

New College Durham
Access Fund Policy
Higher and Further Education Students
2009/10

1. Introduction

- 1.1. New College Durham has developed a single coherent Access Fund Policy to enable students to assess their eligibility for support via the College's Access Funds. The College's Access Fund Policy is reflective of the prevailing national guidelines relating to the administration of Access Fund for learners undertaking studies on both Higher and Further Education courses.
- 1.2. The Access Fund is administered by the College to assist learners with the costs associated with learning at the College.
- 1.3. Specifically excluded by the Learning and Skills Council from support from Access Fund are asylum seekers aged 19 and over and prisoners on day release.
- 1.4. The support detailed in this policy is subject to the College receiving appropriate funding from the Learning and Skills Council and/or Higher Education Funding Council for England. The College reserves the right to amend/cease the support detailed in this policy in light of funding received.

2. Aims of the Policy

- 2.1. This policy aims to:
 - 2.1.1. Ensure that the limited funds available to the College are distributed effectively and efficiently to those learners with the greatest needs.
 - 2.1.2. Clarify the different eligibility criteria for learners undertaking studies on either Higher or Further Education courses.
 - 2.1.3. Outline the range of support available to eligible learners.

3. Applications under the Policy

- 3.1. Applications will only be considered for the term in which the application is received. Invitation for applications will close a week before the end of each academic term. Details of these closing dates will be published on the College Intranet.

4. Payments under the Policy

- 4.1. Higher Education Payments:
 - 4.1.1. Any payments direct to the student will be made via BACS transfer.
 - 4.1.2. The College is unable to make retrospective payments under this policy. Normally payments will only be considered in the academic term in which they are due. However, the College will consider in the case of childcare, retrospective payments as long as the invoice is submitted within four weeks of issue.

4.1.3. Any payments will be pro-rated to when the application form is received by the College, for example, an application form received in the sixth week of a 12 week term will receive 50% of any payment.

4.2. Further Education Payments:

4.2.1. Any payments direct to the student will normally be made via BACS transfer.

4.2.2. Payments to the external childcare providers will be paid on receipt of an invoice from the childcare provider at the end of every month. There is no payment in advance for services yet to be provided.

4.2.3. The College is unable to make retrospective payments under this policy. Payments will only be considered in the academic term in which they are due except for payments for course fees which will only be considered in the first term for the academic year to which they relate.

4.2.4. Any payments will be pro-rated to when the application form is received by the College, for example, an application form received in the sixth week of a 12 week term will receive 50% of any payment.

5. The Access to Learning Fund Policy for Higher Education Students

5.1. The Access to Learning Fund arrangements for Higher Education students are based on the prevailing guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

5.2. Eligibility Criteria for Higher Education Students

5.2.1. In order to qualify the student must satisfy **all** the following criteria:

- Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
- Be up-to-date with all course work/assignments;
- Applied for their full entitlement of student loan/bursary and must have received their first instalment before any payment will be made from the Access to Learning Fund. Where a student has not been able to receive any statutory support, because they have a previous Higher Education qualification, they may still apply for support to the Access to Learning Fund.

5.2.2. Satisfy the three following residential requirements relating to their residence and immigration status on the first day of the first academic year of the course:

- Have been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and Islands throughout the three-year period preceding that date other than wholly or mainly for the purpose of receiving full-time education; (Students covered by the Bidar Guidance and those classed as “home” students are also eligible);
- Be ordinarily resident in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland (Students from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are ineligible for support);
- Be settled in the United Kingdom under the terms of the Immigration Act 1971, in other words ordinarily resident here without being subject to any restriction on the period for which they may stay.

5.2.3. Applications for support can be made by ‘home students’ undertaking the following HEFCE funded courses:

- Full and Part-time undergraduate courses, including distance learning;
- Sandwich courses;
- Flexible PGCE courses.
- Full and Part-time postgraduate courses, including distance learning, lasting a minimum of one year, and providing that the part-time postgraduate course is at least 50% of a full-time equivalent course;
- NHS students (both means-tested and non-means-tested Bursary holders and NHS salaried employees);
- Students attending part-time courses **must** be receiving six or more guided learning hours per week in order to be eligible.

5.2.4. The College validates some of its Higher Education Provision with external HE institutions, thus students may qualify for Access Fund support from these institutions, for clarity please check with the Access Fund Administrator.

5.3. **Childcare Support for Higher Education Students**

5.3.1. In order to qualify the student **must** be eligible for a payment from the Access to Learning Fund and satisfy **all** of the following criteria:

- The childcare provider **must** be registered with OfSTED.

5.3.2. Students seeking support for childcare are expected to use the College Nursery facilities unless before and after school care is required or there are other exceptional circumstances. The College will pay up to a maximum of 15% of the childcare fees where the student qualifies for support from the Local Education Authority (LEA), who normally reimburses 85% of the fees. The College support will be **limited to 15%** of the maximum childcare support provided to each household. The College payments will be solely for child care and they will be no payment for penalty charges which are advocated by some providers (e.g. late payment fees).

- 5.3.3. Where students are required to pay retainer fees in order to retain the place in the nursery in non-term time, for example Christmas, Easter, half terms, it is vital that this information is reflected in any application of childcare support. The College will only pay up to 15% of any retainer fee which equates to no more than 50% of the fees normally incurred in term time. If a student engages in employment during the non-term times, they are **not** eligible to receive support via the Access to Learning Fund during the period of employment.
- 5.3.4. Where a student is seeking payment of a retainer fee over the summer months, a signed undertaking is required from the student that they will attend for the next academic term or repay in full this payment.
- 5.3.5. Childcare payments are normally available only to support attendance at classes/tutorials/placements with the exception of retainer fees (see 5.3.3.). In exceptional circumstances the College may consider an extension to this to allow for the completion of academic work.
- 5.3.6. If following an application to the LEA the Higher Education student does not receive support via the Local Education Authority but satisfies the College's criteria (see paragraph 5.3.1) the College will consider supporting childcare fees on the following basis:

Category Under Access Fund	1	2	3	4
% Support to Childcare Fees	100	75	50	25

5.4. Emergency Loan for Higher Education Students

- 5.4.1. A student on a full-time Higher Education course who is awaiting the receipt of their first instalment of the student loan/bursary is eligible to apply for an Emergency Loan of up to £400 per academic year. The loan will seek to support the student to purchase materials and equipment required for his/her studies.
- 5.4.2. The payment of this loan will be subject to a receipt of a formal legal undertaking for the student to repay the loan in full when one of the following occurs:
- He/she receives their student loan/bursary;
 - He/she leaves the course;
 - He/she receives notification that they will not be eligible for a student loan/bursary.
- 5.4.3. In exceptional circumstances, the College will consider paying a loan to support childcare fees whilst the LEA considers the eligibility of the applicant. The College would consider supporting childcare fees from the date of submission of the application to the LEA. The payment of this loan will be subject to a receipt of a formal legal undertaking for the student to repay the loan in full when one of the following occurs:
- He/she receives the LEA funds;
 - He/she leaves the course;
 - He/she receives notification that they will not be eligible for a LEA fund.

5.5. Hardship Grant for Full-Time Higher Education Students

- 5.5.1. It is recognised that a student on a full-time Higher Education course may in **exceptional circumstances** require additional assistance to pursue their studies due to genuine hardship. Consideration of any payment under the Hardship Grant must assist the student to fulfil their studies/course at New College Durham e.g. text books, materials, travel.
- 5.5.2. The Hardship Grant will not be awarded in relation to issues, which are out of the College's control and form part of every day living expenses, e.g. rent, rates, maintenance of mode of transport etc.
- 5.5.3. In order to qualify the student **must** be eligible for a payment from the Access to Learning Fund and satisfy **all** of the following criteria:
- Be enrolled on a full-time Higher Education course;
 - Have a net individual income of less than £20,817 per annum;
 - Have a genuine hardship **directly** related to their Higher Education studies at New College Durham.
- 5.5.4. If the student satisfies all of the above criteria in full, the student should apply to the Funding & Welfare Adviser, located in ASC.

The maximum Hardship Grant per student per academic year is:

Category Under Access Fund	1	2	3	4
Maximum Hardship Grant	£300	£200	£150	£100

5.6. Disabled Students in Higher Education

- 5.6.1. The Access to Learning Fund is not intended to provide additional study support that is available from the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), unless the DSA is insufficient to cover the whole cost, or the costs cannot be met from the DSA. Under such circumstances the College will seek to support the individual up to a maximum of £3,000 from the Access to Learning Fund.
- 5.6.2. Request for support must be made in writing to the Access Fund Administrator.

6. The Learner Support Fund Policy for Further Education Students

- 6.1. The Learner Support Fund arrangements for Further Education students are based on prevailing guidance issued by the Learning and Skills Council.
- 6.2. Learners should exercise their entitlement to other forms of financial support before eligibility for discretionary funding is considered, for example:
- Education Maintenance Allowance;
 - Adult Learning Grant;
 - Residential Support Scheme;
 - Dance and Drama Awards;
 - Care to Learn;
 - LEA Financial payments.

6.3. Eligibility Criteria for Full-Time 16-18 Further Education Students

6.3.1 All full-time students aged 16 to 18 on LSC funded courses running for 30 weeks or more per year and receiving 15 hours or more tutored time per week may apply for additional assistance to address exceptional study related expenses e.g. text books, materials.

6.3.1.1. In order to qualify the student must satisfy **all** of the following criteria:

- Be under the age of 19 on 31 August in the year the course commenced at the College;
- Have a net household income of less than £30,810;
- Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
- Be up-to-date with all course work/assignments.

6.3.2. Hardship Grant (Uniform) for Full-Time 16-18 Further Education Students

6.3.2.1. All full-time students aged 16-18 on LSC funded courses, who are required as part of the curriculum to wear an occupational specific uniform, e.g. Hair, Beauty, Catering students, will have one set of uniforms purchased by the College, subject to them meeting the qualifying criteria.

6.3.2.2. In order to qualify the student must satisfy **all** of the following criteria:

- Be eligible for a payment from the Learner Support Fund;
- Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
- Be up-to-date with all course work/assignments;
- Have a net household income of less than £20,817.

6.3.2.3. In **exceptional circumstances**, where a student identifies to the Funding & Welfare Adviser, located in ASC, genuine financial difficulties in purchasing a uniform, the Funding & Welfare Adviser can recommend to the Assistant Director of Human Resources and Facilities to relax the above criteria to purchase a uniform.

6.3.3. Hardship Grant (Equipment) for Full-Time 16-18 Further Education Students

6.3.3.1. All full-time students age 16-18 on LSC funded courses, who are required as part of the curriculum to utilise specialist occupational specific equipment, e.g. Hair, Beauty, Catering students, will have the use of such equipment while in College. The equipment will remain the property of the College.

6.3.3.2. Consideration for such equipment will be undertaken by the appropriate Curriculum Leader in conjunction with the Access Fund Administrator.

6.3.4. Hardship Grant (Exceptional Requests) for Full-Time 16-18 Further Education Students

6.3.4.1. It is recognised that a student on a full-time 16-18 Further Education course may in **exceptional circumstances** require additional assistance to pursue their studies due to genuine hardship. Consideration of any payment under the Hardship Grant must assist the student to fulfil their studies/course at New College Durham e.g. text books.

6.3.4.2. The Hardship Grant will not be awarded in relation to issues, which are out of the College's control and form part of every day living expenses, e.g. rent, rates, maintenance of mode of transport etc.

6.3.4.3. In order to qualify the student must satisfy **all** of the following criteria:

- Be eligible for a payment from the Learner Support Fund;
- Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
- Be up-to-date with all course work/assignments;
- Have a net household income of less than £20,817.

6.3.4.4. The maximum Hardship Grant per student per academic year is £150.

6.3.5. Free Meals for Full-Time 16-18 Further Education Students

6.3.5.1. Students may be entitled to a free meal card.

6.3.5.2. In order to qualify for a free meal card the student must satisfy **all** of the following criteria:

- Be under the age of 19 on 31 August in the year the course commenced at the College;
- Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
- Be up to date with all course work/assignments;
- Living independently away from home and receiving income support or living at home with a parent or guardian who is receiving income support.
- Not be in receipt of a concessionary meal card (see 6.3.6)

6.3.6 Concessionary Meals for Full-time 16-18 Further

6.3.6.1. A Concessionary Meal Card entitles the student to a hot meal or snack at a reduced cost. For meals up to £3.00 in value the card entitles the student to pay a reduced amount of £1.50. Any costs in excess of £3.00 will be charged at the full rate. Note that no confectionery can be purchased with any type of meal card. Students may be entitled to a concessionary meal card and must satisfy all of the following criteria:-

- Have a net household income of less than £30,810;
- Be under the age of 19 on 31 August in the year the course commenced at the College;
- Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
- Be up to date with all course work/assignments
- Not be in receipt of a free meal card (see 6.3.5)

6.4. Eligibility Criteria for 19+ Further Education Students

6.4.1. 19+ Further Education Students (Course, Registration and Examination Fees)

6.4.1.1. The Learning and Skill Council has allocated specific funding to support the course, registration and examination fees for:

- Adults undertaking first full level 2 qualification;
- Learners aged 19-24 undertaking a full first level 3 qualification;
- In receipt of one of the following means tested qualifying benefit/tax benefit specifically:
 - Council Tax/Housing Benefit;
 - Income Support;
 - Job Seekers allowance;
 - Pension credits – guarantee Credits;
 - Working Tax Credit.

Where an individual meets one of the above requirements, the Learning and Skills Council allow the College to waive the fees for the course.

6.4.1.2. The Learning and Skills Council also allow for consideration of support with course, registration and examination fees for learners who are “economically or socially disadvantaged” **and facing financial difficulties**, in relation to such consideration the College needs to adopt a two stage process:

Stage One

The students must:

- Be aged 19 and over seeking to study a LSC funded course receiving six or more guided learning hours per week;
- Have a net household income of less than £30,810 (as evidenced from example by tax credit documentation);
- Confirm they are facing financial difficulty in paying the fees published.

Stage Two

The College is required to further prioritise those at Stage One, to seek to address under-representation by certain groups:

- Learners taking a skills for life programme of study;
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- Aged between 19-25 and in care or on probation;
- Young parents;
- Single parent;
- Those formally identified “at risk”;
- Medically ill;
- Those in care or recently left care.

If the student satisfies both stages of the above process they will still be expected to pay their course, registration and examination fees, but the College will use the Access Funds to reimburse the individual.

- 6.4.1.3. If the student satisfies only Stage One of the above process, the College will seek to prioritise support for those where there is an established financial hardship (based on income assessment), such support is dependent on a realistic prospect that the individual will not participate in Further Education without this support.
- 6.4.1.4. In respect of paragraphs 6.4.1.1 and 6.4.1.2. there will be no further support from the Learner Support Fund unless the learner has a net household income of less than £20,817. Where this is the case, support towards childcare may be considered where the student satisfies the specific conditions relating to this criterion.

6.4.2. Childcare Support for Further Education Students

- 6.4.2.1. Students aged 20+ on 31 August at the start of the academic year may be eligible for support with childcare costs from the Learner Support Fund.
- 6.4.2.2. In order to qualify the student must satisfy **all** of the following criteria:
- Have a net household income of less than £20,817;
 - Have an attendance record of 90% or greater and a satisfactory tutor report;
 - Be up-to-date with all course work/assignments;
 - Be receiving six or more guided learning hours per week;
 - The childcare provider who is receiving payment via the Learner Support Fund **must** be registered with OfSTED.
- 6.4.2.3. Students seeking support for childcare are expected to use the College Nursery facilities unless before and after school care is required or there are other exceptional circumstances. Students using the College nursery will normally have up to 100% of the cost met, which includes the £25.00 initial registration fee.
- 6.4.2.4. Students who wish to be considered for support in utilising an alternative childcare provider must make an application prior to placing the child (ren) in the alternative nursery and provide a written explanation as to the exceptional reasons for such consideration. This explanation should be attached to their application. Students

using alternative childcare providers may not necessarily receive 100% of the costs.

- 6.4.2.5. Where students are required to pay retainer fees in order to retain the place in the nursery in non-term time, for example Christmas, Easter, half terms, it is vital that this information is reflected in any application of childcare support. The College will only pay a retainer fee, which equates to no more than 50% of the fees normally incurred in term time. If a student engages in employment during the non-term times, they are **not** eligible to receive support via the Learner Support Fund during the period of employment.
- 6.4.2.6. Where a student is seeking payment of a retainer fee over the summer months, a signed undertaking is required from the student that they will attend for the next academic term or repay in full this payment.
- 6.4.2.7. Childcare payments are normally available only to support attendance classes/tutorials/placements with the exception of retainer fees. In exceptional circumstances the College may consider an extension to this to allow completion of academic work. The College payments will be solely for child care and they will be no payment for penalty charges which are advocated by some providers (e.g. late payment fees).
- 6.4.2.8. Each household will be limited to a maximum childcare support of £175 per child/per week.

7. Appeals under the Policies

- 7.1. Applicants who have been refused support have the right to appeal to the Director of Curriculum & Quality. Appeals must be made in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the College's decision to decline support. Appeal decisions will be made and communicated as soon as possible.
- 7.2. Please address your appeals to the ACCESS FUND APPEALS PANEL c/o Access Fund Administrator, New College Durham, Framwellgate Moor Campus, Durham, DH1 5ES.
- 7.3. The panel will consist of:
 - Director of Curriculum & Quality (Chair);
 - Student Union President;
 - Head of Learning Support & Skills for Life.

The decision of the panel will be final.

8. Management of the Policy

- 8.1. The overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy rests with the Deputy Principal and Chief Executive
- 8.2. Responsibility for the administration of this policy rests with the Director of Human Resources and Facilities.

9. Policy Review

- 9.1. The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored annually by the Senior Executive Group and reviewed every year by the appropriate Corporation Committee, in light of experience and best practice.
- 9.2. The College reserves the right to amend this policy, without prior notice in light of experience, responding to changes to Government/funding body requirements and financial constraints.

Implementation Date	August 2009
First Review Date	August 2010