

Brighton & Hove Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families & Schools Sub-Committee
Date: Monday 20 October 2003
Report of: Director Children, Families & Schools
Subject: Post-16 Further Education (FE) Student Support
Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To inform members about the support available to post-16 students in FE; to update them on progress with the new Local Transport Partnership; and to obtain their agreement to minor changes to that part of post-16 FE policy that is directly funded by the Local Education Authority (LEA).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Members agree to the policy amendments set out in Sections 5.2 and 5.5 below.

3. Information/Background

- 3.1 Post-16 FE student support covers students in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and FE colleges. The majority of support available is for full-time students aged between 16 and 18. Some exceptions are made for students aged 19 or over, but there is little support available for adults.
- 3.2 There have been many changes in Government policy and funding since 1999. The current range of funding types and sources is set out in grid form in Appendix 1.

4 New Transport Initiatives

Transport Pathfinder Project 2002/03

- 4.1 The most recent significant new development in post-16 funding began in February 2002, when the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) offered Pathfinder funding to about one half of all LEAs to develop innovative transport solutions for the 2002/03 academic year, in support of FE recruitment and retention.
- 4.2 The LEA was allocated approximately £192k to develop a local project. A partnership group was set up consisting of the LEA Student Support Strategic Manager, the City Council's Public Transport Officer, and representatives from Sussex Learning and

Skills Council, Sussex Connexions, East Brighton Excellence Challenge, local colleges, the Lewes site of South Downs College and East Sussex County Council.

4.3 There were two main strands to the project:

- Consultancy funded jointly by the LEA and East Sussex County Council. MCL consultants, based in Lewes, delivered an interim report in the spring that helped to inform policy for both LEAs for 2003/04. A final report was due to be launched at a conference on 16 October.
- The Pathfinder shuttle bus service, linking East Brighton to City College, BHASVIC and Varndean College. A development worker was appointed to take this part of the pilot forward. This project was chosen by Ministers in February this year to launch the Government's report into Social Exclusion and Transport.

Transport Policy 2003/04

4.4 The Pathfinder pilot anticipated new legislation that came into force this year. LEAs must now ensure that transport is not a barrier to young people wishing to enter FE and work in partnership with crucial local agencies to develop and improve local transport arrangements for them. Each local partnership must publish its policy by 31 May each year and circulate this as widely as possible. The funding allocated to Brighton & Hove this year is approximately £92k.

4.5 The Local Transport Partnership used to determine policy for 2003/04 was expanded from the Pathfinder group to include the Head of Longhill School and West Sussex County Council. The full policy agreed on by the partnership is set out in detail on the City Council website under www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/studentsupport (follow the FE links). The principal elements are:

- a new Brighton & Hove Buses route 88 running from Hollingbury and Coldean to City College, BHASVIC and Varndean College;
- a continuation of the two Pathfinder shuttle buses but with modified routes and timetables;
- issue of a free BUS ID+ (discount) card to all new students living in East Brighton or 3+ miles from their school or college location; and
- a new rail discount scheme giving around 1/3 off rail fares, negotiated jointly with East and West Sussex County Councils and South Central Trains.

4.6 A grid summary of all of the transport help now available to FE students is set out in Appendix 2.

4.7 All elements of discretionary student support policy (ie that part of the overall support that is entirely LEA-funded) are open to reconsideration in individual cases. Exceptions can be applied where the case made is sufficient to justify it.

5 **Policy Amendments**

Child Tax Credit

- 5.1 The 'Who's eligible' column of Appendix 2 explains that students or their families must be in receipt of income support; or income-based job seeker's allowance; or child tax credit of £13,230 or below in order to receive the basic travel grant. This criterion also applies to help with living costs.
- 5.2 Prior to this year, students whose families received working families' tax credit were eligible for support, regardless of the level of that credit. Students who qualified on that basis and are continuing their studies in 2003/04 will continue to receive support. However, it has been necessary to move to using child tax credit as an eligibility condition for new students because working families' tax credit has been phased out. The figure of £13,230 has been chosen to match the criterion used for free school meals.
- 5.3 For the past two years, the LEA has worked closely with local colleges, the local LSC and the two neighbouring LEAs to try and achieve broadly common policies in the interests of students. The change from working families' tax credit to child tax credit has been adopted as a criterion by all Brighton & Hove and West Sussex colleges and by East and West Sussex County Councils as well as this LEA.
- 5.4 The change affects applications for help with living costs from school sixth form students but that help is not LEA-funded. The only policy affected by this change that is entirely LEA-funded is help with travel costs (see Appendix 1).

Journey Times and Distances (Help With Travel Costs)

- 5.5 An additional policy criterion has been adopted for this year stating that the LEA will not normally assist for journeys of over 15 miles or one and a quarter hours' travelling time. The purpose of this new criterion, which brings the LEA into line with neighbouring councils, is to discourage students from making long daily journeys to college which in the LEA's judgement (based on evidence from Connexions and other relevant agencies) are not in the student's best interest. This applies particularly to students with special needs wishing to undertake very long daily journeys to school or college by taxi. Exceptions to this criterion can be made where the LEA thinks it appropriate and/or there is a request for a decision to refuse support to be reconsidered.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 In drawing up its policy, the Local Transport Partnership consulted widely with all partners and students. Research carried out by MCL consultants and the Transport Pathfinder development worker played a crucial role in this.
- 6.2 Schools and colleges within Brighton & Hove and within East and West Sussex LEAs were consulted on the policy recommendations set out in Section 5 above via the FE Student Support Sub-Group of the Learning Partnership and the Pan Sussex Student Support Consultative Group. They were also discussed with Sussex Learning and Skills Council.

