



LEARNER BURSARY POLICY 2025-2026

Version	2025-26
Approved by	Senior Leadership Team
Approval date	July 2025
Next review due	July 2026
Updated by	Executive Director of Finance and Resources

1. INTRODUCTION

Sandwell College receives allocations of funds from the Department for Education (DfE) and WMCA (West Midlands Combined Authority) to support eligible students to meet the costs of participating in education. The College sets its criteria for funding in accordance with the guidelines provided by the DFE/WMCA.

Eligible students will be required to show supporting evidence that they meet the required criteria. In certain exceptional circumstances, Sandwell College may exercise its ability to make discretionary awards.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

- Sandwell College provides information about and promotes access to financial support via information leaflets, the College websites, posters, during interviews and at promotional events i.e., open events and during enrolment.
- The Welfare Team is based at Central Campus on the 3rd Floor in the HUB and also at the Cadbury campus. If you have any questions or need further support, please visit the team or contact via telephone or email address:

Campus	Telephone	Email
Sandwell College – central campus (includes Central St Michaels and learners from all campuses except Cadbury)	0121 667 5073	welfare@sandwell.ac.uk
Cadbury College	0121 458 3898	welfare@cadbury.ac.uk

- Progressing students must reapply for funding.
- Evidence of entitlement must be provided each academic year.
- Bursary application forms are available online to all learners with an active College login and email address. Links and QR codes are included on the College website and on posters around the campuses, and learners are invited to apply for bursary by text and letter as relevant. The online application forms are clear and easy to follow and students can get help to complete their application by visiting the Welfare Team(s). The online bursary application forms can be completed on mobile devices, a learner's own IT equipment or College computers which are available to learners on the bridges and in the HUB on 3rd floor at Central Campus, in the Library at Central St Michaels campus and at the Cadbury campus.
- Online applications are preferred, however for learners who have difficulty accessing the online form, paper forms are available from tutors in ESOL, Foundation Learning or from the Welfare Team(s).
- Waged apprentices are not eligible.
- Should an applicant withdraw from their chosen course of study and decide to leave College, they may be required to repay monies or return equipment supplied/bought by the support fund.

- Award notification letters/emails are sent to learners each term confirming their award from the bursary fund and how this will be provided.
- No awards will be made until a learner is fully enrolled on their course (awards cannot be made when a learner's enrolment status is "provisional").
- All awards are subject to acceptable behaviour standards and meeting minimum attendance criteria as set out in the award letter.
- If applications are not successful learners are notified by letter/email. If learners are not eligible for bursary and have applied for tuition fee support; they will then need to decide if they are able to enrol on their chosen course without financial support from the bursary fund.
- Learners have the right to appeal, if their application is refused or the award is withheld. Learners must submit any appeal in writing (via letter or email), within 10 working days of receiving notification of refusal. Additional information will be required to support any appeal.

3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Eligibility is based on age, residence, household income. The College eligibility criteria is reviewed and updated annually based on the published guidelines for that year. Full eligibility criteria and maximum levels of support are included on the College website.

The 16-19 Bursary Fund, 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund and Advanced Learner Loans Bursaries are means-tested and applicants will be required to provide evidence to verify total household income.

It is the responsibility of the learner and their carers/parents to make the College aware of any change in circumstance which may affect their entitlement to college funds.

4. 16-19 BURSARY AWARDS

a) ***BURSARIES FOR STUDENTS IN DEFINED VULNERABLE GROUPS*** ***("Vulnerable Learner Bursary")***

The bursary for vulnerable groups can pay up to £1,200 per year to a student participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more if they need that amount of support. Students on study programmes of less than 30 weeks should be paid a pro-rata amount, as appropriate based on an assessment of their actual needs.

Students should only receive the amount they actually need to participate, and we will not automatically award students £1,200 if they do not need the full amount.

This includes young people who are living apart from their parents and are looked after (in care) or have recently left care (Care Order in force), and are:

- in receipt of Universal Credit in their own right (with a tenancy or dependent child)
- in receipt of both Employment & Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance OR (Personal Independence Payments) in their own right (not parents)

Learners will need to provide up to date evidence to confirm receipt of benefits, or a recent letter from Social Services confirming their care status.

The Vulnerable Learner Bursary is paid monthly, learners are issued with guidance notes to explain the procedure in case of authorised absences. Bank details will need to be provided.

b) FREE MEALS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Students are entitled to free College meals if they live in a household that is in receipt of one of the benefits listed below and

- i) they are aged 16-18
 - ii) 19 on the second year of a level 3 programme; or
 - iii) aged 19-25 with a valid EHCP at the beginning of the academic year
- Income Support
 - Income based Jobseekers Allowance
 - Income related Employment Support Allowance
 - Support under part IV of the immigration an Asylum Act 1999
 - The Guaranteed Element of Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.
 - 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

The Government provide free meals funding for days learners attend study or activity that is part of their course. (i.e., work experience) at £2.61 per day. The College has elected to top this funding up utilising discretionary bursary funds to £3.50 per day, for timetabled days per week (term time only) for all learners eligible for free meals. Meals will be supplied through the College's catering outlets.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students#free-meals-in-further-education>

Alternative arrangements will only be made for students who are studying off site (e.g.; collaborative provision) or in exceptional cases.

c) 16-18 DISCRETIONARY LEARNER SUPPORT FUND

Any learners with a household income of less than £37,000 will be eligible to apply for discretionary support. This may include assistance in terms of trips, equipment and books.

Trips and Visits

- 16 - 18 learners are eligible for support for essential trips and/or visits.
- The maximum payable per student for a residential visit is £250 UK based and £350 for overseas trips (A maximum of £350.00 per student per academic year); where it is part of the curriculum and where there is demonstrable value from the trip.
- Where the student requires additional help, a carer to attend for example, this will be considered upon receipt of appropriate written support from the tutor.
- Only one overseas trip can be funded per student per academic year; where it is part of the curriculum and where there is demonstrable value from the trip.
- Should a student not attend a trip/visit once costs have been paid, they may be expected to refund the payment unless an acceptable reason can be given.

Books and Equipment

- 16 - 18 learners are eligible for support for essential equipment, this may include Uniform (PPE), books or kits.
- Costs will be met for those that qualify, to a maximum of £250 per student per year.
- Amounts per course are agreed with team leaders who supply the welfare department with appropriate lists and costs.
- Costs in excess of the maximum limit will be assessed on an individual basis.
- Procedures are in place to recover equipment if the student leaves the course prior to completion.
- Items requested by students that have not been verified as essential by the relevant course tutor will not be awarded.
- Where possible BACS payments will be made payable to the supplier. Students may be reimbursed directly for essential equipment if this has already been purchased. However, there will be no reimbursement payments made during the first term and only upon production of an itemised receipt.
- 16 - 18 learners maybe eligible for the provision of a Chromebook; if this supports their studies at college. Applications for Chromebooks are via the main bursary application form.
- Learners can only receive one Chromebook during their studies at Sandwell College and prior year/s bursary award information will be checked to ensure the criteria is adhered to.
- Learners are expected to look after and maintain their Chromebooks and no replacements for lost or damaged equipment will be made without a written appeal (and approval).
- Learners are expected to follow ICT policies including the Acceptable Use policy.
- Full Chromebook usage requirement are included on the College website.

High Needs Travel Assistance

- The special need travel assistance is for the cost of taxis (for special needs learners who cannot access public transport and who are not eligible for funding through their Local Authority), this needs to be verified by the department.

- This travel assistance can include the cost of a bus pass for learners who are confident in using public transport.
- Tutors provide a projection of travel costs for each learner.
- All learners or their carers/parents/guardians need to complete the Learner Support Fund application form and be eligible to receive the bursary.
- All learners or their carers/parents/guardians must complete a Travel Assistance Form with evidence of their benefits for example, Personal Independence Payment (PIP)/Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and that have been declined travel assistance from their Local Authority. This form must be approved by the Head of Department

d) *CHILDCARE FOR LEARNERS UNDER 20*

- Students aged under 20 at the start of the academic year need to apply for support with childcare costs through the Welfare department. Welfare staff can help with applications
- Students aged over 20 on 31 August 2025 can apply for support with childcare costs through the Discretionary Learner Support Fund / Advanced Learner Loans Bursary for up to four dependent children.
- Where funding is awarded towards the cost of childcare with a registered provider. Funds will be paid to a third party only. The third party must be OFSTED registered.
- Students must use their free childcare funding towards the cost of the childcare.
- In order to be eligible for childcare funding students must have an approved bursary application, be active on their course, be enrolled on a full level qualification and have no other childcare support available.
- The amount of funding available for childcare is limited.

5. 19+ HARSHIP/ADULT LEARNER LOAN BURSARY AWARDS

All bursary applications are means tested and learners whose household income does not exceed £31,000 (which allows for 1 dependent child) can apply. If household income exceeds this amount, it can be increased by £1,000 for each additional child they are responsible for (maximum of 4 children), age stipulations will apply.

Support is available towards tuition and examination fees for courses up to Level 2, child care and essential equipment, trips and books. Eligible learners will also receive a hardship bursary that can be used to help towards the cost of attending College.

Suitable evidence of income is required, dated within 12 weeks of the bursary application, such as:

- State benefit letter dated within the last 12 weeks;
- 2025-26 Tax Credit Award Notice;
- Latest Universal Credit Statement showing all entitlements and all deductions;
- Support under part VI of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999 (copy of both sides of Application Registration Card (ARC card) and FRONT only of ASPEN Card including a recent receipt; or
- P60 (April 2025) or 3 consecutive wage slips (showing name and address) if they are not in receipt of any of the above.
- Learners must provide all pages of relevant evidence
- Further evidence may be requested by the Welfare Department if required.

Discretionary Hardship Awards

- The discretionary fund can be provided to any learners who have a need that cannot be met from other means. Type of support could include:
 - Being provided with short term College Meals.
 - Assistance with housing if homeless or facing the threat of homelessness by signposting learners to external agencies.
 - Provision of emergency assistance, for instance travel.
 - Any unforeseen clothing or other costs.
 - To support learners who are at risk of dropping out of education.
 - Any other costs deemed by Welfare staff to be necessary due to individual circumstance.

Applications must be received before the termly deadline (as advertised in college, student portal and application forms). Any application received after the deadline will be assessed for the next termly bursary if applicable.