# Learner Support Fund and Bursary

# Learner Support Fund and Bursary Policy 2026–2027

## Policy Statement

The College administers Learner Support Funds and Bursary funding in accordance with the DfE funding rules for post-16 education (2026–27).

Funding is:

- Discretionary
- Based on individual financial need
- Awarded to meet actual participation costs

Funding is limited and the availability of support is dependent on budget allocations.

Support is only provided to cover essential costs directly related to participation, including:

- Travel
- Meals
- Essential course equipment
- Childcare

Funding must not be used for general living costs or non-essential purposes.

## Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that Learner Support Funds and Bursary funding are administered fairly, consistently and in accordance with the Department for Education (DfE) funding rules and guidance.

The Policy provides the framework for assessing applications, determining awards and ensuring that public funds are used appropriately to remove financial barriers to participation in learning.

## Scope

This Policy applies to all staff involved in the assessment, approval, administration and monitoring of Learner Support funding. It covers:

- 16–19 Bursary Fund
- Free College Meals
- Adult Skills Fund (ASF) Learner Support including GLA (Greater London Authority)
- Advanced Learner Loan Bursary

## Types of Funding Available

The College administers the following funds:

### 1. 16–19 Bursary Fund

- Vulnerable Student Bursary
- Discretionary Bursary

### 2. Free College Meals

3. **19+ Learner Support Fund**
    - Adult Skills Fund (ASF) support
    - 20+ Childcare

4. **Advanced Learner Loan Bursary**

**Key Principles**

The College will ensure that:

- All awards are based on individual assessment of need
- Funding reflects actual costs of participation
- Awards are supported by appropriate evidence
- Flat-rate or blanket payments are not made unless approved by Compliance and Funding Manager
- In-kind support is prioritised over cash payments
- Funding is not an entitlement.
- Awards are subject to the availability of funds.
- Awards will normally be based on the lowest reasonable cost necessary to enable participation.
- Learners must promptly report any change in circumstances that may affect their eligibility or award.
- The College reserves the right to amend, suspend or withdraw awards where eligibility or participation changes.

Funding must only be awarded where it is necessary to remove a financial barrier to learning.

**Eligibility**

1. **Residency**

Learners must:

- Be ordinarily resident in the UK on the first day of learning
- Have a legal right to reside in the UK
- Meet DfE funding eligibility requirements
- Not be in the UK solely for the purpose of study or hold a skilled worker visa.

The College will obtain and retain evidence of residency and immigration status.

2. **General Eligibility**

Learners must satisfy the eligibility requirements applicable to the relevant funding stream as set out within current DfE funding rules. Learners must:

- Be enrolled on an eligible further education programme
- Be participating in learning funded by the DfE
- Not be in waged training such as apprenticeships

**Vulnerable Student Bursary (16–19)**

1. **Eligibility**

Learners must meet the DfE eligibility criteria for the Vulnerable Student Bursary applicable to the relevant funding year:

- In care or care leaver
- The student must be receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) in their own name. (Financially supporting themselves and or someone who is dependent on them, living in the same household, such as a child or partner)
- Receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit together with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in their own name, in accordance with DfE guidance. Receipt of DLA or PIP alone does not meet the criteria.

Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for vulnerable bursary funding unless they meet the 19+ continuer or EHCP criteria.

2. **Award**

- Maximum £1,200 per academic year
- Awards are determined by individual need
- Payments may be spread across the academic year

The full award must not be automatically allocated.

**Discretionary Bursary (16–19)**

1. **Eligibility**

Age

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026 or be a 19+ continuer or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Eligible Education Provision

Students must be enrolled on provision funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and subject to quality assurance (e.g. Ofsted).

Residency

Students must meet residency requirements set out in DfE funding regulations for post-16 provision.

Employment Status

Apprentices or students in waged training are not generally eligible unless they qualify for The Apprenticeship Care Leavers Bursary.

Learners may apply if:

- Household income is £45,000 or below, or
- The household is in receipt of qualifying benefits

Household income will normally include the gross annual income of parents, carers, spouse, civil partner or partner living within the same household. The College reserves the right to request additional evidence where household arrangements are complex.

**2. Evidence Requirements**

Applicants must provide:

- Benefit evidence dated within 3 months, or
- Evidence of household income (payslips, P60 or tax return)

All evidence must demonstrate the learner's financial circumstances at the point of application.

**3. Income Assessment Framework**

| **Household Income** | **Maximum Contribution** |
|---|---|
| Up to £30,000 or benefits | Up to 100% |
| £30,001 – £35,000 | Up to 75% |
| £35,001 – £40,500 | Up to 50% |
| £40,501 – £45,000 | Up to 25% |

Household income is one factor used to determine priority for funding. Meeting the income criteria does not guarantee an award.

All awards are discretionary and based on actual costs and individual circumstances.

**Free College Meals**

Free College Meals are provided in line with DfE guidance. The College will determine eligibility in accordance with the national eligibility criteria published by the DfE. The College will obtain appropriate evidence before awarding Free College Meals.

From September 2026 Eligibility is determined according to national criteria
In receipt of, or having parent/carers who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

Universal Credit

Support under part VI of the immigration and Asylum Act 1999

- The College will not apply its own income thresholds

**1. Delivery of Support**

The College provides a meal provision for each attendance day, delivered through a cashless system or equivalent.

- The value of the meal provision is **£5.50 per attendance day**
- Awards are based on timetabled attendance
- Provision is only available on days the learner is expected to attend

This funding is provided to ensure access to a meal and must not be treated as a cash allowance.

Where attendance or engagement falls below expected levels, support may be reviewed and payments adjusted taking individual circumstances into account.

| Attendance and Participation Guide | Adjustment to Travel / Maintenance |
|---|---|
| 80% and above | No adjustment (full payment) |
| 50%–79% | 25% Reduction in payment |
| Below 50% | 50% Reduction in payment |
| 0% | Maximum payment of £5 to support return to college (Pending approval from Finance Director / Funding Compliance Manager) |
| More than 3 weeks of non-attendance | Payments will be paused |

These thresholds are indicative and are not applied automatically. Individual circumstances, including illness, disability, caring responsibilities, safeguarding concerns, authorised absence, and other exceptional factors, will be considered before any decision is made.

## Travel Support

### 1. Eligibility

Learners may apply where they live 2 miles or more from their main campus.

### 2. Assessment

- Awards are based on the lowest reasonable cost of travel
- Learners are expected to use discounted travel schemes where available

### 3. Maximum Contribution

- Up to £50 per week

### 4. Private Transport

Private transport may be supported where public transport is not available or appropriate.

- Mileage rate: 25 pence per mile

## Essential Equipment and Kit

Funding may be provided for essential items required to participate in a course, including:

- Uniform
- Specialist equipment
- Course materials
- Essential digital equipment

### 1. Conditions

- Only essential items will be funded
- Maximum contributions may apply depending on the course

### 2. Evidence Requirement

Before any payment is made, learners must provide:

- Receipts or invoices as proof of purchase

Evidence of expenditure will normally be required before reimbursement is made. The College may accept alternative evidence where appropriate.

## Childcare Support

### 1. Eligibility

Learners must:

- Be the main carer of a child
- Use a registered childcare provider

### 2. Contribution

- Up to 85% of childcare costs
- Maximum £180 per child per week and £195 for GLA residents
- Maximum £6,800 per academic year

Any available free childcare entitlements or other childcare support schemes must be fully utilised before learner support funding is awarded.

### 3. Payment

Payments are made directly to the childcare provider and are subject to confirmation of attendance.

Childcare support will only be awarded where permitted by the relevant DfE funding rules or in exceptional cases approved by the Compliance and Funding Manager.

## Adult Learners (19+)

### 1. Eligibility

Age

Learners must be aged 19 or over on 31 August 2026.

Childcare support is available to learners aged 20 or over at the start of their learning aim, where childcare costs would otherwise prevent participation.

Eligible Provision

Learner support funds are used towards course fees, all fee remission and full funding eligibility must be explored and applied.

This includes:

- National entitlement qualifications (e.g. Level 2 and Level 3 entitlements)
- Legal entitlements (e.g. English and maths)
- Devolved or local funding agreements

Learner support funds will only be used towards fee contributions in exceptional circumstances where this is necessary to support participation.

Residency

Learners must meet the residency and eligibility criteria set out in funding rules for the relevant funding stream.

Employment Status
Apprentices or students in waged training are not generally eligible unless they qualify for The Apprenticeship Care Leavers Bursary.

Asylum Seekers
Learners aged 18+ who are asylum seekers are not eligible to receive cash payments from learner support funds. Support must be provided in-kind and only where necessary to enable participation in learning.

This may include:

- Travel support - Travel passes or pre-paid tickets where available.
- Meals or food vouchers
- Essential course equipment or materials
- Childcare (where applicable and funded)

Additional financial support should be sought through the Home Office or external organisations such as the Refugee Council.

Cash payments will only be made in exceptional circumstances where in-kind support is not feasible and must be clearly justified, evidenced and approved by the Compliance and Funding Manager.

All support provided must be clearly recorded, justified, and auditable, demonstrating how it enables participation.

## Apprenticeship Care Leavers Bursary

- The bursary is for eligible apprentices who are 16-25 and are care leavers or still in care.
- This bursary is claimed and assessed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with DfE guidance

## Advanced Learner Loan Bursary

### 1. Eligibility

Learners must:

- Have an approved Advanced Learner Loan and meet the eligibility requirements of the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund.
- Have household income of £45,000 or below or be on qualifying benefits

### 2. Support

Support may be provided for:

- Travel
- Equipment
- Childcare

- Hardship support

**3. Payments**

Payments may be made as one-off, monthly, or termly instalments, depending on the type of support awarded and the learner's individual circumstances. All payments are subject to continued eligibility, attendance, participation, and available funding.

**4. Returning Students**

All returning students must reapply for Learner Support Fund support each academic year and provide current evidence to confirm eligibility.

The College may review eligibility and request updated information at any time during the academic year.

All awards are subject to:

- Available funding.
- Ongoing eligibility.
- Satisfactory attendance and engagement.

Support may be amended or withdrawn where eligibility criteria are no longer met.

**Funding Prioritisation**

Where demand exceeds available funds, priority will be given to:

1. Learners in vulnerable groups
2. Learners with the lowest household income
3. Essential participation costs
4. Learners at risk of withdrawal due to financial hardship

Priority does not guarantee an award where funding has been exhausted.

**Attendance and Engagement**

Funding is conditional upon continued participation in learning.

Where attendance or engagement indicates that participation costs are no longer being incurred, the College may reduce, suspend or withdraw financial support.

| Attendance and Participation Guide | Adjustment to Travel/Maintenance |
|---|---|
| 80% and above | No adjustment (full payment) |
| 50%-79% | 25% reduction in payment |
| Below 50% | 50% reduction in payment |
| 0% attendance | Maximum payment of £5 to support your return to college |
| More than 3 weeks of non-attendance | Payments will be paused |

Before making any decision, the College will consider the learner's individual circumstances including authorised absence, illness and other exceptional circumstances.

**Changes in circumstances**

Learners must notify the College immediately of any change which may affect their eligibility or financial need.

This includes:

- withdrawal from learning
- change of address
- change in household income
- change in childcare arrangements
- receipt of alternative financial support

The College may review and amend awards following any change in circumstances.

**Application and Assessment**

- Applications must be completed in full and supported by required evidence
- Each application is assessed individually
- Funding is approved prior to payment

Funding will only be awarded from the point at which a complete application and all required evidence has been received.

**Backdated Payments**

Backdated payments will not normally be made.

Backdating may only be considered where:

- The learner was eligible and actively attending during the period
- Evidence supports both eligibility and participation costs
- There is a clear and documented justification

All backdated payments must:

- Be approved by the Director of Finance
- Be recorded with a clear audit trail
- Be treated as an exception

**Payment of Funds**

Support will be provided as:

- travel passes
- direct purchase of equipment
- meal provision
- reimbursement of approved expenditure
- direct payment to childcare providers
- bank transfer where appropriate

Cash payments will only be made where necessary.

All payments are subject to:

- Evidence verification
- Confirmation of attendance

**Data Protection**

The College will process personal information in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the College's Data Protection Policy.

Information may be shared with funding bodies or auditors where required for funding assurance purposes.

**Audit and Assurance**

The College will:

- retain evidence supporting each funding decision;
- maintain records of payments made;
- ensure an appropriate audit trail exists for all awards;
- retain records in accordance with DfE funding requirements.

Funding may be recovered where:

- Payments are made in error
- Eligibility requirements are not met

Any suspected fraud or misrepresentation will be investigated.

**Exceptional Bursary Payments**

Discretionary awards may be made only in exceptional circumstances where the standard assessment does not adequately reflect a learner's financial need. The Funding Compliance Manager may approve these awards following discussion with the relevant support manager(s), with appropriate evidence retained to support the decision.

**Overpayments and Recovery**

The College will take appropriate action where an overpayment of funds occurs.

This may arise where:

- A learner withdraws from their programme
- Participation, attendance or engagement requirements are not met
- Incorrect or incomplete information has been provided

In such cases:

- Payments may be stopped immediately
- The College may seek to recover funds where appropriate
- Repayment arrangements may be agreed on a case-by-case basis

Decisions to recover or write off funds will be:

- Proportionate
- Documented
- Approved by the Compliance and Funding Manager

**Fraud Prevention and Irregularity**

The College will take appropriate steps to prevent, detect, and investigate fraud or misuse of Learner Support Funds.

Controls include:

- Verification of supporting evidence
- Requests for additional information where inconsistencies are identified
- Random sampling and audit checks
- Cross-checking for duplicate or repeated claims

Where fraud or misrepresentation is suspected:

- Payments may be suspended
- Funding may be withdrawn
- The case may be referred for disciplinary or legal action

All suspected or confirmed irregularities will be recorded and managed in line with College procedures.

**Appeals**

Learners may appeal decisions in writing. Appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of notification of the decision. The appeal will be reviewed by the Funding Compliance Manager or Head of Student Services, whoever has not been involved in the original decision. If the learner remains dissatisfied, a final appeal may be submitted to a member of the College Leadership Group. The decision of this appeal is final.

**Equality and Diversity**

The College is committed to ensuring that Learner Support Funds are administered fairly, consistently and without discrimination. Applications will be assessed in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the College's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

**Responsibilities**

- LSF Administration team: assessment and administration
- Finance Team: budget monitoring and compliance checks
- Funding Compliance Manager: approval and oversight
- MIS Team: Supporting with facilitation of return data

**Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure alignment with DfE funding rules and guidance.

| Version | Approved by | Approval Date | Effective From | Review Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Nidha Patel (Director of Finance) | 23/9/26 | 23/9/26 | 21/7/27 |