

Free College Meal (FCM) Policy

Policy for the disbursement of Free College Meals 2018/2019

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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 Smartcard). Please see section 8: 'College FCM Allowance Guidance and Rules'.
- 2.4. The College works closely with providers (including franchise providers) 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 2018, must satisfy the residency criteria as set out by the 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 £7,400 pa.
 - 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 18 education: free meals for academic year 2018 to 2019](#)

- 3.3. In addition to the above benefits criteria students age 19+ must also meet one of the following:
- Have an Education 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 Progress Advisors 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. The rollout of Universal Credit (UC) from 01 April 2018 will ultimately result in certain households being eligible for free college meals whilst others fall out of the eligibility criteria. 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 (DfE).
 - Any student already on FCM or who becomes eligible for FCM, but has moved to UC after 01 April 2018 with net earnings that exceed the threshold will remain eligible **during the UC rollout** provided that they are on a 16 – 18 study programme, are a 19+ continuer or in possession of an EHCP. Rollout is currently expected to complete in March 2023
 - Once UC is fully rolled out, students receiving FCM who no longer meet the criteria due to exceeding the UC earnings threshold will continue to be protected until they complete their entitlement to 16 - 18 funded education. 19+ continuers and those in possession of an EHCP will only receive protection until the end of their existing programme of study following rollout completion
 - We may check with a student's previous educational institution if they were in receipt of Free College Meals in order to provide them with transitionally protected FCM.

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. The College is currently undergoing a transition from a paper voucher system to a cashless system for access to FCM. As a result, upon confirmation of eligibility, students may be issued with FCM vouchers in the first instance. These will be issued immediately once all correct evidence has been verified and copied. Once students have been enrolled on to their course and course tutors have requested their individual Student Smartcards (including photo ID), vouchers will be replaced with a card loaded with credits for FCM.
- 5.2. Upon receipt of the vouchers or a smartcard, students must sign a usage declaration form to demonstrate that they have read and understood the guidance and rules of usage.
- 5.3. Occasionally, it will be deemed appropriate for vouchers or smartcards (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 Smartcard spending on FCM will be linked to a tracking system.
- 5.5. Smartcards 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 UKSA and Platform One will be issued with Student Smartcards for ID purposes, but FCM will be tracked separately because they will use alternative catering facilities to those provided on the college campus. 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 a FCM student loses their Smartcard they can request a replacement. The £5 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. 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. It has been agreed that the bursary will top up the £2.41 FCM allowance by up to 59p daily as required from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund.
- 6.3. Students in receipt of FCM are entitled to and have the option of a hot, healthy meal.
- 6.4. Students are entitled to FCM when they attend an external work placement or timetabled work-related activities offsite, please refer to section 9.

7. Administration process

- 7.1. The College will track and record all FCM recipients and hold on file the evidence obtained confirming eligibility and usage.
- 7.2. Student Services will work closely with the Aramark 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 Smartcard usage tracked online.
- 7.3. UKSA and the Double Decker Diner at 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 will sign a declaration when they initially receive their FCM allowance and confirm that they understand and will adhere to the guidance. A copy will be given to the students.

8.2. Principles (summarised below)

- 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 food or drink purchased with your FCM allowance
- When using FCM credits in voucher form to purchase food or drink, you must show some form of identity when you present your voucher
- You should only use the FCM credits on days that you are timetabled to attend College
- Up to £3 can be used per day unless a higher amount is agreed beforehand with Student Services because of exceptional circumstances
- You can spend the £3 allowance 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
- Voucher books are issued by the Student Services Team at the beginning of your course. Once your Student Smartcard is requested by your course tutor and issued, it will be loaded with FCM credit for you to use.
- The FCM credit allows you to access **Hot and Healthy Food** whilst at College (including CECAMM), so please take care to select these options.
- FCM credit can be used at CECAMM, The Courtyard Café or The Lounge (Starbucks) at the College and **MUST** be handed to the staff at the till when purchasing food and drink.
- If you lose your vouchers or Smartcard, please come to the Student Services Office as we may be able to pay the £5 Smartcard replacement fee for you.
- If you leave or finish your course, your student Smartcard will be disabled. If you leave prior to the issue of a card, you must return any unused FCM vouchers to Student Services.
- 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.
- If you choose to spend more than £3 per day, you will need to pay the difference yourself, i.e. you will have to pay anything you spend above £3 per day.
- 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.
- Please be aware that checks will be made, to monitor how you are using your FCM allowance.

9. Work placement and franchise students

- 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 £2.41 per day they attended. Tutors must confirm work placement timetables and attendance before the allowance can be issued. The allowance of £2.41, as opposed to £3, recognises that students can make their own lunches to take on placement and/or have potentially a greater choice of establishments from which to buy their food.
- 9.2. 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.
- 9.3. 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.
- 9.4. 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.
- 9.5. Students taking part in the Industry Placement project may also be entitled to an FCM dependent on the nature of the placement, even if they are not ordinarily eligible under normal bursary criteria. These placements will be specifically marked as Industry placement and the discretionary allocation of the Capacity Development Fund (CDF) monies will be administered by the College Curriculum Planning Manager who is responsible for liaison with tutors on each course area providing Industry Placements.

10. Appeals process and complaints

- 10.1. Students can appeal a decision not to award FCM. Appeals or concerns regarding the administration, management or disbursement of FCM should be submitted through the College complaints procedure.