



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Scotland's college students want less debt

Scotland's Colleges has found that college students in Scotland regard their debt levels to be a huge problem and would far rather have greater financial hardship than be in debt.

A survey of over 1,000 students found that three-quarters of those students currently receiving student loans would prefer to avoid this debt, even if this meant having less income to live on.

The survey also found that money is by far the biggest concern for Scotland's college students and that more than half of all students do not understand how decisions were made to calculate their student funding and support.

The findings are part of research launched today (xx) by Scotland's Colleges, which surveyed further and higher education students at seventeen colleges throughout Scotland.

Sue Pinder, Lead Principal for Scotland's Colleges said, "This report is the first in a long time to focus exclusively on the financial position and concerns of college students. It has found that concerns about money are by far the biggest consideration for students in our colleges, and it is therefore of the utmost importance that we address this.

"The Scottish Government's consultation document, *Supporting a Smarter Scotland* sets out their proposed options for reforming financial support for higher education students. This includes our suggestion of introducing full bursary support in colleges.

"This research clearly supports our case that college students should be moved out of the student loans system and onto means-tested bursaries. College students are often from more deprived backgrounds than their university counterparts and are more likely to have childcare responsibilities, which we believe means they should be considered as a priority as part of this funding review."

The key findings of the research are:

Financial concerns

The biggest consideration for students applying to college is, overwhelmingly, money. Nearly half of all students cite money as a key consideration, with older students the most likely to raise it as a concern.

Understanding of student support

More than half of all students do not understand how decisions are made to calculate their student funding and support.

Further study

Nearly three-quarters of further education students are considering studying for an HNC or HND, yet almost half of these do not know that the funding system changes dramatically when moving from FE to HE, from a college bursary to a student loan.

Debt concern

Three-quarters of students with a student loan were concerned by the prospect of getting into debt when applying to college.

Debt or hardship

A large majority of higher education students in colleges find their debt levels to be a significant problem and would far rather have greater financial hardship than be in debt.

Recommendations

This report recommends an overhaul of the mechanisms of student support in colleges, starting with the removal of the debt burden from HNC and HND students and then looking at ways to simplify the funding systems, making them easier to understand, less complex and more closely interlinked with the benefits system.

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Notes to editors

Scotland's Colleges is the policy and representative body of Scotland's 43 colleges of further and higher education.

The research project consulted a total of 1,054 students between September and December 2008.

41% of those students surveyed were studying higher education courses and 59% were studying further education courses.

Research took place at the following colleges:

- Aberdeen College
- Anniesland College
- Ayr College
- Banff and Buchan College
- Barony College
- Central College
- Dundee College
- Edinburgh's Telford College
- Forth Valley College
- Glasgow Metropolitan College
- James Watt College
- Jewel & Esk College
- North Glasgow College

- Perth College
- South Lanarkshire College
- Stevenson College Edinburgh
- West Lothian College

The full report of this research is available at
http://www.ascol.org.uk/docs/research_report_web.pdf