



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoinachaidh na h-Alba

**Additional FE Student Support
COVID-19 Discretionary Funding for
Colleges in AY 2021-22**

SFC Announcement

Issue Date: 25 June 2021

Additional FE Student Support: Coronavirus Discretionary Funding for summer support in colleges

Issue date: 25 June 2021

Reference: SFC/AN/22/2021

Summary: Announcement of £3 million of additional Coronavirus Discretionary Funding for colleges to support FE students in hardship over summer.

FAO: Principals / Executive Directors / Finance Directors / Chairs / Board Secretaries / Student Support contacts in Scotland's colleges/Regional Strategic Bodies

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Additional FE student support: Coronavirus Discretionary Funding for summer support in colleges

Summary

1. I am writing to announce £3 million of additional student support discretionary funding for colleges to support payments for Further Education (FE) students in summer hardship due to COVID-19.
2. This announcement compliments the HE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund guidance published by the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) in June 2021. It also supplements SFC's student support [FE Discretionary Fund guidance](#).

Background

3. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the extended lockdowns and the lack of temporary employment, many students are facing financial hardship. The Scottish Government has [committed to continue supporting students experiencing hardship](#) as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. £20 million has been allocated for supporting students during the summer months and in the coming Academic Year (AY) 2021-22. Of that funding, £3 million has been allocated to SFC for FE students at college and £17 million has been allocated to SAAS for HE students at college and university.
4. In April 2021, SFC updated its [Student Support COVID FAQs](#) to reflect the guidance that, where FE students need to repeat or extend their courses because of disruption as a result of the pandemic, they should continue to be able to access student support for the duration of any extended activity. The guidance also recognises that students who are transitioning to/from social security benefits over the summer may need to be supported from the Discretionary Fund whilst they wait for claims to be processed.

Purpose of funding

5. This funding should be allocated to students, at the discretion of colleges, who are in immediate need of additional financial support. Priority should be given to students who:
 - have been impacted financially by COVID-19 and are facing hardship; and/or
 - are unable to secure employment because of the pandemic; and/or
 - are transitioning to/from social security benefits over the summer; and/or
 - need to complete or repeat elements of their courses over the summer and the next AY because of disruption resulting from the pandemic and therefore require extended support.

International students

6. As with the previously announced [£3 million additional FE Discretionary Funding for Winter COVID-19 payments](#), international students, both full and part-time, who have not previously had access to student support discretionary funds, are eligible to apply for this funding.
7. Students can also access this funding for support towards the costs of managed isolation and testing when their reason for travel is essential. Visa schemes for international students have a financial requirement whereby the student must have sufficient funds in their bank account in order to qualify. If the student has funds in their bank account as part of the visa requirement, this can be disregarded for the purposes of assessing financial hardship if the student is seeking financial support for the cost of managed isolation and testing.
8. International students should only be supported from this specific Coronavirus Discretionary Fund. International students remain ineligible for support from the main FE Discretionary Funds for AY 2021-22.
9. Colleges are reminded that, in this context, 'international' includes European Union (EU) students not eligible for home fee status or student support, for example those who have come to Scotland specifically for the purpose of study. However, many students who are EU nationals – primarily those with settled or pre-settled status – are eligible for student support, including support from the main FE Discretionary Funds.
10. It is a matter for individual colleges to determine how much of their Coronavirus Discretionary Fund they choose to allocate to international students. Recent analysis of the Winter COVID-19 Fund issued in February 2021, showed a low number of international students were supported from that fund. This reflects the relatively low numbers of international students enrolled on FE courses.

Allocation of funding to students

11. Colleges are encouraged to be flexible in exercising their discretion in assessing the needs of students, and should note that there is no maximum cap per student. (This is consistent with SFC's main FE Discretionary Fund policy where the normal £4,000 cap has been removed since March 2020 due to COVID-19 circumstances). Individual colleges remain responsible for identifying appropriate award levels in line with their existing budget and overall demand on the funds.
12. In recognition of the timescales attached to the administration of this fund, colleges should take a proportionate approach when considering each application in regards to evidence submitted/assessed.

13. In addition to their application, colleges may wish to request that students provide a recent bank statement (which can be a screenshot) as the evidence for them seeking support for hardship reasons. For any students seeking support for accommodation costs that have not been refunded by the college, proof of accommodation (rent/tenancy agreement) may be requested.
14. Following discussions with NUS Scotland we ask colleges, where possible (and if applicable), to provide support to students from this fund in the form of cash or bank payments rather than supermarket vouchers.
15. This guidance should be read in conjunction with SFC's student support [FE Discretionary Fund guidance](#). It should also be read in conjunction with [The Education \(Access Funds\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Scotland\) Determination 2021](#) and [The Education \(Access Funds\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Scotland\) Direction 2021](#).

Interaction with HE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund

16. Colleges will receive separate allocations of Coronavirus Discretionary Funds from SFC and SAAS, to be used for FE and HE students respectively. The level of demand from these different student groups is influenced by a number of external factors, such as the availability of social security benefits for some students, and is therefore difficult to predict. Colleges can exercise flexibility in using their FE and HE Coronavirus Discretionary Funds. They may use the HE fund to support FE students or the FE Fund to support HE students, if this better reflects patterns of student demand (see paragraphs 22-25).
17. Transfers of funding between the HE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund and FE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund should be reflected in the data returns submitted to SFC and SAAS.

Allocation of funding to colleges

18. Most of this additional funding (£2.5 million) has been allocated to colleges/regions in proportion to their core SFC student support budgets for AY 2020-21. £0.5 million has been allocated in proportion to international student numbers.
19. Individual college/region funding allocations are shown in **Annex A**.
20. SFC will pay these funds alongside the core student support funding according to colleges' monthly drawdown requests. The Coronavirus Discretionary Fund will be available from July 2021 and throughout the course of AY 2021-22. The drawdown request deadline for July 2021 payment has now passed, but colleges requiring to be paid from this fund in July 2021, can still request this by emailing Catherine Atkinson (catkinson@sfc.ac.uk) by Monday 12 July. Any requests will be paid outwith the July main payment run but before the end of the month.

21. These funds are required to be spent by 31 July 2022 and any unspent funds must be recovered.

Fund management

22. The Coronavirus Discretionary Funds are ring-fenced and cannot be transferred into any other fund. However, as detailed above, transfers can be made between the FE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund and the HE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund, to best meet demand from college students who have been impacted by COVID-19. Note that this flexibility between the FE and HE levels applies only to the Coronavirus Discretionary Funds only and not the main FE and HE Discretionary Funds.
23. You should not transfer any funds from your core SFC student support or discretionary fund budget into the Coronavirus Discretionary Funds. Colleges can of course continue to use their core student support budget to support eligible students affected by COVID-19 through discretionary funding; however, the additional £3 million fund should be the priority source.
24. In order to maximise the support available for students, we would encourage colleges to prioritise the use of the Coronavirus Discretionary Fund; particularly for those students who are not eligible for support from your core student support/discretionary fund budget.
25. Colleges can use this additional funding to assist with the administration or advertisement of this new fund.

Reporting requirements and monitoring

26. Colleges will be required to separately report on spend of the FE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund, using a similar format to the report on the Winter COVID-19 Fund. We are conscious of adding further administrative measures for sector staff, but for the moment we ask colleges to keep a record of the number of international and EU students supported by this additional funding.
27. The timing of the reporting requirements for these funds and further details of the format of returns will be confirmed in the coming weeks.
28. Based on the information returned in the monitoring reports, SFC will recover any funds that are unspent by 31 July 2022.

Conditions of grant

29. The following conditions of grant apply to this funding:
 - Funds must only be used for the purpose(s) for which they are being allocated.

- Funds must be spent by the end of AY 2021-22 (by 31 July 2022).
- Funds not spent by the end of AY 2021-22 (by 31 July 2022) will be recovered.

Further information

30. If you require any additional information or have any queries, please contact the SFC Student Support team by emailing studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. MacDonald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Lorna MacDonald
Director of Finance