A guide for those starting Further Education at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)

Further Education **Financial Support** for **Full-time Students** 2026/27

cafre
College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Depairtment o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

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1. Introduction

This booklet applies to students commencing or currently in Further Education at Enniskillen, Greenmount or Loughry Campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). CAFRE is an integral part of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

In this booklet you will find information on the financial help that DAERA has put in place for full-time further education students for the academic year 2026/27. It applies to students participating in courses between 1 September 2026 and 31 August 2027.

You can apply for a Further Education Grant from April 2026 onwards. You should apply as soon as you know the course you want to do. Do not wait for exam results.

Applications for financial support in the 2026/27 academic year for students at CAFRE will be administered by the Education Authority, Further Education Grants Section.

This booklet is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances.

For further information please contact:

Education Authority
Further Education Grants Section
1 Hospital Road
Omagh
Co Tyrone
BT79 0AW

Telephone: 028 9047 0155 and select option 2.
Email: fegrants@eani.org.uk

You can apply online at:
https://feportal.eani.org.uk

Note!

If you apply on-line you can upload any supporting documents.

However verification of date of birth must be sent to the Further Education Grants section of the Education Authority. Original documents only (not photocopies).

If you are posting a paper application you should obtain a receipt of postage as proof.

2. What financial help is available for full-time students

2.1 Tuition Fees

Tuition fees for full-time students on further education courses at CAFRE will be paid in full by DAERA.

2.2 Living Expenses Grant

Financial support for living costs (Living Expenses Grant) is means tested and is available to students living in Northern Ireland. It applies to students who intend to commence a further education course below HND/Degree level, or are already on a course and are applying for support for the second or subsequent year of that course.

Who is eligible?

Students of any age, on a full-time further education course or a sandwich course at Enniskillen, Greenmount or Loughry Campus. You can get further information on the eligibility criteria in Section 6 of this booklet or by contacting the Education Authority (contact details on page 2 of this booklet).

If you have ever received support for a publicly funded course in the past, you should check your eligibility with the Education Authority.

If you are not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland, but you have moved to Northern Ireland to attend a CAFRE course, you may not be eligible for a DAERA Living Expenses Grant.

How much?

The maximum amount of living expenses grant is:

Living Expenses Grant	
• Students living in Campus Halls of Residence or in lodgings	£3,400
• Students living in parental home	£2,400

The Living Expenses Grant is based on an assessment of your household income. The Education Authority will carry out this assessment (see Section 6 on page 10 ‘How you are assessed and paid’). This means that they may expect you and relevant members of your household to contribute towards the costs. If you depend upon your parents financially, your parents’ income will be considered when assessing your household’s income. If your parents are separated, divorced, or no longer live together, we will use the income of the parent you normally live with. If your parent lives with a partner we will use their income as well as the parent you live with.

If you are independent and so do not rely on your parents financially, your household income will include your partner’s (if any) income.

How is the Living Expenses Grant paid?

You will usually receive the Living Expenses Grant in three instalments, one at the start of each term. The three instalments will be paid by BACS transfer directly into your bank or building society account. There are a number of things that you as a student can do to make sure that you receive your payment promptly. At enrolment, make sure you bring any documents that your campus needs, in particular the Notification of Award issued by the Education Authority. Make sure that you always refer to yourself in the same way on all of the documents you are asked to fill in.

For example, if you apply for a place on a course as 'John Anthony Smith', please refer to yourself in the same way in the student support application.

It is best to give your full name as it appears on your birth certificate or passport in all dealings with the Education Authority or CAFRE.

Is the Living Expenses Grant repayable?

You will not have to repay this help **unless** you withdraw from the course, or if we have to re-calculate your grant for any reason (for example, if inaccurate information is given or if you have a poor attendance record).

2.3 Childcare Grant

You can claim a childcare grant if you are using registered or approved childcare. Your childcare provider must be registered or approved by the Health and Social Care Trust, or an out-of-school club who provide childcare provision for up to four hours per day, and more than five days a year, which is available either before or after school and during school holidays. You could receive up to £130 per week for one child, and up to £220 a week for two or more children. How much you get depends on your income and that of your dependants (including your husband, wife or partner).

You **will not be eligible** for the Childcare Grant if the childcare is provided by a registered or approved childcare provider who is:

- Your partner;
- A relative of the child and providing care in the child's own home;
- A relative of the child providing care away from the child's own home and is only caring for children he or she is related to.

A relative of the child means a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, brother or sister related by blood or marriage, or living arrangements.

You can claim for childcare costs during:

- Term time;
- Christmas and Easter holidays if your childminder charges you;
- If you are on a two year course and need help with childcare costs for the summer holidays between year one and year two.

What you Need to Supply

We will need the following information to process your claim:

- A childcare grant application CG1 - you can request a form by contacting the FE office on 028 9047 0155, selecting option 2 or by emailing **fegrants@eani.org.uk**
- Your child/children's original long version birth certificate(s);
- Your current Universal Credit statement;
- Your childminder's details of registration.

How is this grant paid?

- The EA will pay the childcare provider directly;
- If your childcare costs are more than the grant covers you are responsible for the balance.

Will you have to repay this grant?

You will not have to repay this grant unless you withdraw from the course or give inaccurate information.

Note: If you are claiming Childcare Grant you will not be entitled to claim childcare from the Inland Revenue. Any attempt to dishonestly obtain childcare grant will be treated as fraud and will be subject to disciplinary procedures involving the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

2.4 Support for Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability such as a physical disability, a mental health difficulty, long term illness or a specific learning difficulty, you can apply for support. You should contact the CAFRE Student Support Officer who will talk to you and advise you on the support available.

For further information on how to contact the Student Support Officer,
Telephone: 028 9442 6911.

3. When and how to apply for financial support

The process of applying for financial support for a full-time course depends on whether you are a new or current student. The steps below set out what you need to do.

From April 2026 - New students

You should start thinking about applying for financial help as soon as you have applied for a place on a further education course at Greenmount, Enniskillen or Loughry Campus. You can apply on-line at: **https://feportal.eani.org.uk**

Do not wait until you have a confirmed place on a course before applying - simply quote the course that you think you are most likely to attend.

If your course changes after you apply, contact the Education Authority straight away.

Current students

If you received a Further Education Grant last year and will progress on to the next year of your course in September the Education Authority will send you a reminder to apply online at: **https://feportal.eani.org.uk**

New and current students

Complete your Further Education Grant Application via the online portal **https://feportal.eani.org.uk**, providing all the details and uploading any documentary evidence required. If you are completing a paper application form you must return it to the Education Authority.

Once the Education Authority has assessed your application they will send you a Financial Assessment Notification telling you how much support you can get and, if necessary, a letter requesting verification of income.

One provisional payment of grant may be made pending the final calculation.

If you are completing a paper form, make sure you have completed **ALL** sections and signed the form.

If evidence of household income is not received before the date on which the second instalment is due to be paid, DAERA may recover money already paid.

Late applications for financial support

If, after your course starts, you decide that you want to apply for financial help, you must apply no later than nine months after the first day of the academic year of your course.

For example, if your course starts on 1 September 2026, you have until 31 May 2027 to apply.

Applications received after this date will not be accepted.

If you do not receive an acknowledgement of your application within 2 weeks of posting please contact the Education Authority Further Grants Section on 028 9047 0155, selecting option 2.

4. General information

4.1 What are the conditions for student support?

Support is subject to the following conditions:

- you attend the course regularly;
- your academic progress and conduct is satisfactory to CAFRE;
- you sign an undertaking to repay any amount overpaid, for whatever reason.

4.2 For how long will I get support?

Support will last as long as the minimum period normally required to complete the course for which it is made.

4.3 Can the support be terminated or suspended?

Yes - the Education Authority may suspend or terminate your support or withhold or reduce any payment normally due if the conditions for support are not fulfilled.

4.4 What happens if I withdraw or am absent from the course?

- You must inform your Campus immediately if for any reason you are absent from the course;

- You must also inform the Education Authority immediately if you withdraw from your course. If you withdraw from your course, Living Expenses Grant will only be payable up until the last date you attended your course. You should state the last day of your attendance and reason for withdrawal or if you have been absent for more than two weeks, state the period and reason for absence. The Education Authority or DAERA may recover money already paid;

- If absence from your course is due to illness you should forward medical certificates at regular intervals to your Campus showing the nature and duration of illness. If you are absent from your course for a continuous period of more than 60 days due to illness or a medical condition, your Living Expenses Grant will be reduced for any further absence. You should always inform the Education Authority if, due to illness or a medical condition, you are unable to resume attendance at the start of any term forwarding a medical certificate if appropriate.

4.5 How do changes in my circumstances affect my Living Expenses Grant?

- You must inform the Education Authority immediately if you obtain any other scholarship or grant assistance for your course or acquire any source of income;

- The Education Authority must also be informed of any change in your financial or other circumstances which might affect the value of support you are entitled to.

4.6 Can I have my travelling expenses paid for?

The Living Expenses Grant contains a contribution towards travel. The Education Authority do not reimburse travelling expenses incurred in attending course pre-admission interviews or to and from Campus during the course.

4.7 What if I am a sandwich student?

A ‘sandwich course’ is a course consisting of alternate periods of full-time study at a Campus and associated industrial/professional/commercial experience outside a Campus. Living Expenses Grant is not payable during periods of industrial placement.

5. Extra help available

5.1 Hardship Fund

This may be available through CAFRE to provide help for students on lower income who may need extra financial support for their course and to stay in further education.

How do I apply?

If the Hardship Fund opens in 2026/27 application forms will be available from your Campus and should be returned to CAFRE when completed.

6. Further Education Grant

6.1 How you are assessed and paid

The Education Authority will use the information you provide in your application to decide whether you can get financial help towards living expenses.

6.2 Eligibility for financial support

To be eligible for help with your living costs you must meet certain conditions. The course you do must be a full-time course of further education at one of the CAFRE campuses (Enniskillen, Greenmount or Loughry) and you must meet the personal eligibility criteria.

Personal eligibility

Your personal eligibility depends on:

- where you live (this is known as the residence requirement);
- whether you have ever attended or received support, for a publicly funded further education course in the past (known as previous study).

Residence

Normally, you must meet the following three requirements on the first day of the first academic year of your course. On that day you must:

- be 'ordinarily resident' in Northern Ireland; and
- have been 'ordinarily resident' in the United Kingdom, (UK) and Islands (i.e. Channel Islands or the Isle of Man) for three years immediately before the starting date of the course (not wholly or mainly for the purpose of receiving full time education); and
- have 'settled status' in the UK as described in the Immigration Act of 1971. This means there are no immigration restrictions on how long you can stay in the UK.

"Ordinarily resident" is defined as "habitual and normal residence from choice and for a settled purpose throughout the three-year period, apart from temporary or occasional absences".

For EU, EEA and Swiss nationals, you may be eligible for support if you are within the personal scope of the citizens' rights provisions or a person with protected rights under the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement. This does not apply to ROI nationals meeting the 3 year residency requirement. The residence requirements are complicated and even if you do not meet the requirements set out above you may still be eligible for support. You should check with the Education Authority for information about your individual circumstances. Exceptional residency types such as refugee, stateless person or those with humanitarian protection may be eligible.

The Education Authority will decide whether you meet the 'ordinarily resident' requirement.

Previous study

If you have previously attended a publicly funded course we will take this into consideration.

Grants will be awarded only where the Education Authority is satisfied that there is clear evidence that the applicant is progressing to a more advanced level of study.

Leaving your course or transferring to a new course

It is important to remember the rules about previous courses if you are thinking about leaving your course before it ends or transferring to a new course, as this could affect how much help you can get if you take another course in the future. So, it is very important if you want to transfer courses or withdraw from your course that you talk to your college and the Education Authority as soon as possible.

Repeat years

If you have unsuccessfully completed a year of the course and decide to repeat the year, you will not be eligible for any support unless medical or other mitigating circumstances contributed to the need to repeat the year. You will need to look into other ways of paying for your course. You should seek advice from the Education Authority.

6.3 Assessing how much financial support you may be entitled to

Your entitlement depends on your own income and that of your household (the lower the income the more grant you will be entitled to). If you want to apply for this financial support you will need to enclose evidence of your household income with your application. You should send your original birth certificate or passport - photocopies are not acceptable. For documents relating to income you may send photocopies as long as all details are clear. If you do not give income details you may not receive the money you are entitled to. If you want to apply on-line you will be able to upload evidence of your household income with your application at **https://feportal.eani.org.uk**

6.3.1 Dependent Student

We use your own taxable unearned income:

Taxable unearned income is any income you receive from the following sources:

- Bank or building society gross interest;
- Property, lettings or rent;
- Dividends or investments;
- Trusts or sponsorships;
- Any other payment received for attending the course.

Your household income - parents

- If your parents live together the Education Authority will use both their incomes for the financial year 2024/25, before deductions;

- If your parents are separated, divorced, or no longer live together, the Education Authority will use the income of the parent you normally live with;

- If your parent lives with a partner the Education Authority will use their income as well as the parent you live with;

- If your parents' income has fallen by more than 15%, the Education Authority can look at their income from the current year before deductions;

- If your parents are unemployed and are in receipt of benefits the Education Authority will need verification of this from the Benefits Office;

- If your parents receive tax credits they should send their tax credit notification for the financial year 2024/25;

- If your parents are self employed or have income from property, the Education Authority take the taxable profit - the Education Authority will need their tax calculation for the year 2024/25 from the Inland Revenue or a letter from their Accountant;

- If they are in receipt of pensions the Education Authority will need verification of the amount they received for the year 2024/25 from the Pension Branch or whoever pays their pension;

- An allowance of £1,153 will be deducted from income for each child in the family who is mainly financially dependent on your parents;

- An allowance will be deducted from income if your parents pay into a personal pension scheme that qualifies for tax relief.

The Education Authority works out your parents' residual income. It does this by taking their gross income (before tax and National Insurance) and taking off any allowances.

Once the Education Authority has taken away the right amounts and worked out your parents' residual income, they add this to your income and assess a household contribution as follows:

- No contribution if the total income is less than £31,000;
- £45 if the total income is £31,000;
- Plus £1 for every £7.50 of the total income over £31,000.

For example, if the household income is £33,000, the Education Authority would assess a contribution of £45 plus £267, giving a total contribution of £312.

If your circumstances change during your course the Education Authority will reassess the household contribution.

6.3.2 Independent students

If you are an independent student, the Education Authority will not take your parents income into account when working out the household income and contribution.

You are an independent student if you meet one of the following conditions on the first day of the academic year (i.e. 1 September)

- You have care of a child;
- You are 25 or over;
- You have been married or formed a civil partnership. The Education Authority will need to see your marriage certificate or civil partnership schedule;
- Your parents are deceased;
- You have financially supported yourself for 3 years or more outside of full-time education;
- You are estranged from your parents;
- You are in the care of a local authority or voluntary organisation, or you are under a custodianship order on your 18th birthday or immediately before your course if you are not 18 when it begins.

If you are claiming to be an independent student because you have supported yourself for three years or more, you must provide evidence to show how you have supported yourself. If you have been working or claiming benefits, you must provide written confirmation of this. Acceptable proof includes your P60s, a letter from HMRC or letters from employers confirming the dates you worked there and your levels of earnings. For periods where you have claimed benefits, you should ask your local Social Security Agency office for a letter to confirm the dates you claimed benefit and the type of benefit received. If you do not provide birth or marriage certificates or evidence to prove you have supported yourself for three years, it will delay your application.

If you have care of a child and are claiming independent status, you should send your child's original long birth certificate and provide other evidence that you are caring for the child (for example, evidence that you are receiving Child Benefit or Child Tax Credit).

Whose income do the Education Authority take into account?

The Education Authority use your own taxable unearned income:

Taxable unearned income is any income you receive from the following sources:

- Bank or building society gross interest;
- Property, lettings or rent;
- Dividends or investments;
- Trusts or sponsorships;
- Any other payment received for attending the course.

What income do the Education Authority take into account for your spouse/partner?

- If your spouse/partner is unemployed and in receipt of benefits the Education Authority will need verification of this from the Benefit Office;

- If they receive tax credits they should send their tax credit notification for the year 2024/25;

- If they are employed the Education Authority take their total gross taxable income for the financial year 2024/25;

- If they are self-employed or have income from property the Education Authority take the taxable profit - they will need their tax calculation for the year 2024/25 from the Inland Revenue or a letter from their Accountant;

- If they are in receipt of pensions the Education Authority will need verification of the amount they received for the year 2024/25 from the Pension Branch or whoever pays their pension;

- An allowance of £1,153 will be deducted from income for each child in the family who is mainly financially dependent on your spouse/partner;

- An allowance will be deducted from income if your spouse/partner pays into a personal pension scheme that qualifies for tax relief.

- If your partner/spouse's income has fallen by more than 15%, the Education Authority can look at their income from the current year before deductions.

Once the Education Authority has worked out your husband, wife or partner's residual income they add this to your income and assess a household contribution which will be further reduced by £1,153 for each dependant child. The household income threshold is the same.

The household contribution is then assessed as follows:

- No contribution for residual income up to £31,000.
- £45 if his or her residual income is £31,000.
- Plus £1 for every £7.50 of residual income above £31,000.

For example, if the household income is £33,000 the Education Authority assess a contribution of £45 plus £267, giving a total contribution of £312.

Students who have no contact with their parents

If you want to claim independent status because you have no contact with your parents, you must provide confirmation from a professional person outside your family who knows about your circumstances. Examples of proof you could provide are:

- a letter from your social worker (if you have one);
- if you claimed Income Support when you were under 18, a letter from your local Social Security Agency office showing that you received benefits because of your situation;
- if your relationship with your parents broke down while you were at school or college, a letter from an advice worker or personal tutor or teacher, confirming your circumstances; or
- if you have visited your doctor because of problems relating to your broken relationship with your parents, a letter to confirm your circumstances.

To qualify for independent status because of this, you will need to prove that the lack of contact with your parents is permanent. You must provide evidence of this to the Education Authority explaining the circumstances, which led to this. The Education Authority would normally expect you to have had no contact with your parents for at least 12 months although this may not apply in exceptional circumstances.

You will not be able to claim independent status just because you do not get on with your parents or because you do not live with them. You will also not be able to claim independent status simply because your parents do not want to give details of their income or refuse to provide financial support to you.

7. Privacy Notice for Education Authority Further Education Grants

The Education Authority (EA) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs are joint Data Controllers under the Data Protection Legislation. We hold information for the purposes specified in our notification to the Information Commissioner including determining eligibility for a Further Education grant, assessing the maximum amount of financial support available, payment of a Further Education grant and the detection and prevention of fraud, and may use this information for any of these.

For further details about the way your information is used, who is responsible for it and the rights you have in connection with it, please refer to our full Privacy Notice available at:

https://www.eani.org.uk/about-us/privacy/privacy-notices/privacy-notice-education-authority-further-education-grants

If you don't have internet access, please call us on 028 9047 0155, selecting Option 2 and we can send a copy to you.

Enniskillen, Greenmount and Loughry Campuses are integral parts of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise

Department of
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

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