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# Scheme Overview

The Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education (WGLG FE) provides financial support for people aged 19 or over. It is meant for students who want to continue with their education at a school or further education college.

It is a means-tested grant, paid in instalments, based on the number of terms in the student's course or programme of study.

The WGLG FE scheme is an incentive for students from lower income households to stay in or return to further education.

# Service Overview

SLC provides the Learning Centre Portal (LC Portal) and supporting guidance to allow Learning Centres (LCs) to carry out the administrative tasks required to ensure that all eligible students are paid accurately and on time. This includes tracking and submitting attendance data and administering students who change course or their learning centre. The LC Portal is the only option available for LCs to perform these WGLG administrative activities.

SLC also provides LCs with materials to promote awareness of the financial support available under the WGLG scheme, and information and guidance to allow LCs to offer advice about completing and returning the form.

### LC responsibilities and terms of usage

It is the responsibility of each LC to ensure that information held on the LC Portal for their organisation is up to date and accurate. This includes as a minimum of two main LC contacts updated in Profile section of LC Portal, appropriate number of users required for WGLG FE updates, up to date LC address and contact phone number and a signed GDPR Agreement. It is LC’s responsibility to ensure that all student related administrative actions outlined in this document are carried out timely within agreed Service Standards.

The LC is responsible for ensuring that its portal users are aware of, and implement, their responsibilities as defined in this document and in the Joint SLC and LC Service Agreement. LCs are responsible for following the business rules of each function detailed within the guidance documentation held on the Learning Centre Services (LCS) Website: <https://www.lcservices.slc.co.uk/>

### Eligible courses

To receive WGLG FE, students must be studying on an eligible course and must be progressing if they have received WGLG before. The LC is responsible for confirming that the student’s course is valid. This can be actioned on the LC Portal, as part of the process to confirm the student’s WGLG FE Learning Agreement (LA). If LCs are not sure if course is valid or not, in first instance they should refer to the guidance on LCS Website and for any further course related enquiries contact SLCs Partners Support Desk (PSD) for help.

### Course designation

LCs are responsible for approving or rejecting WGLG FE applications based on the level of the course the students are on and whether the student is progressing.

LC should reject any applications from students on courses at level 4 or above on LC Portal.

LCs must map their course programmes via the qualifications framework to enter the courses at the correct level. More information about how to map qualifications can be found on the Welsh Government website.

Only further education courses are valid for WGLG FE support. Courses must lead to recognised qualifications up to and including National Qualifications level 3. Higher education courses at level 4 and above do not qualify.

Eligible course types can be found on LCS Website WGLG FE User Guide.

### Contact hours

All students must follow or intend to follow a designated course that has at least 275 contact hours. For the purposes of WGLG FE eligible designated courses must have:

* 500 or more contact hours if they are full-time
* 275 to 499 contact hours if they are part-time

The WGLG FE scheme leaves some room for interpretation of contact hours. These are the time when an eligible student receives teaching or supervision during periods of study or practice.

### Progression

The main principle of the WGLG FE scheme is to support the progression of eligible students from a previous year of study.

To show progression from a previous year, students must be enrolled on the following year of their course. Alternatively, they may be enrolled on a course at a higher level of study from when they were last eligible for WGLG FE.

Students will not be eligible for WGLG FE if they’ve previously received WGLG FE support for attendance on a course at the same or higher level. They must normally show advancement to a higher level of learning to remain eligible.

In exceptional cases, WGLG FE eligibility may be considered for a repeat period of study. This is usually when the student could not pass the academic year due to extenuating circumstances.

Some students may have made significant progress but may not have progressed in purely academic terms, for example from level 1 to level 2. This could include students with additional learning needs or disabilities.

Another exception is if a student is studying at the same level as the year before, but in a related area of study. This may complement their original course and show progress as a whole. For example, they might follow Level 3 Beauty with Level 3 Hairdressing.

In such circumstances, LCs should use their discretion and consider each case on its own to decide if there is progression. In each case, the student must give documentary evidence from all appropriate sources.

### Changes to course or programme of study

If a student changes their programme of study, SLC may need to reassess their entitlement or eligibility.

These changes include:

* change of course
* change in contact hours
* change of Learning Centre

If any of this happens, the LC should start a reassessment on the LC Portal. The LC must enter the new information as soon as possible. Any delay may cause an overpayment to the student.

### Transferring to another course or programme of study

If a student is transferring to another eligible course during the academic year, the transfer must involve an academic progression. The new course must be of the same or higher level. Otherwise, the student cannot be considered for WGLG FE for the rest of the academic year.

 There is an exception to this rule if all the following apply:

* the new course is at a lower level than the original one
* the student transfers within the first 20 weeks of the start of the original course
* the student has not received WGLG FE support for a course at that lower level before

If these conditions are not met, the student will not be eligible for WGLG FE until they can show progression from the first year of their original course.

### Application timescale

New students must apply for WGLG FE within 9 months of starting their course and returning students must sign their WGLG FE LA within 9 months of starting their course.

Returning students must understand that by signing their WGLG FE Learning Agreement, they are formally applying for WGLG FE support for that academic year. Signing the agreement replaces the need to complete and return an application form.

The applications of eligible returning students are automatically rolled over to the next academic year. However, the LC must still confirm that both the LC and the student have signed the WGLG FE Learning Agreement. This will let SLC know that the application remains valid.

### WGLG FE Learning Agreements

WGLG FE LAs are a clear and concise way of setting out what the students need to do to receive their termly payments. They cover the terms of attendance for the students.

Both new and returning students must sign a WGLG FE LA each year. For returning students, their WGLG FE LA signature is their formal application to the WGLG FE scheme. For this reason, LCs must use the mandatory WGLG FE Learning Agreement template, issued by Student Finance Wales, for both new and returning WGLG FE students. This can be found on the LC Portal. The content of the WGLG FE LA should be the same for a returning student as for a new student.

LAs can be signed in person on a paper form or electronically (if the LC has their own system). These can also be emailed to the students if meeting in person is difficult. The LC should request an email from the student as confirmation that they agree to their WGLG FE terms. LCs must store these return emails in an electronic file for audit purposes.

Both the LC and the student must sign and keep a copy of the WGLG FE LA. Copies must be kept of all WGLG FE records for 7 years for audit purposes.

The WGLG FE Learning Agreement template includes a question to capture the student’s language preference (English or Welsh). The LC should select the correct language preference on the LC Portal when confirming that the student has signed the agreement.

### Extenuating circumstances

The WGLG FE LA includes a question about extenuating circumstances. This may prompt a discussion between the LC and the student about whether they’re experiencing extenuating circumstances that may affect their attendance.

The purpose of this is to support vulnerable students who are at risk of not participating in education. This may include, but is not limited to, caring responsibilities, such as looking after a family member who is ill or a disabled.

If the student has highlighted extenuating circumstances, the LC should note this on their WGLG FE LA and on the LC Portal.

The LC should acknowledge these issues when confirming the student’s attendance. The LC should consider these when deciding if the student should receive their payment.

### Nominated Person WGLG FE Learning Agreement Form

The LC can use the Nominated Person WGLG FE Learning Agreement Form if a student is not capable of signing the WGLG FE LA. This form lets a nominated third party sign it on their behalf.

The nominated third party could be a parent, guardian, or carer responsible for the student’s administrative or financial affairs.

The Nominated Person WGLG FE Agreement Form is available on the Learning Centre Portal.

The LC must use the mandatory WGLG FE LA template for all students, it can be download from the LC Portal.

### Reassessing a WGLG FE Learning Agreement

The LC can use the reassessment option to update a student’s record if they change their academic details. For example, this could be a change of course or contact hours.

Changing academic details can have a serious effect on a student’s WGLG FE eligibility and entitlement. For instance, they may no longer be entitled to receive WGLG FE support, or only reduced support. An example would be where a student finishes a full-time course early, which reduces their contact hours to less than the required 500 hours.

The LC must only reassess a student if it is certain that the changes to their academic details are permanent. The changes must also be fully authorised by the relevant staff members at the school or college.

### Suspending a WGLG FE Learning Agreement

The WGLG FE LA should be suspended if the student is away from the LC for an extended period.

The LC should also use the suspend option when unsure about the reasons or whether the absence is permanent. However, if the student’s absence is permanent, the LC must process a withdrawal

### Reactivating a WGLG FE Learning Agreement

If a student returns to study after a period of absence and the LC is satisfied that they’ve returned permanently, WGLG FE LA can be reactivated. This will allow the student to receive their WGLG FE again.

Only the suspended LAs can be reactivated.

### Withdrawing a WGLG FE Learning Agreement

If a student decides to withdraw from the LC permanently, the LC must update the LC Portal to show this.

The LC should use the withdrawal option if the student transfers to another Learning Centre. In this case, the student must also contact Student Finance Wales to have the transfer processed for them.

The LC should also use the withdrawal option it if a student dies. In this case, the LC should always contact the Partners Support Desk so that SLC can stop any further correspondence to the student.

If a student decides to withdraw from the LC permanently, LC must update the LC Portal to show this. This should be actioned within 30 days of the withdrawal.

### Attendance

LCs need to collate the attendance data each term and use it for authorising WGLG FE payments. This is the evidence that lets the LC decide if the student is in attendance or not.

LCs should use the processes their LC already has for determining attendance and collating the data.

In case of any unplanned school/college closures, the LC must still confirm the attendance of their students.

The LC must keep all records of the attendance monitoring and payment decisions in a format suitable for auditing. This includes both authorised and unauthorised absences. These records must be kept for 7 years in line with standard audit requirements.

Once the LC has decided about a student’s attendance, they must submit it on the LC Portal.

SLC cannot release any payments until the LC has confirmed that the student is in attendance in this academic year.

In term 1, the LC must confirm attendance after the student has been in attendance for minimum of 2 weeks. The LC must also confirm that the student remains enrolled and continues to attend at each term.

The two-week rule applies for term 1 only. There is no specific time frame for the following 2 terms, but SLC expects the LC to confirm attendance as soon as possible. This ensures that the students receive their funding without a delay.

### Telling students about attendance decisions

If a student has not fulfilled the attendance criteria, they will not receive a WGLG FE payment. It is the LCs responsibility to ensure that the students understand the reasons for that.

### Changing attendance confirmations

The LC may change the original attendance confirmation after submitting it if an absence decision has changed from unauthorised to authorised or an absence decision has changed from authorised to unauthorised. It can also be changed if an appeal against an unauthorised absence decision is successful or there were delays in submitting attendance data on the part of the LC.

If there is not sufficient evidence to authorise an absence, the student should be marked as not in attendance until satisfactory evidence has been received.

### Absence

The LC should apply their Learning Centre’s general attendance and absence policy to decide if an absence was authorised or unauthorised. The attendance and absence policy should be the same for WGLG FE and non-WGLG FE students.

Reasons for authorising or not authorising absences must be clear. The LC needs to apply all rules governing these decisions uniformly to all students at their LC. This helps to ensure that no students are in doubt about what the criteria is and how it is applied.

The LCS website provides LCs with guidance on what constitutes an authorised or unauthorised absence.

### Illness

LCs can count isolated periods of illness as authorised absence if convinced the illness was genuine.

SLC recommends that the LC’s academic procedures for illness absences are applied for WGLG FE purposes. This is in line with the general rule for authorised absences. For example, a student can self-certify an absence for up to 5 days, but it is at LC’s discretion how many 5-day certifications are accepted. Beyond this period, the student must produce evidence such as a medical certificate.

WGLG FE can help with the costs of attending a school or college. For this reason, long-term illness is not an acceptable reason for authorising absences.

LCs must review any medical absence of 3 weeks or more and decide whether it should be categorised as long-term illness. LCs should also use their general attendance and absence policy when dealing with WGLG FE for students not in attendance for pregnancy, maternity, or paternity related reasons.

### System User Administration

Users will access the service through the Learning Centre Portal tab that is accessible from LCS Website <https://www.lcservices.slc.co.uk/>

The LCs are responsible for ensuring that a suitable number of staff is fully trained on all aspects of the LC Portal processes and that they are available should we need to contact them. Training can be provided upon request by the LCs SLC Account Manager.

Each user will require access to the portal which will be administered by a User Administrator at each LC.

The users are responsible for the ongoing management of access of users within their organisation. This includes creating new and maintaining existing users and expiring users who no longer access the portal or who are no longer employed by the LC. LCs should expire any old accounts as soon as the user no longer needs access to the portal.

There is no restriction on the numbers of users that an LC can grant access to. When a creation of a new user is complete, the system will then email the new user their username and a temporary password. The user will appear on the list of users at the LC.

LCs can also choose to copy the new user’s details to the Profiles tab. This will add the new user to SLC mailing list so they can start receiving emails from the SLC’s WGLG FE Account Manager.

LCs should have at least 2 users listed on the Profiles section on the LC Portal. These should be the main users of the LC Portal. It is the LC’s responsibility to ensure the profiles are up to date with the correct contact information. Only users who have their contact details on the Profiles section will receive emails from SLC about the scheme.

The LC can also update the address and telephone number of the LC on the same section. It is important that these details are kept up to date SLC can deliver printed materials to the LC, such as application packs and pre-launch materials.

### Documents

The downloads section on the LC Portal has some important WGLG FE related documents available on a PDF Format. These include WGLG FE LA forms that are required to be completed prior to student payments being released.

### Reports

Service Standard reports are available for all LCs to view for their LC on the LC Portal to provide and update on how the LC is performing during the year and check how the LC is doing compared to the national average. Reports to identify the students that have been selected in the sample checks are also available.

### Student information

Student Information is available from the Customer search function from the Menu bar on the LC Portal. The Customer Search area of the portal supplies information about individual students and administer their accounts.

The Customer Search area has access to the following details that the LCs are required for administration of the student accounts:

* view application details
* course and application history
* maintain WGLG FE LA
* confirm attendance

The View Application Details functionality lets the LC to find students who have submitted a WGLG FE application for a selected academic year and see the status of their application, including if the student is an auto-rollover student. The Auto-rollover indicator is active when an eligible student has been automatically rolled over into the new academic year.

### Appeals

Students have the right of appeal about:

* WGLG FE entitlement
* their attendance payments

If students have any questions about the amount of their WGLG FE entitlement, they should contact Student Finance Wales.

If students have any questions about WGLG FE scheme rules, they should email the Welsh Government at studentfinancedivision@gov.wales or isadrancyllidmyfyrwyr@llyw.cymru.

It is the LCs responsibility to decide whether a student is entitled to WGLG FE payments or not. Appeals about these decisions should therefore come to the LC first. LCs should have their own established appeal’s process which is published and available to the students.

Some students, for example young and young adult carers or students with disabilities, may have special circumstances. These may unavoidably affect their attendance. The LC should consider all circumstances when deciding if an absence is authorised or unauthorised. Any subsequent appeals should be made in writing, with all supporting evidence, to the Welsh Government. Appeals should be emailed to Student Finance Wales. More information is available from the following link: https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/complaints-and-appeals/

If students have any questions about the WGLG FE policy or scheme rules, they should email the Welsh Government at studentfinancedivision@gov.wales or isadrancyllidmyfyrwyr@llyw.cymru.

### Record keeping

The WGLG FE scheme is paid for by public funds. As such, it is subject to similar levels of auditing as other education schemes that involve public funds.

### Retention of records

LCs must keep all school and college records relating to financial data for at least 7 years. This includes:

* student data
* WGLG FE Learning Agreements
* authorised absences
* attendance evidence
* correspondence about WGLG FE
* supporting documentation of eligibility, such as course and academic year
* management information

This includes electronic and paper-based records.

In compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, LCs must keep their records in a secure and suitable format and environment.

### Targeted bulk erasure of data

As part of SLC work to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018, SLC deletes some information from the systems that SLC no longer has a reason to keep.

This includes deleting applications and customer information where:

* no payment has ever been made
* agreed retention triggers and periods have passed
* There are some exceptions where SLC will be keeping the data for longer, such as cases of fraud.

The normal retention triggers are:

* WGLG FE applications that have not been approved – the end of the current academic year (31 August)
* WGLG FE applications that have been approved – the end of the following academic year (31 August) if no payment has been made
* The retention period after the trigger is 6 months for all applications.

### Promoting the WGLG FE scheme

Schools and colleges play a vital role in the promotion of the WGLG scheme. They are an important resource for students seeking guidance. SLC therefore ask LCs to promote awareness of the financial support available under the EMA scheme.

SLC will make available publicity material that includes leaflets, guides, and application packs and asks LCs to distribute these to students or refer students to online materials, including the link and QR code to the online application which is the preferred method where possible. Application form and notes are also available to download from Welsh Government website in a PDF format: <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/further-education-funding/>

SLC recommends that LCs email the link or QR code to the online application form and guidance to all their potential students prior to the launch of WGLG Service. SLC will inform LCs via an email once these are available. Coming Soon and Apply Now posters are only available in a PDF format to download from LC Portal.

Although the WGLG application has information and guidance for students, SLC asks LCs to offer advice about completing the application. This could also apply to parents or guardians.

### Summary of Learning Centre responsibilities

SLC most important responsibilities are confirming the student’s course details and attendance. This will let SLC to release WGLG FE payments to the students.

LCs responsibilities also include:

* distributing online application links or forms to the students when needed
* being the point of contact for students after they’ve received their Provisional Award Letters
* offering help and advice on progression, courses and programmes of study
* giving advice about the attendance rules at the school or college
* producing and confirming WGLG FE Learning Agreement Forms for all eligible students
* entering student information on the Learning Centre Portal, including confirmations that they’re attending an eligible course
* dealing with any appeals about course details and attendance confirmations
* keeping audit trails of evidence and supporting documents for 7 years
* telling SLC immediately when becoming aware that a student may be committing fraud in applying for WGLG FE – the WGLG FE administrators can find fraud guidance on the Learning Centre Portal.

### Service Standards for WGLG FE for further education providers

The Service standards for WGLG FE are there to assist LCs to carry out the administrative tasks required within set timescales to ensure that all eligible students are paid accurately and on time. These can be found from the following link on LCS Website and are also available to download.

<https://www.lcservices.slc.co.uk/welsh-government-learning-grant-fe/service-standards/>