

# 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Procedures 2020-2021

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## Contents

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1. Purpose: .....	3
2. Scope .....	3
3. Means Test.....	3
4. Responsibility.....	4
5. Administration.....	4
6. Application Process .....	5
7. Hardship .....	6
8. Learner Support.....	6
8.1 Childcare.....	6
8.2 Travel .....	7
8.3 Kit/Equipment .....	8
8.4 Educational Visits/Trips .....	8
8.5 Free College Meals .....	9
8.6 Contribution Payments .....	9
8.7 UCAS Applications .....	10
8.8 University Interviews .....	10
8.9 Course/Exam Fees .....	10
8.10 Emergency Funds .....	11
9. College Bursary.....	11
10. Payment Method.....	12
11. Eligibility.....	12
12. Appeals.....	13
13. Audit & Retention .....	13
14. False or Fraudulent Claims .....	13

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## 1. Purpose

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLS) is provided by the by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) to Colleges to enable them to provide financial support for learners with a specific financial hardship that prevents them from taking part in learning.

The College will strive to achieve the most effective use of the funds to support the maximum number of eligible learners, and use this to encourage access, retention and achievement of eligible students on their chosen course. Students will be made aware the funding is limited and offered on a first come first served basis. The college understands that the bursary should not be used to support the day to day living costs of an individual student; however, it may choose to do so in exceptional circumstances.

It is available to students aged 19+ who are enrolled on to an EFA funded course whose household income is below £31,000.

(Parental income will not be taken into consideration but the income of any spouse or co-habiting partner will). It is not available to students enrolled on a programme eligible for the Advanced Learning Loan (please see Advanced Learning Loan Bursary document).

## 2. Scope

It is available to students if they are a “home student” i.e. have been resident in the country for three or more years, and studying a programme of learning funded by the EFA. The EFA residency rules must be used if there is any doubt over eligibility as a ‘home student’.

The following ‘categories’ will be used when assessing a student’s needs.

- Hardship for those aged 19+.
- Childcare for those aged 20+.

The fund is not an entitlement and is dependent on the amount of funding allocated to the College each year.

## 3. Means Test

Household income must be below £31,000.

Where the student (or their family) meets the income threshold but has savings of £16,000 or more, it is unlikely that they will be able to demonstrate that they are facing financial barriers to participation and need help to stay in education, and would therefore not normally be eligible for bursary. This is in line with benefit assessments, where claimants are not eligible to receive most income-related benefits if they have savings of more than £16,000.

Where the household income changes during the academic year, the student may apply to be reassessed based on the new household income.

Evidence for 19+ Discretionary bursary will be required, examples of which are Child Tax Credit documentation, Universal Credit documentation, JSA, Income Support, P60 2019/20, previous 3 months payslips or evidence of self-employment from Tax Office.

Students may be eligible to receive the following from the College (subject to sufficient funds being available):

- College meals provided through the cashless catering system for the days the learner is in college, (additional criteria must be met – detailed below)
- Kit/Equipment/Material Costs: course specific
- Bus pass/travel contribution subject to 1 mile radius from college to address held on EBS.
- Educational Visits/Trips
- UCAS application
- DBS
- University interviews

All payments will be subject to the student meeting the following attendance and behaviour criteria:

- Attendance minimum level of 90%
- No disciplinary action

Should a student not meet the criteria an interview will be arranged with the Welfare Team or Senior Tutors to determine level of payment.

#### **4. Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of the Director of Student Support to monitor and update the procedures. The Deputy Principal for Finance & Resources will be alerted to any discrepancies.

#### **5. Administration**

The College will use the allowed 5% of the DLS allocation towards administrative costs.

When making decisions about awarding DLS funding the College will take into account the availability of other financial support available for learners, for example Job Centre Plus or a Work Programme.

Payments will be dependent on an attendance level of at least 90%. Consideration will be given to mitigating circumstances such as: child protection, family illness, safeguarding concerns, caring responsibilities or any other issues that might affect attendance. Students must notify Welfare Team or Senior Tutors of any such mitigating circumstances as soon as they become aware there may be an issue. Where attendance is still deemed unsatisfactory or if no notification is made to Safeguarding, Prevent and Welfare Team, payment will be either withheld or reclaimed.

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Payments will also be dependent on satisfactory behaviour i.e. no disciplinary action

The College reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to students where information given on the application form is found to be false.

The College reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to students where the student has withdrawn before the end of the course.

It is the students' responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any direct funding support that they receive from the College as payments received may affect their eligibility for some benefits.

The College, as per EFA guidance, will not use DLS to support the following:

- If the learner is already receiving help with travel or childcare costs from Jobcentre Plus, Working Tax Credits or a Work Programme provider in connection with pre-employment training or employment.
- If a learner has been released on temporary licence (RoTL), for example, on day release.
- If the learner is carrying out a higher education course, or provision with learning aims that are identified as fully funded from other sources.

## 6. Application Procedure

Students will need to complete an application form for assistance. Forms are available from Learner Services or via the college website.

Completed forms should be handed to the Welfare Team at the campus of study with supporting evidence which for this group will be Working Tax Credit documentation, Universal Credit, JSA, Income Support, P60 19/20 and evidence of self-employment from Tax Office.

The application will be delayed should the student provide insufficient evidence. Where a student is applying for Childcare support, official documents must be provided e.g. child benefit letter or full birth certificate.

Learners will be advised verbally of the decision and what support they will receive. Any declined applications will be notified in writing within 15 days of the date of receipt of the application.

## 7. Hardship

Hardship funding is provided to support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners and to remove barriers to education or training.

Learners will be supported based on their needs and local circumstances. Types of support available include the following.

- Course-related costs, including course trips, books and equipment, support with domestic emergencies and emergency accommodation
- Individual transport costs (learners in receipt of Personal Independence Payment (PiP) who receive the mobility element of PiP, cannot receive transport costs as this would be considered double funding)

## 8. Learner Support

### 8.1 Childcare

#### **Policy:**

It is College policy that students should use OFSTED registered childcare provision. Students will need to provide a copy of the birth certificate for each child.

Students who are under 20 years of age are provided with assistance to apply for the Care to Learn scheme to cover childcare costs. The college will seek to identify and encourage application to the Care to Learn scheme by all eligible students

Childcare will be calculated over the period of the course using EBS course dates a 44-week period and on this basis will cover half-term, Christmas and Easter holidays. College will not pay retainers over the summer holidays. The maximum daily amount is £60 and the maximum weekly amount payable for any one child is £180 unless by prior arrangement. College will only pay 50% of weekly costs during half term breaks.

No childcare payments are agreed for part time learners.

The Student will be responsible for paying any deposit due prior to enrolling at College. The bursary cannot support the cost of nappies, formula or meals which are charged separately by the childcare provider.

The Welfare Team will notify the Childcare provider of the parameters of the funding. They will also be notified that all invoices must be addressed to the student and not the College and should include their registration number. Should a student withdraw from their course the College will only be responsible for payment whilst the student was in attendance at College.

Childcare is high cost support and requires contractual arrangements to be in place between childcare providers and the college. Students must use their free early entitlement for childcare in the first instance. The childcare allowance within the Child Tax Credit will be taken into account when assessing eligibility for support if appropriate. Any available funding

for free 15/30 hour childcare will also be taken in to consideration before any payments are made from LSF to avoid duplicate funding.

Where a student continues to use childcare provision after completing their course the student will be liable for all childcare costs.

**Procedure:**

Students are required to complete an application form and a childcare contract. Claims will be processed every 4 weeks and payment will be made by BACS directly to the childcare provider.

## 8.2 Travel

**Policy:**

Bus passes and travel contribution payments are only available to learners who live a mile from their campus of study. If a student loses their pass it is their responsibility to pay for a replacement pass.

Petrol payments will be made half termly, at £15 per week for those living 1 – 15 miles from college, and £20 per week 15+ miles from college. Payments are made dependent upon the learner achieving 90% attendance.

We will support part time learners with travel costs by paying £5.95 per day (this is the cost of a local day rover pass). Payments will be made in arrears and on attendance.

**Procedure:**

Passes or a letter to the travel company requesting they issue a pass will be given to learners by the Welfare Team at the learner's campus of study.

Students who are applying for Petrol payments are required to provide details of their current car insurance, and provide additional certificates should their insurance expire during the period of their study programme.

## 8.3 Kit/Equipment or Additional Materials

**Policy:**

Assistance with the cost of equipment, kit or uniform will only be considered where items are deemed necessary for the completion of the course, or are required due to health and safety regulations. For those learners who are required to purchase specific kit or equipment, the fund will refund purchases made by learners to their own bank account, or we will order the kit/equipment direct from a college nominated supplier. No refunds will be made or kit ordered until after the first 4 weeks of attendance on the programme.

**Procedure:**

Students will be required to provide receipts for their purchases and will be informed of the approximate date the refund will be actioned. If a learner wishes the college to order items, they must complete an order form and hand this to the Welfare Team. Learners will be advised once items are ready for collection.

**8.4 Educational Visits/Trips****Policy:**

Support will be given to each learner who is required to undertake an educational visit/trip as part of their study programme. An educational trip or visit will be considered essential where it is compulsory for all students in the group to attend, or if a student would not pass the qualification without attending. Educational trips and visits that are not compulsory will not be supported. Attendance must be at 90% or above in order for the fund to support the educational visit. A limit of £400 per learner, per academic year will be adhered to. Learners will be required to pay the required deposit, which will be refunded once the learner has attended the visit. Under exceptional hardship circumstances the college will look at meeting the cost of the deposit. Any part time learners, will not have the costs pro-rated.

**Procedure:**

Monies will be paid directly to the department budget once confirmation of the cost has been received. Deposits will be refunded to the learner's bank account once confirmation of attendance on the trip has been received.

**8.5 Free College Meals****Policy:**

There is no Government entitlement to FCM for most students over the age of 19 while they are in college. As a college we will support those full time learners who are eligible for the 19+ Discretionary bursary by granting Free College Meals to them for each day they are timetabled to be in college. Whether a learner is entitled to government funded Free College Meals, or as a college we have chosen to support them with this element of the bursary, college will follow the guidelines set out in the Gov.uk document which is usually updated each year. The amount set out in the document is the government contribution, and as a college we will review this amount annually and add additional monies from 19+ Bursary monies where applicable, currently this will be £3.50 in total per day the learner is timetabled to be in college. There are strict eligibility guidelines set out in the Gov.uk document which we will adhere to.

With regards to part time learners it should be noted that receiving income-based benefits, or being dependent upon someone who is, is not sufficient to be awarded FCM where students do not meet the usual FCM criteria. Most students will be required to attend an interview with the Welfare Team or Senior Tutors before FCM can be awarded.

**Procedure:**

Learners will be required to provide the necessary evidence as set out in the current Gov.uk document, where college is claiming the Free College Meals funding from government monies. Any monies awarded will be added to the cashless catering system daily, and removed at the end of each day.

## 8.6 Contribution Payments

**Policy:**

Contribution monies are to support learners with course related costs. Payments are made only if there are sufficient monies remaining in the budget, and the level of payment will be agreed based on funds available at the time. Learners will have to achieve 90% attendance and have a good disciplinary record. Monies will be paid termly if funds allow and be made direct to a learner's bank account.

**Procedure:**

Monies paid if funds allow, on dates agreed with the Finance Manager and then learners advised.

## 8.7 UCAS Applications

**Policy:**

Learners who are applying to UCAS can ask the LSF to meet the cost of their application. Monies will be paid directly to UCAS via the learners UCAS application form.

**Procedure:**

Learner must attend Learner Services and open their application form online a member of finance team will then pay the fee via college credit card.

## 8.8 University Interviews

**Policy:**

Learners who are attending Universities for interviews can apply to LSF for travel assistance up to a maximum of £200 per learner to cover all interviews, at a rate of 45p per mile for the first 100 miles, and 27p per mile thereafter, or reimbursement of bus or rail costs. LSF will need to

see evidence of interview(s) and monies can then be transferred via BACS or in emergency instances cash will be provided to the learner.

Where it is not possible to travel to an interview and back on the same day due to public transport restrictions we will considered funding accommodation costs.

**Procedure:**

Once evidence provided Welfare Team will arrange for travel costs to be assessed and refunded.

## 8.9 Course/Exam Fees

**Policy:**

If a learner is not eligible for a government or AEB fee waiver, or has little or no income, the LSF will consider supporting eligible students with fees. Examples of exceptional cases would include the following groups, a student with no independent income in a low income household, or a student with no recourse to other funds. Learners who are required to pay course fees, may be considered for a reimbursement of 75% of these fees towards the end of their programme, or at least until all instalments payments have been received by the College.

**Procedure:**

Welfare Team will liaise with Finance to ensure course fees have been paid in full, and reimbursement will then be made direct to the learner's bank account.

## 8.10 Emergency Funds

**Policy:**

The emergency Fund is short term and is in place to assist students experiencing a sudden or unexpected emergency situation which may impact on their studies. The funds are also to promote the welfare and safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults.

**Procedure:**

Learners who find themselves in an emergency situation will be assessed by the Welfare/Safeguarding Team.

## 9. College Bursary

Where a student requires additional funding due to individual circumstances the College can issue a College bursary irrespective of household income. We will consider cases on their own merits and make awards on an individual basis if we believe there is a genuine hardship, and without assistance via bursary the learner would not be able to start/complete their study programme. Students must be able to demonstrate additional/exceptional hardship e.g. homelessness, estranged from parents etc. and will be subject to an interview and additional monitoring by the Welfare Team. Students will be required to maintain good standards of attendance and commitment to their course.

All support will be based on individual circumstances and the support could comprise any of the following:

- contribution to College meals
- additional material costs
- additional trip/educational visits costs
- one off grant
- assistance with travel costs
- DBS applications
- UCAS applications

## 10. Payment Method

All claim forms, will be processed and paid by the Welfare Team/Learner Support Administrator on agreed publicised dates. Any large payments such as contribution payments will have a date agreed by the Welfare Manager and the Finance Manager.

Payments would normally be made as follows:

- Petrol – half-termly
- Contribution payments – termly (if monies are available)
- Kit & Equipment – payments will be made after the learner has attended for 4 weeks
- Childcare – monthly, direct to the childcare provider

In all cases the student's attendance is checked to ensure that it is 90% or above in each element of study.

On rare occasions it may be necessary to pay claims where the attendance is below the College minimum. This is usually at the recommendation of the Senior Tutor and after discussions with the student. Details are recorded on the claim form.

The authorised claims will then be passed to Finance to pay students via BACs payments.

If an asylum seeker is eligible to receive learner support funds this can be made in the form of course-related books, equipment, cash payments or a travel pass as per the current ESFA Funding Guidance

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## 11. Eligibility

To be eligible to receive a 19+ Discretionary Bursary, students must be aged over 19. Funding is available to students meeting the required criteria if they are a “home student” i.e. have been resident in the country for three or more years and are studying a programme of learning funded by the ESFA, or is an EU national.

Those learners undertaking work-based learning, and higher education students are not eligible to apply to this fund.

The college reserves discretion to ensure that individual student’s needs and personal circumstances are taken into account when decisions are made.

## 12. Appeals

Applicants have the right to appeal against a decision, in the first instance contact the Welfare Manager for explanation of the decision; however, if the student wishes to continue with an appeal they would be required to appeal in writing, to the Director of Student Support. A decision will be made within 10 working days and they will be notified of the outcome and reasons.

## 13. Audit & Retention

The college will maintain accurate and up to date records that evidence which students are eligible for which elements of the funds, including a completed application form, eligibility (including evidence of their financial situation). Information will also detail how much each learner has been awarded and any items purchased, and payments made to demonstrate appropriate use of funds. Documents will be retained for 6 years in accordance with Government guidelines contained within the funding rules.

## 14. False or Fraudulent Claims

Where students are found to have intentionally given misleading or inaccurate information the college will claim back the award made. Providing false statements may result in the student being sanctioned in accordance with college disciplinary policy/or prosecution. A record will be made of fraudulent incidents and subsequent actions taken. Incidents will be reported to ELT and reported to the funding body as necessary.

Students who are found to be passing bursary funding on to a third party will be deemed to have demonstrated insufficient financial need, and will have their bursary funding withdrawn. This includes students who give away or sell free college meals, and also learners who allow another person to use their college funded bus pass. Any costs levied by the bus company in restoring the bus pass must be met by the learner.