



Bursary and Free Meal Procedures

For Entry In: September 2026

1. Introduction

The College receives funds from the Department for Education (DfE) each year to support students in further education. These funds are used to reduce financial barriers to learning and to ensure students can access education successfully.

The funding is split between two main elements: bursary funding, which is allocated to students based on individual need to support access to education, and Free School Meals in Further Education, which provides a daily allowance to enable eligible students to access a nutritious meal during the College day.

Each student must apply annually for financial support. This ensures the College holds up-to-date information, confirms eligibility for funding, and allows individual support arrangements to be reviewed and updated. Upper Sixth students may confirm that their circumstances remain unchanged, but must provide updated evidence where household financial circumstances have changed or where benefits are received.

The bursary element is discretionary, meaning the College will assess each application based on individual need and available evidence. In exceptional circumstances, pastoral staff may request financial support for a student who may not meet standard eligibility criteria. Any such request must be supported by appropriate evidence and approved by the Finance Director.

The Free School Meals element is funded at a rate of £2.66 per day per eligible student by the DfE. The College enhances this provision by topping up the allowance to £4.50 per day. This ensures that students are able to access a sufficient and consistent meal during the College day.

2. Vulnerable Student Support

Overview

The College receives funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to provide financial support to students to enable access to education and participation in learning.

This support is delivered through Free School Meals in Further Education and Vulnerable Student Support. All awards are based on eligibility criteria, individual need, and supporting evidence.

Vulnerable Student Support is not automatically awarded as a fixed amount and is assessed on an individual basis.

Vulnerable Student Support Eligibility

Students who meet Government-defined criteria may be eligible for Vulnerable Student Support.

This includes:

- Young people in care

- Care leavers
- Young people receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own right
- Young people with a disability receiving both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Eligibility does not guarantee a fixed financial award. Each application will be assessed individually to determine the level and type of support required.

Vulnerable Student Support – Provision

Where eligible, support will be based on individual need and may include:

- Free School Meals in Further Education
- Travel assistance, particularly where students live outside the Greater Manchester area or more than 10 miles from college
- Contribution towards essential course materials or equipment where required
- Additional support in exceptional circumstances where a clear educational need is evidenced

Support is not automatic and may vary between students depending on their circumstances.

Where support is provided for materials or equipment, students must provide valid receipts as evidence. Reimbursement will only be made where approved in advance.

Claiming of Funding for Vulnerable Students

The College is required to claim funding separately for students who meet the criteria for Vulnerable Student Support.

Claims are processed in conjunction with the Finance Department to ensure accuracy and compliance with DfE funding rules.

Each claim must be submitted individually and supported by appropriate documentary evidence confirming eligibility.

Supporting evidence must be retained for audit purposes.

3. Free School Meals in Further Education

Students whose household receives Universal Credit or other qualifying benefits, as well as students assessed as meeting Vulnerable Student Support criteria, will be entitled to Free School Meals in Further Education.

Eligible students will receive a daily allowance of £4.50 per day via the College cashless catering system for use in College food outlets.

The Free School Meals allowance is funded at a rate of £2.61 per day by the DfE, with the College providing a top-up to ensure a total daily value of £4.50.

The allowance:

- Is provided daily during term time
- Is not cumulative and cannot be carried forward
- Is not dependent on attendance
- Is provided as a catering credit only and not as cash (except in approved exceptional circumstances, such as work experience placements)

Students who are eligible for Free School Meals will normally receive support for meals through the College catering system rather than through discretionary bursary payments. Students in receipt of Free School Meals will not normally receive additional bursary support for food costs.

Work Experience Placements

Students in receipt of Free School Meals who undertake an approved work experience placement arranged through the College Careers Department will continue to receive their meal entitlement during the placement period.

Where College catering facilities are not available, the Free School Meals allowance will be paid directly to the student's bank account for the approved placement days only.

Pastoral Intervention and Exception Provision

Where a student is identified by the Pastoral Team as requiring food support but does not meet standard Free School Meals eligibility criteria, an exception may be made.

In such cases, the Pastoral Team will notify the Attendance or MIS Team using the agreed internal referral process.

The student may then be granted temporary access to the catering system under the Free School Meals mechanism for a defined period.

All exceptions must be:

- Time-limited
- Evidence-based
- Recorded for audit purposes

Monitoring and Compliance

The College will monitor Free School Meals uptake and eligibility through its MIS and catering systems to ensure accurate recording and compliance with DfE funding rules.

All records will be maintained for audit purposes.

4. Discretionary Bursary Support

Overview

The Discretionary Bursary is available to support students who do not meet the criteria for Free School Meals or Vulnerable Student Support but who may experience financial barriers to participation in education.

Support is intended to assist with essential costs associated with studying, including travel, learning materials, equipment, and other course-related expenses.

All awards are subject to available funding and individual assessment.

Eligibility for Discretionary Bursary

Students may be eligible for Discretionary Bursary Support where:

- Household income is below £35,000 per annum
- The student can provide evidence of financial need
- The student demonstrates satisfactory engagement with their programme of study, including attendance

All applications must be supported by appropriate documentary evidence and will be assessed on an individual basis.

The level of award will vary depending on household circumstances, course requirements, and attendance.

Travel Bursary (Including Placements)

Travel support may be provided where a student is required to travel to College or to an approved placement as part of their study programme.

Students are expected to use existing public transport provision where appropriate, including schemes such as the Our Pass scheme for eligible students within the Greater Manchester area.

Where students live more than 10 miles from College, or where travel presents a significant financial barrier, additional travel support may be considered.

Travel assistance may also be provided for approved work placements where travel costs are not otherwise covered.

All travel support must be evidenced and approved in advance where possible.

Level of Discretionary Bursary Award

The maximum discretionary bursary award is £20 per week.

Awards are linked to attendance and engagement with the student's programme of study.

The College reserves the right to reduce, suspend, or amend payments where attendance or engagement falls below expected standards without valid reason.

Bursary Payment Schedule 2026-2027

Discretionary bursary payments are made during term time only and are paid monthly in arrears via BACS directly into the student's bank account.

The payment schedule is based on attendance review periods as outlined below:

Payment Number	Attendance Dates	Attendance Weeks	Payment Date	Payment Month
1	Not attendance based	Three weeks	18 th September 2026	September
2	Not attendance based	Four weeks	25 th September 2026	October
3	Not attendance based	Three weeks	30 th October 2026	November
4	21 st September – 16 th October 2026	Four weeks	20 th November 2026	December
5	19 th October – 20 th November 2026	Four weeks	30 th December 2026	January
6	23 rd November – 18 th December 2026	Four weeks	22 nd January 2027	February
7	4 th – 29 th January 2027	Four weeks	19 th February 2027	March
8	1 st February – 5 th March 2027	Four weeks	19 th March 2027	April
9	8 th March – 16 th April 2027	Four weeks	23 rd April 2027	May
10	19 th April – 14 th May 2027	Four weeks	28 th May 2027	June

Important Information (Payment Conditions)

- Discretionary bursary payments are based on attendance and engagement during the relevant assessment period
- Payments will not be made during half-term weeks or College holiday periods
- Attendance will be monitored using College systems and may affect the level of award
- Free School Meals are not linked to attendance and are provided separately in accordance with eligibility criteria
- Vulnerable Student Support is assessed individually and is not part of the discretionary bursary payment schedule

Evidence Required for Discretionary Bursary Applications

Students must provide evidence of household financial circumstances to support their application for Discretionary Bursary Support.

Acceptable evidence may include:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- Child Tax Credit (where applicable and subject to income thresholds)
- Working Tax Credit run-on
- Universal Credit statements
- State Pension Guarantee Credit

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Disability Allowance or Carer's Allowance

All applications must be submitted with full supporting documentation.

The College will not accept incomplete applications or applications without sufficient evidence.

Failure to provide the required documentation may result in delays or rejection of bursary payments.