

16- 18 Bursary and Free College Meals Fund Policy 2023-2024

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Approval/ review bodies	Senior Leadership Team
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**Policies will be reviewed more frequently if legal changes or good practice require*

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Related policies/documents:

Residential Bursary Fund Policy
 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund Policy (non-London Borough).
 19+ Advanced Learning Loan Bursary Policy; and
 19+ GLA Discretionary Learner Support Fund Policy (London Borough)

1. Policy Statement

North Kent College (“the College”) is a multi-sited Further Education institution and incorporates Hadlow College (“Hadlow”).

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (“ESFA”) provides a 16-18 Bursary Fund, which is administered by the College. This fund is allocated to help learners who need financial support to attend College and successfully complete their course. The College administers the funds to ensure it is allocated to those who genuinely need them.

A separate ILR Free Meals Fund is provided by the Government to fund free meals for eligible students.

The Bursary funds are intended to help remove the barriers that learners from low-income households may face by assisting with the costs of undertaking their chosen course. Assistance may be given with essential costs i.e., course material fees, books, kit, uniform, equipment, travel and meals.

The College distributes the fund to learners in accordance with the ESFA guidance.

The College reserves the right to make changes to financial support provision in response to Government guidance and other mitigating factors.

ESFA guidance is updated regularly and may affect eligibility for funding. Any changes to this policy and financial support guidance will be communicated with all members of the College community at the time of any change.

Note: There is a separate Residential Bursary Fund Policy for Students residing at Hadlow. See the Residential Bursary Policy for full details.

Any bursary awarded covers term time only.

2. Student Eligibility Criteria and Awards

The 16-18 Bursary has two elements: the Bursary for Defined Vulnerable Groups; and the 16-18 Discretionary Bursary (this includes the free College meal element).

To be eligible for either bursary the student must be enrolled on a course funded, directly by ESFA or by ESFA via a local authority, or otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including Level 3), accredited by Ofqual or on the ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding 14 to 19 or a 16 to 19 traineeship programme.

Documentary evidence must be provided of personal or family income including documentation from the Department for Work and Pensions and/or their own employment.

3. 16 – 18 Defined Vulnerable Group Bursary

Students are eligible for a Bursary for Defined Vulnerable Groups if they are in one of the following groups:

- 3.1. in Local Authority care or a care leaver (this does not include students who are privately fostered but does include those subject to a *Special Guardianship Order).

Note: The 16-18 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 defines the term “looked after child”.

A “care leaver” is defined as: a young person aged 16 - 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.

In some instances, a young person may have been in the care of the Local Authority and the care transferred to another party, via a permanent form of fostering, 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.

- 3.2. receiving Income Support (“IS”) or Universal Credit **in their own right**, financially supporting themselves or because they are financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner.
- 3.3. in receipt of **both** Employment Support Allowance (“ESA”) or Universal Credit **and** Disability Living Allowance (“DLA”) in their own right; or
- 3.4. in receipt of **both** ESA or Universal Credit **and** a Personal Independence Payment in their own right.

Note: Evidence of receipt of any of the above benefits must be supplied before any award can be made. Additional evidence supporting independent living will also be required - i.e. tenancy agreement in the student’s name, child benefit, child’s birth certificate (if the student is a parent) and utility bills.

Students who are eligible for the Vulnerable Student Bursary and are on a full-time course at the College, **may** receive a total award to the value of £1,200 for the year. (Students on part-time courses receive a proportion of this amount).

The award is allocated according to the specific needs of the individual student, dependent upon the course they are on and where they live.

Funding may be allocated, for example, to pay the student's course contribution fee, for any books, kit or equipment that are essential to the course or to contribute to the student's travel. If required, the funding can also be used for a meal allowance (minimum of £2.41 per timetabled day as per Government guidelines for Free Meals in Further Education) which will be allocated on a weekly basis to the student's ID card for use in the campus café/refectory. Students studying at campuses where no food outlet is available will receive a monthly meal payment paid directly into their bank account via BACS. The College supplements this allocation and each eligible student will receive £4.50 per timetabled day.

The student's attendance is monitored and monthly payments will be withheld or reduced if their attendance drops below 90%. Monitoring takes place on a monthly basis and the dates viewed for attendance are 18th of the previous month to 17th of the current month the bursary is due. Students can appeal this decision, through their tutor, where individual circumstances of the student will be considered in order to not undermine the purpose of the bursary fund.

Note: All payments will be applied from the date of approval and not the date the application was submitted.

Funding for this bursary is claimed for each eligible student from the ESFA through the Student Bursary Support Service portal.

4. 16-18 Discretionary Bursary

Students who are not in any of the above groups but who need financial support, may be eligible to receive a 16-18 Discretionary Bursary award to help them meet the costs of attending College.

Discretionary awards are made to students whose household income is less than the threshold set by the College. (This can be increased, if funds are still available). Where household income has dropped significantly, an award may be made depending on the student's personal circumstances. In this case, the Student Bursary Coordinator will make the final decision. This may be in the form of a partial award i.e. assistance with travel only.

The student's attendance is monitored and any monthly travel payments will be withheld or reduced if their attendance drops below 90%. Monitoring takes place on a monthly basis and the dates viewed for attendance are 18th of the previous month to 17th of the current month the bursary is due.

Students aged 16-18 and living with parents, must provide evidence of the total household income including parent(s), carers, step-parents, legal guardian or other person with parental responsibility.

Students who are aged 19 on 31 August (for September start) and continuing on a study programme which they began aged 16 to 18 (19+ continuers) or have an Education, Health and Care Plan ("EHCP") must provide evidence of their household income including that of any co-habiting partner.

Household income means the income of the parent(s)/guardian(s) the student lives with. It includes any income from employment or self-employment and income from any state benefits received. These include but are not restricted to:

- 4.1. Income Support ("IS").
- 4.2. Job Seekers Allowance ("JSA").
- 4.3. Employment Support Allowance ("ESA") or Incapacity Benefit ("IB").
- 4.4. Pensions (private and state) and State Pension Credits.
- 4.5. Universal Credits.
- 4.6. Housing and Council Tax benefit;
- 4.7. Working and Child Tax credits;
- 4.8. Carer's Allowance;
- 4.9. Disability Living Allowance / Personal Independent Payments; and/or
- 4.10. Other income.

Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and disability elements of tax credits are not included in the calculation of household income. However, evidence of these benefits is still required for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups and for the discretionary bursary in order to consider the individual circumstances.

If employed, the College will also require sight the following: the most recent three months' salary slips and/or P60.

If self-employed: Audited accounts from the previous tax year or a copy of your tax return.

All evidence submitted must include all pages of any benefit received and must be dated within six months of the bursary application.

When applying for funding, students are required to provide full evidence of the household income before a bursary application can be fully assessed.

Eligibility for a 16-18 bursary does not mean that the student is automatically entitled to an award. The 16-18 Discretionary Bursary fund is a limited fund and awards are allocated on a first come-first served basis.

Discretionary Bursary awards are tailored to the needs of the individual student and will depend upon the course that the student is on and where they live. The student's household income is taken into consideration along with other factors when issuing funding such as the distance travelling to College, requirements of their study programme or if they are a young carer.

Bursary awards made may include the following and are only a contribution towards costs and may not cover the full amount required:

- 4.11 course contribution/materials fee (this will depend upon the course and is a one off payment);
- 4.12 the cost of essential books required for the course (as determined by the Head of Curriculum and is a one off payment);
- 4.13 essential kit, equipment or uniform for the course (as determined by the Head of Curriculum and is a one off payment);
- 4.14 an award for travel (paid monthly in arrears - see below);
- 4.15 free meals in Further Education if eligible (paid weekly onto the students ID card - see below); and/or
- 4.16 trip deposit only. This is for mandatory trips that are required for the student to pass their course. **Not all course trips are mandatory.** (Maximum £100 for the deposit only and is a one-off payment).

Note: Where students have applied for funding for course equipment or trips, this funding will be made "in kind" where possible or paid direct to the curriculum. If funding is paid to the student by BACS, this will not be paid until after the first half term.

Students may require support towards the cost of specific resources or may require further funding, such as travel to work placements or university interviews. Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis depending on the need of the individual student.

The 16-19 bursary fund is not intended to provide learning support, fees for access to College facilities, support with living costs or to support extra-curricular activities, where these are not essential to the student's study programme.

All payments will be applied from the date of approval and not the date the application was submitted.

5. Travel Awards

An award for travel is made to students who live more than two miles away from the campus they are studying at, or (for students studying at Dartford only) from Dartford Railway Station (since a free shuttle bus from the station is provided by the College). Travel payments are calculated using Google Maps. The allocation is dependent on where the student lives and how they travel to College.

5.1 Monthly Travel Payment

A travel payment may be awarded to students depending on where they live and the number of timetabled days. Funding is at the discretion of the College and will take into account the discounts available to students and if the student already has support in place from the local authority. It will only be a **contribution** to assist with travel and may mean the student is awarded funding for monthly ticket options for example. The contribution will not exceed the cheapest option for travel to the College. The maximum award for any travel is limited to £1,500 per student for the full academic year.

Students aged 16-21 and in care or a care leaver and registered with Kent County Council ("KCC"), or a young carer aged 16-18 are eligible to receive a KCC Travel Saver Card.

Students travelling from a London Borough to any of the College's campuses will be required to use their free 16+ or 18+ Oyster photocard within the Oyster catchment area (taking advantage of the free or reduced travel). Students making the onward journey from outside of the Oyster card catchment area to any of the other College site(s) may be awarded a travel payment for the remainder of their journey.

Students travelling from Kent and whose parents/guardians pay their council tax to KCC (KCC excluding Medway) must apply for the 16+ Travel Saver Card through the KCC website - this can be paid for in instalments.

Students living in Medway must apply for a Medway Youth Pass.

Students travelling by train should apply for a 16-17 rail card which gives a 50% discount on rail travel. The National Rail website has information on the terms and conditions as this card cannot be used after the user's 18th birthday.

Students who live in East Sussex will be required to purchase and use the East Sussex 3-ID discount.

Discounts such as these are reflected in assessments of funding allocated to students and funding awarded will be a contribution to the cost of passes.

Awards for travel will be paid directly into the student's bank account via a BACS payment, in monthly instalments, in arrears.

The student remains liable for their travel costs until an award is agreed and reimbursement for travel costs before an award is agreed will not be refunded.

The College does not purchase travel cards or passes.

6. Free Meals Awards

Students who are aged 16-18 are eligible for free meals funded by the ILR Free Meals Fund if they or their parents receive one or more of the following benefits:

- 6.1 Income Support;
- 6.2 Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance;
- 6.3 Income-based Employment and Support Allowance;
- 6.4 Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
- 6.5 Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit;
- 6.6 Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190;
- 6.7 Working Tax Credit run on – paid for four weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credits; and/or
- 6.8 Universal Credits. (See notes)

Note: Under the Government's new guidelines, Universal Credit will be the main benefit award. The changes implemented will be on a phased basis and if awarded Universal Credit the new **NET** income threshold for FCM is £7,400 (after tax and does not include any benefits).

Students already receiving free meals on or after 1 April 2018 continue to be eligible to receive free school meals whilst Universal Credit continues to roll out. This also applies to students who were eligible for free school meals prior to moving into Further Education provision.

Students who do not fall within the above criteria may also be awarded a food allowance (funds permitting) where household income is less than £7,400 or where there is an identified welfare need, at the discretion of the Student Bursary Coordinator.

Students who qualify for free meals will receive a meal allowance of £2.41 per timetabled day (in line with the Government policy) which is credited weekly to their student ID card (cashless catering account) for use in the College cafeteria.

Students may use the money to purchase food or drink they wish in the cafeteria or the College shop but are encouraged to use this money towards a healthy meal. The College however tops these funds up so that a total allocation per timetabled day is £4.50.

7. Work Placement Capacity and Delivery Fund

This fund is to cover additional costs for 16–18-year olds who are on the new work placement course(s). The fund is to assist the student with additional costs with travel to the work placement and any additional kit/uniform or equipment that may be required. The fund will be allocated on an individual basis, depending on where the work placement is to the student's address and if any other costs are incurred.

8. Childcare

The College is unable to assist young parents with childcare out of the bursary funds. However, young parents below the age of 20 can apply for financial support towards childcare through the government's Care to Learn ("C2L") scheme. For further information, students should visit <https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn>.

9. Residential Fees Policy

(Hadlow students only) A separate fees policy is available for students at Hadlow campus who are residing on site.

10. Residential Bursary Fund Policy

(Hadlow students only). A separate fund is available to assist with residential accommodation fees for students who wish to reside at Hadlow.

11. Raising awareness and the application procedure

The College has information on the website from April for the following academic year and information is marketed around the College. New applicants and returning students are sent notification of the financial support available and the application process. The College works with local authorities and agencies in order to support students to access financial support.

The College has a single online Student Financial Support application form, which covers all the bursary funds. The online application form will be available on the College's website after Easter for the following academic year. Bursary awards **do not** automatically carry over from one year to the next and students will need to make a new application for each academic year. Online applications help reduce our impact on the environment, however, paper applications are also available from the Student Financial Support team.

Along with their application, students will need to provide full evidence of household income for the current tax year. Applications submitted without the full evidence of the household income **cannot** be assessed and, in these circumstances, the Student Bursary Team will contact the student to explain what is required.

Students who are continuing at College for a further year should apply by 1 June for an award for the following academic year. New applicants to the College are encouraged to apply before enrolment and, at the latest, by 1 August.

Complete applications received by these dates will be assessed before the student enrolls. This will ensure students who are awarded a bursary are notified before enrolment day and will, therefore, be aware if they need to make additional payments at enrolment.

Applications will be accepted after these dates, subject to funds being available. For complete applications received by 1 August, the College aims to assess these within 10 working days and will inform applicants if an assessment will take longer. Applications received after 1 August or incomplete applications, may take up to 30 working days to assess once complete. The outcome of the assessment will be communicated via their personal email held on the College's records before enrolment. After enrolment any future correspondence regarding the bursary will be sent to either the student's College email and/or personal email and if authorized a parent/ guardian email. A copy of correspondence sent can also be found on the student bursary portal, along with the application for financial support.

Students will remain liable for any costs accrued at enrolment until the College has confirmed an award in writing.

Application forms submitted without supporting documentation and evidence will be marked as incomplete and the College is unable to process them. If applications are received without the required evidence, the Student Bursary Team will attempt to contact the applicant three times, via telephone or email and if no response is received a final letter will be sent to the address held.

12. Student Commitment

Awards are made on the understanding that the student maintains an attendance level of at least 90% (in all subjects / courses), otherwise payments will be withheld/reduced. Their attendance is monitored on a monthly basis and the dates viewed are 18th of the previous month to 17th of the current month the bursary is due.

If attendance drops below 90% and the payments are withheld/reduced, the student is required to discuss with their tutor the reasons regarding the low attendance. If the tutor is happy with the reasons (exceptional circumstances only) they must email the Student Bursary Team (studentbursary@northkent.ac.uk) to request that the

withheld/reduced payments be released. Consideration will be given to mitigating circumstances such as: safeguarding, child protection; family illness; caring responsibilities; transport issues; and any other issues affecting the student's attendance. For travel payments, the amount will be reduced to reflect the student's attendance. i.e., if the student has only attended 67% of the allocated time, then they will only receive 67% of the monthly residential/travel award.

Funding for students who have not attended for four weeks or more will be stopped, without notice and funding may also be stopped if a student has not adhered to the College's rules.

The College reserves the right to require repayment of funds and the return of any equipment purchased through funding. This includes the Kent 16+ Travel Saver and IT equipment if these have been funded through financial support.

13. Appeals

In the first instance, the student (or their parent/guardian) should contact the Student Bursary Coordinator and ask for a re-assessment of their situation. If the student is still not satisfied with the outcome an appeal must be made, in writing, within two weeks, to the Head of the Department. The letter must clearly state why the award should be re-considered. The student may be asked to provide additional information or invited to discuss their individual circumstances as part of the appeal. The decision of the Head of the Department is final.

14. Fraudulent Claims

It is the College's duty to protect public funds from the possibility of fraudulent claims. The College asks for detailed information and may invite applicants for interview so it can distribute the funds correctly. If the student's claim is considered fraudulent, i.e. through false representation of household income or other eligibility rules during spot checks or auditing processes, the College will request that the funds awarded are repaid in full. If the student fails to repay this, the College may take legal action.

An application that is found to be fraudulent, i.e. through false representation of household income or of other eligibility rules, may be cancelled and the learner may be subject to disciplinary measures by the College. The College will have the right to recover the monies awarded. Government guidance advises that institutions that identify significant fraud should report it to ESFA.

15. Data Protection

College employees, who are involved in administering the 16-18 Bursary and ILR Free School Meals Funds, comply with the College's policy on the storage and transfer of information during the application process and in payments of funds.