



Coronavirus (COVID-19) specific criteria for free meals in FE

16 to 19 providers with a free meals in FE allocation will be able to apply to the national voucher scheme, with the value of any vouchers claimed being charged to you FE meals and/or 16 to 19 discretionary bursary allocations.

You will need to submit a business case to ESFA should you wish to access the voucher scheme. You will also need to submit a business case if you need to apply for additional funding to cover support student meal costs that you cannot service from your existing free meals in FE or 16 to 19 discretionary bursary allocations.

The [free meals in FE](#) and [16 to 19 Bursary guidance](#) still apply. The following criteria apply in addition to that guidance **and should be applied before (A) approaching ESFA to access to the voucher scheme, or (B) putting in a business case for additional funding**. The criteria should be applied in order – that is, if the first criteria cannot be met – proceed to the second, and so on.

Institutions are reminded they must ensure they maintain records of all payments and decisions for future audit, including how the existing guidance and these additional criteria have been considered when making decisions on any awards, including new / additional awards, from their free meals in FE or 16 to 19 discretionary bursary allocations.

(A) Access to the national voucher scheme

1. Institutions should apply to the national voucher scheme if they are having practical difficulties in providing meals, providing payments or providing vouchers to students entitled to free meals. Local processes should continue where these are working and supporting coronavirus (COVID-19) guidelines, and institutions are reminded that ESFA will look to claim back the value of any vouchers claimed from your allocations.¹

(B) Putting a business case for additional funding

1. Institutions should use underspends they have rolled forward from their **2018 to 2019 academic year** free meals in FE and/or 16 to 19 discretionary bursary allocations to support students in need of extra support due to coronavirus (COVID-19) related issues.

2. Institutions should use their **2019 to 2020 academic year** free meals in FE and/or 16 to 19 discretionary bursary allocations to support students in need of extra support due to coronavirus (COVID-19) related issues.
3. Where existing allocations have been exhausted, institutions should apply to the ESFA explaining their need for additional funding.² These applications should only be made with the knowledge that their existing funding has been exhausted, having followed the steps above.

For A or B, institutions will be asked to submit a business case using the form on the [Free meals in further education](#) GOV.UK page. Institutions should consider whether they would be in a position to continue to support existing students whilst a business case is being considered, however, there is no guarantee that additional funding will be available.

¹ Government policy is that a voucher for a free meal will have a value equivalent to £3.00 per student per meal for students of all ages

² Free meals in FE funding issued as cash will have a value of equivalent to £2.41 per student per meal in line with the current free meals in FE allocations methodology