

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Procedures

2025-2026

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1. Purpose

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLS) is provided by the by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) to colleges to enable them to provide financial support for students with a specific financial hardship that prevents them from taking part in learning.

The College will strive to achieve the most effective use of the funds to support the maximum number of eligible students, and use this to encourage access, retention and achievement of eligible students on their chosen course. Students will be made aware the funding is limited and offered on a first come first served basis. The college understands that the bursary should not be used to support the day to day living costs of an individual student; however, it may choose to do so in exceptional circumstances.

It is available to students aged 19+ who are enrolled on to an EFA funded course whose household income is below £33,000. If there are three or more dependent children under 18 in the household the threshold will increase by £1,000 per child up to a maximum of 6 children.

(Parental income will not be taken into consideration but the income of any spouse or co-habiting partner will). It is not available to students enrolled on a programme eligible for the Advanced Learning Loan (please see Advanced Learning Loan Bursary document).

2. Scope

It is available to students if they are a “home student” i.e. have been resident in the country for three or more years, and studying a programme of learning funded by the EFA. The EFA residency rules must be used if there is any doubt over eligibility as a ‘home student’.

The following ‘categories’ will be used when assessing a student’s needs.

- Hardship for those aged 19+.
- Childcare for those aged 20+.

The fund is not an entitlement and is dependent on the amount of funding allocated to the College each year. Students who may be eligible for support may not automatically receive it, as funds can be exhausted. In the light of this, the College asks students to consider any financial commitments they take on prior to any entitlements being awarded from the bursary.

The college reserves the right to amend/cease support detailed in this policy due to changes in the funding rules, or changes or requirements from the ESFA.

3. Means Test

Household income must be below £40,000

Where the household income changes during the academic year, the student may apply to be reassessed based on the new household income.

Evidence for 19+ Discretionary bursary will be required, examples of which are Child Tax Credit documentation, Universal Credit documentation, JSA, Income Support, P60 2024/25, previous 3 months payslips or evidence of self-employment from Tax Office.

The college will keep a copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need, including the calculation that has determined the amount awarded.

Students may be eligible to receive the following from the College (subject to sufficient funds being available):

- College meals provided through the cashless catering system for the days the student is in college, (additional criteria must be met – detailed below)
- Kit/Equipment/Material Costs: course specific
- Bus pass/travel contribution subject to 1 mile radius from college to address held on EBS.
- Educational Visits/Trips
- UCAS application
- DBS
- University interviews
- Costs linked to industry placements – e.g. support with travel costs

All payments will be subject to the student meeting the following attendance and behaviour criteria:

- Attendance minimum level of 90%
- No disciplinary action

Should a student not meet the criteria an interview will be arranged with the Safeguarding & Transition Manager or the Safeguarding & Inclusion Managers to determine level of payment.

4. Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Director of Student Support to monitor and update the procedures. The Deputy Principal for Finance & Resources will be alerted to any discrepancies.

5. Administration

The College will use the allowed 5% of the DLS allocation towards administrative costs.

When making decisions about awarding DLS funding the College will consider the availability of other financial support available for students, for example Job Centre Plus or a Work Programme.

Payments will be dependent on an attendance level of at least 90%. Consideration will be given to mitigating circumstances such as: child protection, family illness, safeguarding concerns, caring responsibilities or any other issues that might affect attendance. Students must notify Bursary Team, Safeguarding & Transition Manager or Safeguarding & Inclusion Managers of any such mitigating circumstances as soon as they become aware there may be an issue. Where attendance is still deemed unsatisfactory or if no notification is made to the aforementioned staff, payment will be either withheld or reclaimed.

Payments will also be dependent on satisfactory behaviour i.e. no disciplinary action

The College reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to students where information given on the application form is found to be false.

The College reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to students where the student has withdrawn before the end of the course.

It is the students' responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any direct funding support that they receive from the College as payments received may affect their eligibility for some benefits.

The College, as per EFA guidance, will not use DLS to support the following:

- If the student is already receiving help with travel or childcare costs from Jobcentre Plus, Working Tax Credits or a Work Programme provider in connection with pre-employment training or employment.
- If a student has been released on temporary licence (RoTL), for example, on day release.
- If the student is carrying out a higher education course, or provision with learning aims that are identified as fully funded from other sources.

6. Application Procedure

Students will need to complete an application form for assistance. Forms are available from Learner Services or via the college website.

Completed forms should be handed to the Bursary team along with supporting evidence, which for this group will be Working Tax Credit documentation, Universal Credit, JSA, Income Support, P60 24/25 and evidence of self-employment from Tax Office.

The application will be delayed should the student provide insufficient evidence. Where a student is applying for Childcare support, official documents must be provided e.g. child benefit letter or full birth certificate.

In extreme circumstances when the requested evidence is unavailable, a panel consisting of the Safeguarding & Transition Manager and a member of the bursary team can approve a student's application after considering an individual's circumstances. This can also be supported by a curriculum manager or the Safeguarding & Inclusion Managers if they are aware of financial hardship impacting on their student's participation on their course.

Students will be advised verbally of the decision and what support they will receive. Any declined applications will be notified in writing within 15 days of the date of receipt of the application.

7. Hardship

Hardship funding is provided to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students and to remove barriers to education or training.

Students will be supported based on their needs and local circumstances. Types of support available include the following.

- Course-related costs, including course trips, books and equipment, support with domestic emergencies and emergency accommodation
- Individual transport costs (students in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PiP) who receive the mobility element of PiP, cannot receive transport costs as this would be considered double funding)

8. Learner Support

8.1 Childcare

Policy:

It is College policy that students should use OFSTED registered childcare provision. Students will need to provide a copy of the birth certificate for each child.

Students who are under 20 years of age are provided with assistance to apply for the Care to Learn scheme via college to cover childcare costs. The college will seek to identify and encourage application to the Care to Learn scheme by all eligible students.

Government guidance stipulates that we must not use LSF monies for those aged 20 years or older to top up childcare payments for those receiving Care to Learn payments. Although LSF monies may be used to provide further help with childcare costs for 19-year-old students in the receipt of Care to Learn whose costs exceed the weekly maximum rates for those schemes. The top up may only be applied to childcare provision eligible under the Care to Learn scheme rules. We will hold evidence that the maximum amount is being paid under Care to Learn to confirm that a top up is required. Any top up paid will be made in line with Care to Learn guidance and paid directly to the childcare provider.

Childcare will be calculated over the period of the course using EBS course dates a 44-week period and on this basis will cover half-term, Christmas and Easter holidays. College will not pay retainers over the summer holidays. The maximum daily amount is £80 and the maximum weekly amount payable for any one child is £250 unless by prior arrangement. College will only pay 50% of weekly costs during half term breaks.

College will consider supporting part-time adult students with childcare, if they attend for a minimum of three hours per day.

The student will be responsible for paying any deposit due prior to enrolling at college. The bursary cannot support the cost of nappies, formula or meals which are charged separately by the childcare provider.

The Bursary Team will notify the Childcare provider of the parameters of the funding. They will also be notified that all invoices must be addressed to the student and not the College and should include their registration number. Should a student withdraw from their course the College will only be responsible for payment whilst the student attended college.

Childcare is high-cost support and requires contractual arrangements to be in place between childcare providers and the college. Students must use their free early entitlement for childcare in the first instance. The childcare allowance within the Child Tax Credit will be considered when assessing eligibility for support if appropriate. Any available funding for free 15/30-hour childcare will also be taken into consideration before any payments are made from LSF to avoid duplicate funding.

As a college we will check student attendance with attendance of the child to nursery. Where a student is found to be taking the child to nursery but not attending college, they will become liable for the childcare costs.

Where a student continues to use childcare provision after completing their course the student will be liable for all childcare costs.

Procedure:

Students are required to complete an application form and a childcare contract. Claims will be processed every 4 weeks and payment will be made by BACS directly to the childcare provider.

8.2 Travel

Policy:

Bus pass and travel contribution payments are only available to students who live over one mile from their campus of study. If a student loses their pass, it is their responsibility to pay for a replacement pass. Petrol payments will be made half termly, at £15 per week for those living 1 – 15 miles from college, and £20 per week 15+ miles from college. Payments are made dependent upon the student achieving 90% attendance.

Students are requested to consider 'nearest for need' when deciding upon which college they wish to attend, a maximum total limit of £1,000 per annum is placed on travel support

Payments for part time students will be pro-rata. Payments will be made in arrears and on attendance.

Bursary will also consider looking to support students with travel to work placements, including T Level industry placements.

Procedure:

The college provide details to eligible students of how to access their funded bus pass via bus company Apps (either Arriva, D&G or Warrington's Own Buses). Students who are applying for Petrol payments are required to provide details of their current car insurance and provide additional certificates should their insurance expire during the period of their study programme.

8.3 Kit/Equipment or Additional Materials

Policy:

Assistance with the cost of equipment, kit or uniform will only be considered where items are deemed necessary for the completion of the course or are required due to health and safety regulations. For those students who are required to purchase specific kit or equipment, the fund will refund purchases made by students to their own bank account, or we will order the kit/equipment direct from a college nominated supplier. No refunds will be made, or kit ordered until after the first 4 weeks of attendance on the programme. If a student purchases their own items, then they will need to provide receipts to enable the college to process a refund. Students should only use college named suppliers, if a student decides not to use this supplier, then the refund will be the amount college would have paid to the named supplier. Kit/equipment will always remain the property of the college. The maximum support for kit/equipment is £350 per student per academic year.

Procedure:

Students will be required to provide receipts for their purchases and will be informed of the approximate date the refund will be actioned. If a student wishes the college to order items, they must complete an order form and hand this to the Bursary team. Students will be advised once items are ready for collection.

8.4 Educational Visits/Trips

Policy:

Support will be given to each student who is required to undertake an educational visit/trip as part of their study programme. An educational trip or visit will be considered essential where it is compulsory for all students in the group to attend, or if a student would not pass the qualification without attending. The bursary cannot support the costs of foreign/overseas field trips where the content can be found within England at a much cheaper cost and/or to support the costs of fields trips that are not a compulsory part of the student's curriculum.

Attendance must be at 90% or above for the fund to support the educational visit. A limit of £1,000 per student, per academic year, will be adhered to. Students will be

required to pay the required deposit, up to a maximum of £20, which will be refunded once the student has attended the visit. Under exceptional circumstances the college will look at meeting the cost of the deposit. Any part time students will not have their costs prorated.

Procedure:

Monies will be paid direct to the department budget once confirmation of the cost has been received. Deposits will be refunded to the student's bank account once confirmation of attendance on the trip has been received.

8.5 Free College Meals (FCM)

Policy:

There is no Government entitlement to FCM for most students over the age of 19. As a college we will follow the guidelines set out in the Gov.uk document, which is usually updated each year. The amount set out in the document is the Government contribution, and as a college we will review this amount annually and add additional monies from 19+ Bursary funds where applicable. Currently this will be £4.50 per day which the student is timetabled to be in college. There is strict eligibility guidelines set out in the Gov.uk document which we will adhere to.

If a student is experiencing severe hardship, we will support with FCM for the days they attend college, and will sometimes do this without checks on household income, or gathering evidence that would normally be required.

Procedure:

Students will be required to provide the necessary evidence as set out in the current Gov.uk document where college is to use FCM funding provided by the Government. Any monies awarded will be added to the cashless catering system daily and removed at the end of each day.

8.6 UCAS Applications

Policy:

Students who are applying to UCAS can ask the bursary to meet the cost of their application. Monies will be paid directly to UCAS via the student's UCAS account.

Procedure:

Students must attend Learner Services and open their application form online. A member of the Finance team or the Bursary & Student Support Administrator will then pay the fee via college credit card.

8.7 University Interviews

Policy:

Students who are attending Universities for interviews can apply to LSF for travel assistance up to a maximum of £200 per student to cover all interviews, at a rate of

45p per mile for the first 100 miles, and 27p per mile thereafter, or reimbursement of bus or rail costs. LSF will need to see evidence of interview(s) and monies can then be transferred via BACS or in emergency instances cash will be provided to the student. Where it is not possible to travel to an interview and back on the same day due to public transport restrictions, we will consider funding accommodation costs.

Procedure:

Once evidence provided Bursary Team will arrange for travel costs to be assessed and refunded.

8.8 Course/Exam Fees

Policy:

If a student is not eligible for a government or AEB fee waiver, or has little or no income, the LSF will consider supporting eligible students with fees. Examples of exceptional cases would include the following groups, a student with no independent income in a low-income household, or a student with no recourse to other funds. Students who are required to pay course fees, may be considered for a reimbursement of 75% of these fees towards the end of their programme, or at least until all instalment's payments have been received by the College.

Bursary funds may be used to support students who are required to pay for an exam re-sit fee.

Procedure:

Bursary Team will liaise with Finance to ensure course fees have been paid in full, and reimbursement will then be made direct to the student's bank account.

8.9 Emergency Funds

Policy:

The emergency Fund is short term and is in place to assist students experiencing a sudden or emergency situation which may impact on their studies. The funds are also to promote the welfare and safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults.

Procedure:

Students who find themselves in an emergency will be assessed by the Welfare/Safeguarding Team.

8.10 Professional Fees

Policy:

College will support students who require a professional registration as part of their course requirements, where the cost is not part of the course fees charged.

Bursary will not support Counselling students with the costs of Personal Therapy and Counselling Supervision.

Procedure:

Fees may be paid for directly by college, or a refund can be made to the student on production of a valid receipt.

8.11 Printer Credit – Art Students only**Policy:**

College will support art students with the cost of printer credit if there is a clear need that the individual must provide printed work in support of their qualification. This assessment will be undertaken on an individual basis and in collaboration with the curriculum staff to confirm the need.

Procedure:

Credit will be added to the printing account of eligible students.

8.12 Student ID Badges**Policy:**

Bursary will support in covering the cost of replacement ID badges. The maximum number of badges funded by the bursary per student, per academic year will be 3, after this the student will be expected to cover the cost of the replacement badges themselves.

Procedure:

Bursary monies will be transferred internally to the relevant budget code.

9. College Bursary

Where a student requires additional funding due to individual circumstances the College can issue a college bursary irrespective of household income. We will consider cases on their own merits and make awards on an individual basis if we believe there is a genuine hardship, and without assistance via bursary the student is not able to start/complete their study programme. Students must be able to demonstrate additional/exceptional hardship e.g. homelessness, estranged from parents etc. and will be subject to an interview and additional monitoring by the Bursary Team. Students will be required to maintain good standards of attendance and commitment to their course.

All support will be based on individual circumstances and the support could comprise any of the following:

- contribution to college meals
- additional material costs
- additional trip/educational visits costs

- one off grant
- assistance with travel costs
- DBS applications
- UCAS applications

10. Payment Method

All claim forms will be processed and paid by the Bursary & Student Support Administrator on agreed publicised dates. Any large payments such as contribution payments will have a date agreed by the Safeguarding & Transition Manager and the Finance Manager.

Payments would normally be made as follows:

- Petrol – half-termly
- Kit & Equipment – refunds will be made direct to the student's bank account after the student has attended for 4 weeks
- Childcare – monthly, direct to the childcare provider
- Printing credit for art students only will be added to their printing account if applicable
- Refund of fees will be made at the end of the course once, direct to the student's bank account

In all cases the student's attendance is checked to ensure that it is 90% or above in each element of study. We will also take into consideration any behaviour issues and disciplinary concerns which have been logged before we make a payment to students.

On rare occasions it may be necessary to pay claims where the attendance is below the College minimum. This is usually at the recommendation of the Safeguarding & Inclusion Managers, and after discussions with the student. Details are recorded on the claim form.

The authorised claims will then be passed to Finance to pay students via BACs payments.

If an asylum seeker is eligible to receive learner support funds this can be made in the form of course-related books, equipment, cash payments or a travel pass as per the current ESFA Funding Guidance.

11. Eligibility

To be eligible to receive a 19+ Discretionary Bursary, students must be aged over 19. Funding is available to students meeting the required criteria if they are a "home student" i.e. have been resident in the country for three or more years and are studying a programme of learning funded by the ESFA or is an EU national.

Those students undertaking work-based learning, and higher education students are not eligible to apply to this fund.

The college reserves discretion to ensure that individual student's needs and personal circumstances are considered when decisions are made.

12. Appeals

Applicants have the right to appeal against a decision, in the first instance contact the Safeguarding & Transition Manager for explanation of the decision; however, if the student wishes to continue with an appeal they would be required to appeal in writing, to the Director of Student Support. A decision will be made within 10 working days and they will be notified of the outcome and reasons.

13. Audit & Retention

The college will maintain accurate and up to date records that evidence which students are eligible for which elements of the funds, including a completed application form, eligibility (including evidence of their financial situation). Information will also detail how much each student has been awarded and any items purchased, and payments made to demonstrate appropriate use of funds. Documents will be retained for 7 years in accordance with Government guidelines contained within the funding rules.

14. False or Fraudulent Claims

Where students are found to have intentionally given misleading or inaccurate information the college will claim back the award made. Providing false statements may result in the student being sanctioned in accordance with college disciplinary policy. A record will be made of fraudulent incidents and subsequent actions taken. Incidents will be reported to ELT and reported to the funding body as necessary. In some instances, a referral may be made to the Police with the possibility of prosecution.

Students who are found to be passing bursary funding on to a third party will be deemed to have demonstrated insufficient financial need and will have their bursary funding withdrawn. This includes students who give away or sell free college meals, and students who allow another person to use their college funded bus pass. Any costs levied by the bus company in restoring the bus pass must be met by the student.