

# Student Support Funds 2025-2026

**Relating to:** Students

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This Policy covers the following student finance support funds:

- 16-19 Bursary Fund (including Free Meals in Further Education)
- Care to Learn
- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund
- Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund

### **Purpose of Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the efficient and effective use of the limited funds that are available to the College whilst maximising the impact on student recruitment, retention, and success rates. The funds are designed and aimed at those students with the greatest financial need, to help them overcome specific barriers to that they can enter and remain in education.

This policy will outline the various support available to eligible students. Each application will be assessed on the actual financial needs of individual students that are required for their study programme and therefore awards will vary, and not all applicants will be successful.

### **Scope/eligibility**

Students must satisfy the following criteria to access student funds:

- Meet the residency requirement of the fund
- Meet the age requirement of the fund
- Be enrolled on an approved programme that meets the requirement of the fund.

Funding is limited and therefore cannot be guaranteed. College reserves the right, from time to time, to review expenditure and as a result may alter or close the support package available to students during the academic year.

### **Raising Awareness**

Student Support Fund information is available on the college website, at pre-arranged information sessions, college open days and enrolment. Students can also obtain information on the funds from The Learner Services Team, based at reception on each Campus, and the College enquiry line.

Application forms will also be available at pre-enrolment and enrolment events, on the college website and at reception on all college campuses.

## **Student Support**

### **16-19 Bursary Fund (including Free Meals in Further Education).**

To be eligible to receive the bursary, students must be aged:

- 16-18 (under 19 on the 31st of August 2024)
- 19 or over and have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP)
- 19 or over and continuing on a learning aim they began aged 16-18 ('19+ Continuer').

There are two types of bursary:

- General Bursary (see below); and
- Vulnerable Bursary (see page 4).

### **General Bursary**

Financial support is available for help towards costs associated with travel, breakfasts, free meals in Further Education for timetabled days in College, books and equipment, uniforms, and mandatory trips, including up to three university visits.

Please note students eligible for childcare support via Care to Learn can apply for additional financial support (Care to Learn Top-Up payments) if required. Any top-up payments will be paid directly to the childcare provider and not the student.

The College also offers a Laptop Loan Scheme to which students may also be eligible. Please refer to 16-19 Bursary Factsheet for further details.

### **Eligibility**

Students in receipt of, or whose parents/guardians 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 guaranteed 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
- Universal Credit (UC) with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any benefits they get)

In addition to the above listed, students from households with an annual gross income of no more than £44,000 and have satisfactory College attendance are also eligible for financial support towards costs associated with travel, breakfasts, free meals in Further Education for timetabled days in College, books and equipment,

uniforms, care to learn top-up payments and mandatory trips, including up to three university visits.

### **General Bursary – Travel Support and Breakfast**

Support towards travel is available for students from households with an annual gross income over £44,000 but no more than £60,000 and have satisfactory College attendance. Students who fall into this category will be issued with a bus pass and free breakfast on timetabled days.

Students from households with a gross annual income exceeding £60,000 will also be eligible for a free bus pass and breakfast, however, this will be funded directly out of College Funds not the 16-19 Bursary Fund and is open to all 16-19 funded students, regardless of income.

### **Vulnerable Bursary**

*(16–18 year old students only)*

Financial assistance towards course related costs of up to a maximum of £1,200 per year, for study lasting 30 weeks or more, is available for those most vulnerable students. This amount will be pro-rated if it is for students whose study lasts for less than 30 weeks and/or on a part time basis. **Please note that the amount of financial support will be determined by a Financial Needs Assessment, undertaken by The Student Finance Manager, which may result in a limited award, or no award being granted.** Where possible, support will be paid in kind (bus pass, meal allowance, books and equipment).

Students aged 19 or over on the 31st of August 2025 are not eligible for a Vulnerable Bursary.

Note, students in receipt of a vulnerable bursary are also eligible to apply for a general bursary, however, any additional funding will be assessed on individual needs and circumstances.

### **Eligibility**

Students must meet one of the following criteria:

- in care.
- care leavers.
- receiving Income Support, or Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner.
- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related) or Universal Credit in their own right.

## **Care to Learn**

Learners aged under 20 on the first day of the course can apply for support with childcare costs through the Care to Learn scheme. Details of the scheme including eligibility, entitlement and how to apply are available at <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>

Care to learn Factsheet and Application Forms are available at Reception across all campuses. Students can be supported through the application process by The Learner Services Team.

## **19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (not including those eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan)**

To be eligible to receive the bursary, students must be aged 19 or over, on the 31st of August 2025. The bursary is available to support students towards costs associated with travel, breakfasts, free College meals, books and equipment, uniforms, residential support, childcare (students aged 20 or over at the start of their course) and other associated course related costs.

Students eligible for childcare support via Care to Learn can apply for additional financial support if required. Any top-up payments will be paid directly to the childcare provider and not the student.

The College also offers a Laptop Loan Scheme to which students may also be eligible. Please refer to 19+ Bursary Factsheet for further details.

In exceptional circumstances, students may also be eligible to apply for assistance towards their tuition fees, if they are a co-funded student and household income is under the income threshold stated below.

The fund does not include those students who are aged 19 and over and are eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan.

## **Eligibility**

If you live as a single person, only your income will be taken into consideration. You must have a gross household income of no more than £34,000 and have satisfactory attendance.

If you live with your spouse/partner, your own income and that of your spouse/partner will be taken into consideration. You must have a joint gross household income of no more than £44,000 and have satisfactory attendance.

## **Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund**

The Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund is for students who are aged 19 and over and have applied and been approved for an Advanced Learner Loan and have

attended on their studies for at least two weeks. Generally, students will be studying a programme at level 3, 4, 5 and 6. The bursary fund is available to assist students with the costs of travel, breakfasts, free College meals, books and equipment, uniforms, additional learning support, residential support, and childcare (students aged 20 or over at the start of their learning aim).

Students eligible for childcare support via Care to Learn can apply for additional financial support if required. Any top-up payments will be paid directly to the childcare provider and not the student.

The College also offers a Laptop Loan Scheme to which students may also be eligible. Please refer to Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Factsheet for further details.

Where a student requires additional learning support, this will be assessed on a need's basis and any award from the fund is not means tested. All assessments will be carried out by the Learning Support Team and will be based upon the student's individual needs/assessment. Any payments that are required for additional learning support will be made from the bursary fund directly to the College.

## **Eligibility**

If you live as a single person only your income will be taken into consideration. To qualify for financial assistance, you must have a gross household income of no more than £34,000 and have satisfactory College attendance.

If you live with your spouse/partner your own income and that of your spouse/partner will be taken into consideration. To qualify for financial assistance, you must have a joint gross household income of no more than £44,000 and have satisfactory College attendance.

## **Entitlement**

### **Meals**

Meals are only available from the College's canteens for timetabled days in college and cannot be transferred as a cash value.

Where a student, however, is unable to access the college canteen (for example placement days), alternative financial arrangements will be made to enable a student to access a meal to the value of £4.50.

## **Childcare**

Students who are aged 20 or over on the first day of learning may be eligible for financial support with childcare costs whilst the student is undertaking classroom-based learning or attending mandatory placement.

For students aged under the age of 20 on their first day of learning who require assistance with childcare costs see Care to Learn above. The childcare provider

must be registered with Ofsted. The contract for childcare arrangements is with the childcare provider and NOT with the College.

There is no agreement between the College and the student for financial assistance until the application has been fully approved, therefore students will be liable for all accrued childcare costs if the application is not approved.

Financial support towards childcare costs will only be approved during term time (excluding Care to Learn Top Up payments). Students will be personally liable for any retainers or childcare costs during college holidays. College holidays are detailed on the childcare application form.

Students must not be receiving funding for childcare from any other source, e.g., free early education places, and students must inform the College if they are receiving funding from any other source.

The maximum amount of financial assistance payable per session is £30.00 per child. A session is a morning or an afternoon and must take place when you are timetabled to attend College. Once approved, if childcare fees increase, the College will not necessarily agree to increase the amount of financial support agreed.

### **Mileage Claims**

As funds are limited, students who are approved mileage will be granted a rate of 45p per mile for fuel.

### **Tuition Fee**

Students will only be considered for assistance towards tuition fees if they are a co-funded student.

Students should include a statement on the application form which should reflect their need, their career path and, if employed, confirming that there is no employer contribution.

### **Application to the Funds**

Application forms for all the Student Support Funds will be available at pre-enrolment and enrolment events, on the college website and at reception on all college campuses.

Bursary awards do not automatically carry over from one year to the next, and students will need to make a new application for each academic year. Along with their application, students will need to provide full evidence of household income (see application form for evidence required) for the current tax year. However, for 16-19 discretionary bursary applicants who are continuing a study programme where financial circumstances have not changed from the previous year, are not required to

provide further financial information. We will, however, ask such students and their respective parent/guardian to sign a declaration to confirm that their household income hasn't changed. Where financial circumstances have changed from the previous year, a new application form and supporting financial evidence is required.

**The requirement to assess actual financial needs each year continues to apply to all students.**

For complete applications received prior to the start of the student's study programme, we aim to assess these within 10 working days and will inform applicants if the assessment will take longer. Applications received after the start of their study programme may take up to 30 working days to assess once complete.

Application forms submitted without supporting documentation will not be processed. If applications are received without the required evidence, the Learner Services Team will attempt to contact the applicant, via their college email.

## **1. Processing the Application**

- Upon receipt of an application to the bursary funds, the Support Funds Administrator will complete the relevant checklist and ensure that the essential evidence/criteria have been provided/met.
- Evidence of income/benefit are retained with the application form; therefore, students are advised to provide photocopies of their evidence.
- The application is entered on to the College's database.

## **2. Assessing the Application**

- All applications are assessed against the standard criteria as described in the appropriate fact sheet.
- If the application requires special consideration e.g., tuition fee support, the application will be considered by the Learner Services Manager or the Student Finance Manager.
- All approved applications are recorded on the approval sheet which specifically states the level of award and the criteria approved against it.
- If an application is unsuccessful, the reason for this decision will be stated.
- Approvals are then logged on to the College's database by the Support Funds Administrator.
- Weekly reports are checked to ensure that amounts within the funds are not exceeded.
- Once a student has pre/enrolled on an eligible course, The College will confirm the award made. Notification will be made by letter via email to the student.
- All awards are made subject to satisfactory/current attendance on the programme. It is for the course tutor to advise on satisfactory attendance using the College's guidance.

### **3. Processing the Award**

Awards will be paid in the most appropriate manner. In most cases the following methods are utilised:

- Books, equipment, and uniforms

This is determined by tutor lists and awards will vary, dependant on learning aim. Payment will be made directly to the College (where College has made payment to designated supplier) unless indicated otherwise, or by BACS payment to the student on production of a valid receipt or confirmation from the tutor that said items have been purchased by the student.

- Trips

Payment will be made directly to the College.

- Travel

Wherever possible an Arriva or Mersey Travel bus pass is issued to the student or if not possible, a cash travel grant may be paid to the student by BACS to cover reasonable travel costs.

- Childcare

Payment will normally be made directly to childcare providers.

- Tuition fees

Payment will be made directly to the College.

- Meals

Payment will be made directly to the College.

### **4. Recording, Monitoring and Reporting**

- All awards are logged on to the College's database.
- The Finance Department maintain records of all payments.
- Statistical returns are made to the relevant bodies in line with the individual requirements.

### **5. Appeals**

Any student who is unhappy with the outcome of a Learner Support Fund application may appeal against the decision, in writing to the Learner Services Manager, giving details of any additional information to support the appeal.

The Learner Services Manager will present the appeal to the Learner Support Fund panel, comprising of the Director of Student Services, Head of School and the Student Finance Manager.

This decision will be final, and the student will be informed of the decision and the reason that the appeal was upheld or rejected.

## **6. Fraud**

The College takes fraud very seriously. If it is proven that any student has made a fraudulent application, they will have all outstanding payments suspended and will be referred for disciplinary action. The disciplinary hearing will decide on an appropriate outcome including how funds will be repaid/ recovered to reclaim funds.

## **7. Criteria for Awards**

The criteria for the individual funds can be seen on the fund factsheets, which can be obtained from the reception on all College sites or on The College's website.

Details of the support available to students will be advertised on the College's website, and during enrolment events and student inductions.

Please note that funding is limited and cannot be guaranteed. College reserves the right to review expenditure against the fund and as a result may alter or close the support package available to students during the academic year.