

# Review of Further Education Support and Charging Policy at CAFRE

## Consultation



*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of the consultation

The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views of stakeholders on the options developed by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' (DAERA) for future Further Education (FE) support at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and the Department's FE charging policy.

## 1.2 Background

DAERA provides a range of full-time and part-time further<sup>1</sup> and higher education courses as well as industry training courses at CAFRE. The courses cover agriculture, equine, food, horticulture and business for agri-food and rural enterprise.

CAFRE's FE provision is rather unique within the wider FE sector in Northern Ireland (NI). CAFRE students come from across NI to study specialised courses at the three campuses in disciplines that tend not to be offered elsewhere. In comparison, most students at NI FE regional colleges live in the vicinity of their college campus and can access a curriculum that tends to be replicated across all FE colleges.

There are approximately 360 full-time and 650 part-time FE students at CAFRE. 90% of full-time and 65% of part-time FE students are between 16 and 25 years old. Around 170 of the part-time cohort are enrolled on apprenticeship programmes at CAFRE.

## 1.3 Strategic context

The **DAERA Knowledge Framework** ("the Framework") sets out the rationale for DAERA's involvement in education, training and technology exchange, the nature of its interventions and what the Department seeks to achieve. The Framework firmly establishes the principle that involvement in education should be driven by DAERA's policy objectives and strategic goals. The Framework aims to ensure that those within the agri-food industry have access to high-quality, relevant and accessible education to improve productivity, resilience, environmental performance and sustainability. The Framework states that the enhancement of knowledge and skills will be an integral component of any policy intervention, and specifies potential interventions, including

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of Further Education courses available at CAFRE is attached at Annex D of this document.

incentives such as subsidising the cost of acquiring skills where appropriate and improving accessibility. This is particularly relevant to this consultation. Ensuring adequate student support is provided and, where required, subsidising tuition costs, may be considered necessary if this drives forward the Department's strategic goals.

A key principle of the Framework is that of accessibility - to encourage continuous life-long learning for its target audiences and to ensure equality of opportunity for all – for example those with dependants and those with particular needs. Another key principle is that of affordability for the Department, targeting investment so that it delivers the best possible returns in terms of achieving DAERA's strategic objectives of enhancing the economic and environmental performance of the Northern Ireland agri-food sector. All education and training funded by the Department must be linked to DAERA's core policy objectives and strategic goals.

The Framework recognises that the future success of the agri-food industry depends on the development of young people with the ability, training and leadership skills to realise the opportunities for the industry to grow.

Current policy in relation to student support contributes to the outcomes and principles stated within the Framework. Means-tested financial support is available to full-time FE students of all ages which takes into account the potential to have to live away from home in order to study CAFRE courses. This helps to remove potential economic barriers to participation in education for target groups. The childcare support provision offered to those in receipt of a grant and the support for any student with learning difficulties or a disability further promotes access for individuals to relevant education in subjects that are core to DAERA's strategic objectives. It is important that these policies remain fit for purpose to meet the overall objective of improving productivity, resilience, environmental performance and sustainability.

The current policy of subsidising all FE courses within CAFRE also contributes to the Framework's intended outcomes and principles by removing potential economic barriers to participation, although consideration must be given as to whether the FE charging policy delivers the best possible returns in terms of providing high-quality education and contributing to a committed, experienced workforce who will impact upon DAERA's strategic objective of enhancing the economic and environmental performance of the NI agri-food sector.

## 2 CURRENT FE SUPPORT AND CHARGING POLICY

### 2.1 Living Expenses Grant

DAERA has provided financial support, on a means-tested basis, to students of any age on full-time FE courses at CAFRE since 1985. The main element of this support is a Living Expenses Grant which was designed to contribute towards accommodation (where necessary), food, study equipment and travel. Part-time FE students and apprenticeship students are not eligible to receive this grant. The administration of this grant is managed by the Education Authority (EA) on behalf of DAERA.

The maximum grant available has not changed since 2006 and depends on whether the student is living on campus or at home. Maximum grant for students living in:

- campus halls of residence or in lodgings      **£2,362 (Away From Home rate)**
- parental home      **£1,659 (At Home rate)**

The grant is based on an assessment of the total gross household income<sup>2</sup> per annum – this is the total amount of taxable income a household brings in from all its members before the tax is deducted. A student receives the maximum grant if the total gross household income per annum is less than £23,660. For household incomes between £23,660 and £52,622 per annum the grant is calculated on a decreasing scale. For household incomes over £52,622 no grant is paid. These income thresholds have not changed since 2008.

The Living Expenses Grant paid out to CAFRE students is approximately £370k<sup>3</sup> per year. On average, 204 grants are awarded each year, approximately 64% of which (131) are the maximum grant available.

### 2.2 Childcare Allowance

The Childcare Allowance provides childcare support for FE students who are in receipt of a grant. Support is provided towards the costs of registered or approved childcare.

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<sup>2</sup> Household Income is calculated taking total gross income (before tax and National Insurance) and taking off any allowances such as personal pension contributions and additional dependent children

<sup>3</sup> Based on five year average 2014 to 2019.

The allowance is means-tested and students may receive up to £130 per week if they have one child and up to £220 per week if they have two or more children in childcare.

### **2.3 Support for Students with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities (SLDD)**

Students with disabilities, including physical disabilities, mental health difficulties, long-term illnesses or specific learning difficulties can apply for support. The level of support provided depends on both the nature of the disability or learning difficulty and the course of study. This support is a legal obligation under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDI). SENDI states that 'reasonable adjustments' must be made to ensure, where reasonable, that further and higher education is fully accessible to disabled people and to protect students from victimisation. There is no residency requirement for a student to receive this support and it is not means-tested.

### **2.4 Hardship Fund**

A means-tested Hardship fund is also available for students experiencing exceptional financial difficulty. Full-time FE students who have received the Living Expenses Grant are eligible to apply. The majority of Hardship payments are to dependant students living away from home (maximum available £630 per annum). The eligibility criteria for this fund is under internal review to ensure the fund is adequately flexible to meet the needs of all students experiencing exceptional financial difficulty.

### **2.5 FE Charging Policy**

The cost of full-time and the vast majority of part-time FE courses at CAFRE are met in full by DAERA.

### 3 REVIEW OF FE SUPPORT AND CHARGING

DAERA policies in relation to FE support and charging should ensure that CAFRE can provide sufficient numbers of trained people to meet the needs of the NI agri-food, horticulture and equine industries in keeping with DAERA's strategic outcome of sustainable agri-food, fisheries, forestry and industrial sectors.

A Review of DAERA Further Education Support and Charging ("the Review") was undertaken during 2018. This Review assessed DAERA policies in relation to further education support and charging in order to:

- i. determine if these policies deliver value for money and coherence with the Department's strategic objectives and conclude if they are fit for purpose;
- ii. determine if the mechanisms for delivering student support are appropriate; and
- iii. if necessary, propose a revised approach.

#### 3.1 Key Findings and Recommendations of the Review

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><b><u>Finding 1</u></b> There is disparity between full-time and part-time students in respect of eligibility for FE grants and hardship support at CAFRE. (This finding contrasts with wider FE support policy in NI and GB which tends to include support measures for part-time FE students).</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation 1</u></b> <i>Identify options for widening the FE Living Expenses Grant to part-time students and, as a consequence, eligibility to other support mechanisms.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Finding 2</u></b> The FE grant is not sufficiently well targeted towards those students with the greatest need; may be focused on too wide a range of students and does not address the varying travel costs of students attending CAFRE.</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation 2</u></b> <i>Identify options to ensure that the FE Living Expenses Grant targets those most in need, helps with ongoing costs of living expenses including transport costs and reduces the number of hardship applications.</i></p>
<p><b><u>Finding 3</u></b> There is significant reliance on hardship funding - almost half of FE students in receipt of the grant also receive hardship funding, with evidence showing that the majority of these hardship applications come from those with the lowest household income.</p>	

FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><b><u>Finding 4</u></b> There was no strong evidence to support the introduction of charges for CAFRE further education courses.</p>	<p><b><u>Recommendation 3</u></b> <b><i>Obtain stakeholder views on DAERA’s current charging policy and potential alternative options.</i></b></p>

The full Review report is available on the DAERA website – [DAERA Further Education Support and Charging Review](#).

## 4 THE CONSULTATION EXERCISE

Taking into account the views of stakeholders is an essential element of robust policy development. The findings of the Review were initially presented to stakeholder and student focus groups during 2019. A list of Stakeholder focus group attendees and the outcome of these engagements is attached at **Annex B**.

To address the recommendations of the Review, and with input from the focus groups, DAERA has developed a set of proposals for future FE support at CAFRE. The purpose of this consultation is to gather the views of the public on FE support and charging proposals.

The consultation exercise will ask whether you agree or disagree with each proposal and whether you have an alternative proposal which you consider to be more appropriate. Responses on these proposals are welcome **up to Friday 11 September 2020**. Details on how to respond can be found in Section 11.

The outcome of the consultation will form part of the evidence base used by the DAERA Minister to inform decision making on the future direction of FE support and charging policy at CAFRE.

## 5 FE SUPPORT PROPOSALS

There are four FE support proposals DAERA wish to gather your views on:

- **Proposal A: Extending support to part-time students;**
- **Proposal B: Increase the amount of grant available;**
- **Proposal C: Raise the lower household income threshold; and**
- **Proposal D: Reduce the upper household income threshold.**

The impact and implications of each proposal including the estimated budgetary implications are detailed in Sections 5.1 to 5.4.

The figures quoted in each proposal are based on a five-year average of FE student support data at CAFRE – 2014/15 to 2018/19. The figures are based on the current grant rate available, except for Proposal B (proposal to increase the grant rate). All full-time budgetary estimates assume no change on current enrolment figures. Part-time estimates are based on current part-time enrolment figures and estimated number of eligible students on part-time FE courses due to commence in 2021.

Where inflation has been applied to a proposal, the inflation rate used is the Bank of England (BoE) Inflation Calculator which utilises the Office of National Statistics (ONS) composite price index that is based on the Retail Price Index (RPI) from 1947 onwards.

It should be noted that the estimated budget required to implement the FE support proposals in this consultation is for the Living Expenses Grant only and does not include:

- i. the fee charged by the Education Authority for the administration of the FE Support Scheme unchanged since 2007 (currently £75 per application / approximately £15,000 per annum);
- ii. the Hardship grant budget and associated administration costs (approximately £40,000 per annum); or
- iii. the cost of Childcare Support and Support for Learning Difficulties and Disabilities.

## 5.1 Proposal A: Extending Support to Part-Time FE Students

**DAERA proposes extending support to part-time FE students for books and equipment associated with their part time study, and, as a consequence, eligibility to apply for the other student support mechanisms available such as the Childcare Support and the CAFRE Hardship Fund.**

### Issue

This proposal addresses Recommendation 1 of the Review: *Identify options for widening the FE grant to part-time students and, as a consequence, eligibility to other support mechanisms.*

The current policy, which excludes part-time FE students from accessing support, is inconsistent with wider FE support policy in NI and GB. Implementation of this proposal would ensure equitable treatment of full-time and part-time students in respect of eligibility for FE support.

### Impact

There are almost twice as many part-time FE students studying at CAFRE compared to full-time FE students. When predictions for part-time support are based on full-time student support data it is estimated that about 56% of part-time students are likely to avail of FE support if it was available to them (approximately 260 students from current FE courses and a predicted 110 from new FE courses each year).

This proposal would also mean that eligible part-time students could also access Childcare Allowance and the Hardship Fund. Childcare Allowance is an important support mechanism for parents on low incomes hoping to complete a course of study. It is difficult to predict the uptake of Childcare Allowance by part-time students should this proposal be implemented. Whilst the numbers of full-time students seeking Childcare Allowance at CAFRE has historically been low (none in 2018/19), approximately 14% of current part-time students have children, which is twice as many as full-time students.

### Budget Implications

Should extending FE support to part-time students be supported, DAERA will develop a support package suitable for this category of students and the costs they incur

completing a course of part-time study at CAFRE. Since a final support package for part-time students has yet to be agreed, in order to assess the potential budget implications at this stage we have modelled future demand for support on a grant to support the purchase of books and equipment set at a maximum of £400 per year and assessed using the same household income thresholds as the full-time grant. Using the percentage of full-time students in receipt of support to estimate likely numbers of part-time applicants, we estimate that the additional budget required could be around £150,000 in the first year of implementation.

In 2018/19 no money was paid out in Childcare Allowance to full-time students at CAFRE despite 7% reporting that they have children. Given that twice as many current part-time students report having children, it is expected that there will be additional charges on the Childcare budget; however, it is not expected to be significant (especially since allowance payments would only apply to the days the student is attending the College).

Extending FE support to part-time students will increase the number of applications processed by the Education Authority each year. Therefore, it is estimated to increase the cost of administration of the grant by approximately £28,000 annually.

## 5.2 Proposal B: Increase the Amount of Grant Available

**DAERA proposes applying an inflationary increase to both the ‘At Home’ and ‘Away from Home’ grant rates which have been frozen since 2006.**

In this proposal the maximum At Home grant would increase from the current rate of £1,659 to £2,400 per annum (a rise from £55/week to £80/week<sup>4</sup>); and the maximum Away from Home grant would increase from £2,362 to £3,400 (a rise from £78/week to £113/week).

### Issue

This proposal addresses Recommendation 2 of the Review: *Identify options to ensure that the FE grant targets those most in need, helps with ongoing costs of living expenses including transport costs and reduces the number of hardship applications.*

The grant rate has remained unchanged for 14 years; however the cost of living during this time has increased. This has meant increased accommodation and food costs associated with staying in CAFRE halls of residence and the cost of travelling to and from the campuses.

The Review found that the approximate annual cost of attending CAFRE is **£3,800 per annum** while living away from home, taking an estimated cost for accommodation, food, travel and resources such as books and protective clothing. The cost of attending a course at CAFRE while living at home is estimated to be **£2,600 per annum**, taking an estimated cost for travel and other expenses but not including accommodation. It is important to note that unlike students in the wider FE sector (under 19 years old) CAFRE students are not eligible for non-means tested transport assistance (bus pass) from the Education Authority to help with the cost of travel. The current maximum grant available falls well below the estimated cost of attendance. This is evidenced in the Review by the proportion of students in receipt of a grant also seeking hardship funding. The majority of hardship applications come from those students with the lowest total gross household income i.e. below £23,660 who are struggling to meet these increased costs.

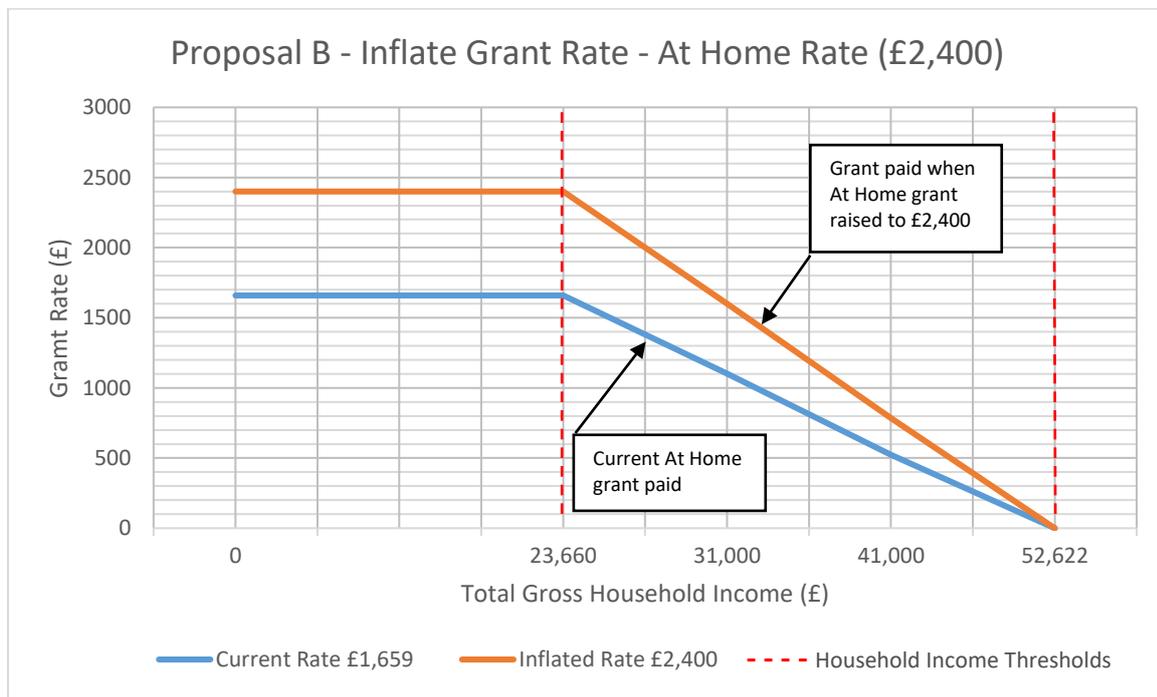
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<sup>4</sup> based on a 30-week course

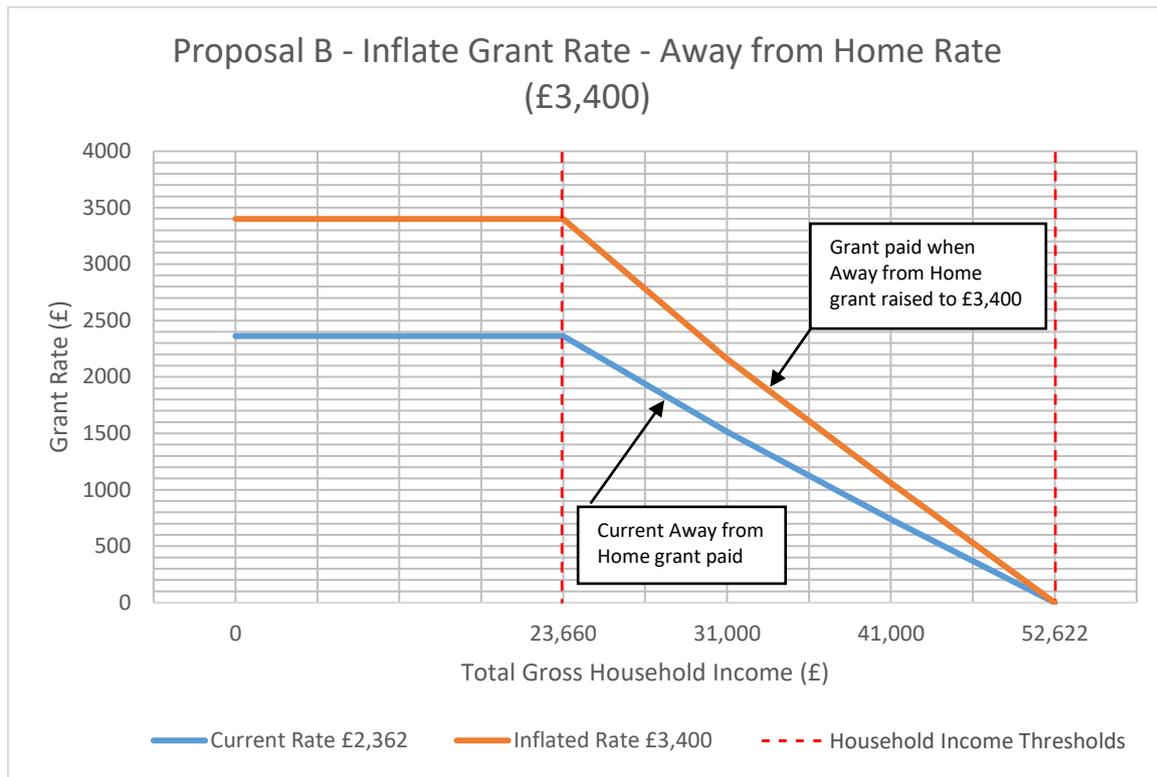
Impact

Since this proposal simply raises the level of the grant available it does not impact on the number of FE students eligible for the grant or the proportion of these students who are eligible for the maximum grant. This is shown in Figure 1a and Figure 1b.

**Figure 1a: ‘At Home’ Grant Paid Against Household Incomes When The Value Of The Grant Available Is Increased.**



**Figure 1b: ‘Away from Home’ Grant Paid Against Household Incomes When The Value Of The Grant Available Is Increased.**



Implementation of this proposal would provide support at a level which better meets the basic costs associated with studying at CAFRE for students receiving either the At Home grant or the Away from Home grant. As these figures are arrived at by applying inflationary increases they take account of the steady increase in the cost of living since the grant rates were last reviewed in 2006 and are more reflective of the actual costs incurred by CAFRE students.

This proposal, if implemented, should reduce the number of students having to seek further financial assistance through the Hardship Fund to complete their studies. In turn this should remove the additional stress and anxiety associated with seeking financial support from two different support schemes.

### Budget Implications

Increasing the At Home (£2,400) and Away from Home (£3,400) grant available to full-time FE students is estimated to cost DAERA approximately an additional £160,000 each year in Living Expenses Grant payments.

### 5.3 Proposal C: Raise the Lower Household Income Threshold

**DAERA proposes raising the lower household income threshold (currently £23,660) to £31,000.**

CAFRE currently apply a lower total household income threshold of £23,660 when assessing applications for FE support. A student with a total gross household income up to £23,660 may be eligible to receive a maximum grant. This lower household income threshold was set in 2008 and has been frozen for the last 12 years.

Under this proposal the total gross lower household income threshold would increase from £23,660 to £31,000 and students with a total gross household income up to £31,000 may be eligible to receive a maximum grant. The new total gross lower household income figure proposed (£31,000) is in line with the 2008 figure once inflation has been applied.

#### Issue

This proposal addresses Recommendation 2 of the Review: *Identify options to ensure that the FE grant targets those most in need, helps with ongoing costs of living expenses including transport costs and reduces the number of hardship applications.*

The Review found that the FE grant is not sufficiently well targeted towards those students with the greatest need and that it may be focused on too wide a range of students. On average 22% of students in receipt of the FE grant have total gross household incomes between £23,660 and £31,000, and this group make up approximately a quarter of all Hardship grants awarded.

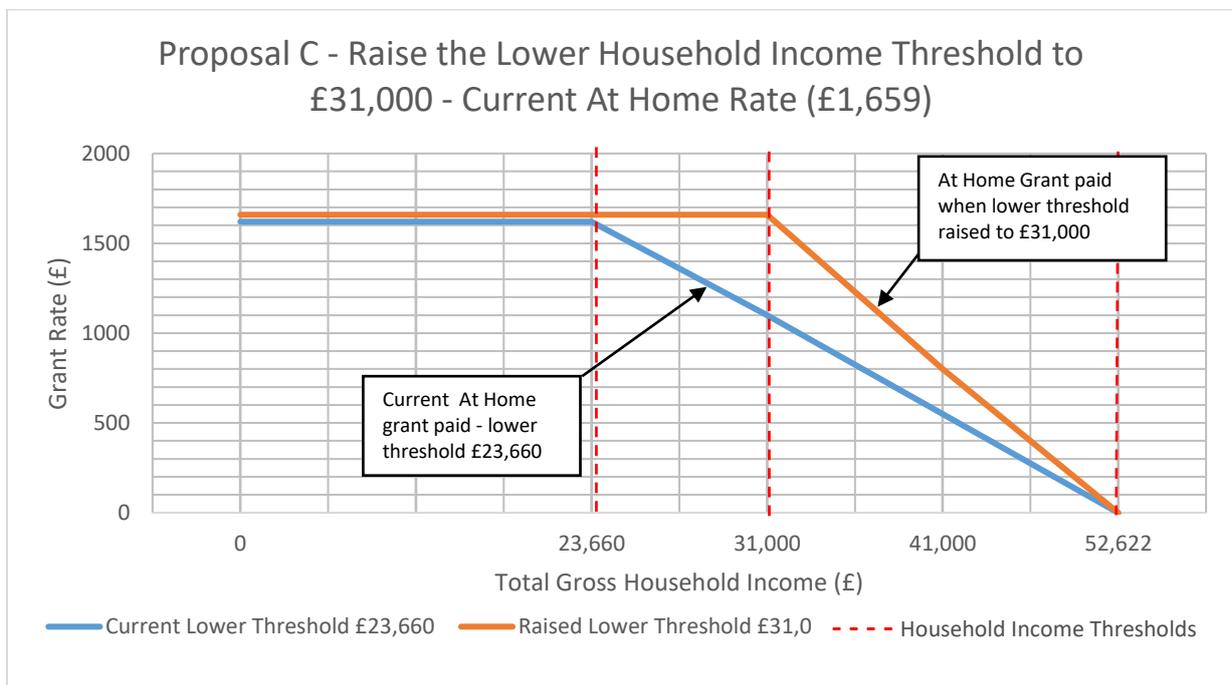
#### Impact

Under this proposal students with a total gross household income up to £31,000 may be eligible to receive a maximum grant. Raising the total gross lower household income threshold does not change the number of students overall receiving FE support; however, it increases the number of students getting the maximum grant available by 22% on average (around 30 students). This proposal could reduce the number of students having to seek further financial assistance through the Hardship Fund to complete their studies. In turn this should also remove the additional stress

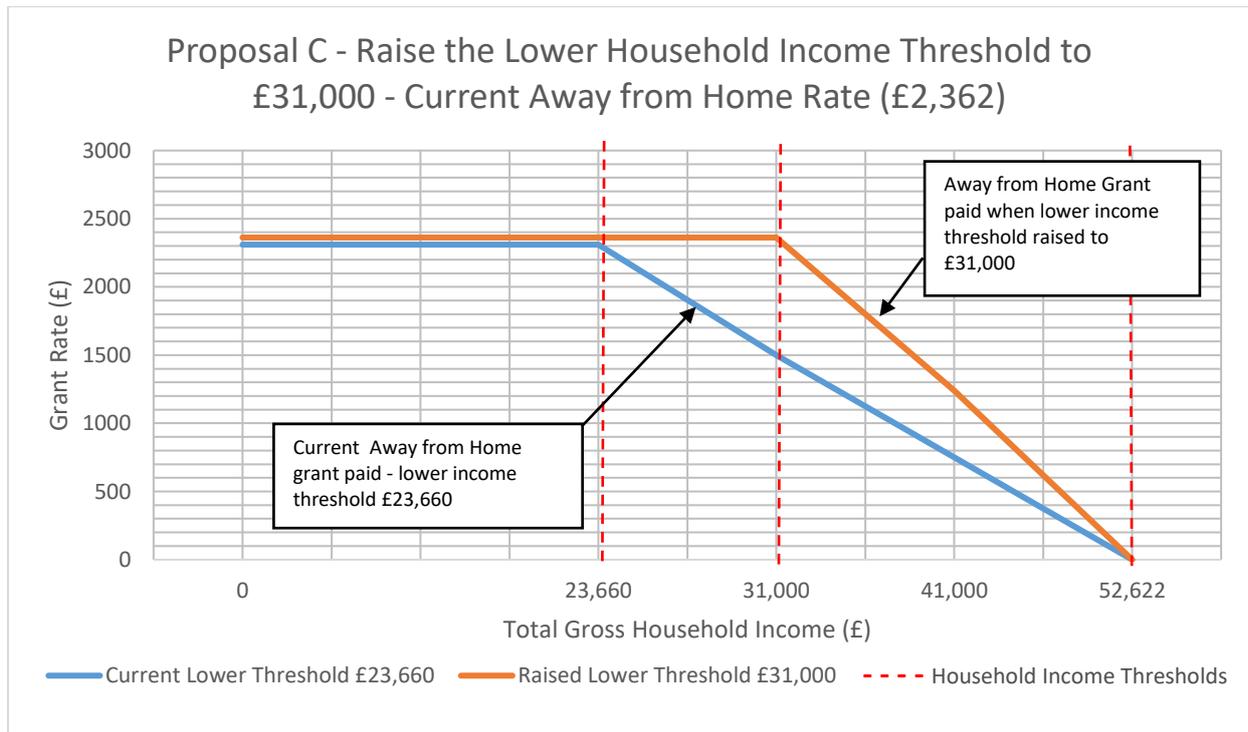
and anxiety associated with seeking financial support from two different support schemes.

Raising the total gross lower household income threshold also has the spill over effect of increasing the amount of grant paid to students with household incomes between £31,000 and the upper threshold of £52,622. This is shown in Figure 2a and 2b.

**Figure 2a: ‘At Home’ Grant Paid against Household Incomes When the Lower Household Income Threshold is raised to £31,000.**



**Figure 2b: ‘Away from Home’ Grant Paid Against Household Incomes When the Lower Household Income Threshold is raised to £31,000.**



**Budget Implications**

Raising the total gross lower household income threshold to £31,000 at the current level of grant available is estimated to cost DAERA an additional £35,000 per year for full-time students.

## 5.4 Proposal D: Reduce the Upper Household Income Threshold

**DAERA proposes reducing the total gross upper household income threshold (currently £52,622) to £41,000.**

This proposal would see the total gross upper household income threshold reduced from £52,622 to £41,000. This reduced threshold figure is similar to the upper threshold used by Department for the Economy (DfE) for the HE Maintenance Grant (£41,065). The grant payable would reduce from the maximum grant (at the total gross lower income threshold) on a sliding scale up to £41,000, above which no grant would be paid.

### Issue

This proposal addresses Recommendation 2 of the Review: *Identify options to ensure that the FE grant targets those most in need, helps with ongoing costs of living expenses including transport costs and reduces the number of hardship applications.*

The Review found that the FE grant is not sufficiently well targeted towards those students with the greatest need and that it may be focused on too wide a range of students. This proposal would reduce the total gross upper household income threshold by nearly £12,000 to £41,000 in order to reallocate the grant to those students from lower household incomes.

### Impact

On average 8% of students in receipt of the FE grant have total gross household incomes between £41,000 and £52,622. Reducing the total gross upper income threshold will reduce the number of students who are eligible for support by approximately 17 students each year.

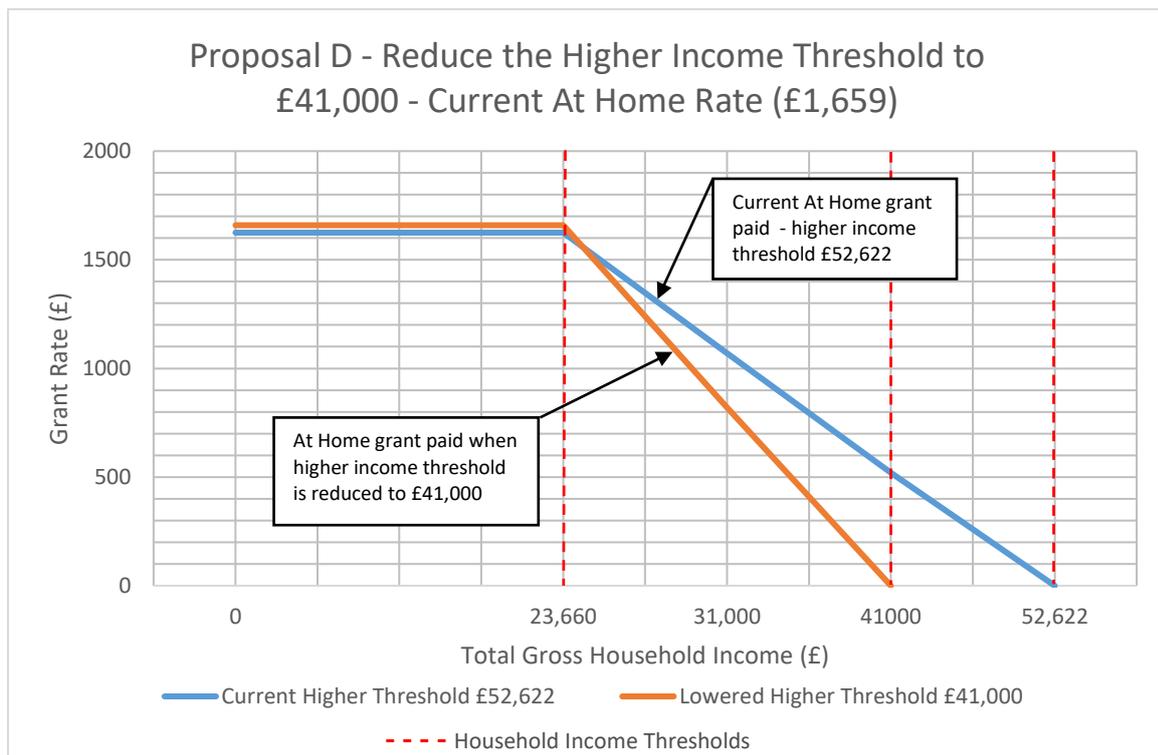
Due to the design of the DAERA FE support scheme reducing the total gross upper household income threshold to £41,000 has the effect of decreasing the amount of grant paid to students with total gross household incomes between the lower threshold (£23, 660) and the new upper threshold (£41K). This is an unintended consequence of this proposal. In order to minimise the effect of this proposal on remaining eligible students (those with a total gross household income of less than £41,000) it would have to be implemented with a corresponding proposal that increased the grant

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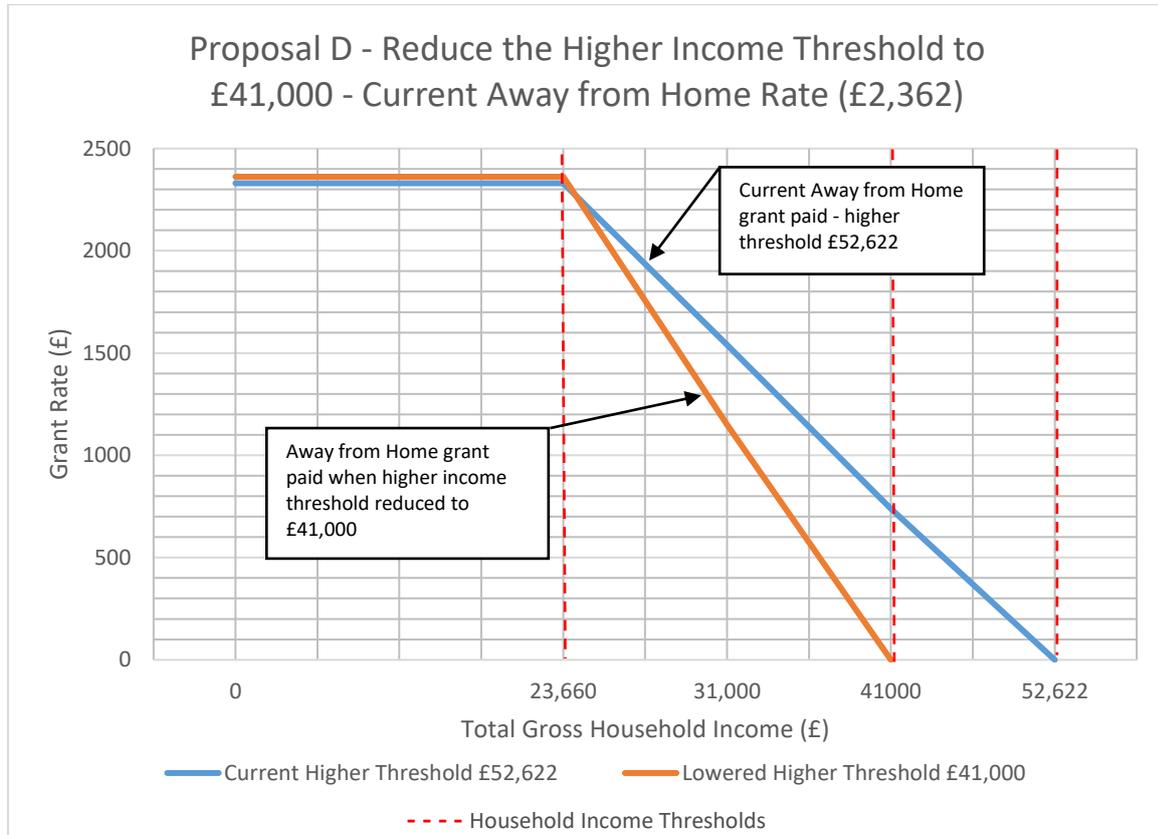
available to students (such as Proposal B that would increase the amount of grant available to all eligible students). Combining these proposals to minimise this effect is set out in more detail in Section 6.3.

The effect of reducing the total gross upper household threshold alone on grant available is shown in Figure 3a and 3b.

**Figure 3a: ‘At Home’ Grant Paid against Household Incomes When the Upper Household Income Threshold is reduced to £41,000.**



**Figure 3b: ‘Away from Home’ Grant Paid Against Household Incomes When the Upper Household Income Threshold is reduced to £41,000.**



**Budget Implications**

Approximately £9,000 (3%) of the total grant paid out is allocated to students in the £41,000 - £52,622 income bracket which would be saved through the implementation of Proposal D. The £75 annual administration fee associated with each of these students would also be saved (approx. £1,300 per annum).

## 6 Combined Effect of All Proposals on Grant Available & Budget

Whilst Sections 5.1 to 5.4 detail the financial impact of implementing a proposal on its own, it is possible following the consultation exercise and consideration by the DAERA Minister that more than one of the Proposals could be implemented in the future (subject to budget availability). The following paragraphs set out some of the implications and impacts of combining all, or some, of the proposals:

### 6.1 Budget Implications

The maximum combined budget implication of implementing the proposals would result in the doubling of current annual expenditure. Based on the 2019/20 FE support budget (£550,000 per annum) and recent expenditure figures (varying between £300,000- £360,000 per annum), it is estimated that this will require an additional commitment of around £150,000 per year initially, bringing the total FE support budget to around £700,000 per year.

It is important to note that these budget predictions were carried out using student data prior to the COVID-19 crisis which could impact on household incomes in the future and potentially increase the number of students seeking support in the short to medium term.

### 6.2 Grant Implications – Combination of Proposal C & D

**Combination of increasing the total gross lower household income and reducing the total gross upper household income thresholds using current grant rates:**

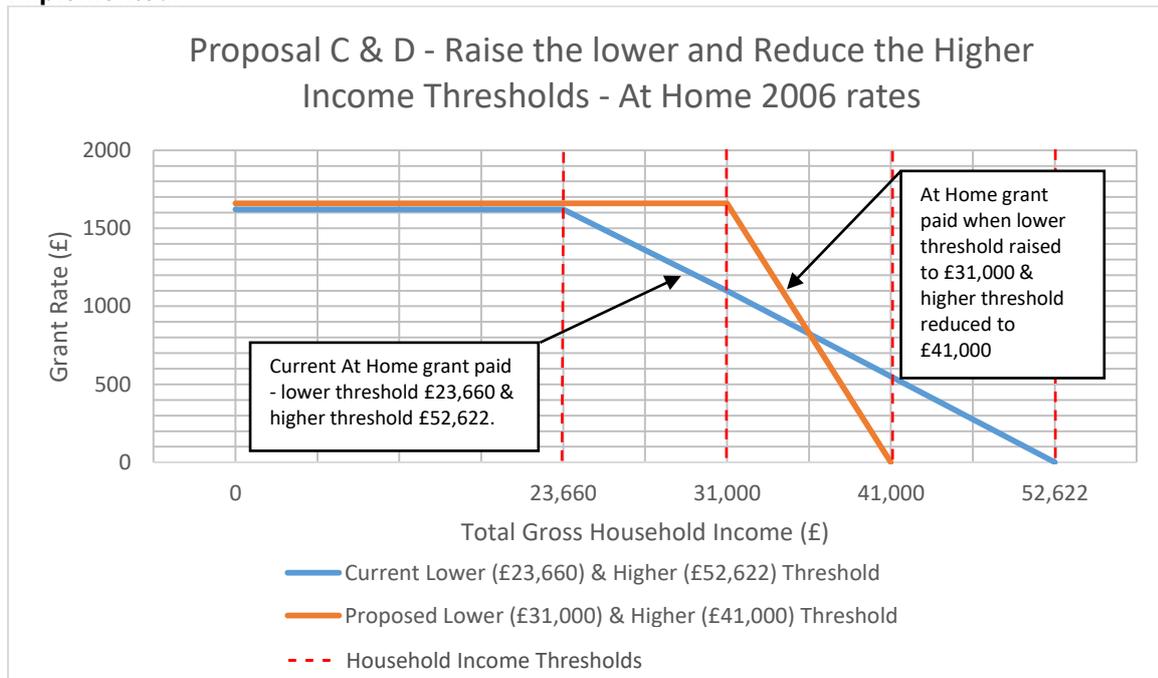
As detailed in Section 5.3 raising the total gross lower household income threshold to £31,000 (Proposal C) will also increase the amount of grant paid to students from total gross household incomes between £31,000 and £52,622. In contrast reducing the total gross upper household income threshold to £41,000 (Proposal D) decreases the grant paid to students from total gross household incomes between £23,622 and £41,000 (Section 5.4). Combining these two proposals has the following effect:

- students from total gross household income thresholds of up to £31,000 would receive the maximum grant;
- students from total gross household income thresholds between £31,000 - £35,000 would receive more grant than they currently receive;

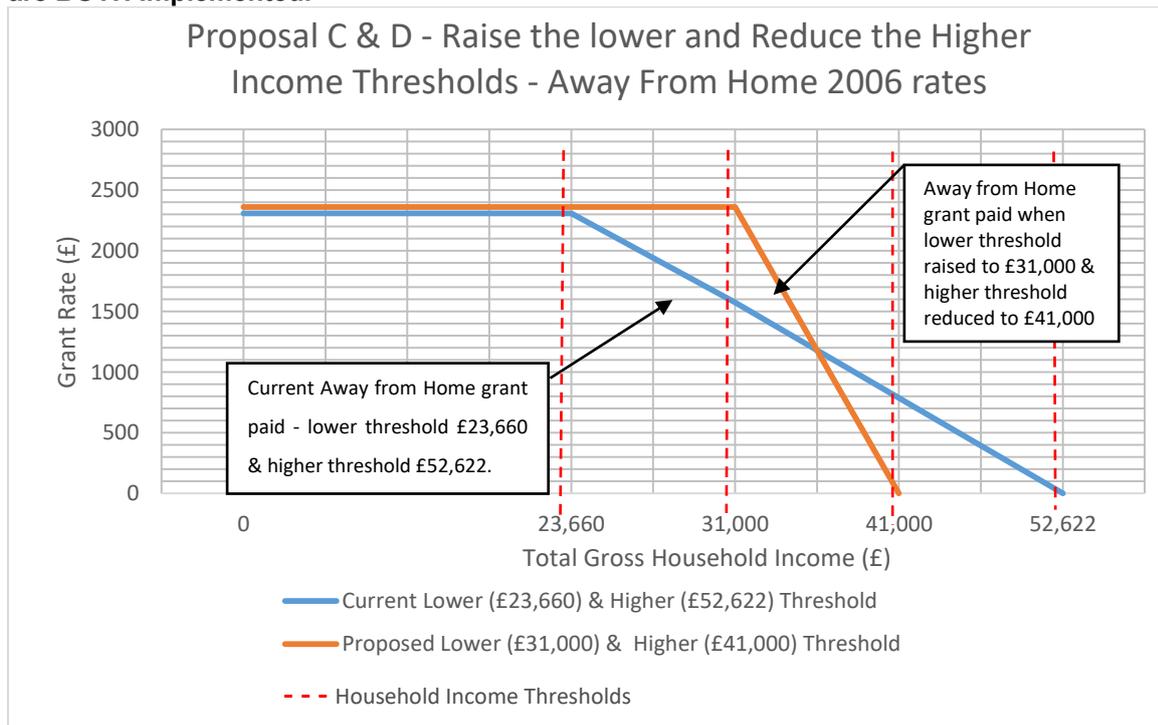
- students from total gross household income thresholds between £35,000 - £41,000 would receive less grant than they currently receive; and
- students from total gross household income thresholds over £41,000 would receive no grant.

This is shown in Figure 4a and 4b.

**Figure 4a: 'At Home' Grant Paid against Household Incomes When Proposals C & D are BOTH Implemented.**



**Figure 4b: 'Away from Home' Grant Paid Against Household Incomes When Proposals C & D are BOTH Implemented.**



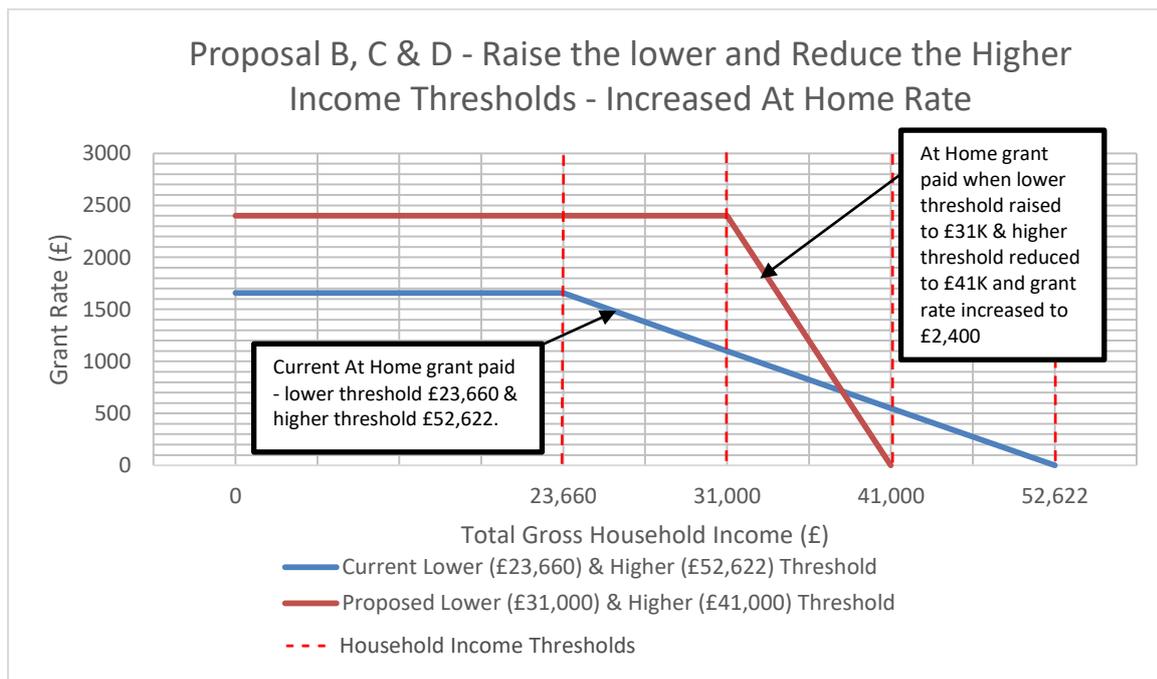
### 6.3 Grant Implications – Combination of Proposals B, C & D

**Combination of increasing the total gross lower household income and reducing the total gross upper household income thresholds and increasing the grant rates:**

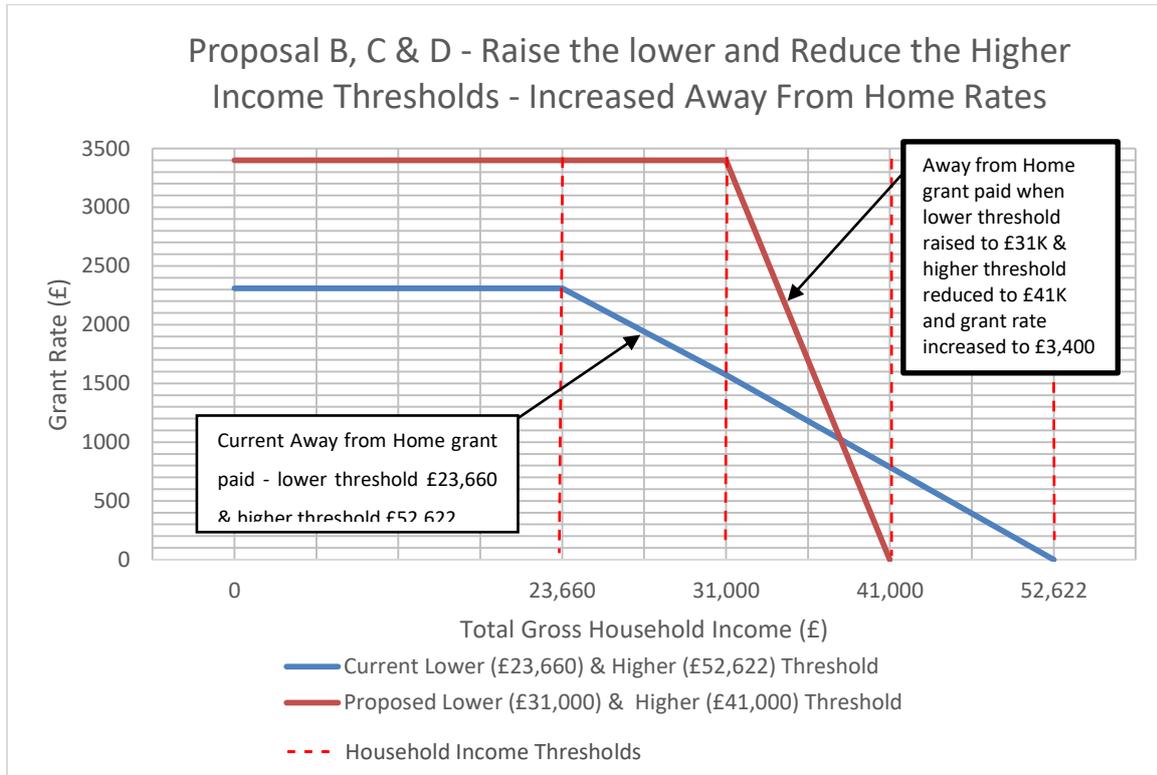
Combining the proposals to adjust the total gross household income thresholds with increased grant rates (Proposal B) slightly minimises the impact of reducing the total gross upper household income threshold so that only students from total gross household incomes between £37,000 and £41,000 experience a fall in the grant available to them.

This is shown in Figure 5a and 5b.

**Figure 5a: ‘At Home’ Grant Paid against Household Incomes When Proposals B, C & D are implemented.**



**Figure 5b: ‘Away from Home’ Grant Paid against Household Incomes When Proposals B, C & D are Implemented.**



## 7 FE CHARGING POLICY AT CAFRE

The cost of full-time and the vast majority of part-time FE courses<sup>5</sup> at CAFRE is largely met in full by DAERA.

The Review did not find any evidence to support the introduction of fees for FE courses at CAFRE, either for full-time or part-time courses. However the Review recommended “*obtaining views on DAERA’s current charging policy and potential alternative options*”.

DAERA FE charging policy was discussed at the stakeholder and student focus groups in October 2019. It was apparent from this engagement that these groups would not be in favour of introducing charges for CAFRE FE courses.

The Department is not minded to introduce fees for FE courses and has not identified any proposals to do so; however, in line with the recommendation in the Review you are invited to share your view of this policy position and any alternative position you consider more appropriate with us as part of this consultation exercise.

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<sup>5</sup> Veterinary Nursing students at CAFRE pay a fee (this includes a payment to their professional body).

## 8 EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

DAERA has a statutory duty to screen decisions to consider the likely equality and human rights impacts of proposed decisions on different groups of customers, service users, staff and visitors.

An equality impact assessment screening has been completed for all options explored in this document. The screening exercise identified a minor impact of one of the proposals on a small number of the Section 75 categories. Mitigating actions to address this impact have been identified and the proposals have been screened out of a full equality impact assessment at this time. Details can be found in the [screening document](#).

If, at a later stage, any of the options identified as having potential impacts are considered as a preferred option, the possible impacts will be further considered and a full EQIA will be completed as necessary.

Views on the screening process and findings are welcomed as part of this consultation exercise.

## 9 RURAL NEEDS CONSIDERATIONS

DAERA has a statutory duty to screen decisions to consider the likely impacts of proposed decisions on rural areas.

A rural needs assessment has been completed for the review. All options explored in the stakeholder consultation document will impact on potential students normally resident in rural areas. However, all options will also impact on potential students resident in urban areas.

The rural needs assessment template is a living document therefore views are welcomed on specific rural impacts identified with each of the proposals presented in the stakeholder consultation document. Details can be found in the [assessment template](#).

## 10 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Details on how to respond to the questions listed below are given in **Section 11** of this document.

**Proposal A: DAERA proposes offering support to part-time FE students for books and equipment associated with their part time study and, as a consequence, eligibility to the other student support mechanisms available such as Childcare Support and the CAFRE Hardship Fund.**

Question 1: Do you agree with offering support to part-time FE students?

- Yes
- No

Please give reasons for your choice and if you consider providing support for books and equipment alone (maximum £400) is sufficient?

**Proposal B: DAERA proposes applying an inflationary increase to both the 'At Home' and 'Away from Home' grant rates.**

Question 2: Please indicate which statement you agree with in relation to the 'At Home' grant:

- The maximum 'At Home' grant rate should increase from £1,659 to £2,400 per annum.
- The maximum 'At Home' grant rate should remain unchanged
- I have an alternative proposal which I have detailed below

Detail of Alternative Proposal for the 'At Home' grant:

Question 3: Please indicate which statement you agree with in relation to the 'Away from Home' grant:

- The maximum 'Away from Home' grant rate should increase from £2,362 to £3,400
- The maximum 'Away from Home' grant rate should remain unchanged
- I have an alternative proposal which I have detailed below

Detail of Alternative Proposal for the 'Away from Home' grant:

**Proposal C: DAERA proposes raising the lower household income threshold (currently £23,660) to £31,000.**

Question 4: Please indicate which statement you agree with in relation to the total gross lower household income threshold:

- The total gross lower household income threshold should increase from £23,660 to £31,000
- The total gross lower household income threshold should remain unchanged
- I have an alternative proposal which I have detailed below

Detail of Alternative Proposal for the total gross lower household income threshold:

**Proposal D: DAERA proposes reducing the total gross upper household income threshold (currently £52,622) to £41,000.**

Question 5: Please indicate which statement you agree with in relation to the upper household income threshold:

- The total gross upper household income threshold should decrease from £52,622 to £41,000
- The total gross upper household income threshold should remain unchanged
- I have an alternative proposal which I have detailed below

Detail of Alternative Proposal for the total gross upper household income threshold:

### **ORDER OF PREFERENCE**

Question 6: Future budgeting constraints could limit the FE support proposals that can be implemented going forward. Please place the FE support proposals in order of preference for implementation should it be necessary for the Department to prioritise them (1 = most preferred option through to 4 – least preferred option):

- Proposal A: Extending support to part-time FE students**
- Proposal B: Increase the amount of 'At Home' and 'Away From Home' grant available**
- Proposal C: Raise the total gross lower household income threshold**
- Proposal D: Reduce the total gross upper household income threshold**

Additional comments about your order of preference:

### **DAERA FE CHARGING POLICY**

Question 7: Should the Department consider introducing charges for Further Education courses?

- Yes
- No

Please give the reasons for your answer:

If you answered YES to Question 7 above please also detail on what basis these charges should be applied e.g. by previous qualifications obtained, type of course, household income, part time/full time etc.

**ANYTHING ELSE WE SHOULD CONSIDER?**

Question 8: Are there any other options for Further Education support which you believe the Department should consider or any other information you would like to add to your response? If so, please detail below:

**IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**

Question 9: Are there any further comments that you would like to add in regards to the published Rural Impact Assessment? If so, please detail below:

Question 10: Are there any further comments that you would like to add in regards to the published Equality Impact Assessment Screening? If so, please detail below:

## 11 RESPONDING TO THIS STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

### 11.1 Responses

You can view and respond to this stakeholder consultation online at the Northern Ireland Hub – [Citizen Space](#). If you are unable to respond to the stakeholder consultation exercise via Citizen Space, written responses will also be accepted and should be sent to:

DAERA Further Education Support and Charging Stakeholder Consultation  
Policy Development Branch  
Policy, Economics and Statistics Division  
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
Room 361A Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast BT4 3SB

Or e-mailed to: [policy.development@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:policy.development@daera-ni.gov.uk)

**If you have any queries regarding making a response you can call 02890 525116 for assistance.**

### 11.2 Closing Date

Responses to the stakeholder consultation should be submitted via Citizen Space or sent to the postal or email address above and should arrive **no later than Friday 11 September 2020**. It may not be possible to consider responses received after this date. An acknowledgement will be sent to confirm receipt of each response.

### 11.3 Publication of Responses

The Department takes data protection, freedom of information and environmental information issues seriously. It takes care to ensure that any personal information received from you is dealt with in a way which complies with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations (2016) and the Data Protection Act (2018).

Click on the [DAERA Privacy Statement](#) for more information.

At the end of the engagement, the Department intends to publish a summary of responses following the closing date for receipt of views. Your response, and all other

responses to this publication, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request. Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation. The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this stakeholder engagement exercise, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response. This means that information provided by you in response to the stakeholder engagement is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances.

The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see web site at: <https://ico.org.uk/> )

## Glossary

<b>AY</b>	Academic Year
<b>CAFRE</b>	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
<b>DAERA</b>	Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
<b>Dependent Student</b>	A dependent student relies on another individual (usually a parent or guardian) as their primary source of financial support.
<b>DfE</b>	Department for the Economy
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>Household Income</b>	Household Income is the total amount of money coming into a household. For the FE grant it is calculated taking total gross income (before tax and National Insurance) and taking off any allowances such as personal pension contributions and additional dependent children
<b>Wider FE Sector - Regional Colleges</b>	Six Regional FE Colleges in Northern Ireland: Belfast Metropolitan College, North West College, South West College, Northern Regional College, Southern Regional College and South Eastern Regional College.
<b>SLDD</b>	Support for Students with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities
<b>Lower Household Income Threshold</b>	This is the total gross household income up to which the maximum grant is awarded.
<b>Upper Household Income Threshold</b>	This is the total gross household income above which no grant is awarded.

## **STAKEHOLDER & STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS**

A stakeholder focus group event took place on 8 October 2019 at CAFRE's Greenmount Campus to consider options for DAERA's future policy on FE Support and Charging. The following organisations were represented at the event;

- CAFRE Student Representative Council (SRC)
- DAERA Agri-Food Support Branch
- Department for Economy
- Education Authority NI
- Equine Council for Northern Ireland
- National Union of Students
- Northern Regional College
- Queen's University Belfast
- South Eastern Regional College
- Southern Regional College
- Ulster Farmers' Union
- Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster
- Youth Work Alliance
- Improve NI – Food and Drink Sector Skills (FDSS)<sup>6</sup>

Student Focus Groups with current FE students were held at each of the CAFRE campuses (Greenmount, Loughry and Enniskillen) during October and November 2019.

The focus groups included a presentation on the findings and recommendations of the Review of Further Education Support and Charging followed by two exercises to gather feedback on alternative support arrangements and DAERA's charging policy.

The majority of Stakeholders were in support of:

- Extending the FE support available at CAFRE to part time students;
- raising the level of At Home grant available to £2,400 and Away from Home grant to £3,400; and
- raising the lower household income threshold to £31,000.

The majority of Stakeholders did not support:

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<sup>6</sup> FDSS did not attend the event in Greenmount but provided input at a separate meeting shortly after.

- reducing the upper household income threshold to £41,000; or
- charging for FE courses at CAFRE.

Stakeholders also supported separating eligibility for the Hardship fund from the FE grant so that the Hardship Fund has the flexibility to address financial hardship of any student with particular circumstances which require them to seek support, including from higher incomes. A review of Hardship policy will be taken forward internally by CAFRE.

## COMPARISON OF THE PROPOSED FULL TIME GRANT AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVELS WITH THE WIDER SECTOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND OTHER JURISDICTIONS

<b>INCREASE 'AWAY FROM HOME' GRANT (PROPOSAL B)</b>	
• non-adjacent rate <sup>7</sup> at Teagasc (Special Rate)	£5,758
• FE Bursary at Scottish Rural College	£3,990
• DfE Higher Education Maintenance Grant	£3,475
• Residential Support Scheme in England	£3,458
• <b>Proposal B - Away from Home grant</b> ----->	<b>£3,400</b>
• <i>Current DAERA Away from Home grant</i>	£2,362
• DfE FE Grant Away from home	£2,092
<b>INCREASE 'AT HOME' GRANT (PROPOSAL B)</b>	
• DfE HE Maintenance Grant	£3,475 <sup>8</sup>
• under 25 FE Bursary at Scottish Rural College	£3,157
• adjacent rate <sup>9</sup> Teagasc (Special Rate)	£2,340
• <b>Proposal B - At Home grant</b> ----->	<b>£2,400</b>
• DfE FE Grant At Home grant	£1,674
• <i>Current DAERA At Home grant</i>	£1,659
• 16-19 Bursary Fund in England	£1,200
• DfE EMA	£1,100 <sup>10</sup>
<b>RAISE LOWER INCOME THRESHOLD (PROPOSAL C)</b>	
• Teagasc (≤ 4 children)	£35,182
• <b>Proposal C Lower threshold Raised</b> ----->	<b>£31,000</b>
• SRUC Scotland	£24,421
• <i>Current DAERA lower threshold</i>	£23,660
• DfE FE Grant	£21,330
• English Residential Support Scheme	£21,000
• Special Teagasc lower level <sup>11</sup>	£20,700
• DfE EMA	£20,500
• DfE HE Maintenance Grant	£19,203
• Welsh FE Learning Grant	£6,120
<b>REDUCE UPPER INCOME THRESHOLD (PROPOSAL D)</b>	
• <i>Current DAERA upper threshold</i>	£52,622
• FE Bursary SRUC Scotland	£45,000
• <b>Proposal D Upper threshold Reduced</b> ----->	<b>£41,000</b>
• DfE HE Maintenance Grant	£41,065
• Teagasc (≤ 4 children)	£40,400
• DfE FE Grant	£38,806
• English Residential Support Scheme	£30,993
• Welsh FE Learning Grant	£18,370

<sup>7</sup> Student lives more than 45km from the college.

<sup>8</sup> available to At Home students at same rate as Away from Home students

<sup>9</sup> Student lives less than 45km from the college

<sup>10</sup> Non means tested transport assistance is also available to these students

<sup>11</sup> Students will qualify for double the normal grant rate if their household income is below this figure.

## FURTHER EDUCATION COURSES AT CAFRE

### FULL-TIME FURTHER EDUCATION COURSES

<b>Agriculture</b>	
Level 2	Technical Certificate in Agriculture
Level 3	BTEC Extended Diploma in Agriculture
Level 3	Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Agriculture
Level 3	Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Land-based Engineering
<b>Horticulture (incl Floristry)</b>	
Level 2	Diploma in Practical Horticulture Skills
Level 2	Technical Certificate in Floristry
Level 3	Advanced Technical Diploma in Floristry
Level 3	Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Horticulture
<b>Equine</b>	
Level 2	Technical Certificate in Horse Care
Level 3	Advanced Technical Extended Diploma in Horse Management
<b>Food</b>	
Level 3	BTEC National Diploma in Food Science and Manufacturing Technology
Level 3	BTEC National Diploma in Food Nutrition and Health

### PART-TIME FURTHER EDUCATION COURSES

<b>Agriculture</b>	
Level 2	Work-Based Diploma in Agriculture
Level 2	Work-Based Diploma in Agriculture - Apprenticeship
Level 2	Multi-skilling Programme
Level 2	Certificate for Animal Nursing Assistant
Level 2	Diploma in Agricultural Business Operations
Level 3	Work-Based Diploma in Agriculture
Level 3	Work-Based Diploma in Agriculture - Apprenticeship
Level 3	Work Based Diploma in Agriculture (Poultry)
Level 3	Diploma in Veterinary Nursing
Level 3	Certificate in Agricultural Business Development
<b>Horticulture (incl Floristry)</b>	
Level 2	Work-based Diploma in Horticulture (Parks, gardens and green spaces)
Level 2	Work-based Diploma in Horticulture (Parks, gardens and green spaces) – Apprenticeship
Level 2	Work-based Diploma in Horticulture (Sports Turf Greenkeeper)
Level 2	Work-based Diploma in Horticulture (Sports Turf Greenkeeper) – Apprenticeship
Level 2	Certificate in Practical Horticulture Skills
Level 2	Work-based Award Horticulture
Level 3	Work-based Diploma in Horticulture (Landscaping)
Level 3	Work-based Diploma in Horticulture (Sports Turf)

<b>Equine</b>	
Level 2	Apprenticeship in Equine Industry
Level 3	Farrier Upskilling Diploma
<b>Food</b>	
Level 2	Certificate for Proficiency in Baking Industry Skills Apprenticeship
Level 2	Certificate for Proficiency in Meat and Poultry Industry Skills Apprenticeship
Level 3	BTEC National Diploma in Food Science and Manufacturing Technology
Level 3	BTEC National Diploma in Food Nutrition and Health
Level 3	Certificate for Proficiency in Baking Industry Skills Apprenticeship
Level 3	Certificate for Proficiency in Meat and Poultry Industry Skills Apprenticeship
Level 3	Certificate for Proficiency in Food Industry Skills Apprenticeship

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