



**The Park  
College**  
Learning for life

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# **THE PARK COLLEGE – FREE MEALS IN FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY**

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September 2025

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## **Background**

The Department for Education provides funding for the provision of free meals for students who qualify for the assistance. For the 2025 to 2026 academic year the rate set is £2.61 per student per meal taken. The meal is provided for the days where a student attends college over the lunchtime period or is on an external work-placement.

Where necessary, reasonable adjustments will be made for special dietary requirements.

## **Continuing Students**

Students who were already receiving a free meal at their school or college on or after 1 April 2018, will still be entitled to receive a free meal when they enrol at the college. This applies even if your household earnings have risen above the universal credit thresholds. All students over the age of 19 must also have an Education Health and Care Plan. The college will ask your previous learning provider or your home local authority to provide confirmation of your eligibility.

## **New Applications**

Students who are applying for a free college meal for the first time in 2025-2026 must complete an application form. The application process requires students and/or parents and carers to provide evidence of benefits that they are receiving.

## **Eligible Benefits**

Free Meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free Meals in FE defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of State 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 Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC))
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- UC with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Please note that students or parents/carers in receipt of working tax credit only are not entitled to a free meal. Qualifying benefits do include the Working Tax Credit run-on which is paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit.

Further information on eligibility is available in the ESFA guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision/advice-funding-rules-for-16-to-19-provision-2025-to-2026>

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Please contact the college if you would like to discuss this guidance further or make an application. Application deadline is Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2025 for students where your local authority has agreed funding for your study programme.

Please contact the college to discuss extended deadlines, where you wish to make an application for a student who commences their study programme after 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2025.

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