

Title of report	Postgraduate Social Work Student COVID-19 Hardship Fund
Public/confidential	Public
Action	For decision
Summary/purpose of report	As part of the COVID-19 response the Scottish Government Sponsor has asked SSSC to administer a Hardship Fund for students who are currently studying for a postgraduate social work qualification and are not currently in receipt of a bursary or receive tuition fees only. This report informs Council of the mechanism we will operate to administer the fund.
Recommendations	Council is asked to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. agree the planned approach for managing and administering the Hardship Fund on behalf of Scottish Government
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Link to Strategic Plan	The information in this report links to Outcome 2: The SSSC supports and enhances the development of the registered workforce to deliver high standards of practice and drive improvement. Outcome 3: Our workforce planning activities support employers, commissioners and policy makers to deliver a sustainable, integrated and innovative workforce.
Link to the Risk Register	Risk 2: We fail to ensure that our workforce development function supports the workforce and

	employers to achieve the right standards and qualifications to gain and maintain registration.
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	An EIA is currently being developed. Due to the urgent nature of setting up the Hardship Fund, the EIA was not complete at the time of writing this report.
Documents attached	None
Background papers	None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSSC's Sponsor department (Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser) has asked the SSSC to develop and administer a Hardship Fund to support postgraduate social work students who are currently not eligible for a postgraduate bursary and those who receive only tuition fees through the postgraduate bursary scheme.
- 1.2 The Sponsor provided £129k in March 2020 for use during the 2020/21 financial year for the Hardship Fund for the period April to June 2020.

2. HARDSHIP FUND ELIGIBILITY

- 2.1 The Postgraduate Hardship Fund will be available to postgraduate social work students who are not currently in receipt of a postgraduate bursary or who are currently eligible for tuition fees only. The funding will be ringfenced to this group.
- 2.2 All social work student placements were suspended as of 20 March 2020. Regardless of this, students who are currently in receipt of a postgraduate bursary have all received their full bursary payment which covers April to June 2020, so they will not receive further funding from us for this period. Once practice placements resume, we will arrange for bursary recipients to access repeat placement funding as required.
- 2.3 The Scottish Government has relaxed the residency criteria to allow those normally not eligible to apply. Such students would normally be excluded because they have not resided in Scotland for the three years preceding the course or they do not have settled status. This includes international students. The eligibility criteria excludes part-time students.

3. HARDSHIP FUND ADMINISTRATION

- 3.1 The SSSC Bursaries team will administer the Hardship Fund on behalf of Scottish Government. This will be overseen by the Head of Finance and Head of Learning and Development.
- 3.2 The Universities will be asked to confirm that students are still enrolled on their courses before we assess eligibility for Hardship Funding.
- 3.3 Early indications are that 114 students are currently studying for a postgraduate social work degree and may be eligible to apply. There are 72 students not receiving a bursary and 42 students in receipt of tuition fees only.
- 3.4 The level of funding is being finalised but is likely to be comparable with funding that their peers who attend the same programme would receive. (e.g. a maintenance allowance based on the number of weeks of programme term and reimbursement of childcare fees from a registered childcare provider).
- 3.5 We have developed a simple application form using Microsoft Forms to collect the data and administer the Fund. There are no additional costs.

4. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DISCRETIONARY FUNDS

- 4.1 On 8 April 2020, the Scottish Government announced a £5 million package of emergency financial support to help students facing hardship as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak with £2.2 million for Scotland's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Discretionary Fund specifically to address COVID-19-related hardships. Discretionary Funds are available to postgraduate and undergraduate students, both full-time and part-time.
- 4.2 Part-time postgraduate social work students who are not eligible for the SSSC Hardship Fund are able to apply for emergency discretionary payments directly to their own institutions.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Sponsor provided £129k in additional funding during 2019/20 to be ringfenced for Hardship Funding. This is held in our general reserve for use during the 2020/21 financial year. The Sponsor has stated further funding will be available, if required.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Hardship Fund is postgraduate bursary funding and we are authorised to make payments to full-time postgraduate bursary students on behalf of Scottish Ministers.

7. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 We have worked with the Sponsor Department to develop the Hardship Fund eligibility criteria. We are working with Universities to identify the students who may be eligible to apply for Hardship Funding.

8. IMPACT ON PEOPLE USING SOCIAL SERVICES AND CARERS

- 8.1 The Hardship Fund has been set up to assist postgraduate students who are not currently in receipt of a bursary or who receive tuition fees only and may be experiencing financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This aims to help students to stay on postgraduate social work programmes during this time. This in turn will ensure that the number of qualified social workers entering the sector to support people using services and carers is maintained.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Sponsor department has provided £129k for a Hardship Fund for the period April to June 2020. We are working with the Sponsor to plan for the following three to six months, should the need for Hardship Funding be required for longer.