

Adult Learner Support 2011/12

Date of issue 31 May 2011

Adult Learner Support Funds headline message

A new enhanced adult learner support fund will be operational from 2011/12.

From August 2011, decisions about the use of learner support funding will be fully devolved to Further Education colleges and training providers, in line with the Government's proposals in Skills for Sustainable Growth. The Adult Learning Grant (ALG) budget will be combined with discretionary learner support, and allocated directly to colleges and training providers for them to distribute to those learners most in need. No current learners receiving ALG, and whose courses are continuing, will lose out, as they will continue to receive payments during 2011/12. The ALG learner and learning provider helpline will also continue.

The total adult learner support budget will rise through the Spending Review period.

The enhanced discretionary fund for 2011/12 is worth around £96m. Learning providers will continue to have the flexibility to give awards at a local level. They will have the discretion to distribute these according to need.

Adult Learner Support Funds – additional key messages

- The Government announced in the Strategy Document "Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth", published in November 2010, the intention to change the current arrangements for learner support from the 2011/12 academic year.
- The announcement followed the FE Consultation in the summer of 2010 which highlighted the sector's desire to simplify adult learner support. The Government response is available on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) [website](#).
- The Government is committed to creating a fund which is better targeted and focuses on those individuals who are financially disadvantaged, and in need of support for childcare, transport, books, equipment and other ad-hoc

Skills Funding Agency

Cheylesmore House Quinton Road Coventry CV1 2WT
T 0845 377 5000 www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk
An agency of the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

essentials whilst in learning. The fund will align to the priorities for funding or groups to receive fee remission.

- The changes will enhance and simplify the support available to enable learning providers to better meet the needs of their learners.
- Stage one of enhancing support will involve the merger of the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) budget with the discretionary learner support fund which will be allocated directly to colleges and training providers for them to distribute to those learners most in need. Stage two will take account of a review of the residential support schemes (Residential Bursary Fund and Residential Support Scheme), and a separate review of the Adult Education Bursary scheme with a view to implementing any changes for the start of 2012/13.
- The changes for ALG for 2011/12 mean;
 - Existing ALG recipients will receive a Notice of Entitlement for 2011/12 to enable them to complete their current course and receive weekly payments from the Learner Support Service. The ALG learner and learning provider helpline will also continue.
 - The final date for receipt of new ALG applications with the Learner Support Service for the 2010/11 academic year will be Friday 1 July 2011. No new applications for the 2010/11 academic year will be accepted after that date. Any applications in query on that date will be given a further two months to be completed (by 26 August 2011).
 - The Skills Funding Agency will allocate the additional ALG funding to the existing Discretionary Learner Support allocations awarding funds to providers based on the number of previous (2009/10) ALG learners.
- The Government is committed to adult learner support funding. In 2011-12 this amounts to around £152m, and this amount will increase over the Spending Review period.

Q&A

BUDGET

Q. What is the total adult learner support budget?

A. We are investing nearly £152m in 2011-12 in adult learner support. This will rise incrementally over the spending review period.

CONSULTATIONS

Q. Who has been consulted as part of the process?

A. We have actively engaged with key stakeholders. These have ranged from colleges, other public and private providers and their representatives bodies, unions, representatives for disadvantaged learners, and a range of learners themselves. We are also working very closely with the Department for Education (DfE) and The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to consider the impact, in both directions, from respective policy thinking. The Department also ran a

public consultation 'A Simplified Further Education and Skills Funding System and Methodology' asking for views on streamlining learner support. Further information on the consultation is available on the BIS [website](#).

Q. Which particular stakeholders were consulted on changes to learner support?

A. BIS has chaired consultation events which were attended by representatives from The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the National Association for Managers of Students Services in Colleges, The National Union of Students, Centrepoint, 157 Group, Sixth Form Colleges Forum, Shaw Trust, First 4 Skills, Connexions, Association of School and College Leaders, and the Association of Learning Providers. The Association of Colleges have also agreed to the principles of distributing remaining ALG money.

We have visited the sector and engaged directly with colleges including Chesterfield, Lincoln, Westminster, Ruskin and Myerscough. BIS used the visits as the ideal opportunity to speak at length with learners in a comfortable environment about how changes may affect them. The Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency also attended the consultations.

ADULT LEARNING GRANT

Q In November you said that ALG would end as a distinct scheme within two years. Why was the decision made to end it as early as 2011/12?

A. We have continued to consult with the sector since November. There has been strong support for a simpler approach to learner support which is easier for learners to understand. Many learners perceive the multiplicity of schemes as confusing and believe they are not targeted most efficiently.

Q. How will 2011/12 affect learners in receipt of ALG?

A. Those currently in receipt of ALG will continue to receive their weekly payments if they are continuing their course. The Skills Funding Agency will allocate the additional ALG funding to the existing Discretionary Learner Support allocations awarding funds to providers based on the number of previous (2009/10) ALG learners. A progressive allocations model will be developed for subsequent years.

Q. What is the evidence for changing the support available?

A. By merging the ALG budget into the provider allocations we are protecting and promoting the Government commitment to adult education, while enabling providers to distribute funds in a less rigid manner, which we know is welcomed by the sector.

Q. What support will adult learners who currently get ALG receive?

A. Existing ALG recipients will continue to receive support until they have completed their course. They will be sent a Notice of Entitlement for 2011/12 which they will need to take to their learning provider for them to confirm their ongoing eligibility for payments. Learners may also be able to receive further support through discretionary funds as is the case in 2010/11.

Q. What about recent 2010-11 ALG applications that have already been sent in?

A. Current applications will be processed as normal. Any new applications received on or before the 1 July 2011 deadline will be processed. Those that are in query on that date will be given a further two months to be resolved (by 26 August 2011).

Q. Will the same ALG application and payment process continue for 2011/12?

A. The Learner Support Service will continue to provide an ALG learner and learning provider helpline. The final date of receipt of new ALG applications for the 2010/11 academic year will be Friday 1 July 2011. No new applications for the 2010/11 academic year will be processed after that date. Any applications in query on that date will be given a further two months to be resolved (by 26 August 2011).

Q. Who will administer the transitional support for continuing learners in receipt of ALG?

A. The transitional arrangements for continuing ALG learners for academic year 2011/12 will be administered by the Learner Support Service, through the contract it holds with the Young People's Learning Agency. Providers with learners who are in receipt of ALG will continue to be required to monitor attendance and confirm payment decisions for those individuals, as they do now.

ALLOCATIONS

Q. How will allocations be made to providers?

A. We want to make best use of the existing arrangements and the Skills Funding Agency will continue to make allocations. The providers that receive the additional ALG funds will have the Hardship line of their allocations increased and will be subject to standard discretionary fund audit and reconciliation regime. Providers will be expected to use the existing systems and processes for recording and reporting activity and expenditure.

Q. How will the ALG budget be re-distributed for the 2011/12 academic year?

A. We will continue to support those learners in receipt of ALG until the end of their current course. The Skills Funding Agency will allocate the balance of ALG funding

to the existing Discretionary Learner Support allocations awarding funds to providers based on the number of previous (2009/10) ALG learners.

Q. Do learning providers have to bid for the additional discretionary funds or will they be awarded it, and if so how?

A. The Skills Funding Agency will allocate the balance of ALG funding to the existing Discretionary Learner Support allocations awarding funds to providers based on the number of previous (2009/10) ALG learners.

Q. What is the position for 2011/12 for those providers who do not receive a discretionary learner support allocation, and can now no longer rely on ALG recipients to maintain levels of enrolment?

A. Following the change to the Adult Learning Grant, colleges and training providers will be able to discuss their planned level of enrolments with the Skills Funding Agency. Ex gratia discretionary payments would be considered on a case by case basis, but based on and not exceeding 2010/11 recruitment and total annual award levels of adults in receipt of the Grant. In the first instance providers should contact their regional Skills Funding Agency office.

Q. What will be the process for providers who do not receive a discretionary learner support allocation to apply for ex gratia discretionary funds?

A. The Skills Funding Agency is developing this approach and they will announce further details shortly.

Q. Are all discretionary funding programmes to be administered by learning providers?

A. Yes. For 2011/12 the Residential Support Scheme will remain under the current administration arrangements. By giving learning providers control of the funds will ensure local knowledge of learner needs is at the forefront of the support ethos.

Q. Will the responsibility for administering all the support be a burden for learning providers?

A. Learning Providers already administer the majority of learner support funding with discretionary learner support, and have contributed to the administration of ALG. Many also have their own in-house support funds. They will be allowed to use up to 5% of their allocation to meet the costs of administering learner support funds allocated by the Skills Funding Agency. Feedback from the sector indicates this level is appropriate to provide the best service while allowing as much as possible to go to learners. We envisage the new scheme will be less bureaucratic and better targeted.

Q. Surely learning providers do not want to be deciding who can be supported?

A. The sector have told us that they want as much discretion as possible to make decisions that fit local needs and circumstances, and that student services are well-placed to understand the needs of the students. Having light-touch guidance will enable all providers to have a common purpose in how they distribute the majority of the funds.

Q. When will providers know how much money they are getting to allocate to students?

A. Final allocations to colleges and work-based training providers have now been made. The Skills Funding Agency will shortly allocate the additional ALG funding to the existing Discretionary Learner Support allocations awarding funds to providers based on the number of previous (2009/10) ALG learners.

Q. Are there minimum and maximum awards that can be given?

A. Minimal awards should make the necessary difference to support the learner. Maximum awards, particularly for childcare or accommodation, should be given in consideration of award levels in this academic year. Providers will be aware of what rates offer value for money and subsequently make best use of public funds.

Q. Will new in-year providers get any funding?

A. It is unlikely that new in-year providers would automatically receive discretionary or ALG funds. If it was specifically requested then each case would be reviewed on its own merit.

DISCRETIONARY FUNDING FOCUS

Q. What can the discretionary funds be spent on?

A. Guidance similar to that currently in place will be issued. We would expect learning providers to target those who are financially disadvantaged and need support for childcare, transport, books, equipment and other ad-hoc needs requiring support whilst in learning. Distribution should align broadly with the priorities for funding or groups outlined in guidance, but decisions will be for providers to make.

Q. Which learners will get discretionary support?

A. Any learner at a learning provider in receipt of such support will be able to seek help. Learners who are financially disadvantaged, who are not eligible for such support from other government sources, are a key group. For example, those mandated to training by DWP would be expected to receive support from DWP funds in order to protect the discretionary pot. ***From August, all who have been 'mandated' to training (whether on a full- or part-time basis) by Job Centre***

Plus will have their travel and childcare costs met by Jobcentre Plus where required. Providers can refer to the published guidance for further details.

Q. Will support such as childcare and residential costs continue to be allocated by providers from distinct pots within the overall discretionary fund?

A. We envisage the current arrangements of 'ring-fenced' elements for childcare, residential costs and hardship to continue for 2011/12.

Q. What is meant by discretion?

A. We want providers to use their knowledge of individuals' needs in making support available. Providers should consider each case on its merit, and support those learners who need that help to achieve their learning aims.

ADMINISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Q. What are audit requirements for 2011-12?

A. All support provided to learners must be documented and an audit trail established. The data returns will continue to be used to assess the impact of the funds and inform future allocations.

Q. Who will monitor whether or not learning providers distribute money in a fair way?

A. The Skills Funding Agency will retain the monitoring arrangements that exist for the current funds.

Q. Can providers in receipt of funding for young people and adults move money between the funds?

A. The support for 16-18 and 19+ is allocated to providers from two Departments, with separate accountability. Providers will need to continue to manage and account for budgets separately, which will be subject to audit.

RECEIVING DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT

Q. Will all learners who apply for discretionary funding receive it or will they have to meet conditions, like ALG?

A. We expect that learning providers will make awards based upon a proven hardship need. It is up to them to put in place parameters and policies for determining this and, if appropriate, it should be substantiated by evidence to satisfy the administrator. We would expect providers to retain some evidence to prove need as part of any audit arrangements.

Q. What if an adult starts a course, receives discretionary funding, but then drops out?

A. We expect that, in most cases, learning providers will be paying for one-off requests. Additionally, if an agreement is reached in which a payment is given as a loan, we expect the terms of that decision to be a matter for the provider and the learner to agree. The payment of larger sums such as for childcare should continue to be made appropriately.

Q. How will adults receive their support and will it be paid in a single lump sum?

A. Learning providers will determine the way in which learners receive discretionary funding. They will have the flexibility to pay it according to what the need is and in a format they decide. We understand that some support being paid in stages may be more appropriate.

LINKS TO WIDER GOVERNMENT POLICY

Q. How do the changes link to other BIS policy developments?

A. Given the changes to fee remission policy being introduced in 2012/13 and FE loans in 2013/14, we will monitor the use of the enhanced fund closely in the first few years to ensure those in greatest need benefit from it

Q. What support do those on income-related benefits get and for what, and how does that affect eligibility for adult learner support funds?

A. The DWP Flexible Support Fund came into effect on 4 April 2011. It bridges a number of existing Jobcentre Plus budgets used to support people into work. The fund is designed to enable Jobcentre Plus advisers to buy a range of services to help people into work, and as such can be used to fund costs incurred because undertaking SFA funded training - particularly travel and childcare costs. BIS expects providers to ensure that those learners eligible for the DWP fund are directed towards that over the Skills Funding Agency discretionary support funding in the first instance. Where someone is mandated to training, Jobcentre Plus will always meet the costs of travel and childcare. Colleges can choose to use their own discretionary support fund for people on benefit, where they consider that to be appropriate.

Q. I have a question that does not seem to be answered here. How can I enquire about that?

A. In the first instance please contact your Skills Funding Agency Account Manager

