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Welfare and Support Policy

Lead	Approved By:	Date Approved:	Next Review	Where
			Date:	Published:
Name of Lead Staff Member	Samantha Louisy	September 2024	August 2025	Staff Intranet/ Website

Policy Statement

West Thames College acknowledges the vital role of the Student Bursary in eliminating barriers for some students in accessing and completing further education courses. The College aims to use these funds to significantly enhance recruitment, attendance, retention, and achievement.

Funds will be allocated in a fair and transparent manner, adhering to the guidelines provided by the Education, Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Greater London Authority.

The Bursary is designed to assist individual young people and adults facing financial hardship while enrolled in a programme at the College. Awards from the Bursary will cover essential course-related expenses such as travel, meals at college (if eligible), equipment, trips, and other learning-related costs (see Types of Support).

The college reserves the right to make amendments to the criteria in the final term as per the availability of funds. Discretionary and Hardship awards will be subject to sufficient funds being available.

Overview

- The bursary payment is subject to attendance, punctuality and behaviour. Attendance should normally be at a minimum of 90%. Extenuating circumstances that are affecting attendance will, however, be considered.
- The bursary will be applied fairly and consistently.
- The process must be easily understood and accessible to all students.
- The Student Bursary and Hardship Fund will be publicised via Student Services information leaflets, Student VLE (EVOLVE) and the website.
- The process should identify eligible students in a timely fashion.
- There is a commitment to ensuring bursary funds allocated to the College are fully distributed in order to support as many students as possible, however, budgets are provided by the ESFA and the GLA, and therefore, the college can only make payment if there is sufficient funds.

Statutory Funding

Bursary Type	Threshold		
Discretionary Bursary (DB)	16-18 & 19: <u>See Section 1</u>		
Vulnerable Bursary (VB)	16-18 (Looked After, Care Leaver) See Section 1		
Discretionary Learner Support (DLS)	Adults: See Section 2		
Advanced Learner Loans	Adults: See Section 2		
Free College Meals (FCM)	16-18, 19-24 with an EHCP, aged 19		
	continuing students):		
Free School Meals (FSM)	15 Threshold students		
Childcare	Childcare support for students & young		
	parents under 20		

The college will publicise the availability of funds on the website and in other promotional materials. Due to the time lag between printing, updating and confirmation of funding this information can be changed at any time. The college accepts no liability for costs incurred prior to a student receiving written confirmation of bursary award AND enrolling at the college.

1. Eligibility

Funding is available to students who can demonstrate that they live in a household with a low income and that as a result will experience financial hardship through participating in education. These funds are intended to mitigate some of the hardships experienced accessing education.

To be eligible for a bursary a student must demonstrate they are eligible for public funds set by the home office /ESFA and evidence that they are receiving benefits (Universal Credits) with a household income below £35,000 per annum. There are further limitations within this for example, Free Meals. Consideration will be given to households in excess of this amount on a case by case basis.

Funding is subject to full engagement in learning which includes a minimum attendance of 90% and above, progress and positive behaviour. All students are expected to maintain 100% attendance.

Please note that for financial assessments, we will only review wage slips, payslips, or bank statements for adult learners without children in their household. This helps us allocate resources where they are most needed and supports a fair distribution of funds.

Appendix 2 – 16-18 Eligibility Assessment

2. Application Process

The application form must be completed in full, signed and dated and submitted via <u>paymystudent.com</u> with all the required evidence. Bank details must be provided with the application as all awards made will be paid by BACS. Bank details must be for the student's own personal bank account.

We cannot take responsibility for any incorrectly entered bank account information. If payments are sent to incorrect accounts or pre-paid cards issued by the Home Office, we are unable to recover those funds, and no further payments will be issued. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the correct bank details are provided.

Applications submitted without the required evidence will not be processed and will therefore cause delays in approving any support funds. The Bursary team will email the student via the PayMyStudent portal confirming the evidence that is missing. Students are responsible for monitoring the portal to view updates and outcome of application.

Once an application has been submitted, it will be assessed by the Bursary department and a decision made on whether an award can be made. Applications can take up to 28 working days to process and due to high volume of applications payments for equipment, kit and uniform are unlikely to be made until the end of November 2024. Applications will be closed if evidence requested is not received after 28 days.

Awards will be allocated from the start of learning (as noted on the learning agreement) or receipt of the completed application and evidence – whichever is the latter. Pro rata awards will be made to those students who start 6 weeks or later than the start of the course

We will communicate the reason for non-payment to all unsuccessful applications via your college email.

The Award will include the following statement:

"It is your responsibility to advise the Department for Work and Pensions about any financial support you are receiving. If the student who is the beneficiary of support leaves the college before the end of his / her course this may impact some benefits. The college reserves the right to stop or withhold payments where it believes that the student is not meeting his / her obligations to attendance, behaviour or progress. Any application for funding that college believes to be fraudulent may be referred to external authorities like police for investigation with the possibility of the student and/or family facing prosecution."

3. Appeals Procedure

Students can submit an appeal if their application via PayMyStudent was declined.

The applicant will be asked to state the reasons for disagreeing with the decision and why it is unfair, and evidence must be submitted to support the claim and confirm that the bursary claim is for educational costs.

A panel will be convened within 20 working days. The panel will consist of the Director of Student Experience and Vice Principal.

The panel will review the decision and the applicant will be notified of the panel's decision in writing within 5 working days.

The decision of the panel will be final.

4. Appealing for additional funds following a successful application and bursary payment It will not be possible to submit an appeal for additional funds from the bursary until after 31st January 2025.

Any student wishing to appeal for additional support must complete an appeal form via Pay My Student and must specify how much support they require and what the additional support is required for. Additional payments will only be made where the requested support is for educational purposes only and only where evidence is provided and will be limited depending on the Bursary funds available.

5. Method of Payment

The guidance states that bursary money <u>must</u> be paid into students' own bank account this will normally be paid by BACS. The student must provide evidence that they have a bank account in their own name by uploading a copy of a bank statement. Help will be provided with opening a bank account where this is necessary. In exceptional circumstances where a student has evidence of an identified need stating that they cannot manage their own affairs alternative method of payment via BACS will be confirmed.

6. Data Protection and Fraud

All applications and evidence documents will be stored on PayMyStudent. Any associated paperwork that may be collected after the application will be upload where required. Only the Welfare office staff and the Director of Student Experience will have access to the documents. According to guidance, this will be retained for a maximum of 6 years.

The college is required by statute to share certain information with the Government. Further information is available at <u>16 to19 Bursary Fund Guide 2024 - 2025</u>. The college will always co-operate with criminal investigations and may share information with appropriate authorities that may help with the prevention or detection of a crime.

Any apparently fraudulent applications will be referred to the appropriate authorities and may lead to suspension or exclusion.

Section 1 – Discretionary Learner Support Funds 16-18, 19 continuing

(EFA Funded Learners only) – See Appendix 1

Discretionary Bursary (DB): Ranging from £576 - £216

DB award is to support the individual needs of students to participate in education for example, help with the cost of transport, free college meals, books and equipment.

If the college identifies a student as 'in need' of financial support the college will administer the necessary process to help students.

Awards can be paid in kind to purchase required books and equipment. The value of the in-kind payment will be deducted from the total bursary award. Any cash awards agreed will be paid every two weeks term time only (subject to change) into your bank account (BACS), **subject to a minimum of 90% attendance at any given time. All students are expected to maintain 100% attendance.**

The final payment will be based on overall attendance, attendance at all exams and submission of all required work. Pro rata awards will be made to those students who start 6 weeks or later than the start of the course.

The discretionary bursary is allocated on the basis of 3 income threshold bands:

- Band 1, £32 Family income less than £25,000pa will get £576
- Band 2, £22 Family income £25,000 £30,000pa will get £396
- **Band 3**, £12 Family income £30,000 £35,000pa will get £216 (this band will be used only if funds are available)

Vulnerable Bursary (VB) Award up to £1200

This is specifically for learners who are considered vulnerable by the Government and fall into one of four categories:

- In Care Looked After (section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or Section 22 of the Children Act 1989)
- Care leavers (section 31 of the Children Act 1989)
- Receiving income support or Universal Credits in their own right (own name) and living independently or with a dependent child or partner.
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right
- Pro rata awards will be made to those students who start 6 weeks or later than the start of the course

The college claims this funding on a case by case basis from the Government and it does not form part of a block grant. Assessments will be made by considering the financial needs and other income sources for students and a lower rate will be claimed and paid if a student has 16+ free oyster, free or subsidised accommodation provided by the local authority and receive payments from either social services or from benefits. Equally if a student has needs that go beyond the £1200 threshold consideration will be given and funds will be allocated from College's Discretionary Bursary.

Vulnerable bursaries will not pay the costs of purchasing electronic devices such as laptops or tablets, where applicable students should contact their social worker as there is a national scheme to provide this equipment for vulnerable young people supported by social workers. If not supported by their own social worker, students should speak to their Student Learning Advisor (SLA) to enquire about loaning a College laptop.

Payments will be based on achieving a minimum 90% attendance measured per 2 weeks.

Section 2 – 19+ Fund & Advance Learner Loan

19+Discretionary Bursaries (Awarded to students with a household income of £35,000 or less

Provides support for students aged 19+ at the start of the academic year where the student is funded through the ESFA/GLA Adult education Budget (HE, Cost recovery, Apprenticeships are not eligible). Awards will be made subject to a successful application and only to students who face genuine financial barriers to completing their course, and priority will be given to co-funded students who are unable to afford their tuition fees or examination fees.

Students whose household income is in excess of £35,000 can still apply for hardship support however will need to demonstrate that they require financial support due to exceptional circumstances.

This fund can also be used to support childcare costs if an Ofsted registered provider is used.

Advanced Learner Loan

Awarded to students with a household income of £35,000 or less who have successfully funded their course through an Advanced Learner Loan.

Advanced Learner Loans Bursary will be only be available to students who are funded by an Advanced Learning Loan for their course and the approval letter from the Student Loan Company must be attached to the application.

Applications can also be made by students who face genuine financial barriers to completing their Advanced Loan funded course to assist with paying their examination fees or other course related costs but as funds are limited all awards will be made subject to financial limits.

Students whose household income is in excess of £35,000 can still apply for hardship support however will need to demonstrate that they require financial support due to exceptional circumstances.

This fund can also be used to support childcare costs if an Ofsted registered provider is used.

See Appendix 3 for further details.

Childcare Support

Available only to students with a household income of £35,000 or less who are aged 20+ who are funded from the Adult Education budget from the ESFA/GLA or from the Advanced Loan Bursary.

The funds will contribute to the daily childcare fee (agreed with the bursary team in advance) for attendance to an Ofsted Approved childcare provider on the days for those days when a student has timetabled lessons in college. If entitled to use the Free Early Education & Childcare funding this must be used to fund the days students are required to attend College and therefore students must only claim for childcare fees in addition to the free placement.

Applications must have confirmation from the Ofsted Approved provider of the daily rate to be charged. The Learner support funds will only reimburse the agreed daily childcare rate, any other fees or charges made by the Ofsted approved childcare provider will not be covered by this fund.

If funding for the course is provided through an Advanced Learning Loan we will not be able to consider your claim until your loan application has been approved – evidence must be uploaded with the application.

If your application is successful payments are made in arrears, students must upload receipted invoices from the Childcare provider confirming the days the child attended (this must match the attendance to the student's course) and the daily fee invoiced. We will not consider payments for childcare were the student fails to attend their course.

The college will only pay for those days when a student has timetabled lessons in college. The maximum payable per child in any academic year is up to £6,000.

The responsibility will be for the student to pay their childcare fees with the chosen provider up front, once the childcare bursary application has been approved receipted invoices will need to be submitted to the Bursary team within the specified time and these will be reconciled with your attendance and payment made via BACS to the student.

The <u>Care to Learn Scheme</u> can help young parents with the cost of childcare while they study. Young parents must be under the age of 20 as the start of their course.

Types of Support

Meals

All 16-18 year olds and those aged 19-24 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who have an approved bursary application will be able to access a free meal to the value of £6 per day when in College. free meals are available at Isleworth and Skills Centre sites. Students studying at other locations with no catering facilities (Project Search) will be paid via their bank accounts.

Students age 15-16 enrolled onto a Direct Entry Course (Threshold) may also be entitled to free meals.

Uniform, Kit, Equipment, and Books

If students are required to purchase uniforms, kits, equipment, or books as part of their course, these costs will be included in their award, with all payments made after 1st November 2024; applications submitted after this date will be considered subject to fund availability. The college aims to contribute to costs such as equipment, materials, trips, visits, and uniforms necessary for participation in learning, but believes learners show greater commitment when they have a financial investment in their course; therefore, students are expected to pay the first 50% of any course-related costs, while learners with an income below £16,000 per annum may receive full funding.

For identified students, the cost of uniforms, kits, equipment, or books required for their course will be reimbursed directly to the curriculum.

Travel to College or Work Placements

Students that live in London should apply for the discounted Oyster card in the first instance. For students that live over 3 miles away from their place of study travel will be allocated as part of your bursary awarded and included within your band allocation. Travel costs will be paid via BACS only twice a term based on attendance.

Educational Visits and Trips

If students are required to attend an educational visit or trip, this will be confirmed with teaching staff who will advise the Bursary Team of the cost and the department will be reimbursed for the purchase of the tickets on the students' behalf.

Course Fees and Exam costs

For students aged 19 or older that are on an ESFA or GLA funded programme, in exceptional circumstances, we may be able to help with the cost of course fees or exam fees. A request for fees to be paid should be made to the Director of Student Experience.

Hardship

If there are exceptional circumstances for additional hardship support, then an application can be made via PayMyStudent. Any hardship payments must be related to expenses associated to attending college.

Electronic Devices

If the College is required to revert to remote teaching and learning, then the College will also use bursary funds to purchase laptops for loaning to funded students to enable them to study remotely. Students requiring a loan of a College laptop will need to submit a request to the Director of Student Experience and must complete the bursary application process. Laptops are limited and therefore applications will be prioritised by the Curriculum Management Team and all loaning of college equipment will be subject to terms and conditions.

Appendix 1 - Residency Eligibility

Students eligible for funding

The following persons will be eligible for funding

a person on the 'relevant date'1 who is 'settled' in the UK, and who has been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (that is including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) for the 3 years preceding the 'relevant date'. 'Settled' means having either indefinite leave to enter or remain (ILE/ILR) or having the right of abode in the UK. British citizens and certain other people have the right of abode in the UK as follows:

- a. British nationals who hold a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland passport
- b. Irish nationals
- c. European Union nationals or family members of EEA and Swiss workers (resident in the UK before 1 January 2021) with settled or pre-settled status
- d. students who are children of Turkish workers where the Turkish worker has been lawfully employed and resident in the UK before 1 January 2021
- e. British Dependent Territory Citizens (now known as British Overseas Territory Citizens)
- f. those whose passports have been endorsed to show they have right of abode in the UK
- g. those who have a certificate of naturalisation or registration as a British Citizen
- h. those with Hong Kong British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa who have been given Home Office permission to reside in the UK

In addition to the groups outlined above, ESFA will also consider the following groups of students (including those who may not have lived in the UK for the last 3 years) to be eligible for funding:

- a. people with refugee status (RS) or humanitarian protection (HP) or discretionary leave (DL) or exceptional leave to enter or remain (ELE/ELR), their spouses, civil partners and children
- b. people with recently settled status (this means those having been granted indefinite leave to enter or remain, right of abode or British citizenship within the 3 years immediately preceding the start of the course)
- c. people granted pre-settled status following our exit from EU

In addition to the groups above, ESFA will also consider the following groups of students (including those who may not have lived in the UK for the last 3 years), aged up to and including the age of 18, as eligible for funding as follows:

- a. those who are accompanying or joining parents or spouses or civil partners who have the right of abode or leave to enter or remain in the UK (or accompanying or joining relevant family members, usually parents, who are UK or Irish nationals), or those who are children of diplomats
- b. those who are dependants of teachers coming to the UK on a teacher exchange scheme
- c. those who are residing legally in the UK (including those entering the UK in the last 3 years who are or were not accompanied by their parents) who are British (or Irish) citizens or those whose passports have been endorsed (or as part of move to digital immigration systems, either a Biometric residency permit (BRP), or an equivalent digital status and/or an endorsement letter) to either show they have the right of abode in this country or to show that they have no restrictions on working in the UK
- d. those who are dependants of adults residing legally in the UK who have been given immigration rights as workers to reside in the UK
- e. those who are dependants of foreign students where the accompanying parent or legal guardian has a Student visa (the accompanying parent or legal guardian is excluded from our funding)
- f. asylum seekers
- g. those having been granted leave under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (the 'Dubs' amendment)
- h. those having been granted Calais leave to remain
- i. those who are (including unaccompanied asylum seekers) placed in the care of social services or those in receipt of Section 4 support

No recourse to public funds

Someone who has 'no recourse to public funds' included in their passport stamp would not be in breach of their immigration conditions if they had access to state-funded education in the UK. 'Public funds' are

defined in the immigration rules, and the benefits and services listed do not include education or any education funding. This condition in a passport therefore makes no difference to a student's eligibility, which must be determined under the normal eligibility criteria described in the paragraphs above.

Appendix 2: 16-18 Eligibility Assessment

			Yes	Go to section 2
2		Is the student 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2024 (or 19-23 and evidence of an EHCP)	No	Not eligible for support – check for 19+ eligibility. STOP
	2	Has the student been assessed by college as eligible for EFA	Yes	Go to section 3
	2	funding and residency?	No	Not eligible for support. STOP.
Eligibility	2	Is the student claiming "independent" status e.g. Care Leaver	Yes	Go to section 6
Elig	3	or Looked after child?	No	Go to section 4
receipt of o Incom Incom Incom Part VI Child credit.		Universal Credit or/and income less than £25,000	Yes	Entitled to Discretionary Bursary, Support Funds* AND Free College Meals. Go to section 9.
	Part VI support of Immigration Act	No	Go to section 5	
depe	Does parent have evidence dated within last 3 months of receipt of one or more of: Working Tax Credit with income assessed as less than £25,000 Housing or Council Tax Benefit		Yes	Entitled to Discretionary Bursary and Support Funds* . Go to section9.
Non-in			No	Not entitled to Bursary OR Free School Meals. STOP.
		Does the learner have evidence of one or more of the following:	Yes	Student is entitled to Vulnerable Bursary and Support Funds* and <i>may</i> be entitled to Free College Meals. Go to section 7
6	6	 Care leaver Income Support or Universal Credits in own name, living independently or young parent ESA AND DLA or PIP 	No	Student is not entitled to Vulnerable bursary but <i>may</i> be entitled to Free College Meals and Support Funds. Go to section 7
Independent Learners		Does learner have evidence in own name dated within last 3 months of receipt of one or more of: Income Support Universal Credit less than £25,000	Yes — and in receipt of VB	Entitled to Free College Meals . Go to section 9.
		 Income Based JSA Income Based ESA Part VI support of Immigration Act Child Tax Credit income <£16,190 and NO working tax credit. 	Yes – but not in receipt of VB	Entitled to Discretionary Bursary, Support Funds* AND Free College Meals. Go to section 9.
		Guarantee element of state pension credit	No	Not entitled to Free School Meals. Go to section 8.
		Is the learner in receipt of one or more of following: Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit with income	Yes	Entitled to Discretionary Bursary, Support Funds*
Inde	8	assessed as less than £25,000 Housing or Council Tax Benefit	No	STOP.
Exceptional Travel G			Yes	Travel enhancement payment available
	9	Does the learner live in an eligible postcode?	No	STOP.

Do you qualify for an Advanced Learner Loan?

To qualify you must:

- be aged 19 or over on the first day of your course (there's no upper age limit) and starting your course on or after 1 August 2024.
- be living in the UK on the first day of your course
- have been living in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man for 3 years immediately before starting your course
- be a UK national or have 'settled status' (this means there are no restrictions on how long you can stay).

You may also be eligible if you're a UK national (or family member of a UK national) who either:

- returned to the UK on or after 1 January 2018 and by 31 December 2020 after living in the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein
- was living in the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein on 31 December 2020 and has been living in the UK, the EU, Gibraltar, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein for the past 3 years

If you're an EU national or a family member of an EU national

You may be eligible if you're an EU national, or a family member of an EU national, and all the following apply:

- you have settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families
- you've normally lived in the UK, Gibraltar, EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein for the past 3 years

You could also be eligible if you're:

- the child of a Swiss national
- a resident of Gibraltar who is a UK or EU national, or their family member

If you have a different residency status

You may also be eligible if your residency status is one of the following:

- a refugee, or the family member of one
- a migrant worker or a frontier worker, or a family member of one
- you're the family member of a person of Northern Ireland and you have pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme
- you're not a UK national but you've lived in the UK for at least 20 years (or at least half of your life)
- under humanitarian protection or a family member of someone who has been granted it
- · the child of a Turkish worker
- staying in the UK as a stateless person, or their family member, and your course started on or after 1 August 2018
- granted 'Calais leave' to remain, or the child of someone granted 'Calais leave' to remain if your course starts on or after 1 August 2024
- you've been given indefinite leave to remain because you've been the victim of domestic violence
- you've been given indefinite leave to remain as a bereaved partner

The Advanced Learner Loan Bursary is designed to help students who receive an Advanced Learner Loan and need additional support. The Bursary aims to help disadvantaged or vulnerable students - such as those with learning difficulties or disabilities, parents who need help with childcare or those suffering from financial hardship. The Bursary may also be available to support students with travel or other course-related costs.

You can either apply for an Advanced Learner Loan to cover all or part of the fee. All of the information that you need in order to apply for an Advanced Learner Loan is shown below:

- 1. Apply online for an Advanced Learner Loan at GOV.UK.
- 2. The minimum Loan amount you can apply for is £300.
- 3. The Student Loan Company (SLC) will process your application and write to you to confirm whether your application has been successful.
- 4. The SLC will pay the loan for your fee directly to West Thames College.
- 5. You must provide complete and correct information when you take out the loan and tell SLC about any changes to these details or your circumstances during the application process, while you are studying with us, and until you have repaid your loan in full.
- 6. You'll only begin to repay your student loan through the tax system when you complete or withdraw from your course and earn more than the repayment threshold. Please visit www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan for more information.
- 7. You can access up to 4 loans in a lifetime, either one after the other or at the same time.

For further information about Advanced Learner Loans, please refer to the National Careers Service website https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/

West Thames College

Information you will need to complete an Advanced Learner Loan application

Location:	TW7 4HS
UK Provider Reference number:	10007434
Course name:	
Course code:	
Start date:	

Total College fee:

End date:

The amount of loan you can get:

Name of college or training organisation:

If you decide not to take out a loan, you must pay the fees which can be paid by cash, credit/debit card. You can pay all or part of the fee yourself. You must pay this in full before you start your course. The college offers a range of instalment plans to allow you to stagger your payments.

Please note

If you are applying for an Advanced Learner Loan, and your loan has not been approved at the time of your enrolment, you will be charged a £100.00 deposit which will be refunded once your loan comes through.