

ACCESS TO LEARNING FUND

Welcome to Advice Direct... the Advice and Representation Centre's (ARC) written information service.

This leaflet is designed to inform students facing financial difficulties about the Access to Learning Fund.

What Is Access To Learning Fund?

The Government provides this fund to Universities to address the needs of students who face financial difficulties during their course. The Access to Learning Fund (ALF) is awarded as a **grant** and does not have to be repaid. Priority is given to certain groups including mature students, students with children, students from low income families, disabled students, students entering higher education from care, homeless students and final year students.

However, if you are in hardship and need extra financial support, Universities in England can provide it through their ALF.

Who Can Apply?

Students who apply must satisfy the criteria **for home fee status**.

Students granted Refugee status, or whose parent(s) or spouse has been granted refugee status may apply. If you have 'Exceptional Leave to Remain', you must also meet the criteria of being 'ordinary resident' of the UK.

EEA migrant workers (who do not meet the ordinary UK residence requirement) should contact the Student Funding Office as you may qualify in certain situations.

- **If you are unsure whether you are eligible for ALF seek further advice.**
- **Access To Learning Fund Is NOT Available To EU or International Students, please seek further advice**
- **Funds Are NOT Designed To Pay For Fees OR Lifestyle Choices (e.g. mobile phones)**

To apply students must be registered on a:

Full-time Undergraduate or PGCE programme

You must have applied for the maximum Student Loan you are entitled to and have received the first installment. Students who have not applied for the maximum Student Loan should do so before applying for ALF.

The ALF cannot be used to pay for any shortcomings that may have arisen due to parents/partners not making contributions requested by their LEA towards study costs.

Part-time Undergraduate

You must have applied to your LEA for any grants or assistance available to you before applying for ALF.

You must be studying at least 60 credits (or 50%) of an equivalent full-time programme. The exception is disabled students who are unable to do this through their disability; they must be studying at least 25% of an equivalent full-time programme.

Postgraduate programme

You must have attempted to apply for all other sources of funding before applying for ALF. This includes Career Development Loans or Professional Studies Loans (maximum amount). If you started your course without any realistic means of supporting yourself you will not receive an ALF award.

How To Apply?

Students can apply for ALF at any time during the academic year including the summer period. You should make one application each academic year (there are exceptions). Application forms are available from Student Funding Office, Counselling & Guidance Service or the ARC at the Guild of Students.

There is normally a period of awards during the normal academic year, and an additional summer period ALF award – although the criteria for the latter can change slightly.

Provided your form is **completed accurately** and that all requested **documentary evidence** is included - you should be notified of a decision within 4 weeks of the date of submission.

When completing the form it is important that you consider the following:

- *Clearly state why you are applying and mention fully **all factors** that have led to your hardship*
- *All financial income and expenditure figures need to be accurate*
- *Any ambiguous amounts should be explained and be supported by relevant documentation where possible*
- *You must provide appropriate **documentary evidence (where applicable)** such as bank details, rent/mortgage payments, loans/grants received, benefits and Support Notification form in order to have your application processed. The application form provides full details of documents required.*

Additional info:

- Applications for ALF are means tested by the University's Student Funding Office and **not all** applications are successful.
- Only 1 application can be made per year, but if your circumstances change, you are entitled to ask for a review of your application. N.B. you may need to check if a summer ALF application is also applicable.
- You are entitled to appeal an ALF decision if you feel that your circumstances have not been fully considered. This can be done by writing a letter of appeal to the Student Funding Office explaining what you are appealing against, and any relevant evidence should be attached.
- If you are receiving benefits, any payment from the ALF, may affect the benefits you receive so you should contact the benefits agency for further advice with regards to this, before applying.

Sources Of Help

Advice & Representation Centre (ARC), Guild of Students

Email: thearc@guild.bham.ac.uk

Visit the website at: <http://www.guildofstudents.com/thearc>

Advice & Representation Centre Opening Hours (Term Time)*

Monday - Friday <i>Diagnostic Drop In Clinics</i>	10am — 4pm <i>12-2pm (exc. Wed 2-4pm)</i>
Saturday & Sunday	CLOSED

*Vacation Periods	12 noon – 2pm
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Student Funding Office

Aston Webb Building

Tel: 0121 414 7391 or Email: financialsupport@bham.ac.uk

Counselling & Guidance Service

3 Elms Road

Tel: 0121 414 5130 or <http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/studentlife/counselling/index.shtml>

Disclaimer: The information on this leaflet only provides general guidance on financial support and the law. The leaflet should not be regarded or relied upon as a complete or authoritative statement of the law. The ARC will not accept any liability for any claims or inconvenience as a result of the use of information on this leaflet. If you think you have a legal problem you should seek further advice.

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