

The Autism Project

Free Meals and Bursary Funds Policy

for academic year 2024-25



Free (School) Meals (FSM) Policy

Purpose

The government provides funding for the provision of free meals for learners **who meet their eligibility criteria**. For the 24/25 academic year the rate set is a minimum of £2.53 per learner per meal per day.

The Autism Project funds learners eligible for free meals, £4.00 per learner per full day of attendance be that in class or in their work-placement that is part of their study.

Please note, if you receive any payment for work (i.e., move into an apprenticeship or gain some temporary bank work) then these periods of time will not qualify.

Eligibility Criteria for academic year 2024-25

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged learners. Learners **must meet all** the following criteria to qualify for Free Meals: -

- A. **AGE** - you must be aged 16 to 19 **or** must have an **Education, Health and Care Plan** if over 19
- B. **FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES** - you must be in RECEIPT of, or have 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)- **please note** Working Tax Credit alone **is not** a qualifying benefit
 - Universal Credit with net earnings **not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa**
- C. **RESIDENCY** -as set out in the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) regulations guidance 2024-25 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-regulations-for-post-16-provision>

If you meet all these criteria, you are entitled to a Free Meal for each day you attend the course and will remain entitled to the end of the course except for any periods you have paid work.

How Free Meal payments are made and conditions of payments

As The Autism Project doesn't have catering facilities you will be given an Equals Card (this is a pre-payment card and works like a bank card). Cash cannot be paid. A credit will be made to your Equals Card every other week in advance. The allowance is £4.00 per day for days you attend class or your work placement.

- If you are absent for any of the days from the previous weeks, then the money already given must be kept and only spent on a day when you are in class or on a work placement.
- Your transaction history will be checked regularly to ensure that you are spending the money on healthy food options and job coaches will discuss food choices with you to encourage you to eat a balanced diet.

Bursary Funds

There are two bursary funds offered: -

- **a 'vulnerable learner bursary'** - learners **must be under the age of 19**
- **a discretionary bursary** - learners must be aged 19 or over and hold an EHCP
- Residency criteria (as Appendix A) applies to both bursaries.
- **Bursary applications must be submitted to The Autism Project by 4th October 2024.**

Vulnerable Learner Bursary please note learners must be aged 16, 17 or 18 on 31 August 2024 and meet **each of the following criteria:** -

A. vulnerable learner, as defined by one of the below

- young people in care
- care leavers (defined as 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 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.
- young people receiving Income Support (IS) or Universal Credit (UC) because they are financially supporting themselves and/or someone is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner
- young people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right.

B. residency as set out by the ESFA as detailed in Appendix A

C. studying for 30 weeks or more

Where all eligibility criteria above are met, learners are eligible for a bursary of up to £1,200 (calculated on a pro-rata basis as appropriate, based on Full Time 5 day a week, 30 weeks study - at a maximum rate of £40 per week).

The Vulnerable Learner bursary can be claimed for each academic year the learner is in education or training, provided they continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

Where a bursary is awarded the agreed standard for a learner's attendance would be expected to be 95% or above. Where a learner's health and/or medical needs impact upon their attendance, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Head of Education & Learning.

Discretionary Bursary

The Autism Project is awarded a small discretionary fund each year by The Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). This is managed in-line with ESFA bursary fund guidelines. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year/16-to-19-bursary-fund-guide-2023-to-2024-academic-year>
This fund is limited.

The purpose of the fund is to support individual learners to overcome specific barriers that the individual faces to full participation (e.g., books, equipment, uniform or work clothes, transport, meals).

Applicants must meet the following criteria: -

- be attending The Autism Project
- have a current Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- meet the ESFA residency criteria (Appendix A)
- provide evidence of household income - this is for all family members but doesn't include DLA (Disability Living Allowance) or PIP (Personal Independence Payments) - this must accompany the application prior to assessment

Based on the information received and if financial need is identified, the learner will be provided with a contribution/reimbursed towards:

- meals whilst in college, on work placements or attending college social activities (see also Free Meals)
- travel costs to get to college/work placements/college socials (where freedom pass is not available)
- clothes for college and work
- equipment or books to support study (note these may be given on loan)
- other specific requests needed.

Please note - Evidence of expenditure (i.e., receipts or tickets) may be required.

The bursary fund is not intended to:

- provide learning support - services that institutions give to learners - for example, counselling, mentoring or extra tutoring
- support extra-curricular activities where these are not essential to the learners' study programme
- support general household incomes

Where a bursary is awarded the agreed standard for a learner's attendance would be expected to be 95% or above. Where a learner's health and/or medical needs impact upon their attendance, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Head of Education & Learning.

If you wish to apply for a Discretionary Bursary your application will be checked for the following:

- your eligibility against government set criteria
- assess your request
- your household financial circumstances (evidence required)
- may request additional information from you if needed
- consult with the CEO and/or the EAP if required

- aim to inform you of the decision in writing within 3 weeks.

The Autism Project reserves the right to prioritise those in greatest financial need and to make full, partial or no awards. Family income is the primary consideration however individual circumstances will be taken into consideration. However, if you or your representative (parent/carer) disagrees with a decision then you may appeal.

When the Discretionary Bursary Fund is exhausted The Autism Project will inform learners and parents and no further applications will be considered until further funding is received from the ESFA.

Impact of bursaries on Department of Work and Pension (DWP) benefits

Receipt of bursary funding does not affect receipt of other means-tested benefits paid to families, such as Income Support (IS), Jobseeker's Allowance, Child Benefit, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit or, generally, Universal Credit.

If a learner is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA), parents can no longer receive certain household/family benefits for that child, such as child benefit.

Complaints/Appeals process

All complaints/appeals must be made in writing and will be dealt with under CareTrade's complaints procedure.

If a complaint or appeal regarding Free Meals or Bursaries is not resolved through this, then it may be passed to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Please note. You can only be eligible to receive a free meal or a bursary after you, or a responsible adult on your behalf, have made a successful application to TAP. **To make an application please complete a Free Meals Application Form and or a Bursary Fund Application Form, in full** and return to the TAP Coordinator.

APPENDIX A - ESFA GUIDANCE ON RESIDENCY 2023-24

[16 to 19 education: financial support for students - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

A person who on 'the first day of the first academic (or teaching) year of the course' defined as:

- 1 September if the academic year starts between 1 August and 31 December,
- 1 January if the academic year starts between 1 January and 31 March,
- 1 April if the academic year starts between 1 April and 30 June,
- 1 July if the academic year starts between 1 July and 31 July

is 'settled' in the UK, and who has been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (that is including the Channel and the Isle of Man) **for the three years preceding the 'relevant date'**. 'Settled' means having either indefinite leave to enter or remain (ILE/ILR) or having the right of abode in the UK. British citizens and certain other people have the right of abode in the UK.

- British nationals who hold a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland passport.
- European Union nationals
- Family members of European Economic Area (EEA) and Swiss workers
- British Dependent Territory Citizens (now known as British Overseas Territory Citizens).
- Those whose passports have been endorsed to show they have right of abode in the UK.
- Those who have a certificate of naturalisation or registration as a British Citizen
- Learners who are children of Turkish workers where the Turkish worker has been lawfully employed and resident in the UK at any time in the past and where the learner has been resident in the EEA and Turkey for the full three-year period prior to the commencement of their programme.

In addition to considering the groups outlined above, the ESFA will also consider the following groups of learners to be eligible for funding.

- People with refugee status (RS) or humanitarian protection (HP) or discretionary leave (DL) or exceptional leave to enter or remain (ELE/ELR), their spouses, civil partners and children
- People with recently settled status (this means those having been granted indefinite leave to enter or remain, right of abode or British citizenship within the 3 years immediately preceding the start of the course)

In addition to the groups above, the ESFA will also consider the following groups of learners (including those who may not have lived in the UK for the last three years) aged up to and including the age of 18 as eligible for funding.

- Those who are accompanying or joining parents or spouses (*SEE NOTES*) or civil partners who have the right of abode or leave to enter or remain in the UK (or accompanying or joining relevant family members, usually parents, who are EEA nationals), or those who are children of diplomats.
- Those who are dependants of teachers coming to the UK on a teacher- exchange scheme.
- Those who are residing legally in the UK (including those entering the UK in the last 3 years who are or were not accompanied by their parents) who are British (or

EEA) citizens or those whose passports have been endorsed to either show they have the right of abode in this country or to show that they have no restrictions on working in the UK

- Those who are dependants of adults residing legally in the UK who have been given immigration rights as workers to reside in the UK
- Those who are dependants of foreign learners where the accompanying parent or legal guardian has been given Home Office Tier 4 learner immigration status (the accompanying parent or legal guardian is excluded from funding)
- Asylum seekers.
- Those having been granted leave under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (the 'Dubs' amendment)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/19/section/67>
- Those having been granted Calais leave to remain
- Those who are (including unaccompanied asylum seekers) placed in the care of social services or those in receipt of Section 4 support. *Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 allows National Asylum Support Service to provide full board accommodation outside London for destitute asylum seekers who have exhausted all their appeal rights but are unable to return home. Section 4 support is also known as 'hard case support'*

NOTES: -

All eligibility references to **a spouse** should now be read to include a person who has participated in either a formal state-recognised marriage or a state-recognised civil partnership ceremony.