



HARDSHIP FUND POLICY

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Related Documentation

Title	Location	Owner
DfE Circular 07/22 - Hardship Fund (Discretionary) 2022/2023	Insert new circular	DfE

Change Log

Location	Change from deletion/addition	Change to
Whole Document	Convert to standardised policy template	SWC standardised template
P4	DfE Circular 2021/2022	Annual Circular

Communication

Who needs to know (for action)	Senior Management Team Head of Quality and Student Engagement Student Engagement and Support Team Course Coordinators
Who needs to be aware	All staff

Communication Plan

Action	By Whom	By When
Upload to Gateway	J Lucas	On approval
Circulation to key staff	S Pritchard	On approval

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1. Introduction

The College is responsible for the administration of a grant fund to students in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the annual DFE Circular. The Hardship Funds are intended to provide financial help to students who are inhibited by financial considerations from accessing and participating in Further Education.

South West College has not yet received an allocation for the academic year. 2023/2024.

2. College Accountability For Hardship Funds:

DFE guidance requires that the Chief Executive Officer to:

- Ensure that for the purposes of administering the Funds, the College maintains and operates an adequate system of record keeping, financial management and internal controls, including safeguards against fraud, and shall require the College's external auditors, as part of their audit, to report on the adequacy or otherwise of that system.
- Ensure that the College uses the funding provided for the Hardship Fund in a manner consistent with the purposes for which the grant was given by the Department and complies with any terms or conditions attaching to it.
- Provide such returns as may be required by the Department.

3. Effective Operation Of The College Hardship Fund


In order to make effective the operation of the Hardship Fund, the College will ensure a consistent approach across all Campuses by taking the following measures:

- Student Engagement and Support Officers will update their knowledge of the various forms of financial assistance available to students. Staff will endeavour to

promote the Hardship Fund and other forms of assistance across the whole student body.

- A set of guidelines for students and an application form have been drawn up to satisfy DFE guidelines.
- A Hardship Fund panel has been formed in accordance with DFE guidelines to oversee the distribution of the Hardship Fund and approve funding in an equitable manner. This panel will comprise members of staff from Student Services in each campus, finance staff and academic/Business Support staff representatives. The College recognises that, although it is suggested in the DFE circular, it would be unrealistic to expect governor representation in terms of a commitment such as this. As an alternative, the Finance and General Purposes committee will be provided with a report on the outcome of panel meetings on a termly basis. (See Appendix 2).
- A procedure has been drawn up for assessment of all applications (see below) in accordance with DFE circular 07/23 and other relevant guidance.

Signed Chief Executive



Date 15.11.23

Signed Chair of the Board of Governors



Date 15/11/23

Appendix 1 Procedure for The Operation of The South West College Hardship Fund

1. Hardship funds applications forms are digital and can be accessed via the college gateway system under Digital apps.
2. The student completes the digital form and it goes to the relevant Student Services team. The student services on campus will review it for completeness, validate student ID (or ID confirmation forms) and record all applications on a campus database. This initial review upon submission to student services should ensure a more efficient service to the student as any omissions/errors can be identified and dealt with immediately.
3. The Student Engagement Officer will make an initial assessment of eligibility in accordance with DFE guidelines before each Hardship fund panel meeting.
4. The hardship funds panel (See Appendix 2) will review and agree all applications and make decisions. The hardship fund panel will meet termly (See Appendix 3).
5. Students will be advised by email within a reasonable timeframe of the meeting of the outcome of their application by the Student Support Administrator in each Campus. If their application is unsuccessful, they will be advised of the reason/s. They have a right of appeal and will be advised that they should lodge an appeal, if desired, within 28 days. An appeals panel will be established for the purpose of hearing such appeals.
6. The Student Engagement Officer will be responsible for securely storing all forms and relevant documentation at each campus after decisions are made.
7. Payment of maintenance/childcare will be made monthly/termly in arrears by finance based on a satisfactory record of attendance. Student attendance will be verified via e-registers. The Student Engagement Officer will use monthly attendance records to calculate entitlement to grant. Attendance record will be retained on file in each campus.

8. As far as possible all payments will be made by BACs.
9. Finance will prepare regular reports for the panel. On a termly basis, the Director and also the College Governing Body, Finance and general Purposes sub-committee will be provided with a report detailing:
 - (i) position on applications (number)
 - (ii) number of awards and financial allocation outlay
 - (iii) emergency cases
 - (iv) applications turned down
 - (v) appeals
 - (vi) other special cases
 - (vii) balance of funding remaining

Appendix 2 Hardship Funds (Discretionary) 2023/2024 at South West College (Guidelines for Students – September 2023)

This Hardship Fund is available to provide help for students who have financial difficulties which would prevent them from entering or continuing a course of study.

Eligibility

- You must be at least 18 or attain the age of 18 during the academic year 1st July to 30th June.
- You must be enrolled on a full-time or part-time further or higher education course leading to a qualification at South West College.
- Full-time higher education students cannot be helped with tuition fees -
- assistance for this is available through tuition fee loans from Student Loans Company.
- Your Student Engagement Officer/Student Finance advisor can give further guidance
- You must have been resident in the UK for the past three years to receive all forms of assistance. Non home EU students are eligible for assistance with fees only.
- Students undertaking GCSE, GCE, AS Levels or A Level provision can only receive assistance as part of a clear progression route to a higher level of qualification.
- All students must in the first instance apply to their ELB or Care to Learn.
- Students must have explored all other avenues of assistance before applying to the Hardship Fund. Your Student Engagement Officer/Student Finance advisor will advise whether you are eligible to apply for:
 - i. FE Awards (administered by EA)
 - ii. ELB (loans, bursary, grants etc)

- iii. Student Loans Company (for H.E Students), EMA
- iv. Private Trusts or Scholarships

- Colleges should not accept applications from students who have been granted an FE Award/EMA unless exceptional circumstances warrant such additional support.
- Students repeating courses or modules will not be assisted unless in exceptional circumstances.
- Hardship Funds are not available to students on a course that attracts a training allowance such as Training for Success, European Funded Projects, New Deal, Modern Apprenticeships, other DFE funded programmes or full cost recovery courses.
- Students will be required to repay funds if they abandon their course.

To Apply

- Complete an application form available from Student Engagement and Support Service at each campus.
- Return the completed form to your student services advisor who will check that it is fully completed and forward it on for processing.
- Timetable for Accepting Applications

1st Round of Applications	27 October 2023
2nd Round of Applications	26 January 2024
3rd Round of Applications	29 March 2024

Appeals

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your application you may lodge an appeal within 28 days of decision.

Appendix 3 Hardship Fund Panel 2023/2024

1. Joanne Lucas (Chair)
2. Sharon Pritchard – Student Services Manager
3. Judith McCusker – Student services
4. Dermott Feely – Student Services
5. Sharon Watters – Student Services
6. Caroline McCaffrey – Student services
7. Catherine McCrory – Equality Officer
8. Ciara Chisholm – Student Finance Officer
9. TBC – Head of Faculty

Student Engagement and Support Service Role

1. Advise students on their eligibility for the Hardship Fund.
2. Issue and accept Hardship Fund forms from students.
3. With the assistance of finance staff calculate amounts due to applicants.
4. Issue letters to students advising them of application outcome.
5. File all application forms and relevant documentation (including attendance) per Campus

Finance Role

1. Assist the Student Finance officer to process and administer all payments to students, calculation of amounts due to applicants etc.
2. To provide regular updates on budget and expenditure from the fund.

Appendix 4 Hardship Fund Meetings

Terms of Reference

To oversee the distribution of the Hardship Fund by developing policies and procedures to allocate and approve funding in an equitable manner.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising
3. Policy and procedure
4. Report on applications and proposed distribution per campus
5. Consideration of special circumstances
6. Budget/Expenditure update
7. AOB

Meeting to take place in the Enniskillen Campus at 11 am on the dates below:
(meetings subject to change)

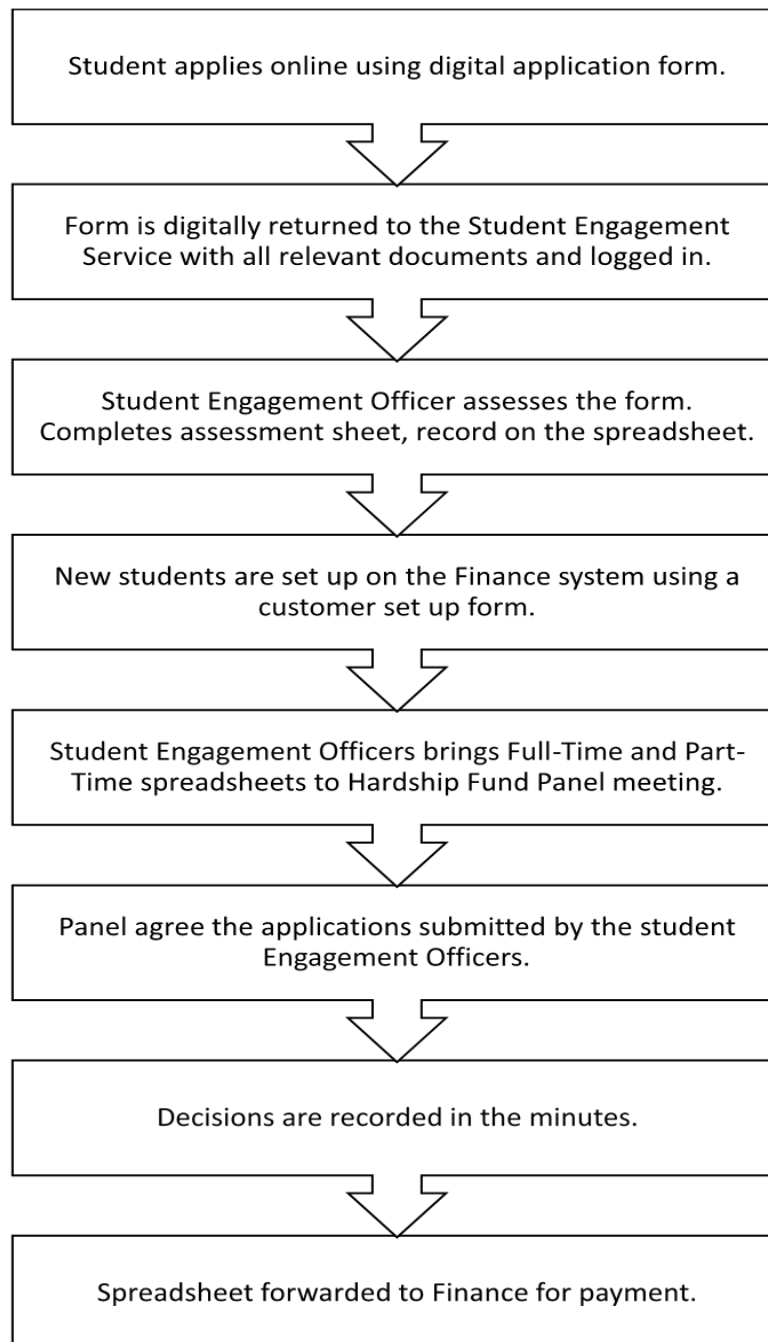
Schedule of Meetings

Hardship Fund Panel Meeting Dates

2023	2024
14 November	19 February
	7 May

Appendix 5 Hardship Fund Application Procedure

2021/2022



Document Development

Details of staff who were involved in the development of this policy:

Name	Role
Sharon Pritchard	Student Engagement and Support Manager

Details of staff, external groups or external organisations who were consulted in the development of this policy:

Name	Organisation	Date
N/A		

Approval Dates

Approved by	Date
Governing Body	

Document History

Issue no. under review	Date of review:	Persons involved in review	Changes made after review? Yes/No If yes refer to change log	New Issue No.	If changes made was consultation required?	If changes made was Equality Screening required?
19/20	September 2021	Sharon Pritchard	Yes	21/22	No	No