

Growth Company Education & Skills 16-19 Bursary Policy – 2026/27 Academic Year

Introduction

The Growth Company aims to support young people to participate in programmes regardless of their financial situation and circumstances. Our 16-19 Study Programmes operate an ‘open door’ policy for all young people that meet Department for Education (DfE) eligibility requirements.

Policy

This policy relates to all learners at The Growth Company attending a 16-19 Study Programme funded by the DfE, subject to meeting eligibility criteria detailed in this policy and as required by the funding agency. This policy covers bursary funding which is designed to help learners who face the greatest barriers to continuing in education or training post -16. The Growth Company will ensure that all applications for the Bursary funds are considered on the same basis irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, belief, or faith in line with the Equality Act 2010.

This policy relates to the academic year 2026/27 which operates from 1st August 2026 to 31st July 2027.

The Growth Company administers three types of Bursary Fund in line with the DfE 16-19 Bursary Fund Guidelines. The Growth Company may also pay Travel Costs as detailed below.

Receipt of any bursary will be conditional on the young person meeting agreed standards of attendance and behaviour (Learner Agreement / Code of Conduct).

The Bursary Funds comprise of:

- **16 -19 Discretionary Bursary**
- **Free FE Meals**
- **16-19 Independent Young Person Bursary**

16-19 Discretionary Bursary Fund

What is the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary Fund?

The Discretionary Bursary is money that has been given to The Growth Company by the Government to support 16–19-year-old learners who face financial barriers to continuing in further education.

The Discretionary Bursary will be assessed on the household income of the learner’s parent(s)/ carer(s) or adult(s) mainly financially responsible for the learner and with whom they live.

Income threshold

Learners will be able to apply for the bursary if their household income is **less than £40,000** (before tax) per year.

What income is taken into account?

- All taxable earnings, income and benefits are considered.
Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Personal Independent Payment, Universal Credit and Tax Credit payments are not counted.
- Applications from learners who are Young Carers and who are registered with a local carer’s organisation will be assessed on household income. (A young carer is a young person who looks after a family member because they have an illness or disability or has a drug/alcohol addiction).
- Applications from learners who live with foster parent(s)/ carer(s) within a private foster care arrangement will be assessed on the household income of their foster parent(s)/ carer(s).
- If the learner lives with a spouse or partner – the household income of both will be assessed.
- We will look at the learner’s income only if the learner lives independently and is supporting themselves.

Please note that any funding you may receive from the 16-19 Bursary does not affect your receipt of household means tested benefits.

What financial help is available if a bursary application is successful?

For eligible learners, help is available towards:

- **Food** – for learners attending a morning and an afternoon session in a day, an amount of £4.25 will be paid to support the cost of lunch. Those attending a morning or afternoon session only are not eligible.
- **Travel** – The Growth Company will pay the £10 for the ‘Our Pass’ for bus travel (or equivalent Merseyside pass in St Helens). Where a learner’s most appropriate public transport is not by bus (e.g. train or tram) or the learner is not eligible for the ‘Our Pass’, this can be paid to the learner. This will be paid on production of receipts for amounts paid out for travel based on cost at the start of the year and re-checked if price increases.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** – the bursary can be used to pay for the PPE for those eligible for bursary in kind. The Growth Company will purchase this PPE on behalf of the learner, so they do not incur any costs directly. This is applicable for those centres offering construction/technical courses and hairdressing and may include overalls/aprons, boots or other PPE required for the course.
- **Emergency food fund** – for one off or short-term support, those who are in need can access the bursary fund for food only without means testing. This is at the approval of the Centre Manager, should only be for two weeks maximum, and all receipts must be provided to the Centre.

Evidence requirements

Learners will be required to provide supporting evidence of their household income to support their claim for the Discretionary Bursary. This evidence will need to be seen by our staff and noted in your application.

Means testing will be rigorous but not excessive and all reasonable attempts will be made to gain evidence of household income. The cooperation or otherwise of parents/guardians will not be seen as a discriminating factor.

Important notice regarding availability of funding

Applications for the Discretionary Bursary will be considered throughout the academic year or until the funding has been fully allocated.

The total amount of funding The Growth Company will receive from the Government is finite.

Application and eligibility are not a guarantee that an award will be made.

The Growth Company will aim to help as many eligible learners as possible and is recommending that all learners who have identified that they are eligible to apply should do so as early as possible. However, should there be a shortfall in funding and if The Growth Company is unable to make awards to all eligible applicants, The Growth Company will prioritise eligible learners on a case-by-case basis according to an individual’s needs and circumstances.

Free Further Education (FE) Meals

What is Free Further Education (FE) Meals?

Further Education providers, including The Growth Company, have a requirement to provide free meals each day when the learner is attending learning where they meet the eligibility criteria.

Eligibility

All learners who have received free school meals in their previous school setting will be eligible for free school meals with The Growth Company.

From the 1st August 2026, the eligibility for Free School Meals has changed to:

All learners from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to receive a free meal.

Evidence will need to be provided to be able to support the claim.

How much support is available:

Free School Meal allocations are paid at a daily rate of £2.61 where the learner attends for a full day of classes over the lunch period.

Please note that if a learner is eligible for the discretionary bursary, the £4.25 daily food amount is inclusive of the £2.61 free school meals funds. This is not in addition.

What happens if you are at a site without catering facilities?

As most of The Growth Company centres do not have canteens/catering facilities, where they do not have these in place, the money will be paid to the learner and advice provided on where food can be purchased in the area local to the site.

If you attend the Skills Centre site in Trafford Park where there is a canteen, you will be given a voucher on your days in centre to use to pay for your lunch on your days in centre.

Independent Young Person Bursary

What is the Independent Young Person Bursary?

The 16-19 Independent Young Person Bursary Fund (criteria are determined by the Department of Education (DfE) and known by the DfE as Vulnerable Bursary) is available where learners are unlikely to receive financial assistance from parents or carers so may need a greater level of financial support to participate with their courses.

Eligibility

The DfE have set the criteria for this bursary as those 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
 - *Learners 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.*

Supporting evidence for the Independent Young Person Bursary must be collected and retained by The Growth Company.

For further guidance, the DfE give the definition of in care and care leavers as:

- 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

What financial help is available if a bursary application is successful?

A payment of up to £1,200 will be made available to help with the cost of travel, living costs, lunch, equipment and other course related costs.

Payments will be made on a weekly basis and pro rata (reduced) for programmes lasting less than 30 weeks and are subject to confirmation of attendance to classes.

Application for a Bursary

How to apply

Learners may start at various intake points during the academic year and need to complete a Bursary Application Form as quickly as possible before their first day.

Learners must complete the Bursary and FE Free Meals form through the online enrolment process. This form is checked and approved by an appropriate manager. Evidence to support the Independent Young Person Bursary must be provided to The Growth Company to retain for audit purposes.

Applications for the Independent Young Person Bursary will be accepted throughout the academic year if circumstances change.

The Growth Company reserves the right to defer or cancel payments in the event of unsatisfactory learner conduct, attendance, or punctuality or in the event of being made aware of a change in circumstances which has resulted in a learner no longer satisfying these eligibility criteria.

Payments will be paid weekly in arrears by BACs into the learners' bank account. This means that if a learner attends for a week, the bursary payments linked to that week are paid the following Friday (or the nearest working day if a bank holiday). Alternative arrangements will be made in exceptional circumstances where the learner does not have a bank account.

Payments must not be made through petty cash, except in exceptional circumstances with permission from the appropriate manager. If payments are made through petty cash, these must not be duplicated by BACS payment.

Travel Costs

Learners within Greater Manchester aged 16 and 17 are eligible for the Our Pass for free bus travel across Greater Manchester (<https://ourpass.co.uk/>), the Growth Company will pay the £10 registration fee for learners to obtain the pass if required.

There are similar schemes in other areas, such as Merseyside for the St Helen's site, that The Growth Company will support.

This *may* be done for learners who are not eligible for bursary payments at the cost of The Growth Company.

Complaints

A Complaints procedure is in place to cover all aspects of learners Study Programmes. If a learner is dissatisfied with their assessment, then they can appeal in writing to the appropriate Manager. Queries or disagreements over agreed standards of attendance and behaviour should also be raised with the appropriate Manager.

Appendix

Bursary Fund/ FE Meals Application Online Form

Review / updates

Type	Date	Version control
Review	October 2025	Version 6
Update – changes to discretionary bursary criteria for 26/27 year	June 2026	Version 7