

Bursary and Free Meals Policy 2026/2027

Audience	Students, parents/carers and staff
Status / review cycle	Statutory/Annual
Current review	June 2026
Next review	June 2027
Review committee	SLT
Staff lead	Kate Parsons: Assistant Principal – Student Services and Communications
Trustee lead	N/A

This information is for the academic year 2026/2027. It will be updated for the following academic year 2027/2028 by 1st July 2027.

Introduction

The College offers two main sources of financial support to students – the Bursary Fund and Free Meals. This guide gives further information on both schemes.

Occasionally other possible sources of support are also advertised to relevant students, such as grants aimed at students progressing to university.

Bursary Fund

The Bursary Fund is provided to help students with the direct costs of study such as equipment, books, travel and essential trips and visits, and is available to assist students who may have difficulties in completing their course because of financial considerations. There are two types of Bursary:

- The Vulnerable Bursary is for young people in care, care leavers and young people who themselves are in receipt of certain benefits. The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:
 - in care
 - care leavers (for definition see criteria in section 3.1 of 16-19 Bursary Fund Guide [LINK](#))
 - receiving Income Support, or Universal Credit 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 or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right
- The Discretionary Bursary is aimed at providing financial support to students from low income families (as specified below).

Students in receipt of the Vulnerable or Discretionary Bursary will receive financial support relating to their actual costs. This means students will receive in-kind payments in the form of course

materials (equipment, resources, books), loaned materials from the College LRC and payments to provide support with the cost of travel to and from the College (up to a maximum of £30 per week plus reimbursement for certain travel discount schemes). Students in receipt of bursary will also receive financial support to facilitate participation in trips and visits that are essential to their core study programme.

Eligibility for Discretionary Bursary

- Students who reside in a household which has a taxable income of less than £35,000 for the tax year 2025-26 may apply for the Discretionary Bursary. This must be evidenced through production of P60, Payslips, Self-Assessment Tax Calculation Form (SA302), Universal Credit statements or bank statements dated within last 6 months.
- Students who qualify for Targeted Free Meals will meet the financial eligibility criteria for the Discretionary Bursary. Any bursary support awarded will be based on an assessment of the student's individual circumstances, actual participation costs and available funds.

Our intention is to have all applications in by the start of teaching each academic year. An application would be considered at any time during the academic year, however, Bursary payments will not be backdated before the application date.

The College receives a fixed allocation of funding, which is awarded to students based on their individual applications, actual costs and available funds. There is no guaranteed level of payment, and awards may vary from one academic year to the next. The weekly amount will be confirmed to successful applicants once the application has been approved, and reviewed at the mid-year point. It may be adjusted, either higher or lower, to ensure that funds are fairly distributed.

Travel costs

Travel costs for both Discretionary and Vulnerable Bursary students are paid weekly into the student's bank account, subject to maintaining good behaviour and attendance. Payments are reflective of actual travel costs, but may not cover the full cost of travel. Students are expected to use public transport and make use of schemes that reduce travel costs, such as railcards. The College may be able to reimburse the cost of some travel discount schemes on presentation of appropriate evidence.

Students must provide evidence of one week's travel costs on an annual basis to continue receiving travel support. Students who live within a 1 mile radius of the College will not qualify for travel costs. For further information regarding support for **16-19 year old students in Surrey, please read Surrey Council's 16+ Transport Policy Statement here: [LINK](#)**

Participation costs

In addition, successful applicants will receive, where required, a participation pack of books, equipment, materials and other items that are essential for their individual study programme. The participation pack will be provided in the first week after the October half-term break. All bursary students will receive a free stationary pack.

If a student is experiencing severe financial hardship and needs further assistance with the direct costs of study, such as equipment, books, travel or compulsory trips, they should speak with the Bursary Officer and request, complete and return an Exceptional Circumstances Claim Form.

Free Meals

Under the Free Meals scheme, eligible students will be allocated a credit of £3.50 per day to cover the cost of their 'main meal'. Eligible students will use their Student ID card to purchase meals using their free meals allowance from the College Cafe. The Student ID card can be used at any contactless terminal.

Student eligibility

- To be eligible to receive a free meal in the 2026 to 2027 academic year, a student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026.
- Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a free meal if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers') or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- These 2 groups of aged 19 plus students can receive a free meal while they continue to attend education (in the case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same programme they started before they turned 19), as long as their eligibility continues.

Students aged 19 or over at the start of their study programme, are not eligible for free meals in further education unless they have an EHCP or are a 19+ continuer.

Eligible benefits

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

Benefit	Evidence
Universal Credit	Universal Credit statements from the previous 3 months (please attach the full statement to your application)
Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999	Entitlement/award letter dated within the last 3 months

Students may also be entitled to a free college meal if their household:

- Is in receipt of income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Receives the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Meets criteria set out in separate guidance for families with no recourse to public funds: [LINK](#)

Process for households in receipt of Universal Credit

To verify the eligibility of students, or their parents, who are in receipt of Universal Credit, the College requires 3 full Universal Credit award statements dated within the last 6 months which includes detail of their monthly earnings. The College will need to assess the information given to obtain an accurate proxy of the individual's current earned annual income.

The College will confirm eligibility for one of the two categories of benefits-based free school meals:

- **Targeted Free School Meals:** for students who are in households in receipt of Universal Credit with annual household income earnings of £7,400 or less
- **Expanded Free School Meals:** for students who do not qualify for Targeted Free School Meals, but who are in households receiving Universal Credit

A manual check will be required to determine eligibility for those students or their parents who are self-employed and in receipt of universal credit. Parents will need to provide evidence:

- They are in receipt of Universal Credit by providing 3 months of Universal Credit statements
- They are self-employed by providing a copy of their company registration or tax return form
- Of their net annual profit before tax

Students not in a household in receipt of Universal Credit but who receive Employment and Support Allowance, or the guaranteed element of Pension Credit need to provide evidence of their award, dated within the last 3 months.

The College will assess eligibility for students of families with no recourse to public funds on an individual basis.

Further information about Free Meals can be found on the government website here: [LINK](#)

Summary

In all cases proof of eligibility will be required with any application. Please be aware that it is the applicant's sole responsibility to provide clear evidence of eligibility and applications will not be considered without the appropriate evidence. We cannot contact HMRC or other external services on your behalf.

Your completed application form together with evidence of eligibility must be sent via Pay My Student once you have enrolled at the College, please see the College website for further information: [LINK](#)

