



LEARNER FINANCIAL SUPPORT (DISCRETIONARY) BURSARY POLICY

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This policy meets all the requirements of SEN and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice. It will be reviewed annually or when there is a change in circumstances, in work practices or the introduction of new legislation.

Index of Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Policy Statement**
- 3. Awarding criteria for Student Financial Support (Discretionary Bursary)**
 - 3.1 Standard requirements**
 - 3.2 Travel**
 - 3.3 Books and Equipment**
 - 3.4 Specialist clothing e.g. work-related clothing**
 - 3.5 Educational trips / residentials**
 - 3.6 Discretionary hardship support**
 - 3.7 Childcare support**
- 4. Assessment and Approval of Applications**
 - 4.1 Learner agreement and payments**
- 5. High value equipment**
- 7. Exemptions**
- 8. Appeals Process**

1. Introduction

LifeBridge ASEND is a Specialist Post-19 Institution and is committed to delivering an educational offer that is tailored to meet the holistic needs of each learner. We provide education, enrichment and vocational opportunities to young adults between the ages of 19 and 25 with special educational needs and disabilities.

We embrace our statutory duty to fulfil our obligations under the Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice (2015) for those aged 19- 25 and are committed to making every effort to meet the needs of the young person. Allocation of places is based on ascertaining the individual needs of the applicant, their goals and aspirations to ensure we can provide an education programme to meet their requirements.

2. Policy Statement

The 16-19 Student Financial Support (Discretionary Bursary) Fund is provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to help learners' overcome specific barriers to participation and to enable them to remain in education.

LifeBridge ASEND is committed to maintaining the integrity of its Learner Financial Support (Discretionary Bursary) awards and the validity of its assessment of qualifying criteria and application process.

This policy sets out the financial support available through, and eligibility for, discretionary bursary funding for 19-25 year old learners enrolled at LifeBridge ASEND Specialist Post-19 Institution.

3. Awarding criteria for Learner Financial Support (Discretionary Bursary)

In accordance with the ESFA guidance, institutions must verify that learners meet the criteria in full and that they have a financial need. They should then award each learner the amount of support they actually need based on their costs, not a fixed or flat rate amount.

In accordance with the Education Skills Funding Agency guidance, LifeBridge ASEND are able to make discretionary bursary awards to learners to help them overcome the individual financial barriers to participation in education. This means to help with, for example but not limited to, the cost of travel to college, to buy essential books and/or equipment, or the purchase of specialist clothing required as part of their study programme.

LifeBridge ASEND bases all decisions on each learner's individual circumstances and financial need to determine how much bursary they receive. The level of support which the college can offer under the discretionary bursary is dependent on the funding received from the ESFA and the number of applications it receives. The college may award a bursary for spending on agreed items or may provide items themselves, the value of which will be deducted from the bursary amount.

3.1 Standard requirements

Learners aged over 19 can apply for the discretionary bursary if they have an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan or are continuing on a course they started aged between 16 and 18 (a '19+ continuer') **and** meet the criteria set out by LifeBridge ASEND which includes a household income of £25,000 or less.

It is your responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any financial support that you receive from LifeBridge ASEND, as learner support payments may affect your eligibility to some benefits.

Where a learner meets the standard requirements above, LifeBridge ASEND may award discretionary bursaries to provide financial support for the following:

- Travel
- Books and equipment
- Specialist clothing
- Educational trips/ residentials
- Discretionary hardship support
- Childcare support

3.2 Travel

Support with travel cost is available where a learner meets the standard requirements above and lives more than 3 miles walking distance from college and/or work placement and the cost of travel is a barrier to attending college and/or work placement (using Google maps walking distance tool).

3.3 Books and Equipment

Where a learner meets the standard requirements in section 3.1 and specific equipment or books etc. have been identified as required to enhance and support a learners' study programme, the learner can apply for a discretionary bursary for financial support towards this. An agreement will be made between Lifebridge ASEND and the learner, and the college will purchase the equipment on their behalf, keeping relevant documentation for auditing purposes.

If the college purchases books or equipment for a learner, Lifebridge ASEND can specify how these items are utilised as part of the learners study programme e.g. a learner may be given permission to take their equipment off-site to a vocational activity or work placement. The learner may retain any equipment purchased on their behalf, using the discretionary bursary fund, on completion of their study programme.

3.4 Specialist clothing e.g. work-related clothing

As part of their programme of study, LifeBridge ASEND learners may attend vocational sessions such as grounds maintenance, catering, horticulture or retail and/or a work placement. There may be occasions when specialist clothing is required, such as protective overalls, work boots and also formal clothing to attend an interview. Where a learner meets the standard requirements set out in section 3.1, the college may purchase any specialist clothing with bursary

funds on behalf of the learner. The learner may retain any specialist clothing purchased on their behalf, using the discretionary bursary fund, on completion of their study programme.

3.5 Educational trips / residentials

LifeBridge ASEND may use part of a learners' bursary award to fund a particular curriculum based trip or residential which must be undertaken in order to gain a qualification. For instance, LifeBridge may fund the residential for a Learner who must complete this in order to achieve the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. Learners/parents/carers will be notified in writing of any monies used to fund an educational trip.

3.6 Discretionary hardship support

Hardship support applications can be made at any point in the year if a particular need arises. Each application will be considered on a case by case basis and will be influenced by available funds. This would be applicable for learners who may live independently or have a particular need which has arisen due to unforeseen circumstances. In this instance LifeBridge ASEND will take into account any extenuating circumstances and a decision will be made.

3.7 Childcare support

Support is available for learners with dependants who require support with childcare costs in order to attend college and/or work placement. Applicants for childcare support are required to apply for all statutory government benefits before applying for this support. Evidence of the following is required, in addition to the standard requirements in section 3.1:

- Use of an Ofsted registered childcare provider
- Be in receipt of child benefit

5. Assessment and Approval of Applications

Funding for the Discretionary Bursary is received directly by LifeBridge ASEND from the ESFA.

The 16-19 Student Financial Support (Discretionary Bursary) funds are managed by the college and are allocated on an individual need basis. To apply for a discretionary bursary, families need to complete the 'Learner Financial Support application form', and return to LifeBridge ASEND along with supporting documentation.

As funds are limited and cannot be guaranteed, applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. LifeBridge ASEND will retain a small amount of bursary funds to cover any mid-year hardship support applications.

Each application, with supporting documentation, will be assessed in strictest confidence using the criteria outlined in section 3. All discretionary fund payments will be subject to review and approval by the LifeBridge ASEND Senior Leadership Team. Applicants will be notified of their application outcome in writing within 20 working days of submitting the application. Any award made will be for the academic year in which the application was made only. Financial support in future years may change.

The allocation process for these funds is as follows:

- Learners that apply will be assessed individually against the criteria and will be awarded a bursary fund based on their actual financial need.
- Any unspent discretionary funding from the previous academic year will be prioritised for learners based on their actual financial need in the current academic year.
- Some funding will be held back for a contingency for learners whose personal circumstances may change.
- 5% of the discretionary fund will be held back to cover administrative costs.

4.1 Learner agreement and payments

Payments will only be made into the learners individual bank account. LifeBridge ASEND will use a BACS transfer for all payments.

On being awarded a discretionary bursary, a learner's attendance and behaviour will be monitored. Where a learners attendance falls below 90%, or they fail to adhere to the Positive Behaviour Policy, financial support payments will be withheld. The impact on attendance that might be caused by illness, caring responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances will be considered.

If payments have not been used to attend college due to absence, future payments may be withheld or reduced until funds paid to the learner have been utilised for the purpose they were awarded.

Payments will be stopped if a learner has been absent for 4 continuous weeks (excluding holidays) or if they withdraw from the course. Where a learner withdraws from a course, they are required to return any travel pass and equipment/books/specialist clothing bought using the bursary funds.

Learners will be required to return money paid to them if they have not spent it for the reasons it was awarded or if they receive an overpayment due to them not informing LifeBridge ASEND of changes detailed below.

It is the learners responsibility to inform the college about any of the following:

- change of circumstances which might affect their eligibility for financial support
- change of address
- change of bank account details
- any exceptional circumstances that cause them to be absent from college

5. High value equipment

We may be able to help with the cost of high value equipment such as laptops, cameras and tablets where learners require them to successfully complete their programme. This will be dependent on the budget available. In special circumstances, and at the discretion of the College Senior Leadership Team, some learners may be allowed to retain their equipment at the end of the programme, where a particular need has been identified. The College accepts no responsibility for the damage or loss of any equipment. Any repairs, replacement or insurance for these items will be the responsibility of the learner.

7. Exemptions

Learners on apprenticeship programmes, or any waged training, are employed, rather than in education and are not eligible for help from the Discretionary Bursary Fund.

8. Appeals Process

Any learner applicant or parent/carer of an unsuccessful applicant wishing to appeal against the refusal of a bursary must do so in writing to the Principal of the College within 10 working days, stating the reasons why. The Principal of the College will review the application within 15 working days of receiving the appeal. The decision of the College Principal is final and will be given in writing within 10 working days of their decision.

The rules within this policy are set at the time of writing but the College reserves the right to adjust the criteria year by year according to the funds available and in accordance with any changes that the ESFA may make.