

16 to 19 bursary fund policy

MK Christian Foundation



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1. Aims and scope

The 16 to 19 bursary fund provides financial support to help trainees overcome the specific financial barriers to participation they face so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries and this policy refers to both:

- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- Discretionary bursaries

This policy aims to:

- Set out clear and transparent processes for the use and allocation of 16 to 19 bursary funds
- Make sure that bursary funds are administered appropriately and fairly, with due regard to the Equality Act 2010
- Make clear to parents/carers and trainees the type of support that is available and how to apply for it
- Make clear to parents/carers and trainees the attendance and behaviour conditions for receiving the funds

2. Guidance

This policy is based on advice from the Department for Education (DfE) on the [16 to 19 bursary fund for the 2026 to 2027 academic year](#).

3. Definitions

- 'In care' is defined 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)
- 'Looked after child' is defined as: a child in the care of a local authority or who is provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions for more than 24 hours ([section 22](#) of the Children Act 1989)
- 'Care leaver' is defined as:
 - A young person aged 16 or 17 who was previously looked after for a period of at least 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to at least 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16 (they can have entered care at any age, but they must have spent at least 13 weeks in care after their 14th birthday before leaving after the age of 16), or
 - A young person aged 18 or above who was looked after prior to turning 18 for a period of at least 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to at least 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The board of trustees

The board of trustees has overall responsibility for:

- Approving this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy
- Monitoring the implementation of this policy
- Ensuring compliance with relevant requirements

4.2 The Head of Learning

The Head of Learning is responsible for:

- Making sure that staff are familiar with this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy
- Making sure the policy is being applied consistently
- Setting eligibility criteria for bursary funding and making sure these comply with the Equality Act 2010
- Promoting awareness of the 16 to 19 bursary fund to prospective applicants and their parents/carers

4.3 Bursary panel

The bursary panel is responsible for reviewing applications and supporting evidence in accordance with this policy.

The panel consists of:

- Head of Learning
- Trainee Engagement Officer

4.4 Business Manager

The Business Manager is responsible for ensuring that the bursary funding is accounted for accurately.

4.5 Staff

Our staff are responsible for implementing this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy consistently.

4.6 Parents/carers

Parents/carers are expected to notify staff or the Head of Learning of:

- Any concerns or queries regarding this 16 to 19 bursary fund policy
- Any change in circumstances that might affect eligibility for bursary funding

4.7 Trainees

Trainees are responsible for meeting the conditions attached to the receipt of any support from the bursary funding.

5. How we use the bursary fund

Financial support is available to eligible trainees from the 16 to 19 bursary fund. See sections 6, 7 and 8 below for details of our eligibility criteria.

The fund is intended to support trainees aged 16 to 19 in overcoming specific financial barriers to participation so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups; and
- Discretionary bursaries

We use the fund to provide trainees with support to fund items the trainee would otherwise need to buy to participate:

- Transport
- Books
- Equipment
- External visits that are essential to the course and other course-related costs
- The costs of attending interviews, open days and work experience placements
- Specialist clothing and PPE
- Lunch on their timetabled days
- Emergency meals and transport

We will provide support for trainees from the bursary fund by making payments in kind where possible.

The bursary fund is not for non-education related costs. For example, it will not be provided for:

- General living costs
- Non-essential extra-curricular activities
- Any learning support and pastoral services that we provide

The bursary fund may be used to provide exceptional further help with childcare costs if the costs exceed the [Care to Learn](#) scheme's weekly maximum rates. Childcare provision must meet Care to Learn scheme eligibility rules, and evidence will be required that the maximum amount is already paid through that scheme and a top up is required. Any top up will be made in line with Care to Learn funding rules and go directly to the childcare provider, not the trainee.

6. Eligibility criteria for the 16 to 19 bursaries

Please note: the following eligibility criteria will be assessed **in addition** to the individual trainee's actual financial needs. This means there is no guarantee of funding.

- No trainee will automatically be awarded an amount of funding without an assessment of the level of actual financial need they have

- Funding provided to each eligible trainee is based on their actual participation needs (supported by evidence) and not a flat or fixed-rate payment that does not reflect the actual costs they face
- Trainees with no participation costs will not receive funding

6.1 Age

To be eligible for either bursary in the 2026 to 2027 academic year, trainees must be at least 16 years old but under 19 years old on 31 August 2026.

Trainees aged 19 or over are eligible only for a discretionary bursary (see section 8 below) if they:

- Are continuing on a study programme or course that they began when they were aged 16 to 18 years old (19+ continuers), or
- Have an education, health and care (EHC) plan

Trainees aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for defined vulnerable groups.

In exceptional circumstances, where Trainees under 16 years old are on an eligible 16 to 19 study programme at our provider, we may use our discretion to pay bursaries to these younger trainees. However, if these trainees are enrolled at another institution that receives public funding for them, they will not be eligible for bursary funding.

Trainees aged under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible for support from the 16 to 19 bursary fund.

6.2 Eligible education provision

Trainees' provision must be subject to inspection by a public body that assures quality (e.g. Ofsted). The provision must also fall into 1 of these groups:

- Funded directly by the DfE, or by the DfE via a local authority
- Otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including level 3) that is accredited by Ofqual or is on the DfE's [list of qualifications approved for funding](#)
- Non-employed trainees aged 16 to 19 who are participating in a King's Trust Team Programme

Trainees are not eligible if:

- They are on an apprenticeship programme
- They are participating in any waged training

Trainees who are studying via distance learning are not likely to require financial help from the bursary fund. If they do require financial help, we will provide support in kind, such as a travel pass to attend exams. Details of this shall be decided on a case-by-case basis.

6.3 Residency

Trainees must meet the residency criteria in the [DfE funding rules for 16 to 19 provision](#).

6.4 Asylum seekers

Accompanied asylum seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner), and asylum seekers aged 18 and above are entitled to education but are not entitled to public funds. If necessary, they can apply to the Home Office for suitable housing and cash for essentials.

We will provide in-kind support such as books, equipment and a travel pass to asylum-seeking young people who have not had asylum refused.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are:

- The responsibility of the local authority
- To be treated as 'looked after' children

- Eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups, where they have a financial need

When these trainees reach 18 years old, we will consider their immigration status. They will still be eligible for a bursary as a trainee from a defined vulnerable group if the asylum claim is in their favour and will be treated as a 'care leaver' until they reach the upper age limit.

7. Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups

Trainees with a financial need, who meet 1 of the following 4 criteria below, in addition to the criteria outlined in sections 6.1 to 6.4 above, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups.

The defined vulnerable groups are trainees who are:

- In care
 - Note: those who are privately fostered are not classed as looked after and are not eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups
- Care leavers
 - Note: where a young person has left the care of the local authority via achieving permanence through an order, such as a Special Guardianship Order, they are a care leaver. They must meet the definition of a 'care leaver' in full (see section 3 of this policy) to be eligible for help from the bursary for vulnerable groups
- Receiving Income Support (IS) or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves, or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) in their own right, as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right
 - Note: trainees must be in receipt of DLA or PIP and ESA or UC to be eligible. Receipt of DLA or PIP alone does not meet the criteria

UC is replacing some benefits for new claimants, including IS and income-related ESA, so current and future young people aged 16 to 18 will not be in receipt of 'legacy' benefits. However, trainees aged 19 to 25 and funded from the 16 to 19 budget (such as trainees with an EHC plan) may still receive 'legacy' benefits.

Trainees will be funded to reflect the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the actual participation needs and costs they have.

Trainees who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups are not automatically entitled to a bursary.

Trainees will not receive the bursary if they do not have any actual financial need (for example, because their financial needs are met from other sources and/or because they have no relevant costs). Should we refuse the application on this basis, we will discuss this with the trainee and their support worker/parent/carer where applicable.

Where a bursary is provided, the funds will generally be up to £1,200 per year for study programmes lasting 30 weeks or more. When calculating the amount, cases will be looked at individually and the outcome based on a particular trainee's needs. Trainees will only receive the amount they actually need to participate and will not automatically receive £1,200 if they do not need the full amount.

We can use our discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to provide more than £1,200 per year for a trainee who meets the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups if it is necessary, in all the circumstances, for the trainee to remain in education. Any such additional payment will be paid either from the provider's discretionary bursary allocation or the provider's own funds.

If a trainee's study programme lasts for less than 30 weeks, this will be considered in the assessment for the bursary amount provided as they may not need as much financial support as those on longer programmes. We will also consider the number of hours involved in a trainee's study programme when deciding the correct bursary amount to ensure it is appropriate.

We will review each trainee's eligibility position each academic year. Trainees will only continue to receive a bursary for vulnerable groups if they continue to satisfy the criteria.

8. Discretionary bursaries

8.1 Criteria and assessment

In addition to the criteria outlined in sections 6.1 to 6.4 above, trainees can apply for a discretionary bursary if they satisfy 1 or more of the following criteria:

- Total household income does not exceed £25,000 per annum. This includes working children in the household.

Trainees who do not satisfy any of the criteria listed in this section, but who are able to demonstrate financial hardship arising from other reasons, may still apply for a discretionary bursary.

In assessing any application for a discretionary bursary, we will consider:

- Distance to travel between the trainee's home and the provider
- The number of dependent children in the trainee's household
- The requirements of their study programme
- Whether the trainee has additional responsibilities that may mean they need extra help

There is no set limit for the amount of discretionary bursary that can be awarded to trainees. We will base all decisions around which trainees receive a discretionary bursary, and how much bursary they receive, on each trainee's individual circumstances and their actual financial need.

We will review each trainee's eligibility position each academic year. Trainees will only continue to receive a discretionary bursary if they continue to satisfy the criteria.

8.2 Emergency meal and travel support

Trainees who face severe hardship can apply for emergency meal and travel support from the discretionary bursary, for the days they attend their study programme. At our discretion, we may provide this support without completing the usual household income and evidence checks.

Emergency support will be a temporary arrangement, with a full discretionary bursary assessment completed as soon as practicable.

We will keep records and documentation related to emergency support for audit purposes.

9. Application and payment process

9.1 Applications

Applications should be submitted via our application form and handed to a staff member.

Applications should ideally be submitted by the end of the young person's 6 week probation period to allow enough time for our provision to assess the overall level of demand and make discretionary awards on a fair basis. This date will be clearly stated on the application form.

However, we acknowledge that trainees' circumstances may change and therefore the application process will remain open for the whole academic year.

Applicants will be notified in writing (either via email or via letter) whether their application has been successful. If a trainee wishes to appeal the outcome of their application for a bursary, they must follow the provider's complaints procedure.

Any enquiries about the application process should be directed to the Trainee Support Office.

9.2 Evidence

All applications for 16 to 19 bursaries must be supported by appropriate evidence, which we will verify. Examples of acceptable evidence we may request are:

- A copy of the UC or IS award notice from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and/or evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP, in the trainee's name
- Documents such as a tenancy agreement in the trainee's name, a child benefit receipt, birth certificate or utility bills
- Written confirmation of the trainee's current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority

9.3 Payment process

Payments are made using the following process:

- Make in-kind payments, such as for equipment, lunches and other course related costs
- Make weekly payments by BACS transfer to the trainees' bank account for travel related costs (we are unable to pay into a bank account that is not in the name of the trainee)

9.4 Conditions for the receipt of bursary payments

Payments of the bursary are conditional on trainees meeting the following conditions in relation to their standards of attendance and behaviour:

- Attendance above 85% (subject to exceptional circumstances)
- Following the conditions outlined in our Trainee Workplace Agreement, including expectations around wearing uniform and PPE.

All trainees are required to sign a declaration confirming that they agree to these conditions.

Trainees who fail to meet these conditions may have their payment withheld, but we will always take trainees' individual circumstances into consideration. This includes considering the impact on attendance that might be caused by illness, caring responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances.

If trainees have received in-kind support such as equipment or travel cards, they will be asked to return these if they fail to meet the conditions.

We will stop payments where trainees have decided to withdraw from a study programme.

We reserve the right to take back money from trainees where it is not spent for the reasons it was awarded.

We will consider the impact of such an action on the individual trainee before taking a final decision to do so, and any decision will be confirmed to the trainee in writing.

If we find evidence that a trainee or parent/carer has knowingly submitted misleading or fraudulent information, resulting in the trainee receiving a bursary they were not entitled to, we will attempt to recover the overpayment from the trainee. Any instances of significant fraud will be reported to the DfE.

10. Change in circumstances

If there are changes in circumstances that may affect eligibility for a bursary, applicants and/or parents/carers must notify the provider without delay.

11. Record keeping and audit

The provider will maintain comprehensive and accurate records relating to the 16 to 19 bursary fund. These records will be kept securely and be readily available for audit purposes. Records will include, but are not limited to:

- Copies of application forms and supporting evidence

- Proof that trainees meet eligibility criteria
- Records of 'zero bursary' trainees
- Details of assessment decisions and rationale for awards
- Records of all payments made to trainees, including dates, value and purpose
- Copies of documents signed by trainees to give formal agreement to the conditions of payment
- Evidence of trainee attendance and progress monitoring
- Records relating to emergency meal and travel support (including the number of trainees supported, the value and reason for support, and signed confirmations from trainees)

Records will be retained for 6 academic years after the end of the academic year in which the trainee completed their programme.

12. Unspent funds

Funding for bursary funding cannot be carried forward by the provision for more than 1 year. Unspent funding must be reported to the DfE by the provider using the [customer help centre](#), specifying the amount of funding and the year(s) it relates to, no later than 31 March each year. The DfE will recover all unspent funds.

13. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be monitored by the Head of Learning.

This policy will be reviewed by the Head of Learning every year. At every review, the policy will be approved by the board of trustees.

14. Complaints or appeals

Where any trainee or parent is unhappy with how we have managed their application for bursary funding or the support that has been provided, they are free to make a complaint or appeal as per the provider's complaints procedure.

APPENDIX A: Statutory Guidance on Free Meals in Further Education (2026/2027 Academic Year)

1. Overview and Core Principle

In accordance with Department for Education (DfE) funding regulations, MK Christian Foundation recognizes its obligation to provide free midday meals to disadvantaged trainees who meet statutory requirements.

While administered alongside the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, the **Free Meals in Further Education** scheme is funded via a separate, ring-fenced national allocation. Eligible trainees are entitled to a free meal for every day they are timetabled to attend their study programme.

2. Eligibility Criteria

2.1 Age Requirements

To qualify for a statutory free meal, a trainee must be:

- Aged **16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026**.
- Aged **19 to 24** only if they have an active **Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan**, or are a **"19+ continuer"** remaining on the exact same study programme they originally started before turning 19.

2.2 Exclusions

The following trainees are **not** eligible for statutory free meals under this scheme:

- Trainees aged 14 or 15 (as they fall under secondary school Free School Meal provisions).
- Trainees aged 19 or over at the start of their programme who do *not* have an EHC plan or qualify as a 19+ continuer.
- Any trainees enrolled on an **apprenticeship programme** or undertaking waged training.

3. Financial Disadvantage Criteria

A trainee is eligible to receive a statutory free meal if they make a successful application and they, or their parent/carer, are in receipt of one or more of the following qualifying benefits:

- **Universal Credit**
 - **Targeted FSM:** Households with annual net earned income of **£7,400 or less** (verified via the DfE digital checking service or recent complete assessment periods).
 - **Expanded FSM:** Households whose net earned income **exceeds £7,400** per annum but remain in receipt of Universal Credit.
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's 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 also entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 as assessed by HMRC.

- Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit).

4. Operational Delivery and Funding Value

4.1 Per-Meal Value

The national funding allocation provides an baseline rate equivalent to **£2.66 per meal** for the 2026 to 2027 academic year. MK Christian Foundation reserves the right to use discretionary bursary funds to augment or enhance this daily value where local food costs dictate it necessary.

4.2 Provision Method (Payments in Kind)

In alignment with Section 5 of our main policy, free meals will strictly be provided "in kind" through internal catering setups or dedicated on-site voucher arrangements.

- **Off-Site Provision:** If a trainee is required to attend a work experience placement, interview, or essential external field trip on a timetabled day, the foundation will ensure a portable voucher or alternative arrangement is made so they can access their meal off-site.
- **Cash Exception:** Direct monetary bank transfers for meals will only be authorized in exceptional circumstances where on-site provision or localised voucher agreements are physically impossible.

5. Interaction with the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund

- **Vulnerable Groups:** A trainee meeting the criteria for a defined Vulnerable Group Bursary is **not** automatically eligible for a statutory free meal. They must separately satisfy the financial benefit criteria listed in Section 3 of this appendix.
- **Discretionary "Safety Net":** Where a trainee faces genuine severe household food poverty but does *not* meet the strict statutory benefit thresholds for Government Free Meals, the Bursary Panel can assess them for meal support funded directly out of the foundation's **Discretionary Bursary Fund** (using our household threshold of £25,000).

6. Verification and Audit Trail

MK Christian Foundation is required to maintain explicit records of eligibility checks for a period of **6 academic years**. These must include successful digital portal confirmations or physical copies of the household's official benefit statements.

Unspent funding allocated specifically for Free Meals cannot be routinely carried forward for more than one year and is subject to recovery by the DfE