



ROSS AND CORMARTY EDUCATION TRUST BURSARIES

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek approval for the amended award criteria for Ross and Cromarty student and pupil bursaries along with temporarily reopening applications for payment under Sections 13 to 29 of the Ross and Cromarty Trusts ('fifth schedule').

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Significantly reduced income for the Trust due to low interest rates has led to a revision by the Ross and Cromarty Committee of The Highland Council in 2019 which reverted the distribution of the funds to match the original intentions of the Ross and Cromarty Educational Trusts. This revision resulted in new Ross and Cromarty administration protocols being introduced by the Comhairle in 2019 to match the intent of the original trusts – student and pupil bursaries.
- 2.2 The protocols set the criteria for the award of Ross and Cromarty annual student and pupil bursaries. The reduced funding for the trusts meant that the previous programme of grants to individual and groups under the "fifth schedule" were curtailed due to lack of available funds.
- 2.3 The criteria for the student and pupil bursary awards agreed by the Comhairle in 2019 were focused on low-income families only and, as a result of these stipulations, the Department have been unable to issue any Ross and Cromarty student bursaries in the last two years due to there being no applications from eligible students.
- 2.4 There have been no applications from pupils from low-income families and in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) whilst in school in recent years. With this in mind, it is proposed to amend the application process to allow any pupil going on to university to apply whilst still retaining the intention to prioritise low-income families. The amended award criteria proposals are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 2.5 The criteria for awarding the Nicolson Institute pupil bursaries to pupils from Bernera, Pairc and Balallan agreed in 2019 also included a requirement to be in receipt of EMA. The amended award criteria proposals are detailed in Appendix 2 reducing the EMA requirement in the interests of increasing eligibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle
 - (a) approve the amended student bursary award criteria as detailed in Appendix 1.



- (b) approve the amended Nicolson Institute pupil bursary award criteria as detailed in Appendix 2.
- (c) approve reopening for applications under Sections 13 to 29 of the Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust scheme from April 2025 until the available funding of £5,000 is awarded.

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Appendix:
1. Amended Student Bursary award criteria.
2. Amended Nicolson Pupil Bursary award criteria.

Background Papers: Report: Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust Bursaries 18 June 2019.



IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None – relates to distribution of Trust Funds
Legal	N/A
Staffing	N/A
Assets and Property	N/A
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities/Child Rights	Will open access to the Bursaries for all pupils.
Corporate Strategy	N/A
Environmental Impact	N/A
Consultation	N/A

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust Funds have predominantly been issued as grants to individuals and community groups for a variety of purposes by the Comhairle over a number of years up till 2019. Significantly reduced income for the Trust due to low interest rates led to a revision by the Ross and Cromarty Committee of The Highland Council in 2019 which reverted the distribution of the funds to match the original intentions of the Ross and Cromarty Educational Trusts. This revision resulted in new Ross and Cromarty administration protocols being introduced by the Comhairle in 2019 to match the intent of the original trusts – student and pupil bursaries. These protocols set the criteria for the award of Ross and Cromarty annual student and pupil bursaries. The reduced funding for the trusts meant that the previous programme of grants to individual and groups under the “fifth schedule” were curtailed due to lack of available funds.
- 5.2 The Highland Council now annually transfer funds from Ross and Cromarty Educational Trust funds to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and delegates the decision making and administrative duties of the relevant portions to the Chief Officer Education and Children's Services of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, with a requirement for an annual report to the trust regarding the utilisation of the funds.

DETAIL

- 6.1 Sums of £670 for prizes, £8260 for bursaries and 30% of any remaining surplus income (based on population size) will be transferred annually. The Ross and Cromarty Educational Trusts prize funds transferred to the Comhairle will be issued by schools in the spirit of the original special conditions imposed by each trust. The prizes will be issued in subjects closest to the original as described in the text of the trust conditions and in an equivalent current value to that originally given out. In recent years there has not been an allocation of the 30% remaining surplus due to low interest rates. This has necessitated the closure of ‘fifth schedule’ application awards.
- 6.2 The criteria for the student and pupil bursary awards agreed by the Comhairle in 2019 were focused on low-income families only and the Department have been unable to issue any Ross and Cromarty student bursaries in the last two years due to the criteria resulting in no eligible candidates being



identified. There have been notable increases in rental for student properties for those attending mainland universities since the pandemic in 2020. This appears to have seriously affected the demographics of island-born students studying at mainland universities.

- 6.3 There have been no applications from pupils from low-income families and in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) whilst in school in recent years. With this in mind, it is proposed to amend the application process to allow any pupil going on to university to apply whilst still retaining the intention to prioritise low-income families. The amended award criteria proposals are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 6.4 The criteria for awarding the Nicolson Institute pupil bursaries to pupils from Bernera, Pairc and Balallan agreed in 2019 also included a requirement to be in receipt of EMA. The amended award criteria proposals are detailed in Appendix 2 to adjust the requirement for EMA to ensure that there are students who are eligible.
- 6.5 Due to this inability to award bursaries over the last two years, the Comhairle has built up a small surplus to the locally held Ross and Cromarty Trust funds. It is proposed to use £5,000 of this surplus funding for 'fifth schedule' applications under Sections 13 to Sections 29 of the Ross and Cromarty Trust scheme. Applications are proposed to open from the 1 April 2025 and remain open until £5,000 of awards under these sections has been completed.
- 6.6 It is proposed to close the Ross and Cromarty Trusts for applications under Section 13 to Section 29 until the funding transferred from Highland Council once again includes a payment of the 30% surplus income to the fund.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Approval of the recommendations in the Report will remove the criteria that was previously restricting the awarding of any bursaries under the scheme. This will once again allow the Comhairle to award bursaries to students attending university on the mainland in accordance with the wishes of the Trusts. This will also allow a temporary opening for individuals and community groups to apply for funding for activities and projects supported by Sections 13 to 29 of the Trust Scheme and use a part of the unspent funds from the last two years. This proposal is to apply from 1 April 2025 until the allocated £5,000 has been awarded. The fund will then close to applications until a further surplus can be identified in future years or supplied as part of our annual allocation from Highland Council.

