

# **College Support Scheme for Students 2026-27**

|                       |                                                         |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Responsible Officer:  | Director of Student Services                            |
| Date:                 | June 2026                                               |
| Review Date:          | June 2027                                               |
| Procedure available:  | Intranet and Website                                    |
| Policy authorised by: | Executive and Curriculum, Quality and Student Committee |

## 1 Summary of Changes (2025–26 → 2026–27)

- Shift to a Needs-Led Prioritisation Model (Major Change)
  - 2025–26:
    - Funding based on eligibility + demonstrated need, but no clear structured prioritisation model
  - 2026–27:
    - Introduction of a formal priority system:
      - Priority 1: Vulnerable groups
      - Priority 2: Low-income households
      - Priority 3: Other hardship
- Stronger Emphasis on “Need Over Entitlement”
  - 2025–26:
    - States funding is not guaranteed and depends on need
  - 2026–27:
    - Reinforced messaging that:
    - Support is not automatic
    - Must evidence actual participation costs and need
  - Key change:  
Stronger focus on fair distribution and justification of awards
- Introduction of Attendance Expectations (Strengthened)
  - 2025–26:
    - Attendance expectations are implied but less explicit in policy wording
  - 2026–27:
    - Clear requirement:
      - 90% attendance expectation
      - Payments may be adjusted based on attendance
- Clearer Funding Allocation and Limits
  - 2025–26:
    - Mentions bursaries (up to £1200 typical nationally)
    - Less explicit on structured allocation approach
  - 2026–27:
    - Clearer statements:
      - Maximum £1,200 cap
      - Tiered / partial awards to spread funding fairly
- More Detailed Application & Processing Guidance
  - 2025–26:
    - General application process explained
  - 2026–27:
    - More explicit:
      - 5-week processing time
      - Students may need to self-fund initially
      - Stronger encouragement to apply early

- Increased Financial Control and Compliance
  - 2025–26:
    - Standard rules on evidence and payments [buckscolle...roup.ac.uk]
  - 2026–27:
    - Clearer controls:
      - More emphasis on evidence of income
      - Stronger statements on:
        - repayment if withdrawn
        - declaring benefit impact
        - changes in circumstances
- Expanded Detail on Childcare and Payments
  - 2025–26:
    - Childcare support included but less detailed
  - 2026–27:
    - Significantly expanded:
      - OFSTED requirement
      - responsibility of student contracts
      - attendance-linked withdrawal
- Alignment with Cost-of-Living and Local Context
  - 2025–26:
    - Focus on general financial hardship [buckscolle...roup.ac.uk]
  - 2026–27:
    - Explicit reference to:
      - local cost of living pressures
      - supporting disadvantaged learners more strategically
- Improved Structure and Clarity
  - 2025–26:
    - Standard policy layout
  - 2026–27:
    - More clearly structured:
      - defined funding categories
      - clearer eligibility criteria
      - simplified explanations

## 2 One-Line Summary

The 2026–27 policy introduces a **more structured, needs-led and accountable approach**, with stronger prioritisation, clearer funding rules, increased compliance, and improved transparency compared to the 2025–26 version.

### 3 Strategic Overview

Buckinghamshire College Group is committed to supporting students whose financial circumstances create a barrier to participation, attendance, and continuation in education. The College will use the financial support available to help students who are most disadvantaged and in greatest need to access and remain in learning, with awards made on the basis of individual need and the availability of funding.

### 4 Scope of Policy

This policy sets out how students can access the College Support Scheme, which includes funding provided by the Department for Education and other applicable public funding streams. The scheme is designed to help eligible students with the costs of participating in education, such as travel, equipment, course materials, meals and childcare where appropriate.

Funding is limited and applications will be considered throughout the year. Awards will be made on the basis of eligibility, demonstrated need, and available funding. Where demand exceeds available funds, the College will prioritise students with the greatest financial barriers to participation rather than determine awards solely by date of application.

There are various forms of financial support available:

- a) 16-19 Vulnerable Learner Bursary
- b) 16-19 Discretionary Bursary
- c) 19+ Discretionary Learner Support (DLS)
- d) 20+ Childcare
- e) Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund
- f) Free College Meals

### 5 The Policy

Financial support is not automatic. Eligible students must demonstrate a genuine financial need, and awards will be made based on an assessment of individual circumstances, participation costs, and available funds. The College may prioritise applications from students facing the greatest barriers to participation, including those from vulnerable or low-income households.

The College will make decisions fairly, consistently, and in line with equality legislation. Information provided by applicants will be treated confidentially and used only for the purpose of assessing eligibility and need

Whilst respecting an individual's right to confidentiality, the College also reserves the right to enquire into their financial circumstances to determine their actual need as required by Government funding rules and guidance. This information is retained and exchanged for the sole purpose of establishing the need for financial support. This information is only exchanged on a need-to-know basis. All applicants for College Support Scheme support will be required to provide evidence of their financial need for support.

The methods of payment for agreed financial support are direct payment into a bank account via BACS, or in exceptional circumstances, a small amount of cash. Direct payments are made to students; only if the student is found not to be responsible for their own finances can the payment be made to a third party, e.g., a parent, guardian or carer. Wherever possible, as encouraged in the Government guidance, the College will seek to make payments directly to a service provider, e.g., a bus or train company, until the bursary is paid rather than provide cash payments to students.

Financial support is linked to attendance to study programme lessons and therefore non-attendance may result in reduced payments being made.

Buckinghamshire College Group will make information about financial support available during the year via the college website, in written material and throughout the application, enrolment and induction period. Applications can take up to 5 weeks to process, and there is likely to be a high volume of applications made during the first few weeks of term. All applicants are therefore advised to ensure they submit their application and evidence as soon as possible after enrolment. Students will need to self-fund until the bursary is paid.

## **1. Priority and Allocation of Funds**

Applications should be submitted as early as possible after enrolment. The main application deadline will be published each year, normally within the first half term of the academic year. Late applications may be considered where there is evidence of exceptional or changed circumstances, and where funds remain available. The College reserves the right to reopen the application process during the year if budget permits and demand has been met for the initial round.

Where demand for support exceeds available funding, the College will allocate awards using a prioritisation approach based on level of need, vulnerability, and the likely impact of the award on the student's participation in education. Applications will not be determined solely by date of submission. Students who apply early are encouraged to do so, but timing of application will not of itself determine whether support is awarded.

Where appropriate, the College may apply a stepped or partial award to ensure that support is distributed fairly across the academic year and across students with the greatest need.

Awards will be based on assessed individual need, taking into account household income, essential costs, distance travelled and personal circumstances. All applications will be processed on the following Terms:

- Funding is limited and offered on the following tiered prioritisation model:
  - Priority 1: Vulnerable Groups (care leavers, looked after children, unaccompanied asylum seekers, EHCP and high needs learner)
  - Priority 2: Low-income Households
  - Priority 3: Other financial hardships
- Attendance will be considered as part of ongoing eligibility with a minimum attendance requirement of 90% at all timetabled lessons. However, flexibility will be applied for students with evidence of exceptional circumstance (e.g. illness, caring responsibilities, disability)
- Meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee an award. Allocation of funds will be subject to the availability of funds.
- Funds are administered by the College to assist students experiencing financial hardship and help towards course associated costs.

- Travel claims will be paid where a student lives more than two miles (as the crow flies) from their College campus of study, and the amount will be based upon the cost of using public transport.
- The bursary award will be capped at a maximum of £1200, and any financial contribution will be assessed and awarded incrementally subject to household income
- Free school meals will be assessed as per government guidelines.
- Students should be aware that any payments from the Support Fund may affect their entitlement to other benefits (e.g. JSA, ESA, universal credit). It is the responsibility of the student to declare any funds received from these funds.
- Eligibility for support does not guarantee entitlement to receive it.
- Each application to the financial support fund will be individually assessed.
- If a student withdraws from a course the college reserves the right to request all monies paid and any equipment purchased by the college to be returned.
- Students are required to inform us of any change in circumstances as this may affect eligibility.
- All applicants for childcare support must complete the correct forms and agreements. All Childcare providers must be OFSTED registered.
- Eligible students may be expected to contribute to the cost of their childcare provision.
- All payments will be made directly to the Student by BACS each month on receipt of an invoice.
- Extra meals provided by Childcare providers not already included in the daily price, are not covered and must be paid in full by Student to the provider.
- All applicants for childcare support must ensure any government entitlements, e.g., 3- and 4-year-old funding, are fully utilised before applying for funds from the College.
- For consistent absences Childcare funding will be withdrawn, and the student will be liable for any outstanding fees.
- It is the students' responsibility to fund their childcare place until their application has been assessed and approved. This may take up to 5 weeks. Any retrospective payments will be made accordingly if the application is approved successfully.
- Students should advise their provider if they have applied for funding from the College.
- Students are required to give 1 month's written notice prior to leaving/finishing their course, please adhere to this as the contract is between the student and the Childcare Provider, and payments from the College will cease when the course with us ends.

## 6 Eligibility & Provision

### 6.1 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary

This bursary is for students who satisfy a set criteria, it is income assessed and could provide a bursary of up to £1,200 per academic year.

Who is eligible to apply for this 16-19 Bursary?

- Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August 2026
- Students must be enrolled on a Department for Education (DFE) funded programme
- Students must fall into one of the following criteria:

- a) Someone who is in care
- b) Care leavers (eligibility for vulnerable bursary for leaving care students ends if they turn 19 by 31 August, after this date they would have to apply for discretionary bursary. If they do not turn 19 until after 31 Aug, they would be entitled to vulnerable bursary for that academic year).
- c) Be on Universal Credit in their own right

**This fund is provided to help with the following:**

- Course-associated costs (equipment, materials, books, essential visits etc)
- Lunch
- Travel

## 6.2 16-19 Discretionary Bursary

Eligible students will receive a discretionary bursary if they meet the terms and conditions, which could provide a bursary of up to £1,200 per academic year.

This fund is to assist those who face genuine financial barriers to staying in education and will help with costs such as books, equipment, materials, and other course-associated expenses. Those who apply will need to have their parent/guardians' income assessed.

Who is eligible to apply for 16-19 Discretionary Bursary?

- Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August 2026 or aged 19-25 with an EHCP
- Those with a household income of £50,000 or below
- Students must meet the residency requirements
- Students must be enrolled on a Department for Education (DFE) funded programme

Who is **not** eligible to apply for 16-19 Discretionary Bursary?

- 16–18-year-olds studying Higher Education qualifications
- 16-18 students enrolled to apprenticeships

**This fund is provided to help with the following:**

- Course-associated costs (equipment, materials, books, essential visits etc)
- Lunch
- Travel

## 6.3 19+ Discretionary Learner Support

Eligible students will receive a discretionary bursary if they meet the terms and conditions, which could provide a bursary of up to £1,200 per academic year. This fund is to assist those who face genuine financial barriers to staying on in education and will help with costs such as books, equipment,

materials, and other course-associated expenses. Those who apply will need to have their household income assessed.

Who is eligible to apply for 19+ Discretionary Learner Support?

- Students must be aged 19+ on 31 August 2026 (19+ students who are receiving a student loan need to apply for a Loan Bursary scheme)
- Have a household income of £50,000 or below
- Students must meet the residency requirements
- Students must be enrolled on a Department for Education (DFE) funded programme
- Students with an EHCP who are 19+ are served by the 16-18 Bursary fund in line with DFE guidance

**This fund is provided to help with the following:**

- Course-associated costs (equipment, books, essential visits etc)
- Travel

#### 6.4 20+ Childcare

This fund is part of Discretionary Learner Support and is available to assist students with the costs of childcare while studying at college. Those who apply will need to have their household income assessed.

Who is eligible to apply for 20+ Childcare?

- Students must be aged 20 + on 31 August 2026
- Have a household income of £50,000 or below
- Students must meet the residency requirements
- Students must be enrolled on a DFE funded programme
- Those who have one or more children and are receipt in child benefit

**This fund is provided to help with the following:**

- Childcare costs (the childcare provider must be Ofsted registered)

Students who are under 20 years of age should apply for help with childcare payments through the Care to Learn scheme. Contact 0800 121 8989. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>

#### 6.5 Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund

Those aged 19 years and above, studying a level 3 or above will be able to apply for an Adult Advanced Learner Loan Bursary. This fund is income assessed, and eligible students will receive a discretionary funding provided they meet the terms and conditions. Those who apply will need to have their household income assessed.

Who is eligible to apply for Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund?



- Students must be aged 19 or over on or after 31 August 2026
- Students must be enrolled on an eligible course at Level 3 or above
- Had a loan approved by the Student Loans Company and evidence will be required
- Have a household income of £50,000 or below
- Students must meet the residency requirements

**This fund is provided to help with the following:**

- Course-associated costs (equipment, books, essential visits etc.)
- Travel
- Childcare
- Exceptional learning support e.g. learning support assistants and necessary adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 and SEND Code of Practice

## 6.6 Free Meals

This fund is aimed at disadvantaged students. For the purposes of eligibility, 'disadvantage' is defined by a student being in receipt of or have parents who are in receipt of benefits (see the eligibility criteria below). Evidence of eligibility is required.

Who is eligible to apply for Free Meals?

- Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August 2026
- Those aged between 19 and 25 on 31 August 2026 who have an Educational Health Care plan (EHC Plan)
- Students must meet the residency requirements
- Students must be enrolled on a Department for Education funded programme

### Eligible Benefits

- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Universal Credit (UC) with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £16,190 for each year as assessed by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs [HMRC] (after tax and not including any benefits they get)

Eligible students will receive a free meal for each day they are timetabled to be in college once evidence has been received. If you have been in receipt of free school meals at a previous educational provider, you may be protected up until the end of the academic 2027. Evidence of eligibility is required and can be obtained from the previous setting or local authority.

| Fund                             | Expected Support once all evidence has been provided                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16-19 Vulnerable Learner Bursary | Vulnerable Learner bursary of up to £1200 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel costs (based on public transport costs)</li> </ul> |

|                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kit and uniform costs</li> <li>• Essential trip costs</li> <li>• DBS cost (eligible courses only)</li> <li>• Free College Meal</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 16-19 Discretionary Bursary<br>(Household income under £50,000)       | 16-19 Discretionary Bursary up to a maximum of £1200 (subject to household income) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel costs (based on public transport costs)</li> <li>• Kit and uniform costs</li> <li>• Essential trip costs (mandatory to complete the course)</li> <li>• DBS cost (eligible courses only)</li> <li>• Free College Meal</li> </ul> |
| 19+ Discretionary Learner Support<br>(Household income under £50,000) | 19+ Discretionary Learner Bursary up to £1200 (subject to household income) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel costs (based on public transport costs)</li> <li>• Kit and uniform costs</li> <li>• Essential trip costs (mandatory to complete the course)</li> <li>• DBS cost (eligible courses only)</li> </ul>                                     |
| 20+ Childcare<br>(Household income under £50,000)                     | Childcare costs based on household income <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The childcare provider must be OFSTED registered.</li> <li>• Informal childcare cannot be funded, e.g., provided by family members, or friends.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                      |
| Advanced Learner Loan Bursary                                         | Bursary dependant on household income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## 7 Proof of Income

For the purposes of any of the financial support provided by the College, household income is all income received by persons living within the household. This can be benefits, salary, self-employed income, a combination of these, or any other means of income received.

Original documents must be provided, as follows:

**Either** proof of an income-based benefit: -

- Universal Credit (provided annual income does not exceed £16,190)
- Pension Credit (provided it includes the guarantee element)
- Income Related Employment Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme

**Or** proof of household income to include the latest payslips or pension statements.

Self-employed people must supply proof of income for the most recent tax year before enrolment. For example, year 2025-26 accounts would be required for enrolment in September 2026. This must be either a set of accounts prepared by an accountant or Self-Assessment Form SA302 from HMRC (an on-line calculation of income).

## **8 Appeals Procedure**

Students who are unsuccessful in their application for financial support or have had a change in circumstances may first discuss their concerns with a member of staff in Student Services. If their concern is not resolved to their satisfaction, they can put their appeal in writing using the appeal form that can be obtained from Student Services. Appeals must be for valid reasons and supported by evidence. Appeals will be decided by a panel, and the decision of the panel is final.

## **9 Equality and Diversity**

All requests will be reviewed fairly following the policy; in exceptional circumstances to ensure equality of access to financial support individual exceptions may be made with final decisions agreed by the Director of Student Services and Assistant Principal Student Engagement and Support.

## **10 Data Protection**

All students' personal data is held securely. Information can only be shared with the applicant's consent. For further guidance see General Data Protection Policy and Procedure and Data Protection Policy Statement for Students available at [www.buckscollegigroup.ac.uk](http://www.buckscollegigroup.ac.uk).

## 11 Equality Impact Statement

| Section One                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>College:</b>                                                                     | Buckinghamshire College Group                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Departments Effected:</b>                                                        | Whole College                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Who is responsible for the Equality Impact Assessment?</b>                       | Director of Student Services                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Title</b> (of the policy/practice/decision)                                      | College Support Scheme for Students                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Description</b><br>(Provide a brief description of the policy/practice/decision) | Ensuring that financial hardship is not a barrier to remain in education, particularly supporting those students who are most in need and economically or socially disadvantaged. |

| Section Two – Stakeholder Consultation |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                            |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2                                      | Who are the main stakeholders and what consultation exercise are you planning to undertake, if required (e.g. consultation with Employee Voice, Trades Unions, Staff groups, Student groups?) | Stakeholders are staff, students, governors. Not required. |
| 3                                      | Are there concerns that this could result in differential or adverse impact on any Equality Groups (Protected Characteristics as identified by the Equality Act 2010)                         | No                                                         |

| Section Three                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Please identify how the policy may impact the following protected characteristics:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify any positive impacts the policy/practice/decision may have on equality groups.</li> <li>Identify any negative impacts the policy/practice/decision may have on equality groups.</li> <li>Propose measures to mitigate or eliminate identified negative impacts.</li> </ul> |                                   |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Protected Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Impact<br>High/Medium/<br>Low/N/A | Action(s) you will take to mitigate or remove the negative or adverse impact if identified?<br><i>Propose measures to mitigate or eliminate identified negative impacts</i> |
| 1. Age<br><i>(e.g. are there ways older or younger people may find it difficult to engage?)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Medium                            | Positive impact by allowing all students the opportunity to apply for financial support drawing on the wide range of bursaries available                                    |
| 2. Disability<br><i>(e.g. do you need to consider large print or easy read?)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | N/A                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 3. Gender identification<br><i>(e.g. is your language inclusive of LGBTQ+ groups?)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | N/A                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 4. Gender Re-assignment<br><i>(e.g. is your language inclusive of trans and non-binary people?)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | N/A                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 5. Marriage and civil partnership<br><i>(e.g. does it treat marriage and civil partnerships equally?)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | N/A                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 6. Pregnancy & Maternity<br><i>(e.g. with this have an impact on pregnant or those on family leave; breastfeeding services?)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                           | N/A                               | Positive impact by allowing students the opportunity to apply for support with childcare costs                                                                              |
| 7. Race / Ethnicity<br><i>(e.g. does it take into account the needs of people from different groups)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | N/A                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 8. Religion or Belief<br><i>(e.g. do people from faith groups experience any specific disadvantage)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | N/A                               |                                                                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                     |     |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--|
| 9. Sexual Orientation<br><i>(e.g. is your language inclusive of LGBTQ+ groups?)</i> | N/A |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--|

| Section Four – Monitoring and Review                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Does your criteria and procedure promote fairness and equal opportunities?</b><br><i>Utilize relevant data sources, such as demographic information, student feedback, or staff surveys, to inform the analysis as necessary</i> | This policy has been produced in line with government guidelines and has been adjusted to reflect local cost of living.               |
| <b>How will you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these measures to determine whether it has been effectively and fairly applied</b>                                                                                        | Review of the College Support Scheme for Students will focus on the data collected on enrolment and relation to bursary applications. |

| Section Five – Outcome, Sign-off and Authorisation                                                                                                                       |                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Equality Impact Assessment Outcome</b><br>Select one of the four options below to indicate how the policy will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision |                                            |
| <b>Option 1:</b> No change required – the assessment is that the policy is robust.                                                                                       | X                                          |
| <b>Option 2:</b> Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.          |                                            |
| <b>Option 3:</b> Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be mitigated/or justified                                       |                                            |
| <b>Option 4:</b> Stop the policy or practice as there are adverse effects cannot be prevented/mitigated/or justified.                                                    |                                            |
| <b>Name &amp; job title of authorised person</b>                                                                                                                         | Vusa Nkomo<br>Director of Student Services |
| <b>Equality Impact Assessment was completed on:</b>                                                                                                                      | 17/6/26                                    |
| <b>Date of next review, and by whom?</b><br><i>This may include regular reviews, data analysis, and stakeholder feedback</i>                                             | June 2027<br>Director of Student Services  |