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UNIVERSITY

Higher Education Childcare Fund

GUIDANCE

2025 to 2026 Academic Year



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba



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Government
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- ✓ Informing Choices
- ✓ Funding Futures
- ✓ Supporting Success

USEFUL CONTACTS

Student Awards Agency Scotland

Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
EDINBURGH
EH11 3UT
0300 555 0505

<http://www.saas.gov.uk/>

If you have any queries about eligibility or implementation of the regulations presented in this guidance, please contact the SAAS Policy Team who will be able to advise you further.

SAAS_Policy@gov.scot

Scottish Funding Council

97 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5HD
0131 313 6500

<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/>

The Students Loans Company Ltd

100 Bothwell Street
GLASGOW
G2 7JD
Freephone 0845 0738891

<http://www.slc.co.uk/>

The Scottish Government

Student Financial Support Team
Atlantic Quay
150 Broomielaw
Glasgow
G2 8LU

<https://www.gov.scot/>

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
ABOUT THE FUND	4
ELIGIBILITY	7
ELIGIBILITY TABLE	7
RESIDENCE	8
AGE	8
ENGAGEMENT	8
ATTENDANCE	9
PREVIOUS STUDY RULE/LINK TO TUITION FEE ELIGIBILITY	9
OTHER SUPPORT	9
ASSESSMENTS	12
HOW NEEDS ARE ASSESSED	12
ADVICE TO STUDENTS	13
FINANCIAL PROCESSES	14
DISBURSEMENT AND PAYMENT AMOUNTS	14
TREATMENT OF FUNDS BY INSTITUTIONS	15
ADMINISTRATION	15
ANNUAL AUDITED RETURNS	16

INTRODUCTION

These notes provide guidance to assist managers in the operation of the University Childcare Funds, which have been allocated to them by Scottish Ministers.

Universities should use these guidelines to assist them to devise suitable systems, for which they will be accountable, to undertake the receipt and disbursement of the Funds.

ABOUT THE FUND

Changes for 2025 to 2026 academic year

- The funds for the current financial year will be disbursed in August 2025 and April 2026.
- SFC issue separate 2025-26 guidance for the Higher Education and Further Education Childcare Funds in the college sector.
- Any unspent funds from 2025-26 should be returned to SAAS by 31 October 2026.

Purpose of the University Childcare Funds

The University Childcare Funds sit alongside the FE and HE Discretionary Funds and are available to all **eligible** students with childcare responsibilities. The funds provide assistance with the cost of **formal registered childcare expenses**.

However, it should be remembered that both FE and HE **eligible** lone parent students are **entitled** to a payment of **up to a maximum of £1,215 per year*** from the Childcare Funds and it is the institutions' responsibility to ensure that there are always funds available to make these payments to lone parents from the childcare funds.

*** These payments will be assessed taking account how much a lone parent student is paying for formal registered childcare and any other payments received for childcare costs from other sources.**

The university childcare funds have two elements, they are:

- **The Lone Parents Childcare Grant (LPCG) element** which will be an entitlement payment of **up to £1,215** per year to all **eligible** further and higher education students who are lone parents and who have formal registered childcare expenses while studying. **The LPCG is not income assessed.**

And

- **The Discretionary Childcare Funds** which all eligible students may apply to for financial help with formal registered childcare expenses. Payments from the Discretionary Childcare funds will be made at the discretion of institutions and based on an assessment of need.

The University Childcare Funds will continue to sit alongside the Higher Education Discretionary Funds (HEDF). Separate guidance for the HE and FE College Childcare Funds will be issued by the SFC.

Distributing body of Fund by Student Type

	Discretionary Fund	Childcare Fund	Lone Parent Childcare grant (LPCG)
College FE Student	SFC (FE Discretionary Fund)	SFC (combined HE/FE Childcare Fund)	SFC (combined HE/FE Childcare Fund)
College HE Student	SAAS (HE Discretionary Fund)	SFC (combined HE/FE Childcare Fund)	SFC (combined HE/FE Childcare Fund)
University Student	SAAS (HE Discretionary Fund)	SAAS (HE Childcare Fund)	SAAS (HE Childcare Fund)

Discretionary Childcare Funding in Universities

Full-time eligible HE students attending university will be able to apply for help for registered childcare costs from the University Childcare Funds, at the discretion of their university.

Full-time HE lone parent students will also be able to apply for **additional** help with registered childcare costs (over and above the Lone Parents Childcare Grant) from the University Childcare funds, at the discretion of their university.

Students with both Childcare and Discretionary Fund needs will continue to be able to access support from the main Discretionary funds, as well as the Childcare Funds, at the discretion of their university.

The differences between the Lone Parents Childcare Grant (LPCG) and the Lone Parents Grant (LPG)

The LPCG and the LPG are two different sources of funding for lone parents. The table below summarises the differences in the grants.

Grant	Non/Income Assessed	Administered By	How Much	Who Can be Assisted
Lone Parents Childcare Grant (LPCG)	Non-Income Assessed	College or University (Childcare Fund provided by Scottish Government)	Up to £1,215	Lone parent students who have to pay all or part of the cost for registered or formal childcare, and are in receipt of LPG.
Lone Parents Grant (LPG)	Income Assessed	SAAS (part of student's original funding application)	Up to £1,305	Single, widowed, divorced, separated or your civil partnership has dissolved, and you have at least one dependent child that resides with you and you care for over the majority of the week.

What is considered as 'Registered Childcare'

Childcare providers must be registered with the Care Inspectorate. Individual child minders must also be registered but nannies do not have to. However, the Childcare Fund can be used by students who use nannies that are recruited through agencies that are registered with the Care Inspectorate.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility Table

Residence

Ordinary Residence

Other Residency Exceptions

Age

Attendance

Previous Study

Other Support

Maintenance Loan

Tuition Fee Loan

Postgraduate Students

Other Childcare Support available to students with childcare costs. – Scottish Domiciled Students

English Domiciled Students (HE students only)

Northern Irish Domiciled Students

Welsh Domiciled Students

Nursing and Midwifery Students

ELIGIBILITY TABLE

Eligible to apply:	The College Childcare Funds (FE and HE Students)	The University HE Childcare Funds
<u>Domicile/residence</u>	SFC Guidance.	Is UK domiciled and meets residency criteria set out in the Education (Discretionary Funds and FE Bursaries) (Scotland) Determination 2023. Is ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date, as set out in The Student Support (Scotland) Regulations 2022 as amended
<u>Age</u>	SFC Guidance	Must be past compulsory school leaving age
<u>Eligible Courses</u>	SFC Guidance.	Must be attending an eligible full-time course of study, as defined by SAAS. This includes postgraduate courses that qualify for tuition fee loan funding from SAAS. Part-time students cannot access the Childcare Funds at university, however they can apply to the main Discretionary Fund for help with childcare costs.

Other Criteria	SFC Guidance.	Must have used full entitlement of all other available support such as student loan. HE lone parents should also have claimed the Lone Parents Grant from SAAS and have claimed Child Tax Credits and free nursery places etc., as provided by their local authority. Students must meet the eligibility criteria for tuition fees to be eligible for assistance from the Childcare Fund, apart from the Lone Parent Childcare Grant element.
Other Support	SFC Guidance.	Must be paying registered childcare costs.
Priority Groups	SFC Guidance.	Mature students, lone parents, care-experienced students, student carers, estranged students (Where it would not negatively impact on their ability to claim, or continue to be entitled to, income related benefits).

RESIDENCE

Ordinary Residence

To be eligible to apply for support from the Childcare Funds, students must meet the following conditions:

- ordinary residence in Scotland
- ordinary residence in the United Kingdom and Islands throughout the period of 3 years immediately preceding the relevant date; and be one of the following-
- settled in the United Kingdom within the meaning given by section 33(2A) (Interpretation) of the Immigration Act; **or**
- a person (who has not applied for refugee status) but has been informed in writing by a person acting under the authority of the Secretary of State for the Home Department that is thought right to allow you to enter or remain in the United Kingdom and been granted leave to enter or remain accordingly which has not expired; **or**
- the spouse, civil partner or child of a person described in the two preceding sub-paragraphs above.

Other Residency Exceptions

If a student is not eligible for support under the general residence conditions, they may still be eligible to apply to the Childcare Fund for support under one of the exceptions to the ordinary residence conditions. Detailed information about the exceptions to our residency criteria can be found at [SAAS Residency conditions](#). If you need further clarification on residency eligibility, please contact the [SAAS Policy Team](#), who will be happy to assist you.

EU nationals who are eligible for full living cost support will also be eligible to apply to the fund. As will those EU nationals with protected rights eligible for tuition fees only, who were here by the end of 2020, have pre-settled status, but haven't been in the UK for 3 years.

AGE

Students entering HE courses before they have reached their official school leaving date are not eligible to apply for support from the Childcare Funds.

ENGAGEMENT

Institutions must be satisfied that students are attending/undertaking an appropriate course of education and that their attendance/ participation and progression is satisfactory and in line with any other national or local guidance on this issue.

PREVIOUS STUDY RULE/LINK TO TUITION FEE ELIGIBILITY

HE Students must meet the eligibility criteria for tuition fees to be paid by SAAS in order to be eligible for assistance from the Childcare Funds. However, you can still award the Lone Parent Childcare Grant element to eligible students who are not receiving tuition fee support due to previous study rules.

There are currently no previous study rules that would have an effect a FE student's eligibility for assistance from the Childcare Funds.

OTHER SUPPORT

Maintenance Loan

Student loans are an integral part of the system of student support. Students who are eligible for a maintenance student loan are, of course, free to decide whether to take out a loan and, if so, how much to borrow.

However, a student must have taken out, or applied for, the full living cost loan/special support loan and/or bursary to which they are entitled before receiving help from the Childcare Fund. Institutions should contact SAAS if they are unsure whether a student has applied for any living cost support.

Tuition Fee Loan

Students do not have to take out the tuition fee loan, in order to apply to the Childcare Fund (for example, the course may attract a fee from SFC). However, universities should consider why someone had not taken out the tuition fee loan, and whether that decision was impacting on their request for Childcare support.

For example, if a student chose to pay their own fees and not take out a tuition fee loan; does that impact on their need to cover childcare costs from elsewhere?

Postgraduate Students

'Taught' Postgraduate Diplomas and Masters courses now attract a living cost loan and a tuition fee loan from SAAS. Eligible students must take out the full living cost loan before accessing support from the Childcare Fund. Students in receipt of an Educational Psychology training grant as part of the two year MSc in Educational Psychology will not be entitled to support from the Lone Parents Childcare Grant (LPCG) and Discretionary Childcare Funds.

Other Childcare Support available to students with childcare costs. – Scottish Domiciled Students Only

Type of Support	Description	Further Information
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Tax Credits.	<p>Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will pay Child Tax Credit to those responsible for at least one child, whether or not they are in paid work.</p> <p>Students who are working or have a partner who is working may be eligible for Working Tax Credit. Where both members of a couple work at least 16 hours per week, Working Tax Credit can include help with registered childcare costs.</p> <p>Universal credit will replace Tax Credits over the next few years. Universal credit can help with childcare costs for people in work, and provides financial support for parent students who have a low income.</p>	<p>Further information on Tax Credits is available at https://www.gov.uk/benefits-credits/tax-credits or by calling 0345 300 3900</p>
Free School Meals	<p>Students who are in receipt of Child Tax Credit or some other benefits may also be eligible for free school meals.</p>	<p>Students should contact their own local authority for more information</p>
Lone Parent Grant	<p>HE Students who are widowed, divorced, separated or single with at least one dependent child are eligible for the Lone Parent Grant from SAAS. Institutions should ensure that they have claimed their full entitlement of Lone Parent Grant from SAAS when assessing any need for support through the Childcare Funds.</p>	<p>Further Information can be found at Living Costs Grants - SAAS</p>
Funded Early Learning and Childcare	<p>Funded early learning and childcare is free to parents, but funded by the Scottish Government.</p> <p>Parents can get up to 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare a year (around 30 hours a week in term time) if their child is 3 or 4 years old.</p>	<p>Further information can be found at Funded early learning and childcare</p>

English Domiciled Students (HE students only)

HE English domiciled students studying in Scotland may be able to receive a Childcare Grant from their funding body if they are using certain types of childcare:

- Childcare provided by child-minders, nurseries and play schemes registered by the Care Inspectorate.
- Childcare provided by out-of-school-hours clubs registered by the Care Inspectorate on school premises and run by a school or a local authority.
- Childcare provided by an approved foster carer. (The care must be for a child who is not being fostered by the foster carer.)
- Childcare provided in the child's own home by (or introduced through) childcare agencies, sitter services and nanny agencies which are required to be registered by the Care Inspectorate.

These students would **not** then qualify for assistance from the University Childcare Fund, **although they would continue to be eligible for assistance from the general Discretionary Funds.**

The types of childcare that qualify for the English HE Childcare Grant have been extended to include other forms of childcare which qualify for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit (WTC) administered by HMRC. This means that childcare in Scotland and Northern Ireland which counts as qualifying childcare for the WTC childcare element, now also counts as qualifying childcare for the Childcare Grant.

Northern Irish Domiciled Students

Northern-Irish domiciled students studying in Scotland may be able to receive support towards childcare from the Northern Irish Government. More information can be found here:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/childcare/childcare-benefits-tax-credits-and-other-help-working-parents>

Welsh Domiciled Students

Welsh domiciled students studying in Scotland may be able to receive support towards childcare from the Welsh Government. More information can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/childcare/help-paying-for-childcare/?lang=en#content>

Nursing and Midwifery Students

Students supported under the Paramedic Science, Nursing and Midwifery Student Bursary Scheme are not entitled to help from the Childcare Funds. However, they may be eligible for help towards their childcare costs from the ring-fenced allocation of the main HE Discretionary Funds specifically for nursing and midwifery students, which is administered by SAAS on behalf of Scottish Government Health Directorate. Further information on the fund can be found on the [SAAS website](#).

[Return to Chapter index](#)

ASSESSMENTS

How Needs Are Assessed

Factors for Consideration in the Assessment of Need

Lone Parent Childcare Grant

Advice to Students

HOW NEEDS ARE ASSESSED

A balanced and proportionate approach should be taken when considering each application in regards to evidence submitted/ assessed. However, it remains at the discretion of each institution as to what evidence is permitted.

In addition to their application a student *may* provide:

- proof of accommodation costs
- a recent bank statement
- details of their weekly income/expenditure
- any other information you feel is relevant to assessing hardship

It is for universities to decide what evidence is required in order to verify the information provided by the student. However, in the interests of prudence and value for money, they should examine a random sample of cases to compare estimated expenditure with actual expenditure incurred. Students should therefore be informed that they may be asked to provide proof of actual expenditure later in the year. Institutions must remember, however, that payments from the Childcare Funds should only be made when the student has applied for their full maintenance student support and supplementary grant entitlement (if eligible).

Factors for consideration in the assessment of need

- Whether the claimed deficit between income and expenditure constitutes real need and cannot reasonably be reduced to a manageable level by the student.
- Whether the payment should be in instalments or in the form of a short term repayable cash advance and the frequency with which payments to individuals should be made and entitlement reviewed.
- The availability of support from alternative sources, e.g. bursaries, assistance from SAAS, assistance from another UK funding body (for students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or Social Security Scotland Benefits.
- The circumstances of students and types of need prevalent locally and any existing local schemes for improving access.
- In considering requests for support from the Funds from students who have temporarily suspended their studies through illness or who may be experiencing difficulty in finding a placement in industry as an essential part of their course, institutions should first check whether the student continues to be registered as a student. They should also take into account the prospect of the student resuming his or her course and the availability of support from other sources

Lone Parent Childcare Grant

Lone parent students who have to pay all or part of the cost for registered or formal childcare* can receive up to **£1,215** a year, depending on the cost of childcare from their university childcare fund. "Formal" childcare includes child-minders, after-school clubs and providers of day-care and education. (If full childcare costs are paid from other sources a student should **not** apply for this grant.)

The Lone Parents Childcare Grant is not income assessed but a student must provide evidence that they are a lone parent with registered or formal childcare expenses and details of funding for childcare from any other sources. *Please see [Annex A](#) for a suggested form that you may find useful for this purpose.*

Students must have applied to SAAS for the Lone Parents Grant (LPG) before they can be assessed for the LPCG, however students who have not received the LPG, perhaps because they were means tested 'out' of receipt are still eligible to apply for LPCG.

To confirm that the student is a lone parent, they might provide:

- a copy of the front page of their tax credit award and the relevant page which shows they have made a claim as an individual
- a copy of a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions which shows that they receive benefits as a lone parent.
- Details of their childcare provider and confirmation of how much they pay

If lone parents have childcare costs in excess of the maximum LPCG, they can also apply for additional help with childcare costs to the Discretionary Childcare Funds. In such cases, lone parents should be assessed for Discretionary Childcare Funding in the same way as other students.

ADVICE TO STUDENTS

Universities may receive enquiries about assistance from the University Childcare Funds before courses actually start. Those administering these Funds may advise prospective eligible students of the amount which they will receive on starting their course, especially lone parents' entitlement to the LPCG. In order to advise students the Discretionary Fund allocations need to have been finalised. This will vary each academic year so it might not be possible to advise students prior to the start of their course

[Return to Chapter index](#)

FINANCIAL PROCESSES

Disbursement and Payment Amounts

Summer support

Treatment of Funds by Institutions

Appeals, Applications and Decision-Making Process

Publicity

Treatment by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) of payments from both funds

Administration

Allocation and Payment of Funds

Transfer and Carry Forward of Funds- Universities

Annual Audited Returns

Universities Required by SAAS

DISBURSEMENT AND PAYMENT AMOUNTS

Assistance from the University Childcare Funds may be given in the form of a direct payment to the student or to a nominated third party, for example, a childcare provider.

When institutions choose to make direct payments to students they must ensure that students use the money for its intended purpose. It is up to individual institution to decide how best to monitor this proof for example, request receipts to show that the money has been passed to their childcare provider. Institutions should make it clear to students what their responsibilities are for example that they must use the money to pay their childcare provider immediately.

Institutions should remember to retain enough funds to help as many student parents as possible and to ensure that there are always enough funds to pay the LPCG to eligible students.

Childcare costs will only be met to cover the time a student is studying.

For example:

If a student is attending university for only three days we would not cover costs of nursery provision for five days.

Summer support

Some continuing students find that they need financial assistance late in the academic year to help support them over the long summer vacation. Institutions may wish to consider holding back some of the funds, and keep in place arrangements for considering late applications.

Universities and colleges will need to consider the circumstances of each case, particularly for those students who have childcare and/or caring responsibilities over the summer; are conducting a placement or other course related activity over the summer and therefore are limited in their capability to work during this

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period. There may also be other personal circumstances out with the student's control that affect their ability to gain employment over the summer.

Universities and colleges should also be mindful that some students may be able to claim benefits over the summer, whilst others may have managed to secure employment. This should be considered when assessing applications for support.

[Return to Chapter index](#)

TREATMENT OF FUNDS BY INSTITUTIONS

Appeals, Applications and Decision-Making Process

Institutions should have an appeals procedure in place for cases where students have applied unsuccessfully for help from the Childcare Funds. This procedure should be clear and students should be informed of their right to appeal. It will be for each university to resolve any appeals internally with individual students about the award of a payment from the funds.

Universities should have a transparent application and decision-making process. Again it will be for each institution to ensure that they have their own arrangements in place.

Publicity

Institutions are responsible for publicising the availability of these funds to their students. We would expect institutions to manage this via their own social media channels.

Treatment by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) of payments from both funds

Payments from the Funds should be disregarded as long as they are not intended for general living costs and do not, therefore, duplicate provision from the benefits system.

[Return to Chapter index](#)

ADMINISTRATION

Allocation and payment of funds

Universities will be notified in October of the amount allocated to them for the Childcare Funds and funds will be distributed in October and April

The University Childcare Funds will include the allocated budget for LPCG for HE students. The institutions will be advised of the percentage of funds that has been included for the LPCG payments.

The LPCG budget for higher education students attending college will be allocated by the Scottish Funding Council as part of the colleges' childcare funds. For HE lone parent students at university, SAAS will allocate the LPCG budget directly to the universities as part of their childcare funding.

Transfer and carry forward of funds- Universities

Universities can transfer money between funds to make best use of their allocations of Childcare and Discretionary funds and need not ask permission from SAAS before doing so.

Universities will not be allowed to carry forward any of their 2025 to 2026 academic year Discretionary Funds, including Childcare Funds.

ANNUAL AUDITED RETURNS

Universities: required by SAAS

Each year, when funds are allocated and paid by SAAS, Fund Accounts returns for the previous academic year are distributed to institutions for completion and submission to SAAS by 31 October. Each institution will provide SAAS with:

- Audited income and expenditure Fund Accounts for the preceding academic year, signed/authorised by the Principal and independent Auditor;
- Details of Funds expenditure;
- Repayment of any unused Funds, as recorded in the return.

Please see **the guidance for HE Discretionary Funds for this**.

Annex A – Application for Lone Parent’s Childcare Grant

If you have more than one childcare provider, you must fill in a separate form for each of them. Please therefore make the relevant number of copies of this form. Please also use black ink to fill in the form.

Section A: Your personal details

Name:	SAAS reference number: «students ref no»
Date of birth:	Your National Insurance No:
University:	

Section B: To be filled in by the student

<p>Please give us details of the registered or formal childcare costs you expect to pay during the period 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026. If your course begins in January or April, the 12 month period we need information for will begin on 1 January and 1 April respectively. The childcare provider you use must be registered with the Care Inspectorate in Scotland and must provide their registration number in the box provided. We will not pay for informal childcare, for example, a friend or relative. Please note that we regularly ask childcare providers to confirm that your child/children is/are registered with them. You must advise us immediately if you change childcare provider or of any change in your circumstances that may affect your entitlement to this grant. If we have paid you more than you are entitled to, we will ask you to pay this back. If you make a false claim, we will seek prosecution.</p> <p>We cannot help you with your childcare costs if you are getting them paid in full from another source. For example, your university. We will take the payment you expect to receive from other sources from your childcare costs for the year. If you expect to receive a payment from your local authority for pre-school education, you should tell us how much you expect this to be, even if you are still waiting to claim this back from the authority.</p>	
Childcare costs for the year: Please enter the total cost of registered or formal childcare that you expect to pay.	£
Childcare costs you expect to receive from other sources: Please enter the total childcare costs you expect to receive from other sources.	£
Total childcare costs: Please enter the total childcare costs for one childcare provider, less what you expect to receive from other sources.	£
Details of children	Date of Birth
Children’s Full name	

Section C: To be filled in by your childcare provider

<p>I confirm that I have agreed to provide childcare to the named child/children above and I will advise you immediately of any change to this. (Please note that it would be helpful if you could keep a record of when the above child/children are in your care and the cost of this care, as we may ask you for this information sometime in the future).</p> <p>Name, address and telephone number of registered (or approved) childcare provider:</p> <p>Name or Company Name</p> <p>Address.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Telephone number</p>													
My Care Inspectorate registration number is	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">C</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">0</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;">N</td> </tr> </table>	C	S	2	0	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
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Manager or Proprietor’s Name:.....Signature: Date:													