



**The
Sheffield
College**

Financial Support for Students

Learner Support Fund Policy Guide

2017/2018

THE SHEFFIELD COLLEGE LEARNER SUPPORT FUND 2017/18

Introduction

The Sheffield College Learner Support Fund helps students on a low income to overcome financial barriers, enabling them to continue with and successfully complete their education.

The Learner Support Fund helps to cover a range of costs;

- Travel between home and College
- Essential course costs – including books, uniform, equipment and study trips
- Childcare
- Costs of meals at College

Learner support funding

The Sheffield College Learner Support Fund is administered by the Financial Support Team, part of Student Services, based at the Hillsborough site. This Policy Guide is intended to provide information on the operational management of the 2016/17 Learner Support Fund.

The Sheffield College receives a limited amount of funding each year which means it may not be possible to support every application. Priority will be given to students with the lowest household income or the highest demonstrated need, against pre-determined qualifying criteria.

The categories of available financial support are;

- 16-18 year olds
- 19 years and over
- Childcare

The Financial Support Team will aim at all times to;

- Distribute learner support funding fairly, through a transparent and easily understood process.
- Ensure all applications are assessed accurately according to the agreed, set criteria
- Allocate funding according to each individual student's need, taking account of the financial circumstances of the applicant and the intended use of the fund.
- Use the funding available to widen access to and participation in post-16 further education.
- To process and assess all Learner Support Fund applications within 6-8 weeks of receipt, though this may take longer during busy periods

How to apply

Learner Support Fund application forms for young learners, aged 16-18 years (FS02); adult learners, aged 19 and over (FS01); and for childcare support for students aged 20 and over (FS05).

Forms are available from;

- Financial Support Team at Hillsborough College;
- Student Services reception desks at all Sheffield College sites; or
- To download from The Sheffield College website.

Applicants who need support in completing the form can ask for assistance from Student Services.

All applications must have sufficient supporting evidence to allow a complete assessment to be made.

Although applications for support can be submitted before enrolment to a course or programme, no assistance will be paid to or on behalf of a student until they are enrolled and have started their course.

All applications for Learner Support Funding will be treated in the strictest confidence and are covered by the Data Protection Act 1988.

Applicants will be formally notified of the outcome of their application and any allocation of awards to be made by letter, by the Financial Support Team.

Any Learner Support Funding is guaranteed for one year only. Students must complete a new application form for each year of study at The Sheffield College. Funding will normally only given to a student for a maximum of three years.

Learner Support Fund applications can be submitted at any time during the academic year, but any award allocations will be made pro-rata and only back dated for a maximum of half a term from the date the application was received or approved.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AGED 16-18

Who is eligible?

- Students aged under 19 on 31 August 2017
- Students studying at The Sheffield College on an Education Funding Agency (EFA) funded course. Those studying as part of an employer's training programme, through work-based learning or on an apprenticeship are not eligible.
- Students must be able to demonstrate financial hardship and provide supporting evidence.
- Students resident or having the right to live in the United Kingdom

There are two elements of the Learner Support Fund for 16-18 year olds;

- Guaranteed Bursary - up to £1200 per year for vulnerable groups of students; and
- Discretionary support – at the discretion of The Sheffield College, targeted at young learners facing the greatest financial barriers to participation in learning.

Students aged 16-18 years should apply for help using The Sheffield College Learner Support Fund and Free College Meals application form for young learners (FS02).

Guaranteed Bursary

Eligibility

A Guaranteed Bursary may be made to the following vulnerable groups of students;

- Young people in care or classed as Looked After Children. This includes unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Care Leavers
- Young people in receipt of Income Support (or Universal Credit in place of Income Support) in their own name
- Students in receipt of both Employment Support Allowance (or Universal Credit in place of ESA) and either Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment in their own name.

Applicants must provide the College with appropriate evidence of their eligibility for a Guaranteed Bursary.

Eligible students may receive the full amount of £1200 if they have expenses and study full-time on a course of at least 30 weeks. They will receive less, or no bursary support if their course is shorter than 30 weeks; they study part-time; they incur few expenses; or if their Learner Support Fund application is received later in the academic year.

Payments and allocations

Initial assessment of applications and all support payments are conditional on the student's adherence to The Sheffield College's ABC rules – Attendance, Behaviour and Completion of work throughout the year. Support will be stopped completely if attendance falls below 85%. In these circumstances the Financial Support Team will require written explanation of mitigating circumstances and approval for assessment or further payments from the student's Tutorial Mentor.

The Guaranteed Bursary awarded may be paid;

- In full or in instalments
- In cash or into a bank account in the name of the student on a weekly, monthly or half-termly basis
- In kind, through budget transfers to College Departments to purchase or provide essential books, equipment, uniforms or study trips on behalf of the student.

Students who are awarded a Guaranteed Bursary may also be eligible to receive Free College Meals.

Discretionary support

Distribution of the discretionary element of Learner Support funding for 16-18 year old students is determined by qualifying criteria set by The Sheffield College. It will be targeted towards students facing the greatest barriers to their participation and completion of their learning.

Discretionary support for eligible students may include contributions towards;

- Home – College travel costs
- Essential course costs
- An NUS Extra student discount card (£12)

All discretionary support is subject to the availability of funding at all times.

Eligibility

Eligibility is determined by the current annual net household income of the student and partner or parents/guardians living at the same address.

All applications are considered individually, but if the annual household income is above £26,000 awards will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

If a student is in care, such as foster care or with the local authority, no income assessment will be undertaken. A letter from Social Services or the foster carer stating that the student is in their charge will suffice as evidence.

If a student's living arrangements are unusual – for example, living with a friend, siblings or grandparents – each case will be assessed individually.

Students or their parents/guardians receiving one or more of the following benefits will also be eligible to receive discretionary support;

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment Support Allowance
- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Child or Working Tax Credits

If there is a significant change to household income or circumstances during the academic year (for example because of redundancy), meaning the new income level falls within the £26,000 income threshold, an application for re-assessment can be submitted if discretionary support funds are still available.

To be eligible for support with the costs of travel from home to college, a student must live 1.5 miles or more from their designated Sheffield College site. Travel support will not be paid to students who hold an English National Concession Pass or Mobility Pass that entitles them to free travel on public transport.

Supporting evidence

Income is assessed on current information, usually dated no more than three months before the application is made. Acceptable evidence includes;

- A complete Tax Credit Award Notice for 2016/17
- Last three months (if paid monthly) or 12 weeks wage slips (if paid weekly)
- Previous tax year's P60
- If self-employed, the most recent SA302 Self-Assessment return from HMRC
- If receiving a private pension, a letter confirming gross pension per year from the scheme administrators
- Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit statement dated from March 2016 onwards
- Confirmation of entitlement to benefits, dated within the last three months, from Jobcentre Plus or the Pension Service

If the student is living in a household where responsibility for living costs is shared and this includes provision for children, the total income of both parents/guardians will be taken into account.

Any Disability Living Allowance (DLA) paid directly to the student will be disregarded when assessing household income.

Where a student or their parents/guardians are unable or unwilling to provide evidence of income and no assessment of income can take place, the Financial Support Team co-ordinator will make a decision based on information provided by the student and supporting agencies if appropriate.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AGED 19 YEARS AND OVER

Who is eligible?

- Students aged 19 or over on 31 August 2017
- Students studying full or part-time at The Sheffield College. Those studying as part of an employer's training programme, through work-based learning or on an apprenticeship are not eligible.
- Students must be able to demonstrate financial hardship and provide supporting evidence.
- Students must have been 'ordinarily' resident in the EU for 3 years prior to the start of the course. 'Ordinarily' means not at any time for the purpose of study.
- Asylum seekers and refugees of all ages are eligible to apply for support from the Fund but will under no circumstances be awarded cash payments.
- Refugees will not be required to meet the three year residency rule if refugee status was confirmed in the three years prior to starting the course.
- Students will usually only be supported for a maximum of 3 consecutive years.

Discretionary support

Students should apply for support using the Sheffield College Learner Support Fund 19+ Students form (FS01).

All Learner Support funding for students aged 19 years and over is discretionary and is determined by qualifying criteria set by The Sheffield College. It will be targeted towards students facing the greatest barriers to their participation and completion of their learning.

Discretionary support for eligible students may include contributions towards;

- Home – College travel costs
- Essential course costs
- An NUS Extra student discount card (£12)
- Tuition fees

All discretionary support is subject to the availability of funding at all times.

Eligibility

Eligibility is determined by the current annual net household income of the student and their spouse or live-in partner (if applicable).

All applications are considered individually, but if the annual household income is above £26,000 awards will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

If a student lives alone, support for help with tuition fees will only be considered if their personal income is less than £16,000.

Students or their spouse or partner receiving one or more of the following benefits will also be eligible to receive discretionary support;

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment Support Allowance
- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Child or Working Tax Credits

If there is a significant change to household income or circumstances during the academic year (for example because of redundancy), meaning the new income level falls within the £26,000 income threshold, an application for re-assessment can be submitted if discretionary support funds are still available.

To be eligible for support with the costs of travel from home to college, a student must live 1.5 miles or more from their designated Sheffield College site. Travel support will not be paid to students who hold an English National Concession Pass or Mobility Pass that entitles them to free travel on public transport.

Supporting evidence

Income is assessed on current information, usually dated no more than three months before the application is made. Acceptable evidence includes;

- A complete Tax Credit Award Notice for 2016/17
- Last three months (if paid monthly), or 12 weeks' wage slips (if paid weekly)
- Previous tax year's P60
- If self-employed, the most recent SA302 Self-Assessment return from HMRC
- If receiving a private pension, a letter confirming gross pension per year from the scheme administrators
- Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit statement dated from March 2016 onwards
- Confirmation of entitlement to benefits, dated within the last three months, from Jobcentre Plus or the Pension Service

If the student is living with a spouse or a partner in a household where responsibility for living costs is shared and this includes provision for children, the total income of both will be taken into account.

Any Disability Living Allowance (DLA) paid directly to the student will be disregarded when assessing household income.

Where a student or their spouse or partner are unable or unwilling to provide evidence of income and no assessment of income can take place, the Financial Support Team co-ordinator will make a decision based on information provided by the student and supporting agencies if appropriate.

Students receiving an Advanced Learner Loan

Students aged 19 or over who have successfully applied for an Advanced Learner Loan can apply for support from the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund.

Applications should be submitted on the Sheffield College Learner Support Fund application form for 19+ Students (FS01). A copy of the letter from Student Finance England confirming approval of the Advanced Learner Loan is required as evidence.

Students who receive the Advanced Learning Loan or who are eligible for the loan but have chosen not to take the loan, are not eligible for funding help towards fees. This includes those who have taken the maximum loan entitlement but the college fee is higher.

Otherwise all eligibility conditions, supporting evidence requirements, payments and allocations are the same as for other 19+ students.

Payments and allocations

The following conditions apply to all students, regardless of age.

ABC rules

Initial assessment of applications and all discretionary support payments are conditional on the student's adherence to The Sheffield College's ABC rules – Attendance, Behaviour and Completion of work throughout the year.

Support will be stopped completely if attendance falls below 85%.

If the attendance rate is affected by the student experiencing personal problems such as a child's illness, family crisis or bereavement, the Financial Support Team will require written explanation of mitigating circumstances and approval for assessment or further payments from the student's Tutorial Mentor.

Payment dates

Payments of support for travel between home and college will usually be paid directly to the student's nominated bank account each half-term and on dates confirmed in the student's award notification letter. Exceptions to these arrangements can be made at the discretion of the Financial Support Co-ordinator.

Back payments

Back payments, resulting from late or additional applications, can be considered on an individual student basis. Travel or bursary payments can be back dated for a maximum of half a term before the application is received. These monies may be split into suitable, smaller payments, on a weekly or monthly basis. The payment programme will be decided by the Financial Support Co-ordinator, after consultation with tutors and safeguarding staff, to ensure students don't receive large sums of money that would potentially make them vulnerable.

Essential course costs

All essential course costs are agreed at the start of the academic year by Heads of Departments for each course or study programme. Further information about these costs can be obtained from the student's Tutorial Mentor or Head of Department.

Types of essential course costs that might be included in discretionary support for students include;

- Books and learning materials
- Equipment, clothing and uniform – where items are deemed necessary by the Course or Curriculum Leader or by Health and Safety regulations
- Educational study visits – if the visit is considered essential for successful completion of a study programme. Students may be asked to pay a contribution of the total cost of a visit themselves. Learner Support funding will not be awarded for study visits deemed non-essential for successful completion of a course and students will be required to meet the full cost of the visit.
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks – if a DBS Certificate is essential to complete a study programme or attend placements or work experience.
- Other essential course related may be considered by the Financial Support Co-ordinator.

The amount and type of discretionary support allocated to a student for essential course costs will be included in their Learner Support Fund award notification letter.

Arrangements for course cost payments and refunds vary and are agreed with the Heads of Departments at the start of the academic year.

Payments for essential course costs may be paid;

- Directly to the student's own nominated bank account (proof of purchase may be required); or
- Ordered and paid for by the College directly through an approved supplier on the student's behalf; or
- Transferred to the appropriate Course Departmental budget and then refunded to the student by cash or direct bank payment.

Travel assistance

- To qualify for assistance with the costs of travel between home and college a student must live at least 1.5 miles away from their normal Sheffield College centre.
- Where the student lives closer to another institution offering the same programme of study travel support will only be considered in exceptional circumstances
- Students who must travel to and from College by means other than public transport will have their cases considered individually.
- Travel assistance will not be paid to students who hold an English National Concession Pass or Mobility Pass that entitles them to free travel on public transport.
- Learner Support Fund travel payments usually paid directly to the student's nominated bank account, on a half-termly basis.
- Students with limited mobility may be entitled to a Mobility Pass which offers free travel on bus, tram and train services in South Yorkshire. Enquiries should be made to local district council offices.

16-18 year olds living in South Yorkshire

16-18 year olds (Y12 and Y13 students) must apply for a 16-18 concessionary travel pass from www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/mystudentpass

This concessionary pass entitles students to concessionary travel on buses and trams in South Yorkshire and to half-fare on Northern Trains services in South Yorkshire.

Students eligible for travel assistance from the Learner Support Fund will have the equivalent of the concessionary fare for travel during term time awarded.

19+ year olds living in South Yorkshire

Students aged 19 years or over on 31 August 2017 who qualify for travel assistance from the Learner Support Fund will be awarded assistance during College term time towards the cost of an appropriate Travel Master pass allowing free travel on buses, trams and trains in South Yorkshire. More information on Travel Master passes is available at www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/ticketspasses

Students living outside South Yorkshire

Students living in Derbyshire may be eligible to apply for a B_Line travel pass.

Details are available from

http://derbyshireyouthinc.com/somewhere_to_go/your_bline_card/

Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Students up to and including the age of 18 years, who previously received transport support through their Local Education Authority (LA) will need to contact the appropriate Student Support department at the Local Authority to discuss continued funding for transport. If the Local Authority refuses to offer support the student will need to provide proof of the refusal by their LA and complete an application to the Learner Support Fund.

The Sheffield Council now request a £540 contribution towards taxis for 16-18 year olds. If a student meets the criteria for LSF we will pay this to the council on behalf of the student.

The Sheffield College Additional Support Team will determine whether the student will be unable to travel to and from College independently.

Where a student is 19 or over and is unable to travel independently by public transport, help towards the cost of transport between home and College by other means (e.g. taxi or minibus) may be considered for essential units of study.

The student must attend the College or campus closest to home, providing that campus offers the desired programme and must agree to undertake Independent Travel Training where appropriate. It is College policy to encourage the development of independent travel skills. The College will therefore only support transport for students who are willing to be assessed for independent travel training. Students who are assessed as being suitable for independent travel training will be expected to participate. Travel support needs will be reviewed throughout the year.

Any support granted from the Learner Support Fund will be reviewed termly.

If another provider closer to the student's home offers an appropriate programme of study and the student chooses not to attend that provider, support with travel will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Any support with transport from the Support Fund is subject to the following conditions;

- student is not entitled to Local Authority support
- student is not receiving support with transport costs from another source
- student cannot travel independently
- student is unable to study with another provider closer to the learner's home

FREE COLLEGE MEALS

Eligibility

Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August 2017 to be eligible for a Free College Meal in 2017/18. Students who turn 19 during their study programme will remain eligible until the end of that academic year or to the end of their study programme, whichever is sooner.

Students aged 19-24 who are subject to an education health and care plan (EHC Plan) are also entitled to a Free College Meal while attending their provision if they meet the eligibility criteria.

The following groups of students are not eligible for a Free College Meal;

- Students aged between 14 and 16 (these are covered by Free School Meal provision)
- Students aged 19 or over on 31 August 2017, unless they have an EHC Plan
- Apprentices – including those with an EHC Plan.

Free College Meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. This is defined by those students in receipt of, or having parents in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits;

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- 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 you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- During the initial roll out of the benefit, Universal Credit

Working Tax Credit is not a qualifying benefit for Free College Meals, however if a student or their parent receives any one of the other qualifying benefits (except for Child Tax Credits) then they are eligible for Free College Meals.

Students must also satisfy the residency criteria set out in EFSA Funding regulation guidance for 2017/18.

How to apply

Sheffield College students must use the appropriate Learner Support Fund application form to apply for Free College Meals and provide copies of appropriate evidence. Eligibility for free meals will be assessed at the same time as their Learner Support Fund application and students will be notified of their eligibility in writing, in their Learner Support Fund award notification letter.

Eligible students are encouraged to use their Free College Meals entitlement. £2.41 is loaded to their Student Card each day they attend College and can be used in College that day to purchase food/drinks to that value. Cards can be used at any time of the day - for lunch, breakfast or mid-morning/afternoon snacks. Tutorial Mentors and the Refectory teams can help students who are unsure about how to use their cards.

Students in Higher Education

Students in Higher Education can apply for support through the Student Opportunity Fund, which is managed by the Sheffield College HE Unit. They are not eligible for help from the Learner Support Fund.

Students who withdraw

The Sheffield College reserves the right to invoice students who leave College before completing their studies for repayments of any funds allocated to them. The student may also be asked to return any items of equipment or protective clothing.

Appeals for all scheme

All applicants to the Support Fund have the right of appeal as follows:

1. The first course of action is to write to the Financial Support Team. The reason for appeal should be clearly stated giving any additional details about the circumstances which should be taken into consideration.
2. Appeals will only be considered for circumstances outside the usual rules and in exceptional circumstances.
3. All information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence.
4. Appeals will be considered by **TBC**, Executive Director of Finance.
5. Notification of the outcome of the Appeal will be sent to the student within 10 working days of the appeal being received. Every effort will be made to look at each appeal on its own merits.
6. The college will reserve the right to make awards to individual students who do not necessarily meet all of the listed criteria. The decision of the director will be final.
7. Change of circumstances is not an appeal, contact the Financial Support Team and explain the change.

Safeguarding the Scheme

Systems and procedures are in place to ensure that the Sheffield College Learner Support Funds are managed appropriately and effectively. All systems are subject to both internal and external audit.

Any student found to have made a false claim for financial support or anyone who disregards the conditions of assistance will have their support suspended and they will be subject to the College's Disciplinary Procedure. False claims may also result in prosecution by the relevant Government body.

Students must provide current documentary evidence as required.

All College staff must be vigilant when determining eligibility. Where a staff member suspects that all is not in order, for example non-disclosure of income or tampering of evidence the case must be referred to the Financial Support Co-ordinator.

Payments may be refused, suspended or reclaimed on the authority of the Financial Support Co-Ordinator.

Evaluating the effectiveness of support

The success of financial support offered to students will be measured by analysing student records, specifically in relation to attendance, retention and achievement.

Tuition Fees

If a student is undertaking an SFA funded course and is not eligible to receive an Advanced Learner Loan then, in exceptional circumstances, we will consider supporting tuition fees, normally up to a maximum of 75%.

Exam fees for Re-sits

Normally exam re-sit fees are not supported by the Sheffield College Learner Support Fund.

UCAS fees

UCAS fees will be supported for students eligible for and already receiving Learner Support Funding if requested by the student with the support of their tutor.

University interviews

Support for help with the costs of students attending University interviews is at the discretion of the Financial Support Co-Ordinator. Support will not be given for attendance at University Open Days.

Other support costs

The Sheffield College Learner Support Fund has a discretionary element to help students to participate, remain and achieve in education. Any requests for support in addition to, or not outlined in this Policy are at the discretion of the Financial Support Co-Ordinator or a Deputy Head of Service for Student Services.

Childcare support

Assistance may be granted towards the cost of childcare for eligible students with dependent children when childcare is needed;

- While the student attends College
- When no other childcare support is being received
- The other parent or guardian cannot provide childcare

Who is eligible?

- Students aged 20 or over on 31 August 2017
- Students studying full or part-time at The Sheffield College. Those studying as part of an employer's training programme, through work-based learning or on an apprenticeship are not eligible.
- Students must be able to demonstrate financial hardship and provide supporting evidence.
- Students must have been 'ordinarily' resident in the EU for 3 years prior to the start of the course. 'Ordinarily' means not at any time for the purpose of study.
- Asylum seekers and refugees of all ages are eligible to apply for support from the Fund but will under no circumstances be awarded cash payments.
- Refugees will not be required to meet the three year residency rule if refugee status was confirmed in the three years prior to starting the course.
- Students will usually only be supported for a maximum of 3 consecutive years.

Students should apply for support using the Sheffield College Learner Support Fund Childcare Support form (FS05).

Childcare funding is limited so early applications are advisable.

To ensure fair and responsible use of the Childcare Support Fund, payment will normally be limited as follows;

- Full week – £200
- Full day - £40 (when a class takes place across the middle of a day and a full day's childcare is required, the cost of this will only be met by the College when there are at least 4 timetabled hours in the day).
- Half day (morning or afternoon) – £22

Any daily costs above the maximum amount that cannot be awarded by the College will be the responsibility of the student and additional costs must be paid to the childcare provider directly.

Childcare costs will be supported for all timetabled classes required by the student's course, as well as any work placements that are essential to successful completion of the course (subject to confirmation from course tutor). A maximum of one extra hour each way, each day between the childcare provider and the College can be allowed for travel time.

Only childcare by Ofsted registered providers of childcare can be supported. Students must provide a copy of their childcare provider's Ofsted certificate.

Students will be expected to use any available Free Early Learning (FEL) funding towards meeting their childcare needs before further support is awarded from the College. This includes all 2 year olds who are eligible for FEL based on their parent(s) income, as well as 3 and 4 year olds who automatically qualify.

The Sheffield College would not normally pay childcare for holiday periods. In exceptional circumstances, such as if a student is required to attend a placement or additional classes, then an individual's case for childcare support would be considered. If the childcare provider requires a student to pay a retainer fee to secure the child's place then in most circumstances the College would consider covering this cost.

All Childcare Support is subject to the availability of funding at all times.

Students aged under 20 on the 31 August 2017 should apply for help with childcare costs to Care to Learn at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn/overview

Care to Learn applications are approved by the Financial Support team and a copy of the child's birth certificate will be required.