



## **Rutland Adult Learning and Skills Service**

# **Discretionary Learner Support Policy**

**2024-25**

## **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) including 19+ transport, 20+ childcare, membership fees and course materials. The fund is money allocated to RALSS by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Eligibility is based on the learner meeting the residency requirements and being on a means tested benefit, disability benefit or low household income (below £27,000). Where possible, funds awarded will be paid directly to the relevant third party.

The fund is limited and 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 the ESFA.

**Tailored Learning Courses** 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, including ESOL. Course fees are already discounted to allow for those on benefits or low household income (below £27,000) 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 Course materials**

As above we will fund up to a maximum of 100% of the costs of essential course materials or text books, but these will remain the property of RALSS.

### **3 Exam fees**

We will fund up to 100% of the exam fees for those learners who are fully funded for course fees but unable to pay the exam fees due to financial hardship, or who qualify for support with course fees as above.

### **4 Essential membership fees (eg AAT)**

We will fund up to 100% of the membership fees for those learners who are unable to pay due to financial hardship.

Items 1-3 will be subject to a variable percentage dependent on their annual gross household income. Currently: 100% for < £16,190, 66% for between £16,190 and £27,000.

## **5 Travel**

Mileage will be paid at 40p per mile. Bus travel is recommended where possible and may be reimbursed weekly if needed, on evidence of bus tickets. Train travel, as per bus travel. 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.

## **6 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.

## **Key Principles**

The DLSF will be administered and distributed entirely in accordance with the relevant policies and guidance set out by the ESFA and by RALSS.

All learners will be required to obtain and fully complete a Discretionary Financial Support Application 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 ESFA 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.

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.

## **Responsibilities**

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 of 90% of the available sessions and full attendance at every assessment or exam session. If a learner's attendance is deemed to be unsatisfactory support funding may be withdrawn.

It is the learner's responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any learner support they are receiving from us, as learner support payments may affect eligibility to state benefits.

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

The Administrator is responsible for:

- Ensuring funds are distributed and administered in line with this policy and relevant ESFA Guidelines
- Checking learner attendance information and using this to inform payments of DLSF awards
- Submitting monthly 'to date' spending via the EAS submission for any large outgoings above £5,000.
- Overseeing the on-going development and improvement of the RALSS DLSF Procedure
- Assessing applications and making effective judgements on learners' eligibility and award amounts in line with both this policy and relevant ESFA Guidelines
- Monitoring the DLSF budgets and providing the Management Team with accurate, up-to-date budget data on request
- Maintaining all paper and electronic records relating to DLSF consistently, accurately and within confidentiality and Data Protection guidelines

The Adult Learning and Skills Manager is responsible for:

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

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. Currently: 100% for < £16,190, 66% for £16,190 - £27,000

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, or were unable to complete the course due to illness or unavoidable outside influences.

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

- Disabled or have learning difficulties
- Disadvantaged
- On a low income, a gross household income below £27,000 or in receipt of a means-tested benefit
- On income-based job seekers allowance

## To apply

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

- Complete a Discretionary Financial Support Application Form, available at Reception
- Return the completed application form to RALSS with the following evidence:
  - ✓ A copy of at least 3 months' pay slips for all working learners
  - ✓ Proof of any benefits awarded to any adult in the household
  - ✓ A copy of your most recent bank statement
- **Please note, without acceptable evidence your application can not be processed.**
- 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 available from our web site at [www.ralss.org.uk](http://www.ralss.org.uk) .

## **How we will use your information**

We will use your information to provide the service requested. We may share your personal data between our services and with partner organisations, such as government bodies and authorities. We will do so when it is of benefit to you, or required by law, or to prevent or detect fraud.

If you are not happy with the way the council is handling your personal information you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk) or telephone 0303 123 1113.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reason for Review</b>	<b>Next Scheduled Review</b>
May 17	Annual Review	May 18
May 18	Annual Review	May 19
May 19	Annual Review	May 20
Oct 21	Annual Review	April 2022
Jul 22	Annual Review	Jul 2023
Aug 2023	Annual Review	Aug 2024
Jul 24	Annual Review	Jul 25

Age 16-18: 19+: 24+: **Support Available (Gross Household income)**Under £16,190 – 100% Between £16,191 and £27,000 – 66% 

**Please complete all sections of the form to avoid delays. Financial Support will only be issued after enrolment and the relevant supporting evidence has been seen.**

<b>Student Details</b>		
First Name:	Surname:	
DOB (dd/mm/yy):	Postcode:	
Contact Number:	Email:	
Course:		
Start Date:	End Date:	No of sessions:

<b>Household Details and Residential Status (Please tick)</b>	
I am a British Citizen (I was born in the UK and have been living in the UK for 3 or more years)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was born outside the UK but have settled status and have been ordinarily resident in the UK for 3 or more years	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a EU/EEA Citizen (I was born in the EU/EEA and have been living in the UK/EU/EEA for 3 or more years)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a refugee and have been living in the UK since being given refugee status	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am an Asylum Seeker	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Income Details</b>	<b>Support Required</b>
Tax Credits Award	Course and/or exam Fees
Income Support or Universal Credits	Equipment Costs - We strongly recommend you do not purchase equipment prior to applying for support
JSA or ESA	
Guaranteed Pension Credit	
Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Benefit	Childcare costs – please complete details below and supply signed agreement with the childcare provider
Other – please describe	AAT Membership fee

**Transport Type:** bus / taxi / car scheme / train / fuel

Costs per return journey: (or fuel @ 40p per mile)	Payment method: Cash each week <input type="checkbox"/> Half term in arrears by bacs <input type="checkbox"/> / Cheque <input type="checkbox"/>
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<b>Record of payments - Dates covered:</b>	<b>Amount:</b>

<b>Evidence seen (from the last 3 months or latest/current):</b>	Dated:
3 months' pay slips	
Benefits letter or equivalent	
Bank statement showing benefits/wage payments	

**Declaration:**

- I declare the information I have given on this form is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and I understand that giving false information will disqualify my application.
- I agree to my details being recorded onto a database for administration purpose only.
- I undertake to notify Rutland Adult Learning & Skills Service of any changes in my financial circumstances which may affect my application. Funding will be reviewed at the end of each term and attendance will form part of the review.
- I agree to give relevant notice to my childcare provider if I leave the course or change providers. If I fail to do so I will be liable to pay any cost incurred.
- I understand that the childcare provision will be for my timetabled hours whilst in college.

Student Signature:	Date:
Staff Signature:	Date:

<b>Childcare</b> - Please complete if you require support with the cost of childcare whilst studying.									
Name of Child	Child's DOB	Childcare Provider Name & Ofsted Reg			Address and Contact Number of Childcare Provider			2/3 Year Funding	
<b>Childcare Days</b>									
Monday	AM	Tuesday	AM	Wednesday	AM	Thursday	AM	Friday	AM
	PM		PM		PM		PM		PM
Cost per session	£	No of sessions				Cost per course		£	

<p><b>DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998:</b> the information you give on this form will be used for the purpose of processing your application for help with your educational needs. RALSS/Stamford College has a duty to protect the public funds it handles and may use the information you provide to prevent and detect fraud. It will not be used for any other purposes without your permission.</p> <p>Appeals: if you disagree with a decision made by the Financial Support team you may appeal. Please contact us to discuss.</p> <p>Please note if applicable it is your responsibility to let the Department for Work and Pensions know about any DLS support that you receive, as DLS payments may affect your eligibility to certain benefits.</p> <p>Additional/Panel Notes (Office Use Only)</p>
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