

# **FEE POLICY AND POUND PLUS POLICY FRAMEWORK 2023/24**

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<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Finance, Personnel and Development Committee 15 March 2023</b>
<b>Version</b>	<b>23/24</b>
<b>Date of next review</b>	<b>March 2024</b>

# WM College Fee Policy and Pound Plus Policy Framework 2023/24

## 1. Background

- 1.1. The Principal and Executive Management Team (EMT) are responsible for setting course fees within a framework approved by Governors.
- 1.2. The College is committed to providing wide access to education to all those who will benefit from it and the fee policy framework therefore needs to endeavour to ensure that finance does not become a barrier to learning.
- 1.3. The College is funded mainly by the Greater London Authority (GLA) but also receives a small amount of funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and follows the rules set down by these funding bodies in setting its fee policy.
- 1.4. There are two main funding approaches that determine how fees are set: formula funded provision and community learning funded provision.

## 2. Formula Funded Courses

- 2.1. Qualification courses are all formula funded. However, there are also some non-qualification courses which are formula funded, where this learning is preparing learners to be able to progress onto a qualification course in future or improving their employability or independent living skills. These non-qualification courses are mainly in areas such as ESOL, English, maths, digital skills, employability or courses for learners with learning disabilities and difficulties.

### ***Courses that are fully funded as part of the legal entitlement***

- 2.2. The following courses are fully funded as they are part of the government's legal entitlement as set out in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. They are thus free to learners and the College is not allowed to charge any fee to learners on these courses.
  - English and maths, up to and including level 2, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have not previously attained a GCSE grade C, grade 4, or higher
  - first full\* qualification at level 2 for individuals aged 19 to 23
  - first full\* qualification at level 3 for individuals aged 19 to 23
  - Digital skills, up to and including level 1, for individuals aged 19 and over, who have digital skills assessed at below level 1
  - 18 year-olds on the Level 3 Foundation Art Diploma

For all other formula funded courses, fees are applied as set out below.

### ***Courses up to and including Level 2***

- 2.3. Learners who are unemployed and on wider state benefits, or who fall within the GLA's "employed and

low wage” definition, are designated as “fully funded” and are entitled to full fee remission; the College will receive funding for them in full from the GLA/ESFA and no fee is chargeable to the learner.

- 2.4. All other learners are designated as “co-funded” and the cost of their course is shared between the GLA/ESFA and the learner. Under the funding formula, the GLA/ESFA will deduct an “assumed fee element” which is an amount equal to 50% of the base funding for the course. It is assumed that the learner will contribute to this amount, but the College is free to set its own fee for the course and is not obliged to adopt the 50% of base rate amount. WM College fees for these courses have a historical base which may be higher or lower than the “assumed fee element” and which have been determined to reflect market forces, demand for the courses, competitor prices, etc. For 2023/24, the College aims to increase these fees by 5% rounded up to the next £1 over the 2022/23 level, but during the detailed curriculum and business planning process these will be considered on a course by course basis, with due regard to the 50% model figure and the other relevant factors which might result in a different increase or even in exceptional circumstances, a decrease.
- 2.5. Learners in these categories who are assessed to pay fees may apply to the Learner Financial Support Fund (LFSF) for financial assistance with the fees. Where successful they will receive an award of 100% of their assessed fees.
- 2.6. Where an accredited or other formula funded course is delivered at a community venue, the normal funding rules would apply, with “fully funded” learners having no fee and “co-funded” learners being assessed for a fee. However, such co-funded learners would be able to apply for support from the College’s Learner Financial Support Fund (LFSF) and are a priority group for awards. As long as the co-funded learner meets the LFSF qualifying criteria, they could reasonably expect to receive an award for 100% of the assessed fees.

### ***Courses at Level 3 or Higher***

- 2.7. The Government has identified a list of level 3 courses which will automatically be approved for full funding for learners of any age who are unemployed and on wider state benefits, or who fall within the GLA’s “employed and low wage” definition.
- 2.8. Learners aged 19-23, on courses not on the list referred to in paragraph 2.7 above, and who do not already possess a full level 3 qualification, will be fully funded and get their course for free under the “first full level 3” entitlement.
- 2.9. All other learners aged 19 or over, studying on courses at level 3 or above, are not entitled to any funding from the GLA/ESFA but may apply for a non-means tested, Government “Advanced Learning Loan” from Student Finance England (the Student Loans Company) if the course is “loan funded”.
- 2.10. Courses that only qualify for loan financing are identified as such in the College’s Course Guide (primarily the College’s 32 week Foundation Diploma arts course). In most circumstances all other Level 3 courses qualify for Loan Funding, if eligibility for any fee remission is not applicable.
- 2.11. Loans are made available for the lower of the course fee set by the College or the prescribed national base rate funding for the course. WM College’s policy to date has been to set course fees at the same as the national base rate for the course, and this will be adopted again in 2023/24.
- 2.12. A small Loans Bursary fund is provided to the College to support Advanced Learning Loan funded learners with other related costs of undertaking the course such as travel or materials.

### 3. Community Learning Funded Courses

- 3.1. Almost all the College's non-accredited and short arts courses, together with some of the courses delivered in community venues, fall under the Community Learning (CL) funding stream. Funding for CL does not have "per learner" funding calculated according to a formula, but rather is effectively a block grant to the College to deliver courses that meet the needs of the community.
- 3.2. Generating additional income and revenue is central to the objective of driving up participation in community learning within a context of constrained public finances. "Pound Plus" describes how learning providers can show that they are maximising the value of their Community Learning funding from the public purse. It refers to the additional income or cost savings generated over and above the core grant income and usually takes the form of course fees from participants, access to accommodation for delivery of learning at no (or reduced) cost, volunteer workers, or donations of equipment or resources. For WM College, the primary sources are course fees on Community Learning funded courses and the provision of serviced community spaces by College partners for delivery of courses in community locations. The following paragraphs set out the College's approach to implementing the "pound plus" concept.
- 3.3. Fees for these courses have a historical base which took account of market forces, demand for the courses, competitor prices, etc. For 2023/24, in line with the approach to formula funded courses, the College aims generally to increase these fees by 5% rounded up to the nearest £1, but during the detailed curriculum and business planning process these will be considered on a course by course basis.
- 3.4. The discount rate to CL funded learners on means tested benefits or low household income will be set at 50% for 2023/24.
- 3.5. Where courses delivered at community venues fall under Community Learning, in recognition of the partner community organisation providing accommodation at no cost to the College and in line with the "pound plus" approach, no fee will be charged to the learner.

### 4. Financial Support for Learners

- 4.1. WM College is committed to making learning accessible to all who will benefit from it and is determined that finance should not be a barrier to learning. A range of support measures is therefore put in place to provide financial help to learners.
- 4.2. Learners on Universal Credit or other relevant means-tested benefits or a household income below £26,000 are entitled to an automatic 50% discount on Community Learning funded courses.
- 4.3. A Learner Financial Support Fund has been created to enable co-funded learners on formula funded courses to get their course for free if they have a household income of below £26000 per annum.
- 4.4. To incentivise learners to enrol early and to avoid the busy September enrolment weeks, an "early enrolment" discount of 10% will be made available from the launch of the Course Guide in June 2022 until Friday 8 September 2023. The date may be extended at the Principal's discretion.
- 4.5. Learners cannot claim more than one discount.
- 4.6. The ESFA provides a small Student Financial Support fund to provide financial assistance to learners under the age of 19 with travel costs and additional course related costs.

- 4.7. Where individual course fees (or the total of multiple course fees) exceed £200, learners may pay the fees by instalments with an initial deposit on enrolment and up to five further equal monthly instalments, payable by direct debit. The exact number of instalments and value of each is determined by the length of the course as the final instalment must fall before the end of the course.
- 4.8. There is no interest or administration charge applied to instalment plans.
- 4.9. Learners applying to pay by instalments must complete and sign a direct debit form at the time of enrolment.
- 4.10. If a direct debit instalment collection is not honoured when claimed by the College, the College will make a further attempt to collect the amount due 7 days later. If this collection is also rejected, then the direct debit agreement will be cancelled and that collection amount, together the remaining balance of the fee, will fall due for immediate payment by the learner.
- 4.11. All direct debit arrangements will be operated in accordance with the Direct Debit Guarantee scheme.

## **5. Overseas Learners**

- 5.1. Learners who live in London must have permission to live in the UK for at least 12 months, on the first day of learning. Learners who live outside of London will need to meet the 3-year residency requirement or another residency status which falls within the ESFA's definition of ordinarily resident in the UK. Learners who do not satisfy this criterion.
- 5.2. Fees for such learners for 2023/24 will be £13 per hour (an increase from £12.50 in 2022-23). This rate may be varied at the discretion of the Principal or the Vice Principal where there is a case of student hardship and it can be demonstrated that a reduced rate will still cover the direct costs of all aspects of the learner's study and attendance at College and not risk recourse to subsidy from public funds.

## **6. Communicating the Fee Policy**

- 6.1. This fee policy framework will be supplemented by information for College managers, other College staff and learners to explain the fee structures and availability of financial support in clear language and terms as applicable to them. This will be published in the Course Guide, on the College website (by virtue of being in the Course Guide) and elsewhere or in other formats as necessary.

## **7. Fee Refunds and Course Transfers**

- 7.1. In the event of a course cancellation, all fees paid by learners will be refunded. If learners choose to withdraw from a course two weeks or more before the date of the first class, their fees will be refunded subject to deduction of a £15 administration fee. If they enrol less than two weeks before the start of a course and withdraw before the course starts, these terms apply. If they choose to withdraw from a course less than two weeks before the date of the first scheduled class, then they will be able to claim a refund of 50% of the fees, subject to a minimum retention by the College of £15. If they choose to withdraw from a course on or after the date of the first class, then no refund will be made under any circumstances, and they will also remain liable for all fees assessed but not yet paid.
- 7.2. If a course transfer is possible, the fees from their original course will be transferred. If the new course has higher fees, they must pay the balance in full (or a new instalment plan agreed) before the transfer can be completed. No refund will be available if the new course has lower fees.