

Funding Information Services (FIS) Webinar

Transcript



Transcript

Paul Smith

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Student Loan Company's webinar on student finance, information, advice and guidance for academic year 24/25. I'm Paul Smith, and at SLC, I'm responsible for business services between SLC and our external partners. And we consider our collaboration with you as an essential partnership.

It is so important that students understand and can access student finance to help them undertake higher education. Now, although we can't determine how many people will go on to student higher education courses, our aim is that no one is put off education for a lack of understanding about the funding that is available from the government.

So, the primary purpose of this webinar is to enable you to incorporate student finance information into your wider careers advice, outreach and recruitment work, and to help students to find the information they need from other sources. It's very good timing, because we plan to open our application system in early March.

The webinar runs for approximately one hour. We will provide a full briefing of the funding for the academic year 24/25 and then, we will run into a question and answer session, planned to last for around 15, 20 minutes. If you have any questions, please submit them at any point during the webinar, using the box below.

I am pleased to introduce two of our account managers, Ahmar and Stacey, who will take us through the briefing. Thank you.

Stacey-May Fox

Thank you, Paul. My name is Stacey and I cover the South-West of England and South Wales, and I'm joined by my colleague, Ahmar, who covers the Midlands. During the next 45 minutes or so, we will aim to provide you with some key information on policy enhancements for the coming academic year of 24/25, with a focus on the updated support votes for both Student Finance England and Student Finance Wales; the changes to disabled students' allowance, and what these may mean for DSA applicants. We will also look at some key policy changes and enhancements being implemented for the academic year 24/25.

As we draw the webinar to a close, we will review application numbers and trends for the academic year of 23/24, to identify opportunities for joint working and message targeting, to ensure on-time and right-first-time application submission.



As you will no doubt know by now, the Ministerial statement made on the 25th January confirmed the maximum tuition fees for a standard full time undergraduate course for the 24/25 academic year in England will be maintained at the levels that applied in the 23/24 academic year. The seventh year in succession that fees have now been frozen. There is also no change in tuition fees for accelerated degrees in England, or part time degrees.

Similarly, the Ministerial announcement for funding arrangements in Wales was made on the 6th February 2024. The headline message is that the tuition fee cap for full time undergraduate courses at regulated providers in Wales will increase from £9000 to £9250. This tuition fee cap is the first in Wales since 2011 and will be increased only to the same level already charged by higher education providers in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Welsh domiciled students who are studying in England, Northern Ireland or Scotland are currently already paying this fee level and will therefore, see no change. It is important to highlight that this increased tuition fee cap will apply to any eligible student studying in Wales, not just Welsh students.

Welsh students who are customers of Student Finance Wales and wish to study for an accelerated degree in England, the maximum tuition fee they can access is £9250 and therefore, will need to find the shortfall themselves. There remains no change to part time courses in Wales at £2625.

The Ministerial announcement confirmed, as illustrated in this table, that maximum SFE maintenance loan rates for new full time students and eligible continuing full time students starting their courses on or after 1st August 2016 will be increased by 2.5% for the academic year 24/25. It was also confirmed that this 2.5% increase will be applied to the maximum levels of disabled students allowance, grants for dependents and post graduate loan rates available to eligible SFE students.

The Government also announced a further £10million of one-off support to help students with mental health and hardship funding, will be made available to supplement the £276million of student premium and mental health funding made available in the academic year 23/24 to support successful student outcomes.

In this table, we can see the uplift to maintenance loan and grant figures from Student Finance Wales. The Welsh Government have confirmed that support will once again increase for all eligible undergraduate students in the 24/25 academic year. Maintenance support for eligible undergraduate students from Wales will increase by 3.7%. This increased rate of support will be available to new students. It will also be available to those continuing a course which began on or after the 1st August 2018. In addition, a range of other grants and allowances will also be increased for 24/25, as they are every year.

The Funding Information Services Team are always available to work with you and deliver more detailed information and guidance sessions or training on all aspects of student loans and supplementary grants to ensure students are fully aware of all sources of support where they are eligible to apply for it.

As you have come to expect, targeted support for undergraduate students with dependents and undergraduate students with disabilities continues to increase for the academic year 24/25, as they have done in previous years, by both Student Finance England and Student Finance Wales. In addition, the Adult Dependents Grant, Childcare Grant, Parent Learning Allowance and Disabled Student Allowance, all illustrating their respective increases in the table as you look at it, remain for all eligible students.

From academic year 24/25, the Welsh Government will be increasing the level of student support available to eligible Student Finance Wales, full time students who are also in receipt of the NHS Wales Healthcare Bursary. From academic year 24/25, these students will qualify for the maximum rate of maintenance loan, excluding the additional weeks loan, rather than the reduced rate of maintenance loan during the NHS Wales Healthcare Bursary funded years. The intent of this change is to provide additional support for living costs to these students during their NHS Wales

Healthcare Bursary funded years of their course. Those Student Finance Wales students who are eligible for an NHS Wales Healthcare Bursary and opt into the two year agreement to work in Wales NHS following graduation, will be eligible to apply for a non-means-tested maintenance loan of any amount up to the maximum rates of maintenance loan available from SFW.

These students are students who are undertaking a non-medical or dental healthcare course in Wales, and medicine or dentistry students in their bursary years who are undertaking a course in Wales or elsewhere in the UK.

Therefore, both new and continuing students will be subject to this change as follows. New students who start a course in academic year 24/25 (in other words, on or after 1st August 2024, known as the 2018 cohort). Students who are continuing their course in academic year 24/25, so both 2012 and 2018 cohorts. Please note, that both the 2012 and 2018 cohort, continuing students are also in scope for this change.

In a recent review of procurement services, the Student Loans Company awarded Study Tech and Capita the framework to supplying needs assessments, assistive technology and assistive technology training for students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance. The new service applies to students receiving DSA from Student Finance England and Student Finance Wales only. Under these new arrangements, students will have one supplier who has ownership of their support for the services above, thus helping to streamline the process and make the end-to-end journey for the student more simplified.

Existing DSA support arrangements will remain unchanged for continuing students who will apply to Student Loans Company in the usual way. SLC will process their application and assess their eligibility. New students applying for DSA in academic year 24/25, will continue to apply as normal and once they are assessed as eligible by SLC, we will assign the student to one of the two new suppliers, which will be dependent on the geographical region.

So, what does this mean for the student? They will continue to receive a DSA1 letter confirming their eligibility. However, they no longer need to visit the gov.uk website and find their local needs assessment centre. From academic year 24/25, new students will have a single point of contact for the DSA technology and other associated training needs. Once the need for assessment report is carried out, this will continue to be sent by the supplier to SLC for review, where SLC will then inform the student and supplier of the agreed package via the DSA2 correspondence. The supplier will be responsible for arranging delivery of the students assistive technology, the students installation, setup and familiarisation of their equipment and software, and any training as required.

Here, we have put together a visualisation of the new process, from start to finish, with prompts highlighting the importance of students following the key stages. Not only completing the DSA form online at the same time as applying for their core funding, so tuition fee and maintenance loan, but ensuring they have sourced any and all medical evidence required by the Student Loans Company DSA assessors to ensure there are no delays in supporting the applicant.

Now, to repayments for the upcoming academic year of 24/25. We'll begin with Student Finance Wales. As you will be aware, the Welsh Government confirmed on the 5th December 2022 that the repayment threshold for SFW students will remain at £27,295 until April 2025. Therefore, there has been no change. The Plan 2 threshold remains at £27,295. Students will continue to pay 9% of income earned above the set threshold and if their income drops below threshold, then their repayments will stop. The 30 year write-off period will remain and interest will be accrued using the existing Plan 2 interest model.

Now, for Student Finance England, again, as you will be aware, the Government introduced a new repayment threshold for new SFE borrowers who commence study from academic year 23/24. This is known as Plan 5. The Government confirmed that the Plan 5 threshold would be set at £25,000 and will be maintained at this level until April 2027. Therefore, there has been no change to the threshold for the 24/25 academic year. As with Plan 2 loans, students will not need to make repayments until they are earning above the £25,000 threshold and once they do, will only pay 9% of income earned above that threshold. The 40 year write-off period will remain for Plan 5 students and interest will be accrued using the Retail Price Index only.

Now, I'd like to hand over to my colleague, Ahmar, who is going to take you through policy changes.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thanks, Stacey. Over time, provisions have been added to regulations to allow students to become eligible during a course where they are granted a particular immigration status. In academic year 23/24, students who become settled can only become eligible as an event where they are granted settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

From academic year 24/25, students who are granted settled status for any reason will be able to become eligible as an event, subject to satisfying other eligibility requirements. The requirement to hold settled status on the first day of the first academic year of the course, or on the course start date, status specific, will be removed from academic year 24/25.

So, from academic year 24/25, the acquisition of a settled immigration status under any route, will be added to the regulations as an in-year qualifying event. This means students will be able to qualify for support, full tuition fee, only under the following regulations. Settled and three years of ordinary residence in the UK and Ireland. Settled and three years of ordinary residence in the UK, islands and Ireland, although Northern Ireland do not have these categories in their regulations. Settled and three years of ordinary residence in the United Kingdom, islands and British overseas territories. Again, Northern Ireland do not have these categories in their regulations.

To better understand the term, 'Settled,' in relation to this policy enhancement. 'Settled,' has the meaning given in Section 33 2a of the Immigration Act 1971. References to a person being settled in the United Kingdom are references to his being ordinarily resident, there without being subject under the immigration laws, to any restriction on the period for which he may remain.

The 24/25 student finance regulations also make the following changes for the 24/25 academic year to children granted indefinite leave to enter or remain, by the Home Office, where their parent has been granted indefinite leave to remain or enter as a victim of domestic abuse, or children granted indefinite leave to remain by the Home Office, where their parent has been granted indefinite leave to remain as a bereaved partner. Such categories will be treated for student support and home fee status purposes in the same way as their parent. This simply means that they will not be subject to the three year ordinary residence requirement, but will instead, need only to be ordinarily resident in England on the course start date. The in year qualifying event provisions will also be extended to include students in these status categories. Again, simply put, this means that students whose parents were not granted leave as a victim of domestic abuse or as a bereaved partner, by the Home Office, on the core start date but later acquire this status, will become eligible for student support for the rest of their course and will qualify for home fee status.

A further policy change is being introduced for a category known as the Chagossians. This term refers to residents of the Chagos islands which now form part of the British Indian Ocean territory. The British Overseas Territories Act of 2002 granted those born on the islands and their children, but not their grandchildren or any subsequent generations, the right to British citizenship.

The Nationalities and Borders Act of 2022 extended the right to British citizenship to anyone who is a direct descendant of someone born in the British Indian Ocean territories. I.e. their children, grandchildren and other direct descendants by birth or adoption. Under existing policy, Chagossians with British citizenship are ineligible for fee support, postgraduate Masters and doctoral funding, unless they satisfy the three year ordinary residence requirement that applies to settled persons.

From academic year 24/25, a new eligibility route will be introduced within the British Overseas Territories category for Chagossians with British citizenship. As per those students who are eligible for funding under the current British Overseas Territories category, this route will provide access to undergraduate fee only funding, ALL, postgraduate Masters and postgraduate doctoral funding. The British Overseas Territories category will be amended so that any person who is either a British citizen who was born in the islands which now form the British Indian Ocean territory or a British citizen who is a direct descendant of a person who was born in the islands which now form the British Indian Ocean territory, will be treated as being ordinary residents in the British Indian Ocean territories during any period or periods during which they are or were not already resident in the UK and islands. Thus, allowing Chagossians with British citizenship to become eligible for the funding specified above.

In 2024, the Home Office introduced a new Ukraine scheme, called the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme. This scheme will be available to those who have previously been granted leave under one of the current Ukraine schemes. Proposed changes will be made to SLC guidance to make clear that persons with Ukraine scheme leave can continue to access support once their original leave expires and they have a new lawful immigration status in the UK. Leave under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme will be limited leave that is granted for a period of 18 months at a time, with the first grant of leave under this scheme to be made in March 2025.

Individuals who have leave under the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme and their eligible family members will be able to rely on that leave, to become eligible as a new student, where the course starts on or after the date that the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme leave is granted. I.e. in March 2025 or later. Welsh domicile students also need to be ordinarily resident in Wales on the first day of the academic year, to remain eligible for funding where their existing Ukraine scheme leave expires in March 2025 or later and is replaced with the new leave.

Any form of lawful leave currently allows the student to remain eligible for ongoing funding. So, this is not a change to the existing policy rule. Continuing students who do not replace their expired leave with a new form of leave are subject to termination provisions where these apply.

The funding information services team, over the last few years, have been working closely with their IAG practitioners and partners, to better understand how SLC can help support key messages as part of the recruitment strategies, but also ensure we are able to utilise our own data, which in turn, provides insight into student applicant behaviour.

What we have been able to do is look at application analysis and behavioural trends by region, to see how we may help to support unique comms that need to be issued at key times of the recruitment cycle, based on data that we are able to collate, monitor and share with our providers. This graph is an example from academic year 23/24 for tuition fee loans, showing the ten different regions of performance, from student finance launch to December. You will see that there are multiple peaks and troughs, consistent with each region, and this is tracked against a national average. It is only fair to say that this is not an exact science, as this is data measured at different points of the assessment cycle, and official SLC data is always published at the end of the year via the gov.uk website.

Like the tuition fee graph, this graph shows maintenance loans in the ten different regions, from launch to December. Again, multiple peaks and troughs are consistent with each region, and tracked against the national average. What this allows us to look at is whether earlier intervention to help change trends from previous years, is possible. To track student loan applications amongst vulnerable student groups which may be of interest to your higher education providers when planning your own activities and delivering on widening participation initiatives. Most importantly, this helps to bring an earlier application submission and right first time. We will look at the correlation between some of the data shown to you for student finance applications against key campaign timelines in the next few slides. We encourage you to book in with your Regional Funding Information Services Account Manager to look at your provider data and collaborate on comms moving forward.

You've seen some data on application trends, and now we can show you Student Finance England's campaign message, mapped against the key times of year, to issue comms to key groups. Ensuring that customers receive the right message at the right time remains absolutely paramount for SLC. We can see from application trends that there is a high percentage of applications submitted after the deadline each year, and consistent regionally against the national average.

So, what can we do as a sector to help reduce this number of late applications? As a reminder, when students have applied for their UCAS application and receiving their offers, it is important to push these messages about making an early student finance application when launch happens. Students should not wait until their results day or until they have heard back from their UCAS office. An early application ensures students have in place their funding when they start their journey into higher education.

Information and timely messaging, along with our MI data, may help to better inform and support customers to ensure that late applications and a lack of student loan support do not create a barrier to the positive experience so many university and college applicants hope to have when they start.

This timeline can act as a journey planner, supporting not only the student applicant but also those involved in supporting students with detailed IAG and the sponsor of an application for student support. The Student Finance Campaign page provides in-depth guidance on key times of the year for students. Where a student decides higher education or the course itself may not be suitable for them, there is a correct process to follow as early as possible in the application year.

The campaign page will highlight key information on what should be done and the process for the student to follow if they need to complete a change of circumstances before the start of their course. Equally, where the provider becomes aware of a change of circumstances by the student, they do not have to wait until after the start of the academic year to process their change of circumstances.

And let us not forget, students applying for student finance who have a sponsor attached to their application for household income verification are no longer required to submit that evidence of income from the previous tax year to SLC in the way previously done. Enhancements to this process now simply require the national insurance number from the sponsor to be electronically submitted when they log into their account and then we verify the household income with HMRC. Providers will play a key role in sharing student funding information with their students. Thinking about your own provider, how are you intending to communicate these messages ahead of launch?

Before we move into the final part of this webinar, this is an opportunity to promote the new information and web pages that will be updated over the coming weeks and months. Encourage students in schools and colleges to sign up to our student finance campaign link to be notified when launch is live.

Key information on how to make a successful right-first-time application, and what students need to complete that successful application is so vital. Don't forget, there are multiple sources of support and information available from the link shown here and from our resources pages that students can use.

Remember, the funding information services team are available to work with providers to help promote, explain and upskill practitioners about all aspects of the loan. In the run-up to launch, they can spend time with you to help ensure your internal processes can help facilitate an easy application journey to payment. The team have a suite of resources for IAG practitioners and partners, designed to enhance your discussions with your students. It's easy to get in touch with your regional account manager. Our details can be found on the practitioners website, via the link which is listed on the final slide.

Thank you very much for your participation in this webinar, and we hope that you have found the information provided helpful. We will continue to keep in contact with IAG practitioners and partners between now and the launch of the application cycle for the academic year 24/25. And don't forget, the Funding Information Services team are available to deliver more detailed training and upskill sessions on all aspects of student finance, including the complex areas of the United Kingdom, EU and rest of the world's student eligibility criteria.

I think we've had several questions come in already, and we will continue to accept any questions relating to eligibility and entitlement for the next 15 minutes. So, please do get in touch if you have any queries. And that concludes our webinar presentation. I'd now like to hand back to Paul for the question and answer session.

Paul Smith

And that concludes the briefing on the Funding Information Service for the coming academic year, and I hope you found the content extremely helpful. The resources that we'll be putting on our events page include the slide deck that you've just seen, together with a question and answer list. The questions that we're going to answer for you just shortly, and any others that we don't have time to answer today.

So, let's go straight to our question and answer session. And I'll go to our first question, which is from Fiona. It's always good to work with new people, Fiona, welcome to Student Finance. And your question, 'I'm new to student finance. How can I keep updated with your resources and your changes?'

Stacey-May Fox

So, ultimately, there are a multitude of ways that you can keep up to date with new student finance information and making sure that you have the relevant updated resources. So, the practitioner site initially is our one-stop-shop, where you will be able to access all sort of guidance chapters, the financial regulations and memorandum. You can also access the practitioner site for both SFE and SFW. We also would advise gov.uk as another really good source for accessing up-to-date information. So, the various student finance pages, there's lots of additional information and things like support for parents, support for sponsors, explanations of evidence required for student finance applications. I would probably personally suggest that keeping engaged with your local Funding Information Services Account Managers, as we tend to ensure that obviously, you receive the updates as soon as we receive them. If you are not already registered, please do let us know your contact details for our contact database. The reason being, we do tend to send out bulletins which will include up-to-date information or inform you of any changes. In order to receive that, you will have to be signed up, as I say, to our bulletin mailing list. So, if you're not already, please ensure that you send your details across.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thank you very much, Stacey. I can see that we've had another question come in from Heather. 'When will we find out more about extra support to higher education institutions for the hardship funds?'

Heather, I'm assuming you're refereeing to this one-off £10million announcement by the Government for additional support for bursaries. Unfortunately, that will not be down to SLC to be administering that money. It will be directly coming from the Government and I would imagine it will come via the Office for Students. So, if you do have a contact at the OFS, it's wise that you get in touch with them to learn more around when this money will be made available directly for you.

Stacey-May Fox

Okay, so next one is from Wendy. 'When do the applications for SFE open for 2024?'

As you're probably familiar with by now, we are unable to give an exact date, but we can say if you keep an eye for early to mid March. The best way to find out, as soon as we do open, is to sign up to our mailing list. You can find the details on our campaign page. You will have to sign up through the student room, but ultimately, if you sign up to the mailing list as soon as we do launch applications, you will get a notification to let you know so you in turn, can inform your students that they are able to apply for their 24/25 finance.

Ahmar Ehsan

I can see that we've had another question come in. 'Is the Welsh rate applicable only to students ordinarily domiciled in Wales or for all eligible students studying in Wales?' From Rudolph.

Stacey-May Fox

Okay, so it depends what Welsh rates you're talking about. If you're referring to the new increase in tuition fee then ultimately, that's going to apply to all students studying in Wales. There has been an increase so ultimately, Welsh universities may charge more for their courses as they will now be able to charge up to £9250. So as I say, that would be applicable to students from both England and Wales. If you're referring to the Welsh rate in the sense of the maintenance amount, so the grant and the loan, then that is only going to be applicable to students who are Welsh domiciled and apply for their finance through SFW.

Ahmar Ehsan

Another question from Emily. 'When will HE providers be sent the new maintenance loan figures for 24/25 so that we can start making and speaking to students, sorry, at sixth form colleges?' Thanks, Emily.



The new slide decks are available and I think this is a great opportunity just to reiterate the relationship between your Funding Information Services Account Managers and yourself. So I'm not sure which region you are based in, but if you get in touch with your Regional Account Manager, we can certainly make available to you the new slides based on the publication of the new uplift to the rates for 24/25, which are very useful for student facing sessions, that we'll be able to distribute to you.

Stacey-May Fox

Perfect. Next question is from Kate, and Kate is asking if we would, 'Be able to repeat the part about parent or sponsor income. 'Did you say that only the NI number is required now?'

So yes, great news in the sense that when we are now asking for sponsor income information, they can essentially just provide their national insurance number. We will then check those details directly with the HMRC to ensure that they are sort of accurate. And ultimately, the student will be awarded maintenance support based on those household income details.

Ahmar Ehsan

Question from Steph, which is a question that I do get asked quite a lot, and it's a topic that's been sort of prevalent over the last few years within the world of higher education and student finance. 'Do you have any update on Shariah compliant student loans?'

Well, I'm pleased to say that the Government, through the gov.uk portal and the DFE did make an announcement around a product that may well be known as the Alternative Student Finance. As yet, we have no further information that we can elaborate on around that. It was proposed at the time, that potentially there may be a release date around the Lifelong Learning Entitlement in 2025. My understanding is, reading the recent documents, is that now has been pushed back to potentially 2026. But we are, just like yourselves, awaiting further information as to what may be the finalised documentation for what will be known as Shariah Compliant Finance, although it will be more likely known as Alternative Student Finance. So again, this is a great opportunity to engage with your Regional Account Managers, keep in touch with us. Please, do invite us in and as soon as we have more information on this, we will be pleased to come along and talk to you further around this.

Paul Smith

Okay, the next question. 'Can you shed any more light on LLE?' I don't think you will have time for all things LLE today. So, LLE, Lifelong Learning Entitlement, is the working title for the new student finance system from the academic year 25/26.

I suppose I would encourage anyone to make sure they have got links to our website, where we have a whole set of FAQs and information as policy and operational implementation begin to be fleshed out. And further details are incorporated into our FAQs on the site. We try and do an update every month. So, that's the first thing.

I'll also say that there's been quite a bit of misunderstanding, perhaps, that LLE is really only relevant to modular courses. And whilst funding for modular courses is being implemented under LLE, to some extent in 25/26 and then more widely from academic year 27/28, LLE is more than just about modular learning. So, getting familiar with the credit based system to the extent which we can help students to understand credits and how they drive the value of the course is very important. Understanding the concept of a personal account as students utilise their tuition fee loan funding and the impact that has on the amount of available funding they'll have for future courses, it's a very important feature.

I guess I will also look to encourage as many people as possible to come to our summer programme, which is training and awareness in Lifelong Learning Entitlement. We're running a series of events across May, June and July and we're in the process of publishing those dates now. Thank you.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thank you, Alex. We've had another question come through and it relates to a number of students who may be working part time up until the point of application and transition into higher education, and also while studying in higher education.

I think it's important to note that where the student is the applicant themselves, whilst they may be progressing to higher education, their actual income is not classed as part of the household income if they are dependent on their parents. It is only the parental income. If they continue to progress into higher education and undertake study part time, again, it is not their income; it is the unearned income of any student through assets that they may hold or assets in their name that must be declared as household income, but not if somebody is actually working part time.

Stacey-May Fox

Okay. We've got a question from Eileen, and this is relating to an earlier session which was Highsted and the DSA Reforms Information Session that was held on the 6th. Within that session, it was mentioned that a presentation and frequently asked question document was going to be made available on the website.

And you are right, it hasn't been uploaded yet. We do expect that to be uploaded imminently, so do keep an eye out but again, referring to my earlier comment, if you're not already, make sure you are signed up to our visiting mailing list as we will send a bulletin to you to let you know once it is available to access through the practitioners sites.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thank you, Paula, for your question. It's asking to confirm that, 'The change to the settlement rules will apply for continuing students as well as new in 24/25.'

So, absolutely. The idea of students becoming eligible as an event will apply to new and continuing students, but it's important to also highlight that continuing students must have held a lawful status at the point at which that category has been applied to them.

Stacey-May Fox

Okay. Another question from Jack. 'We are often asked by students, whose income do they put down on the application form if their parents are separated and their time is split between both parents equally, or as equally as possible?'

So yeah, one I think, that comes up quite regularly, particularly at sort of parents evenings. So, in a nutshell, from an SLC perspective, the main question that we will ask is which parent's residential address does the student spend the majority of their time at. So, if they do spend more time at mum's than dads, then it would be mum's income, and vice versa if they spend more time at dad's. Ultimately, if you would say it's sort of accurate 50/50 split, it would ultimately be down to the student to determine whose details are declared.

Ahmar Ehsan

And just to add a little bit further to that question, because it is a great question and as you said, Stacey, we do get asked this question quite a lot... Whichever parent or household that the student is actually declaring where they spend most of their time, if there is a change of circumstances, either the parent becomes living with a co-habiting partner then the co-habiting partner's income does also need to be then declared as part of that household income assessment, as part of any change of circumstances. And we see this quite a lot through year and later in years of study.

Stacey-May Fox

That's right, and similarly, if the household income decreases by 15% or more, if for any reason a parent decides to go from full time to part time and as a result of that, they've seen a 15% reduction in that household income then ultimately, they can also request a current year income assessment as that will be based on the current year's estimates of household income.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thank you, Megan. We have had a question, that you have, 'Noticed an increase in trend since the pandemic, especially of younger students telling you that their relationship has broken down internally with their home, with their parents and often, they then go on to live with either grandparents, uncles or other family members. Do they automatically get classed as estranged, i.e. under independent category?'

Unfortunately no, that is not an automatic category to be declared as independent. Where they are living with grandparents or other family members, if there is no legal guardianship in place and under 25, and do not fall under independent categories, we do still require the parent or parent's household income to be declared. However, if they believe that their relationship has broken down and they need to be deemed estranged, they will need to complete the estrangement declaration form, countersigned by a person of good standing in the community or a member of their school or college, or university and supporting mitigating circumstances can also be submitted to us at SLC from the university and the college staff as well, to be able to advocate on that individual's behalf, for us to then be able to pick up and process if that student will be falling under independent category for the duration of their higher education studies.

Stacey-May Fox

And we've got another question from Pauline. 'If a student is on a fully funded foundation year, can they apply for Disabled Students Allowance, and if they do, will they still be eligible to seek a student loan for continuation onto a degree?'

So, Disabled Students Allowance is available for undergraduate and postgraduate students, both new and continuing across both SFE and SFW domiciles. Would you have anything for the...

Ahmar Ehsan

Yeah, I think the important thing again, here, just to add to your important point there, Stacey, is that foundation years must be integral to the progressing course of either the BA Honours or the BSE Honours full time, or an integrated Masters course.

We often get asked the question, a standalone foundation year, is that funded from undergraduate higher education funding? It's not.

A standalone course will not be funded. There must be a progression route for that course to the full three or four year programme, and that's when it draws down the full funding.

James, I can see we've had another question. 'How we can be best prepared for LLE and deliver IAG to schools?' Paul, would you like to take that?

Paul Smith

Yes, thanks. I think in most organisations, there's probably by now, someone taking a lead for ensuring that students in the local area or students intending to come to their place of study are being prepared and in receipt of the right messages. I guess it all starts with a provider's strategy on whether they're intending to offer modular based courses. It also depends on a provider's strategy about whether such courses will be delivered directly or through franchise arrangements. Other aspects to consider are whether the subject areas that are currently funded under advanced learner loans that move across to lifelong learning entitlement system will be developed and developed and delivered by the provider.

So, if you're going into schools to discuss with potential students, LLE, it's important to know that some providers will be offering modular courses, new learning aims at levels four to six and others won't. I think it's important that school leavers will need to understand the credit system because so much of the student finance communications will be on that basis. Not forgetting, of course, that a key aspiration of the LLE policy is to enable mature students who have maybe completed a degree but want to come back and do another course, perhaps a special technical area, can get additional funding under the LLE rules.

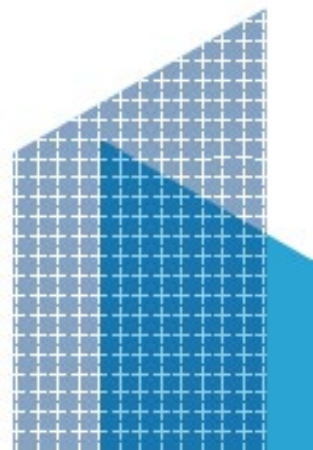
I suppose there are other aspects or other locations where a school leaver can get information as well. And what we're really trying to do is rollout a significant sort of volume of resources, key messages, content and so on, so that we can have consistent messages about student finance incorporated into messages going to all schools.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thank you.

Stacey-May Fox

A question from Alex.



Ahmar Ehsan

Yeah, 'For student's whose parents or parents have passed away within the last year and they live on their own with some external support, would they be classed as independent applications? They don't have someone in their household who is the income earner.'

So, thank you very much for that question, Alex. Where a student is the applicant themselves, progressing to higher education, if unfortunately, they have lost parent or parents, they are automatically classed as independent. And for means tested assessments, they are granted the full rate of maintenance loan under the independent category rules. So, the second part of your question also does ask about any subsequent pension to the student. So again, because they are deemed as an independent category student because of the fact that they've lost parent and parents, again, they will be assessed under full maintenance loan assessment in order to be able to progress into higher education.

Stacey-May Fox

So, we've got another question from Daniel. 'What is the earliest point in the UCAS cycle that a student can submit a student finance application? Before they receive offers or only when they have accepted offers?'

So, this is probably one of the key messages that I'm sure lots of you have heard us reiterate at various events. Ultimately, the student can apply as soon as the student finance applications go live. They do not need a confirmed place at university in order to apply for their finance. We actively encourage students to apply with their preferred choice. If the information changes later and they decide actually, they want to study at a different university on another course, it's not an issue. We can change those details later on in the year. It's actually far better from an SLC perspective to fully progress with an application earlier so that we can do all of the relevant checks around residency, evidence and household income, and much easier, as I say, to change the course details later on, perhaps, than it is to have a student apply in August because they've got their confirmed place at that time, as we have to undertake, obviously, the complete application.

So, please do actively encourage your students to apply as early as possible to ensure that the funds are in place for when they're starting university.

Ahmar Ehsan

We've had a question from Liddy. 'Am I right in thinking that parents no longer have to submit payslips, etc, and only have to submit their national insurance number?' That's absolutely correct, Liddy.

So, in order to streamline the process and make it faster for not only the sponsor income but the student themselves by the time they start higher education, the household income or the verification of household income is now done through the national insurance, which is matched to HMRC records, based on the previous tax full year.

Colleen, thank you very much for your question. 'For students on an industrial year, placement year where they are paid, do they still apply for student finance tuition fees and maintenance?' Yes, they do. And obviously, for placement years and there are different types of placements and the categories under which attracts either a full maintenance loan or a reduce rate of maintenance loan, tuition fees are capped at a percentage of the full tuition fee for any placement and study years during that placement.

Stacey-May Fox

So, a question from Eve. 'When will the 2024/25 guidance chapters be available on the SFE practitioner website? Particularly the Accessing Eligibility Guidance chapter?'

So, at the moment there are some 24/25 documents available on the SFE practitioners' site, so I believe the financial memorandum has been published for 24/25. You also have the SSIN regulations for 24/25. I'm not sure, Ahmar, if you're familiar when the rest of the guidance chapters...

Ahmar Ehsan

Guidance chapters; I wish I had a pound for every time somebody asked me that question; I could retire very happy. No, we are still awaiting final publication of those guidance chapters. But what I will say is again, this is a great opportunity to keep an eye on the practitioners' website but also keep in touch with your regional account manager and we'll be able to update you as soon as possible.

Debbie has asked a question, and it's a follow-on from one of the previous questions. 'Further to the question regarding the loss of parents, if a student's parents live abroad, how does the household income work?'

So, where parents are working abroad, armed forces or are currently living and working overseas on a temporary basis, or even on a permanent basis and said child is living in the United Kingdom and ordinarily lawfully resident here, we would issue what's known as a PFF2 form to the parents, to be able to supply evidence of their income for the previous tax year, and any further evidence of income through bank statements to identify how we would need to means test your application.

Alex has asked another question. Paul, it's again on LLE, so I'll just read this out for you. 'How does LLE impact current or new Plan 5 student finance students going forward? Do they stay on their same plan?' Fairly simple... yes. Yes. Sorry, I didn't even need to direct to you.

Paul Smith

Yes, it's very simple. Of course, LEE students like anybody else, need to understand the whole principles about some students will repay all their loans, some will repay none, and some will repay none, and that is some. And that is the principle of income contingency, but yes.

Ahmar Ehsan

I think it's great to see some of the questions that have been coming through and I think what it does do for us within our teams, and respective regions, is provide a great opportunity for all of us to be able to work together and further engage within our regions to ensure that anybody that's new to the sector, Paul, I would say, it's great for them to be able to get in touch with us and learn more from the services that we actually offer within partner services. And not only that but obviously, from us within the Funding Information Services Team and a wonderful service, let's be honest, that we do provide to our sector and our practitioners and our providers. So yes, if you are new to the sector or if you've been doing it for a while and you feel that there is any refresher training or upskilling that's required, especially as we know what's about to come out in 2025, you know, once we know more around this subject, you know, please feel free to get in touch with us. And as Paul said earlier and alluded, there will be quite a vibrant roadshow if I'm absolutely honest, between May and July. Made vibrant by us, the Funding Information Services Team. And we look forward to seeing a lot of the sector personnel attending that. I'm looking forward to it, Stacey, I don't know about you.

Stacey-May Fox

Oh, looking forward to seeing everybody in Bath, so... We've had another question come through from Kate. 'Is the income of any other adults in the household taken into account for household income? For example, an older sibling who lives at home, or is it just parent or parents and cohabiting partner?'

So, latter is correct. Ultimately, it's just going to be the parents and any cohabiting partner of parents. If you have an older brother who's actively working, we will not take their income into account for household income. It is literally just parent or parents, or parent and step-parent.

Ahmar Ehsan

Thanks, Helen, for your question. You say that it's often put to you when you visit schools and it's around repayment, from what I understand. So, 'Will students under Plan 5 still make their repayments in the same way as previous Plan 2 repayments?'

Quite simply, I think it's a great question and I think more people need to understand how repayments actually work. So, the payments are taken at the point where a student graduates from university or leaves their course, enter into employment and start their career, and are working with their employers. The repayment if you're above the threshold, is deducted at source, i.e. through your PAYE or if you're self employed. SLC does not take the repayment from your salary. It is done at source via the PAYE at your employer, and is deducted by HMRC. So yes, in short, the repayments for Plan 5 will continue in exactly the same way as they have been doing for Plan 2 during your employment or any self employment, and self employment tax returns.

Stacey-May Fox

Yeah, so just to build on that. Lots of similarities between the place. As Ahmar said, students won't start making repayments until the April following completion or withdrawal of their course. Both Plan 2 and Plan 5 have to be earning over their set thresholds, which as we've already discussed, is £27,275 for Plan 2 and £25,000 for Plan 5. Both sets of plans, student wise, will actually pay 9% of income earned above that threshold. So yeah, very similar and the main points to be aware of, like we say, is that those thresholds are slightly different.

Ahmar Ehsan

Shelley has asked a question which I think Paul, you are best placed as the boss to answer that one.

Paul Smith

I will, and thanks for your question, Shelley. I don't know if you're a regular at our annual seminar which we've run for a number of years now. We won't be running it this year. The Lifelong Learning Entitlement development work is going to be a priority and we're going to run the LLE programme instead. It's really a question of capacity and resources, and so on. So, we'll miss the seminar this year, but we will still have the active interaction with our partners through our account managers and through local forums, and other events and workshops, and meetings that we have as part of our business as usual activity on top of the LLE Roadshow. Thank you.

Ahmar Ehsan

A question from Julie. 'Are you able to share more on the rest of the world guidance?' with a question mark. Julie, I would like to try and answer that question as comprehensively as I possibly can, other than what's already been presented in the slides.

I'm not sure which region or sort of provider you're based in or with, but I would ask you to drop us an email with your respective account manager and maybe elaborate on that question if it pertains to a specific sort of student case, or maybe a more detailed scenario that you're seeking further guidance on, and we'll be more than happy to be able to answer that question for you.

Stacey-May Fox

Yeah, and just building on that, as we've mentioned, obviously your friendly Funding Information Service Account Managers are more than happy to come out and host a more niche session on rest of world guidance, if that's something that you feel you could benefit from. So just reach out to us and like I say, we can tailor the needs to the session to you.

Paul Smith

Thanks, Stacey. And I think given the time, this will be our last question. So, thanks, Colleen, for the question. So, the question, 'For students who graduate and then move abroad, how does SLC get repayments and how do students repay their loans?'



And you're right, of course, that students have to repay their loans under the rules of income contingency until the loan is written off in line with the policy rules. If a student is overseas and wishes to repay direct, and in fact, they don't really have a choice, they have to repay unless they are still working for an employer who is based in the UK for the purpose of tax. But if they're not, they have a range of repayment options. To some extent, it depends on the country of residence, so that's why we offer some options. And notwithstanding that there is an index that we adjust the amount of repayments due to be paid, based on the cost of living in those countries. So the sterling value of some repayments is higher and other times, it's lower, based on the country of residence of the graduate.

So, in wrap up then, thank you very much for all your questions. It's been a pleasure being with you. And I will remind you, if I may, that our resources will be available on our events website in two or three weeks, including the questions and answers that you've posed today, and any others that we pick up. And thank you very much for your time, we hope it's useful and no doubt, we'll see you again soon. Thank you.



For more information:

events@slc.co.uk

www.slc.co.uk