



Discretionary Learner Support Funds Policy

1. Scope and Purpose

The purpose of the Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) is to support learners on a low income with assistance in costs for their study, to retain learners and promote a positive attitude to learning in order that learners may achieve their learning goals.

2. Eligible Learners

A learner is eligible to apply for Discretionary Learner Support Funds if they are:

- a 19+ enrolled learner with Brent Start on 31st August.
- on a full-time or part-time funded FE course

3. Support Available within Brent Start

3.1 The Discretionary Learner Support Fund – Transport

19+ learners may apply for grants to aid transport costs to and from their place of study. (Only granted with permission from SMT Member)

3.2 The Discretionary Learner Support Fund – Childcare 20+

The DLSF meets the needs of both full and part-time funded learners who are primary carers of a dependent child under 15 years (16 years for children with disabilities) and who satisfy general eligibility for hardship funds.

The following must be followed by the learner who is applying for support with childcare costs:

- They use an OFSTED registered provider. Informal childcare (e.g. provided by a relative) cannot be included, even if charged for. If a family member is a registered child minder, then their fees can be paid.
- They apply and use all free childcare provision (Early Years Fund for 2 & 4 year olds and 2 year olds where applicable) to provide childcare for their timetabled course content in the first instance.
- They maximise the use of Working Tax Credit - Childcare element by the learner or the other parent to fund additional hours over the free provision before receiving DLSF childcare element.
- They do not have a partner, who is not seeking work, who is able to provide childcare.
- Evidence will be required of the above and of a learner's status and income as an individual or joint where living with a spouse or partner to support an application for childcare support.
- The maximum that will be paid to an individual learner in any one year is £2,500 unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- Payments will not be made direct to the learner, but to the registered childcare provider.

3.3 The Discretionary Learner Support Fund – Fees & Exams

For full fee remission details see – ‘Brent Start Fee Fees and Waivers’.

In exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of Brent Start a learner may fall outside of the regular fee remission categories for full funding. This may occur where:

- They are unable to claim state benefits,
- Be over the free entitlement due to age thresholds
- Have level 2 or 3 which is classified as ‘full’ yet unable to undertake the suitable progression route due to funding, awarding body or age changes, particularly as a route to Higher Education or employment
- They were previously entitled to fee remission but their circumstances have changed and they wish to complete the natural next stage of that qualification at that level.

4. Conditions of Payments

- a) Payments will depend on attendance of at least 90%. Where attendance is unsatisfactory, payment can either be withheld or reclaimed.
- b) Payment will also be subject to satisfactory behaviour in accordance with the Brent Start Learner Code of Conduct. Therefore any learner under a sanction within the Disciplinary Procedure will not be eligible to receive payments.

- c) Brent Start reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to learners where information given on the application form is found to be false.
- e) Brent Start reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to learners where the learner has withdrawn before the end of the course.

5. Table of funding – according to gross family income

The amount of financial assistance a learner may be awarded is based on the information in the table below and is subject to adjustment annually:

Annual Gross Income	Single Annual Gross Income less than £23,300 or combined of £40,000 Or In receipt of income-related state benefits
Assistance Awarded	up to 100%

6. Learners on benefits

Learners supported by state income-related benefits and who are applying for Discretionary Learner Support Funds must take responsibility for possible risks of benefit deductions with their award. Learners may receive payment for the following, without deduction from their benefits:

- Exam fees
- Books and equipment.

A learner may need to declare grants made from this fund.

7. Application Process & Administration

A learner can apply for the hardship fund only once in an academic year but can place multiple courses on one application. After that application the learner must wait until the following academic year before applying again.

- Application forms for all categories and guidelines are available from the Learner Support Services staff. If you would like any of the documents in an alternative format, please let the Learner Services team know.
- All the sections of the form must be completed, documentary evidence attached as requested and the form sent to Learner Support Services.
- All applications will be recorded onto the DLSF tracker & provided a reference number.
- All applications must have the appropriate evidence to validate and meet the DLSF criteria
- Applications are dealt with on a first come first served basis and will be assessed and validated by the Learner Services Coordinator and Learner Services Manager within five working days. The applicant will then be informed in writing of a decision.
- Lack of evidence will result in an application form being returned and may delay or result in an award not being made.
- No purchases should be made independently of Brent Start.

8. Appeals

There is a formal appeals procedure for unsuccessful applicants. Any learner not satisfied with the decision, and who wishes to appeal, should appeal in writing by contacting the Learner Support Services Manager, who will investigate your appeal. This investigation may include obtaining further information regarding your personal circumstances, your financial position and information about your attendance and motivation on the course. Failure to provide any requested information or evidence requested will invalidate your appeal. All appeals will be discussed at the Brent Start Senior Management Meeting. You will be advised of the outcome and any action that has been taken.

9. Payments

All financial awards will be confirmed in writing and Learner accounts credited.

- The DLSF is limited and if it becomes exhausted and further learners seek support, then a waiting list scheme will come into operation
- Discretionary Learner Support Funds are allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis
- No payments will be made direct to the learner.

10.Reduction or cancellation of payments

The level of support will require re-assessment and possible withdrawal of funds if:

- The learner withdraws early from a course
- Tutor references and attendance reports are unsatisfactory

- The learner is suspended or excluded from Brent Start as a result of disciplinary action
- The learner is absent from Brent Start for any reason for more than 3 weeks
- The learner has been detained by a court order
- The learner is found to have given incomplete/false information regarding personal circumstances.

Any withdrawal of support will be notified in writing, giving guidance for appealing against the decision. Brent Start may require repayment of any amount overpaid for any reason.

11. Change in circumstances

Any learner in receipt of financial support from the Discretionary Learner Support Funds must immediately inform the Learner Support Services Manager of any:

- Change in permanent address
- Change in own or dependant's income during the course
- Intention to change course or withdraw temporarily or permanently
- Significant periods of illness or absence.

12. Administration of funds

Through government guidance and regulations:

- Brent Start is required to manage the Discretionary Learner Support Funds efficiently, effectively and with due financial diligence. In this respect Brent Start will make awards accordingly.
- Brent Start may, with permission of the agency, use funds to purchase equipment which will benefit all learners in receipt of DLSF.

13. Fraudulent Claims

Action will be taken for any claims found to be fraudulent and the appropriate measures will be taken to recover funds.

14. Equality and Diversity

Learners can expect an inclusive and supportive learning environment whatever their background.

15. Associated documents

- Brent Start Fees and Waivers
- Brent Start Learner Code Of Conduct
- Brent Council Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Brent Council Data Protection Policy
- Brent Council Equality Policy