

Learner Support Scheme Policy

From August 2024

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1. The purpose of the policy

- 1.1. The Learner Support Scheme facilitates access to study for students who face financial difficulties, or are not eligible for other forms of financial study support. Through the Learner Support scheme eligible students are able to access financial support for OCA tuition fees and other associated study costs.

2. Scope

2.1. What does this policy cover?

- 2.1.1. This policy applies to OCA enquirers, applicants, and students.
- 2.1.2. The policy covers the types of funding available to support study with OCA, and how to apply for them. It also covers the eligibility criteria to access different types of funding.

2.2. What does this policy not cover?

- 2.2.1. This policy does not cover financial support in relation to debt, maintenance costs, or other costs not associated with study.
- 2.2.2. This policy does not ordinarily cover funding for undergraduate units taken as personal development.
- 2.2.3. Funding cannot be used towards course transfer fees or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) fees.
- 2.2.4. Certain types of funding may only be available at specific times and to specific groups; please see details on available funding for details.

3. Guiding Principles

- 3.1. In considering requests for funding, OCA applies the following principles:

- 3.1.1. Applications must meet any financial, academic, or course entry criteria.
- 3.1.2. Applications for specific funding must be available for the study option you are enrolling to.
- 3.1.3. You agree to remain actively engaged with your study option throughout, as defined by OCA's [Active Study Policy](#).
- 3.1.4. You must be in [good financial](#) and [academic standing](#) with the OCA.

- 3.1.5. If you have previously studied with OCA your past progress and outcomes will be considered as part of your application.
- 3.1.6. OCA will consider all applications fairly and without bias.
- 3.1.7. OCA will provide advice on the Learner Support Scheme, advocating the best possible solutions for students and applicants as possible.
- 3.1.8. OCA will request further information, where this is necessary, with due care, consideration, and empathy.
- 3.1.9. Applications from continuing students will be prioritised if limited funding remains.

4. Eligibility

- 4.1. Applications for funding from the Learner Support Scheme will be considered against the following eligibility criteria:
 - 4.1.1. You must be ordinarily resident and studying in the UK.
 - 4.1.2. You must not be eligible for other sources of financial support such as Student Finance loans or grants through Student Finance England, Wales, or Northern Ireland.
 - 4.1.3. You have made an application to Student Awards Agency Scotland or Student Finance Northern Ireland where your funding does not cover the full cost of an OCA unit/course (up to one unit/course per academic year).
 - 4.1.4. You have made an application to Student Finance Wales for the second unit of study on an undergraduate degree within the same academic year that you commenced your degree, and your funding does not cover the full cost of an OCA unit/course (up to one unit/course per academic year).
 - 4.1.5. You must have a net household income of less than £25,000 for the last complete tax year, or be in receipt of a qualifying benefit.
 - 4.1.6. You are ineligible for funding for a postgraduate study through Student Finance as you are over the age of 65.
- 4.2. At the discretion of the Head of Student Services (or their nominated representative), applicants with a household income above the threshold for the year who have evidenced exceptional and unavoidable financial commitments may still be considered.
- 4.3. In addition, specific funding options may also have eligibility criteria attached; please see the relevant funding option for further details.

5. Evidence of Financial Eligibility

5.1. To confirm eligibility for financial criteria, OCA will need to see and confirm one of the following depending on your employment status:

5.1.1. Employed

- 5.1.1.1. P60/P45.
- 5.1.1.2. Wage slips from month 12 or tax week 53 showing 'total paid to date'.

5.1.2. Self-Employed

- 5.1.2.1. Letter from a chartered or certified accountant confirming total income received in the last tax year.
- 5.1.2.2. HMRC tax calculation.
- 5.1.2.3. P60, P11D or confirmation of earnings from your chartered or certified accountant.

5.1.3. Qualifying Benefit

- 5.1.3.1. A qualifying benefit is any of the following:
 - 5.1.3.1.1. Universal Credit.
 - 5.1.3.1.2. Income Support.
 - 5.1.3.1.3. Housing Benefit.
 - 5.1.3.1.4. Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).
 - 5.1.3.1.5. Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA).
 - 5.1.3.1.6. A reduction under the Council Tax scheme (not including the single occupant reduction).

6. Tuition Fee Bursaries

6.1. You 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 after the cancellation period.

6.2. You cannot take up any other promotional offers, reductions or discounts alongside a bursary; the bursary will be applicable to full-price units only.

6.3. You will need to provide a personal statement in your application to demonstrate commitment to study, outlining reasons for wishing to do the study option.

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

- 6.4.1. Foundations students can apply for up to 75% of the unit fee, with the remaining balance paid by agreed instalments.
 - 6.4.2. Undergraduate students can apply for up to 75% of the unit fee to study one unit at a time, with the remaining balance paid by agreed instalments.
 - 6.4.3. 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.
 - 6.4.4. Postgraduate students can apply for up to 25% 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.
- 6.5. In exceptional circumstances the Learner Support Manager can recommend up to 100% funding for a unit.
- 6.6. Retrospective applications may be considered if you are applying for support with instalments. To be eligible you must be able to evidence a change of financial circumstances. For appropriate evidence please see Section 5 (Evidence of Financial Eligibility). If you are awarded funding the total amount will not exceed the amounts listed in paragraph 6.4.

7. Study-Related Costs Bursary

- 7.1. To be eligible you must be enrolled onto a Foundations unit, an Undergraduate or Postgraduate degree.
- 7.2. Students who are not ordinarily resident and studying in the UK may apply for this bursary. If you are outside the UK you must meet the financial criteria listed in the eligibility section, and evidence must be submitted in English (with an official translation if required). Currency conversion (confirmed by [OANDA](#)) will be taken from the date on which you make your application.
- 7.3. Student support bursaries may be requested for items which will support study. Please note this list is not meant to be exhaustive:
 - 7.3.1. Arts consumables
 - 7.3.2. Postage and packaging
 - 7.3.3. Textbooks
 - 7.3.4. Stationery
 - 7.3.5. Computer software / equipment / subscriptions
 - 7.3.6. Study visit travel / costs

- 7.4. You may apply once per unit for a maximum of £200 per application and this can only be paid once the unit cancellation period has passed.

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

- 8.1. To be eligible you must be enrolled onto an Undergraduate or Postgraduate degree.
- 8.2. One-off support may be applied for towards the following specific purposes, payable after the cancellation period has passed:
- 8.2.1. Up to £250 to cover the cost for a new laptop/pc/tablet, to be paid retrospectively on provision of a receipt (less than one month old at point of application). If you have been awarded a DSA computer this can be paid directly to the supplier.
- 8.2.2. Up to £500 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 (or their nominated representative), if it can be evidenced that there are no alternatives within this figure, and sufficient funds are available.*
- 8.3. Where applicable under clause 8.2.2, you will be expected to provide evidence of at least two quotes and the provider will be paid directly by the OCA.

9. Additional Learner Support and Wellbeing

- 9.1. Funding may be awarded at the discretion of the Head of Student Services towards projects and initiatives for the betterment of the OCA student community.

10. Making an application

- 10.1. 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
- 10.2. 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.

10.3. 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.

11. Appeals

11.1. 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](#).

12. Related OCA policies and procedures

12.1. 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](#).

13. Support for the policy

13.1. 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.

13.2. Guidance notes on making an application are included in the relevant application forms, in the [Student Handbook](#), and on [the OCA website](#).

14. Changes from the previous policy

14.1. Transfer to new policy template.

14.2. Amendments to wording for clarity and readability throughout.

14.3. Removal of 3.1.3 regarding savings requirements.

14.4. Introduction of paragraphs 3.2 (eligibility for funding) and 3.4 (active study).

14.5. Introduction of paragraphs 4.1.3 (eligibility for SAAS or Student Finance Northern Ireland applications), 4.1.4 (eligibility for Student Finance Wales applications), and 4.1.6 (eligibility for MA applications).

14.6. Introduction of section 5 (evidence of financial eligibility).

14.7. Change to paragraphs 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 from 50% to 75%.

- 14.8. Change to paragraph 6.4.4 from £500 to 25%.
- 14.9. Change to paragraph 6.6 from up to 50% of fees to link total awards to paragraph 6.4.
- 14.10. Introduction of paragraph 7.1, including eligibility for students studying outside the UK.
- 14.11. Change to paragraph 7.3 increasing amount from £100 per unit to £200.
- 14.12. Change to paragraph 8.2.1 increasing amount towards computer contributions from £200 to £250.
- 14.13. Change to paragraph 8.2.2 increasing amount towards dyslexia assessments from £400 to £500.