

Financial Assistance Committee - DRAFT

8 September 2026, Online via Microsoft Teams

In attendance:

Voting Members

Paula Murphy (Tutor Representative, School of Natural Sciences), Aine Mulcahy (Financial Services Division Representative), Ava Tuohy (Graduate Students' Union Officer), John Walsh (Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Pharmacy), Alice Jørgensen (Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning, School of English), Lorenzo Cheasty (Welfare and Equality Officer), David Heavey (Dean of Graduate Studies)

Non-Voting Members

Stephen Smith (Chair, Senior Tutor), Eamon O'Gorman (Finance Partner, Academic Services Division), Christina Boccardo (Undergraduate Support Officer, Secretary), Seán Doherty (Executive Officer, Senior Tutor's Office)

Apologies: Mr Martin McAndrew (engaged in postgraduate orientation activities)

1. Student Assistance Fund Overview

The Senior Tutor provided an overview of the Student Assistance Fund ("SAF") for new committee members, outlining eligibility criteria, funding sources and the role of the Fund in supporting student retention and participation. Members discussed common reasons for application, including low income, accommodation costs and transport expenses.

2. Student Feedback

The committee considered feedback received from students who had previously received support through the SAF. Members welcomed evidence of the positive impact of the Fund and noted the favourable comments received regarding the administration of applications. The committee further noted ongoing work to simplify application processes and reduce processing times while maintaining appropriate governance controls.

3. Student Progression and Retention

Prof. Walsh proposed that progression and completion rates among SAF recipients be analysed in future reporting cycles. Members agreed that such

data would provide useful evidence regarding the impact of financial support on student outcomes and retention.
4. 2026/27 Operations The committee reviewed arrangements for the forthcoming application cycle. Applications will open on 21 September 2026, with Round 1 payments anticipated in mid-November. Members noted the introduction of Copilot-assisted review processes and updated student guidance materials.
5. Proposed Amendments to Student Assistance Fund Allocations and Thresholds for 2026/27 With reference to the papers before it, the committee considered recommendations for amendments to Student Assistance Fund income thresholds and allocation rates for the 2026/27 academic year.
6. Bursaries and Emergency Assistance The committee considered proposals regarding the use of bursary funding and emergency assistance. DECISION: The committee approved increased flexibility in the administration of several bursary funds and approved an emergency bursary allocation of €1,200 for Applicant E21.
7. Any Other Business No further business was raised. The Senior Tutor thanked members for their contributions and closed the meeting.
8. Next Steps • Implement approved SAF rates and thresholds for 2026/27. • Open Round 1 SAF applications on 21 September. • Finalise revised student guidance and webinars. • Submit approved calendar amendments. • Explore future retention and progression reporting. • Process emergency bursary payment for Applicant E21.

Approved Changes for 2026/27

Members approved:

Income Thresholds

- Family income threshold increased from €64,000 to €66,000.
- Single-income threshold increased from €32,000 to €33,000.

Course Expenses

- Standard allocation retained at €600.
- Discretion granted to increase awards to approximately €900 in cases of significant hardship.

Rental Assistance

- Standard allocation increased from €1,200 to €1,300.
- Maximum allocation increased to €1,600 where justified.
- HAP recipient allocation increased from €400 to €425.

Transport

Approved replacement of distance-based awards with TFI zone-based awards:

- Zone 1: €125
- Zone 2: €160
- Zone 3: €190
- Zone 4: €250
- Beyond Zone 4: €300

Energy Costs

- Increased from €125 to €150 per eligible utility type.
- Maximum support increased from €250 to €300.
- Internet costs removed as an eligible expense.
- Support limited to gas and electricity expenses.

Siblings in Education

Approved simplification to:

- €100 per sibling in education
- Up to a maximum of four siblings

Childcare

Approved:

- €200 per child
- Maximum €800

Other Supports

Approved retaining:

- Postgraduate loan parent support: €600
- Final year supports: unchanged
- Medical expense support: €100 standard allocation with discretionary flexibility

Bursaries and Emergency Assistance

Members approved greater flexibility in the use of several bursary funds and approved an emergency bursary allocation of €1,200 for Applicant E21.