

Subject:

Circular Number: FE 08/13

**FUNDING FOR STUDENTS WITH A LEARNING
DIFFICULTY AND/OR DISABILITY/
ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND**

Date of Issue:
01 July 2013

Target Audience:

- Principals/Directors/Chief Executives of Further Education Colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies
- FE College Finance Officers
- Colleges NI
- College Learning Support Co-ordinators
- College Student Support Officers
- College Discrete Provision Managers

Summary of Contents:

This circular consolidates existing guidance on eligibility and funding arrangements for the Additional Support Fund (Basic and Discrete) for the academic year 2013/14.

The following key points should be noted:

- Colleges should continue to use ASF Basic for students in discrete provision (coded 03 on NICIS), for whom an additional support need has been identified.
- An addendum may issue, pending the review of funding.

Enquiries:

Any enquiries about the contents of this circular should be addressed to:

Further Education Policy and Strategic Development Branch
Department for Employment and Learning
Adelaide House
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BELFAST
BT2 8FD

Status of Contents:

Information

Related Documents:

Superseded Documents:
FE 09/12

Expiry Date:
N/A

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INTRODUCTION

1. Article 13(2) of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 requires that 'the Governing Body of an Institution of Further Education shall have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties'. Colleges are also required to 'comply fully with the Equality Commission's Disability Discrimination Code of Practice for Further and Higher Education.'
2. ASF funding is targeted at **all** FE students, enrolled in FE college provision, who have declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. It is intended to help colleges to meet the necessary additional cost of provision for these students.

OBJECTIVE OF THE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND

3. The key objective of the ASF is to widen access and increase participation of SLDD in FE provision.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND: 2013/2014 ARRANGEMENTS

4. During the academic year 2013/14, the Department will provide colleges with £3.5 million ASF funding, broken down as follows:

Additional Support Fund Basic

£1.5 million, to help meet the cost of technical and personal support for all SLDD. ASF Basic will be allocated, as outlined in Appendix 4.

Additional Support Fund (Discrete)

£2 million to help meet the extra costs associated with offering discrete courses for SLDD, for whom mainstream provision is not suitable. This funding will be paid to colleges in three stages, and will be based on the number of FE SLDD code 03 students recorded on colleges' MIS systems in November 2013, February 2014, and June 2014.

5. All ASF expenditure should be based on objective assessment of need and supported by professional assessment, where deemed necessary. Further guidance is available in the Equality Commission's Disability Discrimination Code of Practice for Further and Higher Education.
6. All support should be in the form of additional, technical and/or personal support, purchased by the college as set out in Appendix 1, paragraphs 5 and 6. The ASF

can also be used to meet any additional salary costs incurred by the college to support ASF students.

7. Colleges may use the ASF to help meet the extra costs associated with offering discrete courses for FE SLDD (coded 03 on the Northern Ireland Colleges Information System (NICIS)) for the duration of their course.
8. Only those students who attend a college campus or college outreach centre are eligible to receive support through the ASF Fund. (See also Appendix 2, paragraph 5).
9. ASF cannot be used to support:
 - provision delivered by a third party or sponsored providers;
 - students enrolled in Higher Education in FE colleges, who are in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance under the FE Awards arrangements;
 - students in receipt of assistance under any other DEL-funded programmes, such as Steps to Work, Training for Success, ApprenticeshipsNI, EU-funded programmes, or full-cost recovery provision; or
 - provision, which is not delivered in a college campus or outreach centre (coded 04 on NICIS).
10. ASF cannot be used to cover student travel costs (for example, taxi/bus hire,) or any notional costs associated with providing additional support.
11. Detailed guidance on funding, recording and administration of ASF is set out in the attached Appendices:
 - ASF Basic - Appendix 1
 - ASF Discrete - Appendix 2
 - Audit and Accountability Arrangements - Appendix 3
 - Allocation and distribution of 2013/2014 ASF Basic - Appendix 4
 - ASF Monitoring form - Appendix 5
 - Sample declaration form - students coded 03 (Discrete) - Appendix 6
 - Summary table of funding eligibility - Appendix 7

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND (ASF) BASIC

1. This funding applies to all FE SLDD students, who have enrolled in FE mainstream provision (coded 02 on NICIS), **and** those in discrete provision (coded 03 on NICIS), for whom an additional support need has been identified (see appendix 7 for coding breakdown).
2. The ASF Basic is earmarked, limited, and discretionary and can be provided as an enhancement to the funding available to colleges for SLDD students, under the FE Funding Formula. Whilst the main purpose of this funding is to provide additional technical and/or personal support for individual students, who are in mainstream provision (e.g. braille, specialist software, signer), it can also be used to provide support for those students undertaking discrete provision, as mentioned above.
3. **It is imperative that colleges code these students, correctly, on the NICIS system, following assessment.**
4. To help meet the cost of technical and personal support for all SLDD, £1.5 million ASF Basic, will be allocated, as outlined in **Appendix 4**. Definitions of personal and technical support are detailed below.

Personal Support

5. Personal support is categorised as follows:
 - **Specialist Tutor/Adviser**, such as hearing or visual impairment tutor, IT consultancy, speech therapist or counsellor;
 - **Lecturer** or IT adviser (including technician);
 - **Interpreter** (for students with a hearing impairment);
 - **Support Worker/Classroom Assistant**, such as examination support or reader;
 - **Notetaker**, such as shorthand notetaker and/or typist, for assistance with student notes;
 - **Assessment**: one-off assessments, (for example, by an educational psychologist), where the assessment is considered necessary, and is in addition to the college's standard assessment and enrolment procedure. (Colleges should take all reasonable steps to ensure a student provides evidence of a disability, before progressing any assessment); and
 - **Staff time** for specific meetings in relation to an SLDD student.

Technical Support

6. The ASF may also be used to purchase specialised enabling equipment, such as braille, Reading Edge equipment, IT adaptations, specialist software and related licences and IT hardware, hearing loops, and conference folders.
7. Colleges may give consideration to leasing specialist equipment, if it is required for a short period of time and is the most cost-effective option.
8. Technical support does not include photocopying, books, printers, general software, and capital expenditure, such as lifts or items which will become the personal property of students.

Assessment Guidance

9. In order to ensure that ASF supports as many students as possible, it is imperative that funding is specifically targeted to widen SLDD participation in FE. In doing so, it is important to ensure equality between students undertaking FE provision and those undertaking HE provision in FE Colleges (via the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)). As such, it is recommended that the following general guidance should be considered for all needs assessments:-
 - assessment should be carried out, taking into consideration the evidence base, course structure, reasonableness and student capabilities, to justify the level of support agreed; and
 - a parameter of £20,000 per student, per annum should be considered, in line with HE (DSA) allocation, with 'exceptional' circumstances applicable, only where a strong evidence base exists to justify additional funding above this level. This will require a higher level of college authority.

Supplementary Learning Agreements

10. In order to ensure that the student is actively involved in the process of making any appropriate adjustments, colleges should complete and retain a Supplementary Learning Agreement (SLA).
11. SLAs can be maintained in either paper or electronic format. Records maintained electronically should highlight student involvement in the process, including signature evidence.
12. The following conditions apply to all FE students (both full-time and part-time), for whom ASF Basic is being claimed:
 - a) An enrolment form must be completed.

- b) All FE students, declaring a learning difficulty and/or disability at enrolment should be interviewed by the college's Learning Support Co-ordinator (or other appropriate member of staff).
- c) The Learning Support Co-ordinator should assess the student's support needs or arrange for an assessment to be completed.
- d) An **individual** SLA must be completed for each student, for whom ASF Basic is being claimed.

13. The minimum data requirements to be retained, in respect of each student, in addition to normal enrolment data, include:

- nature of disability and/or learning difficulty;
- details of additional needs/level of support required (this should include details of ASF personal and/or technical support, and associated costs);
- evidence of eligibility to support funding (e.g. educational psychologist's report, Statement of educational needs, GP letter etc.
- expected duration of support; and
- agreed progression route/action plan.

14. A minimum of two reviews must also be carried out in respect of each student. Details of reviews should be recorded, signed and dated by, both, the college representative and the student. It is important that records are maintained for those reviews arranged for which students failed to attend.

All agreements must be signed by, both, the appropriate college representative and the student.

15. Students should not be recorded on the College MIS as SLDD or any ASF funding claimed, until steps a) to d) (as set out in paragraph 12 above) have been completed and the requirement for additional support has been identified.

Progression

16. Upon enrolment, students, for whom basic funding is being, claimed should be actively involved in decisions relating to their course of study, support needs and educational and developmental progression. Progression routes must, as a minimum, ensure that the student has a clear pathway identified for future study or potential employment.

KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- **Where additional support has been identified during any part of an academic year, the student will be entitled to that support for the entire academic year.**
- **Where the course spans more than one year, but the additional support is required for one year only, the student will be entitled to support for that academic year only.**
- **It is mandatory for colleges to complete an SLA form for each individual student for the purposes of claiming ASF Basic.**
- **Failure to comply with these terms and conditions could result in recoveries being sought by the Department from the college concerned.**

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND (DISCRETE)

1. This funding applies to all FE SLDD students enrolled in discrete provision in a FE college or college outreach centre (coded 03 on NICIS).
2. ASF (Discrete) funding is earmarked to provide additional lecturers or classroom assistants to facilitate smaller class sizes to help accommodate those students who, as a result of their particular learning difficulty and/or disability, are unable to participate in mainstream provision.
3. The ASF (Discrete) for 2013/14 will provide colleges with £2 million to meet any additional costs arising from the provision of discrete courses for **FE SLDD (code 03 students only)**.
4. Funding will be paid to colleges in three stages and will be based on the number of FE SLDD code 03 students, recorded on colleges' MIS systems in November 2013, February 2014 and June 2014. Discrete funding will be distributed on the same basis as a Funded Learning Unit (FLU). Colleges will be notified of their ASF (Discrete) funding allocation, following each lift of the relevant data.
5. Discrete provision can **ONLY** be delivered in either a college main campus or college outreach centre. For the purpose of this exercise, college outreach centres are defined as any venue other than a FE main campus, used to deliver provision. This includes (but is not limited to) church halls, community halls, schools, and outreach FE campuses.

Supplementary Learning Agreements (SLAs) – ASF (Discrete) Full-time or Substantive Part-time FE students (five hours per week or more)

6. The following conditions apply to all FE students, for whom ASF (Discrete) is being claimed.
 - a) An enrolment form must be completed.
 - b) All full-time and substantive part-time FE students, enrolling in a discrete course, should have an assessment carried out to determine their course of study and any additional support required.
 - c) An assessment form must be completed and agreed by both parties.
 - d) An **individual** SLA must be completed for each student, for whom ASF (Discrete) is being claimed.

All agreements must be signed by, both, the appropriate college representative and the student or an appropriate third party.

7. The minimum data requirements to be retained in respect of each student, in addition to normal enrolment data, include:
- nature of disability and/or learning difficulty;
 - details of additional needs/level of support required (including details of any ASF Basic support required);
 - evidence of eligibility to support funding (e.g. educational psychologist's report, Statement of Educational Needs, GP letter etc.) or signed Learning difficulty and/or disability declaration form (see Appendix 6); and
 - agreed progression route.
8. It is recognised that students participating in discrete provision, due to the nature of their learning difficulty and/or disability, are likely to be subject to continuous assessment by the college. Colleges should, therefore, retain evidence of such assessments/reviews in order to meet the review requirements for the fund. These details should be recorded and must be signed and dated by a college representative and the student (or an appropriate third party).
9. SLAs can be maintained in either paper or electronic format. Records maintained electronically should highlight student involvement in the process, including signature evidence.
10. These records should be signed, as agreed by both parties, and retained for audit purposes. Where reviews are not completed, the reason should be noted on the SLA.
11. It is recommended that steps a) to d) (as set out in paragraph 6 above) should be completed for each student and recorded on college MIS by the end of October 2013 or within four weeks of enrolment date for part-time students.

Assessment Guidance

12. In instances where a student is on a course lasting more than one year, the final review may be used as the initial baseline assessment for the following year.

Supplementary Learning Agreements (SLAs) – ASF (Discrete) Part-time students (less than five hours per week)

13. The following conditions apply to part-time FE students, for whom ASF (Discrete) is being claimed.
- a) An enrolment form must be completed.

- b) Students enrolling on a discrete course should be assessed to determine their needs for their course of study and any necessary additional support required, through ASF Basic.
- c) An assessment form must be completed and agreed by both parties.
- d) An **individual** SLA must be completed for each student, for whom ASF (Discrete) is being claimed.

14. The minimum data requirements to be retained in respect of each student, in addition to normal enrolment data, include:

- nature of disability and/or learning difficulty;
- details of additional needs/level of support required (including details of any ASF Basic support required); and
- evidence of eligibility to support funding (e.g. educational psychologist's report, Statement of Educational Needs, GP letter etc.) or signed Learning difficulty and/or disability declaration form (see Appendix 6); and
- agreed progression route.

15. It is recommended that steps a) to d) (as set out in paragraph 13 above) should be completed for each student and recorded on college MIS by the end of October 2013 or within four weeks of enrolment date.

16. SLAs can be maintained in either paper or electronic format. Records maintained electronically should highlight student involvement in the process, including signature evidence.

17. Given the nature of these shorter part-time courses, for the purpose of this circular, there is no **formal** requirement to review the SLAs, unless there is a change in provision or progression route.

Provision outside FE campus or outreach centre (coded 04 on NICIS)

18. This applies to those receiving training/provision, which is not being delivered in an FE campus or outreach centre (coded 04 on NICIS).

19. ASF funding cannot be drawn down for provision being delivered in:

- day centres (including Social Educational Centres);
- hostels;
- nursing homes; or
- homes for the elderly.

Progression

20. Upon enrolment, students for whom discrete funding is being claimed should be involved in decisions relating to their course of study and developmental progression. Progression routes must ensure that the student has a clear developmental pathway and is not repeating any previously undertaken qualifications or similar levels of qualifications.

KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- **It is mandatory for colleges to complete an SLA form for each individual student for the purposes of claiming ASF.**
- **Failure to comply with these terms and conditions could result in recoveries being sought by the Department from the college concerned.**

AUDIT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ARRANGEMENTS

1. Colleges are required to ensure that SLAs are completed for all students being assisted through the ASF Basic and Discrete.
2. In addition, the Director of each FE college shall:
 - ensure that, for the purposes of administering receipts from the fund, the college maintains and operates an adequate system of record-keeping, financial management and internal controls, including safeguards against fraud and shall require the college's external auditors to report on the adequacy or otherwise of that system;
 - ensure that the college uses ASF in a manner consistent with its intended purpose and complies with all terms and conditions attaching to the award; and
 - provide such returns as may be required by the Department and comply with any audit/inspection arrangements.
3. In addition to standard annual returns, the Department requires each college to include a note with their audited accounts indicating the funding drawn down from the ASF. Auditors will be required to certify that funds provided by the Department have been applied in accordance with the Financial Memorandum, and any other terms and conditions applied to them, including those set out in this circular.
4. If, at any time, a college considers that it will be unable to spend any or all of the funds allocated, or identifies a possible overspend, it should declare this to the Department at the earliest possible date. The Department will then redistribute these funds as necessary. Redistributions in any given year need not compromise the subsequent year's allocation.
5. Each college shall, **by 30th September of each year**, provide the Department with a report on the use of ASF funding for the previous academic year. The format of the report is set out at **Appendix 5**. The completed form should be returned to: FE Finance Branch, Department for Employment and Learning, Room 203, Adelaide House, Adelaide Street, BELFAST BT2 8FD. The Department shall require each college to declare any grant for the purpose specified in this circular, remaining unpaid at 31st July of the following year.
6. Colleges must retain auditable evidence of the use of the funding, categorised into Technical and Personal Support, as described, including a direct cross-reference between each expenditure item and the name of the student to whom the expenditure applies.

**ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF 2013/2014
ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND (BASIC)**

A sum of £1.5 million for the Additional Support Fund Basic is being allocated to colleges in the 2013/14 academic year. The table (below) sets out the breakdown on a college-by-college basis, which is based on the total number of each college's FE SLDD student types 02 and 03 in the 2011/12 academic year.

These allocations may be adjusted by the Department in due course to take account of any under/overspends from the 2012/13 allocations. Unspent funds should not be returned to the Department, but the Department should be notified of any potential underspends or overspends immediately. These amounts will be used to adjust in-year allocations. Colleges, which seek to carry over surpluses into the new year, must seek written approval from the Department. Colleges should ensure that the figures are consistent with those recorded in the college accounts. The Department cannot guarantee that it will be able to cover the costs of any additional funding, which a college may require, beyond its original allocation.

College	1 Aug 2013 – 31 July 2014 Allocation
Belfast Metropolitan College	£268,733
Southern Regional College	£425,922
North West Regional College	£190,567
South West College	£143,781
Northern Regional College	£254,184
South Eastern Regional College	£216,812
TOTAL	£1,500,000

**ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUND
MONITORING FORM FOR THE PERIOD
1ST AUGUST 2013 TO 31ST JULY 2014**

College Name:

Contact Name:

Summary of Expenditure

(The figures in this section should match those which are in your final accounts)

	TOTAL
ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUNDS ALLOCATION	
INTEREST EARNED	
TOTAL ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUNDS AVAILABLE	
TOTAL ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FUNDS EXPENDITURE	
AMOUNT SPENT ON AUDIT	
SURPLUS/DEFICIT	
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS RECEIVING ASF	

Signature: _____
(Principal/Director/Chief Executive)

Date: _____

**LEARNING DIFFICULTY AND/OR DISABILITY DECLARATION FORM
2013/14 - FOR STUDENTS CODED 03 (DISCRETE)**

Completion of this form is necessary, in the absence of other evidence, to secure funding for learners, enrolling on a discrete learning programme, consisting of students with a learning difficulty and/or disability [e.g. smaller class sizes].

This form must be associated with the learner's Supplementary Learning Agreement (SLA)

The form must be signed by a 'designated person', who can confirm the declared learning difficulty and or disability. A list of examples of designated persons, who may qualify is provided below.

Student's Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

Course Title: _____

Course Code (NICIS): _____

Telephone Contact: _____

Declared Learning Difficulty and/or Disability: _____

Name of designated person, declaring the learning difficulty and/or disability: _____

Designated position of person, declaring the learning difficulty and/or disability on behalf of the above student:

Signature of person, declaring the learning difficulty and/or disability:

Date: _____

College Representative Signature: _____

Date: _____

Examples of designated persons who may be deemed qualified to declare the learning difficulty and or disability, stated on this form:

- School representative [e.g. special school or special unit within a school],
- Health Trust Representative,
- Doctor [GP/ Specialist],
- Psychologist,
- Psychiatrist,
- Social Worker.

NB: The above list is not exhaustive and any other person, who deems themselves qualified to declare a learning difficulty and/or disability on behalf of a learner, should record their position.

This will not, however, guarantee that the declaration can be accepted by the college.

SUMMARY TABLE OF FUNDING ELIGIBILITY

CATEGORY/ CODING	SLDD 01	SLDD 02	SLDD 03	SLDD 04/ Non – SLDD 99
TYPE OF STUDENT	Mainstream in college, but who do not require an extra level of support for learning	Mainstream in college, who require an additional level of support for learning (including students where additional technical and/or personal support is provided by ASF)	Discrete in college or college outreach centre	Day Centre/ Hostel/ Nursing Homes/Homes for the Elderly
FUNDING STREAM	FE Recurrent Funding Formula	FE Recurrent Funding Formula & ASF Basic, if appropriate	FE Recurrent Funding Formula & ASF (Discrete) & ASF Basic, if appropriate	FE Recurrent Funding Formula
SLDD SUPPLEMENTARY LEARNING AGREEMENT REQUIRED	No	Yes	Yes	No