

Circular Number: FE 09/26

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Subject: Further Education Grants 2026/27

Target Audience:

- Principals / Chief Executives in FE Colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies
- Education Authority Further Education Grants Section
- FE College Finance
- College Student Support Officers / Hardship Fund Co-ordinators

Summary of Contents:

This Circular provides information and guidance on Further Education Grants.

Enquiries:

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

Further Education Finance Team
Department for the Economy
Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD

Related Documents: 08/26 Hardship Fund Circular 2026/27

[04/24 FE Residency and Funding Requirements](#)

Superseded Documents: 04/25

Expiry Date: 31 July 2027

Website: www.economy-ni.gov.uk

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Further Education (FE) Grants are administered by the Education Authority (EA) on behalf of the Department for the Economy. Funding of FE Grants are made subject to the conditions specified in this circular and subject to a limited budget targeted at FE courses for which there is no statutory support.

1.2 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. Education Maintenance Allowance - EMA) are not eligible to apply for a FE Grant. An exception to this is the FE Hardship Fund.

1.3 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 the EA.

1.4 Students must meet the residency requirements set out in the “Schedule – Eligible Students” of [The Further Education \(Student Support\) \(Eligibility\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2012](#), as amended by:

- [The Further Education \(Student Support\) \(Eligibility\) \(Amendment etc\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2021](#);
- [The Further Education \(Student Support\) \(Eligibility\) \(Amendment etc.\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#);
- [The Further Education \(Student Support\) \(Eligibility\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2024](#); and
- [The Further Education \(Student Support\) \(Eligibility\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2025](#).

1.5 Details of the eligibility categories are set out in [FE Circular 04/24 – Further Education Residency and Funding Requirements](#) which was published on 11th July 2024.

1.6 The final closing date for full-time and part-time applications is 31 October 2026.

1.7 Qualifying Courses

1.7.1 To qualify for a FE Grant, a student should be studying an 'approved course at level 3 or below' listed on the Qualifications and Credit Framework which can be found on the Register of Regulated Qualifications, or prescribed list of FE courses, at <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk>.

1.7.2 The course must be held at an FE college which is maintained or assisted by grants from public funds.

1.8 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 Grant 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 Grant. 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, providing they do not obtain a qualification and received an FE Grant 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 EA deems that exceptional circumstances warrant support through FE Grants.
- Students who, as a result of their particular learning difficulty and/or disability are unable to participate in mainstream provision and are coded as 03 "Discreet" in line with the Additional Support Fund FE 06/19 can be funded for courses at the same level as long as they do not 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 a FE Grant.
- Students receiving a FE Grant are not entitled to a bus pass.

2. FURTHER EDUCATION GRANTS

2.1 Students wishing to apply for the Further Education Grant can do so online at <https://feportal.eani.org.uk>. Students who cannot apply online should contact the FE Grant Section at fegrants@eani.org.uk who will issue a paper application.

2.2 The Applicants for FE Grants will be considered only if the student is following a vocational FE course of post compulsory education and if they have reached the age of 19 years on 1 July 2026. Entitlement to this support will depend on the family income. This can be estimated using table 1 if undertaking a full-time course or if doing a part-time course, use table 2.

2.3 FE students who are under 19 years of age on 1 July preceding the academic year in question and who are following any eligible FE course will not normally be eligible for a living cost grant costs unless they have to live away from the parental home to undertake the course.

2.4 Assistance Available

2.4.1 Full-Time Courses

- Colleges in Northern Ireland will not charge fees (i.e., tuition, registration, and examination fees) for full-time FE students who are aged 19 and over and are studying for a vocational qualification. Colleges in the rest of the UK and Republic of Ireland may charge fees.
- 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 1 - 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

2.4.2 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.
- Grants 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 FE course may be eligible for a grant which will include provision for the payment of fees (tuition, registration, and examination) up to a maximum of £465 plus a course grant (for books and stationery) up to a maximum of £265. Both these grants are subject to a means test based on the student's income and the income of their spouse or partner if applicable – see table below.

Table 2 - Part Time

Income (Students + Partners)	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

3. CHILDCARE ALLOWANCE

3.1 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 in Section 6). 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 3 & 4).

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

3.3 Childcare Grants will not count as income when working out a student's entitlement to Universal Credit. Students with dependent children in registered or approved childcare cannot get this Grant if they, or their partner, receive the childcare costs element of Universal Credit. If a student is undertaking a part-time course and in receipt of the childcare cost's element of Universal Credit, the student must state that they only receive the childcare element for the hours they are working and not for the time they are attending college.

3.4 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 the academic year can remain on Care to Learn for that academic year. Assistance with childcare through the FE Hardship Fund can only be accessed when a student has missed the application processing date for the FE Grant. Applications for the Hardship Fund may be obtained from the local FE College.

3.5 The Childcare Grant Allowance is paid by the EA directly to the childminder on the student's behalf – there is no exception to this rule.

Table 3 – 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
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Table 4 - Part Time

Household Income	1 Child *1-7 Hours/Week	1 Child 8-14 Hours/Week	2 + Children 1-7 Hours/Week	2+ Children 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 lessons taught plus compulsory placement hours on the course.

** If a student is on a one-year course, EA will pay childcare for the Christmas and Easter holidays but not the summer holidays – if they are on a two-year course EA 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.

3.6 Childcare must be provided by either a child-minder/nursery/crèche registered with the local Health and Social Care Trust; 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.

3.7 The choice of child-minder is the sole responsibility of the parent – EA accepts no responsibility in relation to risks, accidents or payments owing outside of any approved period.

3.8 Confirmation of the age of the child should also be provided by copy of original birth certificates (unabridged version).

3.9 The EA will contact the local Health and Social Care Trust to confirm that the child-minders registration is still active. Funding will not be available for inactive registration.

3.10 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. EA will require confirmation of a student's attendance from the relevant college.

3.11 If both parents are in education and eligible for assistance towards childcare costs, then only one of the parents will be assisted.

See also monitoring attendance (page 11).

4. SUPPORT FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

4.1 FE 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 FE College. Students should contact the Disability Advisor in the College who will assess the student and advise on the support available.

5. CALCULATION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

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

5.2 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 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; or
- Where parents living abroad (in certain circumstances).

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

5.4 Income includes any taxable income (this can include interest earned on bank accounts and private pensions etc); Grants and Department for Communities Benefits including Universal Credit. Evidence of income must be obtained and retained for audit purposes. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will not be treated as income.

5.5 Acceptable evidence of income includes:

- Students who submit evidence that they or their parents are in receipt of Income Related Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit (with a net income below £15,000) or Pension Credits will not be required to submit any further evidence of household income.
- Employed income must be confirmed by the receipt of recent payslips – Monthly/4 Weekly – 1 payslip, Weekly – 4 payslips.
- Self-Employed income must be confirmed by the receipt of the tax calculation/accountant's letter from the previous financial year.
- Other income must be confirmed by the receipt of official correspondence from the provider e.g. Department for Communities, HMRC or Bank etc.

6. EDUCATION AUTHORITY ACCOUNTABILITY

6.1 The Chief Executive of the EA shall ensure that:

- for the purposes of administering the FE Grants, the EA maintains and operates adequate systems 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; and
- the EA 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.

6.2 Advertising will be via social media, Facebook, Twitter and in addition will also feature on the EA website, with posters and videos in FE Colleges to promote FE Grants.

7. ROLE OF THE FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF FURTHER EDUCATION GRANTS

7.1 Part-Time Fees

- The FE Grants Section will issue a report to all Colleges detailing students who are eligible for part-time support by 8 January 2027, asking the College to confirm the student's attendance and tuition/registration/exam fee due. Following confirmation, FE Grants Section will issue a revised list to the Colleges confirming payment for each student by the 12 February 2027. NB - FE Colleges must claim a composite fee i.e., claim must include the tuition/registration/exam element of fees, FE colleges cannot at a later stage claim for a single element of fees.
- If necessary, a follow-up exercise will be carried out in late March/early April 2027 to deal with any issues regarding outstanding fees. The EA will not accept responsibilities for payment of fees if the college does not invoice before 30 April 2027.

7.2 Part-Time Course Grant

- The part-time course grant will be paid when the FE Grants Section obtains evidence from the college that the student has enrolled and commenced attendance on the course. The FE Grants Section will contact the college directly for this information.

7.3 Maintenance Payments

- When evidence is received from the College that the student is enrolled and attending the course for which the grant has been offered, the FE Grants Section will pay the grant directly into the student's bank account.

7.4 Monitoring Attendance

- To receive payments for terms 2 and 3 students must have achieved 80% attendance in term 1 and term 2. Electronic registers should be used, where possible, to verify a student's attendance. The FE Grants Section will contact the College directly for evidence of attendance. Where attendance is between 60-80% the grant will be re-assessed, on a pro rata basis, and a reduced grant will be issued directly to the student's bank account. If the student had medical

or extenuating circumstances the college can use discretion to request from the FE Grants section that the grant should be released in full. In these cases, the following points should be established by the college before a request is made: (1) has the college been made aware of the medical or extenuating circumstances (2) do the college feel the case is genuine and (3) is the student 'on track' to complete the course within the published timeframe? If the attendance is below 60% the college should inform the FE Grants Section and financial assistance will be withdrawn.

- Colleges must notify the FE Grants Section immediately if a student withdraws.
- When a student transfers from full-time to part-time study and the student has completed less than half a term (31 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. Colleges must notify the FE Grants Section immediately if a student changes their mode of study as this may impact on payment of fees and grant.
- Where a Student receives a loan from College Student Finance in lieu of receipt of their FE Grant during September/October, FE Grants Section have agreed that they will deduct the loan amount from terms 2 and 3 of the student FE Grant and refund the College. Colleges must therefore provide EA with details of the amount of loan paid to each student by mid-November.

7.5 Advertisement and Promotion

- FE Grants should be advertised and promoted within each college. The EA will supply colleges with PDF promotional material.

8. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

8.1 Applications

- It is the responsibility of the applicant to complete the FE Grant 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; and
 - Students who submit an online application will be required to submit evidence of identity such as Passport or Birth Certificate (photocopies are

not acceptable). Evidence of income must also be supplied e.g. payslips, tax returns, accountant's letters – these documents can be uploaded or posted to the Further Education Grants Section.

- Incomplete applications will result in a request for additional information and will ultimately delay the final outcome of the application.
- All requests made by the EA for additional information must be returned within 10 days of issue; unless there are mitigating circumstances that the EA is aware of and have approved an extension period. Information not received within the required timescale will mean that the application may be rejected.

8.2 Fees

- Students are liable for fees from the date of enrolment.

8.3 Payments

- Students are required to return to study before their payment is released by the EA.

8.4 Change of Circumstances

- Students have a responsibility to report all known Change of Circumstances to FE Grants Section that may affect their FE Grant application.
- Students must notify FE Grants Section at the EA immediately if they change their mode of study as this may impact on payment of fees and grant.
- Students must notify the FE Grants Section at the EA of any applications to other publicly funded bodies for financial assistance after their FE Grant has been approved.

8.5 Appeals

- Where an application has been refused, one appeal against the EA decision may be made in writing, giving the grounds for appeal to: Education Authority, Further Education Grants Section, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh, Co Tyrone, BT79 0AW. The appeal should be lodged with the EA within 28 days of receiving notification of the EA decision.

8.6 Other Languages

- The EA should have appropriate mechanisms in place to enable, on request, alternative versions or methods of communication of the FE Grants literature, including other languages, Braille or interpreters. The EA 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 EA and the Department.

APPENDIX 1

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 grant 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.
- “grant” includes an award or grant previously made under Article 50 of The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.
- “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 prescribed list of FE courses, at <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk>.
- “student” means a person to whom an award or grant has been made under these arrangements or was previously made under Article 50(3) or similar arrangements.

APPENDIX 2

Payments

The EA 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 EA may reasonably require, the EA may withhold, reduce or recover payments in the circumstances set out below and reduce or recover any payment in respect of any period:

- (1) after the termination of a grant.
- (2) during which the student is excluded by the academic authorities from attendance at the course.
- (3) where a grant 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 Grant to the student.
- (5) where attendance on the course is recorded as 60 – 80% the grant will be reduced.
- (6) where attendance on the course is recorded as below 60% the grant will be withdrawn.

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 EA, having regard to all the circumstances of the case. In cases where a student is overpaid (for whatever reason) the student will be required to repay the amount notified to them by the EA who will recover an overpayment unless it is considered inappropriate to do so. The methods of recovery are:

- (1) Subtracting the overpayment from any grant payable to the student either in the current year or in any subsequent year.
- (2) Taking such action to recover the overpayment as is available to the EA.

APPENDIX 3

Extension, Suspension and Termination of Grants

A grant 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 EA may extend the grant until he or she has completed it.

The EA may terminate a grant 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 grant is held, and the grant 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 a grant.

If, after consultation with the academic authority concerned, the EA 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 a grant held by him or her in respect of that course, or withhold, reduce or recover any payment normally due in respect of that grant.

If, in the case of a student who is required to provide information, the EA 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 EA may terminate the grant or withhold any payments due under the grant or recover as it sees fit.

Further information and applications may be obtained by contacting:
Further Education Grants Section,
Education Authority
1 Hospital Road,
Omagh,
Co. Tyrone.
BT79 0AW
Telephone: 028 9047 0155 and select Option 2
E-Mail: fegrants@eani.org.uk