Learner Support Service stakeholder e-bulletin, March 2008

Hello and welcome to the third e-bulletin from the Learner Support Directorate. We hope you find it helpful.

The aim of our e-bulletins is to keep you informed about the changes to the ways in which the LSC's different Learner Support programmes are administered.

These changes are designed to make the application process easier, and more streamlined and responsive for everyone involved: learners, their advisers – and those handling the administration process.

Among other items, this month's e-bulletin sees the launch of a major new multimedia campaign for EMA – and includes more details about how EMA applications will be handled under the new system.

As we are sure you will appreciate, it is very important at this stage to keep communicating the core information to as many interested stakeholders as possible. If you are not yet aware of the changes, please read Item 1 first – Background to the Learner Support Service.

In the March e-bulletin:

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1. Background to the new Learner Support Service
We realise that staff move on or change and that not everyone is aware of the changes taking place to the way in which the different learner support programmes are administered under the new Learner Support Service.

The following is a brief summary of the Learner Support Service.

For the 2008/09 academic year, in addition to the traditional application method of the paper application forms, learners will be able to apply for an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or an Adult Learning Grant (ALG) online or over the phone.

We are also running two pilots in South Yorkshire area and in the South West, where we shall strongly promote the new online and telephone application methods, while limiting the number of traditional paper application forms.

The evaluation of the pilot will help us plan our approach for 2009-10 and we are very grateful to the pilot areas for their support.

In all other regions, the paper application forms will be available as before – and learning providers need not worry about changing their current marketing materials to learners. We are, however, still encouraging learners to apply online or by phone in non-pilot areas.

Care to Learn, Dance and Drama, 6th Form Childcare and the Residential Support Scheme will move to the new online and phone application methods at a later date. In the meantime, please continue to use the existing methods to apply for these schemes.

We will obviously keep you posted well in advance of the new application methods being introduced.

2. Regional Learner Support workshops – key messages and next steps
A series of nine regional Learner Support workshops were held during March in Manchester, York, Newcastle, Bridgwater, Leicester, Birmingham, Cambridge, Gatwick and London. There was an excellent turnout and thank you to those of you who attended. We hope that you found the events useful and informative.

The key objectives of running the workshops were to introduce learning providers to the new Learner Support Service and to:
- clarify understanding of the arrangements for the new Learner Support Service;
- explore the rationale for change;
- introduce the single Helpline, Assessment and Payment Body;
- explain the customer journey.
Next steps:
We collected lots of questions from the workshops and we will update the learning provider website with the questions and answers shortly: www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn.

You can also find a link to the slides we used at the workshop on the website so that any learning providers who were unable to attend the workshops can see what was covered.

3. EMA national campaign live – 24th March
The LSC is re-launching the national EMA campaign with a brand new look and feel using the ‘hands’ motif that ties in with the national Skills campaign. The ads are on a wide range of media including: TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, youth-interest magazines, cinema, bus interiors and sides, together with online activity, a radio promotion and PR. The TV campaign starts on Monday, 24 March.

- The campaign will target 16-18 year olds, including young people not in education, employment or training and those who have already left compulsory education, as well as parents and teachers.
- Along with the message that young people can receive up to £30 a week with EMA, the campaign also tells them about the wide range of courses that are available, including options inside and outside the classroom.
- People will be encouraged to call 0800 121 8989 for more information or to apply. There is also an updated website with a lively new campaign-branded landing page at www.direct.gov.uk/ema where you can see the fully interactive version, with short clips of young people talking about EMA and how it's helping them achieve their ambitions.

If you would like to order new EMA materials, including posters and leaflets, please see section 4 of the e-bulletin. You can also look on www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources, where you can view the latest advertising and download it to use locally.

4. How to order EMA paper application forms and marketing materials
You can now order paper application forms and marketing materials for EMA. Please, as before, contact LSC Publications:
LSC Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham NG15 0DJ

Tel: 0845 602 2260
Fax: 0845 603 3360
Please remember to quote the publication numbers when you make your order:

- EMA paper application forms, please quote ref: LSC-P-NAT-080016
- EMA leaflets, please quote ref: LSC-P-NAT-080002
- EMA A3 posters - money version. The money version uses simple messages relating to how much EMA is worth. Please quote ref: LSC-P-NAT-080001
- EMA A3 posters – choices version. The choices version uses simple messages relating to the range of course options. Please quote ref: LSC-P-NAT-080031
- For EMA GCSE envelopes 2008/09, please quote ref: LSC-P-NAT-080005
- For the Financial Help for Young People booklet, please quote ref: LSC-P-NAT-070158

What to do if you are in a pilot area:
If you are in South Yorkshire or the South West, you are in a pilot area and, as explained in item 1 of this e-bulletin, while the new online and phone application methods are being piloted, the number of paper application forms you can receive will be limited.

Please call the LSC Publications number as usual and we will take your order. We will then send you an explanatory letter with your order, together with leaflets and pilot-specific flyers to distribute to your learners to promote the new online and phone application methods.

Other Learner Support schemes
Materials for the other Learner Support schemes will be available in the coming months. We will keep you posted about dates.

5. How the Learner Support Service will handle EMA applications from April
The new Learner Support Service can receive new EMA applications for 2008/09 from April.

New applicants
In April, learners applying for EMA will be able to apply using paper application forms or over the telephone. Learners can also go to www.direct.gov.uk/ema to find out more information about their eligibility and how to apply.

Later in the spring, we will start processing applications. We will also offer learners more options to apply online and over the telephone.

Existing applicants
If learners already receive EMA, they do not need to apply again in April. We will write to them individually to let them know how they can receive the award in 2008/09 and give them an application form already pre-populated with their details.
6. **Helpline numbers for learners and learning providers**
There are helplines for learning providers and learners. Please check below for the right number as the numbers differ depending on the academic year.

- **Learning provider helpline for 2007/08 applications:** If you have any queries about applications being made in the current academic year, please continue to call the existing number 0800 0562811
- **Learning provider helpline for 2008/09 applications:** 0845 600 7979
- **Learner helpline for 2007/08 EMA queries:** 0808 10 16 2 19
- **Learner helpline for 2008/09 EMA applications:** 0800 121 8989

7. **EMA policy changes – a quick overview and where to find out more**
Several policy changes to EMA will come into effect over the coming months. These include:

- the introduction of an EMA Guarantee for new applicants;
- the extension of £30 EMA to all E2E learners; and
- revised bonus arrangements for FE, work-based learning and short-course FE programmes.

A brief summary of the changes follows:

**EMA Guarantee for new applicants** – From 2008/09 a new learner will be eligible for EMA, at the same amount, for a period of up to three years through a one-off household income assessment. This will be known as the ‘EMA Guarantee’.

**New E2E arrangements** – All E2E learners starting a programme of study on or after 30 June 2008 will receive the maximum £30 weekly EMA payment, regardless of their household income.

**EMA bonus arrangements for 2008/09** – As we have previously advised, in order to drive attainment, the criteria for the payment of EMA bonuses have been revised by strengthening the link with attendance and adding elements of learner effort and behaviour.

**September bonus** – EMA bonus arrangements are reviewed annually to evaluate their impact on take up and learner progression. Engagement with providers and other stakeholders showed that the September bonus was the least effective and least well understood of the bonuses. Based on this information, the decision has been taken to withdraw the September bonus as it represented poor value for money and did not meet the objective of encouraging returning learners to enrol for a second year of post-16 learning.

The EMA weekly payment criteria will also include a link to learner effort and behaviour. This change is a direct result of the consultation carried out with providers earlier this year.
More information will be provided in the full EMA guidance which will be published and distributed in due course.

8. Answers to some of your questions about the new Learner Support Service

Over the past few weeks, we have received a number of questions about the new application system at the regional workshops. Some of the most frequent questions are answered below. Please also keep an eye on the learning provider website www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn for further FAQs:

- **How will the changes affect me? What should I be doing this year?**
  We are rolling out the new service gradually, so we can monitor the best way to manage the changes. You do not need to change your approach from previous years unless you are in one of the two pilot regions: the South Yorkshire area and South West region.

  In these areas, we are exclusively promoting the telephone and online channels for EMA and ALG and limiting the availability of paper application forms. In all other regions, paper application forms will be available as in previous years and no further actions are required. We are, however, still encouraging learners to apply online or by phone in non-pilot areas.

- **We have already circulated the old EMA helpline number to learners, what should we do?**
  If learners call the old EMA helpline number, they will be redirected to the new helpline depending on their query, so don’t worry about changing materials you have already developed for 2008/09. This redirect facility will remain in place for the duration of the 08/09 academic year.

- **What should we advise returning applicants in 2008/09 to do?**
  If learners entering year 12 already received EMA last year, the Learner Support Service will be writing to them separately to let them know how they can receive EMA in 2008/09 and to provide them with a specific pre-populated form to complete and return.

  Year 13 learners who received EMA last year will be sent a letter telling them what they need to do to receive it this year.

- **What will the online and telephone application channels offer that the paper application forms don’t?**
  A single point of access to all Learner Support schemes: In the future, the online and telephone channels will be available for EMA, ALG, Care to Learn, Dance and Drama Award, Residential Support Service and Sixth Form College Child Care.

 **Pre-application guidance:** The new online and telephone application channels will, through pre-application guidance, offer learners an early decision, in principle,
about their eligibility for an award. Learners will also be able to more easily identify the range of support available to them.

**Personalised services through MyAccount:** Learners will be able to save and track their application and payments online using the security protected MyAccount facility, which will allow learners to return as many times as they like to their application before submitting it to the LSC. Learners who are successful in applying for a scheme will also be able to use MyAccount to track their payment information and access messages.

**Proactive personalised communications:** The learner will be asked to identify how they want to be contacted, for example by text, email or letter so that they can receive information and updates about their application and payments.

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**9. Survey for you to complete - helping you use the Learner Support Service**

As mentioned throughout this months e-bulletin, there are a number of changes being made this year to the administration of LSC Learner Support, as we move toward the six schemes being administered through a single Learner Support System. The first schemes to transfer onto the new system will be EMA and ALG, from spring 2008. The new Learner Support System being introduced will very much resemble EMASYS but will include additional functionality and features.

We are conducting a training needs survey to find out what EMA/ALG training needs your organisation may need to be able to ensure learners are supported in their completion of the new application form, whether online, through one-to-one helpline support, or via a hardcopy version, and that you and your staff are comfortable supporting the process. If you are a learning provider, we also want to find out what your training needs are in relation to administering payment decisions.

To access the survey please click on the following link: http://learnersupportservice.speedsurvey.com. The closing date for responses is Friday 11 April 2008.

The outcomes from the analysis of the completed questionnaires will inform the roll out of our training programme for 2008/09. Please feel free to circulate this email and link to the survey to any relevant colleagues.

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**10. Keeping you informed**

We obviously want to make sure that you are kept up to date with our plans for the Learner Support Service.

We are posting all the e-bulletins, FAQs and other information on the learning provider website www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolean.

We would like to hear from you about other ways in which we could keep you
informed. For example, you might have an internal communications vehicle that you could forward this e-bulletin through. Plus, there may be aspects of the changes you would like more information on – please contact us at:

mftlearnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk

We hope you’ve found this update useful. Don’t forget the next monthly e-bulletin will be with you in April.

Many thanks for your continued support.