

16-19 Bursary Fund and Free Meals Policy and Procedures

2026-2027

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1. Policy Statement

The College is committed to distributing the 16-19 Bursary Fund in a fair and consistent way in line with Department for Education 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 considered, and standards may not have been reached.

2. 16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome the specific financial barriers to participation they face so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- bursaries for defined vulnerable groups.
- discretionary bursaries which the College award using the Policy as set out below

2.1 16-19 Defined Vulnerable Groups Bursary

Students who meet the criteria, and who have a financial need, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups. The defined groups reflect that these students are unlikely to be receiving financial assistance from parents or carers, so may need a greater level of support to enable them to continue to participate.

Students should be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the actual costs they have. Bursary funding exists to help students with the cost of travel, to buy essential books, equipment, or specialist clothing (such as protective overalls, for example).

The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- In care
- care leavers
- receiving 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) as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right.

The managed move of legacy benefits claimants to UC means that new claims for the legacy benefits have not been possible since 2018. This means young people who are aged 16 to 18 now will not be in receipt of the legacy benefits listed above. However, students aged 19 to 25 and

funded from the 16 to 19 budgets (continuing students and those with an EHC plan) 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.

Free meals in Further Education has its own eligibility criteria and a student who meets the criteria for a defined vulnerable group bursary is not automatically eligible for a free meal.

2.2 Defining in care and care leavers, foster care, including privately arranged foster care and Universal Credit

The College will require proof that students meet the criteria for the bursary for vulnerable groups in full.

- The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund defines 'in care' as children looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or under a care order (section 31 of the Children Act 1989). Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 defines the term '**looked after child**'.

A '**care leaver**' is defined as:

- a young person aged 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16; or
- a young person aged 18 or above who was looked after prior to becoming 18 for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16.

Foster care, including privately arranged foster care:

- A young person placed with a foster carer by the local authority, including where the foster carer is on the books of an independent fostering agency, is classed as **looked after**. They meet the criteria for the '**in care**' vulnerable group if they have a financial need.
- A child who is **privately fostered** (in other words, a private arrangement is made between the parent and the person who will care for the child) is not classed as a looked after child and is not eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups.
- In some instances, a young person may have been in the care of the local authority and the care transferred to another party via a permanent form of fostering such as a **Special Guardianship Order**. In these circumstances, the young person is defined as having left care so is now a care leaver. They must meet the definition of a '**care leaver**' in full (so, the period of weeks and age range set out above). If they do, they are eligible for help from the bursary for vulnerable groups, where they need financial support to participate.

All students must have their need for support assessed individually, to determine the type and amount of support they need.

Universal Credit (UC)

- Universal Credit has replaced Income Support (IS) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) as well as other benefits, for new claimants. This means young people who are aged 16 to 18 will not be in receipt of legacy benefits listed above. However, students aged 19 to 25 and funded from the 16 to 19 budget (such as those with an EHC plan) may still be in receipt of those other legacy benefits.
- UC award notifications do not include any information on the benefits they replace. For this reason, the description of the bursaries for vulnerable group category that relates to receipt of UC or IS is that a student must be receiving UC in their own right because they are financially supporting themselves and anyone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are treated as **looked after children** and are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups ('in care' group), where they have a financial need. When these young people reach legal adulthood at age 18, their immigration status will be taken into consideration.

Only students who meet the above definitions are eligible.

2.3 Evidence of Eligibility

The College will obtain proof from the student who meet the criteria for the bursary for vulnerable groups in full.

- 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 benefit. The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent them from participating in further education or training. Students in receipt of UC, must also provide a document such as a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit letter, children's birth certificates, utility bills etc.
- For students receiving UC/ESA and DLA and PIP, a copy of their UC award notice from DWP and evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP.

UC claimants should be able to print off details of their award from their online account or provide screenshots to the College. Students can also contact their UC work coach (or relevant benefit office if they are receiving IS or ESA) and ask them for help in providing evidence of receiving benefits.

2.4 Discretionary Bursary - Eligibility

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 travel, kits, uniforms, University trips / interviews, UCAS fees, DBS (including portable DBS costs), field trips in England that are a compulsory part of the students course (they cannot achieve the qualification without it) and other course related costs, to a maximum of £800 (this will include the cost of the travel funds/passes).

Course Leaders and Students will need to provide evidence where possible to support the requests e.g. College order forms for kits and uniforms, equipment lists e.g. boots/overalls, materials etc. For students who are in digital poverty there is a supply of laptops that can be loaned from the College, this is accessed via the Progress Tutors or Safeguarding and Welfare Team.

To qualify students must be under 19 on the 31st August 2026 and be on a study programme at Southport Education Group. Students will be assessed on:

- In receipt of Universal Credit the assessment will be based on less than £30,000 net
- Any other income evidence provided assessment will be based on £38,500 gross

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.

For students who do not meet these criteria but are facing financial hardship they will be directed 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 Director Student Wellbeing / Finance Manager, awards of this nature could include temporary access to free meals, temporary support for travel, referrals to other agencies e.g. debt advice charities.

For both elements of the fund (defined vulnerable groups or discretionary) students **cannot** apply for funding towards the following:

- provide learning support – examples include counselling, mentoring, extra tutoring, or support such as servicing laptops/tablets
- support extra-curricular activities where these are not essential to the students' study programme goals and course objectives.
- support the costs of foreign/overseas field trips where the content can be found within England at a much cheaper cost and/or to support the costs of fields trips that are not an essential part of a student's study programme goals/qualifications pr course objectives.
- Support general household income/general living costs (rent, household bills etc)

3. Free Meals

The College can provide meals to disadvantaged students who are aged over 16. Free meals are made available to students who are eligible on each day the student attends their study programme. Students aged over 19 who are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) they started before they turned 19, or who have an education health and care plan (EHC plan) are eligible for a free meal where they meet the criteria. Meals are provided on site via the College canteen whereby a nutritionally balanced meal (including a drink) is offered, this is accessed by using the students ID card which is activated once assessed as eligible.

3.1 Evidence of Eligibility

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026 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 EHC plan.

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 between 14 and 16 (these students are already covered by FSM provision)
- students aged 19 or over at the start of their study programme unless they have an EHC plan or are a 19+ continuer
- apprentices, including those with an EHC plan

3.2 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
- Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Universal Credit (no income threshold, transitional protection discontinued from August 2026)

4. Travel Passes

Eligibility applies to students living more than 1 mile but less than 3 miles from the College where:

- In receipt of Universal Credit the assessment will be based on less than £30,000 net
- Any other income evidence provided assessment will be based on £38,500 gross
- net

Where a student lives more than 3 miles from the College and is not eligible under the income or means-tested benefit criteria, the College will subsidise the most cost-effective travel pass for the 2026–27 academic year.

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

Mileage is assessed using shortest walking distance, measured by Google maps.

Passes will be allocated based on the cheapest form of travel.

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

This Policy is inclusive of all students, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups. The College is committed to ensuring that no student is disadvantaged in accessing travel support due to their gender identity, disability, ethnicity, religion, or any other protected characteristic.

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

5. Childcare Financial Support (Care to Learn)

Students who are under the age of 20 on the day their course starts or who become 20 years old during their study programme can continue to get funding to the end of their course (to the end of the same level of course). Students should apply for funding through the PayMyStudent system as they would for travel, bursary etc. Students can claim a maximum of £180 per week and associated travel costs that would be incurred when travelling from home to childcare provider (this cost will be part of the maximum allocation of £180). Students can get support from the Welfare Officer in applying for this fund via the Student Hub or Reception. Please see the Care to Learn Guidance guidance for further details - [Print Care to Learn - GOV.UK](#)

6. Application Process and Documentary Evidence

The application process for all 16–19 funding streams, including Care to Learn, will commence in early July 2026. Applications will be accepted until such time as funding is fully utilised and will be assessed in line with available resources.

Pay My Student.

For 16-19 funding, including travel passes, all students who enrol at the College who wish to access funding must complete an application using the online student support bursary service, PayMyStudent <https://www.southport.ac.uk/student-portal/college-bursary-fund> .

In accordance with the Department for Education guidelines, documentary-evidence is required to assess income and / or identification of being in a priority group. Supporting evidence may include, but is not exhaustive:

- Pay slips
- P60
- Proof of earning for self-employment (SA302)
- Bank statements
- Universal Credit monthly statements
- Proof of benefit awards (letters from DWP / Job Centre)

Evidence of household income / means tested benefits / award letters etc. for a minimum of most recent three-month period will be required. All supporting documentation must be clear and visible. It should include name, address and all sections and/or pages. Receipt of 16 to 19 Bursary Funding does not affect receipt of other means-tested benefits paid to families, such as us (Universal Credit), Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit.

For students who are applying for Care to Learn evidence of receipt of child benefit or their child's birth certificate is sufficient. In addition, they will need to supply information for the Ofsted registered childcare provider during the application process

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

7. 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.

8. Exemptions

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

- Young people on Waged Apprenticeships
- Young people serving a custodial sentence
- Young people who have been released from a custodial sentence on temporary license
- Young people have been remanded to a secure institution

9. Residency Eligibility Criteria

Young people must satisfy the residency criteria as set out in Advice: funding regulations for post-16 provision. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision>

10. 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 Director Student Wellbeing Finance Manager /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 their needs are being addressed.

11. Vulnerable Learners

Students who are identified as Vulnerable Learners should direct any requests regarding funding to 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/Welfare Officers with approval from the Director Learner Wellbeing/Finance Manager.

12. 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 as an ongoing 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 or a member of the Safeguarding or Welfare Team. The student's account will be activated, and meals can be purchased using the College canteen. For any student that needs this support on an ongoing basis a meeting with the Welfare Team will be scheduled and the correct support put in place.

In addition to this the College operates a Food Bank to support learners with food, personal supplies etc, this is accessed via the Safeguarding and Welfare Team.

13. Appeals

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

The Appeals Panel will be made of a member of SLT and 2 managers.

The Student Finance Co-ordinator 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.

14. 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 Department for Education 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;

- Admissions correspondence
- Information at the point of enrolment
- Information at Induction
- Internal advertising of funds
- College web pages

To ensure all information is correct the Student Finance Co-ordinator will link with tutors and view Pro monitor comments to;

- Check attendance and behaviour concerns. Any concerns without a valid reason can result in funding being withdrawn / reduced (this is in liaison with the Director Student Wellbeing).
- Curriculum Leaders/Heads of Division to provide the Student Finance Co-ordinator with standard kit lists / compulsory trip costs / materials and equipment lists.
- Tutors to liaise with the Student Finance Co-ordinator for standard items i.e. individual kit items, course books.

15. Monitoring Effectiveness

An annual report will go to SLT and Corporation. Policies will go to the Equality and Diversity Committee to ensure compliance.

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

16. Confidentiality, Data Protection and Retention

All personal and sensitive information will be managed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 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, but they are also 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.

17. Administration of the Fund

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

18. Policy Update

The procedures will be reviewed annually in line with the release of the Department for Education and are the responsibility of the Director Student Wellbeing and Finance Manager.

19. 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
- Charitable Trusts e.g. Pinecone Trust, Bishop David Sheppard Trust

Useful Contacts

Student Finance Team - studentfinance.team@southport.ac.uk

Student Hub – 01704 392704

[Pay My Student](#)