Student Financial Hardship Policy

1. Purpose

BIRD Conservatoire is committed to ensuring that no student is forced to underperform due to unexpected financial hardship. This policy sets out how the Conservatoire will provide financial support to students experiencing genuine and unforeseen financial difficulty that impacts their ability to participate fully in training. The policy is intended to support students facing emergency and short-term financial difficulties. It is not a main source of financial support and is not designed to meet the cost of tuitions fees or rent arrears.

2. Scope and Eligibility

This policy applies to:

a) All enrolled students at BIRD Conservatoire.
b) Students must meet the following criteria:
c) UK National students or EU National students with a maintenance loan from Student Finance England (or equivalent).
d) Self-funded students will need to show that reasonable arrangements were made at the start of the course to fund their studies.

3. Definition of Hardship

Hardship is defined as:

a) An unexpected and unavoidable financial difficulty that threatens a student's ability to meet essential living and course-related costs.
b) Given the nature of conservatoire training, this may include:
    i. Unexpected course-related costs (e.g., equipment)
    ii. Delays in Student Finance or other funding
    iii. When another source of money is not available (e.g.: family, overdraft, etc)

4. Principles

BIRD Conservatoire will ensure:

a) Fair, transparent, and consistent assessment
b) Respect for confidentiality and dignity
c) Timely decision-making, recognising urgent student needs
d) Equitable access across all programmes
e) Sensitivity to the intensive and physically demanding nature of performing arts training

5. Types of Support Available

Support may include:

a) Non-repayable hardship grants
b) Support towards:
    i. Food and essential living expenses
    ii. Travel

iii. Essential course materials (e.g., dancewear, equipment)

Support is discretionary and subject to available funding.

Typical awards will be around £50; however, this amount may be exceeded where a higher level of support is justified by the student's circumstances.

6. Priority Groups

While all eligible students may apply, priority may be given to:

a) Care-experienced or estranged students
b) Disabled students or those with long-term health conditions
c) Students from low-income backgrounds
d) Students at risk of withdrawal/Interruption due to financial hardship

7. Eligibility Criteria

Students must:

a) Be currently enrolled and engaged with their programme
b) Demonstrate genuine financial hardship
c) Provide required supporting evidence
d) Have explored all other funding options (e.g., Student Finance, bursaries, family, etc)

Students may not be eligible if:

a) Financial difficulty arises primarily from discretionary spending
b) They have not engaged with academic or student support processes
c) They fail to provide sufficient evidence

8. Application Process

Students must:

1. Complete the Hardship Fund Application Form
2. Provide supporting evidence such as bank statements, credit card statements, and relevant letters, emails
3. Submit applications to the Student Wellbeing Team: wellbeing@birdcollege.co.uk

Students are strongly encouraged to contact the Student Wellbeing team before applying for guidance.

9. Assessment Process

Applications will be assessed by the Dean of Students, or nominee.

10. Decision Making

a) Decisions will normally be made within 5 working days
b) Urgent cases may be prioritised
c) Students will receive written notification of:
   i. Outcome

ii. Amount and type of support (if awarded)
iii. Any conditions attached

11. Emergency Support

In cases of immediate hardship (e.g., inability to afford food), students should contact Student Wellbeing Team for same-day support. BIRD will endeavour to support students in an emergency; however, claims submitted after 5pm will only be processed on the following working day.

12. Appeals Process

Please refer to the Appeals Procedure for further information.

13. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All applications will be:

a) Treated in strict confidence
b) Managed in accordance with UK GDPR and data protection legislation
c) Accessed only by relevant staff involved in assessment

14. Fraud and Misrepresentation

Providing false or misleading information may result in:

a) Withdrawal of funds
b) Referral to disciplinary procedures under BIRD Conservatoire regulations

15. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every 2–3 years or as needed

16. External sources of support for students

- Local Food and Essential Living Support (Bexley / Sidcup)
  - Bexley Foodbank (Trussell Trust)
    Provides emergency food parcels for people in crisis (via referral voucher). Located in Sidcup and across Bexley.
  - Community Larder – St John the Evangelist Church (Sidcup)
    Free, no-referral food support where individuals can drop in and take essential items.
  - Bexley Community Fridges
    Free surplus food available to anyone to reduce food insecurity.
  - Mind in Bexley Community Pantry
    Low-cost food scheme (small contribution for groceries worth more value).

- University of Greenwich Hardship Fund
  The university provides a hardship fund for students who encounter sudden financial difficulties.

- Charities and Grant-Giving Organisations
  - Turn2us (National Charity)
  - Shelter (Emergency Financial Advice)
    Provides guidance on emergency grants, local welfare schemes, and hardship support options.

- Student-Specific Funding Platforms
  - Save the Student!
    Central platform for discovering additional funding opportunities and student support schemes. Provides up-to-date guidance on grants, bursaries, and scholarships available to students.

17. Document Control

Document type:	Policy		
Document number:	044	Version:	1.0
Department:	Safeguarding & Wellbeing		
Approved by:	Executive Team	Date approved:	23/06/2026
Effective from:	01/08/2026	Review date:	22/06/2029
Publication:	BIRD website		
Related documents:	Appeals Procedure		
Documents replaced:	N/A		
Notes:	N/A		