EKC GROUP BURSARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT POLICY - ACADEMIC YEAR 26/27

Section		Page
1	Introduction	2
2	Roles and Responsibilities	2
3	Funding available to students	2
4	Eligibility	3
4.1	16-19 Discretionary Bursary Fund - Eligibility Criteria	3
4.2	16-19 Vulnerable Bursary Fund - Eligibility Criteria	4
4.3	Care To Learn Eligibility Criteria	5
4.4	Free College Meals - Eligibility Criteria	6
4.5	19+ Discretionary Learner Support Fund - Eligibility Criteria	6
4.6	19+ Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund - Eligibility Criteria	7
4.7	Students not eligible for Bursary funding:	8
5	Household Income	8
6	Terms and Conditions – All Bursaries	8
7	Bursary Support Information for Students	10
8	Travel costs	10
8.2	Students aged 19-25 with an EHCP	11
9	Digital Support (Laptops)	12
10	Other Equipment and sundries	12
11	Trips – Curriculum Trips	12
12	Childcare (20+ Adults)	13
13	Hardship fund	13
14	Change in Circumstances	13
15	Record Keeping & Audit	14
16	Data Protection and Privacy	14
17	Monitoring Arrangements	14
18	Fraud	14
19	Appeals	15
20	Complaints	15

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 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 Roles and Responsibilities

2.1.1 The Governing Body

The Governing Body has overall responsibility for

- Approving this bursary and financial support policy
- Monitoring the implementation of this policy
- Ensuring compliance with relevant requirements

2.1.2 The Director of Student Experience and Safeguarding

The Director of Student Experience and Safeguarding is responsible for:

- Making sure that staff are familiar with this bursary and financial support policy
- Making sure the policy is being applied consistently
- Setting eligibility criteria for bursary funding and making sure these comply with the Equality Act 2010

3 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).

4 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 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, the Disability Element within Universal Credit (for Children) 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.

4.1 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 2026 or
- Aged 19 or over on 31 August 2026 and have a current Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or
- Aged 19 or over on 31 August 2026 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.

4.2 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 2026
- 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.

4.3 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 criteria:

- 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

Further information regarding Care To Learn funding is available online: https://www.gov.uk/care-to-learn

4.4 Free College Meals - Eligibility Criteria

Students that are enrolled on a 16-19 funded programme that receive or whose parents or carers are 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 £4.50 per day (the group reserve the right to alter this amount in year):

- Support under part VI of the immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (applies to accompanied asylum seekers)

- Universal Credit

An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) is defined as being a Child in Care. Children in Care are entitled to support from the Vulnerable Bursary (VB) and are **not automatically** entitled to Free Meals.

If the UASC is being looked after and supported by the local authority under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, then the UASC may be eligible for discretionary free meals on the days they attend college which would be funded directly from the Vulnerable Bursary and will be based on the individual UASC circumstances. We would require official confirmation of this looked after status or section 20 support from the local authority on headed paper.

For the 2026/27 academic year, EKC Group has set the Free College Meal rate at £4.50 per meal following a benchmarking exercise with other further education colleges, alongside a review of operational costs.

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 31st August 2026.
- 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.

4.5 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 31st August 2026.
- 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.

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.

4.6 Students <u>not</u> 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
- Students who are not on a course funded by the DfE and are self-financing

5 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, the Disability Element within Universal Credit (for Children)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.

6 Terms and Conditions – All Bursaries

6.1.1 An assessment for an award is made based on a fully completed application using the PayMyStudent 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.

6.1.2 Regular payments for travel will be made **in arrears** directly to the nominated bank account via BACS at the beginning of each month (no later than the 7th of each month). Childcare payments are made directly to the childcare provider.

6.1.3 The bursaries are a discretionary award, and financial support is reflective of 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.

6.1.4 EKC Group retains the right to cancel the support of learners who do not demonstrate behaviours in line with the Student Charter.

6.1.5 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.

6.1.6 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.

6.1.7 Claims for support can only be made within the current academic year. No claims can be made for any cost relating to previous years.

6.1.8 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.

6.1.9 Bursary funding cannot be used to fund non college expenditure or cost of living (eg: housing/accommodation costs, entertainment, leisure activities, utilities).

7 Bursary Support Information for Students

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

8 Travel costs

8.1.1 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:

8.1.2 There is an upper limit of £2,000 per student per year. This is a contribution, and students will need to 'top up' any outstanding travel costs.

8.1.3 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.

8.1.4 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.

8.1.5 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.

8.1.6 For students who travel by car, mileage will be paid at £0.45 per mile. Park and ride costs (Canterbury College only) will be funded.

8.1.7 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.

8.1.8 Where a bus pass provided by the College does not meet travel assistance needs, 16-18 year olds should apply to Kent County Council for alternative support. https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/school-transport/school-transport-for-children-with-special-educational-needs/post-16-transport-options-for-send-young-people

8.2 Students aged 19-25 with an EHCP

8.2.1 Following the changes to support from Kent County Council (KCC) from September 2026 regarding how they will financially support transport to college for students aged 19-25 with a current EHCP, we have considered how this will impact our students. With specific reference to supporting the transport needs of students aged 19-25 with a current EHCP who have previously been eligible for personalised KCC transport assistance a, we will contribute to your overall transport cost where the eligibility criteria is met for financial support as outlined in this policy, and subject to affordability from the Group's bursary funding.

8.2.2 Students should apply to College in the first instance for financial support for transport via a bursary application before making an application to KCC for additional support. KCC will require evidence of your bursary application outcome from the College to support your request for this additional support.

8.2.3 The following will apply:

- the maximum support available per student from the College will be up to and not exceeding £2,000 per student. If this sum is insufficient to cover travel arrangements, students aged 19-25 with a current EHCP should apply to KCC for additional support.
- the awarded amount will be paid in arrears in monthly instalments via BACS transfer payment to the nominated bank account

- this support is available from a designated finite budget for eligible students and is allocated on a first-come-first-served basis.

Information about KCC Post-16 Transport Assistance can be found online: https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/school-transport/school-transport-for-children-with-special-educational-needs/post-16-transport-options-for-send-young-people/apply-for-post-16-transport-assistance#alternative

9 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.

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.

10 Other Equipment and sundries

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

11 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 and international trips will not be funded.

12 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 PayMyStudent 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. With persistent student non-attendance, we may cease payment 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.

13 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

14 Change in Circumstances

If there are changes in circumstances that may affect eligibility for a bursary, applicants and/or parents/carers must notify the College without delay.

15 Record Keeping & Audit

The College will maintain comprehensive and accurate digital records relating to the bursary funds. These records will be kept securely and be readily available for audit purposes. Records will include, but are not limited to:

- Copies of applications and supporting evidence
- Proof that students meet eligibility criteria
- Records of 'zero bursary' students
- Details of assessment decisions and rationale for awards
- Records of all payments made to students, including dates, value and purpose
- Evidence of student attendance and progress monitoring

Records will be retained for 6 academic years after the end of the academic year in which the student completed their programme.

16 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.

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.

For further information, please refer to the EKC Data Protection and Privacy Notice for Student Bursary and Funding Support available on our website.

17 Monitoring Arrangements

This policy will be monitored by Director of Student Experience and Safeguarding.

This policy will be reviewed annually by Director of Student Experience and Safeguarding. At every review, the policy will be approved by the Education Committee of the Governing Body.

18 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.

19 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.

20 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
Travel Costs (Students residing 2miles or more from Campus and funded up to £2,000 per year)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Park & Ride (Canterbury College Only)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Digital Support (Laptops provided subject to availability and assessed on individual need)	✓	✓	✓ (Loan Only)	✓ (Loan Only)
Essential Books	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uniform & Essential Footwear	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kit (Applicable for Hairdressing, Beauty, Catering, Animal Care, Creative and Computing)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Curriculum Trips (Required trips related to study programme)	✓	✓	✓	✓
College Meals (Subject to qualifying criteria)	✓	✓	✗	✗

Childcare	✓ (Care To Learn)	✓ (Care To Learn)	✓	✓