

Government announce improved support package for students

College bursaries and undergraduate student loans will increase and support for postgraduate students on eligible courses will be made available as part of the Scottish Government's commitment to put more money in students' pockets.

Investment of well over £100 million in college bursaries will deliver an increase in line with inflation. Undergraduate student loans will increase by £250 a year, bringing the minimum income for those from the lowest income households to £7,500.

Scottish domiciled postgraduate students undertaking eligible supported courses, a majority of which cover STEM subjects which are in demand from employers, will be able to apply for a loan of up to £4,500 a year to help with living costs from 2015-16. This is in addition to the current loan available as a contribution towards the cost of tuition.

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning Michael Russell said:-“Providing protection from inflation for further education student support in the next academic year was a key priority for students. Our response will see the value of the total college bursaries package rise to around £105 million.

“For higher education students, we scrapped tuition fees, introduced a minimum income of £7,250 – which will now rise to £7,500 – for students from the lowest-income households and have provided what NUS describe as ‘the best package of student support in the UK’.

“Today's announcement to increase bursaries and loans builds on these commitments.

College students will be better off while undergraduate students at university will have access to an extra £250 per year. Scottish domiciled postgraduate students on eligible courses will now be able to apply for a loan of up to £4,500 to help meet the cost of their living expenses.

“We want students in Scotland to be able to study for the qualification that suits their ability and ambition. These changes will help make that a reality and improve the life chances and employability of young Scots delivering real benefits to the Scottish economy in future.”

Gordon Maloney, President of NUS Scotland, said:-“The announcements today are very good news for students in Scotland. We have asked for increased support for college, university and postgraduate students and this announcement is a big step forward.

“Students need enough money to get by to be able to concentrate on their studies. Too often, students in colleges and universities have to take on multiple part-time jobs, or go deep into commercial debt, to avoid dropping out. While, of course, grants and bursaries would be better than loans, worst of all would be no increases in support at all.

“The increase in postgraduate support is particularly welcome news, given that at the moment postgraduate students have to self-fund their way through their studies, or borrow commercial bank loans. Hopefully opening up access to living cost loans will open up new opportunities to people from poorer backgrounds towards gaining postgraduate qualifications that employers increasingly demand.

“These announcements are a great step forward but there is still more work to do to get student support up to where it needs to be. We will continue to press the Scottish Government to increase student support even further, including through grants and bursaries, between now and the budget being

finalised early next year. This announcement will see more money in students' pockets, and will help students from all backgrounds focus on their future rather than their finances."