



LEARNER SUPPORT FUND POLICY

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Scope

This policy sets out the position from which Telford College will administer the discretionary awards that it receives annually, and how these funds will be distributed to learners.

Introduction

Telford College receives funding to target support towards 16-18, 19+ and Advanced Learning Loans learners, to help with the costs of participating in education and training post 16.

Telford College is committed to supporting its learners. Nonetheless funding is limited and cannot be guaranteed. Funds are administered on a first come, first served basis.

Purpose

To ensure finance is not a barrier to enrolment, Telford College will strive to:

- Do all it can so no eligible learner has to withdraw from a course due to lack of financial support
- Take steps to ensure that all eligible learners can apply for financial help, thus supporting widening participation and the provision of learning for under-represented groups
- Ensure all applications for financial support are dealt with efficiently and fairly
- Have processes in place to record, monitor and review the effectiveness of its financial support for learners on a regular basis and ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010

All managers and members of staff are responsible for ensuring the Policy and procedures are applied consistently, rigorously and fairly.

Enhanced Bursaries

The ESFA has identified a priority group of learners who will receive an Enhanced Bursary. To be eligible, learners must be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2023, and prove they fall into one of the following defined vulnerable categories:

- Classed as a 'Looked After' child by the Local Authority
- Have been In Care and now classed as a Care Leaver
- Care Leaver
- In receipt of Income Support or Universal Credit in place of Income Support, in their own right
- In receipt of Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit and Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence payments in their own right

Eligible learners could receive up to £1200 per academic year, if they have a financial need, (pro-rata for part time courses) and providing the College's attendance criteria has been met. Learners are not automatically entitled to £1200 and a reduced amount may be awarded.

All other young people aged 16 -19 who are experiencing financial hardship but do not fit into one of the above categories, may still be eligible for support from the 16 – 19 Discretionary Award.

Discretionary Award

To be eligible for Discretionary Award, learners can be any age and enrolled on a full or part time course. Students enrolled on Higher Education, Apprenticeships and Job Centre Plus courses are not eligible. Total household income must be below £35,000 to qualify.

Eligible learners may receive support in the form of:

- A bus pass
- Other travel expenses
- Kit/uniform
- Essential books and materials
- UCAS fees
- Trips/workshops
- Travel expenses for University Open visits (up to a maximum agreed)
- Professional fees (including AAT registration fees)
- Exam fees (including one resit fee)
- Help with childcare fees for when you are at college or placement
- Travel expenses for University Open days
- College meals (certain criteria apply)
- One off emergency hardship payments (in exceptional circumstances)

Advanced Learning Loans Bursary

To be eligible for financial support from the Advanced Learning Loans Bursary, learners must be 19 or over at the start of the course, have a total household income below £35,000 and be in receipt of an Advanced Learning Loan to pay for their course fees.

Eligible learners may receive support in the form of:

- A bus pass
- Other travel expenses
- Kit/uniform
- Essential books and materials
- Professional fees (AAT Registration for example)
- Exam fees (including one resit fee)
- Help with childcare fees
- UCAS fees
- Travel expenses for University Open days
- Trips/workshops

Free College Meals

To be eligible for free meals at College, learners must be 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2023 and your parents/carers be in receipt of one of the following:

- Income Support
- Universal Credit with net earnings below £7,400 pa (after tax and not including any benefits received)
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child tax Credit and have an annual gross income of less than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC. If you/your parents/carers receive Working Tax Credits, you are NOT entitled to free meals regardless of income amount.
- Working Tax Credit run-on paid or 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit

The following groups of learners are also entitled to free meals (if they or parents/carers meet the above criteria)-

- Learners aged between 19-24 and are subject to an EHCP or are studying the second year of your course that you started before you turned 19.
- Learners who received free meals at school may be entitled. Evidence from the Local Authority will be needed.

The Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding has the discretion to award free meals from 16-19 Discretionary Awards to learners who are suffering financial/personal hardship.

A weekly allowance of £17.50 will be loaded onto learners' ID cards every Monday of the academic year.

Industry Placements

All learners attending Industry Placements are eligible to claim their travel expenses. This may be bus/train fares or a reimbursement of petrol costs. Where Industry Placements are hard to reach, the college will consider payment of taxi fares. Learners are required to obtain prior authorisation for reimbursement of travel costs, by completing a pre-travel claim form with a member of the Industry Placement team.

Support with Childcare Fees

Young parents who are under 20 years of age at the start of their course, may be eligible for help with childcare fees from a Government scheme called Care to Learn.

Application is online at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn

Learners who are over 20 at the start of their course, will be able to apply for help towards Childcare Fees. Childcare Providers must be Ofsted registered. The College will not enter into a contract with a Childcare Provider, and will only pay fees on behalf of the learner if the learner adheres to the terms and conditions of the College Childcare Contract.

We can only pay fees, up to a maximum of £125 per week, per learner (irrespective of how many children a learner may have) for timetabled lessons and organised work placements. Childcare funding may be withdrawn if learners have persistent non-attendance.

We will pay for the lessons attended at college plus a small amount of travelling time in order to drop-off and pick-up your child.

Learners will need to use any free funding from the Government to offset fees to Telford College. If there is a shortfall, College may pay the difference (up to £125 per week).

The College may only pay a contribution towards fees. Learners will be liable to pay the remaining fees to their Provider.

General Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for help from all Bursary schemes, students must:

- Satisfy residency criteria and be enrolled on an appropriate course of study (full time or part time)
- Have a yearly net TOTAL household income of no more than £35,000 (disregarding child benefit, DLA, PIP and Carers Allowance)

Bursaries cannot be paid to:

- Learners on Higher Education (HE) courses
- Waged Apprentices
- Young offenders serving, or have been released early from, a custodial sentence

Application Process (all schemes except Care to Learn)

Learners wishing to receive financial help, will need to complete an online Grants application form via a personalised link sent directly to them. Evidence of household

income will be required. In exceptional circumstances, and at the discretion of the College, learners can apply using a paper copy which can be obtained from Student Services.

Assessment will be carried out by the Student Services staff, within 15 working days of receipt of the form.

Student Services staff will inform learners, detailing the level of support awarded. Learners may only receive a contribution towards their expenses.

Where possible, learners will receive payment in kind e.g. learners will receive a bus pass or kit/uniform so that they do not need to find the money up front. All other awards may require receipts before payment can be reimbursed into the learner's bank account. The award will only be paid into someone else's account under exceptional circumstances, and with the agreement of the Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding.

Cash payments for one-off emergency support may be made if a learner is experiencing exceptional difficulty whilst attending their course. These will be authorised by the Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding.

Telford College is committed to doing everything it can to support its learners, however funding is limited and cannot be guaranteed.

If students fail to meet the eligibility criteria or cannot provide the appropriate income evidence, the Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding has the discretion to authorise funding in exceptional circumstances.

Evidence to Support Application

The evidence required to support the application will be as follows (where applicable):

Enhanced Bursary

- A letter from the relevant Local Authority Children's services confirming the learner's "looked after" or "leaving care" status
- A letter from Jobcentre Plus confirming the learner is in receipt of Income Support or Universal Credit in place of Income Support
- A letter from Jobcentre Plus confirming the learner is in receipt of Employment Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments
- Last 3 Universal Credit awards statements

All other schemes (except Care to Learn)

- All pages of 2023/24 Tax Credits Awards or 2023 Tax Credits Review
- Last 3 Universal Credit awards statements showing how payments have been calculated
- All pages of Income Support / Job Seeker's Allowance / Employment Support Allowance awards letter for payments after April 2023
- Audited accounts for the most recent tax year or official tax return
- All pages of State Pension/Pension Credit awards letter for payments after April 2023
- Last 3 payslips
- Housing benefit/Council Tax benefit awards letter for April 2023
- Last 3 bank statements to prove nil income

Learners applying for Free College Meals, will need to provide all pages of the appropriate Benefits letter.

Learners who are under 19 at 31 August 2023 and living with parents, will need to provide evidence of their parents/carers income. Learners over 19 at 31 August and living with parents/carers, will need to supply details of their own personal income (bank statements will be required if learner has no income). Learners living with a partner are required to supply details of their own income and their partners.'

Attendance and Payments

Awards are linked to learners' attendance and behaviour.

The allocation of funding and financial help to learners will be dependent on them meeting a minimum accumulative attendance rate. This is monitored by electronic registers.

The Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding has the discretion to award monthly or weekly tickets until learners' attendance improves.

Learners may not receive 100% of their costs, depending on availability of funds.

One-off payments may be made to learners for costs associated with their course, on production of receipts. If learners' attendance is less than 70%, the Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding has the discretion to refuse payment. If payment has already been made and attendance drops below 70%, the Assistant Principal Student Experience and Safeguarding may ask the learner to repay the costs.

Costs could include:

- Uniform/kit
- Materials
- Books
- Professional Fees (AAT registration for instance)
- Exam Fees (including one re-sit)
- UCAS Fees
- Trips
- Childcare Fees

Payments towards trips will only be made after October half term and if funds allow.

Childcare fees are payable half termly directly to the Childcare Provider.

A £17.50 allowance for free meals is loaded daily onto learners ID badges, every Monday that they are timetabled to attend college, regardless of attendance percentage.

Any learner whose attendance dips below 70% may be contacted and advised that their bus pass/payments are at risk. Progress coaches will be informed. Parents/Carers will also be contacted in all appropriate cases.

Where a learner is subject to suspension/exclusion from College, as per the College's Student Code of Conduct, this may also impact their eligibility for payment/bus pass.

The decision to pay awards to students whose attendance is below 70%, will always take into account specific student circumstances. The Director of Student Services has the discretion to authorise payments/bus passes for students who have not met attendance criteria.

Appeals Procedure

If a learner wishes to appeal against the outcome of an application or non-payment of an award, this will be reviewed by the Assistant Principal or a senior designated member of staff. The appeal should be in writing and should be submitted with appropriate supporting evidence.

Appeals will be replied to in writing, within 10 working days. Decisions are final.

Promotion

All Discretionary Learner Support and Bursary Funds will be promoted through:

- College Information communications/sessions/presentations
- Mail shots to prospective students
- Flyers, posters and displays around College
- Presentations to learners
- Tutorials
- Future Focus
- Internet/College Hub
- Telford College Schools Liaison

Monitoring and Managing the Bursary

- Discretionary Awards and Bursary Funds are assessed and administered by members of Student Services. The College's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Corporation contribute to and oversee the process.
- A member of Student Services Grants team liaises with Finance staff regarding the production of cheques and emergency payments

Data Protection

Applications for financial help are confidential.

All data is kept in a secure area and details of security processes are outlined in the College's Data Protection Policy.

Equality and Diversity

The College will comply with Government Guidelines for Learner support Funds, and the Equality Act 2010.

Where learners have specific difficulties, they are able to:

- Obtain a form in large print
- Have the use of a writer/reader
- Have the opportunity of a private interview at a time to suit, and be accompanied by a friend or relative

Staff will refer to current legislation for specific entitlement details for asylum seekers and refugees.