funds

1. Awareness

- In general, students attending the workshops had heard of their college and university Discretionary Funds. However, a few were unaware that this support was also available to them over the summer.
- It was noted that colleges and universities have multiple funds available to students and that it is not necessarily clear what each of them is for.
- Some students reported that they don't think the funds are advertised particularly well at their institution whereas others advised that their institution promotes them at every opportunity.

2. Experience

- Discussions around the evidence required when applying for Discretionary Funds were that some students feel the process is invasive, degrading, unpredictable and inconsistent.
- Some students also reported that questions are framed in a way that they must have exhausted all other options, including turning to debt solutions such as overdrafts and credit cards.
- Students also identified barriers which hindered them from getting support such as not having applied for a student loan and/or inability to provide their partner's income information.
- In general, students reported that there is still a stigma around applying for Discretionary Funds. They also reported that myth-busting is needed as to how some institutions view students.
- The length of time for an application to be processed can vary across institutions and can be affected by external factors such as staff shortages.



3. Suggested Improvements

- Although some institutions promote the availability of the funds to their students well, some students felt that more focus could be given to the advertisement of these funds.
- As a way to introduce a level of consistency, some students suggested that specific amounts could be allocated depending on the item of expenditure e.g.: a set amount if the support was for rent or for bills.
- It was noted that providing applicants with reassurance on how their information will be used would also be helpful. For example: the use of privacy notices and making them readily available to students.
- Some students reported that the current process for applying for Discretionary Funds is impersonal and that they would benefit from a more relational process where they are able to contact the funding manager directly (in person or via telephone) rather than email a generic inbox.

Benefit Interaction & Entitlement

1. Applying for benefits

- Students in the workshops reported issues with transitioning from their student support payments to benefits/Universal Credit payments over the summer.
- Students are required to apply for Universal Credit on the last day of their course and the average timescale for a Universal Credit application is six weeks, which means a delay in receiving their first payment and a larger gap between their final student support payment and first benefit payment.



2. Information Available

- Student participants reported that when looking to apply for benefits over the summer there was a lack of awareness as to what they were eligible to apply for.
- In terms of benefit support for students, most students suggested that it would be helpful to have advisers or welfare rights officers at colleges and universities who have specialised knowledge in this area.
- In general, students reported that they feel that there is a lack of information and guidance available in this area.

Communications & Awareness

1. Communications from Institutions

- The majority of students participating in the workshops reported that they mainly receive information from their college/university via email. However, some institutions also use internal portal systems and apps which students have access to.
- In some cases, students reported that they are contacted by their course tutor or other member of staff directly. However, some students reported that not all institutions continue this level of support into and throughout the summer.



2. Resources Available

- Some students reported that upon starting their course, they are provided with information on the counselling and wellbeing services at their institution. They are also provided with information on Discretionary Funds. This communication continues to be signposted throughout the year and on the lead up to summer.
- It was also noted that some institutions run budgeting workshops for their students at the beginning of the academic year.
- In terms of advice on summer jobs, some students reported that the college/university Careers Advice Service has been particularly helpful.

Outcomes and Recommendations

Based on the feedback obtained from the survey, engagement workshops and the SSSEG, the Scottish Government have produced interim recommendations to improve summer support for students.

Recommendations for 2022/23 AY & 2023/24 AY

1. Discretionary Funds

College and University Discretionary Funds should be used (where available) to support students over the summer.

2. £350 Loan Uplift

An initial £350 loan uplift to be introduced from 2022/23 AY for HE students, ensuring the most disadvantaged students can access £8,100 per year through a combination of bursary and loan.

3. Guiding Principles

Introduction of Guiding Principles for institutions administering Discretionary Funds to provide a level of consistency in the administration of these funds.

4. 12 monthly Payments Programme

Launch of 12 monthly payment option for HE care experienced students from 2022/23 AY, where eligible students can choose to receive their Care Experienced Bursary payments over 12 months.

5. Information and Guidance

SAAS to update the HE Discretionary Fund Guidance for 2022/23 AY to include a dedicated section on summer support and to introduce a specific guide for students.

6. Helpful Resources

A dedicated page on the Student Information Scotland website to be created that provides advice and links to helpful resources to support students over the summer.

7. Information on Benefit Entitlement

Develop benefit guidance in conjunction with the Child Poverty Action Group, which will be hosted on the Student Information Scotland and SAAS websites and issued to colleges/universities, ensuring consistent and well informed advice is provided to students.

8. Awareness of Funds

Institutions to promote the availability of Discretionary Funds amongst their students with clear and regular communication throughout the academic year, including the summer period providing funds are remaining.

9. Student Information Scotland

SAAS, SFC and institutions to promote the Student Information Scotland website on a larger scale to ensure students and institutions are maximising the resources and support available to them.

10. Monitoring of Funds

SFC and SAAS to monitor college and university Discretionary Fund pots.

11. FE Summer Support

FE students should continue to access benefits over the summer period as a means of support. FE colleges can provide a 'transition payment' to help bridge the gap between the FE course finishing and the student's first benefit payment.

12. Student Support Package – FE

To provide an increase to the Care Experienced Bursary package for further education students.

13. Student Support Package – HE

To provide an incremental increase to the student support package for all higher education undergraduate students, including care experienced and estranged students, as the next step towards achieving the living wage commitment.

15.12 monthly Payment Option

To introduce the 12 monthly payment option to all undergraduate students, ensuring that students have the option to receive their student support payments over the summer period.

16. Budget Calculator

Introduce a link to the budget calculator on students' Award Notices from SAAS to support them with managing their finances.

17. Care Experienced Accommodation Grant

To consider the current operational processes for administering the Care Experienced Accommodation Grant to ensure care experienced students do not fall into rent arrears as they enter into the summer period.

18. Cross Government Working

To continue to work across government on the complete support offering available to students.

Progress to Date

We are pleased to report that the majority of the interim recommendations have been implemented, with the remainder being in progress for delivery by the end of the parliamentary term. Since the start of the review of summer support, we have delivered the following improvements to help further support students over this period:

February 2022

- [We announced a £350 loan uplift to the higher education undergraduate student support package for 2022/23 AY](#)
- [We introduced a new 12 monthly payment option for higher education students receiving the Care Experienced Bursary, so support is also available over the summer months](#)

June 2022

- Created a [dedicated page on the Student Information Scotland website that provides advice and helpful resources to support students over the summer](#)
- Published [benefit guidance for students on the Student Information Scotland and SAAS websites](#)

August 2022

- Updated the [HE Discretionary Fund Guidance](#) to include a section on summer support
- We added a link to the [Student Information Scotland Budget Calculator](#) to the SAAS Student Award Notice to help students manage their finances

September 2022

- We published [Guiding Principles for institutions administering Discretionary Funds](#) and wrote to college and university principals asking them to sign up to and adhere to these principles.

March 2023

- [We announced a £900 uplift to the higher education undergraduate student support package for 2023/24 AY](#)
- [We announced a £900 uplift to the care experienced bursary for further and higher education students for 2023/24 AY](#)

Next Steps

We continue to work towards our long term goal to provide year round support to students at the level of the Living Wage.

We are currently working to provide all higher education undergraduate students with the option to receive their student support payments over a 12 month period. This follows on from the option being provided to students in receipt of the Care Experienced Bursary from 2022/23 AY.

On 7 June, the Scottish Government published [the final report on the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape](#). The Review sets out fifteen recommendations which would amount to significant reform of the delivery landscape for post-school education and skills. As a result of this, we now need to consider the current student support system as it operates and ensure that it is fit for the future.

Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group Terms of Reference

Purpose

To establish a new Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group to ensure key stakeholders are informed and collaborating on work being undertaken across student financial support policy and the 2021 Student Support Manifesto commitments (including 'First 100 days commitments').

This will provide opportunities for collaborative thinking and generating ideas for policy development.

Membership

The group will be chaired by Roddy Macdonald (Deputy Director in Advanced Learning and Science Directorate, Scottish Government) and will include representatives from:

- Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS)
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
- Colleges Scotland
- Universities Scotland
- NUS Scotland
- NASMA (National Association of Student Money Advisors)
- CPAG Scotland (Child Poverty Action Group)
- FESSAG Representative

Other stakeholder groups may be invited to join the group on an ad hoc basis and depending on future agenda items.

Timetable

The Student Support Engagement Group will meet approximately every 6-8 weeks from 10th August 2021. There is no proposed end date at this time.

This group will be established in addition to existing regular meetings.

Secretariat

The secretariat function will be provided by Scottish Government officials

Student Support Stakeholder Engagement Group

Details of Meetings and Topics

Meeting 1 – August 2021

Focus on stakeholder views on summer student support and identification of key themes to be considered as part of the review: Financial Support; Timing of Payments; Holistic Support

Meeting 2 – September 2021

Focus on student mental health (Holistic Support) and the creation of a Student Summer Support Survey suggested by stakeholders to engage with students directly

Meeting 3 – October 2021

Focus on NUS research findings from their national ‘Coronavirus Student Survey’ and finalisation of research questions for the ‘Student Summer Support Survey’ (presentation from NUS)

Meeting 4 – December 2021

Focus on student support interaction with benefits; benefit entitlement over summer; accessibility to a summer support package and identification of potential priority groups for support (presentations from Social Security Scotland and CPAG)

Meeting 5 – January 2022

Focus on the Higher Education Discretionary Fund model as a means of administering summer support (presentation from NASMA)

Meeting 6 – March 2022

Focus on high level research findings from the SG Student Summer Support Survey and discussion on delivering Student Engagement Workshops to gain a more in depth understanding of student financial experiences over the summer (using the results of the survey to help develop these)

Meeting 7 – April 2022

Focus on refining the Discretionary Fund model and exploring the potential of creating some form of agreement in principle for administering Discretionary Funds, similar to the approach implemented by the Hub for Success across their 7 partner institutions (presentation from the Hub for Success)

Meeting 8 – June 2022

Focus on feedback from Student Engagement Workshops and development of Discretionary Fund Guiding Principles



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