

Special Support Payment

Equality Impact Assessment

January 2024

Equality Impact Assessment – Results

Title of Policy

Special Support Payment

Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy

Relevant National Outcomes:

- We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation
- Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

The policy proposes that a proportion of the student loan element of the Higher Education student support package and Postgraduate student support package is introduced as a special support loan, specifically for costs relating to travel, study, equipment and childcare.

The HE student support package would therefore consist of three elements: maintenance grant, maintenance loan and special support loan, with eligibility for each being dependent on household income and if the student is accessing the Young Student Bursary (YSB) or Independent Student Bursary (ISB) package.

For Care Experienced students, the package of support would consist of a Care Experienced Bursary and Special Support Loan.

For Postgraduate students, the package of support would consist of a Tuition Fee Loan, Maintenance Loan and Special Support Loan.

Directorate: Division: team

Lifelong Learning and Skills: Student Financial Support Team

Executive summary

This EQIA considered the impact of introducing a Special Support Payment for Scottish students.

The EQIA identified that in general the introduction of a Special Support Payment is seen as a positive change for all equality groups as it allows students who are entitled to benefits whilst studying, to not see a reduction in their benefit entitlement when accessing the payment, which will encourage students to access and remain in Higher Education in Scotland.

Background

The Programme for Government committed to introducing a Special Support Payment, so that students who are in receipt of benefits do not lose out because they are in receipt of, or entitled to, student support.

Benefits such as Universal Credit, which are administered by the UK Government, are subject to income assessment. Student support is regarded as a form of income in this assessment and this is the case even if the student has chosen not to receive a loan. This means that for students who are eligible to claim income assessed benefits, every pound of student support entitlement would result in an equivalent pound reduction in benefits.

Payments for the following purposes are not taken into account for benefit assessment:

- to meet tuition fees or examination fees;
- in respect of the person's disability;
- to meet additional expenditure connected with term time residential study away from the person's educational establishment;
- to meet the cost of the person maintaining a home at a place other than that at which they reside during their course (except where universal credit includes an award for housing costs);
- for the maintenance of another person (only if no equivalent award under universal credit);
- to meet the cost of books and equipment;
- to meet travel expenses;
- for childcare costs.

The intention behind this commitment is to introduce a special support payment which is intended for a purpose from the list above, which means that students who are in receipt of benefits can access this payment, without reducing their benefit entitlement.

The Scope of the EQIA

As the change to introduce a Special Support Payment is intended as a positive change, it is considered a concise and focussed EQIA is proportionate in these circumstances.

Students in Further Education (FE) can still receive the FE bursary and remain on benefits, as long as they meet the work search requirement. There is no loan element to the FE financial support package.

Part-time students are able to remain on benefits whilst they study, due to the current living-cost support package not extending to part-time students in Scotland. The Scottish Government have committed to reviewing part-time support for Scottish students and officials will re-consider the requirement of a Special Support Payment

for this group of students, should their package of support change in future academic years.

This commitment therefore applies to full-time Higher Education students only.

There are only certain groups of students who remain entitled to claim income-related benefits whilst engaged in courses of full-time study in Higher Education. The main groups of students who are entitled to claim are:

- living with their partner and the partner is eligible for UC;
- responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple;
- disabled and entitled to Attendance Allowance (AA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP) and already have limited capability for work.

The above groups of students will therefore be affected by the introduction of a Special Support Payment.

Key Findings

The impact analysis identified that there are gaps in the information available relating to the characteristics of students who are eligible for benefits whilst studying in Scotland and therefore the impact that the introduction of the Special Support Payment will have on those protected characteristics.

However, introducing a Special Support Payment in general is seen as a positive change in all equality groups as it allows students who are entitled to benefits whilst studying, to not see a reduction in their benefit entitlement when accessing the payment, which will encourage students to access and remain in Higher Education in Scotland.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In conclusion, positive impacts were identified for all equality groups regarding the introduction of a Special Support Payment.

SAAS will gather statistical data on student support applications for the Special Support Payment and we will be able to monitor the impact of this change on relevant groups going forward. The Higher Education student support package will also be subject to ongoing monitoring by the Lifelong Learning and Skills Division.



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