

**SUBJECT: DELIVERING THE ENTITLEMENT
FRAMEWORK (EF): ADDITIONAL EF AND ALC
MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT FUNDING TO
SCHOOLS 2025/26 FINANCIAL YEAR**

DE Circular Number: 2026/06

Date of Issue: 16 February 2026

Target Audience:

- Principals and Boards of Governors (BoG) of all grant-aided post-primary schools and special schools with secondary departments;
- Education Authority (EA);
- Further and Higher Education Colleges (FE&HE);
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS);
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG);
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE);
- Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC);
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA);
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI).

Summary of Contents:

This circular, issued by the Department of Education, provides confirmation of funding in the 2025/26 financial year for collaborative courses delivered in the 2024/25 academic year and Area Learning Community membership in support arrangements for the delivery of the Entitlement Framework.

Enquiries:

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

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Governor Awareness:

Essential

Status of Contents:

For information and action by schools
and other settings

Superseded Documents:

DE Circular 2025/02

DE Website:

www.education-ni.gov.uk

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Introduction

1. In order to meet the full statutory requirements of the Entitlement Framework (EF) all post primary schools are required to provide pupils with access to a minimum of 21 courses at Key Stage (KS) 4 and 21 courses at post-16; of which at least one third must be general and one third applied.
2. Schools are funded through their core delegated budget to deliver their statutory obligations including the curriculum of which the EF is one part. Additional EF funding has been provided year on year; however, this funding is not guaranteed and is allocated on an annual basis. For the 2025/26 financial year, £2.9m has been allocated for additional EF Funding by the Department (this includes Area Learning Community participation which is currently £3,000 per school).
3. In order for a school to receive EF collaborative course funding it is essential that the school's curricular offer is accurately completed on the EF Online Audit System (EFOAS). Collaborative course funding cannot be calculated without this information.
4. The purpose of this circular is to confirm the EF funding arrangements for the 2025/26 financial year. These are as follows:
 - Funding will continue to be awarded for courses delivered collaboratively with other schools, further education colleges and other training providers;
 - Special Schools will continue to be funded for courses delivered collaboratively; and
 - Funding will continue to be allocated to support the work of Area Learning Communities (ALC).

EF Support Arrangements

5. Schools receive their core funding via the Local Management of Schools budget allocation to deliver the statutory curriculum which includes the EF. Please note that the additional EF collaborative course funding element is provided as a *contribution* towards meeting the costs associated with the collaborative delivery of KS4 and post-16 courses. The funding allocated for 2025/26 is calculated on the basis of courses that were delivered through collaboration in the 2024/25 academic school year.
6. The additional cost attached to the participation of SEN pupils in the EF continues to be recognised through applying a different formula to special schools to ensure a slightly higher level of support.

7. The rate per pupil and the formulae for calculating the EF contribution is set out below:

Key Stage 4 - $120\text{glh} \times \text{£}56.70 / 2 / 14$

Special Schools - $140\text{glh} \times \text{£}56.70 / 2 / 10$

Post-16 - $360\text{glh} \times \text{£}56.70 / 2 / 20$

8. **It must be emphasised that the figures used in the different elements of the formulae do not reflect the Department's position on actual cost per hour or class size numbers. As in previous years, the figures within the formulae have been adjusted to enable the Department to stay within the allocated EF budget; nothing more should be inferred.**

9. The Education Authority (EA) will issue the EF collaboration amount to schools (this excludes ALC membership contribution which is detailed below). Schools should contact the Education Authority (EA) in the first instance if they need to discuss their EF allocation; this can be actioned through the EFOAS 'Info & Help' and 'Help Request' submission.

Area Learning Community Funding

10. ALC support membership funding of £3,000 per school, for those schools who actively participate in an ALC will remain in place for 2025/26 financial year. This funding will be made available to the nominated ALC bank account by the Education Authority. If you have not yet provided bank account details to the EA, please contact Jarlath McGill at jarlath.mcgill@eani.org.uk.

Entitlement Framework Course Count

11. Only qualifications listed in the NIEFQAN File are approved for use in schools in NI and it is the responsibility of schools to check that approvals are in place before any course is offered to pupils.

12. Schools should also be aware that there will be instances, for the purposes of the EF funding and course count, when courses will discount each other. Examples of this include the following:

- Courses that are available for delivery either as single or double awards e.g. GCSE science;
- Courses leading to qualifications at different levels of the same subject

specification;

- Courses with similar curriculum content (generally indicated by courses with the same discount code);
- Courses leading to the same qualification but with different awarding bodies; and
- All six Occupational Studies (OS) pathways are recognised and funded under the terms of the EF, however, a maximum of two pathways are counted towards a school's curricular offer and course count.

Delivery of Professional and Technical Qualifications

13. If the qualification meets the requirements of the appropriate level and guided learning hours, and provided it is delivered in an appropriate setting, then it can count towards a school's curricular offer. However, if a school is attempting to deliver a professional/technical qualification in a standard classroom setting, this would give the Department cause for concern given that they are work based qualifications.

14. Further information on the approval of new courses and delivery of professional and technical qualifications can be found in the 'Guidance on Qualification Approval Process' publication on the Department's webpage:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/decision-making-process>

Work Placements associated with qualifications

15. Each school should satisfy itself that all qualification specification requirements and any relevant EA guidance pertaining to work placements and their associated indemnity and safeguarding arrangements are in place. Where the delivery of a qualification involves work experience, schools are advised to consider the guidance in [Circular 2025/06 - Pre-Employment / AccessNI check requirements and safer recruitment practices for staff and volunteers working in or providing a service for schools/education settings](#). If you require further information relating to work placements, please contact the EA directly.

Service Level Agreements

16. Schools are reminded of the need to ensure that a Service Level Agreement (SLA) is in place before any form of collaborative provision commences. Article-21 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 allows schools to enter into arrangements to provide secondary education on behalf of the school by an institute of Further

Education or other provider (note 'other provider' has to be on the current Approved list for EF compliance). Any such arrangements are subject to a written agreement which must include specific details on issues including pastoral care and child protection, quality of provision, the basis for any costs to be incurred or charged and any other issues deemed necessary by the school's Board of Governors. Schools should ensure that this documentation is available within the school if required at any point in the school year.

Reporting pupil results

17. Schools are also reminded that there is a duty of care to ensure that all results of public examinations are recorded for each individual pupil. As a pupil can only be registered at one school, it is important that the school at which a pupil is registered ensures it receives the result of a course undertaken at any other host school, FE College or other institution and reflects this in any of their statistical returns to the Department. It is the responsibility of a school, FE College or other institution providing a course to enter pupils for public examinations which are part of that course. All arrangements relating to entering a pupil for examinations, associated payment of fees, receipt and reporting of results should be clearly reflected as part of the SLA.

Other Providers

18. If offering a course in collaboration with another provider, to include training organisations and Further Education Colleges, schools are reminded that they must ensure, prior to collaboration/teaching commencing, that any person delivering a course has the required qualifications to teach pupils on behalf of the school. As referenced at paragraph 16, other providers/training organisations must be on the current Approved list for EF compliance.

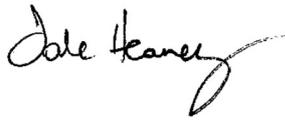
19. All details of other providers/training organisations must be provided in the appropriate fields when completing the EFOAS.

Special Schools

20. Funding for Special Schools will continue to be awarded for approved collaboratively delivered courses. All details of other providers/training organisations, including the percentage of the course being delivered, should be provided in the appropriate fields when completing the Entitlement Framework Online Audit System.

21. If a course is delivered in collaboration with an independent approved provider, full detail of the course should be provided, this includes the QAN Code, course name

and the unit it refers to; the number/name of units and the number days/hours undertaken to deliver the course including the total cost.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale Heaney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

DALE HEANEY

Head of 14-19 Strategy Team