

Responsibility:	Director Quality & Compliance	Date doc. created:	February 2025
Print name sign off:	Chris Garcia	Last review date of doc:	April 2026
Signature:	Chris Garcia	Next review date:	April 2027

Owner and version control

Student/ Learner Hardship Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline Best Practice Network's commitment to support Students/ Learners facing financial hardship. This policy ensures that every hardship application is considered on an individual basis, with fairness, sensitivity, and confidentiality, enabling Students/ Learners to continue and succeed in their programmes.

Scope

This policy applies to all Students/ Learners enrolled in any programme offered by Best Practice Network, including apprenticeships, professional qualifications and training courses.

Definition of Hardship

Hardship is defined as a situation where a Student/ Learner is experiencing financial difficulties that may hinder their ability to continue or succeed in their programme. Hardship may arise due to unforeseen circumstances, including, but not limited to:

- Loss of income or employment
- Unexpected personal or family expenses
- Illness or disability (if not claiming disability allowance)

Priorities for assistance

The Fund is there to help any eligible Student/ Learner who has a particular financial need, but we may be unable to accept application we receive or all costs that you might apply for. The Government asks us to give priority to the following groups of Students/ Learners when deciding how to allocate the funding:

Priority groups are:

- Students/ Learners with children (especially lone parents)
- Students/ Learners from low-income families

- Students/ Learners with disabilities
- Students/ Learners who have entered higher education from care
- Students/ Learners not supported by their family (estranged)
- Students/ Learners from Foyers or who are homeless
- Students/ Learners who have been identified as young adult carers
- Students/ Learners receiving the final year loan rate, who are in financial difficulty (undergraduate Students only)

If you are not in one of the priority groups, you can still apply but you must provide as much evidence as possible to show why you have a particular need.

Support Available

Best Practice Network is committed to offering tailored support to Students/ Learners facing hardship with costs associated with their programme. As a Student/ Learner, you are expected to apply for all the loans, grants and bursaries (as appropriate) to which you are entitled, before asking for help through financial hardship funding. Support may include but is not limited to:

- Financial assistance towards essential programme-related costs (e.g., travel, learning materials, assessments)
- Flexible payment arrangements for programme fees
- Signposting to external support services or funding opportunities
- Support with IT equipment required to support you complete your course if you do not have access to any laptops or work on computers

Each Student/ Learner is limited to one hardship application per course, and approval of applications is not guaranteed. All applications are treated sympathetically but this is a limited fund, therefore awards may be capped and cannot be guaranteed.

Application Process

Students/ Learners seeking support must submit a Hardship electronic application form. You can complete the application using the following link: <https://forms.office.com/e/s6MBMpntj>

Applications will require the following information:

1. A detailed explanation of the hardship circumstances
2. Evidence to support the claim (e.g., bank statements, letters from employers, medical certificates)
3. A statement outlining the type of support required
4. Evidence to support financial support already in receipt (maintenance loan, child care benefit)

Assessment of Applications

Each application will be:

- Reviewed on an individual basis by the hardship review panel, consisting of representatives from Student/ Learner support and programme management teams

- Assessed based on the evidence provided and the Student's/ Learner's specific needs.
- Processed within 15 working days of receipt.

Decision and Notification

The Student/ Learner will be notified of the panel's decision in writing. If the application is successful, the notification will include details of the support to be provided. If the application is declined, the reasons for the decision will be explained, and alternative support options may be suggested.

Confidentiality

All hardship applications and supporting documents will be handled with strict confidentiality. Information will only be shared with those directly involved in the review and decision-making process.

We are committed to protecting your personal data. Information provided in this form will be used solely to assess your eligibility for hardship support and will not be shared with third parties without your consent, except where required by law. Data will be stored securely and retained only for as long as necessary to process your application in accordance with GDPR <https://www.bestpracticenetwork.co.uk/Media/Policies/25-26/BPN%20Data%20Protection%20Policy%202025-26.pdf>

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Feedback from Students/ Learners and staff will be considered as part of the review process.