

The Chesterfield College Group

Discretionary Learner Support Fund and Bursary Policy 2024/25



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Impact Assessment status	In preparing the Policy, any potential disproportionate impact it might have upon individuals with protected characteristics, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, have been carefully considered. It is the conclusion of the College Group that the Policy does not adversely impact on individuals with any of the protected characteristics.
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Aim

The policy aims to ensure that:

- Students facing financial hardship can access the appropriate financial support during their time at college to maximise participation and increase retention and achievement.
- The college fulfils its responsibility to ensure that bursaries are awarded appropriately in accordance with funding guidance and the aims of the scheme.

Scope

This policy and associated operating procedures apply to Chesterfield College, which includes our subsidiary companies: Training Services 2000 Ltd (Learning Unlimited Derby), Learning Unlimited ATA Ltd, Recruit Unlimited Ltd and Chesterfield College Enterprises Ltd.

Policy Statements

Chesterfield College receives an allocation of funds from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to support eligible students studying further education courses funded by the ESFA with the costs of participating in education and training post 16.

To ensure finance is not a barrier to recruitment, retention, and success, the college will promote ESFA funds and other sources of financial assistance. This policy states how the funds are allocated and prioritised.

There can be no virement between the 16-19, 19+ Discretionary, Advanced Learner Loan, and Free Meals funds.

A summary of this policy is available in other formats upon request. Reference to bursaries and funds available to support students will also be made in all full-time and part-time prospectuses.

Students who apply for any of the funds available will be assessed individually and awarded support based on their financial need. Please note:

- Bursaries are subject to available funds and eligibility does not guarantee entitlement to funds.
- Funds will be allocated to students who meet the eligibility criteria on a 'first come first served' basis, with any funds that become available being reallocated to those on the waiting list.
- Bursary payments are subject to students maintaining satisfactory levels of attendance and behaving in line with college policies and procedures.
- Bursary awards only cover one academic year, and students must re-apply for support on an annual basis.

Bursary support provided through Chesterfield College will take the form of the provision of services or equipment that will enable students to overcome some of the barriers to participation which they may face. Cash payments may also be deemed appropriate in a minority of situations.

The college is committed to doing everything it can to support its students, however bursary funding is limited and cannot be guaranteed. The bursary fund is not intended to support extra-curricular

activities, costs not related to education, or to provide learning support and other services that the college might provide to students, for example counselling, mentoring, or extra tutoring.

Application

Applications for financial support must be made in person by completing a paper-based form or via the online application portal which can be accessed from the student's Prospect Learner Hub account. Applications will only be processed from enrolled students as defined by the college.

All students must submit their application as soon as possible as funds are limited and are awarded on a 'first come first served' basis. The only exception to this is students applying for the 16-19 Vulnerable Young Person Bursary, which is guaranteed for all eligible students.

All income and benefits (including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) are considered when calculating total household income. The college does not take into account Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, or Personal Independence Payments when calculating total household income.

Assessment of Income

The assessment of income for all groups of students and, where applicable, the parents of students, will be made using clear and consistent criteria which takes into consideration the payments and payments in kind received from employment, benefits, and other sources, and will be clearly outlined in the application process. Applicants and, where applicable, their parents, will be responsible for the completeness and accuracy of the information used to assess eligibility.

Withdrawal and Clawback of Payment

Students are expected to meet minimum standards of attendance and participation throughout their programme. Failure to do so may result in the withdrawal or clawback of bursary payments.

Where a student has been absent for a period of four consecutive weeks or more, excluding holidays, and where a student has made the decision to withdraw from their programme of study, all payments of student support will be stopped. Payments will restart when attendance restarts and meets agreed minimum standards.

Wherever possible, support will be provided to students in the form of travel passes, equipment, access to trips, or vouchers for meals. Where Chesterfield College Group believes a cash payment has been made in error or obtained by a student or their household by fraudulent methods, it will seek to claim back this payment by all methods up to and including the employment of external debt management agencies in order that this money can be employed in the support of other students.

Provision of Bank Details

Where a cash payment is to be made to a student, this will usually be via BACS to the bank account of the student. The bank details provided by the student must be provided on a signed Chesterfield College BACS form. Students who do not have a basic bank account should be encouraged to open one as part of the application process.

Students under 18 who do not hold a bank account may request for funds to be paid into an alternative account. This must be the account of a parent or guardian and notified upon completion of the College Bursary Form.

It is expected that students aged 18 and over have their own bank account. Exceptional circumstances outside of this will be considered by the Bursary Team.

Protection of the Bursary System from Abuse

Where a student in receipt of bursary is withdrawn from the college and later reinstated, the student will not automatically continue to receive bursary funds.

Implementation

16-19 Bursary

To be considered eligible for the 16-19 Bursary in 2024/25 the student must be:

- Resident in the UK for 3 years or more.
- Enrolled on a 16-19 study programme funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).
- Aged 16, 17, or 18 on 31st August 2024.
- Aged 19 or over and continuing a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (19+ continuer).
- Aged 19-24 on 31st August 2024 and have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Have a household income of £29,000 or below.

Students aged under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible for support from the 16-19 Bursary Fund.

The 16-19 Bursary Fund has three student priority groups:

Priority Group 1

For students participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more, priority for a guaranteed bursary to a maximum value of £1,200 will be given to young people identified as a Vulnerable Young Person through the following criteria:

- In care; or
- Care leaver; or
- Receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own name because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner; or
- Receiving Personal Independence Payments (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA) as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit in their own name.

Young people in Priority Group 1 will receive a combination of cash payments and support with direct course-related costs, meals, and transport up to a total award value of £1,200. Students will be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on assessment of the types of costs they have and will not be automatically awarded £1,200.

Students on a study programme lasting less than 30 weeks will be awarded a bursary on a pro-rata basis as appropriate based on an assessment of actual need.

Evidence of the above must be provided and retained to support an application. For students in care and care leavers, this must be a signed letter or email confirmation from a local authority appointed Personal Advisor.

Priority Group 2

A discretionary bursary may be given to young people who do not qualify for the guaranteed bursary but who have a household income of under £29,000. The college will make discretionary awards based upon a proven hardship need, which must be substantiated by evidence and will be retained in accordance with audit requirements. Eligibility for Free Meals is determined by guidance provided by the ESFA.

Allocation of discretionary 16-19 funds will be prioritised as follows:

1. Costs directly attributed to a study programme, e.g., materials, uniforms, equipment to allow practical skills to be practiced and developed outside of college.
2. Support for Free Meals where the student is eligible.
3. Support with the cost of meals in extenuating circumstances if the student is not entitled to Free Meals.
4. Subsidising public transport costs for college attendance (if the student lives more than 2 miles from the college).

Successful course-related cost awards will, where possible, be paid directly to the student's curriculum area. However, where a student has purchased an item and can evidence this, payment will be made directly to the student.

All Priority Group 2 awards are subject to the availability of funds.

Priority Group 3

Students whose household income ranges from £29,000 to £41,500 will be eligible for support with travel costs via a subsidised termly bus pass (subject to availability of passes) providing they live more than 2 miles from the college. Where a student lives more than 2 miles from the college but cannot access a Stagecoach bus route, a BACS contribution up to a maximum of £600 split across three terms may, in exceptional circumstances, be awarded towards public transport costs.

All Priority Group 3 awards are subject to the availability of funds.

Childcare Funding for Students Aged 19 or Under

Childcare funding for all students aged 19 or under is covered by the Government's Care to Learn scheme. Further information can be accessed on the Care to Learn website (<https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>) or via the Learner Support Helpline (0800 121 8989).

Free Meals

Chesterfield College Group will administer funds provided by the ESFA for the provision of Free Meals as per guidance provided by the ESFA. These awards will comply with the eligibility criteria detailed below:

1. Age

Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31st August 2024 to be eligible for free meals. Students who turn 19 during the 2024/25 academic year will remain eligible for free meals until the end of the academic year or to the end of their study programme, whichever is sooner.

Students aged 19 to 24 on 31st August 2024 who are subject to an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) are also entitled to free meals while attending their provision if they meet the eligibility criteria.

The following groups of students are not eligible for free meals in further education support:

- Students aged 19 and over on 31st August 2024, unless they have an EHCP.
- Apprentices, including those with an EHCP.

2. Eligible Benefits

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. For the purposes of eligibility for free meals, disadvantage is defined as the student being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one of the following benefits:

- Income Support.
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- The Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit.
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC.
- Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit).
- Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any other benefits).

A student is only eligible to receive free meals once they, or a parent/guardian on their behalf, have made a successful application to the college.

Working Tax Credit is not a qualifying benefit for free meals, and a parent or student who is in receipt of Working Tax Credit only is not entitled to free meals. However, if a parent or student is in receipt of one of the other qualifying benefits (with the exception of Child Tax Credit) as well as Working Tax Credit then they are eligible for free meals (i.e., the other qualifying benefit takes precedence over Working Tax Credit).

3. Payment

The standard rate of payment for Free Meals allowance is £2.41 per day for eligible students. However, Chesterfield College Group will boost this allowance to £3.50 per day for the 2024/25 academic year. This allowance is transferred internally from bursary funds to the college refectory where students sign for a meal each day that they attend college.

On some remote college sites, payment of free meals allowance by cash is the only possible option. Where this is the case, the college aims to make payments in three instalments at the beginning of each term.

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF)

To be considered eligible for the 19+ DLSF in 2024/25 the student must be:

- Aged 19 or over on 31st August 2024 (20 or over for childcare support).
- Eligible for Adult Skills Fund funding for their course.

- Enrolled on a programme of learning funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Students on courses funded via an Advanced Learner Loan should see the section for Advanced Learner Loan Bursary below.
- In receipt of an individual (if living alone, with parents, or with friends/flatmates/other relatives) or household (if living with a spouse/partner) income of £31,000 or less.

Eligibility is assessed at the point of enrolment. Claims for fee reduction as part of DLSF will only be accepted up to 45 days after enrolment.

Students remain responsible for all correspondence with the Department for Work and Pensions and must inform them of any support funds received as this may affect eligibility for some benefits.

The DLSF provides support to students aged 19+ who are experiencing financial hardship. The fund can be used to help students with the costs associated with further education that are directly attributed to a learning programme, such as materials, uniforms, childcare costs, and transport costs. The college may also be able to offer help with unexpected hardship.

For students who are not eligible for full fee remission for their tuition fees under the criteria set by the ESFA, a contribution of up to 75% of the tuition fee set by the college will be made through the DLSF where the student meets the eligibility criteria for the fund. The remaining balance will need to be paid as per the terms for payment of course fees laid out in the college's Fees and Refunds Policy (FIN09).

The DLSF aims to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students with a specific financial hardship who otherwise would not have attended college. The success of the scheme will be measured by analysing the attendance, retention, and achievement rates of the students supported through the scheme and comparing those rates with overall college performance.

More details regarding eligibility can be found in the ESFA Funding Rules. Bursaries cannot be paid to students on commercial or higher education courses, waged apprentices, or people released on temporary licence from custody.

Where a student is drawing down an Advanced Learner Loan but is also enrolled to an ESFA-funded course, the college will use its discretion as to which bursary fund to allocate.

Childcare Funding

Students claiming discretionary support with childcare costs can only do so if they are aged 20 or over on the start date of their course. Students aged 19 or under can claim childcare support through the Government's Care to Learn scheme. Through DLSF, a student can claim support with childcare costs up to a maximum of £2,500 per academic year, per child over the duration of a 35-week study programme. Where students reach the maximum £2,500 award cap before the end of their programme, subject to necessary funds being available, further financial support may be provided to cover childcare costs. Where a study programme is shorter than 35 weeks, this will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

If a student's childcare costs exceed their DLSF allocation, the student is liable for any additional fees incurred. Funds will only be used to pay for childcare that is approved and registered with Ofsted; informal childcare arrangements (e.g., with family members) cannot be funded. The responsibility/contract for childcare costs is between the student and the childcare provider. Chesterfield College will not take responsibility for any disputes between the student and childcare

provider. All payments for childcare will be made directly to the agreed provider on submission of their invoice. Should a student withdraw from the college at any point during the academic year, financial support for childcare will end on the last date of recorded attendance and the student will be liable for all outstanding fees. Payments will reflect the student's attendance and will be paid to the childcare provider in arrears.

The amount of funding available for childcare is limited and there is no guaranteed entitlement to the funds. In exceptional circumstances and where funds allow, the maximum award may be increased. The college reserves the right to withhold payments if the student's attendance falls below the minimum standards for attendance, targets, and progress.

Asylum Seekers

Asylum Seekers are eligible for support via the 19+ DLSF. This support, however, cannot take the form of any cash payment. Asylum Seekers can only be supported by 'in kind' awards. These will be one, all, or a combination of the following (subject to availability and assessed need):

- Subsidised college bus pass.
- Equipment to support practice outside of college.
- Stationery and other materials.

Once an Asylum Seeker achieves Refugee status all normal DLSF rules apply, and cash payments can be made where applicable.

Advanced Learner Loan Bursary

To be considered eligible for support from the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary, students should be:

- Enrolled and funding their learning through an approved Advanced Learner Loan via the Student Loans Company.
- In receipt of an individual (if living alone, with parents, or with friends/flatmates/other relatives) or household (if living with a spouse/partner) income of £31,000 or less.

This bursary forms the ESFA's commitment to additional student support requirements and allocation of this fund to the college is based on a percentage of actual Advanced Learner Loans applied for by students. This subsidiary bursary for financial aid can be used for the following purposes:

- To finance Learning Support provided in addition to the course. This will be assessed as part of the recruitment process in consultation with the relevant curriculum area.
- Costs directly attributed to a learning programme, such as materials, uniforms and kits, childcare costs, and transport costs.
- Unexpected hardship (at the discretion of the college).

Apprenticeship Bursary for Care Leavers

Students on apprenticeship programmes are employed rather than in education. They are therefore not eligible for Bursary Funds. The only exception to this is apprentices eligible for the Care Leavers Bursary.

Apprentices are eligible to receive a £3,000 bursary if they have been in the care of a UK local authority. This is defined as:

- A young person aged 16 or 17 who has been looked after by a UK local authority or health and social care trust for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still looked after.
- A young person aged 16 or 17 who has left care within the UK after their 16th birthday and before leaving care had been looked after by a UK local authority or health and social care trust for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14.
- A young person who is under the age of 25 who, before turning 18, had been looked after by a UK local authority or health and social care trust for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14.

Evidence of the above must be provided and retained to support an application. This must be a signed letter or email confirmation from a local authority appointed Personal Advisor.

The care leavers bursary payment will be paid as follows:

- The first instalment of £1,000 will be paid 60 days after the apprentice's learning start date if the apprentice is still undertaking their apprenticeship.
- The second instalment of £1,000 will be paid 120 days after the apprentice's learning start date if the apprentice is still undertaking their apprenticeship.
- The third and final instalment of £1,000 will be paid 300 days after the apprentice's learning start date if the apprentice is still undertaking their apprenticeship.

The care leavers bursary is a one-off claim, and an eligible apprentice must only receive the bursary once. Where an apprentice leaves their apprenticeship before receiving the full bursary, they will still be entitled to further payments on a new apprenticeship until they have received £3,000 in total.

If the apprentice is found to have accepted the payment when they are ineligible, the government will require it to be repaid.

Course-Related Costs

Awards for kit, materials, and uniforms are available up to the amount identified by the curriculum area and described as **essential** for that course. In some cases, students will already have some or all the kit/equipment required and will not be granted funds to duplicate or replace such equipment.

Transport

Only travel by public transport will be considered, and the cheapest option will be awarded.

The 16-19 Bursary, 19+ DLSF and Advanced Learner Loan Bursary may support the costs of coming to the college for students who are travelling more than 2 miles to their place of study but who are not on a college-subsidised bus route/have a subsidised college bus pass. The maximum award will be £600.

Emergency Payments

The college will retain 5% of the annual allocation of support funds for emergency and late payments. A separate procedure applies in exceptional circumstances for granting emergency support to the most vulnerable students, which is approved by the Assistant Principal Student Experience and Wellbeing and/or Assistant Principal Finance, IT and Estates, or an appropriate deputy.

Administration Charge

The college can utilise up to 5% of the total DLSF allocation, capped in line with historic costs, to pay for the administration of the scheme, in line with ESFA guidelines.

Communication Flow

The Discretionary Learner Support Fund and Bursary Policy is available for staff and students to view on the college website. All staff with responsibility for processing application forms and payments within the Student and Apprentice Services and Finance departments are familiar with and work to the policy and procedures outlined within this document.

Regular meetings take place between Student and Apprentice Services and Finance to monitor processing of applications and payments, and monthly reports are created by MIS to support this process.

The Student and Apprentice Services Team have developed an introduction to the service that provides information and guidance around the college bursary and DLSF, which is delivered to cross-college staff and students as part of the induction process.

Monitoring

College staff involved with administering the bursary scheme will comply with college policy on the storage and transfer of information supplied in the course of application and payment.

The annual return to the ESFA will be completed by the due deadline.

This policy and accompanying procedures will be reviewed by Student and Apprentice Services and Finance on an annual basis and submitted to the Finance and Corporate Services Committee for approval.

Complaints concerning failure to comply with this policy or published procedures should be made in accordance with the College's Complaints and Compliments Policy and Procedure (CSE06).

Associated Information and Guidance

ESFA guidelines on financial support for 16-19 students: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students>

ESFA adult skills fund funding rules for 2024/25:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-skills-fund-funding-rules-for-2024-to-2025/adult-skills-fund-funding-rules-2024-to-2025>

Advanced Learner Loans Bursary guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan/bursary-fund>

Related Chesterfield College Group Policies and Documents

- Fees and Refunds Policy (FIN09)
- Higher Education Bursary Policy (FIN08)
- Complaints and Compliments Policy (CSE06)

