Learner Support Service
Background Briefing No 1 – May 2008

Primary audience: STUDENT ADVISERS
From: The Learner Support Directorate at The LSC
About: the new arrangements for EMA and ALG applications

The aim of this briefing:
To give you the latest news, information and developments about the changes to the ways that the LSC’s financial support schemes are administered. These include:

- Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)
- Adult Learning Grant (ALG)
- Care to Learn
- Sixth Form College Childcare
- Dance and Drama Awards
- Residential Accommodation Support.

The changes will be carried out in stages during 2008. The first Learner Support schemes to be affected are EMA and ALG. In the meantime, please continue to use the existing application and administrative system for all the other schemes.

If you are new to these changes, there is a useful overview you can download from www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss

To carry out these changes, the LSC is working closely with a new Helpline, Assessment and Payment Body (HAPB) that was appointed last year after a rigorous procurement exercise. The HAPB is a consortium of three organisations:

- Liberata www.liberata.com
- PA Consulting www.paconsulting.com
- Perot Systems www.perotsystems.com

More flexible application methods for EMA and ALG
A vital part of student advisers’ work is helping learners apply for a wide range of financial support schemes including EMA and ALG.
The new changes mean that as well as applying for EMA and ALG via the traditional paper application form, learners will soon be able to:

- fill out an online ‘eligibility checker’ to see, in principle, whether or not they are eligible for EMA, ALG or other financial support;
- apply online for one or more financial support schemes;
- apply over the phone via a dedicated number for one or more financial support schemes; and
- be contacted through their preferred channel, for example, text or email.

**The online ‘eligibility checker’**

The ‘eligibility checker’ is a new online tool that has been specially developed in response to past feedback in which you asked for a facility to help applicants find out early on the application process whether or not they are eligible for EMA, ALG or another scheme.

The ‘eligibility checker’ is a great asset for learners and their advisers because:

- it will greatly improve the level of advice given to learners by offering an early decision, in principle, about eligibility for a scheme;
- highlight other potential financial support schemes that the learner might be eligible for; and
- save time by weeding out those who are not eligible and ensuring there are more ‘right first time’ applications.

The ‘eligibility checker’ will be ready to use online at [www.direct.gov.uk/moneytolearn](http://www.direct.gov.uk/moneytolearn).

**User guide ready**

We have a user guide for the ‘eligibility checker’ you can access from: [www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss)

**Benefits of the new application methods**

We believe these changes will benefit you – as well as the learner – in offering flexibility and ultimately giving a one-stop shop for the different schemes.

Once they have registered online, applicants can access the password-protected ‘My Account’ facility. This makes the process much less stressful by:

- allowing applicants to partly fill in an application form – and then to return to it as many times as they like;
- keeping applicants up to date with the status of their application; and
- sending out chaser reminders for part-completed forms.

Once an applicant receives EMA or ALG, the ‘My Account’ facility also:

- keeps a record of payments made; and
- sends out useful information and messages.
Provisional timetable as of April 2008
We fully understand that you will need specific dates for these changes but we hope you also understand that it is essential that the new online facilities are rigorously tested – so we don’t want to commit ourselves to a specific date until we are sure everything is ready.

From April 2008, we will begin to take applications for EMA and ALG from learners on the telephone and via the traditional paper-based application packs.

In June 2008, we will open our online channel. At this point, learners can apply on the internet, over the phone or by using a paper application pack.

From late June 2008, we will begin making payments to appropriate 2008/09 EMA and ALG customers.

Arrangements for the other nationally administered schemes (Sixth Form College Childcare, Residential Accommodation Support, Dance and Drama Award and Care to Learn) will change later. We will keep you updated on the timescales. In the meantime, arrangements for these schemes will continue as usual.

Attendance monitoring
An important aspect of administering EMA is attendance monitoring as this affects weekly payments and any potential bonus that may have been agreed.

At present, colleges tend to use either the current EMASYS system or have a third-party software interface that connects to EMASYS.

The EMASYS system will be replaced by the new Learner Provider Portal (LPP). All users will also need a username and password. We will be mailing these to existing users in the coming months.

The LPP will be very similar to the old EMASYS system, so you should not find it too different to work with. However, we will of course support you through the transition period – and particularly those of you who have not used EMASYS before.

Third party interfaces to EMA system
If your college uses a third party interface to link between your IT systems and EMASYS, you will need to get this interface updated so it can work with the new Learner Provider Portal.

We have written to all accredited software providers of third party interfaces with details of our new system. Most of the software providers are planning to have made the required updates by the end of August – the main switchover date to the Learner Provider Portal.

Training and support
In recent feedback from workshops and e-bulletins, you told us that the following are key in supporting you, and other stakeholders, in the changeover to the new Learner Support Service:

- an operating manual;
- workshops and seminars on either a regional or county basis; and a
- briefing pack to include frequently asked questions.

We are now working on a range of training and support materials and will keep you posted.

**Your role**

Student Advisers play a very important role in encouraging learners to develop skills by applying for, staying in or progressing further in learning programmes. It is vital, therefore, that we all work together to make sure the new Learner Support System works as well and as effectively as it possibly can.

Please make sure that you:

- Advise learners that they can now apply online or over the phone for EMA and ALG – as well as via the traditional paper-based route.
- Publicise [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) as the main online source for information about EMA and ALG (and other financial support).
- Keep colleagues in your college informed about the changes and let them know about the monthly e-bulletin. Anyone who would like to subscribe to it should email: Ben.Petter@hillandknowlton.com; all past e-bulletins are on the LSC website at: [www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn)
- Encourage colleges to promote EMA and ALG by displaying the latest posters and leaflets.

There is a wide range of marketing and campaign materials for ALG and EMA that you can order from LSC Publications (known as Prolog).

For EMA log onto [http://ema.lsc.gov.uk/resources/](http://ema.lsc.gov.uk/resources/)
For ALG log onto: [http://alg.lsc.gov.uk/resources/resourcematerial/](http://alg.lsc.gov.uk/resources/resourcematerial/)

**EMA Policy summaries online**

Please note you can find the latest EMA policy summaries at: [http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/resources/](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/resources/)

**Workshop materials online**

A range of workshop slide packs, briefing documents and regularly updated FAQs are available at: [www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss)

**Learner Provider Helpline**

If you have any queries, please phone the Learner Provider Helpline on 0845 6007979.