

## Student Finance Statement 2024/2025

This information is for the academic year 2024/2025. It will be updated for the following academic year **2025/2026 by 1st July 2025.**

### Introduction

The College offers two main sources of financial support to students – the Bursary Fund and Free Meals. This guide gives further information on both schemes.

Occasionally other possible sources of support are also advertised to relevant students, such as local bursaries provided by rotary clubs or grants aimed at students progressing to university.

### Bursary Fund

The Bursary Fund is provided to help students with the direct costs of study such as equipment, books, travel, exam costs and trips and visits, and is available to assist students who may have difficulties in completing their course because of financial considerations. There are two types of Bursary:

- The Vulnerable Bursary is for young people in care, care leavers and young people who themselves are in receipt of certain benefits. The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:
  - in care
  - care leavers
  - receiving Income Support, or Universal Credit 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 or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right
  
- The Discretionary Bursary is aimed at providing financial support to students from low income families (as specified below), and when deciding the weekly amount or in-kind support (such as the purchase of a laptop) we can award, we will consider other factors such as distance students live from the College, number of children in the household and course participation costs.
  - Students who reside in a household which has a taxable income of less than £30,000 for the tax year 2023-24 may apply for the Discretionary Bursary. This must be evidenced through production of P60, Working Tax Credit Award Certificate, Self-Assessment Tax Calculation Form (SA302) or Universal Credit or bank statements dated within last 3-6 months.
  - Students who qualify for Free Meals will also qualify for the Discretionary Bursary. However, students who qualify for the Discretionary Bursary may not automatically qualify for Free Meals.

Both funds are either paid weekly into the student's bank account or via an in-kind support purchase of a laptop, but payment is dependent on maintaining good behaviour and attendance. It is expected that that any funds are used for the costs of study, although for compulsory study

trips further financial subsidy is provided upon application. A list of qualifying trips (those essential in meeting the course assessment objectives) are available upon request.

Our intention is to have all applications in by the start of teaching each academic year. An application would be considered at any time during the academic year, however, Bursary payments will not be back-dated before the application date. The College cannot say in advance how much money there will be per week/course per student. The College is given a fixed amount of money which we award to students based on their individual applications and there is no guaranteed level of payment, as well as the possibility of no award being given. The payment is therefore likely to vary from one academic year to the next. Each year, after the start of teaching, the College will know how many students have made successful applications and will then be able to calculate how much to pay each week. This weekly amount will be published to successful applicants and the amount of the award will depend upon individual circumstances and available funds. The weekly amount is reviewed at the mid-year point and may be adjusted (higher or lower) to ensure the funds allocated by the government are fairly distributed. In addition, successful applicants will also receive where required a single payment for courses enrolled upon for the 23/24 academic year to cover essential participation costs (such as protective clothing or equipment). This may take some time to process and pay, with the payment being made in the first week after October half-term. All bursary students will also receive a free stationary pack, and where required, an LRC pack which will contain books and/or a scientific calculator as required for a bursary student to complete specific courses. If a student is experiencing severe financial hardship and further assistance is needed with the direct costs of study such as equipment, books, travel, work experience, exam costs and trips the student must speak with the bursary officer and request, complete and return an 'Exceptional Circumstances Claim form'.

### **Free Meals**

Under the Free Meals scheme, eligible students will be allocated a credit of £5.00 per day to cover the cost of their 'main meal'.

Eligible students will need to use their Student Card to 'pay' for a meal using their free meals allowance. All they will need to do is swipe their Student Card on a reader – much like with a contactless debit or credit card. This will be available at all the tills in the College Café.

### **Student eligibility**

To be eligible to receive a free meal in the 2024 to 2025 academic year, a student must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2024.

Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a free meal if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers') or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

These 2 groups of aged 19 plus students can receive a free meal while they continue to attend education (in the case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same programme they started before they turned 19), as long as their eligibility continues.

Students aged 19 or over at the start of their study programme, are not eligible for free meals in further education unless they have an EHCP or are a 19+ continuer.

## Eligible benefits

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

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Income Support	Entitlement / award letter dated within the last 3 months
Income-based Jobseekers Allowance	Entitlement / award letter dated within the last 3 months
Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	Entitlement / award letter dated within the last 3 months
Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999	Documentary evidence
The guarantee element of State Pension Credit	Entitlement / award letter dated within the last 3 months
Child Tax Credit (provided that 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.	Final Tax Credits Award (TC602) showing total household income for the financial year April 2023 /2024. Must be for the whole year (Full Award Notice) and not partial awards.
Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit	Documentary evidence
Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa. (after tax and not including any benefits you get)	Documentary evidence – See Criteria underneath

## Universal Credit Criteria and Process

To verify the eligibility of students, or their parents, who are in receipt of Universal Credit, the College will need to ask for a copy of their Universal Credit award notice which includes detail of their monthly earnings. The College will need to assess the information given to obtain an accurate proxy of the individual's current earned annual income.

The College will check eligibility using the following three-step process:

- Step 1: the student or their parents/carers provide a Universal Credit award statement from their most recent complete assessment period, showing that their earnings in that period do not exceed £616.67 (this is a twelfth of an equivalent annual income of £7,400). If their earnings do not exceed £616.67, they are eligible for free meals. If their earnings do exceed £616.67, the check must move on to the next step
- Step 2: the student or their parents/carers provide Universal Credit award statements from their 2 most recent complete assessment periods, showing that their earnings in that period do not

exceed £1233.34 (this is a sixth of an equivalent annual income of £7,400). If their earnings do not exceed £1233.34, they are eligible for free meals. If their earnings do exceed £1233.34, the check must move on to the next step

- Step 3: the student or their parents/carers provide Universal Credit award statements from their three most recent complete assessment periods, showing that their earnings in that period do not exceed £1850.00 (this is a quarter of an equivalent annual income of £7,400). If their earnings do not exceed £1850.00, they are eligible for free meals. If their earnings do exceed £1850.00, the student is not eligible for free meals

A manual check will be required to determine eligibility for those students or their parents who are self-employed and in receipt of Universal Credit. Parents will need to provide evidence that:

- They are in receipt of Universal Credit by providing their Universal Credit award letter
- They are self-employed by providing a copy of their company registration or tax return form
- Their monthly net earnings do not exceed the threshold as set out in steps 1, 2 and 3. Institutions should request that self-employed parents complete the self-declaration form and, once satisfied that they are eligible, provide the student with a free meal

Note: Students who were eligible for free meals immediately prior to 1 April 2018, but who do not meet the new criteria after this date, will receive transitional protections and will continue to be eligible for free meals until the end of their course of study.

#### Transitional protection arrangements

As stated in the EFSA guidance '16 to 19 funding: free meals in further education funded institutions for 2023 to 2024' the introduction of new eligibility criteria under Universal Credit from 1 April 2018 will result in some households becoming eligible for free meals and others falling outside of the eligibility criteria. The Department for Education is introducing transitional protection arrangements to provide certainty for families and to ensure that they do not experience a sudden loss of free meals.

The protection arrangements will apply as follows:

- From 1 April 2018, all students already receiving free meals will continue to receive free meals until March 2025 and then until the end of the course they are enrolled on at this point. This will apply even if their household earnings rise above the new threshold during that time
- any student who becomes eligible for free meals after the threshold has been introduced will also continue to receive free meals until March 2025 and then until the end of the course they are enrolled on. This will apply even if they subsequently become ineligible during this period because their household earnings rise above the new threshold

The College does not need to carry out any further eligibility checks for these protected families

during this period.

Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, any students receiving free meals who no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold) will continue to receive protection until they complete their 16 to 19 funded education. 19+ continuers and students aged 19 and over with EHCPs will continue to receive protection until the end of their current programme of study.

For students unable to provide the required evidence via the Free School Meals eligibility checker ([Free School Meal Eligibility Checker \(lgfl.org.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/free-school-meals-eligibility-checker)), the College will seek consent to contact their previous school to gain confirmation of eligibility.

Students who apply for Free School Meals for the first time after 1 April 2018 and who have household earnings above the threshold will not be eligible for free meals.

### **Travel to College**

Some local authorities will provide support with student travel costs. Please consult directly with your local authority to find out what support may be available.

For further information regarding transport for 16-19 year old students in Surrey, please read Surrey Council's 16+ Transport Policy Statement <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/transport/16-plus>

### **Summary**

In all cases proof of eligibility will be required with any application. Please do be aware that it is the applicant's sole responsibility to provide clear evidence of eligibility and applications will not be considered without the appropriate evidence. We are not able to contact HMRC or other external services on your behalf.

**Your completed application form together with evidence of eligibility must be sent via the Microsoft Form on the College website: [Student Finance – Esher Sixth Form College](#) using your student email. Any enquires should be sent to [Bursary@esher.ac.uk](mailto:Bursary@esher.ac.uk)**