

Alberta Student Awards Personnel Association Recommend Procedural Changes (2014)

STUDENT AID ALBERTA – INNOVATION AND ADVANCED EDUCATION

MAINTENANCE GRANT & EXCEPTIONAL EXPENSES

Adopted: 2006/ Updated: 2013

Sufficient information regarding how exceptional expenses are assessed appears to be lacking among borrowers. Students who are unaware of the flexibility within the loans program may perceive that they will not be eligible for sufficient funding and forego entry into post-secondary studies or overburden themselves with employment while in school, affecting the time able to be devoted to the completion of their courses.

The availability is unclear to students and the eligibility is unclear to EIs. When students apply for a student loan they are informed that they are automatically considered for all grants and bursaries. However, the Maintenance Grant is not automatically assessed for most students. Students must specifically request to be considered based on atypical circumstances, and often do not even know of the request procedure or even this grant's availability.

Recommendation

ASAPA recommends that the Maintenance Grant be more transparent. Information regarding situations where eligibility is automatically assessed and situations in which students must submit a written request, as well as the process for requesting consideration of the Maintenance Grant be clearly identified on both the paper and on-line application forms as well as in the Quick Tips booklet and website.

COMMUNICATION OF POLICY AND PROGRAM INFORMATION

Adopted: 2006/ Updated: 2013

Constant, clear, concise and up-to-date communication of information is critical to educational institution staff to be able to communicate accurate information to students. The EI staff rely heavily on the Student Aid Alberta Program Guide to ensure they are giving students the correct information and following the guidelines.

Recommendation

ASAPA recommends that the student Aid Alberta Program Guide be updated regularly to include policy and program changes. Instead of yearly updates, we would like to see continual updates as policy changes.

ASAPA recommends that the Student Aid Alberta Program Guide be more user friendly and contain more comprehensive information similar to the previous Helpers Guide to better meet EI's needs.

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ALBERTA WORKS – HUMAN SERVICES

HS POLICY CHANGES

Adopted: 2006

Changes made to the Alberta Works policies which impact ongoing students are currently done throughout the funding year. As institutions are the point of contact for these learners, institutions credibility is often questioned when policy changes mid-term.

Recommendation

ASAPA recommends that changes impacting clients become effective August 1 of each year.

FEDERAL INITIATIVES/ ALBERTA WORKS

Adopted: 2010/ Updated: 2012

The process for a student who may be EI eligible as well as Alberta Works eligible is very confusing and complicated. Students are often misinformed, misdirected, and face significant delays in accessing either program's funding.

New Federal initiatives are created and implemented and are required to be managed through the Alberta Works program. This requires Institutions to implement new processes and procedures for these programs to meet additional needs. These programs tend to be implemented on short notice with little or no training and due to this many communication issues arise between students, EI, HS and Institutions.

Recommendation

ASAPA recommends that future Initiatives be implemented with realistic time lines and training for all partners involved. There should be consultation on new processes including institutions expected to facilitate the application of these programs.

Communication and collaboration between Alberta Works and Service Canada is critical and must be improved to prevent learners from being left without any supports while their paperwork is being processed.