

FE-LEARNER SUPPORT FUND

Policy Document

Incorporating: 16 - 19 Bursary / 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund /
Advanced Learner Loans Bursary / The Travel Scheme / Free College Meals

INTRODUCTION AND FE-LSF POLICY STATEMENT

- The College receives allocations of funding from the Department of Education annually to provide financial support for Further Education students.
- The College is committed to providing a fair and transparent policy for the distribution of publicly funded bursaries.
- The policy is designed to be accessible and easily understood by students, potential students, staff and parents.

In establishing the Learner Support Policy, the College has taken into account the following guidance:

- 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2023-24
- Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding rules 2023-24
- Advanced Learner Loans funding rules: 2023-24.
- This Policy sets out the arrangements for how the College administer and manage the Learner Support Fund (LSF) in 2023-24. It aims to ensure that arrangements for LSF meets the needs of students in accordance with the eligibility criteria.
- The funds have been developed to help students overcome specific barriers to participation in education and all funding is subject to certain conditions such as maintaining satisfactory levels of attendance, progress and behaviour.
- The Student Finance team will provide advice and information on the LSF and its processes to enable students to fulfill their responsibility regarding the application processes.
- Commercial courses, Higher Education, Apprenticeship or waged training, and young people in prison or who have been released on temporary license cannot be funded through the Learner Support Fund.
- The College will monitor and review the effectiveness of its financial support for students on a regular basis.
- The College will ensure wherever possible, that no eligible student has to withdraw from their course due to financial hardship.
- The guidance within this policy is set at the time of writing but the College reserves the right to adjust the criteria in year according to funds available and in accordance with any changes to government policy.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- All applications to the FE-LSF should be returned to either the Redditch, Bromsgrove or Worcester Advice Centre, depending on which campus you have applied to, as soon as possible. Funds are limited and offered on a 'first come first served' basis.
- Awards are decided by a Student Finance Panel.
- All applications must be accompanied with copies of evidence of income (Universal Credit statements including a full breakdown of income and deductions). If applicants do not provide evidence of income, awards will be delayed until the relevant evidence is provided.
- In order to receive support students are expected to maintain a rate of 90% attendance, progress academically and adhere to the Student Standards. Students whose attendance is less than 75% will have their funds stopped automatically.
- Payments will be made to the student bank account via BACS, either on a monthly, irregular, or on a one off basis depending on the support allocated.

STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT BREAKDOWN 23-24

ASSESSMENT GROUP	INCOME TIER	INCOME LEVEL	ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE
16 - 19	Vulnerable Tier	Vulnerable young people - as defined by Government criteria.	Up to £1,200 bursary for three terms of travel support, assistance with essential equipment, trips and uniform costs. Recipients can also get meals support where funds are loaded onto their student card.
	Discretionary Tier	Household income less than £25,000 (gross income).	Three terms of travel support, assistance with essential equipment, tuition fees, trips and uniform costs. Recipients can also get a mealcard to redeem in our onsite cafes.
	Free Travel	Household income less than £45,000 but greater than £25,000 (gross income). Priority will be given to young carers and those with caring responsibilities.	Three types of travel support which includes bus or train pass or travel contribution.
19 - 23 (24+ studying a level 2 or below)	Learner 19+	Household income less than £25,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support, meals, assistance with childcare (adults aged 20 years and over), essential equipment and uniform costs. Recipients can also get assistance with fees and hardship in exceptional circumstances.
	Learner 19+ (Remitted)	Household income less than £25,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support, essential equipment/uniform will be supplied by the Department, assistance with childcare (adults aged 20 years and over), essential equipment and uniform costs. Recipients can also get assistance with fees and hardship in exceptional circumstances.
19 + (studying level 3 to 6) Student funded via an Advanced Learner Loan	Learner 19+	Household income less than £25,000	Three terms of travel support plus assistance with childcare (adults aged 20 years and over) and essential equipment will be supplied by the Department. Recipients can also get assistance with hardship in exceptional circumstances.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- To secure assistance with travel costs students must live more than 1.5 miles from their main campus of study. Receipts will be required for any bus/train passes and petrol costs.
- If you are under 20 years of age and would like assistance with childcare costs you can apply to the Care to Learn scheme at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn
- Childcare support is paid directly to childcare providers
- Required equipment and their associated costs are agreed at departmental level.
- Students will need to provide proof of purchase of any essential uniform or kit costs for 2023-24, therefore you will need to keep all receipts.
- Payment will be based on achievement of a set target of 90% attendance, reasonable academic progress and adherence to the student standards
- Funding is finite and will be awarded on a discretionary basis, it is not guaranteed
- The panel retains the right to make one off individual allocations in addition to bursary payments in extreme circumstances.
- Receipts will be required prior to any refund being paid for equipment/uniform or books.

FE-LSF SUPPORT BREAKDOWN

16-19 BURSARY OR 'VULNERABLE TIER'

Bursaries of up to £1200 for students who are:

- Young people in care or care-leavers
- Young people in receipt of income support or universal credit (UC) in their own right
- In receipt of Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit and Disability Living or Personal Independence Payments in their own right.

The panel will assess the most appropriate form of support after assessing each individual application and will make allocations based upon this assessment, up to the value of £1,200. Please note not all learners will receive the full £1,200, thus it is likely that a mixed package of support will be the most common form of bursary package.

Payments and other assistance will be based on achievement of a set target of 90% attendance, reasonable academic progress and adherence to the Student Standards. The Student Finance panel will retain the right to make allocation decisions on individual students who have attendance of below 90% who can demonstrate exceptional circumstances or illness. The panel retains the right to make one off individual allocations in addition to Bursary payments in extreme circumstances. These allocations would most likely take the form of emergency meal-cards or purchase of goods to support independent living.

16-19 DISCRETIONARY TIER

Bursary funding will be allocated to students who can demonstrate eligibility. Support can be offered towards costs associated with your course such as travel and equipment. Payments will be made by BACS direct to the learner's account or purchased on their behalf. Priority will be given to students who are young carers and those with caring responsibilities.

FREE COLLEGE MEALS

To be eligible to receive a free meal the student must be aged 16 to 19 on 31 August 2023 or up to 25 with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). Where they reach the age of 19 during their programme of study, they can continue to be supported to the end of the academic year in which they reach the age of 19, or to the end of the programme of study, whichever is sooner.

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. For the purposes of eligibility for free meals, 'disadvantaged' is defined as students being in receipt of, or having parents/carers who are in receipt of, one of more of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.
- Working Tax Credit (paid for 4 weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any benefits they get)

Learners eligible for free meals will be given a daily allowance available on their ID card which can be used to purchase food in our on site cafes. Learners based at Alliance, Malvern and Duckworth will be given a monetary amount paid into their bank account monthly.

TRAVEL SCHEME

Learners aged 16-19 whose household income is too high to receive support via the Discretionary Bursary, and who live more than 1.5 miles from their main campus of study can access assistance with three terms worth of travel support.

Eligible household incomes begin where eligibility for the Discretionary bursary ends (£25,000) and continues up to £45,000 (gross income).

A bus or train pass will be provided in most cases unless a contribution towards petrol costs are requested. The amount for the 1st term pass will be refunded.

19+ DISCRETIONARY LEARNER SUPPORT (DLS)

Students 19-23 at the start of their course studying up to a Level 3 Programme and learners over 24 but studying a Programme up to a Level 2 will be assisted by the 19+ DLS portion of the FE-LSF. The table divides this cohort into four sections based on the following:

- If you are over 19 and live 'at home' i.e., with parents or guardians, the decision will be based upon your income, also if you have moved out and live alone.
- If you have moved in with a partner, then we would base our decision upon your joint income- the household income.

These groups have separate income levels and are treated as separate groups of the same tier. Students from these groups would be eligible for similar assistance.

If your course fees have been remitted, i.e., funded by the government, then the FE-LSF cannot assist with the cost of essential equipment for your course, instead required equipment, uniform and will be made available by the department in which you study. Priority will be given to those aged under 24 with caring responsibilities.

19+ ADVANCED LEARNER LOANS BURSARY

The Advanced Learner Loan bursary is predominantly used to fund the costs of travel and childcare. It is only available to those students who are funding a learning aim via an Advanced Learner Loan. In exceptional cases students can request assistance with hardship. The Advanced Learner Loan bursary fund is also used to fund in year Learner Support costs.

APPEALS PROCEDURE

Appeals against the outcome of an application can be made in the first instance by email to studentfinance-worcester@howcollege.ac.uk or studentfinance-redditch@howcollege.ac.uk. If not satisfied with the result of this review, a further appeal may be made to the Vice Principal Student Experience and Stakeholder Engagement.

FE-LSF SUPPORT FUND PROCEDURES

1. Students are required to apply for support each academic year.
2. Students receive information on the various schemes through the application process, during enrolment, via college prospectus and website, student finance literature (posters), parent and student newsletters and at their course induction.
3. All additional essential course costs are verified by the Student Finance team. (Courses MUST be Government funded to qualify for assistance – Customer Services team will be able to confirm this for you). Receipts will be required for reimbursement of all costs - including travel.
4. The Student Finance panel will assess claims based on means tested criteria that are re-evaluated each year in line with the rules and regulations produced by the Government. Students must apply for financial support by completing the appropriate application form ASAP.
5. Funds are limited and awards made later in the year will be subject to the availability of funding.
6. Application forms are available online via this link www.howcollege.ac.uk/student-life/student-finance/further-education-finance/ Paper copies are also available from the Advice Centres
7. Completed applications are dated when received and logged on a database in compliance with the Data Protection Act.
8. The Student Finance team will assess the application against the eligibility criteria, check the evidence and discuss the application with the student if required. Any other potential sources of funding will also be considered.
9. Processing is normally completed within 4 weeks of application although due to volume of applications at the start of the year, applications and notifications are likely to take longer.
10. All applications are assessed by the Student Finance panel. The Student Finance panel will consider the applications and decide the level of any award. The panel retains the right to make discretionary awards to students in special circumstances where the financial situation is preventing attendance at College.
11. Payments will be based on achievement of a set target of 90% attendance, academic progress and adherence to the Student Standards. The Student Finance panel will retain the right to make allocation decisions on individual students who have attendance of below 90% who can demonstrate exceptional circumstances or illness. The panel reserve the right to make one off individual allocations in extreme circumstances.
12. Students with attendance below 75% will have their award stopped automatically.
13. The Student Finance team arranges for the agreed award to be paid in the most appropriate manner, either: By BACS into an individual student bank account, payment direct to a childcare provider or the college finance Department.
14. Students can appeal against decisions made regarding awards by writing to the Student Finance Panel within 14 days of receipt of the letter notifying them of the award. If not resolved at this stage, a further appeal can be made to the Vice Principal Student Experience and Stakeholder Engagement. The appeal will be considered within 4 weeks of receipt. The applicant is informed of the outcome within 7 days. The decision of an appeal is final. (This process will take longer during the Autumn Term due to the number of applications.)
15. Applicants should be aware that payments of these bursaries may have implications for their entitlement to social security benefits. This has a particular bearing on Income Support, Universal Credit, and certain Social Fund payments. You should discuss these implications with the appropriate authority.
16. For 16-19 students Aldi vouchers are available for days of study off campus, ie work placement/work experience if awarded meals.