



## **16-19 Student Financial Support Policy & Implementation guidance 2022- 2023**

**This document outlines how the College will use the Free Meals in F.E. allowance and Bursary Funds to support vulnerable and disadvantaged learners**

<b>Policy owner:</b>	Head of Student Support Services
<b>Date of last issue:</b>	March 2022
<b>Approval/Review Body</b>	Corporation
<b>Review Date:</b>	March 2023

## 16 -19 Bursary Fund and Free Meals in F.E.

### 1. Overview of funding for 16- 19 year old's

#### 1.1. Context

The ESFA is providing funding to support to young people who are experiencing financial hardship to participate in education. This is in addition to the financial support available for students who are identified as being in a “*Nominated Vulnerable Group*”

This document outlines United Colleges Group Policy and the procedures which will be followed to ensure that eligible students apply for and receive bursary fund support and free meals.

#### Funding categories

#### 1.2 Nominated Vulnerable Groups (NVG) Bursary Fund

Bursaries of up to £1200 have been allocated for young people aged under 19 on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 and in the following defined vulnerable groups:

- Students in care,
- Care leavers,
- Young people in receipt of Income Support or Universal Credit because they are estranged and financially supporting themselves
- Disabled young people in receipt of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit who are also in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

#### 1.3 Free Meals (FM) in F.E and Discretionary Bursaries

The ESFA provides an allocation to spend on bursaries and free meals for financially disadvantaged young people. Although the allocation has been broken down into two payment streams (free meals and bursary), Colleges have the flexibility to merge the funds as long as those entitled to free meals are allocated this funding as a priority.

##### 1.3.1. Free Meals in F.E

The College is required to provide a meal free of charge for each day that a student **attends** their study programme. The ESFA have stated that students must have a minimum of £2.41 to spend on food via an electronic credit or voucher payment system. There is a recommendation that:

- a hot meal should be offered
- the food is available at lunch-time
- students will be encouraged to make healthy food choices.

Students must apply for free meals.

Resources should be put in place to enable students on work placements to have access to a meal.

### 1.3.2 Discretionary Bursary Fund

The College has been allocated funding by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) for 2022- 2023. ESFA guidelines state that “*Discretionary bursaries are targeted at students who cannot stay in education without financial help for things like transport, meals, books and equipment*”

Bursary funds are awarded to support access to education for learners from low income families. The Discretionary Bursary fund is targeted at students who are aged under 19 on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022. Students who turn 19 after the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022, will continue to receive the 16-19 bursary for the remainder of the academic year, if they continue to meet the attendance requirement.

Students who are 19 or over on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 and who fall into the following categories will be eligible for a bursary if

- They are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 -18 (19+ continuers)
- They have an Education Health care plan (EHCP)

and continue to meet the eligibility criteria outlined in this document.

## 2. General Eligibility

### 2.1 Residency requirement

- All students must satisfy the residency criteria outlined in the ESFA Funding Guidance 2022/23 Funding Regulations. They must be participating in provision that is subject to *inspection* by a public body that assures quality (e.g. Ofsted). That provision must be:
  - Funded by the ESFA or ESFA via a local authority
  - Otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to level 3) that is accredited by Ofqual or is pursuant to Section 98 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000

### 2.2 Nominated Vulnerable Groups – eligibility

In order to qualify for assistance from the Nominated Vulnerable Groups 16-19 Bursary Fund a student must fulfill the following criteria. They must be:

Under 19 years of age on 31<sup>st</sup> August in the academic year in which they start their programme of study. Where a young person turns 19 during their programme of study, they can continue to be supported until the end of the academic year in which they turn 19, or to the end of the programme of study whichever is sooner.

**AND** one of the following:

- In care
- Care leaver (This category includes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children)
- A young person who is living independently and who is in receipt of Income Support or the equivalent Universal Credit in their own right.

- Previously in the care of the local authority but now placed with a family via a permanent form of fostering such as a Special Guardianship Order
- a young person getting both Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit as well as Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right

Students satisfying this criteria will be eligible for a bursary totaling £1,200 if their course lasts for more than 30 weeks. A pro-rata amount will be paid for courses of less than 30 weeks.

When an unaccompanied asylum seeker reaches 18 their immigration status will be checked with the Local Authority to confirm continued eligibility for NVG bursary.

## 2.3 Free meals in FE

**In order to qualify for a free meal at college under the Free Meals in F.E the student's parent/guardian must be in receipt of one of the following:**

- Income support
- Income based jobseekers' allowance
- Income related Employment and Support allowance (ESA)
- support under part IV 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 HMRC
- if a family are in receipt of Working tax Credits and an additional qualifying benefit, a young person is eligible for free meals
- Working tax Credit run-on paid for 4 weeks after a person stops qualifying for Working tax credit
- Universal Credit – with earnings after tax and not including any benefits of less than £7,400 p.a. (£616.67 monthly)
- Transitional protection arrangements – students receiving Universal Credit on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 will continue to receive free meals during the Universal Credit roll out where evidence of this is provided from previous school or FE institution. This eligibility will continue until the student finishes their 16-18 education ie including 19+ continuers or learners with EHCP will continue to receive protection until their current programme of study. (see full guidance)

### 2.3.1 Discretionary Bursary - Eligibility

In order to qualify for assistance from the College's 16-19 Bursary Fund a student must:

- Be under 19 years of age on 31<sup>st</sup> August in the academic year in which they start their programme of study. Where a young person turns 19 during their programme of study, they can continue to be supported until the end of the academic year in which they turn 19, or to the end of the programme of study whichever is sooner **or**
- Be aged 19 or over and continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 -18 (19+ continuers) **or**
- Have an Education Health Care Plan **or**
- Enrolled on a 16- 18 traineeship programme

### 2.3.2 Accompanied asylum seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner).

Students in this category who have not had their asylum application refused can receive in kind support (e.g. meals, equipment or travel passes). They are not entitled to cash payments

## 3 Implementation of Funds

### 3.1 Nominated Vulnerable Bursary

For eligible students, the Nominated Vulnerable Group bursary will comprise of weekly payments totaling up to £1200 for the academic year.

Students who are eligible for the Nominated Vulnerable Group bursary will also be eligible for free meals in addition to their weekly payments.

### 3.2 Discretionary Bursary – 16-19, 19-25 EHCP learners, 19+ Level 3 Second year and offsite learners

Applicants must meet both the age and residency requirements **and** meet the following economically disadvantaged criteria:

- *Be a dependent of someone who is:*
- on a low income e.g., Universal Credit (UC) with take home pay below £7,400 after tax and not including any benefits or
- Income Support (IS) / Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or
- Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or
- in receipt of working tax credits or child tax credits or universal credits showing a gross annual income for 2021/2022 of up to £27,500.

### 3.3 Learners demonstrating a financial need will be awarded funds in the following categories:

#### Appendix 1:

Categories	Range	Free Meals	Additional Bursary Elements
1) Free Meals threshold and under	<i>Tax Credit</i> £0 - £16,190 <i>Universal Credit</i> £0 - £7,400	Eligible for <b><u>Guaranteed</u></b> Meals	Eligible for 2 options
2) Free meals threshold and above but below £23,000 pa	<i>Tax Credit</i> £16,191 - £23,000 <i>Universal Credit</i> £7,401 – £23,000	Eligible for <b><u>Optional</u></b> Meals	Eligible for 2 options
3) Income above £23,000 but below maximum income threshold £27,500 pa	<i>Tax Credit</i> £23,001 - £27,500 <i>Universal Credit</i> £23,001 - £27,500	Eligible for <b><u>Optional</u></b> Meals	Eligible for 2 options
4) Income above maximum income threshold £27,500 + pa		Not Eligible	Not Eligible

In addition, the college will have a contingency fund to support learners who are at risk of withdrawal as a result of financial difficulties with or without the above income evidence. E.g. young learners living independently and working to support themselves financially who are unable to access DWP benefits.

### 3.4 Types of Bursary awards according to financial need

Learners can choose **up to** three elements in order of priority of the bursary categories listed below. Student will be awarded two categories based on assessment of their free meals. Those eligible for Guaranteed meals (*see Appendix 1*) can have free meals in addition to other bursary categories.

- **Travel Element (Paid to the student)**– This will be assessed using the City Mapper tool based on the recorded postcode of the student to the main site of study using the 16+ Zip Oyster (peak return rates). Students who travel via bus or walk will be advised to choose another element of bursary. Students with medical conditions will be required to provide medical evidence.
- **Books and Materials (Paid to the student)**
- **Equipment e.g. Course Kits / laptops (Paid to the Career Cluster)** - More expensive materials will be paid directly to faculties.
- **Free Meals (Paid to the student)** - £3.50 daily amount added to student's ID card.

Students may apply for funds towards trips and visits where they are able to demonstrate financial hardship. This will be assessed on an individual basis.

Student's chosen options are calculated on a weekly basis and are distributed through the academic year. In exceptional cases, where student's wish to change their options, they will need to provide a notice of 14 working days before the end of term. Students who have chosen the 'Equipment' element will not be able to change their option.

## 4. Assessment of eligibility

### 4.1 Nominated Vulnerable Bursary

To meet the eligibility criteria for the vulnerable bursary students must submit one of the following;

- A letter or email from Local Authority Children's Services confirming their 'Looked After' status
- A letter or email from Local Authority Children's Services confirming 'Leaving Care' status
- A letter from Benefits Agency in the student's own name confirming Income Support Benefit or Universal Credit
- A letter from Benefits Agency confirming Personal Independence Payment, Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance are being made in the student's name

### 4.2 Bursary & Free Meals in F.E

The ESFA have targeted FSM at "financially disadvantaged students". For the purpose of eligibility for free meals "disadvantaged" is defined by the student 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 IV 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 HMR&C
- if a family are in receipt of Working tax Credits and an additional qualifying benefit, a young person is eligible for free meals
- Working tax Credit run-on paid for 4 weeks after a person stops qualifying for Working tax credit
- Universal Credit – with earnings after tax and not including any benefits of less than £7,400 p.a. (£616.67 monthly)
- Transitional protection arrangements – students receiving Universal Credit on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 will continue to receive free meals during the Universal Credit roll out where evidence of this is provided from previous school or FE institution. This eligibility will continue until the student finishes their 16-18 education i.e. including 19+ continuers or learners with EHCP will continue to receive protection until their current programme of study. (see full guidance)

A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or their parent/ guardian have made a successful application to United College Group.

#### **4.2.1 Discretionary Bursary**

To meet the eligibility criteria for the discretionary bursary students must submit one of the following;

- Any current benefits agency letter dated after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022
- Pension Credit Award Notice for current year
- Asylum Seekers documents/letter from Home Office and Evidence of family Aspin support
- 2 months bank statements (dated in the last 3 months) showing benefits or wages being paid
- Students whose parents are self-employed or will be required to provide a recent copy of certified accounts for the business or a recent Working Tax Credit Assessment.
- Students living independently or who are estranged from their parents/guardians will be assessed on their individual gross income.

Monies unallocated at the end of the first term will be used to increase support for the current recipients/support additional applications.

### **5. Application and assessment process**

The same application form will be used to assess eligibility for mainstream bursary and Free Meals in F.E.

Nominated Vulnerable Group applicants will use a different application form.

There will be a two-stage screening process.

Applications will be screened for Free Meals in F.E eligibility in the first instance.

The information will be recorded on the LSF field of pro-solution by members of the Bursary team

Systems have been developed to record FM information on Student's ID cards.

The College canteen has facilities to scan ID cards and record expenditure.

## **6. Implementation**

### **6.1 Free Meals in F.E Credits**

Students who are eligible for Free Meal will have credits for each day they are timetabled to be in College. The credits will be loaded onto ID cards.

Free Meals credits will be uploaded daily, and unused credits will be cleared on a daily basis.

The credits can only be spent in the College canteens.

Students must present their ID cards to get a Free Meals.

### **6.2 Free Meals for Students on work-placements**

Tutors will be required to notify the Student Advice team if students will be on work-placement. Additional payments, equal to the sum allocated for FSM at College will be added to the mainstream bursary payment.

### **6.3 Bursary payments**

Applications will be screened for eligibility.

All applications will be subject to an individual financial assessment, normally undertaken by the LSF Coordinator or the Student Advice Team. Other members of Student Support Team staff may be asked to assist on occasions, as required.

Payments will be made to student's bank account, fortnightly after the application has been approved subject to meeting attendance criteria.

In exceptional cases, where a student is refused a bank account and can provide evidence of this, payments in kind may be issued to ensure that the student is not disadvantaged.

In exceptional circumstances as approved by the HOSSS students may be awarded bursary payments where attendance criteria have not been met.

The Bursary Team aim to make bursary payments by week 7.



## **7. Off-site (or franchised provision)**

### **7.1**

Students who are enrolled on United Colleges Group funded courses that are delivered by a partner organisation may be eligible for bursary support if the programme of study fulfills the general eligibility criteria and the student meets the eligibility criteria for either the NVG or discretionary bursary

### **7.2 The provider is responsible for:**

- informing their students of the financial support available to them, the evidence they need to present and the attendance requirements.
- collecting the relevant supporting evidence and forwarding this to the Student Support Team in a timely fashion.
- providing United Colleges Group Learner Support Fund (LSF) Coordinator with evidence of attendance in order for payments to be made in a timely manner.

### **7.3 Free meals for eligible students on franchised provision**

It is the responsibility of the provider to meet with the Senior Student Advisor to come to an agreement on how eligible students will access their entitlement to Free Meals in FE.

## **Exceptional Circumstance**

**7.4** The College will keep some funds in reserve (i.e. unallocated) to cover costs associated with student emergencies or occasional trips or visits (e.g. HE interviews)

## **8. Monitoring of Expenditure**

The LSF coordinator will prepare a financial summary on a termly basis for the consideration of the panel. This will include a statement of the total allocations agreed to date, the total funds paid out to date, and the uncommitted balance. A mid-year report will be prepared for consideration by College governors and a full year report for presentation to Governors in December/January. In addition to a financial summary, this will include an analysis, by age and mode of attendance, of the applications received and the decisions made as well as a report showing the percentage retention rate for students in receipt of the 16-19 discretionary Bursary.

In emergencies, decisions on an application will be made by the Head of Student Support Services (acting as Chair of the 16-19 Bursary Fund) and recorded under exceptional circumstances.

## **9. Appeals**

Should a student be unsuccessful in an initial application for support from the 16-19 Mainstream Bursary, or for a free meal they will be encouraged to seek advice from one of the student advisers who will be able to identify if grounds exist for a re-submission to the Panel, offer advice on alternative possible sources of help and assist the student in preparing an appeal if necessary.

Appeals must be made in writing and will be considered by an appeal committee comprising of the Head of Student Support Services and the Assistant Principal of Student Support Services.

## **10. Complaints**

The College is committed to ensuring continuous improvement in all aspects of its work. Complaints will be taken seriously and every effort will be made to eliminate the causes of complaints.

Students wishing to make a complaint should speak to a member of the Student Advice team or Head of Student Support Services in the first instance. Where the complaint is not resolved at a local level the student can make a formal complaint.

Formal complaints should be made in writing, to the Principal's Secretariat team. The complaint will be investigated following the procedures outlined in the Complaints Procedure.

**Diana Brown-Head of Student Support Services**  
**Sophie Knight- Student Support Co-Ordinator**  
**Bursary Team**  
**March 2022**