

# Childcare Policy 2023-24



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Summary:	This guidance sets out the conditions for use of Childcare funds for FE/HE college students in Academic Year 2023-24.
FAO:	Principals and Finance Directors of Scotland's colleges and the general public.
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## Introduction

1. This guidance sets out the conditions for use by colleges of student support Childcare Funds (CCF) for Academic Year (AY) 2023-24. These funds are for students studying both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) courses in college.

## Background

2. The College Further and Higher Education Childcare Fund Guidance is included as Annex A to this publication. This guidance is jointly produced by Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) on behalf of the Scottish Government to assist universities and colleges in the distribution of CCF to support students studying HE and FE courses. SAAS has separately published its guidance to universities for AY 2023-24, so the guidance in Annex A relates only to the distribution of CCF in colleges.
3. 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. There are two elements to CCF:
  - 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.
  - The Discretionary Childcare element, which is open to all eligible students.

## Policy changes for AY 2023-24

4. As set out in the guidance (Annex A) there are no substantive policy changes to CCF for AY 2023-24.
5. However, as with other student support policies, the rules on student eligibility on the basis of residency have changed. In February 2023 SFC circulated planned updates to the FE Residency Guide for AY 2023-24, covering changes to evacuated or assisted British nationals from Afghanistan and UK nationals who have fled Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion. The Residency Guide for AY 2023-24 is available on SFC's [information for colleges](#).
6. We have removed the COVID-related flexibility that was temporarily in place for AYs 2021-22 and 2022-23 that allowed colleges to use unspent CCF to supplement their HE Discretionary funds (see paragraph 23).

## Purpose of funding

7. The purpose of 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. The LPCG element of the funding is an entitlement-based grant to be managed by colleges.
8. Where a college chooses to add to CCF 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 SFC funding that student support funds will be administered in accordance with the requirements of the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#), the [Education \(Access Funds\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1990](#), the [Education \(Access Funds\) \(Scotland\) \(No. 2\) Determination 2022](#).

## Guidance for students

11. The policy guidance provided in Annex A has been written for bursary and student support officers within colleges. We recommend that for communication with students on student support, colleges publish their own college policy. This will ensure that students receive information that is relevant to their own circumstances, local community and college systems.
12. The [Student Information Scotland \(SIS\) portal](#) is a Scottish Government resource which puts information about FE and HE student funding and finance altogether in one place, including help for parents, carers and education professionals.

## Conditions of grant

13. These funds must be used by colleges for student support purposes, in accordance with this policy and any changes made to this policy. (SFC retains the right to audit relevant institutional documentation to satisfy itself that this is the case.)
14. Colleges should also follow all applicable legislation and any supplementary guidance SFC may issue when using these funds.
15. General conditions of grant also apply, as set out in annual AY College Final Funding announcements.

16. Under no circumstances can colleges use CCF 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.
  - Compensation for a lack of parental contributions.
  - Communal facilities, adaptations to buildings or to meet staff salaries.
17. 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.
18. It is the responsibility of each college to ensure that their students are familiar with the availability of these funds and the procedures they must follow to access funding.

## General conditions of award for CCF

19. Students who are in receipt of other living costs support 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 impact on their individual circumstances.
20. Colleges can access general advice and guidance on benefits on the [UK Government's website](#). Further information related to benefits can also be accessed through the [SIS portal](#). In addition, more information about students and their benefits can be found on the [Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland \(CPAG\) website](#).
21. Only students on SFC-fundable non-advanced and advanced courses are eligible. For an explanation of 'SFC-fundable', please refer to SFC's 2023-24 [Credit Guidance](#).

## Transfer of funds

22. Colleges can transfer funding between 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 element of funding, including transferred funds, in their audited data returns.

23. Colleges are not permitted to transfer funding from FE/HE CCF to HE Discretionary funds. This was permitted in AYs 2021-22 and 2022-23 to provide colleges with additional flexibility to respond to student demand during the COVID-19 recovery phase.

## Recovery of unspent funds

24. Colleges cannot carry-forward any unused funds. Unspent funds will be recovered by SFC as part of the annual in-year redistribution exercise.

## Timing of allocation of childcare awards

25. Where childcare providers require upfront payment of CCF, colleges should take this into account in their allocations to students and, if necessary, should consider advance payments to students to cover any upfront costs incurred. Upfront payments to cover childcare costs should also be made to students where there are delays in processing awards.

## Reporting mechanisms and data collections

26. 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.
27. 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 2023-24 FES data return is due on 4 October 2024. [Guidance on completing the data returns](#) can be found on the SFC website.
28. 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.
29. Colleges should ensure that their auditors receive a copy of this policy and the student support audit guidance. The [Student Support Funding Audit Guidance AY 2022-23](#) can be accessed on the SFC website. Colleges may wish to provide their auditors with details of SFC's [student support web pages](#) and SFC student support staff contact details (see paragraph 31).
30. Colleges should refer to the Accounts Direction for Scotland's Colleges when presenting information on student support funds in their annual accounts. The [Accounts Direction for Scotland's Colleges AY 2022-23](#) can be accessed on the SFC website.

## Further information

31. Please contact the SFC Student Support team, email [studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Maconachie', is positioned above a horizontal line.

**Richard Maconachie FCCA**  
Director of Finance