

Change of Circumstances and Overpayments Policy Guidance

Higher Education Student Finance in England 2013/14 Academic Year

June 2013

Attached is guidance for the 2013/14 student finance implementation project: **'Change of circumstances and overpayments policy guidance'**. [Please note: Paragraphs 38 and 56 of this guidance have been updated as of June 2013 to clarify policy intent.](#) If you have any enquiries on this guidance, please contact:

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Introduction

1. This chapter provides policy guidance to Student Finance England (SFE) on how to deal with changes in the circumstances of a student that may have an impact on their entitlement to support, and on the recovery of overpayments of grants and loans from students who have received support under the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 (as amended) which govern the provision for support for AY 2013/14.
2. This chapter deals with the following subjects:
 - students who have withdrawn from their course;
 - students who have suspended their study;
 - resuming payment of support; and
 - recovery of overpayments of loans and grants.
3. Policy guidance on previous study, including termination of eligibility and SFE discretion can be found in the 'Assessing Eligibility' chapter.
4. SFE should refer to the 'Assessing Eligibility' chapter for further policy guidance relating to students transferring courses. In all transfer cases, the written consent of the importing institution is required.
5. An 'overpayment' occurs, for example, when a student's entitlement is reassessed, and the result of this reassessment is that the annual entitlement to support is reduced to an amount less than that which the student has already been paid, or it comes to light that a student has been paid more than he is entitled to.

Policy

Withdrawals (Tuition payments)

6. There are separate provisions in the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 (as amended) and The Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 that govern payment of fee support and living cost support where a student has withdrawn from the course. These are summarised below.

Tuition payments: Full Time (All Current System students, including those beginning in 2013/14). The following paragraphs also apply to students commencing full-time distance learning courses on or after 1 September 2012.

7. From academic year 2012/13, tuition loans are paid to HEIs in 3 instalments. The first payment will be made early in the AY with the remaining 2 being paid shortly after the start of each term. Prior to academic year 2012/13, students became liable for the full tuition fee loan 3 months after the start of the AY. From 2012/13 this has now changed to students becoming liable at 3 liability dates. The students' liability for the fee loan extends at each liability date – becoming liable for the full amount if in attendance at the third and last liability date. HEIs will have to confirm attendance to SLC at each of the 3 liability dates to receive payment of each instalment. This affects withdrawals, suspensions and transfers for all current system students including those beginning in 2012/13 & 2013/14.

8. The tuition charge payment in the form of a loan is split into instalments of 25%, 25% and 50% of the total tuition charge for the academic year.
9. No tuition loans are payable unless the HEI confirm that the student is in attendance, ie if they withdraw before the course starts or never actually enrol. Only 25% of the tuition charge is payable in the form of a loan if the student withdraws during the 1st term, 50% if they withdraw during the 2nd term and the full 100% if they withdraw during the 3rd term.
10. Where a student withdraws from their course in AY 13/14, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills expects HEIs to charge that student in AY 13/14 a fee amount which is no greater than the amount of fee loan the student is liable to repay up to the date of withdrawal from the course.

Tuition payments – Part Time (Students who commence a part time course on or after 1st Sept 2012 – Part Time Tuition Loans)

11. No payment of part-time tuition loan will be released until the HEI has confirmed that the student has been undertaking their course for two weeks.
12. The part-time tuition loan will be paid to the HEI in three 'termly' instalments, following receipt that student is undertaking their course. The second and third instalments will be made unless the HEI confirms that the student has withdrawn or suspended their studies before the start of the 2nd term or 3rd term.
13. Where a student withdraws from their course during an academic year, the HEI should notify SLC as soon as reasonably possible before the next liability point so that the next instalment of tuition loan is not paid. The student will only be liable to repay the tuition loan instalments paid whilst they were an eligible student.
14. For students on part time courses that began prior to 1st September 2012 and remain on the 'Fee Grant package of support' the above paragraphs do not apply. Their entitlement following a change of circumstances should be assessed as normal as detailed in the specific 2013/14 guidance chapter for 'Part Time Students'.

Suspensions (Tuition payments)

15. If a student suspends their studies, the HEI should notify SLC as soon as reasonably possible before the next liability date. The following rules apply to tuition loan payments where a student has suspended study:
16. A student who suspends their studies during one term and resumes their studies either before the start of the next term or during the next term will be liable for the tuition charge instalment in the form of a loan for both terms. For example:

Student A starts a course on 1 September 2013 and the first tuition payment in the form of a loan (25% of the tuition charge for the academic year) is made to the HEI. The student suspends their studies on 1 November 2013. The student resumes their studies before the 2nd liability point. The 2nd 25% tuition loan instalment is paid to the HEI.

Student B starts a course on 1 October 2013 and the first tuition payment in the form of a loan (25% of the tuition charge for the academic year) is made

to the HEI. The student suspends their studies on 1 December 2013. The student resumes their studies after the 2nd liability point but before the 3rd liability point. The 2nd 25% tuition loan instalment is paid to the HEI.

17. A student who suspends their studies during the first term, remains suspended during the whole of the 2nd term and resumes their studies during the third term (on or after the 3rd liability date) will be liable for the first and third tuition charge instalments in the form of loans but not the second tuition charge loan instalment. For example:

Student C starts a course on 1 September 2013 and the first tuition payment in the form of a loan (25% of the tuition charge for the academic year) is made to the HEI. The student suspends their studies on 1 November 2013. The student resumes their studies after the 3rd liability point. The 2nd 25% tuition loan instalment will not be paid to the HEI. However the 3rd 50% tuition loan instalment is paid to the HEI.

18. Where a student suspends their studies before a liability point and informs the HEI, but the HEI does not notify SLC of this suspension until after the liability point (giving the effective date of suspension as occurring before the liability point) the payment made should be clawed back from the HEI on receipt of the suspension notification.
19. Where a student decides to suspend their studies before a liability point but does not inform the HEI that they are no longer undertaking the course, and the next payment of tuition loan **for a part-time course** is **automatically** made to the HEI, the student would be liable for that instalment of the tuition loan.

Transfers (Tuition payments)

Current System Students – Tuition Fee loans

20. Where a student transfers course and/or HEI after the start of the academic year, to a course with a different tuition charge, the total amount of tuition loan which can be paid out in the academic year will never exceed the highest tuition charge which the student has been subject to in that academic year.
21. Where students transfer courses between HEIs, it will be up to the HEIs to agree between them how to apportion the tuition fee for that term (but subject to the annual tuition fee that applied at the start of that term and the maximum tuition fee loan instalment paid for that term). Any change in the annual tuition fee for the new course will only be applied at the start of the next term; the amount already paid for the term in which the student transfers will not be adjusted.
22. Where a student transfers course and HEI mid academic year, the HEI to which they transfer will only receive a percentage of the maximum tuition charge for that course in the form of a loan. This will depend on when the student transfers. I.e. If the student transfers after the start of term 1, the new HEI will only receive 75% of the tuition charge for the second course in the form of a loan. If the student transfers after the start of term 2 the new HEI will only receive 50% of the tuition charge for the second course in the form of a loan, and if the student transfers after the start of term 3, the new HEI will not receive any further loan payment for tuition until the start of the following academic year.

23. Please see below for examples:

Student A commences a course in September 2013, for which the tuition charge is £6,000. Student A's attendance for the 1st term is confirmed and the first instalment of the tuition loan of £1,500 is paid.

During the 1st term, Student A transfers to a new course at a different HEI (HEI2) which has the same tuition charge of £6,000.

HEI2 will only receive 75% of the £6,000 tuition charge (£4,500) in the form of a loan for the second course. This total amount will be split 33% and 67% for instalments 2 and 3 respectively. (This equates to 24.75% and 50.25% of £6,000) Note -These figures are a slight variance on the normal 25% / 50% instalment split where a student studies on only one course during the academic year but are necessary to accommodate SLC's IT systems.

Student A's attendance is confirmed by the new HEI for the 2nd term and the second instalment of £1,485 is paid to HEI2.

Student A's attendance is confirmed for the 3rd term and the third instalment of £3,015 is paid to HEI2.

Student B commences a course in September 2013, for which the tuition charge is £6,000. Student B's attendance for the 1st term is confirmed and the first instalment of the tuition loan of £1,500 is paid.

Student B's attendance for the 2nd term is confirmed and the second instalment of the tuition loan of £1,500 is paid.

Student B transfers during the 2nd term to a new course at a different HEI, which has a higher tuition charge of £9,000

HEI2 will only receive 50% of the £9,000 tuition charge (£4,500) in the form of a loan for the second course.

Student B's attendance for the 3rd term is confirmed and the third instalment of the tuition loan of £4,500 (50% of new TF amount) is paid.

Student C commences a course in September 2013, for which the tuition charge is £6,000. Student C's attendance for the 1st term is confirmed and the first instalment of the tuition loan of £1,500 is paid.

Student C's attendance for the 2nd term is confirmed and the second instalment of the tuition loan of £1,500 is paid.

Student C's attendance is confirmed for the 3rd term and the third instalment of £3,000 is paid.

Student C transfers during the 3rd term to a new course at a different HEI, which has the same tuition charge of £6,000. As liability date 3 has passed, no tuition loan payment is made to the new HEI

Old System Students – Tuition Fee Grants

24. For old system students, no grant for fees (regulation 108) or fee contribution loan (regulation 114) is payable if:

- a) before the expiry of three months from the beginning of the academic year the eligible student ceases to attend the course, and
 - b) the HEI has determined or agreed that the student will not return to the course again during the academic year in respect of which the fees are payable, or at all.
25. The relevant date (three months from the beginning of the academic year) will be 1st December, 1st April, 1st July or 1st October, depending upon whether the academic year of the course in question begins on 1st September, 1st January, 1st April or 1st July respectively. Therefore, if a student has withdrawn from the course before the relevant date, and the institution has confirmed or agreed that the student will not be resuming the course later in that academic year, or at all, no grant or fee contribution loan is payable for fees.
26. If, on the other hand, the student is in attendance on the relevant date but then withdraws later in the academic year, the grant for fees or fee contribution loan is payable. The fact that the student may withdraw later in the year, or may indeed have withdrawn by the time that the fees are actually paid, does not affect their payment. The only circumstance where the fee payment is revisited is where there is a revised financial assessment (for example, where a provisional assessment is converted into a final assessment following receipt of accurate financial details) that affects the amount of grant for fees that an old-system student is entitled to for that academic year.

Grants and loans for living costs (general)

27. Regulation 107(b) defines a 'payment period' as a period in respect of which an instalment is payable, or would have been payable if the student's period of eligibility had not terminated.
28. The loan for living costs is paid in respect of three academic quarters in the academic year (which is defined in Regulation 2(1) as a period of 12 months). An academic quarter usually corresponds to a term. The three academic quarters may not however comprise 75% of the academic year. The loan for living costs does not cover the academic quarter in which the longest vacation falls, or in the case of a compressed degree, any one of the four academic quarters. The long courses loan does not cover any one of the four academic quarters. Both loans for living costs and long courses loans are paid in three instalments. Where the first instalment of is paid in the first quarter of an academic year, the loan is payable in three instalments of 33% for the first quarter, 33% for the second quarter and 34% for the third quarter. Where the first instalment of loan is paid in the second quarter, it is paid in two instalments of and where the first instalment is paid in the third quarter, the whole amount for the academic year is paid in one instalment.
29. Where students withdraw part-way through a payment period, regulations 109(14) and 109(15) gives SFE discretion to determine whether a payment of grant for living costs should be made in respect of the whole of that payment period or only for the portion of that period during which the student was undertaking the course.
30. Regulation 109(11) provides that no grants for living and other costs are payable in respect of a payment period beginning after an eligible student's period of eligibility terminates. This covers cases where the student has withdrawn from, abandoned or been expelled from their course; cases

where students' eligibility has been terminated because they have shown by their conduct that they are unfit to receive support; and cases where students' eligibility has been terminated because they have failed to provide requested information or who have knowingly provided materially inaccurate information. SFE does not have discretion to determine otherwise in these circumstances. Discretion is limited to the payment period during which the student withdraws from the course.

31. Regulation 116(4) provides that the first instalment of a loan for living costs or long courses loan (or in cases where the support is not being paid in instalments, any payment of a loan) must not be paid to an eligible student before the institution has sent an attendance confirmation, unless an exception applies. Regulation 116(5) provides that an exception applies if SFE determines that owing to exceptional circumstances it would be appropriate to make a payment without receiving an attendance confirmation.
32. Regulation 116(11) provides that no loans for living costs or long courses loan are payable in respect of any payment period beginning after an eligible student's period of eligibility terminates.
33. Since September 2008, any student who has been a prisoner within the academic year will not be entitled to any maintenance support whilst they are in prison. Maintenance support will be calculated on a pro-rata daily basis excluding the time in prison (see regulations 38(10) and 116(9)).

Grants for living costs

34. Maintenance Grant (MG), Special Support Grant (SSG), Higher Education Grant (HEG), Adult Dependants' Grant (ADG) and Parents' Learning Allowance (PLA) are payable in respect of a full 'academic year' (which is defined in Regulation 2(1) as a period of twelve months) and are intended to support students for this whole period of 365 days. (This differs from the loan for living costs which is paid in respect of three academic quarters in the academic year. The three academic quarters may not comprise 75% of the academic year). The maintenance grant, special support grant and dependants' grants (Parents learning allowance, adult dependants' grant and childcare grant) are paid in three equal instalments by SLC at the start of each term.
35. Where a student withdraws from their course part-way through a payment period, a reassessment of these grants should normally be based on the number of days that the student was undertaking, or can be treated as undertaking, the course from the first day of the academic year to the date of withdrawal.
36. However, under regulations 109(14) and 109(15) SFE has discretion, taking into account the student's circumstances, to extend the student's eligibility in respect of grants for living and other costs to the end of the payment period in which the student leaves the course. If a student who has attended their course in the AY ceases to attend that course as a result of going to prison, all payments should cease from the time of withdrawal and no discretion is to be given.

Example

Student A has an academic year starting 1 September.

His PLA entitlement for a full year, after income assessment, is £900.00.

Student A leaves his course on 25 October.

The first term ends on 13 December.

SFE determines that PLA should not be paid beyond the date of withdrawal.

Therefore number of days for reassessment purposes = 55 (1 September – 25 October).

So, revised entitlement is as follows:

$$55/365 \times £900 = £136$$

37. Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs), Childcare Grant (CCG) and Travel Grant (TG) are based on a student's actual requirements. Where the student withdraws part-way through a payment period SFE has discretion under regulations 109(14) and 109(15) to extend the student's eligibility in respect of grants for living and other costs to the end of the payment period. However, the very nature of the DSAs, CCG and TG are that they are based on a student's actual requirements in respect of expenditure incurred whilst undertaking the course. Therefore, the fact that support may be extended to the end of the payment period in which the student withdraws from the course does not mean that these three grants should continue to be paid.

Loans for living costs

38. Where a student withdraws at the end of a term, it will not be necessary for SFE to reassess the amount of loan payable if the loan amount was properly calculated. The system will calculate the student's revised loan entitlement on the basis of 33% of the assessed loan where the student leaves the course at the end of first term, 66% at the end second term and 100% if the student completed the full year. The loan will be recovered in the normal way through the income contingent repayment procedure. This applies to all students including those who cease to attend that course on commencement of a custodial sentence, all payments should cease from the date of withdrawal.
39. Loans for living costs should not be paid beyond the date of withdrawal, where the withdrawal happens midway through a term, the system will reassess the loan entitlement. The revised loan entitlement is calculated using the method outlined in the following worked example.

Student B, a 2012 cohort student, has an academic year starting 1 September. There are 75 days in the first term. He is eligible for the full 'elsewhere' rate of loan (£5,550).

Having received the instalment of loan payable in respect of the first payment period, Student B leaves the course on 3rd October (having attended for 33 days) and does not return.

SFE decides that Student B is only eligible for support for the number of days that he was undertaking the course.

The student's revised entitlement is as follows:

Maximum loan: £5,500 (full 'elsewhere' rate)

Number of days attended in term: 33
Number of days in term: 75
Number of terms in academic year: 3

$$\frac{33}{75} \times £5,500 = £2,420 \div 3 = £807$$

Reassessment of a student's loan entitlement resulting in an underpayment

40. When a student withdraws from a course it is possible that they are entitled to a higher amount of loan than they have so far claimed (for example, because their original assessment, which was provisional, has now been finalised). Regulation 89(3) provides that where an eligible student has applied for a loan for living costs or long courses loan of less than the maximum amount to which he is entitled in relation to the academic year, he may apply to borrow an additional amount which, when added to the amount that he has already applied for, does not exceed the relevant maximum applicable in his case. Please note: Regulation 89 (3) can apply in circumstance other than when a student withdraws from a course.

EXAMPLE:

Student C, a 2012 cohort student, begins a course in October 2013, having been assessed as entitled to £3,575 for the year (the 65% non-income assessed element of the £5,500 'elsewhere rate'), payable in three instalments of 33%, 33% & 34% or £1,180, £1,180 and £1,215.

Student C then withdraws from the course in the December of the same academic year. He receives a revised support notification from SFE, showing his loan entitlement for the period in which he withdrew to be £1,526.

As he only received £1,180 in October he may apply for the remaining £346 if he wishes to, provided that he does so not later than one month before the end of the academic year, or one month after the date on which he receives the revised support notification, whichever is the latter.

Extra weeks' loan / Long courses loan

41. Where students have in an academic year attended their course for longer than 30 weeks and 3 days, they may be eligible for long courses loan (or extra weeks' loan as it is known for most students who commenced their course before 1st September 2008). The amount of extra weeks' loan / long courses loan is added to the main student loan and paid in three instalments of 33%, 33% and 34%. Students are only eligible for the extra weeks' loan / long courses loan when they have attended for at least 30 weeks and 3 days.
42. If they have not attended for more than 30 weeks and 3 days a reassessment should be processed showing the amount of main student loan reassessed less any extra weeks' loan / long courses loan.

EXAMPLE:

Student D is a 2012 cohort student who commenced study in September 2013 and his course has an academic year of 33 weeks.

Original assessment:

Student loan: £5,500 (full 'elsewhere' rate)

Long courses loan:	£249 (3 extra weeks @ £ 83 per week)
Total loan for year:	£5,749
Student D withdraws during the first quarter, therefore:	
Loan received in first quarter:	£1,897 (33% of £5,749)
Loan due on reassessment:	£1,815 (33% of £5,500).

The household contribution towards fees and living costs

43. In cases where the student's residual household income **includes the income of his or her parents**, the Regulations make no provision for the apportionment of an assessed student contribution except in a case where more than one member of a family is receiving support. In the case of someone who is the only student in the family and who leaves their course, the assessed household contribution is not altered as the parents' residual income has been included in the calculation of household income. The student's annual entitlement is calculated on the basis of the assessed household contribution for that year, and that entitlement is then reduced in accordance with the Regulations. The following example helps to illustrate this:

Student E is an old system student eligible for the 'elsewhere' rate of loan (£4,745). His residual household income is such that the contribution is assessed as £1,400.

As an old system student this will offset the full £1,380 tuition fee and leaves a balance of £20 to be offset against Student E's loan entitlement. Student E leaves the course at the end of the first term and does not return.

As a result, he is only eligible for support in respect of the first quarter of the academic year. His revised entitlement will be as follows:

a) 33% of full-year loan rate (£4,745) = £ 1,565.

b) £1,565 less the assessed household contribution to the loan (£20) gives a loan entitlement of £1,510.

Student F is a 2012 cohort student eligible for the 'elsewhere' rate of loan (£5,500). Her residual household income is such that the contribution to loan for living costs is assessed as £300. She is not eligible for any supplementary support products (Adult Dependents' Grant, Childcare Grant, Parents' Learning Allowance, Long Courses Loan or Travel Grant); therefore this is the only contribution that is applied to her.

As a 2012 cohort student this will offset against Student F's loan for living costs entitlement. Student F leaves the course at the end of the first term and does not return.

As a result, she is only eligible for support in respect of the first quarter of the academic year. Her revised entitlement will be as follows:

a) 33% of full-year loan rate (£5,500) = £ 1,633.

b) £1,633 less the assessed household contribution to the loan for living costs (£300) gives a loan entitlement of £1,333.

44. This same principle will apply where the household income includes the income of a spouse, civil partner or partner. It will also apply if more than one member of the household is an eligible student and a split contribution has been calculated. In a split contribution case the same procedure outlined in examples E and F above should be followed but the "assessed

household contribution” will be that proportion of the contribution which has been allocated to the student.

Suspensions (general)

Circumstances when a student may suspend their studies

45. Some full-time students may have to interrupt their studies for a variety of reasons. These may include illness, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, financial difficulties, bereavement or premature termination of a work placement. In some of these cases, when the students are ready to resume their studies, their institutions may not allow them to do so immediately. The institution may often require the student to wait until the beginning of the next academic year, or require the student to resume their studies at some later point in the next academic year, for example at a point comparable to when the student had left the course in the previous academic year.

Reassessments for students who are absent from their course

46. Regulations 109(17) and 116(12) relate to a relevant payment period during any part of which a student is absent from the course. Regulation 109(17) provides that no grants for living and other costs shall be payable during that period, unless the Secretary of State determines that, taking into account the circumstances of the individual case, part, or indeed all, of the grants otherwise due in respect of that period may be paid. Regulation 116(12) makes similar provision for loans for living costs and long courses loans.
47. In the case of full-time undergraduates, regulation 109(19), in the case of grants for living and other costs, and 116(14), in the case of loans for living costs and long courses loans, allow for an automatic disregard of absence for 60 days if the student is ill. Such students are eligible for full support during this period. Institutions may also make payments from the Access to Learning Fund during this period. If a student has spent any time in prison the first 60 days are not disregarded in these cases.
48. Regulations 109(17) and 116(12) respectively give SFE the discretion to determine that all or part of the grant or loan support due is payable where the student is absent from the course for reasons other than illness, or where the illness exceeds 60 days. Regulations 109(18) and 116(13) respectively provide that in deciding whether it would be appropriate to pay all or part of the grant or loan support, consideration should be given to:
- the reasons for the student's absence;
 - the length of the absence; and
 - the financial hardship caused by not paying all or part of the support.
 - If the student is in prison then no further support should be paid for that time.
49. In these circumstances, institutions also have discretion to make payments from the Access to Learning Fund, provided that SFE has determined that the student has not abandoned, withdrawn from or been expelled from the course.

Extending student support to students who suspend their studies

50. The lack of financial support has often led to financial hardship and to some students withdrawing from their courses. Clearly, it is not in the public interest for students to withdraw from their courses in these circumstances, given that any expenditure on their tuition fee and living costs support would therefore have effectively been wasted. This is not in the interests of either the student or the taxpayer. It is important that SFE use the discretionary powers available to them to avoid students having to drop out due to financial pressures.
51. SFE should be aware that their discretionary power to determine that part or all of the student support is payable can be exercised in circumstances other than illness. The list of circumstances in paragraph 45 is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. SFE should be particularly sympathetic towards those students who have dependants.
52. In deciding on the exercise of their discretion, SFE should consider each case on its own merits. SFE may wish to consider the reasons for the absence, whether the student will face financial hardship during their absence, and the prospect of the student returning to the course. SFE should also take account of how the institution treats the student's absence, particularly if the institution has given the student permission to be absent, and on what terms.

Benefit provision for students who have suspended their studies

53. Full-time students who have suspended their studies due to illness or caring responsibilities and who are required to wait until their institution allows them to rejoin their course are able to claim Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Housing/Council Tax Benefit from when they recover from illness or the caring duties end, until the day before they rejoin their course, but not exceeding one year.
54. JSA is not payable to students who are entitled to a student loan. However, JSA can be paid subject to the student satisfying the normal criteria for receipt of that benefit. JSA is payable up until the day before the student rejoins their course but not exceeding one year.
55. Students who have suspended their studies are not eligible for payments from the Access to Learning Fund while in receipt of JSA.

Students without financial support

56. Although JSA, Housing Benefit (and in future Universal Credit) may be available to students who are waiting to resume their studies following a period of suspension due to illness or caring, there may be cases where students do not qualify for benefits and may be left without any source of financial support. These may include:
 - Students waiting to rejoin their course after the expiry of one year since suspension;
 - Students who remain sick unless they are entitled to DLA; and
 - Students who cannot meet the work-related requirements for JSA (or in future UC) because they are doing significant amounts of study in preparation for their return to their course.

Procedures for suspending study

57. The administrative procedures to be followed when a student suspends and resumes study on the same course are set out in the 'Change of Circumstances: Administration' Guidance. Although SFE has the discretion to determine continuation of student support, HEIs and students themselves have an important role in this process. It is essential that there is prompt interaction between the student and the institution, and that institutions promptly notify SFE when students temporarily suspend, or indeed withdraw from their courses.
58. Students should, in the first instance and at the earliest opportunity, contact their institution. The suspension process should involve the student receiving support and advice from a range of staff at the institution, particularly course tutors, welfare and financial advisers. Institutions should consider the reasons for suspension and reach an agreement on the best course of action for the student, either withdrawal or suspension. The student and the HEI should agree the likely period of absence and then arrange to keep the position under review. The student should then ask the institution to complete the agreed 'Notice of Student Suspending Study' form (the 'Change of Circumstances: Administration' Guidance), confirming that they are suspending their studies, giving the reasons for suspending and providing an agreed date of return.
59. It is the responsibility of institutions to notify SFE as soon as it is agreed that the student will suspend study. The student should also be advised to approach SFE, requesting that they be assessed for continued support if required. Whenever possible a joint approach to SFE from the institution (supporting the case to extend student support) and the student is recommended. The process would enable SFE to make a timelier and better informed decision on whether to continue student support, and it would also reduce the possibility of confusion arising over whether a student has withdrawn from the course or has suspended their studies.

Students suspending their studies and returning later in the same term (tuition payments)

60. All current system students who suspend their studies during one term and resume their studies either before the start of the next term or during the next term will be liable for the tuition charge for both terms. For example:
- Student A** starts a course on 1 September 2012 and the first tuition payment (25% of the tuition charge for the academic year) is made to the HEI. The student suspends their studies on 1 November 2012. The student resumes their studies before the 2nd liability point. The 2nd 25% tuition loan instalment is paid to the HEI.
- Student B** starts a course on 1 September 2013 and the first tuition payment (25% of the tuition charge for the academic year) is made to the HEI. The student suspends their studies on 1 November 2013. The student resumes their studies after the 2nd liability point but before the 3rd liability point. The 2nd 25% tuition loan instalment is paid to the HEI.
61. For **Old System** Students who suspend their studies for whatever reason but then return to the course during the same term, regulation 108(4) will not apply. The full fee will still be payable even if the break in study occurs during the term in which the fee payment becomes due. Thus, if a student starts to attend in September, then suspends studies on 27th October but returns to the course on 4th December, the full fee will still be payable, even

though the student will not actually be attending the course on 1st December (see also paragraph 21).

Grants and loans for living costs

62. In accordance with regulations 109(17) and 116(12) no grants or loans for living costs will be payable during the period in which the absence falls, unless SFE decides that, in view of the circumstances underlining the absence, payment should be made either in full or in part. If the period of absence falls across two periods, then whether or not the student should receive support during either of those two periods will depend upon the extent of the absence in each period. If the absence covers more than half of one period, then the student might not receive support at all for that period. Again, SFE has the discretion to decide whether or not it would be appropriate to pay full or only partial support, or none at all, in respect of either of those two periods. If a student spends any time in prison they are ineligible for any support whilst serving a custodial sentence.
63. Where the student is deemed to be eligible for support for only part of the academic year, the Regulations do not allow the assessed student contribution to be reduced.

Students suspending their studies and returning later in the same academic year

64. For Example:

Student H is a 2012 cohort student and begins the second year of his course in September 2013. However, he suspends his attendance in October, having attended for 45 days of the first term and having received payment of the instalment of maintenance loan due in respect of the first period. There are 75 days in the first term.

Student H is eligible for the £5,500 'elsewhere' rate of maintenance loan. As a current system student his household income is below the threshold where a contribution would be applicable.

However, instead of returning to the original course, **Student H** starts a new course in January, the academic year of which runs from 1st January to 31st December.

STEP 1: SFE will need to action the case as a transfer.

Original course

Student H was attendance on 1st September and will not return to the original course. Therefore 25% fee loan is payable in respect of the original course.

New course

Student H starts the new course in January. As the academic year of the new course runs from January to December his maintenance loan entitlement for the first academic year of the new course will still be payable in three instalments, the first becoming due in the quarter beginning on 1st January. SFE should reassess as follows:

Student H is eligible for the £5,500 'elsewhere' rate of maintenance loan, with no household contribution applicable.

SFE would calculate maintenance loan entitlement as normal, and adjust payment accordingly, taking into account any overpayments from a previous assessment.

Overpayments

65. In order to provide the maximum amount of flexibility, the Student Support Regulations for academic year 2013/14 allow for an overpayment of any **grant for living and other costs** to be recovered from any other grant that is payable to the student in respect of a later academic year of the same or a different course under regulations made under section 22 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (regulation 119(3)). Recovery of overpayments under this regulation should only need to be implemented following the action detailed in paragraph 69-71 below. I.e. after any overpayment of a specific grant is deducted from further instalments of that grant due in that academic year (or other grants if deductions from the original grant still leave an outstanding overpayment)..
66. All withdrawals and suspension will be treated in the same manner so recovery is possible whether the student stays on the same course or changes course, irrespective of whether the course is full-time, part-time or postgraduate.
67. Prior to AY 2012/13, the Regulations allow SLC to recover a maintenance loan and/or grant overpayment directly from the student. There was previously no discretion to do so for overpayments of **tuition** as overpayments of these loans had to be recovered directly and immediately from the HEI. From Academic year 2012/13 onwards, the regulations (see regs 117, 118 and 157) allow SLC some discretion in certain circumstances to recover the overpayment directly from the student through the normal Income Contingent Repayment process.
68. The Student Support Regulations allow for an overpayment of **loan for living costs or long courses loan** to be recovered from any further loan for living costs which is payable to the student (regulation 119(11)), regardless of whether the student withdrew or suspended their studies. Where part or all of an overpayment of a loan for living costs or long courses loan is outstanding when the student leaves or completes his course, the method of recovery will depend on the circumstances in which the overpayment occurred.

Overpayments of grants for living and other costs

69. Regulation 109(20) applies where SFE has already paid out grants for living and other costs and then reassesses the amount due.
70. If the amount of grant to be paid has increased, SFE should process the reassessment as soon as possible. The student's instalments of grant for the year will be increased to reflect the increased entitlement to support.
71. If the reassessment results in a **reduction** in entitlement to grant, the amount overpaid will be recovered in full from the next instalment(s) of that grant or any other grants which remain to be paid within the current academic year.
72. The student will receive a payment schedule letter detailing the amounts to be recovered.

73. If there is still an amount outstanding after any remaining instalments of grant due in the current academic year have been reduced to zero, then that amount is to be recovered in accordance with regulation 119.
74. Regulation 119(3)(a) provides for an overpayment of grant for living and other costs to be subtracted from 'any kind of grant payable to the student from time to time pursuant to regulations made under section 22 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998'. In other words, the overpayment may be recovered from a grant payable in respect of a later academic year of the current course, or in respect of a later course (irrespective of whether the later course is full-time, part-time or postgraduate).
75. Alternatively, under regulation 119(3)(b) SFE may recover an overpayment of a grant for living and other costs by taking such other action as is available. For example, where the student is no longer attending the course, SFE may seek to recover the overpayment directly from the student, for example by initiating proceedings in the county court.
76. SFE is obliged by regulation 119(2) to recover overpayments of grants for living and other costs unless they consider that it is not appropriate to do so. They may, however, exercise discretion as to how and when to go about this. For further information please see: Change of Circumstances and Overpayments Administration Guidance, section Overpayments Administration Guidance from section 73.

Disabled Students' Allowances paid to third parties

77. DSAs are generally paid direct to the suppliers of equipment or other support. It is an option for SFE to recover an overpayment of grants for living or other costs from DSA monies earmarked to pay a supplier.

For example, a student is assessed to be eligible for DSAs and equipment worth £3,500 is ordered from a supplier. It subsequently comes to light that there is an overpayment of grants for living and other costs of £1,000 outstanding from a previous course. SFE has the option to recover the overpayment from the DSA monies earmarked to pay the supplier. This will mean, of course, that the student's remaining DSA is not enough to pay the supplier in full. The question then arises as to who is liable to pay the balance. Whether SFE is liable will depend on the facts of the particular case, and before seeking to recover an overpayment from DSA money earmarked to a supplier SFE should satisfy itself that it will not be liable to pay the supplier.

Equipment supplied before the student starts the course / delivered after the student has left the course

78. A DSA assessment may be provided before a student has started their course to ensure that any equipment or other support that they need can be arranged and delivered for the beginning of term. In some cases it may be appropriate to supply DSA equipment early as well, for example where training in the use of the equipment is necessary before the student starts their course. However, if the student subsequently does not start the course, this may constitute an overpayment (see regulation 119(4) in the case of a full-time student, regulation 156(5) in the case of a part-time student or regulation 168(4) in the case of a postgraduate student).
79. Similarly, a student may start his course, then abandon it and then receive DSA payments or equipment after he has abandoned the course (possibly because SFE had not been notified that the student had left the course). This may constitute an overpayment (see regulations 119(6)-(8) in the case

of a full-time student, regulations 156(7)-(9) in the case of a part-time student or regulations 168(6)-(8) in the case of a postgraduate student).

80. SFE will be able to accept the return of the equipment, a monetary repayment or a combination of both. For example, where the student has received two items of equipment through the DSA, the value of the items is equal to the amount of the overpayment and it is possible to return one item to the supplier and secure a full refund but not possible to return the other item, the amount of the overpayment can be reduced by the amount refunded and paid to SLC with the student still having to make up the difference if the remaining amount of the overpayment cannot be recovered from any other grant for living and other costs.

Overpayments of loan for living costs or long courses loan

81. Regulation 116(15) applies where a loan for living costs or long courses loan has already been paid and SFE then reassesses the amount due.
82. If the amount of loan for living costs or long courses loan to be paid has **increased**, SFE should process the reassessment as soon as possible. The student's instalments of loan for the year will be increased to reflect the increased entitlement to support.
83. If the reassessment results in a **reduction** in entitlement to loan for living costs or long courses loan, the amount overpaid will be recovered in full from the next instalment(s) of loan for living costs or long courses loan which remain to be paid within the current academic year.
84. If there still remains an amount outstanding, then it is to be recovered in accordance with regulation 119.
85. The student will receive a payment schedule letter detailing the amounts to be recovered.
86. Regulation 119(10) provides that SFE may recover an overpayment of loan for living costs or long courses loan if:
- a) the overpayment is a result of a failure of the student to provide promptly information which might affect either his/her eligibility for a loan, or the amount of loan for which he/she is eligible; or
 - b) any information which the student has provided is inaccurate in a material particular; or
 - c) the student has failed to provide information which SFE considers to be material in the context of the recovery of the loan.
87. The method of recovery in these circumstances is either subtracting the amount of the overpayment from any loan for living costs or long courses loan payable to the student under regulations made under section 22 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 or such other action as is available.
88. Where the reason for the overpayment is not one listed in regulation 119, SFE may subtract the amount of the overpayment from any loan for living costs or long courses loan payable to the student under regulations made under section 22 of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998.
89. These methods for recovering an overpayment can be carried out before the income contingent repayment procedure begins.

Overpayments made as the result of an internal error

90. The Regulations do not specifically cover circumstances where a miscalculation by SFE results in a student receiving payment of a higher amount than he or she is entitled to. However, regulation 119(1) provides that an eligible student must, if required by the Secretary of State, repay any amount paid to him under Part 5 or Part 6 of the Regulations which **for whatever reason** exceeds the amount of support to which he is entitled under Part 5 or Part 6. And regulation 119(2) provides that the Secretary of State must recover an overpayment of any grant for living and other costs unless he considers it is not appropriate to do so.
91. SFE should always carry out the re-assessment even when the overpayment has resulted from an internal error. The circumstance that caused the overpayment to arise should be taken into consideration when negotiating the most appropriate method of recovery where the student is unable to make repayment in full. SLC will negotiate the recovery of the overpaid amount on a case by case basis and in line with BIS guidelines.