Welcome to the 8th edition of the Learner Support Partnership Team Update, which aims to tell you more about the LSC’s Learner Support team, including the latest on policy developments and how you can help deliver this support to learners.

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Update on the Learner Support Service

EMA ‘Not Set’ Payment Decisions

An important User email was sent out during November to users of laps, regarding payment decisions made by Providers for EMA learners. Please read the following information and disseminate this to all Providers with a responsibility for EMA.

It has come to our attention that the number of ‘Not Set’ decisions for EMA payments relating to learning activity in the current term is higher than we would have expected.

We have received feedback from learners about this and would ask that wherever possible a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ decision is made. If it is not possible to make a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ payment decision and a ‘Not Set’ decision is in place, colleagues are asked to make every effort to confirm the payment decision within four weeks.

It is worth remembering that EMA is an incentive payment and the incentive is lost if payments are delayed; undermining the scheme intent. Delaying payments also increases the risk of learners leaving learning for financial reasons.

The easiest way to identify all ‘Not Set’ decisions is by using the ‘Payment’ tab in laps, which will present you with the ‘Weekly Payment’ screen and allow you to create a list of ‘Not Set’ decisions by week. As you select each week it will bring back a list of learners who are due payments and enable you to make the decision within that screen.

Back Payment Timeout Limit

Users who are administering payments for learners on PLA, E2E or FE Short course Programme Types should be aware that the timeout limit in laps for back payment of weekly payments and bonuses is eight weeks after a learner’s course has ended. In 2008/09, users had 52 weeks in which to make weekly payment decisions and 39 weeks to make bonus decisions. This means that Users now have only eight weeks from the course end date to make a “Yes” or “No” decision for each learner’s weekly payment and bonus decision. After eight weeks, laps will no longer allow you to enter a decision and you will not be able to pay the learner.

It is therefore very important that prompt weekly payment and bonus decisions are made for all learners. As we have stated above, EMA is an incentive payment and the incentive is lost if payments are delayed. If you have any learners registered on an 2009/10 programme with ‘Not Set’ decisions, whose course ended more than eight weeks ago and you would like to enter a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ decision, you should call the Provider Helpline on 0845 600 7979 or email lscenquiries@lsclearnersupport.co.uk for assistance. Please note that this does not apply to learners enrolled on the FE Academic Year Programme Type or for payments that relate to the 2008/09 year.

If you have any queries at all about the payment process, please consult the Provider Guidance on the LSC website: http://ema.lsc.gov.uk/ema-guidance/guidance2009-10/. If your query cannot be resolved in this way please contact the Provider Helpline on 0845 600 7979.

It is important that Providers are made aware of this limit, to ensure that learners are paid on time and do not miss out on payments owing to administration issues. Please stress the importance of this message to Providers.

ACTION:
• Disseminate this information on Not Set payment decisions to Providers involved in the delivery of EMA.
• Encourage Providers to consult the EMA Provider Guidance 2009/10 for queries on the scheme.
Backdating payments for Learner Support childcare schemes

We would like to make clear the backdating rules for the Learner Support childcare schemes; we are aware that some Providers are not clear on these. Please inform Providers of the following information and encourage them to assist learners with completing their application forms and returning these to the Learner Support Service as quickly as possible.

For Care to Learn and Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work, we will only backdate childcare payments to the start of a parent’s course if we receive an application within 28 days of their course start date.

Where an application is received outside of the 28 days, payments will usually be backdated to the beginning of the week in which the application is received by the Learner Support Service. Backdating payments for any longer period will be approved only in exceptional circumstances and will be at the discretion of the LSC. In cases where there is a genuine reason for a late application, the applicant should enclose a letter with their application explaining the reason.

When Learning Providers are requested to complete their part of the form, they should do so and return this to the parent as soon as possible. We depend on the goodwill of Childcare Providers for the success of our schemes and providing the information we need to make prompt payments to them will help this to continue.

Applications for the Sixth Form College Childcare Scheme will be backdated to the start of the course when the application form is received before the end of the term in which the course starts. Applications received outside of the first term will be eligible to receive backdated payments from the Monday of the week that their application was first received by the Learner Support Service.

ACTION:
• Make sure that Providers are aware of the backdating rules for Learner Support childcare schemes.
• Encourage Providers to complete their section of the application form and return it to the learner as soon as possible.
• Advise the learner to enclose an explanatory letter in cases where the application is submitted more than 28 days after the course start date.

Learner Attendance Monitoring Forms

We have identified an issue with the Learner Attendance Monitoring forms (LAMs) that are issued to Learning Providers by the Learner Support Service (LSS) for our childcare schemes: Care to Learn, Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work and Sixth Form College Childcare Scheme.

A LAM is issued to Learning Providers each month in order to confirm whether or not a learner is still in learning. So as not to put the parent’s childcare place at risk, we continue to make childcare payments to Childcare Providers until the LAM is returned to the LSS.

Some Learning Providers do not complete and return the LAM forms in a timely manner; in some cases this can be several months after the LAM was issued. When this happens and the LAM is eventually returned showing that a learner has left the learning programme, it is likely that considerable overpayments will have already been made to the Childcare Provider.

Learning Providers are urged to complete each LAM accurately and return it to the LSS within 2 weeks.
ACTION: • Urge Learning Providers to return LAMs as soon as possible to the Learner Support Service.

EMA and ALG Weekly Payments over the Christmas Period

At the beginning of December we sent out two User emails explaining the procedures for making weekly payment decisions for the Christmas period, as well as giving information on the helpline’s opening hours at this time. Please ensure that you remind all Providers about the email sent by the Learner Support Service, and encourage them to contact the helpline on 0845 600 7979 if they have any queries.

For EMA (FE Learners) and ALG 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. Providers must make sure that their term dates are recorded correctly in laps to ensure that they can make payment decisions on the last day. Please encourage Providers to make payment decisions before breaking for Christmas to ensure that learners do not have to wait until their return to receive their payment. For further details, please ensure Providers see the email.

For EMA e2e, PLA and FE Short Courses payment decisions for the week commencing 14th December will be presented in week commencing 21st December and these should be approved by Providers as normal. However, payment decisions for week commencing 21st December will not be presented until week commencing 28th December; given that the majority of Providers will be closed at this time, the Learner Support Service 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, however, include the bonus payment; the bonus decision should be made by the Provider on their return after Christmas.

Where a learners did not meet the attendance requirements and should not have received a payment for week commencing 21st December, Providers must ensure that the payment decision for the week commencing 21st December is reversed from a Yes to a No decision immediately on their return after Christmas.

For further information on e2e, PLA and FE Short Course decisions around accrued authorised absences, please ensure Providers see the email.

For information, the opening hours for the Provider helpline over the Christmas period are as follows:

- Christmas Eve: 07:00 – 16:00
- Christmas Day – closed
- Monday 28th December – closed
- Tuesday 29th December – 08:00 – 18:00
- Wednesday 20th December – 08:00 – 18:00
- New Year’s Eve – 08:00 – 16:00
- New Year’s Day – closed.

ACTION: • Ensure that Learning Providers are clear on the information on making Christmas payments.
Update from the Learner Support Directorate

Learner Support Contacts

In Issue 7 of this Partnership Team Update we reminded you about the contacts within the Learner Support Directorate that you should use as your first port of call when you have a query on any of the Learner Support scheme policies. Please make sure that you take note of who these contacts are.

We want to make sure you are kept informed of updates from Learner Support and would welcome your feedback on this publication. Please send any comments to learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

ACTION:
• Make a note of who the Learner Support contacts are, in case of query.

Learning Provider Resource Pack online

You may be aware that one of the resources available for EMA is the Learning Provider Resource Pack. This pack is aimed at teachers for use in PSHE lessons with Year 11 learners and consists of a booklet giving information for young people on their post-16 options, including information on EMA, some example worksheets for teachers to photocopy and use with learners and the EMA DVD.

This resource is now available to view online, so that Providers can see what information is included to help plan how they can use this within their own organisation. Providers should then order hard copies, to use in lessons with learners. This resource can be viewed on the EMA website.

Please make Providers aware that this resource is available to view online, but please also make them aware that they should order hard copies from LSC Publications as these contain a copy of the EMA DVD.

Providers can order these from LSC Publications by calling 0845 602 2260 or emailing lsc@prolog.uk.com, quoting the reference number LSC-P-NAT-080087.

ACTION:
• Inform Providers of the online availability of the Learning Provider Resource Pack and encourage them to order hard copies.
Learner Support Policy Updates

Care to Learn:

**Learning and childcare hours**
Please make Learning Providers aware that the description of a parent’s required attendance at learning is very important when assessing applications. Any discrepancy between the number of childcare hours and learning hours is checked during assessment and this can cause delays in payment to Childcare Providers.

It is important that when Learning Providers state on the form the number of hours and minutes that the parent must attend, they include the following; time spent on breaks, assemblies, study time on the Learning Provider’s premises, any work placements linked to the learning, as well as guided learning hours. The hours and minutes a parent is expected to use for home study should also be included.

Please note that this is also relevant to Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work and Sixth Form College Childcare schemes.

**Connexions data**
To align with the LSC’s procedures on data security it has been necessary to stop sending data about Care to Learn recipients in each area through the post, with immediate effect.

We are now looking at distributing this information by secure email instead. Please note we will only send these emails to recognised organisations (e.g. Connexions, local authorities etc). If any of your contacts have queries about this, please direct them to the Learner Support Service helpline on 0845 600 7979, where they can get more advice.

**Care to Learn maximum funding rates; template for case studies**
As you may be aware, owing to budget restrictions the maximum rates for Care to Learn have not been raised this year. We are aware that this may be causing a problem in your area, and so we would like to ask for case studies to help inform our understanding of the situation. In these case studies, we require the following information:

**Age of learner**
- Subject, level and qualification
- Type of Learning Provider – school, FE college, general college, community-based etc
- Length of course overall e.g. six months, one year, two year to complete
- Hours and days attendance required at the Learning Provider per week – 4 hours on Monday, 6 hours on Tuesday etc. Does Care to Learn cover all of this? If part, how much?
- Hours and days spent travelling between Learning Provider and childcare setting per week – 2 hours on Monday, 2 hours on Tuesday etc. Does Care to Learn cover all of this? If part, how much?
- Hours and days spent private study per week – 4 hours on Monday etc. Does Care to Learn cover all of this? If part, how much?
- Any alternative unpaid childcare arrangements the young parent may have access to – family/friend

We also need to know whether any of the options outlined below have been considered any why these are not considered suitable:
- Are the hours and days that are planned for learning and childcare the most cost effective, given the maximum amount payable from Care to Learn? For example, could the young parent study part time, requiring less childcare?
- Is the amount of childcare that is being considered the most cost effective for the learning, or could the young parent manage with less? Does the young parent need as much private study time?
- Perhaps another Childcare Provider would be more affordable? For example, if nurseries are more expensive than childminders, has the young parent considered using a childminder?
**Young parents approaching / turning age 20**

In issue 7 we have you some information on 19-year-old young parents studying A Levels. We have also received a number of queries about the treatment of young parents who turn age 20 whilst receiving support from Care to Learn.

As such, we would like to clarify the following information: Care to Learn is payable to young parents under the age of 20 when they start their course or programme of learning*, and it will be paid up until the end of that course. Should the young parent decide to start a new course after the age of 20, they are considered an adult and so will need to apply for adult Learner Support; Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work, Sixth Form College Childcare, or discretionary Learner Support (20+ childcare).

*A ‘programme of learning’ for Care to Learn means learning such as short courses, taster sessions and Activity Agreements. It does not mean a ‘programme of courses’, for example English GCSE followed by English A Level. Different levels of the same subject are different courses. A young parent turning 20 while studying for English GCSE by Care to Learn would have to apply to one of the adult schemes if they needed childcare support to continue learning at the next level.

**Describing the course on the Care to Learn application form**

Please be aware that how an applicant’s course is described on their application form will affect what is funded. For example, A Levels are now considered two distinct courses (AS and A2); if a 19 year old applicant puts on the application form that they are studying AS Levels, and then turns 20 during the AS Level course, Care to Learn can only be paid to the end of that AS Level. If the young parent intends to study both the AS and the A2, the form needs to state ‘A Levels’. The same applies to modular courses such as e2e; the whole course needs to be stated on the application form, not just the first module. Any timetable changes can be applied for on a Change of Circumstances form, which is available from the Learner Support Service on 0800 121 8989.

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**ACTION:**
- Inform Providers that they must state the correct number of attendance hours on the application form for Learner Support childcare schemes; not just guided learning hours.
- Encourage Providers to assist learners with completing their application form for Learner Support childcare schemes.
- Please note that Care to Learn data is no longer supplied by post.
- Send us any case studies where the current rate of Care to Learn affects childcare provision.
- Inform Providers about the rules around young parents turning 20.
- Inform Providers of the importance of correctly describing the young parent’s course on the application form.

Please send us any case studies with the answers to the above questions to C2Lsurvey@lsc.gov.uk
Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work

The Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work scheme is currently supporting over XXXX learners with the cost of their childcare. In addition to the audio feature that we produced (mentioned in Issue 7), we have produced a promotional video for the scheme, featuring Suzanne Shaw and a learner who is receiving support from the scheme. We are keen for Providers to play a role in encouraging parents to apply for the scheme, and so we have made this video available for them to download from the Campaign Resources website (CRS) at www.lsc.gov.uk/campaignresources. Also posted on the site is some example text of words they could use alongside the video.

To complement these new resources, we have also uploaded some website artwork (a web banner and button) onto the CRS, for Providers to download and use on their website to link to the Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work pages of the directgov website. This will enable learners to find out more information on the scheme to see if they may be eligible to receive support.

Please encourage Providers to sign up to the CRS and to use the resources available to them to help raise awareness of Learner Support schemes. By signing up to the CRS Providers can also keep up to date with national marketing activity for Learner Support.

**ACTION:**
- Encourage Providers to download Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work resources from the CRS and use this to promote the scheme amongst learners.

Management Information:

**EMA, Care to Learn and Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work**

We would like to remind you that we publish Management Information (MI), including take-up reports, on the Learner Support pages of the LSC Intranet (https://newintranet.lsc.gov.uk/corporate/learning/GroupStructure/LearnerSupport/ManagementInformation/Pages/index.aspx). These are available for Education Maintenance Allowance and Care to Learn.

The **EMA** report details take-up by region and local authority and this is updated on a monthly basis. On the **Care to Learn** page you will find take-up data for the scheme in the 2008/09 academic year.

Information is also now available for **Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work**. You can download a report, which details the number of learners applying to the scheme and the number of learners taking up the scheme in each local authority. You can also download a User Guide, giving full details of the data contained within the report.

If you have any questions after looking at these reports, on the data contained within them, please email LearnerSupportMI@lsc.gov.uk. If you have any queries on the policies, you can contact the relevant colleague within the Learner Support Directorate; (see earlier article, or **Issue 7**).

**ACTION:**
- Download MI reports for EMA, Care to Learn and Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work.
Materials to help you

Posters on Learner Support

You may be aware that we have produced two posters outlining support that learners can receive from Learner Support schemes. We would like to remind you in this issue about the availability of these posters, that can also be used by Providers to help learners to see what support they may be eligible to receive. Please order a copy of each of the below posters for your own reference.

- **Childcare Big Picture.** This poster gives an overview of the eligibility criteria for the Learner Support and Jobcentre Plus schemes that support childcare for parents wishing to enter learning. The support of the learner is based on their age and personal circumstance. This poster is available both to view online and to order in hard copy from LSC Publications (reference number LSC-P-NAT-090083).
- **What does Learner Support do Big Picture.** This poster outlines the basic information of all of the Learner Support schemes, and how they contribute to wider LSC objectives. On the reverse side of this poster is an eligibility checker, which displays what support a learner may be entitled to based on their age and personal circumstances. This poster is also available to view online and to order in hard copy from LSC Publications (reference number LSC-P-NAT-090139).

To order copies of these from LSC Publications, please call 0845 602 2260 or email lsc@prolog.uk.com, quoting the relevant reference number.

To find out more of our available marketing materials, please see the Marketing and Support Materials Catalogue on the Learner Support Service website.

Sign up for more information

If you are not subscribed to receive this Partnership Team Update, but would like to receive this regularly, please email learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk. Please note that from April 2010, the Learner Support Directorate will be part of the YPLA, and will continue to be responsible for both youth and adult Learner Support. We will also continue to produce this Update. If you know of any colleagues who will be interested in receiving information on Learner Support, please encourage them to sign up to receive this publication.

We produce a number of other regular e-bulletins that give information about Learner Support. Details of how to register for your name to be added to the distribution list are as follows:

- **The Learner Support Service Stakeholder e-bulletin** is a monthly update, distributed at the end of the month for stakeholders and colleagues providing useful information on the Learner Support Service. If you would like to receive this please visit http://www.ewagroup.com/lsc-newsletter/registration. Previous copies of this are available to view from the Learner Support Service website.

- **Childcare News** is a monthly e-bulletin, distributed at the end of each month, for stakeholders and colleagues providing useful information on all of Learner Support’s childcare schemes, including Care to Learn and Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work. If you would like to receive this please visit http://www.ewagroup.com/lsc-newsletter/registration. Previous copies of this are available on the Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work and Care to Learn websites.

- **Professional and Career Development Loans e-bulletin** is distributed quarterly and gives information on the loans to key stakeholders. If you would like to receive this e-bulletin please email us at pcdladvise@lsc.gov.uk.