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1. GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS

New guidance was issued by the Scottish Government which applies from 1st September and replaces the earlier guidance of 29th June 2020.

From 22 July, colleges and universities have been able to commence a phased return to on campus learning as part of a blended (or 'hybrid') model with some remote teaching.

This blended model will continue. Staff and students will be on campus albeit less frequently and in lower numbers than before the virus.

Institutions should continue to make reasonable efforts to facilitate working and studying remotely. Staff and students can expect to spend time working or studying from home. This will not always be possible and, where that is the case, public health measures (including physical distancing) must be in place.

Student Accommodation

Specific guidance and information will be issued to any students taking up places in Halls of Residence and other Student Accommodation.

Scottish Government guidance is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-universities-colleges-and-student-accommodation-providers/pages/student-accommodation/>

2. EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE

Education Maintenance allowance (EMA) payments will continue for young people. Department Staff at South Ayrshire Council are working from home and will ensure this continues.

3. GRANT FUNDING AND STUDENT LOANS

The Student Loans Company has confirmed that students WILL be paid their loans/grants next term as normal (for people awarded an 'away from home' loan this will still be paid at the normal rate even if at home).

See <https://www.saas.gov.uk/news/saas-coronavirus-faq> for useful information including financial guidance on what to do if you need to repeat a proportion of your course because of Covid 19.

Some student services and funding staff will continue to work from home, Hardship Funds are still operational, but will be subject to demand.

Anyone receiving Universal Credit will have had their previous student funding counted as income until the last assessment period before the 'long holiday' commences. For example for a course ending in June, your grant payments will only be used as income up to and including your May assessment period.

Universal Credit can remain in payment up until the month that your course recommences. Depending on circumstances, or if you are still able to meet any set Work Related Requirements UC may continue to be in payment. Income from any bursaries or non-charitable grants will be used to assess income for the duration of the course and calculate any award of UC that is due.

4. EXTRA HARDSHIP PAYMENTS FOR STUDENTS

A £5 million package of emergency financial support was put in place to help students facing hardship as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Extra cash was made available to any university and college students now struggling as a result of COVID-19, including those attending private institutions. University and college students will be able to apply for any emergency discretionary payments directly to their own institutions.

All bursaries, grants and loans are continuing to be paid as planned but the current unprecedented situation has resulted in increased hardship. The extra funding is immediately available for students most in need, to help alleviate concerns around accommodation costs, mental health issues, general living costs and wellbeing.

Institutions will be provided with specific guidance on the discretionary funding related to COVID-19

Other details of the emergency package include:

- A three-month suspension by SAAS of all new debt recovery actions in respect to grants and bursaries, for students whose circumstances have changed and therefore may have to return overpayments. Where a student is experiencing difficulties SAAS will work with them to agree the best options, with suspension potentially one of the solutions. Some individuals may still wish to continue recovery with a reduced payment plan.
- An extension of the Care-Experienced Accommodation Grant from early April allowing eligible students to access support of a non-repayable grant of up to £105 per week - this is eight weeks earlier than usual.
- £100,000 available to support around 1,000 students studying with private providers, administered by Student Awards Agency Scotland and paid directly to affected students.

Earlier financial help for those facing hardship.

Minister for Further, Higher Education and Science Richard Lochhead said: “Given the economic impact of COVID-19, many continuing students who rely on seasonal and part-time jobs in the summer could find it difficult to cover their basic housing or cost of living costs. No student should face financial hardship as a result - so these new measures will support students until the start of the next academic year when bursary, grant and loan payments will begin again”

To address this hardship, The Scottish Government brought forward early access to £11.4 million of discretionary funds - support for higher education students in financial difficulty – to be administered by colleges and universities.

Unlike continuing higher education students, most former further education students can receive benefits if they are unemployed. Colleges will now have flexibility to offer discretionary funds to bridge the timing gap between bursary payments ending in June and Universal Credit payments starting.

Scottish students studying in Europe as part of EU Portability or historically arranged schemes will be able to access a £100,000 emergency fund administered by the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS).

SAAS has also suspended all new debt recovery actions in respect to grants and bursaries until September for students whose circumstances have changed and may have to return overpayments.

Students are encouraged to contact SAAS to discuss what help is available.

Latest information and advice for students on COVID-19, including support for employment, is available at www.studentinformation.gov.scot

**If you have any further questions about any of the above topics,
or if you require Housing Advice or Information**

**Email advice@ayrhousingaidcentre.com or call, text or whatsapp us on 07549 603895 /
07760750256 or contact us via facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ayrhac>**