



Student Awards Agency for Scotland

Our commitment to customer service

This document sets out the standards of service you can expect from us and tells you what to do if things go wrong.

Who we are and what we do

We are a Government Agency. We pay grants and bursaries to Scottish students in higher education. We have 150 staff and handle over 130,000 applications every year.

What we do:

- assess and pay financial support for living costs and tuition fees;
- deal with the Students' Allowances Scheme, the Postgraduate Students' Allowances Scheme (PSAS), the Nursing and Midwifery Students Bursary Scheme (NMSB) and applications for student loans;
- collect the Graduate Endowment;
- provide resources and data to the Student Loans Company for the payment of student loans;
- distribute Hardship Funds and Childcare Funds to Scottish universities and colleges;
- maintain a register of charities that offer educational endowments;
- help learners through the Individual Learning Accounts Scotland (ILAS) scheme, which we run with Learndirect Scotland; and
- work with the Health Department to develop and deliver NHS Bursaries targeted at specific groups (eg Dentistry students).

Our Standards of Service

Our main service targets are currently under review.

Helping us to help you

There are some things you can do to help us give you a better service:-.

- Apply for your support as early in the year as possible. If your application is late then your money may be too. If you don't apply by the closing date you could end up having to pay your own fees and not getting the money you're entitled to while you study.
- Use our website at www.saas.gov.uk . It contains all the information you need about what support is available.
- The easiest way to apply for your support is to apply on-line. You will find it's quick and saves you postage. There is online help to fill in your form and you only need to fill in a whole form once. After that, each time you apply you will only have to update any of your details that have changed.

- If you want to use a paper form, you can download one from our website or you can pick one up at your college or university. You can also phone us to ask for a form on 0845 111 1711 or e-mail saas.geu@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
- If you use a paper form, make sure you fill it in carefully and give us all the details we ask for. You **must** use a black pen and make sure that you, your parents or your husband, wife or civil partner sign the declarations at the end of each section. If you make mistakes or don't fill in all the sections that apply to you, we may need to send the form back to you which could delay payment.
- You should only send **photocopies** of any documents we ask to see. We will normally destroy photocopies after we deal with your application unless you have asked us to send them back to you. Do not send us originals as we cannot guarantee their safe return.
- Keep the award notice we send you and show this to your college or university when you enrol. By doing this, we know that you are on the course and we and the SLC will make any payments you are due. We will also pay your tuition fees straight to your college or university.
- If you contact us always tell us your SAAS reference number (it is on your award notice).
- We need to know if any of the details you gave us on your application change, for example, if:
 - you change your bank account;
 - you change your name, address or phone number;
 - you leave or change your course of study; or
 - your personal or financial details change which changes the amount of support you are due. If we have paid you more than you are due, we will ask you to pay us this back.

Our website and guidance documents

As well as using our website to apply for your support, you can use it to find out answers to frequently asked questions and you can also ask for a copy of your award notice. The site has a 'support calculator' that you can use to work out how much money you may get from us. There is also a 'support budgeter' that gives you an idea of the sorts of things you are likely to have to spend money on and how much these may cost you.

Every year, we put out guides and other booklets with information about the support that is available. Our aim is to make these meet the standard of the Plain English Campaign and gain their crystal mark. If you are not able to read our information because of, for example, a sight problem, we can give you a larger version. If you have any other needs, contact us on 0845 111 1711 and we will arrange for you to have a copy in a format that meets your needs.

We also put out a video and CD-ROM for schools to show to people who want to enter higher education. We also send the CD-ROMs to colleges and universities to give to people who intend to apply for courses.

Contacting us

Our staff will tell you their name on the phone, in all correspondence or when you meet them.

Our office is open between 8.30am and 5pm (4.30pm on Fridays). We close on public holidays, weekends and over the Christmas and New Year period. You can contact us by e-mail at saas.geu@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to the following address:

Student Awards Agency for Scotland
Gyleview House
3 Redheughs Rigg
Edinburgh
EH12 9HH

Personal callers

You can come to our office during the hours shown above. If you want to discuss your case, you should make an appointment in advance so that we can look out your details and have someone ready to see you. If you do not make an appointment, you may have to wait during busy periods but we will aim to see you within 15 minutes.

Phone calls

You can use our automated phone-answering service on 0845 111 1711. You can call this 24 hours a day seven days a week if, for example, you want to find out when we will pay you the money you are due or you need a copy of your award notice. You will need your SAAS reference number to use this service.

During our busiest period (May to October) our General Enquiry Unit is open from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Thursday, and from 8am to 4.30pm on Fridays, except public holidays. At other times of the year, it is open for calls from 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Thursday, and from 8.30am to 4.30pm on Fridays.

We print a phone number on all the award notices and letters we send to you. This is the number to use if you have specific questions to ask about your own case. It gives you a direct line to the team or person dealing with your application.

We try to answer all calls as soon as we can. However, calls to the Agency increase significantly when the Scottish school exam results come out in early August and again in October when most university courses start. At these times, we may have to place your call in a queue.

We record all calls to the Agency for training purposes.

Our approach to quality and customer service

We aim to give an excellent level of service to all our customers and we always try to improve the quality of our service and make our systems easier to use. When things do go wrong we try to put them right as soon as we can.

Complaints or appeals

We aim to apply the laws governing student support correctly, consistently and efficiently. If you feel that we have not done so or have any other grounds for complaint please tell us and we will try to put things right as quickly as we can. If we cannot do so you have the right to make a formal complaint or appeal.

If you have either a general or a specific complaint about the way we have handled your case or you want to appeal against a decision, you should write to “The Head of Section” marking your letter clearly as a complaint or an appeal.

We will look into all complaints and aim to reply within 14 days of receiving your complaint. If you are not satisfied with our response you can write direct to our Chief Executive. This is the final stage in our internal complaints procedure. If you are still not satisfied, you can write to your MP or MSP or you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to investigate matters further on your behalf.

We want to improve our services. We monitor all complaints to see if they have any issues in common which may require a change to our procedures or staff training.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will normally only act if you have fully used the Agency’s complains procedure. You must contact the Ombudsman within 12 months of the day you first noticed the matter. The contact details are as follows:-

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR

Phone: 0800 377 7330
Fax: 0800 377 7331
Text: 0790 049 4372

Website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk
E-Mail: ask@spsso.org.uk