

ACCESS FURTHER EDUCATION - BURSARY POLICY

Responsible for Implementation: Access Further Education - Finance, Funding & Compliance Committee (AFE - FFCC)

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Contents

1. About Us
 2. Bursary Policy Statement & Intent
 3. Summary
 4. Key Eligibility Criteria: 16-19 Discretionary Bursary
 5. Key Eligibility Criteria: 16-19 Vulnerable Young Person Bursary
 6. Eligible Educational Provision
 7. Asylum Seekers
 8. Household Income Assessment
 9. Returning Learners
 10. Free College Meals
 11. Travel
 12. Essential Kit & Equipment
 13. Childcare Funding Support
 14. Advanced Learner Loan Bursary
 15. Trips
 16. Industry Placements
 17. Application and Assessment Process
 18. Payment Process
 19. Award Conditions and Attendance Adjustments
 20. Repayment
 21. Exceptional Circumstances
 22. Emergency Cash Payments
 23. Change in Circumstances
 24. Appeals & Complaints
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About Us

Access Further Education Ltd ('The College') has subsidiary companies, trading names and trading partnerships through which it operates. The trading names and partnerships might have their own names or brands, but the legal entity for the purpose of this policy is Access Further Education Ltd. Trading subsidiaries, trading names and trading partnerships include Access Creative College ('ACC'), Access Sport College ('ASC') and Access Industry ('AI'). The dBs Institute (DBS Music UK Holdings and its subsidiaries), whilst a separate legal entity, shares common Directorships with the College.

Bursary Policy Statement & Intent

The College is committed to ensuring that all learners are supported to attend College & achieve their goals whilst studying with us. The College receives funding from the Department for Education (DfE) each Academic Year to award learners facing specific barriers that would prevent their participation at college to enable them to remain in or return to education.

The College is able to award bursary funds (where eligible) to support 16–19-year-old learners (inc. learners with an EHCP up until age 25), learners funding their course with an Advanced Learner Loan and learners at Centres with courses eligible for Devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding. The intent of this policy is to detail the Financial Support available to our learners and the eligibility criteria that must be met before any funds can be awarded. This is applicable to all learners studying at both Access Creative College & Access Sport College Centres.

All bursary funds are managed by the Bursary Support team

bursary.support@accesstomusic.ac.uk.

All applications are assessed on a first come first served basis and all email queries will be responded to within a 3-day SLA. Applications are completely paperless utilising an online application and assessment portal:

<https://accesscreative.paymystudent.com/portal/>

The College is permitted to utilise 5% of the Student Bursary Fund allocation per annum to cover the costs of administering the bursary.

Summary

Bursary funds are intended to provide financial support to help learners overcome the specific financial barriers to participation so they can remain in education. Funding allocated can only be used to help learners with the essential costs of participating in their study programme e.g., contribution towards travel costs, lunch, childcare, and essential kit/equipment.

There are 2 types of bursaries:

- 16-19 Discretionary Bursary
- 16-19 Vulnerable Young Person Bursary

Both types of bursary funding are to help eligible learners with essential costs of participating such as:

- Transport via bus and rail
- Essential books, equipment and specialist clothing (protective overalls, for example) that are required for their study programme
- Field trips and other mandatory course-related costs
- The costs of attending university interviews and open days
- UCAS application fee
- Meals while at college
- Other barriers to continuing in education, as considered as appropriate by the Head of Funding and Compliance.

The bursary fund is not intended to provide learning support - for example, counselling or mentoring; to support extracurricular activities that are not essential to the learner's study programme; or to provide living costs support. Awards made will depend on individual circumstances and actual financial need; the college is therefore required to carry out individual assessments for each learner who applies for support to establish household income and what kinds of costs they have.

All decisions are made entirely at the College's discretion, taking individual circumstances into account.

Key Eligibility Criteria: 16-19 Discretionary Bursary

The following eligibility criteria will be assessed in addition to the individual learner's actual financial needs. No learner will automatically be awarded an amount of funding without an assessment of the level of actual financial need they have.

To be eligible learners must be:

- Resident in the UK for 3 years or more.
- Enrolled on a 16-19 study programme funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).
- Aged 16-18 on 31st August.
- Aged 19 or over and continuing a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 (19+ continued).
- Aged 19-24 on 31st August and have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Have a household income of £45,000 or below.

Key Eligibility Criteria: 16-19 Vulnerable Young Person Bursary

To be eligible, learners must meet the criteria set out above as well as being:

- A young person in care
 - Classed as in care for the purposes of the bursary if the learner is under Section 20 or Section 31 of the Children Act 1989)
 - Learners placed with a Foster Carer by their Local Authority are classed as in Care for the purposes of the bursary.
 - Learners in Private Fostering arrangements are not eligible.
- A care leaver
 - 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
 - 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
- In receipt of income support or universal credit in the learner's own name
- In receipt of employment support allowance (ESA) as well as Disability Living Allowance or personal independence payment (PIP) in their own name

For study programmes of more than 30 weeks, eligible learners in the specific vulnerable groups as defined above may be eligible for a bursary of up to £1,200. Learners on a study programme lasting less than 30 weeks will be awarded a bursary on a pro-rata basis based on an assessment of actual need.

Learners will be awarded the amount of support they need to participate based on an assessment of the types of costs they have and their individual financial needs, and will not be automatically awarded £1,200. Awards are intended to support costs directly related to college programmes of study, e.g., for equipment and/or travel costs.

Learners in or who have recently left care should provide a letter from the local authority which confirms their care status.

Eligible Educational Provision

- Learners must be studying for a qualification at level 3 or below, which is co-funded or fully funded, and which is campus-based.
- Learners on apprenticeship programmes, or any waged training, are considered to be employed rather than in education, and are not eligible for the bursary fund.

Asylum Seekers

Accompanied asylum seekers under 18 with an adult relative or partner, and asylum seekers aged 18 and above are entitled to education but are not entitled to public funds. If necessary, they can apply to the Home Office for suitable housing and cash for essentials.

We will provide in-kind support such as books; equipment and a travel pass to asylum seekers who have not had asylum refused.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children:

- Are the responsibility of the local authority
- Are to be treated as 'looked after' children; and
- Are eligible for a bursary for vulnerable groups, where they have a financial need

When these learners reach 18-years-old, we will consider their immigration status. They will still be eligible for a bursary as a learner from a defined vulnerable group if the asylum claim is in their favor and will be treated as a 'care leaver' until they reach the upper age limit.

Household Income Assessment

Learners with a household income of less than £45,000 (including benefits income) can apply for support via a household means test.

Learners with a household income between £45,000 and £50,000 (including benefits income) may also be considered on a discretionary basis, provided appropriate justification is given, and subject to individual circumstances and the availability of funding.

All decisions are made entirely at the College's discretion, taking individual circumstances into account. Income evidence should be provided for all parents and/or guardians of the learner's household and/or learners own income; each person in the household must supply either:

- All payslips from the past 3 months
- P60, dated for the last financial year
- Tax return letter from HMRC, dated for the last financial year

Returning Learners

In making decisions about bursary awards, institutions can now exercise discretion as to whether they carry out checks annually or just once at the beginning of a learners study programme.

Therefore, if household circumstances have not changed since the learner was approved for funding in the last academic year, they will be required to sign and date a self-declaration form rather than resubmit benefit and/or income evidence.

Free College Meals

Access Creative College can support eligible learners aged 16-18 with free College meals for each day they are due to attend college.

The College will provide an award of £5.50 per day for Free College Meals. The exact amount awarded is based on individual circumstances and how many days the learner is expected to attend college.

The learner is only entitled to a free meal for every day they actually attend college. If the learner only attends for part of the day, they may not be entitled to a free meal for that day.

From September 2026, all households receiving Universal Credit, regardless of income, will be entitled to free school meals.

Students aged over 19 who are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) they started before they turned 19 or who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are eligible for a free meal where they meet the criteria.

All college meal awards are provided via an E-voucher.

Unless otherwise stated, benefit evidence supplied can be in the learner's own name, or the name of the parent/carer or spouse they live with. If the learner has a different surname to their parent/carer or spouse, a name link document should also be provided. This could be:

- A benefit letter linking to the applicant e.g., Child Benefit letter

- Birth/adoption certificate
- Wedding/civil partnership certificate

Benefit evidence provided must be dated within three calendar months of the application.

Universal Credit claimants should provide a printout or screenshot of all pages of their full UC statement, showing:

- Name and address of claimant
- The calculated take-home pay for the period
- The Universal Credit payment for the period

Travel

Learners who live more than 1 mile (measured by google maps walking) from their main campus of study can apply for a contribution towards their travel costs.

The amount awarded will be based on the learner's actual transport costs, up to a maximum weekly award of £75 or annual award of £3000.

Extenuating circumstances will be considered on an individual basis and are entirely at the discretion of the College.

Mode of Transport	Information on Eligibility
Public Transport	Awards for use towards public transport costs will be based on learner/discounted rate tickets. It is the learner's responsibility to apply for this directly from the relevant organisation. We will also reimburse the cost of any required discount cards, i.e., Student Rail Card, to reduce the costs of travel. If the Town or City where the learner lives already has a Free travel programme in place for Young People, we would expect the learner to first apply for this before applying for the bursary. Evidence of the discount card must be provided at application. Examples of discount cards are: • 16+ Zip Oyster Photocard • 18+ Learner Oyster Photocard • 16-25 Railcard
Motor vehicle	It is expected that learners will use public transport to get to and from campus. Travel routes via. private cars/motorbikes/mopeds will only be considered where there are no accessible public transport options e.g. rural locations or where a disability impacts a learner's ability to use public transport independently. Contributions towards fuel costs for private vehicles are based on a calculation of .25p per mile from the learner's home address to their main campus of study. Daily mileage is calculated as one round trip on each timetabled day.
Cycle	Eligible learners who choose to cycle will be awarded a one-off payment of £50 to support the costs associated with cycling and securing their bike. Any award made is intended to be used to purchase/upgrade associated safety equipment and accessories, e.g., a D lock, or a new helmet. Learners should retain receipts of any purchased equipment and submit this with their refund request

Private hire taxi / mini-cab	Support towards the cost of private hire taxis and mini-cabs are not eligible for a college contribution. If a learner cannot walk to college or access public transport because of their special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or a mobility difficulty, the family should apply for support from their Local Authority directly
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Essential Kit & Equipment

Certain courses require specific, essential kit, uniform, or specialist equipment. The maximum contribution per annum is £185. Learners should retain receipts of any mandatory kit and equipment purchased and submit this with their refund request.

Childcare Funding Support

16-19

Learners who are aged 20 or under at the start of their course and want help with childcare costs can apply for Care to Learn. A learner can still apply for Learner Support for help with other costs, like travel or, in exceptional circumstances, if childcare costs are in excess of the Care to Learn scheme's weekly maximum rates.

20+

Learners may be eligible for help towards childcare costs incurred whilst they participate in their programme of study at college if:

- They are a parent under 20 at the start of their course
- They are the main carer for their child/ren (under 15 or under 17 with special needs)
- They are living in England
- They are either a British citizen or have a legal right to live and study in England
- Their childcare provider qualifies

Learners can claim up to a fixed maximum amount of £200 per week.

The total College contribution towards childcare costs is capped at £6800 per academic year per household.

Learners must pay any remaining costs directly to their childcare provider.

Free early education and childcare allocations must be fully maximised prior to applying for college childcare funding support.

Learners who wish to apply for childcare funding support are required to complete an additional Childcare Funding application. To qualify, the childcare provider must be one of the following:

- Registered with Ofsted
- Registered with a childminder agency (the General Childcare Register)
- A school

They can be:

- A Childminder
- A preschool playgroup
- A day nursery
- An after-school club

Awards are paid directly, on a termly basis, to the childcare provider and the College contribution is dependent on individual circumstances. Before they are paid, the childcare provider must confirm the child/ren's attendance.

To support a funding application, the learner must provide either:

- A copy of the child/ren's birth certificate, or
- A letter confirming receipt of Child Benefit for that child

The childcare provider needs to supply:

- A copy of their Ofsted registration or General Childcare Register inclusion
- Confirmation of the child/ren's attendance
- Their payment details and a signed childcare provider agreement

If the learner is studying on a Higher Education programme, they should apply for a [Childcare Grant](#) instead.

Advanced Learner Loan Bursary

The Advanced Learner Loan Bursary Fund is provided by the UK Government to support learners who have been approved for an Advanced Learner Loan. The bursary aims to help learners overcome financial barriers to participating in education and training and is non-repayable.

To qualify for the Advanced Learner Loan Bursary, learners must:

- Be in receipt of an approved Advanced Learner Loan from the Learner Loans Company (SLC) and enrolled on an eligible Level 3–6 qualification funded through the Advanced Learner Loan
- Be aged 19 or over
- Be in receipt of means tested benefits and/or with a household income of £45,000 or below

Advanced Learner Loan Bursary payments towards travel and course materials and equipment only.

Advanced Learner Loan learners are not eligible for free meals unless they are continuing on the same study programme they started before they turned 19 (19+ continuers) or who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). In these cases, learners are eligible for a free meal where they meet the applicable criteria (see above).

The Advanced Learner Loan Bursary can also support childcare costs incurred whilst participating in a programme of study at college. The Childcare section of this policy provides further information related to applications for support with these costs.

Trips

Payments will be made directly to the learner's College where possible. The Bursary Team will assess the contribution to be made by bursary funds based upon the learner's household income and circumstances using the below thresholds:

Household income up to £16,190	Full costs covered
Household income between £16,191 and £45,000	50% (with ad hoc approval for extenuating circumstances to cover full costs)
Household income over £45,000	0%

Industry Placements

Learners who are required to complete an Industry Placement as part of their course can submit receipts to have extra costs as a result of their placement reimbursed. This includes meals and travel only. We will not reimburse car parking costs for travel to and from the placement. Petrol reimbursement is considered on a case-by-case basis.

No costs can be reimbursed without receipts. The College reserves the right to ask for evidence of household income/benefits to support this.

Claims must be sent monthly and any claims after the academic year has closed will not be reimbursed.

Application and Assessment Process

All awards are made subject to available funds and applicants will be notified if funding is no longer available.

Applications should ideally be submitted by October half term to allow enough time for the Bursary Support Team to assess the overall level of demand and make discretionary awards on a fair basis.

However, we acknowledge that learners' circumstances may change and therefore the application process will remain open for the whole academic year.

Application forms should be submitted online, and the College aims to assess complete applications within 3 weeks of receipt of a complete application and full submission of supporting evidence. Please note, in busy periods, this is likely to be longer.

Complete applications (those submitted with **all required supporting evidence**) are processed in order of receipt.

Back payments will only be calculated from the date on which all supporting evidence has been received. **To approve and issue any back payments, all relevant receipts for the period must also be provided.** Evidence of eligibility is retained for audit purposes and remains confidential.

Confirmation of whether an application is successful or not will be emailed to the applicant directly via their college email address. It will outline what support will be provided, alongside any payment conditions.

The bursary fund is intended to help learners with their actual costs of participating. Block, blanket, or flat rate payments are not permitted under the funding guidance, and all awards must reflect the actual costs the learner has.

Discretionary awards for exceptional circumstances must be agreed by the Head of Funding and Compliance.

Attendance and participation will be checked before payments are released.

Payment process

In line with identified best practice in the Department of Education guidance, the majority of support offered through the 16-19 bursary scheme, where possible, will be payments in kind rather than cash. Where this is not possible, payments will be made through BACS transfers directly into a learner's bank account.

Payments will be made monthly in advance over 10 months, starting 4th September 2026, usually on the last Friday of each month during the academic year (September–May), in accordance with the payment schedule below:

Payment 1	Friday 4 th September 2026
Payment 2	Friday 25 th September 2026
Payment 3	Friday 30 th October 2026
Payment 4	Friday 27 th November 2026
Payment 5	Monday 28 th December 2026
Payment 6	Friday 29 th January 2027
Payment 7	Friday 26 th February 2027
Payment 8	Friday 26 th March 2027
Payment 9	Friday 30 th April 2027
Payment 10	Friday 28 th May 2027

Payments must be made into the learner's own bank account; we cannot make payments into a third-party account unless there are extenuating circumstances that have been agreed with the Bursary Team.

Award Conditions and Attendance Adjustments

Payments of the bursary are conditional on learners meeting the following conditions in relation to their standards of attendance and behaviour:

- Learners are expected to attend all timetabled sessions. Attendance will be checked regularly and attendance below 80% may result in payments being stopped until the learner's attendance improves (subject to exceptional circumstances)
- Learners must adhere to the College's Code of Conduct
- Information provided on the bursary application form is true and accurate to the best of the knowledge of learner and parent/carer
- Learners must inform us of any change in circumstance while attending the course
- Learners must declare to their benefit providers (where required) if they are awarded any support
- Bursary funds must only be used for the purpose for which they are intended, e.g., payments for meals must be used for meals, or travel payments for bus & train tickets. Misuse of bursary funds will result in the cancellation of further payments.
- If a learner withdraws from the course, support will cease immediately

All learners are required to sign a declaration confirming that they agree to these conditions. Learners who fail to meet these conditions may have their payment withheld, but we will always take learners' individual circumstances into consideration. This includes considering the impact on attendance that might be caused by illness, caring responsibilities or other exceptional circumstances.

We will stop payments where learners have been **absent for a period of 3 continuous weeks** or more (excluding holidays) and where learners have decided to withdraw from a study programme.

We reserve the right to take back money from learners where it is not spent for the reasons it was awarded. We will consider the impact of such an action on the individual learner before making a final decision to do so, and any decision will be confirmed to the learner in writing.

From a bursary perspective any type of absence, whether authorised or non-authorised, counts as an absence, as this is a day that the learner receives DfE funds to attend College. Therefore, the College regularly checks to ascertain whether learners are still meeting the required thresholds to continue to receive these funds. The College cannot pay out DfE funds for non-attendance, but will always take individual circumstances into account before stopping any further payments.

Adjustments will be made as follows:

Last 4 weeks Attendance	Adjustment to usual travel payment
80 - 100%	No adjustment made
60 - 79%	Reduction of 50%
0 - 59%	Payments will be paused
Over 3 weeks non-attendance	Payments will be paused

Repayment

The College reserves the right to request that bursary funds are returned or repaid if the learner's bursary is stopped as a result of a breach of the above Conditions of Award or any of the below circumstances:

- If a learner, or learner's parent/guardian, has knowingly provided incorrect, false or inaccurate information regarding the household's financial position to meet bursary eligibility criteria
- If a learner has knowingly used bursary funds awarded to them for anything other than their intended purpose
- If any equipment purchased through bursary funds is damaged or stolen through misuse or neglect on the part of the learner, then the learner is liable to cover the cost of replacement items
- If equipment purchased through bursary funds is not returned by the learner when they complete their studies, they will be liable to cover the cost of the item purchased for them.
- If a learner has committed a serious breach, or repeated breaches, of discipline/code of conduct that leads to their expulsion, the learner may be liable to repay any funds awarded to them for that Academic Year

Exceptional Circumstances

Assessment to establish financial hardship is usually based on income and evidence, except in exceptional circumstances. In this instance, awards can be made on a discretionary basis according to the individual's circumstances and financial hardship. Any exceptional circumstances will be considered on an individual basis and must be approved by the Head of Funding and Compliance.

In exceptional circumstances, and where there is real need, food support can be provided without undertaking checks on household income or gathering usual Financial Support Funding evidence. For audit purposes, signed confirmation of receipt of funding should be retained.

Emergency Cash Payments

The College recognises that a learner's circumstances and needs may change later in the year. Therefore a small emergency fund will be retained.

Where emergency payments are made, they must be authorised by either the Head of Funding and Compliance, or appropriate delegate, and detail the reasoning for the payment. Where cash or a payment in-kind is provided (e.g., a bus pass), the learner must sign to confirm receipt, and copies should be retained for audit purposes.

Change in Circumstances

If there are changes in circumstances that may affect eligibility for a bursary, applicants and/or parents/carers must notify the college without delay.

Appeals & Complaints

If a learner's application for Bursary Funding, or a particular element of the bursary application, is rejected, they can appeal the decision made, but must provide their appeal in writing to bursary.support@accesstomusic.ac.uk, explaining the reason for appeal and providing any new supporting evidence.

The application form will be reassessed using the new evidence provided by the Bursary Team. The decision made after reviewing the appeal and new evidence, is the final decision and cannot be appealed again to the Bursary Team.

Appeals will be responded to, in writing, within ten working days, following a review by the Head of Funding and Compliance. If a learner is not satisfied with the way their application has been dealt with, or any aspect of the application process, they should follow the college's usual Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy, which is available via the College website.