

Scottish Social Services Council submission of 1 February 2024

PE1993/G: Reform the financial support for social work students on work placements

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute additional information to this petition.

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is the regulator for the social work, social care and children and young people workforce in Scotland. Our work means the people of Scotland can count on social work, social care and children and young people services being provided by a trusted, skilled, confident and valued workforce.

We protect the public by registering the social work, social care and children and young people workforce, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training and education and by supporting their professional development. Where people fall below the standards of practice and conduct we can investigate and act.

We:

- publish the national Codes of Practice for people working in social work, social care and children and young people services and their employers
- register this workforce and make sure they adhere to our Codes of Practice
- promote and regulate their learning and development
- lead workforce development and planning for the social work, social care and children and young people workforce in Scotland and provide national statistics.

We initially contributed to this petition in May 2023. The Committee has now requested the following additional information:

- information about what improvements the Scottish Social Services Council made following the 2021-22 review of its postgraduate bursary policies, procedures and processes
- an update on the review of practice learning finance

- information about when the paper from Higher Education Institution leads on poverty issues is expected and confirmation on whether this paper will be shared with the Scottish Government.

We will address each of these points in turn.

Improvements made by us following the 2021-22 review of our postgraduate bursary policies, procedures and processes

The SSSC began administering Postgraduate Bursaries on behalf of the Scottish Government in 2004. The process for administration and assessing applications has been streamlined during this time with a paperless process, including electronic applications being introduced and on-line calculation of assessments. The Postgraduate Bursary Schedule of Rates is updated annually.

The review of postgraduate bursaries policies and procedures we carried out in 2021-22 had the following aims:

- Widening access to eligible postgraduate social work students.
- Increasing clarity for students on the funding they would receive if they are eligible for a bursary.
- Reducing the complexity of assessments.
- Further streamlining administrative processes.

The Review modelled several options with the preferred affordable option allowing a maximum of 321 eligible students to receive an element of funding. Tuition fees would remain at the current rate of £3,415.00 pa alongside a one-off payment of £510.00 pa for travel, books and sundries. Weekly allowances for the duration of the course are £120.00 for students living independently and £50.00 for those living in their parental home. Students would also receive a weekly dependants allowance for each adult or child dependant of £63.00 and a contribution of £70.00 for each child in childcare.

Since the 2021-22 review we have continued to look at how we can streamline and improve our bursary policies, procedures and processes. We have recently made changes to the quotas to allow us to spread funding out more and to utilise quotas not fulfilled by the allocated University. We have also changed the sundry allowance to £600 pa and have changed the means-tested grant allowance to remove the distinction between students living on their own and those living in the parental home.

Update on the review of practice learning finance

In response to a request from Scottish Government, the SSSC commissioned a review of social work practice learning funding on behalf of the Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) in May 2023. The remit of the research was to review the funding streams, structures and mechanisms that support social work practice placements. The broad objectives of the financial review were:

- To ensure improved consistency in how funding support is applied across student placements in all higher education institutions
- To maximise the resource available to support student placements and offer flexibility to employers in how they use funding to support student placements
- To encourage more employers to offer placements by ensuring financial support is available to support the employment of Practice Educators or other support required to supervise placements.
- To ensure funding is available for both undergraduate and post graduate placements.

Researchers from Learning Network West were appointed to undertake the review, which concluded in September 2023.

The research findings set out a number of recommendations which were shared with SWEP in September 2023. An action plan in response to the recommendations is currently being drafted by the SWEP Programme Office, which will identify short, medium and longer term actions. Communication about this will come out from the SWEP programme office in due course.

One immediate action that is currently being prioritised by Scottish Government is a change to the travel/subsistence payments to increase financial support and ensure consistency of support provided to both undergraduate and postgraduate (home) students on placements. This short-term measure is being progressed by Scottish Government in partnership with the Higher Education Institutions.

This change will offer greater financial equality for all students. Communication about this will come out from Scottish Government and/or the SWEP programme office soon.

While not directly impacting undergraduate students, another action that has recently been taken forward by Scottish Government is that, from

2024-25 academic year, postgraduate students not eligible to receive SSSC bursary support will be able to apply for the postgraduate funding package administered by the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS).

The SSSC and/or SWEP partners will keep stakeholders updated on the work of the financial review as it develops, as we all continue to work together to ensure that students who wish to become social workers are financially supported to do so.

The paper from Higher Education Institution leads

The Higher Education Institution social work programme leads are supporting the SWEP programme office with development of a paper on poverty issues for consideration by SWEP. The SSSC is not involved in the development of the paper and therefore is unable to comment on when the paper can be expected or whether it will be shared directly with Scottish Government once it is completed.