

SG POLICY UPDATE

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Access Delivery Group with regular updates on related policy developments within the Scottish Government. ADG members should notify SG officials of any additional policy areas that they would like to see covered within the update going forward.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF STUDENT SUPPORT

The Scottish Government responded to the independently chaired Student Support Review (SSR) in June 2018 with commitments for improvements across Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE). In 2018/19, we invested over £5 million to support an increase in the Care - Experienced Bursary (CEB) to £8,100 per year for students across FE and HE.

In 2019/20, we have increased bursaries for eligible students from the lowest income families in HE and increased the HE bursary income threshold to support access. In FE, all eligible students have seen an increase to the FE bursary levels and we introduced the 'FE Bursary Guarantee' system for eligible 18 and 19 year olds.

In 2020/21, we will remove the age cap for the CEB and in the April of 2021, we will increase the student loan repayment threshold from £18,935 to £25,000. The repayment period has already been reduced from 35 to 30 years in 2018.

We are continuing to progress a number of recommendations made by the Review, which require further work. These include the development of an Information Advice & Guidance portal for students and parents, a review of student support for Disabled Students and exploring options which give students more choice on the timing of their payments.

The internal Student Support Review Programme Board met for the 8th time on the 28th October and will not meet again until next year.

LEARNER JOURNEY

We continue to progress with implementing the 17 recommendations from the 15-24 Learner Journey Review.

The Learner Journey Directors Group met on 24th October 2019, with the next meeting scheduled in January 2020. Progress was noted and Directors fed back that overall progress within the programme is on track, however there is scope for increasing the pace of implementation.

In the year ahead we will be continuing work to: ensure every pupil in Scotland has access to an online account to collate their skills and experiences; publish a new Careers' Strategy to set the vision for high quality career information, advice and guidance services that are accessible to all; and publish a shared vision on the purpose of post 15 education.

DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE (DYW)

The most recent Developing the Young Workforce Programme Board meeting was held on 13 November 2019 at PriceWaterCoopers LLP. The main focus of the session was on forward planning with Changes Themes until the end of the programme. Overall members recognised the positive work going on in all areas of the programme however were keen to reflect on the challenges which still remain as we approach the end point of DYW.

The eighth session of the DYW National Advisory Group will take place on 28 November 2019 at Edinburgh College, which will be co-chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and Councillor Stephen McCabe from COSLA. The group will discuss the impact of DYW in schools and explore progress of the Foundation Apprenticeship.

The Fifth Developing the Young Workforce Annual Progress Report will be published in December 2019.

ATTAINMENT

Interim Evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund and Local Authority Survey

On 21 June the year 3 Interim Evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) was published. The first interim evaluation report for years 1 and 2 was published in March 2018. The second report focuses on Year 3 (2017/18) of the ASF and includes evidence on the implementation of Pupil Equity Funding for the first time.

The report describes what is working well and also identifies some challenges: concerns about sustainability and the impact that withdrawal of funding could have on additional staffing resources. Progress towards closing the gap is variable across Challenge Authorities however evaluation findings found that 88% of headteachers saw improvements in relation to closing the poverty-related attainment gap as a result of interventions supported by the Attainment Scotland Fund. 95% of headteachers expect to see improvements over the next 5 years.

Findings from the Attainment Scotland Fund Local Authority Survey were published on 19 November. Feedback from local authorities shows a clear majority feel the Attainment Scotland Fund is successfully supporting progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

The fund has been recognised as a driver for increased collaboration between schools and partners. There were also positive findings regarding the use of data and evidence in local decision making and the role of Attainment Advisers within local authorities was also highlighted as a positive.

The evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund follows the duration of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and has adapted in line with developments in the Attainment Scotland Fund. Now in its fourth year, the evaluation focuses on three strands of the Attainment Scotland Fund: Challenge Authorities, Schools Programme, Pupil Equity Funding. A fourth strand, the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund, is also being considered as part of the evaluation for Year 4.

Extension of Attainment Scotland Fund

On 3 September, we announced as part of the Programme for Government that we will continue our investment in the Attainment Fund beyond this Parliamentary term into 2021/22. This gives vital clarity to schools and councils that this support will continue.

Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund

On 25 October, the Scottish Government announced the latest tranche of funding for local authorities through the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund.

More than £8 million of Scottish Government funding was spent last year on projects to improve the attainment of care experienced young people. Projects as diverse as mentoring programmes, counselling services and driving lessons were supported through the Care Experienced Children and Young People fund.

More than £12 million of further funding will be provided this academic year to enhance the support available. Care experienced young people from birth up to the age of 26 are eligible for support.

Pupil Equity Fund

On 31 October, figures were published showing school level spend of Pupil Equity Funding around Scotland in 2018 to 2019.

With £122.258m PEF allocated in 2018/19, alongside the £47.667m PEF carry over from 2017/18, there was almost £170 million of PEF available for schools in 2018/19. £133.058m of this was spent across Scotland, which equates to 78% of available PEF, a significant increase from the £72.540m spent in 2017/18 which equated to 60%.

Cumulatively, over 2017/18 and 2018/19, £205.535m has been invested of the £242.466m (85%) allocated PEF across the two years, with £36.868m carried forward.