



# **LINCOLN COLLEGE**

## **LEARNER SUPPORT FUND POLICY AND PROCEDURES 2025-2026**

### **POLICY CQ/PO/8**

#### **SPONSOR**

**Student Financial Support Specialist, Student  
Services**

## **Equality and Diversity Statement**

Lincoln College strives to treat all its members and visitors fairly and aims to eliminate all forms of unlawful discrimination, specifically across all protected characteristics. We will work towards a fair and just organisation and promote inclusion for all those impacted by Lincoln College and the wider community.

# LINCOLN COLLEGE

## LEARNER SUPPORT FUND POLICY AND PROCEDURES ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-26

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# **LINCOLN COLLEGE**

## **LEARNER SUPPORT FUND POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

### **1. PURPOSE**

To set out the procedures involved in the assessment, distribution and management of the College's Further Education (FE) Learner Support Funds, so as to ensure consistency, transparency and audit compliance.

### **2. AIM OF THE POLICY**

To ensure the FE Learner Support Funds are distributed in compliance with the guidelines contained in the:

- Department for Education's (DfE) "Funding Rules for 16 to 19 Provision 2025 to 2026,
- 16-19 Bursary Fund Guide: 2025 to 2026 Academic Year,
- Free Meals in Further Education Funded Institutions Guide: 2025 to 2026 Academic Year,
- Adult Skills Fund: Funding Rules 2025 to 2026,
- Advanced Learner Loans Funding and Performance Management Rules: 2025 to 2026,
- East Midlands Combined County Authority's (EMCCA) Adult Skills Funding Rules 2025 to 2026.

### **3. INTRODUCTION**

The College's Learner Support Funds support learners whose access to, or completion of education might be restricted or prevented by financial considerations. Through the timely and targeted distribution of the funds the college seeks to help learners commence and remain in study; get the best out of their studies and achieve their potential, as well as widening participation and helping those financially disadvantaged by removing barriers to learning.

The Learner Support Funds, however, are cash limited. Support, therefore, cannot be guaranteed. If funds are low the college will prioritise support beyond the published eligibility criteria. Should this happen learners within the groups identified below will be given priority for remaining funds:

- Learners facing an emergency situation who, without financial support, would be at immediate risk of withdrawing from their course,
- Learners identified by the college Safeguarding Team as having a safeguarding need whom, without financial support, would be at immediate risk of withdrawing from their course.
- Learners who have been assessed as meeting the 2025-26 eligibility criteria for Free College Meals.

### **4. RESPONSIBILITY**

The following personnel are responsible for ensuring this policy is adhered to:

- Head of Student Services
- Student Financial Support Specialist

- Financial Support Team Leader
- Financial Support Team Administrators

## **5. REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed annually for approval by the Board of Corporation.

## **6. ADMINISTRATION OF THE COLLEGE LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDS**

- The Learner Support Funds will be administered on a day to day basis by the following staff: Student Financial Support Specialist, Financial Support Team Leader and Financial Support Team Administrators.
- The Financial Support Team will maintain the PayMyStudent on-line database to accurately record all Learner Support Fund applications received, assessments undertaken and awards made to learners.

## **7. ELIGIBILITY**

Full details can be found in Annex 1: “Financial Support-Student Eligibility Guide Academic Year 2025/2026”.

## **8. WHAT THE COLLEGE LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDS CANNOT BE USED FOR**

- Provide Learning Support (except 19+ Advanced Learner Loan learners), such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring
- Support extra-curricular activities
- Support general household incomes
- Gain a competitive advantage over other institutions
- Pay for access to facilities within Lincoln College, such as college sports facilities membership fees
- Block subsidise the college’s catering facilities
- Block subsidise transport, or support travel for all learners regardless of their financial circumstances
- Block subsidise provision of equipment, materials or books
- Pay attendance allowances or achievement and attendance bonuses
- Make payments to support learners’ general living costs
- Help with non-essential course participation costs.

## **9. THE APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

- Learners must complete an on-line application form, through the PayMyStudent portal. To ensure equality of opportunity a paper-based version of the on-line application form will, in exceptional circumstances, be available where a learner is not able to complete an on-line application.
- All sections of the on-line or paper-based application form must be completed, so that eligibility for support, or otherwise, can be fully determined.
- Evidence requested to support an application must be submitted. Additional evidence must be requested and provided where that initially supplied is not sufficient for eligibility for support, or otherwise, to be fully determined.

- Evidence submitted must be current and clearly state the learner's name where the learner is aged 19+, or demonstrate that the learner resides in the same household as the parent(s)/guardian(s) submitting evidence where the learner is aged 16-18, except in exceptional circumstances.
- Where a learner is aged 16-18 and is not living in the same household as their parent(s) they must submit evidence to confirm that the adult(s) with whom they are living are their legal guardian(s). If such evidence is not supplied then they must provide evidence of their parents' income.
- Where a learner aged 16 to 18 on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2025 claims to be estranged from their parent(s)/guardian(s) and is not, therefore, able to provide evidence of their parent(s)/guardian(s) financial circumstances then their application must be endorsed in writing by a member of the Student Services Safeguarding Team. The only exception to this is where a learner is in care, a care leaver or in receipt of an eligible benefit in their own name.
- The member of staff assessing the application should disregard any money received by the learner/their parent(s)/guardian(s) for Child Benefit, Severe Disability Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance, Universal Credit Disabled Children payments.
- The member of staff assessing the application must, on all occasions, declare any personal interest to the Student Financial Support Specialist or, in their absence, the Financial Support Team leader, of any application received, such as from a relative or close personal friend. They will ensure that the application is assessed by a member of the Financial Support Team who has no personal interest in the application.
- Once an application has been submitted learners will receive written confirmation within 10 working days of the outcome of their application or whether further information is required (this will be extended to 15 working days for the Autumn Term, due to the volume of applications received during this period).
- Where possible, awards agreed will be made by Internal Transfer to the learner's Lincoln College school. Where awards are to be made direct to the learner this will be by bank transfer only.
- The Assessor must at all times be aware of the contents of this Policy and must be aware of funds available before authorising an award.

## **10. APPEALS PROCEDURE**

### **DECLINED APPLICATION APPEALS**

- Where an application for support has been refused and a "Declined" decision made, the learner will be notified in writing of the decision and the reason for it. "Declined" decisions can be made for many reasons. Examples of "Declined" outcomes may include where a learner's (or their parent(s)/guardian(s)) income is above the threshold for support; where, for travel support, the learner's address is less than 1.5 miles from the college they attend; where the learner does not meet the DfE residency requirements for support; where the learner's childcare provider is not registered with Ofsted as required by DfE for support.
- The "Declined" correspondence sent to the learner will specify why the application has been declined. It will also state that any appeal against this decision should be made in writing and specify the College address and email address that the learner, or their parent(s)/guardian(s), should send the appeal to.

- Appeals should be addressed to the Student Financial Support Specialist.
- The Student Financial Support Specialist will, except in exceptional circumstances, provide the learner with a written response to their appeal within **10 working days** of its receipt.
- Should the learner not be satisfied with the outcome of the appeal reached by the Student Financial Support Specialist they can further appeal to the Head of Student Services who will provide the learner with a written response to their appeal within **10 working days** of its receipt, except in exceptional circumstances.

## **OTHER APPEALS**

- The learner may also make an appeal where the level of award made does not match their expectation. For example, where the amount awarded for uniform/equipment is lower than the amount shown on receipts submitted.
- In such cases the learner should contact the Financial Support Team, Student Services. This can be done either in person by making an appointment to see a member of the Financial Support Team through one of the College's Main Reception desks or by telephone by contacting Main Reception at Lincoln (01522 876000) or Newark (01636 680680) and asking to speak to a member of the Student Services Financial Support Team or by email [financialsupport@lincolncollege.ac.uk](mailto:financialsupport@lincolncollege.ac.uk).
- The above is not an exhaustive list of when a learner can make an appeal against a decision made relating to the College's Learner Support Funds. The learner is welcome to make an appeal on each occasion where they believe they have a justified reason to do so.

## **11. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

- Learners who wish to make a verbal complaint should be directed to the Student Financial Support Specialist (01522) 876000.
- If the learner wishes to complain in writing then they can do so by using the standard complaints form available from each of the college's Main Reception desks or request that a form be sent to them.
- A copy of the college's Customer Complaints and Grievance Procedure can also be found on the college website at [Feedback and Complaints](#).
- If a learner is not satisfied with the outcome of their "Declined" appeal or "Other" appeal or the way in which the "Declined" appeal or "Other" appeal has been handled, or is unhappy with any aspect of the administration of their application or the service they have received from the Financial Support Team, Student Services they can take the matter further through the Lincoln College Complaints and Grievance Procedure.

## **12. PUBLICISING THE FUNDS**

- The Financial Support Team will publicise the Funds through a variety of means. These include, but not exclusively, the college website and Lib-Guides sites, the college WorkVivo page, posters, leaflets, college prospectuses, college newsletters, the Student Services and Progress Coach inductions, the annual college LATfest, college Open Days (evenings and weekends), college Welcome Days and college Parents/Carers Information Evenings.

- Information guides and leaflets will be produced which give the precise details of the support available through the Funds. These will be made available in both paper-based and electronic format. An electronic copy of the *Financial Support – Student Eligibility Guide 2025/26* will be available in the Support section of the college Website and the Financial Support section of Lib-Guides, as well as in the Create an Account page of PayMyStudent.
- The Financial Support Team will provide the college's Schools Liaison Officer with information required to promote the 16-18 Learner Support Fund within local schools and other education establishments.
- Information on the Funds will be updated annually by the Financial Support Team, Student Services.

### **13. STORAGE OF RECORDS**

- Paper-based documents received **must**, at all times, be kept in locked filing cabinets in room M002 at Student Services, Lincoln and room PM29 Student Services, Newark. Documents received should be uploaded to the on-line PayMyStudent portal within a maximum of 15 working days of receipt. Once uploaded and confirmed as attached to the learner's account on PayMyStudent each document should be disposed of the end of the 2025/26 Academic Year, by placing in the confidential waste disposal bins available within Lincoln and Newark Student Services.
- To comply with DfE audit requirements, records must be kept for 6 years from the end of the academic year in which an application was made. They must then be deleted/disposed of.

### **14. MANAGEMENT OF THE COLLEGE LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDS**

The Student Financial Support Specialist and/or Financial Support Team Leader will be responsible for the following:

#### **ANNUALLY**

- Ensuring that a robust recording system is in place that shows each individual Learner Support Fund transaction by detail code and that is able to show real-time information on allocated funds, free funds and committed funds.
- Ensuring that a robust recording system is in place to capture the financial and statistical management information required mid-year and at year end by the DfE.
- Liaising with internal and external auditors of the Fund and ensuring that any recommendations arising from an audit are put into effect within the timescale identified.
- Ensuring that an annual report is produced and made available to the Head of Student Services that shows the impact on course completion of learners who received Learner Support Fund support, and which also shows a comparison with previous academic years data. This report should include data relating to the retention of learners by ethnicity, gender, and disability.
- Liaising with the college's Group Management Accountant to produce an agreed reconciliation spreadsheet for the 2025/26 Learner Support Funds.

In addition to confirming Funds allocated, this spreadsheet will also confirm any unspent funds that will be carried forward to the next academic year.

### **TERMLY**

- Liaising with the Head of Central Information Services to prepare and submit mid-year (February), end of year (June) and final (October) Learner Support Fund returns to the DfE.
- Ensuring accurate and timely submission of 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary and Care To Learn claims to DfE.
- Providing the college Finance Department with a spreadsheet showing Internal Transfer payments to be processed.

### **MONTHLY**

- Receiving spreadsheets from the college Finance Department which show funds allocated from each of the LSF detail codes and reconciling these with amounts shown as paid in PayMyStudent.
- Providing the Finance Department with a written report notifying any amendments that need to be made to the spreadsheets identified in the previous bullet point.
- Ensuring that any amendments identified in the previous bullet points are made.

### **WEEKLY**

- Providing the Head of Student Services and the staff of the Financial Support Team with a weekly bulletin which shows the financial status of each of the Learner Support Funds.
- Ensuring that learners in receipt of a Learner Support Fund award and those who access their Free College Meals Entitlement are added to the college ILR.
- Providing the college Finance Department with a spreadsheet showing Bacs payments to be processed (spreadsheet to be sent to Finance 3 times per week during the first half-term of the 2025/26 Academic Year).
- Reviewing expenditure to ensure all Funds remain within allocated budgets and, where necessary, review and amend individual detail code allocations.

## **15. FREE COLLEGE MEALS MAXIMUM DAILY ALLOWANCE RATIONALE**

The national Free College Meals (FCM) basic rate for 2025/26 is £2.61. Where the learner is assessed as eligible for the 16-18 Learner Support Fund or 16-18 Extended Bursary their allowance will be topped up from the respective fund by a further £1.89 per day to make a maximum daily amount of £4.50. If learners are not eligible for the 16-18 Learner Support Fund or 16-18 Extended Bursary it will be topped up by a further £1.89 per day from the Lincoln College Hardship Fund.

The £4.50 allowance reflects the fact that Lincoln College prides itself on using fresh food ingredients to provide nutritional and healthy meals for our learners.

In the past 5 years the college's catering provision has been developed for the better with the health and wellbeing of our learners at the forefront of our provision; the college has implemented the use of a butcher, baker and fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers and now employs creative and innovative chefs to produce high standard foods on a daily basis, which comes at an added cost.

In addition to learners eligible for FCM, meals support at the same rate is provided to learners who are not eligible for FCM but who meet the 16 to 18 Learner Support Fund eligibility criteria. The rationale for providing this support includes:

- Parents of these learners are either in receipt of a means tested benefit, but above the level at which FCM is available, or whose gross, not net, income is below £45,000pa so have less disposal income available to them.
- According to statistics provided by national research company Pumplot, the average salary for all Local Authorities in Lincolnshire is less than the United Kingdom average.
- Lincolnshire is a rural county and has a large low paid, low skilled land-based economy.
- Lincolnshire is the second largest county in England, with poor transport links, which has an impact on household incomes, unlike other urban areas, such as London, where transport is frequent and free.
- According to the Office of National Statistics, Lincoln is ranked as the 65<sup>th</sup> most income-deprived area of England, out of 316 local authorities.

## 16. GROSS HOUSEHOLD INCOME THRESHOLD RATIONALE

The Gross Household Income Threshold used by Lincoln College to assess whether a learner is eligible for support is based on the funds available for Academic Year 2025/26 and the National Living Wage for 2024/25:

The 2024/25 National Living Wage:

$$\boxed{\text{£11.44}} \times \boxed{37.5 \text{ Hours}} \times \boxed{52 \text{ Weeks}} = \boxed{\text{£22,308}}$$

Where 2 adults live in a household this would give a gross household income of £44,616. To aid with ease of communication and administration this figure has been rounded up to a gross household income threshold of £45,000pa.

This threshold will be reviewed annually, taking in to account any increase in the National Living Wage and funding to be received and available for the forthcoming academic year.

## 17. ADMINISTRATION CONTRIBUTIONS AND UNSPENT FUNDS

The Financial Support Team can, in compliance with DfE requirements, claim an administration contribution for Academic Year 2025/2026:

- 5% of total allocation for 16-18 Learner Support Fund and Free College Meals, excluding any carry forward of funds from the previous academic year;

- 5% of actual funds allocated for 19+ DfE's Adult Skills Fund Learner Support Fund, 19+ Advanced Learner Loan Learner Support Fund, 20+ DfE Adult Skills Fund Learner Support Fund Childcare, 20+ Advanced Learner Loan Learner Support Fund Childcare; EMCCA 19+ Adult Skills Fund Learner Support Fund and EMCCA 20+ Learner Support Fund Childcare
- 5% of the total amount claimed (excluding summer retainer payments) for Care to Learn learners.

Unspent 2025/2026 16 to 18 Learner Support Fund and Free College Meals funds **must** be carried over to the next academic year.

Any funds carried forward to 2026/2027 **must** be used to support students as stated in Section 10 of the DfE's "16-19 Bursary Fund Guide: 2025 to 2026" and Section 6 of their "Free Meals in Further Education Funded Institutions Guide: Academic Year 2025 to 2026" document. These sections clearly state that "you cannot add the funds to general institution funds".

The college cannot carry forward funding for the 16 to 18 Learner Support Fund and/or Free College Meals funding for more than one year. This means, in compliance with DfE requirements, the college must return unspent funds prior to, and including, the 2023 to 2024 academic year or any funds that are over the college's current year allocation value to DfE.

## 18. AUDIT, ASSURANCE AND FRAUD

To minimise the risk of fraud, the assessment of applications and the authorising of awards will be conducted by different college departments. The Financial Support Team, Student Services Department, will be responsible for the assessment of applications and authorising payments. The college's Finance Department will be responsible for the payment of awards.

To ensure accountability, the member of Financial Support Team staff responsible for authorising payments must complete and sign a copy of the LSF BACS Authorisation Form each time an LSF Payment Spreadsheet is sent to the college Finance Department. In addition, the completed Form must be counter-signed by either the Student Financial Support Specialist or Financial Support Term Leader where a single payment (except childcare) exceeds £600 or the total value of payments on the spreadsheet to be sent to Finance exceeds £10,000.

The DfE must be notified where significant fraud is suspected. Significant fraud may involve one or more of the following:

- the amount of money is over £1,200.
- the particulars of the fraud are novel, unusual, systemic, or complex.
- there is likely to be great public interest because of the nature of the fraud or the people involved.

## 19. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually for approval by the Board of Corporation.