

FINANCIAL AID

FINANCIAL AID POLICY & TERMS OF REFERENCE

Financial Aid Policy

Overview and principles

1. Oxford Brookes University makes provision to offer aid to enrolled students who encounter financial hardship. The purpose of this provision is to enable students to continue their studies in circumstances where their participation is threatened by financial hardship.
2. The principles governing the award of financial aid at Oxford Brookes are as follows:
 - a) That financial aid is available only to current, enrolled students of the University;
 - b) That it is provided for the specific purpose of enabling students to continue in Higher Education;
 - c) That it is provided to meet costs which are not covered by statutory or other sources of funding. Financial Aid is not intended to form the sole form of support for any student. Therefore, students need to have exhausted all statutory support prior to applying for financial aid;
 - d) That each application for financial aid is considered fairly and consistently with regard to these principles and to any eligibility rules which may apply to particular sources of funding;
 - e) That applicants will be required to provide clear documentary evidence of their eligibility for funding and the circumstances which have given rise to financial need;
 - f) That the eligibility criteria and the evidence requirements will be clearly communicated to students in advance of their application;
 - g) That the terms of any payment will be clearly communicated to students and agreed in advance of payment.
3. The amount of funding that is available in each academic year is described and confirmed in the University's Office For Fair Access (OFFA) agreement.
4. The available funding comprises the Hardship Fund, which is money made available by the University to Home; the International Fund to make funds available to International Students; and the Postgraduate Fund to make funds available to Home students and students not eligible for either the Hardship or International Funds.
5. Eligibility for the funds is as follows:
 - Currently enrolled undergraduate 'Home' including Associate Students of Oxford Brookes are eligible for support from the Hardship Fund.

- Students on approved temporary withdrawal ('Home' students who have not permanently withdrawn from studies and intend to return to their course) are only eligible to apply for help from the Fund if they can demonstrate that an award would make a material difference to their capacity to return to University.
- International students may be assisted from the International Fund. To be eligible, International students must have had adequate funding for both tuition fees and living costs in place at the start of their course and of the academic year 2023-24, and demonstrate a significant change of circumstances after the start of academic year 2023-24.
- Home postgraduate students and enrolled students not eligible for either the Hardship or International Funds, may be assisted from the Postgraduate Fund. To be eligible, postgraduate students must have had adequate funding for both tuition fees and living costs in place at the start of their course and of the academic year 2023-24, and demonstrate a significant change of circumstances after the start of academic year 2023-24.
- Global Banking School (GBS) students are not eligible for the Oxford Brookes financial aid and should seek assistance from their campus Welfare team.
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Degree Apprenticeship students are not eligible for the Oxford Brookes financial aid.

Purpose of Financial Aid provision at Oxford Brookes University

6. The purpose of financial aid is to support students in continuing their studies in instances where they have particular financial needs (see "Priority" below), or where an unforeseen event has resulted in significant additional costs or a significant loss of income.
7. Whilst all eligible students may apply for financial aid awards, students who may be considering leaving higher education because of financial problems are particularly encouraged to apply.
8. Students' individual circumstances will be taken into account for each application. However, the norm will be that awards made will be to assist students in making up any substantial, evidenced deficit between accepted reasonable expenditure and expected income. This does not necessarily mean that 100% of any such deficit will be met by an award. The Financial Aid Committee will have responsibility for determining the percentage of this deficit which will be used to calculate the amount of awards. This will be applied consistently in assessing students' applications. The Financial Aid Committee will have responsibility for reviewing the percentage of the deficit awarded throughout the year, to protect available funds and continue to support students in a meaningful way.
9. The Financial Aid Committee will review the manner in which applications are individually assessed throughout the year. If the volume of applications prevents individual means-testing, the Financial Aid Committee may choose to assist students by making standard awards based on a particular group of students' needs, e.g. Home final year, in order to provide support in a timely fashion.

10. Applications from disabled students for disability-related support which is not covered by the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) will not be means-tested. There is a ring-fenced fund within the Hardship Fund for providing this financial aid to disabled students. The assessment will be based on the student's need for additional support or resources to complete their course of study which is not covered by the DSA itself.
11. The Financial Aid Committee is responsible for determining whether an award could make a material difference to a student's ability to complete the course. Where it is unlikely to make such a difference, an award will not be made: this is in order to protect available funds and continue to support students in a meaningful way.
12. The Financial Aid Committee will consider applications from students in their final year, requesting support for tuition fees for modules being retaken in the final year because of academic failure. The maximum award will cover the tuition fees for one module credit. The award will be paid directly to Brookes Student Finance. To be eligible to apply, students must have accessed all other forms of redress available to them e.g. via the Exceptional Circumstances or Student Complaints routes.
13. In exceptional circumstances, financial aid may be awarded to students leaving the University without graduating e.g. those at risk of homelessness.

Priority

14. Applications will be assessed on the basis of need. The University will give particular priority to the following groups of students when deciding how to allocate financial aid.

The priority groups are:

- Students with disabilities, particularly where DSA is unable to meet particular costs.
- Students in receipt of the transition from care bursary.
- Students at risk of homelessness.
- Students in their final year who are in financial difficulty.
- Students with children, especially single parents, and/or those who have other caring responsibilities.
- Students whose study pattern means that they are unable to work.
- Students who are young carers.
- Students who are estranged from their family.
- Students in other exceptional circumstances who are in financial hardship.

Governance

15. The Financial Aid Committee has responsibility for ensuring the fair and appropriate distribution of financial aid. The Terms of Reference for that committee describe how these duties are discharged.
16. It is an underpinning principle of governance that, whilst each application will be assessed on the basis of need, no student should be given awards totalling over £10,000 for the duration of a programme of study except in highly exceptional circumstances.

17. There are certain circumstances, as detailed in the Financial Aid Committee's Terms of Reference, in which applications *must* be referred to that committee for consideration. This includes any application for which the assessed amount of funding exceeds £3,000 in any single academic year.
18. Awards totalling over £7,800 for the duration of a student's programme of study must be authorised in writing by the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic and Student Administration (or their nominee), with a clear rationale provided.
19. Over their entire course of study, no student should be given in excess of £10,000 in total payments except in highly exceptional circumstances. In instances where the Financial Aid Committee believes that such exceptional circumstances exist, the award must be authorised in writing by the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic and Student Administration (or their nominee), with a clear rationale provided.
20. The Financial Aid Committee will review the total maximum awards, as listed in 17 and 18 above, on an annual basis, and make any recommendations for change to the Vice-Chancellor's Group.
21. The Financial Aid Committee will report annually (or more frequently as required) to Vice-Chancellor's Group and is accountable to the Vice-Chancellor's Group for its oversight and governance of financial aid.
22. Awards will be paid via bank transfer or directly to creditors, as appropriate. Where a student is in debt to a third party, it will be the University's preferred option, where possible, to pay money directly to that third party. Where an award is made for the full academic year in Semester 1, payments will be made in two instalments, one in Semester 1 and one in Semester 2.

Reassessments and Appeals Process

23. Reassessments

If a student has forgotten to submit evidence which would make a material difference to their application, they can request a reassessment within 10 working days of the date on which they were informed of the decision of the Financial Aid Committee, providing the Financial Aid team at that point with the additional evidence. The student will be informed of the outcome within a further 20 working days.

24. Appeals

An appeal can be requested on the basis that there has been a fault or irregularity in the consideration of the student's application under one of the following grounds:

- a. The decision was not in accordance with the Guidance Notes; and/or
- b. The judgement of the Financial Aid Committee was affected by personal bias; and/or
- c. There was a material administrative error or some other material irregularity in the conduct of the Financial Aid Committee, such that the decision would have been materially different had the error or irregularity not occurred.

Appeals must be received in writing within 10 working days of the date of the email informing the student of the outcome of their application and needs to state the ground(s) under which they are making the appeal. All appeals are considered by the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic and Student Administration (or their nominee). The student will be informed of the outcome within a further 20 working days. The decision following an appeal is final and the student will be sent a Completion of Procedures letter.

Financial Aid Committee - Terms of Reference

Summary of Purpose

1. The Financial Aid Committee is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor's Group of the University for ensuring that the University's financial aid provision is managed and distributed in ways that are fair to students and consistent with the aims and principles of financial aid as described in the Financial Aid Policy.

Duties and Responsibilities

2. To review the Financial Aid policy on an annual basis and make recommendations for change to Vice-Chancellor's Group.
3. To approve the criteria for the provision of:
 - University Hardship Fund, International Fund, and Postgraduate Fund allocations
 - Any other specific grants allocated by the Financial Aid Team
4. To review and approve updated Financial Aid procedures on an annual basis.
5. To set the maximum award values that will normally be provided through the application process on an annual basis.
6. To monitor expenditure against allocated funds during each academic year, amend procedures in line with available funds, and ensure clear communication to students of any such changes.
7. To establish a nominated individual(s), usually the Chair or the Head of Student Life, responsible for approving emergency payments between meetings.
8. To receive for review a list of applications which have previously been considered and provisionally determined by the Financial Aid team which do not fall under any of the categories listed under 9. below, and verify or challenge these as appropriate.
9. To consider applications for Financial Aid in circumstances where:
 - a the assessed amount, whether as an award, exceeds £3,000 in an academic year;
 - b a student has exceeded the number of applications they are normally permitted to make during a single academic year, which is currently one, and where the Financial Aid team believes there is a reason to consider the applicant's particular circumstances;
 - c the Financial Aid team believes that the circumstances around the application are complex or particular enough to require the Committee's consideration;
10. To provide a decision, and reasons for that decision, in response to considerations listed under 9. above, which will form the basis of the Financial Aid team's written response to the applicant.

11. To provide a full audit trail for all decisions taken and further action required for review at following meetings.
12. To provide timely and accurate minutes for all meetings.
13. To receive reports on the amount of expenditure incurred from each fund, and any additional financial evidence required for oversight of the funds including number of students receiving assistance etc.
14. To monitor the distribution of Financial Aid and ensure that it is delivered in accordance with the Financial Aid Policy.
15. To monitor, on a regular basis, the spend in each of the allocated funds, with the support of the management accountant for Academic and Student Administration.
16. To carry out a year-end review of spend in each of the allocated funds, and set budgets for the following financial year, based on the evidence of need for each fund.
17. To report annually to Vice-Chancellor's Group on the effectiveness of the University's financial aid provision, including:
 - end-of-year budget reports on spend vs available funds
 - equality and diversity monitoring information;
 - data on the number of payments made to students;
 - data on the amount awarded per student
 - data, as far as it can reliably be obtained, on the *value* of awards to students, expressed in terms of measurable outcomes.

Scheme of Authority

18. The Financial Aid Committee has ultimate responsibility for the Hardship, International and Postgraduate Financial Aid funds provided by Oxford Brookes University.
19. Emergency payments of up to £50 in the form of supermarket food vouchers or direct payments to a bank account may be authorised by the Financial Aid team. It will normally be the case that students who make a request for an emergency payment will be asked to make a full application for Financial Aid.
20. Applications for emergency payments of more than £50, or instances where the student has already been awarded an emergency payment during the current academic year, must be authorised by the Chair of the Financial Aid Committee or the Head of Student Life.
21. The Financial Aid Committee will consider and verify all decisions made in response to applications for financial aid which fall within Financial Aid guidelines, on the basis of completed proformas which will be provided by the Financial Aid team for each meeting of the Committee. The Committee will give reasons for its decisions.

22. The Financial Aid Committee will consider all applications under 9. above, on the basis of information which will be provided by the Financial Aid team for each meeting of the Committee. The Committee will give reasons for its decisions.
23. On occasions, the authority to make such decisions may be delegated to the Chair of the Committee, for example when an urgent response is required. It is expected that the Chair will take advice from Committee members as appropriate.
24. All payment requests must be given signed authorisation by two Financial Aid authorised signatories.
25. Awards totalling over £7,800 for the duration of a student's programme of study must be authorised in writing by the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic and Student Administration (or their nominee), with a clear rationale provided.
26. Over their entire course of study, no student should be given in excess of £10,000 in total payments except in highly exceptional circumstances. In instances where the Financial Aid Committee believes that such exceptional circumstances exist, the award must be authorised in writing by the Academic Registrar and Director of Academic and Student Administration (or their nominee), with a clear rationale provided.
27. The Financial Aid Committee will review the total maximum awards, as listed in 25 and 26 above, on an annual basis, and make any recommendations for change to Vice-Chancellor's Group.

Frequency of Meetings and Quorum

28. The Committee will normally meet on a weekly basis during semester and a fortnightly basis out of semester. The frequency of meetings will be reviewed throughout the year and may be changed in response to need. Further *ad hoc* meetings may be scheduled, for example to consider particularly complex cases, or in the event of a volume of applications placing unexpected pressure on the available funds.
29. The quorum necessary for the transaction of the business of the Committee will be three. This must include the Chair or Deputy Chair or their nominee and the Head of Financial Services and Development or their nominee. For quoracy the committee must contain representatives from the Directorate of Academic and Student Administration *and* the Directorate of Finance and Legal Services.

Membership

- Head of Financial Services and Development (Chair)
- Head of Student Life (Deputy Chair)
- Student Welfare Manager or their nominee
- Inclusive Support Manager or their nominee
- International Student Adviser
- Credit Control Manager

In attendance

- Financial Aid Manager
- Student Money Adviser
- Adviser (Financial Aid)
- Secretary to the Financial Aid Committee

Last revised by the Financial Aid Committee, July 2023.