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**2024-25 Student Bursary Statement**

**Birkenhead Sixth Form is an outstanding College in which excellence is achieved in a positive, ambitious, resilient, and thoughtful environment. We are committed to ensuring that all students have access to the right resources to be successful in their academic studies and that any barriers to participation are removed.**

This statement sets out how Birkenhead Sixth Form College implements the 16-19 Bursary Fund guidance issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). A copy of the ESFA’s 16-19 Bursary Fund Guide for 2024-25 can be accessed on the gov.uk website: <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>

**Eligibility conditions (all bursaries)**

To be eligible for bursary support, students must meet the following conditions:

* **Age:** A student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2024 . However, students aged 19 or over are eligible to receive a discretionary bursary if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (19+ continuers) or have an education, health, and care (EHC) plan. Students aged 19 or over are not eligible for bursaries for vulnerable groups.
* **Residency:** Students must meet the residency criteria in [ESFA funding regulations](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision) for post-16 provision.
* **Study programme:** students must be on a full-time study programme.

Further details relating to asylum seekers are available here: <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>

**Types of bursary**

The 16-19 Bursary Fund has two elements and, in addition to meeting the eligibility conditions above, bursaries are awarded following an assessment of individual participation needs.

1. **Bursaries for defined vulnerable groups:** based on individual needs,a bursaryof up to £1,200 a year could be available for young people in the following defined vulnerable groups if they have a financial need -
* 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

\* see **Appendix A** for definitions of in care, care leavers and foster care.

A payment of up to £1200 pa could be awarded based on individual circumstances. Payments will be spread across the academic year and paid directly into a student’s bank account. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the College will not backdate any bursary payments by more than one month. Vulnerable students could also receive the other relevant benefits listed in the discretionary bursary.

1. **A discretionary bursary** is available to young people in a way that best fits the needs and circumstances of individual students. Bursary awards will be targeted towards those young people who face the greatest financial barriers to participation and is used to remove these barriers. This can include spending bursary funds to ensure that students are supported with the costs of travel, meals in College, compulsory books, equipment and compulsory trips.

Birkenhead Sixth Form College is free to determine the assessment criteria for eligibility for discretionary bursaries, and the frequency of and conditions for all awards; subject to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Birkenhead Sixth Form College’s criteria is linked to household income and uses the same means-tested criteria used for Free School Meals i.e. a student’s parents should be in receipt of one or more of these benefits:

* Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
* Income Support
* Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance
* Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
* Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
* The guarantee element of Pension Credit
* Child Tax Credit (provided you’re not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
* Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Previously, the College liaised with Wirral Borough Council to verify FSM eligibility. The Council have now outsourced this service to an online eligibility checker provided by Capita SIMS. This process is easy for parents/carers to confirm their eligibility for a bursary and it gives an instant decision. The portal checks various government databases so is always up to date and removes the need for the College to see any evidence or seek a signed declaration that the information provided is correct. The system also provides updates if an applicant’s circumstances change and they become eligible.

Under the Free School Meal guidance (FSM) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fdad5965ca2f00117da947/Free_school_meals.pdf>, student’s FSM entitlement is protected as part of the Universal Credit roll out. If a student no longer meets the eligibility criteria on the online eligibility checker, the student’s previous school will be contacted to confirm their FSM status.

**Bursary Awards**

The size and nature of the bursary awarded to a student will be subject to the amount of funds available, an assessment of individual needs and the student’s individual participation costs.

In line with best practice outlined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, Birkenhead Sixth Form College will pay awards in kind. Cash payments will **only** be made if in kind payments are not possible or appropriate. Receipts will be required as evidence of expenditure.

Under exceptional circumstances, additional discretionary awards may be made and a student can make a Request for Financial Assistance, usually with the support of their Personal Development Tutor. This can include emergency food support.

Students should note that all awards from the Student Bursary Fund will be subject to the expectations outlined in the College’s Core Requirements and satisfactory attendance. The College reserves the right to defer or cancel awards in the event of unsatisfactory student conduct and/or in the event of the College being made aware of a change in circumstances which has resulted in a student no longer satisfying the eligibility criteria.

**Application process**

All applications are treated confidentially.

When applying for bursary support, students/parents/carers are required to declare that the information and evidence they have provided is complete and correct to the best of their knowledge. False or incomplete information may lead to the withdrawal of a bursary award.

**Applying for a Defined Vulnerable Bursary:**

* Students should complete (usually with the support of a progress mentor) the paper application form available from the Finance Office and supply supporting evidence of their eligibility.
* Following an assessment of individual student need, participation costs and any other relevant factors, financial support will be awarded as appropriate.
* The award decision will be communicated to the student and is contingent on the student’s satisfactory attendance and meeting of the College’s Core Requirements.

**Applying for a Discretionary Bursary:**

* Students/parents/carers should complete the online form available on the College website (<https://www.bsfc.ac.uk/college-information/bursary-scheme>).
* Applicants will then be directed to complete the online eligibility checker <https://www.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/sims> to determine if they meet the household income criteria.
* The College is then automatically notified of the outcome (successful or unsuccessful).
* If the application is unsuccessful but the student was entitled to FSM in school, the College will seek to contact their previous school to ask for evidence if their parent/carer is unable to provide evidence.
* Following an assessment of individual student need, participation costs and any other relevant factors, financial support will be awarded as appropriate.
* The award decision will be communicated to the student and is contingent on the student’s satisfactory attendance and meeting of the College’s Core Requirements.

**Returning students**

Students are only required to complete the application process when they join the College. However, ahead of each new academic year, the College will ask all returning students to complete a self-declaration to confirm that their household circumstances have not changed.

**Complaints or appeals**

If a student/parent/carer is unhappy with how their application has been handled, they should follow the College’s complaint procedure: <https://www.bsfc.ac.uk/college-information/policies>

**Appendix A: Definitions**

**Defining in care and care leavers**

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund defines ‘in care’ as children looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act 1989) or under a care order (section 31 of the Children Act 1989). Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 defines the term ‘looked after child’.

A ‘care leaver’ is defined as:

1. 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**
2. 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

Only students who meet this definition are eligible if they have a financial need.

**Foster care, including privately arranged foster care**

A young person placed with a foster carer by the local authority, including where the foster carer is on the books of an independent fostering agency, is classed as looked after. They meet the criteria for the ‘in care’ vulnerable group if they have a financial need.

A child who is privately fostered (in other words, a private arrangement is made between the parent and the person who will care for the child) is not classed as a looked after child and is not eligible for the bursary for vulnerable groups.

In some instances, a young person may have been in the care of the local authority and the care transferred to another party via a permanent form of fostering such as a Special Guardianship Order. In these circumstances, the young person is defined as having left care so is now a care leaver. They must meet the definition of a ‘care leaver’ in full (so, the period of weeks and age range set out above). If they do, they are eligible for help from the bursary for vulnerable groups, where they need financial support to participate.

**SOURCE:** <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>