

16- 19 Bursary and Free College Meals Fund Policy 2025-2026

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Person Responsible	Vice Principal Information and Learning Resources
Approval/ review bodies	Senior Leadership Team
Frequency of Review*	12 months

**Policies will be reviewed more frequently if legal changes or good practice require*

Review History:		
Date	Reviewed by	Reason for review
Aug 2013	Student Services Manager	Policy written
Dec 2014	Student Services Manager	To reflect new practice & ILR Free Meals
Apr 2016	Student Services Manager	To reflect change in Free Meals Fund & annual review
Jan 2016	Student Financial Support Coordinator	Policy Update
Feb 2017	Student Financial Support Coordinator	Annual review
July 2018	Student Financial Support Coordinator	Annual Review
May 2019	Student Financial Support Coordinator	Annual Review
June 2020	Student Financial Support Coordinator	Annual Review
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May 2022	Student Bursary Coordinator	Annual Review
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Mar 2025	Student Bursary Coordinator	To reflect the Care to Learn element of Childcare

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Related policies/documents:

16-19 Care to Learn Policy;
 19+ Adult Skills Fund Learner Support Policy (non-London boroughs);
 19+ Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Policy;
 19+ GLA Discretionary Learner Support Policy (London boroughs); and
 Residential Bursary Fund Policy.

1. Policy Statement

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

The Department for Education “DfE” 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 helps remove the barriers that learners from low- income households (currently set at £28,000 net, including all benefits this could increase should funds be available) might face, by assisting with the costs of undertaking their chosen course. Assistance may be given with essential costs i.e., books, uniform, equipment, compulsory UK trips, travel and meals.

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

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

DfE 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 DfE or by DfE via a local authority, or otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including Level 4), accredited by Ofqual or on the DfE list of qualifications approved for funding 14-19 or a 16-19 traineeship programme.

2.1 Residency

Students must also meet the Residency Criteria in DfE funding rules (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision>).

2.2 Accompanied asylum seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner)

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

2.3 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

UASC do not receive cash support from the HO and are the responsibility of the local authority. They are treated as looked after children and are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups (in care; group), where they have a financial need.

When these young people reach legal adulthood at age 18, institutions must consider their immigration status. If the asylum claim is decided in their favour, the local authority must provide them with the same support and services as they do care leavers. As such, they continue to be eligible for a bursary as a student from a vulnerable group until they reach the upper age limit.

When an asylum claim is not supported, the individual may not be able to claim to stay legally in the UK. When asylum claims have been fully heard/the appeals process exhausted, an individual has no entitlement to public funds (with a few exceptions where the withdrawal of support would be seen as a breach of human rights).

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 up 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 contribute to the cost of the student’s books, compulsory UK trips, equipment that are essential to the course or contribute to the students travel if required. The funding can also be used for a meal allowance (£2.61 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. The College supplements this allocation and each eligible student will receive a combined total of £5.55 per timetabled day.

The student’s attendance is monitored, and monthly travel payments will be reduced if their attendance drops below 90% (in all subjects, including Maths and English). This is monitored monthly, 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 DfE 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 the College nearest to their home that offers their chosen course.

Discretionary awards are made to students whose household income is less than the threshold set by the College. (Currently £28,000 net including all benefits). 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 due will be withheld reduced if their attendance falls below 90% (in all subjects, including Maths and English). This is monitored monthly, and the dates viewed for attendance are 18th of the previous month to the 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.

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 16-18 (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 benefit;
- 4.7. Council Tax benefit;
- 4.8. Working and/or Child Tax credits;
- 4.9. Carer's Allowance;
- 4.10. Disability Living Allowance/Personal Independent Payments; and/or
- 4.11. Other income.

Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and disability elements of tax credits or Universal 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 of 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 Discretionary 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 the cost of essential books required for the course (as determined by the Head of Curriculum and is a one-off payment);
- 4.12 essential equipment or uniform for the course (as defined by the Head of Curriculum) and is a one-off payment;
- 4.13 an award for travel (paid monthly in arrears - see below);
- 4.14 trips. This is for UK compulsory trips related to the course the student is undertaking. **Not all course trips are deemed compulsory.** Maximum £75 contribution towards all compulsory trips in any one academic year.
- 4.15 childcare – a ‘top-up’ contribution towards childcare for one nursery aged child (subject to ‘Care to Learn’ terms and conditions and paid directly to the childcare provider); and/or
- 4.16 Residential Accommodation (**Hadlow students only**) – subject to meeting the College’s criteria (paid in monthly instalments to North Kent College). See separate Residential Bursary Fund Policy.

Note: Where students have applied for funding for course equipment or trips, this funding will be made “in kind”. If funding is paid to the student by BACS, this will not be paid until the end of November.

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 1.5 miles away from the campus they are studying at, Students must be studying at the College nearest to their home that offers their chosen course. 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 or if the student already has support in place from the local authority. Any travel award will only be a **contribution** to assist with travel. The contribution will not exceed the cheapest option for travel to the College. 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 - Care.

A maximum contribution towards travel per academic year is £2,500.

Students travelling from a London Borough to any of the College's campuses will be required to use their free 16+ or 18+ Oyster card within the Oyster catchment area (taking advantage of the free or reduced travel). If the student is studying at Gravesend, Tonbridge or Hadlow, more additional funds may be awarded towards the onward journey outside of the Oyster catchment area. The contribution will not exceed the cheapest option for travel to college.

Students travelling from Kent and whose parents/guardians pay their council tax to 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 the College may contribute 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.

All payments are made in arrears and under no circumstances will they be paid in advance.

Students who apply for and are awarded a residential bursary are **not** eligible to also apply for a travel award. See the Residential Bursary Fund Policy

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 £2.61 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 £5.55.

The meal allowance money is cleared down at the end of the week in line with the funding guidelines.

7. T-Level Fund

This fund is to cover additional costs for 16–18-year-olds who are on the new T-Level courses. 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. 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>. If Care to Learn does not cover the full cost of childcare the College may be able to provide 'top-up' contribution provided all Care to Learn criteria has been met.

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 to support students accessing financial support.

The College has a single, online, Student Bursary application form, which covers all the bursary funds. The online application form will be available on the College's website after the Easter half-term 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 available from the Student Bursary team.

Along with their application, students will need to provide full evidence of household income for the current tax year. Where financial circumstances have changed from the previous year, a note needs to be made on the online application. This will be considered when the application is assessed.

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. This will delay the processing of the application and may impact its success, as the fund is finite and once all funds are awarded, subsequent applications will be declined.

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. Fully completed applications received by these dates will be assessed before the student enrolls; this will ensure that 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, we aim to assess these within 10 working days and will inform applicants if the 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 to the student via their personal email held on the College records before enrolment. After enrolment, all future bursary correspondence will be sent to either the student's College email and/or personal email and if authorised, 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 will not be processed. If applications are received without the required evidence, the Student Bursary Team will attempt to contact the applicant three times, via email. With a final reminder being sent by email. Copies of all correspondence sent regarding the Bursary can be found on the student Bursary portal along with the student's application. If no response is received from the final letter within 14 days, the application will be closed.

12. Student Commitment

The student's attendance is monitored and any payments due will be reduced if their attendance falls below 90% (in all subjects, including maths and English). This is monitored monthly, and the dates viewed for attendance are between 18th of the previous month to 17th of the current month, the bursary is due. Any payments withheld or reduced due to attendance (including residential fees); student(s)/parent(s)/guardian(s) are liable for any shortfall/difference in the reduced monthly payment for the month the attendance falls below the required 90%.

If attendance drops below 90%, the bursary payments are reduced, it is up to the student to discuss with their tutor the reasons regarding the low attendance. If the tutor is happy with the reasons (exceptional circumstances only), then they must

email Student Bursary (studentbursary@northkent.ac.uk) to request that the reduced payments are re-instated to the full monthly entitlement. Consideration will be given to mitigating circumstances, such as safeguarding, family bereavement; or; transport issues e.g. train strikes. For travel payments, the amount will be reduced to reflect the students' attendance. i.e., if the student has only attended 67% of the allocated time, then they will only receive 67% of the residential/travel award for the month.

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 student charter.

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 card, IT equipment, books, uniform and other equipment purchased or loaned to the student, 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 Director of the MIS and Admissions. The appeal must clearly state why the award should be re-considered. The student may be asked to provide additional information or invited in to discuss their individual circumstances as part of the appeal. If they are unhappy with the outcome of their appeal, they should follow the College's Complaints Procedure [here](#).

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 DfE.

15. Data Protection

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