



Manchester's Rising Stars Fund guidance 2026

At We Love MCR Charity our mission is to empower positive change for communities and young people across the city of Manchester by awarding financial grants. This support helps people move forwards with their lives, connects diverse communities and transforms city spaces.

Our Manchester's Rising Stars Fund is unique, enabling ambitious, talented 15* to 22 year old Mancunians to achieve their potential and flourish. We support young people across the city whose family or personal circumstances mean they are likely to face financial barriers that are out of their control. Our support begins by placing belief in them and providing resources that enable them to take their next steps to success in Work, Qualifications, Training or Entrepreneurship.

We've awarded grants to hundreds of ambitious young Mancunians since we launched the fund in 2020. This was made possible by the legacy of Sir Howard Bernstein, former Manchester City Council CEO and our first ever Charity Ambassador, who sadly passed in June 2024. Generous donations from both his 2017 retirement celebration and memorial in November 2024 have ensured opportunities exist for our city's next generation and future leaders.

We are delighted to have awardees across fields including, but not limited to, sports, science, trades, health, law, fashion, social care, teaching, cybersecurity, art, and music.

We support Manchester's City Council's aim to become a UNICEF Child Friendly City. We believe young people can flourish and can have a fair chance in life if they have access to the items they need to succeed.

We can provide grants from £50 to £5,000, for equipment, courses, qualifications and other resources. But whatever form our grants take, one thing never changes - the commitment and ambition of our Manchester Rising Stars.

This guide outlines our criteria to apply, the themes we are focusing our funding support on, key parts of the application process and what happens after you have applied. If you have any questions about any aspect of the fund, please do not hesitate to contact us at welovemcrcharity@manchester.gov.uk

Criteria to apply

To make an application the fund you must fit into the following criteria:

- You must be a City of Manchester resident and have been for over 3 years before making an application* (If you are unsure if you live in City of Manchester, enter your postcode [here](#). If you pay council tax to Manchester City council, you live in the City of Manchester. If you pay council tax to any other council, you are not eligible to apply)
- You must be aged 15 (if in year 11 at school) to 22 **OR** aged up to 25 if you are care experienced or held an EHCP plan at school/college.
- You must be able to demonstrate that you are unable to access the items you need. This could be due to low income**, homelessness, restrictions on saving and/or earning the funds you need due to caring responsibilities.
- You must be able to demonstrate a realistic ambition for success and how the items you are requesting will help you achieve this personal goal

*Refugees and/or asylum-seeking young people do not need to meet this residency requirement. Manchester looked after children placed outside of the City of Manchester also do not need to meet this requirement.

We define low income as a household income of below **£22,458. This is based on the government definition of household below average income (HBAI) - [hbai-low-income-how-is-it-measured-infographic.pdf](#)

What can I apply for?

You can apply for books, equipment*, training courses, access to apps or additional learning materials to support your ambitions in **education, employment or training**.

You can **only apply for a laptop** to support your studies* under the academic application - university students' theme. Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- You are due to begin an accredited university study programme in Autumn 2026 and you will be in your first year.
- You have secured a place at university and can provide proof of this via an offer letter.
- You **do not** have a laptop of your own and/or you borrowed a device from school/college.
- You can demonstrate that you cannot afford a laptop yourself.
- You have applied for and are in receipt of student support.

Please note: The window to make applications under the university starter theme will open from the **1st May until the 28th July**. Applicants will then need to revisit their applications to upload their A level results, proof of student support and university acceptance information.

*Care experienced young people only at school or college **can apply for a laptop to support their studies under the general academic application criteria**. You will need to upload proof of being a care experienced young person to support your application such as the name of your social worker or personal adviser.

If you are **over 18** you can make an application in relation to employment. This could include self-employment and entrepreneurship, such as starting and/or growing your business.

How much can I apply for?

We will look at applications up to the value of £5000.

How can I make an application?

If you meet our criteria to apply, you can make an application on our online platform: [We Love MCR Charity Grants](#). You will need to set up an account to proceed with an application.

Please make sure you tick 'broadcast emails' to make sure you do not miss a message from us.

The application is split into 9 tabs, all of which must be completed. You can save your progress as you go along and come back to the application later.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'We Love MCR Charity Grants' application platform. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <https://mcrcharity.grantplatform.com/entry-form/entrant/start?formSlug=vjMOwpXm8t6bSlug=ZPhkIeqV>. The page has a dark header with the 'We Love MCR Charity Grants' logo and navigation links: 'Manage', 'Apply', and 'Review'. A user profile 'Marie O'Neill-Steinegger' is visible in the top right. On the left, a sidebar contains 'Applications', 'Action tasks' (with a red notification bubble), and 'Grant reports'. The main content area is titled 'My applications → Manchester's Rising Stars Fund → Start application'. Below this, a row of tabs includes 'Start here' (highlighted in red), 'Eligibility to apply', 'Your information', 'Your ambition', 'Your circumstances', 'Grant request information', 'Supporting material', and 'Supporting information from referee'. An 'Equality Monitoring Form' is also visible. The 'Start here' tab contains the following text: 'We welcome requests for grants to purchase equipment, to fund courses and accreditations, and to support other costs related to moving into employment, training or entrepreneurship. We will only consider requests from young people where their financial or family circumstances put them at a disadvantage, and they can demonstrate they are unable to meet the costs of the items themselves. We welcome applications from ambitious young people who have a clear plan for themselves and where any award from the fund will make a sustainable difference rather than a fleeting benefit. Please give us as much detail as you can on the form to help us make our decision. You will be asked to provide the details of a referee that can support your application and they will be emailed some questions to answer. Please ensure that you have spoken to your referee and they are happy to complete a reference for you. Your referee needs to be someone who knows you in a professional capacity - i.e a teacher, tutor or a social worker. It cannot be a family member or a friend. If they do not complete it will delay your application and we cannot proceed without it. Please ensure you complete the eligibility questions and click the 'Check Eligibility' button. The system will not let you complete an application without taking this step.' Below the text are two input fields: 'Theme' (a dropdown menu) and 'Application name' (a text box with a red error indicator).

Each tab has several questions, and they must all be answered (if they apply to you). There are word limits on each question, so please make use of these.

Themes of application

There are 7 themes of the Manchester Rising Stars Fund. We ask that you pick the correct theme when making an application on our online platform. This helps us track and monitor where the funds are going.

- **Academic** - Your application is in relation to your studies to help you progress or develop in your chosen field. Your application could be for books, equipment, training courses, access to apps or additional learning materials. Your application should be supported by a teacher/tutor/professor who can suitably reference your academic abilities and ambitions.
- **Sport** - Your application is in relation to sport - this could be to help you compete and/or progress in your chosen sport (if this a viable **career option** for you) or to train to work in a sporting field. Your application should be supported by your coach and/or manager in your field who can suitably reference your talent and your realistic ability to reach your sporting goals.
- **Business / employment** - Your application could relate to you starting or growing your own business. You may already be trading and could be ready to take the next step. Your application should be supported by someone who can comment on your business plans and/or someone who has supported you on your business journey. Please note, we will require a business plan as a minimum to support your application (We would recommend accessing <https://bipcgm.org/> for support to develop a business plan if needed).

Alternatively, your application could be in relation to costs to entering employment – you may need specific clothes or tools to take up an offer of employment. **Please note you need to be over 18 to apply under this theme.**

- **Creative Arts** - Your application is related to creative arts - this could be music and/or art creation. You could be an aspiring performer or developer. Your application could relate to equipment or training costs. Your application should be supported by someone who can suitably reference your talent and ability to reach your ambitions.
- **Media** - Your application is in relation to entering the field of creative media. You could aspire to work in videography, content creation or film production. Your application should be supported by someone who can suitably reference your talent and ability to reach your ambitions.

- **Academic Application - University Starters Applications** – Your application is for a device to support your studies as you are starting university at an accredited course and institution in Autumn 2025 and you do not have one. Your application should be supported by a teacher/tutor/professor who can suitably reference your academic abilities and ambitions and will require all supporting material outlined in the criteria. **Please note applications under this theme will only open from the 1st May to the 28th June 2026.**
- **Other** – Your application doesn't fit into any of the above themes.

Referees to support applications

You will need to add a referee who should provide a detailed reference to support your application.

A referee is someone that knows you in a professional and/or supporting context. Examples of this could be a teacher or a tutor, a manager at work, or even a social worker or sports coach. **It cannot be a family member or a friend.**

It is vital that you add the correct referee to support your application. Not doing so could delay your application or even result in it not progressing to the approval stage. The referee must be able to comment on your application, talent, abilities, and your potential to reach your ambition.

If you are unsure who the best referee would be for your application, you can contact us at welovemcrcharity@manchester.gov.uk and we can advise.

Your referee will automatically be contacted via the application platform **once you have submitted your application**. They will be able to view your application and will need to answer some questions about you, your ambition, and your application.

It is your responsibility to make sure the referee fills in the reference for you. The charity cannot chase references on your behalf. Without your reference, your application will remain incomplete, and it will not progress.

We recommend that you confirm with your referee they are happy to complete a reference for you **before** submitting your application and tell them to look out for the link to complete the reference. Please also ask them to ensure they complete your reference in a timely manner!

Supporting Material

In this section, you can upload relevant information to support your application. This could be (but is not limited to) examples of your work, a business plan, links to your social media or anything else that will support your application.

If you or your family are in receipt of benefits, please upload proof of this in this section. If you or your family are in work, please upload proof of income (this could be wages slips or bank statements)

If you are making an application for a laptop to support your studies under the university starter theme, you will need to submit your application when the window opens 1st June – 30th June. You will then need to provide the below (the application window will re-open on A level results day for 4 days to allow you to do this):

- Proof of your A Level (or other relevant qualification) results
- Proof of your confirmed university place
- Proof of your student support (student loan)

Please note, we may request more information to support your application.

Deadline and assessment dates

You can make an application at any time using the online platform. Assuming we have all the information we need to proceed; your application will be reviewed following the below schedule:

Deadline No.	Deadline Date	Assessment Date
1	19 January 2026	16 February 2026
2	3 March 2026	1 st April 2026
3	21 April 2026	19 May 2026
4	9 June 2026	7 July 2026
5	28 July 2026	1 st September 2026
6	15 September 2026	13 October 2026
7	3 November 2026	1 December 2026

The assessment date is when applications are assessed by our board of trustees, and they decide if they will make an award. They can decide to make an award, a partial award, not to grant an award or to defer an application pending some more information.

Applications to the university starter theme open on the 1st May until the 28th June deadline. The application portal will re-open on A Level Results day (13th August) until the 16th August so

applications can be finalized with the additional information required to support the application which is outlined above. They will then be assessed by the 1st September.

Applications need to be submitted by 4pm on the day of the deadline. No extensions will be granted to this.

What happens after I submit my application?

Once you have submitted your application, it will be reviewed by an initial team of reviewers who will ensure that the application meets our criteria.

The team will then read and assess your application. The team will contact you if we need more information; however, this is subject to capacity. Please ensure that any information you would like us to know and/or supporting information you would like us to see is included in the relevant section of your application.

Once the initial review is complete, all the applications are sent to our board of trustees to decide on the outcome to award or not. This happens every 6-7 weeks. All of the relevant deadlines and assessment dates are outlined above and displayed on the application platform.

Please note: The Trustees decision is final and there is no right of appeal.

What happens next?

Following the trustees' review, the grants manager will make you aware of the outcome of your application.

If you are successful, they will outline the next steps which will include sending us a few lines of thanks, a picture of yourself which demonstrates your ambition and signing our award agreement.

They will also discuss with you how we keep in touch with you and gather feedback which is a requirement of receiving any award from the fund.

Please note, we do not give money directly to young people. Items are ordered and paid for by the charity team.

Frequently asked questions:

1. **My application will not let me fill in any details?** Please click the green 'check eligibility button' this will allow you to move forward with your application, if you are eligible to apply.
2. **Can I apply for driving lessons?** We rarely fund driving lessons so would recommend you contact us on welovemcrcharity@manchester.gov.uk before making an application.
3. **Can I apply for a laptop while I am at school or college?** You can only apply for a laptop at school or college if you are a care experienced young person. Please contact us if you are unsure if you fit this definition.
4. **I go to school / college / work in Manchester, but I live outside of Manchester – can I apply to the fund?** No, you cannot apply. You need to be a resident of the city for 3 years to make an application.
5. **My referee says they have not received the link to fill in the reference for me?** Please check that you have filled in their email address correctly in your application. Also ask them to check their junk folder for the link.
6. **What kind of laptop can I apply for?** We have standard laptops that we award depending on your level of study. Please email us at welovemcrcharity@manchester.gov.uk for details of these.
7. **Can I change my referee after I have submitted my application?** Yes, you can change your referee after submission.
8. **I cannot add all the links to the items I would like to apply for?** You can add these to a word document and upload this in the supporting information section of your application.
9. **I have more questions; can I talk to someone about my application?** Our Grants Manager is happy to advise. Email welovemcrcharity@manchester.gov.uk