

## EKC GROUP BURSARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT POLICY - ACADEMIC YEAR 25/26

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## 1 Introduction

EKC Group receives annual funding from the Department for Education (DfE) which is allocated to the Group's Colleges to help remove barriers for socially and financially disadvantaged students and ensure that they can participate fully in education.

The aim of this policy is to:

- Outline what funding is available to students and the eligibility criteria that must be met to receive the funding.
- Ensure a fair and consistent approach to administering the bursary funding.
- Ensure that funding is allocated to students with the greatest level of need, with the amount awarded based on both their individual and financially assessed needs.
- Ensure that funding is available to provide students with access to technology.
- Ensure adherence to the DfE's funding rules and guidelines.

This policy will be reviewed and updated annually.

## 2 Funding available to students

Students may apply for a range of bursaries/funding, depending on eligibility criteria. These include:

- 16-19 Discretionary Bursary Fund
- 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary Fund
- Care to Learn
- Free College meals
- 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund
- Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund

Further details regarding the eligibility criteria for each funding stream are provided in Section 3 and information regarding the type of support available is detailed in Section 6 (See Appendix A).

### 3 Eligibility

Eligibility criteria are reviewed and updated annually based on the DfE published guidelines for that year.

In accordance with the DfE's guidelines, EKC Group will assess a student's legal status, household income and actual financial needs when awarding bursary funding. This will be assessed for each individual student, each academic year.

Applications are means-tested, and applicants will be required to complete an online application to verify the preceding three months total net household income from point of application. All income and benefits (including housing benefit, council tax benefit, working tax credits, child tax credits, etc.) are taken into account. EKC Group does not take into account Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment when calculating total household income.

Higher Education students should refer to the HE Admissions Policy for information about financial support that may be available.

#### 3.1 16-19 Discretionary Bursary Fund - Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary, students must be participating in a provision funded by the DfE and must meet the following criteria:

- Aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2025 or
- Aged 19 or over on 31 August 2025 and have a current Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or
- Aged 19 or over on 31 August 2025 and continuing on a study programme they began aged 16-18 (19+ continuers);
- Meet the residency criteria in the DfE funding regulations for post 16 provision.
- Is an accompanied asylum seeker who has not had their application for asylum refused.
- Is a member of a household whose net income is below £34,000 per year for full bursary or £36,000 net income per year for travel only assistance. See Section 4 for further explanation of household income.

### **3.2 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary Fund - Eligibility Criteria**

The bursary for vulnerable groups can provide funding of up to £1,200 per year for a student participating on a study programme that lasts for 30 weeks or more. Students on study programmes of less than 30 weeks are paid a pro-rata amount. The bursary amount will be based on an assessment of “actual” needs, so students may not receive the maximum amount in all cases.

To be eligible for the 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary, students must be participating in provision funded by the DfE and must meet the following criteria:

- Aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2025 or
- Aged 19 or over on 31 August 2025 and have a current Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or
- Aged 19 or over on 31 August 2025 and continuing on a study programme they began aged 16-18 (19+ continuers);
- Meet the residency criteria in the DfE funding regulations for post 16 provision.

Students must also fall into one or more of the following categories:

- In Care (including unaccompanied Asylum Seeker students)
- A Care Leaver
- A student in receipt of 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
- A student receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

When students meet the eligibility criteria for a vulnerable bursary, but their financial needs are already met (e.g. via social services) so they have no relevant costs or do not need the maximum award, the College will decide not to award a bursary. In all such cases, the College will explain the reasons to the student and signpost to the appropriate funding stream. If no funding requirement is demonstrated no funding may be pulled down from the Government hub in respect of that student.

Conversely, in rare cases where the £1,200 limit is not sufficient, such as when travel costs are high due to a student being relocated, funding may be supplemented from the Discretionary Bursary, provided there is a clear, demonstrable need to support that student in accessing their learning.

### **3.3 Care To Learn Eligibility Criteria**

Students who are under the age of 20 when they start their course can receive help with childcare costs of up to £180 per child per week through Care to Learn funding. Childcare costs that exceed this amount may be supplemented from the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary, subject to eligibility.

To be eligible for Care to Learn students must meet all of the following:

- Are a parent and under the age of 20 at the start of their course.
- Are the main carer for their child.
- Reside in England.
- Are a British citizen or have a legal right to live and study in England.
- Are enrolled on a course funded by the DfE.
- Use a childcare provider that is registered with Ofsted, a childminder agency or a school.

And provide the following evidence:

- A copy of the child's birth certificate.
- Proof of receipt of child benefit

### **3.4 Free College Meals - Eligibility Criteria**

Students that are enrolled on a 16-19 funded programme, who live in a household that is in receipt of one of the benefits below are entitled to a Free College meal for each of the days they attend study or activities that are part of their study programme (i.e. work experience), up to the value of £4 per day. The group reserve the right to alter this amount in year.

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income related Employment Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (applies to accompanied asylum seekers)

- The Guaranteed element of 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 HMRC
- Working Tax Credit run on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 per year

### **3.5 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund - Eligibility Criteria**

To be eligible for the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund students must meet the following criteria:

- Aged 19 years or over on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025.
- Be participating in a provision funded by the DfE.
- Meet the residency criteria as outlined in the Adult Skills Fund: Funding and Performance Management Rules.
- Asylum Seekers are eligible to receive funding if they have lived in the UK for six months or longer while their claim is being considered by the Home Office and no decision on their claim has been made, or are receiving local authority support under section 23C or section 23CA of the Children Act 1989 or the Care Act 2014.
- Is a member of a household whose net income is below £34,000 per year for full bursary or £36,000 net income per year for travel only assistance. See Section 4 for further explanation of household income.

### **3.6 19+ Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund - Eligibility Criteria**

The Advanced Learner Loan Bursary fund is available to provide financial support for students with a specific hardship preventing them from taking part or continuing in learning. The Advanced Loan Bursary fund is defined by two support categories as follows:

**Hardship funding** – The types of support include:

- course related costs, including course trips, books and equipment (where these costs are not required to be part of the fee).
- Transport costs.
- Professional membership fees.
- Exceptional support with domestic emergencies.

**20+ Childcare funding** – this is for learners aged 20 or over to help pay for childcare with a childminder, provider or childminder agency that is registered with Ofsted. See Section 11 for more information.

To be eligible for the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund, students must meet the following criteria:

- Aged 19 years or over on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025.
- Enrolled on a course funded by an Advanced Learner Loan.
- Meet the residency criteria in the DfE Advance Learner Loan funding rules.
- Have an approved Advanced Learner Loan in place and have passed the liability point.
- Household income?

It is the responsibility of the student to inform the Department of Work and Pensions about any bursary support they are receiving, as these payments may affect their eligibility to state benefits.

### **3.7 Students not eligible for Bursary funding:**

Students who are enrolled on:

- Higher Education courses
- Apprenticeship programmes
- Distance Learning programmes
- 14-16 elected home-educated students
- Junior College students

## **4 Household Income**

To be eligible for the 16-19 Discretionary Bursary, 19+ Discretionary Bursary or Advanced Loan Bursary, students must be a member of a household whose net income is below **£34,000 per year for full bursary or £36,000 net income per year for travel only assistance.**

All income and benefits are taken into account, including Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Working Tax Credits, Child Tax credits etc. EKC Group does not take into account Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment when calculating total household income.

For parents/guardians or students who are self-employed, EKC Group will assess income based on gross profit, but taking into account any business expenditure. For example, household items, mortgage and food would not be deducted from gross profit but servicing and maintenance of equipment, purchase of stationery etc would be deducted.

## 5 Terms and Conditions – All Bursaries

- 5.1.1 An assessment for an award is made based on a fully completed application using the Pay My Student portal. This form will be electronically signed by the student and parent/guardian (dependent upon the student's age and circumstances) detailing the last three months' income from employment and/or benefits along with supporting evidence of all declared income.
- 5.1.2 Regular payments for travel will be made **in arrears** directly to the nominated bank account via BACS on the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month (childcare payments are made directly to the childcare provider).
- 5.1.3 The bursaries are a discretionary award, and financial support is conditional on attendance. The expectation is that students achieve 100% attendance, however there is an appreciation that in some cases financial hardship can result in a lowering of attendance. Support will be provided when a student achieves 80% or above attendance across all parts of their programme.
- 5.1.4 EKC Group retains the right to cancel the support of learners who do not demonstrate behaviours in line with the Student Charter.
- 5.1.5 Bursary funds are limited, and students are advised to apply as early as possible. EKC Group aims to support all eligible students where possible and consider applications made during the academic year should an unforeseen situation arise. However, once the funds are exhausted, students may not automatically receive support.
- 5.1.6 If a student withdraws from their chosen course of study and decides to leave College, they may be required to repay monies or return equipment supplied/bought through bursary funding.
- 5.1.7 Claims for support can only be made within the current academic year. No claims can be made for any cost relating to previous years.

- 5.1.8 Travel passes, vouchers or credits for meals, books or equipment required for a student's programme of learning will be provided directly to the student. The only payments that will be made will be those with respect to rail travel or mileage. In the event of students purchasing equipment themselves, they can be reimbursed up to the agreed pathway cost upon receipts being provided.
- 5.1.9 Bursary funding cannot be used to fund non college expenditure or cost of living (eg: housing/accommodation costs, entertainment, leisure activities, utilities).

## **6 Bursary Support Information for Students**

See **Appendix A** for details of which types of support are available through the different bursary funding streams.

## **7 Travel costs**

Travel support will normally be provided in the form of a bus pass. However, the College will exercise discretion on this decision where another form of support is deemed more suitable (e.g. train or fuel). Students who are in possession of local authority travel assistance can request financial support from the college with the cost of the contribution they are required to make.

The conditions of travel funding are as follows:

- 7.1.1 There is an upper limit of £2,000 per student per year (students can apply for more subject to circumstances). This is a contribution, and students will need to 'top up' any outstanding travel costs.
- 7.1.2 Students who live within two miles (using Google maps) of the College will not be funded unless students provide evidence of extenuating circumstances e.g. disability or caring commitments.
- 7.1.3 Colleges will fund the cost of a Travel Saver card for students aged 16 or 17 if receiving assistance for train travel. This is a photo ID card and enables the student to receive a 50% discount on all train fares. The cost of the card is paid directly to the student to enable them to purchase the card.

- 7.1.4 Rail costs will be awarded in line with the existing cost at the point of application approval. Any inflation increase in year will not be covered by the College.
- 7.1.5 For students who travel by car, mileage will be paid at £0.40 per mile. Park and ride costs (Canterbury College only) will be funded.
- 7.1.6 EKC Group will provide a contribution of up to £380 for the purchase of a bicycle, safety helmet and lock. If purchased by the student receipts for these purchases will be required for a payment to be made. This is an alternative to the above means of transport and supports those wishing to be more sustainable when accessing their learning. The bike will be the student's property, and the students are responsible for insurance and maintaining the bicycle and ensuring it is roadworthy.

## **8 Digital Support (Laptops)**

EKC Group recognises that some students will not have access to a laptop. This means that they may not be able to fully participate in learning and other developmental opportunities and consequently may be placed at a disadvantage. The Group's aim therefore is to ensure that as far as possible, bursary funding is prioritised to provide technology so that students who need it can fully engage with learning.

For students applying through the 19+ Discretionary Support Fund, laptops will be on loan and students will be expected to return them at the end of their programme or when they leave the course.

Where students need a device which is a higher specification e.g. for creative programmes, the college will order the device on behalf of the student, up to a maximum value of £750 in consultation with the curriculum area.

Students will need to sign an agreement to state that they will keep the laptop secure for the duration of their programme. Laptops which are broken, lost, stolen, or sold will not be replaced. Students will be required to inform the College in all such cases. Students will need to make their own arrangements for IT support and insurance.

## 9 Other Equipment and sundries

- Essential books
- Uniform and essential footwear
- Kit (Hairdressing, Beauty, Catering, Animal Care, Creative, Computing)

## 10 Trips – Curriculum Trips

Students will not miss out on a curriculum trip because of hardship. Required course trips will therefore be fully funded for bursary students. The trip must be directly related to enabling the student to pass the course, extra-curricular trips will not be funded.

## 11 Childcare (20+ Adults)

Students aged over 20 can apply for support with childcare costs up to £8,840 per year for each child to a maximum of three children if they are awarded the 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund or Advanced Learner Loans Bursary.

The funds will only reimburse the daily childcare fee for attendance to an **Ofsted Approved** childcare provider on the days the student attends their timetabled course. If entitled to use the Free Early Education & Childcare funding this must be used to fund the days students are required to attend College and therefore students must only claim for childcare fees in addition to their government funded placement.

Applications must have confirmation for the Ofsted Approved provider of the daily rate to be charged and the childcare questionnaire on Pay My Student must be completed at the time of the bursary application.

Please note that we can only pay for childcare once a bursary is awarded. This cannot be backdated. Payment linked to attendance with a month's notice being given to the childcare provider in the event of withdrawal or continued non-attendance.

Evidence required: Child's birth certificate or passport or adoption certificate.

## **12 Hardship fund**

If there are exceptional circumstances for short-term hardship support, this can be awarded at the discretion of the College, dependent upon a demonstrable need and within the scope of the Bursary regulations

## **13 Data Protection and Privacy**

EKC Group complies with its data protection obligations and will treat all applications and supporting evidence provided by students, parents and carers in a secure and confidential manner.

With the exception of evidence for the Advanced Learner Loans Bursary Fund, we will retain supporting evidence to help us make a decision about eligibility, along with any payment records, for a period of seven years. At the end of the retention period, we will destroy the data via a secure disposal service.

## **14 Fraud**

EKC Group are responsible for investigating instances of fraud relating to bursary fund applications. If we find evidence that a student or parent has knowingly submitted misleading or fraudulent information, resulting in the student receiving a bursary they were not entitled to, we will take actions to recover any overpayment from the student.

## **15 Appeals**

If any student is dissatisfied with the decision regarding their award, they can appeal using an appeal form available from the College Services department within their respective College. All appeals will be acknowledged within 10 working days. A decision will be made within 20 working days.

Appeals will be made via an independent panel to ensure a fair and equitable approach.

## **16 Complaints**

If a student has a complaint about the way in which their bursary application has been managed, they should follow the Group's [Complaints Procedure](#).

## Appendix A

SUPPORT TYPE	FUNDING TYPE			
	16-19 Bursary Fund	16-19 Vulnerable Bursary Fund	19+ Discretionary Learner Support	Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund
<b>Travel Costs</b> (Students residing 2miles or more from Campus and funded up to £2,000 per year)	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Park &amp; Ride</b> (Canterbury College Only)	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Digital Support</b> (Laptops provided subject to availability and assessed on individual need)	✓	✓	✓ (Loan Only)	✓ (Loan Only)
<b>Essential Books</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Uniform &amp; Essential Footwear</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Kit</b> (Applicable for Hairdressing, Beauty, Catering, Animal Care, Creative and Computing)	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Curriculum Trips</b> (Required trips related to study programme)	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>College Meals</b> (Subject to qualifying criteria)	✓	✓	✗	✗
<b>Childcare</b>	✓ (Care To Learn)	✓ (Care To Learn)	✓	✓

