

16 – 18 Further Education Bursary Policy

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This policy and procedure is subject to The Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation, Disability.

16 – 18 Further Education Bursary Fund Policy 2025/26

(Including 16 – 18 Bursary, Vulnerable Learner Bursary and Free FE Meals)

Introduction and Overview

1. This policy sets out the financial support available in 2025/26; the eligibility criteria and the conditions for continuous receipt of Bursary support for 16–18-year-old students attending Milton Keynes College.
2. Milton Keynes College of Further Education recognises that the 16 – 18 Bursary Fund has an important role to play in removing barriers for some learners accessing and completing further education courses. It is the aim of the College to optimise the impact of support linked to this funding on recruitment, attendance, retention, student progress and achievement rates.
3. The fund will be distributed in a consistent and transparent way and in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE). Learner eligibility will be determined through assessments of the learners' social and economic disadvantage.
4. It is the policy of the College to optimise the use of 16-18 Bursary funding to provide support to those young people facing the greatest financial barriers to continuing in education. To ensure the funding has a positive impact, priority will be given to those defined as vulnerable learners, those eligible for free meals and to those from low-income households whose income could prevent them from participation and achieving their qualifications. Once enrolment has finished and all priority costs have been met, any surplus funding may be used to award discretionary bursaries.
5. The College receives an allocation from the DfE to fund bursaries for 16-18-year-olds. Eligible applications are considered within a first come first served basis. The College monitors actual expenditure linked to this allocation and reserves the right to close the application process for students at any stage, with immediate effect, to ensure that spending does not exceed the allocation. Students are advised to apply at the earliest opportunity and ensure that all relevant supporting evidence linked to an application is provided in a timely way to access funding. The Bursary Team is on hand at both Chaffron Way and Bletchley sites to provide advice and guidance linked to bursary applications.
6. Bursary funds will be offered in the following categories:

Category 1 - Discretionary 16-18 Bursary

A bursary may be available for any student whose annual household income does not exceed £35,000 from income or benefits. Students on 16 – 18 Bursary could be eligible to receive:

- Contribution towards food for every day that a student is in college for timetabled learning. The meal bursary will be awarded for each day of timetabled attendance at college. This fund will be loaded onto the student's ID card to be spent at the College food outlets. Any funds unspent at the end of each day will be cleared and new funds added for the next timetabled day that the student is in learning.
- A contribution towards Kit/Uniform (to be returned if a student withdraws or transfers prior to the end of a course).
- A contribution towards bus travel (via a Travel Card) or the cheapest alternative. Alternative public transport payment arrangements based may be considered for exceptional circumstances.
- A contribution towards Trip fees (course essential only). Bursary funding can only be used to support the costs of field trips in England that are a compulsory part of the student's curriculum – in other words; the student cannot achieve their qualification without it.

This category of bursary is paid from the DfE allocation.

Eligibility

Students must provide evidence of how they meet each of the following three strands of eligibility for financial support:

- Age - Students must be aged 16-18 as of 31st August 2025 **or** hold an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan) **or** aged 19+ on 31st August 2025 and continuing a Level 3 study programme they began aged 16-18.
- Residency – Students must have resided legally in the UK for at least the past three years before the start of the course.
- Household Income – Total household income must be below £35,000, evidence of all household income must be declared and provided for inspection at time of application.

These criteria must be met as well as the course being studied being subject to inspection by a public body such as Ofsted and the course must be funded directly by the DfE.

Bursary Payments

The Discretionary Bursary will be offered in the following strands:

- Travel
- Meals
- Essential Course Cost

Travel

7. Students who live less than 3 miles away are not eligible for travel support unless they are able to provide medical evidence to support their need for help with travel to and from college. Bursary payments are only available where Milton Keynes College is the closest learning provider offering the chosen course.
8. Payments for the travel bursary will be made on the following basis:
 - Termly – Bus Travel - Paid directly to travel provider for bus travel.
 - Monthly – Train Travel – Paid directly to the student's bank account.
 - Weekly – Exceptional Travel Arrangements – Paid directly to the student's bank account.

Meals

9. The meals bursary of £4.80 will be awarded for each day of timetabled attendance at college. This fund will be loaded onto the student's ID card to be spent at the college's food outlets. Any funds unspent at the end of each day will be cleared and new funds added for the next timetabled day that the student is in learning.

Free Meals in Further Education

10. In addition to the meals provided for each timetabled day within the college, Milton Keynes College has elected to, in line with guidance, to provide support for the purchase of a 'meal' to eligible Free FE Meal students who are attending external placements and/or opportunities as part of their study Programme for example – work placement and/or Work Experience.
11. Free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
 - Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
12. The above list may be subject to change dependent on benefit changes by the Government.
13. A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or a responsible adult on their behalf, have made a successful application to the college bursary where they are enrolled.
14. Students already receiving free meals on or after 1 April 2018, continue to be eligible to receive free meals up until July 2026

Essential Course Costs

15. Some courses have essential costs including books, materials, equipment, uniform, or trips. A discretionary course cost bursary may be awarded, subject to household income and the availability of funds.
16. Bursary support may be awarded to contribute to the costs of attending industry placements and university interviews/open days.
17. Essential course cost items must (wherever possible) be purchased through Milton Keynes College. All funds will be transferred internally from Bursary to the supplier.
18. The College will require the return of any equipment where a student withdraws from their course early. This equipment will then be available for reuse with consideration being given to hygiene and reasonable wear and tear.

Category 2 - 16-18 Bursary for Vulnerable Students

A bursary of *up to* £1,200 a year will be available to assist with the costs of travel, meals, books, and other associated course costs. Students in the following groups will be eligible if enrolled and assessed as being in one of the four defined vulnerable groups:

- In care (not private fostering)
- Care leavers
- In receipt of Income Support, or Universal Credit 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.
- In receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right, as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

This category of bursary is not funded through the DfE allocation.

Learners on waged Apprenticeships, higher education courses or in young offender institutions are not eligible for 16 – 18 Bursary.

Bursary for Vulnerable Students

19. Students in the defined vulnerable groups (see category 2) for more information on these groups) will be eligible for the vulnerable learner bursary of up to £1,200 per academic year. These funds will pay for all essential course costs, any travel costs required and a healthy meal on each day of attendance. The balance once all other costs have been deducted will be paid to the student directly in monthly instalments.
20. Where the student's circumstances change in-year and put them in one of the defined vulnerable groups, they will receive a pro-rata amount of the vulnerable learner bursary, which will be from the date the student became eligible to the end of the academic year.

Where a student is enrolled on a course of less than 30 weeks, the vulnerable learner bursary will be adjusted to an appropriate pro-rata amount e.g., a 15-week course = £600.

21. If the College accrues any unused vulnerable learner funds e.g., where a student withdraws from their course, funding will be used to support future vulnerable learners.
22. The College will make provision to deal with immediate financial assistance and crisis payments following full assessment. Learners must be assessed as being

eligible to receive the fund; this might be a needs assessment and not necessarily a financial assessment for emergencies or crisis.

Childcare

23. Childcare support for young students (up to the age of 20 years) who have children is provided through Care to Learn (C2L). It is only available if the students' childcare provider is Ofsted-registered and offers up to £180 per week per child.
24. Students aged under 20 years must apply to C2L scheme through their education provider
25. The bursary fund may be available to contribute to exceptional further help with childcare costs for those young parents in receipt of Care to Learn whose costs exceed the scheme's weekly maximum rate.

Conditions and Procedures

26. The College awards bursaries based on a household income up to £35,000.

Bursary Category	Award
Bursary for Vulnerable Students	<u>Up to</u> £1200 per year (pro rata)
Meals Bursary	Up to £4.80 per day
Travel Bursary	Contribution towards Public Transport Costs (cheapest option)

Essential Course Costs	Contribution towards Associated Essential Costs
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27. Learners who apply for the Bursary will be required to supply evidence of all household income and information about their actual need for support. This should be in the form of benefit or other official documents or verification from statutory or other agencies.
28. Payments are subject to satisfactory attendance, conduct and progress at college. The college reserves the right to suspend, delay or reduce payments where a student's attendance or conduct is giving cause for concern, in consultation with their curriculum area.

Staff administering the fund will examine attendance, disciplinary records, and the timely submission of assessments for all bursary recipients on a weekly basis. Should the attendance of a student currently receiving bursary drop below 90% across a given four-week period, their award will be reviewed and may be either withdrawn or adjusted. This decision will be taken in consultation with relevant curriculum teams and will be informed by an understanding of the context of the issues linked to the performance of the student in question.

Should an applicant withdraw from their chosen course of study and decide to leave college, they may be required to repay monies or return equipment supplied/bought by the support fund.

29. Most bursary transactions now focus on providing services to students (e.g., meals via ID cards, bus travel via the Travel card) rather than making direct payments to students for these services. Only where exceptionally necessary will any payments to students will be made by BACS into the student's own bank account.
30. Where the student's positions change during the academic year 25/26 and they become eligible as a vulnerable learner, they will receive a pro-rata amount of the vulnerable learner bursary entitlement, which will be from the date the student became eligible to the end of the academic year. Similarly, students will be required to disclose any change of circumstances during the year, which may affect their eligibility for assistance. If a student in receipt of assistance withdraws or transfers before the completion of the course, they may be required to repay all or part of their award, or return any equipment purchased with their award.
31. Applicants will be notified in writing how much has been allotted to the categories they have applied for help with, including how payment will be made. Awards will be made to a third party or paid by internal budget transfer where possible. In all cases the application will be judged on its individual needs as outlined in the DfE guidelines. The amount awarded will be specific to each application.

32. Each student will be sent an agreement to sign and return to the bursary team. If this is not done, the College has the right to withdraw the financial support that has been agreed.
33. If a student is unhappy with their award decision, the procedure for appeal is outlined in the letter informing them that the application has been unsuccessful.

Organisation and Responsibility

This Policy reflects the Milton Keynes College Structure in June 2025. The policy is the responsibility of the Group Leadership Team.

The Bursary team are responsible for the administration of the fund.

Quality Assurance and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Activity and budgets are reviewed on a monthly basis through the College Financial Review process.