

## Education Fact Sheet: Help with school costs

### Who is eligible for financial help

As a parent, you may be entitled to certain types of financial help, depending on your financial circumstances. In some circumstances, financial help will be dependent on whether your child is of compulsory school age. In other cases, it will depend on what type of school your child is attending. Examples of financial help include free school meals, school milk, school clothing and school transport.

### Who may give financial help

The following organisations may give financial help:

- local **Education and Library Boards (ELB)** - must give you written information about what help they give with education costs, the criteria for getting this help and how you can apply
- **Governing Bodies/Parents' Associations** - may give financial help. If they do, they will usually publicise this in the information they give to parents about the school. You can find out what help is available from the Parents' Association or the Head Teacher
- **Charities** - some charities give grants to parents to help with the costs of education. These charities often have a limited amount of money to give and usually have very specific criteria which must be met in order to get a grant.

### Free school meals

Free school meals apply to pupils at grant-aided nursery schools, primary schools, special schools, grant-aided secondary or grammar schools and further education colleges for pupils who are under 18.

A pupil will be entitled to free school meals if:

- her/his parent is in receipt of Income Support, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or if s/he claims Income Support in her/his own name; or
- her/his parent receives Child Tax Credit (CTC) only (and is not eligible for Working Tax Credit (WTC) because s/he works less than 16 hours per week) and the award is based on a gross annual income of £16,190 or less; or
- her/his parent receives Working Tax Credit and the award is based on gross annual income of £16,190 or less **and** the pupil was born on or after 2 July 2000 and is in full-time nursery school, primary school or special school; or
- her/his parent receives the guarantee element of Pension Credit; or
- s/he has a statement of special educational needs and is designated to require a special diet; or
- s/he is a boarder at a special school; or
- s/he is the child of an asylum seeker supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Parents who have reduced their working hours below 16 hours per week or have stopped working are eligible for a four week run-on for Working Tax Credit. Children of these parents can qualify for free school meals during this period.

### **How to apply**

You must complete an application form which is available from your local Education and Library Board and may also be available from the school. This should be completed and returned to your local ELB.

### **School milk**

Free school milk is provided to all special school pupils, pupils in schools where school meals are not provided and to pupils with a medical certificate stating that milk is a necessary part of their diet. Milk is also available at a charge to pupils who do not qualify for free milk.

### **School clothing**

The school uniform allowance applies to primary and secondary school pupils. There is no assistance available for nursery schools.

A pupil will be entitled to the school uniform allowance if:

- her/his parent is in receipt of Income Support, Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or if s/he claims Income Support in her/his own name; or
- her/his parent receives Child Tax Credit (CTC) only (and is not eligible for Working Tax Credit (WTC) because s/he works less than 16 hours per week) and the award is based on a gross annual income of £16,190 or less; or
- her/his parent receives Working Tax Credit and the award is based on gross annual income of £16,190 or less **and** the pupil was born on or after 2 July 2000 and is in full-time primary school or special school; or
- her/his parent receives the guarantee element of Pension Credit; or
- s/he is the child of an asylum seeker supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

The school uniform grant is £35.75 for primary school pupils which includes a PE allowance.

The school uniform grant for post primary and special schools is £51 for pupils aged under 15 years of age (on 1 August 2011) and £56 for pupils aged over 15 years (on 1 August 2011).

A PE allowance of £22 is available for eligible pupils attending post-primary and special schools.

### **How to apply**

You must complete an application form which is available from your local Education and Library Board and may also be available from the school. This should be completed and returned to your local ELB.

## **Back to School Grant**

The Back to School Grant is a scheme run by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund to help those who have been affected by the Troubles with the cost of providing school uniforms, books, and other costs associated with the start of the school year.

To qualify for the grant, you must have a child in full-time education who is living at home and must, as a result of the Troubles:

- have lost either a parent, partner or child; or
- have been injured yourself; or
- be the primary carer for an immediate family member who has been injured.

The grant is not means-tested, that is, it does not depend on your income or savings. The grant is subject to available funding within the NI memorial fund

The Back to School Grant is £75 for each primary school pupil and £150 for each secondary or grammar school pupil.

To apply for a grant contact the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund on 028 9076 1166 for an application form.

## **School transport**

A child will only be eligible for assistance with transport costs to school if they attend a school which is beyond the statutory walking distance from home and the pupil has been unable to get a place in any suitable school within the statutory walking distance.

The statutory walking distance is:

- two miles for primary school pupils
- three miles for post primary school pupils.

The ELB can provide transport assistance in a number of ways including the issue of bus passes for public transport, provide its own transport, hire buses or taxis and the payment of bicycle or car allowances.

ELBs may also provide help to pupils who have special educational needs.

## **How to apply**

You must complete an application form which is available from your local Education and Library Board and may also be available from the school. This should be completed and returned to your local ELB.

## Education Maintenance Allowance

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a fortnightly payment of up to £60 for eligible students from low income families who stay on in education after the age of 16.

EMA is intended to help a young person cover everyday costs that have to be met if they decide to stay at school or college, for example, travel costs or books and equipment for their course.

For more information about EMA contact EMA Customer Services on 0845 601 7646.

## Further Education Awards

Financial support may be available for eligible students studying part-time and full-time further education courses. However the amount of money an ELB has available for these awards is limited.

Further information and application forms for further education awards is available from your local ELB.

## Further help

### Citizens Advice Bureau

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help you solve problems. To find your nearest CAB visit [www.citizensadvice.co.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk) or look under C in your phone book.

**This fact sheet is produced by Citizens Advice, an operating name of The Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as a full statement of the law. The information contained within the fact sheet applies to Northern Ireland only.**

**This fact sheet was last updated in July 2011 and is reviewed on a monthly basis. If it is some time since you obtained this fact sheet, please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check if it is still correct. Or visit our website [www.citizensadvice.co.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk) where you can download an up-to-date copy.**

Copyright © 2010 Citizens Advice. All rights reserved  
Registered charity no: XN85136 Registered in NI no: 17574

## Contact Details:

Citizens Advice, 46 Donegall Pass, Belfast, BT7 1BS

Telephone: (028) 9023 1120 Fax: (028) 9023 6522 E-mail: [info@citizensadvice.co.uk](mailto:info@citizensadvice.co.uk) Website: [www.citizensadvice.co.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk)