



Cheshire College
South & West



MACCLESFIELD
COLLEGE

Learner Support Fund Policy 2026-27

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 All awards are subject to an individual assessment of actual financial need and available funding. Meeting eligibility criteria does not automatically guarantee an award.
- 1.3 In establishing such a policy, the College takes into account government policy and guidelines.
- 1.4 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 by some learners, the funding entitlement criteria aims to provide support for barriers faced in accessing education and to support those most in need.
- 1.5 Continued receipt of funding is subject to satisfactory attendance, progress, behaviour, and ongoing participation. The College reserves the right to review, reduce, suspend, or withdraw support where learners fail to meet agreed conditions.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 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.
- 1.8 This policy applies to Cheshire College – South & West and Macclesfield College. For purpose of this policy, references to “the College” apply collectively to both institutions unless otherwise stated.

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 College reserves the right to amend funding arrangements, thresholds, award levels, and eligibility criteria in response to changes in government guidance, allocations, or available funding.
- 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 23rd October 2026, forms received after this date will be assessed only when funds are available.
- 2.4 Awards are not automatic and will be based on an individual assessment of actual financial need, participation costs, household circumstances, attendance pattern, course requirements and available evidence. Published bands (Table 1) indicate maximum potential support only and do not guarantee an award.

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 2026. 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 (FCM)

- 3.2.1 This funding is available to learners who are classed as disadvantaged. Free meals in further education define disadvantage as learners being in receipt of, or having parents/carers who are in receipt of, one or more of the benefits:
 - 3.2.1.1 Universal Credit
 - 3.2.1.2 Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - 3.2.1.3 Households in receipt of Income-related Employment and Support Allowance or the guaranteed element of Pension Credit may also be entitled to a meal.

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 Adult Skills Fund (ASF) 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 learning support and reasonable adjustments for learners with a disability or learning difficulty following assessment by the College;
- 3.4.2 Advanced Learner Loans Bursary support will only be released once the learner's loan has been approved by Student Loans Company (SLC), the learner has passed the liability point, and the College has completed and recorded an assessment of need.

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, 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 of 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 £40,000 may be eligible to apply for support, subject to an assessment of actual financial need, course costs, and available funding.

- 4.2 All funds (*excluding the 16-19 Enhanced Bursary Fund*) are limited and completed applications including all required documentation will be prioritised based on financial need, vulnerability, participation barriers, and available funding.
- 4.3 Learners with a household income of above £40,000 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 the College and must be returned when the course is completed.
- 4.6 The College encourages applications to be submitted by 31st July 2026 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 monthly, 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.
- 4.9 Table 1 highlights indicative maximum support, subject to eligibility, assessed need, actual cost, evidence and available funds.
- 4.10 Meeting eligibility criteria does not automatically guarantee funding. Awards will only be made where there is an evidenced financial barrier to participation.

Banding	Criteria	Travel	Equipment	Educational visits	Childcare	Meals	Additional Funding
EB 16-18 only	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	Up to £5.50 day (£2.66 from FCM allocation if eligible)	Individual assessment completed to identify any further financial costs.
I 16-18	Eligible for FCM	100% funded	100% funded up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	Learners can access funding via the Care to Learn Grant	Up to £5.50 day (£2.66 from FCM allocation)	N/A
2 16-18	Household income below £40,000	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
W	Eligible for EMA	No Funding	No funding	No funding	No funding	Subject to meeting eligibility as per 3.2	
ASF Bursary	Household income below £40,000 and meet ASF funding criteria	Bus pass or travel award	100% up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	£200/week per child	N/A	Termly Payment may be awarded to cover additional costs associated with attending education
ALL Bursary	Household income below £40,000 and meet ALL bursary funding criteria	Bus pass or travel award	100% up to £300	100% Funded Up to £600	£200/week per child	N/A	Termly Payment may be awarded to cover additional costs associated with attending education

(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 £40,000.

- 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. 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 advance direct to the learner, once an initial invoice has been received.
- 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 The College reserves the right to request updated childcare invoices, attendance records, and evidence of childcare usage throughout the academic year.
- 6.10 Continued support is subject to satisfactory attendance of all the subjects you enrol on at the College. 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

- 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. From 2026 entrants UCAS introduced a fee waiver to remove the application costs for all learners who are eligible for Free College Meals.
- 7.4 Eligible learners approved for Learner Support Fund support may receive a monthly printing credit of up to £1 added to their College printing account to support essential course-related printing. The value and availability of this support may be reviewed annually and is subject to available funding.

- 7.5 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. Learners may be required to sign a loan agreement for College-owned devices.
- 7.6 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. Funding will be issued monthly in advance after an initial week where the learner provides receipts for their journeys and their timetable. Receipts will be requested periodically during each term and attendance monitored with the award being amended if necessary.
- 8.2 Eligibility will be assessed based on the learner's home address, available transport options, travel distance, and the College's travel support arrangements in place for the relevant academic year.
- 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 can be replaced within the academic year. The 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 The College may provide additional travel support funded directly by the College for learners who are not eligible for bursary-funded travel assistance. Such support does not form part of the 16–19 Bursary Fund.
- 8.7 19+ learners are eligible for funding of a travel pass or car allowance costs.
- 8.8 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.
- 8.9 Emergency travel support is available in cases of severe hardship.

9 19+ Termly Payments

- 9.1 Termly awards will be made to 19+ learners to support additional costs associated with attending education. Additional funding may be applied, should sufficient funds be available and the learner can demonstrate an ongoing need for increased support.
- 9.2 Payments will be made at the beginning of the term subject to meeting satisfactory behaviour, progress, and attendance.
- 9.3 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 up to £5.50 per day (£2.66 from the FSM 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 is available when attending work/industry placement.

- I 0.3 Emergency meal support is available to support individual learners where there is severe hardship, and a learner is considered to be in real need.
- I 0.4 Learners who do not qualify for Free College Meals may be eligible to receive meal support. This may be funded through the College's Learner Support Fund where bursary eligibility criteria are met, or directly by the College where learners are not eligible for bursary funding. Support is provided at the College's discretion and subject to available funding.

I 1 Hardship Awards

- I 1.1 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.
- I 1.2 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.
- I 1.3 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.
- I 1.4 Emergency support is available to support individual learners where there is severe hardship, and a learner is in real need. Learners may not need to provide income evidence; however, they must provide details and be referred by a member of staff.

I 2 Funding Approval

- I 2.1 Applications will only be assessed when the application has been completed fully and submitted with the required evidence.
- I 2.2 Learners and/or parents/carers may be required to provide additional evidence to support an application. Where false, misleading, or incomplete information is provided, the College reserves the right to withdraw support, recover funds paid, and refer the matter for further investigation.
- I 2.3 All funding is subject to maintaining satisfactory levels of behaviour, attendance, and progress.
- I 2.4 Applicants will be notified within 15 working days on the outcome of their application.
- I 2.5 It is the learner's responsibility to declare any direct payments from the Learner Support Fund to the Department for Work and Pensions.

I 3 Appeals

- I 3.1 If a learner wishes to appeal against the outcome of their application or believes that their application has not been assessed fairly, they may submit an appeal in writing.
- I 3.2 Appeals will be reviewed independently by an appropriate senior manager not involved in the original decision where practicable. A written response will be sent to the learner within 10 working days.
- I 3.3 Complaints regarding the administration of the Learner Support Fund will be managed in accordance with the College Complaints Procedure.