



Derby Adult Learning Service

Learning Opportunities for Adults

Hardship Support Fund Policy

Author	Heather Pawley
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Purpose

This policy sets out how Derby Adult Learning Service (DALs) administers the Hardship Support Fund (HSF) that it receives annually as part of its Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Adult Education Budget Funding and how these hardship funds will be applied.

The fund supports learners who have difficulties meeting the costs of attending their course(s); these costs fall under five categories:

- Course Fees
- Travel
- Exams costs
- Childcare
- Books (Key texts)

Eligibility for the hardship support funding is based on the learner meeting the residency requirements, the overall eligibility criteria and being on a means tested benefit, disability benefit or low income.

The fund provides support to learners who are experiencing genuine financial hardship. It is a means tested fund and the amount a learner may receive depends on their disposable income levels. Please see the Hardship Support Fund application form for criteria. **It can only be used for learners enrolled on courses funded by the ESFA.**

Hardship Support Funds are limited and therefore caps on funding limits are utilised to give fair access to support. The Hardship Support Fund covers the academic year from August to July, however, once the hardship support funding for the academic year is all allocated to eligible learners, we will not be able to support any further applications.

Support Available

The fund can help meet costs such as travel, equipment, exam costs, childcare and course fees for skills qualification courses with prefix LD, LE, LR only.

1. Course Fees

We will fully meet (100% of) the tuition / exam fees for up to 2 courses per academic year for learners with a learning disability / difficulty who are unemployed and not seeking work.

We will fund up to a maximum of 100% of course fees where a learner declares genuine financial hardship, for example if their payment of course fees will significantly and negatively impact upon current living standards.

Eligibility for awarding support through this fund will include reviewing previous course attendance; where attendance does not meet our minimum standards, hardship funding may not be awarded.

2. Travel

Eligible learners can apply to the Hardship Fund for support with their travel costs covering the journey from their home to the centre where their course/exam is being delivered.

Requests for travel costs where the distance is less than 1.5 miles between the learner's address and the course venue will be declined unless the learner declares a disability affecting mobility and they cannot access public transport and have no other means of transport available to them.

Bus fares will be allocated as a return ticket / travel card from the centre admin staff. Bus fares are capped at £120 per term, per learner for bus tickets and £200 maximum contribution per term, per learner for taxi costs. Any additional travel costs each term are to be met by the learner.

Taxis may be provided for learners who declare a disability affecting mobility and are unable to use public transport or access any other forms of support for their transport costs. Only DALs nominated taxi suppliers are to be used where hardship funding has been awarded.

3. Exam/registration costs

For eligible learners up to 100% of the exam fee can be paid through the Hardship Support Fund. **Exam resits are not eligible for any Hardship Support Funding.** Learners will have to pay back any exam fees for missed exams.

4. Childcare

Financial support for childcare can only be used for ESFA funded courses. Childcare funding will be funded to a maximum of £500 per learner per academic year.

Childcare funds will only be used to support childcare costs for learners aged 20 or over at the start of their Skills course. Funds will only be used to pay for childcare that is approved or registered with the Local Authority and OFSTED in accordance with the Children Act 1989. Hardship Funding can only be used on DALs approved childcare providers. Informal childcare cannot be funded.

Childcare funds will not be used for learners eligible for the government 'Care to Learn' scheme. Only learners under the age of 20 are eligible to apply to the 'Care to Learn' scheme.

Where children are entitled to free childcare this entitlement is to be used in the first instance.

Should a learner cease to attend or withdraw from their course(s) at any point during the academic year, financial support for childcare and transport will finish on the last date of recorded attendance. The responsibility for childcare costs reverts to the learner from that date.

Awards from the fund are made to individual learners on a discretionary basis. Any award is made subject to satisfactory course attendance. Childcare is only paid for the attendance of a class.

5. Books

We will subsidise up to 2 key texts for learners who successfully meet the Hardship Support Fund criteria. These key texts will be from a list of those provided by the course tutor.

Key Principles

The Hardship Support Fund will be administered and distributed entirely in accordance with the relevant policies and guidance set out by the ESFA and by DALs.

With the exception of learners with learning difficulties/disabilities who are enrolling onto (up to 2) LD coded courses, all learners will be required to obtain and fully complete a Hardship Support Fund Application Form

Funds will be distributed only to current DALs learners who meet the eligibility criteria set out by the ESFA and who declare genuine financial hardship on their application form. Learners will be sent a letter informing them of this and detailing the funds that have been granted.

Learners who do not meet the eligibility criteria for Hardship Support Funding will not receive an award and will be sent a letter informing them of this and detailing the reason for their ineligibility.

The Hardship Support Fund is limited and will be distributed on the premise that the funds available should be used to help support as many eligible learners as possible.

Receipt of Hardship Support Funding is dependent upon the learner's continued satisfactory attendance on their course. If a learner's attendance is deemed to be unsatisfactory, support funding may be withdrawn.

We aim to process applications to the Hardship Support Fund within a maximum of 14 working days. However, in situations in which a learner is in emergency need of financial help, their application will be prioritised and processed as quickly as possible.

Learners may appeal the decision that is made on their HSF application. All learners who apply will be provided with details of how to make an appeal.

Responsibilities

The Senior Manager for Operations & Finance retains overall responsibility for this policy.

The Senior Administration Officers are responsible for:

- Ensuring funds are distributed and administered in line with this policy and relevant ESFA guidelines
- Overseeing the on-going development and improvement of the DALs Hardship Support Fund procedure
- Agreeing the content of this policy with the Administration Officers
- Monitoring the Hardship Support Funds and providing the management team with accurate, up-to-date budget data on request

Administration Officers are responsible for:

- Checking learner attendance information and using this to inform payments of Hardship Support Funding awards
- Maintaining all paper and electronic records relating to HSF consistently, accurately and within confidentiality and Data Protection guidelines
- Liaising with the finance team in coordinating the Hardship Support Funding accounts
- Ensuring all work relevant to Hardship Support Fund is carried out in line with this policy and the HSF procedure

Adult Learning Assistants are responsible for:

- Initially vetting applications and making effective judgements on learners' eligibility before the application is submitted for consideration.
- Issuing bus fare tickets and updating the trackers

Eligibility

Learners must be:

- 19+ on the 31st August of the year of application for travel, materials and fees
- 20+ on the 31st August of the year of application for childcare
- Enrolled on a DALs course funded by the ESFA

Refugee or Asylum Seekers need to be recognised by the Home Office or need to have been resident in the EU for at least 3 years with the right to remain.

Additionally, it is DALs's policy that learners must be:

- Fully enrolled on a course with DALs
- On a means-tested benefit or in a low-income household

Funds will not be awarded to learners if they received any form of funding during the previous academic year and did not complete their course, unless they repay the funds received.

Priority for an award will be given to learners who are:

- Disabled or have learning difficulties and require support to be able to access learning
- Disadvantaged
- Have a total individual disposable yearly income below £20,000
- On income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Universal Credit

Advanced Learning Loans Bursary Fund

The Loans Bursary Fund is provided to help vulnerable and disadvantaged learners who are being funded through a Loan, such as those with learning difficulties or disabilities, parents who need help with childcare, and ex-military personnel. The fund will be distributed as decided by the provider and is not an entitlement.

To apply

In order to receive Hardship Support Funding whilst studying at DALs, learners need to:

- Complete a Hardship Support Fund Application Form available at reception in our main centres or download / complete electronically from our website
- Return the completed application form with self-declaration to DALs as soon as possible

DALS reserve the right to reclaim monies paid to learners where information given on the application form is found to be false.

DALS reserve the right to reclaim monies paid to learners where the learner has withdrawn before the end of the course.

APPEALS

Applicants may appeal about the amount or type of an award by writing to the Senior Manager – Operations & Finance at DALSenquiries@derby.gov.uk stating why they feel the award should be reconsidered.

Applicants may be invited to provide additional information or invited to discuss their individual circumstances with the Senior Manager – Operations & Finance. The Senior Manager – Operations & Finance will respond to the appeal in writing within ten working days. This decision is final.

COMPLAINTS

Complaints concerning failure to comply with policy or published procedures should be made in accordance with DALs complaints policy, which can be found on our website or a copy can be provided by our Centre staff.