



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Student Finance Wales Information Notice:

Extenuating circumstances for the Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme and Welsh Government Learning Grant (Further Education) Scheme

Academic Year 2022 to 2023

SFWIN 10/2022

Please ensure that this Information Notice is circulated to all staff and colleagues who help to administer the schemes.

Extenuating circumstances

The Welsh Government recognises that students and families across Wales are experiencing financial pressures at this difficult time. We are extremely grateful to learning centres who continue to respond to the challenges and help to administer the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and Welsh Government Learning Grant (Further Education) (WGLG(FE)) schemes. We also appreciate that every effort is being made by learning centres to ensure that applications reach students as early as is possible, including providing support to help them apply for the grants.

Whilst we expect learning centres to operate and maintain their own absence/attendance policies, we recognise there are young people and adults who will be experiencing extenuating circumstances, which may unavoidably affect their attendance whilst they are studying, for example, young/adult carers who provide unpaid care to family members.

Since 2017/18 we have taken positive steps and strengthened the Student Loans Company's (SLC) guidance for learning centres, acknowledging the important role of young/adult carers with unpaid caring responsibilities for attendance purposes.

The EMA and WGLG (FE) agreement templates have also been modified, providing an option for students to disclose voluntarily if they have an extenuating circumstance, which may unavoidably affect their attendance. The aim is to ensure no student is unfairly treated because of their personal circumstances and discretion is considered for those who may be at risk of not participating.

SLC's Learning Centre Portal also provides a visual reminder for when a student has reported an extenuating circumstance via their learning agreement, helping learning centres to consider all circumstances when making informed decisions about authorised and non-authorised absences for the purposes of EMA and WGLG (FE).

The definition of a vulnerable student is not set out in the schemes; however, we would consider this to include cohorts such as young/adult carers, looked after children, and care leavers.

Backdated payments

EMA applicants

Since 2020 we have extended the period for an applicant to be considered for backdated EMA payments. New eligible students may receive backdated EMA payments to the start of their course in the academic year if their application is received by Student Finance Wales (SFW) within 13 weeks (instead of 8 weeks) of their course start date. Eligible returning students may also receive backdated EMA payments to the start of the course in the academic year if their EMA Agreement is signed/agreed within 13 weeks of their course start date.

If, however, an application (for new students) is received or the EMA Agreement is signed (for returning students) after 13 weeks, the student will only be eligible for backdated payments to the date Student Finance Wales (SFW) received their application or the date they signed their EMA Agreement.

WGLG (FE) applicants

For WGLG (FE) applicants they can apply for the grant up to nine months after they started their course. The grant will be backdated to the course start date in the academic year, subject to SFW's assessment. Applicants must also ensure they have signed their WGLG (FE) Agreement before their termly payments can commence.

Drop in household income

If an applicant's household experiences a drop in household income during the current academic year (2022/23), they can request a Current Year Income Assessment for EMA or WGLG (FE). This means household income will be based on estimated income for the current tax year (2022-

23) in determining their eligibility and entitlement. Applicants can contact SFW on 0300 200 4050 to discuss a drop in household income.

Independent students

EMA applicants

For EMA an applicant may be considered as an independent student if they are estranged and do not live with their parent(s) or guardian(s). They will need to supply financial information for their own income and their partner's income if they have one.

An EMA applicant may also be considered an exempt person if they:

- Are a care leaver
- Live under local authority care or with foster parents
- Receive Income Support, income-related Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit
- Are responsible for a child
- Are a young person in custody

If the applicant meets any of the above categories for an exempt person, they will not need to give their household's financial information when completing the EMA application. They will, however, need to send evidence to SFW of their status.

WGLG (FE) applicants

For WGLG (FE) applicants who are recognised as an independent student, the financial assessment of household income will be based on their income (and their partner's income if they have one). However, it is the higher of the two incomes from the student or their partner (if applicable) that will be used by SFW to assess entitlement.

Examples of being considered as an independent student for WGLG (FE) purposes, are:

- aged 25 or over on the first day of the course;
- responsible for a child under 18 years of age;

- supported yourself financially for at least three years before the first day of the course;
- estranged from your parents for more than 12 months before the first day of the course;
- parents are deceased; or
- married or in a civil partnership on the first day of the course

For recognised care leavers aged under 25, they will not need to give their household's financial information when completing the WGLG (FE) application. They will, however, need to send evidence to SFW of their status. Applicants satisfying the criteria for care leavers will automatically receive the highest WGLG (FE) grant available for full-time or part-time studies, subject to meeting all other eligibility criteria.

How to apply for EMA or WGLG (FE)

SFW has provided bilingual application packs for the 2022 to 2023 academic year to registered learning centres. The forms and guidance notes about eligibility and entitlement are available to download from [Student Finance Wales](#). The SFW bilingual customer service can be contacted on 0300 200 4050.

Enquiries

If you have any queries, please contact the Higher Education Division, Welsh Government - email studentfinancedivision@gov.wales. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.