



16-19 Bursary Fund and Free Meals Policy and Procedures 2023/2024

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Contents

1.	Policy Statement.....	3
2.	ESFA – 16-19 Bursary Fund	3
	i 16-19 Vulnerable Students Bursary.....	3
	ii Evidence of eligibility.....	4
	iii Free Meals	5
	iv Discretionary Awards	6
3.	Travel Passes	7
4.	Childcare (Care to Learn).....	7
5.	Application Process and Documentary Evidence.....	7
6.	Payments.....	8
7.	Exemptions.....	8
8.	Residency Eligibility Criteria	8
9.	Hardship Funds (Emergency Funds).....	8
10.	Vulnerable Learners	8
11.	Emergency Food.....	9
12.	Appeals	9
13.	Essential Elements	9
14.	Monitoring effectiveness.....	9
15.	Confidentiality, data protection and retention.....	10
16.	Administration of the Fund.....	11
17.	Policy Update.....	11
18.	Other sources of funding.....	11

1. Policy Statement

The College is committed to distributing the 16-19 Bursary Fund in a fair and consistent way in line with Education and Skills Funding Authority (ESFA) guidance. Funding will be used to help support those young people who face the greatest barriers to continuing in education or training. Funding is provided to learners ensuring they are meeting the agreed standards of behaviour and attendance, in some cases exceptional circumstances are to be taken into account and standards may not have been reached.

2. ESFA – 16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16-19 Bursary fund is split into three elements:

- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- Free Meals
- Discretionary bursaries

If a student's circumstances change during the year the 16-19 bursary can be awarded on a pro-rata basis.

2.1 16-19 Defined Vulnerable Groups Bursary

Students who fall into the following categories are eligible for support up to a maximum of £1,200 over 34 weeks or pro rata. This can be made up of financial support, bus passes, funds for kits / uniforms, trips and/or on going learning costs throughout the year. To qualify students must be under 19 on the 31st August 2023 and be on a study programme at the College. In addition they must fall into one of the following groups;

- in care
- care leavers
- receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) 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 (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right

Universal Credit has now fully rolled out and so young people aged 16 to 18 will no longer be in receipt of the other benefits listed above. However, students aged 19 to 25 and funded from the 16 to 19 budget (19+ continuers and those with an EHCP) may still be in receipt of those other legacy benefits.

The bursary for vulnerable groups can pay up to £1,200 per year to a student participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more if they need that amount of support. Students

on study programmes of less than 30 weeks should be paid a pro-rata amount, as appropriate based on an assessment of their actual needs.

The College will also consider the number of hours involved in student's study programme when deciding if a pro-rata payment is more appropriate. A student studying for around 16 hours a week is likely to have greater costs than a student studying for 4 hours a week, for example.

Students should only receive the amount they actually need to participate, and the College will not automatically award students £1,200 if they do not need the full amount.

The College may decide that although a young person may be eligible for a bursary because they are in one or more of the defined vulnerable groups, but they do not have any actual financial need. This might be because their financial needs are already met and/or because they have no relevant costs. The College can refuse a student's application on this basis.

Equally, the College can pay a bursary to a vulnerable group student of more than £1,200 if they assess they need extra help to remain in education. Any payments over £1,200 must be paid from their discretionary bursary allocation or from their own funds. If paid from discretionary bursary, all the eligibility criteria and usual assessment processes must be met and followed.

Bursary payments will not be paid into another person's bank account except in exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to administer their own account. If the student cannot manage their own funds, the institution will need to consider who will manage their account of their behalf.

2.2 Evidence of eligibility

The College will require proof that students meet the criteria for the bursary for vulnerable groups in full. That they are in receipt of the specified benefits in their own name or that they fully meet the definitions for in care/care leavers. The College will require evidence from each student and retain copies for audit purposes. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year>

For example:

- for students who are in care or a care leaver, written confirmation of their current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority – this is the local authority that looks after them or provides their leaving care services. The evidence could be a letter or an email but must be clearly from the local authority
- for students in receipt of UC or IS, a copy of their UC or IS award notice. This must clearly state that the claim is in the student's name/confirm they are entitled to the benefits in their own right. The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent them from participating in further education or training. For students in receipt of UC, institutions must also see a document such as a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificates, utility bills and so on
- for students receiving UC/ESA and DLA and PIP, a copy of their UC claim from DWP. Evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP must also be provided

- UC claimants should be able to print off details of their award from their online account or provide a screenshot to the institution.

Students can also contact their UC Work Coach (or relevant Benefit Office if they are receiving getting IS or ESA) and ask them for help in providing evidence of receiving benefits.

2.3 Free Meals

Age

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2023 to be eligible to receive a free meal. Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a free meal if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers') or have an EHCP.

These 2 groups of aged 19 plus students can receive a free meal while they continue to attend education (in the case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same programme they started before they turned 19), as long as their eligibility continues.

The following groups of students are not eligible for free meals in further education:

- students aged 19 or over at the start of their study programme, unless they have an EHCP or are a 19+ continuer
- apprentices, including those with an EHCP

Existing students of the College only require a single check of household income for each phase of education. Existing learners who had household income assessed and where eligible in 22/23 will only need to sign and date a self-declaration form to confirm their household circumstances have not changed.

Eligible benefits

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC))
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- UC with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any benefits they get)

A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or a responsible adult on their behalf, have made a successful application to the College. It is important that the College ensure they understand that a parent or student must be in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits set out above to be eligible.

To note: Working Tax Credit is not a qualifying benefit for free meals, and a parent or student in receipt of Working Tax Credits is not entitled to a free meal (this is a common question sent to ESFA). Qualifying benefits do include the Working Tax Credit run-on which is paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit.

From 1 April 2018, any student who is in receipt of, or has parents who are in receipt of, UC must have a net earned annual income of no more than £7,400 to be eligible for free meals.

Students aged 19-24 who are subject to an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are entitled to a free meal while attending their provision if they meet the eligibility criteria.

Students aged over 19 who are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) are eligible for a free meal if they started before they turned 19, are eligible and all other scheme criteria is met.

Students in receipt of the £1200 bursary maybe entitled to Free Meals.

Universal Credit

For new applicants, the College must verify the eligibility of students, or their parents, who are in receipt of UC, by asking for a copy of their UC award notice that includes their monthly earnings. Institutions will need to assess the information given to obtain an accurate proxy of the individual's current earned annual income. Monthly earnings are after tax and do not include any benefits the individual receives.

The College will check their eligibility by using Section 3 and 4

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year/free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year>

2.4 Discretionary Bursary

For those students who do not meet the eligibility criteria above, but are facing financial hardship, they will be able to apply to the discretionary fund for help towards funds for kits / uniforms, trips, University trips, University interviews, UCAS fees, DBS (including portable DBS costs) and other course related costs including support for distance learning, to a maximum of £1000. Students will need to provide evidence to support their request e.g. College order forms for kits, signed book lists from course tutors.

To qualify students must be under 19 on the 31st August 2023 and be on a study programme at Southport College. Students must have a household income of less than £38,500 as assessed by HMRC, or the family must be in receipt of a means-tested benefit.

For students who do not meet these criteria but are facing financial hardship they will need to have a meeting with the Welfare Officer to discuss their individual circumstances. In these circumstances awards will be made at the discretion of the Head of Student Services.

For both elements of the fund students cannot apply for funding towards the following:

- Learning support for example counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring
- Support extra curricular activities where these are not essential to the students study programme
- Support general household costs

All students aged 19 or over who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are eligible to apply for discretionary bursary funding if all other scheme criteria are met.

Students aged over 19 who are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) if they started before they turned 19 are eligible if they meet all other scheme criteria.

3. Travel Passes

For those who live more than 1 mile but less than 3 away from College and whose household income is less than £38,500 or in receipt of a means tested benefit this will be funded from the Bursary Fund.

For those students who live over 3 miles but whose household income is above the threshold above and are not in receipt of means tested benefits, for 2023/24 College will subsidise the cost of the most cost effective travel pass available.

For those students who are eligible for bursaries in the defined groups, their travel pass/cosst will be funded from the discretionary bursary.

Distances must be the shortest walking distance, measured by Google maps

For full time students who live outside of the areas where passes are available the College operates subsidised travel costs fund for students.

For full details of College Travel Passes and Travel Fund please see 'Travel Passes & Funds – Policy and Procedures'.

4. Childcare Financial Support (Care to Learn)

Students under the age of 20 on the day their course starts, should apply for funding through Care to Learn for support with childcare costs. Learners can claim a maximum of £185 per week, the bursary fund may also be used to provide further help with childcare costs for those young parents who are in receipt of Care to Learn whose costs exceed the weekly rate for this scheme. The fund

can help support childcare costs whilst studying or on placement, childcare travel costs and fees to retain childcare places during half terms. Students can be supported through the application process by the Welfare Officer or Head of Student Services.

Further guidance can be found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-to-learn-guide-for-the-2023-to-2024-academic-year/care-to-learn-guide-for-the-2023-to-2024-academic-year>

5. Application Process and Documentary Evidence

The application process for funds will be open from early July 2023 and until such time as funds be used up. All applications will be considered based on the funding available.

Pay My Student

For both aspects of 16-19 funding, including applications for travel passes, new students to the College must complete an application using the on line student support bursary service, PayMyStudent. Documentary evidence is required to make an assessment of income and / or identification of being in a priority group (as laid down in the ESFA guidance). This could be pay slips, P60, proof of earning for self employment, bank statements, Tax Credit Award Notice, Universal Credit monthly statement, proof of benefits (letters from DWP / Job Centre) this list not exhaustive.

The 'application date' will be the date the completed form is received along with all relevant documentation.

Existing students of the College only require a single check of household income for each phase of education. Existing learners who had household income assessed and where eligible in 22/23 will only need to sign and date a self-declaration form to confirm their household circumstances have not changed.

6. Payments

Each request for financial support will be assessed individually. For students eligible for the 16-19 Vulnerable Students Bursary, requests for travel passes, kits / uniforms, statutory free meals and trips will be assessed first.

7. Exemptions

Students in the following categories are not eligible for 16-19 bursaries or discretionary awards:

- Young people on Waged Apprenticeships

- Young people in prison or a young offender institution or who have been released on temporary licence e.g. day release or who have been reprimanded in a secure institution.

8. Residency Eligibility Criteria

Young people must satisfy the residency criteria as set out in the ESFA 2021/22: Funding Regulations for post 16 provision. This document can be downloaded from the ESFA website.

9. Hardship Funds (Emergency Funds)

Hardship funds are one off payments for students who are facing extreme crisis e.g. Homelessness, sudden change in domestic circumstances and need for food, travel, clothing (this list is not exhaustive). These funds are primarily allocated by the Head of Student Services/Welfare Officer to enable any other necessary support to be accessed/arranged. Any student receiving support from this fund must also be immediately referred to the Welfare and Safeguarding team to ensure all of their needs are being addressed.

10. Vulnerable Learners

Students who are identified as Vulnerable Learners should direct any requests regarding funding to the Head of Student Services (or in their absence to a member of the Safeguarding and Welfare Team). Allocations are tailored to individual needs. In some cases carers and social workers are involved in establishing the most appropriate way of getting the funding to the young person in conjunction with the Safeguarding Officers and/or Head of Student Services.

11. Emergency Food

The College can on an individual basis and in cases of severe hardship, provide food support whilst a student attends their study programme (this arrangement should not continue on an on going basis). There is no undertaking of checks on household income or gathering other evidence that would normally be required to agree this. This should only apply to a very small number of the total 16 to 19 student cohort.

A student can apply for this support by speaking with their Progress Tutor, member of the Safeguarding or Welfare Team or Advice and Guidance Officer. The students account will be activated and meal can be purchased using the Free Meal system. For any student that needs this support on an on going basis a meeting with the Welfare Team will be scheduled and the correct support For audit purposes, institutions must retain a copy of:

- a record of the number of students supported in this way
- the number of days this support is given

- the £'s value of support given to each student along with the rationale for the food support
- the signed confirmation of receipt of funding by the student, if actual spend receipts are not obtained. We do not expect this arrangement to continue on an ongoing basis for any individual student - institutions should exercise their discretion in each case and should be mindful that this flexibility relates to food support only.

12. Appeals

Any student, who is dissatisfied with the decision made regarding the allocation of funds, may appeal in writing to the Head of Student Services within 15 term time days of receipt of letter.

The Appeals Panel will be made of a member of the Senior Leadership Team and 2 managers.

The Head of Student Services or Student Finance Administrator will present the information to the panel.

The student will be informed of the decision of the Panel within 10 term time days of receipt of the letter of appeal.

13. Essential Elements

This policy and procedures will operate as a transparent, consistent system, with clear criteria for eligibility, allowing funds to be targeted at those students in financial hardship within the ESFA guidelines. This is ensured by:

- Procedures / guidelines for staff, updated annually
- Staff training and development meetings

A variety of methods will be used to publicise the availability of funds, including the application procedure and appeals procedure. These include;

- Financial information booklet – updated annually, available on line and within the Student Hub
- Admissions correspondence
- Information from admissions tutors at interview
- Information at the point of enrolment
- Information at Induction
- Internal advertising of funds
- College web pages
- VLE - Moodle

To ensure all information is correct the Student Funding Administrator will link with tutors and view

Pro monitor comments to;

- Check attendance and behaviour concerns without a valid reason can result in funding being withdrawn / reduced (this is in liaison with the Head of Student Services)
- Curriculum Leaders/Curriculum Managers to provide the Student Finance Co-ordinator with standard kit lists / compulsory trip costs / materials and equipment lists
- Tutors to email the agreement of additional funding to the Advice and Guidance Officer for standard items i.e. individual kits items, course books

14. Monitoring effectiveness

A termly report will go to SLT and annual Corporation and Equality and Diversity Committee will report on funds spent and identify links between financial support and retention and achievement.

Where additional funds become available part way through a year, the policy will be reviewed to ensure the available funds are targeted appropriately.

15. Confidentiality, data protection and retention

All personal and sensitive information will be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Common Law Duty of Confidentiality.

The Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) are not only restrictions on disclosure of information about the College, they are bound by a common law duty of confidentiality. This duty prevents the College from releasing information about students or other stakeholders, without their consent. This duty applies to manual records as well as information held on computers.

Information which must be treated as confidential includes the names and addresses of students and any other information about them which is not publicly known, i.e. “personal data”. Accordingly, to ensure that the College does not breach its duty, no information, even if it only exists in printed form, should be disclosed unless all the relevant procedures have been followed.

All documents are held for the assessment of eligibility to the fund and audit purposes only. All information will be stored securely and treated sensitively. All documents will be kept by the College for 6 years.

16. Administration of the Fund

Administration of the fund is capped at 5% of the value of the spend.

17. Policy Update

The procedures will be reviewed annually in line with the release of the ESFA Guidance and are the responsibility of the Head of Student Services.

18. Other Sources of Funding

The College operates or has links to a number of other sources of funding. For further details of any of the funds listed below please contact the Student Hub.

- Travel Passes & Funds Policy and Procedures
- Hardship Fund
- 19+ Learner Support Fund (Including 20+ Childcare funding)
- Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund
- Care to Learn
- Professional and Career Development Loan
- Charitable Trusts e.g. Pinecone Trust