Learner Support Service
Background Briefing No 1 – May 2008

Primary audience: ALL LEARNER SUPPORT STAKEHOLDERS
From: The Learner Support Directorate at The LSC
About: the new arrangements for administering Learner Support schemes

The Learner Support Directorate at the LSC is responsible for a number of financial support schemes that are designed to help young people and adults continue in, or return to, learning, training and developing their skills:

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

There is more on Learner Support schemes on the provider pages of the LSC website www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/

After a public procurement exercise last year, the LSC appointed a new Helpline, Assessment and Payment Body (HAPB) to help administer the different schemes and offer learners more flexible and less bureaucratic ways of applying.

The HAPB is made up of a consortium of three separate organisations:

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

What is changing
In the past, all learners applying for a Learner Support scheme had to fill out a paper application form.

However, from July 2008, learners will be able to apply for Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or an Adult Learning Grant (ALG) online via the government’s public-facing website directgov – or over the telephone.
This means the application process will be more flexible, streamlined and easier for the learner – while cutting back on unnecessary bureaucracy.

As part of the online application facility, the new service includes an online ‘eligibility checker’ that can:

- give a decision, in principle, as to whether or not the applicant is eligible for a particular financial support scheme;
- highlight other potential financial support schemes for which the learner might be eligible.

The ‘eligibility checker’ will also help save time and ensure there are more ‘right first time’ applications.

By the end of the year, learners will be able to apply for all the learner support schemes (Care to Learn, Dance and Drama Awards, Sixth Form College Childcare and Residential Accommodation Support Scheme) online or over the phone (as well as through filling out the paper form).

In the meantime, please note that arrangements for these schemes will continue as usual.

**Pilot areas to trial the new application methods**

We are currently running two pilots in South Yorkshire and the South West to test the new application methods. The evaluation of the pilot will help greatly in planning our approach to the Learner Support Service in 2009-10.

The two pilot areas are strongly promoting the online and telephone application methods to learners – while limiting the supply of the traditional paper application forms. The pilot areas will monitor responses, check how the application process works and highlight any issues that arise.

**Training and support**

We received over a 1,000 responses to our Training Needs Analysis (TNA) Questionnaire about what training you felt we should provide. All areas of the country were covered by the responses.

The message coming across loud and clear is that, at the moment, most people are confident about helping students complete their paper-based application forms for EMA and ALG. However, over 65 per cent are not so confident about helping applicants complete their online applications.

You told us that the following are key in supporting you 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 these in readiness for the launch of the new Learner Support Service and will obviously keep you posted via the monthly stakeholder e-bulletin and briefings.

**Your FAQs and workshop feedback**
Over the past few months, we have collected your questions and feedback from our workshops and e-bulletins. We are currently working to answer each one of them and we’ll post them on: 
www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss

In the meantime, if you follow the link, you can see the FAQs that you have asked so far.

**Background briefings**

**Background briefings for:**
- Connexions advisers
- Work-based learning providers
- **nextstep** and **learndirect advice** advisers
- Student Support advisers
- School administrators and staff offering personal, social and health education (PSHE)

are all available to download from www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss

**Monthly e-bulletins**

We are producing a monthly e-bulletin for all our stakeholders. If you are not yet receiving it, please contact: Ben.Petter@hillandknowlton.com

Past e-bulletins are on the website at:
www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss

**Learner Provider Helpline**

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