



Higher Education Discretionary Funds Guidance

**Coronavirus Discretionary Fund
2021-22
June 2021**



**The Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

USEFUL CONTACTS

Student Awards Agency Scotland

Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
EDINBURGH
EH11 3UT

<http://www.saas.gov.uk/>

If you have any queries about eligibility or implementation of the regulations presented in this guidance, please contact the SAAS Policy Team who will be able to advise you further.

Saas_policy@gov.scot



The Scottish Government

Student Financial Support Team
Atlantic Quay
150 Broomielaw
Glasgow
G2 8LU

<https://www.gov.scot/>



**The Scottish
Government**

CORONAVIRUS DISCRETIONARY FUND

PURPOSE

These notes provide guidance to assist Fund Managers in the operation of the 2021-22 Higher Education (HE) Coronavirus Discretionary Fund for which funding has been allocated to them by Scottish Ministers.

These additional funds will be distributed in June and colleges and universities can utilise their allocation up to 31st July 2022.

Please note: This guidance supplements the main HE Discretionary Fund guidance document which will be issued to the sector in due course, and should be read in conjunction.

Institutions may also supplement this guidance with their own fund procedures.

ABOUT THE FUND

- Priority should be given to those students who are unable to secure employment because of the pandemic but all eligible students impacted financially by COVID-19 can apply.
- Any eligible students impacted financially by COVID-19 have been added to the list of priority groups.
- [International and EU students \(full and part-time\)](#) are able to access the Coronavirus Fund.
- All nursing and midwifery students can access the fund up to 31 July 2022.
- The £4,000 cap per student does not apply to the Coronavirus Fund. This does not mean that this level of funding should be made available to individual students without due consideration of someone's circumstances. Individual institutions remain responsible for identifying appropriate award levels in line with their existing budget and overall demand on the funds.
- This fund can be used to support **all** students up to 31 July 2022, subject to funds being available.
- The main HE Discretionary Fund can still be used to support students impacted by COVID-19 but this fund should be the priority source. However, institutions should budget accordingly throughout the academic year, particularly concerning international/EU students who cannot access the main HE Discretionary Fund.

ELIGIBILITY

This fund can be used to support **all** students. This includes **international (including EU students) full and part-time, and also includes Nursing and Midwifery students**. International students include students resident in Scotland who do not qualify for home tuition fee status, as well as those travelling here specifically for study purposes. You should only be providing your international and EU students with support from the Coronavirus Fund. International/EU students and students not listed in schedule 1 to the main HE Discretionary Fund remain ineligible for support from the main HE Discretionary Funds for 2021-22.

The Coronavirus Fund is not solely for international students and all other students can be supported from this additional money as well. Fund managers should however check that students who are eligible for other forms of living cost support from SAAS have pursued those other funding options first.

It is a matter for individual colleges and universities to determine how much of their Coronavirus Fund they choose to direct at international and EU students. Recent analysis of the Winter Covid Fund issued to the sector in February 2021, showed that approximately 40% of that fund was spent on international and EU students. This will be very different at each institution and there is no onus on colleges and universities to allocate a specific amount – it is at your discretion.

ASSESSMENTS

A balanced approach should be taken when considering each application in regards to evidence submitted/assessed. However, it remains at the discretion of each institution as to what evidence is permitted.

In addition to their application a student **may** provide:

- proof of their accommodation (rent/ tenancy agreement) for those who are seeking support for accommodation costs
- a recent bank statement (can be screenshot) for those who are seeking support for other hardship reasons.
- details of their weekly income/expenditure.
- any other information which the institution feels is relevant to assessing hardship.

APPEALS, APPLICATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In line with the main HE Discretionary Fund, institutions should have an appeals procedure in place for cases where students have applied unsuccessfully for help from all the funds. This procedure should be clear and students should be informed of their right to appeal. It will be for each institution to resolve any appeals internally with individual students about the award of a payment from the funds. Appeals should not be referred to the Scottish Ministers or SAAS.

Institutions should have a transparent application and decision-making process. Again, it will be for each institution to ensure that they have their own arrangements in place.

A copy of this and the main HE Discretionary Fund guidance document will be published on the SAAS website at: <https://www.saas.gov.uk/guides/other-sources-of-funding> and can be referred to in any appeal documentation.

FINANCIAL RETURNS

The Coronavirus Discretionary Fund is available to use up to 31 July 2022.

Audit & Reporting

These funds **will** be incorporated into the end of October 2022 returns but institutions will need to report separately on the Coronavirus Fund. Colleges will be asked to provide returns on the amount of Coronavirus Funds that were transferred between the FE and HE funds. You will be asked for a high-level state of play return at the 31 March 2022, in line with normal Finance practice.

Monitoring

We are conscious of adding further administrative measures for sector staff but we would ask you to keep a note of the number of international/ EU students who receive support from this fund. For colleges, we would also ask that you keep a note of sums transferred between your FE and HE Coronavirus Funds.

We are committed to monitoring the spend of this fund along with the main HE Discretionary Fund so further requests for high level spend may be requested during the 2021-22 academic year. We anticipate this will be at the end of November 2021 and the end of March 2022. However, additional adhoc requests may be necessary depending on the impact of the pandemic throughout the year.

Return of Funds

As noted above, these funds will be incorporated into the end of October 2022 returns.

Q + A

Please refer to main Discretionary Fund guidance for information on the main Discretionary Fund/ previous Covid support.

Q. Can we use the funds before the start of the new academic year, commencing on 1st August?

A. Yes, you can use the funds straight away for continuing students but should budget accordingly throughout the duration of the 2021-22 academic year. New students can access support from the start of the new academic year, which is 1st August 2021.

Q. Can we retain any of the unspent funds?

A. No – any unspent funds available at 31st July 2022 should be included as part of the October 2022 return and returned to SAAS.

Q. Can we use these funds for home students?

A. Yes – these funds can be used for all students. It is a matter for each institution to decide if you wish to allocate a specific sum for international and EU students.

Q. Would access to these funds impact on the requirements under the student visa scheme i.e. 'no recourse to public funds?'

A. No – the terms of the visa does not preclude international students from accessing hardship support through the Coronavirus Discretionary Fund.

Q. What are the priority groups for these funds?

A. Priority should be given to those students who are facing financial issues related to being unable to secure any employment. Students who are facing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19 should also be a priority.

Q. What about our first instalment of the main 2021-22 allocation – when should we receive that?

A. This should be paid in August, as normal. Please be aware that the eligibility requirements remain in place for the main HE Discretionary Funds. International students are therefore ineligible for support from the main Discretionary Funds and nursing and midwifery students should be directed to their own Nursing and Midwifery ring-fenced allocation.

Q. (Colleges only) Can I move money between the HE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund and the FE Coronavirus Fund administered by SFC, into the main 2020-21 fund, or the main 2021-22 fund?

A. Yes. You can use your allocations of FE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund and HE Coronavirus Discretionary Funds flexibly to meet demand from your FE and HE students. If you transfer funding between the HE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund and FE Coronavirus Discretionary Fund, you should reflect the transfer when submitting financial returns. You may also be asked to report in-year on this when we carry out analysis of current spending across the sector.

Q. Can I move money from the Coronavirus Discretionary Fund, into the main 2021-22 fund?

A. Yes, this function is available from February 2022 enabling institutions to transfer monies between funds.

Q. Is the £4,000 limit in place for students?

A. No – the limit has been removed. However, this does not mean that this level of funding should be made available to individual students without due consideration of someone's circumstances. Individual institutions remain responsible for identifying appropriate award levels in line with their existing budget and overall demand on the funds.

Q. Can we continue to support students with the use of supermarket vouchers?

A. We would ask HEIs, where possible, to try and provide this support to students in cash/ bank payment, rather than supermarket vouchers.

Q. Can we use these additional funds to support students in receipt of the Nursing and Midwifery bursary?

A. Yes – all nursing and midwifery students can be supported through the Coronavirus Fund.

Q. Can we use these additional funds for any advertising/ administrative costs?

A. Yes – these funds can be used to assist with the administration or advertisement of the additional money. Administration costs can include reasonable staffing costs incurred for bringing in temporary staff to help administer the fund.

Q. Can we use these funds to support groups of students at one time without undertaking individual assessments?

A. No. The fund is available to those individual students who you have established are facing financial hardship.

Q. Do we need to take into account the amount of money that a student may have in their bank account when considering financial support for managed isolation?

A. The student must be experiencing financial hardship in order to access support through the fund including for support towards the costs of managed isolation and testing. HEIs should be mindful, however, that the student visa scheme does have a financial requirement whereby the student must have sufficient monies in their bank account in order to qualify. If the student has money 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.

Q. Can we support students on exchange programmes (such as ERASMUS) which have come to an end with the cost of managed isolation (quarantine) and testing?

A. Yes. Providing the travel is essential (for example, the course has come to an end), the student is facing financial hardship and requires support with these costs, the funds can be used.

Q. Can we support students who are undertaking a period of study abroad and require support with the cost of managed isolation (quarantine) and/ or testing whilst in their host country?

A. Yes. The student would need to have a valid reason for travel in line with the current travel restrictions/ exemptions and be demonstrating financial hardship (hardship assessment noted above would apply).

Q. Do students eligible for living cost support have to access that funding from SAAS or another UK funding body before receiving support from this fund?

A. Yes. The student has to have taken out some form of living cost support, but this does NOT have to be the maximum living cost support available to them. This includes Dentistry students who are receiving the one-off Dental Bursary.

EU AND INTERNATIONAL Q+A SECTION

Q. Can we support CONTINUING international/EU students who are returning to Scotland with the cost of managed isolation (quarantine) and testing?

A. Yes. The student would need to have a valid reason for travel at this time in line with the current travel restrictions/ exemptions and be demonstrating financial hardship (hardship assessment noted above would apply).

Q. Can we support NEW international/ EU students who are planning to start a course in Scotland, with the cost of managed isolation (quarantine) and testing?

A. Yes, but only from the 1st August 2021. The student would need to have a valid reason for travel at this time in line with the current travel restrictions/ exemptions and be demonstrating financial hardship (hardship assessment noted above would apply).

Q. Can we use the fund to support students domiciled in Scotland who would not normally qualify for home tuition fees or SAAS support?

A. **Yes.** There are no residency conditions with this fund and it can be used to support all students. This includes those students domiciled in Scotland who do not have a form of 'settled' status, such as asylum seekers.

Q. Can we use the fund to support EU/ international students with the cost of their tuition fees?

A. **No.** The fund cannot be used to pay the cost of tuition fees. This remains a matter for individual students.

Q. Can we support EU/ international students who require to return to their home country with the cost of managed isolation (quarantine) and testing?

A. Yes. The student would need to have a strong reason for travel during the academic year depending on any travel restrictions and be demonstrating financial hardship (hardship assessment noted above would apply).

Q. Can EU/ international nursing and midwifery students access this fund?

A. Yes. EU/ international nursing and midwifery students can access hardship support from this fund.

Q. Can we use the funds to support EU/ international students who have graduated and completed their studies in 2020-21 but are unable to return home because of travel restrictions?

A. Yes. You can support those students up to 31st July 2021.