

WMCA Financial Support Procedures 2026-2027

Fircroft College is committed to supporting students to access learning where hardship is a barrier to education. These procedures should be read in conjunction with the Student Funding Policy. The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidance on how eligible students can access financial support. For West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) funded courses, students must satisfy the eligibility criteria stated within the appropriate funding guidance.

Students who are enrolled onto an approved learning aim/qualification/course funded by WMCA may be eligible to receive financial support should they meet the eligibility criteria. This is a means tested fund based on individual, gross taxable income. Applications for financial support can be submitted once enrolled onto the programme of study.

It is advised that students familiarise themselves with this procedure before applying for the Student Financial Support Fund including and conditions for receiving support. This procedure will detail the evidence required to support an application.

Where students do not meet the eligibility for funding allowances and wish to stay resident, students will be expected to pay full residential costs.



1. Eligibility

To be eligible, students must;

1.1.1 Be enrolled on a full-time and/or substantial part-time funded programme.

- Full time (long course) = course duration of 23 week or more and 19 or more tutor led and self-directed hours per week.
- Part time (short course) = course duration no less than 10 weeks and 13 or more total guided learning hours per week.

1.1.2 meet the requirements of the fund for example:

- Have a personal income of less than £36,126 PA based on the WMCA earnings threshold

1.1.3 Be considered a 'home' student for the purposes of ASF funding meeting the residency requirements. 'Home' status is the same for any financial support as it is for fee eligibility purposes.

1.1.4 Currently reside at an address with a WMCA postcode.

2. Funding Awards: What can students apply for help with?

2.1.1 The Student Financial Support Fund is awarded through Government funding and it is assessed and distributed on the basis of Financial Hardship as a 'contribution'. These funds are not an entitlement and should be viewed as a 'contribution only' towards the cost of course related costs including travel. It is the responsibility of the student to tell the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about any learner support they are receiving as learner support payments may affect eligibility to state benefits.

2.1.2 The College will provide the following financial support to students with identified needs within specific categories; hardship, 20 + childcare and residential access funding. Please refer to childcare funding procedures for specific childcare funding information.

2.1.3 Please note for students under 20 years of age on the first day of learning applications for childcare support should be made to Care to Learn at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn

Financial Support for students on full time non-residential programmes (over 23 weeks).

	Information	Payment
Hardship - Travel Students can only apply for travel expenses if they are not living residentially at the College.	• Students must use the most cost-effective way of travelling to College. Payment will be made for travel passes on shortest route. • Supporting travel passes (e.g. senior/disabled) must be used to support travel arrangements to College. • The students home address will be used to calculate the shortest route utilising Google Maps as a measuring tool for all claims. • To qualify for assistance with travel costs, a student must live over a 1mile radius from the College. • Exceptional circumstances will be considered on an individual basis for example safeguarding, return home journeys with evidence of request from staff member. • Cost of traveling to University interviews and open days up to a maximum of 3 visits.	Travel expenses (e.g. bus/train fares) capped at £1,500 per learner per academic year £300 in total for up to 3 visits.

Hardship Non-essential course related costs (books and equipment)	• Books • Resources to support studies. • Trips. • Costs relating to these categories may be reimbursed on production of proof of expenditure (receipts, tickets and associated documentation).	£120.00 max in one academic year
Hardship Domestic emergencies	• Emergencies which may impact on student ability to study. • Emergency accommodation provided by others. • All domestic emergency funds must be approved by the Head of Student Experience or a member of Management Team.	£500.00 max
Hardship Emergency Fund	• The Emergency Fund is in place to assist students experiencing a sudden, unexpected and emergency situation, which may impact on their studies. • All emergency funds must be approved by an Assistant Principal or a member of the Management Team.	£50.00 Maximum
Hardship Examination fees	• Retake fees will be paid for where there is no further period of learning. • Fees will be paid directly to exam board on student behalf.	Limited to one retake per academic year (if the student is not continuing to study).

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Hardship Domestic emergencies	• Emergencies which may impact on student ability to study. • Emergency accommodation provided by others when college is closed. • All domestic emergency funds must be approved by the Head of Student Experience or a member of the Management Team.	£500.00 max
Hardship UCAS application costs	• Where students apply for University via UCAS the cost can be reimbursed.	UCAS official cost for application

Hardship Award for students on part time programmes (up to and under 23 weeks)

	Information	Payment
Hardship Travel	• Students must use the most cost-effective way of travelling to College. Payment will be made for travel passes on shortest route. • To qualify for assistance with travel costs, a student must live over a 1mile radius from the College. • Supporting Travel passes (e.g. senior/disabled) must	• Student to pay first £10 • Travel expenses (e.g. bus/train fares) capped at £75.00. • Claim for up to 5 courses per year. • Up to £300.00 per academic year.

	be used to support travel arrangements to College. • Exceptional circumstances considered on an individual basis for example safeguarding, return home journeys with evidence of request from staff member. • Claims will be based on the most economical route and students will be expected to take advantage of any cheap fares available for students and/or weekly/monthly travel passes.	
Hardship Non-essential course related costs (books and equipment)	• Books • Resources to support studies • Award limited to £120.00 per academic year (up to 5 courses) • Costs relating to these categories may be reimbursed on production of proof of expenditure (receipts, tickets etc.)	£120.00 max
Hardship Examination fees	• Retake fees will be paid for where there is no further period of learning. • Fees will be paid directly to exam board on student behalf.	Limited to one retake per academic year (if the student is not continuing to study).

3. Application and Assessment Process

3.1.1 Financial Support Fund application forms are available from Student Services.

3.1.2 Students must apply for the support fund with supporting evidence as soon as possible after their place on the course has been confirmed.

- 3.1.3 Application forms will be considered by a member of Student Support and authorised by an Assistant Principal.
- 3.1.4 Assistance with the application process will be available on request. **Any student found to have made a false claim for financial support or anyone who disregards the conditions of assistance will have their support suspended and may lose their College place.**
- 3.1.5 All students are responsible for alerting the Work and Pensions Department of College financial support where applicable.
- 3.1.6 The College reserves the right to review and adjust payments to meet student need and the availability of funds. Payments may therefore increase or decrease according to availability and distribution of funds. Allocation of financial support will depend on availability of funds.
- 3.1.7 Where there is a significant change to circumstances (personal or otherwise) during the academic year i.e. a transition into residential, an application for re-assessment may be required.
- 3.1.8 Where a student is unwilling to provide evidence of income no assessment or resulting support can take place.
- 3.1.9 Students may be invoiced for repayment of any funds allocated to them and will be requested to return any items of equipment if they withdraw from College before completing their studies and where students withdraw from their programme of study prior to their application being processed/approved, no support will be awarded.
- 3.1.10 Students must have their own bank account, and bank details will be retained for payment processing.
- 3.1.11 Financial support may be withdrawn should students be subject to disciplinary procedures. Payments will be stopped from withdrawal date if a student leaves course or the date of exclusion if excluded from programme.
- 3.1.12 All applications are treated as confidential. However, there may be occasions where it is necessary for the Admissions Officer to contact staff within College for additional information for processing or monitoring purposes.
- 3.1.13 Students will be notified of declined applications by email. If a student wishes to appeal against the declined application this must be made in writing within 10 working days of date of

decline. Appeals can only be made based on either a change in circumstances or household income changes. Further information regarding appeals process can be found in the Student Funding Policy.

3.1.14 The information given within the application is used in line with WMCA funding guidance and Fircroft College Student Funding Policy 2026-27.

3.1.15 All application data is stored confidentially and retained for a period of seven years and is subject to Fircroft College Data Archiving & Retention Policy.

3.1.16 All information given within application is subject to GDPR and Data Protection regulations. Personal information and any supporting evidence will only be used for College for audit purposes.

3.1.17 Fircroft College work is aligned to the Equality Act 2010 which prohibits unfair treatment, eliminating discrimination and advances opportunity of all its students. Within this context this policy aims to remove financial disadvantage and take steps to meet the needs of those students who are most financially vulnerable.

4. Assessment Evidence

4.1.1 Students who apply for financial support must provide evidence that they meet the criteria for personal gross annual income. This is based on the taxable income during the course.

4.1.2 A single student living alone must have a gross personal income of less than £36,126 PA

4.1.3 When assessing applications, one of the following documents **are included** in the assessment and will be required as evidence

- Earned income (3 x monthly wage slips or 4 x weekly wage slips)
- Out of work benefits for example Income Support/universal Credit, JSA, ESA, Incapacity Benefit etc. (to be dated within last 3 months, Universal Credit document must contain all pages)
- Bank statements dated with last 3 months
- Unearned taxable income for example rental income
- Self-employment proof of most recent tax return
- Working and Child Tax credits (full letter)
- CSA or private Maintenance payments
- State pensions (including War/Military pensions)

- Private pensions

4.1.4 The following **will not be included** in the assessment.

- Child benefit
- Housing /Council tax benefit
- Carers allowance
- Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independent Payments
- The 'childcare element' of Working Tax Credit
- Spouse or household income

4.1.5 It is the students' responsibility to provide all supporting documentation. Failure to do so will delay the application process. Evidence should be provided either digitally or in person. It is advised that where a student sends their application (including supporting evidence) by post, postage should be via Recorded or Special delivery. Supporting documentation may also be scanned and sent digitally but must be the original copy. Please note; students may be asked to provide the original paper copy if submitted digitally.

4.1.6 Fircroft College will not be responsible for lost or stolen documents.

4.1.7 Original copies of supporting evidence must be presented to Student Services where by a Student Services team member will confirm eligibility. This process can be digitally, via post or in person.

4.1.8 Assessments for Discretionary Student Support Funds will only be undertaken once enrolment processes are completed.

4.1.9 Applications may take up to six weeks to process during the enrolment period at Fircroft College. Allocated financial support funds will be backdated to the start of the course.

4.1.10 Once a Financial Support Fund application has been assessed and where the support is awarded, students will be notified by letter or email.

4.1.11 It is the students' responsibility to monitor emails to ensure financial support notifications/updates are read and understood.

5. Payment of Discretionary Student Support Fund

- 5.1.1 Payments are attendance based and will be limited to term time attendance. All payments will be made directly into the student's bank account unless payment is being made to a service provider i.e. a childcare provider or in the form of a bus pass.
- 5.1.2 Failure to achieve the minimum attendance criteria of at least **80%** may result in payments being stopped for the month in question and, with the exception of childcare payments, within this context there is no recourse for appeal.
- 5.1.3 Student payments cannot be made into accounts on the student's behalf other than where Power of Attorney is in place. Student Financial Support payments cannot be made into a Credit Union account.
- 5.1.4 Student Financial Support is awarded as a set monthly payment based on the fund from which they are receiving support and the number of planned learning hours.
- 5.1.5 Where Asylum Seekers are eligible for support this will be made 'in kind'. This means that Fircroft College will pay directly to a provider or to Fircroft College; no support will be given in the form of cash.
- 5.1.6 Students will be paid in line with the attendance policy, however for the purpose of financial support payments, only unauthorised absences will be seen as a negative mark which will impact a learner's ability to receive funds.
- 5.1.7 Any absence from classes may result in the support being suspended and payments may be stopped. Authorised absence will include the following:
 - 1. Sickness supported by a medical certificate, hospital or doctor's letter
 - 2. Attendance at medical appointments
 - 3. Parental leave to care for a sick child
 - 4. Attendance at the funeral of a family member or close friend
 - 5. Confirmed breakdown of travel arrangements
 - 6. Attendance at course or mandated probationary proceedings
 - 7. Work experience placements or work interviews
 - 8. Study leave where authorised by the programme manager
 - 9. Religious festivals
 - 10. Driving tests
 - 11. Adverse weather conditions

12. Authorised absence will not be granted for holidays taken during term time

5.1.8 Students must keep in appropriate contact with their tutor and make every effort to attend class. Where this is not possible due to authorised absence, financial support payments will still be paid.

5.1.9 If a learner's absence reaches a point where they cannot complete the course or they are withdrawn from the course due to authorised absence, their financial support payments cease.

6. Appeals

6.1.1 Appeals can only be made against the 'process'.

6.1.3 All appeals should be made in writing to the Finance Director. Appeals should be submitted in writing or by email to; Finance@Fircroft.ac.uk or Finance Director, Fircroft College, 1018 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6LH.

6.1.4 Appeals will be considered by the Finance Director and approved by an Assistant Principal. Where an appeal is upheld the student will be notified in writing and there will be no further recourse.

6.1.5 All appeals will consider presented evidence from the student in relation to their financial circumstances with any relevant information from the Student Services Team and other key staff within Fircroft College.

6.1.6 All appeal decisions are final.

6.1.7 Complaints should be made in writing in the first instance in line with Fircroft College complaints procedure.

If you require further information or support, please contact Student Services on: 0121 472 0116 or email Admissions@Fircroft.ac.uk