York Foundation for Craft & Conservation

Guidance Notes for Craft Trainee Bursary 2026

Guidance for Craft Trainee Bursary applicants 2026

The York Foundation's bursaries support training and skills in the conservation of cultural heritage and the craft skills vital for its preservation. We aim to support the growth of a vibrant community of expert craftspeople and conservators for the future.

The Foundation offers a Craft Trainee bursary to encourage opportunities for sustained training and development in heritage building crafts and trades. It offers up to £15,000, spread over three years, towards training and education for a recent entrant in a field of traditional building craft practice.

Applications are made jointly by the employer together with an existing apprentice or trainee. While the emphasis is on the learning pathway for the trainee, both parties should benefit from the opportunities the award offers for development and growth in their field of practice.

The application round is annual and opens this year from 2 February to 16 March. Please read the notes below for further guidance on the application process. If you have any questions or need clarification, please contact the Foundation at info@conservationyork.org.uk.

Who can apply?

There are no restrictions on the fields of craft expertise for applicants provided they are heritage building-related. This includes the crafts involved in traditional decorative finishes and treatments as well as construction-related crafts. Preference will generally be given to applications from microbusinesses (see Companies House definition) and sole traders and, where relevant, to crafts and skills which are judged to be in short supply.

We are looking for craftspeople and businesses with a commitment to sustaining a structured programme of learning and training for a trainee or apprentice. They should already have an established, sound working relationship and the trainee should preferably have been in employment with the business for at least 6 months.

The apprentice must be at least 18 years old and based in the UK. They should already have attained a basic level of skill and experience and show aptitude to practise in their chosen field. We are looking for evidence of commitment to developing their craft in the long term and a good fit with the ethos and practice of the organisation they work in. We particularly welcome applications from applicants based in, or working in, or from the Yorkshire region who will be considered favourably in shortlisting. Applications are welcome from previous Foundation Bursary individual winners.

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How does the bursary funding work?

The Craft Apprenticeship bursary (up to £15000 spread over three years) is paid to the employer to enable the business or sole-trader to provide a planned programme of experience-based learning, and formal training where appropriate (e.g health and safety, use of IT etc), for a craft apprentice.

A training plan is submitted with the application which sets out clearly how training will build skills and progress through the period of the apprenticeship, and details of the experienced craftsperson / training organisation who will lead and oversee this. The training may include registration for a formal qualification (such as an NVQ, awarded externally) but this is not a requirement and the training can also be devised internally. A Foundation mentor, with relevant experience, may be appointed to advise and be available to work with you on assessing training needs through the apprenticeship period.

The Bursary may be used to support a salary contribution, training costs (external or internal), tools or equipment. There must be a clear explanation of the financial need for the Bursary from the employer, e.g. that they will be able to provide a more worthwhile apprenticeship with the help of this funding and how it will enhance the training experience.

Bursary payments will be made at six-monthly intervals, subject to satisfactory feedback on progress and review of the initial training plan. Arrangements for this will be agreed flexibly, and may for example include periodic visits to the workplace, submission of a short report or portfolio of work experience. We are open to using media in creative ways for this, such as a blog, vlog or regular posts to an Instagram account.

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How to apply

The application has two parts:

- Part 1 for the trainee to complete, telling us about their prior and current experience, any qualifications, aspirations for their career, and how this employment supports their plans for the future.

- Part 2 for the employer to complete, explaining why the funding is necessary, their aims for training the apprentice (including a training plan) and why this trainee/apprentice shows clear potential and is a good fit for the business.

We suggest that you discuss and collaborate on the application together so that the two applications complement each other, e.g. the training plan sent by the employer reflects the areas of skills and work experience that the trainee/ apprentice identifies in their aims and personal goals for the future. The forms should be emailed as pdfs to the Foundation together with a portfolio of images to illustrate current work or relevant previous experience (details are provided in the application form). These are really useful for the selection panel so good quality images are important and the Foundation wants this process to underline the importance of craft practitioners presenting their work to a professional standard. A pdf copy of the most recent company or business accounts must also be submitted with the employer's application. 3 The trainee/apprentice and the employer will be asked to provide email addresses for independent referees who know them and their work.

Applications should be made using the application forms which can be downloaded from the website Bursaries page.
We receive many more applications that we can support so framing a strong application is important. The Trustees' selection panel are looking for well-supported applications which:

- Show a sustained and principled commitment to craft practice and heritage conservation on the part of apprentice and employer

- Reflect a good understanding of the specialist skills and training required in heritage conservation today

- Make the case clearly for how the Foundation's support will make a material difference to advancing the apprentice's work experience and craft practice through a planned programme of training; and also support the growth of the employing business in the heritage sector.

- Demonstrate that the employer has a sound, viable business and shows genuine financial need for requesting funds. Please be familiar with the Terms and Conditions that apply when accepting a Craft Apprenticeship Bursary.

Shortlisting and interview process

The closing date for applications is 16 March 2026. Shortlisting of applications takes place afterward and those not shortlisted will be informed by the first week in May. Interviews will be held at the end of May, to which both the apprentice and the employer (or the relevant person leading training in their team) are invited. The interview panel will include representatives of our Sponsors and the Foundation's Board of Trustees. The successful applicant will hear from us soon after the interviews. Trustees understand that applicants may be making applications for financial support to a number of charities. If you are successful with other grant applications to support the traineeship, please inform us. Depending on the extent that expected costs are exceeded, we would require that any Bursary payments already awarded by the Foundation are reduced proportionately and a partial refund made to the Foundation. This enables the Trustees to redirect this money to other deserving applicants. Successful applicants will be invited to an awards ceremony in York on 21 July, 2026 at the annual meeting when Bursary certificates and awards will be presented.