Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

Item 7b

Additional capital funding to support digital provision in AY 2020-21

SFC Announcement

Issue Date: 14 August 2020

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Issue date: 14 August 2020

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Summary: Announcement of additional capital funding for colleges and universities in Academic Year 2020-21 to support digital provision for learners.

FAO: Principals / Finance Directors of Scotland's colleges and universities

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Additional capital funding to support digital provision in AY 2020-21

Summary

1. I am writing to announce the allocation of additional capital funding for colleges and universities in Academic Year (AY) 2020-21 to support the provision of ICT equipment to tackle digital poverty.

Background

2. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities have found themselves in an unprecedented situation. Campuses were closed towards the end of AY 2019-20 and institutions rapidly moved their provision online. AY 2020-21 seems likely to involve more blended modes of learning with reduced on-campus activity.

3. SFC recognises the strenuous efforts colleges and universities are making to comply with health and safety measures while continuing to provide students with an education. Given that much teaching and learning will continue to take place online, it is essential that all learners have the necessary equipment to access online provision.

Scottish Government commitment to tackle digital poverty

4. On 9 July 2020 the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science announced that the Scottish Government was investing an additional £5 million to help bridge the digital divide for students. The aim of these funds is to support around 13,000 learners, providing them with the necessary equipment to engage in remote online learning.

5. The Scottish Government has split this funding across both college and university sectors, Community Learning and Development (CLD), and Jisc, as set out below:

   - £250,000 for community-based young adult learners.
   - £1,660,000 for FE learners.
   - £670,000 for HE learners in college.
   - £2,370,000 for HE learners in university.
   - £50,000 in support of a Jisc project to minimise the data charges associated with students accessing online learning provided by colleges and universities.

6. It has been agreed that YouthLink Scotland will take forward the funding for community-based young adult learners and the remaining £4.75 million for colleges and universities will be administered through SFC.

7. Colleges and universities will receive £4.7 million of this package of investment to distribute in the form of ICT equipment for FE and HE students to access remote learning in AY 2020-21. This includes, but is not limited to, the following equipment: a computer device such as a laptop or tablet, other hardware necessary such as a keyboard, mouse or headset or any other connectivity equipment.

8. Individual college/region allocations (for both FE and HE students) are set out in Annex A of this announcement. Individual university allocations are set out in Annex B.

Purpose of funding

9. This funding provides an opportunity for colleges and universities to purchase equipment to enable students to engage in their studies, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged students.

10. SFC expects institutions to utilise this funding to tackle digital poverty and provide fair and equitable access to remote learning for their students. These funds should only be utilised for the purchase of ICT equipment to provide access to online learning. We would expect institutions to make use of these funds in the first instance, rather than any other funds available within the institutions.

11. Institutions can use their discretion in establishing the needs of individual students and provide additional hardware and software as required. However, we would not expect the purchased technology to exceed £350 per student.

12. To optimise the use of these funds and obtain best value for money, SFC would encourage institutions to procure equipment in bulk as far as possible. In some limited circumstances institutions may wish to allow students to purchase the required equipment and refund the amount spent once a satisfactory proof of payment and receipt is received. The institutions should make it clear to students in such circumstances that the institution will retain ownership of the equipment and students will be expected to return it once their studies are completed. Those administering the ICT funds should liaise with their IT managers about equipment specifications.

Distribution of funding

13. The Scottish Government, Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS), and SFC have agreed on a mixed methodology to ensure that the funds are distributed equitably across both sectors.

14. For FE students, funding has been distributed to colleges in proportion to SFC's Student Support funding allocations published in Table 4 of our College Outcome Agreement Funding allocations announcement for AY 2020-21.

15. For HE students at college and university we have used data from SAAS and distributed funding in proportion to SAAS Discretionary Fund institutional allocations. SAAS used this allocation methodology for its distribution of COVID-19 ring-fenced funds and other funding brought forward to support students during the pandemic.

16. Whilst the college allocations in Annex A show the breakdown between FE and HE funding, colleges have the discretion to use these funds flexibly between FE and HE to effectively meet the needs of students. (This includes colleges in the Highlands and Islands region.) This flexibility should ensure the best use of the funds available. Colleges must, however, account for spend separately for FE and HE when they report back to SFC.

17. All equipment purchased will be considered to be capital assets, therefore, must be owned and retained by the institutions. SFC recommends that institutions establish a lending or borrowing scheme to maximise the use of the funds and minimise risks of students retaining the equipment when they leave their course.

Payment

18. SFC will pay the allocated funding to universities (and non-incorporated colleges) in one lump sum in September 2020.

19. Incorporated colleges/Regional Strategic Boards should drawdown this funding from September 2020 via their monthly cashflow returns as required.

Eligible students

20. To ensure those students who are most in need are able to access this support, SFC encourages institutions to set up an application process through their relevant departments. Those administering the funding may wish to advertise this support on the institution's websites and through any other channels of communication with their students.

21. SFC expects the amount of funding that has been allocated to cover students' needs; however, we understand that in some cases the supply might not meet demand. Institutions should use their discretion to allocate digital equipment to those most in need, using a fair and equitable approach.

Eligibility criteria

22. Institutions will be required to assess eligibility of the students who apply for this equipment. They may wish to do so against their household income and other factors such as being in receipt of discretionary/hardship funding or any other social benefits such as Universal Credit.

23. These funds are available for both full and part-time eligible students that meet the criteria set out below:

- They are residentially eligible:
  - To be residentially eligible, the student should satisfy the legislative conditions contained within the Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Determination 2019 or subsequent updates.

- They are not or will not be eligible to receive alternative funds to support access to ICT equipment:
  - the student will not be eligible to receive the full relevant allowance in this policy if they already receive and will continue to receive funding from a different source to provide access to online learning such as through the Connecting Scotland initiative (or disabled students who are in receipt of an allowance, such as the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) or Additional Support Needs (ASN) funding, that covers the purchase of the necessary technology the students require to support their own additional support needs).

24. SFC encourages institutions to be flexible and use their discretion when assessing the needs of students. We are aware that this is particularly important for some vulnerable groups. For example, students who are in receipt of DSA or ASN funding may or may not be eligible for ICT support through this scheme, as those funds are used to provide support and adjustments for specific learning needs. Therefore, we would encourage institutions to assess students on a case-by-case basis and draw on the relevant funds available to ensure all students facing digital poverty have access to the necessary equipment while avoiding the potential double-funding of students.

Reporting requirements

25. To ensure that the funds are being used for their intended purpose and to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the scheme, institutions will be expected to provide an outline report at the end of November and a full final report at the end of the AY. The reports will be expected, as appropriate, to cover the following:

- A statement that all funds spent have been used for the purposes intended.
- A financial statement accounting for funds spent, including any underspend.
- A breakdown of the total use of the allocation across the categories of 'computer devices', 'connectivity equipment' and 'other'.
- The total numbers of students supported by the funding.
- An equality and diversity statement on these students.
- An overall statement of the benefits and impacts of the funding.

26. Please send your initial and final reports on the use of these funds to David Beards, Senior Policy Officer (dbeards@sfc.ac.uk) by 31 November 2020 and 31 July 2021 respectively.

27. This is a new scheme and SFC would welcome feedback on its implementation.

Conditions of grant

28. In addition to the above reporting requirements, the following additional conditions of grant apply to this funding:

    - Funds must only be used for the purpose(s) for which they are being allocated. (SFC retains the right to audit relevant institutional documentation to satisfy itself that this is the case and the institution undertakes that it will provide such assistance as SFC reasonably requires.)

    - Funds must only be used for capital expenditure (not revenue expenditure) and cannot be used to support students for items other than equipment to support online learning.

    - Funds are for AY 2020-21 and must be expended by the end of this session (by 31 July 2021).

29. We may recover funding if you do not comply with any of the conditions of grant or reporting requirements.

Further information

30. For more information and any other queries on reporting requirements please contact David Beards, Senior Policy Officer, dbeards@sfc.ac.uk or Rufus Logan, Assistant Director, Capital and Climate Change, rlogan@sfc.ac.uk.

31. For student support related queries please contact the Student Support Team at studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk.

Lorna MacDonald
Director of Finance

Digital support funding allocations for colleges/regions 2020-21 **Annex A**

College/Region	SFC FE student support funding AY 2020-21	Share of SFC FE student support funding AY 2020-21	FE digital support funding AY 2020-21	SAAS HE Discretionary Funds 2020-21	Share of SAAS HE Discretionary Funds 2020-21	HE digital support funding AY 2020-21	**Total digital support funding allocation AY 2020-21**
	£	%	£	£	%	£	£
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Ayrshire College	10,607,955	7.7%	127,603	233,569	7.1%	47,340	**174,943**
Borders College	2,254,272	1.6%	27,117	15,894	0.5%	3,221	**30,338**
Dumfries & Galloway College	2,644,235	1.9%	31,807	53,772	1.6%	10,899	**42,706**
Dundee & Angus College	9,582,644	6.9%	115,269	182,004	5.5%	36,888	**152,157**
Edinburgh College	12,115,433	8.8%	145,736	386,573	11.7%	78,350	**224,086**
Fife College	10,245,064	7.4%	123,238	173,846	5.3%	35,235	**158,473**
Forth Valley College	4,628,655	3.4%	55,678	159,311	4.8%	32,289	**87,967**
Glasgow Region	28,273,572	20.5%	340,102	1,154,497	34.9%	233,992	**574,094**
Highlands & Islands Region*	10,366,448	7.5%	124,698	-	-	-	**124,698**
Lanarkshire Region	16,804,820	12.2%	202,145	399,954	12.1%	81,062	**283,207**
Newbattle Abbey College	287,224	0.2%	3,455	5,000	0.2%	1,013	**4,468**
North East Scotland College	9,341,649	6.8%	112,371	99,379	3.0%	20,142	**132,513**
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig	-	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
SRUC	2,710,287	2.0%	32,602	32,050	1.0%	6,496	**39,098**
West College Scotland	13,822,121	10.0%	166,266	267,615	8.1%	54,240	**220,506**
West Lothian College	4,315,620	3.1%	51,913	142,258	4.3%	28,833	**80,746**
Total	**138,000,000**	**100.0%**	**1,660,000**	**3,305,722**	**100.0%**	**670,000**	**2,330,000**

* HE funding for the Highlands & Islands Region is part of the University of the Highlands & Islands allocation in Annex B.

Digital support funding allocations for universities 2020-21 **Annex B**

Institution	SAAS HE Discretionary Funds 2020-21	Share of SAAS HE Discretionary Funds 2020-21	**Digital support funding allocation AY 2020-21**
	£	%	£
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Aberdeen, University of	548,062	4.2%	**99,648**
Abertay University	486,133	3.7%	**88,388**
Dundee, University of	853,250	6.5%	**155,137**
Edinburgh Napier University	714,463	5.5%	**129,903**
Edinburgh, University of	1,291,336	9.9%	**234,790**
Glasgow Caledonian University	1,285,498	9.9%	**233,728**
Glasgow School of Art	144,747	1.1%	**26,318**
Glasgow, University of	1,467,489	11.3%	**266,818**
Heriot-Watt University	374,654	2.9%	**68,119**
Highlands & Islands, University of the	426,700	3.3%	**77,582**
Open University in Scotland	129,419	1.0%	**23,531**
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	349,271	2.7%	**63,504**
Robert Gordon University	615,025	4.7%	**111,823**
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	51,421	0.4%	**9,349**
SRUC	74,449	0.6%	**13,536**
St Andrews, University of	337,964	2.6%	**61,448**
Stirling, University of	749,505	5.7%	**136,274**
Strathclyde, University of	1,424,902	10.9%	**259,075**
West of Scotland, University of the	1,710,649	13.1%	**311,029**
Total	**13,034,937**	**100.0%**	**2,370,000**