

## Learner Support Fund Policy 2010/11 For Learners Aged 19+

The Learner Support Fund (LSF) is a cash-limited fund aimed at students whose circumstances mean they have difficulties in affording their learning costs and applies to expenses arising during the current academic year.

Funding in subsequent years cannot be guaranteed, though every effort will be made to continue to support those students who carry on to a second year. Students are advised on how to apply to the Learner Support Fund at interview and/or enrolment. It is recommended that students apply early for assistance as once funds are used up no further support can be awarded.

This Policy may be amended on occasions in response to changes in the Young People Learning Agency and the Skills Funding Agency Guidelines.

### Priorities of the Fund

In line with these agency guidelines, the main priority for LSF funding are those who are economically or socially disadvantaged, who need support with transport, childcare or associated learning costs **and are facing financial difficulty.**

Further priorities are those groups who are currently under-represented in Further Education:

- those in care or recently left care
- those on probation;
- young parents and those who are considered to be at risk;
- those eligible for fee remission because they are themselves, or they are the dependant of someone else who is, receiving a means'-tested state benefit or Tax credit;
- adults undertaking a first full level 2;
- students aged 19-25 undertaking a full first level 3 qualification;
- students taking a Skills for Life programme of study;
- those recently made redundant
- those learners supported through the 6 months unemployed training package
- ESOL learners who are low paid workers unable to demonstrate receipt of an income based benefit
- ESOL learners who are spouses unable to evidence their entitlement to full fee remission or are unable to make a financial contribution to their fee costs

### Eligibility Criteria

An application to the fund does not guarantee an offer of assistance as all applications are considered on an individual basis while taking into account the amount of funding available. The Learner Adviser, Welfare is available in Learner Services for further guidance.

Guidelines are given below:

- **Age** - Students aged 19 years or over on 1<sup>st</sup> September of the academic year.
- **Course** - Students who have been accepted onto, and are studying, a programme of learning funded by the Skills Funding Agency at Lowestoft College. If applicable, the course shows progression from a previous course studied. Students repeating a similar level course may not be eligible for assistance. The following students **are not** eligible for assistance: Work-Based Learning (WBL) courses including Modern Apprenticeships; Degree programmes, HND or HNC programmes; courses which students are attending because they are receiving funding from New Deal (apart from participants in New Deal for Lone Parents who *are* eligible). Prisoners on day release are not eligible.
- **Income** - Students on a low-income or from a low-income family. This includes partner's or step-parent's income. The threshold for eligibility for 2010/11 is a gross current household income of **less than £30,810 per year.**

Where a student is aged 19 or over and lives in the parental home it is possible that they may be able to demonstrate some independence by providing evidence that they are in receipt of their own income such as through part-time employment. In this case it may be agreed to base the

assessment on the student's own income. Otherwise it may be necessary to have evidence of the parental income.

As all applications to the Fund are means'-tested; the student must give details of income on the application form, and submit evidence of income with the application. **Evidence can be a Tax Credit Award Notification, three recent pay slips, Tax Credit Award Notification, P60 or letter from official sources such as the Jobcentre, Benefits Agency or an employer.**

Payments from the LSF for fees, transport, books and equipment do not normally affect social security benefits. Students requiring further information on whether LSF payments will affect their benefit position should obtain advice from their local Benefits Agency office.

- **Receipt of other Financial Support** - Students can receive other support such as Adult Learning Grant (ALG), a Career Development Loan or New Deal for Lone Parents, but income from this funding will be taken into account. Evidence of this may be requested.
- **Attendance on Course** - Support may be withdrawn or reduced if the successful LSF applicant does not maintain good attendance in accordance with the College's Attendance Policy and show good commitment to their studies. To monitor this, the administrator will liaise with course tutors. The College may request refund of monies paid if the student does not maintain good attendance and commitment, or withdraws from the course. Where LSF support has been awarded previously, attendance for that year will be taken into account in making a decision on whether to award support.
- **Residency Status** - The College has to abide by the residence conditions set by the Government Skills Agencies. These rules are complex and further advice can be given by the Learner Adviser, Welfare in Learner Services. Evidence of a student's residency status may be required, such as passport and/or other clear evidence of length of stay in UK. Brief guidelines are given below on the residence conditions:
  - A student who on the first day of their course is "settled" in the UK, and has been ordinarily resident in the UK for the three years preceding, and whose main purpose for such residence was not to receive full-time education during any part of the three-year period. "Settled" means having either indefinite leave to enter or remain (ILE/R) or having the right of abode in the UK.
  - The spouse or civil partner of a person with "recently settled" or "settled" status who has been both married (or has undertaken a recognised civil partnership) and has been resident in the UK for 1 year.
  - A national of any European Union (EU) country (or the spouse or civil partner or child of an EU National) who has been ordinarily resident in the European Economic Area (EEA) for the three years preceding the first date of the course.
  - An EEA migrant worker (or the spouse or civil partner or child of such a person) who has been ordinarily resident in the EEA for the three years preceding the start of the course.
  - Anyone who has been granted Refugee status, Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave (DL), or exceptional leave to enter or remain (ELE/ELR) by the UK Government, who has remained ordinarily resident in the UK since so recognised, (or the spouse or civil partner or child of such a person).
  - Asylum seekers aged 16–18 (asylum seekers 19 years and over are not eligible).
  - There are some additional eligibility rules for 16-18 year olds who have entered the UK recently. Further advice must be requested from the Learner Adviser.

This list is not exhaustive and further advice should be sought from the Learner Adviser, Welfare in Learner Services who may contact the Young People's Learning Agency about individual cases.

## **Award Decisions**

Decisions on the support to be awarded are made by the Head of Learner Services and Learner Adviser, Welfare taking into account eligibility criteria.

The table below gives details of the maximum awards/allowances available for the main costs although exceptional circumstances may be considered.

Cost	Award for Full-Time Students	Award for Part-Time Students
Tuition Fees	Max 50%	Max 50%
Exam Fees	Max 100%	Max 50%
Materials Fees	Max 100%	Max 50%
Books	Max £50	Max £50
Equipment	Max £300	Max £150
Childcare	Max £160 per week per child	Max £160 per week per child
Travel to College by Bus Living less than 2 miles from College	nil	nil
Living in Lowestoft more than 2 miles from College	First Eastern Local Bus Pass/Max £12 per week	100% of travel costs
Living outside Lowestoft	First Eastern Network Bus Pass	100% of travel costs
Travel to College by Train	Max 100%	Max 100%
Other Costs including course trips, university interviews, domestic emergencies etc	At discretion depending on circumstances	At discretion depending on circumstances

**Tuition Fees, Examination and/or Registration Fees and Materials Fees** – students are advised about these costs at enrolment and if the course is funded by the Skills Funding Agency. Guidance stipulates that funding for course fees has to be directed towards those applicants who fall within the agreed priorities.

**Travel Assistance** - Help with travel expenses may be offered where students travel longer distances to College. No assistance will be given to those who live less than two miles from the College. Assistance is normally given for public transport only - however consideration may be given to a small contribution towards petrol costs *in exceptional cases*. Support may be offered in the form of a First Eastern Counties bus pass or a refund of travel tickets. Where travel is by public transport, tickets or receipts showing the purchase of a bus pass must be submitted before any refund can be made. Delayed submission of tickets may result in loss of support.

**Books & Equipment** – eg. uniforms, kits, essential course materials (not ordinary stationery items). Where books and non-consumable equipment are to be funded 100% by the LSF these items remain the property of the College and must be returned at the end of the course. Receipts for any items purchased must be submitted. Delayed submission of receipts may result in loss of support. If items have been purchased before starting the course and the claim for assistance is successful a refund can be expected, dependent on the terms and conditions of the offer, within 6 weeks of the start of the course. If the College has agreed to purchase items on behalf of the student, an order with the supplier will not be placed until the student has completed at least 2 full teaching weeks of their course (not including induction). Receipt of that order will be dependent on the supplier.

**Other assistance available** – application will also be considered for support towards:

- The cost of attending essential work placements or course trips – a letter of support must be submitted by the tutor giving dates and costs.
- University interviews and travel costs – a letter of support must be submitted by the tutor giving dates and costs.
- Disability related costs – please specify, using an additional sheet if necessary, together with costs.
- Support with domestic emergencies and accommodation
- Other types of assistance can be requested and considered by the LSF Awards Committee if a letter is submitted outlining the circumstances and costs.

**Childcare Assistance** - Students under the age of 20 when they start their course can apply for assistance with the cost of childcare through the **Care to Learn** scheme. Please contact the Learner Adviser, Welfare for more information.

Out of work parents aged 20 and over who are starting a course and whose partner works can apply for help with childcare costs through the **Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work** scheme. Eligibility also depends on income. Please contact the Learner Adviser, Welfare for more information.

If neither of the above apply, parents can apply for assistance through the Learner Support Fund. Lone parents receive priority with childcare funding. Students must complete an additional Application for

Childcare Assistance sheet when applying for this help. Below are guidelines for the student and childcare provider:

- Assistance from the Learner Support Fund applies to childcare costs arising during the academic year 2010/11. Funding after 2010/11 cannot be guaranteed, though every effort will be made to continue to support those students who carry on to second years of courses.
- Childcare costs, where awarded, can only be paid to a registered childminder, crèche or nursery where no other help such as another parent is available. Informal childcare by friends or relatives cannot be funded.
- Costs can only be paid for times when the student is in College, with a suitable allowance for travel and possibly some agreed study time if requested with the support of a tutor.
- The Fund will not pay for periods when students are not attending their course (eg. through sickness) unless the childcare provider requires payment to retain the place for this short period. The student must make the Learner Adviser and their childcare provider aware, should this happen. If the student is not attending their studies due to sickness or other reason they should not use the childcare provider but should rely on their normal arrangements for looking after their child/ren in such a case.
- If asked, you must provide a copy of your course timetable and inform the Learner Adviser of any changes.
- During half-terms, Christmas and Easter holidays where payment is required by the childcare provider to retain a place for the child, the Fund may only pay 50% of the usual costs. In this case, any other costs during College holiday periods must be funded by the student. No payment will be made to retain a place over the summer break.
- No payments will be made for Bank Holidays.
- Any other times such as placement, visits, etc. must be advised and a letter of support from the course tutor stating the time and reason for the extra costs provided.
- Childcare costs must not exceed £160 per week per child.
- Payments will be made directly to the childcare provider, who should submit an invoice to the College once a month.
- No payments will be made in advance. Where a deposit/advance payment is required the student must bear the cost and then claim the monies back from the Learner Support Fund - a receipt will be required.
- Students must inform their childcare provider of the last date of their course in 2010/11 - this is when payments will cease. Should a student need to attend College after that date (eg. for exams or to catch up on course work) they should discuss this with the Learner Adviser, Welfare otherwise all additional costs must be met by the student.
- Students who withdraw from their course must immediately inform the Learner Adviser, Welfare and their childcare provider as funding will cease. Students who withdraw from their course may be asked to repay to the College the amounts paid towards their childcare costs.

### **Payments / Refunds to Students**

Refunds are made by bank transfer to the student or nominated payee. Payment details must be provided with the application form. Refunds for travel, materials, etc. can only be made against a receipt or tickets. Payments can be made in advance directly to a supplier in special circumstances where details of supplier and items are notified. Childcare providers are paid on receipt of invoices. Course fees are paid by internal transfer and any refund arising will be made by bank transfer.

### **Procedure for Appeals**

Students are advised in writing on the award offer and of the reasons if they are not made any offer. They can appeal against this decision. Appeals should be in writing, addressed to the Learner Adviser, Welfare in Learner Services. The Learner Adviser will acknowledge receipt of the appeal to the student and will advise the Head of Learner Services of the appeal. The Head of Learner Services will arrange a meeting with a senior manager who was not involved in the original decision to discuss the appeal. Normally, this would be the Assistant Principal Quality Improvement and Learner Services. The Head of Learner Services and the Learner Adviser, Welfare will attend this meeting. The decision made at this appeal meeting will be final and the student will be advised of the outcome and the reasons that the appeal was upheld or rejected. In some cases, the Head of Learner Services may decide to arrange an appointment with the student to discuss the appeal.

**If you have any queries about the Learner Support Fund, please contact the Learner Adviser, Welfare in Learner Services, 01502 525124, [v.brown@lowestoft.ac.uk](mailto:v.brown@lowestoft.ac.uk)**