Learner Support Service stakeholder e-bulletin, July 2009

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

In this month’s edition we are pleased to give you an update on the new laps system and tell you about the help we are giving you to get started with laps, two new guides to financial help from Learner Support and an update on marketing activity over the summer.

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

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1. Plans for the future Learner Support Service

We continue to receive a steady stream of applications for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for the 2009/10 academic year and we are pleased to tell you that as of Monday 20th July we had sent out over 74,000 Notices of Entitlement to eligible learners.

We told you in last month’s bulletin that we would introduce the new laps system in August. We have also sent out All User emails to explain that we will nominate Super Users and Standard Users for each organisation to administer laps, and asked you to correct these as appropriate by sending us the Super User nomination form.

Introducing laps

We are delighted to announce that laps will be available from Monday 3rd August, at which point it will fully replace the Interim Learning Provider Portal (Interim LPP) for all 08/09 and 09/10 EMA and Adult Learning Grant (ALG) enrolments and payments.

The migration from the Interim LPP to laps will take place over this coming weekend, Friday 31st July to Sunday 2nd August, with laps available for you to log into and use from Monday 3rd August.

This means that we will need to close down the Interim LPP this evening (Thursday 30th July), and it will not re-open; all activity will migrate to laps for 3rd August onwards. You will therefore not be able to make payment decisions for week commencing 27th July until w/c 3rd August, and you will make these decisions on laps, not the Interim LPP.

If in the unlikely event that we encounter any issues with the scheduled go live of the laps system then we will keep the Interim LPP live to ensure continuity for payments.

We will e-mail all appropriate Users with details of the laps website address and individual laps Username and Password.

Once you are logged onto the laps system you will be able to run the processes that you undertook previously on the Interim LPP. All of your data for the 08/09 academic year will be migrated across into laps. This will include all locations and groups created in the Interim LPP, any current 08/09 EMA and ALG FE learners whose programme of study runs up to week commencing 24th August 2009. It will also include any current e2e, PLA or FE short course learners whose programme of study runs up to, or beyond, week
commencing 24th August 2009. Both Super and Standard Users will be able to access 2008/09 learners and complete payment decisions.

We thank you for your cooperation and support regarding the migration from the Interim LPP to laps and assure you that we are taking every possible step to ensure a smooth and stable transition.

**Getting the best out of laps**

Laps is a new system and we know that many of you are new to EMA and ALG. We hope that the following these 5 hints and tips, specifically related to adding learners to the 09/10 EMA and ALG year, will help you when you start to use the system:

- For learners following Academic Year programmes please ensure the standard default term dates in laps reflect your establishment’s term dates and, if required, create any other Study Patterns in advance of Adding Learners.

- When creating groups for 2009/10 please keep group sizes manageable – we recommend a typical maximum of 50 Learners in a single group. This minimises any impact on processing speed and potential “time-outs”, which are triggered by long periods between pressing “Confirm” on payment decisions. To manage the “time-out” don’t leave more than 15 minutes between confirming decisions.

- When adding learners to laps, if you can, sort your EMA and ALG Agreements by Locations and Groups before you login as this will enable you to add learners quicker (please note that whilst Groups and Locations previously created on the Interim LPP will be transferred to laps, you will be able to create new ones if required). Similarly, when making payments, sort your payment decisions by Location and Group before you log-in; this will also enable quicker payment decisions.

- Take care to add EMA learners to the correct “Programme of Study” as this will ensure that the relevant Bonus decisions are triggered (for example, mistakenly adding an FE learner to the e2e programme will display flexible Bonus decisions, rather than the appropriate January and July decisions, and could result in weekly overpayments to some learners).

- Use the training resources, which are available through clicking on the “hyperlinks” on the laps screen; for example, Getting Started Guide, Operating Manual and the e-learning package (particularly useful for new Users).
Following your use of the training resources available on laps, if you have any further queries you can contact the Provider helpline on 0845 600 7979.

**Flexible Bonuses**

As you may be aware, the “weekly” release option for the EMA Flexible Bonus is being removed and the new Flexible Bonus release options will be: 2 weeks, 4 weeks, 13 weeks or 26 weeks.

Providers registering new enrolments on laps, for either 2008/09 or 2009/10 will need to select the Flexible Bonus release options of either 2, 4, 13 or 26 weeks respectively. However, any 2008/09 learners migrating across from the Interim LPP who are already set up for the “weekly” bonus release option will continue on this option.

If an End of Learning (EOL) is completed for a learner on the “weekly” bonus release option, but they are subsequently re-enrolled onto laps, their “weekly” bonus release option will end and they will only be able to receive the new options for Flexible Bonus Payments as listed above.

**What next?**

You now know that laps will be going live this weekend. If your nominated Super User is not the right person, please make sure that you have returned the Super User nomination forms, which were attached to the All User email sent out earlier in July, to the Learner Support Service. Whilst Standard Users will be able to access 2008/09 learners to complete payment decisions, the Super User will undertake all Site Administration tasks on laps in preparation for new learners who will be receiving EMA and ALG in 2009/10.

Once you have received your laps username and password, login to laps and make payment decisions for the week commencing 27th July, to ensure that all learners receive the correct payment.

You can then start to manage your study patterns in preparation for the new students who will be receiving EMA and ALG in 2009/10 and read the literature that is available to help you in using laps.

**2. Laps training seminars**

We have now completed all the training seminars for laps; with over 40 sessions around the country over June and July and over 2000 people attending, it was a busy time!
We would like to thank all of you who attended these; your feedback has been extremely helpful. We are pleased to hear that you feel positively about laps and that your knowledge has increased by attending these seminars. You told us that what you found particularly useful was seeing the system in practice in front of you and being able to learn about it, table discussions and being able to network with other colleagues. We are aware that a number of you (around 35%) are new to this area of work and so we are pleased to hear that you have left the seminars with an understanding of the benefits of laps.

“The whole event was very well delivered – excellent presentation. I arrived at this seminar with very little understanding of the EMA system. I leave this seminar feeling confident that I will be able to implement it in my school. Thank you.”

The presentation and a handy hints guide that were handed out at the events are now available to download from the LSC Website. This will act as a useful reference for those of you who were able to attend, and provide useful information for those of you who were unable to attend the events.

3. EMA Continuing Entitlement letters

In May, we sent those learners who are eligible for the EMA Guarantee, i.e. learners who had an income assessment and received an EMA payment during 2008/09, a continuing entitlement letter and an EMA Agreement. You should use this letter in exactly the same way as the EMA Notice of Entitlement, to add the learner to laps in 2009/10.

If you know of any learners who have not received this letter and EMA Agreement, please tell them to contact the Learner Support Helpline on 0800 121 8989, and they will issue alternative documents for enrolment.

Please note that we have not sent a continuing entitlement letter to learners who are enrolled on an e2e programme of study who have not received a full income assessment in the 2008/09 academic year. This is because they are not eligible for the EMA Guarantee and they should re-apply for support in 2009/10. Please can you let any learners enrolled on an e2e programme of study know that they will need to fill in a new application form for support in the 2009/10 academic year.

4. Guide to financial help from Learner Support
We have produced two new on-line documents that you may find helpful in assisting learners to decide what financial help they are entitled to.

On the directgov website we have produced an ‘at-a-glance guide to financial help from the LSC’. This Guide consists of two charts: chart A lists the financial support available based on the age or the learner when they start their course and whether they have dependent children; chart B lists the income limits that apply to the schemes. We hope that this will give learners an easy overview of what Learner Support schemes they may be able to apply for. You can also use this as a checklist when providing advice and guidance to learners on financial support.

We have also published two ‘maps of financial support’, both for young people and adults, on the Learner Support Toolkit. These list the financial initiative available from the LSC, the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus. Each initiative listed has a link to the relevant website where you can find the most up-to-date information. You can similarly use this to point learners to where they can access information on any of the listed financial initiatives.

We hope that you find these useful in assisting you with delivering advice and guidance to learners.

5. Marketing materials catalogue and campaigns

We have produced a catalogue of the current marketing materials that are available from the Learner Support Directorate. This is available for download only from the LSS website. The document gives you marketing materials available by scheme, so that you can easily locate which ones you require, reference numbers of each material, and it also gives details of how you can order any of the materials.

During the summer we will be running advertising campaigns to raise awareness of EMA and Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work schemes. Look out for activity in your area and continue to encourage eligible learners to apply for the schemes.

You can find out more information about our marketing campaigns, and others from the LSC by subscribing to the Skills Update e-newsletter by emailing skillscampaign@lsc.gov.uk. This summer is the second Summer of Skills; a nationwide campaign to promote the value of skills and breakdown the barriers to learning. A new Five Step Guide to the Summer of Skills highlights how you can get involved. For more information and to download your free
Five Step Guide, please visit the Campaign Resources Site at www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources.

6. Apply early for 2009/10

We are aware that a number of you will be breaking up for the summer holidays and that learners will not return until the start of the next academic year.

Please encourage learners to apply early for support from any of the schemes, e.g. EMA, ALG, Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work, to reduce the worry of the financial burden of learning over the summer. As you know we are currently processing applications for the 2009/10 academic year. So, by applying early, learners will have one less thing to think about when they return to learning at the end of the summer.

For more details on how to order application packs, please visit our website.

7. Actions you may need to take over the summer

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

- Make sure that you have read all the information on laps that we are sending; nominate the appropriate person to be Super User for your organisation by sending back the pro-forma etc (see Item 1).
- Start to familiarise yourself with laps and follow the 5 hints and tips that we have given you in Item 1.
- Look out for updated FAQs on laps on the LSS website (see Item 2).
- Direct learners who have not received their continuing entitlement letter to the helpline on 0800 121 8989 (see Item 3).
- Take a look at the financial help available from the LSC using the tools on Directgov and the Learner Support Toolkit websites (see Item 4).
- Download a copy of the marketing and support materials catalogue from our website and use this to order a number of marketing materials (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.