

Discretionary and Childcare Fund Procedures 20-21

Full-Time Postgraduate (exc. PGDE)

The Discretionary Fund:

The purpose of the Discretionary Fund is to provide additional financial support to eligible students who can demonstrate a need for this throughout their studies. Support is in the form of a non-repayable bursary and is designed top up the student support received through Government to help meet living costs and assist a student in being able to engage and succeed in their studies.

The Childcare Element:

The purpose of the Childcare Element of the Fund is to provide help meeting the costs of study related childcare to eligible students who are unable to meet this cost independently. Support is in the form of a non-repayable bursary, paid directly to your childcare provider. When applying to the Childcare Element, this is an add-on to an application to the Discretionary Fund, meaning you don't need to apply separately and will be assessed for both elements in the one application.

Whether you are applying for the Discretionary Fund only, or both the Discretionary Fund and Childcare Element, this guidance covers who can apply, what you can apply for, how you apply and how the application is assessed.

Who can apply –

1. Applicants must be a UK home student enrolled for the current session and attending a full-time, taught postgraduate course. In addition, applicants must have taken out their full entitlement of all available student support, including student loans*.
2. International or EU students are **not** eligible and should not apply.
3. Pre-Registration Nursing and Midwifery students are **not** eligible and should not apply.
4. Research postgraduate students are **not** eligible and should not apply.
5. Students studying the MSc in Social Work, which falls under the purview of the SSSC, are eligible to apply, but what you can apply for will depend on whether you are in receipt of SSSC funding or not. You can find further detail in the sections below.
6. As PGDE students are funded by SAAS as undergraduate students, they apply to the Full-Time Undergraduate Discretionary and Childcare Fund.
7. *The only exception to point 1 is where a student has elected not to access their full entitlement to the student loan. In these circumstances a student is eligible to apply to the Childcare Element only (i.e. they remain ineligible to apply to the Discretionary Fund) and may be awarded a maximum of £1,215 towards registered childcare costs.

8. In addition to student support, applicants must have applied for all other sources of funding to which they are entitled, i.e. Tax credits, any relevant Benefits, Free Early Education place from Local Authority, etc. The Funding and Advice Team will assist students who are unsure if they are in receipt of all funding they are entitled to.
9. Applicants must also meet any further eligibility conditions stipulated in the SAAS guidelines for the current academic year.
10. Students who have studied previously at this level, and therefore are not eligible for SAAS Tuition Fee Loan (or equivalent), are still eligible to apply to this fund. However, should there be times when the budget is limited, we may have to consider any previous study, and support received for this.
11. Students who are not in receipt of the SAAS Tuition Fee Loan (or equivalent) for whatever reason, are still eligible to apply to this fund. However, should there be times when the budget is limited, we may have to consider this.

What you can apply for –

12. The Discretionary Fund can provide support meeting general living costs such as rent, travel, debt repayments etc. that students may struggle to meet as a result of being a student. The intent of the fund is to assist a student in being able to engage and succeed in their studies.
13. We accept applications from students who have worked out a budget and are applying for Discretionary Fund support to contribute towards a regular monthly shortfall, i.e. they have planned ahead. We also consider applications from students who have faced an unexpected expense that they have not been able to budget for.
14. Students studying the MSc in Social Work, who receive funding through SSSC, can apply for the Discretionary Fund only, and cannot apply for any additional Childcare Element. This is because the funding available through SSSC will include support for childcare costs and we cannot replicate this.
15. Students studying the MSc in Social Work, who **do not** receive funding through SSSC, can apply for the Discretionary Fund and the Childcare Element. Any Childcare Element will be capped at £4,000 for the academic year. NB: This is not an indication that £4,000 will be awarded as our normal assessment criteria will apply. The Discretionary Fund assessment will also consider how well students have planned to financially support themselves without the SSSC bursary. It is important to note that the Discretionary Fund will not replicate the support available through the SSSC bursary, so we will expect students to have appropriately planned for the both the cost of tuition and living throughout their studies.
16. Applicants may apply for a contribution towards their study related childcare costs in any University academic year. Read our [Childcare Fact Sheets](#) before applying. Full details of the childcare costs we can consider are detailed in these documents.
17. We consider childcare for class time and an element of independent study. This is unlikely to be as much as 5 full days childcare, so students should consider their needs carefully before arranging childcare. We will consider a maximum of 4 days childcare but students are free to use this flexibly, i.e. 4 full days, or 3 full days and 2 half days.
18. We understand certain courses require students to attend placements etc. for 5 days per week. In those circumstances we will consider a maximum of 5 days childcare per week.
19. We understand that many childcare providers may offer discounted rates to those committing to full-time childcare, i.e. 5 days per week. If this discounted rate is cost effective, we may consider it.

20. We are unable to consider summer retainers or childcare costs during a summer vacation. We advise students to negotiate any retainer fees in advance of signing contracts.
21. We will query any childcare costs that appear excessive or unreasonable. Regional averages will be used to determine whether costs are excessive or within the regional norm.
22. We will not consider any costs associated with a parent or stepparent providing care for a child.
23. Benefit rules prevent us from contributing to any work-related childcare costs students may have, without this directly reducing the benefit they may be eligible to receive (i.e. Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit or Universal Credit). While we are unable to contribute to this cost, we will need information on these costs to assess an application.
24. We will consider the costs of registered childcare only.
25. Should there be extenuating reasons why a student is unable to use registered care, and are paying for unregistered childcare, such as friends or neighbours, we may be able to contribute towards the costs of this. In these circumstances a student must book an appointment with an Adviser to discuss their application and these extenuating circumstances. Where we feel the use of this care is justified, we will explain how we calculate any contributions and how an application can be progressed.
26. Students who are not in receipt of the SAAS Tuition Fee Loan (or equivalent) for whatever reason, will have any childcare award capped at £4k for the academic year. NB: This is not an indication that £4k will be awarded as our normal assessment criteria will apply.
27. Funds are limited and are not guaranteed until after an application has been fully assessed.
28. Funds are awarded on a first come, first served basis and we encourage all students to apply early to avoid disappointment. The fund will close when the budget becomes exhausted, often with little or no notice.
29. Late applications may be subject to a lesser award than those received early in the academic year. We consider an early application to be one submitted as soon as the application process opens in July.
30. Any award is unlikely to cover any shortfall in full and is in the form of a non-repayable bursary.

How you apply –

31. The fund reopens each year on 1st August, but we are committed to opening our application process as early as possible, allowing students to apply and receive an early decision, and to plan ahead and budget more effectively. Keep an eye on [our website](#) from **1st July** as we will publish our new applications and guidance from that date.
32. Students should apply early to the fund, in order to have their applications assessed and finalised before the start of term. Students can only take advantage of this if they apply early for their statutory student support, as we are unable to finalise applications without this information.
33. While we encourage early applications, and endeavour to finalise the assessment of applications quickly, funds will only be released after enrolment takes place and classes commence.
34. Applications will be available to download from [our website](#).

35. Applicants should complete all relevant sections of the application and enclose the required supporting evidence. Guidance notes for completing the application can be obtained via [the website](#).
36. When also applying for support with childcare costs, the additional Childcare Form should be completed by the student's childcare provider. This is also available via [the website](#).
37. If applicants have a quick question about any aspect of the fund procedures or the application, the best way to contact us is via fundingadvice@uws.ac.uk where we can respond quickly.
38. If applicants would rather discuss an application with an Adviser, or any aspect of the fund in more detail, please book an appointment through The Hub. You can find more details [here](#).
39. Applicants should ensure that the information provided is accurate.
40. A percentage of random checks may be carried out on awards for audit purposes. Any fraudulent claims will be reported to the relevant authorities and may result in disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the University Code of Discipline.

Submitting your application –

41. Due to the continued coronavirus situation, you should submit your application and supporting evidence by email to fundingadvice@uws.ac.uk We have a lot of guidance to help you complete your application electronically, collate your application and supporting evidence and submit this to us.
42. It is important you read all instructions and complete the form correctly as incomplete applications may be returned and will be subject to delay.

How the application is assessed –

43. Applications join a queue based on the date they were received. We work through this queue in order, ensuring those who have applied first are assessed first.
44. We assess applications as quickly as we can, but it can take around 6 weeks to get back to you, and longer at peak times or where your application was incomplete. We ask that applicants refrain from enquiring about the progress of their application until 6 weeks has passed, as this will give us the time to focus on processing.
45. A uniform method of processing is adopted to ensure continuity and fairness of approach. All applications are income assessed, using the evidence that is required.
46. We will first ensure that applicants are eligible to apply, have all other funding in place, have completed the application accurately and correctly, have provided evidence and information to substantiate any claim made on the application, have shown appropriate money management and have included reasonable figures for expenditure.
47. Increasing numbers of students that are applying for financial assistance appear to be spending excessively on gambling or other lifestyle spending. The Funding and Advice Team need to be reassured that any awards made will fulfil the purpose of the fund, which is to ensure the student is able to meet essential living costs and remain on their course.

48. Where problems with gambling, lifestyle spending, debt etc. are identified, the student may be invited to attend an appointment with an Adviser prior to any award being made. The appointment will offer an opportunity to discuss any areas of concern and agree any actions that could take place to improve these problem areas.
49. If the Funding and Advice Team are not satisfied that any award made will meet the purpose and scope of the fund, we may withhold the award until the student has sought help or changed their spending patterns. However, such an award may not be held indefinitely and may be cancelled.
50. Alternatively, we may consider alternative methods of award payments, such as to third-parties, and may consider your award to be subject to regular review in order to monitor progress.
51. Reasonable household income and expenditure assessments will be used to calculate any monthly excess or shortfall. Any unreasonable expenditure amounts will be queried and changed when calculating awards.
52. In order to assess whether figures are reasonable, a set of standard expenditure rates are used in all calculations. While we understand applicants may not adhere to these figures in reality, we apply these to all applications in order to ensure consistency and a fair and equitable approach.
53. These are currently set at:

TV Licence	£13/month
Food/Housekeeping	£150/month for each person in the household
Course Materials	£30/month
Personal Costs, such as entertainment, clothing etc.	£75/month for each person in the household
Gas/Electricity	£30-£200/month, depending on number of people in the home, and type of fuel used
Mobile Phone	£15/month for each adult and teenage child
TV, Internet and/or Phone	Maximum of £60/month

54. Applicants will have an opportunity to tell us about all of their household expenditure in the application. If applicants have outgoings that are not listed on the application, these can be included in the 'Other' section.
55. Applicants also have an opportunity to tell us about any debt repayments they make. The application includes a section for these to be itemised separately, and to provide any other information that might be relevant.
56. Any student support should be divided by the length of your course to get a monthly figure. If a partner is also a student and receiving a student loan and/or bursary, they should divide this by 12 if they are in years 1-3, and by 8 if in their final year, to get their monthly income figure.
57. Students are expected to supplement their income, e.g. through part time work. We will assume a level of income of £150/month for years 1-3 and £50/month for final year students. No assumed income is included for lone parents and those unable to work due to ill health or a disability that would entitle them to receive PIP.
58. While we do expect most students to supplement their income through employment, we understand that many students will feel compelled to take on considerable part-time work in order to meet their financial commitments. In order for these students not to be disadvantaged in their application, we will cap their income at the levels details in point 59. This should allow them to consider reducing part-time work to focus more on studies.
59. Applicants must tell us about any other income they receive, such as benefits, tax credits, child maintenance etc.

60. Having calculated income and expenditure, a monthly shortfall or excess is determined, allowing us to assess your level of financial need.
61. Where appropriate, we may focus our assessment on any extenuating financial circumstances that may be one-off, and therefore not form part of a monthly budget.
62. We would not expect any student showing a monthly excess to be in need of support from the fund. However, we may invite you to meet with an Adviser to discuss your reasons for applying. We fully understand that it can be difficult for some circumstances to be reflected in the application and welcome an opportunity to discuss this in person. If no additional information is forthcoming, students with a monthly excess will not receive an award.
63. Students showing a monthly shortfall may receive an award towards general living costs. The level of any award can depend on personal circumstances and is not guaranteed. An award is likely to be a contribution towards your monthly shortfall and is very unlikely to cover your shortfall in full.

How the application is assessed if childcare is included –

64. If an applicant is applying to the Childcare Element, we consider the cost of childcare separately to your general living costs, but will ultimately still base any award on your monthly excess or shortfall, calculated as per above.
65. We will expect your request for childcare to be reasonable. Full details of the childcare costs we can consider are detailed in these documents, available [here](#).
66. Where we calculate a monthly shortfall, we will interpret this to mean that you do not have the funds available to meet the costs of your childcare independently, so will contribute towards the cost of study related childcare and may also be able to make an award through the Discretionary Fund, towards general living costs.
67. Where we calculate a monthly excess, we will interpret this to mean that you have funds available to contribute towards the cost of your childcare independently and will expect you to do this. Where your childcare costs for the academic year are above the funds you are expected to pay, we may contribute towards the balance.

What happens next -

68. Applicants can expect to receive an email receipt confirming that we have received the application, and that this has joined our processing queue. You may receive this up to several working days after you submitted your application but rest assured that your place in our queue will be based on when you submitted your application and not the date of your receipt.
69. All correspondence is sent to your University email address, so you should ensure you check this regularly if you are expecting to hear from us. The only exception to this is for new students who do not yet have access to University email accounts.
70. You will receive a response from your application as soon as it is assessed. Please see point 44 for more information on timescales.
71. This response may be an award notification, a request for further information if the application was incomplete, a request to attend an appointment with an adviser, or an email advising that an award is not being made and the reason for this.

72. Award notifications will state the award amount and payment pattern, which is usually monthly. Awards will usually be paid via BACS. If students have difficulty with this method of payment they should tell us about this at the point of application.
73. Where an award has been made in respect of childcare costs, award notifications will also be emailed to childcare providers stating the award amount and payment pattern in respect of childcare costs. Awards will be paid via BACS directly to the childcare provider.
74. Initial payments will be made as soon as possible after processing the application, but not before enrolment is confirmed and classes commence.

What you need to do after an award has been made -

75. You must notify us as soon as possible if there is any change in circumstances. You should send such notification to fundingadvice@uws.ac.uk
76. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in your student status, including withdrawal from the course or the commencement of a period of interruption, changes to your childcare usage, and changes to your financial situation.
77. We may cancel your application and award as a result of such changes. A refund of any unused portion may also be requested.
78. You must also update us of any change in your bank details at least 10 working days before we are due to make a payment.

Confidentiality

The University retains all documents pertaining to the financial award as audit checks are performed annually to ensure awards are made appropriately. Where you have submitted paper copies of documents, these will be kept in a locked, secure location. Similarly, digital records are stored in a secure system.

The privacy and confidentiality of students will be respected at all stages of the process. Anonymous statistical information is collected about expenditure of University and Student Awards Agency Funds for reporting purposes and budgetary management. Application forms and related confidential documents are destroyed as per Data Protection guidelines and will be retained for **7 years** after the current academic year.

What if I disagree with the decision about my application?

Applicants are encouraged to discuss the outcome of their application with an Adviser before making any formal request for reconsideration of the decision. In most cases a conversation like this will allow applicants to present information that was not included in the original application and which could make a difference.

If, after speaking with an Adviser, an applicant still wishes to formally query their award, their reasons for disagreeing with the decision should be submitted in writing to the Head of Student Development within 28 days of notification of the final decision from the Adviser. The Head of Student Development will make an initial response within 5 working days of receiving correspondence. Such correspondence can be submitted via fundingadvice@uws.ac.uk where it will be forwarded appropriately.