

## Guidance Notes

# Access to Learning Fund Information

The Access to Learning Fund (ALF) provides discretionary financial assistance to students in financial difficulty. The primary purpose of the Fund is to relieve financial hardship that might impact on a student's participation in higher education. Particularly those students who need financial help to meet extra costs that cannot be met from other sources of support. The information is divided into several sections. Students requiring clarification before submitting their application form please contact the Financial Aid Office (See Useful Contacts).

1. General notes
2. Who can apply?
3. Information on how an application is assessed
4. Timetable for making a decision
5. How to appeal
6. How to make an application
7. Useful Contacts

### PLEASE NOTE

**An application will not be considered until it is fully completed and all the necessary documentary evidence has been received.**

**An application form will be returned to the student if:**

- they have not completed all relevant sections
- they have not included all necessary documentation

### **IT WILL BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO MAKE AN APPLICATION EARLY IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR**

**The ALF is University money administered using strict guidance on the allocation of the fund:**

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/emergency-funding/access-to-learning-fund>

**The application process does not intend to be intrusive or overburden students with documents to support each application; however it is a necessary requirement to fulfil University audit requirements.**

**AWARDS ARE DISCRETIONARY AND NOT GUARANTEED: Please do not assume an application will be successful, nor anticipate any amount that may be received. Amounts awarded are NOT guaranteed and are subject to change at any time in the academic year.**

## **Part 1: GENERAL NOTES**

### **What is the Access to Learning Fund?**

The Fund can help to alleviate unexpected financial hardship. Students who may be considering leaving higher education because of financial problems are particularly encouraged to apply. Any help awarded from the Fund is usually non-repayable. Students can apply to the Fund at any point throughout the academic year.

## Tuition Fees

The Fund **cannot** be used to meet the cost of tuition fees for any undergraduate or post-graduate student. Full-time or part-time undergraduate students can apply for financial support for tuition fees from Student Finance England (SFE).

## Part-time Support

### Discretionary Childcare grant for part-time students

To be eligible:

**Part time students** who started their course on or after 01 September 2012 must have received confirmation that they are eligible for a tuition fee loan and provide evidence that they have a household income of £16,845 or less. Household income levels vary according to students personal circumstances.

To apply, please contact the Financial Aid Office (see Useful Contacts).

## Part 2: WHO CAN APPLY?

The Access to Learning Fund is for **UK 'home'** students, as assessed by the University of Kent for tuition fees purposes, registered on a course in one of the following categories:

- **Undergraduate students, either full-time or part-time**, including part-time distance learners, following a higher education course, including sandwich courses and any periods of non-paid placement
- **Postgraduate students, either full-time or part-time**, following a course of higher education at a level above first degree, including those who are writing up their thesis and not therefore attending the institution

A full time course is 120 credit points in an academic year or equivalent.

- **Part time students** need to be studying the equivalent of at least 25% of a full time course.

### Home students

Where eligible students must maximise their income from all other sources before an award can be made from the fund. This includes a student applying for their full entitlement of student loan from Student Finance England or other awarding body. A student must have received their first instalment before receiving a payment from the funds before applying to ALF.

### Intermitting Students

UK 'home' students may be eligible to apply for help from the Fund, if they are unable to attend their course for health / medical reasons, pregnancy or caring responsibilities. Providing they do not permanently withdraw from their studies, and intend to return after their time out.

### Priorities for Assistance

The Fund is available to help any eligible student who has a particular financial need.

However, we cannot meet every application we receive, and we cannot always meet all of the costs that have been applied for.

The University gives priority to the following groups of students when deciding how to allocate the funding: -

For **full-time undergraduate** students the priority groups are: -

- Students with children (especially lone parents).
- Students from low income families
- Disabled students (especially where the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are unable to meet particular costs and the institution has no legal responsibility to do so).

- Care leavers
- Students from Foyers or who are homeless
- Students who are estranged
- Students who are care givers
- Students receiving the final year loan rate who are in financial difficulty (including those who are unable to work because of academic pressure).

For **part-time undergraduate/all postgraduate** students the priority groups are: -

- Students with children
- Students in receipt of full statutory support package
- Disabled students

Students who are not in one of the priority groups can still apply, but they must provide as much evidence as possible to show why they have a particular need.

The University gives priority to students undertaking their first Higher Education qualification, before considering supporting students undertaking a subsequent course of Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ), who are not eligible for student support.

Students may apply more than once during an academic year for help from the Access to Learning Fund but only if their circumstances have changed. **Students will be asked to provide documentary evidence for the change in circumstances.**

### **Emergency Short Term Loans from the Access to Learning Fund**

Students who have not received their first instalment from Student Finance England (SFE) at the start of the academic year, can apply for an Emergency Short Term Loan from the Access to Learning Fund. Students will be expected to repay this loan when they receive their first instalment. They will need to complete and sign a short online application form and provide documentary evidence to show that SFE are considering them for financial support. Emergency Short Term Loan applications will be processed within 4 working days and the monies paid into the student's nominated bank account by faster payment.

## **Part 3: INFORMATION ON HOW AN APPLICATION IS ASSESSED**

**Standard awards** can help to meet general costs associated with being a full-time undergraduate student such as living and household costs such as rent, mortgage payments, food, utility bills etc. In addition, assistance with course related costs such as childcare, travel and books is available.

For full-time undergraduate students who are being assessed for a standard award there is an '**Assumed Income**', set at a level of £2211 per year for 'full' year students and £738 per year for 'final' year students. This assumes income from a number of sources including part-time work or additional parental support.

For full-time postgraduate students a weekly **notional postgraduate income** amount is applied to standard assessments. This is set at £208, except for students with dependants or students who are unable to work due to a disability this amount will be £102. For part-time postgraduate students, and full time postgraduate students studying on a distance learning course, actual income will be used in place of the notional postgraduate income.

Postgraduate students will be expected to demonstrate they have plans in place to fund their studies as part of their assessment.

There will be a set expenditure level, known as **Composite Living Costs (CLC)**, for general living and household costs, such as food and utility bills. The relevant amount will be set depending on the student's circumstances: for example, a student with children will have a higher CLC.

If a student lives with a spouse or partner, we take both their income and expenditure into account. A spouse or partner would normally be expected to have some source of income from either benefits, work or student support.

**Variable expenditure** may be capped, for example rent, internet and travel costs. Single students, with the exception of some students with disabilities, or with children, or travelling to or from placements, cannot include private vehicle costs however an equivalent public transport cost can be substituted.

Only when a student has agreed a realistic repayment arrangement for a credit card **debt**, AND has stopped using that source of credit, can the repayment amount(s) be included as expenditure in the assessment for a standard award. Evidence will be required.

**Non-standard awards** will be assessed by Student Welfare Team please see link below for further information [Exceptional Hardship Fund \(EHF\) - Help - University of Kent](#)

## **Part 4: TIMETABLE FOR MAKING A DECISION**

Provided that an application form has been accurately completed, and the appropriate documentary evidence supplied, an assessment and decision will usually be made within 20 working days of submission to the Financial Aid Office (FAO). Successful students can normally expect to receive a payment within this time period. If for any reason we need to defer the initial payment beyond this 20 working day period we shall let the student know.

## **Part 5: HOW TO APPEAL**

Students who are unsuccessful in their application may appeal against the decision. However, appeals against amounts awarded will not be considered. Appeals should only be made if there is no change of circumstances to the original application. If you have experienced a change of circumstances since your original application, please contact a student adviser to discuss submitting a new application based on this change. All information held with your ALF application will be reviewed by the Director of Student Support and Wellbeing where an independent decision to the original assessment will be made. The Director of Student Support and Wellbeing's re-assessment of the application will then be communicated to the student by letter.

Any appeal must be made to the Director of Student Support and Wellbeing by email within 20 working days from the date of the original decision. It should be sent to [Directorstudentservices@kent.ac.uk](mailto:Directorstudentservices@kent.ac.uk) with subject title 'ALF Appeal' and marked **CONFIDENTIAL**.

## **Part 6: HOW TO MAKE AN APPLICATION**

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### **First steps to an Access to Learning Fund Application**

- To start the application process:

**All students** should follow the link below:

<https://kentunion.co.uk/here-for-you/advice/alf#access-to-learning-fund>

**Currently the application process is online.** The **student adviser** will submit the completed application, with all supporting documents, to the Financial Aid Office (FAO) **before 10am** on the dates listed in the table below. An application can only be submitted to the FAO by the student adviser once it is **fully complete** with **all** relevant supporting evidence.

- Students **cannot** submit their application & / or supporting evidence directly to the FAO. All applications must be made through Kent Union.

Deadline dates for submission each term are listed in the following table:

Term	Final Appointment Date	Submission Deadline Date
Autumn	1st December 2023	8th December 2023
	Spring and Summer terms to be confirmed	

### All evidence to be received by 6<sup>th</sup> December

The administration of this fund is currently under review with the intention to introduce a new process for application and awarding funds for the Spring and Summer term. The website will be updated in due course.

## Completing the Application & Submitting it with ALL Required Evidence

- You must supply continuous bank statements for the 3-month period on **your MAIN bank and building society account** up to the date you submitted your application and 1 month-period for all other bank and building society accounts. It is essential that your bank statements show your **income assessed** SFE payments being received into your bank account. Details and evidence of any outstanding debts must be supplied and you may be offered budgeting advice to help with any outstanding debts where applicable.
- You must complete in full the Income and Expenditure sections on the application form to allow the student adviser to complete your Financial Shortfall Calculation. This calculation will be used when determining if an award should be made, and how much it should be.
- It is important that you submit all supporting documentation with your application form. **If your application does not have supporting documents, it will be considered incomplete and will not be processed.**

## Award Assessment and Payment

- Once the completed application form and **all** the relevant evidence has been submitted to the student adviser, the application will be submitted to the Financial Aid Office. An assessment and decision will normally be made within **20 working days** of the Financial Aid Office receiving the completed application. If your application is successful you can usually expect to receive a payment within this time period. If for any reason we need to defer your initial payment beyond this 20 working day period we will let you know.
- Applications where students have provided **false / incomplete information** i.e. not providing evidence of all bank accounts or all funding applied for / awarded will be referred to the Panel. **Giving false information will automatically disqualify an application and may also lead to disciplinary procedures.**
- Awards will be paid by BACS into an account nominated by the student.
- Applicants are advised that payments from the Access to Learning Fund may have implications for their entitlement to means-tested state benefits. Students who receive help from the Fund can be supplied with a letter to present to their local JobCentre Plus / Housing Benefit office to help their claim for benefits if necessary.

## **Part 7: USEFUL CONTACTS**

<b>Student Advisers</b>	<b>Partner Colleges</b>
<p><b>Canterbury Campus</b>  <b>Julie Horsley, Helen Ixer, Shona Kinal &amp; Vicky Hurley</b></p> <p>Kent Union Advice Centre  Mandela Building  University of Kent Canterbury  Kent CT2 7NW  <b>Contact Form:</b>  <a href="https://kentunion.co.uk/welfare/advice/contact">https://kentunion.co.uk/welfare/advice/contact</a></p>	<p><b>North Kent College (Tonbridge Campus)</b>  <b>Sharon Juty</b>  Higher Education Development Officer</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b> 01322 629580</p> <p><b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:sharonjuty@northkent.ac.uk">sharonjuty@northkent.ac.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Financial Aid Office</b>  <b>Diane Elswood, Joanna Hart &amp; Emma Ogunlola</b>  <b>G27 The Registry</b>  <b>University of Kent Canterbury</b>  <b>Kent CT2 7NZ</b>  <b>Telephone: 01227 827289</b>  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:FinancialAid@kent.ac.uk">FinancialAid@kent.ac.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Canterbury College EKC Group</b>  <b>Andrew Heap</b>  <b>Head of Student Support</b>  <b>Telephone: 01227 811262</b></p> <p><b>Email:</b>  <a href="mailto:fundingteamcc@eastkentcollege.ac.uk">fundingteamcc@eastkentcollege.ac.uk</a>  <a href="mailto:andrew.heap@eastkent.ac.uk">andrew.heap@eastkent.ac.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Student Support &amp; Wellbeing</b>  Canterbury Campus  Keynes College</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b> 01227 823158  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:KentSSW@kent.ac.uk">KentSSW@kent.ac.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Student Support &amp; Wellbeing</b>  Medway Campus  Gillingham Building</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b> 01634 888474  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:MedwaySSW@kent.ac.uk">MedwaySSW@kent.ac.uk</a></p>