

Hartlepool Jobs and Skills Service



Learner and Learning Support Policy

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Learner Support Policy is to provide a clear set of guidelines to learners, their parents/carers, staff, the community and wider stakeholders. The Hartlepool Jobs & Skills Service will utilise support funds in line with the relevant funding guidance set out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to ensure it meets the needs of learners, local and regional priorities.

The Service receives allocations of funds from the ESFA and TVCA to help learners access and sustain learning in line with the Equality Act 2010, alongside overcoming the individual financial barriers to participation. All providers must ensure the funds are allocated to those who genuinely need them. Different funding streams have different eligibility criteria set out within this policy.

This policy and the accompanying procedure will outline available funding, application processes, eligibility/evidence requirements and how the funds will be allocated. The Service reserves the right to amend/cease support detailed in this policy due to changes in the funding rules or changes or requirements from the funders, including ESFA and/or TVCA.

2. SCOPE

This policy clearly defines the eligibility criteria for each type of support funding to ensure the Service meets the requirements of the funding guidance. There are two available bursaries through the Adult Skills Fund which are:

- **Learner Support Funds:**
Learning Support Funding is intended to help learners overcome the individual financial barriers to participation to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes, such as Further Progression or Employment.
- **Learning Support Funds:**
Learning Support is available to meet the cost of putting in place a reasonable adjustment, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, for learners with an identified learning difficulty or disability to achieve their learning goal.

The procedure identifies to learners all the criteria that relate to a particular type of support funding within the Service.

3. STATEMENT OF INTENT

Support funding is intended to help learners access learning, participate in learning and overcome individual financial barriers to achieve the best possible outcomes. The Service promotes these funds and other sources of financial assistance to help learners studying with Hartlepool Jobs & Skills.

Learners eligible for support may not automatically receive it, as limited funds are available and can be exhausted. This funding can only be used when the need is demonstrated and is dealt with in line with the Equality Act 2010.

4. LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDING

Overview:

Learner Support Funding is available to provide financial support for learners studying a 'Skills' course with a specific financial hardship preventing them from participating or continuing in learning. It is provided through the Adult Skills Fund by TVCA for learners residing in Tees Valley and ESFA for learners outside North East.

There are two categories of learner support:

Hardship Funding:

This supports financially disadvantaged learners to facilitate their participation or continuation within learning, such as travel costs or equipment. You can use hardship funds for any of the following:

- Course-related Costs such as required Books/Equipment;
- Transport Costs;
- Food Costs, including Meals;
- Examination/Course Fees.

Childcare Funding:

This is for learners aged 20 or older on the first day of learning who are at risk of not starting or continuing learning because of their childcare costs. You can only use childcare funding to pay for childcare with a childminder, provider or childminder agency registered with Ofsted.

You must not use childcare funding to:

- Fund informal childcare, such as that provided by a relative.
- Set up childcare places or financially contribute to the costs of a crèche.
- Fund childcare for learners under 20 on the first day of learning; instead, you must direct them to the ESFA's 'Care to Learn' Programme.

You must also not use childcare for those aged 20 years or older to top up childcare payments for those receiving 'Care to Learn' Payments.

Eligibility and Evidence Requirements:

There are set eligibility criteria for accessing Learner Support Funding. This is to ensure fairness whilst complying with the objectives and requirements of the Adult Skills Fund.

All learners applying for Learner Support Funding must complete a Support Request Form. You will need to meet all of the following criteria:

- Be aged 19+ on 31st August 2024 and unable to access support from any other means, such as Jobcentre Plus or Free Childcare Entitlement.
- Satisfy the residency criteria in the TVCA Funding Guidelines (Tees Valley Residents) or ESFA Funding Guidelines (Non-North East Residents).
- Be studying for a 'Skills' course, which is eligible for funding and being delivered by the Service.
- Provide information to detail the financial hardship if you did not receive Learner Support Funding.

To be able to access Learner Support Funding, you must either be:

- Unemployed, or;
- Employed but earn less than £33,210 Annual Gross Salary (Residing within Tees Valley) or £25,000 Annual Gross Salary (Residing outside North East).

You must provide evidence which confirms you meet the above requirements as part of your Support Request Form. As an example, to evidence unemployment, learners can provide information to show they receive means-tested benefits such as:

- Income Support;
- Jobseekers Allowance (JSA);
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA);
- Child Tax Credit (provided not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC);
- Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding £7,400 per Annum (after tax and not including any benefits you get).

For further clarification and information on Learner Support Funding, you can speak to any staff member from Hartlepool Jobs & Skills.

5. LEARNING SUPPORT FUNDING

Overview:

The Service is committed to the Equality Act 2010 and the protective characteristics that this Act covers. The Further and Higher Education Acts 1992 (now carried over to the Learning and Skills Act 2010), the Education ACT 1996, the Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014, Reforms for Children with SEN & Disabilities 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice 2015.

These Acts define protective characteristics, including the following main categories:

- Physical difficulties
- Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

- Learning difficulties, including Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyslexia or dyspraxia
- Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC)
- Social, Emotional, Mental Health
- Hearing and visual impairment
- Severe disfigurements
- Progressive conditions that are expected to become substantial

Learning Support is available to meet the cost of putting in place a reasonable adjustment, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, for learners with an identified learning difficulty or disability to achieve their learning goal. Learning Support must not be used to deal with everyday difficulties not directly associated with a learner's learning programme whilst studying with the Service.

If a learner aged 25+ needs significant support to start or continue learning and has support costs of more than £19,000 in a funding year, this can be funded through the use of Exceptional Learning Support (ELS). However, this must be planned and approved before the individual enrolls with the Service.

Eligibility and Evidence Requirements:

There are set eligibility criteria for accessing Learning Support Funding, and learners must complete a Support Request Form. You will need to meet all of the following criteria:

- Be aged 19+ on 31st August 2024.
- Satisfy the residency criteria in the TVCA Funding Guidelines (Tees Valley Residents) or ESFA Funding Guidelines (Non-North East Residents).
- Be studying for a 'Skills' course, which is eligible for funding and being delivered by the Service.
- Meet the eligibility requirements in the ESFA/TVCA Adult Skills Fund Funding Rules for Learning Support Funding.

All learners requesting Learning Support will receive a thorough assessment to identify the learner's required support. This will include any additional evidence provided by the individual or their parents/carers, such as Medical/Social Care Records or an Education, Health and care Plan (EHCP).

Our assessment will be appropriately evidenced by the following:

- A record of the assessment outcome is included in the learner's pack, which will, as a minimum, be a completed Support Request Form.
- Any additional documentation/evidence is retained for audit purposes, such as Medical/Social Care Records.

The Service will also retain evidence to show the support provided to the learner throughout their learning programme. This will include the financial cost if this is above the fixed monthly rate of £150 for each learner and therefore requires claiming through the Earnings Adjustment Statement (EAS).

6. APPLICATION PROCESS

Please ask any staff member for a copy of our Support Request Form. They can also assist if you have any queries about completing your form or providing evidence in line with the Eligibility and Evidence Requirements.

We will:

- Base our decision on your individual circumstances and your actual need, which will vary from learner to learner.
- Carry out an open and transparent assessment, which will be based on the type of supporting funds being requested.
- Require evidence to assess eligibility. If this is an issue due to your circumstances, we will work with you to understand your situation.
- Ensure that confidentiality and your individual needs are observed throughout this policy/procedure.

7. STAFF INFORMATION

As part of the approval process, Staff Members must:

- Follow this criteria for administering and distributing these funds, which reflect the principles of equality and diversity and are available to learners on request.
- Ensure a Support Request Form has been completed, which records the learner's needs, reason for support and evidence.
- Report the appropriate Support Reason codes in the 'Learner Funding and Monitoring' fields in the ILR.
- Complete quarterly claims and then submit a final return for Support Funding to relevant funders, including TVCA and/or ESFA.
- Confirm that the support cannot be provided by other means such as Government Free Childcare Entitlement or Jobcentre Plus.
- Make it clear to learners that telling the DWP about any support they receive from the Service is their responsibility.

It is also important for Staff Members to ensure that support funds are not being used for any of the following:

- Essential equipment or facilities if the learner is eligible for full funding, except for the items covered in the Hardship Section.
- A learner in custody or released on temporary licence or studying learning aims fully funded from sources other than either ESFA or TVCA.
- To pay attendance allowances, achievement/attendance bonuses or as a promotional tool to encourage learners to access the Service.

8. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

The Service will make available details of the appeals procedure, where appropriate.

All complaints will follow the Council's Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy, which can viewed on the Hartlepool Borough Council Website.