Southport
Education
Group

# 19 + Discretionary Learner Support Fund Policy and Procedures

# 2026-2027

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# 1. Policy Statement

The College is committed to distributing the Discretionary Learner Support Fund in a fair and consistent way. Funding is to be provided to increase access, retention and achievement. It can be used to help students overcome financial barriers to learning and promote wider access to ensure that people from all backgrounds can take part in learning. This Policy is inclusive, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups. The College is committed to ensuring that no student is disadvantaged in accessing travel support due to their gender identity, disability, ethnicity, religion, or any other protected characteristic.

# 2. Discretionary Learner Support Fund (dLSF)

The dLSF is separated into 2 areas:

- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Funds including Hardship Funds
- 20+ Childcare Funding

The main purpose of the 19+ dLSF is to support learners with a specific financial need that could prevent them participating in learning. Funds should only be allocated to learners where a means assessment has identified a need for that individual.

Students who are aged 19+ and in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan are not eligible for this fund; they must make an application to the Advanced Learner Loan Fund.

# 3. Application Process and Documentary Evidence

The application process for funds will commence in early July 2026. Applications will be accepted until such time as funding is fully utilised and will be assessed in line with available resources.

## 3.1 dLSF 19+ Application Process

For 19+ funding, including applications for travel passes, students must complete an application using the online student support bursary service: Pay My Student

In accordance with the Department for Education guidelines, documentary-evidence is required to assess income and / or identification of being in a priority group. Supporting evidence may include, but is not exhaustive:

- Pay slips
- P60
- Proof of earning for self-employment (SA302)
- Bank statements
- Universal Credit monthly statements
- Proof of benefit awards (letters from DWP / Job Centre)

The ‘application date’ will be the date the completed form is received together with all relevant documentation.

Course Leaders and Students-will need to provide evidence of items needed where possible to support their request e.g. College order forms for kit and uniforms, signed book list from tutors, trips, receipts for individual items etc. If students are in digital poverty they can speak with their Progress Tutor/Course Leader or Safeguarding and Welfare Team, the College has a bank of loanable laptops which can be used for the duration of the course.

Students can apply for support with course related costs including:

- essential course trips within England
- books
- equipment
- Support with domestic emergencies and emergency accommodation provided by others or by providing items or services or cash direct to the learner (this may need to be repaid this will be discussed with the Welfare Officer).
- Transport costs
- Examination fees
- Accreditation fees, professional membership fees and fees or charges due to the external bodies e.g. insurance for Diploma in Counselling students
- In exceptional circumstances, you can apply to for funds to assist with course fees, please see the Welfare Officer for further information.

## 3.2 Childcare Funds 20+

Students can register their interest in applying for funding once they have made an application to study at the College. Funds are allocated on a strict first come first served basis. Students are asked to provide the same financial information as for dLSF 19+ but must also provide evidence of the provider being Ofsted-registered (Early Years Register for children aged 0-5, Compulsory Childcare Register for 5-8 and Voluntary Childcare Register for over 8’s).

Support and applications can be sought via the Student Advisor on 01704 392704 or by emailing guidance@southport.ac.uk

## 3.3 Travel

Full time students who are aged 19+ and live more than 1 mile away from College can apply for a travel pass. For more information, please see Travel Passes and Funds Policy and Procedures.

Students who do not wish to apply for a travel pass can apply for help towards travel costs e.g. fuel 25p per mile per timetabled day. This cost will be capped at the cost of the cheapest ticket / pass available on public transport. Applications follow the normal Discretionary Learner Support Fund process. Car park charges / fees are not supported by the bursary.

Support for travel costs are assessed by attendance and will be assessed based on L6W (last 6 weeks) prior to the payment week, attendance is not calculated using year to date.

# 4. Eligibility – dLSF 19+ and Childcare 20+

## 4.1 Eligibility Criteria

The Learner Support Fund aims to help eligible students who need additional financial support throughout their time at College to complete their course. The fund can help with travel, course related costs and childcare costs.

Eligibility is assessed in a few possible ways; if a student is in receipt of a means tested benefit, then proof of this benefit is sufficient evidence for eligibility, or if they have a household income of less than £38,500 per annum net again this would be sufficient.

Students make applications via the PayMyStudent system, they will need to provide their most recent payslips, P60, most recent Universal Credit Notice.

Evidence of household income / means tested benefits / award letters for a minimum of a three-month period will be required. All supporting documentation must be clear and visible. It should include name, address and all sections and/or pages.

## 4.2 Exemptions

Students in the following categories are not eligible for dLSF:

The following students are NOT eligible to apply for Learner Support Funds:

- Students who are aged 24 or over at the start of their course and who are enrolling on a Level 3 or Level 4 course which is eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan.
- Student on Work Based or Community Learning Courses
- Waged Apprentices
- Learners who are in custody or released on temporary licence
- Asylum seekers are eligible to apply for Learner Support funds (except for the types of courses listed above) but if successful in their application can only be awarded 'payments in kind' for example, travel passes or books/equipment purchased on their behalf.

## 4.3 Residency Eligibility Criteria for dLSF 19+ and Childcare 20+

The residency eligibility criteria for dLSF are aligned to the residency criteria from the DfE which can be found on their web page.

### 4.4 Refugees

Refugees are not required to meet the three-year residency rule if their refugee status was confirmed in the three years prior to starting the course.

## 5. Allocation of dLSF 19+ Payments

All full and part time students aged 19+ can apply for a maximum of £1000 per person per year. Need is assessed by the Student Finance Co-ordinator. In the first instances funds for kits, uniforms and trips will be transferred directly to the relevant department. Other allocations will be made via Bank Automated Credit System (BACS), and in exceptional circumstances a cash payment maybe made.

Where an attendance issue arises for a student (e.g. attendance falls below 90%) the Positive Behaviour Policy may be invoked. This will happen only if the issues of attendance have not managed to be addressed informally with the Progress Tutor/Course Tutor and student. If this fails significantly for either a full or part time student, then funding may be withdrawn.

When funds are used to buy equipment for individuals, the equipment will remain the property of the College, this should be returned to the College when practical, taking into consideration such factors as hygiene, health and safety, and wear and tear.

## 6. Allocation of Childcare 20+

Students can register their interest in funding from the point of an application being made for a course. Funds are allocated on a strict first come first served basis.

Applicants should note there is government funded support in place, but where learners need to continue with employment alongside their College course, students should ensure they accessing all of the government support on offer * and where needed the Childcare Funding can top up the extra costs, if a learner is working in addition to their course it maybe that proof of working days is required to support any top up fees.

Funding for childcare is allocated based on the maximum number of days a student is timetabled to attend the College site (September-June, inclusive of College holidays and bank holidays).

Contributions to the cost of deposits, booking or reservation fees will be considered once the learner has started their course and been on programme for the first semester.

* https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-2-year-olds-claim-benefits
https://www.gov.uk/check-eligible-free-childcare-if-youre-working

## 7. Emergency Hardship Funds

Hardship funds are one off payments for students who are facing extreme crisis e.g. Homelessness, sudden change in domestic circumstances and need for food, travel, clothing (this list is not exhaustive). These funds should be primarily allocated by the Director Student Wellbeing / Organisational DSL so that any other necessary support is accessed/ arranged. In the absence of the Director Student Wellbeing / Organisational DSL, a member of the Welfare or Safeguarding Team can allocate funding. Any student receiving support from this fund must also be immediately referred to the Welfare and Safeguarding team to ensure all their needs are being addressed.

## 8. Tuition Fee Scheme and Exam Fee Waiver

All students aged 19+ who do not receive an exam waiver for exam fees are asked to complete an Exam Fee form on enrolment, assessment for the scheme is dependent upon circumstances.

The College will issue eligible, 19+ students exam fee support bursary, if the household income is less than £60,000 (Gross) and they are not in receipt of any other financial assistance, direct or indirect, to meet the costs of their course at the College. Students will fill in a self-declaration form at enrolment.

## 9. Appeals

Any student, who is dissatisfied with the decision made regarding the allocation of funds, may appeal in writing to the Finance Manager within 15 term time days of receipt of letter.

The Appeals Panel will be made of a member of the Senior Leadership Team, and 2 managers .

The Student Finance Co-ordinator will present the information to the panel.

The student will be informed of the decision of the Panel within 10 term time days of receipt of the letter of appeal.

## 10. Essential Elements

This policy and procedures will operate transparent, consistent systems, with clear criteria for eligibility allowing funds to be targeted to those students in financial hardship within the Department for Education guidelines. This is ensured by:

- Procedures / guidelines for staff, updated annually
- Staff training and development meetings

A variety of methods will be used to publicise the availability of funds, including the application procedure and appeals procedure. This includes;

- Admissions / offer letters
- Information from admissions tutors at interview
- Information at the point of enrolment
- Information at Induction Fair
- Posters, multi-media screen
- College web page

## 11. Monitoring Effectiveness

Termly updates will be provided to the Senior Leadership Team. An annual report to SLT, Corporation and Equality and Diversity Committee will ensure compliance from an EDI perspective across all Learner Support Fund policies and identify links between financial support and retention and achievement.

## 12. Confidentiality, Data Protection and Retention

All personal and sensitive information will be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Common Law Duty of Confidentiality.

The Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) are not only restrictions on disclosure of information about the College, but they are also bound by a common law duty of confidentiality. This duty prevents the College from releasing information about students or other stakeholders, without their consent. This duty applies to manual records as well as information held on computers.

Information which must be treated as confidential includes the names and addresses of students and any other information about them which is not publicly known, i.e. “personal data”. Accordingly, to ensure that the College does not breach its duty, no information, even if it only exists in printed form, should be disclosed unless all the relevant procedures have been followed.

All documents are held for the assessment of eligibility to the fund and audit purposes only. All information will be stored securely and treated sensitively. All documents will be kept by the College for 6 years.

## 13. Administration of the Fund

- There can be no virement between 16-19 and 19+ funds.

- The AEB cannot be used to support learners receiving an Adult Learner Loan.
- Administration of the fund is capped at 5% of the value of the spend of the 2026-27 allocation.

## 14. Policy Update

The procedures will be reviewed annually in line with the release of the dLSF Guidance and are the responsibility of the Director Student Wellbeing and Finance Manager.

## 15. Other Sources of Funding

The College operates or has links to a number of other sources of funding. For further details of any of the funds listed below, please contact the Student Hub.

- Travel Passes & Funds Policy and Procedure
- Hardship Fund
- 16-19 Bursary Fund
- Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund
- Charitable Organisations e.g. Pinecone Trust, Bishop David Sheppard Trust

**Useful Contacts**

Student Finance Team -- studentfinance.team@southport.ac.uk  Student Hub – 01704 392704

Pay My Student