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Guidance for Foundation Apprenticeships AY 2026–27

Guidance for Foundation Apprenticeships AY 2026–27

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FAO:	Principals of Scotland's colleges, and the general public
FURTHER INFORMATION:	**EMAIL:** apprenticeships@sfc.ac.uk

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Guidance for Foundation Apprenticeships AY 2026–27

Introduction

1. I am writing to provide guidance on Foundation Apprenticeship (FA) provision for colleges in Academic Year (AY) 2026-27, including eligibility criteria and reporting requirements.

2. This document has been produced to assist colleges to deliver FAs at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Levels 4, 5 and 6 in AY 2026-27. The options include FAs at SCQF Level 6 Two-Year Delivery Model or Shorter Duration Delivery Model (SDDM), and FA SCQF Level 4/5 One-Year Delivery Model plus an additional one year for Additional Support Needs (ASN) if appropriate.

Background

3. FAs were first introduced in AY 2014-15 offering senior-phase school pupils access to structured work-based learning to industry-recognised standards. There are FA frameworks at SCQF Levels 4, 5 and 6. Since first delivered the model has evolved, and delivery partners now include Local Authorities (LAs) and independent learning providers as lead partners.

4. The aim of the programme is to create a high-quality work-based learning experience within S3 through to the senior phase of education (S4-S6) that:

    - Offers learners the opportunity to develop accredited skills and capability within a work-based context.
    - Enables employers to make a structured contribution to the learning of school age pupils by providing real-life work-based situations and projects.
    - Develops meta-skills within individuals that can contribute to work readiness and create high performing employees.

5. The SCQF Level 4/5 programmes require a different model of delivery to FAs at Level 6 by focusing on:

    - Delivery in schools supported by expertise from employers, practitioners and other experts as required, though delivery can also take place in a college setting.
    - Project-based learning that can be related to the school curriculum.
    - Emphasis on the development of meta-skills for learners using work-based projects and situations.

National Outcomes

6. FAs support the delivery of SFC's strategic objective to invest in education that is accessible to learners from all backgrounds and throughout life; gives them a high-quality learning experience and supports them to succeed in their studies; provides opportunities to participate; and equips them to flourish in employment, further study and fulfilling lives. They also support the Scottish Government's strategic priority of high-quality learning in a system which is seamlessly connected for the learner. This includes learning which prepares people well for the world of work and successful long-term careers, prioritising provision that meets known skills gaps in the economy.

7. SFC is firmly committed to work-based learning as part of the wider curriculum offer and is supportive of FAs as a vehicle for increasing work-based learning pathways.

8. The Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model was introduced in AY 2024-25. The Outcomes Framework sets out SFC's expectations of colleges in return for the funding they receive. There are nine outcomes for colleges. FAs are particularly important in the support of the delivery of SFC's Skills and Work-based Learning outcome:

> Institutions produce confident and highly capable work-ready graduates, engaging with employers to respond to industry and sector needs, skills alignment and to co-create solutions to challenges. Students are equipped with the skills and knowledge to find employment, flourish in their career, meet employer needs and make a positive contribution to society and the economy.

9. The Assurance Model is the method by which SFC monitors and engages with institutions, so that we gain the assurance we need that the desired outcomes are achieved.

10. FAs also contribute to other outcomes such as High-Quality Learning and Teaching and Student Interests, Access and Success.

Delivering FAs

11. SFC and SDS will continue to work together to ensure consistency is maintained across all FA provision. Regional partnerships between colleges, LAs and employers are key to the delivery of a high-quality FA programme. The extensive expertise and experience of a multi-partnership approach have a strong role to play. It is recognised that each member of the multi-partnership approach will bring expertise which can support FAs and provide high-quality delivery.

12. Communities of Practice (COPs) are delivered throughout the academic year and provide opportunities to develop good practice in delivery of FA qualifications. SFC recommends that colleges participate in these events to develop and share good practice. These events, along with the college's quality processes, provide assurance to SFC that good practice is being shared effectively.

Eligibility criteria

13. To be eligible to participate in an approved FA framework, a student must satisfy the criteria set out below. Colleges should use all reasonable endeavours to ensure that the student meets the eligibility criteria as set out below.

    - A student must be domiciled in Scotland at their start date or be a student who is not domiciled in Scotland but whose S3 (for Level 4/5) or senior phase (for Level 4/5/6) of education is provided predominantly in Scotland.
    - A student studying a Level 6 FA must be in senior phase of education at the start of the course (i.e., S4-S6) and for Level 4 and Level 5 FAs, a student must be in either S3 or in the senior phase of education (i.e., S4-S6).
    - The proposed student must have demonstrated an appropriate ability to complete the selected FA framework whilst still participating in their S3/senior phase of education, whichever is appropriate to the SCQF level.

14. If, as a result of exceptional circumstances, any student has not completed their FA Level 6 framework prior to completing their senior phase of secondary education, the college should make every opportunity available to assist the student to complete the qualification. Further advice and support can be received through your SFC Outcome Manager.

Quality management

15. The Quality Standards that apply to FA providers can be accessed in the SDS Learning Provider area of www.apprenticeships.scot. Under Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF), SFC expects colleges to have in place processes for assuring and enhancing academic standards and the quality of the student experience. This includes an expectation that institutions operate systems of annual monitoring and periodic Institution Led Quality Review (ILQR) across the full range of their provision, including FAs. The outcomes of these activities should include identifying areas of both improvement and good practice, and a coherent action plan to deliver enhancement for consideration at institutional level. The mechanism for reporting the outcomes of annual monitoring and ILQR to SFC is through the Self Evaluation and Action Plan. Further information on SFC's expectations for quality can be found in SFC's Guidance on Quality for Colleges and Universities 2024-25 to 2030-31.

16. Under TQEF, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) leads on the delivery of cyclical external peer review of all credit bearing provision in Scotland's colleges and universities. QAA also maintains ongoing engagement with institutions to support quality assurance and enhancement and to follow up on review activity. Further information on TQEF is available on the SFC website and on TQER on the QAA website.

Monitoring and reporting

17. FA reporting will mirror requirements in place for other college programmes through FE Statistics (FES), in accordance with data collection guidance.

18. In addition, SFC's Skills and Coherent Provision Team will meet with regional colleges and with the University of the Highlands and Islands as the Regional Strategic Body for these regions to discuss FA progress and delivery and determine provision for the subsequent academic year.

19. The indicative timeline for SFC / institutional engagement is set out below:

    - October 2026: Request for data on the numbers of FA enrolments by level and framework to determine recruitment against expected sector recruitment figures.
    - November-December 2026: Engagement to discuss FA progress to date, delivery and any operational challenges.
    - April 2027: Request for data on the finalised numbers of FA enrolments by level and framework.

20. Colleges must notify SFC's Skills and Coherent Provision team as soon as practically possible if the college plans to cease delivery of an FA framework.

21. SFC will monitor the uptake of activity through engagement as set out in paragraph 19 and FES returns. The requirements for reporting through FES can be found in data collection guidance and in Annex B of this paper. SFC will continue to work with SDS to produce a FA Annual Report, facilitated through a joint data sharing agreement.

22. FA activity funded through Local Authorities: Colleges should not claim credits for FA activity contracted through a LA. If the FA activity is contracted through a LA, then the FA course must be coded as FES 1 Source of Finance code '05' SDS and credits cannot be claimed. The Qualification Aim at FES 1 and FES 2 should be code '40' Foundation Level Apprenticeship and the FES 2 Target Group should be code '2' Foundation Apprentice.' Both the 'Qualification Aim' and 'Target Group' fields must be populated as above.

Marketing and communications requirements

23. In promoting the FAs, colleges should take appropriate positive action in marketing to schools, pupils and parents, with a view to improving representation where there is clear imbalance in provision, targeting gender, disability, ethnicity and people who have been in care. A marketing toolkit which provides further guidance on promotion of FAs is available at www.apprenticeships.scot/resources.

Allocations and funding

24. The Final College Funding Allocations for AY 2026-27 confirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to FAs as part of senior phase provision, with the expectation that the sector will deliver up to 2,500 opportunities in AY 2026-27. As in previous years, separate FA credits have not been identified when setting college credit thresholds for AY 2026-27.

25. SFC will continue to maximise FA opportunities within our core teaching provision, in line with Scottish Government expectations, whilst recognising the need to balance this alongside other provision.

26. Colleges can vire funding and credit activity between frameworks within their overall allocation; however, in doing so they should be mindful of the overall provision and the relevance of that provision to the needs of the regional economy.

27. Colleges should work with LAs to meet demand within the region, up to the budget available. If colleges have capacity to deliver additional activity, and there is unmet demand within the LA, then colleges should aim to deliver that activity.

28. Colleges should draw down funding for FAs as they would for core funding and comply with SFC's Credit Guidance for 2026-27.

Learner travel expenses

29. SFC, in liaison with Scottish Government, will continue to administer travel funding for FA learners on Level 6 frameworks in AY 2026-27. Funding will be provided through Transport Scotland's Regional Transport Partnership to Employment Programme, which forms part of the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026. The eligibility criteria and claim limits remain unchanged. Colleges can claim up to £1,000 per student who cannot reasonably travel to their placement or college using a free bus service. This limit rises to £1,250 for remote and rural areas.

30. The template for claiming travel costs for Level 6 FA learners is provided in Annex D. SFC expects colleges' claims to be broadly in line with those made in previous years, where applicable, and will monitor claims against FA delivery levels reported through FES.

Conditions of funding

31. The following conditions apply:

    - Use of funding must meet the eligibility criteria set out in this guidance.
    - Any under-delivery or shortfall in total credit activity may result in the recovery of funding.
    - Colleges must provide data returns requested by SFC to the deadlines and standards specified, including FES reporting requirements.
    - Colleges must provide updates on the funded activity as requested by SFC.
    - In acknowledgement of SFC's funding contribution, our logo must be displayed on any publicity material relating to FAs (signage, posters, website, etc.). You will also be required to display other logos in recognition of FA delivery – full details are contained within the marketing toolkit on www.apprenticeships.scot/resources.

32. SFC is committed to processing any personal data fairly, transparently and in accordance with the law. SFC's privacy notice is available on our website. SFC will use the information submitted by colleges to provide regular updates to the Scottish Government on the current uptake and use of funding. (The Scottish Government's privacy notice is available on its website.)

Further information

33. In addition to this guidance document, the following annexes are also available to support this process:

    - Annex A: Breakdown of college credits by framework AY 2026-27.
    - Annex B: Reporting Requirements.
    - Annex C: FA Delivery Toolkit and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

34. Any queries/requests for further information should be directed to this e-mail: apprenticeships@sfc.ac.uk.

Dr Jacqui Brasted
Director for Strategic Transformation and Skills

Annex A: FA frameworks

1. There are 12 different FA frameworks at SCQF Level 6. They are designed to provide a work-based learning qualification that meets minimum standards of competence as defined by licensed Sector Skills Councils and industry. Each SCQF Level 6 FA framework contains three key components: skills, knowledge and competence.

2. There are three SCQF Level 4 and two SCQF Level 5 customised awards, each designed to provide a work-based learning qualification. Each Level 4/5 qualification contains two key components: a work-based learning project and a National Progression Award/Skills for Work qualification. The customised awards are as follows:

   - Construction Level 4 & Level 5.
   - Automotive Level 4.
   - Hospitality Level 4 & Level 5.

Breakdown of College Credits by Framework: AY 2026-27

FA Framework	Price group	Credits
Level 6: One-Year Delivery Programmes		
Accounting	1	14.0
Business Skills	1	12.5
Civil Engineering	3	17.0
Creative & Digital Media	2	14.7
Engineering	3	17.0
Financial Services	1	13.0
Food & Drink Operations	2	13.0
IT: Hardware & System Support	2	12.8
IT: Software Development	2	13.0
Scientific Technologies	2	12.0
Social Services & Healthcare	2	13.2

FA Framework	Price group	Credits
Social Services (Children & Young People)	2	13
Level 6: Two-Year Delivery Programmes		
Accounting	1	7.0
Business Skills	1	6.25
Civil Engineering	3	8.5
Creative & Digital Media	2	7.35
Engineering	3	8.5
Financial Services	1	6.5
Food & Drink Operations	2	6.5
IT: Hardware & System Support	2	6.4
IT: Software Development	2	6.5
Scientific Technologies	2	6.0
Social Services & Healthcare	2	6.6
Social Services (Children & Young People)	2	6.5
Level 4: One-Year Programmes		
Automotive	3	7.0
Construction	3	7.0
Hospitality	3	7.0
Level 5: One-Year Programmes		
Construction	3	7.0
Hospitality	3	7.0

Annex B: College-funded FA FES Reporting Requirements

Reporting Requirement	Evidence Requirement	Evidence Source	Comment
Enrolments	Student data entered into FES	FES Q1 Collection 6 November 2026	
	Qualification Name		
	Qualification Aim		Qualification Aim in FES Q1 and Q2 should be code '40'
	Type of Programme – school link		
	Year of course		
	Length of course		
	SQA Entry Group Award		
	Duration of Programme		
	Number of planned credits		
	Group Award		
	Student e-mail address	FES Q2 Collection 5 February 2027	
	Disability		
	Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)	SFC requires assurance that colleges will continue to develop ILPs, aligned to the college procedure, for all learners as	In previous years Colleges were asked to retain ILPs for audit purpose as part of SDS contract requirements.

Reporting Requirement	Evidence Requirement	Evidence Source	Comment
		part of quality processes	As part of changed accountabilities SFC will require assurance that ILPs are in place for FA learners. This assurance will be secured through engagement with SFC's Skills and Coherent Provision Team and Outcome Managers.
Learner Progress	Learner Review Forms	SFC requires assurance that colleges are engaging with LAs and providing updates on learner progress via the learner review approach. There is no requirement for colleges to provide SFC with samples of the Learner Review form.	Learner Review Forms were previously required to drawdown travel funding – this is not applicable in AY 2026-27. Assurance will be secured through engagement with SFC's Skills and Coherent Provision Team and Outcome Managers. FA learners should have an opportunity to provide feedback on their FA through the colleges formal external review process.
Employer Engagement	Employer contact name Employer street name Employer city	FES Q2 Collection 5 February 2027	Employer Work-Based Learning declaration is no longer required by SDS for travel

Reporting Requirement	Evidence Requirement	Evidence Source	Comment
			payments. However, SFC will seek assurance that the college continues to engage with employers to ensure they are committed to support the delivery of FAs, including provision of work placements for learners. SFC assurance will be secured through engagement with SFC's Skills and Coherent Provision Team, Outcome Managers and engagement with QAA.
	Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code		See FES Guidance notes for further information.
	Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code		
Equality	Gender balance Age Ethnicity Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Care experience	FES Q2 Collection 5 February 2027	
Achievement	Programme Element Result	FES Q3 Collection 25 June 2027	

Reporting Requirement	Evidence Requirement	Evidence Source	Comment
Travel Funding	Volume of in training level 6 students		For AY 2026-27, funding for FA travel will continue to be administered through SFC.

FAs funded through Local Authorities (LAs)

1. If FA activity is contracted through an LA then the FA must be coded as FES 1 Source of Finance code '05' SDS. Credits cannot be claimed for this activity. The Qualification Aim at FES 1 and FES 2 should be code '40' Foundation Level Apprenticeships and the FES Target Group should be code '2' Foundation Apprentice.
2. College must also comply with the following SFC conditions/guidance for AY 2026-27:
    - Conditions of College Funding (in Annex A).
    - Credit Guidance for Colleges (in Annex B).
    - Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model.
    - FES Guidance notes.
3. In partnership with SFC, SDS will evaluate the achievements of each provider by assessing the achieved performance levels, therefore colleges are required to make evidence available through FES for performance management purposes.

Annex C: FA delivery toolkit and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. The Foundation Apprenticeship delivery toolkit has been updated which colleges may find helpful. The toolkit includes some new resources including: a mentor guide, equalities information, and a summary which collates all the relevant links into one place for quick access.

2. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are updated as required.

Annex D: FA travel claim

1. From November 2026, SFC has published the travel claim request form for AY 2026–27. Please download the spreadsheet template here.
2. Colleges should complete the request form and email it to SFC's Student Support team mailbox (email: funding@sfc.ac.uk) by **18 December 2026**.
3. FA Level 6 learners are not fundable where a free bus pass is viable for use by the learner to get to their college / employer premises.
4. Where the free bus pass is not viable, learners are eligible to be funded for travel up to a maximum of £1,000 per learner, with an additional £250 rural uplift where applicable.