

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Policy 2023 - 2024

Introduction

This policy outlines the guidelines for the management and allocation of the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund for the 2023/2024 academic year.

These funds are provided to the College by the government to support learners who are experiencing financial difficulties with essential costs associated with their studies. This could include transport, books and equipment, UK compulsory trips (overseas compulsory trips considered on individual basis) and other essential course related costs.

The funds are available to students undertaking a government funded course but cannot be used to support students undertaking a full cost course. Funds are limited, targeted at those most in need and are allocated on a first come, first served basis. All requests for funding will be considered although it may not always be possible to help. If the funding is exhausted, the College reserves the right to close the fund. Throughout this form the word 'student' will be interchangeable with the word 'learner', both referring to the individual undertaking the programme of study.

Eligibility and Conditions

Eligibility: Learners are eligible to apply for funding if they meet the requirements as stated in the Funding Rules 2023/2024 issued by the Education & Skills Funding Agency.

Eligibility to funding does not give the individual the right to funding as funding is not an entitlement. Assistance awarded to a learner will always be conditional on behaviour, commitment to the course and maintaining a **minimum of 90% attendance**. Colchester Institute reserves the right to remove support due to students' misbehaviour, fraud or if the reputation of the College is brought into disrepute. If the learner does not meet the conditions or withdraws from the course then they may be requested to return equipment and any cash awards they have received.

Awards will be made in accordance with the published guidance from the Education & Skills Funding Agency. While it is recognised that learners face financial pressures, funding is not a right and the College has a duty to make sure that funds are awarded fairly and to the learners most in need.

Application Process

Applicants must complete the relevant application form and clearly identify the support that they feel they need to achieve their course of study. Students aged 19 who started a two year programme before their 19th birthday or aged 19 and over and have an EHCP should apply for funding from the 16-19 Bursary Fund.

Applicants must demonstrate their financial need by providing the income information and supporting evidence as detailed in the application forms. Each application for financial assistance will be considered by a College Fund Administrator and decisions will be made based on the information provided and the eligibility criteria for the different type of award.

These are detailed in the sections below.

For courses starting in September 2023, applications should be submitted online by 1st November 2023. Applications received after this date will be considered on a pro-rata basis subject to need and availability of funds.

19+ Discretionary Learner Support (DLS)

19+ Discretionary Learner Support is aimed at supporting learners aged 19 and over, whose course is not eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan.

This support is aimed at students with a specific financial hardship. It aims to support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners by removing the barriers to education or training.

The College Fund Administrators will determine if the area of financial hardship is:

- Learners aged 19 and over in financial hardship
- Learners aged 20 and over with childcare issues

Hardship Fund

Applications will be considered by a College Fund Administrator according to individual needs and local circumstances and awards may be made for the following:

1. Essential course related costs including trips, books and equipment.
2. Transport to College and/or work placement. As funding is provided by public money, we are required to ensure support given provides the best value for money. Travel support may be in the form of a bus pass, train pass or BACS payment, and cost may be a factor when assessing a travel award
3. Professional membership fees
4. A grant to support the learner with a domestic emergency or extenuating circumstances that would render them unable to start or continue with their learning

Important: The college support fund will not make any reimbursements for items purchased prior to an application form being assessed, unless authorised by the Student Services Manager.

Payment by BACS

Where a payment is made by BACS, the student MUST provide receipts for items / tickets purchased. Failure to produce receipts may result in the student being asked to return the BACS payment and may also affect future funding

Additional information required for 19+ Discretionary Learner Support

Evidence of income/benefit which must be in date and should be **one** of the following:

Qualifying benefits:

Income Support
 Jobseeker's Allowance (income based)
 Employment & Support Allowance (income related)
 Working Tax Credit / Child Tax Credit (2023/24) net annual income + tax credits totalling no more than £30,000
 Child Tax Credit (& not eligible for Working Tax Credit)
 Pension Credit
 Universal Credit (take home pay + universal credit totalling no more than £30,000)

Please be aware that it is the learner's responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any discretionary learner support received from the college, as discretionary learner support payments may affect eligibility to some benefits.

Evidence of Income (student's income & partner's income):

3 most recent payslips

20+ Childcare

If applying for help with childcare, the childcare application form must be completed in addition to the student funding application form.

Targeted support will be provided for students who are at risk of not starting learning, or not continuing learning, as a result of difficulty getting childcare due to the cost.

All Colchester Institute childcare awards will be subject to the provider being Ofsted registered. Providers can include nurseries, childminders, breakfast clubs and after school clubs

Childcare will pay for:

- time spent in timetabled classes or placement and continued nursery and childminder places during the Christmas, Easter and half term holidays
- travel time to and from college
- 100% fees for first two children, 50% for third and fourth children. There is no assistance for any other children
- a maximum award of £7,000 per year per student
- Ofsted registered childcare

Please note that any free government funding for 2, 3 and 4 year olds must be used for college and placement days before additional hours can be paid for with college funding.

Colchester Institute reserves the right to cap childcare fees if they are considered to be excessive.

Childcare will **not** pay for:

- deposits, registration fees, make advance payments or be responsible for late payment fees
- any additional costs incurred as a result of changes in the number of days or hours a child attends their childcare provider, unless previously agreed by the childcare administrator.
- childcare if there is a partner at home who can look after the child/ children

If a learner withdraws from College or has funding declined because attendance has fallen below 90%, the College will take no responsibility for payment of outstanding fees to childcare providers. Students who withdraw will be liable for any childcare costs incurred after their last day of attendance.

Funding is limited and childcare funding applications received when the fund is low or exhausted may be refused.

Colchester Institute reserves the right to alter or amend the childcare funding policy at any time.

Childcare for students under 20

Please contact Care2Learn for assistance with childcare costs: <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>

Appeals

Learners can appeal against decisions taken by the College Fund Administrators in writing to the Student Services Manager.

Please note: Applications for financial help are valid for one academic year only. Should you return to College in September 2024 and still require financial assistance, a new application form must be completed and up to date supporting evidence supplied.