Welcome to the December e-bulletin from the LSC’s Learner Support Directorate.

If you would like your name added to the distribution list please fill out our new registration form. We welcome any feedback on this publication; please email us at learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

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1. Update from the Learner Support Service

EMA and ALG Weekly Payments over the Christmas Period

At the beginning of the month we sent out a User email detailing the procedure for making weekly payment decisions for learners over the Christmas Period. For more information, or if you have any queries on this, please contact the Provider helpline on 0845 600 7979.

Key things to note about making payment decisions for the Christmas Period are as follows:

For EMA FE and ALG learners payment decisions for the last week of term can be made on the last day of term set in laps as long as this is before 8pm. It is therefore important that term dates are recorded correctly in laps to ensure that you can make decisions on the last day. Please use this facility to make payments before the Christmas break so that learners do not have to wait until they return to receive their payments.

For e2e, PLA and EMA FE Short Course learners payment decisions for the week commencing 14th December will be presented in the week commencing 21st December and you should approve these as normal. However, payment decisions for week commencing 21st December will not be presented until the week commencing 28th December; given that the majority of Providers will be closed at this time, the LSS will make an automatic payment for this week commencing 21st December on Wednesday 23rd December. This will ensure that learners receive their payment between Christmas and New Year. This does not include the bonus payment; you should make this decision on your return after Christmas. Where a learner did not meet your attendance requirements and should not have received a payment for week commencing 21st December, you must ensure that the payment decision for the week commencing 21st December is reversed from a Yes to a No immediately on your return from the Christmas/New Year break.

For further information on e2e, PLA and FE Short Course decision around accrued authorised absences, please see the User email or contact the Provider helpline on 0845 600 7979.

Provider helpline hours over the Christmas period

If you need to contact the helpline at any point during the Christmas/New Year period, please note the following operating hours:
• Christmas Eve – 07:00 to 16:00
• Christmas Day – closed
• Monday 28th December – closed
• Tuesday 29th December – 08:00 to 18:00
• Wednesday 30th December – 08:00 to 18:00
• New Year’s Eve – 08:00 to 16:00
• New Year’s Day – closed.

January Bonus for Further Education (FE) learners in receipt of EMA

As you may be aware, Further Education learners currently in receipt of EMA may be eligible for a January Bonus payment provided that they have;

• Achieved satisfactory progress against learning goals set out in their Learning Agreement (previously known as Contract Part 2);
• Been enrolled prior to, and received a weekly payment by, 31st December 2009; and
• Returned to study after the Christmas/New Year break.

To enable learners to receive their January Bonus (if eligible), you must confirm that an EMA Learning Agreement is in place, and make the bonus decision on the basis that the Learning Agreement is being met. If either, or both, of these are not met, or if the learner does not meet the attendance criteria described above, they will not receive a January Bonus payment.

Once the criteria is met, and provided that the Learning Agreement box has been ticked on laps, the Bonus payment will be automatically generated from Monday 1st February. This means that the earliest date a learner will receive their January Bonus payment will be Thursday 5th February.

You can find details of attendance requirements and absences in the EMA Provider Guidance 2009/10. If you require more information on how to make a Bonus payment for the January Bonus, or need further explanation, please contact the Provider helpline on 0845 600 7979.
2. Learner Support websites

If you require more information on any of the Learner Support schemes, you may be aware that we have information on each scheme on the LSC Website. You can access specific website pages for each Learner Support scheme from www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn.

Please ensure that you refer to these website pages if you have any queries on the scheme. You can also access the Provider Guidance documents for each scheme from this website, where you will find key information about how to administer the schemes within your organisation.

If you cannot find the answer to your query from either the website or the Provider Guidance, you should call the Provider helpline on 0845 600 7979.

Marketing Learner Support schemes

As you are aware there may be a number of learners who will be starting a learning course in January, who may be eligible to receive Learner Support. Please encourage these learners to find out more information and to apply for support from these schemes.

To help you to promote Learner Support schemes to learners, there are a number of marketing materials available. You can find details of all the materials available in our Marketing and Support Materials Catalogue 2009/10, which you can download from the LSC Website. You may also be able to view copies of some of these marketing materials from the website.

Please ensure that you order copies of these marketing materials to distribute to learners to promote Learner Support schemes.

3. Regional forums

You may be aware that we have a team of people called the Field Force, who are available to support you in the administration of Learner Support schemes within your organisation.

In response from your feedback, the Field Force has commenced a series of Regional Networks that are being delivered at the request of Providers who valued the networking sessions during the laps training earlier this year. These events are arranged and facilitated by the local Field Force representative, and accompanied by a representative from the Learning and Skills Council’s Learner Support Directorate.
The purpose of the sessions is to enable Providers to meet to get an update on Learner Support and discuss the practical implementation of Learner Support Programmes from a Provider perspective; sharing good practice and networking.

The first events were held in Nottinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Sussex, and we received feedback, which indicated that these sessions were helpful particularly for new EMA and ALG Users.

Further sessions are being planned on a regional basis throughout the year. If you are interested in being involved, please contact your local Field Force member.

**Field Force staffing update:** Diane Wallis replaces Kathy Betteridge, to cover the regions of the North East, Yorkshire and Humber and Derbyshire. You can contact her by email on diane.wallis@capita.co.uk. Ruth Prideaux replaces Vicky Bush, covering the regions of the South West and West Midlands. You can contact her by email on ruth.prideaux@capita.co.uk.

Further information on who the Field Force members are, their contact details and which areas they cover can be found on the Learner Support Service pages of the LSC website.

### 4. Professional and Career Development Loans

A Professional and Career Development Loan is a commercial bank loan to help individuals to pay for work-related learning. We pay the interest on the loan whilst the individual is in learning and for one month afterwards. The individual then starts repaying the loan back to the bank as they would any other commercial loan.

The learner can borrow between £300 and £10,000, and has a choice of courses they can study – including full-time, part-time or distance learning courses – as long as the course leads to employment or enhances job skills. Courses don’t have to lead to the achievement of a qualification, but if they do this can include qualifications at all levels, for example Level 3 or 4.

More information about the Programme, including the eligibility criteria for the learner and course Provider, are available by visiting the Professional and Career Development Loans website at [http://pcdl.lsc.gov.uk](http://pcdl.lsc.gov.uk) or by calling the helpline on 0800 585 505. Please direct learners to [www.direct.gov.uk/pcdl](http://www.direct.gov.uk/pcdl).
5. Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work

As you know we have made available a promotional video, featuring Suzanne Shaw, to help you to promote the scheme amongst learners. This video is now available for learners and parents to view on the directgov website at www.direct.gov.uk/freechildcareforlearning. Please either direct those interested in the scheme to the directgov website or upload the video, web button/banner and text from the Free Childcare section of the Campaign Resources Site (www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources) onto your own website to promote the scheme.

Also, the radio adverts promoting the Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work scheme will be played again for a week, from Monday 4th January, on regional/local stations. These will be targeted in the 15 local authority areas where there are high numbers of parents who may be eligible to receive support from the scheme. You can find details of other marketing materials available to help you to promote the scheme from the Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work website.

6. And finally…

The Learner Support Directorate would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We hope you all have a nice break.

7. Actions you may need to take

Below is a reminder of the actions to be taken over the next few weeks. Please:

- Take note of and disseminate the information on making payment decisions for learners over the Christmas period (see Item 1).
- Make a note of the helpline opening hours over the Christmas period (see Item 1).
- Ensure that the relevant colleagues within your organisation are aware of the January bonus Payment information (see Item 1).
- Visit the Money to Learn website to find information on all the Learner Support schemes and order marketing materials to promote the schemes to learners starting courses in January (see Item 2).
- Register your interest in regional forums with your local Field Force representative (see Item 3).
• Visit the Professional and Career Development Loans website for more information on the Programme (see Item 4).

• Download the promotional video for Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work and listen out for radio adverts promoting the scheme in January (see Item 5).

8. Keeping you informed

We will keep you up-to-date with the Learner Support news via this monthly e-bulletin.

If you would like to find out more about the Learner Support Service or the various Learner Support schemes, including EMA and ALG, please go to http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn or call us on 0845 600 7979.