

Document Title	Student Financial Support Policy
Type of document	Corporate
Brief summary of contents	A policy outlining the financial support available to learners
SLT member responsible for policy	Director of Safeguarding and Student Support
Date written	1 st September 2020
Date last revised	23 rd May 2023
This document replaces	Review
Approval route/consultation	Department Head, SLT Member
Head of Department (HOD) responsible for policy	Director of Safeguarding and Student Support
Author of policy	Director of Safeguarding and Student Support
Contact details	safeguarding@rnngroup.ac.uk
Publication location	Public and portals
Date of final approval	TBC
Date policy becomes live	TBC
Review period	Annual
Related documents	
Keywords	Financial Support
Training needs	All Staff

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Student Financial Support Policy

Version 1.4

23rd May 2023

Version Control Table

Date	Version No	Summary of Changes	Changes Made By
3 rd July 2020	1.0	Creation of policy	Laura Reid
23 rd May 2023	1.4	Review of policy	Laura Reid

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The RNN Group (comprising the colleges of Rotherham, North Nottinghamshire, Dearne Valley, RNN Training and subsidiary companies and hereinafter referred to as the '@group') is committed to removing barriers to learning through financial support.
- 1.2 At the date of this policy the funding bodies (hereinafter collectively referred to as the 'Funding Bodies') referred to are the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) and the Office for Students (OfS).
- 1.3 The Group will openly, fairly and transparently follow and apply the guidance set by the Funding Bodies.

2 KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 The Deputy Principal/ CEO is the Executive Leadership Team member with overall responsibility for this policy.
- 2.2 The Director of Safeguarding and Student Support oversees the operational aspects of managing all student financial support funds to remove barriers to learning through financial and in-kind support.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1 This policy applies to students studying towards the Education and Skills Funding Agency, South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) funded further education or the Office for Students (OfS) Higher Education qualifications that also qualify for bursary support based on funding body criteria.

4 PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 These funds are managed by the Group and are allocated on a first come, first served basis (with the exception of the 16-19 Vulnerable Student Bursary Fund) via an application and assessment process. Students must meet the specified eligibility criteria in order to be considered for any assistance. The rules within this policy are set out at the time of writing and could be subject to change at any time from the funding bodies.
- 4.2 Financial support is intended to remove barriers, to support participation, attendance and achievement.
- 4.3 Application forms received by the Student Financial Support Team will be processed within 20 working days of being received, assuming the correct evidence is attached. Support will be put in place from the date of approval, no payments will be backdated unless there are extenuating circumstances. Payments will commence from the end of September to fund support from October until the end of the course. There is no cut-off date for support applications, however the fund is allocated on a first come first served basis so early applications are recommended. Applicants will be notified of their application outcome in writing by email, text or post.

5 OVERVIEW OF FUNDING AVAILABLE

5.1 16 – 19-year-old students (and 19-24 with an EHCP)

- 16 – 19 Discretionary Bursary
- Free College Meals
- Care to Learn
- 16-19 Enhanced Bursary (Bursary for young people in defined vulnerable groups)
- Apprenticeship bursary for care leavers

5.2 19+ Students

- 19 + Discretionary Learner Support Fund
- 20 + Childcare (part of the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund)
- Apprenticeship bursary for care leavers

5.3 Higher Education Students

- HE Hardship fund

6 ELIGIBILITY FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

16 – 18 bursaries

6.1 To be eligible for the bursary students must:

- be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2023 or
- be aged 19 or over at 31 August 2023 and have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- meet the residency criteria in ESFA 2023 to 2024 academic year funding regulations for post-16 provision
- be participating in provision that is subject to inspection by a public body which assures quality (such as Ofsted), the provision must also be either
 - funded directly by ESFA or via a local authority
 - otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including Level 3) accredited by Ofqual or pursuant to Section 96 or the Learning and Skills Act 2000
 - a 16 to 19 traineeship programme

6.2 Students who are on apprenticeship programmes, waged training or employed (rather than in education), are not eligible for help from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund or Free Meals.

6.3 We do not expect students on distance learning provision to need help from the bursary fund because they do not have the kinds of costs the bursary is intended to cover (travel, equipment, and uniforms, for example). In the rare instances where an institution identifies such a student does require financial help, they should provide support in-kind. An example could be providing a temporary travel pass for the student to attend exams.

6.4 In line with Funding Guidance, bursaries are paid to students aged 16 or over. However, in exceptional circumstances we may use our discretion to pay bursaries to younger students, for example, where a 14-year-old student is following an accelerated study programme. Exceptional circumstances do not include students aged 14 to 16 who are attending an RNN Group College as part of their key stage 4 programme e.g. as part of a school links programme.

6.5 Students aged under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible for support.

6.6 Students aged 19 and over at 31 August 2023 in the 2023 to 2024 academic year.

- 6.7 Students who are aged 19 to 23 on 31 August 2023 are not eligible for support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund unless they:
- have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and are attending eligible education provision; or
 - are a 19-year-old student who is continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18
- 6.8 Students aged 19 or over are not eligible to receive a vulnerable bursary.
- 6.9 Generally, asylum seekers are not entitled to public funds. Accompanied asylum seeking children (those under 18 with an adult relative or partner) and those aged 18 and above are entitled to education, but not to public funds. If they are destitute, they can apply to the Home Office (HO) for suitable housing and cash for essentials, but they are not eligible for other income.
- 6.10 As long as an asylum seeker has not had their application for asylum refused, you can provide in-kind student support such as books, equipment, or a travel pass. Under no circumstances should you give cash to any asylum seeker unless they are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC).
- 6.11 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children do not receive cash support from the Home Office and are the responsibility of the local authority. They are treated as looked after children and are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups ('in care' group), where they have a financial need.

Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups

- 6.12 Students who meet the criteria, and who have a financial need, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups. The defined groups reflect that these students are unlikely to be receiving financial assistance from parents or carers, so may need a greater level of support to enable them to continue to participate. Students should be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the types of costs they have and not automatically awarded support to the value of £1,200.
- 6.13 To be eligible for the vulnerable bursary, students must be in one of the defined vulnerable groups:
- in care/ Looked after*
 - care leavers*
 - receiving Universal Credit* (some learners may still receive income support) because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner
 - receiving Disability Living Allowance (DSA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

*For further information on these categories please visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year#eligibility-criteria-bursaries-for-young-people-in-defined-vulnerable-groups>

- 6.14 Learners on study programmes of 30 weeks or more may receive support up to the value of £1200. This will include in-kind support with costs towards learning, such as travel passes (where applicable), free college meals available on their ID card, equipment purchased through department. The amount/ value of support allocated will be based on need. If a learner is on a course of less than 30 weeks duration a pro rata amount will be awarded. Learners can be awarded above the value of £1200 where it is deemed necessary to offer a higher level of support. Funds for this will be drawn from the discretionary bursary. Where a learner falls into the Vulnerable Bursary category, but has no need for financial support, the Group should decide on whether no bursary (where there is no need for financial help) be awarded or to award a reduced amount (where there is limited financial help needed).

6.15 The Group will work closely with external support agencies to understand the needs of individual learners to ensure the adequate amount of support is allocated, this can be reviewed at any time if circumstances change.

7 ELIGIBILITY AND CONDITIONS FOR SUPPORT FUND FOR FULL-TIME

16 - 18, 19+ including Advanced Learner Loans

- 7.1 To qualify for bursary support learners must reside within a home that has an annual gross household income of below £37,000, threshold increase of £1000 per additional dependent e.g. £39,000 for household with three dependents.
- 7.2 Household income above £37,000 will not be eligible for support
- 7.3 Applications that exceed the income threshold will be revisited and supported if funds allow during the year.
- 7.4 The gross household income will be assessed against the household income bands and applied to the assessment of all new applications received in 2023/24. Returning students can complete a self-declaration form, which is signed and dated to confirm that their household circumstances have not changed since they started at college.
- 7.5 Support for students may be reduced, limited or ceased if funds become depleted.
- 7.6 If additional funds become available further financial support may be offered.
- 7.7 For all applications (excluding Free College Meals and **bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups**), funding is limited; therefore, evidence of eligibility does not guarantee an award. Students wishing to apply for financial support should do so as soon as possible, applications can be assessed prior to enrolment however, no monies will be paid until the student is enrolled, the earliest payments will be made at the end of September to support learners from October onwards. See appendix 1 for more information on the support available.
- 7.8 The following are acceptable forms of evidence/proof of income and household circumstances for assessing applications for financial support:
 - Current Tax Credit Award Notice (full letter showing all pages)
 - The last 3 Universal Credit statements, showing all allowances and any take home pay (full statement with all pages)
 - Current (income assessed) Benefits/ Universal Credit Claim Letter – dated within the last 6 months
 - Letter from Local Authority confirming Housing Benefits/ Council Tax Benefit – dated within the last 6 months
 - Bank Statement indicating regular payments from the Benefits Agency
 - Wage slips (minimum 2 months/ 8 weekly payments)
 - Proof of recent tax return if self employed
 - Other evidence may be requested to establish proof of income and household circumstance.
 - National Asylum Seekers Support (NASS) Card
 - For Advanced Learner Loan applications, the proof of loan letter must be provided as well any of the above income evidence.

Evidence of household income is required in order to assess each application and a copy of the evidence must be retained for audit purposes in line with government guidance.

Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups

7.9 To qualify for this bursary, learners will need the following evidence:

- Letter from local authority confirming Looked After or Care Leaver status
- Award letter from Income Support or Universal Credit. For students in receipt of Universal Credit, also required is evidence of living independently e.g. a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificates, utility bills etc.

7.10 Eligibility for financial support does not give students an automatic entitlement to receive it. Students will be made aware funding is limited and offered on a first come, first served basis and during the year if it is necessary to introduce an application deadline the date will be published. Students will be advised in writing in advance if support awards cannot be maintained throughout the academic year.

8 EMERGENCY MEAL SUPPORT

8.1 The Group have flexibility that enable the use our bursary fund in individual cases of severe hardship, to provide meal support on the days a student attends their study programme, for a student they consider to be in real need, without undertaking the checks on household income or gathering other evidence that would normally be required.

8.2 For audit purposes, the Group 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, if actual spend receipts are not obtained

8.3 This form of support is not expected to continue on an ongoing basis for any individual student.

9 HIGHER EDUCATION HARDSHIP FUND

9.1 This process applies to home students studying towards Higher Education courses, wishing to apply for financial support due to hardship. This is in addition to Student Loans Company support, which must be in place before hardship can be supported. **Higher Level Apprenticeship are not eligible for this support.**

9.2 These funds are managed by the RNN Group and are allocated on a financial need basis via an application and assessment process. Applications will be reviewed by Student Finance. The first review will be held week commencing 27th November 2023. Students must meet the specified eligibility criteria and have provided relevant and accurate information about their circumstance, in order to be considered for any assistance.

9.3 Applications for DSA Laptop support only will be assessed as received and will not be held until the review panel.

9.4 Financial support is intended to remove barriers, support participation, attendance and achievement.

Priority students

9.5 The fund is available to help any eligible student who has a particular financial need but cannot support every application received and may only meet some of the costs that students can apply for.

9.6 The Group give priority to certain groups of students when deciding how to allocate funding, these include;

- Students with disabilities, especially where the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is unable to meet particular costs
- Students who have entered Higher Education from care
- Students with children, especially lone parents

Overview of hardship funding available

9.7 The Group is able to provide a number of options depending on specific circumstances;

- One off grant payment (prior to next loan payment)
- Applications will only be granted at the beginning or towards the end of any term to support the student until their next loan instalment is paid.
- Normal maximum level of grant (only one grant will be available in each academic year except where extreme hardship is evidence);
 - Lone parent not working - £250
 - Couple with children, neither working - £200
 - Couple, no children, neither working - £150
 - Individual living independently - £100
 - Individual living at home - £50
 - Extreme hardship payment £300 in exceptional circumstances (available at times of need)
- £200 DSA Laptop Grant

9.8 This is available to full and part time, home students who have applied for the Disabled Students Allowance and their assessment shows they need a laptop. The students must have a household income of £35,000 or less. This grant will pay the £200 not covered by the Disabled Students Allowance.

Discretion in special circumstance

9.9 In the majority of cases this procedure will be followed. However, it is recognised that exceptional circumstance arise that cannot always be written into procedures. Where extreme hardship is evidenced a student may be eligible for additional payments within the year. This would have to be approved by the Head of Student Support and Safeguarding. In these circumstance support would be offered from the College Welfare or Counselling team with an expectation of willingness to access support from the student.

Tuition Fees and other financial support

9.10 Students studying Higher Education (HE) courses are directed towards Student Finance England to apply for help with Course fees, loans and childcare grants while studying HE. Students should visit <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance> for information. Fees and Childcare cannot be covered through this fund.

Eligibility for hardship support

9.11 Funding through the HE Hardship Fund may be available to help students who need extra financial support, the student must have applied for and taken all loans available to them through Student Finance England and evidence of this must be provided before hardship support is granted.

9.12 The following documentation evidence is the minimum required for an assessment of eligibility:

- The prior three months bank statements for all accounts held in the student's name
- Finance breakdown letter (from the Student Loans Company)
- Proof of rent or mortgage payment

- Proof of household income – if partner or parents are working this evidence needs including such as three consecutive wage slips or alternatively proof of benefits. For partners who are also students we need to see their breakdown.
- Benefits – proof to be provided of any benefits

9.13 Funding is limited and therefore awards may be reduced or ceased if funds become limited. If additional funds become available further financial support may be made available.

10 APPLICATION SUPPORT

10.1 We have staff available at each campus and over the phone to support with completing the Student Financial Support form. Predominantly the applications are available online however we have alternative formats available if required. If you have any questions about the application process you can contact the team via email studentfinancial@rnngroup.ac.uk or 01709 722823/01709 722877 or visiting reception.

11 APPEALS/COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

11.1 For learners who are dissatisfied with decisions relating to non-payment of bursary awards, appeals should be made in writing and sent to studentfinance@rnngroup.ac.uk or handed into reception. Appeals should be made within 5 working days of the stopped payment. Appeals will be dealt with in the first instance by the Student Finance Team.

11.2 Any disagreement with a decision made by the Student Financial Support Team in relation to an application should be made in writing to the Director of Safeguarding and Student Support. Any further appeals should be directed to the Deputy Principal.

APPENDIX 1:

<p>Travel</p>	<p>A travel contribution will be allocated on a weekly basis depending on travel category (based on travel passes, distance to travel and age):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rotherham based students ● 16 – 18, with a bus pass ● 18-21, with Zoom bus pass ● Adults ● 16 – 18 but living outside of Rotherham, Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield ● Access to College bus <p>Workshop based:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workshop only ● Workshop and surrounding areas ● Cross border – living in Rotherham, Doncaster, Sheffield. ● Access to college bus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Travel allowance is granted to learners who are eligible and live at least 1.5 miles away from their campus of study – Learners with a Disabled Persons Travel Pass will not be eligible for travel support from the relevant RNN Group College site – If you choose not to study at your nearest provision, the travel contribution may not always fully reflect the full cost of the journey.
<p>Equipment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support for essential kit and uniform (as specified by the Curriculum Area) – internal transfer or reimbursement with receipts – Departments will be provided a list of students who are eligible for support – Departments provide costs of equipment/ kit required to the Student Finance team by 1st August of the academic year, and the information will be made available to students to ensure transparency of processes – Should a student be withdrawn or transfer courses they will be expected to return the kit/ uniform – Kits/uniforms can be retained for further use to enable them to complete their studies if they are progressing onto the next level
<p>Stationery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £10 allowance for stationery to be used in the College outlets, at any time of the year.
<p>Meals and subsistence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £4 as a contribution towards food costs normally offered at RNN Group facilities for each per day of attendance as indicated on the learner’s timetable.
<p>Vulnerable Student Bursary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● May receive support up to the value of £1200. This will include in-kind support with costs towards learning, such as travel passes (where applicable), free college meals available on their ID card, equipment

	<p>purchased through department. The amount/ value of support allocated will be based on need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – This will only be awarded where the learner has a financial need – if a learner is being supported financially through another organisation or has limited financial need there may be no award or a reduced award given
<p>Free college meals</p>	<p>Eligible benefits</p> <p>Free College 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 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 (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 (HMRC) ● Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after Working Tax Credit qualification ceasing ● Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa (after tax and not including any benefits you get) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or a parent/carer on their behalf, have made a successful application to the RNN Group. – Credit will be awarded to students aged between 16 and 18 on 31st August 2023 who are or whose parent/carer are in receipt of qualifying benefits <p>Students aged 19 or over are only eligible for a free meal if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (‘19+ continuers’) or – Have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), people aged up to 25. – £2.41 (topped up to £4) contribution towards healthy meal choices will be made available for use on the student ID card or in exceptional circumstances this may be awarded using an alternative method.
<p>Care to Learn - Childcare for under 20-year-old student</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students who are under 20 years of age, at the beginning of their course, are provided with assistance to apply for the Care to Learn Scheme to cover childcare costs. ● The RNN Group seeks to identify and encourage applications to the Care to Learn Scheme by all eligible students.

Childcare support (learners over 20 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare support is capped at £224 per learner per week for full time learners and is offered on a pro rata basis for part time learners e.g. £56.00 per learner per week for 1 timetabled day, £112 per learner per week for 2 timetabled days etc.
Higher Education associated costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are encouraged to apply early and get costs covered by the RNN Group for UCAS applications. UK University interview travel costs – 50% of the total travel costs reimbursement with receipts and letter confirming interview date, time and venue. Public transport costs only.
Emergency Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The emergency fund is short term and in place to assist students experiencing a sudden, unexpected and emergency situation, which may impact on their studies. This is also to promote the safeguarding and welfare of young people and vulnerable adults. – In exceptional cases the fund use will be recorded on ProSolution, however, depending on circumstances, a full application may not be deemed necessary or appropriate.
Trips/ enrichment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory trips may be supported, with evidence from the curriculum department. Costs associated with Enrichment activities will only be supported if funds allow, students will be required to self-fund and appeal with proof of payments for later consideration.
Digital Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support will be issued, where possible to support learners who have a lack of digital equipment, this could include the loan of a laptop and or access to data The Group aim to support ‘vulnerable learner’ including those with social workers to remove digital poverty. This may be done through gifting identified learners with a chrome book, to be used for the duration of their learning and to be kept thereafter.
Industry placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for additional travel, this may be in the form of short-term financial support to remove barriers of additional travel costs. Support in the form of vouchers to contribute to the cost of purchasing interview/ work clothes.
Care Leaver on Apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apprentices aged 16 or 17, who have left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care were classed as Looked After would be eligible for a one-off payment of £1000. They must consent to sharing this disclosure with their employer, as funds are also available for providers and employers. However, the apprentice can be eligible for the one-off payment without informing the employer. Evidence from the Local Authority of looked after status will be required as proof.