

# BURSARY AND FREE SCHOOL MEAL POLICY

## SIXTH FORM COLLEGE



Policy Family	Finance
Reference	SFC-17
Responsible Manager	Deputy Principal
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### Aim

'The 16 - 19 Bursary Fund is to provide **financial support** to help students overcome the **specific financial barriers to participation** they face so that they can remain in education.'<sup>1</sup>

The full document can be viewed and/or downloaded from;

[16-19 Bursary](#)

[Free meals in Further Education](#)

The policy will provide clear, accessible and transparent information to students, parents and staff about how the Bursary Fund and Free School Meals will be administered. Including, how the funds will be used, eligibility criteria and the procedures used. Therefore, the policy will be published on the Academy website.

Success in achieving the aims of the fund can therefore be measured by participation rates, specifically enrolment and retention rates, and at a subsidiary level by tracking achievement, although that is not an aim of the fund.

### Scope

The City of Stoke on Trent Sixth Form College.

Academies must assess the needs of individual learners and not make flat rate payments because the fund is designed to help students overcome individual financial barriers. '**No student should automatically be awarded a set amount of funding without an assessment of the level of need they have**'.<sup>2</sup>

The 'fund is intended to help students with the essential costs of participating in their study programme ... is **not intended to support extra-curricular activities or provide learning support** – services that institutions give to students – such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring'.<sup>3</sup> It is not intended to cover living costs.

<sup>1</sup> 16-19 Bursary Fund Guide 2021 to 2022 academic year. [www.gov.uk/education](http://www.gov.uk/education) Page 2

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid Page 3.

### Eligibility

1. ESFA funded students aged 16-19 who meet the residency criteria for ESFA funding.
  - Accompanied asylum seekers are eligible for education but not public funds. They may apply to the Home Office for support if they are destitute.<sup>4</sup>
  - Unaccompanied asylum seekers are treated as looked after children and are eligible for the vulnerable bursary.
2. 19+ continuing students who have previously been eligible as point 1, are in scope for the Discretionary Bursary only.
3. 19+ students who hold an EHCP and are eligible as point 1, are in scope for the Discretionary Bursary only.

### Policy

There are two types of 16-19 bursaries;

- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- Discretionary bursaries awarded by the academy using criteria in line with the funding rules.

**Defined Vulnerable Group bursaries** (in student/parent communications this is referred to as the 'Supportive Bursary') of up-to £1,200 will be awarded following 'an assessment of the types of costs'<sup>5</sup> individual students face, and should not automatically award the full amount. The academy may refuse an application or award a reduced amount because they do not have a financial need, for example because there are no relevant costs or the financial needs are already being met (for example by a partner). Defined vulnerable groups are;

- In care<sup>6</sup>
- Care leavers
- Receiving Income Support or Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves, or financially supporting themselves and a dependent living with them, such as a child or partner.
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment Support Allowance or UC in their own right.

**The Discretionary bursary** award is to help to overcome the financial barriers to education, this is likely to include but is not an exhaustive or exclusive list;

- Essential books.
- Equipment including specialist clothing and IT equipment.
- Activities that are an essential part of the students' 16-19 study programme. For example, study visits within the programme of study and activities outside the curriculum that build the ASPIRE graduate qualities.
- Public transport.
- Music lessons
- Meals – where eligible
- University open days and interviews

Bursary funding does not support; the learning support and services that institutions give to students, for example counselling or mentoring, and is not to support general household incomes.

### Free School Meals

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid Page 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Please see Guidance Document for a developed definition of in care and care leaver.

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students and this funding forms part of the overall Bursary Fund designed to overcome the financial barriers to participation. The criteria used to allocate free school meals are available in the student and parent guide and the gov.uk website.<sup>7</sup>

Free meals are provided using the on-site catering facilities for every day that the eligible learner attends for their programme of study. This includes examinations, study visits, and any work experience or industry placement that the student undertakes as part of their programme of study. When a student is attending an off-site activity, or in exceptional circumstances (see guidance document for further detail), the free meal may be provided as a packed lunch, voucher or cash payment. For example, when attending a study visit or industry placement.

The nominal amount of funding for each meal is £2.41 with enhancements to this being provided from the 16-19 bursary funding.

### Emergency Meal Support

In individual cases of severe hardship, we can provide meal support on the days a student attends their study programme, where the student is considered to be in real need, without undertaking the checks on household income or gathering other evidence that would normally be required. This is expected to only apply to a very small number of the total 16 to 19 student cohort.

For audit purposes, we 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 meal support
- the signed confirmation by the student of receipt of funding to be spent on food that day, if actual spend receipts are not obtained

This arrangement is not to continue on an ongoing basis for any individual student – we will exercise our discretion in each case and will be mindful that this flexibility relates to food support only.

### Applications and Data Protection/GDPR

- **Students and parents will be invited and encouraged to apply during the enrolment process and throughout the academic year.** The academy will use a range of communication strategies to help students and the family feel able to apply for a bursary. The academy may choose to access the 'key to success site'<sup>8</sup> to identify if new students were in receipt of pupil premium in year 11 or SEND support, to pro-actively target bursaries information at identified students. The deadline for applications to be assessed equally is 30<sup>th</sup> September. This is not the date that received applications

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<sup>7</sup> [Free meals in further education funded institutions: guide for the 2021-2022 academic year](#)

<sup>8</sup> [www.keytosuccess.education.gov.uk](http://www.keytosuccess.education.gov.uk) (Page 22)

will have been processed. The academy will always endeavor to meet student needs at any time of year, but following 30<sup>th</sup> September the award may be reduced to fit within the funds available.<sup>9</sup>

- The academy must check student eligibility in each academic year, which means that the students may need to apply separately for each academic year.
- The academy can only process applications that provide evidence of eligibility and where copies are retained for audit purposes. Applications will be refused if the required evidence is not provided or copies cannot be retained.
- To ensure that the fund reaches those students who are most in need of financial support the academy will base its need assessment on household income, journey to learn, as well as the actual participation needs of the student.
  - The level of household income in 2025/6 is determined to be £32,000
  - Please refer to the student and parent guide online to see the full range of relevant criteria and evidence required.
- During the application process the academy will apply the eligibility criteria established by the guidance documents for bursary funds and free meals. For example;
  - Three months of Universal Credit award notices may be required to extrapolate annual household income.
  - The Transitional protection arrangements used during the national roll-out of universal credit.
- Students and their families are required to make a declaration (whether paper or electronic) that the information and evidence provided is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge and belief. False or incorrect information that leads to incorrect/overpayment may result in overpayments being stopped and any incorrectly paid funds being recovered. This may also cause a referral to the police with the possibility that the student or family may face prosecution.<sup>10</sup>
- All evidence and data received and retained for audit purposes will conform to the Trust GDPR policy and Academy procedures.

## Awards

Eligibility for a bursary does not automatically mean that funding will be given, it is possible that there will be no award or a limited award. This may be because there is no financial need, the need is already being met or in the case of an in-year application the funds are not available because they are allocated on a first come first served basis.

Decisions about which students receive an award and how much bursary they receive must be based on an individual assessment of each student's individual circumstances and their actual financial need.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Institutions delivering standard academic year provision may wish to specify that all applications for the bursary are submitted by a set date so they can assess the overall level of demand holistically and make discretionary awards on a fair basis. Any specific deadline date should be clearly stated in the application form and included in the bursary policy.'

However, it is important to bear in mind that a student's circumstance and needs may change later in the year. A small emergency fund may be retained for this purpose but consequently, ESFA recommends that there should be no absolute cut-off point for applications.' [16-19 Bursary](#)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid Page 10.

There must not be blanket or flat rate/fixed rate payments to all students. A discretionary bursary may be larger than a vulnerable group award.

The Bursary award may vary through the academic year if the individual specific need changes. For example, a student may travel further to an industry placement and therefore require additional funds for the journey and meals.

The academy must manage the number and size of awards to keep within their budget. A small emergency fund may also be retained to support students who face exceptional circumstances.

The award is not tied to attendance, achievement or behaviour and therefore can't be used to **incentivise**<sup>11</sup> students. However, receipt of the award is conditional upon meeting the minimum expected standards of attendance and behaviour<sup>12</sup>. The minimum expected standard of attendance is 90%, and below this minimum the award may be suspended or withdrawn. In considering suspending the award the academy must first consider the student's individual circumstances and the purpose of the award to support attendance. When students are removed from the college roll they are no longer eligible for the award and this will cease. The academy should also stop payments following a period of absence of 4 continuous weeks.

Specialist equipment purchased with these funds remains the property of the College and should be returned in good condition at the end of the academic year. Other equipment, tools or protective clothing which may be reusable at a later date should be returned in good condition. The College will give practical consideration to such factors as hygiene, health and safety and wear and tear.

The ESFA prefers awards to be made 'in-kind rather than cash as far as possible'<sup>13</sup>. Where awards are made as payments they will be made to the student's bank account, further information on basic bank accounts can be found at the British Bankers' Association ([www.bba.org.uk](http://www.bba.org.uk)). The funds must only be spent on the support that has been identified as necessary for them to participate in education.

## Appeals

Students may appeal an award decision made through the Bursary Policy, for example if they believe the policy has not been followed correctly, that following the policy has manifest an injustice. For the purpose of clarity an appeal is not a complaint. If a student, parent or member of the community wished to make a complaint about a member of staff the Staff Disciplinary Procedure would be used to address the complaint. If the complaint regarded a college function or operation the Trust Complaint's Policy would be used. The academy is the awarding authority and therefore the academy is the final authority for the appeal, there is no right to complain to the ESFA as the funding body.

An appeal would normally be made by the student who is the person holding the legal relationship with the college, and we would encourage those with parenting responsibilities to support the student in making the appeal. The appeal should be made in writing to the college principal (for example an email) and explain the reason for the appeal. An appeal can be made on the basis that the college policy has not been followed correctly or that additional information not previously shared could have a material impact on the original decision made. The following procedure is used to gather information from all relevant parties, consider the appeal, reach a decision and communicate this to the appellant;

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid Page 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid Page 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid Page 11.

Action	Method	Timescale
Appeal in writing to the college principal	Letter or email to the Principal's PA	Within one month of the original decision
The Appeal is acknowledge and next steps explained	Standard letter 1	2 working days from receipt
A lead Manager is appointed		
Lead manager acknowledges the Appeal and agrees the next steps with the Appellant	Email / Phone call / face to face meeting	5 working days from receipt
Lead manager investigates the Appeal gathering evidence from all relevant parties.	GDPR and safeguarding guidelines and policies to be carefully considered when gathering evidence. A particular focus is to protect and enhance the student voice when gathering evidence.	5 working days from receipt or initial meeting with the student as appropriate.
Lead manager carefully considers and weighs the evidence gathered before proposing a written outcome to the college principal.	The test is whether another reasonable manager would have reached the same decision, not whether the original decision is right or wrong. Three outcomes are available, to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uphold,</li> <li>• partially uphold, and to</li> <li>• reject the appeal.</li> </ul>	10 working days from receipt
The principal communicates the outcome of the appeal to the appellant.	Standard letter 2 from the Principal's PA	10 working days from receipt
There is no right to appeal the outcome of the appeal.		

#### **Administration notes and Audit requirements**

The academy will use 5% of the bursary funding received (vulnerable group, discretionary and free school meals) to off-set the costs of administration. This will be administered by the finance team at the start of the academic year.

Any unspent funds from the vulnerable group bursary or free school meals budget will be moved into the discretionary bursary fund at the end of the academic year.<sup>14</sup>

The Academy will make an application for the vulnerable group bursary using the DFE portal. If new applications are made in-year the academy will use any available re-cycled funds before making a new in-year application to the DFE.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid Page 17.

There are clear audit requirements for the collection and distribution of bursary awards. The academy must be able to confirm during an audit the records of the application and award to include;

1. Application form
2. Evidence of eligibility
3. Student declaration
4. Copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need.
5. Purpose of the award and its value
6. Brief justification of the award
7. Evidence of award payments or support provided in kind.
8. Clear bursary policy that has been applied consistently for all students.
9. Details of any unspent funds being carried forward into a new academic year.
10. A copy of the funding claim sent to DFE and evidence of the payment received. For example, bank statements and remittance advice.
11. All documents should be retained for 6 years in either hard or scanned formats. To include household income evidence.

## Implementation

Move all Vulnerable Group Bursary and FSM funds left at the end of the academic year into the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary Fund.

Students who receive FSM are required to be flagged in the ILR.

### To do checklist

- ☐ Policy published on the website.
- ☐ Declaration and warning, signed?
- ☐ Declaration states they understand the award can be withdrawn if they fall below 90% attendance?
- ☐ Evidence retention?
- ☐ Payments/benefits cease when a student leaves the college roll.

## Communication

Training for stakeholders

## Monitoring

At the end of each academic year the impact of the policy will be evaluated by the academy. This evaluation will consider changes to the guidance document (released for each new academic year) alongside these reflections, the experience gained and best practice.

The policy will be reviewed annually if there are substantial changes to the DfE guidance document or every three years whichever is sooner.

## Associated Information and Guidance

Equality Act 2010

16-19 Bursary Fund Guide 2021 to 2022 academic year. [www.gov.uk/education](https://www.gov.uk/education)

[Free meals in further education funded institutions: guide for the 2021 to 2022 academic year](#)

16 to 19 Bursary Checklist V2.0

16-19 bursary summary of key funding rules

## Related Documents

Complaints Policy

SEND Policy



## Bursary Application Process

