

Bursaries & Free College Meals — Frequently Asked Questions

College Support Scheme 2026–27

General

Q: What is the College Support Scheme?

A: It's Buckinghamshire College Group's financial support offer for students whose circumstances make it harder to participate fully in their course. It covers bursaries, discretionary learner support, childcare funding, and Free College Meals.

Q: Is financial support guaranteed if eligible?

A: No. Support is not automatic. Funding is limited each year, and every application is individually assessed against **evidenced need** and the funds available at the time.

Q: How is it decided who gets support when funds are limited?

A: Applications are prioritised in this order:

- 1) students in **vulnerable groups** (care leavers, looked-after children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, EHCP/high needs learners),
- 2) students from **low-income** households, and
- 3) students facing other **evidenced financial hardship**. Date of application does not determine priority.

Q: Does applying early improve my chances?

A: Applying early doesn't move you ahead of a higher-priority application, but it does mean your evidence is in the system sooner, which avoids unnecessary delay to your own application.

Bursaries

Q: What bursaries and support funds are available?

A: 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary, 16-19/19+ Discretionary Bursary, 19+ Discretionary Learner Support, 20+ Childcare, and the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund. Each has different eligibility criteria based on age, income and circumstances — see the **Bursary & Free School Meals Guidance** for full details.

Q: How much bursary could I get?

A: £1,200 is the maximum award per academic year. This is a ceiling, not a typical amount — most awards are based on your specific, evidenced costs, and may be a partial or staged amount where funding is limited.

Q: What can bursary funding be used for?

A: Course-associated costs such as equipment, materials and books, essential (mandatory) trips, travel, and, depending on the fund, lunch or childcare.

Q: What evidence do I need to provide?

A: **Original documents** evidencing household income or a qualifying benefit — for example, Universal Credit, Pension Credit, income-related ESA, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, recent payslips, or an SA302 if you're self-employed.

Q: How long does an application take to process?

A: Applications can take up to 5 weeks to process once your application and evidence are complete. Applications are usually busiest in the first few weeks of term, so apply as early as possible after enrolling and be ready to self-fund initially where you can.

Q: How will I be paid?

A: Usually directly into your bank account by BACS. In some cases, the College may pay a service provider directly instead for example, a bus or train company, or a childcare provider.

Q: Is my bursary linked to my attendance?

A: Yes. You're expected to maintain at least **90% attendance** at timetabled lessons to keep receiving payments. If attendance drops below this for a genuine reason — illness, caring responsibilities, or disability — tell Student Services and provide evidence, as flexibility may be considered.

Q: Will receiving a bursary affect my benefits?

A: It might. Bursary and support fund payments can affect entitlement to other benefits such as Universal Credit, JSA or ESA. It's your responsibility to declare any funds you receive if this applies to you.

Q: What happens if I withdraw from my course?

A: The College reserves the right to ask for any money paid, or equipment purchased on your behalf, to be returned.

Q: What if my circumstances change during the year?

A: You must tell Student Services about any change in circumstances — for example, income, household, or benefit status — as this may affect your ongoing eligibility.

Childcare Funding

Q: Who can apply for childcare funding?

A: Students aged 20+ with a household income of £50,000 or below, who have one or more children and are in receipt of child benefit. Students under 20 should apply through the Government's Care to Learn scheme instead.

Q: Does my childcare provider need to be registered?

A: Yes — all childcare providers must be Ofsted registered. Informal childcare, such as care provided by family members or friends, cannot be funded.

Q: What happens if my child is absent from childcare regularly?

A: Consistent absence can lead to your childcare funding being withdrawn, and you would become responsible for any outstanding fees to your provider.

Q: What notice do I need to give my childcare provider?

A: You're required to give your provider one month's written notice before leaving or finishing your course. Your childcare agreement is between you and the provider, and College payments stop when your course ends.

Free College Meals

Q: Who is eligible for Free College Meals?

A: You'll usually qualify if you're aged 16-18 (or 19-25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan) and you or your family receive: income-related Employment and Support Allowance, support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the guarantee element of State Pension Credit, or Universal Credit.

Q: I received free school meals at my previous school or college — do I need to reapply?

A: You may be protected and able to continue receiving free meals at BCG up until the end of the 2026-27 academic year. You will still need to apply and we'll need evidence from your previous setting or local authority to confirm this.

Q: How do I apply for Free College Meals?

A: Speak to Student Services and provide evidence of your eligibility. Once confirmed, you'll receive a free meal on every day you're timetabled to be in college.

Appeals

Q: What can I do if my application is unsuccessful?

A: You can first discuss your concerns informally with a member of staff in Student Services. If you're still unhappy with the outcome, you can submit a written appeal using the appeal form available from Student Services. Appeals must be for a valid reason and supported by evidence.

Q: Who decides the outcome of an appeal?

A: Appeals are considered by a panel, and the panel's decision is final.

Contact

Have a question that isn't covered here? Contact Student Services at your campus or email bursaries@buckscollegigroup.ac.uk and we will be happy to help you. Further details on the Financial Support can be viewed on [College Support Scheme for Students 2026-27](#)