The way we administer nationally delivered Learner Support, (ALG, Care to Learn, Dance and Drama, EMA 6th Form Childcare and Residential Support Scheme) is changing.

Starting in the 2008/09 academic year we will be introducing a number of new application channels (online and telephone) as well as continuing with the traditional paper application forms. We’re hoping that this will ease the applications process for learners and over time, as we increase take-up through the new channels, make the processes more efficient.

Each month, we will be sending out an e-update to keep you informed of progress towards the introduction of this new Learner Support Service. These updates will include campaign developments, information about the availability of marketing products (leaflets, posters etc), and the messages that we would like you to pass on to learners. Equally important, we will use the e-update to answer your concerns and questions.

This issue sets out the basic facts behind the new scheme, answers a number of initial questions about the new service and explains the pilot we are running to promote the new channels.

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1. The new Learner Support Service – basic facts

A new Helpline, Assessment and Payment Body (HAPB) will operate the service from spring 2008. The HAPB is a consortium of three separate organisations: Liberata, PA Consulting and Perot Systems. If you would like to know more about the organisations, you can check their web sites:

www.liberata.com
www.perotsystems.com
www.paconsulting.com
The new service will introduce online and telephone application channels to supplement the traditional method of paper application forms from spring 2008.

We hope that the new application channels and associated systems will improve the customer experience and make it easier for our delivery partners to administer our schemes.

2. Customer Engagement Pilot

Between now and 2012 we want to encourage as many learners as possible to apply using our online and telephone channels. However, we are conscious of the risks associated with a “big bang” approach. Given this, we have decided to undertake a number of pilots to test out the effectiveness and evaluate the impact, of exclusively promoting the new online and telephone channels.

In the pilot regions, paper application forms will not be made available. Instead, marketing leaflets and brochures will be distributed to encourage learners to apply online and over the telephone.

In other regions, paper application forms will be made available as usual. Learners will be able to apply over the telephone or the internet if they prefer.

At a national level, television and radio advertising will promote the EMA and ALG strands and the online and telephone application channels. The remaining strands will rely on marketing materials and communications.

The evaluation of the pilot will help us plan our marketing and communications approach for 2009/10.

We are in the process of finalising pilot arrangements in two LSC areas and will update you on our plans in the February e-update.

3. What changes are we making and when will they become effective

We are introducing new online and telephone application channels from spring 2008. These will supplement the existing paper application form channel.

Over a number of years, we expect to significantly increase take-up of the online and telephone channels.

There will be a new system for administrators to register attendance. If you currently use EMASYS to administer EMA, the change will be very minor as the new system is almost identical.

4. Why are we making these changes now?
In 2006, we decided that we wanted to make significant improvements to the service we provide to our customers and make efficiency savings. On researching similar services in Government and the private sector, we decided to do this by making our services available over more modern channels.

Through a competitive dialogue, we decided to contract with a new partner to deliver the service from spring 2008. In this procurement, we ensured that the new service provider would meet our objectives of improving customer service and driving efficiencies through more effective use of online and telephone channels.

5. What will the new application process be?

*Telephone / online:* the learner or their chosen advocate will call a dedicated number / access a web site and provide application details. The HAPB will return a pre-populated form through the post for the learner / parent to complete any outstanding information and provide supporting documents. The learner will then post this back to HAPB who will assess the application and notify the learner of the outcome.

*Paper application forms:* the learner or their chosen advocate complete a paper application form, attach supporting documents and post to the HAPB who will assess the applications and notify the learner of the outcome.

*Returning applicants in 2008/09 (for EMA only):* we will send a pre-populated form to all returning learners in summer 2008 for them to complete and return.

6. When will the new channels be available?

Learners will be able to apply via the internet or telephone from spring 08. We will be rolling out the online functionality at a sensible pace during spring to ensure it is robustly tested.

7. Will there be any paper application forms available next year?

Paper application forms will be available for you to distribute to learners in the non-pilot regions. The forms will be available from early March for EMA and at a later point in spring for other schemes. You can pre-order these in the usual way from Prolog – if in doubt check the Money to Learn part of the LSC website.

Paper application forms will not be available in pilot areas. In special circumstances, for specific customer segments, blank forms will be provided.

8. What about learners who do not have access to the internet?

We appreciate that there are a number of learners who do not / cannot access the internet and that these are likely to be in our target population. However,
social research indicates that the vast majority of learners have regular access to the internet and similar government services (UCAS and Student Loan applications) have achieved high levels of online take-up.

If learners cannot access the internet themselves, they could choose the telephone application channel. Alternatively, they could request support from an advocate (e.g. learning provider, Connexions etc) as they currently do if they need support to complete the paper application forms.

9. **Helpline numbers for learners and providers**

If you have any queries relating to applications being made in the current academic year you should continue to call the existing helpline numbers.

The provider helpline number for 2008/09 applications is **0845 600 7979**.

There will be a new number for learners from spring and we will update you on this in future e-updates.

10. **Keeping you informed**

We want to ensure that you are kept up to date with our plans for the HAPB and the Learner Support Service and will continue to provide this e-update to you each month, updating our frequently asked questions (FAQ) log which is attached to this note.

We are planning a series of regional seminars during March. We will provide you more information about this shortly.

However we would like to hear from you about other ways we could keep you informed – please send in your suggestions and queries to the following email **mftlearnerssupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk**

We will be posting all the e bulletins on our website  **www.lsc.gov.uk/provider/moneytolearn**

We hope you’ve found this update useful. Don’t forget your next monthly e-update will arrive in your inbox week commencing 25th February 2008

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The LSC, the organisation that exists to make England better skilled and more competitive

Our world is changing. We all need more skills than ever before. Our future. It's in our hands. Visit http://lsc.gov.uk/inourhands or to speak to an advisor call 0800 011 30 30.

If you are an employer interested in improving the skills of your business, call Train to Gain on 0800 015 55 45 or visit traintogain.gov.uk.