



Northern College

1. Overview

Policy Title	Learner Support Policy 2024/25 (including Residential Access)
Who does the policy apply to?	This policy will outline the guidance and implementation of student financial support. This policy and its underpinning guidance should be read by all students, staff and governors.
Aims	To provide financial assistance and guidance to eligible students enrolled on programmes funded by the ESFA (Education & Skills Funding Agency) Adult Skills funding, SYMCA (South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority) and WYCA (West Yorkshire Combined Authority) or students in receipt of a SFE (Student Finance England) Loans Bursary. This process will be transparent and based on funder assessment criteria which ensures access to, and participation in, adult learning.
To be read in conjunction with	Northern College Fees policy Northern College Learner Support Fund Guidance 2024/25 Northern College Financial Regulations Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
Further advice may be sought from	Assistant Principal Student Experience Head of MIS & ICT Head of Finance Head of Student Support Services
Review arrangements	This policy will be reviewed annually. This policy may be reviewed outside of this cycle should operation and/or legislative guidance dictate.

APPROVED BY:	BOARD OF GOVERNORS
DATE:	July 2024
NEXT REVIEW DUE:	July 2025

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for the allocation and distribution of financial assistance and supporting guidance to eligible students on Adult Skills funded courses through the ESFA, SYMCA and WYCA Adult Skills Fund (ASF) funded courses or students in receipt of a SFE (Student Finance England) Loans Bursary. Northern College is committed to supporting lifelong adult learning using funds where appropriate to remove barriers to education for those in financial hardship.

3. Aim

3.1 Northern College in line with the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities Regulations 2017) will have due regard to the single public sector equality duty, which gives public authorities a legal responsibility to provide this protection and make decisions which are fair and transparent, including the allocations of public money. Therefore, the aim of this Learner Support Policy is to provide a framework for the distribution and monitoring of public funds to students within the College.

3.2 Northern College will have an appropriate and transparent framework to identify, administer, monitor and record spending within the context of learner support funding, including residential access funding. This will be in line with regulations and guidance as laid out by ASF Funding and Performance Management Rules 2024-2025 (SYMCA), West Yorkshire ASF Funding Rules 2024-2025 and ESFA funded Adult Skills Fund- funding rules 2024-2025.

3.3 The College will have robust systems to facilitate the allocation of learner support, including residential access funding. This will include published criteria and be mapped against the requirements of individual courses.

3.4 To demonstrate how evidence will be taken prior to students' attendance and checked against eligibility to ensure funds support the challenges for those from disadvantage communities and those for whom finance or health needs may be a barrier to learning.

3.5 To ensure accountability, all allocations will be reported within the College Individual Learner Records.

3.6 The purpose of the funds is to support eligible students to engage or continue in learning. All students within this context are expected and supported where appropriate to attend all of their classes.

3.7 It is advised that students familiarise themselves with the Financial Support Procedures before applying for Learner Support Fund including the conditions for receiving support. The procedure will detail the evidence required to support an application and will be followed for each instance of learning/enrolment at the College.

4. Financial Support

4.1 Students at Northern College may be eligible to receive five types of support.

4.1.1 Discretionary Hardship - this may include but is not limited to travel support, specialist equipment, learning resources exam fees/registration/professional body fees, tuition fees*, UCAS application costs, meals, course trips.

4.1.2 Childcare: this may include after school clubs, childcare with an Ofsted registered minder or nursery provider.

4.1.3 Residential access - residential accommodation at the College on the associated nights of the course.

4.1.2 ICT devices and connectivity - to support disadvantaged learners who cannot undertake online delivery.

4.1.3 Emergency hardship funding for those who are experiencing sudden unexpected and emergency situations.

**Available if students are not eligible to ESFA tuition fee remission for Level 1 and Level 2 courses only*

4.2 It is important to note that meal allocation is not included within the residential access. Students must meet the criteria for discretionary hardship and residential access to receive meal allocation alongside residential stay.

4.3 The process for all support types will be contained within the relevant Adult Skills Fund (ASF) Financial Support Procedures and the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary (ALLB) procedure and the Childcare Financial Support Procedures. All criteria, childcare elements, residential assessment process, fund allocations and specific hardship awards will be outlined within these procedures.

5. Eligibility

5.1 To be eligible for financial support students must be;

- a resident within the prescribed devolved areas of either West Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority area or South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority area), for ASF courses.
- a resident in England in a non-devolved authority area, for ASF funded courses.
- in receipt of an Advanced Learner Loan from Student Finance England.
- eligible for a Student Loan Bursary, a loan application must be approved before a student can access a student support grant.

5.2 Income

5.2.1 The College will assess those who meet the low wage/unemployed threshold in line with the relevant funding guidance. Where there is no individual taxable income, the household income will be required for assessment purposes.

5.2.2 To be eligible students must meet the requirements of the fund and:

Have an individual taxable income of less than £30,477

If there is no individual taxable income, a household income where the overall income doesn't exceed the threshold of £39,000

5.3 Residency eligibility

5.3.1 Students must meet the residency requirements set out in the ASF Funding Rules 2024 to 2025 as set out by the ESFA, WYCA or SYMCA.

5.3.2 A "home learner" who meets the residency requirements;

Individuals must meet the residency requirements set out in one or more of the following categories.

- UK nationals and other persons with a right to abode;
- UK nationals in the European Economic Area (EEA);
- EEA nationals in the UK;
- Other non-UK nationals
- Family members of the UK and EEA nationals.
- Individuals with certain types of immigration status and their family members.
- Children of Turkish workers.
- Asylum seekers.
- Persons granted stateless leave.

5.3.3 EEA nationals in the UK, with respect to EEA nationals not including Irish nationals, must have obtained either pre-settled or settled Status under the EU Settlement Scheme and have lived continuously in the EEA, Gibraltar or UK for at least the previous 3 years on the first day of learning.

5.3.4 The following are immediately eligible for FE 19+ funding and are exempt from the 3-year residency requirement as per the current ASF, SYMCA and WYCA funding rules:

- British Nationals evacuated from Afghanistan under Operation Pitting;
- individuals with leave to enter or remain in the UK under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)
- individuals with leave to enter or remain in the UK under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)
- British Nationals evacuated from Afghanistan by UK government before 6 January 2022;
- All Ukrainian adults and their family members supported through the Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme and Ukraine Extension Scheme
- Fall within the remit of humanitarian protection status
- Refugee status

5.3.5 The College can support Asylum Seekers if they are 19+ and have lived in the UK for 6 months or longer and have an Aspen card/letter from the home office.

- have lived in the UK for 6 months or longer while their claim is being considered by the Home Office, and no decision on their claim has been made, or
- are receiving local authority support under [section 23C](#) or [section 23CA of the Children Act 1989](#) or the [Care Act 2014](#)

5.3.6 An individual who has been refused asylum will be eligible if:

- they have appealed against a decision made by the UK government against granting refugee status and no decision has been made within 6 months of lodging the appeal, or
- they are granted support for themselves under [section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#)

5.4 Residential Stay Eligibility

5.4.1 The Residential Access Fund (RAF) enables those who need to live away from home to access provision or those who cannot access provision locally to study at the College as a residential student.

5.4.2 Evidence of need for residential will be assessed by the College during the admissions process and recorded within the College Individual Learner Records.

5.4.3 If a student wishes to be assessed for the RAF once a course has started this will be completed at the discretion of the College in line with available funds and stated eligibility criteria.

5.4.4 Once residential eligibility has been assessed and granted this will stand for the entirety of the academic year. This assessment will apply to any subsequent course enrolments the student undertakes within that academic year.

5.4.5 To be eligible to stay on a residential basis whilst studying students must meet at least one of the following criteria

- Student could not attend the same course locally.
- Home environment does not support self-study.
- Declaration of a specific learning difficulty or disability and/or health condition that would prevent the individual from studying on a non-residential basis.
- A referral from a support service or partner organisation that demonstrates the need for study on a residential basis.
- Personal circumstances or barriers that would prevent the individual from studying on a non-residential basis.

5.4.6 The Residential Access Fund will only be used to fund residential stay on the associated nights of the course.

5.5 Fees

5.5.1 Where a student is not eligible for fee remission but meets the threshold set out in the Learner Support Policy, students can apply for their tuition fees to be paid through the hardship element of Learner Support funding.

6. Evidence

6.1 Evidence will be taken and stored in line with UK GDPR

6.2 Evidence taken;

- student information including age, home address and postcode
- evidence of individual or household income
- support needs
- individual residential assessments to ensure each student meets the requirements as laid out in the eligibility criteria
- evidence the student has stayed residentially (where appropriate)
- evidence learning has taken place
- evidence relating to work, benefits, status

6.3 All evidence will be supported by confirmation of correct information by student's signatures

7. Process

7.1 The College will ensure that the student is enrolled on the programme within the first day of attendance or before and that all enrolment documentation is signed and checked in line with funding guidance.

7.2 The College will have a transparent process for application and ensure students are made aware of this process pre course or on the first day of the course programme.

7.3 The Student Services Team will administer funds in accordance with funding guidelines as determined by the relevant funding agencies, and financial audit requirements.

7.4 Where a student receives childcare funding, it is the responsibility of the student to maintain the contract with the childcare provider and any subsequent financial payments.

7.5 If a student makes an application for residential stay at the College through the Residential access fund, they will only be eligible to stay if they meet the criteria set out.

7.6 The Head of Finance is responsible for ensuring funding guidelines Northern College Financial Regulations are adhered to, including 5% administration management.

7.7 The Head of finance will be responsible for ensuring learner support/residential access funds are monitored and reconciled, including payments made to students and internal transfers for meals/equipment/residential accommodation.

7.8 The College may make discretionary payments in exceptional circumstances. This must be approved by a member of ELT.

7.9 The College may make in-year changes to procedures where there are changes to funding or additional monies received.

8. Responsibility

8.1 Where a student has given evidence in relation to their financial status, it is the responsibility of the student to inform the Department of Work and Pension of any income allowances through Student Financial Support.

8.2 It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they have a personal current bank account through which student financial support BACS payments can be made where relevant.

8.3 It is the responsibility of the College to ensure a fair and transparent process for administration and distribution of student financial support reflecting the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

8.4 The Audit Committee is responsible for the approval of this policy and its review.

8.5 The Assistant Principal Student Experience and Head of Finance are responsible for the consideration of complaints and appeals with regards to financial support.

9. Monitoring, Review and Dissemination

9.1 The policy and administration procedures will be reviewed annually in line with:

- ESFA and all devolved authorities' guidelines and audit requirements
- Annual budget, mid-year funding forecast and financial outturn
- College strategic priorities and curriculum plan
- Student feedback
- Audit Committee approval

9.2 The College will ensure that accurate records are retained to evidence students' financial eligibility, including application and enrolment alongside individual allocations and payments.

9.3 Information on financial support will be disseminated via the following:

- Student enrolment and induction sessions
- Staff induction and training events
- Open days and IAG, interviews and enrolment
- The College website/social media
- Student Progress Meetings

9.4 This policy and its underpinning procedures will be located on the Staff-Teams Channel within Microsoft Teams and College website.

10. Appeals and complaints

10.1 All funding is made in line with Northern College Learner Support policy and procedures. If a student feels an unfair decision has been made, they can make an appeal in writing to the Head of Student Support Services. Only appeals relating to process will be considered.

10.2 If a student wishes to complain about the Learner Support Policy or process, they can raise a formal complaint by emailing advice@northern.ac.uk. All complaints will follow the College complaints procedure.

11. Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR (UK General Data Protection Regulation)

11.1 Northern College is a data controller in terms of the Data Protection Act and UK GDPR. Personal information and any supporting evidence will be used by the Financial Support Service for College/audit purposes. The College has a responsibility to administer public funds (financial support) in a manner which is in line with government guidance and the law. In the processing of submitted forms, the College will be mindful of unlawful applications and the prevention of fraud.

11.2 Northern College will ensure effective management and systems of regulation are in place to support the application process. All documentation and evidence of student applications will be confidentially retained by the College for a period of 7 years.

12. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

12.1 Northern College work is aligned to the Equality Act 2010 which prohibits unfair treatment, eliminating discrimination and advances opportunity for all its students. Within this context this policy aims to remove financial disadvantage and take steps to meet the needs of those students who are most financially vulnerable.