Sixth Form Bursary Policy 2026/27

Document Provenance	
Approver:	Executive Leadership Team
Date Approved:	20 August 2026
Effective From:	1 September 2026
Date of Next Review:	July 2026
Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Owner:	Chief Financial Officer / Chief Education Officer
Unless there are legislative or regulatory changes in the interim, this policy will be reviewed annually. Should no substantive changes be required at that point, the policy will move to the next review cycle.	

Version Control		
Version	Date	Changes
1.0	20/08/2026	In-cycle policy review and re-approval

Contents

1. Purpose and introduction 2
2. Policy statement 2
3. Assessment of needs 2
4. Bursary allocation 2
5. Essential participation costs 3
6. Household income checking 3
7. Emergency meal support 3
8. Eligibility criteria - all bursaries 4
   Age Requirements 4
   Eligible education provision 4
   Residency requirements 5
   Asylum seekers and bursary funding 5
   Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children eligibility for bursary 5
9. Bursary for vulnerable groups 5
   Definition of “in care” and “care leaver” for bursary fund eligibility 6
   Eligibility for bursary fund - foster care, including privately arranged foster care 6
   Universal Credit (UC) and bursary fund policy 7
   Proof of evidence of eligibility for bursary for vulnerable groups required evidence 7
   Pro-rata bursaries for vulnerable groups 7
   Young people eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups who do not require bursary funding 8
10. Application processing 8
11. Returning unspent 16 to 19 bursary funds 8
12. Policy review, monitoring and compliance 8
13. Accessibility and communication 9

1. Purpose and introduction

1.1 The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial assistance to help students overcome financial barriers that may prevent them from continuing their education.

1.2 Two bursary types are available:
- Vulnerable Group Bursaries: Available for students in defined vulnerable groups
- Discretionary Bursaries: Awarded based on the E-ACT's own policy, aligned with funding rules

1.3 Bursary funds can be used to cover necessary costs related to education, including:
- Travel expenses to and from school
- Essential books, equipment, or specialist clothing required for the study programme

1.4 Bursary funds cannot be used for:
- Learning support services (e.g., counselling or mentoring)
- Extra-curricular or non-compulsory activities unrelated to the study programme
- Living expenses

2. Policy statement

2.1 The purpose of this policy, in accordance with the guidelines set down by the Department for Education (DfE) is to:
- Ensure that the funds received annually from the DfE are targeted towards students identified as facing the greatest need to ensure that they are supported through their education
- Ensure financial sustainability through the flexible development of DfE funds received, thereby preventing an overspend in any cycle of funding
- Ensure any personal financial details remain secure and confidential
- Set relevant controls to minimise the risk of fraudulent claims.

2.2 The trust has reviewed the DfE 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027[1] in writing this policy.

3. Assessment of needs

3.1 We will ensure that bursary funding is awarded based on the actual needs of each student, not just their eligibility.

3.2 Each student will receive support based on their specific participation needs, rather than a fixed or flat rate.

3.3 This individualised assessment will be conducted annually, even if we do not reassess household income for the discretionary bursary each year.

3.4 In line with DfE guidance, eligibility alone does not guarantee an award. Each student's actual participation needs must be assessed (e.g. travel, books, equipment), and funding provided only to cover these costs. Flat-rate or automatic payments must not be made.

4. Bursary allocation

4.1 Both discretionary bursaries and those for defined vulnerable groups are intended to help students overcome their unique financial barriers to participation.

---

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guidance/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2026-to-2027

4.2 Bursary funds will only be provided to cover the actual costs students incur to participate in their education.

4.3 The Academy will use the Bursary Checklist when assessing bursary applications from students and administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

5. Essential participation costs

5.1 The bursary fund is designed to assist students with essential costs related to their study programme.

Eligible Expenses

- Costs for essential books, equipment, and travel to school or college.
- Additional childcare support costs for young parents receiving Care to Learn (C2L) when expenses exceed the scheme's maximum weekly rates.

Childcare Support costs

- Only eligible childcare providers under C2L rules will be used.
- We will confirm that the maximum C2L amount is being paid before providing any additional support.
- Any top-up payments will follow C2L guidelines and be paid directly to the childcare provider.

Restrictions

- The bursary fund cannot be used for:
    - Non-education-related costs (e.g., living expenses)
    - Extra-curricular or non-compulsory activities
    - Learning support services (e.g., counselling, mentoring, or extra tutoring)

6. Household income checking

6.1 We will ensure that students are eligible for the discretionary bursary each year they seek support.

6.2 We may choose to verify household income either annually or only once at the start of the student's study programme.

6.3 If annual checks are not conducted, we will require a signed and dated self-declaration form from the student, confirming that their household circumstances have not changed. This can be in hard copy or electronic format.

7. Emergency meal and travel support

7.1 In cases of severe hardship, the bursary fund may be used to provide meal and/or travel support without the usual household income checks or evidence.

7.2 This flexibility applies only in exceptional cases and is expected to be used for a very small number of students.

7.3 Meal/travel support can be provided on the days a student attends their study programme.

7.4 We will retain the following records:

- The number of students receiving this support
- The number of days support is provided
- The total value of support given to each student and the reason for it
- Receipts for food expenditures or signed confirmation from the student of receipt of funds for food/travel

7.5 This emergency meal/travel support is temporary and not ongoing for any individual student.

7.6 The student's household income and participation needs will be assessed as usual for future support.

7.7 This flexibility applies only to food and travel support.

8. Eligibility criteria- all bursaries

Age Requirements

8.1 Students must be 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026, to qualify for the bursary fund for the 2026 to 2027 academic year.

Exceptions

8.2 Students aged 19 or over can receive a discretionary bursary if they:

- Are continuing a study programme they started between ages 16 and 18 (19+ continuers)
- Have an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan

Additional Notes

- 19+ students can receive a discretionary bursary as long as they remain eligible and need the support to continue their education. However, they are not eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups.
- Bursaries are generally for students aged 16 and over. In exceptional cases, bursaries may be given to students under 16 if they are on a funded 16 to 19 study programme (e.g., an accelerated study programme).
- Students enrolled at another institution that receives public funding for them are not eligible for the bursary fund. For example, students aged 14 to 16 who are attending college as part of their key stage 4 programme at a local school/ academy. The DfE funding regulations for post-16 provision[2] provides more detail about funded 14- to 16-year-olds.
- Students under 19 enrolled in higher education qualifications are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

Eligible education provision

8.3 Students must be enrolled in a programme inspected by a public body (e.g., Ofsted) that assures quality.

8.4 The programme must fall into one of the following categories:

- Funded directly by the DfE or through a local authority
- Publicly funded and leading to a qualification accredited by Ofqual or approved for funding (up to Level 3)

8.5 Students on apprenticeship programmes, waged training, or those employed are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

8.6 Non-employed students aged 16 to 19 participating in a Prince's Trust Team Programme are eligible for the bursary, just like any other student on an eligible, publicly funded course.

8.7 Students on distance learning programmes are generally not expected to need bursary support due to the lack of associated costs like travel or equipment.

8.8 In rare cases where financial help is needed, support may be provided in-kind, such as a temporary travel pass for attending exams.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-rules-for-16-to-19-provision/advice-funding-rules-for-16-to-19-provision-2026-to-2027

Residency requirements

8.9 Students must meet the residency criteria outlined in the DfE funding regulations for post-16 education.

8.10 We will collect and keep evidence to confirm a student's eligibility for post-16 funding and bursary fund eligibility. This evidence is required for audit purposes.

Asylum seekers and bursary funding

8.11 Generally, asylum seekers cannot receive public funds.

8.12 Asylum-seeking children under 18 with an adult relative or partner, and those aged 18 and above, are entitled to education but not public funds.

8.13 Destitute asylum seekers can apply to the Home Office for housing and essential cash but are not eligible for other income.

8.14 We will provide in-kind support to asylum seekers, such as books, equipment, or a travel pass, as long as their asylum application has not been refused.

8.15 Cash support is not provided to asylum seekers, except for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

Support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children eligibility for bursary

8.16 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who are under the care of the local authority, are eligible for a bursary as part of the 'in care' group if they have financial needs.

Support upon reaching 18

8.17 When they turn 18, their eligibility for bursary support depends on their immigration status:

- If their asylum claim is approved, they will receive support similar to care leavers and remain eligible for the bursary until they reach the upper age limit
- If their asylum claim is refused, they may not legally stay in the UK and will not be eligible for public funds, except in cases where withdrawing support would breach human rights

9. Bursary for vulnerable groups

9.1 Students in financial need who meet the criteria can apply for the bursary for vulnerable groups. The bursary is designed to support students who may not receive financial help from parents or carers.

9.2 Bursaries cover essential costs like travel, books, equipment, and specialist clothing needed for participation. The bursary is not for learning support services (e.g., counselling), extra-curricular activities, or living costs.

9.3 Support is based on assessed needs, not a fixed amount.

9.4 Students on study programmes lasting 30 weeks or more may receive support of up to £1,200 where assessed actual participation costs justify that level of support. Students on shorter programmes may require lower levels of support, depending on an assessment of their actual participation costs and financial need.

9.5 Academies must submit funding claims for bursaries for defined vulnerable groups directly to the DfE at defined points in the year, replacing the previous SBSS draw-down process. Claims must be supported by evidence and records kept for audit.

Defined Vulnerable Groups

9.6 Vulnerable groups are:

- In care
- Care leavers
- Receiving Income Support (IS) or Universal Credit (UC) for self-support or supporting dependents
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) along with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC Legacy Benefits:
- New claims for legacy benefits have been closed since 2018, so students aged 16-18 will not receive these. Students aged 19-25 may still receive legacy benefits.

Additional Considerations

9.7 Students may receive more than £1,200 if extra support is needed, with additional funding coming from discretionary bursaries or other funds.

9.8 The eligibility for a bursary does not automatically guarantee a free meal in further education. Free meals in further education[3] has its own eligibility criteria

Decision-Making

9.9 We will ensure each student's financial need is assessed. Applications may be refused if the student does not have actual financial needs. We will keep detailed records of all bursary awards, including the purpose and amount of funding.

Definition of "in care" and "care leaver" for bursary fund eligibility

9.10 In care is defined as children looked after by a local authority under:

- Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (voluntary basis)
- Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care order)

9.11 For details, refer to Section 22 of the Children Act 1989

9.12 A care leaver is defined as a person:

- Aged 16 or 17 who was looked after for at least 13 weeks (consecutive or combined), starting after age 14 and ending after age 16
- Aged 18 or above who was looked after for at least 13 weeks (consecutive or combined), starting after age 14 and ending after age 16

9.13 Only students who meet these definitions and have financial needs are eligible for the bursary.

Eligibility for bursary fund- foster care, including privately arranged foster care

9.14 Young people placed with a foster carer by the local authority, including those with carers from independent fostering agencies, are considered 'in care' and may be eligible for the bursary if they have financial needs.

9.15 Children in private foster care arrangements (arranged between parents and private carers) are not considered 'looked after' and are not eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups.

9.16 If a young person transitions from local authority care to a permanent arrangement like a Special Guardianship Order, they are classified as a care leaver. To qualify for the bursary, they must meet the 'care leaver' criteria (13 weeks of care, starting after age 14 and ending before or at age 16) and need financial support to participate

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-meals-in-further-education-guide/free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions-guide-academic-year-2026-to-2027

Universal Credit (UC) and bursary fund policy

9.17 UC has replaced Income Support (IS), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and other benefits for new claimants. UC notifications do not specify which benefits have been replaced.

9.18 To qualify for bursaries for vulnerable groups under UC, students must be receiving UC in their own right. This applies if they are financially supporting themselves and any dependents living with them (e.g., a child or partner).

9.19 The DfE is reviewing how legacy benefits descriptions are reflected in the vulnerable groups criteria and this policy will take into account any updated guidance.

9.20 Bursary funds are not included in the UC assessment by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The impact of bursary funding on UC depends on whether the student is in advanced full-time education.

9.21 It is unlikely that 16 to 18-year-olds are in advanced full-time education, as they usually participate in level 3 or below study programmes.

9.22 Since the full rollout of UC, 16 to 18-year-olds can only claim UC, not IS or income related ESA.

9.23 Educational awards, including the 16 to 19 Bursary, do not count as grant income for UC purposes under regulation 68(7) of the UC Regulations 2013.

Proof of evidence of eligibility for bursary for vulnerable groups required evidence

9.24 In Care / Care Leaver**:** Provide written confirmation from the relevant local authority (current or previous). This can be a letter or email.

9.25 Universal Credit (UC) / Income Support (IS): Submit a copy of the UC or IS award notice showing it is in the student's name. Ensure it does not include conditions that prevent further education. For UC claimants, additional documents such as a tenancy agreement, child benefit receipt, or utility bills may be required.

9.26 UC/ESA and DLA/PIP: Provide a copy of the UC claim from DWP and evidence of DLA or PIP receipt.

9.27 UC claimants can print or screenshot their award details from their online account. Students can also request evidence from their UC work coach or relevant benefit office if receiving IS or ESA.

9.28 We submit funding claims for defined vulnerable group bursaries through the DfE funding claim process in accordance with published DfE guidance. Claims will be processed only after verifying eligibility and assessing the actual financial need, not automatically set at £1,200.

Pro-rata bursaries for vulnerable groups

9.29 Students who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups and have a financial need but are on a study programme lasting less than 30 weeks, will have their support assessed according to their actual participation costs. A pro-rata approach may be used where appropriate.

For example:
A student is on a 30-week programme. If assessed that they have financial needs that require a full £1,200, the bursary may be £1,200 ÷ 30 = £40 per week. If the same student was on a 10-week programme, the pro-rata bursary may be £40 x 10 weeks = £400

9.30 We will also consider the number of hours involved in a student's study programme when deciding if a pro-rata payment is more appropriate. A student studying for around 16 hours a week is likely to have greater costs than a student studying for 4 hours a week, for example. We do recognise that some study programme costs may be 'fixed' in nature, for example, course equipment costs.

Young people eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups who do not require bursary funding

9.31 In some cases, a young person might meet the eligibility criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups, but their financial needs are already met and/or they have no relevant costs.

For example:

- *A student attending specialist residential provision that covers their educational costs in full*
- *A student taking a distance learning programme who has no financial barriers to participation (for example, they do not have any travel costs or meal costs)*
- *A student in the care of the local authority whose educational costs are covered in full by the local authority*
- *A student who is financially supported by their partner*

9.32 In these circumstances, we can refuse the student's application. We will explain to the student and their support worker/parent where applicable, the aim of bursary funding and why we are not awarding any bursary.

9.33 We are clear in our bursary fund application form that there is a possibility of no award or a limited award. This ensures all parties understand that meeting the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups does not automatically entitle them to funding and that an assessment of their actual costs will be undertaken.

10. Application processing

10.1 The bursary fund application form specifies that funding is not guaranteed. An assessment of actual costs will be conducted to determine the amount of support, if any.

10.2 If a student's application is refused, we will provide a clear explanation to the student and their support worker or parent, detailing the bursary's purpose and the reason for the refusal.

10.3 All applicants must confirm that the information and evidence provided in support of their bursary application is accurate, complete and true to the best of their knowledge. Where false, misleading or incomplete information is provided, the Academy reserves the right to:

- Refuse an application
- Withdraw any bursary award
- Recover any funds paid in error or as a result of a fraudulent claim
- Refer suspected cases of fraud to the appropriate authorities where necessary

10.4 The Academy will investigate any suspected fraudulent applications and will maintain appropriate records and evidence in accordance with DfE funding, audit and assurance requirements.

11. Returning unspent 16 to 19 bursary funds

11.1 Bursary funds cannot be carried forward for more than one year, as per DfE guidance.

11.2 We will report any unspent bursary funds from previous years. Unspent funds will be reported via the customer help centre, specifying the amount and the relevant year(s). This reporting will be done as soon as we are aware of the unspent funds and no later than March 31 each year.

12. Policy review, monitoring and compliance

12.1 We will regularly review our bursary policy to ensure it effectively supports students who need financial assistance, especially those with lower income jobs or higher essential costs. The Education Leadership Team and the Trust Bursary Tracker will be used for oversight and consistency across all academies. **Note:** Students from lower-income households or those with significant financial challenges may receive more support compared to those only receiving free school meals or other benefits.

12.2 Monitoring and compliance of the policy will be completed by the Senior Regional Directors.

12.3 The review of this policy will take place annually by the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Education Officer and will be approved by the Executive Leadership Team.

13. Accessibility and communication

13.1 This policy will be published on the Academy website. Please request a printed version from the Academy.

13.2 Please email Governance.Team@E-ACT.org.uk if you request assistance in accessing the policy document.