



## **Student Support Fund Policy**

### **1. Scope and Purpose**

1.1 The Student Support Fund is aimed at supporting students who are experiencing unexpected financial difficulty due to an unforeseen change in their circumstances. This may arise from difficulty covering basic living costs where student finance received has been insufficient.

1.2 Financial circumstances can change suddenly due to unforeseen events, and therefore the Student Support Fund can help to diffuse these situations in a timely manner.

1.3 The criteria and guidance below can be consulted on how this AECC University Student Support Fund is managed, how applications are assessed, and how funds are disbursed.

1.4 The fund operates under a finite budget and, should this fund be depleted, provision will cease until the following academic year. However, students are strongly encouraged to still contact student services if they are in urgent need of financial assistance.

1.5 The fund operates all year round, and should students require additional support due to knock-on effects to their mental health, then the Student Services team can be consulted on-site who provide counselling & one-to-one sessions to help students cope and handle themselves going forward.

### **2. About the Fund**

2.1 The award from the fund is in the form of a single non-repayable grant designed for resolving crisis financial circumstances that the receipt of this money would seek to resolve.

2.2 Students are expected to demonstrate that they have made realistic financial provision and have an appropriate level of funding in place before starting their studies. The Fund is to be used when there are no further financial avenues available. Students must demonstrate that they have utilised all funding available to them.

2.3 To apply to the fund, applicants will need to book an initial financial assessment meeting with a Student Finance Adviser. The assessment will indicate whether you are eligible for an award from the Fund (see point 10).

2.4 The fund is not designed to provide support with tuition fees.

2.5 Students enrolled on AECC University College undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and postgraduate research students are eligible to apply for the fund. Students studying part-time may be eligible to apply to the fund, eligibility depends on the level of course intensity, which relates to the contact hours of the course. Contact the Student Services Team for information if you are studying part-time and wish to apply to the fund.

### 3. Provision

3.1 The amount awarded to eligible students is on a case-by-case basis, but current provision will see payments of up to £500 awarded per assessment.

3.2 If a student is given an award from the support fund of a value greater than £250, then the amount over this threshold will reduce the emergency funding provision for that student for the remainder of that academic year.

3.3 Each student is permitted a maximum of £500 per academic year split between these two funds, with the emergency fund having a maximum award of £250. This is designed to ensure that more students can be reached by the shared budget for these funds before it's depleted.

3.4 Any agreed award will be paid once the financial assessment is completed, and all required evidence is submitted. (See 13 for timescales on payment).

3.5 For students experiencing financial emergencies, there exists provision via the Emergency Fund that has separate criteria to support students facing immediate financial crises with essential costs. There is also an additional version of this fund for International students in particular. (See <https://libguides.aecc.ac.uk/wellbeing/Finance> for more information)

3.6 Limitations have been set to how many awards the student can receive per academic year. Any request for funding over these conditions can only proceed via managerial approval. (see 9 regarding the number of applications)

### 4. Priority funding

4.1 We are aware that some students are studying with additional responsibilities that go beyond their course. The following student groups are designated to be in *priority groups* and are assessed in light of this. The priority groups include:

- Students with children
- Students from a low-income household
- Students with a disability
- Care Leavers
- Final year students
- Mature students
- Estranged students
- Students with caring responsibilities

### 5. Eligibility

5.1 To be considered for the fund you must:

- Be fully enrolled on your chosen course before application to the fund, i.e. you cannot be withdrawn or on a study break
- Be designated as a 'home student' in relation to your tuition fees

- Be studying on an undergraduate or postgraduate course, or be a postgraduate researcher enrolled at AECC University College, full or part-time
- Be currently in receipt of:
  - 1) the full entitlement of funding available to you from Student Finance for your region, or equivalent. This could be the combination of your student loan plus a maintenance loan as a typical example
  - 2) any eligible statutory benefits, such as Universal Credit or childcare grants etc., and you must:
  - 3) declare if you are in receipt of an AECC University College bursary or scholarship.

## 6. Studying part-time

6.1 If you are studying a course on a part-time basis, there is an expectation that you are earning a minimum amount in paid work before you will be deemed eligible for the fund.

6.2 The difference from full-time study is that there is an understanding that you have made adequate provision to earn via paid work to help pay for your expenses. To be eligible for the fund, your net income per year is required to be above £9,988 as the minimum required provision (MRP).

## 7. International Students

7.1 As set out in student visa requirements, there is an expectation that you have sufficient finance in place from the outset of your course. Therefore, it is only under exceptional circumstances that international students can be considered for the Student Support Fund. The following are examples of potential circumstances that could warrant support from the fund:

- Unforeseen medical costs of the student or dependant of the student
- Emergency situations that necessitate the need for flights home
- Emergency situations that necessitate a need to relocate
- Unforeseeable costs related to a visa extension (e.g. costs incurred due to delays in the process outside the student's control)
- Internationally recognised crises directly affecting the student.

7.2 Provision with separate criteria exist for International students facing immediate financial crises. This is the International Emergency Fund for which full policy information can be found at - <https://libguides.aecc.ac.uk/wellbeing/Finance>

## 8. How to Apply

8.1 To arrange your financial assessment meeting with the Student Finance Adviser, email [StudentServices@aecc.ac.uk](mailto:StudentServices@aecc.ac.uk) and include:

- Your name and student number
- Your upcoming availability for a financial assessment appointment. This can be face to face, on the phone, or by video link.

## 9. Number of Applications

9.1 The Student Support Fund can only be successfully claimed from once per academic year per student.

9.1 Additional applications to the fund beyond the first require managerial approval before the student can proceed. The limitation above is intended so that the available budget for the fund can be spread amongst more students.

## 10. What is required

### 10.1 Information for the financial assessment:

Evidence:

- The last 3 months' bank statements from ALL currently held bank and savings accounts.  
If printing copies of statements at your local bank would cause them to charge you, please request a letter from Student Services that would ensure they provide this for free.
- The full Disclosure of current income of a partner / spouse if this is applicable and they live with you
- Letters pertaining to the amount of receipt of statutory benefits if these are being claimed
- A Statement from Student Finance that shows the full extent of funding being provided
- Details of any bursaries or scholarships awarded to you.

Income & Expenditure:

- The vast majority of income & expenditure will be assessed through the 'assumed income' calculations of the spreadsheet that the Student Finance Advisor will use during the assessment to aid in their decisions.
- Specific elements of income & expenditure will be asked to support the application which are detailed below:
  1. Grants or bursaries that they are currently in receipt of
  2. Any applicable Government benefits (such as Universal Credit)
  3. The yearly income of the students' partner, if applicable and only if they live with them.
  4. The amount yearly that the students' parent(s) provide towards them and their living costs, only if declared as a regular amount and only if applicable to them.
  5. The cost of the council tax but only if their partner pays this and only if they live with them.
  6. The cost of the rent or mortgage
  7. The regular cost of insurance apart from insurance taken for their car or place of residence

8. The amount the student pays towards regular health costs, which could be via prescription or other required medication as examples.
9. The repayments towards any secured debts if applicable. Examples include hire finance / hire purchase on vehicles repaid monthly, or mortgage repayments on a property.

#### 10.2 For the application form:

The application form will be provided after the initial assessment, where you will be advised whether you are eligible for the fund. All the above income and expenditure listed would be evidenced primarily through the 3 months' worth of bank statements provided. The exceptions to this are:

- The statement from Student Finance detailing your current funding from them
- Benefit letters as appropriate

**Please note that if any of the above evidence cannot be gathered together in time for your appointment, then please arrive to the meeting with the Student Finance Adviser with as much information of your current finances as possible. Documents that are missing for the appointment would subsequently be required to be evidenced through the application form.**

### 11. Circumstantial Evidence

11.1 If you are experiencing financial hardship due to an unforeseen event, then evidence of that event may be necessary to progress your application.

11.2 Examples could include (but not limited to):

- A death in the family: Death certificate required
- An illness affecting your studies: Medical certificate or doctor's note required
- Parental separation or divorce: A letter explaining the current circumstances relating to you is required
- Redundancy: A letter from your employer confirming this is required.

### 12. Description of your current situation

12.1 A brief summary of what has caused you to be in the position of requesting funds from the Student Support Fund and what support you require from the fund. This would arise from the discussion at the financial assessment, but also reiterated in your own words on the application form.

### 13. Timescales

13.1 Following the full submission of your application form after the financial assessment with all required evidence attached, we aim for the agreed amount from the Student

Support Fund to be received in your account further to the date of the 15<sup>th</sup> of the current month.

13.2 If there is reason to believe that the date of the 15<sup>th</sup> of the current month is unrealistic, then the date of the 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month will be expected instead. This is due to applications that could be received from students only days prior to the 15<sup>th</sup>, thereby not allowing enough time to allow thorough checking of the application by the Student Finance Advisor for any errors or missing information, and subsequent quality control checking via the manager thereafter.

#### **14. Declaration**

- The declaration at the end of the application form will need to be complete before your application can be moved forward for processing.

#### **15. Outcome**

15.1 We will endeavour to ensure that students applying to the Student Support Fund are kept informed throughout the process. The following touch-points are key:

- Amount awarded from the fund: A decision will be made at the financial assessment phase to accept or reject an application and what amount would be required to support the described financial issue.
- Receipt of the funds is aimed to be following the 15<sup>th</sup> of the same month of application unless there would be reason to believe that there would not be sufficient time to check the case before payment. The 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month will be selected instead for these instances.
- Outstanding evidence required: Students are informed at the assessment and by email thereafter, what specific evidence for their application is required before their case can be processed.
- Award: Students who have been informed they are eligible for an award should check their bank account for receipt of funds following the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month or the 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month depending on date when the application was received.

The online application form via email link will be given either at or after the financial assessment, but only if the outcome of the meeting resulted in agreement for the student to apply & receive funds.

In the instance that further information is needed to determine eligibility, then an email explaining the application is 'on hold' will be sent to the student, detailing what is required to move the application forward. Examples could include: a bank statement missing from the form, or unanswered queries relating to transactions on their statement(s) that need addressing.

In the event of a decline, an explanation would be provided verbally prior to the conclusion of the financial assessment meeting, but also an email would be submitted to the student detailing the reason(s) why they have been rejected funding and appropriate other avenues that could be used to gain additional support.

## 16. Appeals and Reassessments

16.1 You may request a review of the decision. The following may be reasons for an appeal or reassessment:

- Your financial circumstances have changed in either the period running up to the 15<sup>th</sup> of the current month or the 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month depending on application date.
- New material evidence has become available which you were unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process.
- You have evidence that procedural error has occurred.

## 17. Questions and Support

17.1 Should you wish to talk with someone about wellbeing, do remember you can speak with a Wellbeing Adviser. To book an appointment just email [StudentServices@aecc.ac.uk](mailto:StudentServices@aecc.ac.uk)

17.2 For any further questions related to applying for the Student Support Fund, or to book your financial assessment meeting, please email [StudentServices@aecc.ac.uk](mailto:StudentServices@aecc.ac.uk)

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