

# Guidance Notes for the Access to Learning Fund

## Academic Year 2011-12

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| <b>Purpose of the ALF fund</b> | The Access to Learning Fund’s remit is to provide discretionary financial assistance for ‘home’ students who may need extra financial support to access and remain in higher education – particularly those students who need financial help to meet extra costs that cannot be met from other sources of support. Unfortunately we cannot offer support to overseas students. The Fund, which is over half a million pounds, can help to alleviate unexpected financial hardship. Students who may be considering leaving higher education because of financial problems are encouraged to apply. You can apply to the fund at any point throughout the academic year, including the long vacation, but please note the deadline dates. Any help you receive from the Fund is <i>usually</i> non-repayable (except for short-term emergency loans). Unfortunately we are unable to provide funds to pay tuition fees for full time and postgraduate students. |
| <b>What the fund offers</b>    | Short term Emergency Loans; Foyer Bursaries for students who are/or were recently homeless; Care Leavers Bursaries. <i>Please see page 10 below for more information</i>   |

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| <b>Important points to note</b> | We will contact you via your university email account, usually within twenty working days, to let you know the outcome of your application. We do not send confirmation letters so please ensure that you check your emails regularly.   |
| Contacting you                  |  |
| Evidence                        | The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills issues guidelines on the type of evidence that students should provide to support their ALF application – all of which is necessary for us to make a decision based on your personal circumstances. Applications that do not contain all of the relevant information, therefore, cannot be assessed and, during busy periods, may be put to one side until staff have the time to chase you for the information. The twenty working days service standard would not apply in these circumstances. |
| Confidentiality                 | Please note that your application form and documents will be seen only by the Student Finance Team and, where appropriate, the Student Advice Centre. All paperwork is stored in confidential files within the Student Finance area of work in accordance with auditing requirements.  |
| Inappropriate spending          | The Access to Learning Fund cannot be used to compensate for <i>inappropriate</i> use of grants and loans. For example large purchases such as a car, a holiday, expensive personal items or loans and/or gifts of cash to friends and family. This also applies to large gifts of cash and/or other donations to charitable organisations.  |
| Posting applications            | If you are posting your application to us please have the envelope weighed at the Post Office – the university will not accept mail when there is postage to pay. Remember if you require proof of delivery you should use registered or recorded post. You should also include your name and address on the reverse side of the envelope in case it has to be returned to you by the Post Office. Please note the deadline dates if you are posting your application.   |

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| Repaying ALF awards     | ALF awards do not normally have to be repaid, however, you <b>may</b> be required to repay all or part of your award if you withdraw or intermit from your course before the end of the academic year, or if you reduce the number of modules or credits you are studying in the academic year.<br>In these circumstances please contact Student Finance on 01782 294510, so that we can assess your circumstances. |
| Debts to the university | Certain debts to the university may prevent students from graduating or progressing onto the next level of their course.  |
| Emergency loan debts    | Emergency loans from ALF that have not been repaid will become a university debt and may make the debtor ineligible to apply to ALF again in the future.  |

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| <b>Deadline Dates</b>     |  |
| Term time applications    | 4.30 p.m. Friday 01 June 2012.   |
| Summer Vacation           | For students who are unable to work for various reasons.   |
| Category A1<br>Category B | Academic reasons, supported by tutor<br>Disabled students or students who have caring responsibilities<br>4.30 p.m. Friday 29 June 2012. |
| Category A2               | Students who lose their job through no fault of their own<br>4.30 p.m. Friday 20 July 2012.  |
| Postgraduate Bursaries    | 4.30 p.m. Friday 03 February 2012. This deadline may be extended if funds are available.   |

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| <b>Requesting a review of your ALF application</b> | <p>If you want to request a review of the decision on your application please contact the Student Advice Centre (SAC) in the first instance. If appropriate the Adviser will contact Student Finance and ask to see a copy of your application form which will include the income and expenditure calculations. The Adviser may contact Student Finance on your behalf if they believe your circumstances are not straightforward. Alternatively the SAC may help you to make your own additional case if you believe that your circumstances warrant it.</p> <p>If later in the year you would like a review of your application because of a significant change in your circumstances, please <u>write</u> to Student Finance explaining the change. Please attach an up to date bank statement and, if possible, provide evidence of the change in circumstances.</p> |
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| <b>Appeals and Complaints – Access to Learning Fund application procedure only</b> | <p>We would encourage any student who wishes to appeal or complain about the way their application has been treated to speak to an Adviser in the SAC in the first instance.</p> <p><b>Appeals</b> must be received in writing by Student Finance within ten working days of the date of the results letter or email. The only grounds for appeal will be:</p> |
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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That there has been a material error or irregularity in the decision making procedure,</li> <li>• That the university failed to give regard to pertinent information contained within or attached to the original application form.</li> </ul> <p>John Franklin Director of Service, and the Students' Union Membership Services Manager, or her nominee, will hear the first stage of the appeal. Afterwards, if the student wants to continue with the appeal they should write to the Dean of Students and Academic Registrar within ten working days after the first meeting. The Dean of Students and Academic Registrar, or her nominee, and the Students' Union Education and Welfare Officer will invite the student to a meeting to discuss the appeal.</p> <p><b>Complaints.</b> Students who wish to complain about the way in which their application has been administered should do so in writing within ten working days of the date of the results letter or email.</p> <p>Complaints should be forwarded to the Director of Student Administrative Services, Information Centre, Staffordshire University, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DE. You will be notified of any action that may be taken as a result of your complaint.</p> |
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| <b>RESIDENCY CRITERIA</b>  |   |
| <b>To be eligible to apply for an ALF award students must meet one or more of the following residency criteria</b> | <p>You are a UK National</p> <p>You are an EU National</p> <p>There are no restrictions on your stay and you are therefore settled (on the first day of the first academic year of your course) within the United Kingdom (UK) (i.e. have the Right of Abode in the UK or have indefinite Leave to Remain (please provide the reference number from your UKBA award notice and submit a photocopy of that award notice).</p> <p>You have been recognised by the UK Government as a Refugee (please provide the reference number from your UKBA award notice giving the expiry date of your status and submit a photocopy of that award notice)</p> <p>You have been granted Humanitarian Protection (HP) by the Home Office (please supply the reference number from your UKBA award notice giving the expiry date of your status and submit a photocopy of that award notice.</p> <p>You are an EEA or Swiss Migrant Worker or the family member of an EEA or Swiss Migrant Worker</p> |

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|  | <p>You are the child of a Swiss National</p> <p>You are the child of a Turkish worker.</p> <p>You have been ‘Ordinarily Resident’ within the UK and islands for 3 years immediately before the start of your course. (Anyone recognised by the UK Government as a Refugee or awarded humanitarian protection should have maintained ‘Ordinary Residence’ from the date the status was granted).</p> <p>None of this time was wholly or mainly for the purposes of receiving full time education, or if it was you were resident in the EEA immediately prior to this three year period.</p> |
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| <b>Eligibility</b>                               |  |
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| <b>Full and Part time undergraduate students</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Full time undergraduate students studying 120 credits in the academic year.</li> <li>○ Part time undergraduates who are registered on 50% of a full time course, usually 60 credits.</li> <li>○ Students on a placement year.</li> <li>○ Full time students must take out the maximum maintenance loan that they are entitled to.</li> <li>○ Part time students must have applied for the part time course and fees grant.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Full and Part time postgraduate students</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Full time postgraduate students studying on a course above first degree and who are studying 180 credits in the academic year.</li> <li>○ Part time postgraduate students who are registered on a minimum of 50% of a full time course, usually 90 credits.</li> <li>○ Students who are writing up their dissertation and not attending the institution</li> <li>○ Distance learning students</li> <li>○ Postgraduate students must prove that they have made <b>realistic provision</b> to fund both their tuition fees and living costs.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Disabled Students</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Disabled students whose disability prevents them from studying 50% of a full time course, may apply to the Access to Learning Fund if they are studying at least 25% of a full time course.</li> <li>○ These students would have registered on 25% of the course at the start of the academic year and will be able to supply medical evidence of their circumstances.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>NHS Bursary holders</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students who receive either a means tested or non means tested NHS bursary.</li> <li>○ NHS secondees are eligible to apply to the Fund.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Taster Modules</b>                            | <p>‘Home’ students undertaking a taster module may be eligible for a fee waiver and a small grant of £80 towards course and travel costs. EU students on a Taster module are eligible to apply for fee remission and course grant if they meet the benefits criteria below.</p>  |
| <b>Contribution</b>                              |  |

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| <p><b>towards tuition fees</b></p> <p><b>Grant of £80 towards travel and course costs</b></p> | <p>Taster module students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ be studying on a recognised undergraduate Taster Module of between 10% and under 50% of a full time equivalent course.</li> <li>○ Be on a course lasts no more than one term or one semester whichever is the longer.</li> </ul> <p>Your tutor will be able to advise you if your course meets the above criteria.</p> <p>Students should also</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have little or no previous experience of higher education.</li> <li>○ Are in receipt of one or more of the following state benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Income Support</li> <li>○ Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance</li> <li>○ Council Tax Benefit</li> <li>○ Income based Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA IB)</li> <li>○ The full amount of Child Tax Credit</li> <li>○ Working Tax Credit</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Have an income which is below £16,845 (or £18,845 if the student has a spouse/partner). Partner's income will be included when assessing gross income.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Intermitting Students</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students who are intermitting on health grounds, or who are pregnant, but continue to receive statutory support may also apply to the Access to Learning Fund.</li> <li>○ Students must provide medical evidence as well as confirmation from their Faculty that they have not abandoned, withdrawn or been expelled from their course.</li> </ul>   |

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| <p><b>PRIORITY GROUPS</b></p>                              |  |
| <p><b>Full-time undergraduates</b></p> <p><b>(4.4)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students with children, especially lone parents.</li> <li>○ Mature students, especially those with existing financial commitments, including priority debts.</li> <li>○ Students from low income families (low income as determined by the university).</li> <li>○ Disabled Students, especially where the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is unable to meet particular costs and the institution has no legal responsibility to do so.</li> <li>○ Care leavers</li> <li>○ Students from Foyers or who are homeless.</li> <li>○ Students receiving the final year loan rate who are in financial difficulty (including those who are unable to work because of academic pressure).</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Part-time undergraduates</b></p>                     | <p>Please note that awards to part time students usually cover course costs only. The priority groups are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students with children</li> <li>○ Students in receipt of the full statutory support package</li> <li>○ Students who are disabled, including disabled students enrolled on between 25% and 49% of a full time equivalent course, who</li> </ul>   |

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|                                | <p>are ineligible for Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)</p> <p>Students who are not eligible for the statutory support package because of <b>previous study</b> may also apply to ALF.</p>  |
| <b>Full time postgraduates</b> | <p>Postgraduate students must show that they have made 'realistic provision' to fund both their tuition fees and their living costs. The priority groups are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students who are self funding</li> <li>○ Students with children</li> <li>○ Disabled students (especially where the DSA is unable to meet particular costs and the institution has no legal responsibility to do so).</li> </ul> |
| <b>Part time postgraduates</b> | <p>Students with children</p> <p>Disabled students (including those studying between 25% and 49% of an FTE who are ineligible for the Disabled Students Allowance)</p>   |
| <b>Non-priority groups</b>     | <p>If you are not in one of the priority groups you can still apply to the Fund but you must provide as much evidence as possible to show why you have a particular need.</p>  |

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| <b>APPLICATION PROCESS</b>   | <p>Full time students may apply to ALF as soon as they have received the first instalment of their student loan until the deadline date of 01 June 2012. Part-time students must apply for the course and fees grant before applying to ALF. Postgraduate students may apply from the start of term.</p> <p>Subsequent applications for term time awards should only be made if circumstances have changed significantly. You will be asked to provide documentary evidence for the change in circumstances and up-to-date bank statements for all accounts held in your name, including joint accounts, savings accounts, ISAs etc.</p> |
| <b>How do I apply?</b>   | <p>Application packs are available from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Information Centres and the Students' Union Advice Centres on the Beaconside campus and the College Road campus.</li> <li>○ Designated staff at the Lichfield Centre and the Schools of Health.</li> <li>○ Designated staff in SURF and Franchise colleges.</li> <li>○ Information Centre website <a href="http://www.staffs.ac.uk/askalf">www.staffs.ac.uk/askalf</a></li> <li>○ Or you can telephone Student Finance on 01782 294510 to request an application pack.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>What do I do next?</b><br><br><b>Your application will be returned to you if you do not have a tutor's signature.</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ You must have your application form signed by your tutor who must confirm that you are in regular attendance.</li> <li>○ Distance Learning students should ask their tutor to email <a href="mailto:askalf@staffs.ac.uk">askalf@staffs.ac.uk</a> to confirm that they are actively pursuing their course.</li> <li>○ All Stoke and Stafford based students must attend a workshop run by the Students' Union Advice Centre. If your circumstances are</li> </ul>  |

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|   | <p>not straightforward or you need debt management advice, you may also want to attend a drop-in session or have a one to one appointment with an adviser. Their telephone numbers are Stafford 01785 353311 and Stoke 01782 294469. The adviser will sign the appropriate section of the ALF form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SURF and Franchise students who live or study too far away from either the Stafford or Stoke campuses can telephone the Advice Centre to make a telephone appointment if they wish. Alternatively they can send their form directly to Student Finance and we will forward it to the Advice Centre on their behalf. Don't forget to allow extra time for this.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>What evidence do I need to attach?</b></p> <p><b>INCOME</b></p> <p><b>Your application will not be processed until ALL appropriate evidence has been received</b></p> <p><b>Photocopies only should be attached – these will be retained by the university for auditing purposes.</b></p> <p><b>Please read and complete the 'Evidence Checklist' included in the application pack.</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Copy of your <b>Maintenance Grant or Special Support Grant</b> as listed on your Student Finance Notification.</li> <li>○ Evidence of the amount of <b>Maintenance Loan</b> you are entitled to.</li> <li>○ Copy of your <b>Student Maintenance Loan payment schedule.</b></li> <li>○ A copy of your <b>University Bursary notification letter.</b></li> <li>○ Evidence of <b>Parents Learning Allowance</b>, where appropriate.</li> <li>○ Evidence of <b>Childcare Grant</b>, where appropriate.</li> <li>○ Evidence of <b>Adult Dependants Grant</b>, where appropriate.</li> <li>○ Copy of your <b>NHS, Social Work or other bursary/grant or scholarship letter</b> where appropriate.</li> <li>○ <b>Part time students</b> should provide a copy of the letter showing the amount of <b>Fees and Course grant</b> they are entitled to.</li> <li>○ Where appropriate a copy of the confirmation of your <b>Professional/Career Development Loan</b> from a high street bank.</li> <li>○ Evidence of <b>any other income for yourself and your partner</b>, where appropriate. You should include evidence of your partner's salary but not your own if you are studying full time. Full time students will have a 'notional postgraduate income' included instead of actual salary.</li> <li>○ <b>Part time students</b> should provide evidence of their own <b>salary.</b></li> <li>○ Copy of any <b>benefits letter for yourself and/or your partner</b>, including <b>Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support etc.</b> If you are receiving a disability premium, please provide evidence.</li> <li>○ Evidence of any <b>Tax Credits</b> received by you and/or your partner.</li> <li>○ Evidence of <b>Child Support Maintenance</b> payments received.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>EXPENDITURE</b></p> <p><b>Your application will not be processed until ALL appropriate evidence has been received</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence of all expenditure listed on the form e.g. <b>Rent or Mortgage payments, Council Tax, and Life and Buildings Insurance</b> (but not contents insurance).</li> <li>○ Evidence of any <b>priority debts.</b></li> <li>○ Evidence of <b>actual childcare costs.</b></li> <li>○ Evidence of any <b>disability costs.</b></li> <li>○ If you are unable to provide evidence of your <b>public transport costs</b> we will include the cost of a saver rail ticket or a bus pass at</li> </ul>   |

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| <p><b>Photocopies only should be attached – these will be retained by the university for auditing purposes</b></p> | <p>£17.80 per week.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We will use the employer’s postcode to find the mileage for travel to work.</li> <li>○ Evidence of any other <b>unavoidable</b> expenditure such as child maintenance payments.</li> <li>○ <b>Three months up to date bank statements</b> for <b>ALL</b> accounts held in your name, including joint accounts, savings accounts, ISAs etc.</li> <li>○ If you have a partner you should provide statements for all of their accounts as well</li> <li>○ Please write a note on the statement to show where <b>ALL</b> deposits have come from, i.e. salary, benefit, parental contribution, gift etc.</li> <li>○ For <b>ALL</b> withdrawals of £50 and above please note what the money has been used for i.e. shopping, childcare, bills, insurance payments etc.</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>What do I do now?</b></p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Read and sign the declaration.</li> <li>○ Make sure your tutor and the SAC have signed the form.</li> <li>○ Ensure that photocopies of all of your evidence are attached.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Who do I send my form to?</b></p>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Take your form to the Information Centre in either the Flaxman Building on College Road, Stoke or the Beacon Building on the Stafford campus. You will be given a receipt.</li> <li>○ If you are posting your application please <b>HAVE IT WEIGHED</b> at the Post Office. The university <b>will not accept mail that has postage to pay.</b> (See below for the postal address)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>How long will it take to make a decision?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Please allow 20 working days from receipt of the <b>complete</b> application, i.e. all documents are attached. If signatures or evidence is missing the process may take much longer.</li> <li>○ Please check your university email account regularly. If we need additional information we will send you an email in the first instance.</li> <li>○ We will email you on your university email account to let you know the outcome of your application. It is your responsibility to check your email account on a regular basis.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>How is the award paid?</b></p>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If you have been allocated an award you will usually collect your cheque(s) from the Information Centre on the site where you study or from the designated person in your college.</li> <li>○ You will need to provide your student card and an attendance form signed by your tutor each time you collect a cheque.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Can I appeal if I have been unsuccessful?</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students are advised to seek advice from the Student Advice Centre if they wish to appeal.</li> <li>○ The appeals process is noted on page 4 above.</li> <li>○ Please note the grounds for appeal.</li> </ul>   |

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| <p><b>EMERGENCY LOANS</b></p> <p><b>Delays in receiving your student loan</b></p> <p><b>How do I apply?</b></p> <p><b>When do I repay the loan?</b></p> <p><b>Where do I repay the loan?</b></p> | <p>Students who do not receive the first instalment of their Maintenance Loan at the start of their <b>first</b> term, either September or January, or their NHS Bursary has been delayed and they have no other funding or savings, may apply to ALF for an emergency loan. We allow a loan of £50 per week in the first instance, and may go up to a maximum of £200 over a four week period to help with the payment of food etc. If you are having problems with your landlord or creditors because your loan/bursary has been delayed, you may want to speak to an Adviser in the Student Advice Centre.</p> <p>Emergency Loan application forms are available from the Information Centres on the Stoke and Beaconside campuses, the Lichfield Centre and the School of Health at Shrewsbury between 9.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. Monday to Thursday and from 9.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. on Fridays. You will need to provide evidence that you are eligible for the Student Loan/Bursary and, if possible, provide a post dated cheque to cover the emergency loan. The emergency loan will be paid to you the following day by university cheque that can be cashed over the counter at the main Lloyds Bank in Stafford, Stoke, Hanley, Lichfield or the Pride Hill branch in Shrewsbury.</p> <p>If you have not provided a cheque, post dated for one calendar month, you must repay your emergency loan as soon as you receive your Student Loan/Bursary. We would expect this to be within one calendar month but if it takes longer you should contact Financial Services on 01785 353365, or the member of staff responsible for emergency loans in Lichfield and Shrewsbury.</p> <p>Please take your payment to Financial Services in the Beacon Building on the Beaconside campus, the Flaxman Building on the College Road campus or to the appropriate section in the Lichfield Centre or the School of Health.</p> |
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| <p><b>DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENTS</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students who wish to apply <b>only</b> for the cost of a diagnostic assessment should complete the ‘fast track’ form available from the Student Enabling Centre. You do not need to have taken out the Maintenance Loan to apply for this funding.</li> <li>○ Nursing students should contact the Student Enabling Centre.</li> <li>○ If you wish to apply to ALF either at the same time or later in the year you should complete the full ALF application form as well.</li> <li>○ Please attach an attendance form signed by your tutor to the form.</li> <li>○ The form <b>MUST</b> be signed by a member of the Student Enabling Centre <b>before</b> you forward it to Student Finance on the Stoke campus.</li> <li>○ Either hand your form in to the Information Centre on either the Stoke or Stafford campus or send it directly to Student Finance.</li> <li>○ You will receive the results of your application via your university email account. Please note it is your responsibility to check your email account on a regular basis. Students must have</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Student Enabling Centre</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Employability and Student Support</b><br/>Telephone - Stoke site : 01782 292783<br/>-Stafford site 01785 353302<br/>Website: <a href="mailto:www.disability@staffs.ac.uk">www.disability@staffs.ac.uk</a></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Schools of Health</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Andy Worden, Faculty of Health &amp; Sciences, Blackheath Lane, Stafford 01785 353760 ext. 3760</li> <li>○ Lynn Wright/Kerri Thomas, Faculty of Health &amp; Sciences, Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, 01743 261136</li> </ul> |
| <b>Lichfield Centre</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Jane Johnston</b> Telephone: 01543 301100</li> </ul>   |

| <b>SURF and Franchise Colleges</b>       | <b>Designated ALF contacts</b>  |
|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>Burton College</b>                    | Tracey Widowson and Bev Elliott |
| <b>Leek College</b>                      | Val Smith                       |
| <b>Newcastle College</b>                 | Lisa Saville                    |
| <b>Radbrook College</b>                  | Frances Oakley                  |
| <b>Riverside College, Halton</b>         | Jo Bullock                      |
| <b>Shrewsbury College</b>                | Sandra Cliffe                   |
| <b>Stafford College</b>                  | Kay Goland                      |
| <b>Stoke-on-Trent College</b>            | Faye Taylor                     |
| <b>Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College</b> | Phil Maddocks                   |
| <b>South Staffordshire College</b>       | Sharon Hall                     |
| <b>Walford &amp; North Shropshire</b>    | Lucy Beaumont                   |
| <b>Worcester College</b>                 | Sarah Bradnick                  |