



The University has undertaken a comprehensive review of all of its scholarships, bursaries and particular financial awards for its students



In an era where students are facing immense financial pressures, the JS Group's introduction of high-speed cash payments directly to students (in conjunction with the Nat West Payit open banking system) and the astute management of credit-based student funding (via the Aspire platform) *"have transformed the experience for our most challenged students"* says the **University**.

The University of Sunderland invests significant amounts in bursaries, scholarships and hardship packages to its students each year – and getting those funds to students in a fast, safe, effective and targeted way *"is a matter of enormous trust"* says the **University's Chief Finance Officer, Ben Dale**.

"The JS Group provides that trust. The partnership we have with them makes our service and administration so much easier. It's a more efficient way of operating for us and it's a much better service to the students."

While the JS group has been working with the University of Sunderland for many years, a recent overhaul of the University's student support packages has prompted the need for even more targeted use of that funding and for fresh and innovative practices in the delivery and application of that funding.

The University has undertaken a comprehensive review of all of its scholarships, bursaries and particular financial awards for its students. This has led to a refinement, targeting and prioritisation of such funds designed to support those that were felt to be in need of greatest support, given the University's particular widening participation agenda and the current economic backdrop.

The JS Group supports the delivery of this new student funding structure through its Aspire platform – with students being provided with a mixture of cash and credit to purchase what they need to help them through their higher

education experience at Sunderland. The JS Group also provides an Engagement Partner to work in the University and to ensure very close student engagement for the whole Aspire approach.

"It took me a about a year to get the evidence together of what we were previously offering to all the students," says **Francesca Carey, Director of Home Student Recruitment**. *"We looked at the budget that we allocated and what the funding envelope looked like, but we wanted to prioritise the support for the student groups where finance is the key barrier. We ended up with more precise and targeted support for key priority groups with a new banded system."*

The University's specialist funding programme is called StudyPLUS and this is channelled to specific student categories that are reviewed annually by the University's Fees and Bursaries Group. The JS Group provides the critical fast-track delivery of this funding to Sunderland's students through its Aspire platform.

"What's really good about the JS Group is that when we fed back that many of our students said they actually wanted some of the funds through cash, they worked with our finance team to meet that request and manage it through our StudyPLUS scheme – allowing students to take a certain percentage of their awards directly as cash into their bank accounts. It was the idea of the JS Group to do this and it was an innovative approach," says **Francesca**.

TO FIND OUT MORE

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"This approach to enable choice of how funding is deployed by the student has moved things forward tremendously," adds Simon Lee, the University's Assistant Director for the Student Journey. "They can go into the Aspire system and use their funds to support their learning needs but also they can obtain immediate cash to address other short-term needs where they are struggling."

"The feedback we have had has been incredibly positive. It's not just the speed but also some unforeseen benefits such as protecting their funds via the use of the Aspire platform for students that may otherwise be at risk of financial abuse from others through open access to their bank accounts. We are also gaining intelligence through high quality management information on what the students are using their bursaries and scholarships for."

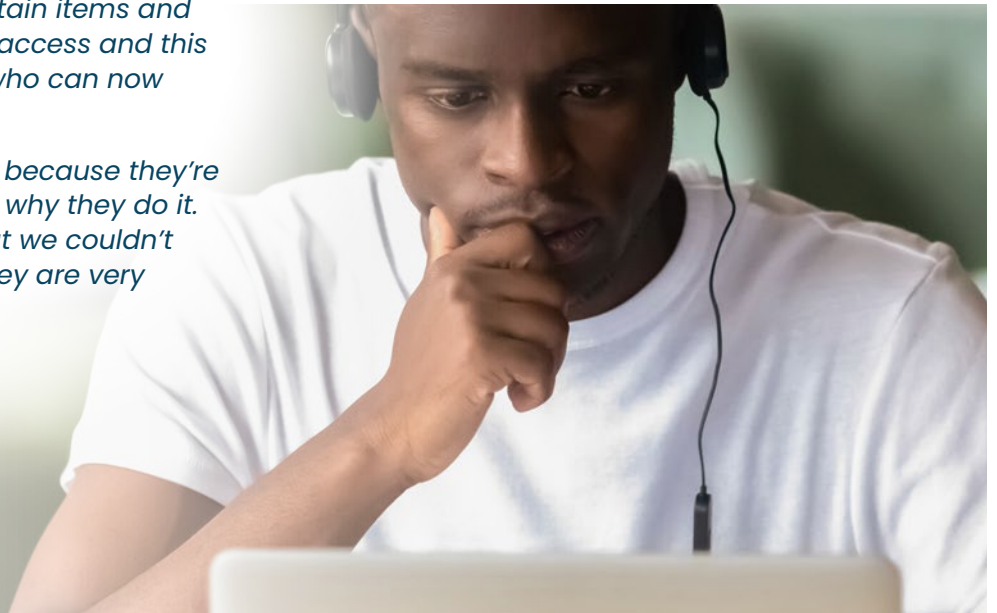
Kirsten Black, Chief Operating Officer, at the University says *"Now that the Aspire platform has got the cash element, it has really enhanced the value to us and the student because we can do more things with it. The other aspect to all this is being able to point students to certain items and resources they may really want to access and this has also involved our academics who can now advocate for certain texts."*

"The trust is built with the JS Group because they're very clear about what they do and why they do it. It's about what they bring to us that we couldn't provide so effectively ourselves. They are very student-focused."

They are very good at listening and understanding what it is that we're looking for as a service from them and then going off and building a service that meets our needs. They are very open about feeding back to us the information that we need to assess the extent to which the various schemes we're working with them on are effective in terms of delivering value to students.

It's all about the efficiency of the process and the quality of information and just taking pressure off the University and its resources.

- Ben Dale, CFO



JS Group support "simply game-changing"

- says **University of Sunderland**

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