



# Higher Education Discretionary Funds Guidance

**Coronavirus Discretionary Fund**

**March 2021**

Updated – 4 March 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](mailto:Saas_policy@gov.scot)



### **The Scottish Government**

Student Support and Participation Team  
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G2 8LU

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**The Scottish  
Government**

# CORONAVIRUS DISCRETIONARY FUND

## PURPOSE

These notes provide guidance to assist Fund Managers in the operation of the Higher Education (HE) Coronavirus Discretionary Fund (referred to as the Winter Covid payment) for which funding has been allocated to them by Scottish Ministers.

The additional funds were distributed in February and HEIs are encouraged to utilise their allocation before 31 March 2021 **but are permitted to carry forward up to 27% of their allocation until 31 July 2021.**

**Please note: This guidance supplements the main Discretionary Fund guidance document and should be read in conjunction. It should also be read in conjunction with the Education (Access Funds) (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Determination 2021.**

## ABOUT THE FUND

- Priority should be given to those students who are facing additional accommodation costs and are unable to secure rent rebates while not returning to their term-time accommodation.
- 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 these ring-fenced funds.
- All nursing and midwifery students can access these funds up to 31 July 2021.
- The £4,000 cap per student does not apply to the ring-fenced fund.
- This fund should be used to support all students up to 31 March 2021. HEIs are permitted to carry over up to 27% of their allocation until 31 July 2021. Should an HEI be sitting with more than 27% of this allocation left as at 31 March, the difference above the 27% would require to be returned to SAAS no later than 16 April 2021.

## ELIGIBILITY

The main change for this fund only is that the amount you have been allocated can be used to support **all** students. This includes **international (including EU students) full and part-time**, who have not previously been eligible to apply for support from the Discretionary Funds. You should only be providing your international and EU students and nursing and midwifery students with support from the 'Winter Covid Payment'. International students and students not listed in schedule 1 to the main HE Discretionary Fund remain ineligible for support from the rest of your existing HE Discretionary Funds and nursing and midwifery students should be directed in the first instance to the Nursing and Midwifery Fund.

The ring-fenced 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.

## ASSESSMENTS

In recognition of the timescales attached to the administration of this fund, we have agreed that a proportionate approach should be taken when considering each application in regards to evidence submitted/ assessed.

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.

## FINANCIAL RETURNS

HEIs are encouraged to utilise their allocation of the Coronavirus Discretionary Fund by 31 March 2021, however you are able to carry forward up to 27% of that allocation into the 2021-22 FY and use it until 31 July 2021.

Should a HEI be sitting with more than 27% of their allocation on 31 March 2021 then the amount over and above the 27% must be returned to SAAS no later than 16 April 2021.

### Audit & Reporting

These funds **will** be incorporated into the end of October 2021 returns. There will be no requirement to audit these funds prior to the end of the 2020-21 FY. You will be asked for a high-level state of play return at the 31 March 2021, 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 and nursing and midwifery students who receive support from this fund.

We are committed to monitoring the spend of this fund along with the main HE Discretionary Fund and N&M Discretionary Fund so further requests for high level spend may be requested over the remainder of this academic year.

### Return of Funds

As noted above, these funds will be incorporated into the end of October 2021 returns. However, if a HEI has in excess of 27% of the allocation remaining as of 31 March then the amount over and above the 27% would need to be returned to SAAS by 16 April following the standard returns process.

If you require to return funds by 16 April, please notify SAAS Finance via [SAAS\\_Finance\\_Mailbox@gov.scot](mailto:SAAS_Finance_Mailbox@gov.scot) at the point of return of the money with a note of the amount that is being returned.

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

**Q. Why do these funds have to be used by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021?**

A. As noted above, HEIs are encouraged to utilise these additional funds by 31 March but can carry forward up to 27% of their allocation to use until 31 July 2021.

**Q. Can we retain any of the unspent funds?**

A. No – any unspent funds by the 31<sup>st</sup> March (above the 27% permissible carryover) should be returned to SAAS by 16<sup>th</sup> April. Any unspent funds available at 31<sup>st</sup> July should be included as part of the October return and returned to SAAS.

**Q. Can we use these funds for home students?**

A. Yes – these funds can be used for all students. Home and International.

**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 accommodation costs and are unable to secure rent rebates while not returning to their term-time accommodation. Students who are facing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19 should also be a priority.

**Q. What about our second instalment of the 2020-21 AY allocation – when should we be using that?**

A. It may be advantageous to use these funds first and utilise the second instalment funds to support students thereafter. 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 Discretionary Fund.

**Q. Can I move money from the Coronavirus Discretionary Fund, into the main 2020-21 fund, or the main 2021-22 fund?**

A. No. This money cannot be transferred into any other fund and should only be used to help students impacted financially by COVID-19. Equally, you should not transfer any money from the main fund into the COVID-19 pot. However, you can still use the main fund to support students affected by COVID-19.

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

A. No – the limit has been removed.

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

A. Following discussions with NUS Scotland, 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 these funds.

**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 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.

**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 students who you have established are facing financial hardship.

**Q. Does the hardship need to have occurred on or after w/c 15 February 2021?**

A. No – the fund can support students who you have established have faced financial hardship from any point in the 2020-21 academic year.

**Q. Can we support EU/ international students who require to return 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. 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 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 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 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).