

Fees & Refunds Policy 2023-24

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Policy Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles and framework for determining the fees charged for courses offered by Kingston, South Thames, Merton and Carshalton Colleges (South Thames Colleges Group)

Overriding Objectives

- 2 The following objectives underpin the Fees Policy of South Thames Colleges Group (STCG) for 2023/24:
 - a. The fee structure of the College should be transparent.
 - b. The fee structure should be easy to understand for all prospective learners and enrolment staff.
 - c. The fee levels should be competitive, but not unduly discounted.
 - d. The fee levels applied to individual courses should ensure financial viability.
 - e. The policy should be in line with relevant legislation and funding body rules.
 - f. The implementation of the policy should not be administratively burdensome but should be sympathetic to the learner's needs.

Scope

- 3 The Fees Policy is a key document, which is approved by the Finance Planning Resources Committee of the Corporation. The Group Leadership Team will be responsible for ensuring that all relevant staff members become familiar with the policy as part of 2023/24 planning process.
- 4 The Fees Policy will be available on request to learners. It will also be published on each College website.

Responsibility

- 5 Responsibility for implementing the policy rests with the Group Leadership Team.

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Fee Types

- 6 The following fee types will apply in 2023/24:
- a. Course Fee. This is payable for a learner to participate in a course.
 - b. Examination Fee. This is payable for a learner to undertake an examination or assessment to enable the completion of any qualification. This may also include where necessary an element that is payable for a learner to register with an Awarding Body or Professional Body to enable the award of any qualification;
 - c. Additional Costs / Material Costs Fee. This is a fee to meet the costs that may be incurred by a learner when undertaking a course, over and above the course fee (e.g. specialist equipment, uniform, educational visits, CRB/DBS registration costs).

Fees Application Course Fee

- 7 Course Fees will be set for each education and training course offered in line with the following principles:
- a. Where a learner is fully funded as defined by the relevant funding body rules, then no Course Fee will be charged.
 - b. Where a learner is co-funded then the Course Fee is set in reference to the national fee rate for the courses published in the Learning Aim Reference Service (LARS). This fee rate may vary from the national rate as appropriate according to demand.
 - c. Where a learner is funded for their course through a Student Loans Company FE loan, fees will not exceed the qualification funding rate specified in LARS.
 - d. Learners who enrol on programmes funded directly by Office for Students (OFS) will be required to pay the published fee. The fee for each course can be obtained from the College web- site or by contacting Student Admission Services at each College. Where programmes are funded by a partner university but delivered by the College, the partner university will charge a fee directly in accordance with their Fee Policy.
 - e. Fees for overseas students will be published having regard to delivery costs, level and mode of study.
 - f. Learners who enrol on programmes funded by a school or a local authority will not pay a fee.
 - g. Course Fees for Adult and Community Learning courses will be set in accordance with the terms of the specific agreements with the respective Local Authority, such that the overall programmes are financially viable.
 - h. Course Fees for other Full Cost provision will be set at market rates, ensuring that courses are financially viable.

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- 8 Any variation from the Course Fees principles set out above must be approved by the Deputy CEO.
- 9 All Course Fees will be valid for the period 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024. Where learners enrol on courses that continue beyond 31 July 2024, they should be made aware that any fees due after this date (e.g. for the second year of a course) may be subject to amendment. Courses Fees are non-transferable between individual learners.
- 10 The STCG reserves the right to change any Course Fee. Any fee changes will not be applied retrospectively, unless specifically agreed.

Examination Fee

- 11 Where appropriate, an Examination Fee will be payable for a learner to undertake an examination or assessment to enable the completion of any qualification. This may also include, where necessary, an element that is payable for a learner to register with an Awarding Body or Professional Body to enable the award of any qualification.
- 12 An Examination Fee will not be payable where a learner is fully funded by the ESFA or GLA.

Additional Costs/Materials Costs Fee

- 13 Where appropriate, an Additional Costs/Material Costs Fee will be payable to meet the costs of providing materials that are over and above the course fee (e.g. specialist equipment, uniforms, educational visits, CRB/DBS registration).
- 14 This fee may be chargeable to fully funded learners where the materials/items provided are for optional/additional equipment or services not required to complete the course such as clothing, educational visits or personal equipment/materials. These may be charged at the level notified to the learner or sponsor at enrolment.

Fees Publication

- 15 The approved Course Fee and other elements associated with each course will be agreed in advance of the academic year and recorded against each course in the Course Database (EBS). This data will form the basis for all course fees listed in marketing material such as the prospectus and website.
- 16 Where fees are published by the STCG or third parties for external use, the Course Fee should always be quoted clearly indicating the elements of Course Fee, Examination Fee and Material Costs / Additional Costs, where applicable.
- 17 A central file detailing Material Costs / Additional Costs where relevant will be

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maintained so that details can be provided to potential learners on request.

Fee Concessions

Course Fees

- 18** For GLA & ESFA accredited courses, the following categories are eligible for full funding or fees as per the table shown below. Where a course is fully funded, no course fees shall apply.

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19 to 23-year-olds (age exception on traineeships 19- to 24-year-olds)

Provision	Notes and Eligibility	Funding
English and maths up to and including level 2	Must be delivered as part of the legal entitlement qualifications	Fully funded
Essential digital skills qualifications up to and including level 1	Must be delivered as part of the digital legal entitlement qualifications	Fully funded
First full level 2 (excluding English and maths)	First full level 2 must be delivered as part of the legal entitlement qualifications. Level 2 provision from the local flexibility offer will not be funded for 19- to 23-year-olds who do not have a first full level 2. See local flexibility and legal entitlement section.	Fully funded
Level 3 legal entitlement (learner's first full level 3)	First full level 3 must be delivered as part of the legal entitlement qualifications	Fully funded
Level 3 free courses for jobs offer	Learners without a full level 3 or above can access a qualification on the free courses for jobs offer qualifications list	Fully funded
	Learners who already hold a level 3 or above and meet the definition of unemployed or who are in receipt of low wage	Fully funded
NOTE: Once a learner has been funded by free courses for jobs (FCFJ) in line with the funding rules, they will have exhausted their eligibility for the FCFJ offer.		
Level 3 advanced learner loans	A learner who has already achieved a full level 3 and exhausted their eligibility for the free courses for jobs offer	Loan funded
Learning aims to progress to a full level 2 - up to and including level 1	Must be delivered as entry or level 1 provision from local flexibility	Fully funded
Learning aims up to and including level 2, where the learner has already achieved a first full level 2 or above (local flexibility and legal entitlements)	For those who meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learning up to and including level 2	For those who meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded
Traineeships (16- to 24-year-olds)	16- to 18-year old learners must be eligible under ESFAs young people's residency requirements. Excluding the flexible element where funding depends on age and level.	Fully funded

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Provision	Notes and Eligibility	Funding
English and maths up to and including level 2	Must be delivered as part of the legal entitlement qualifications	Fully funded
Essential digital skills qualifications up to and including level 1	Must be delivered as part of the digital legal entitlement qualifications	Fully funded
First full level 2 (excluding English and maths)	For those who meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded
Level 3 free courses for jobs offer	Learners without a full level 3 or above accessing a qualification on the level 3 free courses for jobs offer qualification list	Fully funded
	Learners who already hold a level 3 or above and meet the definition of unemployed or who are in receipt a of low wage	Fully funded
	Where 24+ learners are not eligible for the level 3 free courses for jobs offer, providers must refer to the advanced learner loans rules	Loan funded
NOTE: Once a learner has been funded by free courses for jobs (FCFJ) in line with the funding rules, they will have exhausted their eligibility for the FCFJ offer.		
Learning to progress to level 2 (local flexibility and legal entitlements)	For those eligible for their first level 2 as they meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded
Learning aims up to and including level 2 where the learner has already achieved a first full level 2 or above (local flexibility and legal entitlements)	For those who meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded
Learning aims up to and including level 2 where the learner has not achieved a first full level 2 or above (local flexibility and legal entitlements)	For those eligible for their first level 2 as they meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learning up to and including level 2	For those who meet the unemployed criteria or who are in receipt of a low wage	Fully funded
	For those who do not meet the definition of unemployed or do not meet the eligibility criteria for learners in receipt of low wage	Co-funded

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For funding purposes, a learner is defined as unemployed in the table, if one or more of the following apply:

- receive Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), including those receiving National Insurance credits only
- receive Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- receive Universal Credit (UC), and their take-home pay as recorded on their UC statement (disregarding UC payments and other benefits) is less than £494 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £782 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner)
- are released on temporary licence, studying outside a prison environment, and not funded by the Ministry of Justice

20 South Thames Colleges Group may also use its discretion to fund other learners if all of the following apply:

- receives other state benefits (not included in the list above) and their take-home pay (disregarding UC payments and other benefits) is less than £494 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £782 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner), and
- wants to be employed, or progress into more sustainable employment, and their take-home pay (disregarding UC payments and other benefits) is less than £494 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £782 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner), and you are satisfied identified learning is directly relevant to their employment prospects and the local labour market needs

Examination Fees

21 The following Examination Fee concessions will apply:

- a. For GLA & ESFA funded learners, the categories identified in paragraph 20 as eligible for 100 per cent tuition fee concessions are also eligible for 100 per cent examination fee concessions (i.e. exam fees are zero).
- b. For Higher Education full cost learners, no exam fee concessions are given.
- c. For project funded learners, exam fee concessions may be given, dependent on the project specifications.
- d. For International learners, no exam fee concessions are given.
- e. For employer funded learners such as Apprenticeships, fee arrangements will be determined with each employer.
- f. There are no exam fee concessions given for other learners.
- g. For Full Cost (unfunded) learners, Professional and Teacher Education courses, no exam fee concessions are given.
- h. For Community Learning funded learners, no exam fee concessions are given.
- i. The College reserves the right to charge the exam fee in the following circumstances:

- i. attendance and/or coursework requirements have not been met;

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- ii. the learner is re-taking a whole or part qualification;
- iii. the learner fails to attend an examination without good reason.
- iv. After failure to achieve a qualification or element of a qualification, the learner repeats an examined element.

Additional College Concessions

- 22** Subject to financial viability, the College concessions may be applied to learners who do not qualify for GLA & ESFA fee remission, in particular the low paid employed, their dependants, and the dependants of JSA claimants who are not party to a joint claim.
- 23** Learners who are members of staff at South Thames Colleges Group qualify for 100% course fee remission for GLA & ESFA courses only, provided there are places available on the course at the start date. Exam fees etc. remain payable.

No Fee Concessions

- 24** Categories of individuals which fall outside paragraph 20 would be subject to fee charges for their study. This includes:
- a. Individuals who are not fully funded.
 - b. For Higher Education, no tuition fee concessions are given.
 - c. For project funded learners (e.g. ESF, SEEDA), tuition fee concessions will be given dependent on the project specifications.
 - d. For International learners, no tuition fee concessions are given.
 - e. For employer funded learners or for courses delivered in the workplace, no tuition fee concessions are given.
 - f. For unfunded (full cost) learners, no tuition fee concessions are given.
 - g. For Community Learning courses, no tuition fee concessions are given.

Eligibility Evidence

- 25** The College reserves the right to verify the eligibility of all learners for fee concessions and to make the necessary checks and request evidence to support eligibility of the learner.
- 26** It is the responsibility of the learner to notify the College of any change in status that may affect their eligibility for fee concessions. The College, however, reserves the right to make checks to verify continuing eligibility to fee concessions.
- 27** The College will make learners aware of any financial support that may be available to them from the College to assist in meeting Course Fees.

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Means of Payment

28 The College accepts payment of fees via the following means:

- Cash (sterling)
- Debit Card
- Cheque
- Credit Card (excluding American Express)

29 Where an employer or other third party has agreed to pay a Course Fee on behalf of an individual, payment will be by invoice under the condition that a written agreement from the third party to pay the Course Fee is provided at the time of enrolment.

30 The College will then invoice the employer or sponsor within one month of the student's enrolment. Fees are payable within 30 days of the invoice date.

Advanced Learning Loans

31 Loan funded learners shown at paragraph 20 (with the exception of Advanced or Higher level apprenticeships) will not be eligible for funding and will need to pay for the course themselves, through an employer or contact the Student Loan Company to agree a student loan facility. Student Finance England is responsible for assessing whether learners are eligible.

32 The College will provide a Learning and Funding Information letter to help learners make their application. The letter must include:

- i. The UK provider reference number;
- ii. The learning aim reference number;
- iii. The title of the learning aim;
- iv. The fee charged to the learner; and
- v. The maximum amount of loan available for the learning aim or apprenticeship framework on LARS.

33 Further details on 19+ Learning Loans can be found in the ESFA website, Government Direct Website and the Student Loans Company website.

34 Learners are responsible for ensuring that they are eligible for loan funding prior to enrolment, and remain liable for any fees in the event that they are deemed ineligible, or in the event that payments from the Student Loans Company cease for any reason.

HE Loans

35 Learners may apply for HE loans from the Student Loans Company in support of Course

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Fees.

- 36** Learners are responsible for ensuring that they are eligible for loan funding prior to enrolment and remain liable for any fees in the event that they are deemed ineligible, or in the event that payments from Student Finance England cease for any reason

Payment of Fees

37 International students:

- For students not requiring a Student Route visa: Payment of one third of the total course fee or first year fee for two year courses, as a non-refundable deposit, (before enrolment), and payment of the remaining fee for the academic year by end of the first term is required.
- For students requiring a Student Route visa: The entire first year fee must be payable in advance.

38 Self-funding students:

- Courses of less than 3 month's duration, must be paid in full at enrolment;
- Courses with a duration of more than 3 months and total fees of up to £500 payment must be paid at enrolment;
- Courses with a duration of more than 3 months and total fees above £500 but less than £1,200. First instalment of 50% payable at enrolment and a second instalment of 50% two months after enrolment;
- Courses with a duration of more than 3 months and total fees above £1200. First instalment of 33% payable at enrolment, second payment and third balancing payment spread equally across the duration of the course but prior to its completion;
- Failure to meet agreed instalment payments will result in the STCG taking recovery action and/or the withholding of qualification certificates;
- Students who withdraw from a course before it is completed remain liable for any outstanding fees.

39 Employed or Sponsored Students:

- Subject to written confirmation that an employer or sponsor will take responsibility for the payment of a student's fees the STCG will invoice the employer or sponsor within one month of the student's enrolment. Fees are payable within 30 days of the invoice date.

- 40** Any variation to these payment terms required to address the specific circumstances/characteristics associated with discrete delivery areas will need to be agreed on a case by case basis by the Deputy CEO.

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Transfers

- 41 In the event of a learner transferring between courses, there will be no financial penalty, or refund, but if the course transferred into has a higher Course Fee, the learner must pay the difference at the point of transfer.

Policy on refund of fees

- 42 The College commits staffing and resources to courses on the basis of learner enrolments and will only offer refund of fee payments in limited circumstances.
- 43 Full details of the College's policy on refunds (to FE and full cost learners) is set out in Appendix A, Group Refunds.

Additional Fees

- 44 If a learner exceeds the expected duration of a course, for example a learner has not completed all assessments within the expected timescale, additional fees may be levied to cover any additional costs of assessment or administration that might arise. These will be determined on a case by case basis and must be approved by the relevant Assistant Principal.
- 45 The College reserves the right to charge a fee to learners for amendments to qualification certificates if the changes requested by the learner are for a reason other than an error made by the College.
- 46 The College's normal practice is to make qualification certificates available for collection by individual learners. If a learner requests that the qualification certificate(s) are to be delivered to an address other than the College, then the College reserves the right to charge a reasonable fee for the administration and cost of delivery. The qualification certificate(s) will not be dispatched until the fee has been paid in full.
- 47 The College reserves the right to add any reasonable collection costs incurred to the outstanding fee balances in the event of non-payment following the issue of all standard reminder letters, and to use the services of external agencies to support the collection of fees due.

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Appendix A: Refund Policy 2023/24

Refunds are only granted under certain circumstances and in accordance with this policy. The refund policy has been developed to enable staff and students to understand the limited circumstances where a refund of fees paid, or cancellation of fees due will be considered.

This policy does not deal with Higher Education student fees. Refunds for HE students is covered by the 'Withdrawing Undergraduate Students Fee policy'.

Refund policy for home students on long (over 24 weeks) funded courses

A full refund of your course fees will be made if:

- The course is cancelled or significantly amended by the College.
- You withdraw your application before the course starts.

A partial refund of course fees will be made if:

- You have overpaid
- You withdraw from the course within the first six weeks of the course starting and the college has not paid any charges on your behalf
- The Head of School considers there are exceptional circumstances

The following are **not** considered exceptional circumstances and will not automatically entitle you to a refund:

- You change your mind about enrolling on the course
- You change occupation
- You move away

The amount of the partial refund will be:

- Such sum as the Head of School considers appropriate

Refund policy for home students on short (under 24 weeks) funded courses

A full refund of your course fees will be made if:

- The course is cancelled or significantly amended by the College
- You withdraw your application at least 14 days before the course starts
- The Head of School considers there are exceptional circumstances

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A partial refund of course fees will be made if:

- You have overpaid.
- The Head of School considers there are exceptional circumstances.

The following are **not** considered exceptional circumstances and will not automatically entitle you to a refund:

- You change your mind about enrolling on the course
- You change occupation
- You move away

The amount of the partial refund will be:

- Such sum as the Head of School considers appropriate

Refund policy for students on Full Cost Courses

A cost recovery or full cost course is one where there is no additional source of funding (i.e. from Funding Bodies). The tuition fees paid by the students on these courses have to recoup all the costs of the course and contribute to the fixed costs of the college. Therefore, there are no refunds on full cost courses, except in the following circumstances.

Exceptions:

- The course is cancelled or significantly amended by the College
- You withdraw your application before the course starts and your place can be refilled

In the above instances, fees will be refunded in full.

Refund policy for International Students

Deposits from international students are non-refundable except in the following circumstances:

- Your visa is refused – a deduction of £500 will be made to cover administration costs
- The course is cancelled or significantly amended by the college – the administration charge will not be made in this instance

Tuition fees for international students are non-refundable and non- transferrable unless:

- You have overpaid
- Or the Head of School considers there are exceptional circumstances

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The following are **not** considered exceptional circumstances and will not automatically entitle you to a refund:

- You change your mind about enrolling on the course
- You move away to another area

The amount of the refund will be:

- The fees paid for complete terms not yet started, minus the deposit, minus any charges the college has paid on your behalf
- A student will be considered to have started the term, unless written notification of the student's intention not to continue is received before the first day of the relevant term
- Such sum as Head of School considers appropriate

Online and Telephone Enrolments

- For enrolments that are completed wholly on-line or via telephone, the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013 apply. The College complies in full with the Regulations and will provide a full refund of any fees paid if a cancellation is received within fourteen days of the initial enrolment, and before the course has started.
- In circumstances where the course starts within the fourteen day cancellation period, the refund given will be adjusted to reflect the proportion of the course delivered at the point of cancellation.
- Once the fourteen-day cancellation period has elapsed the College standard refund policy will apply.

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