



Guidance

16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2025 to 2026

Updated 8 September 2025

Applies to England

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1. Introduction

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome the specific financial barriers to participation they face so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- discretionary bursaries

Both types of bursary funding are to help eligible students with essential costs of participating such as travel to and from school or college or to buy essential books, equipment, or specialist clothing (protective overalls, for example) that are required for their individual study programme. These are items a student would otherwise need to pay for to participate.

The bursary fund is not intended to provide learning support – services that you give to students, for example, counselling or mentoring - or to support extra-curricular activities that are not essential to the students' study programme or to provide living costs support.

Any references to 'we' or 'us' below are to the Department for Education (DfE), and 'you' are the institution. Where we refer to 'you' this means education institutions (colleges, schools, academies, for example).

Unless explicitly stated as applying to the bursary for defined vulnerable groups or to the discretionary bursary, all the funding rules and conditions of funding set out in this guide apply to the bursary fund as a whole.

These funding rules cover academic year 2025 to 2026.

2. Important points

We would like to highlight some of the important points below.

2.1 Changes to arrangements for submitting funding claims for bursaries for defined vulnerable group bursaries

Institutions currently draw down funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups from the Student Bursary Support Service (SBSS) a third-party administrator, whenever new students are verified as meeting the criteria and having a financial need. From academic year 2025 to 2026, you will instead submit funding claims directly to DfE at defined points in the year. The [payments and allocations](#) section provides more information about the process.

2.2 Assess actual needs

Both types of bursary funding (discretionary and defined vulnerable groups) are designed to help students overcome the individual financial barriers to participation they face, and you must ensure funds go to those who genuinely need them. You must ensure you assess the actual needs of all individual students in addition to eligibility when agreeing bursary funding. This means you must provide funding to each eligible student based on their actual participation needs and not make flat or fixed rate payments to students that do not reflect the actual costs they face and that you have evidence to support. The requirement to assess actual needs each year continues to apply if you exercise discretion not to carry out household income assessments annually for the discretionary bursary.

2.3 Checklist to support application assessment

This guide includes a [checklist \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance) institutions can use when assessing bursary applications from students, and a [summary \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance) that lists the most important things institutions need to consider when administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. These reflect common errors and issues identified during audits.

2.4 Essential participation costs

We remind you that the bursary fund is intended to help students with the essential costs of participating in their study programme, so to help with the cost of essential books or equipment or with the cost of travelling to school or college, for example. The bursary fund may be used to provide exceptional further help with childcare costs for those young parents in

receipt of Care to Learn whose costs exceed the scheme's weekly maximum rates. Only childcare provision eligible under the [Care to Learn scheme](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-to-learn-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-to-learn-guidance>) rules can be used and you must be able to evidence that the maximum amount is being paid under Care to Learn to confirm that a top up is required. Any top up paid must be made in line with Care to Learn funding rules and paid directly to the childcare provider, not to the student.

The bursary fund is not intended to support costs not related to education, such as general living costs, extra-curricular activities, or non-essential activities or to provide learning support – services that institutions give to students – such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring.

2.5 Rules for returning unspent 16 to 19 Bursary Funds

You cannot carry forward bursary funding for more than one year. **You must inform us of the total amount of any unspent funds (not previously reported) from any year up to and including academic year 2023 to 2024.**

You must report unspent funding using our [customer help portal](https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/access-the-enquiry-portal/) (<https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/access-the-enquiry-portal/>) specifying the amount of funding and the year/s it relates to. You should do this as soon as you are aware however you must report it no later than 31 March each year. We will recover all unspent funds.

2.6 Household Income checking

Following discussion with institutions and recognising both the administrative burden of handling large numbers of bursary applications in a short space of time, and the need to maximise retention of students facing financial disadvantage, you can exercise discretion as to whether you carry out household income checks annually for the discretionary bursary or just once at the beginning of a student's study programme. This assumes the student is enrolled on a typical 2-year study programme. If a student changes course or level, you have discretion to determine the approach you take but must make sure both the student and the study programme meet the eligibility criteria.

If you decide not to conduct annual checks of household income eligibility for the discretionary bursary, you must ensure you obtain a signed and dated (hard copy or electronic) self-declaration form from the student to confirm that their household circumstances have not changed.

2.7 Emergency meal support

You have flexibility to enable you to use your bursary fund in individual cases of severe hardship (a student you consider to be in real need) for meal support on the days the student attends their study programme without undertaking the checks on household income for the discretionary bursary or gathering other evidence that would normally be required. We expect this to only apply to a very small number of the total 16 to 19 student cohort.

For audit purposes, you must retain a copy of:

- a record of the number of students supported in this way
- the number of days this support is given
- the £'s value of support given to each student along with the rationale for the meal support
- the signed confirmation by the student of receipt of funding to be spent on food that day, if actual spend receipts are not obtained

We do not expect this arrangement to continue on an ongoing basis for any individual student – this is a short-term arrangement, and you should ultimately assess the student's household income for the discretionary bursary and their overall participation needs in the usual way. This flexibility relates to food support only, not to any other aspect of support.

2.8 Receipts for expenditure and purchases

Receipts for expenditure and purchases made with bursary funding form part of the audit and assurance of the scheme. Receipts are evidence that funding is being used for the reasons it was awarded. For standard weekly costs like travel and food, it may not be practical to collect receipts for every transaction, so costs can be evidenced initially by receipts then paid after that linked to attendance patterns. Students could then be asked to provide receipts to you at various points in the year (for example) which could form part of the terms/conditions set out in the award letter/confirmation document you give to students.

3. Eligibility: all bursaries

Students must meet the age and residency criteria which follow to be eligible for help from the bursary fund.

3.1 Age

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2025 to be eligible for help from the bursary fund in academic year 2025 to 2026.

The only exceptions for the discretionary bursary are students aged 19 and who are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (19+ continuers) or students aged 19 or over who have an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) Plan.

These 2 groups of aged 19+ students can receive a discretionary bursary while they continue to attend education (in the case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same programme they started before they turned 19), as long as their eligibility continues, and you consider they need the support to continue their participation.

Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups.

You should generally only pay bursaries to students aged 16 or over. However, in exceptional circumstances where under 16 students are on funded 16 to 19 study programmes at the institution, you may use your discretion to pay bursaries to younger students. For example, where a student is following an accelerated study programme.

Bursary funds must not be awarded to students enrolled at another institution, where that institution also receives public funding for the student, for example, students aged 14 to 16 who are attending college as part of their key stage 4 programme at a local school/ academy. [DfE funding rules \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision) for post-16 provision provide more detail about funded 14- to 16-year-olds.

Students aged under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible for support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

3.2 Eligible education provision

Students must be participating in provision that is subject to inspection by a public body that assures quality (for example Ofsted). The provision must also fall into one of these groups:

- funded directly by us, or by us via a local authority
- otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including level 3) accredited by Ofqual or on our list of [qualifications approved for funding](https://www.qualifications.education.gov.uk/) (<https://www.qualifications.education.gov.uk/>)

Students on apprenticeship programmes, or any waged training, are employed, rather than in education. They are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

Non-employed students aged 16 to 19 who are participating in a Prince's Trust Team Programme are eligible to receive the bursary in the same way as any other student participating in an eligible, publicly funded course.

We do not expect students on distance learning provision to need help from the bursary fund because they do not have the kinds of costs the bursary is intended to cover (travel, equipment, and uniforms, for example). In the rare instances where an institution identifies such a student does require financial help, they should provide support in-kind. An example could be providing a temporary travel pass for the student to attend exams.

3.3 Residency

Students must meet the residency criteria in [DfE funding rules](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision>) for post-16 provision. This document also specifies the evidence institutions must see and retain for audit to confirm eligibility for post-16 funding (and therefore meet the residency criteria for bursary fund eligibility).

3.4 Accompanied asylum seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner)

Generally, asylum seekers are not entitled to public funds. Accompanied asylum seeking children (those under 18 with an adult relative or partner) and those aged 18 and above are entitled to education, but not to public funds. If they are destitute, they can apply to the Home Office (HO) for suitable housing and cash for essentials, but they are not eligible for other income.

As long as an asylum seeker has not had their application for asylum refused, you can provide in-kind student support such as books, equipment, or a travel pass. Under no circumstances can you give cash to any asylum seeker unless they are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC).

3.5 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

UASC do not receive cash support from the HO and are the responsibility of the local authority. They are treated as looked after children and are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups ('in care' group), where they have a financial need.

When these young people reach legal adulthood at age 18, institutions must consider their immigration status. If the asylum claim is decided in their favour, the local authority must provide them with the same support and services as they do care leavers. As such, they continue to be eligible for a bursary as a student from a vulnerable group until they reach the [upper age limit](#).

Where an asylum claim is not supported, the individual may not be able to stay legally in the UK. When asylum claims have been fully heard/the appeals process exhausted, an individual has no entitlement to public funds (with a few exceptions where the withdrawal of support would be seen as a breach of human rights).

4. Eligibility: bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups

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

Students must 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.

They must not be automatically awarded £1,200.

You must be able to evidence the amount and purpose (for example, the cost of travel, the cost of essential books or equipment) of the funding you provide.

You must ensure students are eligible for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups in each year they require support.

The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in care
- care leavers
- 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 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. This means young people who are aged 16 to 18 now will not be in receipt of the legacy benefits listed above. However, any students aged 19 to 25 and funded from the 16 to 19 budget (such as those with an EHC plan) may still be in receipt of those other legacy benefits.

The bursary for vulnerable groups can pay up to £1,200 per year to a student participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more if they have costs that mean they need that amount of support. Students on study programmes of less than 30 weeks are not likely to need as much financial support as those on longer programmes and you must ensure you consider this in your assessment. You must also consider the number of hours involved in a student's study programme. A student studying for around 16 hours a week is likely to have greater costs than a student studying for 4 hours a week, for example.

Students must only receive the amount they actually need to participate, and institutions must not automatically award students £1,200, but must provide funding based on actual costs.

Although a young person may be eligible for a bursary because they are in one or more of the defined vulnerable groups, some may not have any actual financial need. This might be because their participation needs are already supported and/or because they have no relevant costs. You must refuse a student's application if they have no actual participation costs.

Equally, you can provide support to a vulnerable group student of more than £1,200 if you assess they need extra help to remain in education. Any payments over £1,200 must be paid from your discretionary bursary allocation or from your own funds. If paid from discretionary bursary, all the eligibility criteria and usual assessment processes must be met and followed. You must ensure your auditable records evidence the type, purpose, and amount of all funding awards.

[Free meals in further education \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students#free-meals-in-further-education\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students#free-meals-in-further-education) has its own eligibility criteria and a student who meets the criteria for a defined vulnerable group bursary is not automatically eligible for a free meal.

4.1 Defining in care and care leavers

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund defines 'in care' as children 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'.

A 'care leaver' is defined as:

1. 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
2. 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

Only students who meet this definition are eligible if they have a financial need.

4.2 Foster care, including privately arranged foster care

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, is classed as looked after. They meet the criteria for the 'in care' vulnerable group if they have a financial need.

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.

In some instances, a young person may have been in the care of the local authority and then left care via achieving permanence through an order such as a Special Guardianship Order. In these circumstances, the young person is defined as having left care so is now a care leaver. They must meet the definition of a 'care leaver' in full (so, the period of weeks and age range set out above). If they do, they are eligible for help from the bursary for vulnerable groups, where they need financial support to participate.

Institutions decide which students receive discretionary bursary support and how much they receive, based on their own policies. Foster carers' income does not need to be taken into account before awarding support. Eligibility for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups is based on the student meeting the criteria for one of the defined groups. All students must have their need for support assessed individually, to determine the type and amount of support they need, but vulnerable groups students are not subject to a household income assessment and institutions should not consider foster carers income though must consider what costs may be covered by the local authority, as explained in section 4.6, to avoid double-funding.

4.3 Universal Credit

UC has replaced IS and ESA as well as other benefits, for new claimants. This means young people who are aged 16 to 18 now will not be in receipt of the legacy benefits listed above. However, students aged 19 to 25 and funded from the 16 to 19 budget (such as those with an EHC plan) may still be in receipt of those other legacy benefits.

UC award notifications do not include any information on the benefits they replace. For this reason, the description of the bursaries for vulnerable group category that relates to receipt of UC or IS is that a student must be receiving UC in their own right because they are financially supporting themselves and anyone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner.

Bursary funds awarded to a student should not form part of the UC assessment undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). How DWP treat any funding for education depends on whether the student is undertaking advanced full-time education.

It is unlikely that 16- to 18-year-olds will be in advanced full-time education as they are generally on study programmes at level 3 or below.

Under UC, any educational award which is paid under a scheme to enable persons under age 21 to complete a course of non-advanced education (which will include the 16 to 19 Bursary) does not fall to be treated as grant income for UC purposes – as provided under reg 68(7) of the UC Regulations 2013.

4.4 Evidence of eligibility

You must obtain proof that students meet the criteria for the bursary for vulnerable groups in full. In other words, that they are in receipt of the specified benefits in their own name or that they fully meet the definitions for in care/care leavers. You must ask for evidence from each student and retain copies for audit purposes:

For students who are in care or a care leaver, written confirmation of their current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority – this is the local authority that looks after them or provides their leaving care services. The evidence could be a letter or an email but must be clearly from the local authority.

For students in receipt of UC or IS, a copy of their UC or IS award notice. This must clearly state that the claim is in the student's name/confirm they are entitled to the benefits in their own right. The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent them from participating in further education or training. For students in receipt of UC, you must also see a document such as a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificates, utility bills and so on.

For students receiving UC/ESA and DLA and PIP, a copy of their UC award notice from DWP and evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP.

UC claimants can print off details of their award from their online account or provide a screenshot to the institution.

Students can also contact their UC work coach (or relevant benefit office if they are receiving IS or ESA) and ask them for help in providing evidence of receiving benefits.

You must only submit a funding claim to DfE:

- when you have seen and verified appropriate evidence to confirm that the student is eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups, and
- when you have assessed the actual amount of help the student needs, based on the actual participation costs they have. It is the actual amount that institutions must request on the funding claim, not automatically a request of £1,200. We may require evidence, as part of our pre-payment checks, to support the amount and purpose of the funding being requested

4.5 Students on part time study programmes

Students who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups, who have a financial need, but are on a study programme that lasts for less than 30 weeks are likely to need less support than a student on a longer programme. The actual amount is dependent on your assessment of their specific financial needs.

You should also consider the number of hours involved in a student's study programme. A student studying for around 16 hours a week is likely to have greater costs than a student studying for 4 hours a week, for example. We do recognise, however, that some study programme costs may be 'fixed' in nature, for example, course equipment costs.

4.6 Young people eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups who do not require bursary funding

In some cases, a young person might meet the eligibility criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups, but their participation costs are already met, or they have no relevant costs.

For example, a student:

- attending specialist residential provision that covers their educational costs in full
- taking a distance learning programme who has no financial barriers to participation (for example, they do not have any travel costs or meal costs)
- in the care of the local authority who has covered their educational costs in full
- who is financially supported by their partner

In these circumstances, you should refuse the student's application. You should explain to the student and their support worker/parent where applicable, the aim of bursary funding and, as they have no costs, that financial support is not required. You should include these '[zero bursary](#)' students in your funding claim form.

We recommend you are clear in your bursary fund application form that there is a possibility of no financial support. This ensures all parties understand that meeting the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups does not automatically entitle them to funding. You must ensure your forms avoid any terminology such as 'guaranteed bursary' or wording such as 'you will automatically get a bursary of £1,200 if you are in one of the defined groups'.

5. Permitted use of funding: assessing eligibility and awarding support

You provide bursary funding to help students with for example, the cost of travel, to buy essential books, equipment, or specialist clothing (such as protective overalls, for example). These are items the student would otherwise need to pay for to participate.

The bursary fund is not intended to provide learning support – services that you give to students, for example, counselling or mentoring – or to support extra-curricular or non-essential activities that are not essential to the students' study programme or to provide living costs support. We do recognise that some students may need items of clothing and/or footwear to be able to access further education and continue to participate. Such items may be eligible for exceptional support from the bursary fund, but you must ensure any such expenditure is genuinely and directly about the student accessing their education provision. You must retain evidence of expenditure for audit purposes, including the rationale, amount, and purpose, along with receipts.

For the discretionary bursary, you set your own eligibility criteria but must comply with the eligibility conditions and funding rules set out in this guide. You must ensure that students are eligible for, and need help from, the bursary fund each year.

You must base all decisions about which students receive a bursary and how much bursary they receive on each student's individual circumstances and actual need. These will vary from student to student, depending on their household income (in the case of the discretionary bursary), and their actual costs, based on factors such as the distance they need to travel to the institution, and the requirements of their study programme.

You must not make blanket or flat rate/fixed rate payments that do not reflect students' actual costs and needs, for example:

- to all students who meet your discretionary bursary policy
- to students in particular income bands, set as part of your discretionary bursary policy
- to students whose families are in receipt of particular benefits
- to all students who are in the defined vulnerable groups

To give an example about families in receipt of particular benefits, if a student had previously benefitted from a free school meal, this may indicate they may be eligible, but the actual financial need will vary depending on personal circumstances. An individual assessment of actual financial needs must be made to determine this.

You must manage the number and size of discretionary bursary awards to keep within budget.

You may decide to retain a small emergency fund from your allocation to support students who face exceptional circumstances during the year due to a change in their situation – if it impacts on their ability to participate in education. Evidence of the student's eligibility, the individual assessment and the student's actual participation costs must be held for audit purposes as for any other bursary fund application/award and all bursary expenditure must be in line with the funding rules in this guide. You may also choose to top up the bursary with your own funds.

There is no set limit for the amount of discretionary bursary that can be awarded to students. You can award discretionary bursaries equal to or higher than the bursary for vulnerable groups maximum as long as you have clearly identified an individual student has actual costs that require this level of funding to participate. You must hold evidence or receipts to support

the costs paid from the discretionary bursary fund along with the rationale as part of your auditable record.

5.1 What the bursary fund cannot be used for

The bursary fund cannot be used to:

- provide learning support – services that institutions give to students. Examples include counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring or support such as servicing laptops/tablets
- support extra-curricular activities where these are not essential to the students' study programme goals and course objectives
- support the costs of foreign/overseas field trips where the content can be found within England at a much cheaper cost and/or to support the costs of fields trips that are not an essential part of a student's study programme goals or course objectives. Learning activities and experiences must be clearly mapped to show the link between the activity and the student's study programme goals or course objectives
- support general household incomes/general living costs (rent, bills, wi-fi and so on). This is out of scope and any such payments would be subject to the Social Security Amendment (Students and Income-related Benefits) Regulations 2000

You are not permitted to use the bursary fund in any way that would give you a competitive advantage over other institutions. Examples include:

- fees for access to facilities in the institution
- block subsidy of the canteen
- support for travel for all students regardless of family incomes or using the bursary fund to subsidise travel, for example, charging bursary supported students more than other students or charging bursary supported students when other students are not charged
- block provision of equipment, material, or books
- making bonus payments to reward attendance or achievement
- payments to support students' general living costs

You must not use the bursary as a way of incentivising attendance (for example, to award or guarantee additional payments if a student achieves specific attendance targets) or as a marketing tool to encourage students to choose one institution over another.

If you use non-bursary funds to provide free travel for all your students, you must make clear this is an offer from the institution and not support from the bursary fund.

5.2 Using household income for the discretionary bursary and establishing individual student need

You must ensure your discretionary bursary policy is focused on funding reaching those students who are most in need of financial support. This means you must use household income in some way to help establish which students are eligible for the discretionary bursary before confirming the actual amount of support a student may need. You can decide to use household income in conjunction with other factors, such as distance to travel from the institution and the number of dependent children in the household, as well as the actual participation needs the student has.

It is for you to decide the process you use to assess household income for the discretionary bursary, what you consider/include, the household income levels you use and the specific evidence you request from students/their families.

However, we are aware that some institutions are unsure about how to use UC award notices when these are provided as evidence of household income. The take-home pay figure in addition to the amount of UC after all deductions will give a total monthly income. The section on the notice called 'what we take off (deductions)' shows earnings reported by an employer or self-employed income and the expenses reported by the claimant, as appropriate. The format of the claim in a mobile view and desktop view will look slightly different, but both will contain the same information.

We suggest you ask for the 3 most recent monthly award statements. Using 3 months statements will act as a guide to the household income for a quarter of a year. You could then estimate assumed income for a full year.

You are encouraged to keep your bursary policies under review to ensure you continue to provide support to students who need it. For example, students from households being supported via lower income jobs could be in more financial need than a student in receipt of free school meals or where the family receives other benefits. An assessment of individual need should help to identify whether they are struggling to afford the books and equipment they need or to cover their essential travel costs.

The defined vulnerable group bursary is not subject to household income assessment, in the same way as the discretionary bursary, because eligibility is based on the student being in one of the defined groups.

However, all students, whether applying for the discretionary or defined vulnerable bursary, must have their actual participation needs assessed individually to determine the type and amount of support they need.

6. Publishing bursary fund policies

You must publish a policy or statement setting out how you will use your bursary fund. The document should be available early enough for students to use the information when they are making decisions about their post-16 options. Your eligibility criteria must be clear and available to us and to students. The policy document must state that the support available is from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and you must be mindful of this if you develop your own financial support branding, and/or use your own funding to enhance your offer to students.

You must comply with the requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf) (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf) when setting your criteria and must not discriminate against your students, either directly or indirectly, because of their protected characteristics.

Bursary fund policies must clearly set out what type of help you offer, for example, help with transport, books and equipment and other essential course-related costs and whether bursary support is available to contribute to the costs of attending industry placements, university interviews/open days, UCAS application fees or, at institutions' discretion, to top-up to Care to Learn funding, where necessary and appropriate.

Bursary funding can only be used to support the costs of field trips that are an essential part of achieving a student's study programme goals or supports the course objectives. This means learning activities and experiences must be clearly mapped to show the link between the activity and the student's study programme goals or course objectives.

The bursary can be used for transport costs but does not replace the statutory transport duty local authorities have. Each local authority will publish an annual transport statement to set out their arrangements to facilitate participation in education or training for students aged 16 to 19. You should consider the relevant local authority's transport statement and local offers when setting your bursary policy.

7. Managing bursary fund applications

You develop and use your own application forms for students to apply for support from the bursary fund. Application forms must capture all the relevant information for you to assess the application in line with the funding rules and conditions of funding, including defined vulnerable groups, household income for the discretionary bursary and the actual financial needs the student has to support their participation (such as help with travel or to buy essential books or equipment for example). The student must sign the application form.

Institutions delivering standard academic year provision may wish to specify that all applications for the bursary are submitted by a set date so they can assess the overall level of demand holistically and make discretionary awards on a fair basis. Any specific deadline date must be clearly stated in the application form and included in your bursary policy.

However, it is important to bear in mind that a student's circumstances and needs may change later in the year. A small emergency fund may be retained for this purpose but consequently, we recommend that there should be no absolute cut-off point for applications.

Institutions delivering short programmes, roll-on roll-off provision, or industry placements, must enable students to apply for help from the bursary fund at any point during the year.

Your application process must maintain confidentiality and your application form, promotional materials and so on, should emphasise this message, so students do not feel embarrassed about applying.

Application forms, bursary policies and any supporting information must all be clear that students who meet the criteria for bursaries for vulnerable groups are not automatically entitled to financial support if they do not have financial needs and/or their participation needs are covered from other sources. They may receive a lower amount of bursary or no bursary funding, if they do not have any actual participation costs.

It is best practice for students and/or their families to sign a declaration when they apply for help from the bursary to confirm that the evidence they have provided is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge and belief. Students and their families need to be made 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 informed that this might result in a referral to the police with the possibility of the student and/or their family facing prosecution.

You must communicate the outcome of the application to the student (the amount of bursary they have been awarded and for what purpose/what types of costs, for example, travel). You should also inform them how the costs will be paid, so in-kind or by payments to their bank account. You

must set out clearly what terms and conditions you are attaching to the funding, so, attendance, when you require any receipts to be provided or the return of equipment at the end of the study programme, for example. You must hold a record of the planned amount of funding required for each participation need, based on the actual needs of the student.

7.1 Paying bursary funding and providing support to eligible students

We encourage you to pay both defined vulnerable group and discretionary bursary funding to students in-kind rather than cash as far as possible. This helps ensure that the bursary is spent for the reasons it was awarded. In-kind payments can include travel passes, vouchers or credits for meals, required books and required equipment.

When you make in-kind payments, you must explain to the student the value of the payments and, if appropriate, how these have been deducted from the total value of their bursary support.

When you make bursary fund payments to students rather than providing support in-kind, it is good practice to pay the funding by BACS transfer to the student's own bank account. A basic bank account (which students can open at age 16) allows BACS transfers and allows the student to withdraw money.

You must insist that students only spend the bursary payments you make to them on the support that has been identified as necessary to help them participate in education. This means you must specify students should only use the funds to pay for travel costs and/or a meal during the day, to buy equipment or any other support that has been agreed.

You should make the value of the support and any terms/conditions clear to the student in the confirmation letter/document you give to them.

Receipts for expenditure and purchases made with bursary funding form part of the audit and assurance of the scheme. Receipts are evidence that funding is being used for the reasons it was awarded. For standard weekly costs like travel and food, it may not be practical to collect receipts for every transaction, so costs can be evidenced initially by receipts then paid after that linked to attendance patterns. Students could then be asked to provide receipts to the institution at various points in the year (for example) which could form part of the terms/conditions set out in the award letter/confirmation document to students.

You must remember that the purpose of the bursary is to provide help to those who need it to participate and remain in education. Asking students to incur expenditure and provide a receipt first before providing any funding does not reflect the policy intent which is why payment in-kind rather than in cash is recommended.

We do not expect bursary payments to be paid into another person's account, except in exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to administer their own account. If the student cannot manage their own funds, you will need to consider who will manage the bursary on the student's behalf.

Where payments are made, it is good practice to make these on a regular basis (weekly, for example) as this helps students manage their finances. It also means that if a student has a payment withheld due to failing to meet the conditions you have set, they will not be left without financial support for a long period. However, you should take decisions based on the reasons the bursary was awarded, the student's circumstances and local arrangements.

You must not make large or lump sum bursary payments to students.

7.2 Conditions for receiving bursary funding

You must make payments for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups and the discretionary bursary conditional on the student meeting agreed standards of attendance and behaviour. You must ensure that standards you set are clear and that students understand them. Examples might be attending all required classes, demonstrating agreed standards of behaviours and so on.

You must ensure you obtain and retain evidence that a student has seen and agreed to the conditions. This might be an agreement signed by the student or a signed declaration that forms part of the institution's bursary fund application form.

You can withhold payments if a student does not meet agreed standards, but you should always consider the individual circumstances of the student. You must retain copies of documents the student has signed to give formal agreement to their conditions for payment. This might include attendance, returning equipment at the end of their study programme for certain points in the year when they need to provide receipts for expenditure, for example.

If you purchase books or equipment, such as a laptop or internet dongle that is necessary for the student to complete their study programme, you can purchase it with bursary funds. We recommend you specify the student

must return it once they have completed their study programme so it can be used again by another student where appropriate. If keeping equipment on campus is the best way of ensuring this happens, you have the right to set this as a condition.

7.3 Institutions' responsibilities in managing complaints or appeals

Any student or parent who is unhappy with how an institution has managed their application for bursary funding or the support that has been provided, must follow the institution's own complaints procedure. You should manage the escalation of complaints about the bursary fund in the same way as any other complaint you may receive.

We do not have a role in the administration of bursary funding to students because this is the responsibility of individual institutions. As such, we do not usually get involved with complaints and you should not routinely advise students or parents to contact us. We may get involved if there is an allegation that the bursary fund eligibility criteria or any content within this guide is being disregarded.

8. Receipt of DWP benefits and the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund

You may wish to highlight to students and parents 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 (the [Universal Credit section](#) of this document contains more detail about this benefit).

If a student 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.

You must not make bursary fund payments as payments for 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.

9. Payments and funding claims: bursary for defined vulnerable groups

9.1 The funding claim process

We will manage the funding claims process differently to the process operated by SBSS in previous years:

Funding claims will be available and submitted through your [DfE Sign-In account \(https://services.signin.education.gov.uk/\)](https://services.signin.education.gov.uk/). We have [published guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-care-to-learn-and-16-to-19-bursary-fund-for-defined-vulnerable-groups-funding-claim\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-the-care-to-learn-and-16-to-19-bursary-fund-for-defined-vulnerable-groups-funding-claim) to support you in completing the form.

It is important to emphasise that the dates for each claim window below are indicative and may be subject to change. We will issue additional communications ahead of each claim window and will update this guide later in the year.

We expect the first funding claim window to open on 8 September 2025 and close on 12 November 2025. This is the window in which we expect most institutions will submit their funding claims.

Payments will be made in February 2026 (March for academies) after all checks, validations and quality assurance processes have been completed. This will include a validation against the [individualised learner record \(ILR\)](#) or school census as appropriate. We may request additional evidence from you as part of these checks. Payments will be via the usual payment mechanism for the relevant institution type. The amount you receive will be the total required for the academic year.

Funding claims that miss the specified closing date for the first window will not be accepted and must be submitted in the second claims window.

We expect the second funding claim window to open on 5 January 2026 and close on 11 February 2026. This window will enable institutions to submit new funding claims.

Payments will be made in April 2026 (May for academies) after all checks and quality assurance processes have been completed. As in the first window, we may request additional evidence from you before making payment.

Funding claims must include all the students you have verified as eligible. You must have seen and verified evidence that the student meets their specific defined vulnerable group in full before submitting a funding claim. You must assess, and be able to evidence, the actual amount of funding each student needs, based on their specific participation costs, with the amount you request reflecting that. You must not automatically request £1,200 if the student does not need that amount of funding.

Funding claims that miss the specified closing date for the second window will not be accepted and must be submitted in the final claims window.

We expect the third and final window to open on 18 May 2026 and close on 1 July 2026. This window is primarily for end year reconciliation (any funds claimed in error because a student ultimately was not eligible or any funds that you wish to return). You may also submit any late funding claims if you need to.

Any resulting recovery action and any final additional payments will be made in September 2026 (October for academies). Recoveries will be made by off-setting against other DfE payments.

All our funded institutions in receipt of a discretionary bursary allocation in the academic year can submit a funding claim for bursaries for vulnerable groups if you have eligible students that you assess need financial help. Payment will be dependent on whether you have signed and returned your DfE funding contract.

9.2 Payment summary

Purpose	Dates	Payment
Initial claims	September 2025 to November 2025	February 2026 (March for academies)
New claims	January 2026 to February 2026	April 2026 (May for academies)
Final claims and any reconciliation	May 2026 to July 2026	September 2026 (October for academies)

9.3 Bank account details

It is important you keep your bank account and contact details up to date with us as any discrepancies will impact on payments. You should request a change to change your bank account details, by completing the [online form \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/provide-information-about-your-banking-and-payments-to-dfe\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/provide-information-about-your-banking-and-payments-to-dfe) and send any queries about amending your bank account to: dfe.standingdata@education.gov.uk

9.4 Funding claims for students placed in independent provision

Local authorities remain responsible, as they were via SBSS managed claims process, for submitting funding claims for students they have placed in independent provision if they are eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups and have a financial need.

The independent education institution is responsible for verifying that students meet the eligibility criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups, including obtaining evidence and assessing their actual need for help. Once the institution is satisfied the student is eligible for support and needs an agreed amount of support, they should contact the relevant local authority. The local authority cannot submit a funding claim to DfE without formal confirmation of eligibility from the institution. Confirmation must be given by sending the local authority a copy of the evidence and setting out in writing/by email that an appropriate assessment of need has been conducted to determine the amount of support required.

We will pay the funding to the local authority. Education institutions making funding claims through local authorities must ensure they liaise with the local authority finance contact to ensure the bursary funds are redirected to them as appropriate.

9.5 Recycling bursaries for vulnerable groups funding

You may accrue some unused funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups during the academic year. For example, if a student leaves their study programme early after only receiving part of their bursary, or you do not pay the full amount to a student because they did not meet the agreed conditions. You are expected to recycle this funding and use it to support other eligible students.

You can add any funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups you have claimed, but no longer need, for eligible students to your discretionary

bursary allocation from 1 May 2026. Alternatively, if you assess you cannot fully use the funds, you can return them to DfE in the third funding claims window for end year reconciliation.

Where an institution has incorrectly claimed funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups (for example, you submitted a funding claim without properly verifying a student met the criteria), you should try to recycle the funding for other eligible students, maintaining the evidence to support this. But if you have no other students who are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups, the incorrectly claimed funds cannot be added to your discretionary bursary allocation. Instead, you must report the funds to us in the third funding claim window for end of year reconciliation and we will recover the funds.

9.6 Zero bursary students

If you hold enough funds to cover the costs of a bursary for defined vulnerable group student in full or if you have decided that a young person in one or more of the defined vulnerable groups does not have any actual financial need, these are 'zero bursary' students. You must include these 'zero' bursary students in your funding claim. This helps give us information on the number of 16 to 19 students in education who are in each of the defined vulnerable groups and helps inform future 16 to 19 funding.

10. Payments and allocations: discretionary bursaries

10.1 Allocations

We make discretionary bursary allocations to institutions that have a 16 to 19 contract or funding agreement each year.

If an institution operates from more than one location across England, or operates through subcontracts, we will make the allocation to the lead office for distribution to each site. You should ensure that students attending provision delivered by subcontractors or at different sites can apply for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. The lead institution is responsible for ensuring the bursary fund is administered appropriately at each site and at any subcontractor to ensure students can access support.

The methodology for calculating discretionary bursary allocations has 2 elements:

10.2 Element 1: financial disadvantage

Element 1, disadvantage, is calculated based on students' home postcodes, matched against the [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) 2019](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>). The IMD is a government index that uses statistics on education, crime, health, employment, and income to determine how disadvantaged an area is. Financial disadvantage instance values are assigned to students living in the 27% most deprived areas of the country.

10.3 Element 2: a) student costs to support travel and b) industry placements

Element 2, student costs, is intended to provide a general indicator of the main costs faced by students.

Element 2a calculates an amount of funding for travel to support non-residential students whose home postcode is in the top 60% most deprived areas (based on IMD 2019). The calculation factors in both the rurality of the student's home postcode and distance between the student's home postcode and the delivery location of their learning.

Element 2b considers whether the student's industry placement through their participation on a T Level programme qualifies an institution for bursary funding. The calculation factors in the proportion of each institution's students whose home postcode is in the top 60% most deprived areas (based on IMD 2019). Only institutions approved to deliver T Levels (up to and including wave 5) in academic year 2025 to 2026 are in scope for this funding.

Both elements are based on analysis of data from academic year 2023 to 2024, to gauge the underlying student factors that inform an institution's academic year 2025 to 2026 discretionary bursary allocation.

Institutions' local bursary policies do not need to be split into these 2 elements, nor do they need to be referred to. These elements form part of the allocations methodology only. There is no restriction between the different elements and institutions can use their allocation flexibly, to support the needs of their students.

The [16 to 19 funding allocation statement guides](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocation-statement-guides) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-funding-allocation-statement-guides>) explains how we calculate your 16 to 19 funding allocation.

In a small number of instances, a 'by exception' process will be used. For example, the application of averages may be used where there is no end of year data available. This will be made clear to any institutions affected.

10.4 Payment schedule

Discretionary bursary allocations are paid in 2 parts: two-thirds in August 2025, one-third in April 2026. The first payment for academies is September, in line with general academy payment schedules.

10.5 Converter academies

Any school sixth forms that convert to academies in September will have already received their first bursary payment in August (via the local authority as school sixth forms). We will make subsequent bursary payments directly to the academy.

10.6 Maintained schools

We make discretionary bursary allocations to maintained schools with a DfE-funded sixth form through local authorities. Local authorities must pass this bursary funding to the school.

10.7 Maintained special schools

Local authorities will receive discretionary bursary funding to support students at maintained special schools (MSS). The discretionary bursary allocation methodology is applied to the number of students recorded in the 2023 to 2024 full-year census return and requires the use of calculations based on averages. This bursary funding is aggregated and paid as a single allocation to each local authority. Local authorities should distribute the funding across all their MSSs, according to need, using their own local knowledge and judgment.

10.8 New institutions

We will make discretionary bursary funding available to institutions that start delivering eligible education and training for us for the first time in academic year 2025 to 2026. This could be during or after the 2025 to 2026 allocations round. These allocations will require the use of calculations based on averages.

To be eligible for an allocation, the institution must meet the eligible provision criteria set out in this guide. We may also undertake a financial health assessment on the institution before deciding to allocate funding.

10.9 Administration contribution

You are permitted to use up to 5% of your academic year 2025 to 2026 discretionary bursary allocation for administrative costs relating to the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. Institutions that receive both a 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and free meals in FE allocation are permitted to use up to 5% of the combined allocation for that year for administration. You must ensure you do not take a sum that is greater than 5% of the single allocation total you receive for the academic year.

11. Rules for returning unspent bursary funds

We permit you to carry unspent bursary funds over to the next academic year. You must continue to use any funds carried forward to support students in line with the funding rules in this guide. You cannot add the funds to general institution funds.

When you are given a single overall allocation that includes funding for both free meals and the bursary fund, you can carry forward funds from both schemes. You can use this funding for either free meals or bursary fund payments in the new academic year.

You cannot carry forward funding for the bursary fund and/or free meals funding for more than one year. This means you must return unspent funds from any year up to and including academic year 2023 to 2024.

Below is an example of how you can calculate the funds you need to return:

11.1 Example: Calculating unspent funds to be returned

Bursary funding allocation for year 2025 to 2026	£400,000
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Bursary funding from 2024 to 2025 allocation carried forward at year end	£50,000
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Bursary funding allocation for year 2025 to 2026	£400,000
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Bursary funding from 2023 to 2024 allocation (or earlier) carried forward into 2024 to 2025 at year end (unspent funding from previous years) to be returned	£50,000
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Amount available for 2025 to 2026 (£400k allocation + £50k carry-over from 2024 to 2025)	£450,000
--	----------

You must fully use any unspent funds for either discretionary bursary or free meals or return them, in line with the one-year rule.

You must inform us of the total amount of any unspent funds that you have not previously reported from any year up to and including academic year 2023 to 2024. You must report the unspent funding via our [customer help centre \(https://customerhelp.education.gov.uk/hc/en-gb\)](https://customerhelp.education.gov.uk/hc/en-gb). You must specify the amount of funding and the year or years it relates to. You must do this as soon as you are aware; however, you must report it no later than 31 March each year. We will recover all unspent funds.

16 to 19 Bursary Funds are subject to normal assurance arrangements for 16 to 19 education and training. Local authorities are also required, via the local authority section 151 grant return process, to confirm that they have used the funding we have paid to them for the purpose it was intended. The bursary fund forms parts of this process. Any funding declared by local authorities as not being used for the purpose it was intended, or which cannot be properly accounted for, is also recovered.

12. In-year growth

16 to 19 Bursary Fund and free meals in FE allocations are linked to allocated student numbers in the ILR or census. This means an increased student number allocation resulting from the exceptional in-year growth for student numbers process may also result in increased bursary and/or free meals allocations.

In addition, and subject to budget availability, we will release additional bursary funding outside the main growth process, where analysis of the data suggests that an increased student number could put an institution's bursary allocation under considerable pressure. Additional bursary funding may be awarded where student over-delivery is expected to be 25 or more above the number already allocated (plus any exceptional in-year growth award).

As with all other strands of in-year growth, we make growth awards on the assumption that the in-year data used is materially accurate. If later data returns (usually the R14) show that the in-year data returns are inaccurate, we will recover some or all the bursary and/or free meals in FE growth award.

13. Data returns, including the ILR and school census

You must complete the ILR or school census, as appropriate, to indicate the numbers of students receiving support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. This must include any students eligible for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups but who do not require support ('[zero bursary' students](#)). We will validate your bursary for defined vulnerable groups funding claim against the ILR or school census data as part of our pre-payment checks. We may also use the ILR data field or school census data to review your use of the bursary against the amount of allocated funding. More information about the student support codes (LSR 55 and LSR 56 both relate to the bursary fund) in the ILR can be found in the [ILR specification: 2025 to 2026](https://guidance.submit-learner-data.service.gov.uk/25-26/ilr/entity/LearnerFAM/field/LearnFAMType) (<https://guidance.submit-learner-data.service.gov.uk/25-26/ilr/entity/LearnerFAM/field/LearnFAMType>) guidance.

You must also ensure you complete the ILR or census fields to provide data on the number of students participating in industry placements.

In addition to the completion of the ILR or school census, we may undertake survey activity to monitor how effective the allocations methodology is, providing information on how institutions are using the funding. Your co-operation in completing the survey is appreciated.

14. Audit, assurance, and fraud

16 to 19 Bursary Funds are subject to normal assurance arrangements for 16 to 19 education and training. You must ensure you have robust and appropriate processes in place to record bursary applications and expenditure at student level. This must include a breakdown of the value, purpose, type of cost, whether paid or not, and a brief justification for the decision.

For standard weekly costs like travel and food, it may not be practical to collect receipts for every transaction, so costs may be evidenced initially by receipts then paid after that linked to attendance patterns.

You must also be able to confirm, during any audit, the amount of any unspent funds that have been carried forward to the current academic year.

You must ensure you can evidence your application process, how the student was assessed as eligible, how you made the decision to award the specific amount of bursary based on actual financial need and the funds that you have issued to the student. Auditors will be looking for evidence that you have a clear bursary policy, have applied your bursary fund eligibility criteria correctly and used a consistent application and assessment process for all students.

You must retain copies of documents the student has signed to give formal agreement to their conditions for payment. This might include attendance, returning equipment at the end of their study programme or certain points in the year when they need to provide receipts for expenditure, for example.

You must retain hard or scanned copies of documentation to support eligibility, and the funding claimed for 6 years (records can be kept electronically). This includes the application form, the household income evidence for the discretionary bursary and evidence of actual financial need.

Examples of documentation auditors expect to see include:

14.1 For the bursary for vulnerable groups:

- a copy of the funding claim sent to DfE
- evidence showing that the student is eligible, for example, a letter from DWP or the local authority or a copy of the student's online UC statement

- evidence of payments received from DfE, for example bank statements and remittance advices
- a copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need, along with a breakdown of the calculation that has determined the amount required by the student
- receipts for purchases or in-kind support provided to the student, for example, bus pass, lunch receipts or book receipts
- attendance evidence to support payments

14.2 For the discretionary bursary:

- evidence used to assess eligibility and determine household income, such as P60's, self-employment accounts, wage slips, a letter from DWP, copies of online statements for UC
- a copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need, including a breakdown of the calculation that has determined the amount awarded
- receipts for purchases or in-kind support provided to the student, for example, bus/travel pass, travel tickets, lunch receipts or book receipts
- evidence to support the value of any cash payments made to the student such as travel pass, bus tickets or meal deals
- attendance evidence to support payments

Local authorities are also required, via the local authority section 151 grant return process, to confirm that they have used the funding we paid to them for the purpose it was intended. The 16 to 19 bursary fund forms parts of this process. Any funding declared by local authorities as not being used for the purpose it was intended, or which cannot be properly accounted for, is also recovered.

14.3 Common audit errors

Common errors identified at audit, which can lead to the recovery of funds, include:

- making blanket or flat rate/fixed rate payments (whether £1,200 or any other amount) to students and payments not based on actual need or the types of costs they have. For example, awarding a student £10 a week when their travel costs are £3.50, and they have no other defined costs

- no clear bursary fund policy in place which explains, for example, the criteria the institution will use to assess students and how they will make decisions about the amount of support they award
- bursary fund application forms which are not fit for purpose because they do not capture all the necessary evidence to confirm the student's household income and the actual participation costs they have
- application forms not completed and signed by students each year to allow an assessment of their current financial needs to be made
- for the discretionary bursary, financial assessments not always being undertaken or undertaken based on partial/incomplete evidence
- For the bursary for defined vulnerable groups, incomplete evidence to verify students meet the criteria, for example, evidence of receipt only of PIP and not the other required benefit/s
- Using bursary funding to pay for foreign/overseas field trips where the content can be found in England at a cheaper cost and/or using bursary funding to support field trips that are not an essential part of achieving a student's study programme goals. The bursary fund can only be used to support learning activities and experiences that are clearly mapped to show the link between the student's study programme goals or course objectives
- evidence to support household income for the discretionary bursary not being retained

It is good practice to use an eligibility checklist to ensure a clear and complete bursary fund process is followed, in line with the funding rules set out in this guide. This guide includes an [example checklist](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance>) which you may wish to use.

This guide also includes a [summary document](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance>) which lists the most important things you need to consider when administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, based on common errors and issues DfE auditors have identified.

We will recover funds where auditors identify funding errors in any circumstances where you are not able to demonstrate at audit how your students meet the eligibility criteria and conditions of funding, where you do not have sufficient evidence to support payments made to students, and in any circumstances where you have claimed defined vulnerable group bursary payments for duplicate students.

We take any concerns relating to financial irregularity or impropriety seriously. We will investigate where we assess those concerns have been raised in good faith and there is sufficient evidence to warrant it. [Further guidance and contact details](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/complaints-procedure>) are available on GOV.UK.

You are responsible for investigating instances of fraud relating to bursary fund applications. If you find evidence that a student or parent has knowingly submitted misleading or fraudulent information, resulting in the student receiving a bursary they were not entitled to, you must attempt to recover the overpayment from the student.

Institutions that identify significant fraud must report it to us. Significant fraud may involve one or more of the following:

- the amount of money is over £1,200
- the particulars of the fraud are novel, unusual, systemic, or complex
- there is likely to be great public interest because of the nature of the fraud or the people involved

15. Free meals in further education

Institutions that receive allocations for both free meals in further education and the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund discretionary bursary have flexibility to use the funding as a single allocation. You must manage the single allocation appropriately to ensure all students eligible for a free meal receive one (including when they are attending a work placement) in line with the [free meals guide](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students#free-meals-in-further-education) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students#free-meals-in-further-education>).

Before the introduction of additional funding for free meals, institutions had supported the cost of meals for students who needed them from discretionary bursaries. We will continue to adjust discretionary allocations to take account of this double funding for those institutions also in receipt of an allocation for free meals.

Where students are eligible for a free meal, you must ensure you consider the provision of a free meal, or the funding provided to the student for the free meal, when you assess their overall need for support, whether from the discretionary bursary or bursaries for vulnerable groups to prevent double funding.

16. Other useful information

This section provides information on specific groups of students to help inform institution's eligibility decisions.

16.1 Industry placements

A few students may find themselves facing financial difficulties due to incurring extra participation costs, for example, because they need to pay for additional travel to their placement. These students may only need support for a short period of time.

16.2 Young offenders

Young offenders can apply for a bursary if they:

- are serving a non-custodial sentence
- have been released early from a custodial sentence (except on temporary license)
- have been remanded to a non-secure institution

Young offenders cannot apply for a bursary if they:

- are serving a custodial sentence
- have been released from a custodial sentence on temporary license
- have been remanded to a secure institution

You should provide in-kind support to young offenders rather than cash wherever possible.

16.3 Residents of Scotland

If a student lives in Scotland and travels to study at an English institution, they must approach their home local authority in Scotland to make an application for [Scottish Education Maintenance Allowances](https://www.mygov.scot/ema/?via=http://www.emascotland.com/) (EMA). These students are not eligible to apply for support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

If a student lives in England and travels to study at a Scottish institution, they must approach their home local authority in England to make an application for a discretionary or vulnerable group bursary. These students are not eligible for Scottish EMA.

16.4 Residents of Wales

If a student lives in Wales and travels to study at an English institution, they must approach their home local authority to make an application for [Welsh EMA \(https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe/ema.aspx\)](https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe/ema.aspx).

These students may also apply to their English institution for help from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund discretionary bursary but are not eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups. You should consider any support the student is receiving from Wales before making any bursary award.

All students living in England and travelling to Wales to study who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups are eligible to apply for one if they have a financial need. They must approach their home local authority in England to make an application.

17. Good practice

The following section highlights some areas of good practice in administering both types of bursary fund.

17.1 Raising awareness of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund

Examples of policies and procedures designed to raise early awareness of the bursary include the below:

A college has information about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund on their website and in their prospectus, as well as on posters that are on display around the college throughout the year. The college distributes information at open evenings for year 11 pupils from local schools. Further information, including an application form, is available following enrolment and all new entrants receive a text message and email about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund soon after the start of the academic year.

In another college, as well as information about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund being in prospectuses and posters, the college works with local support services to target potential students who are homeless and provide them with information.

One college raises awareness about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund by providing information to prospective students prior to enrolment at open evenings, talks at schools and so on. Any young person who attends a pre-enrolment interview gets a card with brief information on the bursary and pointers directing them to the full information on the college's website. In addition, social workers who work with the most disadvantaged young people help the college to identify those who may be eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups.

Another college uses text messages throughout the year to inform students of the financial support available to them. In the summer term, text messages are sent to inform students that application forms are available to download and complete.

17.2 Identifying students eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups

You can take the initiative to identify students eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups by working with the local authority, looked after children's education services and care leaver services, to encourage students to apply. Institutions and local authorities can also set up local data sharing agreements to share information about which students might be in need.

Below are some examples of working with local stakeholders to identify eligible young people:

In one area, institutions include information on the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund in a bulletin to social worker contacts. This is published 3 times a year, and ensures contacts are updated about the bursary.

Another college's Inclusion Manager, who has developed links with local agencies working with vulnerable young people (YMCA, Social Services, and Youth Offending Teams), identifies young people who might need support. This helps the college identify young people likely to be in need before enrolment. They then assist in completing the application process if appropriate.

One college promotes the bursary through partner organisations, social services, foster parent networks, schools, asylum support teams and youth offending and health services. The college works with these organisations to

identify and engage with young people considering further education and to provide opportunities to discuss the support they may need.

17.3 Identifying students who may need support from the discretionary bursary

We recognise it can be difficult for you to identify which students may need help from the discretionary bursary if they do not proactively ask for support. General further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, school sixth forms, 16 to 19 academies and special post-16 institutions can access Get Information about Pupils (GIAP) through your DfE sign-in account which may help identify students you could proactively approach to see if they require support.

You must not use this information to guarantee support or to offer blanket support to students. However, it could be a helpful source of information for you to use to identify students you could proactively approach to see if financial support is required (subject to the usual assessment of individual need).

17.4 Young people with caring responsibilities

Young people with caring responsibilities, for example, caring for a parent or other relative, may be reluctant to say so because of fear of being stigmatised. You must ensure confidentiality to reduce these concerns, publicise the availability of help from the bursary fund and encourage young carers to apply where they have a financial need.

When assessing young carers' eligibility for support from the bursary, you could consider whether they have had a young carers assessment (which includes questions about the support they need for education), whether they access a young carers service, whether their GP could confirm their caring role or whether they receive Carers Allowance.

17.5 Working with other organisations

You are encouraged to work with other local institutions and the local authority to agree a common approach to the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. This could include you working together to identify and support eligible students,

pool funds, and centrally manage and administer the bursary. For example, one group of colleges has created a Learning Executive with representatives from each local college. This meets regularly and sets a consistent approach to financial support across all colleges in the area.

17.6 Paying bursary funding to students

You must ensure students and their families know who they should contact if they have any queries about payments.

Some examples of different payment approaches used by institutions are below:

One institution involves carers and social workers in establishing the most appropriate way of getting the funding to the young person. At the beginning of term, if the student needs specialist equipment and/or a travel pass, the college purchases this and deducts the cost from the student's overall award. In cases where a carer has responsibility for the young person's finances, the institution sets up meetings with them to decide how payments should be made.

In another institution, a financial support advisor interviews students to decide together on the best way to deliver his or her support. They address priority areas first: travel to college, equipment costs and support with studies. They also discuss additional expenditure, such as university visits.

One institution pays students a greater amount of funding at the start of their course so they can pay for equipment and course-related items. Students use travel vouchers to pay for bus fares. The student services team meet with the students regularly to help them with budgeting.

18. Further information

These funding rules provide the information that you need to administer the bursary fund and must be consulted before contacting us. However, if you have a question that is not answered by this guide, you can contact us via our [customer help portal \(https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/access-the-enquiry-portal/\)](https://customerhelpportal.education.gov.uk/access-the-enquiry-portal/).



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