



Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Update on bursary scheme
Date:	25 January 2013
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that a number of reports have recently been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources and Development Committees in connection with development and implementation of the Council-sponsored education bursary programme – one of the key projects within the economy section of the Investment Programme.
1.2	At its meeting on 22 June 2012, Members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee considered a number of potential ways forward in relation to development of the £300,000 bursary fund and reached agreement on a preferred approach for the first year. Members agreed to two different types of bursaries working in conjunction with Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) and the Prince's Trust.
1.3	With an annual budget of £100,000, an indicative split of £70,000 to BMC and £30,000 to the Prince's Trust was agreed for year 1. Members are aware that bursaries channelled through the Trust will be used to help disadvantaged young people aged 16-25 access education, training or employment. Awards provided via the College are intended to incentivise young people to choose a specific course of study which will lead them towards employment in key growth sectors.
1.4	On 14 December 2012 Members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee received a full update on delivery of the bursary scheme including progress which had been achieved by both organisations. It was reported that through the Prince's Trust, Development Awards had been provided to 57 disadvantaged young people aged 15-25 in Belfast City Council area with 87% of those achieving a positive outcome by moving into education, training or employment.
1.5	Members were also informed that in the case of the BMC, eligibility criteria for

1.6	<p>the scheme had been established and priority courses identified. However no bursaries had been allocated as yet given that the College had not been able to include advance promotion of the scheme in any of its promotional literature for the 2012/13 academic year. As a result, the funding earmarked for year 1 was not able to act as an incentive towards a particular course of study as had been initially intended.</p> <p>In light of the above, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee therefore agreed to Development Committee's proposal that the £70,000 allocated to the BMC bursaries for the current academic year be carried forward into the next financial year to allow greater impact and to incentivise more young people to study in priority skills areas. Committee also recommended that consideration be given to lowering the household income criteria set by the College for its existing bursary programme (currently £55,000).</p>
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2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>This section of the report sets out a number of issues relating to the bursary scheme in particular the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – revise the eligibility criteria for those wishing to receive financial support via the BMC bursary, particularly those focusing on household income thresholds and targeting priority courses; – consider appropriate levels of assistance for year 2; – consider proposed arrangements for increased engagement with the public, private and community and voluntary sectors in promoting and collaborating with the council on this scheme; – raise the profile of the Council's investment in the scheme.
2.2	<p><u>Eligibility criteria for the BMC Bursary</u></p> <p>Members will be aware from its December meeting that eligibility for the scheme had previously been established including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – individuals must be resident in the Belfast City Council area; – aged 16-24 at the date of application; – must meet the criteria set out by the College for the hardship fund; and – must be preparing to study or currently studying on a full-time further/higher/vocational education training course at Levels 2-5 on one 25 priority courses identified.
2.3	<p>It was anticipated that the awards would be to a value of £500 and would be allocated only if it could be confirmed that the student completed at least 80% attendance at all classes and all appropriate examinations and assessments.</p>
2.4	<p>The College has recently made progress in identifying those students who could potentially meet the eligibility criteria for the courses of study previously identified and detailed in an earlier Committee report i.e. courses in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, computing, renewables, creative media and travel, tourism and hospitality. However given the sheer volume of expected applications - approx 925 students, with up to 460 eligible for the awards (based on 2012/2013 entry information) it is proposed that the Council uses the scheme to target the same priority areas of study but reduces the number of eligible courses from 25 to 10 (see Appendix 1).</p>

2.5	To ensure the scheme is targeted at students from families where income levels are low, it is also proposed the household income criteria set by the college for its existing HE bursary programme (currently £55,000) is reduced to £19,204 – bringing the Council's bursary programme in line with the threshold currently set by Student Finance NI for access to grant finance. It will also facilitate administration of the scheme by the college, as opposed to having to operate to a range of income levels for different schemes.
2.6	If Members agree to reducing the number of eligible courses and lowering the income threshold, it is envisaged the BMC will be able to offer approx 240 awards of £500 to new first year students entering in September 2013 to undertake a further/higher/vocational education training course at levels 2-5 of one of the 10 priority courses identified in Appendix 1. Whilst it is difficult to predict the exact number of student applications to be received in 2013/14, these figures which have been forecast are based upon current entry information.
2.7	This approach will help ensure that financial assistance is given to lower income families and the volume of the bursaries will be of sufficient value to truly incentivise someone to participate in a particular course of study in further or higher education.
2.8	<p><u>Levels of assistance</u></p> <p>Assuming an annual budget of £100,000 for year 2; consideration will need to be given to agreeing a split between funding allocated towards supporting further/higher education initiatives (through BMC) versus funding to help individuals access training or education (not at further or higher levels) or employment (administered through Prince's Trust).</p>
2.9	With regard to the Prince's Trust, it is anticipated that, during the first year, the Development Awards programme will support 145 young people and help over 80% of those who receive an award to achieve a positive outcome, progressing into education, training or employment.
2.10	In planning for year 2 the Prince's Trust has given a non-formal commitment that it may have the capacity to increase the number of awards provided, assuming appropriate levels of funding are in place.
2.11	Officers are currently exploring a range of options in terms of what volume of bursaries might be feasible to deliver on an annual basis e.g., increasing the volume of awards by two-thirds and providing approx 241 awards at a cost to the Council of £50,000.
2.12	It is clear than any change in budget to the Prince's Trust would have implications for the funding available under the BMC-element of the bursary, given the overall annual budget of £100,000 for this initiative.
2.13	It is also important to note that, at this stage, it is impossible for the council to make a financial commitment to students beyond the next academic year of study, given that budgets are set on an annual basis. It is therefore proposed that the BMC bursary is made available to first-year students only within the selected areas of study and that consideration is given - at a future date - to whether the next round of funding (for academic year 14-15) is allocated to the same students or whether a new batch of eligible first year students receive the award.

2.14	<p><u>Increasing engagement with the private sector</u></p> <p>While the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has introduced a number of incentive schemes for employers to provide work placements, these are targeted at those who are not in employment, as opposed to students. However when students conclude their studies, they very often have no practical experience to fall back on or to demonstrate their capabilities when seeking employment.</p>
2.15	<p>In response to this challenge, early discussions on the subject of creating placement opportunities for those young people availing of the Belfast bursary have taken place with various trade bodies representing small digital, ICT and catering and hospitality businesses. Early feedback would suggest that a placement/apprenticeship scheme would be very attractive to each of the industries however there is still a lot more work to do to tie down the logistics of this approach with potential employers and with the college.</p>
2.16	<p>To add value to the programme, the Council will continue to investigate any opportunities that might exist to secure practical work experience for those young people who benefit from a Belfast bursary but will look beyond the private sector, extending their talks to the public, community and voluntary sectors.</p>
2.17	<p><u>Branding</u></p> <p>Whilst the Belfast Bursary Scheme will be branded within the context of the Investment Programme, an individual name will be developed which will help create a unique identity for the programme and reinforce the Council's investment in the scheme. This identity will be repeatedly communicated in multiple ways throughout the lifetime of the programme and officers are currently working alongside Corporate Communications to finalise the design work.</p>
2.18	<p>An event to promote the Bursary Scheme will be hosted by the Lord Mayor, in conjunction with the Chair of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, on Wednesday 27 February in City Hall. Details of this event will be shared with Members shortly.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	An overall budget of £300,000 was allocated to the bursary scheme over a 3 year period 2012-2015.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	No specific equality and good relations considerations at this stage.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the update on proposals for year 2 of the bursary scheme. - Consider and agree the proposed income threshold for those in receipt of the BMC bursary, setting this at £19,204 – in line with Student Finance NI

	<p>threshold.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Note the proposal to allocate up to £50,000 of year 2 finance towards the bursary scheme managed by Prince’s Trust, with £50,000 allocated to BMC. This will mean that BMC will administer £120,000 in the current financial year (£70,000 carried forward from year 1 plus £50,000 from year 2). – Consider the proposal to set the bursary at £500 for Belfast-based students meeting the eligibility criteria and undertaking a course of study in one of the selected areas (see Appendix 1). – Note the proposal to pursue work placement opportunities for those students availing of the bursary. – Note the proposed launch of the scheme in February 2013.
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6	Decision Tracking
An update on the proposals for year 2 of the programme will be brought back to Committee at a later date.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
BMC – Belfast Metropolitan College DEL – Department for Employment and Learning	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 - Belfast Met – Proposed eligible full-time courses 2013-14	

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Course	Title	Level
C3037	Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Electrical/Electronic Engineering	3
C4039	Foundation Degree in Product Design and Development	5
C5048	Edexcel BTEC Level 5 HND Diploma in Computing & Systems Development	5
C3077	Access Diploma in Computing with Business & Multimedia (UU)	3
C3071	Access Certificate in Foundation Studies Maths & Computing (QUB)	3
C5029	Foundation Degree in Building Services and Renewable Energies	5
C3048	Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Hospitality	3
C2039	Edexcel BTEC Level 2 Diploma in Travel and Tourism	2
C2077	(Games, Web & iMedia) Edexcel BTEC Level 2 Diploma in Creative Media Production	2
C3110	(Film & TV) Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Creative Media Production	3

How many students met the criteria on these courses in current academic year