

## **Student Support in Colleges - Redirection of Travel and Childcare Cost support and increased flexibility in the use of FE Discretionary Funds related to COVID-19 financial hardship**

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) allocates Further Education (FE) Student Support funding to colleges across Bursary, Childcare and Discretionary funds.
2. The national COVID-19 situation may mean that many students are experiencing additional financial hardship.

### **Travel costs**

3. SFC has already [advised](#) that, due to national self-isolating guidance and in light of colleges ceasing face-to-face teaching, students should no longer require travel costs support. Therefore for all FE student support payments going forward, there should no longer be an award for travel costs included. Colleges should look to redirect any funds previously set aside for travel costs to enhance available discretionary funds.

### **Childcare costs**

4. Now that many childcare providers are closed and offering a reduction or no charge in fees, SFC has updated its [FE Student Support in Colleges - COVID-19 FAQs](#) to advise that where childcare fees are reduced or no longer required, colleges should look to redirect these funds to enhance available discretionary funds.

### **FE Discretionary Funds**

5. Currently colleges should allocate discretionary funds to those students experiencing financial hardship, as outlined in the [FE Discretionary Fund 2019-20 Guidance](#). There is normally a maximum limit of £4,000 per individual student in a single academic year, as detailed in paragraphs 20-21 of the 2019-20 Guidance. However, in light of the difficult circumstances students may be experiencing due to COVID-19 changes, **SFC has temporarily removed this maximum limit.**
6. This means that, going forward, colleges should assess all discretionary fund applications on the basis of current financial hardship need. Any previous discretionary fund awards which the student has received in AY 2019-20, prior to 13 March 2020, should not be taken into account.
7. SFC expects colleges to continue to assess discretionary funding applications within the limits of the financial resources that the college currently has

available, and encourages colleges to seek to maximise the number of students they can support with the funds they have available.

8. Colleges should continue to consider when making any discretionary awards to students on benefits, how such an award may affect students' benefits payments. Colleges may wish to consider advising these students about the potential to apply for [crisis grants](#) from their local authority, as these do not affect Universal Credit.
9. SFC has already worked with colleges to arrange for some of their April-July 2020 student support funding allocation to be paid in March 2020 where requested, so that colleges have access to funds to be able to make awards immediately to students facing increased financial hardship.
10. SFC will ask colleges to provide data at the end of the academic year about the amounts of travel and childcare costs they were able to redirect to discretionary funds, and how many students they were able to fund in relation to COVID-19 related financial hardship.
11. The National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland is concerned about students receiving financial support in the form of vouchers. While all financial support is helpful, in these current times, vouchers can be more difficult to use, and do not allow the student the flexibility they require to access what they most need. SFC therefore recommends that, where possible, all student support funding awards in this current period should be made on a cash basis (usually paid to the student by bank transfer).

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