

# **Rutland Adult Learning and Skills Service**

## **Discretionary Learner Support Policy**

**2018-2020**



## Purpose

This policy sets out how Rutland Adult Learning & Skills Service (RALSS) will administer the Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) that it receives annually and how these funds will be used.

The fund helps learners who have difficulties meeting the costs of attending their course(s). The fund is money allocated to RALSS by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Education Funding Agency (EFA)

Eligibility is based on the learner meeting the residency requirements and being on a means tested benefit, disability benefit or low income. Where possible, funds awarded will be paid directly to the relevant third party.

The fund provides support to learners who are experiencing financial hardship. It is a means tested fund and the amount a learner may receive depends on their household income. Please see the Learner Support Form for criteria. It can only be used for learners enrolled on courses funded by either the SFA or EFA.

**Community Courses** (coded C) are not generally eligible for help from the Discretionary Learning Support Fund (DLSF) but, in exceptional circumstances, Transport costs may be supported for those on English or maths programmes. Course fees are already discounted to allow for those on benefits or low income to participate. There is no support for childcare.

## Support Available for Qualification Courses

Support is available for the following applicants; unemployed and seeking work; in receipt of benefits; learners with a learning disability/difficulty and who are unemployed and not seeking work; learners unable to claim benefits but on low earnings and costs will significantly and negatively impact upon current living standards

### 1 Course Fees

We will fund up to a maximum of 100% of course fees where a learner declares and can provide comprehensive evidence of financial hardship.

### 2 Travel

Mileage will be paid at 15p per mile. Requests for mileage where the distance is less than one mile between the learner's address and the course venue will be declined unless the learner declares a disability affecting mobility.

Taxis may be provided for learners who are both eligible and unable to use public transport.

### 3 Childcare

Childcare funds will only be used to support childcare costs for learners aged 20 or over at the start of their 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.

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.

It is expected that where children are entitled to 15 hours of free childcare a week, these hours will be used to enable a learner to attend their course.

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.

## **Key Principles**

The DLSF will be administered and distributed entirely in accordance with the relevant policies and guidance set out by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and by RALSS.

All learners will be required to obtain and fully complete a Learner Support Form and to supply any requested documentary evidence if required.

Funds will be distributed only to current RALSS learners who meet the eligibility criteria set out by SFA and who declare financial hardship both on their application forms and through supplied documentary evidence if requested.

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

The DLSF 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, as much as possible.

Receipt of DLSF 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.

If a learner is granted an award from the DLSF on the basis of a disability and the award is made in order to buy large items of equipment, such equipment will remain the property of RALSS after the end of the academic session. As such, all equipment will require to be returned by an agreed date.

If possible, applications to the DLSF will be processed within a maximum of 21 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 DLSF application. All learners who apply will be provided with details of how to make an appeal (additional doc needed).

## **Responsibilities**

The Adult Learning and Skills Manager retains overall responsibility for this policy.

The IAG Officer is responsible for:

- Ensuring funds are distributed and administered in line with this policy and relevant SFA Guidelines

- Overseeing the on-going development and improvement of the RALSS DLSF Procedure

The Administration Team Leader is responsible for:

- Assessing applications and making effective judgements on learners' eligibility and award amounts in line with both this policy and relevant SFA Guidelines
- Monitoring the DLSF budgets and providing the Management Team with accurate, up-to-date budget data on request
- Checking learner attendance information and using this to inform payments of DLSF awards
- Maintaining all paper and electronic records relating to DLSF consistently, accurately and within confidentiality and Data Protection guidelines
- Liaising with the Finance Team in coordinating the DLSF accounts
- Ensuring all work relevant to DLSF is carried out in line with this policy and the DLSF procedure

## **Eligibility**

Learners must be:

- 19+ on the 31<sup>st</sup> August of the year of application for travel, materials and fees
- 20+ on the 31<sup>st</sup> August of the year of application for childcare
- Enrolled on a course funded by the SFA

If you are a Refugee or Asylum Seeker this needs to be recognised by the Home Office or you need to have been resident in the EU for at least 3 years with right to remain

Additionally, it is RALSS policy that learners must be:

- Fully enrolled at RALSS
- On a means-tested benefit or on a low household income

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
- Disadvantaged
- On a low income (less than £16k) or in receipt of a means-tested benefit or have a household income below £25k

On income based job seekers allowance

## **To apply**

In order to receive DLSF support whilst studying at RALSS learners need to:

- Complete a Learner Support Form Application available at Reception or downloaded from our website
- Return the completed application form to RALSS
- Provide us with documentary evidence if asked
- RALSS reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to learners where information given on the application form is found to be false
- RALSS reserves 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 Adult Learning Manager stating why they feel the award should be reconsidered.

Applicants may be asked to provide additional information or invited to discuss their individual circumstances with the Adult Learning Manager or his/her deputy. The Adult Learning Manager 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 RALSS Complaints Procedure.

- Updated August 2018