Higher Education Hardship Fund

Policy

2025-26

New College Durham is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, as well as vulnerable adults, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

Policy Title	**HE Hardship Fund Policy**
Document Owner	**Head of Training, Development and Access Fund**
Owning Directorate	**Corporate Services**
Owning Department	**Access Fund**
Directorates and Departments affected by this Policy	**HE Academic Areas**
Policy Effective From	**1st August 2025 – 31st July 2026**

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New College Durham

Higher Education Hardship Fund Policy

(Equality and Diversity Assessment)

We will consider any request for this Policy to be made available in an alternative format.

We review our Policies regularly to update them and to ensure that they are accessible and fair to all. Whilst Access Fund Policies are based upon prevailing national guidelines all Policies are subject to Equality Impact Assessment which consider whether the Policy has, or is likely to have, a different impact on grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or human rights.

We are always keen to hear from anyone who wants to contribute, and we welcome suggestions for improving the accessibility or fairness of the Policy.

To make suggestions or to seek further information please contact:

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1. Introduction

1.1 This Hardship Policy is written to allow Higher Education Students suffering financial difficulty to determine their eligibility for support from the College to assist them with their study costs.

1.2 The College will seek to provide a limited proportion of the Student Opportunity Funding to financially assist eligible students with genuine financial need.

1.3 Students falling into one of the categories below are specifically excluded from applying for support under the hardship scheme:

- asylum seekers aged 19 and over;
- prisoners on day release and;
- Non-EU nationals.

1.4 The support detailed in this policy is subject to the College receiving funding from the external funding bodies; the College reserves the right to amend/cease the support detailed in this policy in light of changes to the funding received or changes in the requirements from the funding bodies.

1.5 **The College reviews the Access Fund Policy on an annual basis. This annual review may change eligibility for any support detailed in the Policy, and in some cases remove elements of support entirely.**

1.6 The budget for support to students is finite. Students who may be eligible for support may not automatically receive it once the limited funds have been exhausted. **Early application for support is therefore advised.**

2. Aims of the Policy

This policy aims to:

Ensure that the limited funds available to the College are distributed effectively and efficiently to those students with the greatest financial need.

Clarify the different eligibility criteria for students studying a higher education course at New College Durham.

Outline the range of support available to eligible students.

3. Hardship Fund for Higher Education Students

The Hardship Fund arrangements for Higher Education students are specified in this policy.

3.1 Eligibility Criteria for Higher Education Students

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

- have a gross household income of **less than £32,000** in the previous tax year 2024/25*

*** In exceptional situations where a student's financial circumstances have significantly changed then more current evidence of household income may be accepted.**

- have an attendance record of at least 90%, be up to date with all course work/assignments and receive a satisfactory tutor report.
- Applied for their full entitlement of student loan/bursary.

3.1.2 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 a 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;

3.1.3 Once the criteria in 3.1.1 & 3.1.2 have been met, eligibility for support is dependent on:

Full-Time Undergraduates

Applications for support from the Access to Learning Fund can be made by 'home students' enrolled on the following full-time courses at undergraduate level in the academic year 2025/26:

- First Degree, such as BA, BSc or BEd
- Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)
- Higher National Diploma (HND)
- Higher National Certificate (HNC)
- Certificate of Higher Education
- NVQ at level 4 where this is awarded alongside a first degree, DipHE or HND
- Foundation Degree
- course for the initial training of teachers
- course for the further training of youth and community workers

- course which prepares for a professional examination of a higher standard than GCE advanced level, Scottish Higher, National Certificate or National Diploma

Part-Time Undergraduates

Applications for support can be made by 'home students' on part-time HE courses who are studying at least 50 per cent (60 credits) of a full-time equivalent course. Any students whose disability (including physical and mental health) prevents them from studying at least 50 per cent of a full-time course may be eligible for a payment from the Fund provided they are studying for at least 25 per cent (30 credits) of a full-time equivalent course at undergraduate level.

3.1.4. Students on foundation years, which are an integral part of one of the above courses and where progression to the HE part of the course depends on the completion of the foundation year, are also eligible to apply for help from the Fund.

3.1.5 Students on foundation or access courses that are FE equivalent (e.g., Art and Design) should apply to the FE Learner Support Fund.

3.2. Childcare Support for Higher Education Students

3.2.1. To qualify for the additional childcare payment, the student **must** meet the above criteria and ensure that their childcare provider is registered with Ofsted. The scheme allows for a maximum of two children.

3.3. Emergency Loan for Higher Education Student

3.3.1 A student on a 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 £150 per academic year. The loan will seek to support the student to travel to and from college, purchase materials and equipment required for his/her studies.

3.3.2 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

3.4 HE Discretionary Bursary for Higher Education Students

3.4.1 It is recognised that a student on a Higher Education course may in **exceptional circumstances** require additional assistance to pursue their studies due to genuine hardship. Consideration of any payment under the New College Durham HE Discretionary

Bursary must assist the student to fulfil their studies/course at New College Durham e.g., text books, materials, travel.

3.4.2 The HE Discretionary Bursary will not be awarded in relation to issues, which are out of the College's control and form part of everyday living expenses, e.g., rent, rates, maintenance of mode of transport etc.

3.4.3 In order to qualify the student **must** be eligible for a payment from the Hardship Fund and satisfy **all** the following criteria:

- Satisfy the College's eligibility requirement for Hardship Fund Support detailed above
- Have a genuine hardship **directly** related to their Higher Education studies at New College Durham

3.4.4 If the student satisfies all the above criteria in full, the student should apply in writing to the Access Fund. The student must provide details and evidence of hardship related to fulfilling their studies at new College Durham. **Any decision will be final and there is no right of appeal for the HE Discretionary Bursary element.**

4. Applications

4.1 Applications will only be considered for the period in which the application is received.

4.2 Where a student is subject to disciplinary sanctions, consideration will be made regarding continued eligibility to receive the support from this fund.

5. Payments

5.1 All payments are subject to receipt of a satisfactory Tutor Report and require the student to have an attendance* record of at least 90% and be up to date with all course work/assignments.

*** NB the attendance threshold is set at 90% acknowledging that students may not be able to achieve 100% attendance. The bursary scheme seeks to support students attending college and does not differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence. The attendance records for the bursary schemes include attendance across the whole study programme.**

5.2 For academic year 2025/26 a payment will be made in Term 1 in recognition of students having to pay costs for resources and learning materials, this payment will be made based on students still studying with the College and having at least 90%. Subsequent payments will look at attendance of 90% and students being up to date with their studies/work. Payments for all bursary types will be made on the following dates.

	Application Deadline	**Payment to be made**
Term 1	Thursday 9th October 2025	Friday 7th November 2025

Term 2	Thursday 12th February 2026	Friday 6th March 2026
Term 3	Thursday 7th May 2026	Friday 5th June 2026

5.3 Tutor Reports will be completed by the Academic Staff and are subject to review by the Access Fund Coordinator to ensure fairness and accuracy. Generally, Tutor Reports will not be questioned unless the Access Fund Coordinator determines that there is a discrepancy, query or amendment required.

5.4 Students may be eligible for support through the Colleges IT Poverty Scheme. In order to access this support the student should initially discuss concerns with their tutor, the tutor will determine a case for support and seek authorisation from their Head of School. A request for IT Support would not impact on the bursary allocation to a student and would be in addition to any bursary support.

5.5 Payments will be allocated based on the following three criteria and are related to household income.

Tier 1	**Tier 2**	**Tier 3**
If the annual household income is £16,190 gross per annum or less.	If the annual household income is greater than £16,190 and less than or equal to £26,000 gross per annum or less.	If the annual household income is greater than £26000 but less than or equal to £32,000.

5.6 All payments will be made directly to the student via BACS transfer.

5.7 The College is unable to make retrospective payments under this policy.

5.8 The Hardship Fund is finite, and the available funds will be distributed according to the number of applicants who meet the above criteria. Payments are made on a pro rata basis based upon the study hours.

5.9 Students who meet the above criteria and can demonstrate that they have childcare arrangements to allow them to undertake a course of study will receive an additional payment per child (maximum of two children) from the Hardship Fund.

7. Case Review

7.1 Based on the points outlined in the payment terms of this policy the Access Fund Team will determine eligible applicants.

7.2 Applicants who are refused support have the right to have their case reviewed by the Access Fund Manager.

7.3 A request for a case review must be made in writing (letter or e-mail) within 10 working days of receipt of the College's decision to decline support. Please ensure that the following information is clearly stated in the written communication:

- The grounds for requesting the case review, (these grounds will normally be an error in procedure or error in fact).
- Sufficient detail and any evidence to support the case review request (i.e., evidence of mitigating circumstances that have affected attendance).
- The outcome that they are seeking from the case review.

Please address all case review requests to the Access Fund Case Review, Access Fund Office, New College Durham, Framwellgate Moor Campus, Durham, DH1 5ES or e-mail access.fund@newdur.ac.uk

7.4 Case reviews will aim to be undertaken and the decision communicated within 10 working days of receipt of the case review request.

8. Appeals

8.1 Applicants who have been refused support following a case review have the right to make a final appeal.

8.2 Appeals must be made in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the case review decision to decline support.

The Appellant should state, in their written communication:

- The grounds for the appeal, (these grounds will normally be an error in procedure or error in fact).
- Sufficient detail and any evidence to support the case review request (i.e., evidence of mitigating circumstances that have affected attendance).
- The outcome that they are seeking from the Appeals Process.
- How they would wish to have their appeal considered either via correspondence or personally attending an appeal hearing.
- How they would wish to receive any correspondence, including the appeal outcome decision (e.g., email, letter etc.). In the absence of any preference, the College's default method of communication will be via letter.

8.3 Please address all case review requests to the Access Fund Appeals Panel, Access Fund Office, New College Durham, Framwellgate Moor Campus, Durham, DH1 5ES or e-mail access.fund@newdur.ac.uk

8.4 The Appeals Panel will arrange to meet within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal communication. The outcome as determined by the panel will be communicated within 5 working days of the hearing. **The decision of the panel will be final.**

8.5 The panel will consist of:

- A Vice Principal (Chair)
- Students' Union President
- ASC Manager

8.6 The Appellant may be accompanied to the appeal by a representative of ASC (normally Learner Development Co-Ordinator).

9. Policy Review

9.1 Responsibility for this policy rests with the Deputy Principal (Human Resources and Corporate Services).

9.2 The College reserves the right to amend this policy, without prior notice considering experience, responding to changes to government/funding body requirements and financial constraints.

9.3 The College will undertake an annual survey of students receiving bursary support to help evaluate the value of the scheme. The results will assist the College in complying with OfS requirements regarding the use of funding and will also inform future support provision.

Implementation Date	1st August 2025
Termination Date	31st July 2026