16-19 Bursary Fund Academic Year 2026

Policy and Process

This policy explains how VLUK will use our bursary fund, the criteria applied to determine which learners are eligible and the terms and conditions involved.

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help learners overcome the specific financial barriers to participation they may face so they can remain in education. The funds should be used for the essential costs of participating in their programme of study.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

1. bursaries for defined vulnerable groups
2. discretionary bursaries

The bursary fund is not intended to support costs not related to education (e.g living costs), extra-curricular activities or provide learning support. Both types of bursary funding (discretionary and defined vulnerable groups) are designed to help learners overcome the individual financial barriers to participation.

Funds are available for the current academic year only, any learners who continue into the 2027/2028 academic year must re-apply for possible bursaries.

All payments are made either in kind or directly into the learner's named bank account, and not to any other person or by any other method.

Evidence must be obtained to support any funds awarded and copies kept for audit purposes, for a minimum of 6 years.

As funds are limited and can't be guaranteed, applications should be submitted with evidence of income by 2nd October 2026. Late applications will still be reviewed but can't be guaranteed.

Application and Decision Process

Learners are invited to apply for the bursary fund via the "VLUK 16 to 19 Bursary Fund Application AY26" form. All applications will be treated confidentially.

Year 13 learners who were in receipt of a bursary in 2025/26 can complete the "VLUK 16 to 19 Bursary Fund Application AY26 for returning learners" form. A signed/dated self-declaration from the learner that their household circumstances/income and requirements have not changed is required rather than evidence of household income. If circumstances have changed a new application is required.

A learner must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026 to be eligible for help from the bursary fund in the 2026/2027 academic year.

Learners aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a discretionary bursary if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

Learners must be enrolled on an eligible VLUK programme and meet the residency criteria before their application is reviewed.

Learners who meet the criteria for the vulnerable group, and who have a financial need for support, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable learners. All other learners should apply for the discretionary bursary.

The defined vulnerable groups are learners who are:

- in care
- care leavers
- receiving Income Support (IS), or Universal Credit (UC) 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 (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP) in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or UC in their own right

Vulnerable group learners are not subject to a household income assessment.

Once the application is received for either bursary, evidence is reviewed to confirm

- relevant funds for which the applicant is eligible (vulnerable or discretionary)
- age of learner
- enrolment on suitable VLUK programme
- residency criteria is met
- evidence of meeting vulnerable group status (if applicable)
- evidence of household income (must be under **£45,000** per year) for discretionary bursary applications

Applications are then reviewed, involving carrying out a financial needs assessment to confirm actual financial need and amount of support required. A separate form must be completed for a one off cost application.

Without the correct evidence the application will not be considered.

Each application is reviewed on an individual basis based on the actual need of that learner.

Bursary awards will be made to help learners with the costs of travel, to buy essential equipment, to pay for lunches, or specialist clothing (such as football kit, dance shoes etc). These are items the learner would otherwise need to pay for to participate, and are essential course-related costs.

Learners can apply for an ongoing bursary to cover food and/or travel costs, and/or a one off bursary to contribute to the cost of equipment that is necessary for the course.

Ongoing bursary is paid monthly, a month in arrears. The one off bursary is paid from October subject to evidence of receipts being received, and then on an ongoing needs only basis.

The bursary is not intended to cover all costs associated with learning, but is a contribution towards those costs.

VLUK will use household income in conjunction with other factors, such as method of travel to campus and the number of dependent children in the household, as well as the actual financial needs the learner has to make a decision on the amount of bursary awarded.

Travel awards will only be made if the learner lives over 1.5 miles from the campus (as measured using google maps for walking), and within 30 miles of the campus.

If a learner travels by car, petrol costs will only be awarded in exceptional circumstances calculated at 36p per mile. The learner must provide receipts for this to be considered.

A payment towards food will be limited to £4.50 per day that the learner is on campus for education, and the amount awarded for one off bursaries for equipment etc will be limited to £250.00 per learner.

Although a learner (vulnerable group or not) may be eligible for a bursary, if they do not have any actual financial need, e.g. their financial needs are already met or they have no costs then there is the possibility of no award or a limited award.

The Bursary Fund Learner Response

All learners who apply for a bursary will be responded to via email communicating the outcome of their application.

If successful the amount of bursary will be confirmed along with what types of costs it should cover, for example, travel. VLUK will confirm how the costs will be paid, in kind or by payments to their bank account.

Terms and conditions attached to the funding,e.g. attendance, when receipts are to be provided or the return of equipment at the end of the study programme, for example, will also be noted.

For each payment period learners will receive their full bursary for food and travel costs if their attendance is above 90%. If attendance is below 90% learners will only receive bursary for food and travel for the days actually attended.

VLUK insists that learners only spend the bursary payments on the support that has been identified as necessary to help them participate in education, specifying learners can only use the funds to pay for travel costs and/or a meal during the day, to buy equipment or any other support that has been agreed.

To support this, for new applications, learners will be requested to provide receipts to confirm costs of travel/food etc when they apply for the bursary and may be asked to submit further receipts again in February 2027. Returning learners will have to provide receipts by November 2026. Failure to submit receipts may result in bursary payments being ceased. VLUK can also request to see receipts at any point during the academic year. We will write to Learners in advance requesting receipts for a five day consecutive period.

Where an application has not been successful the learners will also be emailed explaining why.

If there is a change in circumstances and the learner re-applies for the bursary then a new confirmation email will be sent confirming any change in award and the date this is from.

Back pay may be limited to 4 weeks from the date an application is received if after 2nd October 2026.

Payments

Payments are made via BACS on or by the following dates:-
15th October 2026
10th November 2026
10th December 2026
8th January 2027
10th February 2027
10th March 2027
9th April 2027
10th May 2027
10th June 2027
9th July 2027

Payments are made a month in arrears, e.g. a payment to cover costs from September is made in October.

Please be advised that this date serves as an estimate, and actual payment dates may occasionally fluctuate.

Please note that if any of the payment dates fall on a weekend or public Bank Holiday, payment will be made prior to this date.

Other considerations

Learners are entitled to Free School Meal funding if they are 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 guarantee 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
- UC with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year (after tax and not including any benefits they get)

Learners should highlight on the application form if they qualify for free school meals, a payment of £4.50 per day will be paid to those that are eligible.

Whilst the bursary can be used for transport costs, it does not replace the statutory transport duty local authorities have. Each local authority must publish an annual transport statement that sets out the arrangements they will make to facilitate participation in education or training for students aged 16 to 19.

Any learner or parent/carer who is unhappy with how VLUK have managed their application for bursary funding should follow our complaints procedure.

Any questions or issues regarding the bursary fund should in the first instance be directed to Gemma Halsey, Director of Operations - gemma.halsey@vluk.org

Evidence that can be used

Vulnerable

- For learners who are in care or a care leaver, written confirmation of their current or previous looked-after status from the relevant local authority – this is the local authority that looks after them or provides their leaving care services. The evidence could be a letter or an email but must be clearly from the local authority.
- For learners in receipt of UC or IS, a copy of their UC or IS award notice. This must clearly state that the claim is in the learner's name/confirm they are entitled to the benefits in their own right. The evidence must not state any conditions that prevent them from participating in further education or training. For learners in receipt of UC, we must also see a document such as a tenancy agreement in the learner's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificates, utility bills and so on.
- For learners receiving UC/ESA and DLA and PIP, a copy of their UC award notice from DWP and evidence of receipt of DLA or PIP.
- UC claimants can print off details of their award from their online account or provide a screenshot.

Discretionary

- Universal Credit - all pages of the 3 most recent monthly award statements.
- Tax Credits - All pages of the most recent Tax Credit Award Notice.
- Other benefits - A letter dated within the past 3 months evidencing receipt of one of the following: Income Support, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance, Child benefit, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit If your household does not receive income-related benefits.
- Salary / Earnings - Last 3 months payslips. If self-employed – all pages of the HMRC tax bill for the previous year.

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