



Derby Adult Learning Service

Learning Opportunities for Adults

Hardship Support Fund Policy

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Purpose

This policy sets out how Derby City Council's Adult Learning Service (DALs) administers the Hardship Support Fund (HSF) element of its Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Adult Education Budget (AEB) 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
- Exam costs
- Childcare
- Books (Key texts)

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

The fund provides support to learners who are experiencing genuine financial hardship. It's a means tested fund and the amount a learner receives depends on their disposable household income levels.

Hardship Support Funds are limited and therefore caps on funding per learner 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 contribute to costs such as travel, equipment, exam costs, childcare and course fees for skills qualification courses up to level 2 and level 3 national skills for jobs courses only.

Eligibility for awarding support through this fund will include reviewing previous course attendance. You're expected to attend 100% of your classes, where your attendance falls below 85%, hardship funding may be withdrawn.

Course Fees

Learners in financial hardship

The Hardship Support fund will fund 100% of course and exam fees for a maximum of 2 skills classes in one academic year, where a learner declares genuine financial hardship, for example if their payment of course fees will significantly and negatively impact upon current living standards. Evidence of household income will need to be provided.

Learners with a learning disability / difficulty who are unemployed and not seeking work

The Hardship Support fund will fund 100% of course fees for a maximum of 2 skills courses per academic year for learners with a learning disability / difficulty who are unemployed and not seeking work. Learners don't need to complete an application form for this funding, it will be applied automatically during enrolment.

Sign Language offer

Under the Hardship Support Fund where learners are not eligible for full funding under existing ESFA Adult Education Budget funding rules, we will fully fund British Sign Language courses at level 1 for:

- Learners who are deaf or hearing impaired
- The spouse or civil partner of a deaf / hearing impaired person
- The parent/carer of a deaf / hearing impaired person / child

Learners will be responsible for any exam fees for qualification courses.

Learners don't need to complete an application form for this funding, it will be applied automatically during enrolment.

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 help with 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 or support available to them.

Bus fares will be allocated as a return ticket / travel card by the centre administration staff. These travel tickets/cards can only be used for travel to classes, where a learner does not attend, they will be expected to use the ticket/card for a future journey to one of their classes. 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 DALSS nominated taxi suppliers are to be used where hardship funding has been awarded.

Applications for support with travel costs for learners who reside out-of-area, i.e., those from neighbouring suburbs to Derby City, will only be considered where there is no alternative provision available in the learners' local area. The fund does not cover travel costs from learners residing in any other city/location in the UK.

Exam / registration costs

Hardship Support funding will cover 100% of an eligible learners' exam and registration fees.

Hardship Support funding will also cover the fees for one exam resit where a learner has failed their first exam for each qualification course covered by the HSF.

Learners will have to pay back any exam fees for missed exams.

Childcare

Financial support for childcare can only be used for ESFA funded skills/qualification courses.

Childcare funding is limited to a maximum of £500 contribution to childcare costs per learner per academic year. The learner must be able to cover any additional childcare costs themselves.

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 DALSS approved childcare providers. Informal childcare cannot be funded.

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 funding is only paid for days where learners are attending a DALSS class.

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 a learners' children are entitled to free childcare, this entitlement is to be used in the first instance. You can find more information about this scheme here: <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>

Books

We will fund up to 2 key texts, up to maximum of £40 in total, 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 Derby Adult Learning Service (DALs).

With the exception of learners with learning difficulties/disabilities who are enrolling onto (up to 2) LLDD skills courses and eligible learners accessing a level 1 BSL course, 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 15 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 Officer is 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 skills/qualification 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.

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 by emailing our team at DALSenquiries@derby.gov.uk
- Return the completed application form with evidence of household income 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.