September 3, 2008

Press Statement on the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) payments delays.

Payment guaranteed for student funding help

The Learning and Skills Council has confirmed that all eligible students who apply for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and who may have experienced delays with the processing of their application form will get all the payments for which they are eligible. All payments will be backdated and no-one will miss out.

The EMA, managed by the LSC, was set up to keep students from less well-off families in education to improve their job and life prospects.

Every year hundreds of thousands of teenagers are eligible for the allowance. This year there have been some delays in the processing of the applications, managed by the contractor Liberata.

Trevor Fellowes, Director of Learner Support at the Learning and Skills Council, said: “We are committed to ensuring all young people eligible for EMA, get paid.

“No young person will lose out. We will backdate all payments for applications received within 28 days of when a course starts. This has always been our commitment, during the 5 years that EMA has been in operation.

“This year there have been some unacceptable delays in notifying learners that they are eligible and we are working closely with Liberata to make this happen. The company has taken on an additional 400 extra staff, at their expense, to ensure a swift turnaround.

“To date 157,000 applications have been fully assessed, and of these 133,000 youngsters have already been told they will receive their payment.

“The LSC estimates that about 150,000 applications are experiencing delays caused by technical problems. These will be processed over the next few weeks.

“Regrettably we have experienced some delays in the process, including some technical difficulties with the helpline, but we are committed to resolving these to make sure learners receive their money promptly”.

The contract was awarded to Liberata after a substantial and detailed procurement exercise, the normal practice across Government.
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