

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) – Learners

Advanced Learner Loans are for learners aged 19 and over studying at Levels 3 to 6. In this document we answer questions you might have. If you need more information speak to your college or training organisation.

Eligibility

Am I eligible for an Advanced Learner Loan?

To be eligible for one of these loans you must:

- be aged 19 or over (24 or over if your course begins before 1 August 2016) at the start of your course;
- be undertaking an eligible course at Level 3 to 6 (Level 3 and 4 only if your course begins before 1 August 2016) at an approved college or training organisation in England. See below for more details on which type of courses are eligible. Your college or training organisation will be able to confirm exactly which courses are eligible and if they're an approved organisation.
- be living in the UK on the first day of your course
- have been living in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for 3 years immediately before starting your course
- be a UK national or have 'settled status' (this means there's no restrictions on how long you can stay). You may also be eligible if you:
 - are an EU national or a family member of one
 - are a refugee
 - have humanitarian protection (as a result of a failed application for asylum)
 - are a migrant worker
 - are the child of a Swiss national
 - are the child of a Turkish worker

Does getting a loan depend on my income or credit history?

No. Getting a loan doesn't depend on your income and credit checks aren't carried out.

Repayments are based on your income and won't begin until your income is over £404 a week, £1,750 a month or £21,000 a year.

Is there an upper age limit for someone applying for a loan?

No. There's no upper age limit.

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Which qualifications can I get a loan for?

You'll need to be doing a Level 3, 4, 5, or 6 qualification which is eligible for loan funding. Level 3 to 6 qualifications include A Levels, Access to HE Diplomas and other Vocational Qualifications. These loans don't cover Degrees or other forms of Higher Education where separate student support arrangements exist.

You can get further advice on which qualifications are eligible for loans from your college or training organisation.

If you are 19 to 23 and are studying your first full Level 3 qualification you might be able to get a grant to help pay for your course. You can choose to fund your Level 3 qualification with either a grant or an Advanced Learner Loan, but you if you choose to fund it with an Advanced Learner Loan, you lose your entitlement to grant funding.

If your Learning Provider does not offer a grant-funded course, you'll need to find a Learning Provider that does. The National Careers Service will be able to advise you which Learning Providers in your local area offer the course you want to do with grant funding.

For advice on your future skills, career, work and life choices you can contact the National Careers Service at nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk or call an advisor on **0800 917 8000**.

What if I want to study a qualification that's not eligible for a loan?

If you want to undertake a qualification that's not eligible for a loan then you'd need to agree another method of funding the course with the college or training organisation.

Application Process

How do I apply for a loan?

Once you've identified the qualification you'd like to study you should contact the college or training organisation who can provide it. That college or training organisation will confirm whether there are places available on the course and give you a Learning and Funding Information Letter. You'll need the information set out in this letter to complete an application and submit this to Student Finance England.

Can I apply online?

Yes, applying online is quick and easy. You can register and apply online now at gov.uk/advancedlearnerloan

You can also download an application at gov.uk/advancedlearnerloan. If you need help, contact your college or training organisation.

Can I get impartial advice about managing my finances?

If you're unsure about taking out a loan and want to seek advice then you'll have the opportunity to do so. If you want advice on managing your finances, the Money Advice Service, established by the UK government, can offer free, impartial money advice. Visit their website at moneyadviceservice.org.uk

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Can I get independent careers advice?

If you're unsure whether the course you'd like to take is right for you, then you can find support and advice on the National Careers Service website at nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk or call their helpline on **0800 917 8000**.

What information do I need to provide when applying for a loan?

You'll need to provide details of the:

- course you wish to study;
- college or training organisation you wish to study at;
- fee you're being charged; and
- amount of loan you want to take out.

The college or training organisation will give you details about your course in your Learning and Funding Information Letter. You'll need to decide how much loan you want to take out.

You'll also be required to provide your personal details (name, address, etc) and evidence to confirm your identity. For UK passport holders this will just be your valid UK passport details (not a physical passport).

If you're a UK national but don't have a passport you'll be asked to provide another form of evidence such as a UK birth certificate, which will be returned to you.

If you're not a UK national you'll need to provide physical identity evidence, as well as evidence that you're a permanent resident inside the UK.

You'll also need to provide a valid National Insurance number so that the loan can be paid to the college or training organisation on your behalf.

I don't have a National Insurance number but I want to apply for a loan. What should I do?

A National Insurance number is required before the loan can be paid to the college or training organisation on your behalf. If you don't have a National Insurance number you can still apply for a loan. Student Finance England will contact you if you need to do anything to obtain one. This may mean that you'll need to arrange an appointment with your local Job Centre to have one assigned to you.

Can I apply for a loan after my course has started?

You should apply as early as possible to make sure Student Finance England can pay your college or training organisation at the start of your course. However, you can apply for a loan at any time during your course, but not after you've completed it.

If you wish to apply for a loan during your course, you'll need to agree this with your college or training organisation in advance, as you'll already have discussed with them how you're going to pay your fees. Deciding to take out a loan will change this arrangement.

The college or training organisation will also need to provide you with information so you can complete your application.

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How long will it take me to hear the outcome of a loan application?

Applications submitted online that don't require any further supporting evidence (because you've provided your valid UK passport details) will be processed quickly and you should hear from us within two weeks. If you don't apply online or you don't send us the evidence we ask for at the time of application it will take longer.

If my course lasts for more than one year do I need to reapply each year?

No. Your loan application will last for the duration of the course, even when that course lasts for more than one year.

What happens if I change my mind before I start my course?

If you decide before the start of your course you no longer want to undertake your course or you don't want to take out a loan for the course, log onto your online student finance account and follow the instructions. Your loan application will be cancelled and you won't have any loan to repay.

What happens if I change my mind once I've started my course?

No loan payments will be made to your college or training organisation on your behalf until you've attended the course for at least two weeks. If you leave the course after more than two weeks then you'll be liable to repay the loan payments that have been made to the provider on your behalf, for the time you have been on the course.

Fees

How much loan can I take out?

There's a maximum amount of loan available to you based on the type of qualification you're doing. Your college or training organisation will be able to advise you of this amount.

The fee charged by the college or training organisation may be less than the maximum loan amount available - so in this case you'd only need to take out a loan to cover the fee being charged.

You can take out a loan for the maximum amount to cover your fee or you can pay all or part of the course fee yourself.

Will I have to repay the full loan amount if I leave part way through the course?

No. Your loan will be paid to your college or training organisation in line with your attendance on the course. When you stop attending, payments will stop and you'll only be liable to repay the amount (including any interest accrued on that amount) that's already been paid to the college or training organisation.

If I leave my course part of the way through will I be required to pay the remainder of the fee to my college or training organisation even if my loan payments have stopped?

Before you enrol on the course you'll need to enter into an agreement with your college or training organisation. This agreement should include the fee they're charging you and what you'll be required to pay if you don't complete the course.

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How much of the course costs will the loan cover?

The loan should cover the fee charged by the college or training organisation. You'll need to agree with the college or training organisation upfront all of the costs associated with the course and that the loan will be able to cover these costs.

Can I get additional support to help with childcare and travel?

The Advanced Learner Loan only covers the fee you're being charged by the college or training organisation for your course. However, it's possible the college or training organisation will be able to provide financial support for course related costs for those facing financial hardship. Your college or training organisation will be able to provide you with more information on the help and support they can make available to you.

Loans

Will I be able to get a loan if I've already achieved a similar qualification (i.e. I already have A Levels)?

Yes. Previous qualifications you've achieved won't affect your ability to apply for your first loan. However, depending on when you started your course, you might not be able to get another loan to do the same type of course at the same level.

How many loans can I take out?

You can have up to a maximum of four Advanced Learner Loans in total.

If you started your course before 1 August 2016, you can only take out one loan at a time for non A Level courses and you can't get a second loan for a course of the same type and level as one you have already completed.

Examples:

If you want to do both a Level 3 Certificate and Level 4 Diploma at the same time, as part of your training to be an electrical engineer, you wouldn't be able to take out an Advanced Learner Loan for both these qualifications at the same time.

If you take out an Advanced Learner Loan to do a Level 3 Certificate in Plumbing, on completion of this course, you could then take out a second loan to do a Level 4 Certificate in Plumbing, which would be a course of the same type but a different level. However, having done a Level 3 Certificate in Plumbing you couldn't take out a second Advanced Learner Loan to do a Level 3 Certificate in Construction, as this would be a course of the same type and level of qualification.

If you start your course on or after 1 August 2016 you can apply for up to four loans at the same time for courses of the same type and level.

For A Levels you can apply for a loan to fund each course you take towards your A Levels - up to a maximum of 4 A Levels. This means you can have up to 8 loans if you're taking each A Level as 2 separate courses (AS and A Level if you start on or after 1 August 2015 or AS and A2 if you start before 1 August 2015). The courses must be in the same subject to qualify for a full A Level. You can get up to three more loans for non A Level courses once you have completed your A Levels.

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What happens if I change my mind about the course and want to do something different?

It'll depend on how much of the course you've undertaken. If you've done less than two weeks you can simply cancel the loan and this won't count against the total number of loans available to you. After two weeks on a course, the college will confirm your attendance and you'll become liable for the loan. It will count against the total number of loans available to you.

Before making this decision you should speak to your college or training organisation, as it may be possible to transfer to a new course under the same loan rather than having to apply for a new one.

What happens if I'm unable to complete my course and I'm forced to withdraw?

Where there are compelling personal reasons preventing you from completing your course this won't count as one of your four loans. You'll still be expected to repay any loan paid in connection with the course, but you'll be able to take out a loan to complete the course again.

Repayments

How will I pay back the loan?

Repayments will be automatically deducted from your income through the tax system from the April after you complete or leave the course and your income is more than £21,000 a year.

When will repayments start?

You'll be due to start repaying your loan in the April after you complete or leave your course.

You'll only start making repayments when your income is over £404 a week, £1,750 a month or £21,000 a year. If your income falls below these thresholds, repayments will stop and only re-start when your income is over these thresholds.

You can make voluntary repayments direct to SLC at any time in order to accrue less interest and pay off your loan more quickly.

How much will the repayment be?

Repayments will be made at 9 per cent of your income over £404 a week, £1,750 a month or £21,000 a year. For example, if your income is £25,000 a year then your loan repayments would be around £360 a year or £30 a month. The repayments are based purely on income, not on the amount borrowed or number of loans. So, regardless of how much you owe, the repayments will be the same. If your income falls below £21,000, repayments will stop and only re-start when your income increases to more than £21,000.

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What happens if I have more than one student loan?

You'll make a single repayment regardless of how many student loans you have, including HE and Advanced Learner Loans.

If you complete an Access to HE Diploma course, funded with an Advanced Learner Loan, and go on to complete an HE qualification, SLC will write off any outstanding balance on your Advanced Learner Loan.

How do I repay the loan early?

Voluntary repayments can be paid to the Student Loans Company at any point. You don't need to wait until your income is over £21,000. Any early repayment, either partial or full, will reduce the interest that will accrue. If you want impartial advice about repaying your loan or other debts you can contact the Money Advice Service at moneyadviceservice.org.uk

What happens if I can't repay the entire loan?

You'll only ever have to make repayments in line with your income if you earn more than £21,000. Any loan balances which remain after 30 years will be written off.

What if I declare bankruptcy?

Loans are excluded from your bankruptcy debts. This means that during and upon discharge from bankruptcy you remain liable to repay this loan.

What happens when I retire?

Loans repayments aren't taken from Pension Income, so if you retire and are paid a pension then you will only repay if you have other taxable income that is above £21,000.

What happens when I die?

If you die then your loan will be written off.

Is this the best value loan?

You'll need to consider whether it's the best thing for you in your circumstances. If you want impartial advice on managing your money contact the Money Advice Service at moneyadviceservice.org.uk

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If I move to another country following my course and my income is more than £21,000 do I still have to repay the loan?

Yes. If you go abroad we'll make arrangements with you to collect repayments while you're outside of the UK tax system. Your repayment threshold may vary according to price level indices for that country. You'll be required to pay a fixed instalment to be calculated by SLC.

Interest

How much interest will I be charged on the loan?

Some of the interest on your loan will be based on inflation (Retail Price Index (RPI)). The table below shows how interest is calculated.

	Interest rate
While you're studying and until the April after you finish or leave your course	Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 3%
From the April after you finish or leave your course	Interest will be based on your income. £21,000 or less – RPI £21,001 to £41,000 – RPI plus up to 3%, depending on income £41,000 and over – RPI plus 3%

What is RPI, and what happens if it changes?

The Retail Price Index, RPI, is a measure of UK inflation. It measures changes to the cost of living in the UK. The UK government uses the rate of RPI for many purposes, including setting the interest rate charged on student loans.

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