

Education Maintenance Allowance Return 2025–26



Education Maintenance Allowance Return 2025–26

Issue Date:	20 July 2026
Reference:	SFC/GD/15/2026
Deadline:	18 September 2026
Summary:	Guidance notes for the completion of the Education Maintenance Allowance 2025–26.
FAO:	Principals/Chairs/Finance Directors/Board Secretaries of Scotland’s colleges and the general public.
Further Information:	EMAIL: datareturns@sfc.ac.uk

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Revisions to EMA Return guidance

1. Apart from the adjusted EMA return dates, there is no change in the 2025-26 EMA Return guidance.
2. As part of the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver a simplified post-school education and skills funding body landscape, further education (FE) student support provision will be transferring from SFC to SAAS.
3. Transition will be from 1 August 2026, for the start of the academic year 2026 to 2027. SFC and SAAS will be working together on this process in 2026-27.

Introduction

4. This document contains guidance notes for completing the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Return 2025-26.

About the Education Maintenance Return

5. Under the EMA programme, colleges must submit two kinds of returns to SFC:
 - Monthly aggregate returns.
 - Annual aggregate return (collected in September) that contains individualised information on the students participating in the programme. The 2025-26 template must be used for this return. Any templates from prior years populated will not be accepted by SFC.
6. Each return serves two purposes:
 - Acting as a data return, giving information on the operation of the programme.
 - Acting as a claim form for payments relating to college activity under the programme.
7. Both returns allow reconciliation checks to be carried out and will be used to monitor the EMA budget.
8. Any queries or correspondence relating to the collection should be made to datareturns@sfc.ac.uk

Annual aggregate return

9. The annual aggregate return is collected on behalf of the Scottish Government for reporting purposes.
10. Before you make an individualised return, select the name of the college; the college field will automatically be filled with the college number.
11. We **do not** require student data for anyone that has not received a payment – **only include data for those students who have received an EMA payment.**

Data required

12. The mandatory data we require in the 2025-26 annual aggregate form is as follows.
13. **Note: the data fields should match exactly what has been reported in the FES student record and if the return is not submitted in the format as requested it will not be accepted (see [Annex A](#)).**

Field	Title	Explanation
A	Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) candidate number	Student's unique SQA number; if student has no SQA candidate number leave field blank.
B	Programme directory number	This number is a unique number in FES which identifies each programme and allows matching to the student FES record. This should be 8 characters in length.
C	College Programme ID	Unique identifier for programme(s) as used by the college that the student is enrolled on to and as reported in FES. This should be provided at the course group/period level.
D	Student matriculation number	Student's unique college matriculation number.
E	Surname	Student's surname.
F	Full forename	Student's first name.
G	Sex of student	Sex of the student. Please select a suitable option from the drop-down menu (Male/Female/prefer not to say/unknown).

Field	Title	Explanation
H	Date of Birth	Student's full date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy format).
I	Home post code	Postcode of student's permanent home location
J	Household income	Combined incomes of all people sharing a particular household or place of residence of the candidate.
K	Level of final EMA payment (£30)	Fixed field – weekly allowance the student is entitled to.
L	Mode of attendance	Student's mode of attendance will be part-time or full-time. Please select a suitable option from the drop-down menu (full-time or part-time).
M	Total EMA paid, excluding admin payments (£)	Total amount of maintenance money paid to the candidate excluding the administration fee paid to colleges.
N	Total number of weekly payments made to student	Number of weekly payments made (not pounds paid) to the student cumulative of the number of weekly payments received. Again, this should exclude any administration payments.
O	Expected total payment (= weeks x level of payment)	Calculated field – expected total payment
P	Total error check	Error check – if weeks by payment level does not = total EMA then the cell will be highlighted red.
Q	Student started after 13 January 2025	Students who enrolled or became eligible for an EMA after the January return was submitted should be recorded in this return to ensure the administration cost is paid to your college. Please select a suitable option from the drop-down menu (yes or no).

Returning the form

14. Please submit the September aggregate return by **18 September 2026**. Ensure you have titled the spreadsheet with 'EMA 2025-26' followed by the college name. Your college MIS staff can upload the file to the SFC SecureShare CDC site.
15. The return should be submitted in the format as requested and on the 2025-26 template (not a prior year's edition), if not it will not be accepted and will be returned to the college.
16. Please contact datareturns@sfc.ac.uk, if you have any queries about the SFC SecureShare CDC site.

Annex A: Return samples



Education Maintenance Allowance Return for 2025-26

Institution Name:

Main Contact Name:

Institution Code:

Email:

Please complete the main contact field as this will help us keep our records up to date

Notes for completing the return

1. Please check that that you have entered the data into the table correctly to ensure you are returning accurate data.
2. The table should include all students in EMA system from start to end of the academic session payment period.
3. Each enrolment requires a separate record i.e if a student has withdrawn from a course and starts a new course.
4. The return contains a number of validation checks to help identify any errors or discrepancies.
5. The completed template should be returned via the SFC Secure Share - CDC site.
6. Guidance for completing the return [EMA 2025-26 guidance](#)
7. If you have any questions please email datareturns@sfc.ac.uk
8. Return date no later than Friday 18 September 2026.

SQA Candidate Number	Programme directory number	College Programme ID	Student matriculation number	Surname	Full Forename	Sex of student	Date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy)	Home postcode	Household Income	Level of EMA payment (£30)	Mode of attendance	Total EMA paid, exc admin payments (£)	Total number of weekly payments made to student	Expected total payment (= weeks x level of payment)	Total error check (if weeks by payment level does not = total EMA)	Student started after 13 January 2026
Student's unique SQA number; if student has no SQA candidate number leave field blank.	This number is a unique number in FES which identifies each programme & allows matching to the student FES record. This should only be 8 characters made up of letters and digits.	Unique identifier for programme(s) as used by the college that the student is enrolled on to and as reported in FES. This should be provided at the course group/period level.	Student's unique college matriculation number.	Student's surname.	Student's first name.	Sex of the student Please select a suitable option from the drop-down menu (Male/Female /prefer not to say/unknown)	Student's full date of birth (dd/mm/yyyy format).	Postcode of student's permanent home location.	Combined incomes of all people sharing a particular household or place of residence of the candidate.	Fixed field - weekly allowance the student is entitled to.	Student's mode of attendance will be part-time or full-time. Please select a suitable option from the drop-down menu (full-time or part-time).	Total amount of maintenance money paid to the candidate excluding the administration fee paid to colleges.	Number of weekly payments made (not pounds paid) to the student cumulative of the number of weekly payments received. Again, this should exclude any administration payments.	Calculated field - expected total payment	Error check - if weeks by payment level does not = total EMA then the cell will be highlighted red.	Students who enrolled or became eligible for an EMA after the January return was submitted should be recorded in this return to ensure the administration cost is paid to your college. Please select a suitable option from the drop-
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