

# 16–19 Bursary Fund/Free Meals

## Policy Guidance & Procedures

### 2019/20

<b>Review Number</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Date</b>	22 May 2017	20 May 2019							

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## **16 – 19 Bursary Scheme**

### **1 Background**

The aim of the 16 - 19 bursary scheme is to provide support to learners aged 16 and above, who are experiencing financial difficulty with meeting costs associated with learning. The 16 -19 Bursary Fund has two elements:

- A vulnerable bursary of £1,200 a year for young people in the following defined vulnerable groups: young people in care (including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children); young care leavers; young people in receipt of Income Support or equivalent Universal Credit; and disabled young people in receipt of Employment Support Allowance or equivalent Universal Credit who are also in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments.
- Discretionary awards made by institutions to young people in ways that best fit the needs and circumstances of their students. Bursary awards should be targeted towards those young people who face the greatest financial barriers to participation; such as the costs of transport, books and equipment. Institutions are free to determine the assessment criteria for eligibility for discretionary bursaries, and the frequency of and conditions for payments for all awards

When making decisions about awarding funds, providers should consider the availability of other strands of financial support for learners ahead of consideration for the discretionary funds. However, receipt of other forms of learner support is neither a pre-condition, nor an exclusion factor for the receipt of the discretionary funds.

The full document can be viewed and/or downloaded from [www.EFA.gov.uk](http://www.EFA.gov.uk)

### **2 Purpose of the Policy**

- To ensure the fair and equitable distribution of 16 - 19 Bursary Funds.
- To ensure that learners have a set of written criteria on how the College will prioritise and distribute the funding to learners.
- To provide an update relating to 16 - 19 bursary scheme procedures internal to SOTSFC.
- To clarify 16 - 19 bursary scheme policy and procedures in line with recent developments relating to 16 - 19 bursary scheme nationally.
- To provide guidance in relation to eligibility for 16 - 19 bursary scheme funding and the process of appeals against payment decisions.
- To aid student retention and achievement.

### **3 Role of the 16 -19 Bursary Scheme within SOTSFC**

The funding is provided to increase access, retention and achievement. Examples of costs associated with learning are detailed below:-

16-19 discretionary funds can be used for course related costs including exam fees for re-sits and course trips, for books and equipment; for support with domestic emergencies and accommodation. They are specifically designed to respond to hardship needs, particularly those that arise through sudden changes in circumstances where nationally administered schemes are not able to respond in-year

## **4 Priorities**

In accordance with EFA guidance financial hardship will be based on income assessment, except in exceptional circumstances'. However, awards will not be based solely on income without identifying whether there is a specific financial need and learner's access to other strands of financial support will be taken into consideration.

Whilst priority will be given to economically or socially disadvantaged learners, there may also be cases of learners who are not in these groups.

## **5 Eligibility**

To be eligible to receive a 16-19 Bursary the young person must be aged 16 or over and under 19 at 31 August before the academic year. Where a young person turns 19 during their programme of study, they can continue to be supported to the end of the academic year in which they turn 19, or to the end of the programme of study, whichever is sooner. Students who are aged 19 or over on the 31<sup>st</sup> August and have a Educational Health Care Plan are eligible to apply for the bursary. Institutions may, in exceptional circumstances, use their discretion to pay bursaries to younger students providing they meet the stated criteria. This does not apply to 14-16 year olds attending college as part of their Key Stage 4 programme.

## **6 Administration of Funds and Assessment Criteria**

16-19 Bursary funding is limited to funding allocations made by the relevant funding body. It is likely that the demand for such support will be greater than annual allocations. All requests for financial support will be assessed to establish eligibility. Requests from part time learners will receive equal consideration.

To assess the level of financial support, to determine financial hardship, it will be necessary to assess household income and information supplied will require documented evidence. The assessment will be recorded for audit purposes.

Temporary short term emergency crisis support will provide a discretionary safety net for genuine emergencies that cannot be foreseen or provided for in advance. Students facing such hardship will be assessed and in such circumstances it will not be necessary to take account of their household income and costs. It is more important that appropriate and timely help is provided. The Head of Student Services will use their discretion to ensure that students are able to continue with their chosen course of studies until the situation is resolved.

Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments will not be taken into account when assessing income of disabled learners.

All awards will be made on the understanding that the learner will adhere to the College Attendance Policy, full engagement with the Stoke 6<sup>th</sup> Graduate activities, the Student Behaviour Policy and their course programme as detailed on the Individual Learning Plan. Failure to achieve this may result in payments being stopped or delayed until a satisfactory outcome has been achieved. The learner will receive support from their Progress Coach and other staff to meet these criteria. Refunds may be requested where these targets have not been met.

All awards are made subject to the availability of funds. Awards will be made on a first come first served basis, and there is no guarantee that applications will be funded.

Specialist equipment purchased with these funds remains the property of the College and should be returned in good condition at the end of the academic year. Other equipment, tools or protective clothing which may be reusable at a later date should be returned in good condition. The College will give practical consideration to such factors as hygiene, health and safety and wear and tear.

## Free Meals

### 7 Background

Free Meals are targeted at disadvantaged learners. For the purposes of eligibility for free meals, 'disadvantage' is defined by learners being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of one or more of the benefits listed in the eligibility section below. From September 2014 the College is required to make provision for free meals to eligible learners for each day that a learner attends for their programme of study. A free meal provision will also be made available to learners on days when they are off-site as part of their programme of study for example if they are attending work experience or educational visits.

Free Meals are targeted at the most disadvantaged learners in the College. For students to be eligible for Free Meals learners must be in receipt of, or have parents who are in receipt of one or more of the benefits listed in the eligibility section below.

From September 2014 the College was required to make provision for free meals to eligible learners for each day that a learner attends for their programme of study. A free meal provision will also be made available to learners on days when they are off-site as part of their programme of study for example if they are attending work experience or educational visits.

### 8 Purpose of the Policy

Students do better in their studies when they have access to proper, regular meals. The College in collaboration with its external caterers will offer healthy food and hot meal options daily to encourage students to make healthy food choices. The College will make reasonable effort to ensure;

- all learners entitled to Free Meals are registered for them
- all registered learners make use of their entitlement

### 9 Eligibility

To be eligible for Free Meals the learner must be

- Aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August before the academic year. Learners who turn 19 during their study programme will remain eligible for a Free Meal until the end of the academic year in which they turn 19 or the end of their study programme, whichever is sooner
- Aged between 19 and 25 who are subject to a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan)
- Must have been resident in the UK or EEA for three years preceding the 31 August (verified before enrolment)

#### AND

In receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support/Universal Credit
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)
- 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 on no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.
- Working Tax Credit run-on paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- During the initial roll out the benefit, Universal Credit

## 10 Administration of Free Meals

The learner, or their parent/guardian, must complete a 16-19 Bursary Fund/Free Meals application form and current evidence of receipt of the qualifying benefit(s) list above will be required.

Learner's ID cards will be allocated with an allowance for each day they attend for their programme of study. Special arrangements will be agreed for students who are off-site as part of their programme of study. There will be **NO** cash equivalents.

Continued entitlement to Free Meals will depend on full engagement with the Stoke 6<sup>th</sup> Graduate activities and any other terms and conditions in accordance with the signed application form including a requirement for full attendance.

## 11 Confidentiality

Electronic data is held on a computer database registered in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and may also be used for the prevention and detection of fraud and crime. For these purposes we may also share the information with other public sector bodies and government agencies that administer public funds under statutory requirements.

All applicants to 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Details of individual learners and / or related family circumstances will only be shared with those SOTSFC staff directly involved with the process.

## 12 Declaration

If false or incomplete information is submitted, or if parents do not declare any part of their income that is relevant, the matter may be referred to the Department for Education or the police.

The learner / parent could face prosecution and the College will seek to recover any payments the learner is not eligible for.

## 13 Funding Body Requirements of the Provider

The College will meet its obligations to administer the 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals according to the guidelines laid down by the EFA i.e. the College will ensure administrative procedures that:

- Record the details of learner applications for financial assistance through 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals.
- Identifies unspent funds at the end of the academic year in each of the age related categories.
- Ensures accurate completion of the relevant end of year monitoring form.
- Meets the deadlines relating to 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals required annually by the EFA.

## **14 Internal Procedures**

### **1. Staffing**

The administration of the 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals will be undertaken by trained staff who are members of administrative services under the direction of the Director of Finance and Resources or the Head of Student Services.

### **2. Promotion of 16 – 19 Bursary Scheme**

Guidelines will be made available on the College intranet and key access points, such as learning resource centres, throughout the College.

The 16-19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals is to be promoted via tutorial bulletins, notice boards, flyers, verbally by tutors and any other appropriate medium.

### **3. 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals Application Process**

Students are invited to complete and submit an application form. The application will be assessed for financial hardship against agreed criteria and the applicant will receive notification by letter of the decision. Applications can be submitted throughout the academic year and reapplications will be accepted where there are changes to circumstances.

### **4. 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals Awards Process**

All awards will be made on the understanding that the learner will adhere to the College Attendance Policy, full engagement with the Stoke 6<sup>th</sup> Graduate activities, the Student Behaviour Policy and their course programme as detailed on the Individual Learning Plan. The College will provide a safety net for genuine emergencies that cannot be foreseen or provided for in advance. The Head of student Services will use her discretion in such cases.

### **5. 16 - 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals Appeals Process**

Where the applicant is not satisfied with the original decision he/she may appeal formally in writing within ten working days to the Principal, who is totally independent of the assessment process. Appeals will be assessed by the Principal and a decision notified to the applicant in writing within 15 working days of receipt. **This decision is final.**

### **6. Annual Review**

At the start of each academic year the 16 – 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals policy, guidance and procedures will be reviewed by the Director of Finance and Resources and Head of Student Services in conjunction with the EFA guidelines for that academic year. The views and experience of the College, young people and their parents will be taken into account.

### **7. Records**

A file (see also paragraph 7) is to be kept of all 16 – 19 Bursary Scheme/Free Meals assessment forms and correspondence relating to the claim.

Records must be kept confidential and in a secure place in accordance with the confidentiality requirements above.

All records to be recorded in an appropriate format to enable such analysis and returns as required by relevant bodies.