

Colchester Institute

Free College Meals and 16-19 Bursary Fund Guidelines for 2025 – 2026

These guidelines apply to

- students who are aged 16, 17 or 18 on the 31st August 2025.
- students aged 19 on 31st August 2025, starting the second year of a two-year course
- students aged 19 to 24 on 31st August 2025 who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

If you turn 19 on or before 31st August, 2025 please refer to the 19+ Learner Support Fund Guidelines or the Advanced Learner Loan Guidelines.

What are Free College Meals (Statutory Meals)?

From September 2014, Further Education colleges have been required to provide free meals to 16-18-year-old students from low-income households.

Eligible students at Colchester Institute will be funded by a meal credit to the value of £5.00 for each day that they have timetabled lessons at College. No cash payments can be made for free college meals if there is a refectory on the campus that you attend. However, if you attend a campus without a refectory or you are undertaking work placement, a cash award will be made.

Are you eligible for Free College Meals (Statutory Meals)?

You are eligible for free meals if you or your parents are in receipt of one or more of the following benefits	Evidence required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Support • income-based Jobseekers Allowance • income-related Employment and Support Allowance • support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 • the guarantee element of State Pension 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) 	<p>The Learner (or their parent/guardian) must produce provide evidence of the award of qualifying benefits. This might be an award notice or letter from DWP, HMRC, or the Job Centre Plus.</p> <p>The evidence should be dated within the last 3 months. If your letter is older than 3 months, you should provide a recent bank statement showing the relevant payment going into your account within the last 3 months.</p> <p>Copies of Universal Credit award statements for the previous three months / if self-employed, copy of company registration form or tax return form is also required</p> <p>Any letters / bank statements provided must show the name and address of the person receiving the benefit.</p>

If you are eligible for Free College Meals, please complete the Application for Student Funding 2025 / 2026, ensuring that you tick the 'meals' box in the 'I need help with' section.

You can also top up your meal award by using Upay (register at <https://www.upay.co.uk/app/>), the easy to use payment system at Colchester Institute refectories and cafes, which is open to all students. Upay will always use College awarded meal credits first, so any college funding is deducted from your account before any top-up credit is used.

You can apply for additional help from the 16-19 Bursary Fund on the same application form.

What is the 16-19 Bursary Fund?

The 16-19 Bursary Fund is provided to Colchester Institute by the government and is aimed at supporting 16–18-year-olds overcome any financial barriers they may face in attending college.

Students aged 19 who started a two-year programme before their 19th birthday and students aged 19-24 who have an Education Health and Care Plan should also apply to this fund.

The Bursary Fund is made up of two parts:

1. The Discretionary Bursary:

Awards will be targeted towards students who face the greatest financial barriers to participation to cover course related costs including transport, books, equipment, free meals (non-statutory meals), specialist clothing, travel to placement and university days, and other essential course related costs. The discretionary bursary cannot provide help with costs unrelated to your course, such as general expenses, nor can it be used as an attendance incentive.

Are you eligible for a discretionary bursary?

Learner MUST provide evidence of their/their household income for their application to be considered. The income can be one of the following:

Employed and no benefits claimed (annual take home pay totalling no more than £30,000)	Last 3 months' worth of payslips - if self-employed, company registration form or tax return form also required
Employed and on Universal Credit (annual take home pay + UC payments totalling no more than £30,000)	Last 3 months universal credit payment statements – all pages (can be accessed on your UC account); if self-employed, company registration form or tax return form also required
Income Support	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months or a current bank statement showing income support payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Jobseeker's Allowance (income based)	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months confirming that jobseeker's allowance is INCOME BASED. If letter more than 3 months old, please also provide

	current bank statement showing JSA payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Employment and Support Allowance (income related)	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months confirming that employment and support allowance is INCOME RELATED. If letter more than 3 months old, please also provide current bank statement showing ESA payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Pension Credit	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months or current bank statement showing pension credit payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Unemployed and on Universal Credit (annual UC payments totalling no more than £30,000)	Last 3 months universal credit payment statements – all pages (can be accessed on your UC account)
Unemployed (no benefits claimed)	Self-declaration
You are currently of No Fixed Abode eg living in emergency accommodation or homeless	Please speak to Student Services

2. **The 16-19 Vulnerable Bursary:**

An award of up to £1,200 a year for young people in the following defined vulnerable groups:

- Young person receiving Income Support (IS) or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting someone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner
- Young person receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right
- Young person looked after by a Local Authority on voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or under a care order (section 31 of the Children Act 1989)
- Young person who is a care leaver:
 - 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

The vulnerable bursary is awarded to help students in paying for course related costs, such as books, equipment, uniform, kit, travel, DBS and stationery.

Please note that the full £1200 vulnerable bursary is not automatically given if there is no financial need. Awards will be based on the amount that you need to participate

in education. There is the possibility that the outcome of your application will be an award of less than £1200 or no award if you do not have any relevant costs. Awards from this bursary cannot be used to support living costs.

Are you eligible for a 16 – 19 Vulnerable Bursary?

If you fall into one of the following groups, you can apply for a 16-19 vulnerable bursary

Group	Evidence required
Income Support	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months or a current bank statement showing income support payment. Bank statements must show the account holder's name and be currently dated
Universal Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Last 3 months universal credit payment statements. •Evidence that universal credit has been awarded because the student is financially supporting themselves and anyone who is dependent on them and living with them (such as a child or partner) e.g. tenancy agreement in student's name, child benefit receipt, child's birth certificate, utility bills •The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent the student from participating in further education or training
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	Letter from benefits agency dated within the last three months or current bank statement showing ESA / UC AND evidence of DLA or PIP. UC – Evidence from DWP confirming which ESA group the student has been placed in.
In care	Letter from Local Authority or Social Services confirming looked after status under either section 20 or section 31 of the Children's Act (relevant child)

When and how should you apply?

Applicants must demonstrate their financial need by providing the income information and supporting evidence as detailed in the application form. Each application for financial assistance will be considered by a College Student Finance Advisor and decisions will be made based on the information provided and the eligibility criteria for the different type of awards.

For courses starting in September 2025, online bursary applications will be open in July and all application should be submitted by 1st November 2025. Applications received after this date will be considered on a pro-rata basis subject to need and availability of funds.

Supporting Evidence as listed above must be submitted online, along with the online application form

What happens after you submit an application form?

We will assess your application and email you with a decision. If you are successful then we will tell you how much you have been awarded, what the award is for, how the award will be made and when you can expect to receive any payment.

During busy periods, it can take up to 15 working days to assess your application and we may contact you for further information.

Please note that all payments are dependent on your attendance record and you displaying satisfactory behaviour during your time at Colchester Institute. Colchester Institute reserves the right to remove support due to students' misbehaviour, fraud or if the reputation of the College is brought into disrepute. You will be expected to demonstrate commitment to your course through completion of work and engagement in class activities. The College will expect to see attendance of over 90% maintained throughout the year.

- Applications received on or before 31st July will be processed before the end of August.
- Applications received on or after the 1st August may take longer to process so you should ensure that you budget for any expenses that you are likely to incur during your first weeks at College.

If your application is unsuccessful, we will write to you explaining why.

What can the bursary fund pay for?

****Important: The college support fund will not make any reimbursements for items purchased by you prior to your form being assessed, unless authorised by the Head of Student Services.****

Payment by BACS

Where a payment is made by BACS, the student **MUST** provide receipts for items purchased, as these are required for audit purposes. Failure to produce receipts may result in the student being asked to return the BACS payment and may also affect future funding. Also, BACS payments are available to unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) for transport support when no other options are available.

Course costs – the bursary fund can help with payment of course costs confirmed by your tutor as essential to the course. Course costs may include books, equipment, uniform, membership fees, and DBS checks. If you need help with any of these costs, please make sure that you tick the relevant box on the application form.

- **Books** – the fund will make a contribution towards the cost of books confirmed by your tutor as essential for your course. Payment may be made by either BACS payment into your bank account or if course books are available through the CI on-line store, we will make the on-line store payment on your behalf.
- **Equipment and uniform** – for sports, catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy students, payment for equipment and uniform will be made directly by the College either to the supplier or via the CI on-line store. All other

equipment and uniform payments will be made by BACS payment into your bank account.

- **AAT Membership Fees** – a contribution towards the cost of AAT membership will be made by BACS payment into your bank account.
- **DBS check** – If you are required to pay for a DBS check, payment will be made by the college as an internal transfer.
- **Meals** – Please make sure that you tick the appropriate box on the application form.

If you are eligible for Free College Meals (Statutory Meals), you will receive a meal credit to the value of £5.00 for each day that you have timetabled lessons at College. No cash payments can be made for free college meals if there is a refectory on the campus that you attend. However, if you attend a campus without a refectory or you are undertaking work placement, a cash award will be made by BACS payment into your bank account.

Please contact Student Services at least two weeks prior to starting placement if you require a cash payment for your placement weeks.

If you are not eligible for Free College Meals, the College may make an award for a discretionary meal credit (non-statutory meals).

Please note that the intended use of meal credits is to provide a hot or cold meal, and the credit should not be spent on multiple snack items i.e. multiple packets of crisps and chocolate bars, coffees, cans of drink. If we notice repeated patterns of inappropriate use, we will look into the spend and may cease the award.

- **Travel** – to receive support with travel you must live over 1 mile away from the campus that you attend. We use the AA Routeplanner to calculate the distance from your home address to college. If you wish to check the distance yourself the website is: <http://www.theaa.com/route-planner/index.jsp>
The Colchester campus postcode is CO3 3LL, and the Braintree campus postcode is CM7 5SN.

As funding is provided by public money, we are required to ensure support given provides the best value for money. Travel support may be in the form of a bus pass, train pass or a BACS payment and cost maybe a factor when assessing a travel award. Also, BACS payments are available to unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) for transport support when no other options are available.

If your journey to college can be made on an Arriva bus, First bus or a Greater Anglia train, the College will purchase a travel pass on your behalf. Travel passes will be automatically renewed each term, if attendance for the

previous term is at an acceptable level. You should be aware that that it is your responsibility to fund your travel to college on the first day of each term.

If you use any other bus company to travel to college, payment for a travel pass will be made by BACS payment into your bank account.

In some instances, your travel award maybe the cost of purchasing a termly ticket from the local authority.

If you drive to college and would like help with petrol costs, the distance to college from your home address will be calculated using the AA Routeplanner website. Mileage is paid at 20p a mile (cars) and 10p a mile (motorbikes and mopeds) and will be based on the distance of your return journey to college x the number of days you attend college. Payments will be made by BACS payment into your bank account. Parking costs of up to £2.50 per day can be applied for if the student is driving themselves to campus (Colchester campus students only). Payments for petrol and parking will not exceed the cost of travelling to college by public transport.

It is important for you to be aware that it can take up to two weeks after the start of a term for the travel payment to be made into your bank account and therefore you must budget for any travel costs prior to the travel payment reaching your account.

Travel support for the spring and summer terms may be affected if you do not maintain an attendance of **at least 90%** in the preceding term.

- **Stationery**

You will be given a £25 WH Smith voucher in order that you can purchase the items of stationery necessary for your course. The voucher can be used in store or online. Please note that this is not automatically awarded to all learners, and it depends on the course leader to decide if you need this voucher or not.

- **Printer Credits**

If you require additional printing credits during the year, please let Student Services know and we will arrange for additional credit to be added to your printer account

- **University Interviews and Open days**

If you incur travel costs as a result of attending a university interview or open day, then we may be able to help you with this expense. This will be dependent on the budget that we have available at the time.

You will have to cover the upfront costs yourself then we will refund your transport costs on the production of public transport tickets **and** university interview or open day letter. If you travel by car we will pay towards petrol

costs, providing this does not exceed the cost of travel by public transport. We will not pay for overnight accommodation. Funding for travel to interviews and open days will be capped at **£200** in total.

- **Travel to Job / Apprenticeship Interviews**

As above. Payment on production of tickets **and** interview letter.

- **UCAS application fee**

A contribution towards the cost of applying to UCAS. Confirmation will be required from the Careers office to advise whether you have made a single or multiple UCAS application

- **Trips**

Bursary funding can only be used to support the costs of field trips that are an essential part of achieving a student's study programme goals/qualification/s or supports the course objectives. This would be decided by the Area Heads and course leaders.

- **Childcare for students under 20**

Please request and complete a childcare application fund from Student Services office. Funding is provided by the Care to Learn Scheme.

- **Other course related costs**

If you require funding for any course related costs not specified above, please complete an Application for Student Funding in the normal way. You should include full details of the item that you are looking for help with and a short statement covering why you consider the item to be necessary for your course

What can't the bursary fund pay for?

- **Locker Deposits** – students requiring a locker are asked to pay a deposit which is returned at the end of the year. As the deposit is refundable, we cannot provide support with this cost.
- **Exam Re-sits**
- **Extra-curricular activities** – any extra-curricular activities that are not essential to your study programme
- **Attendance bonuses / incentives** – all payments to you are based on you achieving a minimum of 90% attendance and displaying satisfactory behaviour during your time at Colchester Institute. The bursary fund does not reward students with additional monies if they achieve good attendance levels throughout the year.
- **General living costs** – e.g. accommodation, utility bills, mobile phone bills

- **foreign/overseas field trips** – support the costs of foreign/overseas field trips where the content can be found within England at a much cheaper cost and/or to support the costs of fields trips that are not an essential part of a student's study programme goals/qualification/s or course objectives.
- **Associated trip costs** – funding for passports, suitcases etc will not be covered by the fund.

Do you need your own bank account?

Yes. Students aged 16 and over can open a basic bank account which will allow BACS payments and allow you to withdraw money. We cannot make payments to your parent(s), guardian(s) or any third party accounts unless there are exceptional circumstances and you are unable to administer your own account. In the case of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are unable to open a UK bank account, we will make payments to a nominated carer's bank account, providing we receive written confirmation from both the young person and carer confirming that they are happy for payment to be made to the nominated account.

If you make an application are you guaranteed support?

No. Unfortunately the budget we have available is limited and we may not be able to meet your funding requirements. We would advise you to put in an application as soon as possible as funds are limited and can run out.

If you are successful in your application are there any conditions on your award?

Yes. If you are awarded a guaranteed or discretionary bursary then you will need to meet conditions of attendance and behaviour in order to receive your award. The College will expect to see attendance of over 90% maintained throughout the year.

If you feel that you have extenuating personal circumstances that have affected your attendance, it is important that you speak to Student Services as soon as possible.

What should you do if you are unhappy with the outcome of your application?

Any student or parent who is unhappy with how the college has managed their application for bursary funding or the support that has been provided, must follow the institution's own complaints procedure.

Appeals should be made in writing to the Head of Student Services to student.finance@colchester.ac.uk. Appeals should be made within 15 working days of you receiving a decision from us.

If you are still unhappy with the decision, you can raise a complaint following Colchester Institute's Complaint Procedure [Concerns and Complaints Form - Colchester Institute](#).

What should you do if you are not sure if any of this applies to you or if you

have any questions regarding financial support?

Contact Student Services. We can talk you through whether or not you are eligible. We can help you complete the application form, advise you on the evidence we need from you and answer any questions you may have.

When should I re-apply for financial assistance?

Applications for financial help are valid for one academic year only. Should you return to College in September 2026 and still require financial assistance, a new application form must be completed and up to date supporting evidence supplied.

What happens to my funding if I withdraw from my course?

If you leave Colchester Institute you will not be eligible to receive further payments and may need to repay a proportion or, in exceptional cases, all of the money paid to you. You may also be asked to return any equipment you have received that has been funded by this scheme.

Student Services contact details

Phone: 01206 712435

Email: student.finance@colchester.ac.uk

Call in: Student Services offer a drop-in service. We are open:-

Colchester: 8.30am – 5.00pm (Monday – Thursday) / 8.30am – 4.30pm (Friday).

Braintree (term time only): 8.00am – 4.00pm (Monday – Thursday) and 8.00am – 3.30pm (Friday)