



PRESS RELEASE

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Colleges work together for Scotland's poorest students

Bursary officers and student support staff from all 43 colleges in Scotland are meeting today (Friday 10 October) to discuss how Scotland's poorest students can be better supported.

Large numbers of students who claim benefits actually find themselves worse off in education than out of it, due to the fact that the Westminster-administered welfare system and Holyrood-administered student support system have moved further apart since devolution.

This situation is particularly relevant to college students who are, on average, poorer than their University equivalents, with almost one fifth of all College students in receipt of benefits. Many students face a reduction in the amount of benefits they receive simply for being eligible for a student loan – regardless of whether they actually claim the loan or not. College students now juggle up to nine separate income streams, with the average HNC/D student surviving on a household income of just £18,000.

Delegates at today's conference, which is being held at the University of Stirling, will hear from Anne Maguire, MP for Stirling and former Minister for Disabled People, and consider how the UK Government's most recently proposed changes in the welfare system will interact with the current system of student support in Scotland. They will also consider what can be done to ease the strain on staff time that the current complicated system imposes, particularly on staff working in student support departments.

Howard McKenzie, Acting Chief Executive of the Association of Scotland's Colleges commented: "We are really pleased to welcome Anne Maguire MP to the conference today, as Support for students on benefits is an issue that is relevant at Westminster as well as Holyrood.

"The ASC is proposing the introduction of a bursary system instead of the current student loans system, which would mean that benefits no longer clash so badly with the Scottish student support system. It is really important that we gather as much support for this proposal as possible in both London and Edinburgh, so that we can make the necessary changes to make life better for Scotland's poorest students."

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