



DurhamLearn

19+ Learner Support and Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Funding Policy 2024/25

Version	Date Completed	Approved by	Date Approved
Version 1	24/07/2024	David Lee/ Donna Ross	

Aim of the Policy

The aim of the 19+ Learner Support/Bursary Fund is to provide financial support for learners with a specific financial hardship preventing them from taking part or continuing in learning. This policy outlines how DCC's DurhamLearn service will manage applications for this support.

What is Learner Support/Bursary Funding?

The 19+ Learner Support/Bursary Fund (LSF) helps learners aged 19 and above who are experiencing financial difficulties meaning that they will struggle to meet the cost associated with their learning whilst undertaking further education courses funded by the North East Combined Authority (North East CA) either via the Adult Skills Fund or an Advanced Learner Loan.

DCC's DurhamLearn service receives Learner Support/Bursary Funds from North East CA for:

Hardship Funding - general financial support for financially disadvantaged learners to support participation in learning, for example:

- course-related costs, including course trips, books and equipment (where costs are not already included in the funding)
- support with 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 us.
- transport costs (but not a block contribution to post-16 transport partnerships or routinely fund transport costs covered in a local authority's legal duty for learners of sixth-form age)
- accreditation fees, professional membership fees and any fees or charges due to external bodies
- examination fees (**not Advanced Learner Loans Bursary**)
- registration fees (**not Advanced Learner Loans Bursary**)
- to support learners on a traineeship including the work placement element

In addition to the above any learner experiencing short term financial hardship, including Emergency Food, can request one off assistance through the Learner Support Fund. This can be accessed through their Tutor who would complete the Learner Support Fund one-off support request form with them or on their behalf.

NB In exceptional circumstances and for Adult Skills Fund funded learners ONLY (not Advanced Learner Loans) support may be available towards the cost of course fees, where a learner does not already qualify for full funding as outlined below.

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. Funding is available to pay for childcare with a childminder, provider or childminder agency, registered with Ofsted.

Learner Support/Bursary funds cannot be used to:

- fund informal childcare, such as that provided by a relative
- set up childcare places or to make a financial contribution to the costs of a crèche
- fund childcare for learners aged under 20 on the first day of learning; learners under the age of 20 will be directed to the 'Care to Learn' programme
- top up childcare payments for those aged 20 years or older receiving 'Care to Learn' payments

Residential access funding – to support North East CA funded Adult Skills Fund or Advanced Learner Loans learners (where you need to live away from home to access provision).

ICT devices and connectivity (not Advanced Learner Loans) - to support disadvantaged learners who cannot undertake online delivery, for instance if you do not have:

- internet access at home, and/or
- a suitable device, for example a laptop or tablet, to complete the necessary online course work

Any IT devices provided will only be loaned out to learners and must be returned at the end of your learning to allow them to be re-used by other learners. You must sign a declaration, confirming:

- you will return the device when your online learning aim(s) is complete, or if you leave before completing your learning
- you will return the device in the same condition in which you received it

If an eligible learner requests help with any other items not listed above, this should be referred to the Curriculum Manager for advice.

Eligibility

All learners accessing Learner Support/Bursary funds must meet the North East CA general eligibility criteria for funding in terms of residency and:

Adult Skills – learners aged 19 years or older on 31 August within the 2024 to 2025 funding year or, on the 31 August in the year in which the course starts and are undertaking a qualification based further education course funded by North East CA.

Tailored Learning - learners aged 19 years or older on 31 August within the 2024 to 2025 funding year or, on the 31 August in the year in which the course starts and are undertaking a tailored learning course that is at least 20 hours or 2 weeks long funded by North East CA.

Advanced Learner Loans – learners aged 19 or older on the first day of starting their designated loans funded qualification and studying one or more designated loans qualifications at levels 3, 4, 5, or 6.

Learner Support/Bursary funds will not be granted where other sources of funding are available to support the learner, for example from Jobcentre Plus where learners are mandated to undertake training. The following learners are already entitled to full funding for their course fees:

- Unemployed learners, ie receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), including those receiving National Insurance credits only, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Universal Credit (UC), and their take-home pay as recorded on their UC statement (disregarding UC payments and other benefits) is less than £892 a month (learner is sole adult in their benefit claim) or £1,437 a month (learner has a joint benefit claim with their partner) or are released on temporary licence, studying outside a prison environment, and not funded by the Ministry of Justice
- Learners aged 19 and over studying English and maths, up to and including level 2, and who have not previously attained a GCSE grade 4 (C), or higher
- Learners aged 19 to 23 studying for their first full qualification at level 2 for
- Learners aged 19 to 23 studying for their first full qualification at level 3
- Learners aged 19 and over studying essential digital skills qualifications, up to and including level 1 and who have digital skills assessed at below level 1
- Learners aged 19 and over who are using an Advanced Learner Loan to undertake training at Level 3 and above
- ESOL learners, aged 19 and over on the day they start their ESOL learning, and where they are unemployed (see above definition). Where learners are employed, the low wage flexibility may apply
- We will fund ESOL learning up to and including level 2
- Low Wage learners with annual gross salary that is less than £25,000.

Allocation of Funds

It is imperative that DurhamLearn's funds are available to learners whose applications identify them as being most in need.

The main priorities for the hardship and childcare strands of Learner Support/Bursary Funds in 2024/25 are:

- Learners who are economically or socially disadvantaged, who need support with transport, childcare, residential costs or associated learning costs and are facing financial difficulty.
- Those in receipt of Benefits or with a household income of less than £25,000.

These priorities have been further refined to include the following:

- Learners who have had a sudden change in financial circumstance such as redundancy
- Those who have been in care, on probation, or are young parents, lone parents or otherwise considered to be at risk
- Those eligible for fee remission because they are themselves, or they are the dependant of someone else who is, receiving a means tested state benefit. Learners receiving a means tested benefit will need to produce proof of their entitlement to benefit
- Adults undertaking a full first level 2 qualification
- Learners aged 19-23 undertaking a full first level 3 qualification

- Learners aged 19 and over who are using an Advanced Learner Loan to undertake training at Level 3 and above
- Learners taking an English/Maths/Essential Digital Skills programme of study
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are in receipt of a health-related benefit.

How to Apply for Learner Support Funds

Application process

In the first instance, learners should indicate on their enrolment form if they feel that they are in a hardship position where they may require support. A 16-19 Bursary Fund Application Form will then be issued via a weblink which the learner should complete at their earliest opportunity. Please provide us with as much information as possible. Your assigned Tutor will then provide further information in support of your application, and this will be forwarded to the Curriculum Manager for approval.

Each application will be reviewed by the Curriculum Manager and other senior members of staff in the DurhamLearn team, and the level of assistance will be determined based on eligibility criteria, personal circumstances and financial need, and the availability of funds at the time of application.

Successful and Unsuccessful Applications

All learners who are allocated funding from Learner Support/Bursary funds will be sent written confirmation outlining the terms and conditions for the funding and information about how the money will be paid to them.

Further evidence of eligibility may be requested at this time if not supplied with the original application. From time to time, we may ask to meet with a learner to discuss their claim.

All applicants who are unsuccessful will be advised in writing and given information about how to appeal against the decision.

Appeals Process

We hope that you do not have a complaint about the Service and/or the Learner Support/Bursary fund. However, if you do, we hope to make it easy for you to express your views and receive a speedy and effective response. The procedure is outlined below:

If you dispute a funding decision you may appeal against it. Valid grounds for appeal are:

- You feel the assessment of your application did not take into consideration all previously reported circumstances that may have significantly affected our decision
- You feel that we did not appropriately assess your eligibility or ability to pay
- There are other compelling circumstances that you consider would affect our decision that you could not reasonably report at the time of our assessment of your application

- You feel that we did not conduct the assessment of your application in a fair manner in line with principles of equality and diversity
- You feel that we did not correctly follow administrative procedures, or we made a significant mistake in the administrative process

If you wish to appeal, you will need to contact the Curriculum Manager for an Appeals Form. You will need to complete it and return it to them within 14 days of the decision letter, together with relevant supporting evidence.

How we will deal with your appeal

Your appeal will be forwarded to the DurhamLearn Learner Support/Bursary fund team who will:

- Confirm whether or not you have grounds to appeal. If you do not have grounds for appeal, we will write to you and tell you the reason for this.
- If you have grounds to appeal, they will fully review your application and supporting evidence you provide.
- They will make a new decision on your eligibility for funds and make and record the decision
- A copy and explanation of the decision will be sent to you in writing. We will use our best endeavours to reply within 15 working days.
- If you are eligible for funds support, your payment will be processed after the decision has been made.

We hope to resolve most appeals at this stage, but if you feel the matter remains unresolved, you can use the DurhamLearn complaints procedure to take the matter further.

Payment Process

Learners who are granted financial assistance will be paid as follows:

Fees: No direct payment to learner, paid directly to DurhamLearn from the Learner Support/Bursary fund

Exams: No direct payment to learner, paid directly to DurhamLearn from the Learner Support/Bursary fund

Travel costs: Payments will be based on the cheapest form of travel for those learners accessing public transport, a prepaid valid travel card will be purchased on their behalf by DurhamLearn/DCC where possible or reimbursement will take place where this is not possible. For those learners accessing own transport, ie car, a standard fee of £0.25 per mile is paid in arrears on confirmation that the learner has attended the required session.

Books/Equipment/Materials/Dongles: No direct payment to learner. Learner completes a list of materials needed which will be ordered on behalf of the learner.

Childcare: No direct payment to learner. Ofsted registered Crèche/Childminder paid directly upon receipt of an invoice.

Learner Support/Bursary Fund Terms and Conditions

All learners:

- should submit their application form as soon as possible
- will receive support from the date the application is signed (or up to 1 month before signature date in exceptional circumstances only)
- by claiming mileage allowance for use of their car are confirming it has both a valid MOT and insurance certificate and are legally entitled to drive in the UK
- will be required to attend at least 80% of possible sessions (for example 10 weeks for a 12-week course, 30 weeks for a 36-week course etc). Learners will be contacted regarding any absences
- in the case of non-attendance, withdrawal or overpayment we are permitted to recover any costs paid by way of invoice
- should complete all the necessary homework/coursework
- must undergo the assessment and/or sit the examination and/or achieve the necessary outcomes at the end of the course. If they do not, they will be required to reimburse DurhamLearn for the cost of any exam or assessment for which they have been entered
- should notify their Tutor of any change to their social or financial circumstances during the course
- will be required to pay back any monies received from the Learner Support/Bursary fund in the event of leaving the course early
- must return any books and/or equipment (non-perishable) including IT devices, given, loaned or purchased on their behalf, at the end of the course