



## FE Learner Support Fund Policy

<b>Purpose of Policy/Document</b>	This document outlines the policies and procedures for processing applications for Learner Support Funds inc 16-19 Bursary, Free Meals, Travel Scheme, 19+ Discretionary LSF and Advanced Learner Loan Bursary
<b>Target Audience (staff/students/visitors/contractors)</b>	Staff/Students
<b>Particular Legal Requirements/Issues outside of EDD</b>	ESFA and AEB funding rules
<b>Links with Other Policies/Documents</b>	FE Fee Policy, Financial Regulations, Student Standards
<b>For completion by The Executive</b>	
<b>Policy/Document Reference No.</b>	FIN17
<b>Category</b>	Finance
<b>Owner (job title)</b>	Admissions and Advice Centre Manager
<b>Issue Date</b>	July 2024
<b>Review Date</b>	May 2025
<b>Postholder Responsible for Review (job title)</b>	Admissions and Advice Centre Manager
<b>Authorised By: (ELT/Corporation)</b>	ELT
<b>Communicated via/Location: (Policy Acceptance software/website/portal etc)</b>	Portal/website
<b>Equality Impact Assessment Statement</b>	The Equality Act 2010 does not require public authorities to carry out EIAs by law. The College does, however, carefully consider the impact, when creating or amending its policies, on all concerned parties regarding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and records this at SLT meetings in order to demonstrate compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

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### 1. POLICY STATEMENT

Heart of Worcestershire College promotes equality, diversity, inclusion, and social mobility by using learner support funds to remove financial barriers to learning, which may prevent students from enrolling, fully participating, completing, and progressing from courses. We recognise the positive impact of education on the lives of our students and promote the full participation in course-related activities and college enrichment programmes.

### 2. POLICY AIMS

This policy is subject to funding agencies' rules and therefore may change during the year. We reserve the right to change the policy during the year to reflect the changes.

This policy seeks to ensure that:

- Learner support funds are distributed in accordance with the regulations and guidelines laid out by the funding agencies:
  - [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2024 to 2025 academic year - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
  - [Adult skills fund: funding rules for 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
  - [16 to 19 funding: information for 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Administration of learner support funds meets the needs of students and removes barriers to learning:
- Systems are in place to administer, record and monitor funds, ensuring that funds are used for their intended purposes.

### 3. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

- Heart of Worcestershire College receives allocations of funding annually to provide financial support for Further Education students from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) (16-19 year olds) and Adult Education Budget (AEB) (19+ year olds).
- 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.
- This Policy sets out the arrangements for how the College will administer and manage the Learner Support Fund (LSF) in 2024-25. It aims to ensure that arrangements for LSF meet 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 fulfil their responsibility regarding the application processes.
- 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 must withdraw from their course due to financial hardship.
- LSF is not intended to support costs not related to education such as living costs, extra-curricular or non-compulsory activities.
- 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. This policy covers the following age groups and funds:

### **3.1 16-19 years old students (or up to 25-year-old with an EHCP)**

- 16-19 Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- 16-19 Discretionary Bursaries
- Free College Meals
- Care to Learn
- 16-19 Travel Scheme

### **3.2 19+ (AEB funded) students.**

- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support
- 20+ Childcare

### **3.3 Advanced Learner Loan Students**

- Advanced Learner Loan Bursary (only those in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan)
- 20+ Childcare

## **4. Main Eligibility Criteria**

### **4.1. Students must satisfy all the following criteria for access to be eligible:**

- A “home student” who meets the residency requirements.
- Meet the age requirements of the fund.
- Be enrolled on an approved Government funded programme (ESFA or AEB)
- Be in receipt of income assessed state benefits/Universal Credit and have an annual gross household income less than £25,000 for 16-19 Bursary, 19+ Discretionary and 19+ Advanced Learner Loan Bursary or £45,000 for the 16-19 Travel Scheme.

Exceptional circumstances will be considered individually based on information provided.

The college can support Asylum Seekers if they are 16-19 and an unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Child (UASC), or if they are 19+ and been in the UK for 6 months or longer and have evidence from the Home Office.

### **4.2. The following vulnerable groups will be eligible to receive a 16-19 vulnerable bursary of up to £1,200:**

- Young people in care, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Young Care leavers
- Young people in receipt of income or the equivalent of Universal Credit (UC) in their own right
- In receipt of Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit and Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right

**4.3.** Commercial courses, Higher Education, Apprenticeships or waged training, and young people in prison or who have been released on temporary license cannot be funded through the Learner Support Fund.

## **5. Terms and Procedures**

5.1 HoW College strives to achieve the most effective use of ESFA and AEB funding to support the maximum number of eligible students. Students with an annual gross household income of:

- £25,000 and below for 16–19-year-olds
- £25,000 and below for 19+
- Free College Meal Entitlement

It is important for the College to distinguish between the Free College Meal entitlement and discretionary meal support. Free college meals are for students who meet the government criteria, the majority were previously receiving Free Meals at school. Discretionary meal support is for students who aren't eligible for government free college meals but are eligible for the 16-19 Bursary Fund. See Appendix 2 for details regarding the eligibility criteria for Free College Meals.

**5.2.** Where a student is aged 19 or over on 31 August 2024 and is not dependent on another adult on their household, awards may be made on a discretionary basis. The fund provides help for students from low-income households. Applications are income assessed, based on supporting evidence submitted with the application. Refer to Appendix 1 for details of income levels and documents acceptable as proof of income.

**5.3.** Application forms are available electronically online via the website and can be submitted after the 1<sup>st</sup> of July each year. 2<sup>nd</sup> year returning students must reapply each year of their course. A student will only be awarded learner support funds if they have provided a completed signed application form and the required evidence that proves their eligibility for the relevant fund. Copies of the income evidence will be retained by the college for six years. Each application to the Learner Support Fund will individually be assessed.

**5.4.** Eligibility for learner support does not give students an automatic entitlement to receive it. Students will be made aware that funding is limited. Measures are in place to support inclusion of students starting at different points in the year.

**5.5.** Payments are subject to satisfactory attendance at college which are outlined on the application form. The College may stop or reduce any payments where a student's attendance or behaviour falls below an acceptance level.

**5.6.** All payments that are made are by BACS and into the student's bank account only.

**5.7.** Wherever possible and if requested, payments for mandatory course costs (kits, trips, uniform etc) will be made via college internal transfer.

**5.8.** Free Meals will be awarded at £4.75 per day for each timetabled day at college, funds will be uploaded to the student's ID badge for use in the onsite cafes.

**5.9.** Applicants will be advised in writing, via email within 4 weeks of their application of how much they have been awarded and in which categories, including how and when payment will be made. The college reserves the right to recover funds (where appropriate) including equipment and travel pass from any student who withdraws from college or those who have made a false application. Students are expected, encouraged to attend 100% of all their classes. This includes English and Maths classes, work placement and any timetabled events. The college will monitor student

attendance and attitude to learning and may make changes to the amount of financial support to ensure it is used effectively. A minimum attendance of 90% is expected to continue receiving support, however the college will apply discretion to promote retention and accommodate students' individual needs. Bursary funding should not be stopped if the learner is engaged, partially engaged in learning or is likely to reengage in learning. Staff will liaise with Personal Tutors regarding individual students.

### **5.10 Appeals**

All awards are made in accordance with the terms of this policy. If a student disagrees with the award decision, the process to appeal is:

- If a student feels an unfair decision has been made, they should state their reasons in writing to the Admissions and Advice Centre Manager, who will review the application.
- The final stage of appeal is in writing to the Vice Principal, Student Experience who will make a final decision.

### **6. Responsibility**

The responsibility for this policy rests with the Vice Principal Student Experience and the Admissions and Advice Centre Manager is responsible for its implementation.

### **7. Related Documents**

This policy should be read with reference to the following documents available on the website:

- [Further Education Finance | Heart of Worcestershire College \(howcollege.ac.uk\)](https://www.howcollege.ac.uk)

### **8. Review**

The Learner Support Fund policy will be reviewed annually, and the next review date is May 2025. A new policy will be published annually.

## Appendix 1 – Student Financial Support Breakdown

Age/Assessment group	Income Tier	Income Level	Assistance available
16-19	<b>Vulnerable Tier</b>	Vulnerable young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in care</li> <li>• care leavers</li> <li>• receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves.</li> <li>• receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employments and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right</li> </ul>	Up to £1200 bursary for three terms of travel support, assistance with essential equipment, uniform, and trip costs. Students will also receive a daily meal allowance, added to their college ID badge.
	<b>Discretionary tier</b>	Household income under £25,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support, assistance with essential equipment, uniform, and trip costs. Students will also receive a daily meal allowance, added to their college ID badge.
	<b>Free Travel</b>	Household income less than £45,000 but greater than £25,00 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support which includes bus, train, or travel contribution.
<b>19-23 (24+ studying a level 2 or below)</b>	Student 19+	Household income less than £25,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support, assistance with childcare (adults aged 20+), essential equipment and uniform costs. Students may also get assistance with fees and hardship in exceptional circumstances

	Student 19+ (receiving fee remission)	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+).
<b>19+ (studying Level 3 to Level 6)</b>	Student 19+ (in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan)	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+).

### Important Notes:

- The following are acceptable proof of income and household circumstances for assessing applications for financial support:
  - Current Tax Credit Award Notice for the current financial year (full letter with all pages)
  - 3 recent Universal Credit Statements which include a full breakdown showing income and deductions.
  - 3 recent wage slips or P60
- **Vulnerable Bursary**
  - Letter from local authority confirming current or previous status.
  - 3 recent Universal Credit Statements if they are financially supporting themselves.
  - Letter confirming DLA or PIP in own right as well as ESA or UC
- To secure assistance with travel costs, students must live more than 1.5 miles from their main campus of study. Receipts will be requested for any bus/train passes and petrol costs. Students will be expected to purchase term 1 bus/train pass, which will be refunded once the application has been assessed, passes will be provided for terms 2 and 3. If students are unable to purchase the term 1 pass, they should contact a member of the Student Finance Team.
- If students are under 20 and require assistance with childcare, they can apply to the Care to Learn Scheme [Care to Learn: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- Childcare support is paid directly to the childcare providers.
- Students will need to provide proof of purchase of any essential uniform and kit costs.
- Payment will be based on achievement of a set target of 90% attendance, reasonable academic progress, and adherence to the student standards.
- The panel reserves the right to make one off individual allocation, in addition to bursary payments in exceptional circumstances.

## **Appendix 2 – Free Meals eligibility**

Students who meet the criteria can claim one meal per day from college onsite cafes. Criteria is based on parents who are in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- 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 (HMRC))
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- UC with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa (after tax and not including any benefits you get)