



Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Belfast Bursary Fund – proposed amendments to eligibility criteria
Date:	25 April 2014
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext. 3470
Contact Officers:	Lisa Toland, Economic Development Manager, ext. 3427

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	At the 15 April meeting of the Development Committee, members received an update on the Belfast Bursary and agreed to the allocation of £50,000 funding to Prince's Trust to roll out year 3 of the bursary. The bursary scheme is an element of the Belfast Investment Programme.
1.2	Members were also updated on progress with the bursary being delivered on behalf of the council by Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC). They were advised that, at a previous meeting of the Development Committee, a number of recommendations were being made regarding the eligibility criteria for the scheme and the potential for these to impact on numbers applying. Members asked that a report be brought back to a future meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to consider the implications of changing the scheme criteria and to make recommendations on any changes required for the coming academic year.

2	Key Issues
2.1	In order to be eligible for the bursary at present, the criteria are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First year, full-time student at BMC, resident in Belfast City Council area - Aged 16-24 - Household income threshold not to exceed £23,820 - Students to be studying on one of priority courses focusing on new growth areas, course are at levels 2-5.
2.2	The aim of the bursary is to offer an incentive to young people to consider undertaking study in one of the areas in which we project future employment growth to be greatest, as opposed to those areas where new jobs are less likely to be created. Hence the courses eligible for bursary support cover IT, multimedia, renewable energies, science and tourism and hospitality. The value of the bursary is £500.

2.3	<p>In the current academic year, Belfast Met reported that 64 students availed of the bursary. Spend on the awards amounted to £32,000. A total of 120 students applied for the scheme, of whom 64 were successful and 56 failed to meet one or more of the eligibility criteria set. Participants were ineligible predominately because they lived outside the Belfast City Council area (principally in Castlereagh) or because the household income levels exceeded the £23,820 threshold.</p>
2.4	<p>One of the most significant challenges has been our ability to predict the number of students who will apply for and be eligible to take up the Belfast Met bursary, given that this programme is targeted at first year students on approved courses. While there is a pool of over 800 students undertaking the priority courses agreed by members, only around 8% of those students met all of the scheme's eligibility criteria last year.</p>
2.5	<p>Of the successful students, over a third of awards have been provided to young people who live in the top 10% of most deprived wards while over half of the awards have been taken up by young people who live in the top 25% most deprived wards.</p>
2.6	<p>Based on last year's figures, and assuming that the uptake levels and student profile will be broadly similar to last year, it is likely that around 70 students will avail of the bursary in the coming academic year, should the scheme go ahead in the same format as previous years.</p>
2.7	<p>Assuming an available budget of up to £50,000 in the coming year – in line with the budget for Prince's Trust bursary – the following options may be considered by members.</p>
2.8	<p><u>Extend the scheme to second year students</u> This would potentially double the amount of students availing of the bursary. As such, it could mean that the £50,000 allocation would be exceeded. Also, given that the bursary was intended to act as an incentive to get students to take up a certain course, the fact that they were going into year 2 would mean that they no longer needed that incentive and were simply completing their course.</p>
2.9	<p><u>Consider removing the upper age limit</u> At present, only students aged under 24 are eligible for the scheme. This criterion was established to take account of the high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity among that group. Belfast Met advise that removing the upper age limit would enable access by a small number of additional students, particularly people studying on Access courses at level 3 which can lead to a study on a degree course. Based on last year's figures, this could lead to an uplift of 10-15 additional recipients.</p>
2.10	<p><u>Consider revising the household earning limits</u> As part of the consultations undertaken through party briefings last year, members were keen to see the earning cap pitched at a level that meant that a student living in a household where two people were earning minimum wage would still be eligible for the bursary. On that basis, the earnings threshold was set at £23,820. If this cap was lifted, considerably more students could benefit from the scheme. However it may mean that the initiative is less targeted than the current position, namely half of recipients resident in the top 25% most deprived wards. When the bursary was established, the minimum wage was £6.19; this has since been revised (October 2013) to £6.31 and will increase</p>

	<p>again in October 2014. Assuming uplift to around £6.50 per hour in October this year, this would mean that the earnings threshold could be increased to £25,000 for household income, and still be based on the assumption of two people working within the household at minimum wage.</p>
2.11	<p><u>Consider revising the priority courses</u></p> <p>The courses of study were chosen based on the fact that they focused on areas of projected future employment growth. The Development Committee, at its meeting in December 2013, agreed the inclusion of a number of additional courses, still within the agreed priority areas (see Appendix 1). Applications were received from across all of the courses last year. It is therefore recommended that the same courses are eligible for bursary support in the coming year.</p>
2.12	<p>In addition to any changes in criteria, it is also proposed that additional work is undertaken in the coming months to promote the bursary, using council networks and outreach facilities. This includes promoting the scheme to the following key conduits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welfare rights advisors in advice sector to ensure those who need help the most have an opportunity to apply - Targeted engagement through existing community networks and outlets, including the council's community centres and community development staff - Organisations on the Council's Section 75 consultee list. This is particularly important in widening participation among younger people's groups and disability specialist groups - Targeted use of both the Council's and on Belfast Met's website (including on the online prospectus and at open days and via media) - Schools' career advisers in order to ensure that young people are aware of the financial incentive when making their choice of course.
2.13	<p>Members have previously raised the potential of making the bursary available to Belfast City Council residents who were studying at other institutions, principally Northern Regional College. While it would be possible to identify how many students with a Belfast City Council postcode studied at the college last year, it would take some work to set up the relevant administration systems with the college as well as identify priority courses available in the college. It is unlikely that this could all be in place to allow for promotion of the bursary for the coming academic year. However members should be aware that these students would potentially be eligible for the council bursary provided through Prince's Trust (open to all Belfast residents aged 16-25 who are not currently undertaking training but who would want to do so, if the relevant financial support was available to cover fees or course materials). Officers will work with members in the coming months to promote this scheme to interested young people and to encourage take-up, particularly in disadvantaged communities.</p>
2.14	<p>Taking account of all these considerations, it is proposed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The bursary continues to be available to first year students only - The age cap is removed, in order to support adult returners and those undertaking access courses - The household earnings cap is set at £25,000 - The priority courses previously agreed by the Development Committee are maintained.

3	Resource Implications
	Based on the recommendations, it is anticipated that the budget required will not exceed £50,000 (i.e. covering up to 100 bursaries at a value of £500).

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	No specific equality or good relations considerations.

5	Recommendations
	It is recommended that the following changes to the scheme eligibility are agreed: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The bursary continues to be available to first year students only- The age cap is removed, in order to support adult returners and those undertaking access courses- The household earnings cap is set at £25,000- The priority courses are maintained.

6	Decision Tracking
	An update on uptake will be provided to a future meeting of the Committee. Timeline: November 2014 Reporting Officer: Lisa Toland

7	Key to Abbreviations
	BMC – Belfast Metropolitan College

8	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: list of courses eligible for bursary support

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Course Name
BTEC Diploma Engineering (Electrical)
Edexcel BTEC Diploma in Travel and Tourism
BTEC Diploma in Applied Science
Edexcel BTEC Diploma in Creative Media Production (Games, Web and iMedia)
Level 2 Media Studies
First Diploma ICT Practitioner
BTEC Extended Diploma Procom (Systems Support)
BTEC Extended Diploma in Hospitality
Access Certificate in Foundation Studies Maths and Computing
Access Certificate in Foundation Studies Biological/Biomedical Science
Access Diploma in Computing with Business and Multimedia
BTEC Extended Diploma Construction and Built Environment
BTEC Extended Diploma in Applied Science
BTEC Extended Diploma Creative Media Production (Interactive Media)
BTEC Extended Diploma Creative Media Production (Games Development)
Edexcel BTEC Extended Diploma in Creative Media Production (TV and Media)
BTEC Extended Diploma in Creative Media Production (Media)
Ext Dip Creative Media Production
BTEC Extended Diploma in IT
Edexcel BTEC Extended Diploma in Electrical/Electronic Engineering
Foundation Degree in Product Design and Development
Foundation Science Degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management
Foundation Degree Travel and Tourism Management
Foundation Science Degree in Event Management for the Tourism Industry
Foundation Degree in Building Services and Renewable Energies
Foundation Degree in i Media
Foundation Degree Software Engineering
Edexcel BTEC HND Diploma in Computing and Systems Development
BTEC HND Diploma in Graphic Design
BTEC HND Diploma in Creative Media Production (Computer Games Design)
BTEC HND Applied Science (Biology)
BTEC HND Applied Science (Chemistry)
BTEC HND Diploma in Electronic Engineering
Foundation Degree in Sustainable Construction
Foundation Degree in Architectural Technology with Sustainable Design