

16-19 BURSARIES AND DISCRETIONARY LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDS POLICY 2025/2026

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1. Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines the financial support available to students at Bridgwater and Taunton College for the 2025/2026 academic year. It applies to:

- Students aged 16-18 attending the college.
- Students aged 19 and over attending the college.

1.2 The College's Commitment:

We will:

- Ensure students are aware of available financial support through open evenings and published information on our website.
- Process applications fairly and efficiently.
- Monitor and review fund allocation.
- Offer assistance or advice with completing applications for students and parents with additional needs.
- Prioritise students most in need.

2. Purpose of Financial Support

2.1 The 16-19 Bursary (funded by the ESFA) and the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF) exist to help students with college-related costs, reducing financial barriers to education.

Funds are limited and eligibility does not guarantee an award. The Vulnerable Groups Bursary is not limited, but carries a maximum award of £1,200. Early application is advised.

3. Who Can Apply?

Students studying full or part-time on ESFA-funded courses can apply if they or their parents/carers are on a low income or receiving income-related benefits.

4. Types of Financial Support

4.1 Travel Assistance

- A contribution for the cheapest travel option, usually bus travel for 16-19 students, up to a maximum of £6 per day. Travel contributions based on household income levels are shown in the table below.
- Help with fuel or rail costs in special cases, assessed individually.
- Travel support for eligible students on Extended Industry Placements (T Levels) and work experience. This will be paid on the submission of tickets only.
- Travel costs will be calculated at the time of awarding, in-year increases in travel costs will not be supported.
- Students must provide evidence of tickets for the first two weeks of term before any payments are made. After this, payment will be linked to attendance.
- Payments will only be backdated to the date the bursary application was submitted, and only for tickets dated on or after that submission date.
- We may ask for tickets at any point in the academic year for audit purposes to ensure students are still using public transportation to access College.

- If tickets are not provided, no payments will be made.

Household income (net)	Travel contribution
£0 - £12,500	Maximum £6 per day
£12,501 - £25,000	Maximum £5.40 per day
£25,001 - £40,000	Maximum £4.80 per day
£40,001 - £50,000	Maximum £4.20 per day

4.2 Course-Related Costs

- Help with essential materials, equipment, field trips, and residentials (up to a maximum of £400).
- Trip and material funding will be based on the costs detailed by the curriculum area at the beginning of the year.

4.3 Childcare Support

- Students under 20 can apply for full funding via the College's Care to Learn scheme (maximum limits apply).
- Students 20+ may receive up to 90% support (max £5,000 per child per year).

4.4 Tuition Fees & Exam Costs (DLSF Students Only)

- Help towards tuition fees and exam costs where fee remission or loans aren't applicable. The course must be co funded in order to be eligible.

4.5 College Accommodation Support

- Students studying specialist subjects may qualify for the Residential Bursary.
- Those aged 19+ may be eligible for the Residential Access Fund.

4.6 Higher Education & University Progression Support

- Help with travel costs for university interviews and Open Days (subject to fund availability).

4.7 Meal Support

- Free College Meals for eligible students.
- Meal contributions for students whose household income is below £25,000 net.
- Both schemes award students £5 per timetabled day to spend in any of the College outlets. However, second-year continuing students at Strode College (those continuing to the second year of a 2-year course) who received a bursary in their first year, will receive £10 per timetabled day for a one-year transitional period. After this period, all students will receive the same rate.
- Emergency Meals: In cases of extreme hardship, students may receive meal vouchers worth £5 per day, assessed by Student Experience teams. This support is available for a maximum of 7 days.

4.8 Technology Support

- Loaned devices for essential learning, subject to availability.

5. Eligibility Criteria for 16-19 Bursary

5.1 To qualify, students must:

- Be under 19 at the start of the 2025-2026 academic year (with the exception of 'continuing' students who were under 19 at the start of their 2-year course) or aged 19-24 with an Education, Health and Care Plan.
- Meet residency criteria.
- Be on an ESFA-funded programme (not an apprenticeship or waged training).

5.2 Income-Based Support Limits:

- Household income under £25,000: May receive help with essential course costs, meals and travel.
- Household income under £40,000: May receive help with essential course costs and travel.
- Household income under £50,000: May receive help with travel only.
- Household income will be calculated from earned income.

5.3 Proof of Income

- Students and their parent/guardian must complete an application and provide proof of household income (e.g., benefits statement, P60, or payslips).
- Where a learner is not living with a parent or guardian (i.e., someone who is claiming Child Benefit in their name), the learner must provide proof of their own income instead, and evidence to show they are financially supporting themselves.

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

6.1 Young people in defined vulnerable groups may be eligible for a bursary of up to £1,200, depending on their financial need. The bursary is intended to help with essential costs related to their study programme, and students will not automatically receive £1,200 if their educational need does not require the full amount.

- Where a student has little or no financial need, the bursary will be reduced accordingly.
- Students in receipt of a Vulnerable Bursary can also apply for additional support from the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary if further financial assistance is required, subject to availability of funds.
- Students aged 19 or over at 31st August 2025 are not eligible for the Vulnerable Groups Bursary.

6.2 Eligibility – Defined Vulnerable Groups

6.3 To qualify, students must be:

- In care
- Care leavers
- Receiving Income Support/Universal Credit in their own right
- Receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit and Disability Living Allowance (DLA)/Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right

6.4 Evidence Required

Students must provide official evidence to support their application, such as:

- A letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirming benefit entitlement in their own right.
- For Universal Credit applicants, additional evidence such as a tenancy agreement (in the student's name), proof of Child Benefit entitlement, or a utilities bill.
- A letter from the Local Authority confirming the student's current or previous looked-after status.

Students cannot self-certify their eligibility for the Vulnerable Groups Bursary.

Students who do not have a financial need or whose needs are already met through other means are not automatically entitled to this funding.

7. Eligibility for 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF)

7.1 To qualify, students must:

- Be 19+ at the start of the academic year.
- Meet residency criteria.
- Be on an ESFA-funded programme (not an apprenticeship, waged training, or loan-funded course).

7.2 Income-Based Support Limits:

- Joint household income under £40,000 (or single income under £26,500).
- Up to 90% support for tuition fees, and up to £800 for travel.
- Advanced Learner Loan students may apply for the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary with the same household income thresholds.
- Higher Education students may apply for HE Bursaries.

8. Care to Learn Childcare Scheme (Under 20s)

- Covers childcare costs up to £180 per week per child (this includes any travel costs)
- Payments go directly to registered childcare providers which can be added as a third-party payment on the bursary portal.
- Support includes travel from the childcare provider to college if the route is alternative than the one from home to college and will be paid at the cheapest mode of transport, which is usually public transport. If the cheapest means is by car, this will be calculated at the rate of 25p per mile.
- Students can claim C2L for independent study time where it is required as part of their study programme to complete coursework, undertake revision or homework.
- C2L will support time needed to undertake work experience and industry placements but only where these have been identified as an integral part of the study programme.
- Costs associated with independent study time, work experience and industry placements are included in the maximum limits of £180 per week per child.
- The C2L scheme is funded by the UK government and supports young parents with childcare costs while they study. All eligibility criteria, application processes, and conditions of support are governed by official guidance, and these must be followed even if not explicitly detailed within this policy.

9. 20+ Childcare Fund

- Covers up to 90% of childcare costs (max £5,000 per child per year).
- Payments made in arrears directly to the student upon receipt submission.
- Must be in an Ofsted registered placement.

10. Residential Bursary & Residential Access Fund

- Support for on-site accommodation costs for students on specialist courses not widely available at other colleges i.e., Agriculture, Motor Sport.
- Students must live further than 15 miles from college, and over 3 miles from a public service or college operated transport route to be eligible.
- Eligibility will be means tested using the same criteria as the relevant 16-19 Bursary or 19+ DLSF and eligible students may be entitled to an award of up to the full cost of standard accommodation (excluding meal plans).
- Where students are living with parents/carers aged 19-24 the parental income must be used to calculate Residential funding, if they are living independent of parent/carers then household income must be used (i.e., including spouse/partner).
- If a student withdraws from the course or transfers to a non-specialist programme that no longer qualifies for the Residential Bursary, the funding will be withdrawn and the student will be expected to pay the remainder of the accommodation and meal plan fees for the remainder of the contract.
- Available for 16-19, 19+ DLSF and Advanced Learner Loan Bursary students.

11. Application Process

- Apply via the Pay My Student portal.
- Provide proof of household income or benefits.
- Student and parent/guardian to sign the application declaration.
- Successful applicants will receive email confirmation detailing award amounts and payment methods.

12. Attendance & Behaviour Expectations

- Students receiving travel support must maintain a minimum of 85% attendance in timetabled lessons to receive payment (inclusive of authorised absences). Payments are released automatically based on overall attendance.
- Any payments that are not released due to attendance will be rolled over each week. Once attendance exceeds 85%, the rolled-over payments will be released automatically.
- If attendance remains below 85% by the end of the month, the rolled-over payments will be withdrawn. The next month's payments will follow the same process.
- Students facing attendance challenges due to disability or caring responsibilities should notify the Student Experience team for adjustments.
- In exceptional circumstances, we may agree to pay a percentage of the award based on attendance, after confirmation from the Deputy Head of Department that academic targets are still being met.
- Students can request a Travel Appeal questionnaire to be added to their online bursary account to start this process.
- Student behaviour must align with the college's Student Code of Conduct to remain eligible for financial support.

13. Additional Funding Considerations

- It is the learner's responsibility to inform the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about any learner support they receive from the College, as this may affect their eligibility for certain benefits.
- If all funds have been allocated and a waiting list is implemented, eligible learners in the greatest financial hardship will be given priority.

13.1 Funds cannot be used for:

- Regular payments for living costs.
- Enrolment or administration fees imposed by the College.
- Fees for access to College facilities.
- Block subsidies for transport.
- Block subsidies for canteens (Support is provided on a daily basis, not as a one-off lump sum).
- Block provision of equipment, materials, or books.
- Bonus payments for attendance or achievement.
- Counselling, mentoring, extra tutoring, or extra-curricular activities.

13.2 Accompanied Asylum Seekers:

- If an accompanied asylum seeker is eligible for 16-19 Bursary funding, support will be provided in the form of course-related books, equipment, or a travel pass.
- Under no circumstances will financial support be given in the form of cash.

14. Appeals Process

14.1 If a student has been declined payment from the 16-19 Bursary (including Vulnerable Groups) or Discretionary Learner Support Fund and they believe our decision is wrong, or if they believe that the level of support they have been offered is wrong, they can make an appeal against our decision.

14.2 Grounds for Appeal

14.3 Eligibility – The student will have been declined assistance if we do not believe that they meet the eligibility criteria. Our letter explains why we believe they do not qualify for any support. If the student decides to make an appeal against our decision to decline support because they believe that they do meet the eligibility criteria, they will be required to explain in writing why they feel they qualify and may have to provide us with additional documentary evidence to support their appeal.

14.4 Level of support - If the student is considering making an appeal against the level of support they have been offered, they will be required to explain in writing why they feel that they may be entitled to additional support and may have to provide us with additional documentary evidence to support their appeal (for example, a bank statement).

14.5 Their application will already have received careful consideration, and an appeal is only likely to be successful if they can provide relevant new information that was not considered in their original assessment.

14.6 Procedure

If the student decides that they have grounds to make an appeal, they must email the Student Experience team within 14 days of receipt of the allocation or letter of decline. The Student Experience team will allocate an appeals questionnaire to their online bursary account. This questionnaire must be completed and will be sent to the Vice Principal of Student Experience.

The original application, appeal and any other information the student supplies to us will be given fresh consideration. The appeal will be dealt with within 15 working days. The student will be advised of the outcome in writing.

15. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually.