

DfE 16 to19 Bursary Fund Application & Payment Procedure 2026-27

The 16 to19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help learners overcome the specific financial barriers they face to participation so they can remain in education. For example, clothing, books, other equipment for your course, transport and lunch on days you study or train.

There are two types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- A bursary for learners in vulnerable groups (aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026).
- A discretionary bursary (aged 16 to19 or students aged 19 and who are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to18 (19+ continuers) and students aged 19 or over who have an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Plan.

All applications must be made using the Bursary Application Form and will be considered on an individual basis.

Eligibility

Learners must meet the age, type of education provision and residency criteria to be eligible for help from the bursary fund, 16 to 19 bursary fund guide 2026 to 2027 eligibility criteria from DfE and evidence to support eligibility will be collected from the learner on application to the fund.

Eligibility Criteria: Bursaries for Young People in Defined Vulnerable Groups

Learners who meet the criteria, and who have a financial need, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups. The defined groups reflect that these learners 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.

Learners be funded to reflect the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the actual participation needs and costs they have.

This policy follows statutory guidance for the provision for young people (aged 16 to 19 only), meeting the criteria of the following identified groups:

- **In care** (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'). This also includes 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. 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.
- **Care leavers** 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

- **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 Universal Credit (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. By 2026-27, the majority of claimants will have transitioned to UC. However, students aged 19 to 25 funded from the 16 to 19 budget (such as those with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan) may still be in receipt of legacy benefits during the transition period.

The bursary for vulnerable groups can pay up to £1,200 per year to a learner participating on a programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more if they need that amount of support. Learners on programmes of less than 30 weeks will be paid a pro-rata amount, as appropriate based on an assessment of their actual needs. The actual amount of funding will be determined by the Trust based on guidance provided by the Department for Education (DfE).

We 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, 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. We can refuse a learner's application on this basis.

Learners will need to have attendance, punctuality and appropriate attitude to learning, to qualify for any bursary agreed. Attendance will be confirmed/checked via Arbor registers to authorise payment, which will then be paid directly into the learners' bank account. Failure to meet the stipulated criteria unless there is an extenuating circumstance, will result in non-payment for that week only.

Eligibility Criteria: A discretionary bursary

Discretionary bursary awards can be made to help learners with the cost of travel, to buy essential books, equipment, or specialist clothing (such as protective overalls, for example). These are items the learner would otherwise need to pay for to allow them to participate. The Trust have agreed the following criteria and allocation, for discretionary bursaries to support a wider group of learners.

Discretionary financial support will be available to learners whose total household income falls below £30,000. Learners will have an opportunity to apply for hardship funding for items to support learning up to a value of £200 per academic year (other than exceptional cases), which would be ordered/arranged through the Trust. No cash alternative is available. In addition to the above any learner experiencing short term financial hardship, including Emergency Food, can request one off assistance through the Bursary Fund. This can be accessed through their Tutor who would complete the Bursary Fund request form with them or on their behalf.

If learners are requesting items which are not study related, i.e. clothes, footwear, etc., a price for these items will be agreed with the learner, prior to purchase. Learners can then use the bursary fund issued for whole or part payment of the item. Receipts must be provided for any items purchased before bursary fund for these items is released, only in exceptional circumstances will money be released first, without receipts. Any application of this type must be approved by the Head of School before being submitted to finance for approval/payment.

Learners and/or their families will need to sign a declaration when they apply for help from the bursary fund to confirm that the evidence they have provided is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge and belief. Learners and their families should be aware that giving false or incomplete information that leads to incorrect/ overpayment may result in future payments being stopped and any incorrectly paid funds being recovered. They should also be aware that this might result in a referral to the police with the possibility of the learner and/or their family facing prosecution.

Learners and/or their families also need to be aware of the impact of receipt of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund on other benefits. Receipt of bursary funding does not affect receipt of other means-tested benefits paid to families, such as IS, Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit or, generally, UC. If a learner is in receipt of DLA (or PIP) and ESA, parents can no longer receive certain household/family benefits for that child, such as child benefit.

The Trust will not make bursary fund payments to cover living costs. This is out of scope of the bursary fund and any such payments would be subject to the Social Security Amendment (Students and Income-related Benefits) Regulations 2000.

Free School Meals for Post-16 Students

Post-16 students may be eligible for free school meals if they (or their household) receive certain benefits. From September 2026, all students from households receiving Universal Credit are eligible, regardless of income level.

Free school meal payments are made separately from bursary funding. Eligible students will receive £2.66 per day directly into their bank account for each day they attend their study programme. Payments are made weekly in arrears.

Students should refer to our separate Post-16 Free School Meals Policy for full details on eligibility and the application process.

How to Apply for 16 to 19 Bursary Funds

Application process

In the first instance, learners should indicate on their enrolment form if they feel that they are in a hardship position where they may require support. A 16 to 19 Bursary Fund Application Form will then be issued which the learner should complete at their earliest opportunity. Please provide us with as much information as possible. Your Tutor will then provide further information in support of your application, and this will be forwarded to the Head of School for approval.

Evidence Requirements

Bursary for Young People in Defined Vulnerable Groups a letter from the Local Authority confirming your Care Status, benefits documents from DWP, 3 months UC statements or IS claim/award notice or a copy of your UC claim from DWP and evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP where applicable.

Discretionary Bursary for 16-19 Year Olds evidence of house hold income i.e 3 months UC award notices, payslips, P60 to prov that your household's total income falls below required amounts.

Each application will be reviewed by the Head of School and the level of assistance will be determined based on eligibility criteria, personal circumstances and financial need, and the availability of funds at the time of application.

Successful and unsuccessful applications

All learners who are allocated funding from 16-19 Bursary Funds will be sent written confirmation outlining the terms and conditions for the funding and information about how the money will be paid to them.

Further evidence of eligibility may be requested at this time if not supplied with the original application. From time to time, we may ask to meet with a learner to discuss their claim.

All applicants who are unsuccessful will be advised in writing and given information about how to appeal against the decision.

Appeals Process

If you dispute a funding decision you may appeal against it. Valid grounds for appeal are:

- You feel the assessment of your application did not take into consideration all previously reported circumstances that may have significantly affected our decision.
- You feel that we did not appropriately assess your eligibility or ability to pay.
- There are other compelling circumstances that you consider would affect our decision that you could not report at the time of our assessment of your application.
- You feel that we did not conduct the assessment of your application in a fair manner in line with principles of equality and diversity.
- You feel that we did not correctly follow administrative procedures, or we made a significant mistake in the administrative process.

If you wish to appeal, you will need to contact the Head of School for an Appeals Form. You will need to complete it and return it to them within 14 days of the decision letter, together with relevant supporting evidence.

How your appeal will be dealt with

Your appeal will be forwarded to the Trust appeal panel who will:

- Confirm whether you have grounds to appeal. If you do not have grounds for appeal, we will write to you and tell you the reason for this.
- If you have grounds to appeal, they will fully review your application and supporting evidence you provide.
- They will make a new decision on your eligibility for funds and make and record the decision.
- A copy and explanation of the decision will be sent to you in writing. We will use our best endeavors to reply within 14 working days.

If you are deemed eligible for financial support, your payment will be processed following the outcome of the decision. While we aim to resolve the majority of appeals at this stage, if you believe the issue remains unresolved, you may escalate the matter through the Trust's formal complaints procedure.

Payment Process

Learners who are granted financial assistance will be paid as follows:

Public Transport and Meal Reimbursement: Learners may be reimbursed for travel and meal expenses upon submission of valid receipts (e.g. bus tickets or shop receipts). Reimbursements will be made directly into the learner's bank account.

Use of Personal Transport: Learners who travel using their own vehicle may claim mileage at a standard rate of £0.25 per mile. Payment will be made in arrears and is subject to confirmation of attendance at the relevant session(s).

Books/Equipment/Materials: Learners will not receive direct payments. Instead, they are required to submit a list of necessary materials, which will be procured on their behalf

Free School Meals: Eligible students will receive a direct payment of £2.66 per day into their bank account for each day they attend their study programme. Payments are made weekly in arrears (one week in hand).

Bursary payments are processed weekly on a Friday for the previous week's attendance. For example, attendance from Monday 8th September to Friday 12th September will be paid on Friday 19th September.

The first payment may take up to 4 weeks to process while bank details are verified and attendance records are confirmed.

Bursary Fund Terms and Conditions

All learners in receipt of the 16–19 Bursary Fund are subject to the following terms and conditions:

- **Application Submission:** Learners are encouraged to submit their completed application form as early as possible.
- **Start of Support:** Financial support will commence from the date the application is signed. In exceptional circumstances, support may be backdated up to six weeks prior to the signature date.
- **Attendance Requirements:** Learners must maintain a minimum attendance. Absences will be monitored, and learners will be contacted regarding any unexplained or extended absences.
- **Non-Attendance or Withdrawal:** In the event of withdrawal, prolonged non-attendance, or overpayment, the Trust reserves the right to recover any costs incurred. Learners may be invoiced to recoup these funds.
- **Assessment and Outcomes:** Learners must participate in all required assessments and/or examinations and are expected to achieve the necessary outcomes. Failure to do so may result in the learner being required to reimburse the Trust for the cost of any exam or assessment entries.
- **Change in Circumstances:** Learners must inform their Tutor of any changes to their social or financial circumstances during the course.
- **Early Withdrawal:** If a learner leaves the course early, any financial support received from the 16–19 Bursary Fund must be repaid.