



University of Sheffield

Professional Judgement Policy

The Federal regulations governing the administration and disbursement of US Federal Loans determine the majority of the decisions that the Financial Aid Administrators (FAAs) at The University of Sheffield make. However, in certain circumstances, we may exercise discretion under Professional Judgement (PJ). For example, we may be able to consider a student's special circumstances to make small adjustments to their calculated Cost of Attendance or Expected Family Contribution (EFC). (Allowed COA components are determined by law and specified in statute). We are also able to perform a dependency override for an undergraduate student, under Professional Judgement.

The University of Sheffield has statutory authority to use PJ to adjust the COA (HEA Section 479(a) and 480(d)(7)).

Students may pursue an adjustment based on special or unusual circumstances and The University of Sheffield will consider, make and document all such PJ requests on a case by case basis, but please note a student has no appeal rights.

Special circumstances we will consider adjusting data elements in the student's COA or in the EFC calculations under PJ discretion.

Unusual circumstances we may consider adjustment to a student's dependency status based on a unique situation, more commonly referred to as a 'Dependency Override'.

They can determine that a student who does not meet any of the basic independence criteria should still be treated as an independent student.

Circumstances in which the University is willing to consider adjusting a student's calculated cost of attendance would include (but not be limited to) the following:

- A student demonstrates that they have a disability or specific learning difficulty which causes them to incur additional costs
- A student demonstrates that they have children who are financially dependent on them and who have been authorised to travel with them to the U.K. and reside with them during their study.
- Change in employment status, income, or assets
- Change in housing status (e.g., homelessness)
- Medical, dental, or nursing home expenses not covered by insurance
- Tuition expenses at an elementary or secondary school
- Other changes or adjustments that impact the student's costs or ability to pay for college.

During a qualifying emergency, disaster or economic downturn, the University may:

- determine that the income earned from work for an applicant is zero, if the applicant can provide paper or electronic documentation of receipt of unemployment benefits or confirmation that an application for unemployment benefits was submitted; and
- make additional appropriate adjustments to the income earned from work for a student, parent, or spouse, as applicable, based on the totality of the family's situation, including consideration of unemployment benefits.

The reason for any adjustments made as a result of the financial aid administrators exercising their professional judgement must be documented with a written justification; any supporting documentation will be required and held on the student's file for three years. Documentation pertaining to unemployment should be submitted no more than 90 days from the date it was issued.

Acceptable documentation for evidence may include:

- A documented interview between the student and the financial aid administrator; or
- Supplementary information, as necessary, about the financial status or personal circumstances of eligible applicants as it relates to the special circumstances.

Unusual Circumstances: Dependency Status and Dependency Override

Postgraduate Students

Students on Postgraduate or professional programmes at the start of the academic year are deemed to be independent.

Undergraduate Students

Depending on their circumstances, many Undergraduate students are deemed to be dependant. The regulations governing the Federal Student Aid (FSA) programmes are based on the premise that the family is the first source of an undergraduate student's support. They provide several criteria for deciding whether or not a student is considered independent of their parents for aid eligibility. If a student is considered a dependent of their parents, their income and assets must be included on the FAFSA, and the CPS will calculate a parent contribution and add it to the student's contribution to derive an SAI (formerly EFC).

If the student answers yes to any of these questions, then they are considered to be independent for the purposes of Title IV Aid:

Contact Information :

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