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

In this month’s issue, we would like to tell you about the important changes to the contract for administering the various Learner Support schemes and the implications for learning providers and other stakeholders.

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

We are also updating the website regularly at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss

In this e-bulletin:

1. Changes to the contract for administering Learner Support. IMPORTANT!
2. Processing EMA applications – the latest
3. Improvements to the Interim LPP
4. Processing ALG applications – the latest
5. Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work scheme
6. Actions you may need to take
7. Keeping you informed
1. Changes to the contract for administering the various Learner Support schemes

You may have already heard that following a review of the contract to deliver Learner Support Services, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has terminated the contract with Liberata.

As you are aware, there have been a number of problems with the administration and delivery of the Learner Support schemes, particularly EMA, (see below) since Liberata took over operational responsibility earlier this year. These problems include delays in processing learners’ applications, difficulties in making payments and sub-standard services from the learner and learning provider telephone helplines.

Our priority has always been – and continues to be – to make sure that learners do not suffer unduly as a result of the delays. We worked hard to make sure Liberata minimised delays and the number of applications awaiting assessment has been reduced to fewer than 11,000. We expect these to be cleared within the next few weeks.

Despite the progress made in clearing these applications, the LSC’s view is that a change of supplier is the best way forward. From Friday, 28 November onwards, the learner and learning provider helplines, processing and payments service will be managed by Capita. Capita will bring in a new senior management team to oversee the staff and operations in the Coventry, Manchester and Darlington processing centres.

Capita has a long history of working on learner support programmes, including EMA, having managed the processing and helplines between 2004 and 2008. We are confident that these changes will lead to significant improvements in the service learners receive in future. We will keep you closely informed of progress and the improvements being made.

We are working with Liberata and Capita to make the transfer as smooth as possible. Although the transfer will not immediately fix all of the helpline and processing problems, it will help us to improve the future service for young people, colleges and learning providers.

What this will mean for learners

In the 2008/09 academic year, learners will not be adversely affected by the change in supplier from Liberata to Capita. All the outstanding applications will continue to be processed, and registered learners will continue to receive
payments during the transfer period to Capita. The learner helpline (0800 121 8989) will remain open.

What this will mean for learning providers

In the short term, please note that there will not be any immediate changes to the service. The learning provider helpline will continue on the same numbers and you should continue to use your existing systems to make payments to learners.

However, in time Capita will want to make changes so that improvements can be made to the service.

As you will appreciate, transferring the Learner Support delivery operation from one contractor to another is a significant management challenge. Capita will not know exactly what they will find until they have been installed for a week or so, and they will need time to put improvements into effect. We ask for your patience and understanding: we are confident that service will improve, but do not expect this overnight.

In particular, it is important that the helpline is not over-run with calls asking about the change.

We are working closely with Capita and will keep you closely informed of progress and changes through this monthly e-bulletin and via www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss.

2. Processing EMA Applications – the latest

Our number one priority is always to ensure that as many young people as possible benefit from EMA. Over the past few months, many learners have had to wait longer than the three-week target we set Liberata to respond to applications and we are very sorry for the inconvenience and concern this has caused to learners and their families – and for the inconvenience caused to learning providers.

The latest position on the processing of EMA applications is outlined below. These processing figures are as reported to the LSC by Liberata at the conclusion of the contract. One of the first tasks we have asked Capita to carry out is a full stock take of applications in process; as such these numbers may be revised. We will inform you of any revisions in the next e-bulletin.

As of midnight on Thursday 27th November (the point of transfer from Liberata to Capita) 821,000 applications had been processed with the daily
processing rate standing at over 6,000 per day. More than 510,000 Notices of Entitlement (NoEs) had been sent out and more than 399,000 learners had received at least one payment.

As of the same date, Liberata were working on fewer than 11,000 applications, down from 45,000 applications when we issued the previous e-bulletin on 28th October. We expect that all outstanding applications will be cleared in the next few weeks

**Outstanding EMA issues – update**

Despite the progress being made in processing EMA applications, we are aware of a number of outstanding issues that are affecting learners and learning providers.

- Returning evidence to learners – there are currently around 60,000 documents that have been sent in as evidence (e.g. proof of income) that are waiting to be scanned and returned to learners. Capita will work to return all documents to their rightful owner as soon as possible. In the meantime, please be assured that these documents are being held securely and are not ‘lost’ as some learners are reporting.

- There are several thousand prepared Notices of Entitlement (NoE) that have not been matched with an application form. Capita will assess how best to address this.

- A major problem with the help-line is that operatives have not always been able to access information on the state of an application, to answer queries. Capita will begin a major exercise to build a reliable database, but this will take time.

3. Improvements to the Interim Learning Provider Portal (LPP)

We are continuing to make improvements to the Interim LPP in direct response to feedback from Learning Providers.

**Amending study patterns**

Some learning providers have raised concerns about the half-term dates in the default study pattern. The majority of these issues are now resolved and the learners affected are available for payment decisions. If you continue to experience difficulties with payments for weeks beginning 20th and 27th October please contact the learning provider helpline on 0845 600 7979.
Please check that your study patterns entered into the Interim LPP match identically with the term dates of your organisation. If you need further guidance, then please contact the helpline on 0845 600 7979 for advice.

**EMA January bonus payments**

In preparation for the payment of January bonuses, we would ask all providers running Academic Year EMA programmes to ensure that they have completed all contract Part 2s for eligible learners and that the process for agreeing payment decisions is underway.

Capita will write to you shortly to confirm the process for paying January bonuses.

**NoE errors**

We have recently been informed that some learning providers are getting error messages and, in some cases, the wrong learner when inputting a learner NoE number in the Interim LPP.

We believe that these issues are now resolved. However, if you receive an error message for a learner, please contact the helpline on 0845 600 7979 for guidance.

**Interim LPP Performance**

During the last month, there have been a number of reports from learning providers over system performance, for example error messages, logouts and screens taking a long time to load.

In response to this feedback, a number of upgrades were implemented, including some specific work last week designed to increase the speed of the system. We have also asked Capita to review the Interim LPP, working with the Association of Colleges and visiting providers to see how the system is actually used.

We hope that these changes will improve the performance of the Interim LPP and improve experience for users.

**Summary of previous hints and tips**

A summary of hints and tips for using the Interim LPP is available at [www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/keydocuments](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/keydocuments)

The latest version of the document covers:

- End of learning
4. Processing ALG Applications – the latest

The latest position on the processing of ALG applications is outlined below. These processing figures are as reported to the LSC by Liberata at the conclusion of the contract. One of the first tasks we have asked Capita to carry out is a full stock take of applications in process; as such these numbers may be revised. We will inform you of any revisions in the next e-bulletin.

As of 26th November, more than 35,500 ALG applications have been received, around a quarter more than this time last year. More than 27,000 applications have been assessed.

There were fewer than 1,000 applications awaiting processing. However, further information is needed from the learner in the case of approximately 7,500 applications before they can be processed.

Helping learners to accurately complete their ALG application form

We have identified several areas in the application form that are causing confusion, leading to applications being returned to learners. It would be extremely helpful if you could please help learners to complete the form:

1. Residency (question A8). Please ensure learners complete this section. Eligibility cannot be determined without it.
2. Learning Achievements (question A10). This section should be used to record previous qualifications. It should not be used to record a qualification the learner intends to study for.
3. Income Details (Part B). All learners must complete this Part B regardless of their age/marital/partner status and provide original documentation to verify their income details.
5. Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work

In recent editions of this e-bulletin we told you about our new childcare scheme, Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work. We will write to you soon to update you as to how Capita will administer the scheme.

To make sure you receive the very latest information on the scheme please sign up for our e-newsletter by sending us an email at freechildcare-adults@lsc.gov.uk.

6. Actions you may need to take

A reminder of the actions to be taken over the next few weeks. Please:

- Continue to use existing systems for making payments to learners;
- Reassure learners that outstanding applications will be processed and that payments will continue to be made during the transfer to Capita;
- Help learners to complete their ALG application forms correctly and return them with all the necessary evidence (please see item 3 above);
- 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;
- 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

7. Keeping you informed

We will keep you up to date with the transfer of the contract to Capita via this monthly e-bulletin.

You can also find out more about the Learner Support service online at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss. We are updating this website regularly, so please check the website for the latest information.
If you would like to 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](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn)