

16-19 Discretionary Learner Bursary Fund Procedures (including Vulnerable Bursary) 2026-2027

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1. Purpose

The 16-19 Discretionary Bursary is provided by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to college to enable them to provide financial support for students. It is specifically aimed at students aged between 16 and 19 years facing financial hardship in accessing education. The College will strive to achieve the most effective use of the funding to support the maximum number of eligible students. The college understands that the bursary should not be used to support the day to day living costs of an individual student; however, it may choose to do so in exceptional circumstances.

The College will make awards based upon a proven hardship need which must be substantiated by evidence which will be retained in accordance with audit requirements. The college reserves discretion to ensure that individual student's needs and personal circumstances are taken into account when decisions are made.

The current bursary offer will be informed by socioeconomic, demographic, national and regional information. We will consider the data for the previous academic year including the number of applicants who fell outside of the income threshold, and use this information to review the income threshold accordingly (funds permitting).

2. Scope

It is available to students if they are a 'home student', i.e. have been resident in the country for three or more years and are studying a programme of learning funded by the ESFA. The residency 'decision tree' available in the ESFA circular should be used if there is any doubt over the eligibility as a 'home student'.

The fund is not an entitlement and is dependent on the amount of funding allocated to the college each year. As funding is limited, monies will be awarded on a first come, first served basis. Students who may be eligible for support may not automatically receive it, as funds can be exhausted. In the light of this, the College asks students to consider any financial commitments they take on prior to any entitlements being awarded from the bursary.

Eligible students can receive funding for the duration of their progressive programme provided it remains funded by ESFA and appropriate bursary funds are allocated to the College. Students are required to make a new application each academic year.

When making decisions about awarding bursary monies the college will consider the availability of other financial support for students.

Payments will be dependent on an attendance level of at least 90%. Consideration will be given to mitigating circumstances such as child protection, family illness, safeguarding concerns, caring responsibilities or any other issues that might affect attendance. Students must notify the Safeguarding & Transition Manager of any such mitigating circumstances as soon as they become aware there may be an issue. Where attendance is still deemed unsatisfactory or if no notification is made the payment will either be withheld or reclaimed.

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Payments will be dependent upon satisfactory behaviour i.e. no disciplinary action. The College reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to students where information given on the application is found to be false.

The College reserves the right to reclaim monies paid to students where the student has withdrawn before the end of the course.

The college reserves the right to amend/cease support detailed in this policy due to changes in the funding rules, or changes or requirements from the ESFA.

3. Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding & Transition Manager to monitor and update the procedures. The Deputy Principal for Finance & Resources will be alerted to any discrepancies.

It is the student's responsibility to tell the Department for Work and Pensions about any direct funding support that they receive from the College, as payments received may affect their eligibility for some benefits.

4. Means Test

Students will be assessed to receive either Vulnerable or Discretionary Bursary.

Students will be assessed for actual need and will be awarded an amount based on their individual participation need.

Details for each group are listed below.

Vulnerable Bursary Students

A bursary of up to £1,200 per year is available to vulnerable students who meet the required criteria, and have a financial need. 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 types of costs they have. Students who meet the criteria for bursaries for vulnerable groups are not automatically entitled to a bursary if they do not have a financial need, an assessment of actual need will be undertaken. They may receive a lower amount of bursary or no bursary.

Vulnerable students must be aged 16, 17 or 18 on 31st August 2026, students who are 19-year-old continuers and students who are 19 to 25 with an EHCP will be assessed for Discretionary Bursary. Evidence for this group will be Social Services/Local Council letters, Income Support, Universal Credit ESA/DLA letters etc.

Young people in this category have been identified by the government as the following:

- Young people in care or care leavers

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- Young people receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own right
- Disabled young people receiving **BOTH** Employment Support Allowance and either Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment

Students in this category may receive some or all of the following from the College:

- College meals provided through the cashless catering system for the days the student is in college
- Kit/Equipment and uniform
- Bus pass/travel contribution subject to 1-mile radius from college to address held on EBS
- Educational Visits/Trips
- UCAS application
- DBS application
- Travel Assistance
- University interview travel costs
- Other monies to be taken from the 16-19 Discretionary funds if there is a genuine financial need which can be proved.

Once a financial need has been established, the Bursary team will submit a claim for the funding via the Student Bursary Support Service (SBSS) online portal. Copies of any claims submitted to SBSS, and records of funds paid to us through the claims process, will be kept with the bursary records for the relevant academic year.

Students on part time/short courses within this priority group will receive pro-rata amounts.

Discretionary Bursary

Household income must be below £45,000 to be considered for a full bursary, or below £60,000 to be considered for a travel bursary (travel costs only).

Where the household income changes during the academic year, the student may apply to be reassessed based on the new household income.

Evidence for discretionary bursary will be Universal Credit documentation, previous 3 months payslips, P60 for 2025/26 and evidence of self-employment from Tax Office.

These students may be eligible to receive the following from the College (subject to sufficient funds being available):

- College meals provided through the cashless catering system for the days the student is in college, (additional criteria must be met – detailed below)
- Kit/Equipment/Material Costs: course specific
- Bus pass/travel contribution subject to 1-mile radius from college, or a college bus stop, to address held on EBS.
- Educational Visits/Trips
- UCAS application
- Travel assistance
- University interview travel assistance

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- DBS application

All payments will be subject to the student meeting the following attendance and behaviour criteria:

- Attendance minimum level of 90%
- No disciplinary action

Should a student not meet these criteria an interview will be arranged with the Safeguarding & Transition Manager to determine level of payment.

For either bursary, the college will keep a copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need, including the calculation that has determined the amount awarded.

5. Administration

The college will use the allowed 5% of the bursary allocation towards administrative costs.

When making decisions about awarding bursary funding the college will consider the availability of other financial support available for students, for example Job Centre Plus or a Work Programme.

6. College Bursary

Where a student requires additional funding due to individual circumstances the college can issue a college bursary irrespective of household income. We will consider cases on their own merits and make awards on an individual basis if we believe there is genuine hardship, and without assistance via bursary the student would not be able to start/complete their study programme. Students must be able to demonstrate additional/exceptional hardship e.g. homelessness, estranged from parents etc. and will be subject to an interview and additional monitoring by the Bursary team. Students will be required to maintain good standards of attendance and commitment to their course.

All support will be based on individual circumstances and the support could comprise any of the following:

- contribution to college meals
- additional material costs
- additional trip/educational visits costs
- one off grant
- assistance with travel costs
- DBS applications
- Travel assistance
- University interview travel assistance
- UCAS applications
- Costs linked to industry placements – e.g. support with travel costs

7. Student Support

7.1 Childcare (including Care to Learn)

Policy:

Care to Learn (C2L) provides funding for childcare to help young parents (defined as those aged under 20). The Government provide separate guidance for C2L funding which the college will adhere to. Currently the weekly maximum support for childcare under C2L is £180 per child. The bursary fund may be used to provide exceptional further help with childcare costs for those young parents in receipt of C2L whose costs exceed the scheme's weekly maximum rates. The overall support will be £80 per day/£250 per week maximum per child.

Procedure:

Students should complete a college bursary application and a C2L college childcare application. If college is to support childcare for a student in receipt of C2L only childcare provision eligible under C2L scheme rules can be used, and evidence will be retained to show the maximum amount is paid under C2L to confirm that a top up is required. Any additional funds to be paid from bursary will only be paid to the childcare provider.

7.2 Travel

Policy:

Bus passes and travel contribution payments are only available to students who live one mile from their campus of study, or one mile from a college bus service stop. If a student loses their pass, it is their responsibility to pay for a replacement pass.

Bursary will also consider looking to support students with travel to work placements, including T Level industry placements.

Petrol payments will be made half-termly, at £7 per day, £21 per week for those living over 1 mile from college. Payments are only made for each day the student attends college or work placement. Attendance will be checked before payments are made.

Students are requested to consider 'nearest for need' when deciding upon which college they wish to attend, a maximum total limit of £1,000 per annum is placed on travel support

Procedure:

The college provide details to eligible students of how to access their funded bus pass via bus company Apps (either Arriva, D&G or Warrington's Own Buses) Students who are applying for Petrol payments are required to provide details of their current car insurance, and provide additional certificates should their insurance expire during the period of their study programme.

7.3 Kit/Equipment or Additional Materials

Policy:

Assistance with the cost of equipment, kit or uniform will only be considered where items are deemed necessary for the completion of the course, or are required due to health and safety regulations. For those students who are required to purchase specific kit or equipment, the fund will refund purchases made by students to their own bank account, or we will order the kit/equipment direct from a college nominated supplier. No refunds will be made, or kit ordered until after the first 4 weeks of attendance on the programme. If a student purchases their own items, then they will need to provide receipts to enable the college to process a refund. Students should only use college named suppliers, if a student decides not to use this supplier, then the refund will be the amount college would have paid to the named supplier. Kit/equipment will always remain the property of the college. The maximum support for kit/equipment is £450 per student per academic year.

Procedure:

Students will be required to provide receipts for their purchases and will be informed of the approximate date the refund will be actioned. If a student wishes the college to order items, they must complete an order form and hand this to the Bursary team. Students will be advised once items are ready for collection.

7.4 Educational Visits/Trips:

Policy:

Support will be given to each student who is required to undertake an educational visit/trip as part of their study programme. An educational trip or visit will be considered essential where it is compulsory for all students in the group to attend, or if a student would not pass the qualification without attending. The bursary cannot 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 a compulsory part of the student's curriculum

Attendance must be at 90% or above in order for the fund to support the educational visit. A limit of £1,000 per student, per academic year will be adhered to. Students will be required to pay the required deposit, up to maximum of £20, which will be refunded once the student has attended the visit. Under exceptional hardship circumstances the college will look at meeting the cost of the deposit.

Procedure:

Monies will be paid directly to the department budget once confirmation of the cost has been received. Deposits will be refunded to the student's bank account once confirmation of attendance on the trip has been received.

7.5 Free College Meals (FCM)

Policy:

College will follow the guidelines set out in the Gov.uk document which is usually updated each year. The amount set out in the document is the government contribution, and as a college we will review this amount annually and add additional monies from 16–19 Bursary monies to a maximum level, currently this will be £4.80 in total per day for each day the student is timetabled to be in college. Government guidance stipulates that all students from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to a free meal.

If a student is experiencing severe hardship, we will support with FCM for the days they attend college, and will sometimes do this without checks on household income, or gathering evidence that would normally be required.

A student who falls into the vulnerable bursary cohort is not automatically entitled to FCM, although we may consider providing these by utilising discretionary bursary monies.

Procedure:

Students will be required to provide the necessary evidence as set out in the current Gov.uk document. Those not eligible under the scheme may be awarded monies from 16-19 bursary funds where hardship is evident. Any monies awarded will be added to the cashless catering system daily, and removed at the end of each day.

7.6 UCAS Applications

Policy:

Students who are applying to UCAS can ask the LSF to meet the cost of their application. Monies will be paid directly to UCAS via the students UCAS application form.

Procedure:

Student must attend Learner Services and open their application form online a member of finance team will then pay the fee via college credit card.

7.7 University Interviews

Policy:

Students who are attending Universities for interviews can apply to LSF for travel assistance up to a maximum of £200 per student to cover all interviews, at a rate of 45p per mile for the first 100 miles, and 27p per mile thereafter. We will need to see evidence of interview(s) and monies can then be transferred via BACS or in emergency instances cash will be provided to the student. Where it is not possible to travel to an interview and back on the same day due to public transport restrictions, we will consider funding accommodation costs.

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Procedure:

Once evidence provided Bursary team will arrange for travel costs to be assessed and refunded.

7.8 Emergency Fund

Policy:

The emergency Fund is short term and is in place to assist students experiencing a sudden or unexpected emergency situation which may impact on their studies. The funds are also to promote the welfare and safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults.

Procedure:

Students who find themselves in an emergency situation will be assessed by the Welfare/Safeguarding Team.

7.9 Professional Fees

Policy:

College will support students who require a professional registration as part of their course requirements, where the cost is not part of the course fees charged.

Bursary will not support Counselling students with the costs of Personal Therapy and Counselling Supervision.

Procedure:

Fees may be paid for directly by college, or a refund can be made to the student on production of a valid receipt.

7.10 Printer Credit – Art Students only

Policy:

College will support art students with the cost of printer credit if there is a clear need that the individual must provide printed work in support of their qualification. This assessment will be undertaken on an individual basis and in collaboration with the curriculum staff to confirm the need.

Procedure:

Credit will be added to the printing account of eligible students.

7.11 Student ID Badges

Policy:

Bursary will support in covering the cost of replacement ID badges. The maximum number of badges funded by the bursary per student, per academic year will be 3, after this the student will be expected to cover the cost of the replacement badges themselves.

Procedure:

Bursary monies will be transferred internally to the relevant budget code. This will be reconciled at the end of the academic year.

8. Eligibility

To be eligible to receive a 16 – 19 bursary, students must be aged 16, 17 or 18 on 31st August 2026, or aged 19-25 and on an EHCP, or aged 19 and continuing on a programme of study they started before they turned 19. Funding is available to students meeting the above criteria if they are a “home student” i.e. have been resident in the country for three or more years and are studying a programme of learning funded by the ESFA, or is an EU national.

Eligible students can receive funding for the duration of their progressive programme, e.g. NVQ 1 - 3 (3 years funding), Introductory Diploma - National Diploma (4 years funding). Those students undertaking work-based learning, and higher education students are not eligible to apply to this fund.

Students wishing to or those required to, repeat a level in a related or different subject area, will be assessed on an individual basis.

9. Application Procedure

Students will need to complete an application form for assistance. Forms are available from Learner Services or from the college website.

Completed forms should be handed to the Bursary team with all supporting documentation. The application will be delayed should the student provide insufficient evidence. All payments are paid by BACS and as such applicants are required to provide their own bank details. Government guidelines do not allow college to make payments to a bank account other than that of the student, unless the student can provide proof they have an appointee.

For those students who were awarded 16-19 bursary at the commencement of their studies, or became eligible after their first year of studies, we will not carry out annual checks of bursary fund eligibility. We will however require these students to complete, sign and date a self-declaration form confirming their household circumstances have not changed.

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In extreme circumstances when the requested evidence is unavailable, a panel consisting of the Safeguarding & Transition Manager and a member of the bursary team can approve a student's application after considering an individual's circumstances. This can also be supported by a curriculum manager or the Safeguarding & Inclusion Managers if they are aware of financial hardship impacting on their student's participation on their course.

Students will be advised of the decision usually verbally, with any declined applications being notified in writing within 15 days of the application being received.

10. Payment Method

All claim forms, will be processed and paid by the Bursary & Student Support Administrator on agreed publicised dates. Any large payments will have a date agreed by the Safeguarding & Transition Manager and the Finance Director.

Payments would normally be made as follows:

- Petrol – half-termly (attendance will be checked prior to payments being made)
- Kit & Equipment – refunds will be made direct to a student's bank account after the first half-term, or when the student has attended for 4 weeks
- Printing credit for art students only will be added to their printing account if applicable
- Refund of fees will be made at the end of the course once, direct to the student's bank account
- Childcare – payments will be made directly to the childcare provider

In all cases the student's attendance is checked to ensure that it is 90% or above in each element of study. We will also take into consideration any behaviour issues and disciplinary concerns which have been logged before we make a payment to students.

On rare occasions it may be necessary to pay claims where the attendance is below the College minimum. This is usually at the recommendation of the Safeguarding & Inclusion Managers, and after discussions with the student. Details are recorded on the claim form.

The authorised claims will then be passed to Finance to pay students via BACs payments.

Payments to accompanied asylum seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner)

Generally, asylum seekers are not entitled to public funds. Accompanied asylum seeking children (those under 18 with an adult relative or partner) and those aged 18 and above are entitled to education, but not to public funds. If they are destitute, they can apply to the Home Office (HO) for suitable housing and cash for essentials, but they are not eligible for other income.

As long as an asylum seeker has not had their application for asylum refused, institutions can provide in-kind student support such as books, equipment or a travel

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pass. Under no circumstances should an institution give cash or make BACS payments to any asylum seeker unless they are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC).

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children do not receive cash support from the HO and are the responsibility of the local authority. They 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, institutions must consider their immigration status. If the asylum claim is decided in their favour, the local authority must provide them with the same support and services as they do care leavers. As such, they continue to be eligible for a bursary as a student from a vulnerable group until they reach the upper age limit.

Where an asylum claim is not supported, the individual may not be able to stay legally in the UK. When asylum claims have been fully heard/the appeals process exhausted, an individual has no entitlement to public funds (with a few exceptions where the withdrawal of support would be seen as a breach of human rights).

11. Appeals

Applicants have the right to appeal against a decision, in the first instance contact the Safeguarding & Transition Manager for explanation of the decision; however, if the student wishes to continue with an appeal they would be required to appeal in writing, to the Director of Student Support. A decision will be made within 10 working days, and they will be notified of the outcome and reasons.

12. Audit & Retention

The college will maintain accurate and up to date records that evidence which students are eligible for which elements of the funds, including a completed application form, eligibility (including evidence of their financial situation). Information will also detail how much each student has been awarded and any items purchased, and payments made to demonstrate appropriate use of funds. Documents will be retained for 7 years in accordance with Government guidelines contained within the funding rules.

13. False or Fraudulent Claims

Where students are found to have intentionally given misleading or inaccurate information the college will claim back the award made. Providing false statements may result in the student being sanctioned in accordance with college disciplinary policy/or prosecution. A record will be made of fraudulent incidents and subsequent

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actions taken. Incidents will be reported to ELT and reported to the funding body as necessary. In some instances, a referral may be made to the Police with the possibility of prosecution.

Students who are found to be passing bursary funding on to a third party will be deemed to have demonstrated insufficient financial need, and will have their bursary funding withdrawn. This includes students who give away or sell free college meals, and students who allow another person to use their college funded bus pass. Any costs levied by the bus company in restoring the bus pass must be met by the student.