

Discretionary Funds Procedure

August 2010

Also available in large print (16pt)
and electronic format.

Ask Student Services for details.

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Discretionary Funds Procedure

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This document sets out the procedure that will be followed in order to achieve the key principles of the Discretionary Funds Policy.

2 Scope

- 2.1 The procedure covers both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) Discretionary Funds, including the Childcare Funds.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 Discretionary Funds are intended to provide non-repayable assistance for students in financial difficulties in order for them to access and/or continue in education and are paid in addition to any other forms of student support.
- 3.2 The Student Funding Team referred to in this procedure comprises the Customer and Student Services Manager and the Student Funding Adviser.

4 Responsibilities

- 4.1 The Assistant Principal Curriculum and Planning has overall responsibility for this procedure.
- 4.2 The Customer and Student Services Manager is responsible for:
- Ensuring funds are distributed and administered in line with this policy and relevant SAAS/SFC Guidelines;
 - Overseeing the on-going development and improvement of the Perth College UHI Discretionary Funds Procedure;
 - Dealing with student appeals and complaints relevant to Discretionary Funds.
- 4.3 The Student Funding Adviser is responsible for:
- Accurately and professionally advising students on Discretionary Funds;
 - Distributing Discretionary Funds application forms;
 - Assessing applications and making effective judgements on students' eligibility and award amounts in line with both this policy and relevant SAAS/SFC Guidelines;
 - Monitoring the Discretionary Funds budgets and providing the Customer and Student Services Manager with accurate, up-to-date budget data on request;
 - Gathering and checking student attendance information and using this to inform payments of Discretionary Funds awards;
 - Maintaining all paper and electronic records relating to Discretionary Funds consistently, accurately and within confidentiality and Data Protection guidelines;

Status: Final, Version Number 3
Effective Date: August 2010
Owner: Student Funding Adviser

Approved By: Customer and Student Services Manager
Review Date: July 2011
Impact Assessment Status: Completed July 2009

- Carrying out all preparations for audits;
- Liaising with UHI Executive Office on the HE Funds;
- Ensuring all work relevant to Discretionary Funds is carried out in line with this policy and the Discretionary Funds procedure;
- Leading the on-going development and improvement of the Perth College UHI Discretionary Funds Procedure.

5 Procedure

- 5.1 The Student Funding Adviser will receive and review guidance documents on Discretionary Funds that are annually updated and distributed by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). This guidance will be used to inform the annual updating of the Perth College UHI Discretionary Funds Policy and Procedure.
- 5.2 All application forms, guidance notes and other documentation associated with Discretionary Funds will be reviewed and updated annually by the Student Funding Adviser, and approved by the Customer and Student Services Manager. HE documentation will be updated in conjunction with the amendments agreed by the UHI Student Finance Group. All materials will be ready and available during July each year.
- 5.3 The Student Funding Adviser and the Customer and Student Services Manager will meet prior to the start of the academic session to agree maximum allocation amounts for the coming year, based on the overall allocations that have been made available to the College.

Application Stage

- 5.4 Application forms will be available for students to collect from locations around the main college campus from the first day of Induction Week onwards each year. Forms require to be returned to the Student Services area within the Brahan Building and may be returned from the first day of the second week of teaching onwards.
- 5.5 Applications may be obtained and returned at any point during the academic session until the end of the third last week of semester 2.
- 5.6 An application returned after the end of the third last week of semester 2 may only be considered at the discretion of the Student Funding Adviser and with the agreement of the Customer and Student Services Manager.
- 5.7 If a student is in need of emergency financial help when they first start at Perth College UHI, the Student Funding Adviser will treat their application as a priority and will ensure that funding is made available as quickly as possible, so long as the student is eligible.
- 5.8 An emergency situation would be one in which a student has not yet received their main source of funding (ie student loan or bursary etc) and has stopped receiving benefits or a salary, or a case in which a student has not received their funding due to an issue related to their course code being recognised by SAAS.

- 5.9 When a Discretionary Fund Application Form is submitted, the student will be advised that they will receive a letter notifying of the outcome of the application within a maximum of 21 days.
- 5.10 If an application form has been submitted without all the necessary supporting documentation or information, a letter will be sent to the student advising them of the information that is still required within 7 days and may also be asked to attend a short interview to discuss their application.

Assessment Stage

- 5.9 When an application from an eligible student is ready to be assessed, the Student Funding Adviser will work through the form and the evidence supplied and make a judgement as to whether to award the student funding to help with Housing Costs, the cost of registered or formal Childcare, or General Hardship.
- 5.10 The amount awarded will be based directly on the level of need demonstrated by the information on the application form and the evidence supplied, up to the maximum agreed allocation.
- 5.11 If the Adviser feels that an application warrants an award greater than the maximum allocation, they will discuss this with the Customer and Student Services Manager and a decision on the award will be reached on a joint basis.
- 5.12 When assessing an application, the Adviser will complete the Discretionary Funds Crib Sheet with information on the assessment they have carried out and attach this to the back of the form. When the assessment is complete, the amount to be awarded will be added and the form will progress to being countersigned.
- 5.13 Every assessed application for Discretionary Funds will be countersigned by the Customer and Student Services Manager. The purpose of this countersigning is to ensure that every award made is agreed as being the most appropriate by at least 2 members of staff.
- 5.14 Once countersigned, applications move to the payment stage.

Payment Stage

- 5.15 A letter will be sent to each student who is to receive an award from the Discretionary Funds detailing their award, the conditions attached to the award, and information on how to collect or receive payment.
- 5.16 Payments will be made to students in 3 equal instalments in October, January and April, or as soon as possible after a successful application has been assessed, followed by payments in the months above, depending on when in the year the application is made.
- 5.17 Payments for child-care costs will be made directly to the registered provider by cheque, all other payments will be deposited into the student's bank account by BACS. No payments will be made in cash.

- 5.18 Payments to Perth College UHI Nursery will be made directly and in one instalment. However, in some cases, an award may be made on the basis of service provision within the Nursery, for the student, rather than payment.
- 5.19 Before each payment, the attendance of each student receiving an award will be checked to confirm that he/she is still enrolled on their course, and is continuing to attend.
- 5.20 Prior to receiving their first payment, students will be required to come to the Student Services area in the Brahan Building to sign for the payment in order to confirm that they accept the conditions attached to the award and that the payment information held is correct. Students will be required to bring ID with them on this date.
- 5.21 Students who have already been given a Discretionary Fund award can make a second application during the same academic year. This can be done using the "Discretionary Funds Second Application Form" and awards will be considered on the basis of any changed circumstances from the first application, up to the maximum, or as per point 5.11.
- 5.22 A Discretionary Funds Database will be used by the Student Funding Adviser to record student details and payment arrangements, and to allow the Student Funding Adviser to monitor amounts allocated.
- 5.23 The monitoring of allocations is essential in ensuring that awards are made within budget and that funds continue to be available throughout the academic session as much as possible.

Reconciliation

- 5.24 When all payments to students have been made and payments for withdrawn or non-attending students cancelled on the database (usually early June), a spreadsheet report detailing totals committed for each Curriculum Area will be run from the database. This report is called the "Totals Committed" report.
- 5.25 This is done for both FE and HE students.
- 5.26 The spreadsheet is then checked against the Discretionary Fund Application forms and Signing Sheets to ensure that they correspond accurately.
- 5.27 Each of the 4 funds will then be reconciled by recording all BACS payments, cheque payments and Nursery transfers and also returned BACS and cancelled cheques from the Discretionary Funds Administration folder. These details will then be entered on a new spreadsheet and the total spend from each fund calculated.
- 5.28 These totals should correspond fully with the 'Totals Committed' report.

- 5.29 A reconciliation should then be carried out based on information received from the Finance Team.
- 5.30 Once this reconciliation has been agreed, the figures will be entered on the Audit Reports.

Quality Checking and Audit

- 5.31 A quality check of a random sample of 10% of applications takes place in February in order to confirm that applications are assessed in line with guidance and agreed policy and procedure. The check is carried out by a group of staff including Customer and Student Services Manager and Finance Officer and facilitated by the Student Funding Adviser.
- 5.32 A quality check of a random sample of 10% of applications takes place in March in order to check the estimated expenditure detailed in a student's application against actual expenditure. This check is carried out and documented by the Student Funding Adviser.
- 5.33 After Reconciliation has taken place, all application forms, student signing sheets, attendance checking sheets and administration paperwork is checked, finalised and closed in preparation for audit.
- 5.34 Audit Reports are completed by the Student Funding Adviser, passed to the Customer and Student Services Manager, signed by the Principal and sent to relevant third parties prior to audit taking place.
- 5.35 FE and HE audits are completed by December 31 for previous academic session.

6 Linked Policies/Related Documents

- 6.1 Perth College UHI Discretionary Funds Policy.
- 6.2 UHI Higher Education Discretionary Funds Policy
- 6.3 UHI Higher Education Discretionary Funds Operational Guidance
- 6.4 2010-11 National Policy: Further Education Discretionary Fund and Childcare Fund (SFC).
- 6.5 Higher Education Undergraduate and Postgraduate Discretionary and Childcare Funds. Guidance for Academic Year 2010-2011 (SAAS).

7 Relevant Legislation

None.