Frequently Asked Questions for the Learner Support Service

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2. BACKGROUND TO THE LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICE

2.1 What changes are we making?

We are introducing new online and telephone application to supplement the existing paper application forms for Learner Support Schemes.

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 and make payment decisions for EMA and ALG called the Learner Provider Portal (LPP).

2.2 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 who have been delivering the service from April 2008.

We are making these changes to (i) improve customer experience, (ii) make it easier for scheme administrators who work with learning providers and (iii) drive administration efficiencies and pass on savings to the taxpayer.

2.3 What will the online and telephone application channels offer that the paper application forms don’t?

Telephone and application channels provide a number of benefits not available through paper applications including:

A single point of access to all Learner Support schemes: The online and telephone channels will be available across the full range of LSC schemes.

Pre-application guidance: The new online and telephone application channels will 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.

Proactive personalised communications: The learner will be able to specify 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.

2.4 When will these changes happen?

We will be rolling out the online functionality at a sensible pace to ensure it is robustly tested.
The online application system will be available for the 2009/10 academic year. We had intended to make the system available during the 2008/09 academic year but we experienced some issues in testing, and we want to ensure that it is absolutely right before we make it available to learners.

We are making a steady transition to the new Learning Provider Portal (LPP) so we are sure to manage the risks of the introduction of the new IT. In the meantime we have introduced an Interim LPP. For further information please see the Learning Provider Portal section of this website.

2.5 Are Residential Support Scheme, Dance and Drama Award, Care to Learn and Sixth Form College Childcare schemes continuing as usual?

RSS, DaDA, Care to Learn and Sixth Form College Childcare will be changed at a later stage. Applicants for these schemes should continue as usual until told otherwise. We will write to learning providers using e-bulletins nearer the time with further information.

2.6 Will the changes have an adverse impact on participation?

We want to make service improvements by using the new channels, but our ultimate aim is to maintain or increase participation levels to support learners.

We are closely monitoring participation to ensure that participation levels are maintained throughout the introduction of the new service.
3. DELIVERING LSS

3.1 Who are HAPB?

The HAPB are the partner we have contracted with to deliver the new service and HAPB stands for the Helpline, Assessment and Payment Body.
4. The applications process using LSS

4.1 What will the application process be under the new arrangements?

Making a new application online or over the telephone

When the new service is fully introduced, the learner or their chosen advocate will visit the website or call a dedicated number and they will be helped through the application process. The Learner Support Service (LSS) will return a pre-populated form through the post for the learner and parent/carer to complete any outstanding information (for example, household income details for EMA) and provide supporting documents. The learner will then post this back to the LSS who will assess the application and notify the learner of the outcome.

Making an application using a paper application pack

The learner or chosen advocate will pick up an application pack from their learning provider or advisor (e.g. Connexions). Once complete, they will return the form with all additional information to LSS as instructed on the form.

Learning providers will need to order paper application packs from LSC publications as in previous years.

4.2 What if a learner doesn’t have access to the internet?

If a learner cannot apply online for whatever reason, they will be able to apply by calling the learner helpline or by completing a paper application form.

4.3 How can we get application forms for learners?

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

To order paper application forms and marketing materials for EMA please contact LSC Publications (also known as Prolog):

LSC Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham
NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 602 2260
Fax: 0845 603 3360
Minicom: 0845 605 5560
email: lsc@prolog.uk.com

Please remember to quote the publication numbers when you place your order. Publication numbers can be found at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn.
4.4 If an applicant applies through the paper application will their information be available in the My Account facility?

Once the online application system is live, learners will be able to set up their account online at any time, even if they have applied by phone or paper application. An account will not be automatically created for Learners who have applied by paper form so a Learner looking to benefit from the My Account facility should register online to create an account.

4.5 How will other parties (e.g. parents or carers) provide application information?

For some of our schemes, learners might need to ask others (e.g. their parents or carers) for some information. Two options are available in this case:

The parents or carers can enter the information online themselves or ask the learner to do so on their behalf. If they choose to submit the information over the website, we can provide them with their own login details so they can keep their information private from the learner.

Alternatively, the parents or carers could complete the information on a pre-populated paper application form if they prefer. If this is the chosen route, the learner will fill in as much information as possible online and submit it. The Learner Support Service will then write back to the learner with a pre-populated form containing the gaps that need to be filled in by the parents or carer. The learner will ask their parents or carer to complete this information and arrange for the form to be returned to the Learner Support Service.

4.6 Will the learning provider still have to write to the Learner to inform them they aren’t getting paid in a given week?

When the full system is introduced, LSS will send a notification directly to the learner (in the learner’s specified communication method, e.g. text message, letter) to inform them that we will not be getting paid. There is no need for the Provider to contact the learner, however, the learner may contact the Provider with any subsequent queries they may have as to the reason for non-payment.

4.7 Notification of non-payment – what is the timescale between learning provider and learner being informed?

Once the system has been implemented, the Learning Provider is not notified of non-payment to the learner. The Learning Provider will be responsible for recording Learner attendance and via the attendance recording process will have visibility of whether the attendance for the Learner is marked as Yes, No or Not Set. Where attendance is marked Yes the Learner will be paid, where attendance is marked No or is Not Set the Learner will not be paid.

4.8 How will the system cope with changes in policy / scheme operation and how will Learning Providers and learners be informed?

LSC have a process for agreeing changes to the LSS and future policy changes will be incorporated in the system. Learners can inform the LSC of a change of circumstances by using the My Account facility online or by phoning the contact centre.
We will inform Learning Provider and Learners about such changes as and when they occur.

4.9 Has an Equality impact assessment been completed?

An Equality impact assessment has been carried out for the LSC schemes which include EMA, ALG, Care to Learn, DaDA, Adult Childcare and Residential Accommodation schemes.

4.10 Supported applications – How can frontline advisers support Learner applications online?

Advisors can sit with the Learner to help them complete the questions for the Eligibility Checker to get an early indication as to eligibility for all LSC schemes. Once eligibility has been confirmed the advisor can also sit with Learner to go through the on-line application form.

For further information on how you can support learners please visit the Training section on our website.

4.11 As the application process still requires physical evidence to be submitted how will processing efficiencies be achieved?

The processing time for online and phone applications is significantly lower than paper applications despite the need for physical evidence. Efficiencies of reduced processing time are passed on to the LSC.

4.12 Will Learning providers be able to track applications to identify if they can do anything to help progress payments?

Once the online system has been implemented, each Learner will be able to see the progress of their own application through the ‘My Account’ facility however Learning Providers will not have access to information regarding the status of an application due to data protection restrictions.

4.13 Why is it a requirement to produce a copy of a bank statement?

LSC will only make payments to the Learner, payments cannot be made to parents or careers. Bank statements are required to verify that the bank account belongs to the Learner and to provide an identity check against the application information provided. Bank statements will be returned to the learner.

4.14 How will students with LLDD requirements be supported to apply?

Learners with Learning Disabilities or Disabilities (LLDD) should refer to the connexions service for further support in completing their applications.

4.15 How will Notice of Entitlements be communicated?

Once an application has been approved the learner will always be notified by letter as the notice of entitlement is a legal document. Learners will also be notified by their preferred method of communication if this has been specified. Learners can choose the method by which the LSC communicates with them by logging on to the ‘My Account’ facility.
4.16 Will existing residency checking requirements continue under LSS?

LSC will use self declaration of residency for 2008/09. Learning providers have a responsibility to check residency as part of enrolment for the learner. Please see the policy section for further details.

4.17 Where a family has multiple siblings applying can original evidence be submitted for multiple applications?

Each learner must continue to apply separately and submit individual evidence.

4.18 What the turnaround on processing applications?

We will aim to complete the assessment of all applications as quickly as possible. Learners and learning providers can help speed up this process by ensuring that applications are completed accurately and that all required information is provided promptly.

4.19 Will E2E learners apply through same route and if so do they need to submit financial information?

Yes, E2E applications will go through the same route as EMA applications although slightly different information is required to complete the application. Applications for E2E can be made online or by phone. For E2E, no financial information is required.

4.20 Can an adult (or carer) apply on behalf of a learner using the new channels?

Parents or other advocates (eg Connexions, nextstep, learndirect advice etc) will be able to apply on behalf of the learner, however, the bank account details must be those of the learner themselves. We will provide more detailed explanations of how this will work using the new systems and processes in coming months.
5. **ONLINE APPLICATIONS PROCESS**

5.1 **Will learners be able to check whether they are likely to be eligible using the new system?**

When the new service is fully operational, learners will be able to get a quick decision in principle about their entitlement using the Eligibility Checker. The intention of the Eligibility Checker (also available over the phone) is to take applicants through a short list of basic questions to determine their likely entitlement across all of our Learning Support Schemes.

The online facility will help learners understand their entitlement quickly and easily so they can apply successfully. It will also help them to make informed decisions and be able to plan ahead for their education and training.

5.2 **Does a learner need to know the family household income in order to complete the Eligibility Checker?**

The learner will need details of household income to get an accurate indication of eligibility. If income information is not available then the learner can make assumptions to help estimate eligibility. Learning providers may be able to support applicants in completing the Eligibility Checker and making such assumptions where information is not available.

Financial details will be required to complete an application for EMA.

5.2.1 **Is the online application form filled in online or is it printed off and filled in by hand?**

The online application is filled out online.

Where information cannot be supplied over the web, the process is completed using a pre-populated paper form. In these cases, we will collect as much information as possible online, we will send the learner a paper pre-populated form and request them to provide the missing information by completing and returning the form with the required evidence to support the application.

5.3 **Will the learner be able to save and track their application online?**

Yes, when the online channel is fully operational, a learner applying online will be able to use the MyAccount facility. This will be a personalised account, protected by a username and password. It will allow the learner to return as many times as they like to their application before submitting it to the LSC. After submitting the application, they will be able to track its progress online through MyAccount.

Learners that are successful in applying for a LSC scheme will also be able to use MyAccount to track their payment information and access messages.

5.4 **What info will be made available through the LP portal about applications in progress?**

The status of the application can be viewed by the learner via the My Account function of the Learner Portal. The status can be incomplete, awaiting evidence or
pending assessment. Once the application has been assessed the result (accepted or rejected) will be communicated to the applicant.

5.5 Will the learner be able to track the payments through the My Account facility?

Yes. The MyAccount facility will support learners in understanding the status of their LSC scheme account and will also provide a summary of payment record information.

5.6 What happens when an applicant loses their password?

There will be a button on the logon screen that applicants can click if they forget their password. The password will then be emailed to the applicant’s registered email address.

5.7 In order for a learner to access full back pay will the 4 week backdating apply to online applications?

Online applications will be treated in the same way as paper applications. The same process as used in previous years will continue to apply.

5.8 Why is an online application more efficient to process?

It is significantly more efficient to process an online application because there is an increasing level of automation.

Online applications, because of the way they are devised, result in fewer incomplete or poor quality (e.g., wrong information or bad handwriting) applications. This reduces rework and makes processing much more efficient.

5.9 The application forms require signatures from parents or carers. How will the online form obtain these?

Once the online application is completed, there is some information that needs to be collected physically. We will send the applicant a pre-populated form to be completed, signed and identity information attached (bank statement). In future years, we expect to be able to complete the entire process online, but this is not possible at the moment.

5.10 Is the system secure?

The security of customer information is of paramount importance to the Learner Support Service. We have a robust security policy in place that is compliant with e-Government guidelines and we review our processes on a regular basis to identify and manage any risks.

5.11 How many Learners are likely to use the online route?

By 2013, we expect 74% of applications for EMA, ALG, Care to Learn, DaDA, Adult Childcare and Residential Accommodation to be made online by 2013.
More people have access to the internet than ever before and statistics show that there is a national trend for increased take up of online services. For example, the majority of UCAS applications and student loan applications are now made online.

5.12 Will the online system be able to cope with large volumes of concurrent users?

Yes, the LSS has been specifically designed to cope with the anticipated volume, both now and in the future. We are rigorously testing the system to ensure that Learners have uninterrupted access to LSS.
6. TELEPHONE APPLICATIONS PROCESS

6.1 Will the contact centre be able to cope with the Learner demand?

Call centre has been designed to cope with higher than forecasted call volumes. Our forecasts are based on previous EMA and ALG demand statistics. There are three principle contact centres that handle calls and additional centres on stand-by. We are confident that LSS is capable of dealing with the anticipated learner demand.

6.2 How will you ensure that helpline staff are able to deal with both Learner and Provider calls?

All helpline agents are fully trained in the schemes and the systems used to deliver Learner Support. In addition to this, calls are routed to agent groups who specialise in handling either Learner or Learning Provider calls, ensuring they are fully up to speed with the most current issues for each of these different customer groups.

6.3 Is the telephone number freephone to the learner?

The learner helpline is freephone, the number for Learners is 0800 121 8989. Call charges from a mobile phone will vary so Learners calling from a mobile phone should check tariffs with their network provider.

6.4 Is the telephone number freephone to learning providers?

The learning provider helpline is charged at the local call rate. The LSC is committed to providing free access to information to learners via 0800 numbers. However we do not provide free telephone access to providers in the wider Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and we are bringing the Learner Support Service (LSS) in line with this policy.

The learning provider helpline provides access to the latest information and a specialist team who are specifically trained to answer learning provider questions. Therefore, learning providers who phone the learner helpline will be asked to redial the correct learning provider number.

6.5 What are the service levels around call handling?

We aim to answer calls within 60 seconds.

6.6 Will there be a multi-lingual helpline?

The helpline is already staffed by a multi-lingual team of agents that is capable of handling calls in several languages and we will do our best to accommodate your requirements.
7. ACCESSIBILITY

7.1 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 very high levels of online take-up.

If learners cannot access the internet themselves, they will be able to choose the telephone application channel. Alternatively, learners can apply by paper application form which they can get from their learning provider.

7.2 How will the LSS support hard to reach learners?

The helpline will be of particular use to this group as a trained advisors will be on hand to help the learner through the application process and provide further guidance where online access is not available.
8. TRAINING

8.1 What training will be made available? When will it be available and to whom?

In April 2008, we received 1000 responses to our training needs survey. In response we have developed training solutions for learning providers and system administrators / super users.

a. TRAINING TO SUPPORT LEARNING PROVIDERS & LEARNERS USE THE LEARNER PORTAL (PRE-APPLICATION AND ONLINE APPLICATION)

Once the online system has been implemented we will provide a handout for learning providers, explaining how they can help learners to use the Eligibility Checker. This will be available on the LSC provider website.

b. TRAINING TO SUPPORT LEARNING PROVIDER ADMINISTRATORS TO USE THE LEARNING PROVIDER PORTAL

We have produced a user guide to help you use the Interim LPP. Please see the ‘Learning provider Portal’ section of this website for more information.

We will be providing training packs for the full LPP when it becomes available. This will include a comprehensive operating manual and a pack of supporting learning aids, for example an updated ‘Handy Hints’ card.

We will continue to support you after go-live with ongoing communications (including e-bulletins and frequently asked questions), a dedicated learning provider helpline to answer all your queries and a dedicated ’field force’ team.

8.2 Will the field force be allocated to local areas?

Each region has a field force representative allocated to them. Please see the diagram below for details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Force Representative</th>
<th>NORTH WEST: All areas</th>
<th>WEST MIDLANDS: Staffordshire, Shropshire</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bryan Walsh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:bryanwalsh@liberata.com">bryanwalsh@liberata.com</a></td>
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<td>Phone: 07976 468 256</td>
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<th>YORKS AND HUMBER: All areas</th>
<th>EAST MIDLANDS: Derbyshire</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kathy Betteridge</td>
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<td>Phone: 07909 934601</td>
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<th>Field Force Representative</th>
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<th>SOUTH EAST: Thames Valley (Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Bucks)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rachael Norman</td>
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<td>Email: <a href="mailto:rachaelnorman@liberata.com">rachaelnorman@liberata.com</a></td>
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<th>Field Force Representative</th>
<th>LONDON: All areas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Rogers</td>
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<td>Phone: 07989 693 717</td>
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<tr>
<th>Field Force Representative</th>
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<th>WEST MIDLANDS: Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Coventry and Warwickshire,</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paula French</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:paulafrench@liberata.com">paulafrench@liberata.com</a></td>
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<td>Phone: 07814 169 402</td>
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8.3 How will we develop Learning Providers knowledge about the new system?

We will develop Learning Providers knowledge through:

- regular communications, monthly e-bulletins, super user emails and updates of our key websites. These will continue after go-live so we regularly inform you of latest news and answer FAQs;

- a period of learning and development prior to new system releases, that may include regional events and updates to key learning and development products such as an operating manual;

- provision of dedicated and ongoing support through a provider helpline and via our 'field force' team.
9. **COMMUNICATIONS**

9.1 How will you keep providers informed of what is happening and when?

We appreciate that providers are on the front line and understand the importance of keeping providers informed. We want to ensure that providers are kept up to date with the plans and will communicate through the following methods:

- Monthly e-bulletins
- Super User emails
- Cascade messages via connexions, Local Authorities and LSC

If you would like to be added for the distribution list of our e-bulletins please contact us at mftlearnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

9.2 How do we find out more / contact LSC?

If you would like to find out more about LSS or would like to get in touch you can contact us please use the following:

**9.2.1 Learners**

Learners can find out more by logging on to [www.moneytolearn.direct.gov.uk](http://www.moneytolearn.direct.gov.uk/) or by calling the following learner helpline:

**0800 121 8989**

**9.2.2 Learning Providers**

Learning providers can find out more by logging on to [www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/) or by calling the following learning provider helpline:

**0845 600 7979**

If you would like to order paper application forms and marketing materials please contact LSC Publications (also known as Prolog):

LSC Publications
PO Box 5050
Sherwood Park
Annesley
Nottingham NG15 0DJ
Tel: 0845 602 2260
Fax: 0845 603 3360
Minicom: 0845 605 5560
email: lsc@prolog.uk.com

Please remember to quote the publication numbers when you make your order.
9.2.3 Administrators

Administrators can find out more by logging on to www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/ or by calling the following learning provider helpline:

0845 600 7979
10. **POLICY**

Please note that answers to policy questions can be found in our policy guidance documents. The policy guidance documents should be your first port of call.

10.1 **How do I access the policy guidance documents?**

To access the guidance please select the relevant link below.

- Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Guidance 2008/09

- Adult Learning Grant (ALG) Guidance 2008/09
  [http://alg.lsc.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-08-09](http://alg.lsc.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-08-09)

- Care to Learn (C2L) Guidance 2008/09

- Sixth Form College Childcare Guidance 2008/09

- Dance and Drama Awards (DaDA) 2008/09
  [http://danceanddrama.lsc.gov.uk/non-DaDA-providers](http://danceanddrama.lsc.gov.uk/non-DaDA-providers)

- Residential Support Guidance for Colleges 2008/09
  [http://studyingaway.lsc.gov.uk/rss-guidance](http://studyingaway.lsc.gov.uk/rss-guidance)

- Local Authority Transport Support Guidance 2008/09

- Discretionary Support Funds: Hardship, 20+ Childcare and Residential Bursaries

10.2 **Will the policy guidance for learners and learning providers be updated?**

Yes. We will continue to update guidance as and when policy changes are made so please check the website regularly to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version.