

Name of Policy:	Financial Support Policy
Last Approved:	June 2024
Approved By	Corporation
SLT Owner	Director of Finance

Long Road Sixth Form College is committed to helping students overcome financial barriers to successful participation and completion of their studies. The College receives government grants each academic year specifically to provide financial support to students. Grants are limited so in managing and administering the Financial Support funds, the College will:

- Clearly identify priorities, so that support is awarded on a fair yet affordable basis
- Put financial checks and controls in place as appropriate to public funds
- Ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of any grants
- Provide effective and efficient processes for handling applications, payments and appeals
- Identify potential sources of support from other agencies or charities, where appropriate
- Retain sufficient funds to deal with emerging changes in students' financial circumstances
- Ensure arrangements and decisions take due account of equalities legislation

Grants received by the College known as 'Financial Support Funds' are as follows:

- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- Free Further Education Meals
- 16-18 Discretionary Bursary Funds

These funds may contribute towards the cost of one or more of the following:

- Essential materials required to study on their chosen courses.
- Stationery and Print Credits/Items
- Essential equipment and/or uniform required to study on their chosen courses.
- Internet access for distance learning where it has been demonstrated the household cannot afford it.
- College Fund
- Revision guides
- Deposits to access the resources required to study on their chosen courses
- Transport to and from the College and placements
- Further education free meals
- DBS for placements
- Trips essential for their participation on chosen courses. (*Support is not normally available for trips outside the United Kingdom*)
- Exam re-sit fees
- Progression Fees
- Fees in supporting industry placements/work experience

The rules for each fund are different and therefore an award may be made from different funds and is individual to the circumstances of the student. As funds are limited, it may be necessary to close a fund at any point during the academic year. The college will, however, strive to support students and will consider applications throughout the academic year if emergencies arise. There is no entitlement to a discretionary bursary.

The policy will provide clear, accessible and transparent information to students, parents and staff about how the Bursary Fund and Free School Meals will be administered. Including, how the funds will be used, eligibility criteria and the procedures used. Therefore, the policy will be published on the Academy website.

Success in achieving the aims of the fund can therefore be measured by participation rates, specifically enrolment and retention rates, and at a subsidiary level by tracking achievement, although that is not an aim of the fund.

Support for all Students

All 16-18 year old students attending Long Road Sixth Form College receive the following support or benefits:

- Free tuition and free examination entries in respect of students' first entries. This excludes charges for examination services.
- Access to free or low-cost extra-curricular activities (e.g. sport, music).
- Eligibility for NUS card, which gives access to various on-line and in-store discounts.
- Parents eligible to claim Child Benefit, if student is on a full-time course.

Priorities and eligibility

Students experiencing particular financial difficulty are eligible to apply for assistance from the Financial Support Fund to ensure access to their learning. The fund is cash-limited and so priority will be given to those students from families with the lowest household income and/or highest demonstrated need. The funds are intended to cover costs associated with studying at Long Road Sixth Form College and are not a substitute for other sources of financial support (e.g. childcare payments under the Care to Learn Scheme) nor will they be used for regular payments for living costs. Funds are not intended also to support extra curricular activities or provide learning support services such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring. The College targets any support on an individual basis and the list below indicates the form such support may take. The College will assess the needs of individual learners and not make flat rate payments because the fund is designed to help students overcome individual financial barriers. 'No student will automatically be awarded a set amount of funding without an assessment of the level of need they require. This does not prevent applicants from making a case for alternative support; each case being considered on its merits. However, funds are awarded at the College's discretion and decisions are made with respect to demands from, and needs of, the whole student population. There is no entitlement to a discretionary bursary.

The eligibility criteria for assistance from any of the individual Financial Support Funds are different. However, in all cases students must:

- be aged 16 or over but under 19 as at 31st August 2024. Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive support from the 16-18 discretionary bursary if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers') or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). In case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same study programme they started before they turned 19.
- be studying a qualification up to and including Level 3.
- Students must meet the residency criteria on ESFA funding regulations for post 16 provision.
- be able to demonstrate an annual household income below £30,000 (gross taxable income) and that they will struggle to afford to pay the cost of coming to College.

Awards from the Financial Support Funds cannot be made if:-

- the student is an overseas student
- Government regulations prohibit the College from doing so.

Bursaries for Young People in defined vulnerable groups

Students who meet one of the criteria below and who have a financial need can apply for a bursary for vulnerable learners of up to £1,200 per year (if they are participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more; a pro-rata amount is paid to students on study programmes of less than 30 weeks). This reflects that students in these groups may need a greater level of support to enable them to continue to participate.

The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in Local Authority Care and defined as a 'Looked After Child'
- a care leaver of the Local Authority defined as:
 - a young person aged 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16; or
 - a young person aged 18 who was looked after prior to becoming 18 for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16 or 13 weeks consecutively (or periods of 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16
- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit, clearly stating the claim is in their own name because they are financially supporting themselves or
- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit, clearly stating the claim is in their own name because they are financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner
- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups.

Free Further Education Meals

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa

16-18 Discretionary Bursary Funds

To be eligible for financial support a student will need to demonstrate an annual household income ordinarily below £30,000 (gross taxable income) and that they will struggle to afford to pay the cost of coming to college.

Disbursements will be made as per the following table

	Under £30,000
Public Transport <i>This is a contribution towards travel and may not cover the full costs</i>	100%
Essential Books	100%
Essential Equipment/Kit/Starter Packs	100%
College Services Fee	100%
Essential Uniform	100%
Stationery	100%
Equipment Deposits	100%
UCAS Fees	100%
GCSE English/Maths Resit Fee	100%
Childcare	Learners aged under 20 on the 31st August 2024 with childcare needs while at College may apply to Care to Learn at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn or ring 0800 121 8989. Please note the care provider must be OFSTED registered.

The application should be accompanied by a recent **photocopy** of the following full document(s) that are applicable to the household in which the student lives (dated within the last six months):

- Tax Credit Award Notice 2024/2025 (start date 06/04/2024)
- Annual tax credit review ending 31st July 2024
- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- National Asylum Seekers Support
- Last three consecutive months of Universal Credit award notices

If they do not have any of the above, proof of household income under £30,000 must be supplied. This can either be done by providing the last three months bank statements and wage slips for each working member of the household. For those who are self-employed, a photocopy of the Self-Assessment Tax Return or a letter from their accountant stating the projected earnings for 2022/23 will be required.

Transport

Students who meet the eligibility criteria of the 16-18 Discretionary Bursary Funds will get their transport costs covered or subsidised if they live three miles or more from College and use public transport.

Students are encouraged to apply to their local County Council in the first instance for assistance with the cost of transport if they meet the following criteria

- Long Road Sixth Form College is the nearest college to their home offering their course/subjects
- they are enrolled on a full time course
- they are under 19 on 1 September 2024
- they are resident at an address more than three miles from their college

and in receipt of one of the following:

- Income Support
- Universal Credit with a household net monthly income of no more than £935.00
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- NHS Tax Exemption (valid at the time of application - Cambridgeshire County Council only)
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Tax Credits where the Household income is below £16,190

This is correct at the time of writing although is subject to change and each student will need to check the eligibility criteria of their County Council at the time of application.

If a student's application is refused by their County Council or they do not meet the eligibility criteria, they should be encouraged to make an application to the 16-19 discretionary bursary.

Discounted Travel

Discounted season tickets are made available by various transport operators. There are terms and conditions for the discount which students will need to check with the operators' websites before applying.

Distance Learning

In cases of distance learning due to temporary closure of college site, the college will continue to support students by accepting applications, ordering items, and making payments for awards made. There may also be additional awards made for equipment, software or items (eg Internet access, print cartridges etc) to assist the student in continuing their studies. Some of the additional awards may however be subject to additional eligibility criteria eg the household will need to demonstrate that it does not currently have Internet access.

For those awarded Free College meals, this will be paid on a regular by BACS at the meal allowance rate of £4.00 per college day. It will remain at the discretion of the Government and/or the College if payments are to be made during college holidays.

During this period, any payments for transport maybe suspended until the college reopens.

At times where there is a combination of college and distance learning, transport payments will be made accordingly. Free College meals will continue to be paid at the rate of £4.00 per day either by placing the amount on their College Card for the days the students are at College or by BACS payments for the days of distance learning

APPLICATION PROCESS

Students and parents will be invited and encouraged to apply during the enrolment process and throughout the academic year. The College will use a range of communication strategies to help students and their families feel able to apply for a bursary. The College may contact local authorities to identify if new students were in receipt of pupil premium in year 11 or SEND support, to pro-actively target bursaries information at identified students.

There will be one application form which will be used for applications to all Financial Support Funds. This form will be available from Reception, Student Services, Admissions, Finance, electronically from the College website, by e-mail from financialsupport@longroad.ac.uk or by telephoning the College on 01223 631141. An application can be made prior to enrolment however no awards will be made until the student is enrolled at Long Road Sixth Form College. An application does not mean an award will be made.

The College must check student eligibility in each academic year, which means that the students must apply separately for each academic year.

Timescale for Applications

Applications can be made throughout the year, to allow for changing circumstances. However, funds are limited and this may reduce the amount which can be awarded for late applications. Students are, therefore, encouraged to apply as early as possible. As funds are limited it may be necessary to close a funds at any point during the academic year.

Assessment Process

All applications will be assessed for each of the College's Financial Support Funds and if funds are available an award will be allocated subject to meeting the College's eligibility criteria, a correct and completed application form and relevant evidence being provided.

During the application process the College will apply the eligibility criteria established by the guidance documents for bursary funds and free meals.

For example;

- Three months of Universal Credit award notices may be required to extrapolate annual household income.
- The Transitional protection arrangements used during the national roll-out of universal credit.

All evidence and data received and retained for audit purposes will conform to the Trust GDPR policy and Academy procedures.

AWARDS

Eligibility for a bursary does not automatically mean that funding will be given, it is possible that there will be no award or a limited award. This may be because there is no financial need, the need is already being met or in the case of an in-year application the funds are not available because they are allocated on a first come first served basis.

Decisions about which students receive an award and how much bursary they receive must be based on an individual assessment of each student's individual circumstances and their actual financial need.

There must not be blanket or flat rate/fixed rate payments to all students. A discretionary bursary award may be larger than a vulnerable group award. The Bursary award may vary through the academic year if the individual specific need changes. For example, a student may travel further to an industry placement and therefore require additional funds for the journey and meals.

The College must manage the number and size of awards to keep within their budget. A small emergency fund may also be retained to support students who face exceptional circumstances.

Specialist equipment purchased with these funds remains the property of the College and should be returned in good condition at the end of the students studies. Other equipment, tools or protective clothing which may be reusable at a later date should be returned in good condition. The College will give practical consideration to such factors as hygiene, health and safety and wear and tear.

The ESFA prefers awards to be made 'in-kind rather than cash as far as possible. Where awards are made as payments they will be made to the student's bank account, further information on basic bank accounts can be found at the British Bankers' Association (www.bba.org.uk). The funds must

only be spent on the support that has been identified as necessary for them to participate in education.

MAKING PAYMENTS

Bursaries for defined vulnerable group

Monthly payments will be paid up to a maximum of £1,200 for the academic year. Any payments required for equipment, books, revision guides, starter packs, college fund, trips and equipment deposits will be deducted from this amount and the remainder will be paid equally each month, during term time, into the student's bank account. The College cannot pay into another person's bank account under the terms and conditions of the government grant, though an award can be paid into a joint account provided the student is one of the account holders.

Discretionary Bursary Payments

Transport/Travel

Where a payment has been agreed (e.g. to cover transport costs) then this will be processed via BACS direct into the student's bank account - with the first payment being in October (or the first month after the award has been approved). Any subsequent payments will be paid at the beginning of each term subject to the student meeting the attendance criteria.

Free Meals

The government entitlement is to £2.53 for each day the student attends their study programme, but the College tops this up to £4.50 per day from its bursary grant. The College funds these meals by providing an electronic credit via ParentPay on a daily basis in advance which can be redeemed on site at the College's food centre.

Stationery/Art Equipment/Internet Access

Where a contribution of £15 has been agreed to cover stationery costs or an award made for Art equipment or internet access, then this will be processed via BACS direct into the student's bank account - with the payment being mid-September/early October (or the first month after the award has been approved).

Books/Revision Guides/Equipment

Where the College contributes to costs for these items, then the College will order these on a student's behalf. Once the items have arrived, the student will be notified via e-mail to collect them from the Student Helpdesk/College Shop. If a student has bought an item themselves, consideration may be given for a refund however this may not be for the full amount and will be at the discretion of the panel. In the event of a temporary closure of the college site, arrangements will be made to have the books/revision guides and equipment distributed to students.

College Services Fee

An internal transfer will be made to the College finance department once a student enrolls on a course at the college.

Starter Packs/Equipment Deposit

When a student enrolls on a course and requests assistance with the cost of these items, an internal transfer will be made to the college department.

Trips

Where the College contributes towards a cost of a trip, then a credit will be made direct to the trip account and "Parentpay". The student will still need to supply the relevant consent information.

Other payments, unless urgent, will be processed on a monthly basis. Payment will preferably be by either BACS or cheque, though cash payments of up to £50 are possible for minor and/or urgent payments. BACS payments can only be made into the student's bank account. The College

cannot pay into another person's bank account under the terms and conditions of the government grant, though an award can be paid into a joint account provided the student is one of the account holders.

Industry Placements/Work Experience

Additional support may be given for students on industry placement or work experience. These additional funds will be processed via BACS direct into the student's bank account the week before the placement is due to commence.

Minor Payments & Emergency Fund

There will be occasions when students face an immediate financial crisis and some form of assistance is urgently required. To ensure such requests do not by-pass the fair and transparent processes then a small cash loan of up to £50 can be made to the student as a temporary measure, on the authorisation of the Finance Manager, Director of Finance or the Principal. The loan should then be repaid within an agreed time period. If the student is already receiving financial assistance, then the repayment may be deducted from their next payment. Alternatively the student may then apply for the loan to be converted into a non-repayable grant. In such cases, a simplified financial support form should be completed, with a detailed explanation of the need for support and the estimated amount of the minor costs which then goes to the Financial Support panel for a decision.

Emergency Meal Support

In individual cases of severe hardship, the College can provide meal support on the days a student attends their study programme, where the student is considered to be in real need, without undertaking the checks on household income or gathering other evidence that would normally be required. This is expected to only apply to a very small number of the total 16 to 19 student cohort.

For audit purposes, the College must retain a copy of:

- a record of the number of students supported in this way
- the number of days this support is given
- the £'s value of support given to each student along with the rationale for the meal support
- the signed confirmation by the student of receipt of funding to be spent on food that day.

This arrangement is not to continue on an ongoing basis for any individual student – the College will exercise our discretion in each case and will be mindful that this flexibility relates to food support only.

Financial Support Panel

Provided eligibility is satisfactorily proven, certain awards may be automatically approved by a member of the Financial Support team (e.g. transport costs, lunches). Other decisions are discretionary (e.g. levels of contribution, consideration of exceptional circumstances). To ensure these are dealt with on a fair yet affordable basis, these discretionary decisions will be considered by a panel of at least two members of staff - one representing the Financial Support team and one representing Finance (usually the Director of Finance).

Notification of Decision and Appeals

Once an award has been approved then the Financial Support team will confirm in writing to the student, detailing the amount(s) awarded, what the award is for, when and how the award will be paid and any specific conditions which apply. If an award is not made, the notification will explain the reasons for this. Students will be reminded of their right to appeal against an award decision and given details of how to submit an appeal as follows:

- If a member of the Financial Support team made the original award decision, then any appeal will be heard by the Financial Support panel.

- If the Financial Support Panel made the original award decision, then the appeal will be heard by a member of the Leadership Team not previously involved (usually the Assistant Principal).

Conditions of Student Support Fund

Students and their families are required to make a declaration (whether paper or electronic) that the information and evidence provided is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge and belief. False or incorrect information that leads to incorrect/overpayment may result in overpayments being stopped and any incorrectly paid funds being recovered.

Payments will not be made until appropriate documentary evidence has been provided. This is to safeguard public money from potential fraud. Fraudulent activities, including giving false statements, will be treated seriously and may leave the individual open to prosecution.

Financial assistance from the Student Support Fund is dependent upon attendance and behaviour. Should either be unsatisfactory or should the student withdraw from the course early, then they may be asked to pay back some or all of their award, and future awards may be withheld or reduced.

The general approach will be that payments other than Free Further Education meals will be reduced in proportion to non-attendance where attendance is between 70% and 80%. Where attendance is below 70%, then no such payment will be made. Exceptions to these may be made, but only with the authorisation of two of the Financial Support team members following discussions with Progress Coaches.

Accounting and Audit Arrangements

The College is required, when requested to submit returns to the relevant funding bodies for expenditure relating to student financial support grants. As a public body, the College is also expected to have sound systems in place to control and account for any items of expenditure and internal auditors regularly review such systems.

Responsibilities

- The Principal has overall responsibility for the operation of the Financial Support Funds.
- The Director of Finance is responsible for ensuring that the College maintains satisfactory financial systems, controls and records in relation to the Financial Support Funds, which are compliant with auditors' and funding body requirements.
- The Director of Finance is responsible for ensuring the Financial Support Funds provides appropriate financial assistance to those individual students in greatest need.
- The Senior Finance Officer is responsible for managing the Financial Support Funds budget, for oversight of the day-to-day administration of the Fund and for ensuring the terms of any grants are met.
- The Financial Support team are responsible for the efficient and timely processing of Financial Support Funds applications.
- Finance staff are responsible for the efficient and timely processing of payments and keeping clear records.
- Welfare staff, Progress Coaches, Registry and the Financial Support team are responsible for ensuring students are appropriately informed and advised of the financial support available from the College and from external agencies and of how to apply for such funds.

The Corporation of the College has responsibility for the approving of the Financial Support Policy on an annual basis and the monitoring of its application

Confidentiality

Applications are only seen by those involved in the management and administration of the Financial Support Funds. From time to time it may be necessary for additional supporting information to be

sought from other College staff in order for a decision to be made. The Finance Department and Progress Coaches may be provided with details of any award made.

Personal data provided on the application form or in support of the application will be used solely for the purposes relating to the application for financial assistance. Processing of such data will take place in compliance with data protection legislation and College policy.

Other Funds and Support

Students may be eligible for grants or benefits from other government or external agencies. Examples include:

- Care to Learn grant - available to help with childcare costs for students up to age 20. Further details can be found on the gov.uk website.
- Assistance from the student's local County Council with the cost of transport
- Ministry of Defence scholarships - available to support the children of servicemen and women killed on active service. Further information can be found on the gov.uk website.

In processing applications for support, the Finance team and the Financial Support team will actively look out for opportunities for students to claim funds from these other sources, including government benefits.

Equality Implications

In determining arrangements for assessment and payment of the Financial Support Funds, the College is subject to equalities legislation, which means that students must not be discriminated against, either directly or indirectly, on the grounds of protected characteristics. The procedures and eligibility guidelines detailed in the previous sections have been established in order to ensure all student applications are dealt with fairly and consistently. In relation to conditions attached to attendance and behaviour, the Finance team is aware that attendance and behaviour may be affected by disability or by other protected characteristics and will make reasonable adjustments for this in making decisions about levels of payment.

The fund improves equality of opportunity by helping students overcome financial barriers to successful participation and completion of studies. Priority is given to those students from families with the lowest household income and/or highest demonstrated need (which includes those students with disabilities).

MONITORING

At the end of each academic year the impact of the policy will be evaluated by the College. This evaluation will consider changes to the guidance document (released for each new academic year) alongside these reflections, the experience gained and best practice.

The policy will be reviewed annually if there are substantial changes to the DfE guidance document or every three years whichever is sooner.