

Learner Financial Support Policy and Guidance 2021/22

Created by	Director of Learner Services
Approved by	Finance, Personnel and Development Committee 17 March 2021
Version	2.0
Date of next review	March 2022

1. Purpose

- 1.1 WM College is committed to supporting learners facing financial difficulty in their journey to achieve their learning aim in an Adult Education funded course. WM College is funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and has chosen to allocate some funding to a College Learner Financial Support Fund (“LFSF” or “the fund”). The funding for the year 2021/22 will primarily be used to support learners with paying their course fees.

We aim to ensure that learners, prospective learners and those supporting learners are aware of:

- The courses that qualify for funding
- The level of financial support available
- Who is eligible for funding and the evidence required to claim funding
- How to apply

2. Scope

- 2.1 The fund is open to all learners and prospective learners wishing to study a funded Adult Education course at WM College. Eligibility to receive an award from the fund is means tested.
- 2.2 Separate bursary and financial support funds are available for learners aged 19 or under or those in receipt of Advanced Learner Loans. Please refer to the relevant policy and guidelines for these funds or speak to a member of the Learner Services Team

3. Responsibility

- 3.1 The Director of Learner Services is responsible for reviewing the guidance, implementing the policy and for monitoring the funds. She/he is also responsible for ensuring that the fund is fully explained in WM College literature.

4. Monitoring and Review

- 4.1 The policy, guidance and operational procedures will be reviewed each year and updated as necessary and in accordance with any funding body guidance.
- 4.2 The fund will be reviewed throughout the year to ensure that the allocation is appropriately and optimally utilised. This may mean that the eligibility rules vary during the year at the discretion of WM College’s Executive Management Group (EMG) or in accordance with any GLA/ESFA guidelines. Any changes will be communicated to eligible learners.
- 4.3 EMG will be updated regularly by the Director of Learner Services with monitoring information about the expenditure and forecast.

5. Levels of Financial Support

Once an application has been received, it will be assessed, based on the individual circumstances of the applicant. Where we can provide financial assistance for the payment of fees it will be calculated as follows:

5.1 Courses that qualify for funding

LFSF is only available for courses funded by the GLA or ESFA under the Adult Education Budget funding stream, including Community Learning courses.

5.2 Formula-funded courses

5.2.1 Learners studying a formula-funded course (generally courses leading to an external qualification) who are unemployed, on Universal Credit or most other means tested benefits, or where household income is less than the London Living Wage are exempt from paying fees and no fee will be assessed.

5.2.2 From 2021/22, learners studying a level 3 qualification listed in the National Skills Framework (NSF) are also exempt from paying fees and no fee will be assessed. Neither is there any longer a requirement to take out an Advanced Learner Loan to help fund the course.

5.2.3 All other learners on formula-funded courses, who are assessed to pay a fee, can apply to the LFSF for support with those course fees. If eligible they can have up to 100% of their course fees met by the fund.

5.3 Community Learning funded courses

5.3.1 Learners studying a Community Learning (CL) funded course (generally courses that do not result in an external qualification) who are unemployed, on Universal Credit or most other means tested benefit, or where household income is less than the London Living Wage will receive an automatic 50% discount on their fees from the College.

5.3.2 Learners on Community Learning funded courses who are not entitled to the automatic 50% discount on course fees can apply for support from the LFSF and successful learners will receive support for up to 25% of the fees.

5.4 Studio Practice courses

Learners who meet the relevant criteria will be eligible for a discount on Studio Practice courses of up to 50%.

6 Eligible Learners

- 6.1 Learners who, at the time of enrolment, are on a low family income and/or in receipt of a means tested benefit, which totals less than £25,000 may be eligible for LFSF. Learners must be enrolling on a WM College course that is funded under the Adult Education Budget stream. The fund will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. WM College will prioritise the funding to focus on groups currently underrepresented in FE, securing participation and attainment in priority learning by removing financial barriers for disadvantaged learners including:
- Those in care or who have recently left care
 - Those on probation
 - Those eligible for fee remission because they are themselves, or they are dependent on someone else who is, receiving a means tested state benefit
 - ESOL Learners
 - Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
 - Those recently made redundant or currently at risk of redundancy
 - Learners who are studying a vocational course at level 2 or below, who are aiming to progress to a higher level of study or to employment.
- 6.2 Funding applications cannot be backdated where an individual's circumstances change after the start of the course unless the benefit is also back dated.
- 6.3 This is a means tested fund available only where household income is under £25,000 per annum.
- 6.4 Learners may be paying a full or reduced fee. The fund cannot be used to support learners attending courses that are full cost and not funded by the GLA or ESFA. The number of courses for which any learner can apply for financial help in any one year may be limited at the discretion of the Director of Learner Services.
- 6.5 Personal Independence Payment (formally DLA) is ignored when assessing disabled learners' income in relation to LFSF.
- 6.6 Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit are excluded from the calculation of household income.
- 6.7 Further information about the evidence required for means tested benefits is provided in the course guide, on the website and at Learner Services.
- 6.8 The qualifying threshold may also be reviewed by EMG at any point in the year to ensure that the funds are being effectively and optimally utilised.

7 How to Apply

- 7.1 Application forms are available at Reception at both the Crowndale Road and Kentish Town sites and via the College website (www.wmcollege.ac.uk). Photocopies showing proof of income, payslips, self-employed accounts for the previous year or refugee documentation must be attached to the application form. If applying via the website, learners will be provided with a secure method of sharing personal documents.
- 7.2 Applications should be made in advance where possible. All applications should be submitted by no later than a month after the course start date. It may not be possible to refund course or exam fees that have already been paid.

8 Appeal Process

- 8.1 If learners have had an application for LFSF support declined, but then submit further evidence to support their application it will be considered by the Admissions and Learner Services Manager who may arrange for a reassessment of the application.

9 Waiting Lists

- 9.1 Once the funds are depleted, a waiting list will be maintained in order to keep a log of learners who may be able to receive support if further funds are made available either through additional College allocation to the fund or because a learner withdraws or cancels and the funds are recycled.
- 9.2 This log will be kept by Learner Services and does not guarantee that the learners recorded on this list will receive funds.
- 9.3 The Director of Learner Services will inform EMG through the returns on the expenditure of the funds. It will be at the discretion of EMG to use this list.

10 Learner Progression and Data Collection

- 10.1 LFSF is used to support learners in financial hardship to participate in their learning aim.
- 10.2 WM College may contact learners who have received financial support to gather information about the impact that the fund has had on their learning experience and on the improvement of their job prospects.