Learner Support Service stakeholder e-bulletin, September 2008

Welcome to the September e-bulletin from the LSC’s Learner Support Directorate. The e-bulletin provides information about the changes to the ways in which the LSC’s different Learner Support schemes are administered.

In this month’s edition, we update you on the issues we have recently experienced with the helpline and inform you about the temporary measures we have introduced to help young people severely affected by delays in processing Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) applications.

If you would like your name added to our distribution list please send us an email at learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

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1. Helpline problems resolved – lines now open

Last month we told you about some technical problems with our helplines, where some callers found it hard to get through to us or experienced engaged tones, or continued ringing.

We’re pleased to report that these problems have now been solved and both the learner and learning provider helplines are now open.

However, because of the high demand for the learner helpline, advisers are unable to take calls as quickly as we would like. Our supplier, Liberata, is taking on additional staff and opening new centres to solve this problem and answer calls more quickly.

Please note that the learner helpline is now open at weekends between 8.00 am and 4.00 pm to deal with calls about EMA.

Don’t forget that learners can also find out more about all of the Learner Support schemes including EMA and the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) by visiting http://moneytolearn.direct.gov.uk.

2. Financial support for EMA students

Mark Haysom, Chief Executive of the LSC, recently wrote to all colleges outlining a proposal to help them access funds to support learners affected by delays in processing EMA applications.

All eligible learners will, in time, receive their EMA payments and we are working hard with our contractor to ensure that this is done as quickly as possible. However, we are aware that a small minority of learners, might find themselves in a position of severe financial hardship as a result of the delay in the processing of EMA applications.

To help learners in severe hardship, we have put in place temporary measures to pay young people most at need. The LSC already provides discretionary learner support funds to help learners in severe financial hardship and we are actively encouraging colleges to offer to help learners suffering as a result of late EMA payments.

Colleges will consider individual requests and apply their existing hardship criteria when deciding who to help. It is not the LSC’s intention to use discretionary learner support funds to pay all those who have applied for EMA.
We have taken steps to address any immediate funding pressures on colleges so that they can offer support to young people while we work hard to sort out the current difficulties.

3. Processing ALG Applications

The problems affecting the processing of EMA applications do not affect ALG. There is no delay in processing applications.

ALG applications are assessed in a different location by a dedicated team and our supplier is notifying learners of the outcome of their application within three weeks.

So far this year we have had more ALG applications than ever before. We have received about 20% more applications than last year and are on track to increase participation in the scheme.

4. Update on the Learning Provider Portal and online application

Implementing the Learning Provider Portal

On 5th September, we launched version two of the Interim Learning Provider Portal (Interim LPP) to enable you to register and make payment decisions for 2008/09 EMA and ALG learners. This updated system also enables you to record end-of-learning and use your own or third party software.

We have had a number of questions from learning providers about the Interim LPP and have sent out super-user emails to answer these questions. Over the next few weeks we will continue to send users ‘hints and tips’ when there are important points to be clarified about the Interim LPP. In the meantime, if you have a question about the system please email: learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

Remember, this is only an interim system. The full Learning Provider Portal will be introduced later and will be similar to the images you may have seen presented at our training events earlier this year.

Online application system

As you may know, we took the decision earlier in the year to delay plans to introduce a new online application system.
We would like to reassure all learners and learning providers that an online application system is still very much part of our plans for our Learner Support schemes.

We do, however, want to make sure that the system is absolutely right before we make it available to learners. To that end we plan to introduce an online application system in good time for the 2009-10 academic year. We will of course keep you updated through future editions of this e-bulletin.

5. Using the Interim LPP to register ALG learners

We are issuing Letters of Entitlement, known as an LoE, to learners whilst we introduce the new Learning Provider Portal. Most ALG learners will have received a Letter of Entitlement (LoE) instead of a Notice of Entitlement (NoE).

To register an ALG learner on the Interim LPP you will need either a Letter of Entitlement (LoE) or a Notice of Entitlement (NoE). An LoE number is a five digit number followed “\” and two further digits and a letter, for example 12345\08A.

When enrolling learners for ALG please check that the learner is assessed against the scheme criteria. At the moment, the Interim LPP does not have the functionality for you to confirm the learner’s eligibility. We will be adding a button to the Interim LPP to cover this functionality in the next few weeks.

For full details on ALG scheme criteria please go to http://alg.lsc.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-08-09.

6. Introducing the Field Force

As part of our commitment to support all learning providers, we have established a Field Force with a dedicated representative for each region.

The main focus of the Field Force is to:

- Support learning providers in using the Learning Provider Portal (LPP) – both the Interim LPP and final LPP;
- Support learning providers with specific problems in using the Interim and final LPP;
- Identify and share good practice in the administration of Learner Support;
• Support all stakeholders working with learners to maximise successful applications for the Learner Support Schemes; and

• Raise awareness regionally of the Learner Support Service including all 6 schemes of EMA, ALG, C2L, DaDa, 6FCC and RSS

The first point of call for all learning providers must be the helpline. The helpline has full access to Learner Support systems (including the LPP) and will be able to resolve most queries.

If you require additional support, beyond that offered by the learning provider helpline, please contact your local field force representative using the details below. As the Field Force is spend much of their time travelling, we strongly advise you to contact your representative by email initially.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bryan Walsh</td>
<td>NORTH WEST: All areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WEST MIDLANDS: Staffordshire, Shropshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Betteridge</td>
<td>NORTH EAST: All areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>YORKS AND HUMBER: All areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EAST MIDLANDS: Derbyshire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachael Norman</td>
<td>EASTERN: All areas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EAST MIDLANDS: Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Leicester Shire, Lincolnshire and Rutland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOUTH EAST: Thames Valley (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Bucks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Rogers</td>
<td>LONDON: All areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SOUTH EAST: Berkshire, Surrey, Sussex, Kent and Medway, Hampshire and Isle of Wight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paula French</td>
<td>SOUTH WEST: All areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WEST MIDLANDS: Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Coventry and Warwickshire, Birmingham and Solihull, The Black Country</td>
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7. New childcare scheme to help 50,000 workless parents

Last year the government announced a commitment to make £75 million available to fund free childcare for 50,000 workless parents to help them to access learning or training that leads to sustainable employment. The scheme is called Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work.

The scheme will be trialled in 67 local authorities from January 2009 and extended to all Local Authorities from September 2009.

The scheme is aimed at families where one parent is working but the second parent is not and wants to undertake learning or training as a route to finding work.

Research shows that childcare costs are a major barrier to participation in learning. The new scheme will help us to encourage more adults back into education.

We are organising a series of roadshows starting on Monday, 29 September to tell learning providers all about the scheme. There are still some spaces left, so if you’re interested in attending please register at: www.livegroup.co.uk/newchildcareschemeforadults

In the coming weeks, we will produce an e-newsletter for this scheme. If you’d like to sign up to it please email us at freechildcare-adults@lsc.gov.uk.

In the meantime, to find out more about the Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work scheme, please visit our website at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/childcaretraininglearning.

8. Actions you may need to take

This section explains the actions that Learning Providers may need to be taking during September.

Please check each action carefully to see if it applies to you.

- Look out for our hints-and-tips emails helping you to use the Interim LPP.
- Sign up for our e-newsletter telling you all about our new childcare scheme – Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work. Email us at freechildcare-adults@lsc.gov.uk.
• Register to attend the training seminars starting 29 September to find out more about our new childcare scheme – Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work.

• Ensure that all EMA e2e Learning Declaration forms are returned in the same envelope as Part A of the EMA application form and that the envelope is marked ‘e2e Learner’.

• Continue to encourage Learners to apply for Learner Support schemes. Application forms are available from schools, colleges, local Connexions services and by calling the Learner Helpline on 0800 121 8989.

• Order marketing materials as required by calling LSC Publications (also known as Prolog) on 0845 602 2260. Please remember to quote the publication number when placing your order. Publication numbers can be found at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn.

9. Let us know what you think of our e-bulletins

If you have any comments on the e-bulletins we’d love to hear from you.

Do you find them useful? Are there any other Learner Support Service topics you would like us to cover?

We’ll gather your comments and make amendments to the next edition, including more on items you would like to see.

Please e-mail us at learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk and include “e-bulletin suggestion” in the subject box.

10. Helpline numbers for learning providers and learners

There are specific telephone helplines for learning providers and learners. These are:

Learning Provider helpline
0845 600 7979

Learner helpline
0800 121 8989
11. Previous e-bulletins and more information

If you would like to see earlier e-bulletins or find out more about the Learner Support Service or the various Learner Support schemes, including EMA and the ALG, please go to: http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn