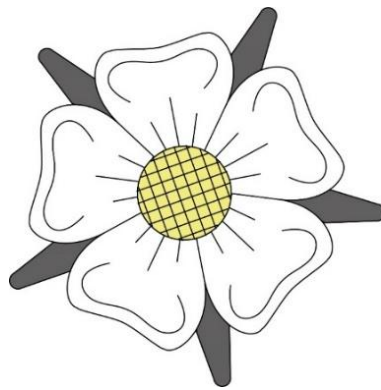


John Taylor Free School Post-16



Bursary Fund Procedure Academic Year 2024-25

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

John Taylor Free School provides 16-19 bursaries to eligible students to help them overcome specific financial barriers so they can remain in education.

We are committed to:

- Distributing 16-19 bursaries via a fair and equal process that is transparent, accountable and easily understood.
- Ensuring information about the bursary scheme and the application process are well promoted and easy to access.
- Widening access to, and participation in, Post-16 education.
- Monitoring and reviewing our policies to ensure effectiveness.
- Setting high targets and objectives to develop a culture of continuous improvement.
- Spending the Post-16 bursary funding on helping eligible students to overcome any financial barriers to education.

2.0 JOHN TAYLOR FREE SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITIES

JTFS is responsible for setting eligibility criteria for students, using gov.uk guidance.

JTFS will set conditions for receiving the bursary, which are outlined in the application form. For example, attendance rate of 95% or above, and abiding by the JTFS Post-16 Code of Conduct.

Arrangements for applying for bursaries will be straightforward and confidential.

Each student who applies for the bursary will be assessed by the Post-16 Team, and evidence will be obtained to support each application. Students will be informed of the outcome of their application in a timely manner, which will vary depending on volume of applications.

JTFS will claim vulnerable bursaries from the Student Bursary Support Service (SBSS) for each eligible student.

Records will be kept by the Post-16 Team of all assessments and payments.

3.0 RAISING AWARENESS AND TAKE-UP OF THE 16-19 BURSARY FUND

To raise awareness of the bursary, JTFS employs different marketing activities, including the following:

- Posting information about the bursary on the school website and in the prospectus
- Displaying posters and on the digital TV screens in school advertising details
- Distributing information at the Post 16 Open Evening
- Providing Personal Tutors with information to inform discussions between PTs and students
- Working with the Student Support Team who help the most disadvantaged, to identify those who may be eligible for vulnerable groups
- Advertising information about the 16-19 Bursary on the Post-16 social media account

JTFS works with local stakeholders to identify the vulnerable students that may be eligible. For example, working with the LA, LAC education services and care leaver services to help and encourage students to apply for a bursary.

Ensuring the JTFS Student Support Team and JTFS Safeguarding Team are fully aware of 16-19 bursary arrangements, who will develop links with local agencies working with vulnerable people e.g. social services, to help identify eligible students.

JTFS ensures that the application form explains how to maintain confidentiality, relating to the Data Protection Act 2018, to encourage more students to apply for the bursary.

4.0 ELIGIBILITY

Students who are aged 16 or over, and under 19 years old on the 31st August before the academic year in question, will qualify for bursaries for that academic year.

JTFS operates a no-cash policy and, as such, bursary payments will, where possible, be paid in-kind or via the BACS system direct to the student's bank account.

Where a student turns 19 during their programme of study, they will continue to receive the bursary up until the end of the academic year in which they turn 19, or until the end of the programme of study, whichever is sooner.

JTFS will only pay bursaries to students aged 16 or over, unless in exceptional circumstances e.g. where a student is following an accelerated study programme. JTFS will use its discretion to decide whether a student under the age of 16 is eligible.

Students can apply more than once if their circumstances change. In this case, their application will be reassessed to determine if there are any exceptional circumstances to consider.

Students must be enrolled full time to Post-16 at JTFS to be eligible.

Students must meet the residency requirements to be eligible. This means having a legal right to be resident in the United Kingdom at the start of their Post-16 studies. Passport evidence may be requested.

5.0 DISCRETIONARY BURSARIES

John Taylor Free School will ensure that discretionary funding is allocated to the students who are most in need of financial support. The Post-16 Team will manage the discretionary bursary to keep payments within budget.

John Taylor Free School's eligibility criteria for receiving a discretionary bursary includes:

- Students living in a low-income household
- Students who are from a single parent family or have one or more dependent siblings in their family
- Students who have additional responsibilities, such as being a young carer or parent
- Students who have an EHCP
- Students who are in receipt of Asylum Seeker Funding from the Home Office

Each application will be assessed individually. This assessment will be documented and evidence to support the claims will be obtained and retained for auditing purposes. A low-income household is usually defined as an income of £27,000 or under, however, each application will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. As such, the assessment will consider any unearned income, such as shares/investments, pensions and rental income.

6.0 BURSARIES FOR VULNERABLE STUDENTS

The eligibility criteria for receiving a vulnerable bursary includes students who are:

- Looked after by the Local Authority
- Care leavers
- Receiving Income Support or Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves and/or someone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or a partner
- Receiving Disability Living Allowance, Employment Support Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right

Students who claim Universal Credit in their own right, are able to do so whilst living in the parental home - there is no requirement to be living independently.

Students who are in one or more of these categories can apply for a vulnerable bursary of up to £1,200. To be eligible the course needs to last 30 weeks or more, and the student is participating full-time. JTFS may pay a student in a vulnerable group more than £1,200 if it believes the student needs extra help to remain in education. Where a vulnerable student is on a part-time course, the institution can make a reduction based on an hourly or daily rate. Each application will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure fair allocation of funds, so there is no guarantee any student will receive the full £1,200.

Proof will be needed to evidence that a student is eligible for the bursary, for example:

- In care/care leaver: written confirmation, such as a letter or an email, of current or previous LAC status from the relevant LA (the LA that looks after them or provides their leaving care services). Note that the young person needs to have been looked after for a period of at least 13 weeks, which began after the age of 14.
- In receipt of Income Support: a copy of the Income Support award notice, which must evidence that the student is entitled to the benefit in their own right, and confirm that the student can be in FE or training.
- In receipt of Universal Credit: copies of the Universal Credit Award notice from the last three months, which must evidence that the student is entitled to the benefit in their own right, as well as additional documentation to confirm their independent status e.g. a tenancy agreement in the student's name, a child benefit receipt, children's birth certificate, or utility bills.
- In receipt of Disability Living Allowance, Employment Support Allowance or Personal Independence Payments: evidence of receipt of the benefit within the last 3 months

John Taylor Free School will only submit a funding claim to the SBSS once sufficient evidence has been provided.

JTFS may decide that although a young person may be eligible for a bursary as they fall within one or more of the vulnerable groups, but the bursary is not required as they do not have any financial need and do not need further support. If financial needs are already met and there are no other costs, the institution may decide not to allocate a bursary to the student, for example:

- A student attends specialist residential provision that covers their education costs in full.
- A student undertakes a distance learning programme and there are no financial barriers to participation e.g. no travel or food costs.
- A student is in LA care and education costs are covered in full by the LA.
- A student is financially supported by their partner.

Where JTFS decides that a student is ineligible for funding, the reasons for this will be explained to the student and/or the student's parents/carers, followed by written confirmation.

If a student or the student's parents/carers still want to claim a bursary for vulnerable groups they must inform the Post-16 Team. JTFS will then consider the particular circumstances in each case and assess whether no bursary should be awarded as the student has no financial needs; or a reduced bursary should be awarded as the level of financial help needed is limited. Students who do not receive the Vulnerable Bursary may apply for the Discretionary Bursary instead.

7.0 PAYING BURSARY FUNDING TO ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

Payments will be paid in-kind rather than in cash – this may include, for example, travel passes; vouchers; required clothing; books or equipment. The funding must only be used for items that are essential costs of the students participating in their Post-16 studies. Details of the course related costs are requested on the application form, such as receipts or screen shots.

Where in-kind payments are given to students within vulnerable groups, JTFS will explain the value of these payments to the student and how these have been deducted from the total money they have been awarded.

JTFS has the right to determine how often payments are made – when doing so, the following will be considered:

- The reason the bursary was awarded
- The student's circumstances
- Local arrangements

JTFS will not pay a bursary to students in large or lump sums.

In order to decide how best to use individual students' bursary funding, JTFS employs the following procedures:

- Every student who qualifies for a bursary is offered an interview with a member of Student Support Team or Post-16 Team to decide the best way to allocate their support
- Priority areas are addressed first, including travel to school, equipment costs and support with studies
- Students are allocated a higher amount of funding at the beginning of their course to address the priority areas
- A percentage of the funding is kept back as a hardship fund to respond to any emergencies that may arise during the year

If students or their parents/carers have any queries about payments they should contact the Post 16 Team.

8.0 CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING BURSARY FUNDING

Receipt of a vulnerable or discretionary bursary will be conditional on the student meeting the agreed standards set by John Taylor Free School. The conditions of payment will be clear and accessible to students, as well as being thoroughly explained as part of the induction process and on the application form. The application form (see appendix 1) must be completed in full, including all requested evidence.

Evidence that the student has seen and agreed to the conditions will be kept for audit, such as an agreement signed by the student and their parent/carer.

Students in receipt of bursaries must:

- Have 95% attendance at timetabled lessons unless the absence is authorised.
- Present a note from a qualified medical practitioner if their absence due to sickness is longer than five school days
- Not take holidays outside the timetabled school holidays times
- Abide by the Post-16 Code of Conduct
- Not be late more than 4 times in a calendar month
- Be aware that if they are subject to JTFS Disciplinary Procedures that they may be liable to repay funds
- Reapply every academic year
- Inform the Post-16 Admin Team of any changes to financial circumstances

Where there are concerns regarding a student's attendance or behaviour, a member of the Post-16 Team or Progress Leader will discuss the issue with the student and consider individual exceptional circumstances before withholding any payments. Students will be spoken to in advance should they be in danger of having their bursary payments revoked or stopped.

JTFS will stop payments where a student has been absent for a period of four continuous weeks or more, excluding holidays or if there is evidence that the student intends not to return. Payments will stop if a student withdraws themselves from a study programme.

Money may be taken back from students if it has not been spent for the reasons it was awarded to them. Before doing so JTFS will always consider the impact of this on the student.

JTFS may specify that students return any books and equipment at the end of their study programme for use by other students. This will be clearly communicated to students and their parents/carers upon confirming eligibility of the bursary.

9.0 STUDENT DECLARATIONS

Students and/or their parent/carer will sign a declaration when they apply for either a vulnerable or discretionary bursary, confirming that any evidence given in support of the application is correct. By signing the declaration, the student and their parent/carer are agreeing to all the conditions and eligibility criteria.

The Post-16 Team will retain copies of the declaration and supporting documentation for six years, this includes:

For vulnerable bursaries:

- A copy of the funding claim sent to SBSS
- Evidence showing that the student is eligible
- Evidence of payments received from the SBSS e.g. bank statements
- Evidence of payments made to the student

For discretionary bursaries:

- Evidence used to assess eligibility
- A copy of the student's individual assessment of actual financial need
- Receipts for purchases made e.g. bus pass, clothes or book receipts

10.0 MANAGING APPLICATIONS

All applications for the 16-19 bursary should be submitted by the 30th September of each academic year, allowing the Post-16 Team to correctly and fairly assess overall demands and distribute discretionary awards.

JTFS understands, however, that some needs may arise throughout the academic year. As such there is not a cut-off date for applications, but it is advised that all applications are submitted by the 30th September wherever possible.

The date for applications to be submitted will be outlined in the bursary fund procedure, the bursary application form and on marketing materials.

Application forms and marketing materials will outline that students who meet the criteria for bursaries for vulnerable groups are not automatically entitled to receive them e.g. if they do not have any financial needs or these needs are covered by alternative means.

11.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Post-16 Team will use an eligibility checklist to confirm which documents have been provided for each student – these relate to the following:

- The application process
- The decision to award the specified amount of bursary
- The funds that have been issued to the student

The Post-16 Team maintain written records of the following:

- The number of applications received
- The value of all bursaries awarded
- The purpose of all bursaries awarded
- Which applications qualified for the bursary and which did not
- Brief descriptions of the justification for any decision to award a bursary or not

JTFS retains copies of any documents the student has signed to give formal agreement to their conditions for payment, as well as any others mentioned in this section, for six years.

12.0 FRAUD

JTFS has the right to investigate any suspected instances of fraud relating to bursary fund applications. If evidence comes to light that supplied information is misleading or fraudulent, JTFS will stop all further payments and will attempt to recover any payments already provided to the student.

Where significant fraud is identified, JTFS will report this to the ESFA – this includes the following:

- The amount of money is in excess of £1,200
- The particulars of the fraud are novel, unusual, systematic or complex
- There is likely to be great public interest due to the nature of the fraud of the people involved

The matter may also be referred to the police, with the possibility of the student and/or their parent/carer facing prosecution.

13.0 CONDITIONS FOR USING THE BURSARY

The bursary fund will not be used by JTFS for any reasons which would give them a competitive advantage over other education trusts, such as:

- Enrolment or administration fees imposed by the institution
- Fees for access to facilities in the institution
- Block subsidy of the restaurant
- Block provision of equipment, material or books
- Make bonus payments to reward attendance or achievement

The bursary fund will only be used for supporting students who have a genuine financial difficulty which might prevent them from continuing in education, rather than acting as an incentive for attendance.

14.0 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

All complaints and appeals must be made in writing in accordance with the JTMAT Complaints Procedure. A copy of this may be obtained from the JTMAT website. All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the JTMAT Complaints Procedure. The Post-16 Team at JTFS will act as a first point of contact for students who have complaints and will support students as much as possible throughout the complaints procedure.

If the complaint, or appeal, concerns operational processes or customer service for a vulnerable bursary funding claim, the SBSS will deal with the case. If the case is not resolved following this, it will be passed to the ESFA.

For full government guidelines please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-financial-support-for-students>