

16-18 Bursary Policy and Financial Support Guidance (including Free Meals in Further Education)

Summary

Middlesbrough College recognises that financial support plays an important role in removing financial barriers to participation, attendance, retention and successful completion of further education programmes. The College will use available funding to support students with genuine financial need in accessing and participating in education.

These funds will be distributed in a consistent and transparent way and in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department for Education.

HE courses, students following an Apprenticeship, or any waged training are not eligible to apply. There is, however, a HE Bursary which provides a one-off annual payment of £500 for Level 4–6 students commencing study in 2026–2027 with a household income of less than £45,000. Applications can be submitted via PayMyStudent.

This guidance is reviewed annually and updated in line with the Department for Education (DfE) 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2026 to 2027 and Free meals in further education funded institutions guide 2026 to 2027. It forms part of the College's funding agreement and audit assurance framework.

Application Procedure

We encourage all prospective and returning students who believe they may face financial barriers to participation in education to apply for financial support by completing and submitting an application via the PayMyStudent system as soon as possible. The application can be accessed via the Middlesbrough College website or by scanning a QR code available from Student Services.

We guarantee that any applications made on or prior to 30th October 2026 will be assessed for financial support, with relevant funds applied and bursary backdated to the beginning of the academic year. This backpay does not include free meals.

Applications received after 30 October 2026 will be assessed subject to funding availability and may not be eligible for backdated financial support.

To ensure students are not disadvantaged, Middlesbrough College offers all students free travel for the first 6 weeks to enable them to attend college on their timetabled days. Following this a bus sticker must be obtained in order to travel on Arriva or Stagecoach. For further information please visit the Middlesbrough College website.

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Students who have applied for College bursary support but are not eligible for Free Meals in Further Education and are awaiting assessment of their application may access short-term support where there is an identified need. Students who are experiencing difficulty in purchasing meals during this period are encouraged to speak with Student Services, who may provide interim support until their application has been assessed.

You can apply for one of these bursaries via Pay My Student (located on the Middlesbrough College website). You will need to upload evidence of your household income to check your eligibility. If the correct evidence is not submitted, the form cannot be assessed, and an award cannot be made. If this is the case, we will write to or email the student to inform them of what further evidence they need to submit. It is the responsibility of the student to make sure that they do this promptly.

Students must confirm that they have read and understood this guidance as part of their application.

We will write to or email all students informing them of the outcome of their application. Successful students will get an award notice which tells them what their award is including, where applicable, if they are entitled to free college meals.

We will also communicate with all unsuccessful students informing them of the reasons for this decision.

Please only complete an application form if you are studying on a full-time course up-to Level 3 only (this does not include Apprenticeships).

Funding is intended to help with the financial hardship needs of individual young people studying a programme at college. Financial support awarded to individuals will be used towards essential course-related costs such as travel, meals at college if eligible, equipment, trips and other costs associated with learning. The College will assess both eligibility and actual financial need before making an award. Support will only be provided where there are identifiable financial barriers to participation. Awards are not guaranteed.

Students who believe they may face financial barriers to participating in their education are encouraged to apply for financial support. Applications will be assessed based on household circumstances, individual need, eligibility criteria and available funding.

Financial support is subject to sufficient funds being available, is not guaranteed, and eligibility is based on individual need. Please note that this is a discretionary fund, approval is based on the assessment of personal circumstances and the availability of allocated funding through the Financial Assistance application. All bursary awards

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are based on an assessment of individual student need and must be supported by appropriate evidence. The College will not make standard or flat-rate payments unless these reflect evidenced costs and individual circumstances.

Continued bursary support is normally linked to attendance, engagement and participation in learning. Attendance thresholds are used as an indicator of ongoing participation and need rather than as a reward mechanism.

The College recognises that some students may experience exceptional circumstances including illness, disability, SEND needs, mental health difficulties, safeguarding concerns, caring responsibilities or other factors outside of their control. Such cases will be reviewed individually, and discretion may be applied where supported by appropriate evidence.

Funds will be awarded on an individual needs basis in line with government guidance. Discretion will be applied in exceptional circumstances and will require evidence and approval from an Assistant Principal, Associate Director or the Executive Director of Student Services.

Applications for funding will close during May Half Term 2027.

Statement of Principles

- Financial support should be applied fairly and consistently.
- The process must be easily understood and accessible to young people.
- All relevant information will be publicised via Student Services information leaflets, MyMbro and the college website.
- The process should identify eligible students in a timely fashion.
- There is a commitment to ensuring funds allocated to the College are fully distributed in order to support as many students as possible, however, budgets are provided by the Department for Education and, therefore, the College can only make payments where sufficient funds are available.

All awards are subject to an assessment of individual need, actual participation costs and available funding. The College retains evidence of the costs being supported in accordance with DfE requirements.

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Governance, Roles and Responsibilities

To ensure separation of duties and compliance with audit expectations, the following arrangements apply:

- Applications are assessed by the Student Services Team
- Bursary awards are authorised by the Executive Director of Student Services (or delegated senior manager)
- Payments are processed by the Finance Team
- Audit checks are completed independently of assessment and payment functions.

All bursary awards are made in accordance with the Department for Education's 16–19 Bursary Fund Guidance 2026–27.

The College must be able to demonstrate that all awards:

- Address a genuine financial barrier to participation.
- Are supported by evidence.
- Represent value for money.
- Are capable of withstanding external audit scrutiny.

Bursary guidance is subject to change.

General Eligibility

To be eligible for the Student Bursary, students must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Enrolled on a course within the College.
- Their place on the course must be funded by the Department for Education.
- Students must be aged 16 years or over on 31 August of the relevant academic year.
- They must be a “home” student, i.e., having been ‘ordinarily resident’ in the British Isles.

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- Accompanied asylum-seeking children (under 18 with an adult relative or partner). 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.
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children do not receive cash support from the Home Office and are the responsibility of the local authority. They are treated as care experienced children and are eligible for a 16-18 Priority Bursary where they have a financial need.

Eligibility and awards may be reviewed where a student withdraws or their circumstances change.

16-18 Priority Bursary

This bursary is to the value of £4 per timetabled day and is for students aged 16–18 who are:

- in care
- care leavers / care experienced (in care for 13 weeks or more since the age of 14)
- receiving Income Support, or Universal Credit 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 or Personal Independence Payments in their own right alongside Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right.

Evidence and Data Requirements

The College will request and retain evidence to verify eligibility and need, including:

- Wage slips
- Universal Credit or benefit statements
- Other evidence of household income

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The College will not routinely request bank statements unless a student is supported solely by savings.

All data is stored securely and handled in accordance with UK GDPR. Information is only shared where necessary and through secure systems. Incomplete applications will be reviewed and deleted from college systems at key points throughout the academic year.

This Bursary is based on financial need and is not automatically awarded. Students meeting the eligibility criteria for the 16–18 Priority Bursary will undergo an assessment of financial need and participation costs. Where additional support is required beyond that funded through the Priority Bursary, this will be considered as part of a single assessment of need and in accordance with DfE guidance.

16 -18 Discretionary Bursary

This bursary is to the value of £3 per timetabled day and can be awarded to any student aged 16 to 18 (at the start of the academic year) who faces genuine financial barriers to staying on in education and training and is designed to help with costs related to their timetabled study. This can include students who are care experienced e.g. living in the care of the local authority, have left care or are claiming Universal Credit in their own right.

16-18 Discretionary Bursary awards will only be made subject to a fully completed application with supporting evidence and will only be made to support genuine financial barriers to continuing studies and will be subject to financial limits.

A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 at 31 August to be eligible for help from the bursary fund in the academic year. (If a student turns 19 during their programme of study, they can continue to receive the bursary until the end of the academic year in which they turn 19).

Students must be:

From households with an annual income of less than £100,000 per year and/or whose parents/carers are in receipt of one of the following:

- Universal Credit
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- An income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Guarantee element of Pension Credit

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Uniform, Kit, Equipment and Books

If students are required to purchase uniform, kit, equipment or books as part of their course then they will either be able to purchase all items via Pay My Student (located on the Middlesbrough College website) or in exceptional circumstances submit a receipt for reimbursement. Depending on funds available we may not be able to reimburse 100% of the costs.

Travel to College or Work Placements

Bus travel support may be awarded to eligible students following assessment of financial need and travel requirements. Support is subject to available funding and is intended to remove barriers to participation.

All 16-18 students can purchase a bus pass which entitles them to term time, timetabled day weekday travel up to 7pm effective from Monday 7th September 2026 until Friday 25th June 2027 inclusive, on the Arriva and Stagecoach North East services and college commissioned routes.

Following assessment, bus passes for students from households with an income of less than £100,000 are funded through this fund upon successful application (no payment required), students with household income of over £100,000 are required to pay £60 per term for their bus pass.

Train routes may be reimbursed where bus journeys to college are not available (check website for eligible stations). Middlesbrough College reimburses train tickets upon receipt of proof of travel and eligibility; students **must** purchase the 16-17 Saver Rail Card (this will be reimbursed for students with household income of less than £100,000).

You must submit your tickets on a weekly basis for reimbursement, failure to hand tickets in regularly may result in you not receiving reimbursement – we will not backdate refunds more than 4 weeks. Only requests for train refunds submitted before October half term will be considered.

Visits and Trips

If students are required to attend a visit or trip for educational purposes, volunteering activities and work placements, the full or partial cost of this can be covered under this funding (subject to funds). Teaching staff will be required to advise the Student Services Team of the learning aims and cost and where these are approved, the department will be reimbursed if they are purchasing the tickets on the students' behalf.

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Bursary funding must support essential participation costs (e.g. travel, equipment, course-related costs). It must not be used for non-essential extra-curricular activities or general enrichment.

All awards must be:

- Based on individual need
- Evidence-led
- Not blanket or assumed costs

UCAS

Students who are eligible for free school meals are also eligible for an application fee waiver for UCAS applications, the bursary will pay for those ineligible for the fee waiver under the 16-18 bursary for those with a household income up to £100,000.

Free Meals in Further Education

Eligibility for Free Meals in Further Education (FMFE) is assessed separately from bursary support and is based on DfE eligibility criteria.

Students may be eligible for:

- Free Meals only;
- Bursary support only; or
- Both forms of support where separate eligibility criteria are met.

Eligibility for one scheme does not automatically confer entitlement to the other. Items from the Costa concession hut are not included and must be paid for separately.

Eligibility Criteria 1 - Students are eligible for Free Meals in Further Education to the value of £4* per timetabled day if they or their household receive one of the following qualifying benefits.

- Universal Credit
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- An income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

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- Guarantee element of Pension Credit

*£2.66 per day of this allowance is funded by Free Meals in Further Education. When you submit a Financial Assistance application, we will automatically assess your eligibility for Free College Meals.

From academic year 2026 to 2027, all students from households receiving Universal Credit are eligible for free meals.

Eligibility will be checked prior to the start of the academic year where possible and must be reviewed at least annually.

Eligibility Criteria 2 – Students who are not eligible for Free Meals in Further Education may be considered for food support of up to £3 per timetabled day where:

- Household income is below £45,000 per year; and
- There is evidence of financial need.

Any award will reflect assessed need, attendance, participation and available funding.

This amount will be added to your college card on a half termly basis. Support for food costs will be adjusted downwards based on non-attendance at college.

Students may purchase meal deals, drinks, toiletries, stationery and other college items on their college card. Items from the Costa concession hut are not included and must be paid for separately. Any remaining balance on college cards will be cleared at the end of each term.

(Christmas / Easter / End of academic year).

Students will normally receive either Free Meals in Further Education (£4.00 per timetabled day) or College food support (up to £3 per timetabled day), but not both.

Childcare

Care to Learn (Childcare for students aged under 20 years)

Care to Learn provides financial support to parents under the age of 20 years at the start of their course with the costs of childcare to ensure they are able to continue in education. The parent must be taking an eligible full-time course and must be using an Ofsted registered childcare provider, who is not a relation. The weekly payment depends on the cost of childcare but can be up to £180 per child per week.

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Students who are entitled to the free government childcare (15/30hrs) are expected to use this entitlement before any funding is applied for through the College.

Care to Learn only covers childcare costs for teenage parents. Some young parents will also be eligible for Income Support or Universal Credit, in which case they could apply for the Priority Bursary too.

You must be receiving the Child Benefit for the child to be eligible for Care to Learn. Please note we cannot assess an application without all of the evidence:

- Child's full birth certificate
- Student's birth certificate or passport
- Income evidence including Child Benefit letter
- Copy of student's course timetable
- Completed Provider Form

HE Bursary (Level 4 or higher)

Students enrolled on full-time regulated Higher Education programmes at (levels 4-6), commencing from the 2026–2027 academic year, may be eligible to apply for a Higher Education Bursary of £500 per academic year. To qualify, students must have a household income of less than £45,000 per annum. Applications must be submitted through the PayMyStudent portal and will be subject to assessment. Applicants are required to provide appropriate evidence of household income to support their application.

Bursary payment will not start being processed until after October half term once confirmation of Term 1 fees is in place. Self-funding students must be on track with their agreed payment plan.

Bursary awards are made annually; students must reapply for each year of study.

Exceptional Circumstances

The College may exercise discretion where strict application of the bursary rules would disadvantage a student experiencing exceptional circumstances. This includes, but is not limited to:

- SEND or EHCP-related needs
- Physical health conditions

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- Mental health difficulties
- Young carers
- Care experienced students
- Safeguarding concerns
- Temporary financial crisis

Decisions will be based on evidence and authorised by an appropriate senior manager.

What we do not fund

The bursary fund will not be used for:

- Gas, electricity or general household costs
- DBS checks (covered by College/curriculum areas)
- Non-educational or non-essential expenditure
- Items from the Costa concession hut

Systems and Record Keeping

Applications and evidence are managed through the PayMyStudent system. Records of assessment, decisions, and payments are retained to meet audit and funding requirements.

Audit and Assurance

The College operates a monthly internal audit process:

- A random sample of applications is reviewed
- Checks include eligibility, evidence, payments and ILR alignment
- Findings inform staff training and process improvement

The College must be able to demonstrate compliance with funding rules at audit.

Appealing a decision when the application for support was declined.

In line with DfE guidance, appeals are managed internally by the College. The decision of the panel is final.

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Students can submit an appeal if their application is declined to the student services team via studentservices@mbro.ac.uk. The applicant must state the reasons for disagreeing with the decision and why it is deemed unfair, and evidence must be submitted to support the claim and confirm that the bursary claim is for educational costs.

A panel will be convened within 20 working days. The panel will consist of the Executive Director of Student Services and Deputy Principal for Students.

The panel will review the decision and the applicant will be notified of the panel's decision in writing within 5 working days.

The decision of the panel will be final.

Appealing for additional funds following a successful application and bursary payment

Due to limited funds and high volumes of applications for financial support that are received by the College each year we have imposed strict limits for each of the Bursary elements listed in the policy above. It will therefore not be possible to submit an appeal for additional funds from the bursary until after 31st January 2027.

Any student wishing to appeal for additional support must submit an appeal in writing to studentservices@mbro.ac.uk and must specify how much support they require and what the additional support is required for. Additional payments will only be made where the requested support is for educational purposes only and only where evidence is provided and will be limited depending on the Bursary funds available.

Travel for all students is subsidised through college funds and commercial income.

Household income thresholds are used as an initial indicator of potential eligibility. Meeting an income threshold alone does not guarantee support. Awards are determined following assessment of individual financial need, course-related costs and available funding.

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	Household income		
	<£45,000*	£45,001 – £100,000*	Over £100,000*
Free College Meals (16-18 students / 19-23 with EHCP only)	Eligible for £4 per day if the household is in receipt of a means tested benefit** including Universal Credit		
Bus Travel (Arriva & Stagecoach)	FREE	FREE	£60 per term***
Train Travel****	Reimbursed	Reimbursed	X
MC Bursary (If not receiving Free Meals)	£3 per day ^Δ	X	X
Specialist Equipment	YES	X	X
Mandatory Trips / Visits	YES*****	X	X
UCAS Fee	YES	YES	X
Childcare – Care to Learn (16-19yr old student)	YES	X	X
Childcare – College Funded (20yrs+ student)	YES	X	X

* Earned income plus Universal Credit amount (if applicable)

** Universal Credit / State Pension / Asylum Support

*** Payment due after October half term / after Christmas holidays / after Easter holidays

**** Designated train stations only. Students are required to purchase the 16-17 saver rail card. Tickets must be handed in weekly

***** The bursary fund can only be used to support learning activities and experiences that are clearly mapped to the student's study programme goals or course objectives therefore, each trip award is assessed on an individual basis and is not guaranteed

Δ Bursary paid weekly and based on positive attendance