COVID-19 Staff Assistance Fund

Principles

The strength of our University lies in the excellence of our staff and it is in the interests of our continued success that we take exceptional steps to support our staff through these unprecedented times.

The scheme will rely on the generosity of our community to make funds available.

This staff assistance fund has been developed for a limited period to help only those who are facing exceptional financial hardship or at serious risk of finding themselves in financial hardship as a result of a loss of their income directly due to the COVID19 Pandemic.

The scheme will run from 1 August 2020 to 31 December 2020.

Who is eligible to apply for assistance from the fund?

The scheme is available to:

1. All staff who have an existing contract of employment or on-demand agreement at the date of application (which must be on or after 1st August) or whose contract has come to an end during the month of application; and
2. have been in employment at the University for at least 6 months (or engaged by the University and received pay during the 6 month period)(prior to application

Application to the scheme must be as a last resort, having considered and where appropriate made use of other available sources of finance or support such as:

- Taking a mortgage payment holiday or mortgage break
- Requesting alternate repayments plan from creditors
- Engaging with Government provided statutory benefits or other charitable support schemes.

Financial Support through the scheme

The staff assistance fund provides a non-repayable, one-off grant, subject to income tax and national insurance

Applicants should be mindful of the limited funds within the scheme and in order to allow us to support as many staff as possible only request the amount they absolutely need. If the request is agreed, the minimum amount provided under the scheme will be £50 and the maximum will be £200. This will depend on the availability of funds. Applicants may make a maximum of one application per month

Non-financial Support

The University recognises that financial hardship may not be the only concern that staff are facing during these exceptional times. The following support is also available:

Wellbeing
- **Wellbeing directory** – a directory of wellbeing support services available to all University of Essex, UECS and Wivenhoe House staff
- **SilverCloud** – an online cognitive behavioural therapy service
- **Validium** - a confidential independent service offering health and wellbeing support including counselling. Available 24 hours a day 365 days a year on 0800 358 48 58

**Development (including support for home working and furloughed staff)**
- One to one career coaching
- Digital skills
- **Learning lounge** – details of development opportunities and support

**Use of funds**

We want to prioritise those who are most in need. Therefore grants provided under this scheme must be used towards:

- Mortgage or rent payments
- Utilities/Wi-Fi
- Food bills or other essential items
- Debt repayments

**Application process**

Applications will be reviewed by a newly established staff assistance fund Committee on a case by case basis taking account of individual financial circumstances, noting that (save in exceptional cases) grants will only be offered to those applicants who can demonstrate that they have been ineligible/unsuccessful for other forms of statutory or charitable support.

The Committee will comprise a member of University Steering Group or nominee, a Trade Union representative and a staff volunteer.

Grants awarded may be for the amount requested or a lower amount, depending on the nature of the application and the number of applications received.

Applications should provide the details requested in the Staff Assistance Fund Application Form, including:

- the exceptional reasons applicants are applying for financial assistance;
- evidence of hardship e.g. rent demands, statement showing arrears;
- recent reductions in income, for example if their contract is due to end or has come to an end within the same month or hours have been reduced;
- statutory and/or charitable and/or University support applied for and/or received;
- details of how the funds will be used; and
- Any previous applications/grants awarded to the individual or a member of their household who also works at the University/UECS/Wivenhoe House

This information will be kept confidential by the staff assistance fund Committee in its records (for audit purposes) and will not be recorded on the Employee’s personnel record.

Completed applications should be to staffassistance@essex.ac.uk.

The Staff Assistance Fund Committee will consider applications once a month around the 15th of the month and may request further details if required.
Please note that the decision of the Staff Assistance Fund Committee is final. The process for application may be updated following early experience of the scheme applications.

**Notification of decision**

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their grant within 7 days. Approved grants will be paid via payroll into the bank account into which their salary or wages are paid on the normal payroll date (usually 28th of the month).
Staff Assistance Fund (SAF) frequently asked questions

1. **What is the SAF?** The fund is to support University employees and on demand staff facing financial difficulties, directly as a result of COVID-19 where it has not been possible to find funding from other recognised, reputable sources such as a bank/building society, Government provided support or charitable support.

2. **How will decisions about the use of funds be made?** The fund will be jointly administered by a Committee, including a staff volunteer and a campus trade union representative. The Committee has been established to oversee the administration of the fund and review applications.

3. **Who is eligible to apply to the fund for a grant?**
   - All staff who have an existing contract of employment or on-demand agreement at the date of application (which must be on or after 1st August) and
   - have been in employment at the University for at least 6 months (or engaged by the University and received pay during the 6 month period) prior to application

   The Staff Assistance fund is limited and therefore is intended to help only those who and are facing exceptional financial hardship or at serious risk of finding themselves in financial hardship as a result of a loss of their income directly due to the COVID19 Pandemic.

   Non-financial support is extended to those who have left the University within the previous 3 month period prior to making their application.

4. **I have a disability and need help completing the form or need the form in a different format.** Please contact hrer@essex.ac.uk for support. Applications will be reviewed monthly rather than on a first come first served basis to ensure those who wish to apply are not disadvantaged by not putting in an early application.

4. **How much help can I get as a grant?** The fund will be used to issue one-off grants of no more than £200 on one occasion but the amount provided to an employee will be at the panel's discretion. Grants do not have to be re-paid.

5. **How will it be paid?** Assistance from the fund will be paid to staff through payroll.

6. **Will I be taxed on my grant?** Grants are subject to income tax and national insurance deductions.

7. **How long will the money take to come through?** The grant will normally be paid alongside the payroll on 28th of the month.

8. **Is the process confidential?** All applications will be treated in the strictest confidence; only the Committee will see completed applications. Applications will not be placed on personal files.

11. **Where can I get more help?** For emotional wellbeing staff can access services such as Validum (0800 358 48 58), and SilverCloud (online CBT). A list of websites for external organisations and charities that offer financial support are provided below.

12. **Do I need to have explored other sources of support before I apply to the SAF?** Yes; the rules of the fund ask you to have explored all other avenues of assistance which is reasonably available to you.
13. **What criteria will applications be judged on?** All applications will be judged on an individual basis relative to the level of hardship.

14. **Is there an appeal process if my application is not successful?** The decision of the Committee is final.

**Useful websites:**

- www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- www.stepchange.org
- www.nationaldebtline.org
- www.uswitch.com
- www.moneysavingexpert.com
- www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
- www.gov.uk/universal-credit