



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC Guidance

Reference: SFC/GD/07/2024

Issue date: 27/06/2024

Childcare Funding for College Students AY 2024-25



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Issue Date:	27 June 2024
Reference:	SFC/GD/07/2024
Summary:	This guidance sets out the conditions for use of Childcare Funds for FE and HE college students in Academic Year 2024-25.
FAO:	Principals and Finance Directors of Scotland’s colleges and the general public.
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Table of Contents

Childcare Funding for College Students AY 2024-25	4
Introduction	4
Background	4
Policy changes for AY 2024-25	4
Purpose of funding	5
Legislative context	5
Guidance for students	5
Conditions of grant	5
General conditions of award for Childcare Funds	6
Transfer of funds	7
Recovery of unspent funds	7
Timing of allocation of childcare awards	7
Reporting mechanisms and data collections	7
Further information	8

Childcare Funding for College Students AY 2024-25

Introduction

1. This guidance sets out the conditions for use by colleges of student support Childcare Funds for Academic Year (AY) 2024-25. These funds are for students studying both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) courses in college.

Background

2. The College FE and HE 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 Childcare Funds (CCF) to support students studying HE and FE courses. SAAS has separately published its guidance to universities for AY 2024-25, 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 2024-25

4. As set out in the guidance (Annex A) there are no substantive policy changes to CCF for AY 2024-25. There are some updates to residential eligibility as set out below.
5. In alignment with all SFC student support policies, the rules on a student's residential eligibility will be updated for this Academic Year. The changes were detailed in the [Education \(Fees and Student Support\) \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2024](#). These regulations will become effective on 1 August 2024.
6. In summary, for the purposes of student support, the updates to the residential criteria extend eligibility for three categories of prospective student:
 - Female Afghan students who have been prevented from continuing their studies in Afghanistan by the Taliban regime;
 - Victims of domestic violence or domestic abuse who have been abandoned overseas and granted leave to enter, and to their children; and
 - An extension to Ukrainian nationals who have applied under the Ukrainian Permission Extension Scheme.

7. The updated FE Residency Guidance for AY 2024-25 will be published by the Scottish Government in late Summer 2024. Once published, it will be available on the [Student Support section](#) of the SFC website.

Purpose of funding

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

Legislative context

10. Colleges should follow all applicable legislation. College governing bodies have the power under section 12(2)(c) of the [Further and Higher Education \(Scotland Act\) 1992](#) and section 12(B) of the [Further and Higher Education \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) to provide their students such assistance of a financial or other nature, as they consider appropriate.
11. It is a condition of the [Education \(Access Funds\) Discretionary Funds \(Scotland\) Direction 2023](#) that SFC shall administer student support funds, in conjunction with the fundable bodies, in accordance with the requirements of section 73ZA (1)(a) of the [Education \(Scotland\) Act 1980](#), the [Student Support \(Scotland\) Regulations 2022](#), the [Education \(Discretionary Funds\) \(Scotland\) Determination 2023](#).

Guidance for students

12. 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.
13. The [Student Information Scotland \(SIS\) portal](#) is a resource, delivered in partnership between SAAS and SFC, which brings information relating to HE and FE student funding and finance together in one place, including help for parents, carers and education professionals.

Conditions of grant

14. These funds must be used by colleges for student support childcare 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.

15. Colleges should also follow all applicable legislation and any supplementary guidance SFC may issue when using these funds.
16. General conditions of grant also apply, as set out in annual AY College Final Funding announcements.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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 Childcare Funds

20. Students who are in receipt of other living cost 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.
21. 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 [Student Information Scotland portal](#). In addition, more information about students and their benefits can be found on the [Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland \(CPAG\) website](#).
22. Only students on SFC-fundable courses are eligible. For more information, please refer to SFC's [Credit Guidance for Colleges 2024-25](#).

Transfer of funds

23. Colleges can transfer funding between FE/HE CCF and FE Bursary and FE Discretionary funds to enable them to effectively meet the needs of their students. Colleges must however account for total spend on each element of funding, including transferred funds, in their audited data returns.
24. Colleges **are not** permitted to transfer funding from FE/HE CCF to HE Discretionary funds. This was temporarily 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

25. 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

26. 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

27. 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.
28. 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. Further guidance on completing the data returns can be found on SFC's website.
29. Colleges are no longer required to complete an aggregate return on student support spend. However, an auditor is still required to sign-off the FES online student support funding report.
30. 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 SFC's website. The updated Student Support Audit Guidance for AY 2023-24 will be published in late Summer. Once published, the guidance will be available to access on SFC's website. Colleges may wish to provide their auditors with details of SFC's [student support web pages](#) and SFC Student Support Team email address.

31. 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 SFC's website. The updated Accounts Direction for AY 2023-24 will be published in late Summer. Once published, the guidance will be available to access on SFC's website.

Further information

32. Please contact the SFC Student Support team, email studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk.



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