# Student Assistance Fund: guidance notes for postgraduate research students

*October 2023*

At times students can face unexpected financial hardship that impacts their ability to continue to study. The Student Assistance Fund has been set up by the Open University to help students when this happens.

As the assistance funds are limited, only ask for support towards costs which will make a critical difference to your ability to continue studying. Carefully consider your request before submitting your application.

There may be additional financial support you can apply for, depending on your circumstances; see [Additional funding support](https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/fees-and-studentships/additional-funding) for more information.

Contact the [Research Degrees Team](mailto:research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk) in the Graduate School for more advice and guidance.

## Applying for the Student Assistance Fund

The Student Assistance Fund is for students who have either been impacted by an unforeseen change in circumstances or by an unexpected cost which has arisen through no fault of their own, causing serious financial difficulties and affecting their ability to continue studying.

You can request up to a total of £500 depending on what you need the fund for. The fund covers emergency costs and medical evidence costs.

As funds are limited, we cannot accept applications for foreseeable cost of living rises.

The Student Assistance Fund is not for help with fees or for payment for disability equipment. Some students pay for their fees out of a [Doctoral Student Loan](https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/fees-and-studentships/studentships-and-funding). Please discuss any disability support needs with the [Disability Support Team](mailto:disability-support@open.ac.uk).

You can have one successful application for emergency costs and one for medical evidence costs per academic year (August to July).

## Emergency costs

The fund covers specific emergency costs due to an unforeseen drop in income or an unexpected cost which has arisen through no fault of your own, that has impacted you financially.

* Daily living costs – you may require financial assistance with these costs due to an unforeseen drop in income or something unexpected happening.
* Emergency costs – something unexpected has happened that you were unable to plan for financially and funding will help you resolve the issue.
* Emergency study costs – costs related to study that you cannot afford due to an unexpected issue or a change in circumstances.
* PC or Laptop costs – if you need to replace or repair your PC or laptop (and where the University has not supplied you with a PC or laptop for your research) you can request up to £250 from the fund to pay for that.  Applications for another PC or laptop in subsequent academic years will be awarded at the University’s discretion.     
  NOTE: If you’re applying for a PC/Laptop or emergency study costs, you must first check whether you are eligible for support from the OU’s [Funding for study-related costs](https://help.open.ac.uk/funding-for-computers-internet-childcare), depending on your nation.

## Check your eligibility

If you’re applying for emergency costs you must be directly registered as a postgraduate research student and actively studying with the Open University.

Students registered via Affiliated Research Centres are not eligible to apply.

## Applying for emergency costs

You can apply for up to two of the four emergency costs the fund covers.

You’ll need to explain what's happened, why you’re requesting the funding and how it will help you. You'll also be asked to provide evidence to show what has impacted you financially. When submitting your application think carefully about what created your need for support, this is what we'll need to see evidence of.

If you're not sure what evidence to provide, consider providing us with copies of your last three month's bank statements as your evidence. This could help us assess your application and reduce delays in making a payment to you.

If you don’t provide evidence with your application, this will delay us in completing our assessment because we will need to contact you to request evidence. You can contact the [Research Degrees Team](mailto:research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk) in the Graduate School for more advice and guidance with what evidence to provide.

## Medical evidence costs

If you need to provide medical evidence to the OU or Student Finance England, you can apply for up to £50 to cover the cost.

The following are examples of what the OU may request medical evidence for.

* To evidence your disability to the OU
* To apply for Disabled Students’ Allowance

You can apply for medical evidence costs if you are directly registered as a postgraduate research student and actively studying with the Open University, or three months before your registration starts.

You’ll need to provide a receipt to show you have paid for your medical evidence. If you haven’t paid yet you can still apply and send us the receipt once you’ve paid. You can email a copy to [RES Operations](mailto:RES-operations@open.ac.uk) with your Student Assistance Fund Application Form.

## If your application is successful

Applications can take up to 15 working days to be processed.

If your application is approved, you'll be sent confirmation by email and the money will be paid into your bank account. The bank account will need to be in your name, though it can be a joint bank account. We are unable to make a funding payment to you if you don’t have a bank account.

If you're awarded funding, you'll receive a cash payment, it is your responsibility to check with the Tax Office regarding potential tax implications.

If you're awarded funding, you'll receive a cash payment, which could affect your entitlement to certain means tested benefits provided by the UK Government. If this applies to you, it is your responsibility to investigate the impacts of a cash payment, and to declare this to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Complete the [Application form for Student Assistance Funding for PGR students](https://www5.open.ac.uk/students/research/system/files/documents/Student%20Assistance%20Fund%20PGR%20application%20form_final.pdf) to start your application for the Student Assistance Fund.