



Rotherham Opportunities College

16 to 19 Bursary Fund Policy

Academic Year 2026 to 2027



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Version	Date	Author	Description of Change
1	September 2026	Principal	New policy aligned to the DfE 16 to 19 Bursary Fund rules for 2026 to 2027.



1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Rotherham Opportunities College (ROC) administers the Department for Education (DfE) 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. The fund exists to help eligible students overcome specific financial barriers to participation so that they can access and remain in education.

ROC will use bursary funding only for evidenced, essential participation costs. Awards are based on each student's individual circumstances and actual financial need; eligibility alone does not create an automatic entitlement to a payment or a fixed amount.

2. Scope

This policy applies to students enrolled on eligible publicly funded education provision at ROC who meet the relevant age, residency and funding criteria. It covers both elements of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund:

- bursaries for students in defined vulnerable groups; and
- discretionary bursaries for students facing financial barriers to participation.

For the academic year 2026 to 2027, age eligibility is assessed on 31 August 2026. Students aged 16, 17 or 18 on that date may be considered for either type of bursary, subject to the relevant criteria and assessed financial need. Turning 19 during the academic year does not, by itself, remove that year's eligibility. Students aged 19 or over on 31 August 2026 may only receive a discretionary bursary if they have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or are continuing on the same study programme they began when aged 16 to 18. They are not eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary.

3. Governing Principles

- Funding will be targeted at genuine financial barriers to participation and will reflect actual, evidenced costs.
- ROC will not make blanket, flat-rate or automatic payments simply because a student meets an eligibility category.
- Where practical, ROC will provide support in kind or pay suppliers directly, rather than make unrestricted cash payments.
- ROC will avoid double funding where another body, including a local authority or the free meals in further education scheme, already meets the same cost.
- Decisions will be fair, consistent, confidential and compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and current DfE funding rules.
- All awards are subject to the funds available to ROC in the relevant academic year.

4. Eligibility

4.1 General eligibility

Students must meet the DfE age and residency requirements and be participating in eligible education provision. Eligibility and actual financial need will be checked for each academic year



in which support is requested. An EHC plan establishes an age exception for an eligible student aged 19 or over; it does not create an automatic entitlement to bursary funding.

4.2 Defined vulnerable groups

Subject to the DfE definitions and evidence requirements, the defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in care;
- care leavers;
- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own right because they are financially supporting themselves, or themselves and a dependent living with them; or
- receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in their own right, as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit in their own right.

A student in a defined vulnerable group may receive support up to the level of their assessed need. The DfE makes funding of up to £1,200 available for a student on a programme of 30 weeks or more, but ROC will not automatically claim or award £1,200. Where actual need is lower, the award will be lower; where no financial need exists, no payment will be made. Additional evidenced support above £1,200 may be considered from the discretionary allocation or ROC's own funds where permitted.

4.3 Discretionary bursary

ROC will put in place a household-income threshold for discretionary bursary allocation for each academic year. Details of the threshold, the income included in the assessment and the evidence required can be requested from ROC. The threshold supports eligibility assessment; it does not guarantee an award or determine a fixed payment amount.

ROC will use household income to establish discretionary bursary eligibility and will assess each student's actual participation costs individually. The assessment will also consider relevant circumstances, including means-tested benefits, dependants, unavoidable household costs and other financial support. Where household income exceeds the usual threshold but exceptional circumstances create an evidenced financial barrier, ROC may consider an application individually and record its reasons. Priority will be given to students with the greatest evidenced need where demand exceeds the available allocation. These assessment rules also apply to eligible students aged 19 or over.

5. What the Bursary Fund Can Pay For

ROC may use the bursary fund to meet or contribute to essential costs that the student would otherwise have to pay in order to participate in their study programme. Depending on assessed need, support may include:

- Travel to and from college, including an appropriate public transport pass or other agreed travel cost where this is the most suitable and cost-effective option.



- Essential books, learning materials and equipment required for the student's study programme.
- Specialist or protective clothing, footwear or other items that are genuinely required to access education or complete programme activities.
- Essential field trips, educational visits or learning activities that are clearly linked to the student's study programme goals or course objectives.
- Necessary costs associated with an industry placement, work experience or other required element of the study programme, including reasonable travel where not met elsewhere.
- Reasonable costs of attending a university interview or open day where this directly supports the student's progression from their study programme.
- UCAS application fees where these create an evidenced financial barrier to progression.
- Meals during the college day where there is an assessed participation need and the same cost is not already met through free meals in further education or another source.
- Exceptional clothing or footwear required to enable a student to access and continue in education, where the rationale, amount and purpose are evidenced.
- Other exceptional, essential participation costs where ROC can evidence a direct link to the student's ability to access or remain in education and the expenditure is permitted by current DfE rules.

Support may be provided through travel passes, vouchers or credits, direct purchase of required items, payment to a supplier, or a payment to the student where appropriate. Where money is paid to a student, ROC will specify the purpose for which it must be used.

6. What the Bursary Fund Will Not Pay For

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund will not be used for:

- general living costs or unrestricted household expenditure;
- learning support, high-needs provision or pastoral services that ROC is responsible for providing, such as mentoring or extra tutoring;
- non-essential or purely extra-curricular activities;
- block subsidies for the canteen, books, equipment or materials for whole cohorts regardless of individual need;
- bonus or incentive payments for attendance, behaviour or achievement;
- marketing incentives designed to encourage a student to choose ROC;
- costs that another public body or funding stream is required to meet, including duplication of a local authority's statutory transport support; or
- overseas or other trips that are not essential to the student's study programme goals or where a substantially cheaper suitable alternative would meet the same educational purpose.

7. Applications and Assessment

Students, parents/carers or their representatives may request an application form from ROC. Applications will be handled sensitively and confidentially. The student must sign the



application, and ROC may request evidence needed to confirm eligibility, household circumstances and the actual costs for which support is requested.

ROC will assess each application individually. Applications may be made throughout the year where a student's circumstances change or an unexpected financial barrier arises. ROC may retain a small proportion of its discretionary allocation as an emergency fund for such cases.

Evidence may include benefit award notices, local authority confirmation of looked-after or care-leaver status, household income evidence, travel quotations or tickets, invoices, receipts, course requirements, or other documents reasonably required to establish eligibility and actual need.

8. Awards and Payments

The Principal, or an appropriately delegated member of staff, will approve awards in accordance with this policy and ROC's financial controls. Awards will normally be made by direct purchase where this provides appropriate control and value for money. Cash payments, where used, should normally be made by BACS to the student's own bank account.

ROC will confirm each decision in writing, including the amount and purpose of support, how and when it will be provided, and any conditions relating to attendance, receipts or return of reusable equipment. ROC will explain the value of support provided in kind. ROC will not make large or lump-sum cash bursary payments.

ROC may link ongoing support to reasonable attendance and behaviour expectations. ROC will make these conditions clear and retain evidence that the student has seen and agreed to them. Decisions to withhold support will take account of individual circumstances, including disability-related barriers and reasonable adjustments. The bursary will not be used as an attendance incentive. Where absence means an actual cost is not incurred, a related payment may be adjusted or withheld.

9. SEND, Transport and Other Funding

As a specialist SEND college, ROC will take particular care to distinguish bursary support from funding that should meet a student's special educational needs, high-needs support, reasonable adjustments, social care or statutory transport entitlement. The bursary may support an eligible student with an additional essential participation cost only where that cost is permitted by the DfE rules and is not already met from another source.

When considering travel support, ROC will have regard to the relevant local authority post-16 transport statement and any transport assistance already available to the student. Bursary funding will not be used to replace a local authority's statutory transport duty.

10. Administration, Records and Audit

ROC may use up to 5% of its discretionary bursary allocation for permitted administration costs. The remainder will be used for student support in accordance with the DfE rules.



ROC will maintain an auditable record at student level, including eligibility evidence, the assessment of actual need, the amount and purpose of each award, approvals and payments. Expenditure must be supported by receipts. For regular travel or meal costs, ROC may retain initial receipts and a calculation of expected costs, with subsequent payments linked to actual attendance, as permitted by DfE guidance. Records will be retained in line with DfE requirements and ROC's records management and financial procedures.

Unspent and recycled funds will be managed in accordance with current DfE rules. Bursary funding must not be carried forward for more than one year. ROC will report unspent funding that must be returned as soon as it is identified and no later than 31 March each year. ROC will make defined vulnerable group funding claims through the applicable DfE process after verifying eligibility and assessing actual need, and will record eligible students with no financial need as 'zero bursary' students in the required funding claims and data returns.

11. Fraud, Incorrect Information and Recovery

Applicants must provide information that is complete and accurate to the best of their knowledge. Where false or incomplete information results in an incorrect award or overpayment, ROC may stop future support and seek recovery of funds.

12. Review of Decisions

A student or their parent/carer may ask for a bursary decision to be reviewed where they believe relevant information was not considered or their circumstances have changed. The request should explain the reason for review and provide any additional evidence. The review will be undertaken by a senior member of staff who was not the original decision-maker wherever practicable. The outcome will be confirmed in writing.

If a student or parent/carer remains dissatisfied, they may use ROC's complaints procedure. Complaints will be escalated through ROC's usual arrangements. The DfE does not normally determine individual bursary decisions or appeals.

13. Responsibilities

- The Board of Trustees is responsible for approving this policy and receiving appropriate assurance that bursary funding is administered lawfully and effectively.
- The Principal is responsible for ensuring that suitable application, assessment, approval and financial control arrangements are in place.
- Staff administering the fund are responsible for consistent assessment, confidentiality, accurate records and compliance with current DfE rules.
- Students and, where applicable, parents/carers are responsible for providing accurate information and using any bursary support only for the agreed purpose.

14. Legislative and Regulatory Framework

This policy is informed by the Department for Education 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide for the 2026 to 2027 academic year, the associated funding agreement and assurance requirements,



and the Equality Act 2010. Current DfE funding rules take precedence if they change during the life of this policy.

15. Publication, Monitoring and Review

ROC will publish this policy on its website so that prospective and current students, parents and carers can understand the support available and how decisions are made. Information about how to apply will be made available alongside the policy. The threshold and criteria can also be requested directly from ROC.

The policy will be reviewed at least annually, and sooner where DfE funding rules, legislation or ROC's funding arrangements change.