



## FREE MEAL POLICY

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This policy meets all the requirements of SEN and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice. It will be reviewed annually or when there is a change in circumstances, in work practices or the introduction of new legislation.

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# 1. Introduction

LifeBridge ASEND is a Specialist Post-19 Institution and is committed to delivering an educational offer that is tailored to meet the holistic needs of each learner. We provide education, enrichment and vocational opportunities to young adults between the ages of 19 and 25 with special educational needs and disabilities.

We embrace our statutory duty to fulfil our obligations under the Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice (2015) for those aged 19- 25 and are committed to making every effort to meet the needs of the young person. Allocation of places is based on ascertaining the individual needs of the applicant, their goals and aspirations to ensure we can provide an education programme to meet their requirements.

## 2. Policy Statement

The Department for Education provides funding for the provision of free meals for learners who qualify for assistance. For the academic year 2023 to 2024 the rate set is £2.41 per student per meal taken. The meal is provided for the days where a learner attends college over a lunchtime period or is on an external work placement.

Where necessary, reasonable adjustments will be made for special dietary requirements.

## 3. Awarding criteria for Free Meals

In accordance with the ESFA guidance, institutions must verify that learners meet the criteria in full as outlined below.

To be eligible for free meals, learners must:

- Be enrolled on a funded further education programme, have a right to study
- Be aged 19+ with an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan
- Either the learner (in their own right) or their parents/carers must be 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 guaranteed 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 HMRC)
  - Working Tax Credit run-on: paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
  - Universal Credit with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 pa (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

**Please note:** learners, parents/carers in receipt of working tax credit only are not entitled to a free meal.

Further guidance on eligibility is available in the ESFA guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions-guide-2022-to-2023-academic-year/free-meals-in-further-education-funded-institutions#verification-of-student-eligibility>

## 4. Assessment and Approval of Applications

Funding for Free Meals is received directly by LifeBridge ASEND from the ESFA.

The 16-19 Student Financial Support funds are managed by the college and are allocated on an individual need basis. To apply for free meals, families need to complete the 'Free Meals application form', and return to LifeBridge ASEND along with supporting documentation.

As funds are limited and cannot be guaranteed, applications for free meals are required to be submitted by the end of September for each academic year.

Each application, with supporting documentation, will be assessed in strictest confidence using the criteria outlined in section 3. All free meal allocations will be subject to review and approval by the LifeBridge ASEND Senior Leadership Team. Applicants will be notified of their application outcome in writing within 20 working days of submitting the application. Any award made will be for the academic year in which the application was made only. Support in future years may change.

## 5. Learner agreement

It is the learners responsibility to inform the college about any of the following:

- change of circumstances which might affect their eligibility for financial support
- change of address
- any exceptional circumstances that cause them to be absent from college

## 6. Appeals Process

Any learner applicant or parent/carer of an unsuccessful applicant wishing to appeal against the refusal of free meals must do so in writing to the Principal of the College within 10 working days, stating the reasons why. The Principal of the College will review the application within 15 working days of receiving the appeal. The decision of the College Principal is final and will be given in writing within 10 working days of their decision.

**The rules within this policy are set at the time of writing but the College reserves the right to adjust the criteria year by year according to the funds available and in accordance with any changes that the ESFA may make.**