

FINANCIAL SUPPORT & GUIDELINES 2025/26 POLICY

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SCOPE

Dudley College of Technology receives an allocation of funds from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Department for Education (DfE) and Student Finance. This funding is to support eligible students studying further education courses funded by the ESFA and to help students meet the costs of participating in education and training post 16.

This document is available to staff, students and the public.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out eligibility criteria and entitlements which Dudley College of Technology (the college) offers to students from the Learner Support Funds allocated to the college by the Department for Education (DfE) and Student Finance England.
- 1.2 This funding is to support eligible students studying further education courses funded by the ESFA and to help students meet the costs of participating in education and training post 16. While we recognise that some students face financial pressures, the funding students apply for comes from a government fund and is public money. It is not a right. The College has a duty to ensure that funds are awarded fairly to the students most in need. Funds are cash limited, and funding cannot be guaranteed. Early application is essential. No awards for the bursaries will be issued until learners are fully enrolled and have started their course.
- 1.3 Bursary Support Funds are designed to help support people who face the greatest barriers in education or training post 16; and are available to provide financial support for students with a specific financial hardship, which may prevent them from taking part or continuing in learning. A key Government priority is to eliminate the attainment gap between socio-economic groups and to ensure every individual can participate in learning and recognise their full potential. Thus, a range of schemes are available to support costs associated with learning for those who are eligible.

2. Policy

- 2.1 This policy is to outline financial support that can be awarded to eligible students in 2025/2026 academic year from the following funds:
 - 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.
 - Free Meals in Further Education Funding.
 - 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund.
 - Advanced Learner Loan Bursary.
- 2.2 **The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund** is specifically aimed at students aged between 16 and 19 years facing financial hardship in education. The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund also includes provision for vulnerable students as defined in the DfE Funding Guidance for Young People.

- 2.3 **Free Meals in Further Education Funding** is aimed at students who are aged between 16 and 18 in further education and students aged between 19 and 25 with an active Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan). Students who turn 19 during their study programme will remain eligible for a free meal until the end of the academic year.
- 2.4 **The 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund** provides financial help to eligible students aged 19+. It is a means tested fund and the amount a student may receive depends on their family gross household income. The fund can help meet costs such as travel, equipment, exam costs and childcare. Awards from the fund are made to individual students on a discretionary basis.
- 2.5 The **Advanced Learner Loan** Bursary is provided to help vulnerable and disadvantaged students who are being funded through a Loan. The fund is administered in the same way as the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund and supports the same range of assistance including travel and childcare costs. Students accessing an Advanced Loan to pay their tuition fees must have the loan “approved” before support from the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary can be agreed.

3. Administration of the funds

- 3.1 The college will be responsible for the management of all the funds according to the guidelines laid out by the awarding funding bodies. The college will make awards based upon a proven hardship need, which must be substantiated by evidence which will be retained in accordance with audit requirements.
- 3.2 To ensure finance is not a barrier to enrolment, the college will promote all funds and other sources of financial assistance. The funds policies and guidelines state how the funds are allocated and prioritised. There can be no virement between the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund, however, there may be some “top up” between 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and the Free Meals in Further Education Funding at the college’s discretion. The Advanced Loans Bursary is ring fenced with no virement with any other fund. There is no limit on the amount of the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund which can be used for childcare where the student is under the age of 20 at the start of their course, the apportionment of these funds is set at the college’s discretion. Students below the age of 20 at the start of their course can receive childcare support from the government’s Care to Learn scheme.
- 3.3 All individuals wishing to apply for funding support will need to apply using a standard application and provide appropriate evidence of household and personal income at the time of application.
- 3.4 The college will promote availability of funds effectively, with the assistance of key stakeholders to identify vulnerable students before application. Student Finance subsequently, monitor and report on all aspects of the administration of the funds working with the Data and Finance departments to remain within the budget

allocation.

- 3.5 Each application will be assessed fairly and subject to guidelines and the availability of funds.
- 3.6 Students will receive an award notice, which will allow access to services such as travel, hardship, meals and childcare support. Students are expected to notify of any change of circumstances affecting their award and are responsible for notifying the Department of Work and Pensions of their award of funding.
- 3.7 Where funding is allocated to support access to food it will be paid at £5 per learner per meal, for both 16-19-year-olds and 19+ learners. As a priority eligible learners will be supported to access a lunchtime meal. The rate of support at £5 is an enhancement of the government minimum of £2.61 per day and is justified on the standard costs of accessing a nutritious warm meal.
- 3.8 In all cases where funds are provided directly to the learner the college will request recipients provide evidence as to how funds were spent, in order to demonstrate the funds were used in accord with the purpose for which they were awarded. This will be via the provision of sales receipts, bank statements and other auditable financial evidence issued by third parties. Where the college provides in-kind support i.e. the provision of a bus pass that is purchased by the college and passed on to learners, the college will evidence spend from its own finance systems.

4. Eligibility criteria

- 4.1 All students are eligible to apply for funding if they are enrolled on a publicly funded course subject to inspection by a public body that assures quality provision.
- 4.2 All applications for support will only be considered on the receipt of the submission of a Bursary application form. Necessary supporting information (such as evidence of household income) must be provided before the application will be considered.
- 4.3 The bursaries are a discretionary award and financial support is conditional on attendance and behaviour. Maintaining acceptable levels of attendance and behaviour in line with Dudley College Student Conduct Policy will be necessary to be eligible for support. The expectation is that students achieve 100% attendance, however there is an appreciation that in some cases financial hardship can result in a lowering of attendance. Support will be provided when a student achieves 85% or above attendance (including authorised absence) across all parts of their programme. Dudley College will be entitled to stop payments where students have been absent for a period of 4 continuous weeks or more.
- 4.4 Specific eligibility requirements apply to specific funding streams.

16-19 Bursary

Students must demonstrate financial hardship to be eligible for funding by providing evidence of household income. The maximum household income to receive 16 to 19 Bursary Fund is £42,000 per annum.

To be eligible for help from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund students must be under 19 on the 31 August in the academic year before they start their studies. Students will also satisfy residency criteria and be enrolled on an appropriate course of study. Bursaries cannot be paid to students on Higher Education (HE) courses, waged Apprentices, young people in or released on temporary licence from custody.

Free Meals in Further Education Funding

Free meals are available for households who are in receipt of specified benefits (as per ESFA funding rules); household income for those in receipt of Universal Credit must be below £16,190.

Additional Travel support

- 4.5 Learners on work experience placements that are a mandatory requirement of their qualification will be supported by the College either by a use of support funds outlined above, (subject to eligibility) or by the College's own funds. Support will be means tested and awarded on the following criteria related to an individual learner's personal circumstances:

- The placement exceeds 20 miles in distance from the learner's home address
- The learner needs to travel before 7.30am to access their placement and/or will return home after 7.30pm
- Public transport is not available to the employer's location

Where practicable students will be supported to travel by public transport in alignment with the college's sustainability objectives.

4.6 The 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund

To be eligible for help from the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund a student must be over 19 years of age at the start of their studies. No funding will be awarded to students who are accessing an Advanced Loan to pay their tuition fees - an application to the Advanced Loans bursary can be made instead. 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund is available to students who demonstrate a financial need, and they live in a home with a maximum household income of £35,000 per annum.

4.7 The Advanced Learner Loan

To be eligible for support from the Advanced Loan Bursary, students must have and approved active Advanced Learner Loan and meet the eligibility criteria for 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund.

- 4.8 Students will also need to satisfy residency criteria with having legal right to abode in the United Kingdom and Islands, have right of abode (the right to live permanently in the United Kingdom without any immigration restrictions), or are a citizen of a country that is within the European Economic Area (EEA).

Students have been ordinarily a resident in the United Kingdom and Islands or the

European Union (EU) or the European Economic Area (EEA) continuously for at least the previous three years on the first day of learning.

Asylum seekers and refugees will need to provide a copy of Home Office evidence of residency status.

5. Prioritisation of funding

5.1 The budget for financial support is finite. Students who may be eligible for support may not automatically receive it once the limited funds have been exhausted (except for those who qualify for 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary Fund). In the event of limited availability of funds, priority will be given to the following groups:

5.2 16 to 19 Bursary Fund:

Priority Group 1

Young people on learning programmes that meet ESFA eligibility criteria who are:

- In care or care leavers.
- In receipt of Income Support.
- In receipt of Universal Credit and have a tenancy agreement in their own name.
- In receipt of Universal Credit and Disability Living Allowance or Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments.

Priority Group 2

Young people on learning programmes that meet ESFA eligibility criteria who are struggling to meet the costs of attending college and who come from a home which has a combined annual gross income of under £42,000*.

5.3 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund:

Students who are unemployed in receipt of a means tested benefit or unwaged dependents of persons in receipt of the above will be prioritised for funding support.

The following students will not be eligible for support from any fund:

- Students on Higher Education (HE) courses.
- Waged Apprentices.
- People in or released on temporary licence from custody.

6. Support available

6.1 16 to 19 Bursary Fund:

Priority Group 1

Students can receive travel support, free meals and where necessary, associated course related costs such as mandatory trips that are necessary to complete coursework.

Priority Group 2

May receive travel support and free meals subject to eligibility.

Where a student is on a work placement that is necessary for the completion of their programme of study and are not eligible for support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund or their travel support is not sufficient they are able to apply for exceptional support. All cases will be considered on an individual basis and criteria such as the household income, expectations of the extended work placement, attendance and academic performance will be considered by a panel.

6.2 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund:

Students can be supported with travel support, Examination or registration fees, equipment and material costs, uniform and kit, childcare, eating whilst at college/or work placement where such support is necessary for the completion of their qualification.

6.3 Advanced Loan Bursary:

Students can be supported with travel support, examination or registration fees, equipment and material costs, uniform and kit, childcare eating whilst at college/or work placement where such support is necessary for the completion of their qualification.

Where funding is available for Travel support, this will be provided for students who live within the West Midlands travel area (National Express services); administered via smart phone M Tickets or Swift Card. For students who are unable to travel independently such as those with an EHCP, the equivalent monetary value of a bus pass will be offered.

6.4 Learners requiring full time childcare places at nursery, with childminder or after school clubs can apply for a maximum daily rate of £65.00 per day. With maximum weekly support for any individual learner not to exceed £180, subject to available funds.

All childcare providers must be Ofsted registered.

If a student's childcare costs exceed any **19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund** allocation, then the responsibility to pay the "top up fee" is the students.

6.5 Should a student cease to attend or withdraw from Dudley College of Technology at any point during the academic year, financial support for childcare will finish on the last date of recorded attendance. The responsibility for childcare costs reverts to the student from that date.

6.6 Any trip or visit that a student requests funding support for must be embedded within their course and necessary for the completion of their program of study.

6.7 Any student who are unsure of their eligibility for support should contact the Student Finance Team.

7. Appeals

- 7.1 If a student wishes to appeal against the outcome of an application, this will be reviewed by the Deputy Learner Services Manager. If satisfaction is not reached a further appeal can be made directly to the Executive Director Public Affairs and Marketing. This should be in writing and should set out the reasons for the appeal. The Executive Director Public Affairs and Marketing will respond to the appeal in writing within ten working days. This decision is final.

8. General conditions of funding

- 8.1 The college will strive to:

- Do all it can so no eligible student has to withdraw from their course due to lack of financial support*.
- Take steps to ensure that all eligible students can apply for financial help, thus supporting “widening participation” and the provision of learning for under-represented groups.
- Ensure that any personal information you provide in an application is subject to The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.
- Ensure that all applications for financial support are dealt with efficiently and fairly.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of its financial support for students on a regular basis.
- Dudley College of Technology maintains the right to make in-year adjustments to provisions within the scope of this policy with the approval of both the college’s senior management team and its governing body.

- 8.2 *Dudley College of Technology is committed to do everything it can to support its students; however, it is acknowledged that in all cases funding is limited and cannot be guaranteed.