## Purpose

This policy sets out how Medway Adult Education (MAE) 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 MAE by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Eligibility is based on the learner meeting the residency requirements and in receipt of a low income or benefits. 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 with codes that end in F, T, L or M.

## Support Available

### 1. Course Fees

The fund can help meet costs such as travel, equipment, exam costs, childcare and in exceptional circumstances course fees.  We will fully meet the tuition/exam fees for learners with a learning disability/difficulty and who are unemployed and not and not able to work.  We will fund up to a 100% of course fees where a learner declares and can provide comprehensive evidence of financial hardship, for example the payment of course fees will significantly and negatively impact upon current living standards.

### 2. 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.

We will refund the cost of public transport; we will also refund taxi fares for learners who are unable to use public transport. Transport tickets must be shown as evidence before funding is given.

### 3. Exams

For eligible learners, one exam resit can be funded. Further resits are not eligible for funding.

### 4. 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.

Childcare funds may be available for learners attending online courses but only where the delivery model is different to what was advertised in the brochure i.e. not the regular online learning programme. ‘Attendance’ will be monitored in the usual way.

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.

## 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 MAE.

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 or potential MAE 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.

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 MAE 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 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 DLSF application. All learners who apply will be provided with details of how to make an appeal.

## Responsibilities

The Data and Funding Manager retains overall responsibility for this policy.

They are responsible for:

* Ensuring funds are distributed and administered in line with this policy and relevant ESFA Guidelines
* Monitoring the DLSF budgets and providing the Management Team with accurate, up-to-date budget data on request

The Information, Advice and Guidance Team are responsible for:

* Assessing learners on their eligibility and making effective judgements on learners’ eligibility in line with both this policy and relevant ESFA Guidelines
* Supporting learners to complete applications with as much details as possible

The Administration Team are responsible for:

* Assessing applications and making effective judgements on learners’ eligibility and award in line with both this policy and relevant ESFA Guidelines
* 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. These records are to include applications that have been rejected and reasons for doing so.
* Sharing with the IAG team the outcome of applications.

## Eligibility

Learners must be:

* Eligible for ESFA funding by fulfilling the residency requirements mainly but not exclusively (Please contact the Data and Funding Manager is unsure of residency eligibility):
	+ They have lived in the UK for at least the previous 3 years and if not, a UK citizen have permission from the UK government to live in the UK.
	+ They are a UK or EEA citizen and have lived continuously in the EEA, Switzerland, Gibraltar, or the UK for at least the previous 3 year.
	+ They are a Refugee or Asylum Seekers, have lived in the UK for 6 months or longer and have an active claim or appeal open with the Home Office.
	+ They have been granted leave by the Home Office under and eligible Ukraine or Afghan scheme.
* 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 or ready to be enrolled on an MAE course funded by the ESFA

Additionally, it is MAE’s policy that learners must be:

* Earning less that £25k per year

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
* Have a total household income below £25k
* 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

To receive DLSF support whilst studying at MAE learners need to:

* Complete a Learner Support Form Application available from the Information, Advice and Guidance Team, from their tutor or download/complete electronically from our website.
* Return the completed application form to MAE.
* Provide us with documentary evidence.

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

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

### Payments

Payments will be made by BACs directly into the learners bank account at three points of the academic year. If this is not a convenient process and will put the learner in financial hardship and unable to complete their course alternative arrangements can be made via the Learner Support team and the administration team.

### Applications not awarded and appeals

If a learner has not been approved the learner details and reason for not awarding will be sent to the Programme Manager (IAG) to support the learner in understanding the reasoning. All applications not awarded will also be sent to Data and Funding Manager who will decide whether the decision stands or whether it needs to be further discussed with the DLS decision board. The DLSF decision board will meet within 10 working days of the initial rejection decision.

The board consists of:

* Data and Funding Manager.
* Programme Manager (IAG) or deputy.
* Senior Operations Officer or deputy.

Data and Funding Manager has final decision.

Applicants may appeal about the amount or type of an award by writing to the Data and Funding Manager 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 Data and Funding Manager. The appeal will go to the DLS decision board for further discussion and the Data and Funding Manager will respond to the appeal in writing within ten working days. This decision is final.