

Student Support Fund

POLICY STATEMENT & GUIDELINES 2019-20



This policy primarily relates to students who are under 19 on 31 August in the academic year in which they start their programme of study. See Appendix 2 for variations relating to those aged 19+

Policy Statement

The College is committed to helping students overcome financial barriers to successful participation and completion of their studies at S6F. Individual pastoral support on financial issues is provided through Guidance Support Tutors and College Counsellors, whilst Tutorials cover financial management skills. In addition, the College receives government grants each academic year specifically to provide financial support to students. Most of the grants are cash-limited. In managing and administering the Student Support Funds the College will:

- ✓ Clearly identify priorities, so that support is awarded on a fair yet affordable basis
- ✓ Put financial checks and controls in place as appropriate to public funds
- ✓ Ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of any grants
- ✓ Provide effective and efficient processes for handling applications, payments and appeals
- ✓ Identify potential sources of support from other agencies or charities, where appropriate
- ✓ Retain sufficient funds to deal with emerging changes in students' financial circumstances
- ✓ Ensure arrangements and decisions take due account of equalities legislation
- ✓ Consider providing additional funds over and above the government grants, after taking into account the College's overall financial situation and the level of demand for student financial support.

Support for all students

All 16-18 year old students attending S6F receive the following support or benefits:

- ✓ Subsidised transport costs, so that if a student lives 3 miles or more from College they do not have to pay more than £11 per week
- ✓ Free tuition fees and free examination entries (excluding re-sits)
- ✓ Free textbooks and materials essential to courses and a printing allowance
- ✓ Access to free or low-cost extra-curricular activities (e.g. sport, music)
- ✓ Eligibility for NUS card, which gives access to various on-line and in-store discounts
- ✓ Parents eligible to claim Child Benefit, if student is on a full-time course.

Priorities and eligibility

Students experiencing particular financial difficulty are also eligible to apply for assistance from the Student Support Fund. The fund is cash-limited and so priority will be given to those students from families with the lowest household income and/or highest demonstrated need. The funds are intended to cover costs associated with studying at S6F; they are not a substitution for other sources of financial support (e.g. childcare payments under the Care to Learn Scheme) nor will they be used for regular payments for living costs. The table in appendix 1 gives further details of categories and the level of assistance which will be provided.

Government Grants

For 2019-20 the College has been allocated the following grants from government funding bodies to help provide financial support to students:-

- Free meals funding for disadvantaged students: 16-18 year olds, 19+ continuing students and 19+ students with a current Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) in place.
- 16 to 19 Bursary Fund
 - Vulnerable Bursaries
 - Discretionary Bursaries
- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support
- Advanced Learning Loan Bursary

The support detailed in appendices 1 and 2 is primarily funded by government grants and meets the terms and conditions of these grants. Details of terms and conditions of these grants can be found on the gov.uk website.

College support for transport

Students who meet the eligibility criteria in appendices 1 and 2 will get their transport costs covered or subsidised by the College if they live 2.5 miles or more from College and use public transport (subject to a maximum College subsidy of £900 per year).

Irrespective of household income, the College will subsidise bus transport costs, so that no student who lives more than 3 miles from College has to pay more than £11 per week.* Arrangements for reimbursement will vary dependent on circumstances (e.g. a bus pass may be provided with student paying their contribution i; or the student may be expected to provide receipts for reimbursement on a monthly basis, with the student paying for the first £11 per week).

** Based on lowest cost transport arrangements and subject to a maximum subsidy of £600 per year.*

Further Education Free Meals & College Subsidised Meals

In 2014 the government extended the entitlement to free meals to those 16-18 year olds in colleges who are in receipt of, or who have parents who are in receipt of, certain benefits. These are currently defined as:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa

Students aged 19 or over who are continuing on the same study programme they started before they turned 19 **or** who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are also eligible for a free meal provided they meet the above criteria. Apprentices are not eligible for free meals funding.

The government entitlement is to £2.41 for each day the student attends their study programme, but the College tops this up to £2.50 per day from its discretionary bursary grant. We fund these meals by providing an electronic credit (**sQuid**) on a monthly basis in advance which can be redeemed on site at the College's shop and coffee bar in Café 6.

When students are off-site as part of their study programme (e.g. on work placement or work experience), they may still be able to buy food for a packed lunch in advance from Café 6. Where this is not practicable (e.g. for a week long placement), alternative arrangements can be made either with the work placement provider or via a cash reimbursement. For off-site trips, the College contribution to the trip will include an amount for a meal a day.

For those not eligible for the government free meals, but who have a household income of not more than £20,000 then the College provides a contribution towards lunches at the rate of £2 per day (paid monthly in advance onto the sQuid card).

Minor Payments & Emergency Fund

There will be occasions when students face an immediate financial crisis and some form of assistance is urgently required. To ensure such requests do not by-pass the fair and transparent processes detailed in appendix 1 and 2, then a small cash loan of up to £50 can be made to the student as a temporary measure, on the authorisation of the GST Manager or a member of the College Management Team. The loan should then be repaid within an agreed time period, alternatively the student may then apply for the loan to be converted into a non-repayable grant. In such cases Form FS04 should be completed, which is a simplified application form for assistance with minor costs and which then goes to the Student Finance Panel for a decision.

Student Finance Panel

Provided eligibility is satisfactorily proven, certain awards may be automatically approved by a member of the Finance team (e.g. transport costs, lunches). Other decisions are discretionary (e.g. levels of contribution, consideration of exceptional circumstances). To ensure these are dealt with on a fair yet affordable basis, these discretionary decisions will be considered by a panel of at least two members of staff – one representing Student Services (usually the GST Manager or Vice Principal or another member of CMT) and one representing Finance (usually the Business Manager or Director of Finance).

Timescale for Applications

Applications can be made throughout the year, to allow for changing circumstances. However, funds are limited and this may reduce the amount which can be awarded for late applications. Students are, therefore, encouraged to apply as early as possible and, if they wish financial assistance to be in place at the beginning of the new term, by 31 August 2019.

Notification of Decision and Appeals

Once an award has been approved then Finance will send written notification to the student, detailing the amount(s) awarded, what the award is for, when and how the award will be paid and any specific conditions which apply. If an award is not made, the notification will explain the reasons for this. Students will be reminded of their right to appeal against an award decision and given details how to submit an appeal. If a member of the Finance team made the original award decision then any appeal will be heard by the Student Finance Panel. If the Student Finance Panel made the original award decision, then the appeal will be heard by a member of the College Management Team not previously involved (usually the Principal).

Making Payments

Where a fixed monthly payment has been agreed (e.g. to cover transport costs) then this will be processed via BACS direct into the Student's bank account – with the first payment being early September (or the first month after the award has been approved). We cannot pay into another person's bank account under the terms and conditions of the government grant, though we can pay into a joint account provided the student is one of the account holders. Alternative payment arrangements will be considered by the Student Finance Panel in exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to administer their own account.

Other payments, unless urgent, will be processed on a monthly basis. Payment will preferably be by either BACS or cheque, though cash payments of up to £30 are possible for minor and/or urgent payments. Café 6 top-ups to the sQuid card will normally be made once a month by Finance.

Where the College contributes to costs such as trips, exam re-sits etc, then payment will normally be made direct by the College rather than via the student. The student must provide their contribution first. For example, for trips then students are generally expected to pay the deposit up front in order to demonstrate commitment to paying their share of the costs.

Conditions of Student Support Fund

Financial assistance from the Student Support Fund is dependent upon attendance and behaviour. Should either be unsatisfactory or should the student withdraw from the course early, then they may be asked to pay back some or all of their award, and future awards may be withheld or reduced.

The general approach will be that monthly sQuid payments and any other non-transport related bursaries will be reduced in proportion to non-attendance, where attendance is between 50% and 89%. Where attendance is below 50%, then no such payment will be made. Exceptions to these may be made, but only with the authorisation of two of the Student Finance panel members. In making these decisions, the panel will make reasonable adjustments for those students whose attendance or behaviour is affected by their disability (or by any other characteristic protected under equality legislation).

Payments will not be made until appropriate documentary evidence has been provided. This is to safeguard public money from potential fraud. Fraudulent activities, including giving false statements, will be treated seriously and may leave the individual open to prosecution.

Accounting and Audit Arrangements

The College is required to submit an annual return to the relevant funding bodies for expenditure relating to student financial support grants. External auditors check these returns as part of their annual regularity audit. In addition, as a public body, the College is expected to have sound systems in place to control and account for any items of expenditure and internal auditors regularly review such systems.

Responsibilities

- The **Principal** has overall responsibility for the operation of the Student Support Fund.
- The **Director of Finance** is responsible for ensuring that the College maintains satisfactory financial systems, controls and records in relation to the Student Support Fund, which are compliant with auditors' and funding body requirements.
- The **Vice Principal (Student Services)** is responsible for ensuring the Student Support Fund provides appropriate financial assistance to those individual students in greatest need.
- The **Business Manager** is responsible for managing the Student Support Fund budget, for oversight of the day-to-day administration of the Fund and for ensuring the terms of any grants are met.
- **Finance and Student Services staff** are responsible for the efficient and timely processing of Student Support Fund applications, payments and records, in line with agreed procedures.
- **Student Services staff** and **Guidance Support Tutors** are responsible for ensuring students are appropriately informed and advised of the financial support available from the College and from external agencies and of how to apply for such funds.

Confidentiality

Applications are only seen by those involved in the management and administration of the Student Support Fund and College auditors. From time to time it may be necessary for additional supporting information to be sought from other College staff in order for a decision to be made. Other College staff may be provided with details of awards made provided this is directly relevant to fund administration or pastoral/educational support.

Personal data provided on the application form or in support of the application will be used solely for the purposes relating to the application for financial assistance. Processing of such data will take place in compliance with data protection legislation and College policy.

Other Funds and Support

Students may be eligible for grants or benefits from other government or external agencies. Examples include:

- **Care to Learn grant** – available to help with childcare costs for students up to age 20. Further details can be found on the gov.uk website.
- **Ministry of Defence scholarships** – available to support the children of servicemen and women killed on active service. Further information can be found on the gov.uk website.
- **Scarborough United Scholarship Fund (SUSF)** – a local charity which awards small grants (up to £500) to students aged 16-25 who have attended school in Scarborough and who need support with educational needs (e.g. purchase of musical instruments, equipment, costs of specialist courses, university costs).
- **John Kendal Trust Fund** – this local charity applies to students aged 16-18 who have attended school in Scarborough. Grants are awarded to support those living away from the parental home or where there is a single parent and financial difficulty. These grants cater for a broader range of needs (e.g. contribution to meet costs of travel or living costs/purchases of domestic appliances). The funds are intended to provide emergency help to enable students to stay in education.

In processing applications for support, the Finance team and the Student Finance Panel will actively look out for opportunities for students to claim funds from these other sources, including government benefits.

Equality Implications

In determining arrangements for assessment and payment of the Student Support Fund, the College is subject to equalities legislation, which means that students must not be discriminated against, either directly or indirectly, on the grounds of protected characteristics. The procedures and eligibility guidelines detailed in the previous sections have been established in order to ensure all student applications are dealt with fairly and consistently. In relation to conditions attached to attendance and behaviour, the Finance team is aware that attendance and behaviour may be affected by disability or by other protected characteristics and will make reasonable adjustments for this in making decisions about levels of payment.

The fund improves equality of opportunity by helping students overcome financial barriers to successful participation and completion of studies. Priority is given to those students from families with the lowest household income and/or highest demonstrated need (which includes those students with disabilities).

Policy Owner:	Director of Finance	Version:	July 2019
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