



## Learner Support Fund Policy

### 2025-26

Key Information	
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ELT Post Responsible for Update and Monitoring	Deputy Principal / Deputy CEO
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## **1. Aim/Scope**

- 1.1 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 / carers.
- 1.2 In establishing such a policy, the College takes account of government policy and guidelines.
- 1.3 The fund has been developed to support learners who face a real financial barrier to learning. The College recognises that within the local areas associated transport costs and options for travel to and from College are a barrier, and therefore priority is given to this area. The College also recognises the diverse area that it serves, and the financial challenges faced for some learners, the funding entitlement criteria aims to provide support for barriers faced in accessing education and to support those most in need.
- 1.4 All funding is subject to maintaining satisfactory levels of attendance, progress, and behaviour.
- 1.5 Commercial courses, Higher Education, Waged 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.
- 1.6 This policy will not discriminate either directly or indirectly against any individual on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity or nationality, sexual orientation, marital status, religion or belief, age, disability, socio-economic status or any other personal characteristic.

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 The College administers five funds on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE); the focus of all funds is to support learners who would face a financial barrier to remaining or continuing in education. This policy was developed in accordance with Government Guidance and Policy.
- 2.2 The Learner Support Fund Policy is subject to change, the policy will be reviewed regularly in line with the latest guidance available. The policy will be updated in year where necessary.
- 2.3 All funds excluding the 16-19 Enhanced Bursary Fund are limited, therefore applications will only be approved if sufficient funds remain available. The College strongly encourages applications to be submitted by Friday 24th October 2025, forms received after this date will be assessed only when funds are available.
- 2.4 Applications will be assessed individually and allocated based on actual financial needed.

## **3. Types of Funding Available**

### **3.1 The 16-19 Bursary Fund**

- 3.1.1 This fund is available to learners who are aged between 16-18 years old on the 31 August 2025. Learners aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a discretionary bursary if they are continuing a study programme, they began aged 16-18 or have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

### **3.2 Free College Meals**

- 3.2.1 This funding is available to learners who are classed as disadvantaged. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as learners being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the identified means tested benefits:
  - 3.2.1.1 Income Support
  - 3.2.1.2 Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance
  - 3.2.1.3 Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance (*ESA*)
  - 3.2.1.4 Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
  - 3.2.1.5 Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit

- 3.2.1.6 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 His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)*)
- 3.2.1.7 Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- 3.2.1.8 Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any benefits they get).

### 3.3 The Adult Skills Fund Bursary

- 3.3.1 This fund is available to learners over the age of 19, and on a provision, which is funded ASF (*Adult Skills Fund*) provision. The fund is divided into two categories:

- 3.3.1.1 hardship funding – general financial support for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners; and
- 3.3.1.2 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.

### 3.4 The Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund

- 3.4.1 This fund is available for learners who have secured an Advanced Learner Loan. The funding is divided into three categories:

- 3.4.1.1 financial hardship;
- 3.4.1.2 childcare; and
- 3.4.1.3 classroom assistance for a disability or learning difficulty (*after assessment by College*).

### 3.5 16-19 Enhanced Bursary Fund

- 3.5.1 This fund is available to learners to meet one or more of the following conditions:

- 3.5.1.1 in care;
- 3.5.1.2 care leaver;
- 3.5.1.3 in receipt of Income Support/Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves and or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner; or
- 3.5.1.4 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

- 3.5.2 Learners eligible for this fund can receive a bursary of up to £1,200 per year 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. Consideration on the amount awarded will be taken regarding the number of study hours and the financial need of each learner. Learners will not automatically be awarded £1,200, individual assessments will be completed to assess the level of financial support required.

## 4. Banding and Funding Criteria

- 4.1 Along with meeting the agreed criteria of each funding stream, learners will be assessed based on their household income. Learners with a household income below £35,000 will be eligible to apply for funding.
- 4.2 All funds (*excluding the 16-19 Enhanced Bursary Fund*) are limited and completed applications including all required documentation will be assessed on a first come first served basis.
- 4.3 Learners with a household income of above £35,000 and evidence of exceptional circumstances will be reviewed individually by a panel.
- 4.4 Financial support is available towards the essential costs of participating in their study programme, including help towards with the cost of travel, essential educational trips or equipment and specialist clothing i.e. items that the learner would otherwise need to pay for to participate.

- 4.5 All equipment including books remains the property of Cheshire College and must be returned when the course is completed.
- 4.6 The College encourages applications to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 for kits/uniforms etc. to be ordered and available from the start of the academic year. Applications after this date will still be processed, however equipment/uniform may not be available for the start of term.
- 4.7 All funding streams will be reviewed termly, additional funding may be applied, should sufficient funds be available and/or the learner can demonstrate an ongoing need for increased support.
- 4.8 Learners who reside in Wales can apply for financial support funding via the Welsh Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or the Welsh Government Learning Grant.

Banding	Criteria	Travel	Equipment	Educational visits	Childcare	Meals	Additional Funding
<b>EB 16-18 only</b>	Meet Conditions of the Enhanced Bursary	100% funded	100% Funded up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	Learners can access funding via the Care to Learn Grant	£4/day (£2.61 from FCM allocation if eligible)	Individual assessment completed to identify any further financial costs.
<b>1 16-18</b>	Eligible for FCM or in receipt of pupil premium at school	100% funded	100% funded up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	Learners can access funding via the Care to Learn Grant	£4/day (£2.61 from FCM allocation)	N/A
<b>2 16-18</b>	Household income below £35,000	100% funded	100% funded up to £300	100% funded up to £600	Learners can access funding via the Care to Learn Grant	No funding	N/A
<b>W</b>	Eligible for EMA	No Funding	No funding	No funding	No funding	Subject to meeting eligibility as per 3.2	
<b>ASF Bursary</b>	Household income below £35,000 and meet ASF funding criteria	Bus pass or travel award	100% up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	£200/week 1 child, £400/week more than 1 child	N/A	Termly Payment
<b>ALL Bursary</b>	Household income below £35,000 and meet ALL bursary funding criteria	Bus pass or travel award	100% up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	£200/week 1 child, £400/week more than 1 child	N/A	Termly Payment

(Table 1: Banding & Funding Criteria)

## 5. Exam and Tuition Fees (ASF Fund Only)

- 5.1 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 (ASF funded) course, and their household income is below £35,000.
- 5.2 Learners eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan cannot receive help towards tuition costs.

## 6. Childcare

- 6.1 20+ learners 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.
- 6.1.1 Learners under the age of 20 at the start of their course can access the Care to Learn (C2L) scheme to provide financial support with the cost of childcare whilst learning.
- 6.2 The bursary fund may be used to provide exceptional further help with childcare costs for parents in receipt of C2L whose costs exceed the weekly maximum rates.

- 6.3 Childcare funding is capped at £200/week per child, and £400/week per learner (for those with more than one child) up to a maximum of £10,000/academic year. Anything over this amount, is the sole responsibility of the learner.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 Childcare agreement must be signed by the learner before any funding is released. Any contract is between the learner and the childcare provider.
- 6.6 Childcare is paid one month in arrears direct to the provider as per College Finance guidelines. If a learner funds the childcare personally (only in exceptional cases) then the learner will be reimbursed according to the same payment schedule as per a childcare provider.
- 6.7 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 36 weeks.
- 6.8 The fund can only cover the costs for time spent in College lectures, and not private study time.
- 6.9 Continued support is subject to satisfactory attendance of all the subjects you enrol on at the College. You **MUST** ensure your attendance is at least 90% per term (regular checks will be undertaken). 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.

## **7 Equipment, Educational Visits and Books and DBS**

- 7.1 Equipment (*including core textbooks*) will be purchased on the learner's behalf by the College if it is essential to their course. Any equipment that is bought by the fund for the learner (except uniform etc.) will be returned to the College at the end of the academic year. Equipment funding is capped at £300 per academic year.
- 7.2 Approved educational visits can be funded up to a maximum of £600 per year. Anything over the £600 amount will be the responsibility of the learner. Bursary funding can only be used to support the costs of essential trips that are part of the learners Study Programme, international trips will only be supported where there is evidence to support that the trip could not have taken place within England at a reduced cost.
- 7.3 Funding is available to support the cost of applying to university and any associated interviews. For 2026 entrants UCAS has introduced a fee waiver to remove the application costs for all learners who are eligible for Free College Meals.
- 7.4 Where learners do not have access to suitable devices at home, laptops may be purchased on the learner's behalf by the College if it is essential to their course. Laptops will be available to loan and remain the property of the College.
- 7.5 If an asylum seeker is eligible for provision, financial support may be available in form of course-related books, equipment, cash payments or a travel pass.

## **8 Travel**

- 8.1 Travel funding for 16–18-year-olds is capped at £350 per term where there is no public bus or College Coach service available. Discretion may be applied above this rate where there are considerable travel costs. Travel support will only be provided for the most cost-effective method of transport.
- 8.2 To be eligible for travel support learners must live more than a mile away from their campus of study.
- 8.3 16-19 learners are only eligible to receive travel support for approved travel passes. These can include College coaches, public bus passes and train passes. Learners will not be funded for petrol costs.
- 8.4 Public bus passes will only be replaced once within the academic year at a reduced cost of £25. Learners will be liable for the full cost of the replacement thereafter. These prices may vary and are set by the operators.

- 8.5 Discretion may be applied if the travel passes available are not suitable from the learner's home address/circumstances, a termly payment may be made to the learner's bank account.
- 8.6 19+ learners are eligible for funding of a travel pass or car allowance costs.
- 8.7 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.

## **9 19+ Termly Payments**

- 9.1 Termly awards will be made to 19+ learners based on a rate of £200 per term to support additional costs associated with attending full time education. Additional funding may be applied, should sufficient funds be available and/or the learner can demonstrate an ongoing need for increased support.
- 9.2 Emergency meal support is available to support individual learners where there is severe hardship, and a learner is considered to be in real need.
- 9.3 Payments will be made at the beginning of the term subject to meeting satisfactory behaviour, progress, and attendance.
- 9.4 Termly payments are only available for learners on full time provision.

## **10 Free College Meals**

- 10.1 16-19 learners who qualify for Free College Meals (FCM) are entitled to £4.00 per day (£2.61 from the FSM allocation; £1.39 from the discretionary allocation).
- 10.2 Learners who qualify for FCM are eligible to receive a meal allowance in the form of a voucher or cash if no alternative available when attending work/industry placement.
- 10.3 Emergency meal support is available to support individual learners where there is severe hardship, and a learner is considered to be in real need.

## **11 Hardship Awards**

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 Learners must complete a hardship application form and supply three months bank statements and further supporting evidence to apply. Each case will be considered on an individual basis and must be approved by two members of the bursary and transport team. Awards are limited to £500/term.
- 11.3 Some learners may need items of clothing/and or footwear to be able to access further education and to continue to participate. Such items may be eligible for exceptional support from the bursary fund. Any such expenditure must be considered genuine and linked directly to the learner accessing their education provision.

## **12 Funding Approval**

- 12.1 Applications will only be assessed when the online PayMyStudent application has been completed fully and submitted with the required evidence.
- 12.2 All funding is subject to maintaining satisfactory levels of behaviour, attendance, and progress.
- 12.3 Applicants will be notified within 15 working days on the outcome of their application.

- 12.4 It is the learner's responsibility to declare any direct payments from the Learner Support Fund to the Department for Work and Pensions.

### **13 Appeals**

- 13.1 If a learner wishes to appeal against the outcome of their application their case will be referred to the Director of Marketing and Schools Partnerships. A written response will be sent to the learner within 10 working days.