

## **Eligibility criteria: all bursaries**

Students must meet the age and residency criteria which follow to be eligible for help from the bursary fund.

### **Age**

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August 2021 to be eligible for help from the bursary fund in the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a discretionary bursary 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+ students can receive a discretionary bursary 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 and their institution considers they need the support to continue their participation.

Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups.

Institutions should generally only pay bursaries to students aged 16 or over. However, in exceptional circumstances where under 16 students are on funded 16 to 19 study programmes at the institution, they may use their discretion to pay bursaries to younger students. For example, where a student is following an accelerated study programme. Bursary funds should not be awarded to students enrolled at another institution, where that institution also receives public funding for the student, for example, students aged 14 to 16 who are attending college as part of their key stage 4 programme at a local school/academy. Paragraphs 44 to 48 of the [ESFA funding regulations](#) for post-16 provision provide more detail about funded 14 to 16 year olds.

Students aged under 19 enrolled on higher education qualifications are not eligible for support.

### **Eligible education provision**

Students must be participating in provision that is subject to inspection by a public body that assures quality (for example Ofsted). The provision must also fall into one of these groups:

- funded directly by ESFA or by ESFA via a local authority
- funded or co-financed by the European Social Fund
- otherwise publicly funded and lead to a qualification (up to and including level 3) accredited by Ofqual or on the ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding 14 to 19

- a 16 to 19 traineeship programme

Students on apprenticeship programmes, or any waged training, are employed, rather than in education. They are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

Non-employed students aged 16 to 19 who are participating in a Prince's Trust Team Programme are eligible to receive the bursary in the same way as any other student participating in an eligible, publicly funded course.

ESFA does not expect students on distance learning provision to need help from the bursary fund because they do not have the kinds of costs the bursary is intended to cover (travel, equipment and uniforms, for example). In the rare instances where an institution identifies such a student does require financial help, they should provide support in-kind. An example could be providing a temporary travel pass for the student to attend exams.

### **Residency**

Students must meet the residency criteria in [ESFA funding regulations](#) for post-16 provision. This document also specifies the evidence institutions must see and retain for audit to confirm eligibility for post-16 funding (and therefore meet the residency criteria for bursary fund eligibility).

### **Accompanied asylum seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner)**

Generally, asylum seekers are not entitled to public funds. Accompanied asylum seeking children (those under 18 with an adult relative or partner) and those aged 18 and above are entitled to education, but not to public funds. If they are destitute they can apply to the Home Office (HO) for suitable housing and cash for essentials, but they are not eligible for other income.

As long as an asylum seeker has not had their application for asylum refused, institutions can provide in-kind student support such as books, equipment or a travel pass. Under no circumstances should an institution give cash to any asylum seeker unless they are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC).

### **Unaccompanied asylum seeking children**

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children do not receive cash support from the HO and are the responsibility of the local authority. They are treated as looked after children and are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups ('in care' group), where they have a financial need.

When these young people reach legal adulthood at age 18, institutions must consider their immigration status. If the asylum claim is decided in their favour, the local authority must provide them with the same support and services as they do

care leavers. As such, they continue to be eligible for a bursary as a student from a vulnerable group until they reach the upper [age](#) limit.

Where an asylum claim is not supported, the individual may not be able to stay legally in the UK. When asylum claims have been fully heard/the appeals process exhausted, an individual has no entitlement to public funds (with a few exceptions where the withdrawal of support would be seen as a breach of human rights).

### **Eligibility criteria: bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups**

Students who meet the criteria, and who have a financial need, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups. The defined groups reflect that these students are unlikely to be receiving financial assistance from parents or carers, so may need a greater level of support to enable them to continue to participate. Students should be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the types of costs they have and not automatically awarded £1,200. Institutions must ensure students are eligible for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups in each year they require support.

The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in care
- care leavers
- receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) 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 (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right

We are continuing to review the descriptions of the defined vulnerable groups to reflect the ongoing rollout of UC and ensure they accurately reflect the purpose of the scheme.

The bursary for vulnerable groups can pay up to £1,200 per year to a student participating on study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more if they need that amount of support. Students on study programmes of less than 30 weeks should be paid a pro-rata amount.

Institutions must also consider the number of hours involved in 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.

Students should only receive the amount they actually need to participate and institutions must not automatically award students £1,200 if they do not need the full amount.

Institutions may decide that although a young person may be eligible for a bursary because they are in one or more of the defined vulnerable groups, they do not have any actual financial need. This might be because their financial needs are already met and/or because they have no relevant costs. Institutions can refuse a student's application on this basis.

Equally, institutions can pay a bursary to a vulnerable group student of more than £1,200 if they assess they need extra help to remain in education. Any payments over £1,200 must be paid from their discretionary bursary allocation or from their own funds. If paid from discretionary bursary, all the eligibility criteria and usual assessment processes must be met and followed.

### **Defining in care and care leavers**

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund defines 'in care' as children looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or under a care order (section 31 of the Children Act 1989) - Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 defines the term 'looked after child'.

A 'care leaver' is defined as:

- a young person aged 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16; or
- a young person aged 18 or above who was looked after prior to becoming 18 for a period of 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16

### **Foster care, including privately arranged foster care**

A young person placed with a foster carer by the local authority, including where the foster carer is on the books of an independent fostering agency, is classed as looked after. They meet the criteria for the 'in care' vulnerable group where they need financial support to participate.

A child who is privately fostered (in other words, a private arrangement is made between the parent and the person who will care for the child) is not classed as a looked after child and is not eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups.

In some instances, a young person may have been in the care of the local authority and the care transferred to another party via a permanent form of fostering such as a Special Guardianship Order. In these circumstances, the young person is defined as having left care so is now a care leaver. They must meet the definition of a 'care

leaver' in full (so, the period of weeks and age range set out above). If they do, they are eligible for help from the bursary for vulnerable groups, where they need financial support to participate.

## **Universal Credit**

UC is being rolled out across the country and will gradually replace IS and ESA as well as other benefits. Institutions will increasingly see students claiming bursaries for defined vulnerable groups based on receiving UC.

UC award notifications do not include any information on the benefits they replace. For this reason, the description of the bursaries for vulnerable group category that relates to receipt of UC or IS is that a student must be receiving UC in their own right because they are financially supporting themselves and anyone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner.

We are continuing to review the descriptions of the defined vulnerable groups to reflect the ongoing rollout of UC and ensure they accurately reflect the purpose of the scheme.

Bursary funds awarded to a student should not form part of the UC assessment undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). How DWP treat any funding for education depends on whether the student is undertaking advanced full-time education. It is unlikely that 16 to 18 year olds will be in advanced full-time education as they are generally on study programmes at level 3 or below.

We do encourage institutions to provide support from the bursary fund by making payments in kind where possible. Institutions must not make bursary fund payments as regular payments for living costs. This is out of scope of the bursary fund and any such payments would be subject to the Social Security Amendment (Students and Income-related Benefits) Regulations 2000.

## **Evidence of eligibility**

Institutions must obtain proof that students meet the criteria for the bursary for vulnerable groups in full. In other words, that they are in receipt of the specified benefits in their own name or that they fully meet the definitions for in care/care leavers. Institutions should ask for evidence from each student and retain copies for audit purposes.

For example:

- for students who are in care or a care leaver, written confirmation of their current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority - this is the local authority that looks after them or provides their leaving care services. The evidence could be a letter or an email but must be clearly from the local authority

- for students in receipt of IS or UC, a copy of their IS or UC award notice. This must clearly state that the claim is in the student's name/confirm they are entitled to the benefits in their own right. The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent them from participating in further education or training. For students in receipt of UC, institutions must also see a document such as a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificates, utility bills and so on
- for students receiving UC/ESA and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payments(PIP), a copy of their UC claim from DWP. Evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP must also be provided

UC claimants should be able to print off details of their award from their online account or provide a screenshot to the institution.

Institutions must only submit a funding claim to the Student Bursary Support Service (SBSS) [online portal](#):

- when they have seen and verified appropriate evidence to confirm that the student is eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups, and
- when they have assessed the actual amount of financial help the student needs to participate. It is this amount that institutions should request from the SBSS

### **Pro-rata bursaries for vulnerable groups**

Students who have a financial need who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups may be eligible for a bursary of up to £1,200 (with the actual amount dependant on the specific financial needs they have) if they are on a study programme which lasts for 30 weeks or more in the academic year. Students who meet the criteria and who are on study programmes lasting for less than 30 weeks should be given a bursary on a pro-rata basis (with the actual amount dependant on the specific financial needs they have).

For example:

- a student is on a 30 week programme. If the institution assesses they have financial needs that require a full £1,200 - the bursary would be  $£1,200 \div 30 = £40$  per week
- if the same student was on a 10 week programme, the pro-rata bursary would be  $£40 \times 10 \text{ weeks} = £400$

Institutions should also consider the number of hours involved in 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.

## **Young people eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups who don't require bursary funding**

In some cases, a young person might meet the eligibility criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups but their financial needs are already met, they have no relevant costs or do not need the maximum award.

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 don't 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

In these circumstances, institutions can refuse the student's application. The institution should explain to the student and/or the student's parents or support worker the aim of bursary funding and why they are not awarding any bursary.

If a student, or the student's parents or support worker, still wants to claim a bursary for vulnerable groups, institutions should consider the particular circumstances in each case. They should assess whether no bursary should be awarded (because the student has no financial needs) or to award a reduced amount (because the financial help needed is limited).

ESFA recommends that institutions should be clear in their 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 mean funding will be given. Institutions should ensure their forms avoid any terminology such as 'guaranteed bursary' or wording such as 'you will automatically get a bursary of £1,200 if you are in one of the defined groups'.

## **Eligibility criteria: discretionary bursaries**

Institutions make discretionary bursary awards to help students with the cost of travel, to buy essential books, equipment or specialist clothing (such as protective overalls, for example). These are items the student would otherwise need to pay for to participate.

The bursary fund is not intended to provide learning support - services that institutions give to students - for example, counselling or mentoring, or to support extra-curricular activities where these are not essential to the students' study programme.

Institutions set their own eligibility criteria for the discretionary bursary but must comply with the eligibility conditions and funding rules set out in this guide. Institutions must ensure that students are eligible for the discretionary bursary in each year they require support.

Institutions must base all decisions about which students receive a discretionary bursary and how much bursary they receive on each student's individual circumstances and their actual financial need. These will vary from student to student, depending on, for example, eligibility based on household income, and actual financial need such as the distance they need to travel to the institution and the requirements of their study programme. Institutions must not make blanket or flat rate/fixed rate payments to all students, to students in particular income bands or to students whose families are in receipt of particular benefits without considering the actual needs of each student. For example, although many students who had previously benefitted from a free school meal may have financial needs, these will vary depending on personal circumstances so an individual assessment of need should be made.

Institutions must manage the number and size of discretionary bursary awards to keep within their budget.

Institutions may decide to retain a small emergency fund from their allocation to support students who face exceptional circumstances due to a change in their situation during the year that impacts on their ability to participate in education. Evidence of actual costs must be held for audit purposes. Institutions may also choose to top up the bursary with their own funds to support students who are in need.

There is no set limit for the amount of discretionary bursary that can be awarded to students. Institutions can award discretionary bursaries equal to or higher than the bursary for vulnerable groups maximum as long as they have clearly identified an individual student requires this level of funding to participate.

### **Using household income and establishing individual student need**

Institutions must ensure their bursary policy ensures funding reaches those students who are most in need of financial support. This means institutions should use household income in some way to help establish the amount of support they award to a student. This can be used in conjunction with other factors, such as distance to travel from the institution and the number of dependent children in the household, as well as the actual participation needs the student has.

It is for institutions to decide the process they use to assess household income, and the specific evidence they request from students/their families. However, DfE is aware that some institutions are unsure about how to use UC award notices when these are provided as evidence of household income. DfE suggests institutions may wish to ask for the 3 most recent monthly award statements. The take-home pay figure in addition to the amount of UC after all deductions will give a total monthly



income. Using 3 months statements will act as a guide to the household income for a quarter of a year. Institutions could then estimate assumed income for a full year.

An example of a UC award notice is below. The notice shows the 2 highlighted figures – one for take-home pay; one for the amount of UC after deductions – that should be added together to give a monthly total.



### [Example of a Universal Credit monthly award notice](#)

PDF, 231KB, 1 page

This file may not be suitable for users of assistive technology.

[Request an accessible format.](#)

Institutions are encouraged to keep their bursary policies under review to ensure they continue to provide support to students who need it. For example, students from households being supported via lower income jobs could be in more financial need than a student in receipt of free school meals or where the family receives other benefits. An assessment of individual need should help to identify whether they are struggling to afford the books and equipment they need or to cover their essential travel costs.

## **Supporting industry placements**

Institutions engaged in industry placement delivery are also encouraged to ensure their bursary policies are able to respond to the needs of students undertaking industry placements. A few students may find themselves facing financial difficulties due to incurring extra participation costs, for example, because they need to pay for additional travel to their placement. These students may only need support for a short period of time.

## **Publishing bursary fund policies**

Institutions must publish a policy or statement setting out how they will use their bursary fund. The document should be available early enough for students to be able to use the information when deciding which post-16 institution to attend. The institution's eligibility criteria must be clear and available to students and to ESFA. The policy document must state that the support available to students is from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and institutions must be mindful of this if they develop their own financial support branding, and/or use their own funding to enhance their offer to students.

Institutions must comply with the requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](#) when setting their criteria and must not discriminate against their students, either directly or indirectly, because of their protected characteristics.

Bursary fund policies must clearly set out what type of help the institution offers, for example, help with transport, books and equipment, field trips and other course-related costs and whether bursary support is available to contribute to the costs of attending industry placements, university interviews and open days.

Institutions should remember that whilst the bursary can be used for transport costs, it does not replace the statutory transport duty local authorities have. Each local authority must publish an annual transport statement that sets out the arrangements they will make to facilitate participation in education or training for students aged 16 to 19. Institutions should consider the relevant local authority's transport statement and local offers when setting their bursary fund policy.

### **Managing bursary fund applications**

Institutions develop and use their own application forms for the bursary fund. Application forms must capture all the relevant information for the provider to assess the application in line with the bursary rules, including household income and the actual participation needs the student has (such as help with travel or to buy essential books or equipment for example). The application form should be signed by the student.

Institutions delivering standard academic year provision may wish to specify that all applications for the bursary are submitted by a set date so they can assess the overall level of demand holistically and make discretionary awards on a fair basis. Any specific deadline date should be clearly stated in the application form and included in the bursary policy.

However, it is important to bear in mind that a student's circumstance and needs may change later in the year. A small emergency fund may be retained for this purpose but consequently, ESFA recommends that there should be no absolute cut-off point for applications.

Institutions delivering short programmes, roll-on roll-off provision or industry placements, should enable students to apply for help from the bursary fund at any point during the year.

The institution's application process must maintain confidentiality and their application form, promotional materials and so on, should emphasise this message, so students don't feel embarrassed about applying.

Application forms, bursary policies and any supporting information must all be clear that students who meet the criteria for bursaries for vulnerable groups are not automatically entitled to a bursary if they do not have financial needs and/or their financial needs are covered from other sources.

It is best practice for students and/or their families to sign a declaration when they apply for help from the bursary to confirm that the evidence they have provided is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge and belief. Students and their families should be made aware that giving false or incomplete information that leads to incorrect/overpayment may result in future payments being stopped and any incorrectly paid funds being recovered. They should also be informed that this might result in a referral to the police with the possibility of the student and/or their family facing prosecution.

The institution should communicate the outcome of the application to the student and inform them how the costs will be paid. The institution must hold a record of the planned amount of funding required based on the actual need of the student and this should be recorded against each participation need.

### **What the bursary fund cannot be used for**

The bursary fund is not intended to

- provide learning support - services that institutions give to students - for example, counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring
- support extra-curricular activities where these are not essential to the students' study programme
- support general household incomes

Institutions are not permitted to use the bursary fund in any way that would give them a competitive advantage over other institutions. Examples include:

- fees for access to facilities in the institution
- block subsidy of the canteen
- block subsidy of transport, or support for travel for all students regardless of family incomes
- block provision of equipment, material or books
- making bonus payments to reward attendance or achievement
- payments to support students' general living costs

Institutions must not use the bursary as a way of incentivising attendance or as a marketing tool to encourage students to choose their institution over another.

Where institutions use non-bursary funds to provide free travel for all their students, they must make clear that this is an offer from the institution, rather than being supported via the bursary fund.

### **Paying bursary funding to eligible students**

ESFA encourages institutions to pay bursaries in-kind rather than cash as far as possible. This helps ensure that the bursary is spent for the reasons it was awarded.

In-kind payments can include travel passes, vouchers or credits for meals, required books and required equipment.

Where institutions make in-kind payments, they should explain to the student the value of the payments and how these have been deducted from their total bursary award.

Where institutions make bursary fund payments to students rather than providing support in-kind, it is good practice to pay the funding by BACS transfer to the student's own bank account. A basic bank account (which students can open at age 16) allows BACS transfers and allows the student to withdraw money.

Institutions must insist that students only spend the bursary payments they have made to them on the support that has been identified as necessary to help them participate in education. This means they must specify students can only use the funds to pay for travel costs and/or a meal during the day, to buy equipment or any other support that has been agreed.

Institutions should make the value of the award and any terms/conditions clear to the student in their award letter/confirmation document.

ESFA does not expect bursary payments to be paid into another person's account, except in exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to administer their own account. If the student cannot manage their own funds, the institution will need to consider who will manage the bursary on the student's behalf.

Where payments are made, it is good practice to make these on a regular basis (weekly, for example) as this helps students manage their finances. It also means that if a student has a payment withheld due to failing to meet the conditions the institution has set, they will not be left without financial support for a long period. However, institutions should take these decisions based on the reasons the bursary was awarded, the student's circumstances and local arrangements.

ESFA does not recommend that large or lump sum bursary payments are made to students.

### **Conditions for receiving bursary funding**

Institutions should make payments for both for the bursary for vulnerable groups and the discretionary bursary conditional on the student meeting agreed standards of attendance and behaviour.

Institutions must ensure that any standards they set are clear, accessible and understood by students.

Institutions should ensure they obtain and retain evidence that a student has seen and agreed to the conditions. This might be an agreement signed by the student or a signed declaration that forms part of the institution's bursary fund application form.

Institutions can withhold payments if a student does not meet agreed standards, but they should always consider the individual circumstances of the student first. Sanctioning a student to the extent that their bursary funding had been stopped for a whole term, for example, is not recommended as it can stop students attending and undermine the purpose of the bursary fund.

Institutions should consider the impact on attendance that might be caused by illness, caring responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances. This should be built into the payment conditions agreed between the student and their institution, so that both parties are aware of the potential effect on payments.

Institutions should stop payments where students have been absent for a period of 4 continuous weeks or more (excluding holidays) and where students have made a decision to withdraw from a study programme. Institutions can also take money back from students if they have not spent it for the reasons it was awarded to them. However, institutions should consider the impact of such an action on the individual student before taking a final decision to do so.

If an institution purchases books or equipment for a student, they must specify the student must return these at the end of their study programme so they can be used again by another student where appropriate. So, if an institution purchases equipment that is necessary for the student to complete their study programme, they can purchase this with bursary funds and specify the student must return it once they have completed their study programme. If keeping equipment on campus is the best way of ensuring this happens, institutions have the right to set this as a condition.

### **Institutions' responsibilities in managing complaints or appeals**

Any student or parent who is unhappy with how an institution has handled their application for bursary funding should follow the institution's own complaints procedure.

Institutions should handle the escalation of complaints about the bursary fund in the same way as any other complaint they may receive.

ESFA does not have a role in the administration of bursary funding to students because this is the responsibility of individual institutions. As such, ESFA does not usually get involved with complaints. However, ESFA may get involved if there is an allegation that the bursary fund eligibility criteria or any content within this guide is being disregarded.

### **16 to 19 Bursary Fund and receipt of DWP benefits**

Institutions may wish to highlight to students and parents the impact of receipt of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund on other benefits.

Receipt of bursary funding does not affect receipt of other means-tested benefits paid to families, such as IS, Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit, Working Tax

Credit, Housing Benefit or, generally, UC (the [UC section](#) of this document contains more detail about this benefit).

If a student is in receipt of DLA (or PIP) and ESA, parents can no longer receive certain household/family benefits for that child, such as child benefit.

Institutions must not make bursary fund payments as payments for living costs. This is out of scope of the bursary fund and any such payments would be subject to the Social Security Amendment (Students and Income-related Benefits) Regulations 2000.

## **Funding and allocations: bursary for vulnerable groups**

### **Drawing down funding for vulnerable groups**

Institutions should draw down funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups from the SBSS whenever they identify and verify new students who meet the criteria. Institutions can submit as many funding claims as they need to throughout the academic year. Institutions must ensure they have fully verified the student's eligibility and assessed their participation needs before submitting any funding claim. Institutions should only draw down the amount of funding they need from SBSS – they should not draw down the full £1,200 if the student does not need that amount of funding.

Institutions should not hold onto claims until the end of the academic year and submit them retrospectively for payment. Submitting funding claims regularly helps ESFA to monitor the number of eligible students and the funding that is required to support them. It also ensures institutions do not need to use their discretionary bursary fund allocations to make payments for bursaries for vulnerable groups.

Institutions draw the funding down by completing and submitting a bursary for vulnerable groups funding claim via the SBSS [online portal](#). The deadline for the submission of 2021 to 2022 academic year funding claims is 31 July 2022. The SBSS will not pay any claims submitted after this date.

The portal contains guidance about the submission of funding claims, but if institutions need further help, they can contact the SBSS provider helpline on 0300 303 8610 or use the web chat facility which is available throughout the process.

Institutions must retain a copy of the funding claims they submit to SBSS and records of funding paid to them through the claims process. The portal is not intended to be a filing system for claims and institutions should ensure they keep their own records outside the portal for future audit. This includes local authorities who will receive payment for claims made by or on behalf of maintained schools.

## **Accessing the SBSS online portal for the first time**

To receive funding from the DfE and its associated bodies or agencies, institutions must provide information about banking and payments. The information required includes an email address.

The SBSS use this email address to create access details for the institution's administrator account in the online portal. When the main administrator account is created, an email containing a link to the portal is sent to the registered email address. This is followed immediately by a second email containing a temporary password – this must be used when accessing the portal for the first time. The system will then automatically request that the user sets up a new password for future use.

Once the main administrator has access, they can then go on to set up other users for their institution. It is important that institutions make it clear to any staff who may be required to submit funding claims who their SBSS portal administrator is. Any individual who does not have access to the portal should contact their institution's main administrator to request it. They should not contact ESFA or SBSS.

## **How the SBSS processes and pays funding claims**

The SBSS carries out checks on the funding claim forms to verify that institutions are eligible to claim and that the form has been correctly completed. The usual processing time for a claim is within 2 weeks.

Once processed, a funding statement and remittance advice will be issued in the online portal to confirm payments. Payments will only be made to the institution's bank account as held by ESFA. No other bank account or method of payment is permitted.

It is important institutions keep their bank account and contact details up to date with ESFA as any discrepancies may impact on payments. Institutions should request a change to their bank account details by completing the [online form](#). Any queries about amending bank account details should be sent to: [dfestandingdata@education.gov.uk](mailto:dfestandingdata@education.gov.uk).

Institutions should contact SBSS if they have any queries about funding claims or payments made to them by SBSS they cannot resolve by using the information in the online portal. They should not contact ESFA.

All ESFA funded institutions in receipt of a discretionary bursary allocation in the 2021 to 2022 academic year and institutions delivering 16 to 19 traineeships in the academic year can submit a funding claim for bursaries for vulnerable groups if they have eligible students they assess need financial help. Payment will be dependent on whether an institution has signed and returned their ESFA funding contract.

Institutions who are not in receipt of a discretionary bursary allocation in the 2021 to 2022 academic year may submit a funding claim for bursaries for vulnerable groups if they have eligible students. However, SBSS will need to make further checks with ESFA before an institution can submit a claim.

### **Funding claims for students placed in independent provision**

Local authorities are responsible for submitting funding claims for students who they have placed in independent provision if they are eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups and have a financial need.

The independent education institution is responsible for verifying that students meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups, including obtaining evidence and assessing their actual need for help. Once they are satisfied the student is eligible for support, they should contact the relevant local authority. The local authority cannot submit a funding claim without formal confirmation of eligibility from the institution. The institution can provide confirmation by sending the local authority a copy of the evidence they have seen or by setting out in writing/by e-mail to the local authority that they have seen evidence to confirm eligibility.

The SBSS will pay the funding to the local authority if the funding claim is successful. Education institutions making funding claims through local authorities must ensure they liaise with the local authority finance contact to ensure the bursary funds are redirected to them as appropriate.

### **Recycling bursaries for vulnerable groups funding**

Institutions may accrue some unused funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups during the academic year. For example, if a student leaves early after only receiving part of their bursary or the institution does not pay the full amount to a student because they did not meet the agreed conditions.

Institutions are expected to recycle this funding and use it to offset funding claims for other eligible students until 30 April 2022. For example, if the institution has a newly identified student who meets the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups and who they have assessed as needing £1,000 of financial support, the institution may already have £700 that they claimed for a student who has now left. The institution should recycle the £700 for the new student, claiming only £300 from the SBSS to give them the total amount of funding they need.

Institutions can add any funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups they have claimed, but no longer need, for eligible students to their discretionary bursary allocation from 1 May 2022.

Institutions that have incorrectly claimed funding for bursaries for vulnerable groups (for example, they submitted a funding claim without verifying a student met the criteria), should try to recycle the funding on subsequent funding claims. However, if the institution has no other students who are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable



groups, the incorrectly claimed funds cannot be added to their discretionary bursary allocation because they were claimed in error. Instead, institutions must contact SBSS to return the funds: [1619bursary@studentbursary.education.gov.uk](mailto:1619bursary@studentbursary.education.gov.uk).

### **Submitting 'zero' funding claims**

Where an institution holds enough funds to cover the costs of a bursary for a vulnerable groups eligible student in full, ESFA asks that they submit a funding claim form to the SBSS showing a zero amount.

Similarly, if an institution has decided that a young person is in one or more of the defined vulnerable groups but does not have any actual financial need, it is also helpful if the institution submits a funding claim form showing a zero amount.

This helps give ESFA information on the number of 16 to 19 students in education who are in each of the defined vulnerable groups.

### **Funding and allocations: discretionary bursaries**

#### **Allocations**

ESFA makes discretionary bursary allocations to institutions that have a 16 to 19 contract or funding agreement each year.

If an institution operates from more than one location across England, or operates through sub-contracts, ESFA will make the allocation to the lead office for distribution to each site. Institutions should ensure that students attending provision delivered by subcontractors or at different sites are able to apply for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. The lead institution is responsible for ensuring the bursary fund is administered appropriately at each site and at any sub-contractor to ensure students can access support.

The methodology for calculating discretionary bursary allocations has 2 elements:

- element 1: financial disadvantage
- element 2: student costs to support travel and industry placements

Both elements are based on 2019 to 2020 full year data.

The underlying requirement that institutions make awards based upon students' financial needs to participate has not changed, however, to be clear, institutions local bursary policies do not need to be split into these two elements, nor do they need to be referred to. These elements form part of the allocations methodology only. There is no ring fence between the elements and institutions can use the 2 elements flexibly to support students' needs up to their full allocation.

Element 1, disadvantage, is calculated based on students' home postcodes, matched against the [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) 2019](#). The IMD is a government index that uses statistics on education, crime, health, employment and income to determine how disadvantaged an area is. Financial disadvantage instance values are assigned to students living in the 27% most deprived areas of the country.

Element 2, student costs, is intended to provide a general indicator of the main costs faced by students. There are 2 parts to this element:

- element 2a calculates an amount of funding for travel for non-residential students whose home postcode is in the top 60% most deprived areas (based on IMD 2019). The calculation factors in rurality and distance travelled between the student's home postcode and the delivery location of their learning
- element 2b considers whether the student's study programme makes them eligible for industry placement funding via Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) and their home postcode is in the top 60% most deprived areas. Only institutions approved to deliver industry placements via CDF in the 2021 to 2022 academic year are in scope for this funding

The [explanatory notes](#) that are issued with funding allocations set out the calculation in full.

In a small number of instances, a 'by exception' process will be used. For example, the application of averages may be used where there is no 2019 to 2020 data available. This will be made clear to any institutions affected.

This methodology has only been in place since the 2020 to 2021 academic year and to reflect that, transitional arrangements have been applied. In the 2020 to 2021 academic year, institutions received no less than 75% and no more than 125% of the total amount of discretionary bursary funding they were allocated in the 2019 to 2020 academic year.

For the 2021 to 2022 academic year, the lower and upper limits will increase to +/- 50%, meaning that institutions will receive no less than 50% and no more than 150% of the value of their 2019 to 2020 discretionary bursary allocation.

The lower and upper limits will further change to +/- 75% in the 2022 to 2023 academic year. Transitional arrangements will cease in the 2023 to 2024 academic year when allocations will be based only on lagged data.

## **Payments**

Discretionary bursary allocations are paid in 2 parts, two-thirds in August; one-third in April. The first payment for academies is September, in line with general academy payment schedules.

## **Convertor academies**

Any school sixth-forms that convert to academies in September will have already received their first bursary payment in August (via the local authority as school sixth-forms). ESFA will make subsequent bursary payments directly to the academy.

### **Maintained schools**

ESFA makes discretionary bursary allocations to maintained schools with an ESFA funded sixth-form through local authorities. Local authorities should pass this bursary funding to the school.

### **Maintained special schools**

Local authorities will also receive discretionary bursary funding to support students at maintained special schools (MSS). This bursary funding is aggregated and paid as a lump sum to each local authority. The discretionary bursary allocation methodology will be applied to the number of students recorded in the 2019 to 2020 autumn census and will require the use of calculations based on averages. The local authority is asked to distribute the bursary funding across all their MSS, according to need.

### **New institutions**

ESFA will make discretionary bursary funding available to institutions that start delivering eligible education and training for ESFA for the first time in the 2021 to 2022 academic year when a contract or funding agreement is generated. This will require the use of calculations based on averages.

To be eligible for an allocation, the institution must meet the eligible provision criteria set out in this guide. ESFA may also undertake a financial health assessment of the institution before deciding to allocate funding.

### **Administration contribution**

Institutions are permitted to use up to 5% of their allocation for administrative costs. Institutions that receive both a 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and free meals in further education allocation are permitted to use up to 5% of the combined allocation for administration. Institutions must ensure they do not take a sum that is greater than 5% of the single allocation total.

### **Rules on unspent bursary funds**

ESFA permits institutions to carry unspent bursary funds over to the next academic year. Any funds carried forward must continue to be used to support students in line

with the funding rules in this guide. The funds cannot be added to general institution funds.

Where institutions are given a single overall allocation that includes funding for both free meals and the discretionary bursary, they can carry forward funds from both schemes. The funding may be used for either free meals or discretionary bursary payments in the new academic year.

Institutions must fully make use of any unspent funds for either discretionary bursary or free meals before using their new academic year allocation.

Discretionary bursary and/or free meals funding cannot be carried forward for more than one year. Institutions must inform ESFA of the total amount of any unspent funds (not previously reported) from any year up to and including the 2019 to 2020 academic year by using the [online enquiry form](#) no later than 31 March each year. Institutions are encouraged, however, to contact ESFA as soon as they have determined they have funds that must be returned. ESFA will recover the unspent funds.

### **Data returns, including the individualised learner record (ILR) and school census**

ESFA reminds institutions of the importance of completing the ILR or school census, as appropriate, to indicate the numbers of students receiving support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

Institutions must also ensure they complete the ILR or census fields to provide data on the number of students participating in industry placements.

ESFA operates an in-year growth process for discretionary bursaries based on ILR or census data. This is part of the in-year growth process for 16 to 19 programme funding which will release additional funding to institutions where data indicates it is needed. Any growth or additional funding is subject to affordability.

In addition to the completion of the ILR or school census, DfE aims to undertake survey activity to monitor how effective the new allocations methodology is, providing information on how institutions are using the funding. The co-operation of institutions in completing the survey will be appreciated.

### **Audit, assurance and fraud**

16 to 19 Bursary Funds are subject to normal assurance arrangements for 16 to 19 education and training. Institutions should ensure they have appropriate processes in place to record bursary applications and awards (including the number, value, purpose, whether awarded or not, and a brief justification for the decision). They

must also be able to confirm, during any audit, the amount of any unspent funds that have been carried forward to the current academic year.

Institutions must ensure they can evidence their application process, how the student was assessed, how they made the decision to award the specific amount of bursary and the funds that they have issued to the student. Auditors will be looking for evidence that institutions have a clear bursary policy, have applied their bursary fund eligibility criteria correctly and used a consistent application and assessment process for all students.

Institutions should retain copies of any documents the student has signed to give formal agreement to their conditions for payment.

Institutions should retain hard or scanned copies of documentation for 6 years (records can be kept electronically). This includes the application form and the household income evidence.

Examples of documentation auditors expect to see include:

For the bursary for vulnerable groups:

- a copy of the funding claim sent to SBSS
- evidence showing that the student is eligible, for example, a letter from DWP or the local authority or a copy of the student's online UC statement
- evidence of payments received from the SBSS, for example bank statements and remittance advices
- a copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need
- evidence of payments or support provided in-kind to the student

For the discretionary bursary:

- evidence used to assess eligibility and determine household income, such as P60's, self-employment accounts, wage slips, a letter from DWP, copies of online statements for UC
- a copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need, including the calculation that has determined the amount awarded
- receipts for purchases or in-kind payments, for example, bus pass, lunch receipts or book receipts

### **Common audit errors**

Common errors identified at audit, which can lead to the recovery of funds, include:

- no clear bursary fund policy in place which explains, for example, the criteria the institution will use to assess students and how they will make decisions about the amount of support they award

- bursary fund application forms which are not fit for purpose because they do not capture all the necessary evidence to confirm the student's household income and the actual participation costs they have
- application forms not completed and signed by students each year to allow an assessment of their current needs to be made
- financial assessments not always being undertaken or undertaken based on partial/incomplete evidence.
- making blanket or flat rate/fixed rate payments to students without considering their actual need for financial support or the types of costs they have. For example, awarding a student £10 a week when their travel costs are £3.50, and they have no other defined costs
- evidence to support household income not being retained

It is good practice to use an eligibility checklist to ensure a clear and complete bursary fund process is followed, in line with the funding rules set out in this guide. An example which institutions may wish to use when assessing applications from students is below.



### [16 to 19 Bursary Checklist](#)

PDF, 109KB, 2 pages

This file may not be suitable for users of assistive technology.

[Request an accessible format.](#)

A summary document which lists the most important things that institutions should and shouldn't do when administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, based on common errors and issues identified by ESFA auditors is below.



### [16 to 19 bursary summary of key funding rules](#)

PDF, 105KB, 1 page

This file may not be suitable for users of assistive technology.

[Request an accessible format.](#)

ESFA will recover funds where auditors identify funding errors in any circumstances where the institution is not able to demonstrate at audit how their students meet the eligibility criteria of the bursary fund; and in any circumstances where the institution has claimed vulnerable group bursary payments for duplicate students.

Any concerns relating to financial irregularity or impropriety are taken seriously. ESFA will instigate investigations where it assesses that concerns have been raised in good faith and there is sufficient evidence to warrant it. [further guidance and contact details](#) are available on GOV.UK.

Institutions are responsible for investigating instances of fraud relating to bursary fund applications. If institutions find evidence that misleading or fraudulent information has been knowingly submitted by a student or parent, resulting in the student receiving a bursary they were not entitled to, they should attempt to recover the overpayment from the student.

Institutions that identify significant fraud should report it to ESFA. Significant fraud involves one or more of the following:

- the amount of money is over £1,200
- the particulars of the fraud are novel, unusual, systemic or complex
- there is likely to be great public interest because of the nature of the fraud or the people involved

### **Free meals in further education**

Institutions that receive allocations for both free meals in further education and the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund discretionary bursary continue to have flexibility to use the funding as a single allocation. Institutions must manage the single allocation appropriately to ensure all students eligible for a free meal receive one (including when they are attending a work placement) in line with the free meals guide.

Prior to the introduction of additional funding for free meals, institutions had supported the cost of meals for students who needed them from discretionary bursaries. For the 2021 to 2022 academic year, ESFA will continue to adjust discretionary allocations calculated by the new methodology to take account of this double funding for those institutions also in receipt of an allocation for free meals.

Where students are eligible for a free meal, institutions should ensure they consider the provision of a free meal, or the funding provided to the student for the free meal, when they assess their overall need for support, whether from the discretionary bursary or bursaries for vulnerable groups.

### **Other useful information**

This section provides information on specific groups of students to help inform institution's eligibility decisions.

### **Young offenders**

Young offenders can apply for a bursary if they:

- are serving a non-custodial sentence
- have been released early from a custodial sentence (except on temporary license)
- have been remanded to a non-secure institution

Young offenders cannot apply for a bursary if they:

- are serving a custodial sentence
- have been released from a custodial sentence on temporary license
- have been remanded to a secure institution

Institutions should provide in-kind support to young offenders rather than cash wherever possible.

### **Residents of Scotland**

If a student lives in Scotland and travels to study at an English institution, they should approach their home local authority in Scotland to make an application for [Scottish Education Maintenance Allowances](#) (EMA). These students are not eligible to apply for support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

If a student lives in England and travels to study at a Scottish institution, they should approach their home local authority in England to make an application for a discretionary or vulnerable group bursary. These students are not eligible for Scottish EMA.

### **Residents of Wales**

If a student lives in Wales and travels to study at an English institution, they should approach their home local authority to make an application for [Welsh EMA](#).

Students may also apply to their English institution for help from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund discretionary bursary, but are not eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups. Institutions should consider any support the student is receiving from Wales before making any bursary award.

All students living in England and travelling to Wales to study who meet the criteria for a bursary for vulnerable groups are eligible to apply for one if they have a financial need. They should approach their home local authority in England to make an application.



## **Good practice**

The following section highlights some areas of good practice in administering both types of bursary fund.

### **Raising awareness of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund**

Examples of policies and procedures designed to raise early awareness of the bursary include:

- a college has information about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund on their website and in their prospectus, as well as on posters that are on display around the college throughout the year. Information is distributed at open evenings for year 11 pupils from local schools. Further information, including an application form, is available following enrolment and all new entrants receive a text message and email about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund soon after the start of the academic year
- in another college, as well as information about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund being in prospectuses and posters, the college also works with local support services to target potential students who are homeless and provide them with information
- one college raises awareness about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund by providing information to prospective students prior to enrolment at open evenings, talks at schools and so on. Any young person who attends a pre-enrolment interview gets a card with brief information on the bursary and pointers directing them to the full information on the college's website. In addition, social workers who work with the most disadvantaged young people help the college to identify those who may be eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups
- another college uses text messages throughout the year to inform students of the financial support available to them. In the summer term, text messages are sent to inform students that application forms are available to download and complete

### **Identifying students eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups**

Institutions can take the initiative to identify students eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups by working with the local authority, looked after children's education services and care leaver services, to encourage students to apply. Institutions and local authorities can also set up local data sharing agreements to share information about which students might be in need. For example, institutions might want to ask their local authority if a young person received free school meals in year 11.

Examples of working with local stakeholders to identify eligible young people:

- in one area, information on the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund is included in a bulletin to social worker contacts. This is published 3 times a year, and ensures contacts are updated about the bursary
- young people who might need support are identified by another college's Inclusion Manager who has developed links with local agencies working with vulnerable

young people (YMCA, Social Services, and Youth Offending Teams). This helps the college identify young people likely to be in need before enrolment. They are then assisted in completing the application process if appropriate

- one college promotes the bursary through partner organisations, social services, foster parent networks, schools, asylum support teams and youth offending and health services. The college works with these organisations to identify and engage with young people considering further education and to provide opportunities to discuss the support they may need

### **Identifying students who may need support from the discretionary bursary**

The DfE recognises that it can be difficult for institutions to identify which students may need help from the discretionary bursary if they do not proactively ask for support. General further education colleges, sixth form colleges, school sixth forms, 16 to 19 academies and specialist post-16 institutions can now check the [key to success](#) site to find out if new students were in receipt of pupil premium funding in year 11 or received SEND support. Schools and colleges can use this information to identify students they could proactively approach to see if support is required.

This information should not be used to guarantee support or to offer blanket support to students, however it could be a helpful source of information for institutions to use to identify students they could proactively approach to see if financial support is required (subject to the usual assessment of individual need).

### **Young people with caring responsibilities**

Young people with caring responsibilities, for example, caring for a parent or other relative, may be reluctant to say so because of fear of being stigmatised. Institutions should ensure confidentiality to reduce these concerns, publicise the availability of help from the bursary fund and encourage young carers to apply where they have a financial need.

When assessing young carers' eligibility for support from the bursary, institutions could consider whether they have had a young carers assessment (which includes questions about the support they need for education), whether they access a young carers service, whether their GP could confirm their caring role or whether they receive Carers Allowance.

### **Working with other organisations**

Institutions are encouraged to work with other local institutions and the local authority to agree a common approach to the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. This could include institutions working together to identify and support eligible students, pool funds and centrally manage and administer the bursary. For example, one group of colleges has created a Learning Executive with representatives from each local college. This meets regularly and sets a consistent approach to financial support across all colleges in the area.

## **Paying bursary funding to students**

Institutions should always ensure students and their families know who they should contact if they have any queries about payments.

Some examples of different payment approaches used by institutions are:

- one institution involves carers and social workers in establishing the most appropriate way of getting the funding to the young person. At the beginning of term, if specialist equipment and/or a travel pass is needed, the college purchases this and the cost is deducted from the student's overall award. In cases where a carer has responsibility for the young person's finances, meetings are set up with them to decide how payments should be made
- in another institution, students are offered an interview with a financial support advisor to decide together on the best way to deliver his or her support. Priority areas are addressed first; travel to college, equipment costs and support with studies. Additional expenditure such as university visits is also discussed
- one institution pays students a greater amount of funding at the start of their course so they can pay for equipment and course-related items. Travel vouchers are used to pay for bus fares. The student services team meet with the students regularly to help them with budgeting

### **How to ask a question about the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund**

If institutions have a question that is not answered by this guide, please contact ESFA via our [online enquiry form](#).

Institutions with any questions about completion of the bursary for vulnerable groups funding claim or about bursary for vulnerable groups payments made by the SBSS should contact SBSS on 0300 303 8610 or by using the SBSS web chat facility or by emailing [1619bursary@studentbursary.education.gov.uk](mailto:1619bursary@studentbursary.education.gov.uk).

Published 30 March 2021

[Contents](#)