

Free College Meal (FCM) Policy

Policy for the disbursement of
Free College Meals 2020/2021

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Reviewed: July 2020

Next review: July 2021

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1. Overview

- 1.1. Further Education and independent learner providers are required by law to provide Free College Meals (FCM) to qualifying disadvantaged 16 – 24 year olds. The Isle of Wight College has developed a procedure and application process in order to provide all eligible students with FCM and an administration process to track and monitor those in receipt of FCM.

2. The Isle of Wight College commitment

- 2.1. The Isle of Wight College has devised a procedure and application process that is clear and informative to students enabling an easy application for FCM.
- 2.2. The Isle of Wight College raises awareness of FCM by publishing a statement on the College website, and provides information regarding FCM in the start letter sent to all students before their first term starts. Information is also included in the College Student Handbook.
- 2.3. A set of rules have been produced providing clear instructions on how to use the FCM allowance (either in voucher form or as part of a Student ID Card). Please see section 8: 'College FCM Allowance Guidance and Rules'.
- 2.4. The College works closely with partners (including franchise providers (e.g. UKSA and Platform One) and the College's contract catering provider to ensure eligible students can access FCM.

3. Eligibility assessment criteria for free college meals (FCM)

- 3.1. Students must be aged 16-24 years on the 31st August 2020, must satisfy the residency criteria as set out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), and must be on an eligible course (e.g. Apprenticeships cannot access FCM).
- 3.2. A student's household or a student who is in receipt of benefits in their own right (i.e. they get benefit payments direct, instead of through a parent or carer) must be in receipt of one of the following:
 - Income support
 - Income-based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
 - Child Tax Credit (provided that 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)
 - Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400pa.
 - Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Working Tax Credit is not a qualifying benefit for free meals, and a parent or student in receipt of Working Tax Credits, contribution-based Job Seekers Allowance or contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance alone, is not entitled to FCM. However, if the student's household or student is in receipt of Working Tax Credit but is additionally in receipt of one of the entitling benefits listed above, for example income support, they would then be entitled to FCM. In other words, receipt of one of the qualifying benefits listed in the eligibility section essentially over-rides any additional benefits they may be in receipt of.

For further information about eligibility for FCM please see: [16 to 19 funding: free meals in further education funded institutions for 2020 to 2021](#)

- 3.3. In addition to the above benefits criteria students age 19+ must also meet one of the following:
 - Have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) or
 - Be a 19+ Continuer (i.e. on the second year of a course started when aged 16-18).
- 3.4. Students who have a 16-18 Vulnerable Bursary and who are not already eligible for FCM can opt to have these from their bursary.
- 3.5. Under exceptional circumstances, students may be given FCM after a discussion with one of the student Pastoral and Progress Advisors (PPA) or a designated staff member and following their completion of an Exceptional Circumstances Form. This may be for students who are not eligible for Free College Meals in the usual way or for FCM eligible students to have more than the usual £3 allowance.
- 3.6. Eligibility criteria introduced under Universal Credit from 1 April 2018 will result in some households becoming eligible for free meals and others falling outside of the eligibility criteria. Department of Education has put transitional protection arrangements in place to provide certainty for families and ensure they do not experience a sudden loss of free meals. In order for students not to experience a sudden loss of FCM, the College will adhere to the rules of transitional protection set down by the Department for Education. We may check with a student's previous educational institution where we have a data sharing agreement if they were in receipt of Free Meals previously in order to provide them with transitionally protected FCM.
- 3.7. The government guidance states that the transitional protection arrangements apply as follows:
 - all students already receiving free meals at 1 April 2018 will continue to receive free meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This will apply even if their household earnings rise above the new threshold during that time
 - any student who becomes eligible for free meals after the threshold has been introduced will also continue to receive free meals during the Universal Credit rollout. This will apply even if they subsequently become ineligible

during this period because their household earnings rise above the new threshold.

4. Application process

- 4.1. Application forms for FCM are part of the 16+ Bursary application (i.e. not the Advanced Learning Loans Application Form) which is available to download from the College website or to collect from Student Services.
- 4.2. Students are required to complete the form and provide all the evidence requested demonstrating eligibility for FCM. Copies of evidence are retained for future reference and audit purposes.
- 4.3. Completed bursary application forms should be submitted to Student Services where eligibility will be checked and confirmed by the team.

5. Procedures

- 5.1. Upon confirmation of eligibility, students may be issued with FCM vouchers in the first instance. These will be issued as soon as possible once all correct evidence has been verified and copied. Once students have been enrolled on to their course and individual Student ID Cards (including photo ID) have been issued their vouchers will be replaced with a card loaded with credits for FCM.
- 5.2. By submitting an application to receive FCM, a student is agreeing to abide by the guidance and rules of the FCM scheme. Once it has been confirmed that students are eligible, a copy of the guidance will be emailed to them.
- 5.3. Occasionally, it will be deemed appropriate for vouchers or ID Cards (also referred to as FCM credits or FCM allowance in general terms in this document) to be issued to the curriculum manager or learning support staff in the course area to distribute to students. Student Services will work very closely with the Pathways department to ensure that students who are entitled to FCM receive it. For example, if students are not able to come to the Student Services Office and collect their FCM themselves, alternative appropriate arrangements will be made.
- 5.4. Both vouchers and ID Card spending on FCM will be linked to a tracking system to meet audit requirements.
- 5.5. ID Cards belonging to students who have been withdrawn or who are on a planned break from study will be deactivated and can only be re-activated by the reinstatement of an enrolment, or by an exceptional override authorised by a member of the Student Services Team.
- 5.6. Students enrolled at franchise providers (UKSA and Platform One) will be issued with Student ID Cards for ID purposes, but FCM will be tracked separately because they will use alternative catering facilities to those provided on the main college campus at Newport and at CECAMM. Student Services will liaise with UKSA and

Platform One to ensure that students who are eligible for FCM are identified and can access their entitlement. This will continue to be tracked by the Student Services team.

- 5.7. Anyone eligible for FCM identified through evidence submitted with their bursary form will automatically be provided with FCM unless they choose to opt out by letting Student Services know that they do not want to access this support.
- 5.8. If an FCM student loses their ID Card they can request a replacement. The replacement fee will be paid from bursary funds.

6. Entitlement

- 6.1. Students are entitled to a FCM, on days they attend for timetabled study or participate in structured online or distance learning in the event that they cannot access the College. The College has chosen to give students a £3 FCM allowance every day regardless of the time of study (i.e. if a class finishes at 11:30am the student will still receive FCM for that day).
- 6.2. The value of an FCM per day is up to the value of £3 at all sites. The college decided to top up the £2.41 FCM allowance by 59p per day from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund.
- 6.3. Wherever possible students in receipt of FCM will have the option of a hot, healthy meal. Due to ongoing social distancing measures required due to the coronavirus pandemic, on occasion alternative catering arrangements may have to be put in place, for example the provision of 'take away' packed lunches.
- 6.4. Students are entitled to FCM when they attend an external work placement, timetabled work-related activities offsite or study remotely online or via distance learning in the event that they cannot access the college campus, please refer to section 9.
- 6.5. On occasion the College may need to use its discretion to make payments direct to students (i.e. via BACs or cheque) if it believes that failing to do so would prevent an eligible student from being provided with a meal. This will only be in exceptional circumstances and must be approved by a director or member of the SMT. Where such decisions are made a record will be retained for audit purposes.

7. Administration process

- 7.1. The College will track and record all FCM recipients and hold on file for 6 years the evidence obtained confirming eligibility and usage.
- 7.2. Student Services will work closely with the college catering service manager/area manager and CECAMM chef/manager ensuring that FCM credits are being used correctly, and will meet regularly to confirm the total expenditure for FCM.

Vouchers will be recorded on a spreadsheet and Student ID Card usage tracked online.

- 7.3. UKSA and Platform One will regularly send to the College Student Services team details of expenditure on FCM.

8. College FCM Allowance Guidance and Rules

- 8.1. Students (or an appropriate person) will sign a declaration when they initially receive their FCM allowance and confirm that they understand and will adhere to the guidance and rules. A copy will be given to the students.

9. Work placement, students studying at franchise partners and times when students cannot access the college site

- 9.1. Students in receipt of FCM can use their entitlement on work placement days and / or when attending timetabled work-related activities off the College site(s). Students will be awarded an allowance in arrears to the value £3 per day they attended. Tutors must confirm work placement timetables and attendance before the allowance can be issued which will enable the Bursary Team to process payment.
- 9.2. Payments if the College were closed for classroom learning due to Coronavirus (COVID-19): If it is not possible for students to attend the college campus for learning and instead they participate in online or distance learning, they will be awarded a weekly allowance of £9, based on a daily allowance of £3 multiplied by an average of 3 days participation in learning per week. This will be paid electronically into their nominated bank account.
- 9.3. The College will closely monitor and review how it funds FCM for students on work placements and this policy and procedure may be subject to further amendment depending upon the outcome of these reviews.
- 9.4. Students studying at UKSA may use their FCM allowance in their restaurant and those at Platform One may utilise the catering facility provided on the Platform One site; the value of these will be up to £3.
- 9.5. Students undertaking realistic work simulation at the College outside of normal College catering opening hours may be provided with a meal at the £3 rate. This will be agreed on a case by case basis.

10. Appeals process and complaints

- 10.1. Learners can appeal against a decision of an initial assessment regarding funding. In the first instance a learner or parent should speak to the Senior Student Information Advisor who will try to resolve their query or concern. If the matter remains

unresolved concerns regarding the administration, management of distribution of the bursaries should be submitted through the College complaints procedure.

Appendix

General guidance and rules

- You can use up to £3 per day for Free College Meals (FCM).
- If you choose to spend more than £3 per day, you will need to pay the difference yourself.
- You should only use FCM on days that you are timetabled to attend College
- FCM allow you to access **Hot and Healthy Food** whilst at College, so please take care to select these options.
- **You will not be able to purchase any drinks at the Courtyard Café, The Lounge (Starbucks) or The Pod at the main college and also at CECAMM unless they are part of a Meal Deal. There is free water available on site.**
- The FCM allowance issued is only valid for your use and cannot be used by anyone other than yourself. You must not sell or give away your vouchers, or items purchased with your FCM allowance or allow another person / student to use it.
- Please be aware that checks will be made, to monitor how you are using your FCM allowance.

FCM paper vouchers

- Voucher books are issued by the Student Services Team at the beginning of your course until your Student ID card is printed and loaded with credit for you.
- FCM vouchers can be used at the Courtyard Café, The Lounge (Starbucks), The Pod at the main college and also at CECAMM.
- If using a voucher to purchase items, you must show some form of identity when you present your voucher and you can only use 1 paper voucher per day.
- If you lose your student ID card you may be given a paper voucher to use for that day.
- If you leave prior to the issue of a card, you must return any unused FCM vouchers to Student Services.

FCM using Student ID card

- Your student card can be used at the Courtyard Café, The Lounge (Starbucks), The Pod at the main college and also at CECAMM.
- If using your Student ID Card you must hand this to the staff at the till when purchasing items. The card allows you to spend £3 over a number of purchases in one day, i.e. you can buy a number of items, at different times up to a value of £3.
- If you lose your Student ID Card or please come to Student Services as we may be able to pay the Student ID Card replacement fee for you.
- At the end of each day, any credit you have not spent will be removed from your FCM account and will not be 'rolled over' to the next day.
- If you leave or finish your course, your student ID card will be disabled.

Platform One or UKSA students:

- If you are at Platform One or UKSA you can access Free Meals to the value of £3 per day – please speak to Student Services to let you know how this works.

External Placements:

- If you are required to undertake work placements away from the College as part of your course, please advise Students Services as soon as possible so that arrangements can be put in place for your FCM.
- You may be able to claim £3 per day that you attended placement. We will need confirmation from your tutor or eTrackr log for how many days you have attended.
- Payments for external placements will be paid in arrears into your bank account so we will need your bank details.