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College Fee Waiver Policy AY 2026–27



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Summary: Description of the categories of students for which a college may use an SFC fee waiver in Academic Year 2026-27.

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College Fee Waiver Policy for AY 2026–27

Introduction

1. This document describes the categories of students for which a college may apply a fee waiver from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in Academic Year (AY) 2026-27. The core teaching funding allocations set out in the [College Final Funding Allocations for AY 2026-27](#) include an allowance for fee waivers.
2. The standard fee waiver policy should focus on the students rather than on the course of study (except courses classified as 'Price Group 5').

Policy changes for AY 2026–27

3. There are no policy changes for AY 2026-27. We have updated the list of benefits and tax credits under 'Part-time students' at paragraph 6 to align with the range of benefits and tax credits that are currently available.

Tuition fee rates

4. The full-time Higher Education (HE) fee rate (for Higher National/sub-degree courses) is set by the Scottish Government and remains at £1,285. The Further Education (FE) full-time and part-time tuition fee rates remain at £1,008.

Eligible students

5. A college may apply a fee waiver in respect of activity for any of the following types of students:
 - i. FE students following full-time non-advanced programmes (other than those over the age of 18 who are studying at Orkney College or Shetland College) for whom credits can be claimed. However, students on courses which do not meet the current definition of full-time, but which would have been classified as full-time under the previous definition, are eligible for a non-means-tested part-time fee waiver based on the credits for the course.
 - ii. Flexibilities have been introduced to the credit guidance on claiming credits for short re-skilling and upskilling programmes. If colleges have students on short full-time courses, they may allocate a fee waiver.
 - iii. FE students where credits can be claimed, including those studying at Orkney College or Shetland College, with additional support needs or disabilities on courses in Price Group 5.

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- iv. Students for whom credits can be claimed (see the [Credit Guidance for Colleges 2026–27](#) for more details) and who satisfy the conditions in paragraph 6 below, including those studying at Orkney College or Shetland College, and who are studying either:
- a. A part-time FE programme.
- OR**
- b. A part-time programme of study that is credit-bearing at HE level (equivalent to at least SCQF Level 7) up to and including a first degree.
- v. State school pupils undertaking college activities that form part of their school-based curriculum. A fee waiver will similarly be available for other pupils whose education is funded by the state. Such students should not be means-tested.
- vi. Privately or home-educated school pupils will be eligible for a part-time fee waiver on a means-tested basis. However, in exceptional circumstances, the college may waive the fees and claim fee waiver for privately or home-educated pupils, even if the means testing would otherwise rule them out. For example, where a pupil has additional support needs or other unavoidable circumstances that make it impossible for the pupil to be educated in the state school system.
- vii. Only state school pupils undertaking college activities that form part of their school-based curriculum are eligible for an automatic non-means-tested fee waiver. Other students under the age of 16 are eligible under the fee waiver policy like any other student. This means that for part-time activity, these students, as with other students, should be means-tested.

Part-time students

6. Part-time students, referred to in paragraph 5(iv) above, should satisfy the criteria below. The benefits and tax credits referred to relate to Scottish and UK benefit and tax credit systems only:
- i. The student or the student’s family are in receipt of:
 - Pension Credit.
 - Income-based Job Seekers Allowance.
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
 - Housing Benefit.
 - Universal Credit.

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- ii. Or the student is in receipt of:
- Young Carer Grant.
 - Carer Support Payment / Scottish Carer Supplement (this includes carers who have an ‘underlying entitlement’ to Carer Support Payment but do not receive it because, for example, they receive a state pension).
 - Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance.
 - Pension Age Disability Payment.
 - Adult Disability Payment.
 - Child Disability Payment.
 - Employment and Support Allowance (this also includes people whose contributory ESA has ended due to the time-limited nature of this benefit, but who remain entitled to NI credits for incapacity).
 - Carer’s Allowance (this includes carers who have an ‘underlying entitlement’ to Carer’s Allowance but do not receive it because, for example, they receive a state pension).
- iii. The taxable income of the student’s family in the previous financial tax year is equivalent to or lower than the threshold below:
- Single person: £10,400.
 - Couple without children: £18,000.
 - Single person with dependent children: £21,600.
 - Couple with dependent children: £29,100.
 - Where there has been a material reduction in income from the previous financial tax year, the taxable income of the student’s family in the current financial tax year can be assessed.
- iv. Or the student is a person (or the spouse or child of a person) who is an asylum seeker living in Scotland as defined in section 18 of the [Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).
- v. Or the student is Care-Experienced. This is defined as looked after and in the care of the Local Authority and can include situations where the student is living in a foster home, children’s home, residential home, in kinship care or in the care of the Local Authority in their own home or in informal kinship care with Local Authority involvement. This includes Scottish-domiciled students who have experienced care outside of the UK.

Students on short full-time courses

7. Under Student Award Agency Scotland's (SAAS) current student support guidance, colleges can provide bursary and other student support for short full-time courses. Additional flexibilities have also been introduced to SFC's [Credit Guidance for Colleges 2026–27](#) on claiming credits for short re-skilling and upskilling programmes.
8. In AY 2021-22 we increased access to fee waivers for students on short full-time courses, where students had been assessed as eligible for student support. In AY 2022-23 we expanded the scope of this policy to allow students on all short full-time courses to access fee waivers, where they meet the other eligibility criteria described in this policy and the [Credit Guidance for Colleges 2026–27](#). In their Further Education Statistics (FES) return, colleges should record students on short full-time courses using FES code 56. Further details are set out in the [FES Guidance](#).

Residency

9. A college will be able to apply a fee waiver in respect of the activity of a student, only if they meet the criteria set out in this document and they are eligible for support on the basis of residence:
 - i. That person falls with the definition of eligibility in Schedule 1 of The Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Determination 2022. The current [FE Residency Guide](#) (for AY 2025-26) is on the SFC website. However, it should be noted that this guidance is likely to be updated before the start of AY 2026-27, as summarised in paragraph 10 below. **OR**
 - ii. The student is ordinarily resident in Orkney or Shetland on the date of commencement of the course of study and has been ordinarily resident in the British Islands throughout the previous three years and is settled in the UK within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971 on the relevant date. **OR**
 - iii. The student is a young asylum seeker, or the child of an asylum seeker, who is studying a full-time or part-time FE course, and is living in Scotland on the relevant date. To be classed as a young asylum seeker, or the child of an asylum seeker, an application for asylum should be submitted to the Home Office before they are 18 years old. **OR**
 - iv. The student is a person (or the spouse) who is an asylum seeker living in Scotland on either a part-time or full-time English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course; studying a part-time non-advanced; or studying a part-time advanced course. **OR**

- v. The student is a non-asylum seeker living in Scotland on a part-time ESOL course and the student's main purposes for being in the European Union (EU) is not to receive education.
10. In 2021 the Scottish Government updated its residency guidance for colleges to reflect the UK's exit from the EU. In April 2022 further updates were added to the guidance on support for Ukrainian students. The Scottish Government wrote to college Principals in December 2022 to outline planned changes to legislation that took effect from AY 2023-24. SAAS will publish a fully updated FE Residency Guidance for AY 2026-27 on [the Further Education Publications](#) page of the Student Information Scotland (SIS) website in Summer 2026. A PDF version will also be made available on SFC's website under the Student Support section of the [Student Interests page](#).
11. This will apply to students starting a new course and students continuing on a course. These criteria ensure that we meet our obligations under [The United Nations Conventions on the Right of the Child](#).

Other conditions

12. The burden of proof is on the student to satisfy the college with evidence of the eligibility of their status. If the circumstances of the student change during the course so that the student becomes eligible for a part-time fee waiver when they were not previously, the college can (at their discretion) claim back the full fee from SFC and reimburse the student. The change must occur and be reported to the college by the student before the 'required date', which for AY 2026-27 is:
 - For courses of 20 weeks or less: the date where 25% of the length of course has elapsed.
 - For courses of more than 20 weeks: 5 weeks after the course start date.
13. For more information, please refer to SFC's [Credit Guidance for Colleges 2026–27](#).
14. Changes to student circumstances occurring after this date cannot be claimed back from SFC. However, colleges are free to use their own discretion with college funds.
15. There is no upper or lower age limit on a student's eligibility for a fee waiver.
16. The college will be able to apply a fee waiver in respect of students who satisfy the eligibility rules for the course (as defined in the [Credit Guidance](#)), where the college is claiming credits for their activity in the current AY.
17. With the exception of any fee waivers for state school pupils who are undertaking college activities that form part of their school-based curriculum, additional part-time activity over and above full-time study will not be eligible for a fee waiver, although it may be eligible for credits (to determine if additional part-time activity is eligible, please refer to the [Credit Guidance](#)).

18. Students taking two or more part-time courses will be eligible for a maximum of one full-time fee waiver. The maximum amounts claimable for each student will be:
 - The FE fee (£1,008 in AY 2026-27) for students taking FE courses.
 - The FE fee (£1,008 in AY 2026-27) for students taking a mix of FE and part-time HE courses.
 - The HE fee (£1,285 in AY 2026-27) for students taking part-time HE courses - fee waivers should not be claimed for full-time HE courses, as these are funded through [SAAS](#).

Full-time advanced (HE) fees

19. Fees for full-time advanced courses are assessed and paid, if eligible, by SAAS. Fees for full-time advanced courses are therefore not included in this fee waiver policy.
20. Where a student is undertaking two full-time courses simultaneously, one at FE level and one at HE level, they should not receive more than one full-time fee waiver across FE and HE in a single AY.

Programmes which span Academic Years

21. Colleges should record students eligible for fee waivers on programmes which span AYs, in the AY in which the course ends. This is consistent with how activity is claimed under the SFC Credit Guidance.

Veterans scheme

22. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) programme to assist service veterans gain access to education is continuing. The MOD will meet the tuition fees for study up to [Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) level 6 for some service veterans who do not meet our fee waiver criteria.
23. The number of students falling into this category is expected to be very small. Colleges should note that a fee waiver cannot be applied for any students being supported through this scheme. More information is available on the [Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Service website](#).

Forces personnel

24. Military personnel and their families should be assessed on a relevant connection to Scotland. If they meet the criteria to be assessed as having a relevant connection to Scotland, military personnel, and their families, will be eligible to receive a fee waiver. This is detailed in the Scottish Government's [Further Education Residency Guidance](#).

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