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Student Support Policies and Procedures

Financial Support Policy

Aim: To set out the college framework within which all financial support applications will be administered.

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Financial Support/Free Meals/Access Fund Scheme Policies and Procedures

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out the college framework within which all financial support applications will be administered.
- 1.2 The college follows the Education and Skills Funding Agency guidelines for 16-19 bursaries.
- 1.3 Financial support is available to students with the greatest financial need and provides a funding mechanism that is fair and consistent. Financial support can support travel and study based on individual circumstances.

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1 The Assistant Head of Student Services - Student Finance and Progression is responsible for the management of the financial support available and Student Finance staff will support the daily administration of the financial support schemes.
- 2.2 The MIS team is responsible for setting up the IT systems to support the financial support process.
- 2.3 The Student Finance staff are responsible for advising students and staff about the financial support on offer.

3. Eligibility Criteria

- 3.1 There are a range of tiers of financial support available to students to provide help towards the cost of college studies. The tier of support is dependent on student's individual circumstances and is awarded following an assessment of eligibility and need. More information about the different tiers, eligibility and what support each tier can offer is available on the website: <https://www.blackpoolsixth.ac.uk/financial-support/>.

4. Application and Assessment

- 4.1 All applications for the college financial support are made online using the online portal, PayMyStudent.
- 4.2 New online application forms received through the online financial support portal with supporting documentation will be marked as received on the online portal.
- 4.3 An administrator in Student Finance will check the college database to confirm that the student has either enrolled at college or has applied to start a programme of study.
- 4.4 If the online application form is incomplete or relevant supporting evidence is missing, Student Finance will contact the applicant via email to advise what is required to complete the application process.
- 4.5 Students will be required to upload any subsequent supporting documentation to the online application prior to assessment of eligibility.

- 4.6 Once all evidence is in place, an assessment is carried out by the Student Finance staff and an award decision is made. The decision is recorded on the financial support online portal.
- 4.7 All applicants who successfully complete a financial support application will receive an email notification to check the outcome on the online portal by logging back in.
- 4.8 All completed online application forms received after the end of September will receive a bus pass, if eligible, from the month the application was received.
- 4.9 All students who were in receipt of financial support the previous year will be required to reapply for financial support going forwards into their next year of study and will be contacted via email by the Student Finance team with instructions on how to reapply.
- 4.10 The Assistant Head of Student Services - Student Finance and Progression will conduct ad-hoc checks on completed financial support applications to ensure consistency in the eligibility assessment.

5. Financial Support

5.1 A student receiving financial support may be entitled to help towards the cost of:

- travel to and from college by either bus or train (if you live 1.5 miles or more from college)
- essential course equipment/devices (e.g. art materials)
- essential course 'uniform'
- course-related books
- a contribution towards educational visits
- examination fees
- authorised university visits (e.g. university interviews)
- college arranged work experience related costs
- DBS checks where required for course related work experience

As part of the financial support application an assessment of need will be undertaken to ensure the support is used in a way that benefits the students the most.

5.2 There are up to three elements

- a) travel pass, if the student lives more than 1.5 miles walking distance from college
- b) catering credit - depending on eligibility, students may receive a free meal allowance at a minimum rate of £2.53 in line with the Free Meals in Further Education guidance
- c) any other college related financial support throughout the academic year

5.3 Financial support - Tier 1 students may be eligible for BACS payments after individual assessment of their circumstances have taken place and the in kind college support (see 5.1) does not meet needs.

5.4 The travel pass element is issued directly to the student through Student Finance. Blackpool Transport will be in the form of a digital ticket emailed directly to the student's college email address for them to redeem via the Blackpool Transport app. Stagecoach will be a physical

travel pass, provided directly from the Student Finance office. Students who claim 9 consecutive monthly tickets between October and June will be eligible for free summer (July and August) travel.

- 5.5 The free meal element is credited to a student's online cashless catering account for each day the student attends college. College will also provide arrangements for free meals for students on days when they are off-site as part of their study programme, for instance attending a work placement or work experience.
- 5.6 If an eligible student requires help with any other essential financial costs associated with coming to college, then they are required to email Student Finance via the bursary@blackpoolsixth.ac.uk email address with details of their request, the cost and where it can be purchased. A member of the Student Finance team will then check the student is in receipt of financial support and process the order.

6. Access Fund

- 6.1 An emergency fund accessible to any students who experience short-term financial hardship and are struggling to meet the costs associated with college. The fund is there to help cover costs such as textbooks, course materials, DBS checks and can contribute towards some course-related visits. Students may be required to provide evidence of their family's income such as benefit entitlement, P60 or Tax Credit Award Notice, as part of the Access Fund application process.
- 6.2 A student can qualify for one tier of financial support only but may be entitled to other types of financial support, for example a grant/loan from the Access Fund.

7. Appeals Against Assessment of Eligibility

- 7.1 Appeals in respect of the financial support award should be made in writing to the Head of Student Services within 10 days of the receipt of the Notice of Entitlement notification.
- 7.2 Appeals can only be considered on the grounds of extenuating circumstances, which have not previously been disclosed, or new financial evidence that has not been considered. Any additional evidence must be included with the appeal.
- 7.3 Applicants will be informed of the result of the appeal within 5 working days of the receipt of the appeal letter and in receipt of all necessary evidence.

8. Monitoring

- 8.1 The financial support fund is monitored at monthly Finance Panel meetings by SLT and the Head of Finance.
- 8.2 Ad-hoc audits of the financial support fund are carried out by a member of the college Finance team, overseen by the Head of Finance.