



FE Learner Support Fund Policy

For completion by The Executive

Strategic Theme (7Ps)	Purpose		Place		People	X	Prosper	
	Partnership		Potential		Planet			
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For completion by The Author

Version control	Date	Issue	Change/Comment	Date Approved
	27.5.2025	2	Update ESFA to DfE and AEB to ASF throughout policy document	
	27.5.2025	2	Front cover – update issue and review dates	
	27.5.2025	2	Section 2 0 Guidance and funding rules links updated to 2025-26	
	27.5.2025	2	Section 4.1 – updated eligibility criteria household income threshold increased to £28,000 for all funds	

	27.5.2025	2	Section 5.8 update DfE contribution to meals to £2.61	
	27.5.2025	2	Appendix 1 – update Care to Learn section – application process is now administered by the College.	

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the procedures and criteria for applying for financial support through the Learner Support Fund (LSF), which includes the:

- 16–19 Bursary Fund (including Free Meals and Travel Scheme),
- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support,
- Advanced Learner Loan Bursary.

Its aim is to ensure transparent and equitable access to these funds, helping eligible students overcome financial barriers to education.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- **All students** applying for financial support.
- **All staff** involved in managing, advising on, or processing learner support funds.

3. Policy Statement

Heart of Worcestershire College is committed to promoting equality, diversity, inclusion, and social mobility. We use learner support funding to reduce financial barriers that may prevent students from enrolling, participating, or completing their education. The College aims to ensure all students have access to course-related activities and enrichment opportunities, regardless of financial background.

4. Key Definitions

- **DfE** – Department for Education

- **LSF** – Learner Support Fund
 - **ASF** – Adult Skills Fund
 - **ALL** – Advanced Learner Loan
 - **UASC** – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Child
 - **UC** – Universal Credit
 - **ESA** – Employment Support Allowance
 - **DLA** – Disability Living Allowance
 - **PIP** – Personal Independence Payment
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5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Principal and Senior Leadership Team

- Oversees regular review and strategic implementation of the policy.

5.2 Staff

- **Student Finance Officers:** Process applications and evidence; communicate updates to staff.
- **Admissions & Advice Centre Manager:** Manages Student Finance team, approves applications, and annually updates the policy.
- **Finance Administrator:** Issues payments, orders passes, and updates databases.
- **Head of Finance:** Authorises payment runs and completes year-end reconciliations.

5.3 Students

- Are responsible for understanding and complying with this policy before applying for financial support.
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6. Procedures

6.1 Fund Overview

The College receives annual funding allocations from the Department for Education (DfE) and the Adult Skills Fund (ASF). Funds are allocated based on financial need to help students overcome barriers to learning.

These include:

- **16–19 Bursary (including Discretionary and Vulnerable Group funding)**
- **Free College Meals**
- **Care to Learn**
- **16–19 Travel Scheme**
- **19+ Discretionary Support**
- **20+ Childcare (for eligible students)**
- **Advanced Learner Loan Bursary**

6.2 Eligibility Criteria

Students must meet **all** of the following:

- Be classified as a "home student" under UK residency rules.
- Be enrolled on a government-funded programme (DfE or ASF).
- Meet the age criteria for the relevant funding scheme.
- Have an annual gross household income:
 - **£28,000 or less** for 16–19 Bursary and 19+ funds
 - **£45,000 or less** for the **16–19 Travel Scheme**

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.

6.3 Vulnerable Student Bursary (16–19)

Up to £1,200 may be awarded to:

- Students in care (including UASC)
- Care leavers
- Young people in receipt of income or the equivalent of UC in their own right
- Those receiving ESA or UC and either DLA or PIP in their own right

6.4 Exceptional Circumstances

Students who do not fully meet the criteria but can demonstrate financial hardship may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

6.5 Asylum Seekers

- Aged 16–19: Must be a UASC.
- Aged 19+: Must have resided in the UK for 6+ months with Home Office documentation.

7. Application Process

- Applications must be submitted **online** from **1st July** each year.
 - All students must **reapply annually**, including returning students.
 - A completed application with supporting evidence is required.
 - Evidence must be retained by the College for **seven years**.
 - Eligibility **does not guarantee** funding; funds are limited and assessed individually.
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8. Awarding and Payments

- Funding is conditional on satisfactory **attendance (minimum 90%)**, behaviour, and engagement. However, discretion may be applied to support retention and individual circumstances.
- Payments are made **via BACS** directly into the student's account.
- Course-related costs may be paid **via internal transfer** (e.g., for kits, trips, or uniforms).
- Free Meals are awarded at **£4.75 per day**, loaded onto the student ID badge.

Free Meals

- **Statutory Free Meals:** Based on government criteria (typically for students who had Free Meals at school).
- **Discretionary Meal Support:** For students eligible for bursary but not statutory free meals.

Refer to **Appendix 2** for meal eligibility criteria.

9. Appeals Process

If a student disagrees with an award decision:

1. Submit a written appeal to the **Admissions & Advice Centre Manager**.
 2. If unresolved, submit a final written appeal to the **Vice Principal: Student Experience and Support**.
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10. Monitoring and Review

- The policy will be reviewed annually.
 - Effectiveness will be assessed via:
 - Internal/external audits
 - Student feedback
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11. Legal and Regulatory Framework

- [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)
 - [Adult skills fund: funding rules 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)
 - [16 to 19 funding: information for 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)
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12. Staff Training and Awareness

All relevant staff will receive annual training and updates. General awareness will be promoted across all departments.

13. Environmental Sustainability

The use of **online applications** reduces reliance on paper-based systems and supports sustainable practices.

14. Legal and Equality Considerations

While not legally required, the College considers the impact of all policies in relation to:

- The **Equality Act 2010**

- **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**
This is recorded at Executive Leadership Team (ELT) meetings.

15. Related Policies and Documents

- **Further Education Fee Policy** | Heart of Worcestershire College
- **Appendix 1:** Acceptable Proof of Income
- **Appendix 2:** Free Meal Eligibility Criteria

Appendix 1 – Student Financial Support Breakdown

Age/Assessment group	Income Tier	Income Level	Assistance available
16-19	Vulnerable Tier	Vulnerable young people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in care - care leavers - receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves. - receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right 	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.
	Discretionary tier	Household income under £28,000 (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.

	Free Travel	Household income less than £45,000 but greater than £28,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support which includes bus, train, or travel contribution.
19-23 (24+ studying a level 2 or below)	Student 19+	Household income less than £28,000 (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 £28,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support, essential equipment/uniform will be supplied by the Department, assistance with childcare (adults aged 20+).
19+ (studying Level 3 to Level 6)	Student 19+ (in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan)	Household income less than £28,000 (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
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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. The application for childcare support is made via the college online application. [Care to Learn academic year 2025 to 2026: conditions of grant funding - 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. Payments are automatically held if attendance falls below 75%.

The panel reserves the right to make one off individual allocation, in addition to bursary payments in exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 2 – Free Meals eligibility

[Free meals in further education funded institutions guide: academic year 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

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)