



16-19 BURSARY FUND AND FREE MEALS SCHEME

(FOR LEARNERS ATTENDING TRAINING IN THE 2025/2026 ACADEMIC YEAR)

Mission

'We will increase skills through the attainment of vocational and fundamental English and maths qualifications whilst improving learners' employability skills and life chances. We aim to increase employment levels, decrease NEET and meet the skills demands of the learners, Local Authorities, employers and LEP's that we serve.

Values

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

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

Vision

Through a socially inclusive approach, we will provide high quality learning and training support, to equip individuals with the skills for future employment, further development and or Further Education.

Introduction Bursaries

Bursaries have been made available to help young people overcome financial barriers to their participation in education. All criteria is set in accordance with the EFA 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide: 2025 to 2026 academic year.

Eligibility For Awards

- A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2025 to be eligible for help from the bursary fund in the 2025 to 2026 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 institutions 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.
- Young people must satisfy the residency criteria as stated in the document EFA 2025 to 2026 academic year funding regulations for post-16 provision and must be undertaking a Study Programme at Nova Training as funded by the EFA (paid Apprentices CANNOT access the Bursary Fund).
- The following groups of young people are eligible to apply for the 16-19 Bursary Fund:
- Vulnerable Learners – any young person who is deemed vulnerable as indicated by inclusion in one of the defined vulnerable groups
- Discretionary Learners – any other young person who meets the Discretionary Bursary eligibility with an annual household income is under £50,000

Bursaries Available For 2025/2026

- Vulnerable Bursary - £1,200 per academic year for programmes of study of 30 weeks or more, maybe available to Vulnerable Young People only – reduced pro-rata for programmes of study 29 weeks or less. Where possible this type of bursary is paid in kind.
- Discretionary Bursary – Available to young people aged 16-18 who are facing barriers to their learning, in particular, financial difficulty that means they would struggle to participate in education and training without some help towards the costs linked with learning. Where possible this type of bursary is paid in kind.

Eligibility, Assessment and Payment

Vulnerable Bursary Fund

- The most vulnerable young people may be eligible for a vulnerable bursary of £1,200 for a course of 30 weeks or more, pro rata for programmes of 29 weeks and under. Young people in the defined vulnerable groups are usually, but not always, living apart from their parents/carers, as such they can get social security benefits in their own right. Not all learners (including those in the classification of vulnerable) are guaranteed access to Bursary Funds; it will always be based around an individual learner's circumstances and needs.

The defined vulnerable groups are:

- *Young people in care, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- **Young care leavers
- Young people getting income support or the equivalent Universal Credit (UC) in their own right
- Young people getting both Disability Living Allowance (DLA) OR the new Personal Independence Payments (PIP) AND Employment Support Allowance (ESA) OR Universal Credit (UC) in their own right

*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

Appropriate evidence confirming eligibility will be required, 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 UC or IS, a copy of their UC or IS 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, you 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 DLA and PIP, a copy of their UC claim from DWP. Evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP must also be provided

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

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.

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

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 or evidence of Employment salaries or wages - for example a P60, month 12 or week 53 payslips, evidence of self-employment income (SA302 form).

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, work wear and course related materials. Bursaries will be awarded on a reimbursement or 'in kind' basis and will vary depending on individual circumstances.

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Conditions

Young people who are 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
- Absence due to illness, caring or other exceptional circumstances will be taken into consideration.
- Satisfactory behaviour and conduct
- Responding positively to programme criteria (completing and achieving qualifications satisfactorily)
- Completion of Learning Programme

Application for Bursaries

Learners should obtain a Bursary Fund Application Form (NTS891) from Centre Staff. Completed applications should be returned together with the relevant evidence to Centre Staff in order to be sent to the Bursary Team at Nova Training's Head Office.

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.

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 Funding Request Form (NTS891D) must be completed and forwarded to the Bursary Team for any Additional Bursary funding requests.

Appeals

All learners 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

In the 2025 to 2026 academic year, institutions will receive funding at a rate equivalent to £2.53 per student per meal taken. As for Bursary Fund applications, learners must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August 2025 to be eligible for a free meal in the 2025 to 2026 academic year. All eligibility criteria are set in accordance with the EFA's 16 to 19 funding: free meals in further education funded institutions guide: 2025 to 2026 academic year.

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Other students in receipt of discretionary bursaries may claim for a daily meal from the discretionary fund.

For the purpose of eligibility for free meals 'disadvantage' is defined by the students being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Support under part V1 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit) and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

- Universal Credit (UC) with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any benefits they get)

Learners aged 19 to 24 who are subject to an Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan) are also entitled to a free meal whilst attending their programme of study if all other eligibility criteria is met.

Applications for Free Meals are to be made via the Bursary Fund Application form (NTS891) and learners will be eligible to receive a free meal to the value of £2.53 upon making (or a Parent(s)/Guardian(s) on their behalf) a successful application.

The Bursary Team can be contacted for any bursary related queries on 01902 366 278 or bursary@novatraining.co.uk

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