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**Vulnerable Groups and Discretionary Bursary Policy**

**Academic Year 2024-2025**

This document should be read in conjunction with Bursary Application Form

**Introduction**

Department for Education provide Further Education establishments with a set amount of funding annually for financial support to help students overcome barriers to education so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of Bursary available to students attending National Star College. These have differing eligibility criteria:

* Students who meet eligibility criteria for a Government defined Vulnerable Person Group of up to £1,200 a year
* Discretionary Bursaries awarded to meet individual needs in relation to education. For example, contribution towards transport, equipment or other educational course related costs.
  + This is only available where statutory funding is not obtainable, subject to meeting eligibility criteria and approval of reason for application.
  + For 2024/2025 the maximum Discretionary Bursary normally awarded will be £1,200 to fairly meet anticipated demand with the limited funding available.
  + Note within the Government guidance it is stated Bursaries are not available for students attending specialist residential provision that covers their educational costs in full. Bursaries can **only** be considered for applications relating to educational needs *but not covered within statutory funding.*

Apprentices are **not** eligible for Bursaries.

Students participating in programmes run by National Star as a sub-contract or on behalf of another provider are **not** eligible for a Bursary from National Star and students would need to approach the prime contractor.

Students or other clients receiving services from National Star who do not meet the eligibility criteria (for example privately funded) cannot be awarded a Bursary.

**Bursaries for students in defined vulnerable person group**

1. **Vulnerable Person Bursary Eligibility Criteria –**

* Age 16 or over but under 19 on 31st August 2024 (note students with an EHCP continuing in education past 18 are **not** eligible for the defined vulnerable person group bursary)
* Participating in provision subject to inspection by a public body (eg Ofsted) and;
  + Funded by Education Skills Funding Agency and/or Local Authority or;
  + Otherwise publicly funded and leading to a qualification up to and including Level 3
* Meet the residency criteria for post-16 provision (the vulnerable person group Bursary is **only** available for students with a home address in England. For details of Welsh EMA or Welsh Government Learning Grant please contact the college)
* Meet the Government criteria for defined vulnerable group of;
  + In care or recently left local authority care

or

* + Receive Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) because you are financially supporting yourself or financially supporting yourself and someone who is dependent on you and living with you, such as a child or partner

or

* + Receive Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in your own right **as well as** Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in your own right

or

* + Receive Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in your name **and** either ESA or Universal Credit

Definitions of the criteria are available at: [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2024 to 2025 academic year - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2024-to-2025-academic-year/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2024-to-2025-academic-year) Written copies can be provided on request from National Star College.

The maximum Bursary that can be awarded is £1,200 per year and applications must only be made to cover the amount needed to participate in education. For example, if the amount required to cover cost of transport is £800, only £800 will be awarded from either Bursary source.

Most eligible students at National Star are on full time programmes for the complete academic year. Where a student is participating in a part time or reduced duration programme the amount awarded may be made pro-rata accordingly.

1. **Discretionary Bursary – eligibility criteria**

The maximum Discretionary Bursary that will be awarded in any year is £1,200 to fairly distribute the limited funding available.

Discretionary Bursary may only be a contribution towards the full cost, for example it may not be sufficient to cover the full cost of annual travel to and from college. Where the cost is below the maximum only the amount required must be requested and evidence provided as to the actual cost in all applications.

Receipts or other evidence of how the awarded Bursary has been spent must be provided to the College and details of this will be agreed during the application and approval process. Failure to provide evidence of how the Bursary has been spent will result in no further payments being made and the possibility of recovery of payments already made.

Examples of Bursary awards to help students access or remain in education;

* Cost of travel
* Equipment such as IT resources that are not available from statutory funding and are essential to the learning programme
* Specialist clothing – for example protective clothing to take part in educational activities or uniform to participate in a work placement
* Where a student is on a work placement, where meals are above the cost of subsistence payments provided by the college
* Cost of materials to participate in Lifeskills activities where this is above subsistence payments

The following are examples where a Bursary cannot be awarded within Government guidelines;

* Learning Support or other staffing costs
* Counselling costs
* Mentoring support
* Extra-curricular or other activities not essential to main study programme – for example, trips or other event costs
* Equipment not considered essential to main study programme
* Repairs or replacement of broken equipment statutorily funded in the first instance

**Eligibility Criteria – Discretionary Bursary**

* Age 16 or over but under 19 on 31st August 2024
* Age 19-24 on 31st August 2024 with an active Education Health and Care Plan or equivalent in Wales
* Participating in provision subject to inspection by a public body (eg Ofsted or Estyn) and;
  + Funded by Department for Education and/or Local Authority or;
  + Otherwise publicly funded (for example Welsh Government) and leading to a qualification up to and including Level 3
* Meet the residency criteria for post-16 provision (for Discretionary Bursary the Government extend this to Wales)
* Meet the financial eligibility criteria of;
  + Household income of less than £40,000 per annum (this includes earned income, benefit payments and Working & Child Tax credits)
  + In exceptional circumstances this threshold may be increased where evidence is provided of high outgoings such as number of financial dependents. This is at the discretion of the Bursary Panel.
    - Note that evidence of financial eligibility is required for all applications, irrespective of amount, there is no minimum threshold
* Continue to maintain attendance at college of a minimum of 95%. This threshold may be reviewed by the Bursary Panel in exceptional circumstances.

**Providing Evidence of financial eligibility**

It is the responsibility of the young person/family or those supporting them with the application to provide evidence of financial eligibility. Without evidence of financial eligibility, no Bursary awards will be made.

You do not have to provide all of these, just those relevant for your circumstances:

* Universal Credit Monthly Claim
* Tax Free Credits statements
* 3 months’ worth of payslips
* Bank statements or other evidence showing regular income is less than £40,000 a year

We recognise this may seem intrusive, however we are required to evidence financial eligibility in line with Government guidelines for awarding Bursaries.

Note failure to fully disclose family financial circumstances in order to apply for a Bursary will be considered fraud and appropriate action taken.

It is the responsibility of the young person/family to inform National Star of any change in circumstance in year which may mean financial eligibility is no longer met.

**Application Process**

An electronic or printed form will be provided for applications. The form will include the request for the following information;

* Which Bursary is being applied for (vulnerable person group/discretionary)
* Reason for application including why it is essential for participating or continuing in education
* The amount requested
* How you anticipate you can evidence the spend if a Bursary is awarded (for example taxi invoices/receipts)
* Checklist of evidence provided

In addition to the application form you will need to provide;

* Evidence of household financial circumstances meeting eligibility criteria
* Evidence to support the amount of request, for example quote for equipment, Local Authority letter stating contribution towards the cost of transport or quote for taxi services. Where you plan to provide transport yourself provide details of the journey and costs will be calculated at .45p a mile
* Any other evidence to support exceptional circumstances indicating a Bursary should be considered essential

A panel comprising Director of Funding and 2 Head of Learning and Support Managers will make decision on awarding Bursaries based on meeting eligibility criteria. The decision will be communicated in writing as soon as practical.

All students have the right to appeal the decision and must submit a letter to the Director of Learning and Support within two-weeks of receiving their decision communication. All decisions regarding appeals will be communicated within a week of an Appeals Panel (Director of Learning and Support and 2 other Senior Managers) meeting and this decision is final. However, this should not stop a student submitting a further application should they feel they have sufficient change in circumstances.

Complaints Procedure - Should a student/parent wish to make a formal complaint regarding the 16-19 Bursary Application and Decision Process they should follow National Star Complaints Procedure.

Once awarded finance team will contact young person/family to arrange how payments will be made.

On-going payment is subject to continuation of providing evidence of how Bursary fund is being spent in line with application.

**GDPR and storing of information**

All information provided will be stored securely electronically and any paper-based copies destroyed. Access will only be available to members of the Bursary Panel and Senior Member of Finance Team. All information will be treated in line with National Star Privacy notice and statutory retention requirements of Department for Education.

National Star Privacy Notice is published at: [Privacy Notice | National Star](https://www.nationalstar.org/privacy-notice/)

**Unspent funds**

Funding for discretionary bursary funding cannot be carried forward for more than 1 year. Unspent funding will be reported to the ESFA using the online enquiry form, specifying the amount of funding and the year/s it relates to, no later than 31 March each year in order for ESFA to recover any unspent funds

**Application**

The person completing the application form is responsible for declaring:

* The information provided is true and accurate to the best of your knowledge
* Any award must only be used for the purpose applied for
* Financial information provided is full and accurate
* Any changes in circumstances that may affect ongoing eligibility will be communicated immediately to Bursary Team
* Ongoing payments are subject to continuing attendance at college and engagement in your learning programme
* Application and payment relates only to the academic year applied for. Subsequent years will require reapplication and submission of evidence

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| Statutory Guidance: [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2024 to 2025 academic year - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2024-to-2025-academic-year/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2024-to-2025-academic-year) | | | |