



# Higher Education COVID-19 Hardship Fund

## Policy and Procedures

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## 1. Policy Statement

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- 1.1 This additional funding for students on higher education programmes has been provided by the Office for Students (OfS) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 The College is committed to distributing the Higher Education COVID-19 Hardship Fund in a fair and consistent way and supporting the widening of participation in higher education locally.
- 1.3 Funding will be used to help support students who face the greatest barriers to continuing in education in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.4 Funding is to be provided to assist students with financial difficulty, to support general costs of being a student and emergency situations arising as a result of the pandemic.

## 2. Scope

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- 2.1 This policy applies to eligible full and part time students on higher education programmes of study including those on vocational programmes which are Level 4 or higher.
- 2.2 The policy applies to the period 18<sup>th</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> March as set out in the Office for Students' guidance<sup>1</sup>. Applications received after 31<sup>st</sup> March will not be considered in respect of this policy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f4dcceef-8d59-4ae1-adac-b65d87414742/ofs-guidance-hardship-funding-14122020.pdf>

### 3. Purpose of the Policy

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3.1 The primary purpose of the Fund is to relieve financial hardship that might impact on a student's participation in higher education, including:

1. Assisting those who need extra financial help to meet particular costs which are not already being met from statutory (or other) sources of funding,
2. Meeting specific course and living costs, other than tuition fee costs, which are not already met from other sources,
3. Providing emergency payments for unexpected crises,
4. Intervening in cases where a student may be considering leaving higher education because of financial problems arising from the pandemic.

### 4. About the Fund

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4.1 The HE COVID-19 Hardship Fund is separated into 2 categories:

- Standard awards – aimed at supporting students with general costs of being a student
- Non-standard awards – students who have to meet exceptional costs and emergency situations.

4.2 Students are expected to have applied for all other sources of funding before they apply for the fund. This includes support entitlement (loans, grants, bursaries) along with all other statutory support (in particular tax credits and social security benefits).

4.3 Funds cannot be used towards tuition fees.

### 5. Application Process and Documentary Evidence

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#### 5.1 Application

5.1.1 Students are required to apply for this funding via [Pay My Student](#) where they will be able to provide documentary evidence of income & expenditure.

5.1.2 Students may, if needed, email the HE Quality and Support Officer [eleyp@southport.ac.uk](mailto:eleyp@southport.ac.uk) to make an appointment for support and guidance with completion of the application process. Funds are limited and will be allocated on a 'first come, first served basis'.

5.1.3 Applications are assessed by either the Student Advisor or Welfare Officer. They are then authorised by the Student Finance Administrator. Any discrepancies will be discussed with the Head of Central Services.

5.1.4 Students will also need to provide evidence to support their request e.g. College order form for kit/equipment/uniform, signed book list from tutors, receipts for individual items etc.

#### 5.2 Eligibility criteria

5.2.1 Funding will focus on those individuals who are financially disadvantaged and are in need of support in areas such as childcare, transport, books and equipment, domestic emergencies.

5.2.2 Eligibility is assessed in a number of possible ways. Level of income is assessed by the following household residual income calculation:

i.e. 
$$\frac{\text{Income weekly – mortgage / rent plus council tax payments}}{\text{Number of dependant family members in household}}$$

*e.g. student weekly income of £150 per week plus £40 per week Tax Credits minus weekly rent of £100 per week inclusive of council tax divided by student and two dependants (3) = Residual £30 per person per week*

- 5.2.3 Based on an income assessment the residual income per person should be a maximum of £165.
- 5.2.4 Disability Living Allowance (or Personal Independence Allowance), Incapacity Benefit, Employment Support Allowance and Child Benefit are not taken into account. If a student is in receipt of a means tested benefit then proof of this benefit is sufficient evidence for eligibility.
- 5.2.5 Student would need to provide proof of application for Student Finance (maintenance grants/loans), most recent payslips, most recent Tax Credit Award Notice, Universal Credit, Tenancy agreement or bank statements showing mortgage statements and council tax bill.

### 5.3 Diagnostic Assessments

- 5.3.1 Funds can be used towards assessments for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) but cannot be used to provide additional study support which would be covered by DSA. Students do not need to have made their loan application before applying. The College reserves the right to means test for this support should demand on the fund outweigh funds available.

### 5.4 Course Eligibility

- 5.4.1 Eligible courses include
  - Higher National Certificate (HNC)
  - Higher National Diploma (HND)
  - Foundation Degree
  - BA Hons and BSC Hons Degrees
  - PGCE and Certificate of Education students
  - Students on vocational programmes at Level 4 or higher.

### 5.5 Residency Eligibility Criteria

- 5.5.1 Students must be classed as 'home students', and meet residence requirements.

## 6. Allocation of the Fund

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- 6.1 All eligible full and part time students can apply for up to a maximum of £300. Additional payments may be considered, at the College's discretion and subject to availability.
- 6.2 In the first instances funds for kits, uniforms and trips will be transferred directly to the departments or relevant supplier. Other allocations may be made by Bank Automated Credit System (BACS) or in exceptional circumstances a cash payment maybe made.

## 7. Appeals

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- 7.1 Any student, who is dissatisfied with the decision made regarding the allocation of funds, may appeal in writing to the Head of Central Services within 10 term time days of receipt of letter.
- 7.2 The Appeals Panel will be made of a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and 2 managers.

- 7.3 The Head of Central Services or Student Finance Administrator will present the information to the panel.
- 7.4 The student will be informed of the decision of the Panel within 10 term time days of receipt of the letter of appeal.

## 8. Other Higher Education Funding

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- 8.1 Students on HE-funded courses can apply to Student Finance England for additional funding. Students on other courses at Level 4 or higher may be eligible for College discretionary or adult bursary funds, and can apply for these via [Paymystudent](#).
- 8.2 Additional funding for Care Leavers may be available. Students who are identified as having a learning difficulty / disability may be eligible to access the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and will be provided with information on how to apply.
- 8.3 The College Welfare Officer can also provide students with support in seeking external financial support.
- 8.4 Further information is available via the Student Information Centre or by email to [guidance@southport.ac.uk](mailto:guidance@southport.ac.uk).

## 9. Essential Elements

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- 9.1 This policy and procedures will operate transparently, fairly and consistently, with clear criteria for eligibility, allowing funds to be targeted at those students in financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. This is ensured by providing:
- Procedures / guidelines for staff, updated annually
  - Staff training and development meetings
- 9.2 A variety of methods will be used to publicise the availability of funds, including the application procedure and appeals procedure. These include:
- Financial information booklet – updated annually, available on line and within the Student Information Centre
  - Face to face guidance via the Student Information Centre or by email at and via [guidance@southport.ac.uk](mailto:guidance@southport.ac.uk)
  - Admissions / offer letters
  - Information from admissions tutors at interview
  - Information at the point of enrolment
  - Information at Induction Fair
  - Posters and LCD information advertising funds
  - College web page
  - VLE - Moodle
- 9.3 To ensure all information is correct the Student Finance Administrator will liaise with:
- Head of Department to provide the Advice and Guidance Officer with standard kit lists/ compulsory trip costs / materials and equipment lists;
  - Tutors to email the agreement of additional funding to the Advice and Guidance Officer for standard items i.e. individual kits items, course books;
  - Welfare and Guidance Officer or Student Engagement Officers.

## 10. Monitoring effectiveness

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10.1 A monitoring report on use of support funds will be provided to SLT. An annual report to SLT, Corporation and Equality and Diversity Committee will report on funds spent and identify links between financial support and retention and achievement.

## 11. Data Collection and Protection

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11.1 All documents are held for the assessment of eligibility to the fund and audit purposes only. All information will be stored securely and treated sensitively. All documents will be kept for 6 years.

11.2 The College will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by ensuring that personal data collected in relation to this policy is:

- Collected and processed lawfully, fairly and transparently for only specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes. Further processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, research purposes or statistical purposes shall not be considered to be incompatible with the initial purposes.
- Adequate, updated and relevant and not excessive for the purposes it was collected.
- Processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures. Including not being transferred to a country outside the European Economic Area, unless that country has equivalent levels of protection for personal data.
- Kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed. Personal data may be stored for longer periods solely for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes subject to implementation of the appropriate technical and organisational measures required by the GDPR in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals.

## 12. Confidentiality

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12.1 The Data Protection Act and GDPR are not only restrictions on disclosure of information about the College, they are bound by a common law duty of confidentiality. This duty prevents the College from releasing information about students or other stakeholders, without their consent. This duty applies to manual records as well as information held on computers.

12.2 Information which must be treated as confidential includes the names and addresses of students and any other information about them which is not publicly known, i.e. “personal data”. Accordingly, to ensure that the College does not breach its duty, no information, even if it only exists in printed form, should be disclosed unless all the relevant procedures have been followed.

## 13. Administration of the Fund

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13.1 Administration of the fund is capped at 5% of the value of the spend.

## 14. Other Sources of Funding

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14.1 The College operates or has links to a number of other sources of funding. For further details of any of the funds listed below please contact the Student Information Centre:

- Support via Student Loans Company (HE Students)
- Disabled Student Allowance (HE Students)
- Care Leavers Bursary
- Childcare funding
- Other welfare enquiries

## 15. Related College Policies and Useful Links

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- Travel Passes & Funds Policy and Procedure
- 16-19 Bursary Fund
- Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund
- Paymystudent: <https://www.southport.ac.uk/student-portal/pay-my-student-help>