
LEARNER SUPPORT/DISCRETIONARY BURSARY FUNDING AND FREE MEALS POLICY 2024-2025

1.0 Purpose and scope of the policy

Bishop Auckland College is committed to ensuring discretionary support/bursary funding and free meals distributed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) are administered to learners in a fair and transparent way. These bodies provide the College with set allocations of funding for distribution in accordance with regulations for each academic year and in line with the Equality Act 2010.

This policy sets out an overview of eligibility criteria, payment methodology, management and monitoring and appeal arrangements for these funding allocations:

- Discretionary Bursary Funding 16-19
- Vulnerable Bursary Funding 16-19
- Discretionary Learner Support Funding 19+
- Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund
- Free Meals in Further Education

Discretionary Bursary/Learner Support funding is intended to support learners facing financial hardship or barriers to participation in learning and to support their retention, success and achievement. The allocation for free meals is linked to the income threshold for school pupil premium learners and as such the college can only allocate meals to learners who meet the specific eligibility criteria.

In order to be eligible for Discretionary Bursary/Learner Support Funding, a learner must be enrolled onto a course that is funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) or co funded by European Social Fund (ESF) or other public funding as detailed in associated funding guidance documents.

To be eligible for Advanced Learner Loans Bursary funding a learner must be in receipt of an Advanced Learning Loan and enrolled onto a course at level 3 or 4 or a level 5 or 6 professional qualification with the College. Learners must also meet residency requirements as set out in associated funding rules and guidance documents.

During the assessment process, where it emerges that other sources of government funding/benefits are available, the applicant will be directed to apply for this funding in the first instance to avoid duplication.

The College has a Learner Support Funds Committee which comprises of:

- Director of Finance
- Finance Manager
- Student Funding and Transport Finance Assistant

The Learner Support Fund Committee is responsible for ensuring the effective monitoring of all funding strands and that information is submitted to funding agencies in a timely manner and in accordance with all relevant guidelines. The committee will also regularly review the policy and make any necessary adjustments to eligibility criteria to maximise funding opportunities. Any appeals against assessment decisions are also referred for review to this committee.

Administration costs of 5% from all discretionary bursary/learner support funding strands will be retained to support administrative costs.

All learner applications are recorded centrally and funding award specifics are updated to the ILR for each eligible learner.

Policies may be subject to change as appropriate to meet the needs of learners requiring financial support.

2.0 Definitions

- 2.1 DfE – Department of Education
- 2.2 BIS – Business Innovation and Skills
- 2.3 ESFA – Education and Skills Funding Agency
- 2.4 ESF – European Social Fund
- 2.5 SFA – Skills Funding Agency

3.0 Applying for assistance

Application forms will be assessed in accordance with eligibility guidelines as detailed in the DLSF Guidance Notes. Both documents are available on the Bishop Auckland College website at www.bacoll.ac.uk/learningsupportfunds and www.bacoll.ac.uk/funding. Learners are provided with a notice of entitlement to funding following assessment.

For Vulnerable Bursary learners, the college will submit a claim to the Student Support Bursary Service (SSBS) to draw down funding following application approval.

4.0 Allocation of funds to learners

Funding will be awarded on a strict first come first served basis. Where financial monitoring indicates impending exhaustion of funds, the college reserves the right to readjust award values to maximise learner support. Funding is awarded from the date a successful application is received but not before the course start date. In the event financial support is not approved, learners will be liable for any costs accrued. Where behaviour and application to studies are not satisfactory, the college reserves the right to withhold funding.

Appendix 1 provides an overview of each funding element and its associated processes and guidelines.

Confirmation of the learner's enrolment & attendance will be verified prior to the release of any funds.

4.1 Essential course items

The College will purchase essential course items on the learner's behalf but will provide reimbursement of funds to eligible learners upon provision of proof of purchase if they have directly purchased the items. Reimbursement cannot exceed the maximum essential course item cost as determined by the College.

4.2 Travel costs

Learners eligible for transport funding will be able to access subsidised travel via Arriva North East or Weardale Travel. Where Arriva and Weardale Travel services cannot reasonably be accessed, the college will consider awarding transport funding for mileage or an alternative public service provision. Learners will only be eligible for transport funding where they reside at least 1.5 miles from their campus.

4.3 Childcare

Childcare funding is provided for timetabled periods only within the academic year terms and for Ofsted registered providers only. Where eligible, learners must utilise their government funded childcare entitlement for their childcare requirement. The College will agree funding for any wrap around care required that exceeds this.

If a learner is in paid employment, their government funded hours may be used on working days as a priority over college/placement days. The balance of any hours must be then used towards college/placement days.

Learners will not receive childcare funding for unauthorised absences. If a learner cannot attend college due to sickness or their child's sickness, childcare payments will only be honoured where the learner has followed the college's attendance policy. If the learner withdraws, their childcare funding will cease with immediate effect. Learners must provide the required notice (usually 1 month) to the childcare provider in lieu of their course end date. The college will not be responsible for any charges incurred due to failure to give notice.

If learners wish to make any changes to external childcare the college's Student Funding and Transport Finance Assistant must be notified and approval obtained prior to any changes. Any childcare rates deemed unreasonable will not be accepted and learners may be requested to find an alternative childcare provider.

Childcare funding for learners who are under 20 years old will be directed to apply to Care2Learn. **Childcare funding can only be paid via the Discretionary Learner Support Funds where the childcare costs required exceeds the weekly limit of funding available via Care2Learn.**

4.4 Essential Course Items

This includes kit and uniform, Books, and stationery. All items remain the property of Bishop Auckland College and must be returned upon completion of course or withdrawal. Items will be purchased for and on behalf of the learner except for in exceptional circumstances.

4.5 Free Meals/Meal Allowance to Learners

Learners whose household income is under £16,190 will receive funding as per Free meals in Further Education Legislation. Learners Student Cards will be topped up with £5 each day (topped up from £2.53), this gives a recommended allowance of £2 for breakfast and £3 for lunch.

Learners whose income is between £16,190 and £35,000, if needed will be provided with £5.00 per day in order to obtain a meal for lunch. This is paid directly via discretionary Bursary.

5.0 Marketing of Discretionary Bursary/Learner Support funds

Information on Discretionary Learner Support Funds will be publicised via several marketing mediums to ensure learners and potential learners are fully informed. College learners are also informed during induction and via the Colleges Website and Moodle platform. E mails are sent to prospective learners, recurring students are informed upon re enrolment. New starters are informed prior to and upon enrolment. E mails are issued throughout September – December to all current students. Information is also available in the student handbook and on the TV screens in the main reception.

6.0 Appeals

Learners have the right to appeal against unsuccessful applications. This should be done in writing and addressed to the Finance Manager within ten working days of receiving the notice of entitlement to funding. Appeals will be acknowledged within three working days. The Learner Support Fund Committee will convene within 5 working days to review the appeal and any supporting information. The decision of the Committee will be final and communicated to the learner in writing within three working days.

Learners can also access the college's complaints procedure if they wish to make a complaint. Copies of the complaint's procedure are available from the college upon request.

For further information contact:

Lisa Robson – Student Finance and Transport Assistant
Beverley Laycock – Finance Manager
Lynn Heighton - Director of Finance

APPENDIX 1

Discretionary Bursary Fund 16 – 19

It is recognised that the college is situated in an area with a very high density of low-income families and the discretionary learner support fund 16 – 19 will be used to provide to learners who are assessed as financially disadvantaged undertaking a publicly funded full-time program. Funding is subject to eligibility and conditions as set out in the application guidance and includes the following financial support package:

- Essential course item funding for learners with a household income of under £35,000. Not all courses are eligible.
- Funding for educational visits taking place in 2024/2025 AY for learners with a household income of under £35,000
- Funding to support costs associated with interviews at Higher Education institutions taking place in 2024/2025 AY
- Travel costs to those whose household income falls below £60,000
- Stationery for learners with a household income of under £35,000
- Educational trips and visits for learners with a household income of under £35,000
- A Meal Allowance to those whose household income falls below £60,000
- Emergency hardship payment (assessed on an individual one by one basis)

Emergency payments may be made in cash if deemed necessary and require approval from the Finance Manager. Receipts must be provided to the finance department.

All items remain the property of Bishop Auckland College and must be returned to us on completion or withdrawal.

16 – 19 Vulnerable Bursary

Students who are in one or more of the groups below can apply for a bursary of up to £1,200 (if they are participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more. Students on a study program of less than 30 weeks study will be able to apply for a pro-rata amount of bursary. The bursary is to support students with costs associated with attending a course such as travel, kit and uniform. Eligible learners will also receive free meals.

The defined groups are students who are:

- in care (not privately fostered)
- care leavers or learners in permanent fostering under a Special Guardianship Order
- receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) 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 (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right

Students do not need to live independently of their parents to be eligible for a bursary - they can claim ESA or UC in their own right while living in the parental home. Parents will not be able to continue to claim Child Benefit if the student successfully applies for ESA.

In some cases, a young person might be eligible for a bursary because they are in one or more of the defined groups, but their financial needs are already met and/or they have no relevant costs e.g. a student in local authority care whose educational costs are covered in full by the local authority. In these circumstances we may decide to award a reduced bursary or no bursary at all.

Universal Credit

Students in receipt of UC must confirm which benefit it has replaced. Any student whose UC award is in place of Employment and Support Allowance must also be receiving Disability Living Allowance or its replacement, Personal Independence Payment, to be eligible for a bursary. If the student has been awarded UC to pay for housing costs (in other words, UC has been awarded in place of Housing Benefit), the student is not eligible for a bursary unless they are also receiving another eligible benefit.

To be eligible for the bursary students must also:

- be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2024 or
- Must be resident in the UK for the 3 years prior to the course start date

A student receiving support under the Bursary Scheme will not be eligible to receive support via any other bursary scheme operated by the College.

Bursary can help fund:

- Travel Pass
- Kit/Uniform
- Free Meals
- Stationery
- Trips
- Books
- Stationery

Learners are not automatically awarded £1,200 and will be awarded items based only on their financial need. A financial needs assessment will be carried out whereby evidence of household income must be provided.

Discretionary Learner Support Funds 19+

To be eligible to apply for support from the Discretionary Learner Support 19+ funding learners must be:

- Aged over 19 (aged over 20 for childcare funding)
- In receipt of a household income of maximum £35,000pa
- In receipt of a household income of maximum of £50,000pa for childcare support
- In receipt of a household income of maximum £60,000 for a meal allowance

The Discretionary Learner Support Fund 19+ supports the following, where funding permits:

- Childcare costs - Ofsted approved childcare providers only
- Course related costs including course trips, books and equipment (where these are not included in the funding rate)
- Travel costs
- College registration fees
- Examination fees
- Meal Allowance
- Stationery
- Associated fees or charges by external bodies
- Emergency hardship payments
- Support for other costs as judged appropriate and based upon individual need and circumstances and availability of funding

Cash payments will only be made in exceptional circumstances and as per associated funding rules, cash payments cannot be made to asylum seekers.

Advanced Learning Loans Bursary Fund

This loans bursary fund will be available to learners who are aged 19 and above, in receipt of an Advanced Learning Loan. The qualifications funded through Advanced Learning Loans are:

- Certificates at levels 3 and 4
- Diplomas at levels 3 and 4
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Access to HE Diplomas
- Programme of A levels including AS, A2 and full A levels
- Technical (tech) levels
- Early years Educator learning aims at level 3
- Level 5 and 6 professional qualifications

The Bursary Fund has as its priority, funding for learning support to ensure that learners in receipt of Advanced Learning Loans are not disadvantaged. Funding will also be provided to support childcare and other costs that may prevent continuation in learning. The bursary fund will be prioritised as follows, subject to availability of funding:

- Childcare costs - Ofsted approved childcare providers only
- Travel costs
- Course related costs including course trips, books and equipment (where these are not included in the funding rate)
- Meal Allowance
- A stationery kit
- Support for other costs as judged appropriate and based upon individual need and circumstances and availability of funding

To be eligible to apply for Discretionary Bursary Funding learners must be:

- Aged 19 and over on 1 August 2024
- In receipt of an Advanced Learning Loan
- Enrolled on a level 3, 4, 5 or 6 program eligible for a loan
- In receipt of a household income of maximum £35,000pa
- In receipt of a household income of maximum of £50,000pa for childcare support
- In receipt of a household income of maximum £60,000 for a meal allowance

The loans bursary funding cannot be used to support course fees.

Free meals in Further Education

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents who 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 guarantee 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 as long as any paid earnings do not exceed £7,400 per annum

To be eligible for a free meal in the 2024/2025 academic year, under government guidance, the student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2024.

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

- are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers') or
- have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

These 2 groups of students can receive a free meal while they continue to attend education (in the case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same programme they started before they turned 19), as long as their eligibility continues.

Key points

- Institutions will receive funding at a rate equivalent to £2.53 per student per meal. Allocations are based on a lagged student number basis from the previous academic year

Under Learner support, learners who are between 16-19 and their household income is under £16,190 will receive funding as per Free meals in Further Education Legislation. Learners Student Cards will be topped up with £5.00 each day (topped up from £2.53), this gives an allowance of £2.00 for breakfast and £3 for lunch.

Learners whose income is between £16,190 and £60,000, if needed will be provided with £5.00 per day in order to attain a meal for lunch. This is paid directly via discretionary Bursary. This applies to all learners.

Reference

Refer to the Attendance Policy for additional information