

Scottish Social Services Council submission of 9 May 2023

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

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute 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.

The petition is calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure social work students have access to adequate financial support during their studies by:

1. Providing bursaries to all third and fourth year undergraduate social work students on work placements.
2. Reforming the assessment criteria and adequately funding the bursaries for postgraduate social work students on work placements.

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered the above petition at its meeting 22 March 2023 and agreed to write to the

Scottish Social Services Council to seek its views on the action called for in the petition. The Committee specifically requests:

- a view on providing bursaries to all third and fourth year undergraduate social work students on work placements;
- an explanation of the criteria for assessing bursary applications for postgraduate students; and
- clarification on where members of the public can access information on these assessment criteria.

We will address each of these points in turn.

Providing bursaries to third and fourth year undergraduate social work students

We recognise that there are challenges around the recruitment and retention of staff across the social work, social care and children and young people workforces in Scotland and we welcome any policy that made it easier for people looking to begin a career within this workforce.

It is the role of Scottish Ministers to determine whether bursaries should be provided to third and fourth year social work students. These bursaries would likely be administered by the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) as the SSSC only has a remit to administer postgraduate bursaries. Should Scottish Ministers make the decision to provide bursaries to third and fourth year undergraduate social work students, we would be happy to work with SAAS and Scottish Ministers to develop an effective model for distributing this funding.

The SSSC's role in assessing bursary applications for postgraduate students

Postgraduate bursaries are available for nominated and eligible students studying the MSc Social Work at the following universities:

- University of Dundee
- University of Edinburgh
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- University of Strathclyde
- Robert Gordon University
- University of Stirling
- University of the West of Scotland
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Open University.

Each university receives a quota of bursary places and must nominate students for each year of the course. Bursary places are allocated at the discretion of universities. The universities send us lists of nominated students twice a year. We then invite those nominated to apply.

Nomination does not guarantee eligibility for funding. Students will be

assessed for residence eligibility, previous funding received and if eligible, entitlement.

Our role is to administer postgraduate social work bursaries on behalf of the Scottish Government. Postgraduate social work students are the only group the SSSC are authorised to make payments to on behalf of Scottish Ministers.

The postgraduate social work bursaries budget has remained at £2.655m since the 2012/13 financial year. The Schedule of Rates for bursaries and associated allowances is revised annually by the SSSC in accordance with the delegated budgetary provision and any policy or guidance changes made by the Scottish Government.

We make 321 postgraduate bursaries available across all nine of the postgraduate social work university programmes with each university receiving an annual quota of bursaries regardless the number of postgraduate students. These quotas are set annually by the SSSC following budgetary allocation from Scottish Government.

Applicants can be awarded bursaries for tuition fees, maintenance grant, allowances and expenses. The eligibility of each applicant for any allowances and expenses claimed is assessed individually. If eligible, the amount due for payment is calculated and awarded to individual applicants in accordance with the Schedule of Rates.

Over the financial year 2021-2022, we undertook a review of the postgraduate bursary policies, procedures and processes to ensure funding was being disbursed as equitably and efficiently as possible.

We have worked with the Scottish Government to create a Hardship Fund to support postgraduate social work students. Scottish Government has provided additional funding to continue offering Hardship Funding through 2021/22 and 2022/23. This year we expect to pay out in the region of £85,000 in Hardship funds to social work students.

We are working closely with relevant universities and the wider Social Work Education Partnership forum (SWEP) to explore additional funding models across social work education. This will include looking at how we can maximise the use of funding to support practice placements and are currently reviewing the models that support practice placements. This review is scheduled to conclude this summer.

We have also asked Higher Education Institutions (HEI) leads for a paper on the poverty issues facing students so we can consider how we can better support our social work students.

Where members of the public can access information on assessment criteria

We acknowledge the comments made by SPICe about the availability of information about the postgraduate bursary scheme on our website.

Information on the postgraduate bursary scheme is currently made available to candidates once they have been nominated by their university or if they contact us through our dedicated bursaries email address which is available on our website.

Members of the public can access information on funding for training on our [website](#). This page gives information on part time fee grants, SDS individual training accounts, funding for social work study at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and modern apprenticeship funding. We recognise the need to provide more information about the bursary scheme.

To address this we are updating the information on this web page. The updated page will make it clear that our bursaries are available to students of MSc Social Work programmes at the HEIs listed in the previous section.

The page will also give details of the role HEIs play in this process and the fact that nominated candidates will be assessed on the basis of residence eligibility, any previous funding received and entitlement. The residency eligibility criteria are derived from the Student Support (Scotland) Regulations 2022.

This page will also outline that the overall bursary consists of a maximum contribution toward tuition fees of £3,415, a means-tested grant and dependents allowance and a one-off payment toward placement travel and other expenses.