

# 16-19 BURSARIES AND DISCRETIONARY LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDS POLICY 2026/2027

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Section	Summary of changes	Date updated
1.0	Minor changes made to reflect UCS College Group	22.05.26
4.3	Transitional arrangement added for students who received travel support only who are continuing a 2-year Level 3 programme (as this income band has now been withdrawn)	22.05.26
4.5	Changes to maximum limits for 20+ childcare	22.05.26
4.9	Changes to eligibility criteria for Free College Meals	22.05.26
4.9	Updated to reflect support for students on work experience or industry placement	22.05.26
5.2	Changes to income thresholds. There will now be two income thresholds (£0-£27,500 will receive 100% support, and £27,501-£40,000 will receive 50% support). The travel support threshold has been removed	22.05.26
5.3	Changes to the way we assess Universal Credit statements. UC income will be included in the household income assessment; however, carers allowance and disability benefits will be excluded from the calculation	22.05.26
5.5	New section added regarding bank details being in the student's name, no payments made to parents/carers unless exceptional circumstances	22.05.26
6.1	Additional information added under the Vulnerable Bursary about declaring any support received by the Local Authority to support with education costs, to avoid duplicate funding	22.05.26
6.3	Minor changes to include examples of accepted evidence	22.05.26
8.2	Changes to maximum caps for 20+ childcare from 90% to 80%. Max £5,000 for first child and 50% support with max of £2,500 for any further children	22.05.26
10	Additional text regarding overpayments and ensuring students and parents/carers are receiving the correct amount, otherwise the College reserves the right to ask for funds to be returned	22.05.26

## Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Section Heading</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.	Introduction	4
2.	Purpose of Financial Support	4
3.	Who Can Apply?	4
4.	Types of Financial Support Available	4
5.	Eligibility – 16-19 Bursary	7
6.	Vulnerable Groups Bursary (Up to £1,200)	8
7.	Eligibility – 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund	9
8.	Childcare Schemes	9
9.	Residential Bursary and Residential Access Fund	10
10.	Application Process	10
11.	Attendance and Behaviour Expectations	10
12.	Additional Funding Considerations	10
13.	Appeals Process	11
14.	Policy Review	11

## **16-19 Bursaries and Discretionary Learner Support Funds Policy**

### **1. Introduction**

#### 1.1 Scope

This policy outlines the financial support available to eligible students studying at **University Centre Somerset College Group**, including Bridgwater College, Cannington College, Strode College and Taunton College, for the 2026/2027 academic year.

It applies to:

- Students aged 16–18
- Students aged 19 and over

#### 1.2 College Group Commitment

The College Group is committed to reducing financial barriers to education and will:

- Promote available financial support through open events and published information
- Process applications fairly, consistently and efficiently
- Monitor and review the allocation of funds throughout the academic year
- Provide application support for students and parents/carers with additional needs
- Prioritise students experiencing the greatest financial hardship

### **2. Purpose of Financial Support**

The 16–19 Bursary Fund (ESFA funded) and the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) exist to support students with essential costs directly related to participation in education.

Funding is limited and meeting eligibility criteria does not guarantee an award. The Vulnerable Groups Bursary is not cash-limited but has a maximum annual award of £1,200, based on assessed need.

### **3. Who Can Apply?**

Students studying full-time or part-time on ESFA-funded programmes may apply where they or their household are on a low income or receiving income-related benefits.

### **4. Types of Financial Support Available**

All awards (including discretionary and vulnerable bursaries) will be based on an assessment of the student's actual financial need and the specific costs required to participate. Fixed or standardised payments will not be made where they do not reflect evidenced costs.

Where possible, the College will make payments in kind (e.g. directly to suppliers or via internal purchasing systems) rather than cash payments.

#### 4.1 Travel Assistance

Travel support will reflect the most cost-effective method and the student's actual travel costs, up to the maximum daily contribution. Students must live more than 2 miles walking distance from college to be eligible for travel assistance.

- Maximum support of £6 per timetabled day
- Fuel costs may be considered in exceptional circumstances
- Travel for T Level industry placements and work experience is paid on submission of tickets only. Students must live more than 2 miles walking distance from home to the workplace to be eligible

#### 4.2 Conditions of Support

- Travel costs are calculated at the time of award; in-year increases are not supported (unless based on age-related tickets)
- Evidence of tickets must be provided for the first two weeks of term, otherwise no payment will be made
- Ongoing payments are linked to attendance
- Tickets may be requested at any point in the year for audit purposes
- Failure to provide evidence will result in payments being withheld

#### *Emergency Travel*

In cases of extreme hardship, emergency travel support may be awarded for up to one week (timetabled college days only), assessed by the Student Funding Team, whilst longer term travel support options are explored.

#### 4.3 Transitional Arrangement – Travel Support

Students progressing to the second year of a two-year Level 3 programme who received travel support in their first year under the £40,000–£50,000 household income band (now withdrawn) will continue to receive this support, provided there has been no significant change in their circumstances affecting eligibility.

#### 4.4 Essential Course Costs

Support towards essential materials, equipment and trips required to access the learning programme. This is detailed by the curriculum area at the beginning of the year.

All costs must be evidenced as essential to the student's study programme and required for participation. Non-essential or optional activities will not be funded.

#### 4.5 Childcare Support

- Students under 20: Full childcare funding through the Care to Learn scheme (subject to scheme limits)
- Students aged 20+: Up to 80% childcare support (maximum £5,000 for the first child), and up to 50% for additional children (capped at £2,500 per child)

#### 4.6 Tuition Fees and Exam Costs (19+ DLSF only)

Support may be provided where:

- Fee remission or student loans are not available
- The course is co-funded

#### 4.7 College Accommodation

- Residential Bursary for eligible 16–19 students
- Residential Access Fund for eligible 19+ students

#### 4.8 Higher Education and University Progression

Support with travel costs for university interviews and open days, subject to fund availability.

Support with UCAS fees where the student is not eligible for a waiver, subject to fund availability.

#### 4.9 Meal Support

##### *Free College Meals*

Students aged 16–18 (or 19+ continuers or those with an Education Health and Care Plan) enrolled on an ESFA-funded study programme may be eligible for Free College Meals.

From the 2026/27 academic year, all students from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be eligible, in line with national guidance.

- Eligibility is subject to application and verification by the College
- Awards are based on the student's current household circumstances
- Transitional protection no longer applies from 2026/27

A free meal will be provided for each timetabled day the student attends their study programme and will be issued via the student ID card for use across college outlets. The rate is £5 per timetabled day.

##### *Meal Card*

Students from households with an income of £27,500 (net) or below will receive £5 per timetabled day which will be loaded onto their student ID card to spend in any of the college outlets.

##### *Emergency Meals*

In cases of extreme hardship, emergency meal vouchers of £5 per day may be awarded for up to 7 days, assessed by the Student Funding Team, whilst longer term options are explored.

## Work Experience and Placement Support

Students undertaking work experience or industry placements must request support a minimum of two weeks in advance of the placement start date. Where eligible, support will typically be provided in the form of a packed lunch arranged through college catering outlets, where this is feasible. Where this is not attainable, a supermarket voucher may be issued to cover the duration of the placement, calculated at a rate of £5 per timetabled day.

### 4.10 Technology Support

Loaned IT devices may be provided where essential for learning, subject to availability.

## 5. Eligibility – 16-19 Bursary

### 5.1 Eligibility Criteria

Students must:

- Be under 19 on 31 August 2026 (or aged 19 and continuing a study programme they started before they turned 19), or aged 19–24 with an EHCP
- Meet residency requirements
- Be enrolled on an ESFA-funded programme (excluding apprenticeships and waged training)

### 5.2 Income-Based Support Bands

Household Income (net)	Support Available
£0 – £27,500	100% essential course costs, £5 per timetabled day for meals, and 100% travel support (up to £6/day)
£27,501 – £40,000	50% essential course costs and 50% travel support (up to £3/day)

Students aged 19-24 with an EHCP who live at home with parent/carer will be assessed on parent/carer income.

### 5.3 Household Income Assessment

Household income is calculated using:

- Earned income
- Universal Credit payments

To ensure fairness, the following are excluded from our assessment:

- Carer's Allowance
- Disability-related benefits

### 5.4 Evidence of Income

Applicants must provide evidence such as:

- Payslips or P60s
- Universal Credit statements
- Other income documentation where applicable

Learners living independently must provide evidence of financial self-support.

## 5.5 Bank Details

Bursary payments must be made into a bank account in the student's own name, unless there are exceptional circumstances where the student is unable to manage their own finances.

## 6. Vulnerable Groups Bursary (Up to £1,200)

### 6.1 Vulnerable Groups Bursary Support

Eligible students may receive up to £1,200 based on assessed need; the full amount is not automatic. Essential course costs, travel and meal support will be deducted from the £1,200 allocation, and in some cases these costs may use the full bursary. The maximum £1,200 will only be awarded where it reflects the student's actual assessed financial need. Some students may receive less if costs are lower.

Students applying for the Vulnerable Bursary are required to declare any financial support they receive from a Local Authority or other external agency that is intended to contribute towards their education-related costs (including but not limited to travel, accommodation, or living expenses).

Where a student is in receipt of such funding, the College will take this into account when assessing bursary entitlement. Any confirmed financial support received for the same purposes may be deducted, in whole or in part, from the Vulnerable Bursary award to avoid duplication of funding.

### 6.2 Defined Vulnerable Groups

Students who are:

- In care or care leavers
- Receiving Universal Credit or Income Support in their own right
- Receiving ESA/UC with DLA or PIP in their own right

Students aged 19 or over on 31 August 2026 are not eligible.

### 6.3 Evidence

Official documentation must be provided. Self-certification is not accepted. Types of evidence accepted:

- Letter on headed paper from Local Authorities or Social Workers stating the students care status
- Universal Credit statement alongside a tenancy agreement, utility bill or child benefit entitlement
- Universal Credit statement and PIP award letter
- ESA and DSA award letter

## **7. Eligibility – 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund**

### **7.1 Criteria**

Meeting eligibility criteria does not guarantee funding, and awards may be prioritised based on available funds and level of need.

Students must:

- Be 19+ at the start of the academic year
- Meet residency requirements
- Be on an ESFA-funded course (excluding apprenticeships and loan-funded courses)

### **7.2 Income Thresholds**

- Joint household income under £40,000, or
- Single household income under £27,500

Income includes earned income and Universal Credit, excluding Carer's Allowance and disability-related benefits.

### **7.3 Additional Support**

Additional support may be available towards domestic emergencies and emergency accommodation, examination fees, accreditation fees, professional membership fees and any fees or charges due to external bodies. These must be requested by the student due to hardship and are subject to the availability of funds.

## **8. Childcare Schemes**

### **8.1 Care to Learn (Under 20s)**

- Covers childcare costs up to £180 per week per child
- Paid directly to registered childcare providers
- Includes travel between childcare and college where required

Care to Learn is a government-funded scheme, and the college will follow the full guidance as set out in the *Care to Learn: Conditions of Grant Funding for the 2026 to 2027 Academic Year* (GOV.UK).

### **8.2 20+ Childcare Fund**

- Covers up to 80% costs (maximum £5,000 for the first child), and up to 50% for additional children (capped at £2,500 per child)
- Support for timetabled days only
- Paid in arrears to the student on submission of an invoice and receipt
- Childcare must be Ofsted registered

## **9. Residential Bursary and Residential Access Fund**

### **9.1 Eligibility**

Students must:

- Be studying a specialised course not widely available elsewhere
- Live more than 15 miles from college
- Live more than 3 miles from a public transport route
- Have a household income below £40,000 net

Funding may cover up to the full cost of standard accommodation (excluding meal plans).

Funding will be withdrawn if a student withdraws or transfers to a non-eligible course.

Students aged 19-24 who are living with parents must use parental income to assess for the Residential Bursary.

## **10. Application Process**

- Applications must be submitted via the Pay My Student portal
- Evidence of income and eligibility is required
- Declarations must be completed by the student (and parent/carer where applicable)
- Successful applicants will receive written confirmation

It is the responsibility of the student and their parent/guardian to ensure that the bursary award has been calculated correctly and that they are not receiving more funding than they are entitled to. If it is identified that a student has been overpaid or awarded more than their assessed entitlement, the College reserves the right to amend the award and cancel any future payments. The student may also be asked to return any overpayments.

## **11. Attendance and Behaviour Expectations**

- Travel support requires minimum 85% overall attendance
- Payments roll over weekly and release automatically when attendance improves to the required percentage
- Adjustments may be made for disability or caring responsibilities, or in exceptional circumstances
- Students must comply with the Student Code of Conduct

## **12. Additional Funding Considerations**

- Students must notify the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) of any support received
- Where funding is oversubscribed, priority will be given to students in greatest hardship

## 12.1 Funds Cannot Be Used For

- Living costs
- College administration fees
- Block transport or catering subsidies
- Non-essential equipment
- Bonus payments
- Counselling or extracurricular activities

## 12.2 Accompanied Asylum Seekers

Support will be provided in kind only. Cash payments will not be made.

## 13. Appeals Process

- 13.1 Students may appeal decisions relating to eligibility or level of support within 14 days of notification. Appeals must provide new or additional evidence and will be reviewed by the Vice Principal of Student Experience and Safeguarding. Outcomes will be issued within 15 working days.

## 14. Policy Review

- 14.1 This policy will be reviewed annually.