

Bursary Support Guide

2026-2027

A clear guide to support options, eligibility, evidence and the application process.

At a glance

What this guide helps you do

- Check whether you may be able to apply for bursary support.
- Understand what support can and cannot pay for.
- Know what evidence you need before you apply.
- Avoid delays by applying early and sending complete documents.

Most students apply for bursary support to help with travel, food, course costs, childcare or accommodation. You can apply for more than one type of support, but you must meet the rules and provide the right evidence. Apply early, especially if you need travel support for the start of term.

In this guide

1. Support options
2. Who can apply

3. Evidence needed
4. Application steps

5. Travel
6. Meals & course costs

7. Childcare & accommodation
8. Emergency & checklist

1. What support can I apply for?

Start by choosing the support you need. Each option has different rules and evidence requirements.

Travel support

Use this if: you need help getting to college.

Main rule: usually more than 3 miles and less than 30 miles from college.

You may need: route details, receipts or transport evidence.

Meal credits

Use this if: you need help with food at college or on placement.

Main rule: for eligible 16-18 bursary students only.

You may need: income or benefit evidence.

Course costs

Use this if: your course says you must have specific items.

Main rule: items must be essential and approved first.

You will need: a course costs form and item list.

Childcare

Use this if: you are a student parent and need childcare support.

Main rule: rules depend on your age and Care to Learn.

You may need: provider forms, invoices and Child Benefit evidence.

Accommodation

Use this if: your eligible specialist course is not available locally.

Main rule: usually for very long journeys and college accommodation.

You may need: course, journey and accommodation evidence.

Emergency support

Use this if: you are in severe financial hardship.

Main rule: short-term support, usually up to 6 weeks.

You will need: receipts or evidence of urgent need.

2. Who can apply?

Course You must be enrolled on a funded further education course. Apprenticeships and students aged 14-15 are not included.	Status You must have the right to study in the UK and be classed as a home student for FE funding.	Income and evidence Most support is means tested. Evidence must be provided before your application can be assessed.
---	--	--

A quick eligibility check

Student group	You may be eligible if...	Income rule
16-18 students	You are aged 16-18 on 31 August 2026.	Household income up to £30,000 for one child, plus £1,700 for each additional dependent child under 18.
19 and continuing	You are 19 and continuing a course you started when you were 16-18.	The 16–18 household income rule applies.
19-25 with an EHCP	You are aged 19-25 and have an Education, Health and Care Plan.	The 16–18 household income rule applies.
19+ learners	You are aged 19+ and studying an eligible funded course.	Household income up to £35,000, plus £1,700 per dependent child.

Students in defined vulnerable groups

You may be eligible for up to £1,200 per year if you are aged 16-18 and one of these applies:

- You are in care or you are a care leaver who meets the full definition.
- You receive Income Support or Universal Credit because you support yourself, or yourself and someone who depends on you.
- You receive DLA or PIP and also ESA or Universal Credit in your own right.
- Young carers are not included in this category, but may still apply for other bursary support where eligible.

If you live outside England or are studying an Advanced Learner Loan course

Outside England • Wales: apply to your local authority for Welsh EMA. You may still apply for discretionary support through college, but not the vulnerable groups bursary. • Scotland: apply for Scottish EMA. You are not eligible for the 16-19 bursary fund in England.	Advanced Learner Loan courses • Your Advanced Learner Loan must be approved before you apply for bursary support. • Bursary funds may need to be repaid if you withdraw within the first two weeks. • Tuition fees are not covered by bursary support.
---	---

3. What do I need before I apply?

Your application cannot be assessed until all required evidence has been received.

- Evidence must be clear, complete, current and match the address on your application.
- You may need evidence for all adults aged 18 or over living in your household.
- Asylum seekers do not need to provide household income evidence.
- Use the Evidence Required for Bursary Applications and Household Income Evidence Guide for the full document list.

What evidence might I need?

Support type	You may need
Travel	Travel route, distance from college, receipts, Local Authority invoice if relevant, or Personal Transport Budget details.
Meal credits	Household income or benefit evidence showing eligibility for free meals.
Course costs	Course costs form and details of the essential items required by your course.
Childcare	Childcare application, provider form, invoices, Child Benefit evidence and Care to Learn evidence if relevant.
Accommodation	Course details, evidence of long journey, college accommodation application and Housing Benefit information if relevant.
Emergency support	Receipts or evidence showing immediate hardship or urgent essential costs.

Evidence checklist

Check this	Why it matters	Example evidence or action
Household adults	Income is assessed using all required adults aged 18+ living at the address.	Check who lives in the household before submitting.
Address matches	Different addresses can delay assessment.	Make sure evidence shows the same address as the application.
Full document visible	Cut-off screenshots or missing pages may not be accepted.	Upload the full page or statement, not just part of it.
Support selected	Different support types may need different evidence.	Check the support type before you submit.
Receipts kept	Some payments depend on receipts or invoices each term.	Keep travel receipts, childcare invoices or other requested proof.

4. How the application works

Follow the steps in order. Most delays happen when evidence is missing, unclear or does not match the application.

1 Choose support Decide whether you need travel, meal credits, course costs, childcare, accommodation or emergency support.	2 Check eligibility Check age, course, residency/home student status, income and support-specific rules.	3 Gather evidence Collect income evidence, household evidence, forms, receipts or invoices.
4 Submit application Apply through the correct college process or student portal and upload all evidence.	5 Application checked The Bursary Team reviews your need, evidence and available funding.	6 Outcome confirmed If approved, support is arranged, such as a pass, meal credits, payment or contribution.

If evidence is missing or unclear

Your application may be delayed. The Bursary Team may ask for more information. Support will not usually start until your application is complete and approved.

Rules that apply during and after assessment

Apply early Support is normally not backdated. You may need to cover costs while waiting.	Attendance matters Payments and support can be reduced or stopped if attendance falls.	Funding is limited Awards depend on need and available funds and may be reviewed.	Use funds correctly Support must only be used for the reason it was awarded.
---	--	---	--

Travel support

- Travel support is mainly for public transport.
- You should attend the closest Activate Learning college that offers your course.
- You must usually live more than 3 miles and less than 30 miles from college, using walking distance on Google Maps.
- Apply as soon as applications open if you need support in place for the start of term.
- Travel support is not backdated.

What could I receive?

Travel pass

What it is: a pass for your approved route and provider.

Timing: usually available within 3 weeks of approval.

Important: collect from campus Advice Centre and return if you withdraw or finish your course.

Travel expenses

What it is: payments where a pass is not suitable.

Used when: you attend fewer than 3 days per week or no purchasing agreement exists.

Important: paid fortnightly in advance, based on attendance and receipts.

Exceptional cases

Car travel: only funded for 19+ students or exceptional circumstances.

Taxi costs: not funded unless part of Local Authority arranged transport.

Mileage: 25p per mile may be paid in exceptional cases.

Other travel situations

Work placement travel

May help if: placement travel is over 3 miles.

Apply: through the student portal.

SEN transport

If you use LA transport: provide the invoice by the end of November 2026.

PTB: Personal Transport Budgets may be considered.

Specialist transport: contact your Local Authority.

Emergency travel

May help if: you are in severe hardship.

Limit: usually up to 6 weeks.

Evidence: attendance-based and receipts required.

Meal credits and course costs

Meal credits

Meal credits are for eligible 16-18 bursary students only.

- Meal credits are not included in the 19+ bursary fund.
- From 2026-2027, students must meet the current eligibility criteria for free meals.
- Being eligible for a vulnerable groups bursary does not automatically mean you are eligible for meal credits.

You may qualify if your household receives

Universal Credit; income-related Employment and Support Allowance; support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; or the guarantee element of State Pension Credit.

How meals are provided

On campus: added to your student ID card.

Off-site or placement: supermarket Evouchers.

Receipts: will be needed each term for vouchers.

Emergency meals

May help if: you are in severe hardship.

Limit: usually up to 6 weeks.

Evidence: attendance-based and receipts required.

Course costs bursary

May be covered

Protective clothing; essential UK field trips; AAT membership fees for 19+ students; university interviews and open days; UCAS fees in exceptional cases; exam resits.

Not covered

Laptops or IT equipment; stationery; counselling; extra-curricular activities; items that can be borrowed from college.

Before buying anything

Do not buy first: items must be approved before purchase.

Must be essential: items must be listed by your course.

Apply: submit a course costs form with the items you need help with.

Childcare and accommodation

Childcare support

20+ Childcare Bursary Who it is for: students aged 20+ when they start their course. Support: up to £230 per week per child.	16-19 Childcare Who it is for: students aged 16-19 when they start their course. Main rule: you must show you have been awarded the maximum Care to Learn grant. Support: up to £50 per week top-up.	Care to Learn Support: up to £180 per child per week, or £195 in London. Payment: paid directly to the childcare provider. Provider: must be Ofsted-registered.
Childcare rules to remember • The student must be the child's main carer and receive Child Benefit. • Funded childcare entitlement must be used first. • The childcare application and online Childcare Provider Form must be completed. • Payments are made in arrears to the childcare provider after invoices and attendance checks. • Awards are normally limited to two children per household; extra children depend on available funding.		

Accommodation bursary

You may be eligible if You study a specialist course not available locally, such as eligible land-based courses at Merrist Wood College; your public transport journey is over 2 hours one-way; you apply for college accommodation; and you are not receiving Housing Benefit if applying for the 19+ Residential Access Fund.	Support available Usually: up to 90% of accommodation costs. May be considered: up to 100%. Review: support may be reviewed during the year based on available funds.	Sports programmes May qualify: approved sports programmes may receive travel support even over 30 miles if bursary criteria are met. How paid: funding may be travel support or allocated towards accommodation.
---	--	---

Emergency support, other support and final checklist

Emergency support

May help with Emergency travel or emergency meals	Important rules Usually up to 6 weeks, attendance-based, and assessed by Student Support.	You may need Receipts or evidence of immediate hardship before payments are issued.
---	---	---

Online learners and in-year support

Online learners • Childcare support may be available. • Essential course costs may be supported if listed on the course participation record. • Travel to exams may be partially supported.	In-year support • Replacement travel passes. • Additional course costs funding. • Support for extra attendance such as exams or catch-up sessions. • Payments monitored against attendance.
--	---

Use this before applying

- ☐ I have checked that my course is eligible for bursary support.
- ☐ I know which support I am applying for: travel, meals, course costs, childcare, accommodation or emergency support.
- ☐ I have gathered evidence for all required adults in my household.
- ☐ My evidence is clear, complete and shows the same address as my application.
- ☐ I have not bought course items before bursary approval.
- ☐ I understand payments and support can depend on attendance and receipts.
- ☐ If my circumstances change, I will contact The Bursary Team.

Who to contact

Not sure what to apply for?

- Speak to Student Support or your campus Advice Centre before submitting your application. They can help you understand what support may apply and what evidence you need.
- Students needing specialist transport should contact their Local Authority.
- Students with specific dietary needs can speak to the catering team on campus.

Final reminder: Bursary support is assessed individually and is not guaranteed. Funding is limited and may change during the year. The best way to avoid delays is to apply early and provide all evidence the first time.