

UNIVERSITY CENTRE SOMERSET HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORT FUNDING POLICY 2025-29

Policy relevant to all students regardless of validating organisation

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1 Introduction

The purpose of the UCS HE Student Support Policy is to provide financial support to applicants and enrolled students who, because of their background and personal circumstances, may not normally aspire to, or be able to access, higher education provision.

2 Policy Statement

The objective of the HE student support funds are to:

- Meet the requirements of the University Centre Somerset (UCS) Access and Participation Plan.
- Provide meaningful financial support to students who need it the most
- Ensure a fair and transparent approach to allocating funds.

Ensure information contained within this document is easily accessible to students and staff. This policy, and excerpts from it/reference to it, will be published on the UCS website www.somerset.ac.uk

3 Scope

Students who can access these funds are limited to **students studying prescribed higher education courses** from the academic year **2025 and up to 2029 unless this policy is amended prior to this date**. (This aligns with the 2025-29 Access and Participation Plan).

Prescribed courses are:

- Higher National Certificates (HNC)
- Higher National Diplomas (HND)
- Foundation Degrees (FD, FdA, FdEng, FdSc)
- Bachelor's degrees (BA/BSc/BEng) Top Ups
- Bachelor's degrees (BA/BSc/BEng)

Each fund has specific grounds of eligibility that should be consulted prior to making an application. Students will be considered for all funds for which they are eligible.

Students studying with any of the College's partner universities can access all of these funds, subject to eligibility. This policy is not applicable however to students studying with London Community Kitchen Academy, who have their own bursary policy in place.

Students studying higher level provision but with a professional body or awarding organisation are not eligible to access these funds.

The Access and Participation Plan has allocated £30,000 to be set aside for the following funds in each academic year from 2025 to 2029 but will increase proportionally should the student enrolment numbers significantly exceed that which was expected to ensure all student get the approved minimum amount they are entitled to.

Each eligible student will receive a minimum amount, but the upper limit will depend on the number of eligible students in any given year. There is also an upper limit to what a student will receive. Students can apply once they are enrolled on an eligible programme. Students should refer to the UCS website for further details and conditions linked to the awards.

Students studying with Oxford Brookes University, due to the franchise nature of the agreement, should access the Oxford Brookes financial aid offer instead of the UCS bursaries, subject to eligibility:

(<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/studying-at-brookes/finance/financial-aid/financial-aid/>).

Oxford Brookes students may though apply for the HE Diagnostic Support Fund and DSA Technology Support Fund detailed below.

Students studying higher level provision but with a professional body or awarding organisation are not eligible to access these funds.

4 HE Diagnostic Support Fund

The Diagnostic Support Fund aims to provide financial support for eligible higher education students who are undertaking a full diagnostic assessment that is being conducted by UCS.

Funds available

A grant of £250 per eligible student to pay for the full diagnostic assessment when conducted by UCS. Once the finances available to support this fund have been exhausted there will be no further funding available.

Eligibility criteria for students

- Must be studying a Higher National, Foundation Degree, BA/BSc/BEng or top up programme..
- Must not have had a previous DSA diagnostic assessment with UCS College Group.

How to apply?

• When?

You can apply for this fund once you are enrolled on an eligible programme.

• How?

You can apply for this fund by using the appropriate application form. The form is available upon request from our Learning Support Team, please contact them via learning.support@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk

• Questions?

If you have any questions relating to this fund please contact the UCS College Group's Learning Support Team via learning.support@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk

Conditions of funding

- Funds are paid directly to UCS and not to the student

- The student must apply for a Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and provide evidence that they have done so
- The funds will pay for a diagnostic assessment conducted by UCS or, in exceptional circumstances, on UCS's express advice by an external provider during the current academic year
- To benefit from the funding the student must commit to specifying UCS as the primary choice for providing their support
- Failure to accept UCS as the primary support provider and to apply for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), following a funded diagnostic assessment, may result in UCS invoicing the student for the full £250 to reimburse the cost of the diagnostic assessment.

If it is later discovered that an application is based on false or partially false circumstances UCS would seek to recover any payments and the student may be subject to the UCS College Group Positive Behaviour Policy & Behaviour Management Procedure Policy.

5 DSA Technology Support Fund

The Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) Technology Support Fund aims to provide financial support for eligible higher education students towards the cost of higher specification equipment, as identified by their Technical Needs Assessment (TNA).

Funds available

A grant of £200 per eligible student to pay for the first £200 required towards higher specification equipment as identified by the TNA. Once the finances available to support this fund have been exhausted there will be no further funding available.

Eligibility criteria for students

Must be studying a Higher National, Foundation Degree, BA/BSc/BEng or top up programme..

Must have had their Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) confirmed with Higher Specification equipment identified as part of the TNA.

How to apply

- **When?**
Students can apply for this at any time after they have formally enrolled with UCS and have their DSA confirmed.
- **How?**
The relevant application form must be used to apply for this fund. It is available from the UCS College Group's Learning Support Team. Please contact them via learning.support@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk.
- **Evidence**
Please be aware that you will need to apply and this must be accompanied by relevant supporting evidence as detailed within the conditions of funding.

- **Questions?**

If you have any questions relating to this fund please contact our Learning Support Team on learning.support@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk.

Conditions of funding

- Students must be in receipt of a Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).
- Students must be eligible for higher specification equipment as specified in their Technical Needs Assessment (TNA).
- Funds are paid as a reimbursement to the student for the first £200 of their higher specification equipment purchase that meets the needs identified in their TNA and upon production of adequate proof of purchase. UCS retains the right to refuse to pay the fund if insufficient evidence of the proof of purchase is not provided.
- UCS will not purchase equipment on behalf of students.
- The funds are only available within the current academic year. Applications for equipment from previous academic years will not be eligible.

If it is later discovered than an application is based on false or partially false circumstances UCS would seek to recover any payments, and the student may be subject to UCS College Group's Positive Behaviour Policy & Behaviour Management Procedure Policy.

6 The HE Bursary Fund

The HE Bursary Fund is a means tested bursary to support higher education students from low-income backgrounds with costs directly related to their studies. This fund is only available to students who are studying an eligible course during the current academic year.

Funds available

A grant of a minimum of £300 for all eligible students, payable during the current academic year, larger grants of up to £600 may be available per student depending on the number of applications received to the bursary support fund. Should allocated funds for this bursary as set out in the FIT document be utilised, more funds will be made available. Bursaries are paid per term in equal instalments. Eligible students studying on a part time programme will receive a pro-rata amount.

Eligibility criteria for students

- Students must have a household income threshold of £25,000 or less as assessed by Student Finance England (SFE).
- Students must be entitled to and approved to receive, or are in receipt of, the full student Maintenance Loan for the current academic year.
- Do not already hold a higher-level qualification such as a Degree, Foundation Degree, CertHE or HNC/D.
- If students receive full or part sponsorship (for example from an employer) for their tuition fees they are not eligible for this bursary.
- UCS will prioritise applications based on the conditions specified. This means that there is a limited amount of funding, eligible students within the groups identified will receive funding before those who are not.

How to apply

- **How & When?**

There is no need to apply for this bursary as information is shared with Student Finance England and eligibility determined through the details provided in your student finance applications. If you are self-funding your programme contact the UCS HE Team who will be able to support you with applying for this. This is normally processed by UCS in November with the initial instalment of the bursary paid shortly after.

Please note that payments for eligible applications will only be made at set points and only to students who are currently enrolled.

- **Questions?**

If you have any questions relating to this bursary please contact the UCS College Group's Student Support Team via studentsupport@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk

Conditions of funding

- If a student changes their mode of study during the academic year (e.g. from full time to part time or vice versa) they will continue to receive the bursary as originally awarded.
- If a student postpones or suspends their studies during the academic year, they will not be eligible to continue to receive this bursary. If they defer, postpone or suspend their studies and do not notify UCS College Group's Student Support or the UCS HE Team they will be liable to repay any bursary funds received after they deferred, postponed or suspended their studies. The student can re-apply for a bursary fund, as available, once they recommence their studies.
- If a student transfers into UCS College Group from another provider during the academic year (although this is rare as it is more normal for transfers to occur at the beginning of the academic year) they will be unable to apply for this bursary.

Prioritisation of funding

Funds are granted on a priority basis to identified priority groups. High priority students are those who are:

- Care leavers:
To be eligible as a care leaver you must:
 - Have been in local authority care for a minimum of three months
 - Be a permanent resident in the United Kingdom and be a 'home' student for fee purposes
 - Have proof of being in care from an official source, such as a local authority
 - Be enrolled on an undergraduate course at UCS College Group
 - Not already hold a previous HE qualification
 - Have not been adopted
- Registered as disabled (or in receipt of Disabled Student Allowance)
- From Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups
- Students with children, especially single parents
- Carers with responsibility for caring for others

Evidence of eligibility

- Evidence of eligibility must be provided at the time of application.
- To be eligible students must have a household income of £25,000 or less, evidence as follows must be provided:
 - The income assessment is that used by SFE to assess entitlement to funding. No alternative income assessment will be used.
- To be eligible, students must also be in receipt of the full student Maintenance Loan for the relevant academic year. Students must provide evidence of their loan which will be the maximum loan entitlement for the current academic year.
- Students will not be eligible for this bursary if they are being sponsored to pay for their course by a third party, such as an employer or parent.

Payments to eligible students

- Payments made to the student only and no other third party.
- Payments are paid by equal instalments to eligible students on a termly basis. There are three terms in an academic year so, as an example, a full grant of £600 will be paid at a rate of £200 per term.
- Students must remain as enrolled to be allowed to continue to receive the grant. If a student withdraws during the current academic year, before the final grant payment is made, all future grant payments will cease.
- Payments will normally be made during months of December, February and April.
- If an eligible application is made later during the academic year and there are still funds available, the funds will be paid retrospectively for past payment dates.
- Students studying on a part time basis will receive a pro-rata amount, for example a student studying half the hours of a full-time student will receive half the amount, £300 overall payable in termly instalments at a rate of £100 per term.
- Students failing to meet all of the eligibility criteria or to produce full and appropriate evidence within the timeframes specified by UCS may risk being considered for this fund.
- If a student is in debt with UCS College Group their bursary instalment will not be paid until the students arranges repayment with the UCS College Group's Finance Team.

If it is later discovered that an application is based on false or partially false circumstances UCS would seek to recover any payments and the student may be subject to UCS College Group's Positive Behaviour Policy & Behaviour Management Procedure Policy

Allocation of bursaries

- Decisions regarding the allocation of bursaries will be made by the Student Support Team based only on the evidence provided.

7 Reassessments

If you feel evidence is omitted in the decision making of this bursary allocation that would otherwise have supported the application this may still be accepted and can be submitted within 10 working days. Students should notify the relevant team as soon as

they become aware of this, detailing when they expect to be able to provide the evidence.

UCS reserves the right to delay processing the application if substantial evidence is still to be provided.

8 Appeals

It is UCS College Group's responsibility to operate a transparent and fair process for allocating bursaries and funding awards. Should an student be dissatisfied with the decision regarding their application they have the right to appeal.

Appeals must be made by the applicant in writing or by email. Third parties (e.g. parents or family members) cannot appeal on behalf of the applicant.

Grounds for appeal

Applicants can request an appeal on the basis that there has been a fault or irregularity in the consideration of their eligibility under one of the following grounds:

- The decision was not in accordance with the conditions specified within the UCS HE Student Support Funds Policy
- The judgement was affected by personal bias
- There was a material administrative error or some other material irregularity in the process of considering the application that, if it had not occurred, would have led to a different decision being made about the application.

Appeals are made to the UCS HE Team, who can be contact on the following email address: he@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk in accordance to the UCS HE Appeals Policy.

When making an appeal please ensure that you specify:

- Your name and UCS College Group student ID number
- Name of the programme you are studying
- Provide a copy of your original application
- State clearly why you are appealing the decision
- Provide any additional information that was not provided when you originally made your application and explain why it was not previously provided
- State clearly what you are hoping to achieve from the appeal

Appeals must be lodged with the HE Team within 10 working days from the date of the decision made regarding your eligibility. Appeals submitted after this time period will not normally be considered.

The UCS HE Team and UCS College Group Student Support Team will be responsible for investigating your appeal by checking that the application was processed correctly and consider any additional information or documents that are provided in support of the case. Evidence provided after the original application was made and timeframe for reassessment have passed will not be considered.

Please note that it is not possible to allocate a bursary or funding award where the UCS's eligibility criteria have not been met in full or where the student's interaction becomes vexatious or malicious.

We aim to investigate and respond to your appeal within 20 working days.

The decision following an appeal is final.

9 Internal Progressor Bursary

UCS recognises the unique challenges progressing to Higher Education (HE) has for our students, none more so than juggling the cost and financial implications associated with being a full-time student. The Internal Progressor Bursary is a bursary to support students who have internally progressed from a course at UCS College Group with the costs associated with their studies. This bursary is only available for students who meet the criteria as stated in the section below

Funds available

A bursary payment of £1000 per eligible student is available. Funds will be payable in two instalments as detailed in the section below.

Eligibility criteria for students

- Students must be enrolled on a Full Time (FT) Foundation Degree or Degree (BA/BSc/BEng) as a direct entry student (i.e., not an apprentice, part time student or Top Up Student)
- Students must have directly progressed from a L3 study programme or Access to HE courses at UCS College Group in consecutive academic years (for example finished their L3 course July 2024 and start their HE course September 2024 the following academic year).
- Eligibility for this Bursary Fund is not materially affected by other bursary funds available.

How to apply

Students will not be required to apply for this Bursary, this will be managed internally based upon internal progression data by the Student Support Team.

Conditions of funding

- A student must remain as enrolled, if a student were to withdraw, be withdrawn or suspend their studies during the academic year, they will no longer be eligible for any outstanding payments under this bursary scheme.
- If a student changes their mode of study during the academic year (e.g. from full time to part time) they will not continue to receive any outstanding payments from this bursary as originally awarded.
- If a student is in debt with the UCS College Group, their bursary instalment will not be paid until the students arranges repayment with the UCS College Group's Finance Team.

Payments to eligible students

- Payments are made to the student only and no other third party.

- Payments are paid by two equal instalments of £500 to eligible students.
- The first instalment will normally be paid during term 3 during the first year of study and the second during term 3 of the second year of study, normally during the months of April or May.

10 Allocation of extra-ordinary funds

It should be noted that in extra-ordinary circumstances, should further funds be made available, such as those provided by Government during the Covid-19, pandemic for allocation to those most in need, that these funds will be allocated in line with fair principles and in accordance with any instructions, terms and conditions under which the additional funding has been made available. Records will be kept to complete any reporting obligations in relation to these funds.

Appendix 1 - Application Forms



Application for HE Diagnostic Support Fund

Section 1 Your Details

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Student Finance Ref Number: _____

Course: _____

Section 2 Evidence

Evidence of Support Needs:

Section 3 Declaration

I understand that I may be invoiced for the £250 given by the diagnostic support fund if either

- I do not access my support from University Centre Somerset/UCS College Group where possible
- I do not attend my HE course at University Centre Somerset /UCS College Group

I confirm that the information I have given is correct. I understand that if I give false information, I will be subject to the college disciplinary procedure.

I am happy to be contacted using the contact information I have given.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Please send, hand in or email your completed application form to learning.support@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk or to Learning Support, UCS College Group, Bath Road, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 4PZ

Application for HE Technical Support Fund

Section 1 Your Details

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Student Finance Ref Number: _____

Course: _____

Contact Details: Email: _____ Phone: _____

Section 2 Evidence

Please attach your Technical Needs Assessment (TNA)

Please attach the receipt for your equipment

Section 3 Declaration

I confirm that the information I have given is correct. I understand that if I give false information, I will be subject to the college disciplinary procedure.

I am happy to be contacted using the contact information I have given.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Please send, hand in or email your completed application form to learning.support@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk or to Learning Support, UCS College Group, Bath Road, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 4PZ