

Subject:

FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS 2016/17

Circular Number:
FE04/16

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Target Audience:

- Principals /Directors of FE Colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies
- Education Authority (EA) Further Education Awards Section
- FE College Finance
- Colleges Northern Ireland
- College Student Support Officers / Hardship Fund Co-ordinators

Summary of Contents:

This Circular provides information and guidance on Further Education Awards.

Enquiries:

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

Further Education Finance & Funding Branch
Department for the Economy
3RD FLOOR
Adelaide House
39 – 49 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8FD

Status of Contents:
Information

Related Documents:

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

Superseded Documents:
FE 03/15

Expiry Date:
N/A

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Introduction

FURTHER EDUCATION AWARDS

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

As a student can only receive one form of publicly funded financial support, students who are planning to, or have already submitted applications and/or are in receipt of any other publicly funded financial support (e.g. Education Maintenance Allowance - EMA) are not eligible to apply for a Further Education Award.

Receiving more than one form of Government funding may be construed as fraud and dealt with accordingly. It is the responsibility of the applying student to declare all other publicly funded financial support in their application, failure to do so may result in legal action to recover fraudulent funding and withdrawal of future support. Changes in personal circumstances which may affect eligibility must be notified immediately to the EA.

Residency criteria

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

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

Closing Date

The closing date for full time applications is 1st September 2016 and 30th September 2016 for part time applications. All eligible full time applications received before 30th June 2016 will be guaranteed to receive funding, all other eligible applications received up to and including 1st September 2016 will be considered for funding until the FE Awards budget has been exhausted.

QUALIFYING COURSES

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

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

Other Application Criteria

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

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

1. Further Education Awards

Applicants for Further Education Awards will be considered only if they are following a vocational further education course of post compulsory education and if they have reached the age of 19 years on 1 July 2016. Entitlement to this support will depend on the family income and can be estimated using table 2.

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

2. Dance and Drama Award

From 2016/17 the Dance and Drama Awards are restricted to existing students only, i.e. students who are completing year 2 or 3 of a Trinity College London Qualification started in 2014/15 or 2015/16. New students interested in Dance and Drama should note that the FE Sector in Northern Ireland offers a full range of courses in Dance and Drama from level 2 up to Foundation Degree level. Full details can be found from local colleges.

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

A student in receipt of a Dance and Drama Award will receive a grant from the college which will cover the majority of the tuition fee. However, students still have to make a personal contribution towards their fees. For the 2016/17 academic year this contribution is £1,275. This is not paid by Further Education Awards Section and is the student's responsibility.

Depending on financial circumstances, students who accept the Dance and drama Award may also get additional support to assist with the student fee contribution i.e. £1,275 and maintenance costs. Entitlement to this student fee contribution and maintenance support will depend on the student's family household income. If the family's income is above £33,000, the student will not be entitled to any extra help.

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

Table 1

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

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

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Full Time Courses

Fee Support

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

Maintenance Grant

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

Table 2

Full Time

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

Part Time Courses

A part time course must fulfill the following:

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

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

Fee Support and Books and Stationery Grant

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

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

Childcare Allowance

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

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

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) will not count any help a student receives when working out their Tax Credit entitlement. Students with dependent children in registered or approved childcare cannot get this Grant if they or their partner receive the Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit from HMRC. If a student is undertaking a part time course and in receipt of the childcare element of working tax credit the student must state that they only receive the childcare

element for the hours they are working and not the for the time they are actually attending college.

Students who are under 20 on the first day of the academic year can receive assistance for childcare through the NI Care to Learn scheme. Students who turn 20 years of age during 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 Award. (Applications for both these schemes can be obtained from local FE Colleges).

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

Table 4 – Full Time

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

Table 5 - Part Time

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

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

** If a student is on a one year course, 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.

Childcare guidance:

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

Support for Disabled Students

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

CALCULATION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME

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

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

- Be aged 25 or over before the start of the academic year
- Be married or in a civil partnership, evidence of which must be provided before the start of the academic year
- Have supported themselves for a minimum of 3 years outside of full time education before the start of the course i.e. in full or part time employment and/or on benefits during this period (evidence required)
- Have no living parents

- Have care of a child or children on the first day of the academic year for which they are applying for support (evidence or child's birth certificate required)
- Permanent estrangement from parents (i.e. no contact with parents). Normally it is expected that a student will have had no contact with their parents for at least 12 months although this may not apply in exceptional circumstances.
- They are in placed accommodation after being in care.
- Where parents living abroad (in certain circumstances)

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

Income: includes any taxable income (this can include interest earned on bank accounts and private pensions etc); Grants and Social Security Benefits. Evidence of income must be obtained and retained for audit purposes. Disability Living Allowance (DLA) should not be treated as income.

Please note – From the 20th June 2016 people aged 16 to 64 years will no longer be able to claim DLA. They will be assessed for the new Personal Independence Payment (PIP). If someone on DLA who reports a change or is due for reassessment after 20th June 2016 they will be assessed for PIP instead of DLA.

In relation to dependent and independent student income the PIP like DLA will not be treated as income.

Acceptable Evidence includes:

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

The Education Authority Accountability

The Chief Executive of the Authority shall:

Ensure that for the purposes of administering the FE Awards the Authority 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; ensure that the Authority uses the funding in a manner consistent with the purpose for which the fund has been given by the Department and complies with any terms and condition attaching to it; and provide such returns as may be required by the Department.

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

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

Part Time Fees

- Further Education Awards Section will issue a report to all Colleges detailing students who are eligible for part time support by 6th January 2017 asking the College to confirm the Student's attendance and tuition/registration/exam fee due. Following confirmation Further Education Awards Section will issue a revised list to the Colleges requesting they raise an invoice by the 10th February 2017. 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 February/early March 2017 to deal with any issues regarding outstanding fees. EA will not accept responsibilities for payment of fees if the college do not invoice before 31 March 2017.

Part Time Course Grant

- As of the 2016-17 Academic Year, Part Time Students will be advised that they must return their Confirmation of Acceptance (CA1) or Academic Progress Report (APR) to Further Education Awards Section by 9th December 2016 to ensure payment of the course grant (books and stationery).

Maintenance Payments

- Further Education Awards Section will issue cheques and a signing list to the Colleges at the start of each term. The completed report and

unclaimed cheques must be returned to Further Education Awards Section within 6 weeks of issue. Colleges **must** complete all sections of the receipt report, confirm identity and obtain the student's signature before the cheque is released.

- Monitoring Attendance – to receive payments for terms 2 and 3 students must have achieved 80% attendance. Electronic registers should be used where possible to verify a student's attendance. If the student's attendance is between 60-80% the college should return the grant cheque and the award will be re-assessed on a pro rata basis to reflect actual attendance. If the attendance is below 60% the college should return the grant cheque and financial assistance will be withdrawn. If the student had medical or extenuating circumstances the college can use discretion to release the grant cheque in full. In these cases the following points should be established by the college before they release the grant cheque: (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.
- Colleges must notify Further Education Awards Section **immediately** if a student withdraws.
- The closing date for full time applications is 1st September and 30th September for part time applications. All eligible full time applications received before 30th June 2016 will be guaranteed to receive funding, all other eligible applications received up to and including 1st September 2016 will be considered for funding until the FE Awards budget has been exhausted.
- When a student transfers from full time to part time study and the student has completed less than half a term (31st October), then the full time grant that has been paid to the student will be recovered. If a student has completed more than half a term, there will be a pro rata recovery of the grant paid. Colleges must notify Further Education Awards 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 Award during September/October, Further Education Awards Section have agreed that they will deduct the loan amount from terms 2 and 3 of the student FE Award grant and refund the College. Colleges must therefore provide EA with details of the amount of loan paid to each student by mid November.

Advertisement and Promotion

- FE Awards should be advertised and promoted within each college. EA will supply colleges with PDF promotional material on request.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY

Application

Late Application

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

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

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

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

Confirmation of Acceptance (CA1)/Academic Progress Report (APR)

- It is the responsibility of the student to return either their Confirmation of Acceptance (CA1)/Academic Progress Report (APR) to Further Education Awards Section by 9th December 2016.

Fees

Students are liable for fees from the date of enrolment.

Payments

Students are required to return to study before their cheques are released by the FE College.

Change of Circumstances

- Students have a responsibility to report all known Change of Circumstances to Further Education Awards Section that may affect their FE Award application. This includes:-
- Students must notify Further Education Awards Section at the Education Authority immediately if they change their mode of study as this may impact on payment of fees and grant.

- Any applications to other publicly funded bodies for financial assistance after their FE Award has been approved.

Appeals

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

Other Languages

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

Interpretation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX 2

PAYMENTS

General

The Authority 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 Authority may reasonably require, the Authority may withhold, reduce or recover payments in the circumstances set out below.

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

- (1) after the termination of an award;**
- (2) during which the student is excluded by the academic authorities from attendance at the course;**
- (3) where an award has been transferred from one course to another and the student is not required, for that period, to attend either course, except where the period concerned represents the period of a single vacation.**
- (4) where the FE College has paid the student an advancement/loan of an FE award to the student.**
- (5) where attendance on the course is recorded as 60 – 80% the award will be reduced.**
- (6) where attendance on the course is recorded as below 60% the award 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 Authority, having regard to all the circumstances of the case.

APPENDIX 3

Extension, Suspension and Termination of Awards

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

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

The Authority may terminate an award where:

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

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

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

APPENDIX 4

Dance and Drama Courses – Accredited Providers

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

Further information and applications may be obtained by contacting:

Further Education Awards Section,

Education Authority

1 Hospital Road,

Omagh,

Co. Tyrone.

BT79 0AW

Telephone: 028 8225 4546

E-Mail: feawards-wr@eani.org.uk