

# Student Financial Support Policy

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# Student Financial Support Policy

## 1. Policy Statement

Abingdon and Witney College are committed to ensuring that all students are able to access education, regardless of their personal financial circumstances. Financial difficulties should never be seen as a barrier to accessing education and the college is committed to making every possible use of the funds available to it, in ensuring all learners and potential learners can access further education and fulfil their potential.

The college uses its allocation of Government provided discretionary financial support funds to offer students Bursary Schemes that target learners that are most in financial need, following Government guidance on how the funds should be used.

This policy document outlines how Abingdon and Witney College allocates financial support funds, according to ESFA guidelines, the application and decision making process, responsibilities on those applying for funds and the appeal process. Each year the eligibility criteria is published in 'The Student Financial Support Scheme' which can be located on the college website.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all further education students aged over 16 at Abingdon and Witney College. A students' age range for eligibility of bursary will be made according to their age as of 31<sup>st</sup> August. Abingdon and Witney promote the following bursaries:

- 16-19 Discretionary Bursary
- 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary
- Free Meals
- 19+ Discretionary Bursary
- Advanced Learner Loan Bursary
- The Governments Care to Learn scheme.
- Community Learning Discretionary Bursary

... The bursary fund will cover direct costs associated with a student being able to participate in their course. These costs may include, uniform and equipment required to participate in the course .... The bursary will not cover contributions towards extra curricular activities including trips.

## 3. Our Commitment

Abingdon and Witney College will:

1. Annually review eligibility criteria and publish these on our Student Financial Support Procedure and student financial support application form, which will be available on our website.
2. Incorporate the Government eligibility criteria in our scheme:
  - Students must be enrolled on a funded further education programme and have right to study, this does not include apprenticeships.

- Students must fulfil the residency requirements for the purpose of further education funding. Residency status is the same for the bursary as it is for enrolment fee eligibility purposes.
  - Eligibility under a low-income criterion assumes that students have applied for all other statutory government financial support, evidence of this will be required.
3. Publish clear and accurate information about the annual bursary schemes and actively promote these to new and continuing students across multiple platforms - throughout the admissions process, via the website, leaflets, communications and open event advice sessions.
  4. Provide opportunities for students to find out more information or receive support with making an application via email, phone or in person.
  5. Provide a user-friendly application platform (Pay My Student) and fair process with clear and accurate communication including the eligibility criteria of each scheme. Communication will be by email unless otherwise stated and all applications will remain confidential.
  6. Process applications on a first come, first serve basis and aim to confirm the outcome of any application within four weeks of a complete application being received, which must include all required evidence.
  7. Keep bursary applications confidential and store all records securely in line with the Student Privacy Policy.
  8. Make awards proportionate to the student's actual financial need.
  9. Monitor the attendance of students accessing financial support as good attendance is a criterion of continued receipt of funds.
  10. Cancel (or ask the student to cancel) any bought in services such as travel and childcare if they are no longer eligible for whatever reason and we will let the student know that they will then be responsible for ongoing payments if they wish to continue to use the services.
  11. Confirm by email if an application has been unsuccessful, including details on how to appeal this decision. Once their appeal has been considered and a decision has been communicated, there is no further right of appeal.

#### **4. Evidence Requirements**

1. When assessing applications for financial support, the college will need evidence of the household income declared on the application form before we approve any payments. The evidence provided will help us make an appropriate award.
2. Common examples of suitable evidence include:
  - Bank Statements, for a period of one full month, showing household income and/or benefits being paid into the account.
  - Benefit award letters showing eligibility for Income Support, Universal Credit, Housing benefit
  - Pay Slips
  - Evidence of self employment
3. Generally, one piece of evidence is acceptable though we may request more at our discretion. All evidence must be no more than 2 months old at date of submission.
4. If personal circumstances change, students must inform the college.
5. If evidence is not provided to complete the application, we will remind the student and next of kin ( NOK) via email, letters and phone calls. **If this fails to gain a response after three attempts in one calendar month, we will place the**

**application on hold where it will remain awaiting contact from the student or NOK.** Any fees that would have been covered by the bursary will then become payable to the college by the student.

6. Students on courses of less than 30 weeks, those who become eligible during the year or those on a part time course will get a pro-rata award based on the amount of time spent in college over the academic year.
7. **The college will not approve any awards without evidence of income or benefits.**

**Students and their families should be made aware that giving false or incomplete information that leads to incorrect/ over payments may result in future payments being stopped and any incorrectly paid funds being recovered. False information may also result in a possible referral to the external agencies.**

## **5. Decision Making**

1. Bursary award decisions will be made by the Student Finance Panel. The Student Finance Panel consists of the Head of Student Services, and two other members of the Student Engagement Team.
2. The team will communicate with students regarding award decisions, including unsuccessful applicants who are not eligible for an award.
3. Students who owe the college course costs for previous academic years will only be supported by the Student Financial Panel in exceptional circumstances or when their debt is paid.
4. Students will not normally be given bursary awards for more than two consecutive years, however, in exceptional circumstances, where there is a clear progression of skills and qualifications, bursary awards may be given for a longer period of time.
5. Awards will be made directly to the bank account nominated on the bursary application form by bank transfer or paid internally to the student's college account if the money is owed to the college. Awards for childcare will be paid by bank transfers directly to the Childcare Provider's bank account nominated on the Childcare Provider Details form.
6. Vulnerable students will be supported via alternative financial arrangements if needed.

## **6. Student Responsibilities**

1. Students must ensure that their application is completed in full and that all evidence is provided. Incomplete applications or applications without all the required evidence will not be processed. The address on any evidence that is provided must match that of the student applying for the fund.
2. Students must adhere to the Ready, Respectful, Safe Code of Conduct. Students' attendance will be monitored, and financial support could be withdrawn if attendance drops below 90% or if a student fails to adhere to Ready, Respectful, Safe. No funding will be withdrawn without consideration of all the relevant factors or without notification. Payments will be paused if students have been absent for a period of 2 continuous weeks or more.
3. The Student Bursary team may seek to recover any overpayments of bursary funds if a student fails to notify of any changes affecting their bursary award or withdraws

from their course and any ongoing scheduled payments will stop on the last day the student attended their programme

4. Students are responsible for providing correct bank details to enable bursary payments to be made.
5. Students are responsible for informing the DWP about any financial support payments they receive, as these payments may affect their eligibility to some benefits
6. The Student Bursary team will confirm by email if an application has been unsuccessful, including details on how to appeal this decision. Once their appeal has been considered and a decision has been communicated, there is no further right of appeal.
7. Provide an opportunity, if an applicant is dissatisfied with the service provided, to make a complaint through our complaint's procedure.

## **7. Definitions:**

BACS - Bank Automated Clearing Services

Bursary - financial support provided in order to remove financial barriers to participation in education

DWP - Department for Work and Pension

ESFA - Education and Skills Funding Agency

FE - Further Education

## **8. Linked Policies/ Procedures:**

Student Financial Support Scheme

Data Protection Policy

Compliments and complaints procedure