

# **FE Bursary Policy 2025/26**

### **Our Mission**

Raising Aspirations, Unlocking Potential, Advancing Futures

### **Our Values**

Excellence, Passion, Teamwork, Integrity, Innovation,  
Sustainability, Valuing Others and Supportiveness

### **Sparsholt College Group**

The Sparsholt College Group (the College Group) includes Sparsholt College, Andover College, University Centre Sparsholt, Sparsholt College Services, Westley Enterprises and Andover Town Football Club. College Group policies apply to each part of the group unless specified otherwise.

This updated FE Bursary Policy 2025/26 was approved by the Board of Governors in September 2025 and supersedes previous editions.

|                 |                                            |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Originator:     | Chief Operating Officer                    |
| Located:        | College Group Intranet<br>College Websites |
| Due for review: | Annually (by April)                        |

## **FE BURSARY POLICY**

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## **FE BURSARY POLICY**

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Sparsholt College Group (including Sparsholt College and Andover College) – ‘the College’ - aims to provide bursary support for learners experiencing the greatest financial hardship but also has a flexible approach to allocating funds where a learner can prove a need for support.

To be eligible to receive funding, learners must meet the residency criteria as determined by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and be studying a funded course.

The College will allocate bursary funding in accordance with the funding rules specified by the ESFA.

### **BURSARY FUNDS AVAILABLE**

1. Bursary funds available for learners aged 16-18 are:
  - 16-19 Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups.
  - Learner Support Bursaries including travel awards, equipment, safety/protective clothing and books.
  - Residential Bursary Fund.
2. Bursary funds available for adults aged 19 and over are:
  - Learner Support including Childcare Support, travel, equipment, safety and protective clothing, books and accommodation.
3. Advanced Learner Loan Bursary.
4. Free College Meals Bursary.

### **RULES AND GUIDELINES**

5. **Assessment and Eligibility Criteria**
  - 5.1. All bursaries are means tested and based on household income. Learners who have a household income up to £39,000 may apply.
  - 5.2. All income and benefits (including universal credits, housing benefit, council tax benefit, working tax credits and child maintenance, child tax credits, etc.) are considered. The College does not consider Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment when calculating total household income.
  - 5.3. For parents/guardians or students who are self-employed, the College will assess income based on Gross profit, but considering any business expenditure. For example, household items, mortgage and food would not be deducted from Gross profit but servicing of farm machinery, stationery, etc. would be deducted.
  - 5.4. An assessment is made based on a completed and signed declaration from the learner and parent/guardian (dependent upon age and circumstance of learner) detailing income from employment and/or benefits along with supporting evidence of all declared income.
  - 5.5. The number of dependent children is taken into consideration. The College will allow a further £1650 of income (£39,000 threshold) per additional dependent child living at the same household as the applicant to recognise additional household costs.

- 5.6. In order for funding to be awarded, the College expects that certain standards of behaviour and attendance will be met. Learners are expected to meet college standards of attendance. In circumstances where a learner is involved in disciplinary proceedings or has poor attendance, funding may be withheld or reclaimed at the College's discretion.
- 5.7. The College can only guarantee bursary award for applicants applying by the 18<sup>th</sup> August prior to the academic year of study. Applications made after this date will be awarded if there is funding available.
- 5.8. Where a learner is continuing their studies into another academic year or change their course, a further application will be required as eligibility and financial need may change.

## **6. 16-19 Bursaries for young people in defined vulnerable groups**

- 6.1. Defined as those:
- 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.
- 6.2. For these learners there is a bursary fund of up to £1,200. Learners will be identified through registration forms and funding application forms. In order to qualify, evidence of eligibility will be required. This will be either: written confirmation from the relevant local authority or an award notice. Some additional discretion is allowed for vulnerable learners at risk of not completing their studies.
- 6.3. An interview with the Well Being team and the Student Administration team will be arranged to identify whether there is a financial requirement and, if so, how the money should be allocated. Travel costs and any clothing, books and equipment will be covered in the first instance and the balance may be spread out throughout the year to support the learner as necessary. Learners are expected to always adhere to the Student Code of Conduct and attend all lessons. For learners receiving regular payments 100% attendance is expected. However, the College does recognise that there may be exceptional reasons why a learner cannot attend a lesson and in these instances the College will assess each case on its merits.
- 6.4. Where a learner is identified as eligible for a defined vulnerable group bursary, but their financial needs are met/they do not have any financial need, no award will be made. This will be made clear to the learner and can be revisited at any time during the academic year.

## **7. 16-18 Bursary and 19+ Discretionary Learner Support Funds-DSLF (Not including Advanced Learner Loan Bursary)**

- 7.1. All learners who have a household income of £39,000 or less are eligible to apply for help through the DLSF. The award is discretionary and will be given to those with the greatest need. Section 4.5 further increases the income threshold of £39,000 by £1650 for each dependent child living in the same house as the bursary applicant.
- 7.2. The College will allocate funding to learners with a household income of £30,000 or less in the first instance.

- 7.3. Learners with a household income between £30,000 and £39,000 will be assessed individually and, where sufficient funds are available, those with the greatest need will also be awarded assistance towards their costs.
- 7.4. In exceptional circumstances, and only if sufficient funds are remaining, the College may consider applications from learners whose household income is above £39,000. Discretionary applications will be considered and as appropriate approved by the Chief Operations Officer or College Principal
- 7.5. The College will award funds for the following categories in accordance with the stated preference of the applicant.
- Travel
  - Essential Clothing, books and course equipment
  - DBS costs
  - Exam/registration fee (19+ only)
  - Essential trips
  - Work Experience
  - Unit duties
- 7.6. The amount of support will vary from student to student depending on needs but will usually be between £200 and £1,100. In exceptional circumstances, the College may award up to £3000 where a learner will be unable to attend without the extra help (for example, a learner who lives outside of the College travel routes but is unable to live in College accommodation).
- 7.7. Learners may only receive assistance with Travel costs if assistance is not available through their Local Education Authority. Learners may also receive assistance with petrol costs. This will be determined either by a comparable public/college transport cost calculation or by HMRC's current travel expense rate (0.45p per mile as of December 2024), whichever is lower.
- 7.8. **Travel awards** - For the 2025/2026 academic year all learners with:
- Household income below £30,000 – learner will contribute £0 where they prioritise travel costs as their required area of support.
  - Household income between £30,000 and £39,000 may receive an award of up to 70% for travel where sufficient funds are available and where travel support is prioritised.
- 7.9. For learners who have requested assistance with several categories, the College will work with the learner to prioritise the need under each of these categories before making an award.
- 7.10. The College is restricted on the amount of funding it can offer for tuition fees. As a result, the College will only consider awards towards the cost of tuition fees in exceptional circumstances. (For example, if the learner's circumstances change during the course so that the learner can no longer meet the costs and would otherwise have to leave the course.) This is at the College's discretion and the College's decision is final.
- 7.12. **Emergency Meal Support**
- The College will provide emergency meal support for students considered to be in real need for meal support on the days a student attends their course, without undertaking the normal checks on household income or gathering other evidence that would normally be required. In extreme circumstances this fund can be used at the discretion of the College pending completion of a bursary application form with necessary evidence. The College will require confirmation from DWP/Social Services/Local Authority etc., to confirm the

specific emergency need. This support is a temporary measure only, until such time as bursary form and evidence can be provided and would not be expected to continue for longer than one month.

#### **7.13 Free College Meals**

Free College meals are provided for students who meet the Government criteria. Students who qualify will receive a meal allowance for the days they are timetabled to be in College. If they have lessons before and after lunch. In exceptional circumstances students eligible for free school meals, where the student is only timetabled for morning sessions, they will be paid a credit that covers the cost of breakfast.

Students completing Industrial Work Placement activity as part of their T Level programme will have payments made based on IWP attendance. Evidence of attendance will be confirmed by the IWP team and paid at the National Free College Meal cost. Short term work experience will have a pro forma form to complete and return confirming attendance.

The college will reconcile free school meal credits against attendance on a regular basis and debit the free school meal account for any days of non-attendance, regardless of the reason for non-attendance and in accordance with Department for Education instructions to colleges.

#### **8. Residential Bursary Fund (16-18 Learners) & Residential Access Fund (19+ learners)**

8.1. Funds are available to some students to support students who need to live away from home to study at the college and who meet travel distance and income criteria.

8.2. These funds are available to Land Based and Specialist Provision (excluding Motor Vehicle and some Sports) courses for households with an income under £39,000 Sparsholt campus learners only. Learners with a household income below are eligible to apply for assistance with accommodation costs. Section 4.5 further increases the income threshold of £39,000 by £1650 for each dependent child living in the same household as the bursary applicant.

8.3. Residential Bursary of up to £4,500 (see income bandings below) will be made available to applicants meeting Residential Bursary and Residential Access criteria. Applicants from households with income of up to £30,000 will be prioritised should funding be limited.

##### **8.4. 16-18 Learners**

- Income below £30,000 - The learner will receive a maximum of £4,500 towards the cost of their accommodation.
- Income between £30,000 and £39,000 – The learner will receive a maximum of £4,000 towards the cost of their accommodation.
- Accommodation costs for 16-18 learners include a 10 or 15 meal package. The number of meals awarded to a learner is determined by the identified individual need of a learner, taking into account the household income and the programme of study (some programmes include unsociable hours/weekend attendance at college).

##### **8.5. 19+ Further Education Learners**

- Income under £30,000 – The learner will receive a maximum of £4,500 towards the cost of their accommodation.
- Income between £30,000 and £39,000 - For applications received by 18th August 2024 the learner will receive a maximum of £4,000 towards the costs of their accommodation. Applications received after that date will be assessed on an

individual basis and will be dependent on affordability for the College.

- 8.6 In exceptional circumstances, it may be possible for mature learners to apply for assistance with the cost of their rent for privately rented accommodation. This will only be considered where it is not possible for the learner to live in College accommodation, for example, where they have a dependent partner and/or children and the student has moved to the area specifically to study at Sparsholt. The maximum funding that will be awarded is £4,500. Funds will usually be split over ten months of the academic year and will be paid directly to the landlord/landlady.

## 9. **Childcare**

- 9.1 Learners aged under 20 at the start of their course who require assistance with childcare costs should first check their eligibility and apply for assistance via Care to Learn Care to Learn - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- 9.2 Childcare providers must be Ofsted registered. The college will support up to £180 of childcare costs per week. Payments are made based on attendance requirement at college. The College cannot pay for lessons where the learner has not attended. The Student Administration team will check the learner's attendance before authorising payment. Sickness and holidays will not be covered by the College. The College cannot pay for any retainers. Payments are made directly to the childcare provider on production of an invoice. The College also requires a signed form from the childcare provider to confirm their Ofsted registered number and the hours for which childcare has been requested.

## 10. **Payment of Funds**

Where possible, funds will be used to directly procure the agreed service on behalf of the student. For awards such as childcare, clothing and equipment, payments will be made by BACS to the student. In very exceptional circumstances where the student is unable to administer their own bank account, the college will agree an alternative payment method.

Bursary students are expected to meet the College's minimum level of attendance (85%) to be eligible for bursary awards. Attendance will be monitored throughout the year and payments may be withheld if there are no extenuating circumstances impacting their attendance.

Ref Docs:- Residential Bursary Fund guide for the 2025 to 2026 academic year/16-19 Bursary Fund guide 2025 to 2026 academic year/Free meals in further education funded institutions guide 2025 to 2026.