Access Financial Support Policy – 2023/4

This policy is of relevance to students / staff / applicants	
Version No.	4
Approved on	14th April 2022
Approved by	Ops Board
Written by	Head of Access and Participation
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	3rd March 2022 (updates for AY 2022/23)
	14th April 2023 (updated for AY 2023/24)

Overview

As part of its Access and Participation Plan commitments, the School has established Access funded financial support to assist UK undergraduate students most in need of financial assistance, in recognition of the difficulties of juggling an intensive full-time programme with paid employment, and the need for sufficient rest and recuperation. There are two awards:

Access Bursary Award

The Access Bursary is awarded to cover general living and maintenance costs during the course of a programme, including additional costs incurred in vacation periods where there is no, or limited, family financial support. There are **up to thirty** Access Bursary awards in 2023/24, valued between £3,000 and £5,000 (£90,000 in total), with financially eligible Care Leavers and care experienced students guaranteed the maximum award of £5,000. Successful applicants are paid in three termly instalments. Students can apply in every year of undergraduate study, and do not need to have received it previously to apply (e.g., a student in final year could apply for the first time successfully).

Access Start-up Fund

The Access Start-up Fund is available specifically for Supported Application Scheme new entrants, enabling them to settle into life at the School without financial worry. The awards are valued at £350, and allow recipients to purchase equipment for the undergraduate programme (such as suitable clothing for lessons and performances, technical equipment, books) and to set-up their student accommodation (e.g. kitchen equipment, bedding). This award is a one-off, paid only in the first term of the first year of study, to eligible newly enrolled students.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible for the **Access Bursary**, students will need to satisfy the requirements in both **Section 1 and 2**. In order to be eligible for the **Access Start-up Fund**, students will need to satisfy the requirements in **Section 3**. First year students may be eligible for, and receive, both sources of funding.

Section 1 *(Access Bursary essential criteria)*
Students must meet both of the following conditions.

1. **Be registered on an in-person undergraduate degree programme at the School and have Home fee status[1]**

2. **Be from a low income household**
   Recipients must be from a household with an income of below £33k and in receipt of a maintenance loan[2] from their relevant Student Loans Company[3]. The maintenance loan must reflect the required household income threshold. For example, students from England living away from home in 2023/24 must receive a **maintenance loan of at least £11,841** per year and those living at home for their studies must receive a **maintenance loan of at least £7,271**. The minimum loan figures differ for students from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis using the available student finance calculators.

   The School cannot consider applications from anyone on a higher income, regardless of their eligibility for Section 2, as this bursary is awarded based on financial need. The School cannot accept applications from students who have not accessed all the financial support that they could receive from their student funding body.

Section 2 *(Access Bursary criteria)*
Students must demonstrate that they fall into at least **one** of the categories listed at the start of the academic year for which they are applying for support.

1. **A Care Leaver or care experienced**
To be eligible the student will have spent time in the care of a Local Authority or Health and Social Care Trust at some point before their 18th birthday.

This could include:
- Recognised Care Leavers, who are eligible for statutory support from their Local Authority;
- Living with foster parents;
- Living at home with parents/guardians, or in kinship care under the supervision of social services;
- Living in a residential children's home;
- Living in another residential setting like a school or secure unit;
- Those who are adopted before the age of 18.

If a student believes that they are care experienced, but their personal circumstances are not outlined above, they should contact the Access and Participation team on wp@gsmd.ac.uk for further guidance.

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[1] ELQ students are not eligible for the Access Bursary.
[2] Applicants for the Access Bursary are required to be eligible for, and have applied for a UK undergraduate maintenance loan. Students who are not eligible for this financial support are not eligible for the Access Bursary.
[3] These are: Student Finance England, Student Finance Northern Ireland, Student Finance Wales and Student Award Agency for Scotland.

2. Estranged from their parents/guardians

To be assessed as estranged from their parents/guardians, the student should have had no contact with their parents/guardians for at least 12 months before the start of their academic programme and be unlikely to have a relationship with them again.

3. Independent

To be considered as financially independent from their parents/guardians, the student will need to meet one of the following conditions:
- Be aged 25 or over at the start of their academic programme
- Be married or in a civil partnership
- Be in charge of a dependent child
- Have supported themselves for at least three years before the start of their programme of study. This could include full-time employment or self-employment, receiving benefits including for sickness and disability, or receiving training under a government scheme for unemployment – *the relevant student funding body must confirm this to be the case, and provide a confirmation letter outlining independent student status.*
- Have no living parents/guardians

4. Disability

Students eligible under this criterion must have a declared disability on their student record and have applied, or be in the process of applying (where eligible), for Disabled Student Allowance. Student Affairs may advise on eligibility, and the impact of the declared disability on financial need.

5. From an area of the UK with low progression to higher education

To be eligible for this criterion, the home postcode on your application to the School must be Quintile 1 or 2 on the POLAR4 dataset. POLAR4 is a dataset produced by the Office for Students, which outlines the likelihood of an 18 year old in an area progressing to Higher Education.

<u>Section 3</u> *(Access Start-up essential fund criteria)*

To be eligible for the Access Start-up Fund, students must satisfy the following criteria.

1. **Be registered on an in-person undergraduate degree programme at the School and have Home fee status[4]**
2. **Have participated in the Supported Application Scheme for the year of entry when they first enrol at the School (e.g. participated in the Scheme in 2022/23, and enrolled in September 2023)**
3. **Have applied for the full, means-tested maintenance loan[5] that they are eligible for via their UK student funding body[6].**

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[4] ELQ students are not eligible for this funding, even where they might have participated in the Supported Application Scheme.

[5] Applicants for the Access Start-up Fund are required to be eligible for, and have applied for a UK undergraduate maintenance loan. Students who are not eligible for this financial support are not eligible for the Access Start-up fund.

[6] These are: Student Finance England, Student Finance Northern Ireland, Student Finance Wales and Student Award Agency for Scotland.

Application Process

Access Bursary Award

There are three compulsory steps to apply for the Access Bursary. Students must:

1. **Contact the School's Access and Participation team**, by emailing wp@gsmd.ac.uk, to express an interest in applying for the Access Bursary. The final deadline for notifying the Access and Participation team of interest to be included in the 2023/24 bursary allocation is **Monday 10th July 2023**.

2. **Apply for a full maintenance loan from their funding body**. Upon applying for the Access Bursary, the student should send evidence that they have applied for a maintenance loan to the Access and Participation team. By the start of term, they must send a copy of their final maintenance loan allowance to the Access and Participation team. If the student is applying as an independent student, and this requires verification from the student funding body, they must also provide evidence of this confirmation as soon as it is received. Payment of the Access Bursary will be delayed where the necessary evidence is not provided.

   Continuing students will be required to reapply for their maintenance and tuition fee loans from their student funding body every academic year and **should ensure that they follow the above steps to confirm Access Bursary eligibility.**

3. **Apply for Guildhall Financial Awards**. *New students* should apply for a Guildhall Scholarship, via eGo, as soon as they have accepted an offer of a place at the School. The application deadline for the Guildhall School Scholarship differs by department. Please see http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/about_the_school/shared_left_nav/fees_and_funding/guildhall_school_scholarships_and_other_funding/ for more information about the Guildhall School Financial Awards. *Continuing students* will be required to reapply for a Guildhall Scholarship by the deadline set out by their department.

Access Start-up Fund

Supported Application Scheme offer holders must:

1. **Apply for the full amount of the means-tested maintenance loan available to them** from their student funding body by the relevant deadlines.
2. **Contact the Access and Participation Team** on wp@gsmd.ac.uk to confirm they would like to be considered for the award by **4th September 2023,** and provide the official confirmation from Student Finance that outlines the awarded maintenance loan.
3. **Enrol at the School** at the earliest opportunity so that payment can be made at the start of term one.

Please note that this payment is a one-off at in the first term of the first year of study. It cannot be made retrospectively later in the first year, and former Supported Application Scheme participants who enrolled at the School in September 2020 or earlier are not eligible to apply.

Eligibility Checks:

Eligibility will be confirmed as follows:

- **Care-leavers**: Students who indicate care experience on their Guildhall School application are asked to provide evidence to the Senior Student Funding Officer, who will confirm status. They will then advise eligibility for the Access Bursary. The Access and Participation team may request further information on occasion, to ensure that they can support the student fully, but this will only be requested in their first year of applying to the award. Care experienced students will not be required to prove eligibility for the Access Bursary in future years.

- **Estranged:** As estrangement is not reflected in student funding body records, estranged students will be expected to supply a letter from a social worker, doctor, teacher or another professional, stating that the student is "irreconcilably estranged" from their parents and have not had contact with them for a period of 12-months or more. Estranged students will not be required to prove eligibility again in future years.

- **Disability:** Students must ensure that their disability is recorded on their student record, and that they seek relevant support from Student Affairs. Student Affairs will advise the Access and Participation Team further on eligibility if necessary.

- **Independent:** Independent students will have this status reflected on their funding body record, and can provide evidence of this to the Access and Participation team. The School cannot verify independent student status, other than where the applicant is aged 25 or over on enrolment.

- **POLAR4 Quintile 1 or 2 postcode:** The Access and Participation Team will input the student's home postcode from their application form into the POLAR4 'search postcode' tool[7] to determine whether it is Quintile 1 or 2.

The Access and Participation Team will refer to Supported Application Scheme participant data to confirm eligibility for the Access Start-up Fund.

Additional Information

Students are encouraged to apply for the Access Bursary Award as soon as possible, and may do so before they have received their student funding award letter from their student funding body. The School may provisionally offer eligible students a bursary, but it will only be confirmed on receipt of all necessary evidence.

Students who receive an Access Bursary Award will need to accept and follow the [Guildhall School Scholarships Applicants and Award Holders Terms and Conditions](#). Failure to do so will result in the withdrawal of the award for at least one academic year.

Confirmed Access Bursary Awards will be disbursed in three equal instalments after full enrolment and all the Terms and Conditions have been met. Confirmed Access Start-up Fund Awards will be paid to students in one instalment as soon as possible after enrolment.

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[7] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/search-by-postcode/

Where there are more eligible applications than Access Bursaries, applications will be ranked by need, with priority given to Care Leavers and care experienced students, and then in the order (1-5) outlined above. Additional priority will be given to applicants from Scotland and Northern Ireland, who receive less support from government-funded maintenance loans, and to those with greatest financial need. To support decision-making, the Access and Participation team will liaise with departments to assess overall scholarship awards, ensuring parity of overall financial support.

Care Leavers and care experienced students will **always** receive an award of £5000. All other awards will be the value of remaining funding, divided by the number of successful applicants (e.g., if £80,000 remains, and there are 20 other eligible students, they will each receive £4,000).

For 2023, there will be no limit to the Access Start-up Fund Awards – all eligible applicants will be awarded.

The Access and Participation team will not make any Access Bursary offers until after the 10th July deadline, to ensure that every potentially eligible student has the opportunity to apply. Offers made at this point will be provisional, as they remain dependent on evidence from all applicants being received, and so the amount of the award may increase before September 2023, but never decrease from the provisional offer (unless eligibility is not confirmed and no award is allocated).

Students awarded Access Bursary funding are expected to engage with evaluation activity organised by the Access and Participation Team, as per the requirements in the Access and Participation Plan. Failure to do so may jeopardise their eligibility for financial support in future years, and termly instalments could be halted.