

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)**

### **1. Why is this credit being provided by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science?**

In recognition of the cost-of-living financial challenges facing eligible third level students funded through the Department, including apprentices, the Minister has announced an arrangement of measures to provide additional supports for students in 2023/24.

In accordance with the Budget 2024 announcement, the Government has decided to establish a scheme to provide for a once off reduction of 33% towards the student contribution charged to each eligible apprentice liable for the student contribution in the academic year 2023/2024 as a cost-of-living measure.

### **2. Who is eligible for the 33% credit towards the student contribution and criteria?**

Funding through this measure is only available to craft and consortia-led apprentices eligible in academic year 2023/24.

The Government will provide an amount equivalent to the 33% reduction per eligible apprentice directly to institutions to compensate them for the reduction in the student contribution

### **3. Processing of Personal Data**

Institutions shall not process the personal data of an apprentice or other person unless the apprentice or other person has consented to such processing. The consent of an apprentice or other person to the processing of their personal data for the purposes of applying this measure shall be provided in such manner as the institution may determine. The institutions shall process personal data for the purposes of this measure in accordance with the Data Protection Acts and the General Data Protection Regulation.

### **4. What is the process to avail of reduced student contribution for eligible apprentices?**

In the case of consortia-led apprentices, they do not need to contact their institution or apply for the credit as it will be automatically applied by the institution. In respect of craft apprentices where they are due a refund of an amount paid, institutions will contact the apprentice and seek the necessary bank account details to process a refund. Craft apprentices should provide these details to their institution by 30 November 2023.

## **5. What if apprentices have not yet paid their fee?**

Apprentices should make payments in line with the revised 2023/24 fee schedule of the institution. In this case, the fee to be paid by an apprentice should be 33% lower than the initial fee.

## **6. What if an apprentice has paid the full student contribution?**

Where craft apprentices have paid the full amount, an appropriate reimbursement (reflecting 33% of the fee they have paid) will be paid into the bank account the apprentice nominates for the refund. In the case of consortia-led apprentices, a credit will be applied to the apprentice's account as soon as is practicable but no later than 30 November 2023.

## **7. What if an employer has paid the full student contribution on behalf of the apprentice?**

The guiding principle for this initiative is to provide cost of living relief to apprentices using the same mechanism (i.e., relief on the student contribution) being applied to eligible higher education students. Any contractual arrangements that may be in place between an apprentice and their employer are not a factor for consideration under this measure and are strictly a matter to be resolved between those parties themselves. On that basis, the refund of fees will be made to the bank account nominated by the registered eligible apprentice.

## **8. How do apprentices apply for a refund?**

Where an apprentice is due a refund of a contribution paid, institutions will contact the apprentice and seek the necessary bank account details to process a refund. Apprentices should provide these details to their institution by 30 November 2023.

HEIs will process the bulk of refunds by 31 December 2023 and any remaining refunds will be processed by 31 January 2024.

For some apprentices it may be necessary for the HEI to provide a refund at a later date, on a case-by-case basis.

## **9. What happens if an apprentice drops out?**

Where consortia-led apprentices pay up front and then drop out, an appropriate refund will be issued later into next year as registration records are not finalised until Q2 2024 of the 2023/24 academic year. Where craft apprentices pay up front and then drop out, an appropriate refund of the 33% of the fee paid will be issued later into next year when the HEA receives verification of registration from SOLAS (likely Q3 2024).

## **10. Who will pay the difference of the 33%?**

DFHERIS will compensate the HEIs for the reduction in the student contribution of 33% per eligible apprentice. This will be paid to the HEA prior to the end of 2023 and disbursed to the individual HEIs based craft block allocations for Phase 4 and Phase 6 in Terms 1 - 3 in 2023/24 and consortia-led apprentice registrations as indicated by each consortium to the HEA as per Q3 2024 monitoring reports.

The HEA will seek a signed reconciliation report from institutions in Q3 2024 which will detail the number of apprentices registered on both craft and consortia led programmes. This will be verified with SOLAS registration data in respect of craft apprenticeships and data as returned in second monitoring reports in respect of consortia led apprenticeships.

### **Appendix 1:**

#### **Institutions to which this measure applies**

1. Atlantic Technological University
2. Dundalk Institute of Technology
3. Munster Technological University
4. South East Technological University
5. Technological University Dublin
6. Technological University Shannon: Midlands Mid-West
7. University of Limerick
8. National College of Ireland
9. Griffith College
10. Teagasc