



DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

1. PURPOSE

This policy sets out the framework within which debt management will be administered within the College.

2. POLICY

Brockenhurst College is committed to reducing the probability of bad debts arising. The College will ensure that a robust debt management procedure is adhered to by all relevant staff and is applied to all student, staff and customer transactions.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff with any involvement in the raising of invoices or financial commitments. The College operates a policy whereby students and customers are required to pay for a service (including course fees) in advance of that service commencing, or at an agreed interval if authorised by the Director of Finance.

Students are required to pay their course fees (where applicable) at the time of registration unless agreed otherwise by the Director of Finance.

The College operates an instalment plan in respect of travel costs, which can be applied for if they have difficulty meeting the full cost of travel fees or whenever a student falls into arrears with their payment.

4. RESPONSIBILITY

The Director of Finance is responsible for managing this policy.

The Senior Management Team are responsible for ensuring that College management and staff adhere to the policy.

Appropriate members of the Finance team and relevant College staff are responsible for the effective operation of the policy and procedures.

5. PROCEDURES

Debt management and debt collection are two key activities that facilitate the effective recovery of debt owed to the College and reduce the probability of bad debts occurring. There are three main categories of debtors: 1) Students, 2) External customers and 3) Staff.

1) Students

Students are expected to agree to payment plans for course fees (if applicable), transport passes, resources, organised trips and other relevant services at the time of registration/enrolment or when the activity has been confirmed.

Non-payment by a student for these services should be referred to the student's Tutor / Personal Progress Manager and/or the Student Finance and Welfare Officer to determine whether the student is suffering from any form of hardship and to ensure that alternative means of financial support are investigated. If hardship is the cause then the Student Finance and Welfare Officer will review the case to ascertain a satisfactory solution which could include an option to pay by instalments or access Support Funds.

If a debt has not arisen through circumstances of hardship then the College can pursue the debt by internal mechanisms or may consider legal proceedings. Individual circumstances will be taken into account and formally considered by SMT.

In respect of any assets loaned to a student as part of their course, e.g. laptops, where the item has not been returned on completion of the course, then an invoice representing the book value of the asset will be given to the student. If the invoice is unpaid the procedures outlined above will be followed.

Students are expected to pay all outstanding debts before re-admission on to a new course.

Student debt is managed as follows: -

- a) When a student fails to pay (and has no other payment plan/agreement in place) then the College sends a 1st debt chasing letter informing them that their account is overdue.
- b) If no payment is received fifteen days after the 1st letter, a 2nd letter final demand is sent by the College.
- c) If debt still remains, seven days later, a 3rd letter is sent by the College which informs the student that the debt is being passed to a debt collection agency.

Debt chasing letters are managed by the College Finance Department, save for International Students which are managed by the relevant College department. During steps 2 and 3 the Finance Department may suggest creating a provision for the outstanding debt, with proposals sent to the Director of Finance for approval. The relevant College department / budget holder will be appropriately informed. At point 3, if the Finance team wishes to refer this debt to a debt collection agency they must seek approval from the Director of Finance.

2) External Customers (Non Students)

- a) External Customers are issued with a College invoice. This invoice clearly states the date, name, address, and reference number, detail of service provided, price of service and method of payment. As standard practice all invoiced customers are given fourteen days in which to settle their debt.

- b) After thirty days, if the debt is not settled, the Finance Department sends a 1st reminder to each debtor. In addition they will contact the debtor by telephone advising that the debt is due for payment and a 'reminder' letter is being issued.
- c) After forty-five days, if the debt is not settled, the Finance Department contacts the debtor by telephone to ascertain why payment has not been received and sends a final reminder letter.

During steps b and c the Finance Department will suggest creating a provision for the outstanding debt, with proposals sent to the Director of Finance for approval.

- d) After fifty two days, if the debt is not settled, the Finance Department sends a 3rd letter informing that the debt is being passed to a recovery agency
- e) After sixty days the College will refer the debt to a debt collection agency. A write off request form is completed and signed by the Director of Finance and the Principle (subject to authorisation levels set out in the Financial Regulations), a credit note is then raised and the debt cleared off the ledger, and sent to the debt recovery agency. A debt recovery file is opened holding the relevant documents/correspondence/information relating to that debt.

The progress of the debt recovery agency is monitored weekly by the Finance Department, noted on the finance system and reported to the Director of Finance each month.

If money is recovered, it is posted to the original debtor account and an invoice is raised to the original income code.

When the debt recovery agency recommends commencing legal action, this recommendation is forwarded to the Director of Finance for approval before legal action can begin.

Companies who fail to pay their debts will be barred for future applications to use the College facilities and services.

3) Staff

Staff are expected to pay for any services provided by the College (e.g. rail passes, cycle to work scheme etc.) either at the time of the service being provided or by means of instalments in agreement with the Director of Finance.

Non-payment by a member of staff will result in correspondence from the Director of Finance requesting an explanation for the non-payment. If there is no resolution to the debt position then the debt will be referred to the Senior Management Team (SMT) to make the decision for pursuing the debt.

6. CREDIT NOTES AND REFUNDS

College departments are responsible for informing the Finance Department of all credit note and refund requests. This should be via email using the standard excel based credit note template. Clear narrative should be included indicating all relevant information i.e. if it is a full or part credit, invoice reference and the reason for the credit note / refund (amendment, overcharge, error, duplication, etc). The request will be actioned as appropriate by the Finance Department.

7. DEBT MANAGEMENT CONTROL

The Finance Department, with the support of the Student Services Department, is responsible for providing relevant managers, the Director of Finance and the Finance and Standards Committee with regular reports. These reports will include the following information to enable informed decisions to be made:

- Student debt by age, value, and action taken
- Staff debt by age, value and action taken
- External customer debt by age, value and action taken
- Details of accounts being pursued through the small claims court or referred to a debt collection agency
- Report on doubtful debts considered as bad debt
- A report on proposed debt for write off and debt written off

Doubtful Debts – Once all options have been exhausted to recover outstanding debts, a report should be prepared by the Finance Department to the Director of Finance so that decisions on action can be taken.

Debt Write Offs – Debtors to be written off will be approved by the Director of Finance and the Principal in accordance with the limits stipulated in the College Financial Regulations, as follows:

- The Director of Finance be authorised to approve Write-Offs up to £500. Previously the Principal has been required to approve all Write-Offs up to £5000.
- For Write-Offs above £500 up to £5,000 the Principal will still be required to provide authorisation.
- From £5,000 the Finance and Standards Committee to approve write-offs with an upper limit of £25,000. Anything above that amount should be approved by the Corporation.

8. REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy should be reviewed every 3 years or sooner if changes in debt management affect it.