

All you need to know about the Care-Experienced Students Bursary and Higher Education in Scotland



December 2024

Frequently Asked Questions

This document is about the Care Experienced Students Bursary (CESB) and Higher Education. For information relevant to the CESB and Further Education (FE) see our [separate information sheet](#).

It covers:

- who is eligible for the CESB
- how to apply
- practical information about how payments are made.

What is the Care-Experienced Students Bursary?

The CESB is:

- a non-income assessed, non-repayable bursary of £9,000 per year. It doesn't need to be paid back.
- the same amount as non care-experienced students can receive via the combination of a bursary and student loans
- available to full-time care-experienced students taking eligible courses such as an undergraduate degree, HNC or HND
- awarded by [Student Awards Agency Scotland \(SAAS\)](#) who supports students in higher education and assess applications for the CESB
- there is no longer any upper age limit.

Who is eligible for the Care-Experienced Students Bursary for Higher Education?

You are entitled to the CESB if you are:

- care-experienced, within the UK or outside the UK
- a student taking a full-time Higher Education course at college or university in the UK (such as HNC, HND or undergraduate degree)
- AND a Scottish domiciled student (i.e. you normally live in Scotland).

The care-experienced bursary should be seen as part of a wider suite of support.....As such, this award is intended to enhance rather than replace any existing financial and practical support provided by Local Authorities and other relevant Corporate Parents.

(John Swinney,
Deputy First Minister
and Cabinet
Secretary for
Education and Skills,
2019).

The HUB for Success supports people with care-experience to get in, stay in and return to education at any age and any stage.

As a partnership in the Edinburgh and Lothians we are committed to upholding and promoting care-experienced learners' rights.

Am I care-experienced? What does this mean?

You are care-experienced if you have been in care at any stage of your life, no matter how short (e.g. only temporarily or prior to adoption). Your care-experience could have been provided by a local authority (council), a religious organisation or a charity, in the UK or outside the UK.

This care could be living in one of many different settings, such as:

- **foster care**
- **kinship care** with close family or friends under formal kinship care arrangements or informal care arrangements (for example, staying with grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends) where there has been some local authority involvement.
- **looked after at home** with a compulsory supervision order
- **away from home** with a compulsory supervision order
- **in residential care, secure care or a List D school, a borstal, a close support unit or a children's home**
- **formal care leaver**, looked after on or after your 16th birthday under a formal order.

You may see care experience described in different ways. If you're unsure whether you meet the criteria take a look at the definitions of care-experience on the [SAAS website](#).

Still unsure? Then you can contact SAAS, the care-experienced named person at your college or university or the [HUB for Success](#).

Do I have to share personal details of my care-experience?

If you want to access the CESB you need to tick the Care Experienced Student's Bursary box on the SAAS application. This does not mean you have to share your personal care-experience; this is your private information and your own story to tell if and should you choose to.

Remember, there is also a box on the college or UCAS form that allows you to let the college or universities you are applying to know that you are care-experienced. This is important if you want to open up further support on offer at your place of study. It is not compulsory, but if you don't tick the box you may miss out on learning and financial support that you are entitled to.

What evidence do I need to show I am care-experienced?

You will be asked to complete a SAAS Evidence of Care Experience form. This needs to be signed by a professional person who can confirm your care experience. Evidence does not require details of the circumstances leading to entry into the care system.

A professional person is a support/social worker, doctor, nurse, lawyer, solicitor, college/university student adviser, teacher, notary public, counsellor, police officer, minister of religion or family mediation worker, careers advisor, widening participation officer, representative or employee from an advocacy group, member of the children's panel, child contact centre representative or a family mediation worker.

We appreciate that it can be hard to gather evidence of care experience particularly if you are not currently in contact with any relevant individuals, you are a mature learner or you experienced care outside of the UK. We suggest you contact the care-experienced contact at your place of study, the [HUB for Success](#) for advice and refer to our ['how to guide' to support professionals providing evidence of care experience](#).

You'll only be asked to provide this evidence in the first year that you apply for the CESB.

How much is the CESB and why do I get this amount?

If you are care experienced you are eligible for the non-repayable CESB of £9,000 per academic year. It is non-income assessed and based on the current living wage. It is designed to help support you with your living costs while you study.

Care experienced students receive the same amount of funding other students receive from SAAS, the only difference being that you receive £9,000 as a bursary and you don't need to pay it back.

What is the Special Support Loan?

SAAS has recently introduced the repayable [Special Support Loan](#) of £2,400 per academic year. It is non-income assessed and is designed to help with study, travel and childcare costs whilst studying, to recognise the cost of living. The Special Support Loan element of your award will be paid alongside your CESB payments, but as a separate payment.

The Special Support Loan aspect of your student funding will not impact on the amount you are entitled to in benefits such as Universal Credit. This means you can access this additional support without any further reduction in your benefit entitlement.

You can apply for the Special Support Loan at the same time as applying for the CESB, or later on in your studies. But it is important to note that you will only be able to access additional financial support from your college or university (such as discretionary funding or an access bursary) once you have applied for the Special Support Loan.

You normally won't have to make any repayments while you're studying. Repayment starts after you leave your course and only when you earn over a certain amount (threshold) a year. The salary threshold is currently £31,395. While it is a repayable loan, it is not a commercial loan. You can find out more by visiting [Repaying Student Loans - SAAS](#).

Will the CESB impact on my benefits?

It isn't always straightforward what benefits you will be entitled to as a student. You should contact the DWP or Citizens Advice Scotland for further advice.

In most cases students on full-time higher education courses will no longer be eligible to claim benefits such as Universal Credit. However, there are some exceptions.

If you are on Universal Credit, DWP will consider the CESB as income for the months you are studying (usually 9 or 10 months in a year) and deduct accordingly. DWP will disregard the first £110 per month you receive from the CESB as it won't be considered as income.

Some benefits aren't affected by CESB income such as Limited capability for work (LCW), Additional Disability Payment (ADP) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Child Poverty Action Group provide useful [factsheets on benefits for care experienced students](#) and relevant training.

How and when will my bursary be paid - when is my first payment?

The bursary will be paid directly to your bank account. If SAAS has confirmed your application is completed, and you are fully registered at your college or university, then your first bursary payment will be made on the first day of term. This will be the date your college or university has told SAAS your course starts.

You will receive a double payment on the first day of term. After your first payment it will be paid monthly, normally on the 7th of each month, until the end of term.

A 12 monthly payment option is available, where you choose to receive the bursary over 12 months rather than just over term time. The total bursary amount remains the same but the monthly payments you receive will be lower as spread over 12 months. This option means you have a regular monthly income over the year, which may be helpful for budgeting or if you're also receiving Universal Credit. The 12 monthly payment option is not available if you're on a one year course, such as an HNC, or in the final year.

Can I receive the bursary if I'm on a paid placement?

If you're on a paid placement as a requirement of your course you will still be able to receive the CESB. The placement should not increase the overall length of the course.

Can my bursary payments be stopped at any point?

SAAS will only stop paying your bursary if your college or university has told SAAS that you are suspended or have withdrawn from studies, or you have told SAAS you have left your course. It is important to keep in touch with your care experienced named person if you are struggling to attend or struggling to keep up with course work.

What happens if I need to repeat a year or pause my studies?

If you need to repeat a year or change course you are generally eligible for two years of additional funding. It is always advisable to check your eligibility for repeat funding with SAAS.

If you start studying and need to take a break for medical or caring reasons you can continue to receive your funding for the rest of the academic year if your college or university can confirm you need a Medical Leave of Absence. You are only entitled to one medical leave of absence and it will also be considered as one of your two additional funding years.

Am I eligible for the CESB if I am studying in England or another part of the UK?

If you are studying at Higher Education level at a college or university within the UK, but outside of Scotland, you are eligible for the CESB, but you will need to pay for your tuition fees. You can choose to take out a SAAS student loan to pay all or some of your tuition fees.

Am I eligible for the CESB if I am an unaccompanied asylum seeker?

Unaccompanied asylum seekers under 18 are the responsibility of the local authority and will therefore also be care experienced. You will be eligible for the CESB once you have the right to remain and meet the residency requirement of being Scottish domiciled.

Am I eligible for the CESB if I already have a degree?

Normally you are not eligible for the CESB for a second degree, although there are some exceptions, and you should contact SAAS for further information.

Do I have to pay my bursary back?

Normally you don't need to pay it back. However, if you leave a course part-way through the year, **it's important to tell SAAS as soon as possible** to avoid receiving payments you then need to pay back. If you are worried about this, or if you are in receipt of the bursary and thinking about withdrawing, you should contact the care-experienced named person at your college or university, [SAAS](#) or the [HUB for Success](#) for advice.

Can I get any help during the summer break?

Yes, you can apply to SAAS for the [Summer Accommodation Grant](#). This grant is £1,330 if you are in formal accommodation (such as renting a flat) and £665 if you are in informal accommodation (such as staying with family or friends).

You can apply for the Summer Accommodation Grant if you're progressing between higher education courses, such as an HND to a degree, or through your degree course. You cannot claim the grant before the start of the first year of your higher education course or the summer holiday after you finish your course.

SAAS will contact you around March to April with further information on how to apply.

It is sometimes possible to get a one-off payment from your college or university discretionary fund towards the end of June to help through the summer. Please note this is not a guarantee and depends on individual circumstances and funds available. If you think you will need financial help over the summer contact your care-experienced named contact in plenty of time before the end of your course to reduce the chance of delays to any payments.

Is there any support available for childcare costs?

Yes, colleges and universities will have Childcare Funds available. These provide non-repayable assistance for students with children in order for them to access or continue in education and are paid in addition to any other forms of student support, including the CESB. Students can apply for assistance towards registered childcare costs for scheduled classes and periods of mandatory placement. Ask your care-experienced named contact for more information.

Am I eligible for the CESB if I am a paramedic, nursing or midwifery student?

You will not be eligible for the CESB or the Summer Accommodation Grant, but you will usually be eligible for the [Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery Student Bursary \(PNMSB\)](#). This is £10,000 for each year of your course and reduces to £7,500 in Year 4. The bursary is non-income assessed and non-repayable. Non care-experienced students are also eligible for this bursary.

You will still be eligible for financial support each college and university offer its care-experienced students. There is also additional funding from [SAAS](#) available for paramedic, nursing and midwifery students with dependents, lone parents, and to help with childcare costs or costs related to a disability or a learning difficulty.

Is there other funding available while I'm studying?

Each college and university will offer its own financial support for care-experienced students. This can be applied to in addition to the CESB (so you could receive both in the same year).

If you have additional learning needs it's important to check if you are eligible for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This is to help with extra costs because of your impairment, such as electrical equipment, paper, printing, software, training, travel expenses and Non-Medical Personal Help. You should contact the Disability Advisor at your college or university for advice and support to apply.

If you are a care leaver (looked after on or after your 16th birthday), and under 26, you should be eligible for some financial support from your local authority. Contact your social worker or Throughcare & Aftercare worker for more information.

We know that financial worries can at times get in the way of your studies. If you get in touch with the care-experienced named person at your college or university they can advise you on other funding available, such as scholarships or discretionary funds.

Still got questions?

Contact the care-experienced named person at your college or university. Use [Propel](#) to find out who to contact at your college or university.

If you are at college or university in Edinburgh or the Lothians, living in the area or thinking of moving here then contact the [HUB for Success](#) for a friendly chat. We can provide further advice and information to help you get in, stay in, or return to education.

Keep up to date and follow us on Instagram or x.com at @HubforSuccess
