



Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Postgraduate Discretionary Application Guidance Notes 2022.2023

It is important that you read these guidance notes carefully before submitting your application via the Student Portal at <https://portal.rcs.ac.uk/funding-finance/>

If you wish to apply for childcare support, you can do this as part of the same application. Please note that only those on full-time postgraduate programmes can apply for funding from the Higher Education Childcare Fund. If you are a part-time postgraduate student and have formal childcare costs, please email welfare@rcs.ac.uk

Eligibility

Support from the Discretionary Fund is available to eligible students who are undertaking a course of full or part-time post-graduate study. However, you must meet the criteria below*:

- Be UK domiciled and meet the residency criteria set out in the Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Determination 2022, or be eligible to receive maintenance support under legislation applicable in other parts of the UK, i.e.
 - Be ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for the three years immediately before the relevant date (the first day of the first academic year of the course). If you fall short of being ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands for the three year qualifying period, even by one day, you will not be eligible to apply for support under the normal residence conditions, AND
 - If you are not a UK national, you must have 'settled status' in the UK (as set out in the Immigration Act 1971) on the relevant date, AND
 - Be ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date. We will not treat you as being ordinarily resident in Scotland if your main purpose in coming here has been to receive fulltime education and that you have no intention of staying and living here.
- Be 16 years or over and past compulsory school leaving age.
- Be attending a postgraduate course of study.
- Must have used full entitlement of all other available support such as student maintenance support. (including living cost loan)
- RCS must be satisfied that students are undertaking an appropriate course of education and that their attendance is satisfactory.

*There are some exceptions to the eligibility rules. You can apply to the Fund if:

- You are an asylum seeker looking for help with travel and childcare costs.
- You are facing financial hardship as a direct consequence of a global conflict, which means that some international students will have access to the funds. An example of a direct impact will be where access to financial support from overseas has reduced or disappeared or there is a requirement for students to support families



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overseas because of a conflict. Funds cannot be awarded to pay the cost of tuition or to cover expensive accommodation costs. Funds cannot be awarded to individuals currently targeted by the UK Sanctions regime or to any recipient who is a person 'associated with' one of the designated persons in the UK sanctions regime. The list of designated persons are set out in the <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-sanctions-list>

Priority groups

- students who receive full time postgraduate fee support from SAAS and students who receive part time postgraduate fee support from SAAS
- students significantly impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

Before you apply

You should gather all the documents you will need. These are:

- Student Loan Letter and Schedule – tuition fee/living costs loan letter from your UK funding body. You must have taken out the maximum amount of student loan you are entitled to. If you are on a PG Learning and Teaching Programme and are not entitled to a student loan you can still apply to the Fund.
- Recent bank statements (two months' worth from all your accounts and your partner's, if you live with one). You can provide these from your online account if you wish to, but the statements must clearly show your full details and the logo of the bank. They cannot be in spreadsheet format.
- Recent credit card statements if there is a balance owing.
- Tax Credits or Universal Credits Award Notice (all pages) if you are in receipt of benefits.

How do I apply?

Complete the online application form and upload the required supporting documents listed above. You should state which fund you are applying for and your *main* reason for applying, even if you are applying to both the Discretionary and Childcare funds.

Financial questions

Please give as much detail as possible, particularly in the income and expenditure sections. Please do not guess any financial details as the information you provide will be cross-checked against your bank statements. If you're having trouble working out what you spend your money on please use the RCS Student Budget Planner. To be eligible for funding you must have taken out the maximum amount of student loan that you are entitled to and have uploaded the evidence.

- **Income and Expenditure**
Any weekly income (including benefits) should be multiplied by 52, and then divided by 12 to get a monthly figure.

It is anticipated that average expected monthly expenditure should include:



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- TV Licence (£13 is the norm);
- Mobile Phone (£15 is the norm and if you pay more you should swap tariffs);
- Food costs (£variable);
- Course Books/Materials/Equipment/Clothing (£variable);
- Personal costs including clothing/entertainment etc. (£75 is a realistic figure);

The amounts listed above are for guidance only and if you know that your costs differ, please state your actual spend.

If you live with a partner, you must submit evidence of their income and their recent bank statements (2 months-worth).

Reason for application

This section provides you with an opportunity to tell us why you are applying to the fund and to explain anything that may not be self-explanatory from the figures you have given. You may also want to show how you are seeking to improve your financial situation and how you budget your money.

You can apply at any point from the start of the academic year until one month before your course ends. If you know that you will struggle to pay for graduation expenses you may submit an application for assistance with these costs but it must be submitted one month prior to the ceremony.

Please contact welfare@rcs.ac.uk if you have any questions about the application form.

Can I get help with my application form?

Yes. Any student who needs assistance with completing their application should email welfare@rcs.ac.uk to ask for support. Staff are experienced in helping students who struggle with completing forms due to a disability or other issue. Help can be given in person or through Teams or Zoom.

What happens after I submit my application?

All completed applications are considered by a panel of staff members comprising of the Assistant Registrar (International and Student Experience) and the PA to the Director of Finance and Estates. The Administrator (International and Student Experience) is present at panel meetings in the role of note taker.

The information provided will be discussed by the panel in deciding the level of support, if any, that can be offered. All information discussed remains confidential and a range of factors will be taken into account in deciding awards. These include:

- Accommodation costs. Are your costs excessive? Could you have found a cheaper place to live?



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- Travel costs. Are you using the most economical form of transport to travel to/from the Conservatoire?
- The shortfall in expenditure over income and the reasons for that shortfall.
- Personal circumstances, including any special needs/dependents and whether you are an estranged student, care experienced or a student carer.
- How effectively available income is managed. Are you spending wisely?
- Access to income - family support, paid employment, bursaries, overdraft, etc. It is expected that all students should take advantage of an interest-free overdraft. If you cannot arrange an overdraft, you should explain the reasons why in your application.

The panel meets weekly to discuss applications throughout the academic session. If you wish to discuss your application prior to its consideration by the panel, please make an appointment with Pauline McCluskey via welfare@rcs.ac.uk

Can I apply over the summer?

It is expected that most postgraduate students on courses of more than one year's duration, will be working during the summer vacation to cover their living costs and therefore will not be eligible to apply to the Discretionary Fund. In certain exceptional circumstances, applications to the fund will be accepted, where:

- A student is unable to work due to a disability or illness (medical evidence will be requested) and is unable to go home during the summer; is living independently and has no other source of income.
- In exceptional circumstances, where a student is living independently and is fit for work but is unable to find a job, an application to the Fund may be considered. In this scenario, a student will be asked to submit evidence of all jobs applied for and their outcomes before an application to the Fund can be considered.

Will I be called for interview?

You will not normally be called for interview, so it is important that you provide all relevant information in your application form. Without this information, the panel cannot make a decision regarding your application.

What are the possible outcomes of my application?

Your application will either be:

- *Successful.* You'll be given a letter which will indicate the amount of the award and whether it is a grant or a loan. A grant is a payment made to the student that does not have to be repaid. A loan is a payment made in advance of expected income and must be repaid to the Finance Office by the date specified on the letter. You will be asked to e-sign to confirm that you accept the terms of the grant or loan. You will be asked to provide your bank details.



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The details are passed to the Finance Administrator in the Finance Office who will arrange for your grant/loan to be paid by bank transfer.

OR

- *Unsuccessful.* You'll be told why your application was unsuccessful. If you feel that the outcome is unjustified, you may appeal against the decision. You should request an appeal by email, addressing your letter to the Deputy Registrar, Marie Green, who will then conduct an independent review of your application. You will also be given advice on action you could take should you not wish to appeal but instead submit a further application in the future.

How much am I likely to be awarded?

The Scottish Government stipulates that the maximum award from the fund to an individual student is £4,000 per academic year but it would be very unlikely that a Conservatoire student would be awarded such a large amount. The available funds are limited and the panel budget carefully to ensure that there is money available for students all year round. Most successful applicants to the fund receive an amount of a few hundred pounds. In certain circumstances, if the award is to cover the payment of a bill, the Conservatoire will pay the company directly.

What if I cannot pay back a Discretionary Fund loan?

If you are unable to repay your loan, you must write to the Assistant Registrar (International and Student Experience) via welfare@rcs.ac.uk before the loan repayment date, to state why this is the case and provide evidence of this. You may be called for interview to discuss the possible outcomes in such a situation.

The panel may decide in extenuating circumstances to change a loan to a grant only on provision of a further Discretionary Fund application and evidence that the student is unable to repay the loan. It is important to remember that a loan is NOT automatically turned into a grant. Each application is considered on its own merits and if you choose to submit a subsequent application for further support you will again need to provide all the necessary documents.

Fraud

SAAS has a specific department which deals with fraudulent applications to the Discretionary and Childcare Funds. It is therefore essential that you submit the required documents with your application and that these documents are genuine. If it is discovered that a student has submitted a fraudulent application to the Discretionary and Childcare Funds, that student could be subject to disciplinary action. The



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Conservatoire may also choose to report such a student to SAAS who have the power to open formal investigations and interview alleged fraudsters under caution.

What happens if my situation is urgent?

If you are facing a crisis situation which will affect you financially, please make an appointment to speak to Pauline McCluskey in the first instance. The Conservatoire has a small allocation of online shopping vouchers for UK students in crisis in advance of the submission of a Discretionary Fund application. Before a Discretionary Fund application can be reviewed it is a requirement that the student submits the till receipts from the purchases made with the vouchers.