

Postgraduate Review - Increase to the Postgraduate Tuition Fee Loan

Equality Impact Assessment – Results

August 2023

Equality Impact Assessment – Results

Title of Policy

Increase to the Postgraduate tuition fee loan

Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy

Relevant National Outcomes:

- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

At present, the Postgraduate tuition fee loan is £5,500. This policy change would increase the current Postgraduate support package for Scottish domiciled students by raising the tuition fee loan available from £5,500 to £7,000. This will boost the overall package to £11,500.

Directorate: Lifelong Learning & Skills **Division:** Learner Experience Division

Executive summary

The current Postgraduate support package for Scottish domiciled students was reviewed, of which this EQIA forms a part, and it was considered if the tuition fee loan could be increased.

The EQIA identified that increasing the level of tuition fee loan for this group of students is seen as a positive change to all students as it expands Scotland's postgraduate support package and creates opportunities for Scottish domiciled students to further their education through postgraduate study.

Background

As part of the 2021/22 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to undertake a review of the funding provision for postgraduate students. This review is being conducted jointly by the Scottish Government and Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS).

The review focuses on three research areas; the student support package, course eligibility and widening access.

As part of the student financial support package research, it was considered if the tuition fee loan should be increased, to help counteract tuition fee inflation.

Under the current regulations, full-time postgraduate students are able to access a loan of up to £10,000 (comprising of £5,500 for fees and £4,500 for living costs) for

any taught or research postgraduate course at any Scottish HEI provided it is a Postgraduate Diploma or Masters course. Part-time postgraduate students are also able to access the tuition fee loan element only, which is split across the duration of their course (should it be no longer than twice the length of the full-time equivalent).

The current package of support aims to contribute towards the costs of postgraduate study, however fee levels for postgraduate courses are not regulated by the Scottish Government. This means that higher education institutions have the ability to set the fee levels for each postgraduate course. The package has not changed since 2017.

With the cost of tuition fees increasing over the last 5 years as a result of inflation, raising the tuition fee loan available to students by £1,500 will allow for an overall tuition fee loan of £7,000. Allowing SAAS funding to cover a higher proportion of tuition fees could also mean that Postgraduate students use less of their living cost loan entitlement to subsidise the cost of their fees.

The Scope of the EQIA

As the proposal to increase the tuition fee loan is intended as a positive change for all prospective students, it is considered a concise and focused EQIA is proportionate in these circumstances.

The policy will affect all eligible Scottish domiciled students undertaking an eligible postgraduate course that is funded by SAAS.

HESA data shows that in the academic year 2020/21 there were 26,840 Scottish domiciled students on courses potentially eligible for postgraduate tuition fee support at Scottish HEIs.

Key Findings

The EQIA identified that there are a few gaps in the information available relating to the characteristics of gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity in postgraduate students and therefore the impact that the introduction of a financial support package for this group of students will have on these protected characteristics. However, the remaining data is available and the introduction of a financial support package for this group of students is seen as a positive change as it expands Scotland's postgraduate support package and creates opportunities for Scottish domiciled students to further their education through postgraduate study.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As a result of this EQIA, it is recommended that the tuition fee loan be increased from £5,500 to £7,000. This will create opportunities for full-time Scottish domiciled students to further their education through postgraduate study.

SAAS gather statistical data on student applications which will therefore provide us with the ability to monitor the impact of this policy change on relevant groups going forward.



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