

COLLEGE MEALS, BURSARY AND DISCRETIONARY LEARNER SUPPORT POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bursaries help students (in two categories age 16-19 and 19+) on substantial programmes of study with the costs associated with learning. Specifically, the categories for which support is given may include: transport, college meals, resources including kits and uniform and other items that are essential to the course. Bursaries are not available to students on apprenticeship programmes. Eligibility is based on age, family income levels and current personal situation relating to financial restraint and need.
- 1.2 This policy also refers to College Meals (also known as Free Meals in FE) which is available to eligible students who study on substantial FE courses. Funding for College Meals is a minimum of £2.53 per eligible student per meal taken. Subject to availability of funds this amount can be increased using bursary funds.
- 1.3 To be eligible for College Meals students must be aged 16-18 as of 31st August 2024 and must be enrolled in further education provision funded via the Education and Skills Funding Agency. College Meals are not available to students aged 14-16 or students learning through apprenticeship schemes.
- 1.4 College Meals are also available to eligible students aged between 19 and 25 who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHC Plan) and meet the criteria or are on a 19+ continuer, which means that they must be on the same programme they started prior to turning 19.
- 1.5 The 16-18 bursary allocation for 2024/2025 has been set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency at £866,487, of which £193,766 is to fund free school meals. The bursary allocation for adults has been set at £225,000 but is subject to change according to utilisation of funding. The Loans Bursary Allocation has been set at £101,475 and is based on a loans facility of £202,950.
- 1.6 Students aged 19 and over who have had an Advanced Learner Loan approved by the Student Loan Company and have registered for their course are potentially eligible to apply for a Loans Bursary, dependent on need. The categories for which support is given are: childcare, residential, travel and emergency funding, but discretion may be applied to react to learner needs and local circumstances. This fund is also available to ex-military personnel and to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities where specialist equipment and technology may be required. Students will be financially assessed using the college's tiered system of support.
- 1.7 Eligible students, who have been offered and accepted a place on a substantial programme of study may apply for learner support funds. Discretion may be used to support learners where financial need is identified but eligibility is not fully met as per college tiered system.

Section 2

BURSARY A,B,C,D and E/College Meals

- 2.1 This is available to students who are aged 16-18 on 31st August, 2024 and **have a total family income of less than or equal to £40,000** which can be evidenced through any of the categories below:
- Students who received free school meals in year 11 (certified by their local authority); (automatic eligibility for Free School meals)
 - Students whose parents are on Income Support; (May support Bursary application)
 - Student whose parents are in receipt of Universal Credit; (May support Bursary application)
 - Students whose parents receive income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-based Employment and Support Allowance; (May support Bursary application)
 - Students whose parents receive support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; (May support Bursary application)
 - Students whose parents receive the Guarantee element of State Pension Credit; (May support Bursary application)
- 2.2 The different bursary categories available to all students aged 16-18 assess both financial and personal circumstances to enable each student to receive the appropriate support for their current financial need and the course they are studying on. This may include a free travel pass where required, a cash payment payable as a BACS transfer which will be paid in arrears and/or contribution to resources such kit require for the course. When the travel bus pass is not appropriate for the learner the opportunity to claim fuel mileage to get to and from college can be accessed. All applications will be made for bursary via our online application forms unless students require adaption to be made.
- 2.3 Applications for this bursary should be received by 27th September 2024, however, applications for free travel passes can be made at any time. Guidance on completion of the application and the information that will need to be provided is found at the start of the online application. If there are any concerns, then the Bursary team should be contacted to support the application by making relevant adjustments.
- 2.4 This is available to students who are aged 19+ on 31st August, 2024 and **have a total family income of less than or equal to £40,000** which can be evidenced through any of the categories below:
- Students who are 19+ continuers (on Study Programme who began aged 16-18); (automatic eligibility for Free School meals **for EHCP 19+ learners who meet the criteria**)
 - Students whose are on Income Support; (May support Bursary application)
 - Student whose are in receipt of Universal Credit; (May support Bursary application)
 - Students whose receive income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-based Employment and Support Allowance; (May support Bursary application)
 - Students whose receive support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; (May support Bursary application)
 - Students whose receive the Guarantee element of State Pension Credit; (May support Bursary application)
 - Under 20 years of age, a qualifying element for Child Tax credit and have an annual household income of less than £40,000.
- 2.5 The different bursary categories available to all students aged 19+ assess both financial and personal circumstances to enable each student to receive the

appropriate support for their current financial need and the course they are studying on. This may include a free travel pass where required, a cash payment payable as a BACS transfer which will be paid in arrears and/or contribution to resources such kit require for the course. When the travel bus pass is not appropriate for the learner the opportunity to claim fuel mileage to get to and from college can be accessed. All applications will be made for bursary via our online application forms unless students require adaption to be made.

- 2.6 Applications for this bursary should be received by 27th September 2024, however, applications for free travel passes can be made at any time. Guidance on completion of the application and the information that will need to be provided is found at the start of the online application. If there are any concerns, then the Bursary team should be contacted to support the application by making relevant adjustments.
- 2.7 Any applications received after the deadlines given will be checked, received and processed where eligible, if funds are available. Late enrollees' applications will also be subject to review and the availability of funds.
- 2.8 Evidence of eligibility must be provided to support all bursary applications. Evidence must be postmarked within the last six months unless a tax credit notification is supplied in which case it should be relevant for the most recent tax year. For College Meals applications only, applicants whose parents are in receipt of Universal Credit will have to provide a Universal Credit Award Statement from their most recent complete assessment period, showing that their earnings do not exceed £616.67. If earnings do not exceed this amount, then the applicant will be eligible for college meals. It is recognised that earnings may fluctuate in which case further Award statements may be requested. Further information about Universal Credit eligibility can be found at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133262/Free_school_meals.pdf

Section 3 TARGETED BURSARY /College Meals

- 3.1 This is available to students aged 16-18 on 31st August 2024 in the following groups who will be awarded up to £1,200 per academic year (pro-rata for late starters):
 - Students in care; (including unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children)
 - Care leavers;
 - Students in receipt of income support or Universal Credit in their own right as they are financially supporting themselves or someone who is dependant on them and living with them, such as a child or partner;
 - receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right
- 3.2 For Targeted Bursary applications, the College will be required to complete and submit the *16 to 19 Bursary Fund Vulnerable Students Funding Claim Form* for each applicant to the Learner Support Service (LSS), who will then release the funds.
- 3.3 Targeted Bursary for students aged 16-18 will include a free travel pass where required and a cash payment payable as a BACS transfer which will be paid in arrears.
- 3.4 Applications for this Bursary scheme can be made at any point in the year and

students eligible for this scheme are guaranteed entitlement. Note that receipt of payment and payment decisions are subject to the same terms and conditions as our other bursary categories. Students will only receive what is deemed an actual need to enable the student to participate. If the college feels that the student from the vulnerable group does not have any financial need then the application will be refused.

- 3.5 Evidence of eligibility must be provided to support all bursary applications. Evidence must be postmarked within the last six months unless a tax credit notification is supplied in which case it should be relevant for the most recent tax year. For College Meals applications only, applicants in receipt of Universal Credit will have to provide a Universal Credit Award Statement from their most recent complete assessment period, showing that their earnings do not exceed £616.67. If earnings do not exceed this amount then the applicant will be eligible for college meals. It is recognised that earnings may fluctuate in which case further Award statements may be requested. Further information about Universal Credit eligibility can be found at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133262/Free_school_meals.pdf

Section 4 CONDITIONS OF PAYMENT

Bursary payments are made subject to the financial need of the student; therefore, a student's attendance will be considered as a student needs to be attending college to incur the costs attached to their programme of study.

4.1 Attendance

Support will be given as per need therefore there will be a reduction in financial support given if a student does not attend college. Students are expected to have excellent attendance to college and the assessment that takes place will use college attendance standards as a guide to inform support needed.

4.2 Behaviour and conduct

There may be occasions when a student does not comply with college standards and therefore financial support may be removed as the student will not be required to attend college for that period of time whilst the disciplinary policy is being followed.

Section 5 BURSARY ADVANCED/BURSARY E

5.1 In addition to the bursaries mentioned above, eligible students may apply for support with the cost of:

- Examination fees
- Transport
- Childcare
- Books
- Equipment
- Kits and uniform
- Essential trips and visits
- Other course related costs

5.2 Students are eligible for Bursary advanced/Bursary E support if they fall into one of the categories listed for Bursary 1A-D; or their household income is less than or equal to £40,000; or they can demonstrate circumstances of extreme hardship. Instances of extreme hardship will be assessed on a case by case basis depending on need .

5.3 Bursary E/Advanced funds may also be used to buy equipment for high cost areas which may be available for loan to students facing financial hardship.

5.4 Application forms for this bursary are available online or if a student can't access the application online then they can seek advice from the Programme Management team. Applications may be referred to an arbitration panel and any decisions for all Bursary 1A-E and Bursary Advanced are dependent upon availability of finances.

5.5 Evidence must be supplied to support all financial support applications including College Meals and evidence must be postmarked within the last six months of submission of an application or for Tax Credit award notices within the current financial year. The college must retain evidence of eligibility for all applications for audit purposes.

5.6 Students must have their own bank accounts to access learner support funds. Money cannot be paid into another bank account on the student's behalf. The college recognises that exceptions may apply and will consider mitigating factors on a case-by-case basis.

5.7 Examination Fees

In order to be eligible for support with examination fees, a student must be ineligible for support with examination fees via any other examination fee remission category.

N.B. students are not required to make an application for this support. Evidence of means tested benefits is taken at the time of enrolment and eligible students will automatically be granted payment of examination fees.

5.8 Transport

5.8.1 Students can also apply for support with transport costs to and from College if they do not meet the eligibility criteria for the Bursary schemes.

5.8.2 In order to be eligible for a free travel pass, students must live 1.5 miles or more from the place of study **or** have to cross the Widnes/Runcorn Bridge to travel to college and be enrolled on a substantial programme of study.

- 5.8.3 Students can also apply for a free travel/ fuel mileage claim pass while on industry placement/work experience if they live 1.5 miles or more from the venue of their placement/work experience. Details of the industry placement/work experience must be confirmed by a member of staff.
- 5.8.4 Students must abide by the bus companies' rules and regulations in order to retain the right to use these bus passes.
- 5.8.5 Students who do not reside on a bus route, but who are eligible for support with transport costs, can receive payment towards the cost of their chosen method of transport, to a value of £10 per week, although more may be available where students are travelling on complex routes or longer distances. This support will be paid to the student by BACS on a monthly basis. Students may only receive either a subsidised bus pass or travel payments, not both.
- 5.8.6 Further support towards the cost of transport may be applied for where additional transport costs are incurred such as industry placement, job/university interviews or where significant hardship is faced. This support can be accessed via the Bursary E scheme.

5.9 Childcare

- 5.9.1 Students can apply for support with the cost of childcare while they are at College subject to their meeting eligibility conditions and availability of funding.
- 5.9.2 This support is restricted only to childcare needed when the student is required to be in College, according to their course timetable and other requirements of the course such as work experience placements, scheduled revision sessions and exams/assessments.
- 5.9.3 This support is restricted only to childcare provided by nurseries or registered childminders where Ofsted ensures the childcare provider meets the relevant national standards.
- 5.9.4 This support is only available where care cannot be provided by persons with parental responsibility. Evidence may be required to support such circumstances.
- 5.9.5 In order to be eligible for support with childcare costs, the applicant must be aged 20 years or over (under 20s are supported via the 'Care to Learn' programme).
- 5.9.6 To qualify for payment student attendance must be at 85% or above. If under 85%, the College will not pay unless evidence of authorised absence is shown. Childcare providers will be notified of 'cause for concern' students where poor attendance results in non-payment of a childcare provider's invoice or if attendance falls below 85% and the student is considered to be at risk of further poor attendance.
- 5.9.7 Students will be expected to pay 50% of the cost for any retainer charged by their childcare provider during half terms and Bank Holidays, except when other course related commitments such as work experience placements or scheduled revision sessions are unavoidably arranged during holidays. This support is subject to the availability of funds.
- 5.9.8 The maximum amounts the College will pay for childcare costs are as follows:
- Full day in a nursery - £45.00
 - Half day in a nursery - £25.00
 - Childminder - £ 6.00 per hour
 - After-school club session - £9.00 per session

- 5.9.9 Should any student choose childcare that exceeds these costs, they will be expected to pay any excess charge themselves.
- 5.9.10 Students MUST ensure that they give the necessary notice to their childcare provider before they finish their programme of study. Failure to do so will result in the student being liable for any outstanding payments. If students leave the College before completion of their course they will be required to meet the full cost of their childcare fees for the ensuing period of notice as required by the childcare provider. This is also the case where students are asked to leave the College through the Managing Students Policy.
- 5.9.11 The Early Years Free Education Grant is available for all three and four year olds, providing 15 hours of free nursery education for up to 38 weeks of the year until they reach compulsory school age. Early Years Education Grant is also available to 2 year olds whose parents/carers meet the eligibility criteria. Any entitlement must be deducted from the amount payable by the College. Students in receipt of Tax Credits will need to use their full childcare allowance before any additional amounts are awarded.

As part of this grant from September 2024 you may be able to get 15 hours free childcare for a child from the age of 9 months if you are working. Students can apply for this from 12th May 2024.

5.10 Other Course Related Costs

- 5.10.1 Students can apply for any other course related costs, for example, uniforms, trips and equipment from either the College's bursary or the Advanced Learning Loans bursary. The amount available is subject to assessment and may be proportionate to the total cost of equipment needed.
- 5.10.2 The College reserves the right to adapt the bursary support available to any individual to match unspent funds.

5.11 Advanced Learner Loans Bursary

- 5.11.1 This may be available to support students with costs such as: childcare, travel, emergency funding and to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities where specialist equipment and technology may be required who meet the following criteria:

- Aged 19+,
- Have had an Advanced Learner Loan approved by the Student Loan Company,
- Are due to start their programmes from August 2024

AND

- Have an annual income that is less than or equal to £40,000; or they can demonstrate circumstances of extreme hardship. Instances of extreme hardship may include emergency living expenses.

OR

- Are in receipt of means tested benefits as identified in 2.4.

- 5.11.2 The Loans Bursary is limited and awards are subject to assessment and availability.

- 5.11.3 Eligible students may apply for a Loan Bursary for one of three fixed rate bursaries of:

- Rate 1 - £50 for lower cost support, for example books and equipment

- Rate 2 - £150 for learning support and higher cost learner support for example travel
- Rate 3 - £250 per month to help with the cost of childcare while they are at College, restrictions apply as above.

5.11.4 The funding will be claimed by the College using the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). Where required, the College can claim funding in excess of the fixed monthly rate using the Earnings Adjustment Statement.

5.11.5 Funds may be vied to Advanced Learner Loans Bursary from Discretionary Learner Support Funds where funds are available.

5.12 Assessment

5.12.1 A standard publicity and application process will be used to ensure a consistent basis for the assessment of all bursary applications.

5.12.2 Evidence of eligibility must be copied and retained with the application form.

5.12.2 All applications will be judged against the relevant eligibility criteria outlined above. Applications will be subject to a second screening and, as such, may encounter some processing delays if any irregularities such as incorrect bank details or insufficient evidence are found.

5.12.3 In the first instance, these judgements will be made by the Head of Student Services and Learner Support Fund Administrator.

5.12.4 Any applications which are judged to be ineligible according to the relevant criteria, may be referred to an arbitration panel at the request of the applicant.

5.12.5 Any student who has previously received support through the Learner Support Fund and has withdrawn before completing their course, may have their application referred to an arbitration panel and may have their support reviewed and possibly discontinued by an arbitration panel at such time that insufficient funds are available.

5.12.6 Any student who has already received support through the Learner Support Fund and whose chosen course is not a progression from their previous programme of study, may have their application referred to an arbitration panel, and may have their support reviewed and possibly discontinued by an arbitration panel at such time that insufficient funds are available.

5.13 Internal Decision Making and Appeals Process

5.13.1 Appeals against any bursary decision need to be in writing and addressed to the Head of Student Services at Riverside College. All appeals will be heard by an arbitration panel.

5.13.1 Arbitration panels will consist of at least 2 members of the College Management Team, who will have no direct link to the individual in question (e.g. the panel will not include the Head of School for the individual in question).

5.13.2 Panel meetings will take place within 5 working days of an appeal being made.

5.13.3 The panel will make decisions based on the following criteria:

- If the application has been refused due to the student withdrawing from a course in previous academic years, it may be allowed if this has only happened on one

occasion, or if there are extenuating circumstances leading to the early withdrawal from the programme of study.

- If the application has been refused due to the student having already completed a course at the same level as the current one, the bursary application may be allowed if this has only happened on one occasion, or if there are extenuating circumstances leading to the same level progression.

5.13.4 All panel decisions will be subject to the availability of funds and applications may be allowed or refused on this basis.

5.13.5 Applicants will be informed of the decision of the arbitration panel within 5 working days of the panel meeting.

6 SUPPORT WITH THE PROCESS

6.1 The process for accessing bursaries is administered by members of the Learner Support Fund Team.

6.2 No student will be disadvantaged by this policy and any student who needs help/support with any stage of the process, such as completing application forms, appealing against decisions, or understanding the outcome of any appeal, will be supported by a member of the Learner Support Fund team or a Wellbeing Officer. Students may need support for a variety of reasons, e.g. difficulty with literacy; English as an additional language; learning difficulty/disability; emotional distress.

6.3 The role of the Wellbeing Officer is also to support students in understanding what financial support they are/may be eligible for, and in ensuring they are able to access this support. The Wellbeing Officers do not form part of the Arbitration Panels, and as such are able to advocate on the student's behalf. The College strives to ensure that the application process to bursary and Learner Support Funds is fair and equitable.

7 ANNEX

There have been significant changes within our setting and within the UK in response to the outbreak of COVID-19.

This annex sets out some of the adjustments Riverside College is making in line with the changed arrangements in the college and following advice from government and local agencies.

The current position is that, following the Government announcement, all college sites were closed, and timetables were postponed. The College is now being guided by Public Health and will continue to do so whilst slowly reopening buildings and some students beginning to return.

Despite the changes the College Meals, Bursary and Discretionary Learner Support Policy is fundamentally the same. During lockdown the College has continued to make bursary payments to students with an uplift to the amount to include the costs associated with College Free Meals. The College has continued to follow Government advice and has used Learner Support Funds to assist students to continue with their learning remotely. The College is also reviewing the application process to allow students to apply for learner support funds remotely should social distancing measures continue in the new academic year.

7.1 Learner Support Fund Chart overleaf

Learner Support Fund		
Category	16-18	19+
Free School meals	Yes -£2.53 for eligible students on a full-time course	No- Not generally available College Meals are available to eligible students aged between 19 and 25 who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHC Plan) or are 19+ continuers.
Bursary Support Eligibility	Yes- Any learner on Full time course that has a total family income of less than or equal to £40,000 will be able to access some form of support. Support will be given as per need which will be agreed after the financial assessment. This money comes from the ESFA Bursary Allocation 24/25. Full detail in 2.1	Yes, any learner on a Full-Time course that has a total family income of less than or equal to £40,000. This money comes from the ESFA Bursary Allocation 24/25 for adults. Some students may need some financial support who are accessing our part time courses. Assessments will be made and then support will be agreed which may include support towards kit purchases, uniform and/or other essential items that are needed to fully participate in the course. Full details in 2.4
Bursary Support Covers	Specifically, the categories for which support is given may include: transport, meals, materials, Disclosure & Barring Service checks, essential trips, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service fee, industry placement, exam fees and professional membership fees.	The categories for which support is given are childcare, residential, travel and emergency funding, but discretion may be applied to react to learner needs and local circumstances. This fund is also available to ex-military personnel and to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities where specialist equipment and technology may be required.
Targeted Bursary	This is available to students aged 16-18 on 31st August 2024 in the following groups who will be awarded up to £1,200 per academic year (pro-rata for late starters). Financial need will be considered and support will be offered in line with the need of the student and their course.	N/A
Targeted Bursary Eligibility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students in care; 2. Care leavers; 3. Students in receipt of income support or Universal Credit in their own right; 	N/A

	4. Students who are disabled AND in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance AND Disability Living Allowance (or Personal Independence Payments) in their own right.		
	Bursary E/Bursary Advanced	19+ Bursary Advanced/E (non Advanced Learner Loan students)	19+ Loans Bursary
Bursary E And Bursary Advanced Eligibility	Students are eligible for Bursary E or Bursary Advanced support if they fall into one of the categories listed for Bursary 1A-D; or their household income is less than or equal to £40,000; or they can demonstrate circumstances of extreme hardship. Instances of extreme hardship may include emergency living expenses. In these instances the level of financial assistance provided will be determined on a case by case basis depending on need.	Students are eligible for Bursary E or Bursary Advanced support if they fall into one of the categories listed for Bursary 1A-D; or their household income is less than or equal to £40,000; or they can demonstrate circumstances of extreme hardship. Instances of extreme hardship will be determined on a case by case basis depending on need.	Students are eligible for Loans Bursary if they meet the following criteria: Aged 19+, Have had an Advanced Learner Loan approved by the Student Loan Company, Are due to start their programmes from August 2024 AND Have an annual income that is less than or equal to £40,000 ; or they can demonstrate circumstances of extreme hardship. Instances of extreme hardship may include emergency living expenses.
Bursary E- Bursary Advanced Covers	Eligible students may apply for support with the cost of:	Eligible students may apply for support with the cost of:	Available to support eligible students with costs such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination fees • Transport • Childcare • Books • Equipment • Kits and uniform • Trips and visits • Other course related costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination fees • Transport • Childcare • Books • Equipment • Kits and uniform • Trips and visits • Other course related costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel • emergency funding and to support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities where specialist equipment and technology may be required.
Child Care	Please refer to section 5.9 for under 20 for Care to Learn details.	Please refer to section 5.9 for over 20 for the Child Care Support	