

Subject:

FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS 2014/15

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Target Audience:

- Principals /Directors of FE Colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies
- Student Finance NI - WELB
- FE College Finance
- Colleges Northern Ireland
- College Student Support Officers / Hardship Fund Co-ordinators

Summary of Contents:

This Circular provides information and guidance on Further Education Awards.

Enquiries:

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

Further Education Finance Branch
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Adelaide House
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BELFAST
BT2 8FD

Status of Contents:
Information

Related Documents:

FE 08/07
Education [Student Support]
Regulations (Northern Ireland)
2012.

Superseded Documents:
FE 05/13

Expiry Date:
N/A

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Introduction

FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS

Further Education Awards are administered by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) on behalf of the Department. Funding of Further Education Awards are made subject to the conditions specified in this circular and subject to a limited budget targeted at Further Education courses for which there is no statutory support.

As a student can only receive one form of publicly funded financial support, students who are planning to, or have already submitted applications and/or are in receipt of any other publicly funded financial support (e.g. EMA) are not eligible to apply for a Further Education Award. Receiving more than one form of Government funding may be construed as fraud and dealt with accordingly. It is the responsibility of the applying student to declare all other publicly funded financial support in their application, failure to do so may result in legal action to recover fraudulent funding and withdrawal of future support. Changes in personal circumstances which may affect eligibility must be notified immediately to WELB.

Residency criteria

Eligible students must meet the residency criteria in the Education [Student Support] (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 as amended.

- Students born in Northern Ireland who are ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland but have lived outside Northern Ireland travelling on a gap year (up to a maximum of 2 years), meet the residency requirements for a Further Education Award.

Closing Date

The closing date for full time applications is 1st September 2014 and 30th September 2014 for part time applications. All eligible full time applications received before 30th June 2014 will be guaranteed to receive funding, all other eligible applications received up to and including 1st September 2014 will be considered for funding until the FE Awards budget has been exhausted.

QUALIFYING COURSES

In order to qualify for a Further Education Award, a student should be studying an 'approved course at level 3 or below'. In general an approved course should be interpreted as a course which is listed on **The Register of Regulated Qualifications** or exceptionally, as detailed in circular 'FE08/07 Prescribed List of Approved Non-NQF Qualifications'.

The course must be held at a further education college which is maintained or assisted by grants from public funds.

Other Application Criteria

- A student can only be funded for either one full time or one part time course in an academic year.
- In cases where a student was in receipt of an FE Award in a previous year they must complete a comparable period on the new course at their own expense before they will be considered for another FE Award. The amount of grant for the new course will be assessed on a pro rata basis.
- If a student has completed one year of a part time course and received an FE Award and subsequently wants to undertake a full time course, the part time grant previously received will be deducted from the FE full time grant.
- Support is only available to students whose course is part of their educational progression; unless the Board deems that exceptional circumstances warrant support through FE Awards.
- Students following an ASDAN course can be funded for courses at the same level as long as they don't do the same course twice. The student can be funded for a maximum of 4 years.
- If a student obtained a qualification more than 10 years ago and is choosing to retrain, they can be considered for an FE Award.
- 16-19 year old students in receipt of an FE Award are not entitled to a bus pass.

Courses which are approved for Further Education Award purposes fall into the following two categories:

1. Further Education Awards

Applicants for Further Education Awards will be considered only if they are following a vocational further education course of post compulsory education and if they have reached the age of 19 years on 1 July 2014. Entitlement to this support will depend on the family income and can be estimated using table 2.

Further education students who are under 19 years of age on 1 July preceding the academic year in question and who are following any eligible further education course will not normally be eligible for an award for living costs unless the WELB is satisfied that they cannot travel daily to any college where a similar course is available.

2. Dance and Drama Award

Students are only eligible to receive a Dance and drama Award if they take the Trinity College London qualification at one of 26 accredited providers (see Appendix 4). These courses last between one and three years and cover professional acting, professional dance, professional music theatre, professional production skills and professional classic ballet. Students must apply to their college for the Dance and Drama Award.

A student in receipt of a Dance and Drama Award will receive a grant from the college which will cover the majority of the tuition fee. However, students still have to make a personal contribution towards their fees. For the 2014/15 academic year this contribution is £1,275. This is not paid by Student Finance NI and is the student's responsibility.

Depending on financial circumstances, students who accept the Dance and drama Award may also get additional support to assist with the student fee contribution i.e. £1,275 and maintenance costs.

Entitlement to this student fee contribution and maintenance support will depend on the student's family household income.

If the family's income is above £33,000, the student will not be entitled to any extra help.

The following table shows how much financial assistance a student may get under the Student Finance NI Further Education awards arrangements towards the fee contribution and maintenance support.

Table 1

Household Income (Per Annum)	Students living at home	Students living in lodgings outside London	Students living in lodging in London
< £21,000	£2,292	£4,823	£5,460
£21,001 – £23,000	£2,010	£4,026	£4,559
£23001 - £25000	£1,710	£3,203	£3,632
£25001 – £27000	£1,435	£2,411	£2,724
£27001 - £30000	£1,145	£1,602	£1,810
£30001 - £33000	NIL	£761	£910

Should the family income exceed £33,000 the student will not be entitled to additional assistance.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Full Time Courses

Fee Support

Colleges will not charge a tuition, registration and examination fees for full time students who are aged 19 and over and are studying for a vocational qualification.

Maintenance Grant

Maintenance grants provide financial support for living costs. The grant is means tested and is available to students living in Northern Ireland. The following table shows the amount of the maintenance grant a student will get depending on the amount of household income. The maintenance grant is split into two bands, living at parent's home rate and living away from parent's home rate.

Table 2

Full Time

Household Income	Amount of Grant – Living at Parent's Home	Amount of Grant – Living away from Parent's Home
Up to £21,330	£1,674	£2,092
£21,331 – £26,160	£1,490	£1,863
£26,161 - £31,580	£1,306	£1,633
£31,581 - £38,805	£1,122	£1,402
£38,806 and over	No Funding	No Funding

Part Time Courses

A part time course must fulfill the following:

- (i) Part-time courses should be completed in no longer than twice the time it would take to complete the full time equivalent.
- (ii) If no full time equivalent course exists then-
 - (a) The part time course must be for at least 8 hours per week in duration with the 8 hours being made up of taught hours plus compulsory placement hours and;
 - (b) The part time course duration must be for at least one academic year or more

Awards will only be given to either one full time or one part time course in any given academic year.

Fee Support and Books and Stationery Grant

An eligible student studying a part time qualifying further education course, may be eligible for an award which will include provision for the payment of fees (tuition, examination and registration) up to a maximum of £465 plus a course grant (books and stationery) up to a maximum of £265. Both these grants are subject to a means test based on household income – see table below.

Household Income	Fee Support	Course Grant
Up to £15,000	£465	£265
£15,001 - £20,000	£275	£157
£20,001 - £25,000	£185	£105
£25,001 and over	£0	£0

Childcare Allowance

The Childcare Allowance is available to full and part time students on a low household income with dependent children in registered or approved childcare (See guidance on Page 8). This includes lone parents, students with partners and students married to other students. Only the student who has primary care of the child/children can receive childcare support. If a student has children under 15 (or 17 if the child is registered as having special educational needs), the student may be eligible to receive up to 100% of actual childcare costs during term times and holidays** up to a maximum for full time students of £130 a week for one child and up to £220 a week for two or more children and for part time students up to a maximum of £65 a week for one child and up to £110 a week for 2 or more children. (See tables 4 & 5)

Childcare is means tested and how much a student receives depends on their income and that of their dependants (including their husband, wife or partner and any income their child may have including any maintenance which is paid for them).

HM Revenue & Customs will not count any help a student receives when working out their Tax Credit entitlement. Students with dependent children in registered or approved childcare cannot get this Grant if they or their partner receive the Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit from HM Revenue & Customs; unless the official HM Revenue & Customs notification clearly shows that their childcare element only covers the time the student or their partner works and not their time in a FE College, the Board can then consider allowing childcare costs for the time the student is actually attending the college.

Students who are under 20 on the first day of the academic year can receive assistance for childcare through the NI Care to Learn scheme. Students who turn 20 years of age during their course of study can then apply for assistance with childcare through the FE Hardship Fund

(Applications for both these schemes can be obtained from local FE Colleges).

The Childcare Grant Allowance is paid by the WELB directly to the childminder on the Students behalf – there is no exception to this rule.

Table 4 – Full Time

Household Income	1 Child	2 or more Children
Up to £21,330	£130	£220
£21,331 - £26,160	£110	£188
£26,161 - £31,580	£78	£133
£31,581 - £38,805	£40	£70
£38,806 and over	No Funding	No Funding

Table 5 - Part Time

Household Income	1 Child	1 Child	2 + Children	2+ Children
	*1-7 Hours/Week	8-14 Hours/Week	1-7 Hours/Week	8-14 Hours/Week
Up to £21,330	£33	£65	£56	£110
£21,331 - £26,160	£28	£56	£48	£95
£26,161 - £31,580	£20	£39	£34	£67
£31,581 - £38,805	£10	£20	£17	£34
£38,806 and over	No Funding			

*The number of hours stated refers to the number of taught plus compulsory placement hours on the course.

** If a student is on a one year course, WELB will pay childcare for the Christmas and Easter holidays but not the summer holidays – if they are on a two year course WELB will pay childcare for the summer holidays (if appropriate) between year 1 and year 2. The amount of childcare grant available for the vacation weeks cannot exceed the amount charged during term time.

Childcare guidance:

- Childcare must be provided by either a child-minder/nursery/crèche registered with Health and Social Services Board; or an out-of-school club (Wrap-around) who provide childcare provision for up to four hours a day,

- and more than five days a year, which is available either before or after school, and during school holidays.
- The choice of child-minder is the sole responsibility of the parent – the WELB accepts no responsibility in relation to risks, accidents, payments owing outside of any approved period.
 - Confirmation of the age of the child should also be provided by copy of original birth certificates (long version).
 - The WELB will contact the local social work team to confirm that the child-minders registration is still active. Funding will not be available to an inactive registration.
 - Childcare assistance will only be provided in relation to the time a child is in childcare that is necessary to allow the parent to attend their course of study. WELB will require confirmation of a student's attendance from the relevant college.
 - If both parents are in education and eligible for assistance towards childcare costs, then only one of the parents will be assisted.

Support for Disabled Students

Further Education Students who have a disability such as a physical disability, a mental health difficulty, long term illness or a specific learning difficulty, can apply for support from their Further Education College. Students should contact the Disability Advisor in the College who will assess the student and advise on the support available.

CALCULATION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household Income - generally means the parent(s) step-parent(s) income, unless the student claims to be independent.

Where a student claims to be independent they must meet one of the following conditions:

- Be aged 25 or over before the start of the academic year
- Be married, co-habiting or in a civil partnership, evidence of which must be provided before the start of the academic year
- Have supported themselves for a minimum of 3 years outside of full time education before the start of the course i.e. in full or part time employment and/or on benefits during this period (evidence required)
- Have no living parents
- Have care of a child or children on the first day of the academic year for which they are applying for support (evidence or child's birth certificate required)
- Permanent estrangement from parents (i.e. no contact with parents). Normally it is expected that a student will have had no contact with their parents for at least 12 months although this may not apply in exceptional circumstances.

- They are in placed accommodation after being in care.
- Where parents living abroad (in certain circumstances)

Independent students will also have to provide details of their partner or civil partner income

Income: includes any money earned or received that tax is paid on (this can include interest earned on bank accounts and private pensions etc); Grants and Social Security Benefits. Evidence of income must be obtained and retained for audit purposes.

Acceptable Evidence includes:

- Students who submit evidence that they or their parents are in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers' Allowance, Income Related Employment and Support Allowance or Pension Credits will not be required to submit any further evidence of household income
- Students who have confirmed they or their parents are in receipt of Tax Credits should submit their official Tax Credit notification and will not be required to submit any further evidence of household income.
- Employed income must be confirmed by the receipt of recent wage slips – Monthly/4 Weekly – 1 monthly Payslip, Weekly – 4 wage slips
- Self-Employed income must be confirmed by the receipt of the receipt of tax calculation/accountants letter from the previous financial year
- Other Income must be confirmed by the receipt of official correspondence from the provider e.g. Social Security Agency, Inland Revenue or Bank etc.

WELB Accountability

The Chief Executive of the board shall:

Ensure that for the purposes of administrating the FE Awards the board maintains and operates adequate system of record keeping, financial management and internal controls, including safeguards against fraud and shall require the department's external auditor, as part of their audit to report on the adequacy or otherwise of that system; ensure that the board uses the funding in a manner consistent with the purpose for which the fund has been given by the Department and complies with any terms and condition attaching to it; and provide such returns as may be required by the Department.

TV advertising and press releases to be used to encourage students to return their applications before June.

Role of the Further Education Colleges in the administration of Further Education Awards

- The deadline for colleges to issue invoices to WELB for part time fees is 31st January 2015, invoices issued after this date will not be paid.
- Student Finance NI/WELB will issue a report to all Colleges detailing students who are eligible for part time support in December asking the College to confirm the Student's attendance and tuition fee due. Following confirmation Student Finance NI/WELB will issue a revised list to the Colleges requesting they raise an invoice by the 31st January 2015.
- Student Finance NI/WELB will issue cheques and a signing list to the Colleges at the start of each term. The completed report and unclaimed cheques must be returned to Student Finance NI within 6 weeks of issue. Colleges **must** complete all sections of the receipt report, confirm identity and obtain the student's signature before the cheque is released.
- Monitoring Attendance – to receive payments for terms 2 and 3 students must as a minimum have achieved 80% attendance. Electronic registers should be used where possible to verify a student's attendance. If the student's attendance is between 60-80% the College must establish if there are extenuating circumstances for these periods of absence and they will take a discretionary decision on each individual case and make a recommendation to Student Finance NI/WELB as to whether the student's payment should be reduced. The College in conjunction with the course tutor should establish that the student will still be able to successfully complete their course. Where attendance falls below 60% financial assistance is withdrawn and Colleges should ensure that payments are returned to Student Finance NI/WELB.

- Where a Student receives a loan from College Student Finance in lieu of receipt of their FE Award during September/October, Student Finance NI/WELB have agreed that they will deduct the loan amount from terms 2 and 3 of the student FE Award grant and refund the College. Colleges must therefore provide WELB with details of the amount of loan paid to each student by mid November.
- Colleges must notify Student Finance at the Western Education and Library Board **immediately** if a student withdraws.
- FE Awards should be advertised and promoted within each college. WELB will supply colleges with PDF promotional material on request.
- For Colleges to note: The closing date for full time applications is 1st September and 30th September for part time applications. All eligible full time applications received before 30th June 2014 will be guaranteed to receive funding, all other eligible applications received up to and including 1st September 2014 will be considered for funding until the FE Awards budget has been exhausted.
- For Colleges to note: When a student transfers from full time to part time study and the student has completed less than half a term (31st October), then the full time grant that has been paid to the student will be recovered. If a student has completed more than half a term, there will be a pro rata recovery of the grant paid.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

Application

Late Application

It is the responsibility of the applicant to complete the FE Awards application on time and by the due closing date. Only **complete** applications will be registered and processed. Complete applications must meet the following criteria:

- All sections must be completed.
- All supporting documentation must be supplied with the application i.e. an original passport or birth certificate and evidence of income e.g. original P60, letter from accountant etc

Incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant for completion and will not be registered or processed.

All requests made by the WELB for additional information must be returned within 10 days of issue; unless there are mitigating circumstances that the Board are aware of and have approved an extension period. Information not received within the required timescale will mean that your application may be rejected.

Change of Circumstances

Students have a responsibility to report all known change of Circumstances to Student Finance NI that may affect their FE Award application. This includes any new applications to other publicly funded bodies for financial assistance after their FE Award has been approved.

Appeals

Where an application has been refused, **one** appeal against the Board's decision may be made in writing, giving the grounds for appeal, to; Student Finance NI, Further Education Awards Section, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh, Co Tyrone, BT79 0AW. The appeal should be lodged with the Board within 28 days of receiving notification of the Board's decision.

Other Languages

WELB should have appropriate mechanisms in place to enable, on request, alternative versions or methods of communication of the FE awards literature, including other languages, Braille or interpreters. WELB should be able to demonstrate that the alternative method available/used is cost effective, represents value for money and can be delivered in a predefined timescale agreed by the WELB and the Department.

APPENDIX 1

Interpretation

Expressions and terms, other than those set out below, have the same meanings as those ascribed to them in the Education (Student Support) Regulations (Northern Ireland) for the relevant academic year, hereinafter referred to as 'the Regulations'. The Regulations should be used in relation to further education award applications only to the extent defined in this document or any subsequent amendment; they are not applicable more generally.

For the purposes of the arrangements set out in this document, specific expressions and terms have the following meanings:

“academic authority” means, in relation to an institution, the governing body, or other body having the functions of a governing body and includes a person acting with the authority of that body.

“award” includes an award previously made under Article 50 of the 1986 Order.

“institution” means an institution of further and higher education or other educational establishment within the British Islands or the Republic of Ireland, which is maintained or assisted by grants from public funds.

“further education”, is as defined in the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and means -

(a) full-time and part-time education suitable to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age (including vocational training); and

(b) organized leisure-time occupation provided in connection with the provision of such education.

“living costs grant” means a grant payable to a student as a contribution towards his or her living costs and childcare grant where appropriate calculated in accordance with childcare grant arrangements.

“approved course” means a course which is listed on the Register of Regulated Qualifications, or exceptionally, as detailed in circular 'FE08/07 Prescribed List of Approved Non-Vocational Qualifications'.

“student” means a person to whom an award has been made under these arrangements or was previously made under Article 50(3) or similar arrangements.

APPENDIX 2

PAYMENTS

General

The Board shall make any payments due to the student in such instalments (if any), and at such times, as it considers appropriate. It may make provisional payments pending the final calculation of any living costs grant.

Power to Withhold, Reduce or Recover Payments

Students who have failed to provide such information as the Board may reasonably require, the Board may withhold, reduce or recover payments in the circumstances set out below.

The Board may withhold, reduce or recover any payment in respect of any period:

- (1) after the termination of an award;**
- (2) during which the student is excluded by the academic authorities from attendance at the course;**
- (3) where an award has been transferred from one course to another and the student is not required, for that period, to attend either course, except where the period concerned represents the period of a single vacation.**
- (4) where the FE College has paid the student an advancement/loan of an FE award to the student.**

Where a payment is reduced rather than withheld, the amount of the reduction (not exceeding the aggregate which would otherwise have been payable) will be determined by the Board, having regard to all the circumstances of the case.

APPENDIX 3

Extension, Suspension and Termination of Awards

An award should terminate on the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course in respect of which it is made, or to which it is transferred.

Where the student does not complete the course within the period ordinarily required, in exceptional circumstances the Board may extend the award until he or she has completed it.

The Board may terminate an award where:

- (1) the academic authorities refuse to allow the student to complete the course;**
- (2) after consultation with the academic authorities, it is satisfied that the student has abandoned the course in respect of which the award is held and the award does not fall to be transferred to another course; or**
- (3) after consultation with the academic authorities, it is satisfied that the student has shown himself or herself, by his or her conduct, to be unfit to hold an award.**

If, after consultation with the academic authority concerned, the Board is of the opinion that the attendance, conduct or progress of a student in relation to a course is not satisfactory, it may suspend or terminate an award held by him or her in respect of that course, or withhold, reduce or recover any payment normally due in respect of that award.

If, in the case of a student who is required to provide information, the Board is satisfied that he has wilfully failed to comply with any such requirement or has provided information which he knows to be false in a material particular, or has recklessly provided information which is false in a material particular, the Board may terminate the award or withhold any payments due under the award or recover as it sees fit.

APPENDIX 4

Dance and Drama Courses – Accredited Providers

1. Academy of Live and Recorded Arts - ALRA.
2. Arts Educational Schools London.
3. Bird College - Dance and Theatre Performance.
4. Cambridge Performing Arts.
5. CPS Studios
6. Drama Studio London.
7. Elmhurst School for Dance & Performing Arts.
8. English National Ballet School.
9. Guilford School of Acting.
10. Hammond School, Chester.
11. Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts Ltd.
12. KS Dance Limited
13. Laine Theatre Arts.
14. Leicester College of Performing Arts.
15. Liverpool Theatre School.
16. Millennium Performing Arts Limited.
17. Mountview.
18. Northern Ballet School.
19. Oxford School of Drama.
20. Performers College.
21. Royal Ballet School.
22. SLP College.
23. Stella Mann College.
24. Tring Park School for Performing Arts.
25. Urdang Academy.
26. WAC Performing Arts and Media College.

Further information and applications may be obtained by contacting:

Student Finance NI
Further Education Awards Section,
Western Education and Library Board,
1 Hospital Road,
Omagh,
Co. Tyrone.
BT79 0AW
Telephone: 028 8225 4546
E-Mail: feawards@welbni.org