Open College of the Arts (OCA)
Learner Support Scheme policy

Document History

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The purpose of the policy
The Learner Support Scheme exists to facilitate access to the OCA provision for those who might otherwise be unable to benefit because of financial barriers to continue their studies. Consistent with the OCA's charitable purpose, the fund is to be used to support access to and progression in Higher Education.

Summary of Changes since last version
- New policies are referenced in the section on ‘Related OCA policies and procedures.
- Reference to an instalment fee removed after 1.10 as this is no longer applicable.
- Amendment to the Student Support Bursary (£100) to reflect that payment cannot be made until the unit cancellation period has passed.

Who does the policy apply to?
This policy applies to OCA applicants, students, tutors and staff. Where funding is specific to certain groups this will be outlined.

OCA's guiding principles
In considering requests for funding, OCA applies the following principles:

- Applications must meet any financial, academic, or course entry criteria for their funding purpose
- Applicants must not have savings sufficient to meet the costs they are applying for funding towards
- Applicants must be in good financial and academic standing with the OCA
- Previous enrolments and progress will be considered as part of the application. Applications from continuing students will be prioritised if limited funding remains.
- OCA will consider all applications fairly and without bias
• OCA will provide advice on the Learner Support Scheme, advocating the best possible solutions for students and applicants as possible
• OCA will request further information, where this is necessary, with due care, consideration, and empathy

Related OCA policies and procedures
This policy is part of the Student Regulations. Also of relevance are OCA’s Terms and Conditions, Academic Frameworks, Student Protection Plan, Student Accessibility Policy, Student Complaints and Appeals Policy and Wellbeing Policy.

Learner Support Scheme policy
The Learner Support Scheme can support and fund:

1. Applications for bursaries (unit fees)
   1.1 Applicants must be studying within the UK and must not be eligible for other sources of support such as Student Finance fee loans or grants via Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales, Student Finance Northern Ireland. Student Awards Agency Scotland students can apply where SAAS funding will not fully cover the unit fee.
   1.2 Applicants must apply for a bursary before enrolling to an OCA unit / programme of study. Retrospective applications will only be considered for instalments where a change of financial circumstances is evidenced.
   1.3 Applicants must be studying towards, or applying to study towards an OCA Open Foundations course, an OCA Short Course, or an OCA Undergraduate or Postgraduate degree.
   1.4 Personal development learners are not eligible to apply for a bursary towards unit fees other than where a change of financial circumstances is evidenced which would prevent instalment payments from being met.
   1.5 Applicants cannot take up any other promotional offers, reductions or discounts alongside a bursary; the bursary will be applicable to full-price units only.
   1.6 Applicants must meet the eligibility criteria of household income assessment and any OCA entry requirements that apply to the chosen programme of study. See paragraph 1.9.
   1.7 Applicants must be unable to cover the fees via savings, and must evidence a net household income under £25,000, assessed by review of up-to-date documentation via some or all of the following:
     • Wage slips or P60s (at least the last 3 wage slips)
     • The latest verified accounts for self-employed applicants
     • Current tax credit / Universal Credit award notice (full breakdown)
     • Other current benefits paperwork (e.g. housing benefit, out-of-work benefits etc)
Bank statements (only where a decision cannot be made based on the above documentation, or where some of the documentation is not available).

1.8 At the discretion of the Head of Student Services, applicants with a household income above the threshold for the year who have evidenced exceptional and unavoidable financial commitments may still be considered.

1.9 A personal statement should be included in the application to demonstrate commitment to study. For continuing students, good academic standing will be required; engagement may be ascertained by tutor feedback and the active study processes in place. It is not expected or required that students are exceptional; it is intended to ensure only that applicants can benefit from their requested programme of study.

1.10 Support can be applied for on a unit by unit basis as follows:

1.10.1 Foundations students can apply for up to 50% of the unit fee, with the remaining balance paid by agreed instalments. For students with low (level 2 or below) or no prior qualifications it may be possible to award up to 80% subject to available funds.

1.10.2 Undergraduate students can apply for up to 50% of the unit fee to study one unit at a time, with the remaining balance paid by agreed instalments.

1.10.3 Short Course students can apply for up to 50% of the unit fee, with the remaining balance to be paid prior to the unit start date

1.10.4 Postgraduate students can apply for up to £500 per unit. This must be applied for by the application deadline for the course for new students, and by each assessment event for continuing students. N.B. Postgraduate support is capped at 12.5% of the Learner Support budget agreed.

1.10.5 Students learning within prison / secure environments can apply for up to 50% of the course fee.

1.11 In exceptional circumstances the Learner Support Adviser can recommend up to 100% funding for a unit. In practice, this is likely to be for continuing students experiencing sudden and unexpected hardship whose degree timeframes may be jeopardised by the delay.

1.12 In the case of students applying retrospectively for support with instalments due to an evidenced change of financial circumstances a bursary can be considered of up to 50% of the remaining instalment fees but the total award will not exceed the stated maximums in 1.10 and 1.11

2. Applications for bursaries (student support)

2.1 Applicants must be studying within the UK and must be enrolled on an OCA Open Foundations course or an OCA Undergraduate or Postgraduate degree.
2.2 Applicants must be up to date with fee payments or have an agreed payment plan in place with the Finance team.

2.3 Applicants must be unable to meet the costs via savings, maintenance loans or grants, and must evidence a net household income under £25,000, assessed by review of up-to-date documentation via some or all of the following:

- Wage slips or P60s (at least the last 3 wage slips)
- The latest verified accounts for self-employed applicants
- Current tax credit / Universal Credit award notice (full breakdown)
- Other current benefits paperwork (e.g. housing benefit, out-of-work benefits etc)
- Bank statements (only where a decision cannot be made based on the above documentation, or where some of the documentation is not available)

2.4 Student support bursaries may be requested for items which will support study. Please note this list is not meant to be exhaustive:

- Arts consumables
- Postage and packaging
- Textbooks
- Stationery
- Computer software / equipment / subscriptions
- Study visit travel / costs

2.5 Students may apply once per unit for a maximum of £100 per application and this can only be paid once the unit cancellation period has passed.

3. Applications for bursaries (specific one-off support)

3.1 Applicants must be enrolled on an Undergraduate or Postgraduate degree.

3.2 Applicants must be up to date with fee payments or have an agreed payment plan in place with the Finance team.

3.3 Applicants must be unable to cover the fees via savings, and must evidence a net household income under £25,000, assessed by review of up to date documentation via some or all of the following:

- Wage slips or P60s (at least the last 3 wage slips)
- The latest verified accounts for self-employed applicants
- Current tax credit / Universal Credit award notice (full breakdown)
- Other current benefits paperwork (e.g. housing benefit, out-of-work benefits etc)
- Bank statements (only where a decision cannot be made based on the above documentation, or where some of the documentation is not available)

3.4 One-off support may be applied for towards the following specific purposes:

3.4.1 Up to £200 to cover the cost of the student’s contribution for a DSA-awarded computer, to be paid directly to the approved supplier.
3.4.2 Up to £400 towards the cost of a post-16 diagnostic assessment for dyslexia where scores on the British Dyslexia Association Adult Checklist are 45 or above, to be paid directly to the approved provider. A higher amount may be agreed at the discretion of the Head of Student Services, if it can be evidenced that there are no alternatives within this figure, and sufficient funds are available.

3.5 Funding cannot normally be used towards course transfer fees or Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) fees. Exceptions to this may be where there is valid mitigation, agreed at the discretion of the Head of Student Services.

3.6 Where applicable under clause 3.4.1, students will be expected to provide evidence of at least two quotes and the provider will be paid directly by the OCA.

4. Additional Learner Support and Wellbeing

5.1 The Learner Support Team may also allocate funding to cover 100% of the costs of agreed reasonable adjustments or additional tutorials arising through mitigation subject to the relevant authorisation.

5.2 Funding may also be allocated to cover wellbeing activities or initiatives to support students.

Making an application
You should apply on the form relevant to the funding purpose. Please title your email ‘Learner Support Scheme application’ and send your application form with any required supporting evidence via the Learner Support helpdesk, or by email to learnersupport@oca.ac.uk

Postal applications can be sent to the Head Office address for the attention of the Learner Support Team - Open College of the Arts, The Michael Young Arts Centre, Room 301, DMC02, County Way, Barnsley. S70 2AG.

Your application and supporting evidence will be reviewed to ensure it is complete. You will receive notification that your application is under review. If the form is incomplete and / or we need further evidence, we will inform you in writing, giving you a deadline for providing the additional information. You will receive a response within 20 working days of your review notification.

14.13 Decisions of the Learner Support Team are final and may not be appealed except where it is believed an administrative error has occurred. Students should refer to the Student Complaints and Non-Academic Appeals Procedure.

Authorities
The budget is managed by the designated Senior Learner Support Adviser, subject to that person acting within the authorities set out in the policy and under the oversight of the Head of Student Services.
The Learner Support Team recommends funding proposals. The Head of Student Services has authority to agree funding up to £3,000 for any individual application. For amounts in excess of this, approval is also required from the OCA Principal.

**Support for the policy**
Applicants should seek advice and guidance from the Learner Support Team prior to making an application to the Learner Support Scheme either via the Learner Support helpdesk, or by emailing learnersupport@oca.ac.uk.

Guidance notes on making an application are included in the relevant application forms, in the Student Handbook, and on the OCA website.

**Control of the policy**
This policy was authored by Lia Harness, Senior Learner Support Adviser, and Craig Dewis, Head of Student Services in consultation with OCA Staff and given approval through OCA Strategy and Operations Meeting in July 2023.

**Reviewing the policy**
OCA will work closely with OCA Students Association (SA) to ensure the scope of the policy fits the needs of the student body so that support can be directed as appropriate.

The next review date is June 2024. If you would like to raise any issues around this policy then you should contact the Learner Support Team either via the Learner Support helpdesk, or by emailing learnersupport@oca.ac.uk.