

The final issue of EMA Extension Update

Welcome to the last issue of EMA Extension Update.

We've come a long way since our first edition in November last year, thanks to the hard work of all those involved in the extension of EMA to LSC-funded E2E and Programme-led Apprenticeships.

Since we launched our programme to prepare local LSCs, learning providers and partners for the April extension, 1,200 people have attended our 12 regional conferences; more than 2000 people have subscribed to EMA Extension Update and hundreds of you have contacted us with your comments and queries.

Today, learning providers across the country are successfully operating the web-based payment system, EMASYS and, through our combined efforts to communicate with schools, teachers understand the benefits of the EMA extension and are spreading the word among young people.

Most importantly, more than 65,000 more young people can now benefit from EMA, many of whom will see a considerable rise in their household income.

None of this could have happened without the ongoing commitment of local LSCs, learning providers and our other partners, to whom we would like to extend our gratitude.

This is the final issue of EMA Extension Update, we hope you have found it helpful - we have certainly welcomed your input which has helped us address your issues and concerns. We shall continue to address emerging questions but this will now be via the EMA website (www.direct.gov.uk/ema). Please log on to keep abreast of latest developments and also access our range of resources and support materials. If you have any specific questions please contact your Local Learning and Skills Council who will be happy to help – if you don't have

EMA Update

June 2006

Of interest to work-based learning providers, local LSCs and anyone else interested in delivering EMA

contact details please click here

<http://www.lsc.gov.uk/selectlsc.asp?section=/Corporate>

Once again, thank you all for your invaluable help and support.

Greg Burke, Head of EMA Unit

Application forms

Earlier this year, learning providers received a supply of 2005/2006 EMA application forms (orange in colour).

The 2006/2007 EMA application forms (green in colour) are now ready and details of how to order them will be sent to learning providers shortly. Remember that the 'Application Form Resource Pack' (reference: LSC-P-NAT-060054), which helps practitioners understand all aspects of the EMA application process and includes details on which colour form should be completed, and the 'EMA Aide Memoire' (reference: LSC-P-NAT-060056), which summarises essential information, can be ordered from PROLOG telephone **0845 602 2260** (using the above reference numbers) and can also be downloaded from www.direct.gov.uk/ema.

For more information on application forms, learning providers can call the helpline on **08081016219**.

Benefits queries answered

Over the last month, many of you have submitted queries relating to benefits entitlement under EMA.

Frequently asked questions on this complex issue were addressed in April's EMA Extension Update Benefits Special. Remember to download your copy by logging onto www.direct.gov.uk/ema

Guiding learning providers through EMA

The latest information and guidance for learning providers who are involved in delivering EMA in 2006/2007 has just been made available.

The 2006/2007 EMA Guidance, which details what learning providers should do to operate the EMA scheme can be downloaded from www.direct.gov.uk/ema (NB. Guidance is due out 2 June, so check it's on the web, before issuing the update).

EMA Advertising

Some of you may have already noticed the EMA consumer advertising campaign, which kicked off on 22 May and lasts until 18 June.

The 'spy' themed advertising, which is consistent with previous EMA marketing, is aimed at raising awareness of EMA among young people and their parents or carers.

Target audiences are being reached through the following means:

- TV advertising on ITV, channel 4, channel 5 and national satellite channels
- Radio advertising in regional radio stations across England
- Adverts in many popular women's magazines such as Chat, Bella, Woman's Own and Take a Break
- Thousands of posters on phone kiosks and buses
- Online activity

EMA Q&A

What is the position on a 16 – 18 year old young person who is living with a partner in terms of EMA eligibility?

A young person living with a partner forms a household in their own right for Tax Credit Award purposes. If the partner is 18 or older, the young person should apply using their household income. If both partners are under 18, they can still apply. Any applicant who needs help in applying should contact the APB helpline on **080 810 16219** for the correct advice.

What is the position on making one-off payments for non-EMA learners?

A one-off payment in exceptional circumstances to reward achievement or contribution towards expenses could be made by a learning provider to a non-EMA learner. There are no LSC funds available to support such a payment. However, regular successive payments to a non-EMA learner would not be acceptable as they would impact on the household entitlement to Child Benefit/Child Tax credit. They may also result in an inappropriate delay to the learner's progression to a paid employer-led Apprenticeship.

What is the position on 18 year olds who are living independently and claiming Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance. Can they access EMA?

The state takes the view that a person who is 18 and is no longer in full time education should be treated as an adult. They may choose to live independently from their parents/carers and claim financial support from the state whilst doing so, whether they have chosen to leave home voluntarily or due to estrangement. If they are capable of working they are most likely to be put on Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based). Unless the person cannot actively seek work (for example due to being a lone parent or having a disability) they will not be able to switch their claim to Income Support if they choose to enter education. Under the terms of their Jobseeker's Allowance Agreement, the young person may study for up to 16 hours per week, with the conditions that this will not preclude them from actively seeking work, and that they will be able to accept an offer of employment within 24 hours. This would not fit neatly with the learning pattern for most Programme-led Apprentices or E2E learners. The HM Treasury-led group that is reviewing financial support for 16-19 year olds will be considering all such remaining anomalies as part of their ongoing review, leading to their long-term vision of a single coherent system of support for this age group and their families.

Has the position on learners who are on Jobseeker's Allowance (Severe Hardship) been communicated to Connexions Colleagues yet?

Yes, the Action Note went out in early May. Connexions Advisers do not have to use the standard letter that was included in the Action Note. However, any letter Connexions colleagues write to accompany the learner's EMA Application must contain the same information: any letters which do not contain that information will be rejected by the Assessment and Payment Body.

I have learners who will be transferring to another provider for some of their provision: what am I supposed to do in terms of EMASYS?

The LSC's preference is that a learner stays with the same provider for the duration of their programme and therefore this provider is responsible for all EMA administration. If a learner transfers between providers whilst continuing on the same programme of study a relationship must exist between the two responsible providers. The first provider should maintain administration of EMA, liaising with the second provider regarding payments. This would function in the same way that providers administer EMA on behalf of sub contractors, ensuring a full audit trail of evidence for weekly payment decisions is kept. Where it is not practical for the first provider to maintain administration functions then the EMA local partner helpline should be consulted for guidance on how to proceed. We are currently reviewing the EMASYS functionality with respect to transferring learners between providers and will communicate updates as information becomes available.

I'm not sure when my learner's provision will stop: is it acceptable for me to set the period of study to 2007 (making full use of the 22 week extension)?

No. Best practice is to set the learner's projected period of study as accurately as possible. EMASYS is not designed to be set to the maximum amount of extension for every learner, and this practice will result in the learner being sent letters from the Assessment and Payment Body which they could find confusing if the provider had not told them of the granting of an extension.

Can I offer Hardship Fund payments to my MTA learners for items such as travel or kit?

No. The Hardship Fund is not designed for MTA learners. Funding continues to be available through the Work Based Learning Additional Learner Support funding stream for all WBL learners to accommodate both travel and items of kit, so the Hardship Fund should never be used for this purpose.

The Hardship Fund is available to offer emergency funding for those who cannot afford to participate in learning and who are in genuine hardship. MTA learners are guaranteed to qualify for £40 funding throughout their course, and their households can benefit from both Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit.

My learners have sent off their EMA Application Forms to the APB and nothing has come back – what is going on?

The information that a young person and their parent/ carer must submit to make an EMA Application is very sensitive, and therefore the APB can only communicate with the young person or parent/carer who are applying for EMA. The LSC sets very clear requirements which the APB must deliver against. The APB will write to the EMA applicant immediately to say they have received the application, or if there is missing information which prevents it being processed. Once all information is available every applicant should know within 3 weeks what the position is on their application:

- If their application has been correctly completed, and the learner is eligible, the APB will write to the learner confirming that a good application has been made, returning their proofs and confirming that a Notice of Entitlement will shortly be issued.
- If the young person is ineligible, the APB will write them a letter confirming that is the case.
- If there is a query on the information provided, the APB will write to the young person setting out what needs to be corrected. If the learner has resubmitted the same form twice, and there are still errors on it, the APB will give them a phone call to explain what the problem is and what needs to be done.

In every case, the correspondence will be sent to the young person making the application. For those eligible or ineligible, the adult (the vast majority of applications are supported by an adult) will also get a letter informing them of the decision. Sometimes families fail to open or take action on the APB's correspondence: if further action on that application is required, the APB cannot do anything more for a young person until they make contact, and supply whatever additional information is required. Therefore it is always worth asking the young person to follow up with the APB if there is a significant delay (more than a couple of weeks) after the application form has been posted.

If the young person rings the young person's helpline and authorises the APB to speak to a trusted third party, such as a Connexions Adviser or Learning Provider, the APB will be explain to that third party what the position on the learner's application form is. However, that trusted third party must be physically with the learner.

EMA Extension Update is published monthly and is available online. It can be downloaded from our website (www.lsc.gov.uk) through the Documents section of our national home page by selecting Series on the menu bar.

We value your views, so please let us have your comments on the content and style, or any ideas on how you think we could improve LSC Extension Update at emaextension@lsc.gov.uk

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