



SFC Guidance

2017-18 National policy: Childcare funds for Further and Higher Education students in Scotland's Colleges

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Summary: This guidance sets out the conditions for use by colleges of childcare funds for AY 2017-18.

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2017-18 National policy: Childcare funds for Further and Higher Education students in Scotland's Colleges

Introduction

1. This guidance sets out the conditions for use by colleges of childcare funds (CCF) for academic year (AY) 2017-18. These funds are for students studying both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) courses in college.

Background

2. The joint guidance *Further and Higher Education Discretionary Childcare Funds* (see Annex A to this document) is produced by the Scottish Government to assist colleges in the distribution of CCF to support students studying FE and HE courses at college.
3. These funds contain two elements:
 - All eligible FE and HE student parents attending courses at college will be able to apply for help with registered childcare costs from the college.
 - The Lone Parent Childcare Grant (LPCG) element, which is an entitlement payment of up to £1,215 per year to all eligible FE and HE students who are lone parents and who have formal registered childcare expenses while studying.

Policy changes for AY 2017-18

4. There have been no substantial policy changes for AY 2017-18: the main point to note is that, following changes to the residency policy, students who have established a 'long residency' in the UK will now be eligible to apply for the funds.
5. Colleges have already been informed of this and the detailed changes can be found in paragraphs 3 & 39 of the guidance (Annex A).

Purpose of the funds

6. The CCF is to provide or fund childcare for students studying at college. These funds, which are discretionary and cash-limited, are intended to supplement existing resources used to directly support students' study-related childcare costs.
7. Colleges need to be aware that FE and HE LPCG is an entitlement-based grant to be managed by colleges, is cash limited and any additional funds required to meet demand will need to come from college resources.

8. Where a college chooses to add to these funds from its own resources, it may use the additional resources as it sees fit.

Legislative context

9. College governing bodies have power under section 12(2)(c) of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992* to provide students of the college such assistance of a financial or other nature as it considers appropriate.
10. It is a condition of the *Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Direction 2013*, that SFC shall administer student support funds, in conjunction with the post 16 education bodies, in accordance with the requirements of section 73ZA of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*, the *Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Regulations 1990*, the *Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Determination 2013*.

Joint guidance

11. The [joint policy guidance \(Annex A\)](#) for AY 2017-18 is available on the SFC website.
12. This policy guidance has been written for bursary and student support officers within FE colleges as well as for advisors in HE institutions. We recommend that for communication with their students on student support, colleges publish their own college policy. This will ensure the students receive information that is relevant to their own circumstances and local community.
13. More [information for college student support officers](#) can be found on the SFC website.

Conditions of grant

14. These funds must be used by colleges for student support purposes, in accordance with this policy and any changes made to this policy.
15. Colleges should also follow all applicable legislation and any supplementary guidance SFC may issue from time to time when using these funds.
16. General conditions of grant also apply, as set out in outcome agreements.
17. The Chief Executive Officer must ensure that all accounts and records are adequate and that there are systems in place to minimise incorrect payments.
18. Under no circumstances can the college use the funds for:
 - Students who are below their statutory school leaving date, as defined in the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*.

- Students who are beyond their statutory school leaving date, attending college, but also still studying at school.
 - Administration costs (including the costs of any recovery of overpayments).
 - Capital purposes.
 - Top-up fees such as tuition and/or exam fees.
 - To compensate for a lack of parental contributions.
 - Colleges must not use the CCF to provide communal facilities, adaptations to buildings or to meet staff salaries.
19. Colleges may choose to build on this policy for the use of these funds, but must not introduce anything that goes against the existing policy.
20. It is the responsibility of the college to ensure that students are familiar with the availability of these funds and the procedures they must follow to gain assistance.

Conditions of award

General conditions of award for FE childcare funds

21. Students who are in receipt of other funds - public or private - are still eligible to receive these funds. Colleges should advise students in receipt of benefits to check with their benefit paying office to establish how these funds will affect their individual circumstances.
22. Colleges can access general advice and guidance on benefits on the [UK Government's website](#).
23. In addition more information about students and their benefits can be found on the [Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland \(CPAG\) website](#).
24. Students must have reached their statutory school leaving age to be eligible for assistance.
25. Only students on SFC-fundable non-advanced and advanced courses are eligible. For an explanation of 'SFC-fundable', please refer to SFC's student activity data guidance for 2017-18, which can be found via the following web link:<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/communications/Guidance/2017/SFCGD062017.aspx>

Transfer of funds

26. Colleges can transfer money between the FE/HE CCF and FE Bursary and FE Discretionary funds. They are encouraged to do so to enable them to effectively meet the needs of their students. Colleges must account for total spend on each fund, including transferred money, in their audited statements.

Using FE and HE childcare funds as bursaries

27. Colleges may use their FE and HE CCF to meet shortfalls in their bursary allocations. This allows flexibility between bursary and CCF to meet the needs of students.
28. In order to fulfil our duty to account for the proper use of public funds, any college that wishes to do this should request this in writing. Any CCF used in this way must meet the conditions of the bursary policy in full. Colleges cannot use CCF to meet bursary needs of students who are not eligible. Please ensure that you have met the childcare needs of students who are already being supported at the college before considering using these funds for bursary purposes.
29. Please note that this is not a virement of funds and to avoid clawback you should record your spend under CCF in your student support data return.
30. Colleges will need to renew this request annually.

Clawback of unspent funds

31. Colleges cannot carry forward any unused funds. Unspent funds for AY 2017-18 will be clawed back by SFC during AY 2018-19.

Use of bursary funds

32. Colleges may use bursary funds as HE or FE CCF. The maximum amount of bursary funds that can be spent as CCF is half of the CCF allocation for the year. This use of bursary funds is not a transfer into the CCF. This spend must be included in the relevant student support section of the Further Education Statistics return (see paragraphs 36-41 for details).
33. The original FE and HE CCF allocation must be fully committed before bursary funds are used.
34. Where a college has used some of its bursary funds as FE/HE CCF but has not spent its childcare allocation in full, SFC will not consider those bursary funds as spent unless previous permission has been granted.
35. The unspent bursary funds will, as a result, be subject to a clawback under the bursary clawback rules.

Timing of allocation of childcare awards

36. Where childcare providers require upfront payment of childcare funding, colleges should take this into account in their allocations to students and, if necessary, should consider advance payments to students to cover upfront

costs incurred by the student. Upfront payments to cover childcare costs should also be made to students where there are delays in processing awards.

Reporting mechanisms and data collections

37. The Chief Executive Officer of each college must ensure that all accounts and records are adequate and that there are systems in place to minimise incorrect payments.
38. Colleges are required to complete the student support elements of the Further Education Statistics (FES) return to confirm their final spend on student support. The AY 2017-18 FES data return is due on **4 October 2018**. Guidance on [completing the data returns](#) can be found on SFC's website.
39. Colleges are no longer required to complete an aggregate return on student support spend. However an auditor will still be required to sign-off the FES online student support funding report.
40. Colleges should ensure that their auditors receive a copy of:
 - The [student support audit guidance](#).
 - This [policy](#).
 - The national policy for [further education bursaries](#), and [discretionary funds](#).
 - The college outcome agreement for the relevant year (and the [relevant guidance](#)).
41. You may wish to provide your auditors with details of our [student support web pages](#) and email address: studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk.
42. You should refer to the *Accounts Direction for Scotland's Colleges and Universities 2017-18* when presenting information on the student support funds in your annual accounts. We aim to publish the direction for 2017-18 audit and accounts in summer 2017 on the [SFC website](#).

Further information

43. Please contact Jane Scott, Policy Officer, Funding Policy for further information, tel: 0131 313 6660, email: jscott@sfc.ac.uk.



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