

# Guidance Handbook

## **16 to 18 Education: Free meals**

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## Section 1: Introduction

Maintained school and academy sixth-forms are required by the Education Act 1996 to provide free meals to disadvantaged students who are aged over 16. In the 2014 to 2015 academic year this requirement was extended to disadvantaged students following FE courses at the range of FE funded institutions. Funding Agreements have been amended to place a legal duty on institutions to comply with this requirement.

This guide is intended to support those institutions in providing, and administering, free meals in line with the requirement.

### ➤ Section 2: Residency Criteria

In order to apply for free meals you (the student) must declare your residency status. You will need to fall into one of the categories below listed A TO F. Along with your completed application form, you will need to provide proof of the category chosen.

Category (Please Tick)	Residency Criteria
A <input type="checkbox"/>	I am a British Citizen and have lived in the UK for at least three years prior to the start of my learning programme.
B <input type="checkbox"/>	I have 'Settled Status'* and have been ordinarily resident in the UK for at least three years prior to the start of my learning programme.
C <input type="checkbox"/>	I am a National of an EU Country or child of an EU National and have been ordinarily resident in the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland for at least three years prior to the start of my learning programme.
D <input type="checkbox"/>	I am the child of an EEA migrant worker or the child of a Swiss National or the child of a Turkish Migrant Worker and have been ordinarily resident in the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland for at least three years prior to the start of my learning programme.

E <input type="checkbox"/>	I am the child of a refugee who has been granted Humanitarian protection, or have temporary EU protection.
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*\*‘Settled Status’ means having either indefinite leave to enter or remain or having the right of abode in the UK.*

### ➤ **Section 3: Student Eligibility**

#### **Age**

Students must be aged between 16 and 18 on 31 August prior to starting their course in September/January of each academic year to be eligible for a free meal in that academic year. Students who turn 19 during their study programme will remain eligible for a free meal until the end of the academic year in which they turn 19 or to the end of their study programme, whichever is sooner.

Students aged 19 to 24 who are subject to an Education Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan) are also entitled to a free meal while attending their provision if they meet the eligibility criteria.

The following groups of students are not eligible for free meals in further education support:

- students aged between 14 and 16 (these students are already covered by different provision, that is Free School Meals (FSM))
- students aged 19 or over at the start of their study programme, unless they have an EHC Plan
- apprentices, including those with an EHC Plan

## ➤ **Section 4: Eligible Benefits**

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. For the purposes of eligibility for free meals, disadvantage is defined by the students being in receipt of, or having 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
- during the initial roll out of the benefit, Universal Credit

### **Vulnerable Students**

- In care – Income support/Universal Credit
- Leaving Care – Income support/Universal Credit

If you are in care or you are leaving care a letter from the local authority or your social worker would also need to be provided to support your application.

- Living Independently – Income Support/Universal Credit

## ➤ **Section 5: Verification of Student Eligibility**

A student is only eligible to receive a free meal when they, or a parent/guardian on their behalf, have made a successful application to the institution where they are enrolled.

As part of the application, you the student (or your parent/guardian) would need to provide current evidence of the award of the qualifying benefits, for example an award notice or letter from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) or HMRC. **Financial assistance application forms are available from Student Services across the Shrewsbury College Group.**

### ➤ **Section 6: Raising Awareness of free meals**

New students will receive information about **applying for financial assistance** along with their enrolment letter. Student Services will be available throughout the academic year and at any advice or open events for support. **Students who wish to apply for free meals are expected to return their financial assistance application form with supporting evidence of their income or any benefits they qualify for.** Free College meals will also be promoted throughout the academic year on Moodle and on the college group websites.

### ➤ **Section 7: The provision of free meals to students**

Institutions are required to make provision for free meals to eligible students (ie those who are in receipt of the qualifying benefits and who make a successful application for financial assistance) for each day that the student attends their study programme at college.

The free meals will be distributed to each eligible student in the form of a token. The government has allocated £2.41 per day for each eligible student for the days that they attend college, however Shrewsbury Colleges Group have enhanced the £2.41 free meals funding rate to a greater value of £3.00 a day. In addition, students can use their own cash to pay for the cost of food and drink where it exceeds the stated amount.

### **Catering for students with special dietary requirements**

It is the responsibility of the student to inform Student Services of any food allergies and/or intolerances where medical evidence is supplied.

## ➤ **Section 8: Legal Requirements**

Students and parents/carers must ensure that they complete the application and provide all of the relevant information to the best of their knowledge. If information is falsified and this is discovered the parent/carer will be liable to repay the free college meal award in full.

## **Section 9: Application Process**

Financial assistance application forms are available at Student Services across the Shrewsbury Colleges Group. They are also available to download from both college websites and can be accessed from Moodle.

You the student/parent/guardian are required to complete the application form as accurately as possible and to provide documentary evidence that can be photocopied of either your or your parents/carers household income and any qualifying benefits. Once this has been completed and your household evidence has been assessed for eligibility, a letter will be written to you to confirm the outcome of your application.

## **Section 10: Appeals**

If you have reason to disagree with the decision made on your financial assistance application form, please contact Student Services at either:

Shrewsbury College: 01743 342323/342321 [studentservices@shrewsbury.ac.uk](mailto:studentservices@shrewsbury.ac.uk)

Shrewsbury Sixth Form College: 01743 235491 [adminteam@ssfc.ac.uk](mailto:adminteam@ssfc.ac.uk)

**PLEASE NOTE:** You will have 7 days beginning from the day you received the decision on your application from to exercise your right to appeal. Appeals will be considered by the Student Services Manager and written confirmation outlining the outcome of your appeal will be sent within 10-14 days of the appeal being considered.

If you require further help or advice from your designated college, please use the contact details above and we will respond to your enquiry as a soon as possible.