

Higher Education Hardship Fund Policy and Procedure

INTRODUCTION

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

The College reserves the right to amend/cease the support detailed in this policy considering changes to the funding received or changes in the requirements from the funding bodies.

The College reviews the Hardship 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.

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.**

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 Heart of Worcestershire College.
- Outline the range of support available to eligible students.

HARDSHIP FUND FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

There are 2 funds available for Heart of Worcestershire College students:

BOOST AWARDS

If household income is under £25,000 – students may be eligible to receive a Boost award of up to £1500 for FT and £750 for PT to support students with the costs of attending college i.e., travel, equipment etc. Boost application forms are available online by visiting our website www.howcollege.ac.uk/student-life/student-finance

The closing date for applications is the last Friday in October. Payments are made at the end of November, January, and May. Priority groups for a Boost award are:

- Looked After/Care Leavers
- Applicants with disabilities
- Resident of low HE participation neighbourhood

Self-funding and those sponsored by an Employer, NHD Social Work bursary or the Training and Development Agency for schools aren't eligible for a Boost award.

Hardship funds

May also be available for students struggling to pay course related costs i.e., travel, childcare costs for part time learners or for one off emergency which may prevent students from attending college. To receive support from the hardship fund students must have applied for the full Student Finance package available to them i.e., full maintenance loan. Support will not normally be provided from both Boost award and Hardship fund. Hardship can also be provided towards DSA assessment costs and the initial £200 contribution towards equipment.

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ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

To qualify the student must satisfy all the following criteria:

- Have a gross household income of less than £25,000 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 75%, be up to date with all coursework /assignments and receive a satisfactory tutor report.

** NB the attendance threshold is set at 75% acknowledging that students may not be able to achieve 100% attendance.

- Applied for their full entitlement of student loan/bursary.

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 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.
- 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.

FULL-TIME UNDERGRADUATES

Applications for support from the Hardship Fund can be made by 'home students' undertaking the following full-time courses at undergraduate level:

- Higher National Diploma (HND).
- Higher National Certificate (HNC).
- Foundation Degree.
- Course for the initial training of teachers.
- Degree

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.

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

Childcare Support for Part Time Higher Education Students

To qualify for the childcare support 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.

APPLICATIONS

Applications must be made during the term the payment is required.

PAYMENTS

All payments will be made directly to the Childcare Provider monthly.

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 and days in college.

Students must be up to date with their Tuition Fee Loan.

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APPEALS

Applicants who have been refused support have the right to have their application reviewed.

Appeals must be made in writing (letter or e-mail) within 10 working days of receipt of the College's decision to decline support.

The following should be clearly stated in the written communication:

- The grounds for requesting the review, (these grounds will normally be an error in procedure or error in fact).
- Supply sufficient detail to support the Review request.
- The outcome that they are seeking from the Review.
- Reviews will be undertaken, and the decision communicated within 10 working days of receipt.

Please address all appeal requests to studentfinance-redditch@howcollege.ac.uk

THE DECISION OF THE REVIEW PANEL WILL BE FINAL

The panel will consist of:

- Vice Principal Student Experience and Support
- Admissions and Advice Centre Manager
- Student Finance Officer

POLICY REVIEW

The College reserves the right to amend this policy without prior notice responding to changes to Government/funding body requirements and financial constraints.