**News November 08**

Last Updated: 20th November

This section of the website is dedicated to keeping you up to date with the Learner Support Service. We are updating this website regularly so please keep visiting for the latest information.

We want to assure providers, colleges and all young people that applications will continue to be processed and the helplines will continue on the same numbers and all users should continue to use their existing systems to make payment to their ALG and EMA learners.

**LSC APPOINTS NEW SERVICE PROVIDER FOR LEARNER SUPPORT SERVICES**

“The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has discontinued its contract with Liberata and appointed Capita to take on its full range of learner support services – including Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) and the Adult Learning Grant (ALG).

“Learners have suffered weeks of delay in receiving payments as a result of Liberata encountering technical difficulties in processing EMA applications. The focus of the LSC and Liberata throughout this period was to ensure that all possible steps were taken to overcome these delays. At one stage the backlog of applications was in excess of 200,000. Liberata has worked to reduce this backlog to below 12,000 and the remaining applications are expected to be cleared within the next few weeks.

“Despite this progress, the LSC’s view is that a change of supplier is the best way forward. The LSC has been in talks with Liberata about the future of the contract for the past four weeks and has decided to move the contract to another supplier.

“We can now announce that the Learner and Learning Provider helplines, processing and payments service will transfer from Liberata to Capita on 28 November. With effect from that date, Capita will bring in a new senior management team to oversee the staff and operations in Coventry, Manchester and Darlington processing centre’s.

“We would like to reassure learners that payments will continue and, that during the transfer period, outstanding applications will continue to be processed.

Mark Haysom, Chief Executive of the LSC said:

“We have said throughout that it is unacceptable for young people to have their EMA payments delayed.

“Capita has a long history of working on programmes such as EMA and we are delighted they are able to take this contract forward and provide learners with the service they deserve. We are working with Liberata and Capita to make the transfer as smooth as possible. Although the transfer will not immediately fix all of the helpline and processing problems, it will help us to improve the future service for young people, colleges and learning providers.”

**Financial support from hardship funds**

Colleges can use their hardship funds to help EMA learners. We have set up a panel with our partners to review your questions and concerns about how hardship funds should be administered to support delayed EMA payments.

As well as updating this website, we also produce a monthly stakeholder e-bulletin. If you would like to subscribe please email us at: learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk.

There is more information in letters from the LSC’s Chief Executive, Mark Haysom.