

## 2016-17 National policy: childcare funds for further and higher education students in Scotland's colleges

Issue date: 12 April 2016

Reference: SFC/GD/05/ 2016

Summary: This guidance sets out the conditions for use by colleges of the childcare funds for academic year 2016-17

FAO: Principals and directors of Scotland's colleges

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## **2016-17 National policy: childcare funds for further and higher education students in Scotland's colleges**

### **Introduction**

1. This guidance sets out the conditions for use by colleges of the childcare funds (CCF) for academic year (AY) 2016-17. These funds are for students studying both further and higher education courses in college.

### **Background**

2. The joint guidance *Further and Higher Education Discretionary Childcare Funds* is produced by the Scottish Government to assist colleges in the distribution of CCF to support students studying further and higher education courses at college.
3. These funds contain two elements which are:
  - All eligible further and higher education student parents attending courses at college will be able to apply for help with registered childcare costs from the college.
  - The Lone Parent Childcare Grant (LPCG) element which will be an entitlement payment of up to £1,215 per year to all eligible further and higher education students who are lone parents and who have formal registered childcare expenses while studying.

### **Policy changes for AY 2016-17**

4. There are no significant changes to the guidance for 2016-17. The allocations for 2016-17 are based on a sum of just over £3,000 per student multiplied by the average number of students supported at each college over the last three years. This brings the allocations of childcare funding to colleges in line with the most recent data on student numbers and spend. Colleges are reminded that this is not a cap on the award that can be made to an individual student and colleges remain free to determine the appropriate level of awards to individual students from within their overall allocations.
5. It is our intention to introduce further changes to childcare funding as recommended by the Student Support Review Group from 2017-18 onwards, subject to the availability of funding and in the context of our wider funding settlement. We will also continue to look at how the guidance on childcare funding is used across the sector, with a view to standardising practice where possible.

## **Purpose of the funds**

6. The 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.
7. Colleges need to be aware that FE & HE LPCG, is an entitlement grant to be managed by colleges, it is cash limited and any additional funds required to meet demand will need to come from college resources.
8. Where a college chooses to add to these funds from its own resources, it may use the additional resources as it sees fit.

## **Legislative context**

9. The governing body have power under section 12(2)(c) of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992* to provide to students of its college such assistance of a financial or other nature as it considers appropriate.
10. It is a condition of the *Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Direction 2013*, that SFC shall administer student support funds, in conjunction with the fundable bodies, in accordance with the requirements of section 73ZA of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*, the *Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Regulations 1990*, the *Education (Access Funds) (Scotland) Determination 2013*.

## **Joint guidance**

11. The [joint policy guidance for AY 2015-16 is available on the SFC website](#).
12. This policy guidance has been written for bursary and student support officers within FE colleges as well as for advisors in HE institutions. We recommend that for communication with their students on student support, colleges publish their own college policy. This will ensure the students receive information that is relevant to their own circumstances and local community.
13. More [information for college student support officers](#) can be found on the SFC website.

## **Conditions of grant**

14. These funds must be used by colleges for student support purposes, in accordance with this policy and any changes made to this policy.
15. Colleges should also follow all applicable legislation and any supplementary guidance SFC may issue from time to time when using these funds.

16. General conditions of grant also apply, as set out in outcome agreements.
17. The chief executive officer must ensure that all accounts and records are adequate and that there are systems in place to minimise incorrect payments.
18. Under no circumstances can the college use the funds 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 but still studying at school. This includes students studying at school under the school/college partnership.
  - Administration costs (including the costs of any recovery of overpayments).
  - Capital purposes.
  - Top-up fees such as tuition and/or exam fees.
  - To compensate for a lack of parental contributions.
  - Colleges must not use the CCF to provide communal facilities, adaptations to buildings or to meet staff salaries.
19. 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.
20. It is the responsibility of the college to ensure that students are familiar with the availability of these funds and the procedures they must follow to gain assistance.

## **Conditions of award**

### ***General conditions of award for FE childcare funds***

21. Students who are in receipt of other 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 affect their individual circumstances.
22. Colleges can access general advice and guidance on benefits at:  
  
<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/index.htm>
23. In addition more information about students and their benefits can found on the [Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland \(CPAG\) website](#).
24. Students must have reached their statutory school leaving age to be eligible for assistance. Students studying at school are not eligible. Students studying at school under the school/college partnership are therefore not eligible.

25. Only students on SFC-fundable non-advanced courses are eligible. The only exception to this is courses delivered as part of the SDS employability fund programme. For an explanation of fundable see the [SFC's student activity data guidance circular letter for 2016-17](#), which can be found via the following web link.

### ***SDS employability fund***

26. Changes as a result of the introduction of this programme:
- Courses delivered as part of the SDS employability fund programme should be treated as if they were SFC fundable **for student support purposes only**.
  - Work placement and time spent in college should be treated in the same way, thereby allowing colleges flexibility in the design of courses and the integration of appropriate work placements.

### ***Transfer of funds***

27. Colleges can transfer money between the FE and HE CCF and the FE bursary and FE discretionary funds. They are encouraged to do so to enable them to effectively meet the needs of their students and their community. Colleges must account for total spend on each fund, including transferred money, in their audited statements.

### ***Using FE and HE childcare funds as bursaries***

28. Colleges may use their FE and HE CCF to meet shortfalls in their bursary allocations. This allows flexibility between bursary and CCF to meet the needs of students.
29. In order to fulfil our duty to account for the proper use of public funds, any college who wishes to do this should request this in writing or by email. Any CCF used in this way must meet the conditions of the bursary policy in full. Colleges cannot use CCF to meet bursary needs of students who are not eligible. Please ensure that you have met the childcare needs of students who are already being supported at the college before considering using these funds for bursary purposes.
30. Please note that this is not a virement of funds and to avoid clawback you should record your spend under CCF in your audited student support return.
31. Colleges will need to renew this request annually.

### ***Clawback of unspent funds***

32. Colleges cannot carry forward any unused funds. Unspent funds for AY 2015-16 will be clawed back by SFC during AY 2016-17.

### ***Use of bursary funds***

33. Colleges may use bursary funds as HE or FE CCF. The maximum amount of bursary funds that can be spent as CCF is half of the CCF allocation for the year. This use of bursary funds is **not a transfer** into the CCF. This spend must be included in the relevant bursary sections of the audited returns. The audited returns information can be found in the 'reporting mechanisms and data collection' section below.
34. The original FE and HE childcare allocation must be **fully committed** before bursary funds are used.
35. Where a college has used some of its bursary funds as FE or HE CCF but has not spent its childcare allocation in full, SFC will not consider those bursary funds as spent unless previous permission has been granted.
36. The unspent bursary funds will, as a result, be subject to a clawback under the bursary clawback rules.

### ***Timing of allocation of Childcare awards***

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

### **Reporting mechanisms and data collections**

38. Each college is required to complete and send to SFC by **14 October 2016** an aggregate audited statement and monitoring information for 2015-16.
39. These statements are collected by the SFC's statistics team. The [aggregate audited returns can be found on the SFC website.](#)
40. In the forthcoming returns colleges will be required to account for:
  - HE CCF.
  - FE and HE funds spent on LPCG.

41. Colleges should also ensure they include any recovered funds in the audited return form for the year of recovery. An auditor must sign the audited statement. Colleges should ensure that their auditors receive a copy of:
- The student support audit guidance circular.
  - This policy.
  - The national policy for further education bursaries.
  - The national policy for further education discretionary funds.
  - The relevant outcome agreement for 2016-17.
42. The relevant guidance is available at:
- <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/guidance/guidance.aspx>
43. You may wish to inform your auditors of our student support web pages and email address as follows:
- [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/colleges/collegefundingstreams/student\\_support/student\\_support.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/colleges/collegefundingstreams/student_support/student_support.aspx) and email: [studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:studentsupport@sfc.ac.uk).
44. You should refer to the *Accounts Direction for Scotland's Colleges and Universities 2016-17* when presenting information on the student support funds in your annual accounts. We aim to publish the direction for 2016-17 accounts in summer 2016 on the SFC website at:
- <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/guidance/GovernanceGuidance/FinancialSustainability/FinancialSustainabilityGuidance.aspx>
45. SFC collects data relating to individual students' bursary and other funding via the FES returns.
46. Each college is required to complete and send to SFC by **29 September 2017** an aggregate audited statement and monitoring information for 2016-17. The [aggregate audited return guidance](#) can be found on the SFC website.

#### Further information

47. Please contact Jane Scott, Policy Officer, Funding Policy for further information, tel: 0131 313 6660, email: [jscott@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:jscott@sfc.ac.uk)



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