

Financial Assistance Fund Policy & Supplementary Guidance

2024-25

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1. Introduction

The Financial Assistance Fund (FAF) is made available by the University to provide **discretionary** financial help for full and part-time international and EU students.

The University's Student Experience and Wellbeing Sub-Committee are responsible for approving the guiding principles and caps utilised in assessments. The Sub-Committee reports to the University's Education Committee and consists of academic representatives from all three faculties, Professional Services and NUSU.

2. Purpose of the Funds

The Fund is made available to support eligible students who experience **unexpected** financial difficulties. We would define this as:

- struggling to make ends meet;
- being unable to cover essential, day-to-day living costs.

The FAF cannot act as a major source of funding nor can it be used to fund tuition fees, fines, debts or replace statutory funding.

3. Eligibility Criteria

Before making an application for assistance students must have accessed **all other sources of funding** available to them; this includes accessing all savings including ISAs and also applying for and obtaining any interest free overdraft available, if eligible. **Due to the discretionary nature of the Fund there is no guarantee that an applicant will receive funding.** Successful applicants may receive either a non-repayable award or a loan. Loans will usually be issued where the applicant has a temporary cash flow problem such as a delay in sponsor funding. Applicants must provide evidence of the 'unexpected' circumstances they have encountered, as the Fund requires proof that they had sufficient funding in place at the beginning of their course to cover the full duration of their studies. Hoping to secure paid work once they have commenced their course, but failing to find a job, would not be deemed unexpected.

The Fund cannot provide assistance to those students who have willingly compromised their financial security or who were underfunded when they commenced their course.

In order to be eligible to apply for the FAF applicants must be:

- registered and in attendance on a full-time course of at least one academic year in duration. Undergraduate students studying on a part-time basis must be working a minimum of 60 credits in an academic year, where the full time equivalent is 120 credit in a year, or studying at least 50% of a full time course: similar rules apply to postgraduates where 180 credits is full time;
- a student from outside the UK and must not meet the residency requirements for a home student;
- able to demonstrate that they commenced their course with adequate funding for the duration of their studies
- be able to demonstrate what has changed with the funding provision they had in place when they obtained their visa
- able to show that they need financial assistance and have explored all other ways of supporting themselves.

External and Suspended Students

Students on an interruption of studies (suspended) due to ill health, a disability or medical condition, caring responsibilities, maternity leave or for other reasons deemed appropriate by the assessors are eligible to apply to the FAF. Evidence of both personal circumstances and the intention to return to study must be provided with the application External students are also eligible to apply for support from the FAF and must evidence both personal circumstances and the intention to return to study.

4. Application Process

The majority of students will apply for support by completing the relevant online application form available from the Student Financial Support Team's website: www.ncl.ac.uk/student-financial-support/hardship/ Supporting documentation requirements are listed on the application form. Students who require the application form in an alternative format should contact the Team by emailing: student.fin-supp@ncl.ac.uk

The Team will contact students who submit an incomplete application, or to clarify any outstanding queries. Subsequent follow up will delay the processing and outcome of an application so it is important to provide a fully completed application form and all required supporting documentation at the time of submission.

In-person or Teams appointments can be arranged for students who require assistance in submitting an application. Students should contact the Team by emailing student.fin-supp@ncl.ac.uk to request an appointment. A **pre-arranged Teams or in person appointment** will usually be one hour in duration. In most instances only two submission appointments will be offered so it is important to notify the team if you are unable to make the pre-arranged appointment offered. If you have difficult or complex circumstances, it may be possible to offer a third appointment. No more than three appointments will be offered to any student.

Incomplete applications will not be accepted or processed.

Only fully completed application forms with all required supporting documentation will be assessed. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their application is complete and that all necessary documentation is provided.

Students must ensure that the information provided in their application is accurate and complete to the best of their knowledge. Providing inaccurate information or failing to disclose details about all bank accounts could lead to disqualification of the application and may result in [disciplinary action](#).

For help completing the application form contact the team by emailing student.fin-supply@ncl.ac.uk or telephoning 0191 208 5679.

Although the FAF is a full year assessment students may reapply if they experience a **significant change** in their circumstances. Restating previous reasons is not a basis for a resubmission.

For any subsequent application the student must show that their circumstances have changed significantly since their original application and be able to clearly demonstrate how income and expenditure has changed.

Students must contact the team at student.fin-supply@ncl.ac.uk if they want to explore their eligibility for a reassessment. If eligible, a reassessment application form will be issued. In order to reach a decision about whether the team can undertake a reassessment the student may be asked to submit up to date documentation. The decision to conduct a reassessment is entirely at the discretion of the team. If a student has not changed their behaviour or has not acted on advice provided in the outcome letter from their initial application, a reassessment will not be conducted.

Some students may be eligible to (re) apply for assistance during their summer vacation using the FAF Summer Fund form. Students who wish to apply during the summer vacation can obtain a summer application form from our website: www.ncl.ac.uk/student-financial-support/hardship/

Students who are eligible for help during the summer period are non-final year students:

- with children;
- with caring responsibilities;
- resitting / retaking part of their course;
- who are ill or have a disability and not eligible for benefits;
- who have no alternative substantial means of support and who are unable to secure alternative funding (the team have discretion to determine if a summer application can be accepted on these grounds).

The data provided in the application form will be processed in line with the GDPR and the Student Health and Wellbeing Privacy Notice which can be found at: www.ncl.ac.uk/foi/publication-scheme/policies

Data will be stored in accordance with the University's Records Management Policy. Identifiable data will not usually be shared with third parties (separate legal entities to the University) without explicit consent, except when the University is required to by law. On rare occasions, where it is suspected there is involvement in criminal activities such as money laundering, fraud or funding of terrorism we will report this to the Police.

5. Assessment Process and Payment

All applications will be considered by one of the hardship assessors. A decision will only be finalised, and an outcome issued once the assessment has been conducted in line with the agreed policy outlined in this document.

The assessment will be based on the actual number of weeks a student is registered and in attendance. Students should calculate their income and expenditure for their entire academic year: this is usually 38 weeks for undergraduates and 52 weeks for postgraduates. Some courses such as PGCEs and the later years of MBBS and BDS differ in length. Students should check with their academic school if they are unclear on the length of their academic year. Non-final year undergraduate students who have children or who are unable to work due to ill health or disability, should complete their income and expenditure over a 43 week period.

There are two assessment processes, **Standard** and **Non-Standard**.

A **standard assessment** will always be carried out in the first instance and will compare income and expenditure. The income and expenditure figures used in assessments may not always be the same as those provided by the student. The SESWC determine the income that should be included or disregarded as part of the assessment as well as setting the maximum caps for items of expenditure.

For details on which types of income will be included or disregarded, please refer to Appendix A. Generally, most statutory, personal, and institutional income will be considered in the assessment, as the FAF is intended to be a last resort.

All income received from family members or friends will be included as income unless it is clear that the funds were a loan which has been repaid. Both regular and one off contributions, including gifts and inheritance will be factored in to assessments. If an applicant outlines that funds are ring-fenced or cannot be drawn upon to support living costs, official evidence must be provided to support this claim. Financial support from family paid in other forms, such as direct rent payments or covering mobile phone bills will also be included as income since corresponding expenditure will not be reduced. If there is any uncertainty about the level of family contribution, students may be asked to submit additional bank statements later in the year, which could result in a reduction or cancellation of funding (where subsequent instalments of FAF are due to be paid).

Savings from the beginning of the year will be included in the assessment as available income. The savings amount will be calculated as the total net balance

across all accounts at the start of the assessment period. For example, if a course begins on the 16 September 2024, the savings will be calculated based on the balances as of 15 September 2024. Interest-free overdrafts will not be considered when determining the level of savings for applications submitted during the academic year.

After the income to be used in the standard assessment has been determined, expenditure will then be calculated.

Costs associated with travel by car may be accepted as reasonable but only if individual circumstances warrant this (e.g. young children, disability which affects mobility, for the purposes of regular paid work) where a car is a requirement or travel by car is cheaper than public transport. Normally single students will not be expected to own or run cars.

If childcare costs are incurred estimated costs for the full assessment period as well as evidence from the childcare provider should be provided. Only costs incurred with registered childcare providers will be considered.

Assessments cannot usually factor in debt repayments. Where a student has agreed a realistic debt repayment plan and has ceased using that source of credit, minimum repayments may be included as expenditure in the assessment for a standard award. Rent arrears will not usually be included as debt unless evidence is provided to show there is a risk of homelessness or legal action. The Fund will not normally consider repayment of non-priority debts though there may be some exceptional cases where non-priority debt might be treated as a priority. Debt repayment to family members and friends will also not usually be included in assessments.

Students who incur additional travel costs due to unexpected circumstances (e.g. family illness / bereavement / personal illness or medical issues) or to attend placement or graduate interviews should provide a breakdown of these costs in addition to their usual travel costs along with supporting documentation as it may be possible to factor some of these costs into the assessment, over and above the usual travel cap.

Students who incur additional costs due to caring responsibilities may wish to provide a breakdown and supporting documentation for these costs as it may be possible to factor some of these costs into the assessment.

Students who incur additional 'start-up' costs may wish to provide a breakdown and supporting documentation for these costs as it may be possible to factor some of these costs into the assessment. This may include situations such as having to move out of accommodation unexpectedly and relocating to a new property due to a significant breakdown in relations with family / partner / housemates or may be as a result of having a baby. These costs only be considered if they have not be supported through other funding schemes provided by the team.

Students who incur additional costs as a result of transitioning may wish to provide a breakdown and supporting documentation outlining the additional costs they are incurring as it may be possible to factor some of these costs in to the assessment.

The standard assessment compares the calculated income and expenditure to establish if a student has an additional need (i.e. their expenditure is greater than their income). 100% of the additional need will be awarded up to the relevant maximum award cap (£1,650 for single students and £2,750 for students with dependents). Awards that exceed the maximum caps will not be granted under any circumstances.

Where a standard assessment does not establish an additional need assessors will then consider if there are grounds for a **non-standard assessment** to be conducted. Non-standard assessments will be completed for students who have to meet exceptional costs, who are genuinely unable to work or who are about to withdraw for financial reasons. The minimum award required to allow the student to continue on their course will be made.

Assessors will usually take into account any emergency loan funding previously issued and will convert this into an award removing the need for repayment if a FAF application is successful.

If successful, payment will be made directly into a student's nominated bank account, as specified on their application form via BACS (credit transfer) within 5 working days of the outcome letter being sent. Only in **very exceptional** circumstances will other forms of payment be considered such as direct payments to landlords. Cash payments cannot be made. Awards will be phased if a student is due to receive a large award or if it is felt this will assist with cash-flow.

6. Outcome and Appeals Process

FAF applicants should receive an outcome within 15 working days where a fully completed application form with all supporting documentation is submitted. Outcomes will be sent to the student's university email address. Outcomes cannot be discussed over the telephone. If missing information or the need for further clarification is discovered after submission, the 15 working day turnaround time cannot be guaranteed. .

To support financial capability, students may receive advisory points in their outcome letters. These may include suggestions for increasing income, reducing expenditure, and appropriate signposting to further resources

In some instances students may be referred for compulsory budgeting advice with payment of subsequent instalments subject to attendance. Non-attendance will result in non-payment of any future instalments due to be released.

Students may be asked to provide additional bank statements before receiving payment of subsequent instalments. Failure to supply these statements; evidence of undeclared additional income or not following advice given in outcome letters could lead to the cancellation or reduction of future instalments.

Any correspondence will clearly outline if there are conditions attached to the payment of FAF awards and loans.

If a student needs clarification on how their outcome was determined or believes there was an error in the assessment, they will be given more detailed information about the assessment process and the calculations involved. If they are still dissatisfied they will be invited to attend a review meeting. Students must attend a review meeting before submitting an appeal. A review meeting is less formal than an appeal and will give an opportunity to discuss their application and assessment. If new information and documentation is provided as part of the review process and this may affect the outcome a reassessment will be undertaken. Only one review meeting will be offered in any one academic year.

If, after review, a student still believes the assessment is incorrect, they have the option to submit an appeal. They will be given an appeals application form. An appeal must be submitted within one month of receiving the outcome letter. Supporting documentation must be provided to substantiate claims. All appeals will be considered by the Student Financial Support Team Manager or the Director of the Student Health and Wellbeing Service. No one involved in the original assessment will be involved in the appeal. Not liking the outcome of an application is not grounds for an appeal and students should remember that there is no entitlement to receive assistance. If students are dissatisfied with the standard of service they received they should follow the University [Complaints Procedure](#).

Students who apply to the FAF may be contacted and asked to complete a feedback survey to help evaluate the service.

APPENDIX A – TREATMENT OF INCOME

All income from any source will be included in the calculation with a few exceptions – see below

Income source	Include / disregard	Notes
Statutory		
Overseas Government or Embassy	Include living cost element / disregard fee element	
Student Loans for living costs	Include in full	
Student Loans for tuition fees	Disregard	
Maintenance / Special Support Grant	Include in full	
Adult Dependants Grant	Include in full	
Parents Learning Allowance	Include in full	
Childcare Grant	Include in full	
SAAS Young Persons Bursary Independent Students' Bursary	Include in full	
NHS Bursary / Grant / Learning Support Fund	Include in full	
Local Authority Care Leaver Bursary	Include in full	
Means-tested Benefits	Include in full	*For advice about benefits and tax credits contact the Student Advice Centre: 0191 239 3979
Non means-tested Benefits	Disregard	*
Tax Credits	Include in full	*
Pension Credit	Include in full	*
Postgraduate Master's Loan	Include in full	
Postgraduate Doctoral Loan	Include in full	

Research Council Studentship/ Stipend	Include living cost element	
Teacher Training Bursary / Scholarship	Include in full	
Disabled Students' Allowances	**Disregard	<p>**DSA support can be paid into a student's bank account or directly to an external provider.</p> <p>DSA paid to external providers or as reimbursements will be disregarded.</p> <p>DSA income paid directly to student, not for reimbursement purposes, may be included as income and may also affect how related expenditure is treated.</p>
Personal:		
Paid Work	<p>UG: Disregard in standard term-time assessment</p> <p>Include (up to agreed weekly cap of £172) in non-standard assessments</p> <p>Include in summer assessments</p> <p>PG: Include in full in both standard and non-standard assessments</p>	<p>Salary will be included for students on a paid placements</p> <p>Income from paid work to be included for external students / suspended students</p>

Sponsorship	Include living cost element / disregard fee element	
One-off contributions from family / friends (including monetary gifts)	Include in full	If payable as a loan and bank statements show repayment to family / friend income can be disregarded
Regular contributions from family / friends (including monetary gifts)	Include in full	If payable as a loan and bank statements show repayment to family / friend can be disregarded
Savings	Include in full This includes all Individual Savings Accounts such as Lifetime ISAs and Help to Buy ISAs	Figure will be taken from the first day of the academic year but will not include interest free overdrafts
Investments / Dividends / Shares	Include in full	
Personal Loans	Include in full	
Pensions	Include in full	
Inheritance	Include in full	* Official evidence, such as documentation from a solicitor must be provided if funds can only be used for a specific purpose or cannot be drawn upon
Income from gambling / prizes etc.	Include in full	

Income from selling unwanted belongings	Disregard	
Child maintenance payments	Include in full	
Scholarships / Awards from external organisations	Include living cost element / disregard fee element	
Returned deposits from previous academic year	Include in full	
University Funding		
University Scholarship	Include living cost element / disregard fee element	
Academic Prize	Include in full	
Subject / Sport Scholarship	Include in full	
Donor funded Scholarship	Include in full	
Research Scholarship	Include in full	
Care Leaver Bursary	Include in full	
Career Insight Bursary	Include in full	
School Travel Bursary	Include in full	
NUSU Activities Access Fund (previously WP Bursary)	Include in full	
Student IT Hardship Fund	Include in full	
FAF Emergency Funding	Include in full	