

Further Education Learner Support Fund Policy 2023-2024

Effective date: September 2023

Job role of author: Assistant Principal Student Experience & Support

Review date: September 2023

**Approved by: Policy and Procedure Committee - June 2023 Finance and
Resources Committee - June 2023**

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1. Introduction and Policy Statement

- 1.1 The college promotes equality, diversity, inclusion and social mobility and uses its learner support funds to remove financial barriers to participation in learning and continuation of education. We believe in inclusivity and recognise the key role education has in helping to transform society for the benefit of individuals and communities.
- 1.2 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 learners, potential learners, staff and parents.
- 1.3 The college receives allocations of funding from the Department of Education annually to provide financial support for Further Education learners.
- 1.4 In establishing the Learner Support Fund policy, the College has taken account of Department for Education policy and guidelines.
- 1.5 The funds have been developed to help learners 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.
- 1.6 This Policy sets out the arrangements for how the College administer and manage the Learner Support Fund (LSF) in 2023/24. It aims to ensure that arrangements of LSF meet the needs of students in accordance with the eligibility criteria.
- 1.7 The Student Services team will provide advice and information on the LSF and its processes to enable students to fulfil their responsibility regarding the application processes.
- 1.8 Student services will take the required steps to ensure that management and systems of financial control are in place, funds are used for the purposes for which it is intended and it complies with College and DfE guidelines.
- 1.9 Commercial courses, Higher Education, Apprenticeships, and young people in prison or a young offender's institution or have been released on temporary license for example, day release and Work Based Learning courses cannot be funded through the Learner Support Fund.
- 1.10 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 the funds available and in accordance with any changes in government policy and guidelines.
- 1.11 All funds, excluding the 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary Fund, are limited, therefore applications will only be approved if sufficient funds remain available.

2. Types of Funding

2.1 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary

Statement	There is a Guaranteed (Vulnerable) Bursary available to students who are identified as the most vulnerable or disadvantaged. The eligibility requirement outlined in the eligibility section below.
Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners eligible for this fund, can receive up to £1,200 per year for support in relation to course related costs, If they are participating in a programme of study that lasts 30 weeks or more, a pro rata amount is paid to learners on a programme of less than 30 weeks. • Paid in weekly amounts to student's bank, a weekly payment of £40. Students receiving the Guaranteed Bursary can also receive other discretionary funds if they meet all the criteria and therefore able to access College Meals, Travel pass and potential support with other course related costs.
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the age requirements of the fund. • Be enrolled on an approved Government funded programme. • This fund is available to learners to meet one or more of the following conditions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) In Care b) Care leaver (or classed as a 'Looked After Child') c) In receipt of Income Support/Universal Credit (in the learner's own name) or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner d) In receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right, as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right e) Unaccompanied asylum seeker children who are classed as in the care of the local authority
Required Evidence	<p>Upon submitting an application for bursary support learners must submit eligible evidence to support their financial situation. Examples of what constitutes eligible evidence is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A learner applying for vulnerable bursary who is in receipt of universal credit or income support must provide benefit award letters stating the benefit is claimed in their name. • for learners receiving Universal Credit/Employment Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independent Payments, a copy of their Universal Credit claim from Department of Work and Pensions. Evidence of receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment must also be provided in the form of an award letter or bank statement • Learners who are in care or a care leaver, must provide written confirmation of their current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority, this is the local authority that looks after them or provides their leaving care services. The evidence could be a letter or an email but must be clearly from the local authority, for example a letter head for social worker or e mail from local authority e mail address.

2.2 Free College Meals (FCM)

Statement	The government provides this fund with distinct criteria for awarding Free Student Meals. This fund is available to learners aged 16 – 18 on 31st August 2023 who are classed as disadvantaged. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as learners being in receipt of identified means tested benefits.
Offer	College Meals- Subsidised meals £4.50 per day for timetabled lessons only
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “home learner” who meets the residency requirements (please see the appendix for more details). • Meet the age requirements of the fund. • Be enrolled on an approved Government funded programme. • Being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the identified means tested benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Income Support (b) Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (c) Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (d) Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (e) The guarantee element of State Pension Credit (f) 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)) (g) Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit (h) Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa <p>Students aged 19 or over are only eligible for a free meal if they;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (‘19+ continuers’) or (b) Have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and meet all the 16-19 bursary eligibility criteria.
Required Evidence	<p>Upon submitting an application for bursary support learners must submit eligible evidence to support their financial situation. Examples of what constitutes eligible evidence is as follows:</p> <p>Proof of household income in the form of most recent benefit award as outlined in the eligibility section, most recent letter (within 3 months).</p>

2.3 The 16-19 Bursary Fund (or up to 25 year old with an EHCP)

Statement	This bursary provides help with course related expenses for students from low-income households. Applications are income assessed, based on the supporting evidence submitted with the application. Awards are generally for the provision of travel passes and equipment or uniform recommended by
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	<p>the curriculum area, educational visits and also College meals. This fund is available to learners who are aged between 16-18 years old on the 31 August 2023. Learners aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a discretionary bursary if they are continuing on a study programme, they began aged 16-18 or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).</p>
Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel- Free College Bus Pass if lives more than 1 miles from the College • Equipment -100% funded up to £300 for full time students only • Educational visits • Subsidised meals £4.50 per day for timetabled lessons only • Exceptional Discretionary Hardship Fund
Eligibility	<p>Learners must satisfy all of the following criteria to be able to access to Learner Support Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “home learner” who meets the residency requirements (please see the appendix for more details). • Meet the age requirements of the fund. • Be enrolled on an approved Government funded programme. • Be on a full-time course and/or substantial part-time course (5 hours per week and above including any mandatory placements). • Be in receipt of income assessed state benefits/ tax credits (including Universal Credits) or have an annual gross individual income of below £35,000.
Required Evidence	<p>Upon submitting an application for bursary support learners must submit eligible evidence to support their financial situation. Examples of what constitutes eligible evidence is as follows:</p> <p>Proof of household income in the form of most recent benefit award letters in parent/carers name, last, most recent 3 months bank statement of parent/career confirming benefit or wages, last, most recent 3 months wage slips for parent/carer, P60, most recent self-assessment return for self employed parents, letter headed annual account summary from company accountant for self employed parents.</p>

2.4 Care to Learn

Statement	Care to Learn- Childcare costs for students under age 20 at the start of their course are made through Care to Learn. Details are available at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn . Childcare advice for young parents is provided by the college student services team. Care to learn also provides travel expenses associated with childcare.
Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare costs for students under age 20 - £180 per child per week • Travel expenses associated with childcare.
Eligibility	<p>You can get Care to Learn if all of the following apply to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you're a parent under 20 at the start of your course • you're the main carer for your child • you live in England • you're either a British citizen or have a legal right to live and study in England • your course qualifies • your childcare provider qualifies <p>You're not eligible if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you're an apprentice who gets a salary • you're doing a higher education course, for example at university or college
Required Evidence	<p>You can apply for Care to Learn online through https://studentbursary.education.gov.uk/w/webpage/student-bursary</p> <p>Students must provide the required evidence such as the details of your registered childcare provider.</p> <p>Please note that payments end when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you stop attending your course • you reach the end of your course • your child stops attending childcare

2.5 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund

Statement	<p>This fund is available to learners over the age of 19, and on a provision, which is funded by AEB. The fund is divided into two categories:</p> <p>(a) Hardship funding (b) 20+ childcare funding</p> <p>All awards are discretionary and are not guaranteed as the fund is limited. Awards may vary between students, courses and according to individual circumstances.</p>
Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hardship funding – general financial support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. This include:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Travel- Free College Bus Pass, if lives more than 1 miles from the College ○ Equipment -100% funded up to £300 for full time students only ○ Educational visits ○ Exceptional Discretionary Hardship Fund ▪ 20+ childcare funding – for learners aged 20 or older on the first day of learning who are at risk of not starting or continuing learning because of childcare. Up to £180 per week. Please see below for more details
Eligibility	<p>Learners must satisfy all of the following criteria to be able to access to Learner Support Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “home learner” who meets the residency requirements (please see the appendix for more details). • Meet the age requirements of the fund. • Be enrolled on an approved Government funded programme. • Be on a full-time course and/or substantial part-time course (5 hours per week and above including any mandatory placements). • Be in receipt of income assessed state benefits/ tax credits (including Universal Credits) or have an annual gross individual income of below £25,000.
Required Evidence	<p>Upon submitting an application for bursary support learners must submit eligible evidence to support their financial situation. Examples of what constitutes eligible evidence is as follows:</p> <p>Proof of income in the form of most recent benefit award letters, last, most recent 3 months bank statement confirming benefit or wages, last, most recent 3 months wage slips, P60, most recent self-assessment return for self-employed applicants, letter headed annual account summary from company accountant for self-employed applicants</p>

2.6 Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund

Statement	<p>This is a limited ring-fenced fund which is used for discretionary bursary payments to eligible students facing financial hardship and in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan. The loans bursary fund cannot be used to pay tuition fees. Bursary funds will only be paid to students who have a loan approval confirmation letter from SLC. Funding is divided into three categories:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(a) Financial hardship (b) Childcare</p>
Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hardship funding – general financial support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners. This include: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Travel- Free College Bus Pass if lives more than 1 miles from the College ○ Equipment -100% funded up to £300 for full time students only ○ Educational visits ○ Exceptional Discretionary Hardship Fund ▪ 20+ childcare funding – for learners aged 20 or older on the first day of learning who are at risk of not starting or continuing learning because of childcare. Up to £180 per week. Please see below for more details
Eligibility	<p>Learners must satisfy all of the following criteria to be able to access to Learner Support Fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A “home learner” who meets the residency requirements (please see the appendix for more details). • Be in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan • Meet the age requirements of the fund. • Be enrolled on an approved Government funded programme. • Be on a full-time course and/or substantial part-time course (5 hours per week and above including any mandatory placements). <p>Be in receipt of income assessed state benefits/ tax credits (including Universal Credits) or have an annual gross individual income of below £25,000.</p>
Required Evidence	<p>Upon submitting an application for bursary support learners must submit eligible evidence to support their financial situation. Examples of what constitutes eligible evidence is as follows:</p> <p>Proof of income in the form of most recent benefit award letters, last, most recent 3 months bank statement confirming benefit or wages, last, most recent 3 months wage slips, P60, most recent self-assessment return for self-employed applicants, letter headed annual account summary from company accountant for self-employed applicants.</p>

3. Exam and Tuition Fees – Discretionary

3.1 In exceptional circumstances 19+ learners can apply for help with tuition fees and exams fees. Learners can only apply for tuition fees support if they are:

- applying for a Level 1 or 2 (funded) course
- Not in receipt of a means tested benefit and earning less than £25,000 per year
- If not in employment, living in a household where income is below £25,000 per year gross
- Dependent on a spouse/partner earning less than £25,000 per year gross

3.2 Learners eligible for an Advanced Learning Loan cannot receive help towards tuition costs.

3.3 Students who have successfully applied to receive discretionary funding for course fees cannot additionally apply for funding for travel and childcare.

4. Childcare

4.1 Learners aged 20+ can apply to the fund for help with childcare payments, the childcare provider must be Ofsted registered. Any learner receiving an Advanced Learner Loan must have their loan approved before funding is released.

4.3 Childcare funding is capped at £180 /week (first child), £300 per learner (for those with more than one child). Anything over this amount, is the sole responsibility of the learner.

4.4 Learners who receive free government childcare funding are asked to use this allocation towards their course time-tabled hours. Any childcare hours in addition to free entitlement will be funded through the bursary to the childcare provider.

4.5 Childcare agreement must be signed by the nursery before any funding is released.

4.6 Local authorities should follow this guidance when funding providers to deliver the early years entitlements in the financial year 2023 to 2024

4.7 Department for Education (DfE) provides local authorities with 6 relevant funding streams which together form the early years block of the dedicated schools grant (DSG). They are:

- The universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds
- The additional 15 hours entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds
- Maintained nursery school (MNS) supplementary funding
- The 15 hours entitlement for disadvantaged 2-year-olds
- The disability access fund (DAF)
- The early years pupil premium (EYPP)

4.8 Childcare is paid one month in arrears directly to the childcare provider on receipt of an invoice.

- 4.9 Private childcare/child-minder fees will be calculated on 43 weeks which includes half terms, Christmas and Easter. Breakfast and After School Club will be calculated on 35 weeks.
- 4.10 The fund can only cover the costs for time spent in College lectures, and not private study time.
- 4.11 Continued support is subject to satisfactory attendance, at least 90% per term, for all subjects. All learner attendance is monitored for continued receipt of the bursary. If funding is withdrawn, the learner will be liable to cover their childcare costs.

5. Equipment, Educational Visits, Books and DBS

- 5.1 Equipment (including core textbooks), kit or uniforms will be purchased on the learner's behalf by the College curriculum team, if it is beneficial to their course. Any equipment that is bought by the fund for the learner (uniform etc.) will be returned to the College at the end of the academic year.
- 5.2 Approved educational visits can be funded at the discretion of the Assistant Principal, generally up to a maximum of £300 per year. Anything over this amount that can't be approved will be the responsibility of the learner.
- 5.3 Students can apply for DBS costs, where this is a mandatory requirement for their course.

6. Travel

- 6.1 A free College term-time-only bus pass, or train pass for 16-18 students living more than 1 miles away from College or placement is available. Any student not living on a bus or train route covered by the College standard ticket issue will be considered on an individual basis. In these circumstances, a contribution towards the cost of travel may be made.
- 6.2 Other than in exceptional circumstances, bus passes will only be replaced once within the academic year and those who lose their pass will be required to pay a £10.00 replacement fee. Learners are required to contact the travel provider directly and make efforts to find their bus pass before requesting a replacement. If a learner loses a bus pass after a replacement has been sourced, they will be responsible for funding travel costs from that point forward.
- 6.3 19+ learners living more than 1 mile from the College and on a programme with more than 5 taught hours per week are eligible for funding to support travel costs. Learners attaining over 90% attendance will receive termly payments of between £100 and £150 depending on hours studied. Passes or partial payments for attendance between 80% and 90% will be considered depending on circumstances and available funding
- 6.4 Learners who are attending a work placement as part of their study programme can apply for travel support. Learners and lecturers are encouraged where practicable to arrange a placement that is convenient for the learner to attend.

7. Hardship Awards

- 7.1 Hardship awards are available to help support all learners who experience unexpected financial difficulties or a change of circumstances during their programme of study. All awards are assessed on an individual basis.
- 7.2 Learners must make a hardship request, discuss their needs with a member of staff in Student Services. Each case will be considered on an individual basis and must be approved by the Assistant Principal.
- 7.3 All support for eligible students who are asylum seekers will be provided in kind. No cash payments will be supplied. Instead students will receive support through course-related books, equipment or a travel pass for example. Asylum seekers can apply for discretionary funding to cover the cost of their course fees.

8. Funding Approval

- 8.1 Application forms will only be assessed when the form has been completed fully and submitted with the required evidence.
- 8.2 All funding is subject to maintaining satisfactory levels of behaviour, attendance above 90% and positive progress and may be withdrawn if a student's conduct falls below the expected standards set by the College.
- 8.3 Applicants will normally be notified within 15 working days on the outcome of their application.

9. Process and General Terms

- 9.1 We will publish information on LSF and its eligibility criteria on the College's website.
- 9.2 LSF are administered by the Student Service team and we will offer advice and information LSF via the Student Service Team.
- 9.3 Students must apply via completing the LSF application form which is available on our website.
- 9.4 LSF fund is limited and offered on a first come first served basis.
- 9.5 Eligibility to funds doesn't mean a direct entitlement nor guarantees an award, students must make an application and provide the required evidence, funds will be subject to the availability of funds.
- 9.6 A Student will only be paid out of funds if they have provided a completed application form and the relevant required evidence.
- 9.7 Each application to the financial support fund will be individually assessed.
- 9.8 Students will be advised of the outcome of their application within 10 working days of the date receiving a full and completed application form including the supporting evidence.
- 9.9 Award notifications will be made by email. Written award letter will only be provided upon request.

- 9.10 Students can ask for a review if they are dissatisfied with a decision on an application outcome, by submitting a written request.
- 9.11 We will reserve the right to recover funds (where appropriate) from any student who withdraws from the College or those who made a false application.
- 9.12 Student's application may be declined if the student's attendance and conduct within the College were not satisfactory.
- 9.13 Exceptional cases for financial support will be considered for learners who experience unexpected financial difficulties. Such case will be considered the Assistance Principal.
- 9.14 The LSF will be available and open for application from 4 September 2023 to 30th May 2024. This is subject to the availability of funds and we will reserve the right to bring forward the deadline of 30th May.

10. Appeals and Complaints

- 10.1 A learner who is refused support under this policy may be able to ask for a review of the outcome decision of their application. Reviews must be submitted in writing using the Microsoft Form 365 link, within 14 day's receipt of the allocation or letter of decline. The learner must set out the grounds for review providing appropriate documentary supporting evidence. The review will be considered, by a member of the College's management team and a written outcome provided within 15 working days.
- 10.2 Complaints should be made through the college complaints process.

Hugh Baird College

Balliol Road
Bootle
Liverpool
L20 7EW

Telephone
0151 353 4444

Email enquiries@hughbaird.ac.uk

www.hughbaird.ac.uk