



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Student Finance Wales Information Notice

SFWIN 04/2020

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (EMA) AND WELSH GOVERNMENT LEARNING GRANT (FURTHER EDUCATION) (WGLG (FE)) SCHEMES FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2020/21

This Information Notice provides details of the means-tested EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes for academic year 2020/21. Please ensure that the SFWIN is circulated to all staff and colleagues who help to administer the schemes.

The awards and income thresholds for the means-tested EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes have been maintained for academic year 2020/21. For the purposes of the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes, eligible students must be undertaking an eligible further education course up to level 3 (equivalent to A level or NVQ level 3), leading to a qualification issued by a recognised awarding body. From academic year 2019/20¹, learners with learning difficulties commencing a programme of learning which is wholly non-accredited and leads to the achievement of a personalised learning programme funded by the Welsh Government under the Preparation for Life and Work programme area, are eligible to apply for EMA or WGLG (FE) support, subject to satisfying all other eligibility criteria.

APPLICATION FORMS

We are extremely grateful to learning centres that have taken delivery of their EMA and WGLG (FE) application packs as we continue to respond to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students is essential as we prepare for the new term. We appreciate that every effort is being made by learning centres to ensure that applications reach students as early as is possible.

EMA and WGLG (FE) application forms and guidance notes for academic year 2020/21 are available to download via the Student Finance Wales (SFW) website: www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe.

Please remember that the SFW bilingual customer service continues to provide a reduced service in response to COVID-19. The service is working hard to answer enquires and to process applications. They can be contacted on 0300 200 4050 and information about eligibility and entitlement is also available via the SFW website.

ATTENDANCE

The EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes are designed to provide support to eligible students undertaking eligible further education courses that normally require attendance at a learning centre. However, we recognise that it is important for learning centres to maintain and adhere to Government COVID-19 guidance in planning for and supporting new and returning students from September 2020. We expect learning centres to continue to operate and maintain their own absence/attendance policies.

¹ <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/media/198664/student-finance-wales-information-notice-05-2019-e-pdf.pdf>

For students engaged in learning, including blended learning as a combination of online and attendance, learning centres should provide attendance confirmations to SFW for eligible payments to be released. Student absence for reasons of illness, self-isolation or learning centre closure due to COVID-19, can continue to be treated as authorised absences, at learning centres' discretion.

The Welsh Government has published a series of COVID-19 guidance documents for further and higher education in planning for the autumn: <https://gov.wales/further-higher-education-coronavirus>.

BACKDATED EMA PAYMENTS

For academic year 2020/21 we are extending 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 if their application is received by SFW within 13 weeks (instead of 8 weeks) of starting their course. If an application is received after 13 weeks the student will only be eligible for backdated EMA payments to the date their application was received by SFW.

Eligible returning students may also receive backdated EMA payments to the start of the course they are undertaking in academic year 2020/21 if their EMA Agreement is signed/agreed within 13 weeks of their start date. If an eligible returning student signs their EMA Agreement after 13 weeks they will only be eligible for backdated EMA payments to the signed date confirmed to SFW by the returning student's learning centre.

EMA payments remain subject to SFW receiving confirmation that students are engaged in learning and have agreed their EMA Agreement. We would still encourage students and learning centres to agree to their EMA Agreement as early as possible.

Please note that the EMA application packs for academic year 2020/21 were printed prior to the impact of COVID-19, therefore, the printed EMA form refers to 8 weeks to qualify for backdated payments. We ask learning centres for their support in helping to communicate the change to 13 weeks.

This change will be monitored during academic year 2020/21.

EMA AND WGLG (FE) LEARNING AGREEMENTS

Supplementary guidance for managing and signing EMA and WGLG (FE) agreements for academic year 2020/21 is available from the SFW Learning Centre Portal. Please refer to the guidance for further information.

NEW RESIDENCY CATEGORY

The category for leave to remain on grounds of 'family life' has been included in the Schedules in the EMA and WGLG (FE) Wales schemes for academic year 2020/21, this builds on the existing eligibility in the schemes. Students with this category may be eligible for support, subject to satisfying all other eligibility criteria. The application and guidance forms for academic year 2020/21 have been updated to include the category.

FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME – WGLG (FE)

In accordance with the WGLG (FE) Scheme for the assessment of household income, the WGLG (FE) application form and guidance notes for academic year 2020/21 have been updated to ensure that applicants (where applicable) provide their income details alongside their parents' income details to be assessed for support accordingly. The WGLG (FE) Scheme provides that only the higher of the applicant's or parents' income is to be used when determining eligibility and grant entitlement.

ENQUIRIES

If you have any queries about EMA and/or WGLG (FE) or this Information Notice, 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. A copy of this Information Notice can be downloaded in Welsh or English.