



## FE Learner Support Fund Policy

**For completion by The Executive**

Strategic Theme (7Ps)	Purpose		Place		People	<b>X</b>	Prosper	
	Partnership		Potential		Planet			
Policy/Document Reference No.	FIN17							
Category	Finance							
Owner (job title)	Vice Principal Student Experience & Support							
Issue Date								
Review Date	May 2027							
Postholder Responsible for Review (job title)	Admissions and Advice Centre Manager							
Authorised By: (ELT/Corporation)	ELT							
Communicated via/Location: (Policy Acceptance software/website/portal etc)	Website Portal							

**For completion by The Author**

Version control	Date	Issue	Change/Comment	Date Approved
	18.5.2026	3	Section 6.2 and Appendix 1 – updated eligibility criteria household income threshold increased to £30,000	
	18.5.2026	3	Appendix 2 – update to free meals eligibility	
	18.5.2026	3	Section 11 Guidance and funding rules links updated to 2026-27	
	27.5.2025	2	Update ESFA to DfE and AEB to ASF throughout policy document	1.7.25

	27.5.2025	2	Front cover – update issue and review dates	1.7.25
	27.5.2025	2	Section 2 0 Guidance and funding rules links updated to 2025-26	1.7.25
	27.5.2025	2	Section 4.1 – updated eligibility criteria household income threshold increased to £28,000 for all funds	1.7.25
	27.5.2025	2	Section 5.8 update DfE contribution to meals to £2.61	1.7.25
	27.5.2025	2	Appendix 1 – update Care to Learn section – application process is now administered by the College.	1.7.25

## 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, Vulnerable Bursary and Travel Scheme),
- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support,
- Advanced Learner Loan Bursary,
- Care to Learn

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.

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### 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.

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### 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
  - **SLT** – Senior Leadership Team
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### 5. Roles and Responsibilities

#### 5.1 Principal and Executive 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 Free 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:
  - **£30,000 or less** for 16–19 Bursary and 19+ funds
  - **£45,000 or less** for the **16–19 Free Travel Scheme**

Community and 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. This will be authorised by the Admissions and Advice Centre Manager or SLT.

## 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.

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## 7. Application Process

- Applications can be submitted **online** from end of June 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 expected 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. Offsite provision i.e. Duckworth, Malvern and Alliance are paid monthly in arrears for days they attended.

## 9. Free Meals

- **Statutory Free Meals:** Based on government criteria (typically for students who had Free Meals at school and in receipt of Universal Credit).
- **Discretionary Meal Support:** For students eligible for Free Meals (top up allowance only of £2.14) or in receipt of bursary but not statutory free meals.

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

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## 10. 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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## 11. Monitoring and Review

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

- [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)
- [Adult skills fund: funding rules 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)
- [Advice: funding rules for 16 to 19 provision 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)
- [Care to Learn academic year 2026 to 2027: conditions of grant funding - 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.

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## 13. Environmental Sustainability

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

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## 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.
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## 15. Related Policies and Documents

- **Further Education Fee Policy** | Heart of Worcestershire College
- **Appendix 1: Student Financial Support Breakdown**
- **Appendix 2: Free Meal Eligibility Criteria**

## Appendix 1 – Student Financial Support Breakdown

Age/Assessment group	Income Tier	Income Level and Eligibility criteria	Assistance available
<b>16-19</b>	<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 Employment 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 of £4.75, added to their college ID badge.
	<b>Discretionary tier</b>	Household income under £30,000 (gross income)	Three terms of travel support, assistance with essential equipment, uniform, and trip costs. Students will also receive a daily meal allowance of £4.75, added to their college ID badge.
	<b>Care to Learn (young parents under 20)</b>	Must be under 20 years on the date they start their study Programme. Must be the main carer for the children being claimed for.	Three terms of childcare support (up to £180 per week)
	<b>Free Travel</b>	Household income less than £45,000 but greater than £30,000 (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>	<b>Student 19+</b>	Household income less than £30,000 (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
	<b>Student 19+ (receiving fee remission)</b>	Household income less than £30,000 (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>	<b>Student 19+ (in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan)</b>	Household income less than £30,000 (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 x recent Universal Credit Statements which include a full breakdown showing income and deductions.
- 3 x 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
- \*\* Please note students aged 19 or over are not eligible for defined vulnerable group bursary

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 2026 to 2027: 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 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, all students from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to receive a free meal. Institutions must make a free meal available for all eligible students for each day the student attends their study programme, where this is appropriate. (i.e. for offsite provision such as Duckworth, Malvern or Alliance a cash payment will be made in arrears for each day the student attends).

Students aged over 19 are eligible for a free meal if they either:

- are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) they started before they turned 19
- have an education health and care (EHC) plan

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free meals in FE defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents in who are in receipt of, one of more of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit
- Support under part VI of the immigration and Asylum Act 1999

A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or a responsible adult on their behalf, have made a successful application to the college. Free meal support is funded at a rate of £2.61 per eligible learner. This amount is supplemented to £4.75 through discretionary funds. This provision also extends to learners in receipt of Universal Credit whose income exceeds the £30,000 threshold.

Households in receipt of income-related Employment and Support Allowance or the guarantee element of Pension Credit may also be entitled to a meal.