

Committee: **Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness**
 Date: **19 June 2012**
 Title of Report: **Post-16 Transport Policy 2012/13**
 By: **Director of Children’s Services**
 Purpose of Report: **To revise the Post-16 Transport Policy for the 2012/13 academic year.**

Recommendation:

The Lead Member is recommended to agree the proposed changes to the Post-16 Transport Policy shown as Appendix 2 to give FE students from low income families greater and fairer financial support with transport costs.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 Support with transport for students aged 16 - 19 in Further Education is discretionary. In 2010, the government ceased Education Maintenance Allowance payments and the grants to local authorities (LAs) for transport partnership projects. In addition to these two funding streams, East Sussex County Council allocated a budget of £66,400 in 2010/11 for transport grants for students from low income families. However, the number of qualifying students increased dramatically during this period, which resulted in a budget overspend of some £101,291.

1.2 Consequently, a proposal was presented to Senior Management Team (SMT) in February 2011 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to reduce the value of individual grants and increase eligibility thresholds thus reducing the number of grants to low income families which would have assisted in managing the pressure on the available budget.

1.3 SMT, in consultation with Lead Members deferred the decision on the grounds that post-16 students were already suffering financial hardship due to the cuts in central government spending in other associated areas and that the proposals would impact on our most vulnerable young people. It was therefore decided to keep the grants at their existing level for 2011/12, recognising that projections based on the previous year's number of qualifying students would require approximately £100k additional funding. This was funded from one-off funding in the first instance. The current Post-16 Transport Policy Statement is shown as **Appendix 1**. Evidence suggests eligible student numbers will not fall in the 2012/13 academic year, and as such the base budget has been uplifted to £216,800 for the current financial year. There is a risk that eligible student numbers will increase beyond the budget allocation, and therefore the impact of the policy will need to be monitored closely and financial provisions made accordingly. Should that monitoring indicate at the policy poses significant financial risks to the Department’s resources, a further review of the policy will need to be conducted in the context of the County Council’s key priorities.

1.4 The table below shows the number of student grant payments made in East Sussex in 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 and related costs.

Financial year	Number of payments made	Annual cost
2009/10	967	£139,841
2010/11	1,221	£168,913
2011/12	1,291	£180,583

2. Supporting information

2.1 The above financial implications and rationale for proposing a change to the current policy was reported to SMT on 1 May 2012.

2.2 The cost of Freedom Tickets has risen to £14.50 per week, and the LA's contribution on the existing Band 1 grant equates to £4.50 per week. However, the cost of a Vacant Seat for a student travelling a similar distance is £17.50 per week, demonstrating the disparity between the support provided by the County Council for students from low income families attending different FE providers. It is therefore proposed to end the current lowest level of grant (£156 per year) and maintain only three higher levels of grant which will give students from low income families greater and more realistic support.

2.3 In addition to making the levels of support more equitable, the proposed policy would streamline the current system of four levels of grants to three. The latter would also make it easier to administer within existing resources. This would ensure that the minimum grant is a more realistic contribution to transport costs but would result in an increased cost to the County Council of approximately £6k over the course of a full year. Projections of student numbers (based on last year's student numbers) would indicate this can be met from the existing budget. The Lead Member is advised that exact numbers are very difficult to predict because the number of students moving on to FE, where they will be attending and their families' financial circumstances are currently unknown.

2.4 The policy also proposes a change to the method for measuring home to school/college for FE students from straight line to the shortest walking distance. This is to ensure consistency with the policy for statutory aged pupils

2.5 The proposed policy will ensure we meet our statutory responsibilities as set out in the Education and Skills Act 2008, to promote effective participation in education or training of young people in our area to 18 years old (or 24 years for those with learning difficulties or disabilities). Furthermore the policy will ensure we are supporting those most at risk of disengaging from education or training, in line with our commitment to the implementation of Raising the Participation Age, which comes into effect from September 2013.

2.6 The current post-16 policy funds support with transport for the very small number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities continuing in education until the age of 24. The proposed policy for 2012/13, however, provides Children's Services support for students only until the end of the academic year in which the student turns 21. However, discussions are taking place with Adult Services ('ASC') to explore whether these students continue to be supported by ASC or through Children's Services. Any subsequent proposed change in policy will be brought back to the Lead Member to seek approval for further amendments to the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement.

2.7 Consultation on the proposed policy opened on 14 May 2012 and closed on 11 June 2012. The parties consulted with include all FE providers in East Sussex, existing students, all Year 11 pupils in East Sussex secondary schools and East Sussex Adult Services Department. At the time of writing this report, no comments had been received and reminders were being sent to all parties, again inviting comments. Any comments which are received will be tabled for the Lead Member on 19 June 2012.

3. Conclusion and Reason for recommendations

3.1 The County Council's policy is to support post-16 students from low income families with their transport costs to enable these students to continue in education beyond statutory school age. These proposals will maximise support from existing budgets.

3.2 The Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness is recommended to agree the proposed policy in order to:

- Maximise the support available to students from low income families from the current budget;
- Ensure that the Post-16 policy is consistent with the policy for statutory aged pupils by changing the method for measuring home to school/college from a straight line calculation to the shortest walking distance calculation;
- Support students with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the end of the academic year when they reach age 21 but not beyond. (Discussions are currently taking place with ASC, to determine whether responsibility for students over 21 should rest with ASC or remain within Children's Services. However, these students will be considered for support up to age 24).

MATT DUNKLEY
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Sheila Locke, Head of Admissions and Transport

Tel: 01273 335771

Local Members: All

Background Documents:

Appendix 1 – Post-16 Transport Statement for 2011/12

Appendix 2 – Proposed Post-16 Transport Statement for 2012/13

**Policy statement for learners aged 16 – 18 in further education,
continuing learners aged 19 and over and young people aged 19 – 24
with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.**

1	Summary of policy statement and its main objective
	<p>The providers of post 16 education in East Sussex believe in the principle that no student aged 16 to 19 should be deprived of the opportunity to continue their learning because of the lack of transport or the finance to enable them to use transport. The providers have, therefore, developed policies which ensure there is provision for students in greatest financial need by contributing towards the cost of transport to enable them to travel between home and an approved course.</p>
2	Types of travel assistance available
	<p>Seats on coaches serving schools with sixth forms Students attending schools with sixth forms where hired vehicles are available can purchase a seat by applying to the Passenger Transport team in Transport and Environment Department. The cost of a seat at the time of writing was £100 per term (based on a six term year). However, this is likely to rise in September 2011. Further details will be available during the summer. The charge will be waived for students from low income families meeting the eligibility criteria (see section 4)</p> <p>Freedom tickets Students from low income families may be able to get a Freedom ticket if they travel by bus to their course. Freedom tickets allow unlimited travel on most bus routes in the county and are free of charge to those meeting the eligibility criteria (see section 4)</p> <p>The Transport and Environment department at County Hall can provide advice about available public services. Please call them on 0345 60 80 193 or visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk</p> <p>Travel grants Students from low income families, unable to use the bus network, may qualify for a grant towards their travel costs. Please see the eligibility criteria in section 4 for more information.</p> <p>Link transport Some students (those living in the most rural locations) may be provided with assistance to get to their nearest bus pick up point or railway station. Contact the Admissions and Transport Team within the Children's Services Department at County Hall for more details.</p> <p>College provision Some colleges provide their own transport. Details of this can be obtained direct from the colleges and contact details can be found in section 10.</p> <p>Subsidised rail and bus tickets</p> <p>Rail - Post 16 students in Further Education are able to obtain season tickets offering one third off fares subject to a minimum cost of £8 per week and travel for a minimum of one month. Students will need to obtain a Sussex Student Card (application forms obtainable from Admissions and Transport at County Hall or from www.connexions360.org.uk) before they can apply for a season ticket at southernrailwaytickets.com</p> <p>Bus – Under 19's can buy the East Sussex Freedom bus Ticket for £14 per week. This gives 7 days unlimited travel on most bus routes in East Sussex. A Choice iD Card will need to be obtained from participating colleges and East Sussex libraries. For more information visit www.connexions360.org.uk/choice</p> <p>Some bus companies operate their own discount scheme so we advise students to check</p>

	<p>which concession best suits their circumstances before committing to the Freedom ticket.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Transport arrangements for students who reach the age of 19 whilst continuing on a course.</p>
	<p>Where students receive support it is usually provided up until age of 19 (subject to a normal maximum of two years) but will continue until students complete their course.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Eligibility for support</p>
	<p>Students from families in receipt of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • Income-based Job Seekers Allowance • Child Tax Credit based on income of up to £16,190 • Employment and Support Allowance • Guarantee element of State Pension Credit <p>are entitled to help with transport from the County Council, if the distance between home and the nearest appropriate provision is over three miles. Help is provided in one of the following ways:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ a free seat on a vehicle hired by the County Council (<i>available only to students attending sixth forms at East Sussex maintained secondary schools</i>) ➤ a season ticket on certain public bus services ➤ an annual grant based on distance between home and college. Please note that grants will not increase for 2011/12 and will remain at the same level as in 2010/11. They are payable in three installments: <table style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">3 - 5 miles</td> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">£156</td> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">5 - 7 miles</td> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">£312</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">7 - 10 miles</td> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">£468</td> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">over 10 miles</td> <td style="padding: 0 20px;">£624</td> </tr> </table> <p>For students attending colleges/sixth forms in Brighton and Hove, the grant will be restricted to the cost of weekly bus tickets valid on Brighton and Hove buses.</p> <p>To apply for assistance with transport students/parents should ask for an application form (PS1) which is available from colleges or the Admissions and Transport team at Children's Services Department, PO Box 4, County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1SG.</p> <p>Please note that students doing Apprenticeships should have reasonable expenses met in full by their learning provider.</p> <p>If students are refused assistance by the County Council there is an appeals process. The first stage is to write to the Head of Admissions and Transport setting out why it is felt the decision is wrong. The appeal will be considered by an officer not involved in the original decision. If the student remains dissatisfied they can ask for their case to be considered by the Transport and Student Support Panel. This Panel comprises three elected County Councillors. There is no further right of appeal once the Panel has made its decision.</p>	3 - 5 miles	£156	5 - 7 miles	£312	7 - 10 miles	£468	over 10 miles	£624
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5	Help for students up to age 24 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
	<p>Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities may receive additional help with transport if they are unable to access public transport services to their designated college. This will normally be provided by means of a vehicle hired by the County Council to transport the student between home and college, where possible with other students. We do not provide assistance for pre course visits or work placements.</p> <p>Parents or young people will need to complete an application form explaining why transport is required and what the need or difficulty is. Medical information to support the request must be sent with the application form.</p> <p>For students under the age of 21, the Children's Services Department will decide the outcome. If help is agreed, assistance may continue until the end of the academic year in which the students turns 21 years of age and not beyond. Help is provided in response to assessed need and is subject to regular review. Students wishing to undertake a new course at the same or similar level to a level of qualification already achieved may not necessarily be successful in their application for travel support. For students aged 21+, the decision rests with the Adult Services Department which sets its own eligibility criteria.</p>
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