

Learner Support Fund Policy 2010/11 For Learners Aged 16-18

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 (YPLA).

Priorities of the Fund

In line with YPLA guidelines, the main priority for LSF funding are those who are economically or socially disadvantaged, who need support with course related costs **and are facing financial difficulty**. In particular the funding exists to respond to hardship needs, particularly those that arise through sudden changes in circumstance where the nationally administered Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme cannot respond to in-year.

Funding may further be prioritised for the following groups of young people:

- carers (own child or other person);
- those in care or leaving care;
- those who are supervised by a Youth Offender Team;
- those who are homeless;
- those in receipt of Income Support;
- those who have been out of education, employment or training for 26 weeks or more;
- Gypsy, Roma or Traveller;
- students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- those who are medically ill.

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 16-18 years or over on 1st September of the academic year.
- **Course** - Students who have been accepted onto, and are studying, a programme of learning funded by the YPLA 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 learners 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 2010/2011 is a gross current household income of **less than £30,810 per year**.

Parental income will be assessed where a student is aged less than 19 years and living in the parental home. The student's own income will be assessed as well as any partner's income if they do not live in the parental home.

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, 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 Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), 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. 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" 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 (over 19 year olds 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, Welfare.

This list is not exhaustive and further advice should be sought from the Learner Adviser, Welfare in Learner Services who may contact the YPLA 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
Exam Resit Fees	Max 100%	Max 50%
Materials Fees	Max 100%	Max 50%
Books	Max £50	Max £50
Equipment	Max £300	Max £150
Other Costs including course trips, university interviews, domestic emergencies etc	At discretion depending on circumstances	At discretion depending on circumstances

Examination Re-sit Fees – are chargeable to all learners, as explained during induction.

Materials Fees – students are advised about these costs at enrolment and if the course is funded by the Learning and Skills Council

Books & Equipment – e.g. uniforms, kits, essential course materials (not ordinary stationery items). Where books and non-consumable equipment are 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.
- Hardship payment towards living/accommodation costs in exceptional circumstances
- Support with domestic emergencies
- Other types of assistance can be requested and considered by the LSF Awards Committee if a letter is submitted outlining the circumstances and costs.

Transport - Please note that according to guidelines from the YPLA **no** assistance can be awarded through the Learner Support Fund for transport costs. Please speak to the Learner Adviser, Welfare for more details about subsidised/discounted travel schemes offered through Local Authority Travel Assistance and the Explore Card (Suffolk).

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 see the Learner Adviser, Welfare for more information or, alternatively, visit www.direct.gov.uk/caretolearn or contact the Learner Support helpline direct on 0800 121 8989.

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.

Signing of the Declaration

The declaration will need to be signed by the student and parent/guardian/carer or in the case of a 16-18 year old student living independently, an appropriate professional person. An appropriate professional person could be, for example, a Connexions PA, Member of Local Authority or Member of a housing trust.

Procedure for Appeals

Students are advised in writing of 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 for 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