



THE PARK COLLEGE – FREE MEALS IN FURTHER EDUCATION POLICY

September 2026

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Background

The Department for Education provides funding for the provision of free meals for students who qualify for the assistance. From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, all students from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to receive a free meal. FE institutions will receive additional funding through the existing free meals in further education grant.

The college will make a free meal available for all eligible students for each day the student attends their study programme or is on external work-placement. The rate set is £2.66 per student per meal taken. Where necessary, reasonable adjustments will be made for special dietary requirements.

Students aged over 19 are eligible for a free meal if they are either:

- continuing the same study programme (19+ continuers) they started before they turned 19
- have an education health and care (EHC) plan

Continuing Students

If you had a free meal at the college or at your last educational provider, you would need to reapply with the college to be eligible for free college meals. This is because the transitional protections for free meals are ending at the end of the 2025 to 2026 academic year.

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, transitional protections for free school meals will end. To receive free meals from the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, students (or their families) must meet the eligibility criteria. Ongoing eligibility will be monitored through rechecks of eligibility, taking place once a year.

New Applications

All students who are applying for a free College meal for 2026-2027 must complete an application form.

Qualifying and Eligible Benefits

All students aged 19 or over are eligible to receive a free meal if they have an EHC plan.

If a student does not have an EHCP then they or their parents/carers must have one of the qualifying benefits:

-  Universal Credit (Income cap no longer apply)
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Households in receipt of income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit

A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or a responsible adult on their behalf, have made a successful application to the college.

Further information on eligibility is available in the ESFA guidance: [Free meals in further education funded institutions guide: academic year 2026 to 2027 - GOV.UK](#)

APPLICATION PROCESS

To allow students in FE providers to be eligible for free meals from the start of the autumn term, checks should be completed ahead of the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year.

As part of the application, anyone without an EHCP we must ask the student (or their parent/guardian) to provide evidence of the award of qualifying benefits. This might be an award notice or letter from DWP or HMRC.

Please contact the College if you would like to discuss this guidance further or make an application. Application deadline is Monday 28th September 2026 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 28th September 2026.

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