



**Buckinghamshire
College Group**

College Support Scheme for Students 2024-25

Responsible Officer:	Director of Student Services
Date:	June 2024
Review Date:	June 2025
Procedure available:	Intranet and Website
Policy authorised by:	Executive / Curriculum, Quality and Student Committee

Financial Support Policy and Procedure

1. Strategic Overview

Buckinghamshire College Group is committed to assisting students and 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.

2. Scope of Policy

This document provides information on how to access the Financial Support funds provided to the college by the Government. The financial support is administered by the College to assist students who are experiencing financial hardship, to participate and to remain in education, particularly those who are disadvantaged and in need with course-associated costs such as travel, equipment and lunch. It includes the eligibility criteria and the application process.

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

3. The Policy

Financial support is subject to availability and is for enrolled students at Buckinghamshire College Group, on eligible courses, who meet the financial support eligibility criteria set out in section 5 of this policy. Individual students must demonstrate a need for financial support. However, students who are eligible for financial support are not automatically entitled to it and there is no guarantee of financial provision being made.

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 the Government funding rules and guidance. 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 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 i.e. parent/guardian. Wherever possible, as encouraged in the Government guidance, the College will seek to make payments in kind, rather than provide cash payments to students.

Financial support is linked to attendance to study programme lessons, and 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 will 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.

4. Terms

- Funding is limited and offered on a first come first served basis. Meeting the eligibility 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 three miles (as the crow flies) from their College campus of study, and the amount will be based upon the cost of using public transport.
- 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.
- Awarded funds are subject to a minimum attendance of 90% at all timetabled lessons.
- 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 they may affect eligibility.
- All applicants to 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, eg, 3 & 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 4 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.

5. Eligibility & Provision

16-19 Vulnerable Bursary

This bursary is for students that 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 2024
- Students must be enrolled on an ESFA funded programme
- Students must fall into one of the following criteria:
 - a) Someone who is in care
 - b) Care leavers (someone who has been in care but isn't any longer)
 - c) Be on Universal Credit in their own right

This fund is provided to help with the following:

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

16-19 Discretionary Bursary

Eligible students will receive a discretionary bursary if they meet the terms and conditions. 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 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 2024 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 an ESFA 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, books, visits etc)
- Lunch
- Travel

19+ Discretionary Learner Support

Eligible students will receive a discretionary bursary if they meet the terms and conditions. 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 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 2024 (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 an ESFA funded programme
- Students with an EHCP who are 19+ are served by the 16-18 Bursary fund in line with ESFA guidance

This fund is provided to help with the following:

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

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 2024
- Have a household income of £50,000 or below
- Students must meet the residency requirements
- Students must be enrolled on an ESFA 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

Please note the following:

1. The childcare provider must be OFSTED registered. Informal childcare cannot be funded, eg, provided by family members, or friends.

2. 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>

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 if 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 2024
- 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, visits etc.)
- Travel
- Childcare
- Exceptional learning support e.g. learning support assistants and necessary adjustments under the Equality Act 2010

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 having parents who are in receipt of benefits (see the eligibility criteria below). We would need evidence.

Who is eligible to apply for Free Meals?

- Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August 2024
- Those aged between 19 and 25 on 31 August 2024 who have an Educational Health Care plan (EHC Plan)
- Students must meet the residency requirements
- Students must be enrolled on an ESFA funded programme

Eligible benefits

- Income Support
- 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
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs [HMRC])
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit (UC) with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (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 2025. Evidence would be needed from the previous setting.

Fund	Expected Support once all evidence has been provided
16-19 Vulnerable Learner Bursary	Vulnerable Learner bursary of up to £1200 Travel costs (based on public transport costs) Kit and uniform costs Trip costs DBS cost (eligible courses only) Free College Meal
16-19 Discretionary Bursary (Household income under £50,000)	Travel costs (based on public transport costs) Kit and uniform costs Trip costs DBS cost (eligible courses only) Free College Meal
19+ Discretionary Learner Support (Household income under £50,000)	Travel costs (based on public transport costs) Kit and uniform costs Trip costs DBS cost (eligible courses only)
20+ Childcare (Household income under £50,000)	Childcare costs based on household income
Advanced Learner Loan Bursary	Bursary dependant on household income

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:-

- Income Support
- Universal Credit
- Working and Child Tax 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, working families tax credits award notice.

Self-employed people must supply proof of income for the most recent tax year before enrolment. For example, year 2024-25 accounts would be required for enrolment in September 2025. 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).

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Data Protection

All students' personal data is held securely. Information can only be shared with the applicant's consent. For further guidance see Data Protection Policy and Procedure and Data Protection Policy Statement for Students available at www.buckscollegegroup.ac.uk

Equality Impact Statement

Section One	
College:	Buckinghamshire College Group
Departments Effected:	Whole College
Who is responsible for the Equality Impact Assessment?	Director of Student Services
Title (of the policy/practice/decision)	College Support Scheme for Students
Description (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:

- Identify any positive impacts the policy/practice/decision may have on equality groups.
- Identify any negative impacts the policy/practice/decision may have on equality groups.
- Propose measures to mitigate or eliminate identified negative impacts.

Protected Characteristics	Impact High/Medium/ Low/N/A	Action(s) you will take to mitigate or remove the negative or adverse impact if identified? <small>Propose measures to mitigate or eliminate identified negative impacts</small>
1. Age <small>(e.g. are there ways older or younger people may find it difficult to engage?)</small>	Medium	Positive impact by allowing all students the opportunity to apply for financial support drawing on the wide range of bursaries available
2. Disability <small>(eg do you need to consider large print or easy read?)</small>	N/A	
3. Gender identification <small>(eg is your language inclusive of LGBTQ+ groups?)</small>	N/A	
4. Gender Re-assignment <small>(eg is your language inclusive of trans and non-binary people?)</small>	N/A	
5. Marriage and civil partnership <small>(eg does it treat marriage and civil partnerships equally?)</small>	N/A	
6. Pregnancy & Maternity <small>(eg with this have an impact on pregnant or those on family leave; breastfeeding services?)</small>	N/A	
7. Race / Ethnicity <small>(eg does it take into account the needs of people from different groups)</small>	N/A	
8. Religion or Belief <small>(eg do people from faith groups experience any specific disadvantage)</small>	N/A	
9. Sexual Orientation <small>(eg is your language inclusive of LGBTQ+ groups?)</small>	N/A	

Section Four – Monitoring and Review

Does your criteria and procedure promote fairness and equal opportunities?	This policy has been produced in line with government guidelines and has been adjusted to reflect local cost of living.
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<i>Utilize relevant data sources, such as demographic information, student feedback, or staff surveys, to inform the analysis as necessary</i>	
How will you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these measures to determine whether it has been effectively and fairly applied	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	
Equality Impact Assessment Outcome	
Select one of the four options below to indicate how the policy will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision	
Option 1:	No change required – the assessment is that the policy is robust. X
Option 2:	Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.
Option 3:	Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be mitigated/or justified
Option 4:	Stop the policy or practice as there are adverse effects cannot be prevented/mitigated/or justified.
Name & job title of authorised person	Matt Mansfield Director of Student Services
Equality Impact Assessment was completed on:	21/08/24
Date of next review, and by whom? This may include regular reviews, data analysis, and stakeholder feedback	June 2025 Director of Student Services