

University Centre Leeds Hardship Fund Procedure 2022/23

APPROVED BY JANET FAULKNER

Applies to:	
Harrogate College	
Keighley College	
Leeds City College	
Leeds Conservatoire	
White Rose Academies Trust	
University Centre Leeds	x

CHANGE CONTROL

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1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1. The aim of the University Centre Leeds Hardship Fund is to help current students who experience financial hardship with their living costs and excludes any support towards tuition fees, continuation fees or resits.
- 1.2. Students applying to the Hardship Fund will be required to demonstrate that their hardship is a result of unexpected changes to their financial circumstances, rather than the result of insufficient funding from the outset.
- 1.3. The University Centre Hardship Fund is allocated annually and is a limited amount of money. University Centre Leeds are required to allocate the fund appropriately and to ensure that those who need it are given access to it.
- 1.4. Payments from the Fund are discretionary and if awarded, it will be specified whether it will be a repayable loan or non-repayable gift.
- 1.5. All enrolled University Centre Leeds students are eligible (including Masters students) if all the eligibility criteria (detailed below) is met.

2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1. Hardship Fund support is defined as: short-term financial support for students experiencing unexpected and unforeseeable financial difficulties with living costs.

3. ELIGIBILITY

- 3.1 University Centre will consider hardship fund applications in relation to the following criteria and eligibility:
 - 3.1.1 Students are registered on a full-time degree
 - 3.1.2 Students are in receipt of a student loan from the Student Loans Company
 - 3.1.3 Students can provide the required evidence of hardship
 - 3.1.4 Before applying to the fund, students must have applied for (if applicable) and received the maximum amount of statutory funding available i.e. maintenance loan/grant. Students who choose not to apply for their full entitlement will not be eligible to apply to the fund with the exception of funding for DSA support.
- 3.2 Applications can be made during term time, applications during the summer (June-mid September) will only be considered in rare circumstances. Applications submitted in the final four weeks of a course cannot be considered.
- 3.3 If applicants do not meet the criteria relating to student finance due to self-funding the course, applications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

4. APPLICATION PROCESS

- 4.1. An application should be made through the Hardship Fund Application Form, found on the University Centre Hub or at the request of the Student Support Team.
- 4.2. The application must remain confidential and will be considered by the Hardship Review Panel given their knowledge of the student's circumstances. Supporting information will be

requested from the relevant curriculum team. This will include whether students are actively attending and up to date with any work set.

4.3 Evidencing Hardship

4.3.1. When completing the form, students should provide details of the circumstances surrounding their financial hardship. Students will also be required to provide details of their monthly income and expenditure to determine if hardship assistance can be granted.

4.3.2. Students with partners are not required to declare or evidence their partner's income.

4.3.3 Bank Statements

4.3.4. Students will be required to provide evidence of their income and expenditure by submitting three months of bank statements for all bank accounts they hold including savings accounts. The statements must be sent in PDF format and must be a full statement rather than screenshot or partial statement. Screenshots will be rejected and the student will be required to provide additional evidence which may delay the approval process. Any savings that students hold that are earmarked for a specific purpose, for example to purchase property, will not be taken into consideration by the panel when calculating income.

4.3.5. Students should annotate the statement with additional information where required, for example to show where they are receiving support from or sharing expenditure with friends or family.

4.4 Other financial evidence

Students will be asked to provide evidence of other income or expenditure they have that is not contained within their bank statements. Not all expenses need to be evidenced – the additional expenses which do not require evidence are detailed on the application form.

4.5 It is important that students send as much relevant evidence as possible with their initial application for hardship and evidence should be dated as recently as is possible. This will allow us to process their application with as few further evidence requests as possible.

5. NON-STANDARD APPLICATIONS

5.1 Non-standard awards can be made to help meet exceptional or unexpected costs such as repairs to essential household equipment or assist with emergency situations e.g. travel for family illness or bereavement.

5.2 In addition, the fund can consider costs for disabled students which are not met by the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This will be done on a case-by-case basis and the level of support will be determined by available funding resources. Evidence for non-standard applications will be detailed when the student contacts the relevant member of staff within the Student Support Team.

6. DETERMINING HARDSHIP

6.1 Once a student has submitted their application, the hardship panel will review the information detailed on the form and the evidence received in support of their application. In order to determine if the student meets the eligibility criteria, the student's monthly income and expenditure is assessed. Expenditure is broken down into three main spending categories:

- Communication and leisure
- Personal costs
- Food and travel expenses

6.2 Should the review panel require further information or need to discuss a student's claim for hardship they will contact students to obtain further details to help reach a decision on the hardship claim. Students will have two weeks to submit any additional evidence, if the date surpasses the two-week deadline, the application will be denied.

6.3 In addition, should the level of expenditure exceed the average* amount for an expenditure category (see above), the panel may contact the student to discuss this to ensure the expenditure amounts declared are accurate. Once the panel has all of the required information from the student, they will determine if a hardship claim can be approved or not.

6.4 It is important to note that the panel will consider each claim on a case by case basis and can apply discretion if it is warranted.

6.5 The panel will decide whether a successful application will be granted payment either through a gift or loan. The gift is non-repayable. The loan will be paid back through any biannual bursary payments. e.g if a hardship loan of £250 is paid in January, and the maximum £250 bursary payment is expected for April, the student will not receive the bursary payment.

6.6 It can take up to two weeks following an application submission for a decision to be reached in relation to a claim for hardship, with no guarantee of a successful claim. Forms must also be signed and dated to be approved.

7. APPEALS PROCESS

7.1 Students can appeal the decision made by the hardship panel if they feel that they have mitigating circumstances that can explain either:

- the approved procedures for the allocation of the hardship fund were not followed.
- new evidence has emerged that was not part of the original application.
- financial hardship is greater than the panel determined.

7.2 Students should be aware that appeals are usually only successful if they have evidence attached to it; e.g. statements or clarification from external sources.

7.3 Appeals need to be made within 10 working days of students receiving notification that their hardship payment has been denied. Appeals need to be made following the LCC General Appeals process. This can be found on the Higher Education page of the University Centre Leeds website: ucl Leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Academic-Appeals-Process.pdf

7.4 All appeals will be reviewed by the Dean of Higher Education and will be processed within two weeks of the appeal submission.

8. OTHER SUPPORT AVAILABLE

8.1 As part of the application process, students will be encouraged to explore other methods of financial support. Information, advice and guidance will be provided for any Government funding. Support can include:

- Exploring Student Finance England loan entitlement.
- Applications for additional funding (Parents' Learning Allowance, Childcare Grant).
- Student Finance England Financial Hardship application.

8.2 Students will also be directed towards charities that may be able to offer assistance and advice while waiting for financial hardship payment claims to be processed.

- www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/ - for impartial money and debt advice;
- www.turn2us.org.uk - a good source of information regarding charities that help people with additional funds. It is not targeted at students. Refer to the 'find benefits and grants' section;
- www.prospects.ac.uk - in the 'Applying for University' section of this website advice is given on Student Loans and finance. This includes tuition fee loans, loans for living costs, hardship funds and student bank accounts. This is aimed at postgraduate students;
- www.stepchange.org - an online debt advice organisation with phone and online help tools.

9. CONTACT US

9.1 If you would like to get in touch with the hardship team, please email universitycentrehardshipfund@ucl Leeds.ac.uk

10. VERSION INFORMATION

VERSION	DATE	SUMMARY OF CHANGES
V1	FEBRUARY 2022	CREATED