

Bursary Policy

2026/27 Academic Year

Developing Skills. Changing Lives.

This policy explains how Central Training Academy (CTA) assesses and administers financial support for eligible learners who face specific financial barriers to participation.

Policy control

Control	Detail
Policy owner	Board
Approved by	Board
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Academic year	2026/27
Discretionary income limit	£50,000 gross annual household income
Contact	bursary@centraltraininggroup.com

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1. Introduction

CTA receives funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to provide financial support to eligible learners who face specific financial barriers to participation. The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund helps with essential participation costs such as travel, essential books, specialist equipment or clothing required for a study programme.

The fund must not be used for general living costs, non-essential or extra-curricular activities, or learning support and pastoral services that CTA would ordinarily provide.

- Bursary for defined vulnerable groups
- Discretionary bursary
- Apprenticeships care leavers bursary under the separate apprenticeship scheme
- Free meals in further education
- Temporary emergency or exceptional hardship support where permitted

All decisions are subject to eligibility, an individual assessment of actual need, sufficient evidence and the funding available.

2. Eligibility

For support from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund in 2026/27, a learner must normally:

- be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026;
- meet the applicable DfE residency criteria;
- be enrolled on eligible, publicly funded education provision at CTA; and
- have evidenced essential costs that create a financial barrier to participation.

A learner aged 19 or over is eligible for a discretionary bursary only where they have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or are continuing on the same study programme that they began aged 16 to 18. Learners aged 19 or over are not eligible for the defined vulnerable group bursary.

Apprentices and learners on other waged training are employed and are not eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund. Eligible care-experienced apprentices may instead qualify for the separate apprenticeships care leavers bursary described in section 6.

3. Definition of care and care leavers

'In care' means a child or young person looked after by a local authority on a voluntary basis under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or under a care order made under section 31 of that Act.

For the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, a care leaver is a young person who meets the definition in the current DfE guidance, including the relevant period of local-authority care from age 14 and care status after their 16th birthday.

4. Bursary for defined vulnerable groups

Eligible groups are learners who are:

- in care;
- care leavers;
- receiving Income Support or Universal Credit in their own right because they financially support themselves, or themselves and a dependent living with them; or
- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit, with all relevant benefits received in their own right.

Support may be up to £1,200 per academic year for a programme of 30 weeks or more, but CTA will not automatically award or claim £1,200. The award will reflect the learner's evidenced actual participation costs, programme length and hours. Where assessed need exceeds £1,200, additional support must be met from discretionary bursary or CTA funds and separately evidenced.

5. Discretionary bursary

CTA may award discretionary bursary support where a learner has an identifiable financial barrier to attendance or participation.

CTA household income limit

A learner may apply where gross annual household income is £50,000 or below. Meeting this limit does not create an automatic entitlement to an award.

CTA will decide the nature and value of any award after considering actual need, the evidence supplied, household circumstances, essential participation costs and the funding available. Exceptional hardship above the limit may be considered under section 8.

Assessment factors

- gross household income and benefits;
- distance, frequency and cost of travel;
- dependants and caring responsibilities;
- essential books, equipment, uniform, protective equipment or specialist clothing;
- other necessary programme-related costs; and
- other support available to the learner.

Awards may be made in-kind, through direct purchase, travel passes, vouchers or reimbursement. Cash payments will be used only where appropriate and supported by a clear audit trail. CTA will not make unsupported flat or fixed-rate awards.

Clothing and footwear

Where clothing or footwear is essential for participation, CTA may reimburse reasonable actual costs supported by evidence. General wardrobe purchases, fashion items and non-essential accessories are excluded. As a CTA guideline, footwear support is capped at £60 per learner per academic year unless exceptional evidenced circumstances justify a higher amount.

6. Apprenticeships care leavers bursary

This separate bursary is available to eligible apprentices who are or have been in care and were under 25 when they started their apprenticeship. For eligible starts on or after 1 August 2023, the bursary is £3,000, paid in three £1,000 instalments during the first year, subject to current apprenticeship funding rules and evidence requirements. An apprentice may receive this bursary only once.

7. Free meals in further education

CTA will make a free meal available on each appropriate attendance day to eligible learners. A learner must be aged 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2026, or be aged over 19 and either have an EHC plan or continue on the same study programme started before age 19.

For 2026/27, qualifying benefits include:

- Universal Credit, without an earnings threshold for this entitlement;
- Income Support;
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance;
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance;
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
- the guarantee element of Pension Credit;
- Child Tax Credit where the claimant is not entitled to Working Tax Credit and meets the applicable annual gross income threshold; and
- Working Tax Credit run-on paid for four weeks after Working Tax Credit ends.

Transitional protections ended at the end of 2025/26. Eligibility must be based on current qualifying circumstances and checked at least annually. Free meals eligibility is separate from bursary eligibility.

8. Emergency and hardship support

In cases of severe hardship, CTA may temporarily provide meal or travel support on attendance days before the usual household income and evidence checks are complete. This arrangement is limited to food or travel, should apply only in exceptional cases, and must be followed by a full discretionary bursary assessment.

CTA will retain the learner's signed confirmation of receipt and records of the reason, dates, number of supported days and value provided. CTA may also consider exceptional hardship where evidenced hardship would otherwise prevent participation. Decisions must be individually authorised and recorded.

9. Evidence and assessment

Applicants must provide sufficient current evidence to confirm eligibility, household circumstances and actual need. Evidence may include:

- confirmation of care status from a local authority, social worker or key worker;
- Universal Credit statements, benefit letters, payslips, P60s or other household income evidence;
- course information confirming required equipment, clothing or other costs;
- travel quotations, tickets, receipts or fare information; and
- receipts, invoices or itemised evidence for approved purchases.

CTA may check household income annually or once at the beginning of a typical two-year study programme. Where a full annual check is not repeated, the learner must provide a signed and dated declaration confirming that household circumstances have not changed. Actual need must still be reassessed each academic year.

10. Receipts and expenditure evidence

Receipts form part of the evidence required for audit and assurance. For one-off items, including kits, books, uniforms and equipment, a valid receipt or invoice must normally be provided for each purchase.

For recurring travel or food costs, CTA may retain initial evidence of the unit cost and calculate expected reimbursement by reference to planned and actual attendance. CTA may request refreshed evidence during the year, including in January 2027, to confirm that calculations remain accurate.

Questions and evidence should be sent to bursary@centraltraininggroup.com.

11. Payments

- Payments will normally be made by BACS to the learner's nominated bank account, or support will be provided in-kind or paid directly to a supplier.
- The learner must complete and sign the current CTA Bursary Application Form and any declarations required.
- Awards and payment frequency will reflect assessed actual need and attendance-related costs.

- Payments will stop when the learner withdraws. After four or more continuous weeks of absence, excluding scheduled holidays, CTA will review whether relevant participation costs continue to arise.
- Overpayments or payments made on materially incorrect information may be recovered.

12. Attendance, engagement and behaviour

Bursary support exists to remove financial barriers to participation. Payment of attendance-related costs may be linked to actual attendance, but CTA will not apply an automatic blanket sanction without considering individual circumstances.

CTA may review, suspend or adjust support where attendance, engagement or behaviour gives cause for concern. Before making a decision, CTA will consider disability, health needs, safeguarding concerns, caring responsibilities, authorised absence, reasonable adjustments and whether the bursary is needed to improve participation. The learner will be informed of the reason and right to appeal.

13. Audit, records and unspent funds

CTA will retain auditable records of applications, eligibility evidence, actual-needs assessments, authorisations, receipts or invoices, attendance-linked calculations, payments, emergency support and appeals. Records will demonstrate the type, purpose and amount of each award.

Bursary and free meals funding cannot be carried forward for more than one year. CTA will identify and report relevant unspent funds to DfE through the required process by the applicable deadline and maintain reconciliation records.

14. Complaints and appeals

A learner may ask for a bursary decision to be reviewed by contacting the Bursary Administrator at bursary@centraltraininggroup.com. The request should explain why the decision should be reconsidered and include any additional evidence.

The review will be undertaken by a manager or panel not responsible for the original decision wherever practicable. CTA will communicate the outcome and reasons in writing. If the learner remains dissatisfied, they may use CTA's complaints procedure. Appeals do not guarantee an award and remain subject to eligibility and available funds.

15. Policy review and references

This policy will be reviewed in August 2027, or earlier where DfE or other applicable funding guidance changes. Current funding rules take precedence where they conflict with this policy.

- DfE: 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide, 2026 to 2027, updated 7 September 2026.
- DfE: Free meals in further education funded institutions guide, academic year 2026 to 2027, updated 30 June 2026.
- Government guidance: Apprenticeships care leavers bursary guidance and current apprenticeship funding rules.