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FE Coding Guidance: Learner Support Funding

Target Audience:

- FE College Principals
- FE MIS

Summary of Contents:

This document provides coding guidance on the recording of Learner Support Funding and the eligibility criteria associated with each funding category. It also updates circular FE06/17 in relation to Free School Meals.

This addendum updates the existing Learner Support Funding coding guidance to include two additional funding categories, providing a more complete and accurate picture of learners receiving disability-related support.

Colleges are asked to bring this guidance to the attention of all staff recording learner data on the Learner Management System (LMS).

Enquiries:

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

Further Education Sector Performance
Department for the Economy
Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
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Related Documents: FE06/17
Superseded Documents: FE 04/23
Expiry Date: **This circular will remain in effect until otherwise notified by the Department.**

Website: www.economy-ni.gov.uk

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CODING GUIDANCE

1. The Learner Support Funding field was introduced from the 2023/24 academic year to allow recording of learners in receipt of Learner Support Funding.
2. This circular provides guidance on the Learner Support Funding categories available for recording and provides the eligibility criteria associated with each category to support consistent coding across the FE sector.
3. The eligibility criteria for each Learner Support Funding category are based on the requirements of the relevant support scheme and are included in **Annex A**. It is important that FE colleges record Learner Support Funding consistently across the sector and in accordance with those requirements.
4. The Learner Support Funding categories available for recording are shown below.

Value	Year	Description
01	2023	Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)
02	2023	Care to Learn (CTL)
03	2023	FE Grant (FEG)
04	2023	Hardship Fund
05	2023	Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME)
06	2023	Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)
07	2026	AppNI Disability Support Services (DSS)
08	2026	HLA Disability Support

5. The Learner Support Funding categories 01-06 continue to apply and should be recorded where the learner is in receipt of the relevant support. The additional Learner Support Funding categories 07-08 apply from the 2026/27 academic year

onwards and should be recorded where the learner is in receipt of the relevant support during the associated academic year.

6. Learner Support Funding should be recorded against the Consolidated Data Return (CDR) enrolment (Q level) to which it applies. If there are multiple qualifications attached to a programme, the Learner Support Funding should be recorded against the primary qualification.

7. The Learner Support Funding category should be recorded if the learner has been in receipt of the relevant support at any time during the academic year.

8. More than one Learner Support Funding category may be recorded for a learner where applicable.

9. Colleges are asked to ensure that the guidance set out in this circular is brought to the attention of all staff recording learner data on the Learner Management System (LMS) and that the necessary changes are made to the system to allow the new options to be recorded.

ANNEX A – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDING

Option	Description	Criteria
EMA	EMA is a weekly allowance of £30 to help 16-19 yr olds with costs of Further Education.	• Learner studying full time at school or minimum of 15 hrs per week at FE college on eligible course • Learner meets nationality and residency requirements • Learner lives in household with income of: £20,500 or less and is only young person or £22,500 or less, and there's at least one other young person in household who qualifies for Child Benefit • Learner has not already received maximum allowance for EMA scheme • Learner is aged 16-19 on or before 1st July in the academic year of enrolment
CTL	CTL scheme provides students aged between 16 -20 who are a parent, with help towards childcare costs.	Learner must during their course of study be or become: • the main carer of their child/children • at least 16 years old • under 20 yrs of age at the start of their course of study and meet residency requirements under the Education (Student Support) Regulations (Northern Ireland) • Learners must also meet residency criteria set out in prevailing Education (Student

Option	Description	Criteria
		Support) Regulations (Northern Ireland) and be using a registered childcare provider.
FEG	Education Authority offers a limited number of Further Education grants each year for full and part time courses undertaking courses up to and including Level 3.	Students apply via the Education Authority and must meet several criteria surrounding course type, age, previous study, residence, and status as an independent/dependent student. A full breakdown of the eligibility criteria is available at; Further Education Grants | Education Authority Northern Ireland (eani.org.uk)
Hardship	All Further Education colleges provide a Hardship Fund for students experiencing significant financial problems. Conditions apply and students should contact their respective college directly for advice.	If students are in financial need and require assistance with any of the following categories, they are eligible to apply: • Course Fees • Additional Living Costs (FT only) • Travel Costs • Books and equipment costs (essential/required) • Childcare Costs Students must exhaust all other available sources of funding before applying. All applicants must read their respective college's Guidance & Terms and Conditions before submitting an application.

Option	Description	Criteria
FSME	If you are aged under 18 on the 31st July in the academic year of enrolment and studying a Full Time Education course you may be entitled to free school meals through the Education Authority.	• They or their parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income based Jobseekers Allowance • They or their parent is in receipt of Income related Employment Support Allowance • The parent receives Child Tax credit or working tax credit with an annual taxable income of £16,190 or less • They or their parent is in receipt of Universal Credit with a net household earnings not exceeding £15,900 • The parent receives the Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit • They are an asylum seeker supported by the Home Office Asylum Support Assessment Team (ASAT) • They have a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and are designated to require a special diet
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance is additional funding to help Higher Education students with extra essential costs as a direct result of a disability.	• To qualify for DSA you must have a disability that meets the definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 and that impacts your ability to study. • You will be asked for proof such as a report or letter from your doctor or a diagnostic assessment from a psychologist or suitably qualified teacher

Option	Description	Criteria
		• Learner must meet residency and nationality requirements • Course and place of study be eligible for funding • Course must result in one of following qualifications: ➢ A first degree, eg: a BA, BSc or Bed ➢ A foundation degree ➢ A certificate of higher education ➢ A diploma of Higher Education (DipEd) ➢ A Higher National Certificate (HNC) ➢ A Higher National Diploma (HND) ➢ A Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) ➢ Initial Teacher Education (ITE)
AppNI DSS	Separately contracted ApprenticeshipsNI 2025 Disability Support Services (DSS) provides a disability supplement to support additional training time, equipment, or other support to help apprentices fully benefit from their training.	• ApprenticeshipsNI participants who require additional support due to a disability, health condition, learning difficulty or other identified support need • Apprentices may qualify for Department for Communities workplace support through Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI), subject to eligibility and individual assessment. • Workable (NI) • Access to Work (NI)

Option	Description	Criteria
HLA Disability Support	Disability Support is made available to eligible apprentices to help them overcome the barriers they may face when accessing the off the job training element of the Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA), as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. Disability Support is not subject to an age limit, previous study rules, or income assessment	• An apprentice must meet the definition of a person with a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) defines a person with a disability as someone who has 'a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.' • be participating on a HLA at a Further Education College (FEC) or Higher Education Institution (HEI) in NI. • be able to provide evidence that the effects of his or her disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty will mean that they need to pay extra costs to attend their course (over and above services which can reasonably be expected to be provided by Training Provider) to put them on an equal footing with their non-disabled counterparts. • Apprentices may qualify for Department for Communities workplace support through Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI), subject to eligibility and individual assessment. • Workable (NI)

Option	Description	Criteria
		• Access to Work (NI)
• **Evidence of receipt must be obtained and retained for audit purposes.**		

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