

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Policy 2026 - 2027

Introduction

This policy outlines the guidelines for the management and allocation of the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (Bursary) for the 2026/2027 academic year.

These funds are provided to the College by the government and are aimed at supporting learners who are experiencing financial difficulties with essential costs associated with their studies. This could include transport, books, equipment, meals, specialist clothing, travel to placement and university open days, 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 [Adult skills fund: funding rules 2026 to 2027](#) issued by the Adult Skills Fund (ASF).

Conditions: Assistance awarded to a learner will always be conditional on behaviour, commitment to the course and maintaining an **acceptable attendance rate**. Colchester Institute reserves the right to remove support due to students' misbehaviour, attendance, 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 ASF. 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 online 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 students who are aged 19 to 24 at the 31st August 2026 and have an Education, Health and Care Plan (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 following sections. Each application for financial assistance will be considered by a College Student Finance Advisor and decisions will be made based on the information provided and the eligibility criteria.

For courses starting in September 2026, online bursary applications will be open in July and all application should be submitted by 1st November 2026. Applications received after this date will be considered on a pro-rata basis subject to need and availability of funds. During busy periods, it can take up to 15 working days to assess your application and we may contact you for further information.

If your application is successful, we will tell you what you have been awarded and how the award will be made (i.e. bus ticket, train ticket, uniform order, etc.). If an award is a cash award (BACS Payments) we will advise when you can expect to receive any payment.

If your application is unsuccessful, we will write to you explaining why.

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Bursary

Discretionary Bursary is aimed at supporting learners aged 19 and over whose household net income plus benefits is below **£35,000** and their course is not eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan. Learner support is available to provide financial support for learners with a specific financial hardship preventing them from taking part/continuing in learning. The College's Student Finance Team will identify the learner's needs within the following 'categories':

- **Hardship funding** – general financial support for financially disadvantaged learners to support participation learning
- **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 costs. Applications for childcare must be submitted to college in person on a separate paper form
- **Care to Learn** top up for 19-year-olds (paper form is needed)
- **ICT devices and connectivity** – to support disadvantaged learners who can't undertake online delivery without this provision

Hardship Fund

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

- **Course-related costs**, including books, equipment, essential course trips, specialist clothing, and meals at college/placement.
- **Transport costs**, 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 maybe a factor when assessing a travel award.
- **Additional Fees**, including examination fees, accreditation fees, professional membership fees, registration fees, DBS, etc.
- **Domestic emergencies and emergency accommodation** provided by others, or by providing items or services or cash direct to the learner, this can be in the form of a grant or repayable loan provided by the college.

In exceptional circumstances, the hardship funds can assist with course fees for learners who need financial support to start or stay in learning. However, the learner must pay a portion of the course fee as determined by the Sn. Student finance Advisor. If a course could be funded by the Advanced Learner Loan, the Hardship Fund would not cover any portion of the course fees.

No travel award will be made if the learner lives less than 1 mile away from the College.

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. Also, BACS payments are available to asylum seekers, if they are eligible for provision, for transport support when no other options are available.

Students qualifying for awards in term 1 will continue to be supported in terms 2 and 3 **providing the learners are working towards achieving their qualification and keeping good attendance rates.**

Important: The college support fund will not make any reimbursements for items purchased prior to your form being assessed, unless authorised by the Senior Student Finance Advisor.

Additional information required for the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Bursary

The learner **MUST** provide in date evidence of their/their household income for their application to be considered. The income can be one of the following:

- Employed and no benefits claimed (annual take home pay totalling no more than £35,000)
- Employed and on Universal Credit (UC) (annual take home pay + UC payments totalling no more than £35,000)
- Income Support (IS)
- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) (income based)
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (income related)
- Pension Credit (PC)
- Unemployed and on Universal Credit (UC payments totalling no more than £35,000)
- Unemployed (no benefits claimed)
- Asylum Seeker (No Work)

Supporting evidence

Supporting Evidence as listed below must be submitted online along with the online application form. Applications from households with an income exceeding £35,000 per annum are not normally considered. However, if you feel that your household is in financial hardship, please submit an application, together with a supporting statement and evidence of the serious financial difficulties being experienced

Living with parents

If you live with your parents/guardians, both your own income/benefits (if any) and your parents'/guardians' household income and financial circumstances will be taken into account when assessing eligibility for a discretionary bursary, regardless of whether you consider yourself financially independent. Students living in the parental/guardian home may apply for a discretionary bursary where the combined household income is below £35,000 per annum.

Living independently / with a partner or spouse

If you live independently, your application will be means tested against your income and benefits (if any). If you have a partner / spouse, your partner / spouse's income will also be taken into account.

Evidence required for the 19+ discretionary bursary

Income Support	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months or current bank statement showing income support payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Jobseeker's Allowance (income based)	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months confirming that jobseeker's allowance is INCOME BASED. If letter more than 3 months old, please also provide current bank statement showing JSA payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Employment and Support Allowance (income related)	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months confirming that employment and support allowance is INCOME RELATED. If letter more than 3 months old, please also provide current bank statement showing ESA payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Pension Credit	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months or current bank statement showing pension credit payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Employed and no benefits claimed (annual take home pay totalling no more than £35,000)	Last 3 months' worth of payslips - if self-employed, company registration form or tax return form also required
Employed and on Universal Credit (annual take home pay + UC payments totalling no more than £35,000)	Last 3 months universal credit payment statements – all pages (can be accessed on your UC account); if self-employed, company registration form or tax return form also required
Unemployed and on Universal Credit (UC payments totalling no more than £35,000)	Last 3 months universal credit payment statements – all pages (can be accessed on your UC account)
Unemployed (no benefits claimed)	Evidence of the source of income must be provided
Asylum seeker	ARC card. If work permitted, student need to confirm if they are employed or not and provide last 3 months payslips if working

Appeals

Learners can appeal against decisions made by the College Fund Administrators in writing to the Head of Student Services to student.finance@colchester.ac.uk. If you are still unhappy with the decision, you can raise a complaint following Colchester Institute's Complaint Procedure [Concerns and Complaints Form - Colchester Institute](#).

Please note: Applications for financial support are valid for one academic year only. Should you return to College in September 2027 and still require financial assistance, a new application form must be completed and up to date supporting evidence supplied.

For all applicants, please be aware that if you (your parents) are in receipt of benefit from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and you received an award from the bursary fund, it is your responsibility to inform the DWP about this award, because DWP may decide the learner support payment may impact those benefits.

(All figures are correct at the time of printing)