



To:

Further and Higher Education Institutions in Wales
Registered EMA/WGLG (FE) learning centres
The Student Loans Company
UCAS
Student Finance Wales Stakeholder Group
NUS Wales
Children's Commissioner for Wales

July 2016

Dear Colleague

**EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (EMA) AND WELSH GOVERNMENT
LEARNING GRANT (FURTHER EDUCATION) (WGLG (FE)) SCHEMES FOR
ACADEMIC YEAR 2016/17.**

This Information Notice provides details for the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes for academic year 2016/17.

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@wales.gsi.gov.uk. 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](#).



Student Finance Wales Information Notice (SFWIN 03/2016)

(i) Electronic Signatures

A technical change has been made to the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes for academic year (AY) 2016/17 to allow for the use of an electronic signature on learning agreements. This is in acknowledgement of the work undertaken by Gower College Swansea (GCS) and recognising ways to support learning centres who wish to adopt new effective and efficient systems, helping to reduce the administrative burden.

Learning agreements underpin the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes. Historically, learning centres (i.e. schools and colleges) must retain paper learning agreements with original wet signatures. With greater demand being placed on providing effective digital services, GCS has implemented a pilot project over the period of two academic years, by adapting its digital platform to use an electronic signature for electronic learning agreements (for the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes). GCS had also sought independent advice from Jisc, which is the UK higher/further education and skills sectors' not-for-profit organisation for digital services and solutions.

If learning centres wish to adopt electronic signatures (like GCS) they should refer to the Student Loans Company's (SLC) Learning Centre Guidance Notes and Fraud Guidance for 2016/17, which will be updated to reflect this technical change. It is important that learning centres refer to these guidance documents.

Learning centres will be responsible for ensuring their systems are accessible for students and are supported by robust security systems and standards. Learning centres not wishing to adopt electronic signatures should continue to maintain their wet-signed paper learning agreements.

(ii) Learning/Learning Grant Agreement Template Forms

SLC confirmed at its annual FE Seminars (held in April 2016) for learning centre representatives that new mandatory learning/learning grant agreement template forms are to be rolled out during the summer to learning centres who will be administering the schemes in AY 2016/17.

Following a strong feedback consensus from learning centres and students some administrative changes will be introduced to SLC's new mandatory template forms, as follows:

Name change

The individual agreement template form heading will be known as:-

- EMA Agreement and
- WGLG (FE) Agreement

The name changes will not change the purpose of the learning agreement but should help to provide clarity for students and learning centres.

Alternative agreement template form (Nominated Person signature)

It is recognised that in some circumstances a student (e.g. with additional learning needs or a disability) may require a nominated person (a Third Party) such as a parent, guardian or carer to sign the relevant agreement on behalf of the student as they are responsible for their administrative and/or financial affairs. In such circumstances the nominated person may have signed the student's signatory section or the learning centre has modified the agreement template to include a separate signatory section.

For AY 2016/17 SLC will provide an alternative agreement template form (for EMA and WGLG (FE)) which a nominated person can sign on behalf of the eligible student. The alternative template should only be used for the intended circumstances and will be provided by SLC.

The aims of the above changes are to provide consistency, to help define between EMA/WGLG (FE) agreements and learning centres' own agreements, and to reinforce the importance of the EMA/WGLG (FE) agreements.

SLC's Learning Centre Guidance Notes will be updated to reflect the above administrative changes.

(iii) Electronic Verification of Household Income (VHI)

SFWIN (02/2015)¹ explained that SLC would be modernising its services and that an electronic VHI assessment was being introduced from AY 2015/16. This means SLC completes an electronic VHI assessment for new applicants (and their sponsors) under a data sharing arrangement with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

The following provides a brief outline of how SLC intends to administer eligible returning students as part of their electronic VHI assessments in AY 2016/17:

EMA and WGLG (FE) - started course on or after 1 September 2015

This cohort of returning students will be subject to an electronic VHI assessment as part of SLC's sample checking process to verify household income. SLC will write to selected returning students who will need to complete a financial assessment form with income for the prior financial year (i.e. 2014-15), removing the need for students to provide paper evidence of household income.

EMA and WGLG (FE) - started course prior to 1 September 2015

SLC will continue to manually sample check this cohort of returning students to verify household income, requesting them to provide paper evidence for the preceding financial year (2015-16).

If a returning student starts a new/different course in AY 2016/17 or their personal status changes (e.g. from a dependent student to an independent student) the applicant may be subject to an electronic VHI assessment. If such a change occurs SLC will write to students to explain the process.

¹ <http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/media/9311/student-finance-wales-information-notice-02-2015-.pdf>

(iv) Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (VPR)

The Welsh Government is fully committed to playing a part in the resettlement of Syrian refugees through the VPR programme.

A technical change has been inserted to the EMA and WGLG (FE) schemes for AY 2016/17 to clarify that a person (or a family member of a person) granted humanitarian protection under VPR, and ordinarily resident in Wales, may be eligible to apply for EMA or WGLG (FE) support, subject to satisfying other eligibility criteria.

(v) Student Finance Wales - Administration

EMA and WGLG (FE) applications are administered by Student Finance Wales (SFW) which is a service provided by the SLC, providing financial support on behalf of the Welsh Government to students from Wales entering further or higher education in the UK. SFW's customer service telephone and application services are provided bilingually via telephone: 0300 200 450 or by visiting: www.cyllidmyfyrwrycymru.co.uk/ab / www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe.

We would welcome the support of learning centres and stakeholders to notify students through their normal communication channels that SFW provides a bilingual service and that EMA and WGLG (FE) application forms and other guidance forms for students and parents are available in Welsh. The forms can be downloaded via the above SFW web-links.