**Loughborough College’s approach to the allocation of the ‘Vulnerable Student Bursary’ (VSB) in 2020/21**

**(referred to internally as the ‘Enhanced Bursary’)**

Loughborough College has clear eligibility criteria for the ‘Enhanced Bursary’ (VSB), which is available on our website and in college literature and we make use of the ESFA eligibility checklist. The bursary provides financial support to help students overcome the specific financial barriers to participation they face so that they can remain in education.

Students applying for VS bursary are made aware that meeting the criteria for the ‘Enhanced Bursary’ does not automatically mean funding of the maximum £1200 will be given. In line with ESFA guidelines, “students should be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the types of costs they have. Meeting the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups does not automatically mean funding will be given. In some cases, a young person might meet the eligibility criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups but their financial needs are already met, they have no relevant costs or do not need the maximum award.”

ESFA defines vulnerable groups (who are eligible for the VSB) as students who are:

* in care
* care leavers
* receiving Income Support, or Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner
* receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

ESFA guidance states that, “Institutions must ensure they assess the needs of individual students when awarding bursary funding” and that, “application forms, bursary policies and any supporting information are clear that the bursary fund is intended to help students with their actual costs of participating.”

To this end, we endeavour to allocate bursary funding based on the actual costs each individual student will incur by participating in their study programme.

Furthermore, “ESFA guidance encourages institutions to pay bursaries in-kind rather than cash as far as possible. This helps ensure that the bursary is spent for the reasons it was awarded. In-kind payments can include travel passes, vouchers or credits for meals, required books and required equipment.”

We prioritise in-kind payments at the beginning of an eligible student’s study programme, in order that important participation enablers such as travel passes, kit and equipment, books and meal vouchers are in place for the student; from the outset.

In summary, as a result of revised ESFA guidelines, we are now limited to supporting eligible students in 2020/21 with ‘participation costs’ which are not supported by other sources.

Every student’s need is different dependent on their course, on their individual circumstances and where they live in relation to the college. Therefore, whilst being mindful of the impact of individual circumstances, Loughborough College summarises below the areas we feel that we can legitimately support students with (from their VSB funding):

* Travel to and from college (through the purchase of bus passes\*)

\*Where the student is a returning student and had travel paid for by their local authority in previous years then we would anticipate that the local authority would continue responsibility for such funding.

ESFA guidance is that, “Institutions should remember that whilst the bursary can be used for transport costs, it does not replace the statutory transport duty local authorities have.”

* Kit or Uniform
* Food costs (£3 per day credited to student ID card)
* Stationery
* Other equipment required for their course
* Books/e-books/reader pens
* Trips and visits
* College gym membership
* Expenses for university interviews, visits or open days

After an assessment of each individual student’s eligibility and need, we will prioritise and provide in-kind payment in advance as appropriate to ensure that the student can participate from the beginning of their study programme. Where there is a remaining balance of the student’s allocated bursary funding, we will make 9 equal monthly payments of £15 (totalling £135, in line with the 16-18 Student Bursary Fund), where a participation need has been identified.

Loughborough College commits to supporting eligible students with their educational participation costs as far as possible within the ESFA guidelines. Bursary funds will be allocated based on the principles of individual need, equality of opportunity and financial probity, with students only receiving the amount they actually need to participate.

Loughborough College Learner Services