



## 16-19 BURSARY FUND AND FREE MEALS SCHEME (FOR LEARNERS ATTENDING TRAINING IN THE 2026/2027 ACADEMIC YEAR)

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### Mission

Our mission is to reduce NEET and improve the life chances and employment prospects of disadvantaged young people and adults.

### Values

Maximising learner/customer success and achievement through innovative delivery to improve individuals' life chances and/or employment opportunities, in a safe, secure and nurturing environment underpinned by our specific values of:

**Respect, Honesty, Trust, Openness, and Equality of Opportunity for all.**

### Vision

Through the addressment of local skills gaps, we aim to:

- improve the lives of disadvantaged young people
- support with the development of employability, vocational, English and maths skills
- deliver a high-quality and engaging education programme
- deliver a high-quality CEIAG programme that leads to increasing levels of progression
- equip our staff with skills, qualifications and resources to deliver high-quality programmes

## Introduction to Bursary

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome the specific financial barriers to participation they face so they can remain in education. All criteria are set in accordance with the Department for Education (DfE) 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2026 to 2027.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
- discretionary bursaries

Both bursaries help eligible students with the essential costs of participating such as:

- travel to and from school or college
- the purchase of essential books
- specialist equipment or clothing (for example, protective overalls) required for their study programme

These are items a student would otherwise need to buy to participate.

The bursary fund is not for non-education related costs, such as:

- general living costs
- extra-curricular activities
- non-essential activities
- learning support and pastoral services that you provide, such as counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring

The bursary fund is not intended to provide learning support or pastoral services given to students, for example, counselling or mentoring. Nor should it be used to support non-essential extra-curricular activities or living costs.

The bursary fund may be used to provide exceptional further help with childcare costs if the costs exceed the Care to Learn scheme's weekly maximum rates. Childcare provision must meet Care to Learn scheme eligibility rules, we need evidence that the maximum amount is already paid through that scheme and a top up is required. Any top up must be made in line with Care to Learn funding rules and paid directly to the childcare provider, not to the student.

## Eligibility For Awards

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026 to be eligible for help from the bursary funds (discretionary and defined vulnerable groups) in academic year 2026 to 2027.

A student aged 19 and over is only eligible for the discretionary bursary if they:

- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan

- continue on the same study programme they started between 16 to 18 years (19+ continuers)

Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary.

Nova Training generally only pays bursaries to students aged 16 or over. However, in exceptional circumstances, Nova Training may use their discretion to pay bursaries to younger students, for example, where a student is following an accelerated study programme. Exceptional circumstances do not include students aged 14 to 16 who are attending college as part of their key stage 4 programme.

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

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

We do 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 (for example travel, equipment, and uniforms). In the rare instances where you identify that financial help is needed, Nova Training may provide support in-kind. An example could be providing a temporary travel pass for the student to attend exams.

Students must meet the residency criteria in the DfE funding rules for post-16 provision and must be undertaking a Study Programme at Nova Training as funded by the DfE.

## Eligibility, Assessment and Payment

### **Vulnerable Bursary Fund**

Students in defined vulnerable groups are unlikely to receive financial assistance from parents or carers, so may need a greater level of support to participate.

Top-up bursary funding of up to £1,200 is available to you to meet the needs of these young people, but are not automatically entitled to £1,200. Nova Training will assess students individually to determine the amount of support they need to participate and only claim and provide funds to meet those needs.

Nova Training ensures 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 addition to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC - all benefits must be received by the student, in their own right

Students must be in receipt of DLA or PIP and ESA or UC to be eligible – receipt of DLA or PIP alone does not meet the criteria.

Nova Training considers the length of the study programme and the number of hours involved. The bursary for vulnerable groups can pay up to £1,200 per year to a student participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more if they have costs to that amount.

In some cases, a young person meets the eligibility criteria for the defined vulnerable groups bursary, but their participation costs are already met, or they have no relevant costs.

For example, a student:

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

In these circumstances, we refuse the student's application. We explain to the student and their support worker or parent where applicable, that the aim of bursary funding is to provide financial support to those who need it and, as their costs are paid for by other means, financial support is not required.

Equally, Nova Training can provide support to a vulnerable group student of more than £1,200 if we assess they need extra help to remain in education. At its discretion, Nova Training may, in exceptional circumstances, continue vulnerable payment sums beyond the £1,200 threshold by accessing its Discretionary Bursary Fund should funds allow. Bursaries will be awarded on a reimbursement or 'in kind' basis and will vary depending on individual circumstances.

A student who meets the criteria for a defined vulnerable group bursary is not automatically eligible for a free meal.

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).

The term 'looked after child' is defined in section 22 of the Children Act 1989.

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund defines a care leaver as either a young person aged:

- 16 and 17 who was previously looked after for a period of at least 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to at least 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16 - they do not need to have entered care after their 14th birthday to be eligible, they can have entered care at any age, but they must have spent at least 13 weeks in care after their 14th birthday before leaving after the age of 16
- 18 or above who was looked after before turning 18 for a period of at least 13 weeks consecutively (or periods amounting to at least 13 weeks), which began after the age of 14 and ended after the age of 16

A financial need assessment must be completed and evidence of in care or care leaver status must be obtained.

A young person placed with a foster carer by the local authority, including through independent fostering agencies, is classed as looked after. They meet the criteria for the 'in care' vulnerable group if they have a financial need.

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 then left care via achieving permanence through an order 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 to be eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary.

We do not need to consider a foster carer's income when awarding support.

Eligibility for the bursary for defined vulnerable groups is based on the student meeting the criteria for one of the defined vulnerable groups, not a household income assessment. However, we must take into account any costs that are already covered by the local authority, to avoid double-funding. All students must have their need for support assessed individually, to determine the type and amount of support they need.

## **Discretionary Bursary Fund**

Learners facing financial hardship and whose family income is below the current income threshold set at £50,000 but who are not eligible for the Vulnerable Bursary are invited to apply for access to

the Discretionary Bursary Fund. Appropriate evidence confirming eligibility will be required, for example:

- An in-scope copy of a HMRC Tax Credits Award Letter (universal credits is now the new format of the tax credits award letter),
- a benefits notification award
- evidence of Taxable Social Security Benefits
- evidence of Employment salaries or wages - for example, a P60, monthly, weekly or biweekly payslips, evidence of self-employment income (SA302 form).
- Most recent 3 months worth of universal credit statements

Once confirmed as an eligible learner, a Discretionary Bursary award shall be granted to the learner, the level of award shall be subject to the level of family income. This award will be used to pay for daily costs incurred by participating in the programme and may include travel, meals, workwear and course-related materials. Bursaries will be awarded on a reimbursement or 'in kind' basis and will vary depending on individual circumstances.

## Conditions

Students awarded a Bursary will be expected to meet certain conditions relating to attendance, behaviour and completion of certain work or courses, for example:

- Good attendance
- Satisfactory behaviour and conduct
- Responding positively to programme criteria (completing and achieving qualifications satisfactorily)
- Completion of Learning Programme

## Application Process

Learners should obtain a Bursary Fund Application Form from Centre Staff. Completed applications should be returned together with the relevant evidence to Centre Staff in order to be sent to the Finance & Bursary Team at Nova Training's Head Office.

Nova Training checks household income for bursary once at the beginning of a student's study programme.

This assumes the student is enrolled on a typical 2-year study programme.

We do not conduct annual household income checks, which is why you must complete a signed and dated (hard copy or electronic) self-declaration form to confirm that your household circumstances have not changed.

## Additional Bursary Support

## Device Support

Bursary funds can be made available to assist with remote learning should the learner become eligible for bursary and does not have accessibility to an available device. This will be assessed upon request in accordance with the individual learner's bursary award. A Device Request form must be completed to request this support.

## Other Discretionary Support

Assistance funds for other education or placement related expenditure will be considered for students upon receipt of an appropriate application forwarded by the relevant Centre Staff, this may include (but is not be restricted to) clothing, DBS checks, additional PPE requirement, etc. Any discretionary support must not interfere with any statutory responsibility by other benefit agencies. The Additional Bursary Request form must be completed and forwarded to the Bursary Team for any Additional Bursary funding requests.

## Emergency Meal & Travel Support

In cases of severe hardship, Nova Training may decide to use discretionary bursary to fund meal and travel support on the days the student attends their study programme without completing the usual household income and evidence checks. This will only apply to a very small number of the 16 to 19 student cohort. This will be a temporary arrangement with a full discretionary bursary assessment ultimately still needed.

This arrangement is for food or travel support only.

## Universal Credits

Universal Credit (UC) is replacing some benefits for example, Income Support and Employment and Support Allowance for new claimants. This means young people aged 16 to 18 from now on, are not in receipt of these legacy benefits. However, students aged 19 to 25 but funded from the 16 to 19 budget (such as those with an EHC plan) may still be in receipt of those legacy benefits. UC award notifications do not include information on the benefits they replace.

A student must be receiving UC in their own right to support themselves and dependents living with them, such as a child or partner to apply for the Vulnerable bursary.

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 treats 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.

Under UC, any educational award which is paid under a scheme to enable persons under age 21 to complete a course of non-advanced education (which will include the 16 to 19 Bursary) does not need to be treated as grant income for UC purposes – as provided under reg 68(7) of The Universal Credit Regulations 2013.

## Appeals

All students have the right to appeal against any decision made in respect to a bursary award or non-award of a bursary. Appeals must be made in writing and submitted within 2 weeks of the decision. An independent appeals panel will hear the complaint as outlined in Nova Training's Complaints Procedure (NTS418). Copies of the Complaints Procedure can be obtained on request.

## Free Meals

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, all students from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to receive a free meal.

Nova Training makes a free meal available for all eligible students for each day the student attends their study programme, where this is appropriate.

An uplift to £2.66 will be implemented for the 2026 to 2027 academic year.

Students aged over 19 are eligible for a free meal if they either:

- are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) they started before they turned 19
- have an education health and care (EHC) plan

Transitional protections for free meals are ending at the end of the 2025 to 2026 academic year. To receive free meals from the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, students (or their families) must meet the eligibility criteria. Ongoing eligibility will be monitored through rechecks of eligibility, taking place once a year.

Applications for Free Meals are to be made via the Bursary Fund Application form and learners will be eligible to receive a free meal to the value of £2.66 upon making a successful application. Nova Training uses the Discretionary & Vulnerable bursaries to round this to £5.00 per meal.

## Contact Us

The Bursary Team can be contacted for any bursary-related queries on 01902 366 278 or [bursary@novatraining.co.uk](mailto:bursary@novatraining.co.uk)

*Please note: payments may be adjusted periodically by the Organisation following review or at the instruction of Auditors. Nova Training also has the right to refuse reimbursements or applications in order to comply with Government Guidelines.*