



Student Support Funds Procedure 2023-24

UHI operates to a common set of Student Support Funds procedures across all academic partners. These procedures are set out below, and will be reviewed annually by the Student Support Funds Policy Ownership Group.

Please refer to the Student Support Funds Policy for further information. The Student Support Funds Policy contains link to the relevant Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) guidelines, which all members of the University partnership follow.

Course Application Stage

1. Applicants for courses will be able to access information about the types of financial support that may be available to them during their studies, via the college's website. Information for the forthcoming academic year will be available prior to the course starting once details of SFC/SAAS policy and guidelines for the year have been released. If applicants have any questions, they should contact the college to which they have applied.

Applying for Student Support Funds

2. Once the applicant has accepted a place on a course and the Student Support Fund Application is available online (normally June prior to the course start date), they will be able to log in to their Student Hub and apply for funding through the online application form.

The Student Hub is the system for all communication regarding the Student Support Funds application process and during the course when the student may experience a change in circumstances which may affect their eligibility.

No letters will be sent by post to the student. Documentation and information which support the completion, calculation, claiming (Childcare Expenses) and payment of the

award is available on the Hub. Students are directed to familiarise themselves with the Hub as soon as they are granted access to it. Students should also monitor their Hub account regularly.

Orkney and Shetland College students should refer to their local contacts for detailed information.

3. The application is used to determine eligibility to access funds available to applicants. FE applicants will be assessed as appropriate for one or more of Educational Maintenance Allowance, Bursary, Discretionary and Childcare Funds. HE applicants will be assessed for one or both of Discretionary and Childcare Funds.
4. The student will provide information about their living arrangements and household income. Once submitted, requests will be automatically generated for evidence of the appropriate documentation to support the application.
5. The evidence requested will be based on the information provided by the student in their application. It is therefore vital that accurate information is provided, as any changes may result in new evidence being requested and a delay to the application being assessed.
6. Once all requested documentation has been received the application will be put forward for assessment. Staff will normally complete the assessment within twenty-eight days.
7. Students will be notified of the outcome of their application via the Student Hub once the assessment is complete. For applications resulting in an award, payments will be made in accordance with the relevant payment schedule to the bank account nominated by the student in the Online Funding Application. The Student Hub has several documents to support the award letter which gives information on the Terms and Conditions of Award, an Award Explained document and real-time Payment Schedules for each fund. These documents should be read in conjunction with the Award Letter and the student can see the process status of each award payment.

Orkney College UHI and UHI Shetland students should refer to their local contacts for detailed information.

8. The onus is on the student to provide all necessary documentation. Where this information is not provided, or where the college believes a student or relevant parent or partner is withholding information that may be relevant to the student's application, colleges may use their discretion to refuse to offer the student an award or offer the student a provisional award.
9. In exceptional circumstances, a provisional award may be offered where the college believes that the student is likely to be eligible for funding once the required documentation is available and presented. In these circumstances the partner college will require the student to refund any overpayment resulting from the provisional assessment. If no documentation is provided, the student will be required to repay the award in full.
10. Where the provisional award is less than final award the student will receive the full award including any underpayments.

Attendance and Engagement

11. Students in receipt of Student Support Funds must adhere to the guidelines set out by SFC and SAAS. This includes fulfilling the attendance and engagement requirements.
12. Colleges will monitor student attendance and engagement in line with the Attendance and Engagement Appendix to the Student Support Funds Policy. The Appendix is available on the Student Hub. Students will be contacted by the college should their attendance and engagement fall below expectations.
13. Students who do not meet attendance and engagement requirements should expect to have their funding withdrawn immediately.
14. Students should also be aware of other college policies that require to be followed e.g. Student Code of Conduct etc.

Appeals

15. Applicants for student support funds are advised of their right to appeal against the outcome of any funding application in the notification of award document issued on the Student Hub.
16. In the first instance, queries or dissatisfaction about awards or award levels should be discussed informally with relevant staff. This is intended to ensure that there has been no misunderstanding of the application by either the student or staff.
17. If the student is not satisfied with the informal resolution, a formal appeal can be submitted in writing in paper form, email or the reassessment button on the Student Hub within fourteen days of receiving the application outcome. The grounds for appeal must be clearly stated. The student will receive an acknowledgement of their appeal once received.
18. The formal appeal will be considered by a senior member of college staff impartial to the application process. The student will receive a response within twenty-eight days. This decision is final.

Overpayment and Debt

19. The college must submit withdrawal/cease dates in the student record system in accordance with SFC policy, which states that the withdrawal/cease date must be the last date of regular attendance. This date is the date used for determining the amount of overpayment.
20. Student Services staff may however exercise discretion of up to normally four term weeks award (disregarding holidays, reading weeks and exam periods) where there has been support given to the student under the Attendance and Engagement provisions. Consideration may also be given to the student's circumstances regarding care experience, minority groups and those on low incomes. These students are more likely to cease a course early for reasons which mean they revert to being benefits claimants; under Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) rulings amounts already received by the student determine the award of benefit entitlement.
21. Students who receive an overpayment of Student Support Funds will be expected to return the overpayment in full. Students will be notified by the college of an overpayment

by letter and will receive details of the amount overpaid and acceptable methods of repayment.

22. Should the student not return the overpayment within the requested timescale college debt management procedures will be followed to recoup the funds.

Retention of Records

23. For record retention information, staff and students should refer to the UHI Retention and Disposal Policy.

UHI Student Support Funds Policy: Attendance Appendix 2023-24

1. Overview

1.1 This appendix sets out the regional approach for Further Education funding attendance requirements. The guidance will be used by all colleges in the UHI partnership to ensure parity of experience for students and to limit risk for colleges.

1.2 The guidance below is based on Scottish Funding Council (SFC) [guidance](#), and adds further information for the areas where there is discretion available. The appendix fulfils the SFC [Fund Management and Audit Information](#) requirement that colleges should:

- Implement their own rules for measuring satisfactory attendance, participation and engagement
- Produce their own guidance for authorised absence
- Operate these rules and guidance consistently across the college

1.3 Attendance and engagement are critical parts of being a student and courses are designed on the principle of students attending all classes. Attendance and time management are valuable transferable skills for progression in academic studies or for employment.

2. Guidance

2.1 The expectation set out by the SFC is for students to attend all their classes; this will be assessed through attendance monitoring. Student attendance will be expressed as a percentage of the overall classes attended.

2.2 Examples of authorised absences identified by SFC include, but are not limited to:

- Self-certificated absence because of illness. Medical certificates should normally be submitted for illnesses lasting for more than five working days.
- Absences due to pandemic self-isolation requirements where the class cannot be attended remotely.
- Religious holidays (but not other holidays).
- Work experience placements.
- College agreed exam preparation.
- Attendance at children's hearing, court, meeting related to caring responsibilities or care needs, etc.
- Unexpected caring responsibilities, either for the student's child(ren) or an adult dependant, such as the illness of a child or dependant.
- Severe weather and transport breakdown.
- Attendance at a family funeral.
- Medical or dental appointments for either the student, or a child or adult who is dependent on the student. This can include non-emergency appointments if these cannot be arranged outside college hours, although every effort should be made to avoid clashes with classes.
- Fulfilment of an official position e.g. HISA representation
- Jury duty

As soon as a student becomes aware of an absence from the criteria above they should inform relevant staff via the College's official absence reporting processes.

Levels and patterns of authorised absences will be monitored to ensure the system is not abused.

2.3 Any absence that is not considered a valid authorised absence will be recorded as an unauthorised absence.

2.4 Attendance Thresholds

- 2.4.1 Students should aim to attend 100% of their scheduled activity. Both authorised and unauthorised absences will affect a student's attendance percentage.
- 2.4.2 The reporting period is the duration over which attendance is calculated. The payment schedules are the frequency that payments are made for different types of support fund.
- Reporting Period:
Payment Schedule
- 2.4.3 If attendance falls below 100% of scheduled activity for the reporting period local informal interventions may be used to engage with students in order to reinforce the benefits of attendance and engagement and help improve it.
- 2.4.4 If attendance falls below 85% of scheduled activity for the reporting period formal interventions will commence.

2.5 Where students have failed to maintain the required attendance threshold set out above, staff will consider whether the student has taken reasonable steps to engage with their studies.

Examples of appropriate student engagement include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining contact with relevant college staff, explaining the reasons for absence and the steps they are taking to engage with their studies.
- Keeping up to date with learning by obtaining lecture notes, online resources or other learning materials from college staff.
- Demonstrating that they have engaged in independent study to keep up to date with their learning.
- Handing in assignments or classwork in a timely fashion, unless there are mitigating factors.
- Continuing to meet their learning objectives.
- Engaging with the college in any other way which demonstrates that they are continuing to participate in their studies.

3. Attendance and Engagement Support Procedures

Stage 1

3.1 Students falling below the attendance threshold set out in 2.4 and not maintaining appropriate engagement will be contacted by staff in order to discuss strategies for improving attendance. Local systems can be used to inform this process. Students will be able to confidentially disclose any barriers to attendance or engagement they may be experiencing.

3.2 Students will be informed that should their attendance not improve and they are not meeting engagement requirements they are at risk of having student support funds they are eligible for reduced or withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed. An agreed timeframe for improvement and the student's understanding will be recorded on local systems, along with any evidence from learner support and academic staff regarding attendance and engagement.

3.3 Students who do not participate in the Stage 1 process will have their funding withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed, if they are not achieving appropriate engagement and will be required to arrange a meeting with the appropriate members of staff in order to discuss having their funding reinstated.

Stage 2

3.4 If attendance does not improve, or improves and then declines within the same academic year, the student will be required to attend a formal meeting and agree an Attendance and Engagement Support Plan with staff.

3.5 Students who do not participate in the Stage 2 process will have their funding withdrawn, and any overpayments reclaimed, where they are not achieving appropriate engagement and will be required to arrange a meeting with the appropriate members of staff in order to discuss having their funding reinstated.

Stage 3

3.5 Students who have been through Stages 1 and 2 will not be invited to attend another meeting within the same academic year if issues continue or reoccur. **Instead, withdrawal or reduction of student support funds may initiate immediately if they are not achieving appropriate engagement.** The onus will then be on the student to engage with staff in order to agree a plan for improving attendance and engagement.

Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs)

3.6 Where a student has complex circumstances or health issues (including mental health issues) which may impact on their attendance, the College may exercise particular flexibility with regards to attendance. The College will agree attendance and participation plans directly with the student in these circumstances and this will be reflected in the student's PLSP. Changes to attendance and engagement requirements in a PLSP should be agreed in coordination with the staff responsible for student funding.

PLSPs are created in partnership with a student in response to a disclosed need. Attendance may form part of the PLSP, but issues around attendance alone would not justify the creation of a PLSP. There is local support available for students to access if they have concerns around how their personal circumstances may be affecting attendance and engagement. For further information, the local Student Support team should be contacted and the Learner Support Policy consulted.

Legislative Responsibilities

3.7 All colleges in the UHI partnership have due regard to equalities legislation and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 when considering the position of students with protected characteristics and care experienced students. Colleges may exercise increased flexibility when considering attendance issues for groups of students impacted by this legislation (for example care experienced students, disabled students, student parents and those on maternity/paternity/adoption leave). In addition, colleges will be mindful of their corporate parenting responsibilities under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

4. Monitoring and Changes to SFC Guidance

4.1 Colleges will utilise local means of monitoring and reporting on attendance. This information will be used as appropriate for regional level reporting and analysis.

4.2 Annual changes to SFC policy will be considered by the Student Support Funds Policy Ownership Group and any necessary amendments made to the Attendance and Engagement Appendix made.