

19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Policy 2023 - 2024

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Approval/review bodies	Senior Leadership Team
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**Policies will be reviewed more frequently if legal changes or good practice require*

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Related policies/documents:

16-18 Bursary Fund and Free Meals Policy;
19+ Advanced Learning Loan Bursary Fund Policy;
19+ GLA Discretionary Bursary Fund Policy; and
Residential Bursary Fund Policy.

1. Policy Statement

North Kent College (“the College”) is a multi-sited Further Education institution and incorporates Hadlow College (“Hadlow”).

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (“ESFA”) provides a 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund which is distributed by the College to help learners who are aged 19+ and in need of financial support to ensure they can attend College and successfully complete their course.

The fund is for:

- 1.1. students who are 19 or over on 31 August within the 2023/2024 funding year;
- 1.2. individuals resident in areas of England outside of devolved authority areas undertaking ESFA funded AEB (do we need to explain this acronym?); and/or
- 1.3. continuing learners who are resident in devolved authority areas, who have not completed their learning by 31 July 2022, but started their learning before the authorities’ devolution date with providers who have an ESFA agreement (grant) only.

They must also meet the residency requirements, set out in the ESFA funding guide, in one or more of the following categories:

- 1.4. UK nationals and other persons with right of abode;
- 1.5. UK nationals in the European Economic Area (“EEA”);
- 1.6. EEA nationals in the UK; or
- 1.7. Other non-UK nationals.

see [ESFA 19+ Discretionary funding guide](#)

If the student lives within a London Borough, they are not eligible to apply for NKC 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Funding and should apply for funding from the 19+ GLA Discretionary Learner Support Fund.

A separate Free Meals in Further Education Fund is provided by the Government, which provides free meals for 19-24-year-old students who have a Learning Difficulty Assessment or an Education, Health and Care Plan (“EHCP”) and who meet the Government set income criteria.

Residential Bursary funding is available for students who wish to reside at the College’s Hadlow campus but must meet the eligibility criteria specified in the separate Residential Bursary Fund Policy.

The Bursary helps remove the barriers that learners from low-income households may face by assisting with the costs of undertaking their course. Assistance may be given with course material fees, essential books, kit, equipment, travel, childcare (for students who are aged 20 or over on their first day of learning) and residential accommodation (Hadlow students only)

The College distributes the fund to learners in accordance with the ESFA Funding Guidance.

The College reserves the right to make changes to financial support provision in response to Government guidance and other mitigating factors.

ESFA guidance is updated regularly and may affect eligibility for funding. Any changes to this policy and financial support guidance will be communicated with all members of the College community at the time of any change.

Students/parents/guardians/partners of students, who are in receipt of any state benefits, must ensure they inform the Department for Work and Pensions (“DWP”) of any learner support they receive from the College, including any Bursary awarded.

Any bursary awarded covers term time only.

2. Eligibility Criteria

2.1. Students must:

- 2.1.1. be resident in areas of England outside of devolved authority areas undertaking ESFA funded AEB;
- 2.1.2. be continuing learners who are resident in devolved authority areas, who have not completed their learning by 31 July 2022, but started their learning before the authorities’ devolution date with providers who have an ESFA agreement (grant) only;
- 2.1.3. be 19 or older on 31 August within the 2023 to 2024 funding year and meet the following residential criteria;
- 2.1.4. meet the ESFA residency criteria (see ESFA 19+ Funding Guide); and
- 2.1.5. not live in a London Borough. A separate fund is available for students living in a London Borough. (19+GLA fund)

2.2. Residential support (maximum of 80% towards accommodation costs for Hadlow students only) is also available for students who meet the above criteria and who also:

- 2.2.1. have a complex journey to the College and it takes more than two hours daily to get to and from the campus they are studying at (Hadlow);
- 2.2.2. enrolled on a full-time course which lasts for at least 10 weeks of the year;

2.2.3. need to be on campus for early and late duties as an integral part of the course; and

2.2.4. enrolled on a Land Based course.

Students who are aged 19 on 31 August (for September start) and continuing a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (19+ continuers) or have an EHCP must provide evidence of household income including that of their parent(s)/carer(s).

For students who live with their parent(s) (regardless of age), household income means the income of the parent(s), guardian(s), and/or the parent's partner that they live with.

For student who live independently from their parents: household income is the student's own income, plus the income of any co-habiting partner, where relevant.

All residential bursary students must supply evidence of household income, including parents/guardians/partners. If a residential student is 19 and over and living with their parents /guardians, then it will be the full household income that is used to determine eligibility.

If the above criteria is met, then the student can apply for the bursary, but their household income must be below the threshold set by the College.

Students on apprenticeships and on Higher Education courses are not entitled to bursary funding and those in receipt of a 19+ Advanced Learning Loan should apply for the NKC 19+ Advanced Learner Loan (Bursary) Fund

Awards are made to students whose household income is less than the threshold set by the College. Where the household income has dropped/changed significantly, an award may still be made depending on the student's personal circumstances. In this case, the Student Bursary Coordinator at the College campus will make the final decision. This may be in the form of a partial award i.e. assistance with travel only.

All residential bursary students will need to supply evidence of household income, including parent(s)/guardian(s)/partner. If a residential student is 19 and over and living with their parent(s)/guardian(s), then it will be the full household income that is used to determine eligibility. For further information, please refer to the Residential Bursary Policy.

Household income includes any income from employment or self-employment and income from any state benefits received. These include (but not limited to):

2.3. Income Support ("IS");

2.4. Job Seekers Allowance ("JSA");

2.5. Employment Support Allowance ("ESA");

- 2.6. Tax Credits;
- 2.7. State Pension Credit;
- 2.8. Universal Credit;
- 2.9. Housing and Council Tax benefit;
- 2.10. Personal Pension;
- 2.11. Carers' allowance; and
- 2.12. Other income.

Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments and disability elements of Tax Credits are not included in the calculation of household income. However, evidence of these benefits is still required in order to consider the individual circumstances.

When applying for funding, students are required to provide full evidence of the household income before a bursary application can be assessed. Eligibility for a 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Bursary does not mean that the student is automatically entitled to an award. The 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund is a limited fund and awards are made on a first come-first served basis.

The student's attendance is monitored and any payments due will be withheld or reduced if their attendance drops below 90%. Monitoring takes place monthly and the dates viewed for the attendance are 18th of the previous month to the 17th of the current month the bursary is due.

Discretionary Bursary awards are tailored to the needs of the individual student and will depend upon the course that the student is on and where they live. Bursary awards made may include the following and are only a contribution towards costs and may not cover the full amount required:

- 2.13. course contribution/materials fee (this will depend upon the course and is a one off payment);
- 2.14. the cost of essential books required for the course (as determined by the Head of Curriculum and is a one off payment);
- 2.15. essential kit, equipment or uniform required for the course (as determined by the Head of Curriculum) and is a one off payment;
- 2.16. an award for travel (paid in monthly instalments, in arrears - see below);
- 2.17. support with domestic emergencies (**exceptional circumstances only**). This would only be agreed with the Student Bursary Coordinator and you may be required to provide further evidence to support any request;

- 2.18. trips - deposit only. This is for mandatory trips that are required for the student to pass their course. **Not all trips are mandatory.** (Maximum £100 for the deposit only. This is a one-off payment);
- 2.19. an award for travel (paid monthly in arrears – see below);
- 2.20. childcare – a contribution towards childcare for one nursery aged child (subject to terms and conditions and paid directly to the childcare provider); and/or
- 2.21. Residential Accommodation (Hadlow students only) – subject to meeting the College criteria (paid in monthly instalments to North Kent College). See separate Residential Bursary Fund Policy).

Where students have applied for funding for course equipment or trips, this funding will be made “in kind” where possible or paid direct to the curriculum. If funding is paid to the student by BACS, this will not be paid until after the first half term.

Note: All payments will be made from the date of approval and not the date the application was submitted.

3. Travel Awards

An award for travel is made to students who live more than two miles away from the campus they are studying at or (for students studying at Dartford only) from Dartford Railway Station (since a free shuttle bus from the station is provided by the College).

Travel payments are calculated using Google Maps. Depending on where they live and how they choose to travel to College, students **may** be awarded the following:

3.1 A Monthly Travel Payment

A travel payment may be awarded to students depending on where they live and their number of timetabled days. Funding is at the discretion of the College and will consider the discounts available to students and if the student already has support in place from the local authority. It will only be a **contribution** to assist with travel and may mean the student is awarded funding for monthly ticket options for example. The contribution will not exceed the cheapest option for travel to College. The maximum amount awarded for travel is limited to £1,500 per student for a full academic year.

Students travelling from a London Borough to any campus will be required to use their 18+ Oyster Card which gives discounted travel. The College may then contribute towards the discounted travel amount. If the student is at the Gravesend, Tonbridge, or Hadlow additional funds may be awarded towards the onward journey.

Discounts such as these are reflected in assessments of funding allocated to students and the College will contribute to the cost of passes.

Awards for travel will be paid directly into the student's bank account via a BACS payment, in monthly instalments.

The student remains liable for their travel costs until an award is agreed and reimbursement for travel costs before this time is **not** paid.

All payments are made in arrears and under no circumstances will payments be made in advance.

Students who apply for a residential bursary are not eligible to also apply for a travel award. See the Residential Bursary Fund Policy

4. Childcare awards

An award for childcare may be made for students who are aged 20 or over on the first day of learning, to assist with the costs of their childcare while they are in College. Funding is provided for full daily childcare for one child only, although consideration will be given to funding for additional school-age children who are attending out of school provision, such as after-school clubs. Where the child is eligible for "free for two" funding or the 15 hours' free Government funding for three- or four-year olds, the student is expected to use this free childcare during the time they are at College and the College will then fund any remaining childcare costs from the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund.

Young parents, who are below the age of 20, are not eligible for childcare from this fund. However, they may apply for financial support towards childcare through the government's Care to Learn ("C2L") scheme. For further information, students should visit <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>.

The following terms and conditions apply for childcare awards:

- 4.1 applications for childcare support must be submitted with essential documentary evidence; birth certificate or passport or adoption papers for relevant child(ren);
- 4.2 it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the Childcare Agreement, provided by the College, is completed and signed by both themselves and childcare provider. This duly completed form must be received by the College before payments can commence;
- 4.3 the College will only pay for the cost of one child's childcare during College term time. The student will be liable for any costs outside of these dates;
- 4.4 if the student finishes the course before the end of term, the College will only pay childcare costs up to when the student finishes and not to the end of term;

- 4.5 if the childcare award is withdrawn, the student will become liable for any further costs. Both the student and childcare provider will be notified of this in writing;
- 4.6 it is the student's responsibility to keep the childcare provider informed of their course end date together with any changes to timetabled hours/days;
- 4.7 the College will only pay for childcare for the days and hours that the student attends College or placements associated with the course;
- 4.8 the College will only pay if the student's attendance is 90% or above unless there are mitigating circumstances. If the attendance level drops below 90% the student may become liable for all costs;
- 4.9 the College pays monthly in arrears, never in advance; and
- 4.10 The College will pay up to a maximum of £79.50 for a full day; £54 for half days (am); and £49.50 for half days (pm). If the child is eligible for any Government Funding, this grant amount will be deducted from the funds awarded.

Note: The College will pay the childcare provider directly into their bank account at the end of the month in arrears. **Under no circumstances will the College pay the student;**

- 4.11 the childcare provider must have a current OFSTED rating of Good or above and provide their OFSTED registration number;
- 4.12 once the student's timetable is known, the College will agree with the student and the childcare provider the fees payable per week and calculate the total fees for the whole of the academic year. This is based on the weekly fee multiplied by 34 weeks unless otherwise agreed by Student Financial Support; and
- 4.13 the College does not pay any deposits, retainers or administration fees and the student is liable for any such fees.

5. Residential Fees

Please see the separate Residential Fees Policy

6. Tuition fee awards

Tuition fees are not covered by the bursary fund.

7. Residential Bursary

A maximum award of 80% towards accommodation fees can be awarded, subject to meeting the household income and Residential Bursary and Accommodation criteria.

8. Raising awareness and Application Procedure

The College has information on its website from April for the following academic year and information is marketed around the College. Applicants and returning students are sent notification of the financial support available and the application process. The College work with local authorities and agencies in order to support students to access financial support.

The College has a single online Student Financial Support application form which covers all the bursary funds. The online application form will be available on the College's website after the Easter half term for the following academic year. Bursary awards do not automatically carry-over from one year to the next and students will need to make a new application for each academic year. Online applications help reduce our impact on the environment, however paper applications are also available via the website and Student Financial Support.

Along with their application, students will need to provide full evidence of household income for the current tax year. Where financial circumstances have changed from the previous year, a note needs to be made on the online application. This will be considered when the application is assessed.

Applications submitted without full evidence of household income cannot be assessed and, in those circumstances, Student Bursary Team will contact the student to explain what is required. This will delay the processing of the application and may have an impact on the success of the application, as the fund is finite and once all funds are awarded then subsequent applications will be declined.

Students who are continuing at College for a further year should apply by 1 June for an award for the following academic year. New applicants to the College are encouraged to apply before enrolment and, at the latest, by 1 August. Complete applications received by these dates will be assessed before the student enrolls, this will ensure that students who are awarded a bursary are notified before enrolment day and the student will then be aware if they need to make additional payments at enrolment.

Applications will be accepted after these dates, subject to funds being available. For complete applications received by 1 August, we aim to assess these within 10 working days and will inform applicants if assessment will take longer. Applications received after 1 August may take up to 30 working days to assess. Students, however, will remain liable for any costs accrued at enrolment until an award has been confirmed in writing by the College. The outcome of the assessment will be communicated to the student, via their personal email held on the College's records, before enrolment. After enrolment, all

further correspondence will be sent via email to either their personal email address and/or their College email address.

Application forms submitted without the required supporting documentation and evidence will not be processed. If applications are received without the required evidence, the Student Bursary team will attempt to contact the applicant three times, via telephone or email. If no response is received a final letter will be sent to the address the College holds. If no response is received from the final letter within 14 days, the application will be closed.

9. Student Commitment

Awards are made on the understanding that the student maintains an attendance level of at least 90% (in all subjects/courses), otherwise payments will be withheld or reduced.

If the student's attendance drops below 90%, the Bursary payments due will be withheld or reduced. This is checked monthly and the dates viewed for the attendance are 18th of the previous month to the 17th of the current month the bursary is due.

If attendance drops below 90% and the payments are withheld or reduced, the student is required to discuss with their tutor the reasons regarding the low attendance. If the tutor is happy with the reasons, they must email Student Bursary to request that the withheld/reduced payments are released. Consideration will be given to mitigating circumstances such as: child protection; family illness; caring responsibilities; transport issues; and any other issues affecting the learner's attendance. For travel payments, the amount will be reduced to reflect the student's attendance. i.e. if the student has only attended 67% of the allocated time, they will only receive 67% of the residential/travel award for the month.

Funding for students who have not attended for four weeks or more will be stopped without notice and funding may also be stopped if a student has not adhered to the College rules and regulations.

The College reserves the right to require repayment of funds and the return of any equipment purchased through funding. This includes the Kent 16+ Travel Saver card and IT equipment, if these have been funded through financial support.

10. Appeals

In the first instance, the student (or their parent(s)/guardian(s)) should contact the Student Bursary Coordinator and ask for a re-assessment of their situation. If the student is still not satisfied with the outcome, an appeal must be made in writing, within two weeks, to the Head of Department. The letter must clearly state why the award should be re-considered. The student may be asked to provide additional information or be invited to discuss their individual circumstances as part of the appeal. The decision of the Head of Department is final.

11. Fraudulent Claims

It is the College's duty to protect public funds from the possibility of fraudulent claims. The College asks for detailed information and may invite applicants for interview so it can distribute the funds correctly. If the student's claim is considered fraudulent, i.e. through false representation of household income or other eligibility rules, during spot checks or auditing processes, the College will request that the funds awarded to them are repaid in full. If the student fails to repay this, the College may take legal action.

An application which is found to be fraudulent, i.e. through false representation of household income or of other eligibility rules, may be cancelled and the learner may be subject to disciplinary measures by the College. The College will have the right to recover the monies awarded. Government guidance advises that institutions that identify significant fraud should report it to ESFA.

12. Data Protection

College employees who are involved in administering the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund will comply with the College's policy on the storage and transfer of information in the course of application and payments of funds.