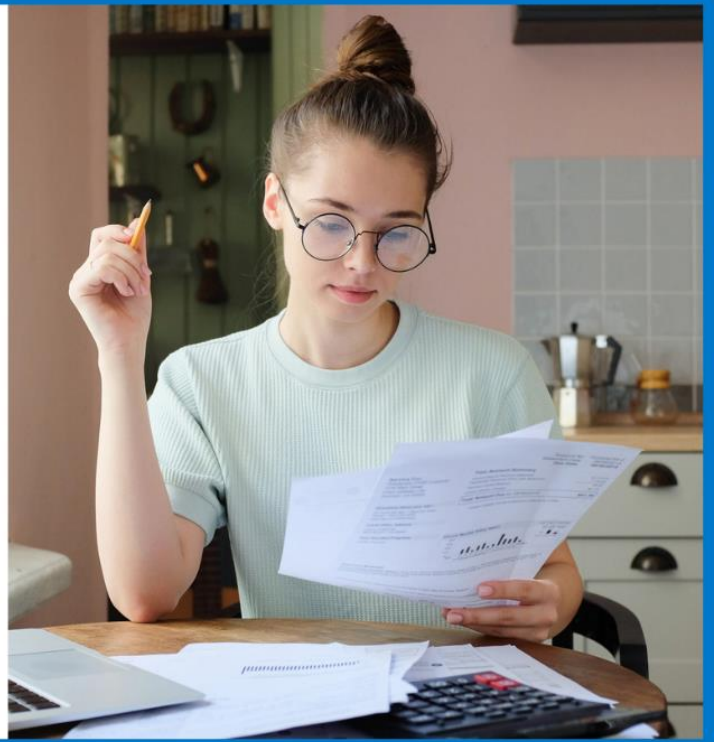


CELCIS Education Forum

Theme: Student finance and support for care experienced people in higher education

Thursday 27 April, 2023

Webinar recording



Education Forum April 23

(Linda O'Neill)

Well, good morning, everyone and very warm welcome to our first Education Forum of 2023. For those of you that I have not had the chance to meet before, my name is Linda O'Neill, and I'm the Education Lead at CELCIS. And it's really nice to see so many of you here this morning. If this is your first Education Forum meeting, welcome to the forum and we hope you enjoy it. I'm absolutely delighted today, to be able to welcome along Stacey Heather-Brash, who is the Funding Awareness and Engagement Manager from Student Awards agency, Scotland, also known as SAAS. Stacey is going to be talking to us today about the support available through SAAS to prospective and current students with care experience in Higher Education. And you will get the chance to properly meet Stacey and ask some questions throughout the morning. But I'll just ask Stacey to give us a wee wave and say hello, before we start.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Good morning. Thank you all very much for signing up and for joining me this morning. And thank you for the introduction, Linda.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey. We've also got some other CELCIS staff with us today. They will be taking part in discussions and also helping us to facilitate the breakout rooms. And they will

introduce themselves as the morning goes on. Before we go into today's theme, I thought it would be helpful just to run through the agenda and to cover some housekeeping. Before we hear from Stacey, we're going to have a really short discussion in which it's going to help us think together about future themes and the format of the Education Forum. We'll then have our input from Stacey, which will be followed by some time for question and answers. Before we split enter some breakout rooms to talk about some questions and thoughts based on our topic. We'll then come back together to share some of the themes from the discussions. And we will finish up at 11 o'clock. You may have seen up at the top of the screen that it says will be recording and transcribing this meeting. We will just be recording the formal input of the session, we won't be recording the breakout rooms. And we make all the videos in the materials that we produce today available on our website. If you want to share them with colleagues or you need to nip out at some point.

Just before we get into today's theme and the agenda, we wanted to spend just a few minutes thinking a wee bit about the future the Education Forum like looks like. As you know, before the pandemic the Education Forum was mainly held in person and would usually meet twice a year for around a half day. We would discuss themes or issues that forum members had raised with us and asked to look a wee bit deeper into together. We'd keep these sessions to around 40 to 50 people so that we can promote connections from different areas, but also small enough to that we could have lots of discussion. As with all organisations during the pandemic, we had to move online. And we made some adjustments to the format and attainments of the meetings to try and continue to provide that space to come together and think about the issues that impact care experience people's education and also think about what we can do collectively and individually to address some of them.

We changed the format so that we keep that to an hour and a half and that was based on people's feedback and focusing on one issue per session, rather than the previous format (the in-person period) looking at maybe two or three different inputs across the half day. After a period of, hesitantly, calling relative stability, after the initial phases of the pandemic, we're now starting to think about what we do moving forward and would really like your views on what you would like that to look like. We've got a really short poll that we would be grateful if you could take part in. The answers to the poll are completely anonymous. And then we'd also be grateful if you could put ideas for any areas for our future themes or discussion into the chat (If you're comfortable doing that). We know that the chat isn't anonymous. At the moment, we're really just hoping to get an idea of whether or not there's an appetite to come together in person, again, to give us a bit of a starting point and what the areas are that you'd like us to focus on.

Once we can gauge this we are then planning to follow that up through email with a wee bit more of an in depth surveys and we will keep people updated with the plans based on feedback. So what I will ask Michelle to do now is launch the poll. And if I could just ask everybody to vote based on your preference. So you should see that appearing on your screens and at the minute. So the first question is, would you like us to organise an in-

person Forum event in the future? So I'll ask you to vote on that. And then the next question is, if you did answer, yes, how long would you like that in person event to be two hours a half day or a full day?

Here we go. You can see the majority of people would like us to organise an in-person Forum event. And about half of our people to the majority are looking for a half day event. So thank you very much for voting on that. We know that that is really, really basic at the moment. But what it does is it starts to give us a wee bit of an idea what the appetite is for people going forward. And if I could just ask you to drop in the chat, if there's any issues or themes that you would really like is to focus on and we can start having a think about that. We'll also be asking people that in the evaluations so if there's nothing coming to mind now, or you prefer to let us more about that later on, then you can do that in the evaluation. But thanks very much for giving us a wee bit of a temperature check around that. And we will go in and do some work and come back to you with a more in depth survey in the next couple of months.

So moving into today's session, we've chosen today's theme because it's a really important time for care experience students who are hoping to or have already been accepted on to Higher Education course. Applications to SAAS for financial support are open. And it's the time of year when young people and the adults and professionals around them who support care experienced people to apply for financial support might need a bit of additional information, advice and guidance. There has been a significant amount of work done in previous years to widen access to both Further and Higher Education for care experienced students. And this is seen both an increase in the number of people applying to HE and FE courses, but also an increase in diversity and the type of support being offered by institutions and other agencies such as SAAS. And just to flag that although today is focusing on support in Higher Education, we know that there's a significant number of care experienced students that are also studying in FE, and that actually FE acts as a progression route for so many care experience students in to enter Higher Education. There is similar support available to students in FE and both Skills Development Scotland and individual institutions, colleges will be able to provide further information if you are interested in this area. In 2019, we carried out some research on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council called Being a Student with Care Experience is very Daunting. And the aim of that was to understand the experience of care experienced students at Scottish colleges and universities. Financial support came through really strongly as a theme that could impact on student retention rates, and also other areas such as coping with studies and mental health. And there have been a number of other studies that have identified the importance of access to not just financial support, but really good and robust financial advice to care experience students in being able to access and sustain their Higher Education course. This is really, really important because we know and we're starting to understand through research coming particularly from England that if a care experienced student can complete their Higher Education studies, they can

go on to be just as, if not even more, successful than all other students. So we really hope today will give us some opportunities to think together about what support is available. And also think about what else people would need to know to be able to support care experience students to access and sustain Higher Education. So before I hand over to Stacey, I just want to acknowledge that we're really aware that everyone in the room will have different experiences in that area, and different levels of comfort, discussing some of our themes. So if you do need to step out or step away for a few minutes, please feel free to do that. We also just ask you to keep yourself and the young people that you've worked with safe and in your breakout room discussions and in the questions and answer sessions, there will be a flag around confidentiality for people. We know that we might not all agree on each other's viewpoints that we are sharing in the discussions and that's okay. We just ask that everybody agrees to be respectful in our contributions and of each other. And if there's anything at all that you want to talk about in more detail after the session, then please don't hesitate to get in touch with myself, the education team, or Stacey. So without further ado, I will hand over to you, Stacey. And if I could just ask that everybody could double check that their microphone is muted, and also turn off that camera for that section of the presentation. Thanks, Stacey.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Thank you very much, Linda. And thank you for the introduction. And again, just want to reiterate, thank you all so much for joining us this morning. So as I said, my name is Stacey Heather-Brash, and I work for a Student Awards Agency Scotland, more commonly known as SAAS, and I work as our Funding Awareness and Engagement Manager. So I really look at our outreach and our approach to that, and how we can raise awareness of the different support packages that are on offer, and also in supporting the widening access agenda. So today, obviously, you know, I'm aware that with the different attendees on the calls, that there might be different levels of experiences and knowledge. And with regards to the care experience bursary. So what I've tried to really do is to take it back to basics a little bit and just do a refresher of the eligibility criteria for the care experience bursary, what funding is available, the application process and the evidence process. And then I'm going to do a demonstration of our Student Information Scotland website as well. However, throughout the session, what I really want to reiterate and raise is the work that SAAS has undertaken. So we work with a range of sector partners, and various different student groups to really shape our approach in order to drive forward continuous improvement with the support and information that is available to care experienced students and those that may support care experienced students.

So in order to be eligible for the care experience bursary, students must be undertaking an eligible Higher Education course. So when I say Higher Education, I mean HNCs and HNDs, a student might do at college or undergraduate degrees, and that also includes postgraduate diplomas in education, which is a one year course that a student can do

once they've graduated, that qualifies them to be either a primary or a secondary teacher. I'm really hoping that my voice holds out I've done a lot of talking over the last fortnight, so bear with me. I apologise in advance if there's any coughs or if I have to mute myself. So in order to be eligible for the bursary, as I say, they must be doing an eligible course. And they must also meet the residency requirements that are set out in the regulations. And they must have been looked after by a local authority in the UK before they turned 18. In terms of those types of placements that were taken into account, that can be a whole host of different things. So that includes kinship care, both formal and informal, foster care and residential. And there's a lot more information on the website on the different types of placement that would qualify a student for the care experience bursary. As Linda has already touched on, it's also worthwhile knowing at this point, that the information that I'll cover today is the Higher Education care experience student bursary, but there is also a care experienced bursary that is available for those on Further Education courses. If you have any prospective students that you're supporting, that want information on the Further Education bursary, they can be found on individual college websites, the Student Funding Council, and there's also the website that I'm going to talk about later on the Student Information Scotland website. That also covers both the funding available in Further and Higher Education routes, as we are aware some students may progress from Further Education on to Higher Education. So that covers both aspects of the funding. So in terms of the support that's available for care experience students. And you probably know already that Scottish students that study a course of Higher Education in Scotland get their tuition fees paid for by the Scottish Government. In addition, if we have a Scottish student that decides to go outside of the UK to study, they can still apply to SAAS for support. The only difference is that that would be in the form of a Tuition Fee Loan, so that money would need to be paid back when they finish. And you're also I'm hoping, aware that we have the non-income assessed care experience bursary, which has gone up this year to £9000. So that has been an uplift across undergraduate student support. So the new figure for the care experience bursary is £9000 from academic year 23-24. So when a student applies for that they do not need to provide any income details at all, any student is assessed as care experienced will automatically get that maximum support. In addition, we also have an accommodation grant that is available for care experienced students. And that is available to support them during the summer. And that's to help with any - clues in their title - any accommodation costs that they will have. And that's up to £105 per week. So they can apply for that during the summer break to support them with those costs over the summer. In addition to the support that we're talking about there, we've obviously put some mechanisms in place as well, to support care experience students to have a little bit more flexibility with their studies as well. So we know that the route that someone make take through Higher Education is not always linear, so every student who is on a higher education course has an additional year of funding that they can use should they need to change course or repeat a year of their course. So every student is able to access that additional unit funding. But there is also a concession that applies to care experience students, where

they do also have an additional plus one year. So care experienced students have two years of additional funding that they can use, should they need to change course or repeat a year of their studies. So that's another mechanism that we've put in place just to support care experienced students through their Higher Education learner journey. We've also taken feedback onboard and with regards to how we process applications. And we do have a specific route and way that we process care experienced bursary applications. And they do come through a specialised team. And I will talk a little bit more about that later on. So in terms of additional support that we can offer, as well, as part of our undergraduate support package, we do also have additional living costs grants that students can apply for, they apply to students that are lone parents, or students that may have another adult that's dependent on them. So that's all part of the SAAS application, that they can also apply for that support. And we also have our disabled student allowance. It's more commonly shortened to DSA. What is DSA? So that's basically an additional allowance that's available, that supports students that are on a higher education course, and have a disability or an additional learning need. And basically, what that means is that they can apply to SAAS for support through DSA. How that process works is they would get in touch with a disability advisor at their chosen college or university, and that disability advisor would support them through the process. What they would do is they would carry out what we call a needs assessment, they would basically get to know the student and their specific circumstances and the nature of their disability or learning need. They would write a report that they would send to SAAS, and that would have a series of recommendations in it. So that could be things like a student may need can have access to assistive software or technology. Or it could be personal help in the form of a note-taker or scribe, or study support skills. So what happens is that report goes to SAAS, we then provide the funding to the student in order to go away and purchase that equipment or to employ that person to support them or their studies. So that's just to give you a flavour of some of the other things that we have in place. So the care experience bursary is paid directly to the student, and something that we introduced last year again to give those students increased flexibility with regards to their payments, and also to really help with budgeting. We've given care experienced students the option to choose how they receive their payments and they are given two options. So they can either receive them during term time, which is normally nine months. So what that means is that their payments would start in August/September at the start of their course. And they would run through normally to May/June time, dependent on the length of the individual course. Or they do have the option to choose to receive payments over the full 12 months. So what that means is the total amount of bursary doesn't change. So every student will receive the 9000 pounds in total. But it would just be split equally over the term time option, or over 12 months. So those that choose to get over the full year would obviously receive a lesser amount each month. But that would help them with budgeting during the summer, because that wouldn't stop. And the rules around that is that students must be receiving the care experience bursary, and they must be on a course that is greater than one year in length. So for example, one year courses like a HNC or the

PGDE, they wouldn't be able to apply for the 12 month option if they're on one of those courses. Similarly, if they're on the final year of their course, they would automatically be paid during term time. So the 12 month option wouldn't apply there. And there's a lot of support and resources that we've produced on our website. So we work very closely with different student groups and the Child Poverty Action Group, and produce some resources that will help students make an informed decision about whether they want to take the term time option, or whether they think the 12 month option would be better for them. So if you are supporting any students in making that decision, please direct them to the SAAS website. And there's a lot of information to help them make that decision. So in terms of how to apply or in key timing at the moment for SAAS applications for our students that will be coming to start this autumn. So all students should apply via the SAAS online application. Applications open from April of each year, and students need to apply to us in every year of their course. And we do quite heavily promote the 30th of June date. And the reason we do that, is we say that if students apply to us by the 30th of June, we'll have all of their funding in place in time for their course starting.

So in terms of applying for support as a care experience student, exactly the same applies, a student would go on to the SAAS website. If they're a new student, they would register and they would create an online account. And then as part of completing that application, they will be asked to declare if they are a care experienced student. Now, throughout the years from the care experienced bursary first being introduced, we've done a lot of work, particularly with organisations like CELCIS, we've worked really closely with Linda, organisations like Help for Success, Who Cares? Scotland, and with students directly to get feedback on this process. So at this point, we have a very streamlined application process where students are asked early in the application. And it clearly explains the eligibility criteria to qualify as a care expedience student. And then ask them to tick a box to self-declare whether they are care experienced. It also asks for a little bit of information about the type of care placement. So it will ask about the care placement, it will ask about the sort of start and end period of that, just so that we have all the information upfront to be able to assess their application. So I'd said that as part of the application, we do ask for details about their care placement. The reason that we do that, as part of the application is that as part of processing the application, we will send the student an evidence form to complete. So all of the personal information that they have given on their application is already pre-populated on that form, to make it as streamlined and as easy as possible for that student to complete. And we have done a lot of work over the years on that evidence template. What we had found in the early days of the care experience bursary is that we were perhaps gathering unnecessary information. And we were getting a lot of detail from our students about their sort of background and history. That wasn't relevant. We didn't need that to be able to assess that application. So we're really looked at the sort of bare minimum information that we need to be able to assess

their application. And we've really tried to take a trauma informed approach with regards to evidence in the care inexperienced data. As I say, I've worked with a range of stakeholders, and we've taken feedback on board each year to shape that approach. Students only need to provide that evidence once And it is, as I say, the minimum amount of information that we need to be able to award that application. So as part of that process, there is a section of the form that needs to be completed and signed by a professional person. Now there is a full comprehensive list on the website, but that can include people like social workers, teachers, doctors, somebody at the college or university that can confirm the information that they've provided, that form needs to be completed and signed. And once that's fully completed, that's the evidence that we would need to be able to assess that application. Now, we have had some questions over the last few years from professional people around the information they're completing, why they're doing that. So we have provided some robust information and guidance on our website to support those that may be completing that evidence form to support a student as well. So if you are ever being asked to complete that forum, please feel free to check the information on the guidance on the website, that'll help to support that to do that as well. So once we've got a completed application from a student, and we've had the evidence form returned to us, care experienced bursary applications are then processed by a specialist team. So we've established a specialist team within the SAAS. And that's called a special support team, funnily enough, have I said the word specialist enough? And so they will review all care experienced applications. And what they may do is they may contact the student or the professional person that's listed on the form, if any further information is required. And I would say with regards to the process and those applications, it's something we've worked very hard on - an individual approach is taken to each case. So we won't just reject an application upon first review. So we do have sort of escalation routes, to team leaders and senior people within the processing side of things that we will look to fund whenever possible, so we wouldn't just reject a case on first review. The team that work within the SST, have received training from various different organisations to make sure that they are taking a trauma informed approach to processing applications and engaging with students and professional people. And I definitely just want to touch on it, but not for too long. If a student receives their care experience bursary, and then they withdraw from their course, they may need to pay some of that money back, although we say it as a non-income assist award, and it's non-repayable. If the student does withdraw from the course and they've been paid too much, that information will be passed to our recoveries team, and they may be asked to pay some of that money back. But what we've really tried to do is look at how we approach that. So again, similarly to with the processing, each case is looked at on an individual basis, our recoveries team, when they contact that student, they will take a compassionate approach and they'll work with the student to understand their needs, and agree an appropriate time to pay that back. If the student is, you know not comfortable dealing with that themselves, then we can deal with third parties as well on their behalf. And we can fill in forms to allow a third party to discuss that for them as well. So in terms

of any additional support and resources, so I'm sure you're all aware that I'm sure some of you are on the call today that fulfil these roles. But we would encourage students to get in touch with their college or university widening access officers. And we'd encourage them to do that as early as possible, just to make sure that they're getting obviously all the financial support from ourselves, but also that if there's any additional support available from their college or university, that they're accessing that. And they are also aware of any other support and mechanisms that different colleges and universities have as well. So there's lots of sort of things in place, for example, health and wellbeing initiatives. So yeah, all the different colleges and universities have sort of different things in place. So we would always encourage a student to get in touch with them. As I say, I'm going to touch on the Student Information Scotland website in just a little bit. And there's also other organisations that I'm sure you are aware of that we'd encourage students to engage with. So the Hub for Success who focus largely on care experienced students in education, Who Cares? Scotland, and obviously CELCIS that have organised this today. So at this point, when we're talking about support and resources. I just want to take a moment to talk a little bit about obviously, I've talked quite a lot about our engagement with various different sectors and stakeholders within the sector and students as well. But that's really vitally important to us. For example, this year, we've engaged with different sector groups to really make improvements to the information and guidance that's on our website. Another thing I'm not sure if you'll know about is that SAAS took the decision to publish their own corporate parenting plan. So in our own right, SAAS isn't a corporate parent, however Scottish ministers are. Now obviously, with SAAS being part of Scottish Government, we are responsible for administering the funding for higher education students. And we were responsible for administering the care experience bursary. So as part of that role, we took the decision to publish our own corporate parenting plan. So the first iteration of that was published in 2017. And the real sort of driver behind that was a delivery of the care experience bursary and the associated processes. And then in 2021, we published the second iteration of that. And that second phase was really for us was about a cultural shift. So it was making sure that all SAAS staff knew the role that they played. So, you know, we have things like as part of our corporate induction, we have a section on corporate parenting, just to make sure that obviously, as I say across the board, irrespective of where you work in the agency, that you are aware of aware of the role that you play, in terms of corporate parenting.

To just to give you an idea of some of the things that we set out. So in that first plan, some of the key achievements and things that we did were, as I say, delivery of the care experience bursary, introducing our bespoke application route for care experienced students. And we do meet with organisations like CELCIS on a quarterly basis. And that's really to help us discuss the experiences and the needs of care experience students to make sure that we are being responsive to that. And we can alter our approach and information and guidance as necessary. And some of the other things that we've delivered is removal of the age cap as well. So when the first care experience bursary was first

introduced, it was that you had to be under the age of 25. So that's now been removed. So those are some of the key things that we have committed to delivering, and have now delivered on. And as I say that sort of second phase of the corporate parenting plan is really about the sort of wider cultural approach. So some of the key commitments that we've set out in the second phase of our corporate parenting plan, are some of the things I've touched on today. So one of them was to introduce a streamlined approach to processing care experienced applications. So that's where the specialist support team has come from, and to really develop staff awareness, as I say with having that corporate induction. And we do have an ongoing commitment to work with both new and existing stakeholders. And just to make sure that, as I say that we are driving forward that continuous improvement. So in terms of other support and resources, so I'm just going to do a shameless plug for all things SAAS here. So we do have the SAAS website. And if you don't already, please follow us on all social media channels, or we have Twitter, YouTube, where we produce help videos, Instagram, and we also do the occasional TikTok as well. So please feel free to follow us on all social media channels. And we would also encourage you that if you are supporting any continuing or prospective students, that these are the best places to go to get help and information on the support that's available from SAAS. So I'm going to take this point just to pause and then I'm going to give you an overview of the Student Information Scotland website. So just bear with me for a second.

So I just want you to take the opportunity to highlight the Student Information Scotland website as a resource. And I think when I've been delivering a lot of sessions recently, there's maybe a lack of awareness across the piece of this resource. And I think it's really, really good for prospective students. And if you're supporting any prospective students, to signpost them, because as I said earlier on, it does cover both Further and Higher Education. And one of the things that I want you to demo today that I think is really useful in terms of promote and sort of financial responsibility and to raise that awareness is as part of the - I'm going to call it SIS, because that's what we shorten it to - as part of the SIS website, there is a funding and budget calculator that I will demo. So if you were to go into resources, you can see there that there's the budget funding calculator, and there's also just the funding calculator as well. So what I've done is I've pre-filled in one that I'll walk through, but as you can see, just as an idea of the wealth of information that's on there, so it's not just the basic, what funding is available. So there's information on things like student life. So considering if a student is going to be moving out, are they going to be living in halls, what are the sorts of costs? There's information on health and well-being and signposts to various different resources. So I would say it's a really good one to look at for yourself, if you're supporting any students, but also to signpost them to as well. So as I say, I've felt in a funding and budget calculator here that I'll just walk you through. So you will see that it gives you the option to do either just the budget and funding, or the funding on its own. So the one that I've looked at here is the budget and funding calculator. So you can see as an idea here, so I asked a student about the income that they're going to have. So I asked them to think about things like, are they going to

be working while they study? It asks about if they live with a partner, what income their partner will have, if they do get any additional support from family and friends, it asks them to provide those details. And it also asks them to let us know if they've got any savings. And obviously, we would think at that point as well, that might be a trigger to think about, okay, if I don't have any savings, is that something I maybe want to think about doing. And then it also asks about any benefits as well. So you can see there, it asks them to declare that the income that they will have incoming, and then it also gives them a chance, I think, really importantly, to have a think about the outgoings that they're going to have while they're studying. So it asks them to think about what sort of accommodation they're going to be living at. And to declare what the cost of that will be. It also asks them to consider sort of things like study materials. So what we find is when I when I go out, and I deliver funding presentations to new students, these are the sorts of things that they maybe haven't considered, you know, they've considered the basic things like accommodation and travel. But they've not considered dependent on the type, of course that they're doing, whether they're going to have to buy books up front, what the ones that they're going to have in the library, if there's any sort of material. So you know, you're doing a science course, will they have to buy things like lab coats. So it really just gets them starting to think about those sorts of things as well. So again, includes things like travel, food, groceries, insurance, then obviously, the normal things that we would expect them to consider things like socialising bills. And then obviously, if you are a student that has a child as well, it asks them to include things like child care as well, and then sort of one off expenses. So what then happens is, once they've filled all this information, they're then presented with the funding calculator as well. So this is where we would determine what funding they would be eligible to receive, either from SAAS or from Further Education. So it asks them some questions to determine eligibility, about the course that they're doing. And then also asked them about specific courses. So there are a few courses that we fund slightly differently. And it's worth noting as well, that the care experience bursary is only available for undergraduate courses. So there are some courses as I say - nursing is funded slightly differently and then, obviously, if you have a student that's part time that's funded slightly differently as well. So as I say, it asks them for their personal information. And then you can see here what the output is, so it then shows them what money they will have coming in, and then what money they've said they're going to have going out. So you can imagine if a student has put in a lot of expenses, they may be in a position where they have more money going out than they have coming in. And then that just helps them to consider you know, okay, am I not if I'm not working part time, do I want to consider getting a part time job? Have I explored the other aspects of the website where it highlights other funding that I might be able to apply for? So it really just helps them to think and plan before they actually start their studies. And you can see here that it also goes into detail as well. So with the one that I filled in I had said that I was a care experienced student, so it highlights there, the £9000 bursary per year, the accommodation grant. And then also highlights other support and resources as well, so things like discretionary funds from college or university. And that

students are eligible for council tax exemption as well. And this website also does cover things like free bus passes and stuff like that. So there's a whole wealth of information on there that I really just wanted to highlight to you all today. So that is a whistle stop tour of all things SAAS, and the steps that we've taken to improve the process and to deliver the care experience bursary. So I'm happy to take any questions.

(Linda O'Neill)

Stacey, that was great. Thank you so much. And we've had lots of questions already coming through in the chat. If I could also ask people, please just to pop the camera back on unless you are doing your ironing in your jammies. But please feel free to put your camera on so that we can see people and what I might do is just go through the questions that we've got in the chat so far. And then if I could just ask people to put their hands up with anything else that they would like us to ask Stacey. We might not have time to get through all of the questions today. But what we will do, if we have to finish up to go into breakout rooms, we'll ask people to put anything that we've not managed to get to in the chat and we'll pass that over to Stacey, and we'll make sure that we get back to people and also publish the answers to the questions on the website. If I could also just flag that we're not able just to go into the level of detail today about individual cases, we know that there will be people here that are supporting care experienced young people to apply and might have questions about very specific individual circumstances. We won't be able to answer those kinds of questions today. But there's lots of sort of general questions in the chat that will hopefully be able to address. So the first question we had is from Holly Robertson, Stacey, and Holly is asking if people are still able to access funds if they're previously care experienced.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

So just to clarify Holly, so do you mean there that if they have previously accessed the care experience bursary, are they allowed to come back and do a second course? If that's the case, if they've gained a qualification, so if they've already gained an undergraduate qualification, so say, for example, the student has access to care experience bursary, and have already gained an undergraduate degree, they wouldn't then be able to come back and get the care experienced bursary to do a second qualification. However, if they've not been successful in gaining that qualification, what we would do is we would look at the number of years of funding that they've had. And obviously, I mentioned there that they have those two additional years of funding. So what we would do is we would look at the previous funding that they've had, and we would work out how many years of support they have left to access so that maybe they're coming back to education, again, having not gained the qualification that they may be able to access the bursary for some years of their studies. But if that's the case, what we would ask that student to do is to contact us directly, and we can discuss their specific circumstances and advise accordingly to help them make that informed decision. Hope that answers that question.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey, I was thinking more about young people who had maybe been in care at some point in their life, but weren't currently in care whether they would be access it? They would be able to access it. Okay, super. Thank you.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Sorry, Holly, I should have reiterated that. So when we say that they've been looked after by a UK local authority under the age of 18, that is at any point in their life. So that can be for any time period at all. So that can be as short as one day that they've been considered looked after. So they don't have to currently be considered or looked after child.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks for that, Holly and Stacey. And when you were talking Stacey, about the students only being asked to fill in the evidence form or provide evidence of their care experience once, Carolanne Strickland had flagged that at Throughcare and Aftercare, they've had some young people that they've supported that have asked to provide their evidence more than once. And I was just wondering if you could let us know what people should do and those situations.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Yeah. So in terms of applying from SAAS, as long as the evidence that they've sent us in the first instance has been sufficient, they shouldn't be asked to provide that again. And the only circumstances that could be the case, for example, is if they are transitioning from Further Education and Higher Education, they may be asked it evidence that again. We are working very closely with the Student Funding Council to try and find a way that, you know, there's that sort of recognition that they've previously been awarded the Further Education bursary, and that carries over into Higher Education. And that is something we are still very much working on at the moment. Carolann, if you have got students that have been applying to SAAS and have been asked to evidence that more than once, and that's maybe something we can pick up offline and just have a discussion about because that shouldn't be the case that if the evidence has been deemed satisfactory, and they've been awarded the bursary that they shouldn't be asked to re-evidence that as part of their application each year, they will still be asked to can indicate that they are a care experienced student, but there shouldn't be need to go through the evidence process more than once.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey, Ruth Tudor had also flagged that students can still struggle with what care experience is particularly kinship care. This has been an area of focus for you guys. I don't know if you want to say a wee bit more about that as, there's a new section and an updated section on the website as well.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Yep, some of our operations and policy colleagues have done a little bit of work over the last year to look around the information and guidance that relates to kinship care, and particularly around informal and formal kinship care. So we have updated our website to reflect that, to hopefully make that easier to understand what sorts of placements do qualify for the care experience bursary. But you know, off the back of this, if anybody does have any additional feedback, obviously, we're going to go into those breakout sessions. So I'm more than happy to take that on board. But we have been doing some work with, as I say, sector partners and students to try and make that a bit more robust and easily accessible and easy to understand?

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey. Taegan has asked a really interesting question and one that we get quite a lot at CELCIS. And she said that some universities have individual care experience bursaries. We know that a lot more institutions now are offering bursaries for various different groups of students in specific circumstances, and we know that care experienced is one circumstance. So Tegan's asking if a young person should apply for the bursary that their institution is offering would that impact that eligibility for the SAAS care experience bursary?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

It would not. Any funding that they get from the college or university would be in addition to the funding package from SAAS, so they wouldn't need to tell us about that. So it would just be, you know, additional support that they can have. So no, no impact whatsoever.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey. And I think just a wee flag as well that for some care experience students that could potentially be a factor in deciding where to go and study. I know that we have you spoken to students in the past who have made decisions based on not just the financial support, but the different types of support that individual institutions offer, and the widening access pages of institutions websites are getting better and better all the time that detail the different kinds of support that's available for students. So that might be a consideration for some students that people are supporting is to have a wee look in to any additional financial and practical support specifically for care experience students, so thanks for flagging that, Taegan because that can be an area where students could get additional support to the SAAS bursary.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Yeah, we're really keen to highlight that that students do declare to their universities that they are a care experienced student, to make sure that they are accessing the sort of wealth and support this out there for them.

(Linda O'Neill)

Stacey, Gillian has also asked a really interesting question and one we get quite a lot at CELCIS is that if you have a care experience student who is getting the bursary but living at home, can they still apply for the accommodation grant over the summer? Do they need to provide evidence that they're contributing towards rent? Those types of circumstances?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Yep. So obviously, you know, we'll look at each individual student circumstances. So what I would say is if a student is continuing to live with and foster carers or kinship carers, we would need a letter from them confirming that they're not in receipt of any payments that are linked to accommodation for that student. And if they are living with a friend or relative, we will need a letter from them that outlines the sort of tenancy agreement or living arrangement agreements. So if it's a friend or relative they're living with, they would just need to send us a supporting letter and explaining, you know, we have an agreement in place that the student pays X amount towards the costs, or, as I say, if it's a foster carer or kinship carer, just that we have confirmation that they're not receiving any support towards accommodation already. So yeah, absolutely fine. We would just need some sort of additional information to allow us to process that.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey. We've got some more questions in the chat, but Jim Little, you had your hand up and wanted to come in with a question.

(Jim Little)

Yeah. Hi, Stacey. That was really good. Just a couple of things. Firstly, it is round about adoption in particular. Obviously, on the care experience pages it used to say - I know you said it's updated, but I'm not sure that it's been changed - it used to say adoption does not make you eligible for the bursary. However, if you can evidence, your previous care experience, you are eligible. And that, for me was always a bit difficult to deal with. It's about the language around that, because if it had a separate section in the website just saying adoption, and the explanation that you will be eligible for the bursary if you previous had been adopted. Because, in my experience, certainly, I've never come across a young person so far that has been adopted who has not been in care previously, prior to adoption. So really, it says, you're not eligible, but actually you are eligible, it's just that you have to get the evidence. And certainly from me, the evidence is quite difficult for adoption, because I did it twice last year, one for SAAS, and one for Further Education.

And it's just about getting the evidence from social work, and obviously, from the actual parents -, the legal letters to prove it. So that was my first question. Sorry, I have taken ages to ask it, is there any point in maybe change or look at the way that that's worded on the website, because I feel that it's quite an important thing that might put people off? Or, you know, some people might not know - older people might know that they are adopted, but younger people might not know, and sometimes that can be a difficult conversation to have.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

That's really good feedback to hear, Jim, especially around the sort of complexities with the evidence process. And we can certainly have a look at the wording around it. I suppose from my perspective, as that yes, you know, a large portion of students that are adopted, will have been in the care of the local authority prior to that, but there will be some that haven't been so I suppose we just want to be clear that adoption in itself doesn't mean that you qualify for the care experience bursary. It is being looked after prior to being adopted. So we can certainly have a look at the wording around that.

(Jim Little)

The other thing was round about adults. I'm a careers advisor for Skills Development Scotland. And we do have quite a number of adults who, probably are previously care experienced, and it's about the knowledge of the care experience bursary in older adults who can't afford to go back to education, but if they had - the care experience bursary is, I think is amazing - because it gives people the opportunity that they probably didn't have a long time ago for them to go back to Further and Higher Education. And I was just wondering about the publicity around aimed at older people. What I mean is people who may have missed the boat initially in education and have always maybe aspired to do that. But you know, money's money, and you have to live and survive. So it's an important thing. I was just wondering if there's any plans to do any work around that?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Yes, I mean the team that I work in, so we are responsible for our outreach and engagement. So we do awareness sessions to promote the care experience bursary. We promote that through various different sort of stakeholder channels, but we're always keen to extend the reach of that to different sort of student demographics. So for example, adult learners, so more than happy to hear if there's anybody on the call that works specifically with sort of people who may be coming to education later on and have, you know, different engagement opportunities that we can perhaps look at. But yeah, it's definitely something we're keen to work on is to extend the reach of that and raise awareness of the care and experience bursary with different demographics.

(Jim Little)

Excellent, thank you. Is it okay to email you? I've got a separate event happening for kinship care in a couple of weeks in South Lanarkshire. And it is aimed at kinship care and transition and care leavers only and I would like you to come along if possible.

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Of course you can drop me an email.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks for that. And I think they're really important areas actually, Jim, that you've highlighted, particularly that the age cap for the bursary was removed, I think there's still quite a lot of myths out there that you have to be under 26, to be able to access it. And I think it's still something that we're all trying to get the word out about. So thanks very much for flagging that. We do have another couple of questions in the chat, Stacey. But we do need to be thinking about going into our breakout rooms. So what we'll do is maybe see if we can come back as well in either in writing or at the end if we've got some time. Does that sound alright? That's absolutely fine. Ruth has flagged and I think this is so important that the care experienced bursary can be an issue for students on benefits because it can be viewed as an income. She's saying that she has had that issue before and that I can see some other people on the call that will have had an issue with that when supporting students. We get a lot of calls and about that. Do you have any information on where people can go to get some more information about how to understand how their bursary could potentially interact with benefits?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

So we obviously worked quite closely with the Child Poverty Action Group. And they have a helpline, that it's not available to students directly. And but for example, student advisors and things can access that helpline. So if they were supporting a student through that they could access that helpline, which would be able to give advice on how the bursary might interact with the benefits that that student was receiving. Obviously, you know, we would always direct students to places like Citizens Advice in Scotland as well. But yeah, I would say I can definitely, excuse me my voice is going, the Child Poverty Action Group details I think are available on our website. We obviously looked at the dependencies on benefits when we were introducing the different sort of payment options for care experience students. So I think that links on there, but I can definitely share that off the back of today's call and other places, that students may be able to go for help and advice on that sort of benefit interaction with bursary.

(Linda O'Neill)

That's brilliant, Stacey, thank you. We do have another couple of questions around the number of years of funding and whether FE funding counts towards HE funding and but I think we will give your voice a rest. You have done a sterling job in talking us through all

this stuff. And I think it'd be unkind to ask you to keep talking. You deserve a wee break, so what I will suggest is that we split into breakout rooms. So Michelle will put us all into breakout rooms for 15 minutes. Stacey has set us a question, which I have put in the chat.

So SAAS have made a series of improvements to the application process, and the information and guidance available on the care experience bursary, but how else can we raise awareness of the support available from SAAS for students who are care experienced?

(Linda O'Neill)

So just as Stacey said, we are really keen to hear people's views on where there's maybe gaps, where there's opportunities to increase awareness. Similarly, about the Student Information Scotland website if people have used that and what other resources people have used as well. So we will go into our breakout groups for 15 minutes, and then when we come back, I'm just going to ask the facilitators or a member of the group to feedback a couple of headline themes. I know there will be really rich discussion, but with the format we won't have time to go into them in too much detail, but it would be really good to hear people's thoughts from those breakout rooms.

I am aware that I have done loads of talking, and so what I am going to do is come to meet fellow contributors and facilitators, and ask for some feedback from the breakout rooms. As you can see, we don't have time today to have a wider discussion about that, but I'm just really interested to hear and some of the themes and the key messages that that came through. So Michael, can I come to your group?

(Michael Bettencourt)

Absolutely. A really good discussion where I won't be able to represent everything, but I'll try to get that key messages over. So I think the group really appreciated everything that SAAS is doing in terms of trying to streamline things and simplify things. However, we did say that young people was still not ticking the box. So we had a conversation about some of those invisible barriers that still exist that prevent people from coming forward. That immediately went into a solution around a piece of research work that's being carried out about reaching back earlier with young people to see their identity as being something positive so that they're more willing to tick the box and then we got into a conversation about the potential to simplify the evidence and get the message out there that all you need is one letter from a professional that says you were care experience - that is enough to give you what you require. And everything else that puts a burden on the person can be stigmatising if you have to provide evidence. That language is slightly criminalised, stigmatising, and that could be a prevention from people coming forward. So we've got into really very subtle, invisible barriers - so fantastic the work that SAAS is doing, but

can we look at some of those like invisible, less tangible things that might be preventing young people , not just young people, anyone with care experience from coming forward?

(Linda O'Neill)

So that's really interesting to hear Michael, I think, as well as, obviously, from my perspective, is perhaps looking at raising the awareness as early as possible, so people know what support is available. But also, if we're asking for evidence, or we're asking for somebody to declare that on the application, that it's very clear why we're asking for it. That is clear that so that we can make sure that they're getting the support and resources that are available. So yeah, I think that's something that's really interesting to hear is that invisible barrier and the stigma behind it. And that we may need to think about how we place that and explanation of the rationale behind us and the benefit to them to clear them up. So thank you.

That was something that came up in our group as well about how we help people understand about the advantages of this sort of ticking the box aspect of various different forms so that people understand the advantages that can come or the additional support that can come in with declaring people's personal circumstances. So that seems to be a bit of a theme that's coming through. Stacey, could that come to your group for a bit of reflection?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

Yeah, of course. So we've talked a little bit about the SAAS and SIS website. There was obviously some really positive feedback on how that's structured and laid out. But we discussed a little bit around the sort of language that's used, and just making sure that's been patched at the right level for all students, as that can be a little bit daunting with some of the things that we've talked about. So you know, even perhaps talking about the wording around course levels that for some students that in itself could be a barrier that they're just off put by the language that we use. And one of the things that we had discussed that might be a sort of wider piece of work not just for SAAS, is perhaps we're looking at something that sets out a sort of step-by-step process for care experienced students applying for Higher Education -sort of key milestones and activities - so things like applying through UCAS, doing your personal statement, accepting an offer, applying for SAAS, submitting the evidence, and that would be helpful not just for prospective students, but also for the professionals that are supporting them as well. If the process is clearly set out and what the expectations are at different stages.

(Linda O'Neill)

I think that's coming through quite strongly as a theme from people as well, just about how we understand some of the barriers that may exist for people and then what are the solutions that we can put in. We had a discussion in our group around that while awareness is certainly becoming more widespread for prospective students, there's still

quite significant gaps around parents and carers and in some professional places as well. And thinking about how we work with students themselves to identify those gaps and think about the solutions, about how to get that information out, about the types of forums and places that we could go to potentially spread that information - different events and information and awareness raising around that.

We had a really interesting discussion about the different types of supports available from local authorities, and how that may impact some children and young people, that in some places there are still specialist throughcare and aftercare teams who will have more of an understanding of this and in other areas there's not, but I think, really importantly, that there's some local authorities that will provide more financial assistance than other local authorities will, and they will still view care expedience through different categories. So for example, some local authorities won't pay accommodation for students who are looked after at home, but they will for students who are in foster care, and just starting to think about some of the nuance of what the impact of that will be for students. So it might be that students from a particular care experience background might have to go out and get a part time or full time job during the summer, because their local authority wouldn't support them with living costs, whereas another local authority will, and just about the injustice that exists for students around that. And I suppose raising that in this forum, because we know that you have regular meetings with Scottish Government as we do and some other people in the call will, can continue to get that message through about that territorial injustice that exists. So even though the care expedience bursary as a national consistent benefit that's available to all care expedience students. The other support that's available and might enable and or otherwise a student to go to Higher Education exists in in different ways. And we also have a conversation about some ideas to get information out directly to guidance teachers in schools as well through a local guidance teacher groups as well, which we can follow up with. We have two questions. We've got five minutes left, and we've got a couple of questions left in the chat. And I think quite technical ones we might be able to cover off around, do Further Education years of the bursary at college count towards the total number of years of SAAS bursary?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

They do not. Any funding that a student receives for Further Education is completely separate. So when a student starts a Higher Education course, so as I say, HNC, and above, that would be the start of their learner journey with SAAS and it would only be any SAAS funding that would be taken into account and would impact that eligibility.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks, Stacey. And I think similarly to that, is it's six years of funding that can be provided in Higher Education for care experience students?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

So it's a good job that previous study is one of my favourite things. I could talk about previous study all day. So simple answer is no. So we would look at the length of a student's course. So you know, for most undergraduate courses that would mean they would have four years of funding, they would have those two additional years should they need to change, so yes, it would be six. However, there are some courses that are longer in length. So for example, I had a girl yesterday at Strathclyde say to me, I'm doing a seven year architecture course. I only get funding for the first four, what do I do for the other three. And I had to say no, that's not the case at all, your undergraduate course is seven years in length, so you will have funding for the full seven years. And then you'll also have this sort of normal previous study plus one and additional plus one as well. So it's not as straightforward as saying you have X number of years and a bank a funding, it's based on your specific circumstances. And the other thing as well as you might have a student that gets more years of support dependent on the route that they take. So for example, if you have a student that does a HNC, and then progresses on to a degree, they're going to continue to be eligible for funding. Because there's a sort of concession where if you're articulating from a college course HNC or HND, on to a degree that you will have funding in place for that as well. So it's not as straightforward as saying you've got X number of years in a bank, it really depends on the route that that specific student will take. The best way to think about it, is as long as they're progressing, not repeating a year, more than once, then they'll continue to be eligible.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thanks very much for that, Stacey. And I think what that highlights is that there is no one size fits all, around this for some of these areas. And I would just urge people to contact the specialist support team, if people have got questions about this. Because Stacey, I know that in you and the specialist support team are always happy to talk things through and to answer questions. And also think about how that information can be gathered together and reflected on the website for people. We are going to have to start bringing things to a close. I have got a feeling that we could stay here for the next two hours discussing this area and answering questions, I suppose I would just urge people to continue that conversation. Get in touch with us, get in touch with SAAS. Carolann, I know that you have flagged in the chat that particularly looked after at home young people can struggle to understand the terminology, and Stacey I know that you and the team are really keen to hear information and feedback on how the website could be updated, how information can be made, more useful, made clear up so Carolann, please feel free to get in touch with Stacey and SAAS later. Stacey, I know that you're happy for us to share your slides and contact details so we will do that. We will double check the chat afterwards, because I'm aware that there might be things that we have not managed to get to or answer today. Like I said, I've got a feeling we could stay here for a lot longer and discuss this area. It's so important and I think, really nuanced and complex. And we want to make sure that we're getting it right and getting the information out to as many

people as possible. So we will double check that we've tried to address everything in the chat. And if not, we will get over it to Stacey and ask her to update us. In terms of next steps, we will make the recording and the transcript, Stacey's slides, the question and answer session and the abbreviated notes from the breakout rooms available on our website. People will get an email to let you know when that's gone live. And so that you can access it. But please also feel free to forward that on to colleagues or networks that you think it would be relevant or are of interest to. And likewise, if you've got anything, any events or ideas that you would like to speak to Stacey and the team about in terms of attendance or updating information, please let Stacey know. Stacey, is there anything you want to add? Before we finish up?

(Stacey Heather-Brash)

No, I just want to say thank you all very much for signing up to come and join me this morning. The conversations sound like they've been really positive for us - lots of feedback to take on board. Just to reiterate what Linda said, obviously we're aware that those that are looked after at home, for us are – I don't think difficult to engage with is the right word - but we find that finding routes in to raise awareness and raise the profile of the care experience bursary with young people that are looked after at home is something that is quite challenging. So if you work with different sorts of partners or organisations that perhaps would be able to do events to support them, we are more than happy to hear any suggestions because it is something that we are keen to progress and look at the sorts of demographics that we do reach out to place as cheesy as it sounds to place Higher Education as accessible for everybody. So it's key that we look at all the different demographics and highlight the care and experience bursary.

(Linda O'Neill)

Thank you. We will send out a short evaluation after this. We'd be really really grateful if you could fill it in. Because it really does help us to shape future events, and there's also a wee bit in that if anybody has ideas that you'd like us to consider for future themes in please keep a wee eye out as well for a survey that will come to you in the next couple of months asking for more about what you would like the format of the forum to look like in future. I'd like to say a huge thank you to Stacey and the wider SAAS team who have also been involved in the prep for this. It has been a great session, I think there has been lots of information and lots for us all to think about. So a huge thanks, Stacey for taking the time out your day to come along and talk to us about this. A big thank you to the internal CELCIS team for coming along and helping organise, facilitate and make sure that we're all in the right places at the right time. We really do appreciate it. And also a huge thank you to all of you for coming along. We know how busy everybody has. So it does mean a lot to us for taking your time out of the day to spend your time thinking together with us about this really important area. So thanks again for coming along. Please get in touch with us afterwards if there's anything else that we could do to help or support. And we hope that you enjoy the rest of your day.

Relevant Websites:

<https://www.saas.gov.uk/>

<https://www.studentinformation.gov.scot/>

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