

LEARNER SUPPORT POLICY

Grantham College undertakes to distribute Discretionary Support Funds as fairly as possible. In reaching a decision on how to apportion these funds the following considerations are applied:

- Learner support funds are for individual students NOT courses. All students requiring assistance should complete an application form and return it **NO LATER THAN** the closing date together with all supporting documentation, i.e.:
 - P60 or TCAN (Tax Credit Award Notice);
 - Income Support/Universal Credit statement and bank statement showing payments received;
 - Child Benefit letter or bank statement showing payments received;
 - 16-19 Bursary Fund/19+ Discretionary Fund/Advanced Learner Loan application form;
 - Housing benefit;
 - Working Tax Credit/Child Tax Credit (TCAN) All pages;
 - Evidence relating to other dependents in the family e.g. students in HE;
 - Supporting information for bursary entitlement.
- Maintenance payments and any part-time employment undertaken by students on full-time courses and living with parents/guardians, are excluded;
- Forms will be available by the beginning of July each year;
- Late applications will be processed when received and notification will be sent once award has been approved;
- All applications will be assessed for discrepancies. If the form is not complete it will be deemed void and no notification will be given;
- If any students are flagged as hardship cases, (e.g. living independently) they should be referred immediately to the Student Finance Officer. These cases will be assessed on an individual basis;
- All allocations are paid at the end of the month the decision has been made direct to student bank accounts or, where this has been agreed, to the curriculum area for course costs. Payments for travel costs are divided equally into 10 monthly instalments and paid at the end of each month or make up part of a weekly award based on attendance;
- Students who are 16-18 years old on the 31st August and either in care, a care leaver claiming PIP and ESA or who are claiming income support or universal credits in their own right may be eligible for additional funding;
- Students will be asked to sign that they understand the conditions under which an award is made and circumstances that may lead to payments being suspended or stopped;
- Parent/Guardian of 16-18 Bursary Fund applicants will be asked to sign that they understand the conditions under which an award is made;
- For clarification on any points students should call the Student Finance Officer (01476 400281).

Criteria used for applications:**General equipment, Childcare and Travel applications**

Household income	Applicant <u>could</u> receive up to:
Up to £16,190	100% of total cost
£16,191 - £20,000	75% of total cost
£20,001 - £24,000	50% of total cost
£24,001 - £30,000	25% of total cost
£30,001 +	No financial assistance
An additional allowance of £1000 per additional dependant may apply	

Travel applications

Applicants aged 16 and 18 on 31st August should apply to their Local Education Authority for assistance with travel costs. Assistance may be given if LEA application is rejected; rejection letter will need to be provided.

Applicants aged 19+ should complete a 19+ Discretionary Support Fund or Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund application form for assistance with travel costs.

Childcare

- The annual allocation awarded to individual students at the start of term should cover all childcare costs based on the information given to the College at the start of the academic year. It may not be possible during the course of the year to increase the allocation due to unforeseen eventualities;
- No childcare costs will be allocated unless an 'Application for Childcare Costs' form has been completed and signed by the childcare provider;
- All invoices for childcare should cover no later than the last day of the current academic year of study, i.e. if a student is undertaking a 2-year course a second application form will need to be completed at the start of their second year;
- Childcare fees will only be paid for the students timetabled sessions;
- Retainer fees are not guaranteed to be paid by the College. However, where possible and funds allow, we will do our best to help with these costs;
- No money will be allocated until 4 weeks after the start of the academic year as all applications need to be given the same priority;
- No invoices for childcare will be paid in advance;
- Any payments made by students should be receipted by the Nursery/Childminder and passed to the Student Finance Officer, once the allocation has been set;

- Payment for childcare costs will only be made direct to the Nursery/Childminder upon receipt of a valid invoice and not to the student unless prior arrangement has been made.

Free Meals

Grantham College will provide free meals to students who meet the eligibility and age criteria, aged between 16 and 18 on 31st August. Eligibility for free meals is based on being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support;
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance;
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA);
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
- The guarantee element of State Pension Credit;
- Child Tax Credit provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs;
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit;
- Universal Credit – with net earnings not exceeding £7,400 pa.

Students aged 19 to 24 who are subject to a learning difficulty assessment (LDA) or education health and care plan (EHC plan) and ESF student aged between 16 and 18 on 31st August 2020 are also entitled to a free meal if they meet the eligibility criteria.

Attendance

- only paid for travel 16-18

- only paid for travel and hardship 19+ ALL

General principles

In deciding whether an absence should be authorised or not, the college should take account of three general principles:

- The presumption is that any absence should be considered to be *unauthorised*, unless there is a valid reason otherwise. In other words, where there is an absence there is no requirement for the college proactively to justify its decision not to authorise the absence;
- If the claimed reason for absence could have been foreseen, then the student should have applied for authorised absence in advance. So, for example, it might be acceptable for a student of the Jewish faith to have authorised absence on Yom Kippur if this was applied for in advance; but it would not be acceptable to miss classes without prior notification and then claim that the absence should be authorised;
- Where the claimed reason for absence could not reasonably have been foreseen, the college should consider whether the absence was really unavoidable. An absence which could not have been notified in advance should be notified to the college on the day in question; unless, exceptionally, there is a good reason why this could not be done, the absence should not be authorised without such notification.

In operating these principles, the college should ensure that decision making processes are transparent, and that there is equitable application of rules across all the students receiving attendance based financial support.

Students are expected to attend 100% of their timetabled lessons. However, Grantham College does recognise that there are occasions when it will not be possible for a student to attend. In these circumstances it may be possible for an authorised absence to be given. This will be essential for students who are in receipt of a Bursary Fund and wish to be paid if they miss lessons.

Absences which can be foreseen in advance

Absences should only be authorised in advance if the reason given for the absence is a good one. The following are examples of reasons for absence which would tend to be acceptable:

- **Hospital or Orthodontic Appointment:** which cannot be arranged outside college hours and supported by an appointments card (a copy should be kept on file). This option could also be used in a medical emergency situation;
- **Emergency Care Responsibility:** a need in an emergency situation to look after a family member or another person for whom the student has caring responsibilities, although, the college should not regularly be authorising absences for a student for this reason. Where such responsibilities are regularly interrupting attendance there is a need to explore solutions personally with the student;
- **Religious Holiday:** where the student belongs to that religion;
- **University Visit:** either to attend an open day or for interview; or a career related interview;
- **Job Interview:** for progression/career related;
- **Funeral/Death:** attending the death or funeral of a relative or close friend;
- **Transport:** severe disruption to a student's mode of transport (i.e. buses not running in bad weather). However, unless the student has a disability we expect distances of under 2 miles to be covered on foot;
- **Driving Test:** a practical driving test NOT driving lessons or theory test;
- **Exam:** if a student is taking an exam within the College;
- **Benefits Appointment:** if a student is required to attend an appointment at the Job Centre.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and clearly decision makers will want to take account of: the inherent reasonableness of any case; the number of absences taken by any one individual; repetitions of the same excuse; and whether the excuse is backed up with evidence.

The following reasons for absence would **NOT** generally be acceptable:

- (a) Holidays;
- (b) Part or full time work which is not part of the student's programme of study;
- (c) Leisure activities;
- (d) Birthdays or similar celebrations;
- (e) Babysitting younger siblings;
- (f) Shopping;
- (g) Driving lessons;
- (h) Sickness (see note below)

This is not intended to be exhaustive.

Absences which cannot be foreseen in advance

Where an absence genuinely could not be foreseen in advance, the student should nevertheless make arrangements to tell the college as soon as possible on the day in question that they will be missing classes by telephoning their student mentor before 9 am. Where a student has failed to do this, the absence should be treated as unauthorised, and therefore the student should not receive any attendance based financial support for the week in question.

The only exception to this is where the student can supply a valid reason why they failed to contact the college. This might be because an event has been particularly disturbing or unpleasant, or because there has been a genuine practical barrier.

The following are examples of reasons for absence, which may be acceptable, provided that the college has been notified on the day:

- An emergency situation involving a family member or another person for whom the student has caring responsibilities. Sudden severe illness would be an example. However, while such cases should be treated sympathetically on a one-off-basis, they should not be acceptable as regular grounds for authorising absence;
- Transport problems, where these were not known about in advance, and where there is no alternative means to hand. It may be reasonable to expect students to walk 2 miles if they do not have a relevant disability.

These lists are not intended to be exclusive.

Sickness

In general, payment will be stopped for sickness. However, students may be allowed up to two days per term supported by a doctor's note or a signed self-certification form and verified by their Student Progress Mentor.

'Second chances'

It is inevitable that there will be situation where there is doubt that a student is telling the truth, but there is no proof. An example might be where a student fails to phone in having allegedly woken up sick, but claims that the household telephone was out of order. Where something of this nature happens for the first time in a student's career, it can be

acceptable for the college to accept the excuse, but to make clear that this is the only occasion on which a dubious excuse will be accepted.

General authorisations

The college may find it helpful to issue a general authorisation of absence in some circumstances – for example, severe weather.

Guidance in respect of attendance based financial payments

In general, a student should be paid only where they have attended all the sessions for which they are required to register for these payments. If the student has failed to attend, then the student should receive no payment for that week, and the college should notify appropriately in its weekly return.

It is, however, acceptable for the college to deem absence to be authorised. Where an absence is authorised, the student will still be entitled to the weekly payment as though he/she has attended in full (unless, of course, they have an unauthorised absence for a different session).

The fundamental principle is that, based on government guidelines, the college decides whether a particular absence is to be authorised or not.

Partial attendance

For attendance based financial payment purposes the key point is that the college needs to report whether there has been satisfactory attendance; and the college is free to determine the basis for taking that decision. Where a student has not registered for an individual lesson, or arrives late, this should be picked up at the register taken for that lesson, but this may not immediately be detected for payment purposes. The college should ensure that where staff are reporting absence from a lesson, there are arrangements for drawing this to the attention of the Student Mentor or Student Finance Officer.

Study leave

Students should receive their weekly payment during periods of authorised study leave preceding examinations until they have sat their final examination

Notification of non-payment of weekly Bursary Fund

If there is a non-payment of Bursary Fund for any reason, students will be notified by email.

Pay – No pay decisions

- I. The Student Finance Officer will make the decision on whether or not to pay a student for a particular week based on the above guidance.
- II. If a student is not satisfied they should appeal to the Student Finance Officer
- III. If the student is not satisfied with the decision of the Student Finance Officer, they should appeal to the Vice Principal: HR & Student Services whose decision will be final

Note

All payments are made at the discretion of the Student Finance Officer and the Vice Principal: HR & Student Services

How to appeal

If a student is not happy with the allocation made to them from the Discretionary Support Fund, they are to appeal in writing to Student Finance Officer, within 10 days of the date of the letter. A further review of the student's personal circumstances will be considered by the Vice Principal: HR & Student Services and a letter in response sent out within the next 10 days.

Maximum allocation

Each course has a maximum payment threshold, determined by the essential expenditure for that course. Allocations will not exceed that threshold and will be paid in accordance with household income criteria.

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