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Council

Evaluation of the New
Criteria for Provision
Associated with the
Education Maintenance
Allowance

March 2009



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. York Consulting Limited Liability Partnership (YCL) was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to undertake an evaluation of the new criteria for provision associated with the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The evaluation was conducted between September 2008 and March 2009.
2. EMA was introduced in an effort to achieve the government's longer-term vision of getting 90 per cent of 17 year olds engaged in learning by 2015. It is also a key tool in reducing numbers of those not in education, employment or training (NEET). The EMA is a weekly payment of up to £30 to encourage participation in post-compulsory education.
3. The LSC and DCSF worked together to create a new set of eligibility criteria to administer the EMA, known as the valid provision trial. These criteria were developed to remove restrictions associated with the previous criteria, which meant that certain types of good quality provision was ineligible for EMA simply due to not fitting in with the strict eligibility criteria.
4. The valid provision trial commenced in November 2007. The evaluation was commissioned to assess the effectiveness of the new criteria, and explore the impact of the new criteria on providers and learners.
5. The methodology has involved:
 - case studies with 8 providers that have been approved for EMA under the new criteria – including consultations with provider staff, learners, local LSC partnership team staff and local Connexions office staff;
 - a telephone survey of providers approved for EMA under the new criteria;
 - a small-scale postal survey of learners on new provision approved for EMA;
 - discussions with national stakeholders including DCSF and ALP;
 - analysis of LSC Management Information (MI) records of learning providers approved for EMA.

Trialling the New Criteria

New Provision

6. The valid provision trial has been **effective in allowing a greater number of new learning programmes to become eligible for EMA**. However, the **additionality of the new criteria is at the margins in terms of the scale of new provision it has attracted**. Around 40–50 of the 221 providers approved under the new criteria are likely to be offering new types of provision that would not have been eligible under the previous criteria.
7. The majority of programmes are aimed at **young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who would otherwise be NEET**, and are also often described as being **hard to reach**. In addition, there are some programmes aimed at specific target groups such as pregnant young women and former young offenders.
8. The programmes are designed with the needs and interest of the target group in mind and typically combine **vocational or work-related learning** with other activities aimed at developing **employability skills** (CV-writing) and **building confidence and self-esteem**.

Provision that Remains Out of Scope

9. Despite the change in criteria, some provision that remains out of scope for EMA has been identified. It is not, however, a significant amount, and nor is there demand amongst those consulted for it to be eligible. This suggests that there is **no requirement for the criteria to be amended in this respect**.

Awareness and Understanding of the New Criteria

10. To make stakeholders aware of the change in criteria, the LSC sent notes/emails to local authorities, super-users at learning providers and to Connexions, as well as placing publications in the media. This has been effective, in part; however, **levels of awareness and particularly levels of understanding of the criteria could be higher among providers, LSC staff and Connexions**.

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11. There are some good examples of where the LSC and Connexions have played a key role in promoting the new criteria, but this is not always the case. As such, while the new criteria has attracted some new provision, there is a possibility that there is still some provision for which the EMA is not available, but potentially could be.
12. Local LSC staff have an important role in raising awareness locally and ensuring understanding amongst providers, but they may need additional guidance on methods by which to do this.

Perceptions of the Trial

13. Overall, there is general agreement that the **trial has met its objectives** and been **beneficial in allowing a wider range of provision to be eligible for EMA**.
14. Some issues have been raised around the extent to which these programmes are comparable to the E2E programme, where the EMA is no longer means-tested. In the main, however, stakeholders are positive about the benefits the EMA has brought in allowing different types of provision to be eligible.

Impact of the New Criteria on Providers

New Provision – Programme Features and Design

15. The majority of programmes delivered by the eight case study providers were described as **“pre-E2E” programmes and/or programmes aimed at young people who were previously NEET or who were at risk of being NEET**. One programme had a slightly different focus, delivering provision for ‘young parents to be’.
16. Four programmes existed prior to the introduction of the new criteria, while four were set up after the new criteria were introduced, three of which were designed with the new EMA criteria in mind.
17. In all but one provider, the EMA was regarded as a critical element of the programme offer. This is also evident by the fact that **three of the four**

programmes that already existed had previously offered an incentive to learners for participation.

18. Across the case studies, there were examples of where the **variability of the learner experience could have consequences for EMA eligibility**. Although the overall programme is broadly the same, each learner may have an individual programme of learning designed to meet their needs, or the learners may participate in the programme for varying lengths of time (e.g. roll-on, roll-off). There is a lack of consistency in how providers deal with this, with some checking individual eligibility and others not.

Administering the EMA

19. Overall, the **administration associated with the EMA is regarded as worthwhile**, especially where providers feel that the EMA is a reasonable support mechanism for young people. In the main, providers have found the administration of the EMA manageable, despite some of the national administrative difficulties with the EMA encountered during Autumn 2008.
20. **Those providers new to offering the EMA tend to have found the administration more difficult**, suggesting that ease of administration will develop over time as staff become familiar with the processes. Smaller providers and those new to offering EMA may benefit from local information-sharing to learn about approaches to administering the EMA. Furthermore, updates to the EMA guidance to reflect the new types of programmes eligible for EMA would also be beneficial.

Impacts and Effects

21. **The changes to the criteria have not had significant effects on approaches to the design of the programmes**, particularly as a number of programmes existed prior to the introduction of the new criteria. Particular attention has been paid to ensuring that the programmes comprise sufficient elements to meet the guided learning hours. Incorporating qualifications and ensuring that provision was subject to a quality inspection were not pertinent to the

design of the programme, however, they were regarded as valuable components of the criteria.

22. Reference was made to the constraints of the EMA in comparison to the former training allowance. Provider staff felt that some **additional flexibility in the payment process for EMA could enhance the way in which the EMA could be used to incentivise learners.**

Impacts on Learners

23. An assessment of the potential impact of the new criteria on learners is provided by looking at the impact of the EMA on learners participating in provision that would not previously have been eligible for EMA. This draws on responses to a small-scale learner survey¹ and consultations/focus groups with learners as part of the provider case studies.

Learning Programme Activity

24. Learners responding to the survey have identified that they are participating in programmes of learning aimed at supporting transition to employment while others are pursuing particular vocational programmes. Most provision is at entry level or Level 1 (and a minority at Level 2).
25. **Connexions staff have played a key role in signposting learners to these programmes.** Learners have chosen these programmes for a range of reasons. The most common reason given was “for the qualification”. A significant proportion of learners had not considered any alternative programmes of learning. For those who had considered alternatives, the most common alternatives were vocational routes.
26. Prior activity was wide-ranging. **Many learners were previously at school, or on another learning programme at a college/training provider.** Other prior activities included looking for another programme/course, looking for work and doing “nothing”.

¹ As the scale of new provision is small, the sample for the learner survey is also small and therefore caution should be exercised in the conclusions drawn from this evidence base.

27. For most learners this was the first time they had received an EMA. The main ways in which they have used their EMA were for costs relating to the learning programme or towards the costs of living.

Impact of the EMA on Choices and Decision-Making

28. The EMA has had some influence on learner choices and decision-making regarding programmes of learning to participate in. Although **many learners report that the EMA played an important role in their decision-making process, most learners indicate that they would have undertaken the programme anyway (though some would have had to earn money as well).**
29. Provider, Connexions and LSC staff felt that the EMA has had a positive effect by ensuring that some young people that need additional support now participate in the most appropriate course, rather than, for example, opting for E2E as they may have done had the EMA not been available.

Impact on Learner Attitudes and Behaviours

30. Although most learners have indicated that they were not likely to have left the programme if they had not been receiving EMA payments, for a **small proportion of learners the EMA does seem to have been an important factor in staying on the programme.**
31. For the majority of learners, the EMA has had at least some positive impacts on learners' attitudes to learning, for the majority of learners. The evidence suggests that the EMA has had a **more significant impact on attendance** than on punctuality, completion, behaviour and staying in training/learning. The extent to which the EMA has influenced learner attitudes and behaviours may depend on provider approaches. It is apparent from the case study visits that some providers have enforced a stronger link between the EMA and learner targets than in others.
32. The EMA bonus and attendance requirements have also had a positive influence on learners in terms of motivating them to achieve their learning goals and attending their programmes of learning more than they might do

otherwise. Most learners were also in agreement that the rules for stoppages and bonuses were fair.

Applying for the EMA

33. Although most learners report that they have found applying for the EMA easy, there is a proportion for whom the process has been problematic. Some of these difficulties relate to learners' abilities to complete the form and provide the required information. Learners have sought support from Connexions staff, teachers and tutors. Simplifications to the application form may be helpful.

Recommendations

34. A series of recommendations have been identified covering the following six areas:
- **monitoring 'new' provision** by capturing greater detail on new types of provision to enable further understanding of the impacts of the criteria over time;
 - **undertaking awareness-raising activities** to generate better awareness and understanding of the criteria among LSC staff, Connexions staff and providers;
 - **issuing guidance to support providers** in implementing the EMA, to provide clarity around how to deal with variable learner programmes and share effective practice on approaches to the administration of the EMA;
 - **reviewing the application process** to identify opportunities to simplify the form and/or process;
 - **maximising the impact of the EMA** by better linking the EMA to targets for young people and considering the feasibility and value of additional flexibility in EMA payments;
 - **considering larger-scale measurement of the impact on young people** in the future, once more detailed MI allows the new types of provision to be more readily identified.

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 York Consulting Limited Liability Partnership (YCL) was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to undertake an evaluation of the new criteria for provision associated with the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The evaluation was conducted between September 2008 and March 2009.

Background to the EMA

1.2 EMA is a weekly payment of up to £30 available to 16–19 year olds from households with an income of less than £30,810² per year to encourage participation in post compulsory education. Bonus payments are also available to learners to encourage progression against set learning goals.

1.3 EMA is a ‘something for something’ measure, not a handout. Payments are only made when a young person attends their learning, as agreed in a contract between the young person and their learning provider.

1.4 EMA was introduced in an effort to achieve the government’s longer-term vision of getting 90 per cent of 17 year olds engaged in learning by 2015. It is also a key tool in reducing numbers of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) and supports the LSC’s four key strategic objectives to:

- increase participation at 16, 17 and 18, and support transition;
- raise attainment at 19;
- improve access to learning;
- support progression towards continuing learning and employment.

² 2008/09

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- 1.5 EMA was piloted to learners in full-time education from 1999 to 2003 and an extensive evaluation undertaken. The evaluators³ projected that the full impact of EMA across the period 1999 to 2008 (i.e. baseline before EMA through to its full roll-out) would be an increase in participation of 3.8ppts for 16 year olds and 4.1ppts for 17 year olds.
- 1.6 Since the 30th June 2008 all eligible learners taking an LSC funded Entry to Employment (E2E) programme are entitled to the maximum EMA of £30 a week regardless of their household income.

Criteria for Provision associated with EMA

- 1.7 Since EMA was rolled out nationally in April 2006, the criterion for administering EMA was that Further Education (FE) providers were required to be registered on Edubase. Providers who are not on Edubase were assessed against a set of criteria in order to be approved for EMA and were deemed as non standard institutions (NSIs).
- 1.8 In order for FE providers to register on Edubase and NSIs to be approved for EMA, providers simply had to be administering courses that were at least 12 guided learning hours per week (for FE providers) and a minimum of 16 hours a week for E2E and Programme Led Apprentices (PLA) programmes, and for a minimum of 10 weeks.

³ 'Evaluation of Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots: Young People Aged 16 to 19 Years, Final Report of the Quantitative Evaluation', Centre for Research in Social Policy and Institute for Fiscal Studies (2005), *DfES Research Report RR678*.

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1.9 It was deemed that the above criteria were restrictive in that there were certain types of good quality provision, such as ESF funded provision that was ineligible for EMA simply due to not fitting in with the strict eligibility criteria. The previous criteria meant providers had to be either on Edubase or the provision had to be LSC funded. The new criteria means providers do not have to be on Edubase and the course does not have to be LSC funded – it can be any course that leads to a recognised qualification, including programmes that are ESF-funded.

New Criteria – The Valid Provision Trial

1.10 The LSC and the DCSF worked together to create a new set of eligibility criteria to administer EMA (called the valid provision trial). The new criteria is intended to allow different types of provision to come under the umbrella of EMA and thus allow more learners to be financially supported in their learning. The valid provision trial commenced in November 2007, for a period of 18 months. **Figure 1.1** outlines the new criteria.

Figure 1.1: New Criteria

In order for a learning programme to be considered valid for the purposes of EMA it must now meet the following criteria:

- a provision must be at least 12 guided learning hours per week (for Further Education providers) and a minimum of 16 hours a week for Entry to Employment (E2E) and Programme Led Apprentices (PLA) programmes, and for a minimum of 10 weeks.
- b all provision must come within a recognised quality control system i.e. provision must be inspected by a public body that assures quality (e.g. OFSTED)

AND it must be one of the following:

- i) funded or co-financed by the Learning and Skills Council in England; or,
- ii) lead to a qualification that is accredited by the Qualifications Curriculum Authority pursuant to Section 24 of the Education Act 1997 (b); or,
- iii) lead to a qualification that is approved by the Secretary of State pursuant to Section 98 (this includes Section 96/97) of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (c).

Evaluation Brief

1.11 The evaluation brief was to:

- **undertake an assessment of the new provision criteria** – how successful has the criteria been at bringing in types of provision previously outside of EMA?
- **explore the impact of the new criteria on providers** – what types of provision are now eligible for EMA and how successful has the trial been in allowing a greater amount of programmes to be eligible?
- **explore the impact of the new criteria on learners.**

1.12 The outcomes of this evaluation provide vital feedback to the Secretary of State as to whether the valid provision should be rolled out in its current format or if it needs changing. The evaluation identifies recommendations to ensure that a full rollout will be effective.

Evaluation Methodology

1.13 The methodology for the evaluation has comprised four key elements:

- **case studies with eight providers that have been approved for EMA under the new criteria**, including in-depth qualitative consultations (and/or focus groups) with:
 - **provider staff** – a total of 29 staff across the eight providers including programme managers, tutors and EMA administrators;
 - **learners** accessing the new provision at these providers – a total of 41 learners;
 - **local LSC partnership team** staff – nine staff in total;
 - **local Connexions office** staff – 10 staff in total.

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The case studies were identified from the records of new providers approved for EMA under the new criteria. They were selected to achieve a mix of different types of provider, region, and programme funding.

- **a telephone survey of providers** approved for EMA under the new criteria:
 - 77 responses were achieved from a sample of 112 (69% response rate);
- **a postal survey⁴ of learners** on new provision approved for EMA:
 - 59 responses were achieved from a sample of 318 (19% response rate);
- discussions with **national stakeholders** including DCSF and ALP;
- analysis of the **LSC Management Information (MI)** records of learning providers approved for EMA.

The LSC has a record of all learning providers that have now become eligible for EMA since the trial of the new criteria began in November 2007. However, the MI does not distinguish between the provision that is only eligible under the new criteria, and that which would also have been eligible under the previous criteria.

1.14 Further detail on the surveys is provided in **Appendix A**.

1.15 The YCL team are grateful to the learners and staff from providers, the LSC and Connexions who have contributed valuable information to this evaluation.

⁴ Telephone numbers and email addresses were not available.

Report Structure

1.16 The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- Section Two provides an assessment of the **effectiveness of the trial**;
- Section Three reports on the **impact of the criteria on providers**;
- Section Four reports on the **impact of the criteria on learners**;
- Section Five summarises the **recommendations** resulting from the valid provision trial.

1.17 Recommendations are highlighted throughout the report, and then drawn together in the final section for ease of reference.

2 TRIALLING THE NEW CRITERIA

2.1 In this section, we explore the extent to which the trial has been effective in meeting its objectives by bringing in types of provision previously outside of EMA and providing a clear definition of valid learning programmes.

2.2 The section is structured around the following aspects:

- **'new' provision;**
- **provision that remains out of scope;**
- **awareness and understanding of the new criteria;**
- **perceptions of the trial.**

'New' Provision

2.3 The valid provision trial has been **effective in allowing a greater number of new learning programmes to become eligible for EMA.** However, the **additionality of the new criteria is at the margins** in terms of the scale of new provision it has attracted. Around 40–50 of the 221 providers⁵ approved under the new criteria are likely to be offering new types of provision that would not have been eligible under the previous criteria.

2.4 The majority of programmes are aimed at **young people who are at risk of becoming NEET** or who would **otherwise be NEET**, and are often also described as being **hard to reach**.

⁵ Note that this is an estimation based on information from the LSC valid provision trial MI and YCL's survey of providers.

2.5 The programmes are designed with the needs and interests of the target group in mind and typically combine **vocational or work-related learning** with other activities aimed at developing **employability skills** (e.g. CV-writing) and building **confidence and self-esteem**. Not all programmes incorporate qualifications, as outlined in Section Three, although activities may be accredited.

Scale of the New Provision

2.6 The LSC valid provision trial MI, responses to the provider survey, and consultations with local LSC and Connexions staff indicate that the **scale of new provision is at the margins**. As the valid provision trial MI does not capture detail of whether programmes would have been eligible previously, the MI and information from the provider survey have been used to provide a rough estimation of the scale of new provision – **around 50–60 new programmes at about 40–50 providers**.

2.7 Since the new criteria were introduced in November 2007, 221 providers have been approved to offer the EMA⁶. This figure is for all providers approved for EMA since the introduction of the new criteria, including:

- those where provision would also have been eligible under the previous criteria;
- those that are eligible only under the new criteria, i.e. the ‘new’ provision.

2.8 It is those that are eligible only under the new criteria that are of primary interest, so that we can understand the additionality of the change in criteria. Using the LSC valid provision trial MI, the number of providers that are offering new types of provision is estimated to be around 53 of the 221 providers (i.e. around a quarter – 24%).

⁶ MI for 12/11/2007 to 17/11/2008.

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- 2.9 This is also reflected in the provider responses to the telephone survey, which indicate that 15 of the 77 providers (21%) can be identified as delivering new provision.
- 2.10 The LSC records do not indicate the number of programmes that have been approved, but the responses from the survey of providers can be used to provide a rough estimate of the likely number of new learning programmes this equates to. All but one have had just one new programme approved, the other has had three new programmes approved.
- 2.11 Extrapolated across the total number of providers approved under the new criteria according to the LSC records, and thought to be delivering new provision (53), this would equate to around 60+ new learning programmes in total. However, we know from the case study set-up process that some providers had not yet started delivering programmes, and/or had not recruited learners. Furthermore, as just 318 learners could be reliably identified from the EMA learner data, this would also indicate that some programmes had not yet started, or recruited learners that were accessing the EMA. A more realistic estimate would be 50–60 new programmes of learning at 40–50 providers.
- 2.12 **Consultations with local LSC and Connexions staff also reflected this finding**, with these staff indicating that the scale of programmes/provision that were new to the EMA was not significant in their local areas:

“A couple of ESF-funded courses aimed at tackling NEET are now eligible, but not much has come out of the woodwork because of the changes.” Connexions Personal Adviser

“I estimate that there are about 12 new courses that are now eligible that weren't previously. Nine are at providers that were already offering EMA and three are at providers not previously offering the EMA.” local LSC team

Programmes of Learning

2.13 The majority of provision approved under the new criteria is targeted at young people who are **at risk of becoming NEET or who would otherwise already be NEET**. The learners were also often described as being **‘hard to reach’**. In addition, there are programmes aimed at former young offenders and young women who are pregnant.

2.14 The LSC records do not capture detail on the title of the programme of learning, nor do they capture detail on the level of programme or qualifications. Information provided through the provider survey and consultations with provider staff, LSC and Connexions highlights the following types of new provision:

- pre-Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes;
- skills development provision (e.g. employment skills);
- programmes for young parents, or ‘parents to be’;
- Prince’s Trust provision aimed at unemployed young people;
- alternative education for disaffected young people.

2.15 In the main, the programmes are aimed at young people who are at risk of becoming NEET or who have already disengaged from learning and would otherwise be NEET. The purpose of the programmes is to **engage (or re-engage) and provide the young people with skills and qualifications**. Typical activities may include:

- **employability skills** e.g. CV-writing, job search skills, interview preparation and practice;
- **confidence and self-esteem building activities;**
- **vocational or work-related learning** – with some resulting in qualifications (mostly at entry level and Level 1, and some at Level 2) and others resulting in accreditation/certificates (e.g. health and safety).

2.16 The courses approved under the new criteria were explored in more detail during the case studies. Some are **existing programmes of learning that are new to the EMA** (four providers) while others are **entirely new programmes of learning for these providers** (four providers) which have, in three cases, been designed with the new EMA criteria in mind.

2.17 To monitor the reach of the new criteria in the future, it would be useful to amend the valid provision trial application form to capture additional detail that would provide more valuable information on the new types of provision.

Recommendation: Monitoring Reach of the New Criteria

- The LSC should capture detail on the title, level and type of qualifications for each programme approved under the new criteria. This would assist better monitoring of the types of provision approved for EMA and would also assist the approval process.

2.18 Further detail on the programmes delivered by the case study providers is presented in Sections Three and Four.

Provision that Remains Out of Scope

2.19 Despite the change in criteria, some provision that remains out of scope for EMA has been identified. It is not, however, a significant amount, and nor is there demand amongst those consulted for it to be eligible. This suggests that there is **no requirement for the criteria to be amended in this respect**.

2.20 Discussions with Connexions and LSC staff revealed that although there is some provision that is not eligible, most agreed that it would not, in general, be suitable for EMA due to the target group or type of provision. There was general agreement that a line had to be drawn somewhere:

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“The idea of EMA is to encourage young people to stay in learning. So if someone’s on a learning course that’s going to help them find employment, or improve their skills, then they should be rewarded for it and receive EMA. At the same time, though, you’ve got to draw the line somewhere, and I think the criteria, as it stands has drawn the line well between what should receive EMA and what shouldn’t.” local LSC staff

2.21 Examples of types of provision thought to remain out of scope included:

- a programme delivered through a local Sure Start Centre that did not meet the minimum number of weeks or hours of learning requirement;
- provision delivered through a Children’s Centre that was not subject to Ofsted Inspection;
- provision linked to probation education that did not offer recognised qualifications;
- provision which provides the “hook into learning” and is not usually accredited, e.g. personal and social skills, confidence building;
- community-based one-off, short courses, such as parenting.

2.22 Most providers (70%, 54 providers) responding to the survey were confident that there was no such provision. However, a fifth (18%; 14 providers) indicated that there is some provision that remains not eligible for EMA and highlighted similar reasons to Connexions and LSC staff such as not meeting the requirements for the number of guided learning hours and/or minimum number of weeks. Similar target groups were also described, namely those at risk of becoming NEET, young parents, low income families and part-time learners.

2.23 The Foundation Learning Tier and Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) will provide new opportunities for accrediting some of these types of provision. These frameworks will ensure that the provision incorporates appropriate accreditation and is linked to suitable progression routes.

2.24 Discussions with the providers as part of the case studies also highlights that there are other ways of incentivising young people to take part in learning and maintain engagement. Incentives, such as vouchers, may be more suitable for some of the informal provision and/or shorter programmes of learning described.

Awareness and Understanding of the Criteria

2.25 To make stakeholders aware of the change in criteria, the LSC sent notes/emails to local authorities, Connexions and super-users at learning providers, as well as placing publications in the media. This has been effective, in part; however, **levels of awareness and particularly levels of understanding of the criteria could be higher** among providers, LSC staff and Connexions.

2.26 There are some good examples of where the LSC and Connexions have played a key role in promoting the new criteria (see para. 2.44), but this is not always the case. As such, while the new criteria has attracted some new provision, there is a possibility that there is still some provision for which the EMA is not available, but potentially could be. This could be because the programme was designed prior to hearing about the criteria or that the providers are still not aware of the change in criteria. This is likely to be the case for smaller, non-mainstream providers that have less contact with the LSC and other providers.

2.27 Local LSC staff have an important role in raising awareness locally and ensuring understanding amongst providers, but they may need additional guidance on methods by which to do this.

Recommendations: Awareness-Raising

- Awareness-raising activities targeted at providers, Connexions and the LSC but differentiated to each audience reflecting their roles and information requirements, would be beneficial.
- A mixed-method approach to communication should be adopted, to reflect differing preferences for particular sources of information amongst the providers.

Provider Awareness and Understanding

2.28 **Most providers responding to the survey were aware of the new criteria for EMA**, however some providers have applied to offer EMA without being aware of the new eligibility criteria. Levels of awareness and understanding of the new criteria are not as high as they could be. Furthermore, levels of satisfaction with the information provided about the new criteria indicate that methods to generate understanding and awareness could be more effective. This could be achieved, in part, by refreshing/updating the EMA guidance to reflect the new criteria.

Awareness of the New Criteria

2.29 Most (70%, 54 providers), but not all, providers were aware that new criteria had been introduced. Around half had first become aware of the new criteria before or during November 2007 and another half between December 2007 and April 2008.

Knowledge and Understanding of the Criteria

2.30 At the time of becoming aware of the criteria, of those providers who were aware (n=54), most providers (74%, 40 providers) felt well informed (very or fairly) about the new criteria, but a quarter (24%, 13 providers) felt not very well or not at all informed.

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- 2.31 Despite feeling well informed, in the main, providers' levels of understanding of the criteria appear to be somewhat lower. By the time of the survey (November/December 2008), just over half (51%, 28 providers) reported that they had a detailed understanding (very or fairly) and a further 43% (23 providers) a patchy understanding.
- 2.32 Those with a 'very' detailed understanding were WBLPs or other providers (not colleges, schools or external providers⁷). This is likely to reflect the fact that the criteria have more significant implications for the types of provision offered by WBLPs and 'other' types of providers, than for colleges and schools.
- 2.33 Amongst those providers aware of the new criteria, there was a mixed understanding of the rationale for the new criteria. Over a quarter (28%, 15) reported that they "did not know" what the rationale was.

Satisfaction with Information Provided

- 2.34 Improvements could be made to the methods by which understanding and awareness of the criteria is generated. Although most providers (65%, 35 providers) were satisfied (very or fairly) with the information provided about the trial of the new criteria, only 9% (5 providers) were very satisfied, and over one in ten (13%, 7 providers) felt dissatisfied (very or fairly) with the information.
- 2.35 Understanding of the criteria is higher amongst the case study providers – a reflection of the fact that they are all offering the new types of provision. However, while some have found the information about the new criteria very accessible, others have had to seek out a lot of information to fully understand it. The following quotes are illustrative:

⁷ The LSC's classification of external providers includes a range of other organisations including charities and private organisations.

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“The information on the website was short and sharp; just how I like it.” Centre Manager, Provider

“Initially we did not know much about it and had to do a lot of digging around. Two staff members attended a local LSC briefing and although there was some information about EMA it was not a significant item on the agenda. The information could be more simple, straightforward and clear. We sought information from the LSC and websites to try and better understand it.” Programme Project Manager

2.36 While around a third of providers responding to the survey did not know what additional information would have been helpful, some respondents, and the staff in the case study providers, offered useful suggestions:

- more support/guidance to understand the criteria;
- consultation with providers in advance of the change, or earlier knowledge;
- more detailed information.

2.37 One particular issue raised during the case studies, was that much of the guidance information and marketing materials do not reflect the new criteria, and are sometimes not relevant to the new types of provision, such as ESF-funded programmes.

Sources of Information

2.38 Information sources most commonly used are the **EMA website** (41%, 22 providers), **emails** (41%, 22 providers), and **the local LSC** (37%, 20 providers). The providers are, in the main, positive about the usefulness of these sources. **Email and weblinks were also most commonly identified as preferred ways to receive information.** Both the case study providers and those consulted via the telephone survey identified these two methods, with 61% of survey respondents (47 providers) citing email, and 12% (9 providers) citing weblinks. A quarter of schools surveyed would prefer to receive such information by letter.

2.39 The information sources used by providers appears to vary by provider type, with FE Colleges more likely to use the EMA website as a source of information than schools, and schools more likely to use emails. This suggests that there is no single method by which to inform providers, rather a mixed method approach would be most effective to ensure the information reaches all relevant providers.

2.40 Other sources of information accessed included:

- **local Connexions service** – used by seven providers responding to the survey and found to be very useful by all but one provider, who found it not at all useful;
- **EMASYS training courses** – three providers responding to the survey, and one case study provider had accessed EMASYS training courses. This was regarded as a useful source of information about the criteria, but not all providers have had access to or taken up similar training;
- **EMA helpline** – two of the case study providers had used the helpline to find out more about the EMA.

2.41 Nearly half of providers (45%, 35 providers) did not make any suggestions about improvements to communication materials. Suggestions that were given included: use of emails, use of plain English and clearly signposted materials.

Awareness and Understanding of Local LSC Partnership Team Staff

2.42 In all but one area, the LSC staff have a good understanding of the change in criteria. In the remaining area, the member of staff described their understanding as adequate. Detailed understanding of the new criteria is not as high as it could be, however. While some LSC staff were able to give detailed descriptions of the change in criteria, others understood the essence of the change, but not necessarily the detail. One LSC staff member referred to excellent support they had received through contacting the LSC Learner Support Team, but others do not seem to have accessed this.

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2.43 Whereas some local LSC staff clearly play a significant role in promoting the EMA and ensuring that providers are aware of the change in criteria, this is not the case everywhere. Out of the eight areas consulted, four referred to their specific role in raising awareness of the criteria among providers. This was typically by email or through existing provider forums/meetings.

2.44 **In three of these areas, the LSC has had a proactive role** in raising awareness through activities such as circulating extracts from the learner support bulletin and undertaking meetings with providers to assist them in understanding the criteria. Two of these areas have also targeted new providers not currently offering EMA. One has done this via the local authority, but felt that marketing direct to the local authority from the national LSC / DCSF would have greater effect. In these areas, the LSC **staff are confident that everyone who should know about the criteria do so.**

2.45 It is important to recognise the role of the local LSC staff in making providers aware of the new criteria and helping them to understand the criteria. There is variation in the roles of the LSC staff from area to area. The LSC has not, in all cases, promoted the new criteria, and there seems to have been a time-lag in getting the information to the providers.

Recommendations: Awareness-Raising

- Awareness-raising activities should be undertaken to increase awareness and understanding of the EMA criteria among providers, LSC and Connexions.
- The role of local LSC staff in promoting the new criteria among all providers, particularly non-mainstream providers, should be emphasised.

Local LSC Role in the Approval Process

2.46 The LSC's role in approving providers (and provision) for EMA means that it is crucial that they have a good understanding of the criteria. The role of the LSC staff with responsibility for this varies. In some cases it appears to be a primarily administrative role whereas in others clear checks are made to ensure that the programmes are eligible.

Recommendation: Approval Process Guidelines

- Enhance guidelines around the role of the LSC in approving provision for EMA to ensure that there is consistency in approaches and that processes to ensure provision meets the criteria are effective.

Awareness and Understanding of Connexions Staff

2.47 **Awareness and understanding of the new criteria among Connexions staff was more variable, and in general lower, than that of the LSC staff.** In three areas, staff had only a limited understanding of the new criteria. However, the critical role that Connexions staff have played in signposting and referring learners to these new types of provision (Sections Three and Four) **emphasises the importance of improving their awareness and understanding.**

2.48 There seems to have been **no common method of awareness-raising** with Connexions staff, suggesting that it varies from area to area. Some have become aware through internal meetings, provider network/forums, the LSC website, and others report that it has been by word of mouth.

2.49 There was **not significant demand from the Connexions staff for additional information** and there were mixed views as to whether Connexions staff needed a detailed understanding. While some reported that their role was to indicate that learners could potentially get EMA (with responsibility for confirming this resting with providers), one Connexions Manager was keen to emphasise the importance of Personal Advisers keeping up-to-date:

“The Personal Advisers are aware of the change in criteria. They have to be checking all the time and know what provision is eligible.” Connexions Manager

2.50 Only one individual commented that communication could be improved. This perhaps reflects a combination of:

- the mixed views as to the importance of understanding the criteria among Connexions staff;
- suggestions by Connexions staff that the impact of the change in criteria has been minimal as it has not brought in much additional provision.

2.51 One LSC contact was aware of an instance where there were errors in the advice provided by Connexions staff due to a misunderstanding of the criteria, but this seems to be an isolated example.

2.52 The awareness of the new criteria among Connexions staff has important implications for the advice and guidance given to learners, particularly given that Connexions have played a role in signposting many of the learners to these types of provision (as outlined in Section Four). Some targeted marketing to and information for Connexions would help to ensure that there is consistency in understanding, and that Connexions staff are well-placed to provide informed advice regarding likely eligibility for EMA.

Recommendation: Targeted Marketing to Connexions Staff

- Targeted marketing to, and information for, Connexions staff would be valuable, given their role in signposting and referring learners to these types of provision.

Perceptions of the Trial

2.53 Overall, there is general agreement that the trial has met its objectives and has been beneficial in allowing a wider range of provision to be eligible for EMA. Some issues have been raised around the extent to which these programmes are comparable to the E2E programme, where the EMA is no longer means-tested for learners. In the main, however, stakeholders are positive about the benefits that it has brought. Requests have also been made to make the EMA more flexible so that providers have greater flexibility in how they use it to incentivise, motivate and reward learners.

2.54 The extent to which the EMA is resulting in positive impacts and benefits for the young people participating in these programmes is explored further in Section Four.

Widening the Range of Eligible Provision

2.55 Across Connexions staff, local LSC staff and providers that were delivering new provision, there was a good understanding of the purpose of the change in criteria. There was agreement across providers and other stakeholders that the trial has been beneficial in allowing more flexible types of provision to be eligible for EMA.

2.56 References have been made to its role in widening the range of provision eligible for EMA, and consequently enabling access to EMA for a wider range of learners, including a slightly different profile of learners, such as disadvantaged groups, those at risk of becoming NEET, young parents, and young women who are pregnant. The following perceptions are illustrative of this finding:

“The trial is good and broadens things out. It has met its objectives. The objective was to attract more learners into learning. The mainstream learners will not have been affected by the change criteria, but the change will have an impact for those young people at the margin of learning.” (LSC)

“It allows ‘stepping stone’ provision to be eligible for EMA. The criteria ensures the provision is tied into credible outcomes, but does allow more flexible and innovative types of provision to be delivered.” (Programme Manager, Provider)

2.57 It is also perceived to be one of a number of strategies that can be used to increase participation and tackle NEET, although attribution of the EMA to these targets directly is not possible.

2.58 Although the scale of new provision is not significant, stakeholders recognise clear benefits in the changes made to the criteria, for example by *“reaching people out there who don’t fit in, and have different needs to, the mainstream”* (Provider).

Comparability to Other Programmes

2.59 In Section Four the effect of the change in criteria on learner decision-making regarding decisions and choices relating to learning, employment and training, is discussed. There are mixed views as to the extent to which the new criteria make the new programmes more comparable to the existing ones but an issue raised commonly by Connexions, LSC and provider staff relates to means-testing.

2.60 Some felt that there should be no means-testing for these new types of provision, as is the case for E2E provision, particularly as the target group are often vulnerable learners. This would also simplify the process and mean that the learners get the money slightly quicker, which is more important on some of the shorter courses.

Recommendation: Consider Appropriateness of Means Testing

- Consideration should be given to whether it would be appropriate for all eligible learners taking certain types of new provision to be entitled to the maximum EMA of £30 a week regardless of their household income, as is the case for those on E2E programmes.

3 IMPACT OF THE NEW CRITERIA ON PROVIDERS

3.1 This section explores in more detail the impact of the new criteria on providers. It is structured around the following areas:

- **new provision:**
- **administering the EMA;**
- **impacts and effects:**

3.2 This section draws primarily on information gathered through the case studies undertaken with eight providers offering programmes of learning approved under the new criteria, and that would not have previously been eligible for EMA. Reference is also made, where relevant, to findings from the provider survey, learner survey and consultations with LSC and Connexions staff.

New Provision – Programme Features and Design

3.3 All eight case study providers were delivering programmes of learning that would not have been eligible under the previous EMA criteria. **Table 3.1** below provides a summary of the programmes delivered in each of the case study providers. The majority of programmes were described as “pre-E2E” programmes and/or programmes aimed at young people who were previously NEET or who were at risk of becoming NEET. One programme had a slightly different focus, delivering provision for ‘young parents to be’.

3.4 Four programmes existed prior to the introduction of the new EMA criteria, while four were set up after the new criteria had been introduced. Of the four new programmes, three were designed with the EMA criteria in mind. We return to the implications of the EMA on programme design later in this section.

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| Table 3.1: Features of New Programmes | | | | |
|--|--|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Provider | Description | Offered Incentive Previously | New or Existing Programme | Programme Designed with EMA Criteria in mind |
| A | Pre-E2E programme aimed at onward progression to E2E | N/A | New | ✓ |
| B | Pre-E2E programme | Yes, by previously subcontracting provision to FE providers | Existing | x (and changes not required) |
| C | NEET reduction programme | N/A | New | x (didn't know about criteria at the time) |
| D | Re-engagement programme (pre-E2E) | No | Existing | x (and changes not required) |
| E | Young parents to be | Yes, vouchers | Existing | x (and changes not required) |
| F | Pre-E2E for those at risk of NEET (and some learners referred from Youth Offending Team) | N/A | New | ✓ |
| G | NEET prevention programme | N/A | New | ✓ |
| H | NEET programme aimed at re-engaging young people into learning | Yes, training allowance | Existing | x (and changes not required) |

- 3.5 In all but one provider, the **EMA was regarded as a critical element of the programme offer**. This is also evident by the fact that three of the four programmes that already existed had previously offered an incentive to learners for participation. Furthermore, in one case (provider H), some programme funding is retained to offer a similar incentive to those learners not eligible for EMA, thus ensuring that all learners have access to an incentive. One other provider (provider A) also indicated that had the EMA not been available they would have sought funding to offer a similar incentive:

“EMA is definitely an incentive to engagement; if it wasn't there we would try and pay it out of other funds.” (Development Officer, Provider)

- 3.6 Just one provider felt that the EMA was not always regarded as a powerful incentive tool. This provider subcontracts the provision to a number of local providers and found that although some providers regarded it as important, others were less keen, due primarily to the administration associated with offering it. A local Connexions staff member was also aware of this situation. This member of staff highlighted that there could be an issue for those learners who do not get the EMA but were expecting to since the programme as a whole is promoted as being eligible, but individual sub-contracted providers may not be offering it.

Learner Eligibility for EMA

- 3.7 Across the case studies, there were three examples of where the **variability of the learner experience could have consequences for EMA eligibility**. In one case, although the overall programme is broadly the same, each learner has an individual programme of learning of varying lengths and content. As a result the provider checks the eligibility of individuals against the EMA provision criteria.

3.8 In the other two examples, the programmes are ‘roll-on, roll-off’ with learners participating in the programmes for **varying lengths of time**. Neither provider were entirely clear on the implications of learners leaving the course early on, and the issue was also raised by an LSC staff member in one of these areas.

3.9 Providers can respond to this in a number of ways:

- by taking no action and the learner consequently receives the EMA for time they are on the programme (there are instances of this at two of the case study providers);
- by dissuading the learner from leaving before 10 weeks but recognising that:

“It clogs places when people are ready to progress.” (LSC)

Recommendation: Guidance on Individual Learner Eligibility

- Guidance should be provided in relation to courses of no set length and instances where the learner experience can be variable, to ensure that eligibility criteria are being applied correctly.

Recommendation: Role of LSC Staff

- Local LSC staff should be encouraged to maintain a watching brief for programme design and learner eligibility issues, and feed them into discussions with the LSC Learner Support Team for advice on suitable solutions and approaches.

Programme Content

3.10 The programmes that are new to EMA provision are designed with the needs and interests of the target group in mind. They typically encompass one or more of the following elements:

- **vocational or work-related learning** including a qualification usually at entry level or Level 1 and/or accreditation/certification;

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- **skills development activities** specifically designed to meet the needs of the target group e.g. job search skills, CV-writing;
- **personal development activities** aimed at increasing confidence and self-esteem.

3.11 The purpose of the NEET programmes is to motivate young people, whilst supporting them to develop skills and attitudes that will enable them to progress to other programmes, employment or work-related learning. The inclusion of the skills development activities and personal development activities is designed to provide additional support to these learners. It is also important, however, to ensure that learners have access to qualifications where appropriate.

Recommendation: Identify Opportunities for Qualifications

- Providers should be encouraged to identify opportunities for learners to undertake qualifications. This is perhaps a role for the local LSC teams to play as part of the approval process. In the future, this may include drawing on the principles of the Foundation Learning Tier progression pathways and making use of the QCF.

3.12 The following three examples illustrate in more detail the content of the programmes.

Figure 3.1: Example: NEET Prevention Course

It is an ESF-funded, roll-on, roll-off programme aimed at motivating young people and helping them to develop the skills and attitudes required to progress to work-based learning, further education or employment. Learners attend for 15–20 hours per week, to allow time for interviews and progression opportunity searching in the remaining time.

There are three components to the programme:

1. an induction week involving accreditation (e.g. Health & Safety and Manual Handling Certificates) and soft skills development (e.g. CV writing)
2. an energiser activity aimed at motivating the young people through team building activities
3. work taster.

There is a progression point at the end of each stage, when the young person can move on to FE, an Apprenticeship, employment or E2E.

Once leaving the programme, some learners will not have contact with the programme again, whereas others may return to the programme for periods of time, as and when required, to maintain their engagement.

Figure 3.2: Example: Young Parents to Be Provision

This programme, funded by the local authority, is run over a minimum of 12 weeks but with the flexibility for the learners to stay longer if required. It takes place over three days per week and the young women also attend ante-natal classes on another day.

It is a Level 1 course, run by three tutors, with two midwives joining every other week and Connexions staff joining every week. The course covers aspects such as: health and safety, communication, money matters. The EMA has been used as an educational tool for budgeting and scenario discussions e.g. with 'x' money per week you can do 'y'.

Connexions provides the link with job searching and further education/training. 50% of learners from the previous year went back to education or work after pregnancy. Connexions staff provide support by identifying suitable provision and childcare arrangements.

Figure 3.3: Example: NEET Reduction Project

This NEET Reduction Project is ESF-funded, delivered by a managing agent that sub-contracts the provision to a number of local providers (FE college, WBLPs, community groups and charities).

The programme is at a similar level to E2E but is for learners identified as vulnerable, and those who require additional support due to lower prior attainment. There are opportunities for seamless transition to E2E if appropriate.

Qualifications are identified to suit the individual young people, following an initial assessment. The learner experience is then tailored around suitable progression pathways but typically includes:

- Vocational learning (e.g. NVQs in hair and beauty, motor vehicle);
- Key skills;
- Functional skills;
- Employability awards;
- Citizenship activities.

3.13 Progression is a key focus in most of these programmes, as all have a clear remit to engage or maintain engagement in learning. For two of the providers where the programmes had been running for some time, there were indications that the majority of learners from previous cohorts have moved on to positive destinations, such as other programmes offered by the provider.

3.14 Four of the programmes, identified as pre-E2E, are specifically intended to lead learners on to the E2E programme. The others, although they could lead to E2E, had identified more variable progression routes depending on learner need, preference and ability.

Learner Profile

3.15 As highlighted in **Table 3.1** and outlined in Section Two, the majority of new provision is aimed at young people at risk of becoming NEET and those who have disengaged from learning or are described as 'hard to reach'. More detailed descriptions provided during the case studies indicate that these learners may also:

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- face issues with their home/family life that are affecting their engagement with learning;
- require more support than those learners that would be suitable for E2E provision;
- have low prior attainment;
- have reasonable prior attainment but are confused about what they want to do;
- be lacking in motivation;
- be unaware of opportunities available to them;
- be learners who are not ready for a full-time, more formal course.

3.16 Although the NEET group is broad, the descriptions of the learner target groups reflect two categories of NEET young people⁸:

- *core* NEET – those with social and behavioural problems including those who come from families where worklessness and unemployment is the norm;
- *floating* NEET – comprising young people who lack direction, motivation and tend to have spells of being NEET in between further education courses or employment with no training.

3.17 The following examples provide an indication of the learners routes into these programmes, the role of the EMA for them, and their future plans.

⁸ 'Lost Talent – Not in Education, Employment or Training', British Chambers of Commerce (October, 2008)

Figure 3.4: Learner Example

Learner A has been on the course since November 2008. It is a pre-E2E programme which is 16 hours per week (over three days). He participates in vocational tasters in areas he chooses – bricklaying, joinery, plumbing and electricals. He also does basic literacy and numeracy. His current literacy and numeracy levels are low.

He was previously at a work-based learning provider doing motor vehicle, but did not enjoy it. He approached Connexions and enquired about this specific programme, as his brother was already on it. This was the only programme he wanted to do and would not have done anything if he had not got a place on it.

Figure 3.5: Learner Example

Learner B was waiting for a college place when she found out that she was pregnant, and then decided not to go to college. She currently lives with her parents.

She is attending a “young parents to be” course and receives an EMA of £30 per week. She heard about the course and the EMA through Connexions. Her midwife had also mentioned it to her. She decided to go on the course to find out more about having a baby and liked the idea of having a support group.

She said that she would still have done the course, even if the EMA had not been available, but the only reason for this was that it was a very specific course. She wouldn't have chosen any other course instead. She plans to go to college after the birth of her baby.

Figure 3.6: Learner Example

Learner C has been NEET for some time and was referred to this programme by Connexions. The programme is delivered by a community centre and is a roll-on, roll-off programme aiming to re-engage disengaged learners. Activities include numeracy and literacy, and job preparation (e.g. CV writing). There is also a focus on building self-esteem and confidence.

He started on this programme in September 2008. The EMA was an incentive to encourage him to participate in the programme. He says that if the EMA had not been available he might not have done the programme and would probably have been “on the dole”. He did not consider any other options instead.

He felt that the money was a good amount and that he attended more because of the EMA. He didn't think that it motivated him to work any harder though. He is likely to progress on to the E2E programme.

Administering the EMA

- 3.18 Overall, the administration associated with the EMA is regarded as worthwhile, especially where providers feel that the EMA is a reasonable support mechanism for young people. However, it is important to ensure that administrative difficulties do not become a factor in providers' decisions to offer the EMA.
- 3.19 In the main, **providers have found the administration of the EMA manageable**, despite some of the national administrative difficulties with the EMA encountered during Autumn 2008.
- 3.20 The evidence suggests that **administration of the EMA may be more of an issue for providers new to offering the EMA**. Over a third (38%) of all providers responding to the survey have found it difficult, and of those who were delivering new provision (15 providers) the majority had found it difficult (very or fairly). In addition, when providers were asked, through the survey, about the effects of the new criteria, a number highlighted that it has created difficulties around administration and learners not receiving money. As might be expected, none of the FE College providers reported any negative effects.
- 3.21 The case study providers also identified that they had faced some difficulties. Larger providers, and those providers that had previous experience of administering the EMA, found the process easier, whereas smaller providers, in particular, found it an additional burden.
- 3.22 In addition to the issues around EMA payments, providers have found it difficult to get the right support/answers from the helpline in order to administer the EMA. A particular issue raised was that there was insufficient clarity around how to register learners on the system. The guidance is not thought to reflect the new types of programmes that are eligible under the new criteria.
-

Recommendations: Administration of the EMA

- Local information sharing would be helpful to assist smaller/newer providers to get to grips with EMA processes and reporting requirements.
- Updates to the EMA guidance to reflect the new types of provision eligible for EMA would be of significant benefit.

Impacts and Effects

Effects on Programme Design

- 3.23 The changes to the criteria have **not had significant effects on approaches to the design of programmes**, however the qualification and quality inspection requirements were identified as valuable components of the criteria.
- 3.24 While four programmes were designed with the EMA in mind, the primary intention is to design a programme that meets learner need. Particular attention has been paid to ensuring that the programmes comprise sufficient elements to meet the guided learning hours requirement. Incorporating qualifications and ensuring that provision was subject to a quality inspection were not pertinent to the design of the programmes.
- 3.25 The other four case study providers were delivering programmes that existed prior to the introduction of the new criteria and the criteria have not required them to make any changes to the design of those existing programmes.
- 3.26 One LSC consultee identified a couple of examples of the potential influence of the qualification and quality aspects of the criteria:
- the criteria had potentially influenced the design of a programme to include qualifications when it may not otherwise have done so;
 - a provider that was not previously inspected consequently sought Ofsted inspection, and received an 'outstanding' judgement.

Flexibility of Payments

3.27 Three providers referred to the constraints of the EMA in comparison to the former training allowance. Training allowances had given greater flexibility and were also paid at a higher level. **Provider staff felt that some flexibility with the EMA payments could enhance the way in which the EMA could be used to incentivise learners.** The following perceptions of provider staff are illustrative:

“EMA has the potential to be a really useful bargaining tool. As it stands currently, it’s either all or nothing, but with more flexibility you could use it as a really good deterrent.”
Programme Coordinator

*“If you take it [the EMA] away on the first day when they don’t attend, then they simply don’t come in for the rest of the week. It would be better if we could just take £10 out of the £30 for that one day, but we don’t have that control.”*Tutor

Recommendation: Payment Flexibility

- Consider the extent to which flexibility in EMA payments would have significant effects on learners, and investigate whether there is any potential to make the EMA payment more flexible but without increasing bureaucracy/administration.

Learner Choice and Decision-Making

3.28 There was agreement that the change in criteria reduced the differential between the new types of provision approved for EMA and other programmes that learners may consider, particularly where learners place importance on receiving an EMA. There were mixed views, however, as to whether stakeholders felt it had necessarily directed young people to the right provision. Some felt that there was still a draw to E2E due to the removal of means-testing for E2E participants. We return to this in Section Four where we present learners’ perceptions of the role of the EMA in programme choice and decision-making.

4 IMPACT ON LEARNERS

4.1 In this section, an assessment of the potential impact of the new criteria on learners is provided, by looking at the impact of the EMA on learners participating in provision that would not have previously been eligible for EMA.

4.2 The section is structured around the following areas:

- **learning programme activity;**
- **awareness and understanding of the EMA;**
- **impact of the EMA on choices and decision-making;**
- **impact of the EMA on learner attitudes and behaviours;**
- **applying for the EMA.**

4.3 This section draws primarily on responses to the small-scale learner survey undertaken, and the findings from the consultations/focus groups with learners as part of the case studies. Evidence from consultations with staff from providers, Connexions and the LSC is also drawn on, where relevant.

4.4 We begin by highlighting some of the constraints associated with the evidence base.

Constraints of the Evidence Base

4.5 The assessment presented in this section provides an indication of the impact of the EMA on learners, but should not be regarded as an entirely robust and reliable evidence source, due to the small sample size. Our approach to assessing the impact on learners is constrained by the following:

- the scale of new provision is relatively small and therefore the potential sample of learners to survey/consult with is also limited. Given the small number of completed surveys the results are based on, caution must be exercised in the conclusions drawn;
- the learner sample for the survey comprises a best estimate of those learners participating in new types of provision. However, we cannot be entirely confident that this is the case for all learners, given the limited detail in the LSC MI and data captured on the EMA System (source of learner contact details);
- there is insufficient detail on the profile of learners (available through the EMA System) and therefore we cannot provide an indication of the extent to which the learners responding to the survey are representative of all those participating in new types of provision.

4.6 Further detail on the survey method is provided in **Appendix A**.

4.7 Where reference is made to the findings from the evaluation of the EMA National Rollout⁹ are made, these should also be interpreted with caution due to the different methodologies, sample sizes, and profile of respondents.

Learning Programme Activity

4.8 Learners were asked to indicate, via the survey, the name of the learning programme they were participating in. This information reflects the type of programmes described in Sections Two and Three – for example programmes specifically aimed at supporting transition to employment, and others programmes designed around particular vocational areas:

- employability programmes e.g. Job Seeking Skills, Employment Finder Scheme, Steps to Work;

⁹ 'Evaluation of EMA National Roll-out: Final Report', RCU (2007).

- vocational programmes e.g. salon services, childcare, retail, business admin.

4.9 Most learners responding to the survey and those consulted during the case studies were involved in entry level or Level 1 provision (and a minority at Level 2). No learners on the new types of provision were on programmes at Level 3 or above, as would be expected.

4.10 The activities learners most commonly report they are involved in as part of these programmes include:

- English, Maths and/or ICT (23 learners);
- vocational or work-related learning such as construction, retail and childcare (18 learners);
- careers advice and employability skills (12 learners);
- practical activities and projects including cooking and first aid (11 learners);
- provision for young women who are pregnant (10 learners);
- work experience or voluntary work (5 learners).

4.11 Most learners (59%, 35 of 59) responding to the survey were still on the learning programme. All but one of the remainder had completed the programme; the other had not.

How Learners heard about the Programme

4.12 **Connexions staff have played a key role in signposting learners to these programmes.** One of the most common referral agencies for the case study provision was Connexions, and the majority of learners responding to the survey (80%, 47 of 59) indicated that they had heard about the programme through a Connexions Adviser. Other, less commonly cited, sources of awareness were friends, teachers/tutors at school/college, careers guidance advisers at school/college and midwives.

Reasons for Choosing the Programme

4.13 When asked to provide reasons for choosing their programme, the most common response was **“for the qualification”** (17%, 10 of 59). Other reasons provided included:

- to learn more about being a “first time mum” (8);
- because of an interest in the subject (7);
- to improve self-confidence (6);
- to help gain employment (6).

4.14 The other responses provided by learners were wide-ranging and included the opportunity to undertake work experience, to access support to enable progression to college, to improve grades, and on the basis of advice provided by Connexions.

4.15 A significant proportion (42%, 25 of 59) had not considered any alternatives to the programme of learning for which they are now receiving EMA. The most common alternatives the remaining learners considered were vocational routes in areas such as mechanics, hairdressing, plumbing, childcare and bricklaying. Two learners reported that they would have done E2E instead, and one said they would have got a job.

Prior Activity

4.16 Nearly half of the learners responding to the survey (47%, 28 of 59) indicated that they were **previously at school, or on another learning programme at a college/training provider.**

4.17 Other prior activities included looking for another programme/course (nine learners, four of whom were also looking for work). Nine learners indicated that they were doing “nothing”. Other less commonly cited main activities included work (full-time or part-time) and full-time mother.

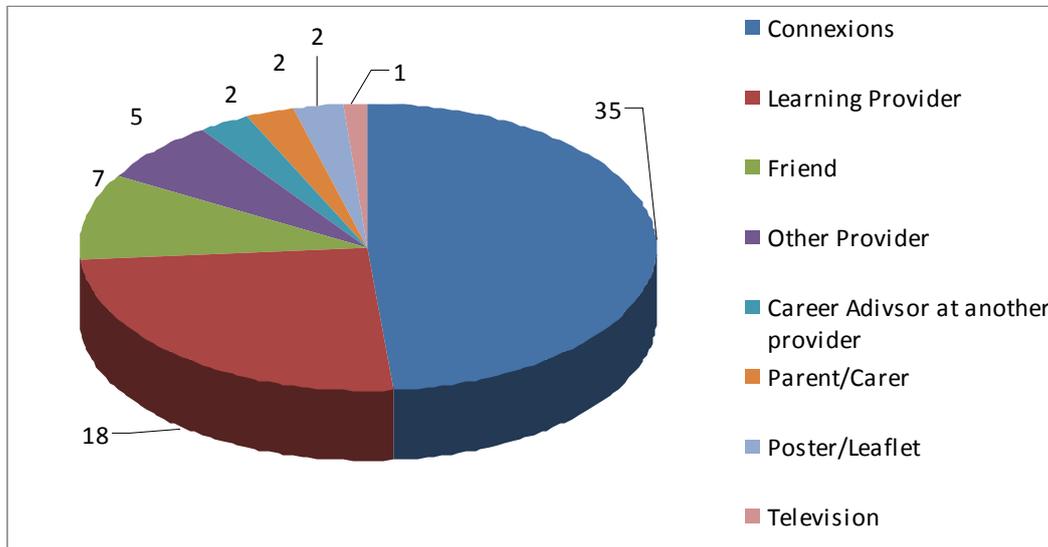
Awareness and Understanding of the EMA

- 4.18 For most learners (63%, 37 of 59) this was the first time that they had received an EMA. Of the 21 learners who had received it previously, 12 were first in receipt of it in 2007/08, six in 2006/07, one in 2005/06, and the remaining two did not know when they first received it.
- 4.19 Responses to the survey and discussions with the learners indicate that **Connexions staff have played a key role in raising awareness of the EMA amongst these learners.** Learners have found out about the EMA with relative ease, in the main, suggesting that there is sufficient information available to them through those individuals/sources that have informed them of the EMA. Furthermore, most learners reported that their parents/carers were aware of the EMA and had a good understanding of it.
- 4.20 The survey responses reflect the discussions held with learners. As illustrated in **Figure 4.1**, the majority of learners responding to the survey (59%, 35 of 59) found out about the EMA through a Connexions Adviser, emphasising the critical role of Connexions staff in programme choice and awareness of the EMA. A significant proportion of learners (31%, 18 of 59) found out about the EMA through the **learning provider delivering the programme.** Other sources identified were friends and teachers/tutors or careers adviser at another provider. National EMA marketing such as TV and posters/leaflets were not commonly cited.
- 4.21 Interestingly, this suggests that the learners accessing the provision that is new to EMA have found out about the EMA through different sources to many other EMA recipients. The evaluation of the EMA National Roll-out¹⁰ found that the main source of information about the EMA was teachers and tutors, and that Connexions was a source of awareness for less than a quarter of learners.

¹⁰ Op. cit.

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Figure 4.1: How learners found out about the EMA



Base = 59 learners

Totals sum greater than 59 due to multiple sources identified by learners.

Source: YCL Learner Survey, 2009

4.22 The majority (79%, 47 of 59) of learners responding to the survey found it easy (fairly or very) to find out about EMA, and no respondents found it difficult. A small proportion (10%, 6 of 59) indicated that they found it 'neither easy nor difficult' to find out about EMA. As might be expected, there was a difference¹¹ in the responses for respondents who knew about the EMA prior to choosing this programme of learning. Those who already knew about the EMA generally found it easier to find out information about the EMA.

4.23 Most respondents (58%, 34 of 59) stated that their parents/carers had heard about the EMA, while only eight did not know and one indicated that they 'haven't mentioned it to them'. Where parents were aware of the EMA, the learners indicated that their parents/carers understood the EMA either completely, or fairly well.

¹¹ Statistically significant at 99% confidence level.

Use of the EMA

4.24 The main ways in which the learners have used their EMA are for costs relating to the learning programme (cited by 28 learners) or towards the costs of living (also cited by 28 learners). Other uses of the EMA cited by a minority of learners included personal items such as clothing and games. Three respondents stated that the weekly allowance was insufficient, and one highlighted that learners not living with parents and/or in difficult circumstances should receive larger bonuses.

Impact of EMA on Choices and Decision-Making

4.25 The EMA has had some influence on learner choices and decision-making regarding programmes of learning to participate in. Although **many learners report that the EMA played an important role in their decision-making process, most learners indicate that they would have undertaken the programme anyway** (though some would have had to earn money as well).

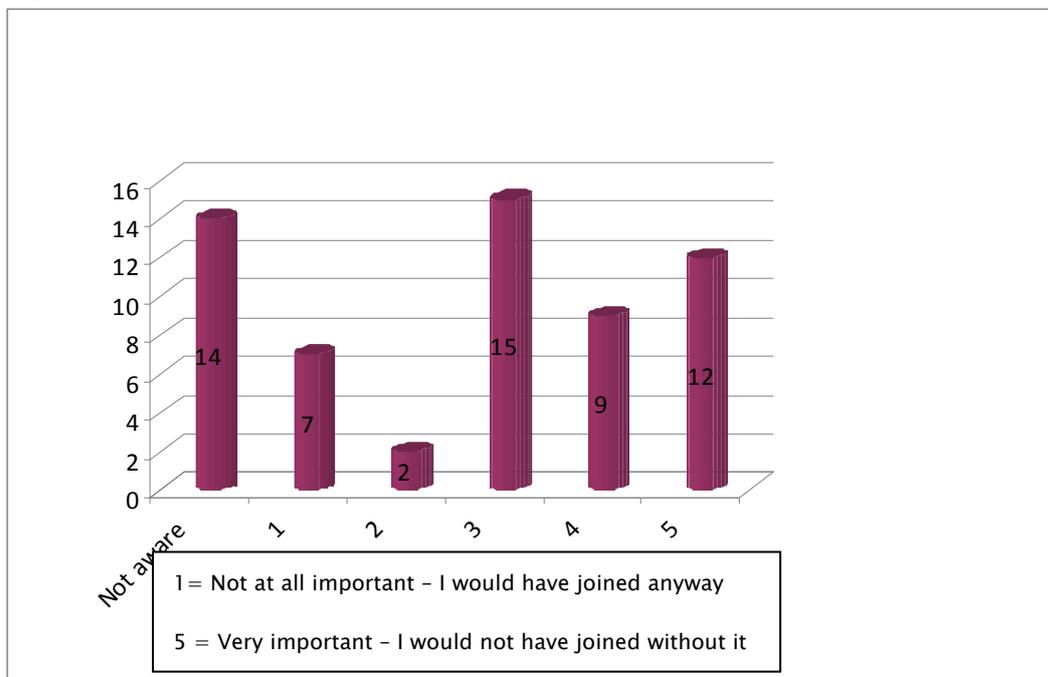
4.26 This was reflected in the discussions with provider, Connexions and LSC staff who felt that the EMA has had a positive effect by ensuring that some young people that need additional support now participate in the most appropriate course rather than, for example, opting for E2E as they may have done had the EMA not been available.

4.27 This finding is also reflected in the mixed thoughts amongst these stakeholders as to whether many young people would have opted for these programmes regardless of the potential to receive an EMA. Some felt that these particular learners were not in a position to be choosing between a number of options, and therefore comparability was not as relevant.

Importance Attached to the EMA

4.28 Most learners (76%, 45 of 59) were aware of the EMA prior to participating in the programme of learning. Of those 45 learners, the **EMA played an important role in their decisions to choose that programme for just under half (21)**, as illustrated in **Figure 4.2** below. A number of learners (15) were indifferent about its role, giving it a score of 3 out of 5, and nine learners rated its role as less important at 1 or 2 out of 5.

Figure 4.2



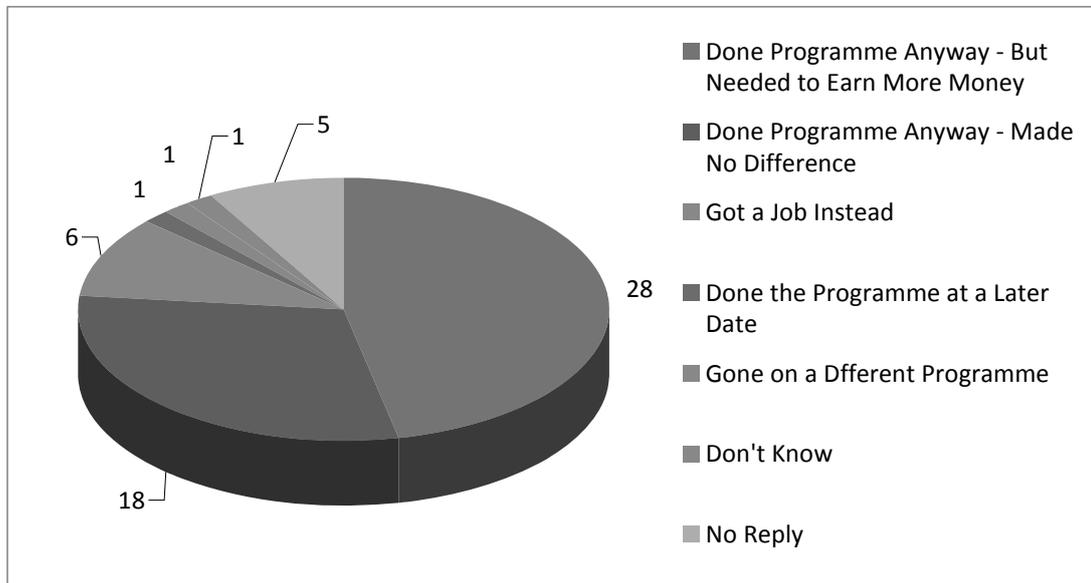
Base = 59 learners
Source: YCL Learner Survey, 2009

Learner Activity had the EMA not been Available

4.29 As illustrated in **Figure 4.3**, had the EMA not been available, **most learners (78%, 46 of 59) also indicate that they would have done the programme anyway**, although 18 of them indicated that they would also have had to earn more money at the same time. This figure is not dissimilar to the findings from the EMA National Roll-out.

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Figure 4.3: Learner Activity if EMA were not available



Base: 59 learners

Source: YCL Learner Survey, 2009

4.30 This was reflected in the discussions with provider staff and learners themselves:

“I would have gone on the course anyway. The EMA is just a bonus.” Learner

“I came on the course to improve my future job prospects by developing skills I need. The EMA is important but it isn’t the be-all. Without the EMA I still would have come but would probably have had to earn money as well.” Learner

“Learners do not go on the NEET programme because of the EMA. They go on it for the help it will give them. They recognise that it will help them get a job.” Manager, Provider

4.31 For a small proportion, it does however appear to have had a more significant impact. Six learners would have taken up employment instead. One learner would have done a different programme (but at the same provider), and one learner may have done the programme at a later date.

4.32 Again, this was reflected in consultations with other stakeholders:

“Feedback from the Personal Advisers is that finance is a big issues for learners and there is anecdotal evidence that the EMA can ‘swing the decision’ for some learners.” Connexions Manager

4.33 Some stakeholders felt that there was a small risk that the offer of the EMA could lead learners to choosing courses on the basis of the EMA offer, rather than the programme most suited to their needs. This emphasises the importance of appropriate induction and assessment processes for this type of provision to ensure that young people are placed according to need as well as preference. It also emphasises the critical role of Connexions in supporting learner decisions.

Impact of the EMA on Learner Attitudes and Behaviours

Impact on Retention

4.34 Most respondents to the survey (59%, 35 of 59) were still participating in their programme of learning at the time of the survey. The survey indicates that, of those 35 learners, **most (57%, 20 of 35) would ‘definitely not’ or ‘probably not’ have left the programme if they had not been getting EMA payments.**

4.35 For a small proportion (31%, 11 of 35), however, the EMA does seem to be an important factor in staying on the programme. These 11 learners stated that they would ‘probably’ or ‘definitely’ have left the programme if they had not been getting EMA payments.

4.36 Notably, there are differences¹² in responses between the males and females. The survey seems to indicate that males were more likely to leave the programme without the EMA, stating that they ‘probably’ would have left as the average response; whereas the average female response is that they would ‘probably not’ leave.

4.37 Only one of the survey respondents had left their programme of learning prematurely, and they indicate that this was because they had not received the EMA on time. This learner indicated that the need to earn more money played a significant part in their decision to leave the programme early. This decision does not appear to have been affected by EMA per se, but by the amount, since the respondent did not feel that the EMA played an important role in their decision to participate in this programme. They also disagreed strongly that they would have left earlier without EMA. This individual reports that they are now looking for work.

Impact on Attitudes to Learning

4.38 Figure 4.4 below suggests that the EMA has had a **positive impact on learners’ attitudes to learning**, with more than half saying it has had at least a “little” impact if not “some” or “a lot” with respect to:

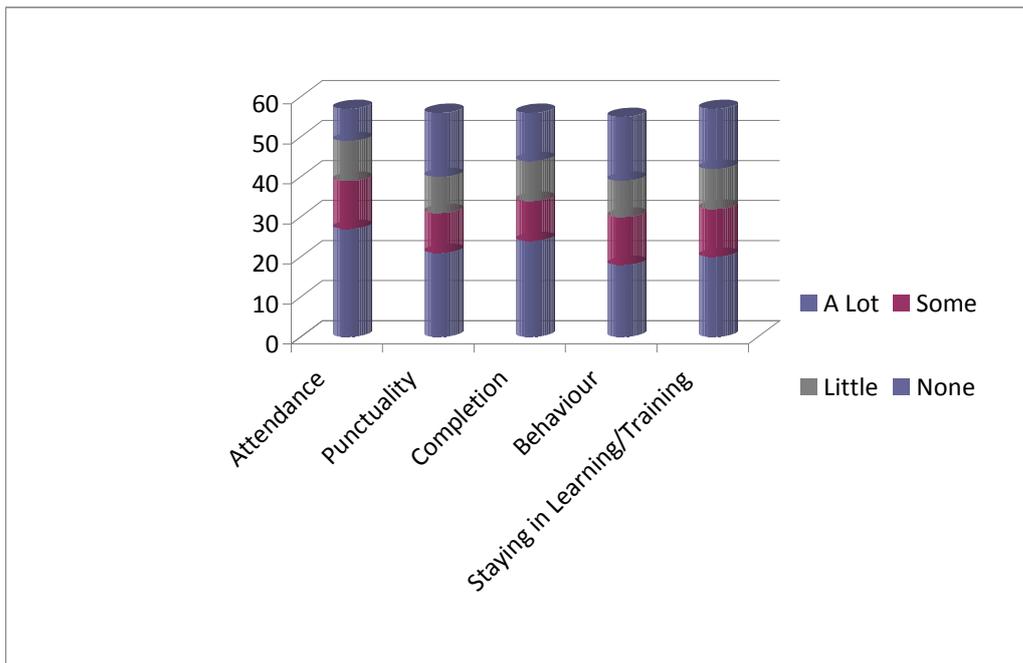
- encouraging them to attend;
- improving their punctuality;
- encouraging them to complete their programme;
- motivating them to behave well;
- encouraging them to stay in learning/training in the future.

¹² Statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

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4.39 The numbers are small and therefore it is difficult to draw comparisons across the different measures. There is, however, an indication that the **EMA has had more of an impact on attendance than on punctuality, completion, behaviour and staying in training/learning.**

Figure 4.4: Impact on Behaviours



Base: 55–57 learners across each measure
 Source: YCL Learner Survey, 2009

4.40 There were examples across the case studies of instances where the EMA has had less effect due to the specific nature of the provision.

Figure 4.5: Effect of the EMA

The Centre Manager compared the situation to that of E2E. Without the EMA, many of the E2E learners would not turn up. However, the ‘young parents to be’ on this programme would still attend because they recognise the benefits of the course for themselves and their babies, and are keen to get the support they need from staff and peers.

Seven of the eight learners consulted at this provider corroborated this finding, by stating they would still have done the programme without the EMA. They also commented that this was because of the course’s specific focus. They did, however, appreciate the benefits of the EMA.

4.41 The extent to which the EMA has influenced learner attitudes and behaviours may depend on provider approaches. It is apparent from the case study visits that some providers have enforced a stronger link between the EMA and learner targets than in others.

Figure 4.6: Example: Linking EMA to Learner Targets

The EMA and the targets work well alongside each other. The learners try to achieve the 'SMART' targets more when they are linked to the EMA:

"EMA is a major driving force and motivation for learners on the programme."

Tutor

4.42 For those providers that are new to delivering the EMA, it may be helpful to identify good practice in linking learner targets to EMA amongst some of the providers that have been administering the EMA for a longer period of time. Providers with less experience of the EMA could use this good practice.

Recommendation: Maximise Impact of EMA on Learner Attitudes and Behaviours

- To maximise the impact of the EMA criteria on new providers, identify and share good practice in linking learner targets to EMA amongst existing providers offering EMA. Providers new to offering the EMA should be signposted to this information.

Influence of the Bonus and Attendance Requirements

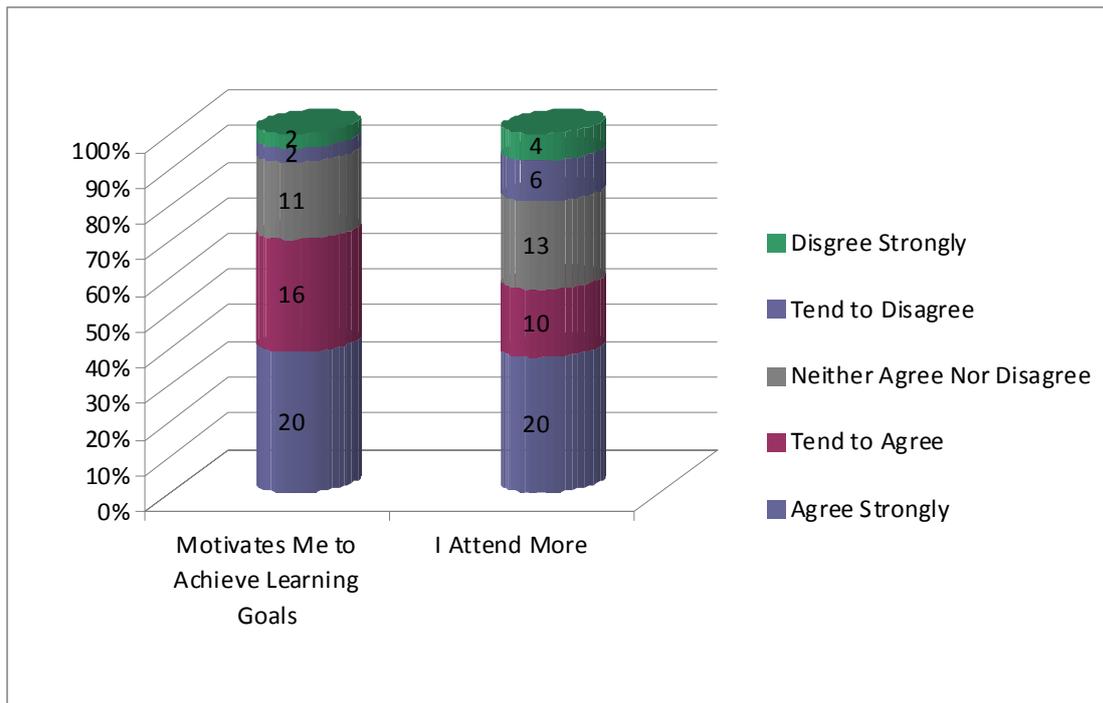
4.43 Additionally, the evidence indicates that the EMA bonus and attendance requirements have also had a **positive influence on learners in terms of motivating them to achieve their learning goals and attending their programme of learning more than they might do otherwise**. Most learners responding were also in agreement that the rules for stoppages and bonuses were fair.

4.44 As illustrated in **Figure 4.7**, most learners tend to agree that the EMA bonus system has motivated them to achieve their learning goals and that the attendance requirements have influenced their attendance. This is also reflected in comments made by provider staff:

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“It definitely makes a difference. When the learners sign up to their agreements the EMA provides a significant motivation to attend, and gives them good reason to.” Provider

Figure 4.7: Influence of the Bonus



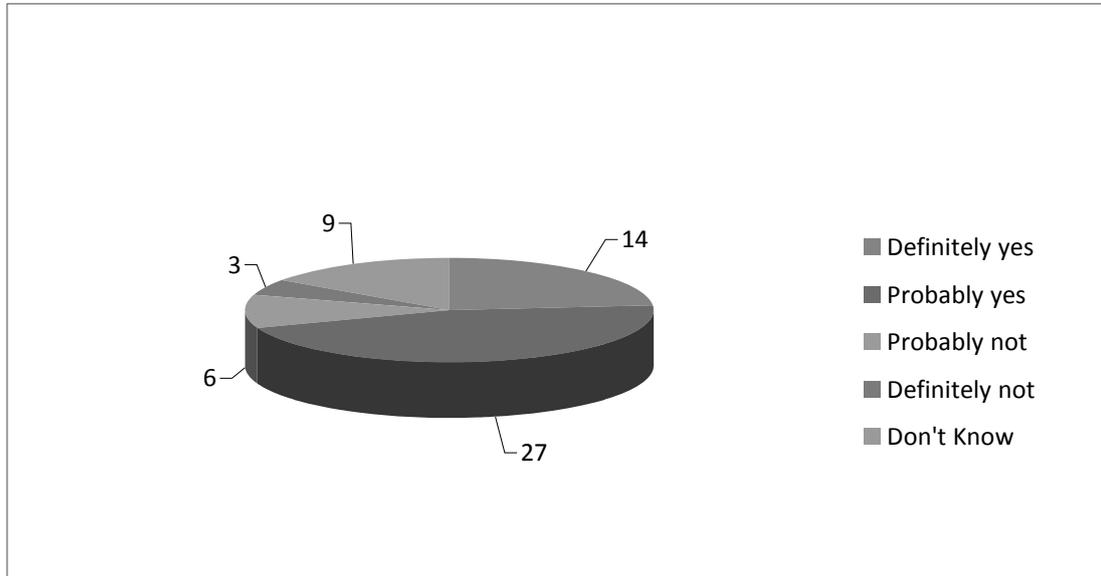
Base: 51 and 53 Learners
 Source: YCL Learner Survey, 2009

4.45 Nearly all (86%, 51 of 59) respondents stated that they either ‘completely’ or ‘fairly well’ understood what was needed to ensure that they received payments and bonuses.

4.46 The majority (70%, 41 of 59) of learners were in agreement that the rules for stoppages and bonuses are fair, as illustrated in **Figure 4.8** below. Only 10% (6) report that they are ‘probably not’ fair and 5% (3) that they are ‘definitely not’ fair.

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Figure 4.8: Do you think the rules for stoppages and bonuses fair?



Base: 59 learners

Source: YCL Learner Survey, 2009

4.47 Respondents were asked for the reasons for their responses. The responses indicate that the learners regard the bonus system as a good motivational tool, highlighting:

- “people should only receive it if they do as asked” (20%, 12 of 59);
- “you need to earn it” (10%, 6 of 59);
- “it is motivational” (5%, 3 of 59).

4.48 Other responses indicate the need for bonuses to ensure that people “take the programme seriously”, are “encouraged to strive”, show “respect for the programme” and demonstrate effective “time keeping”.

4.49 A minority of learners raised some issues about the rules. Two learners felt that the EMA does not provide enough money due to these rules, and a further two indicated that the rules need to be applied fairly. This may reflect individual approaches to reporting absence/illness, as it was not a significant issue raised by the learners during the case studies.

4.50 Three respondents to the survey took the opportunity in the ‘other comments’ section to express their satisfaction with the EMA:

- two stated that they were “pleased with the EMA”;
- one stated that the “EMA is a great help”;
- one stated that they “would like to thank EMA for encouraging me to start a course”.

Applying for the EMA

4.51 Although most learners report that they have found applying for the EMA easy, there is a proportion for whom the process has been problematic. Provider staff highlighted that some of these difficulties relate to the learners’ abilities to complete the form and provide the relevant information. Furthermore, the individual circumstances of some learners meant that they found it difficult to open bank accounts, and for others their home address could change during the application process. Learners have sought support and assistance from Connexions staff, teachers and tutors.

4.52 Most respondents to the learner survey (58%, 34 of 59) found that it was easy (very or fairly) to apply for the EMA, however a proportion (17%, 10 of 59) have found it difficult.

4.53 The difficulties identified by the learners responding to the survey, and those consulted during the case studies, mainly related to **problems with the application form** – for example, they found it confusing, found it difficult to answer the questions and commented that there was too much reading.

4.54 Some learners also highlighted that the EMA had taken too long to come through. Provider staff also raised issues regarding the timing of payments during the consultations, and isolated examples were given of situations where learners had left programmes as a result.

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4.55 Learners indicated through the consultations and the learner survey similar sources of assistance when applying for the EMA. The most commonly utilised sources of help were the **Connexions Personal Adviser** (47%, 28 of 59) and **teachers/tutors** (46%, 27 of 59). Another commonly utilised source was parents/carers (29%, 17 of 59). Other less significant sources were the school careers teachers, EMA leaflets and guides, and the EMA national learner helpline.

4.56 Assistance from Connexions staff and teachers/tutors has been helpful; however the learners consulted with during the case studies had not always found the helpline useful, perhaps reflecting the increased demands on the helpline during Autumn 2008.

4.57 Provider and Connexions staff, and learners themselves, suggested some ways in which the application process could be simplified.

Recommendation: Application Process

It would be worthwhile to review the application process in respect of:

- simplification of the forms – reference was made to the ease of completion of the ‘care to learn’ forms;
- EMA payment options – some learners do not have bank accounts and have temporary addresses which make it hard to open an account. Would a postal order be a suitable alternative?

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 In this section, we draw together the recommendations set out in Sections Two to Four.
- 5.2 The evidence captured through this evaluation indicates that the valid provision trial has been successful in widening the range of provision eligible for EMA, although the scale of such new provision has been marginal.
- 5.3 Fundamental changes are not required to the criteria or the way in which the new criteria have been employed, however a number of areas for attention have been identified to enhance the effectiveness and impact of the new criteria.

Monitoring 'New' Provision

- The LSC should capture detail on the title, level and type of qualifications for each programme approved under the new criteria. This would assist better monitoring of the types of provision approved for EMA and would also assist the approval process. This would also support understanding of the consistency with which the criteria are being applied.

Awareness-Raising Activities

- Awareness-raising activities should be undertaken to increase awareness and understanding of the EMA criteria among providers, local LSC staff and Connexions. The information should be differentiated to each audience reflecting their respective roles and information requirements.
- A mixed-method approach to communication about EMA criteria should be adopted, to reflect differing preferences for particular sources of information amongst the providers.

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- In particular, targeted marketing to, and information for, Connexions staff would be valuable given the key role Connexions staff play in signposting/referring learners to these particular programmes of learning, and in raising awareness of the EMA.
- The role of local LSC staff in promoting the new criteria among all providers, particularly non-mainstream providers, should be emphasised.
- Enhancing the guidelines around the role of the LSC in approving provision for EMA would ensure that the criteria are consistently applied and that processes to ensure provision meets the criteria are effective.
- Local LSC staff should be encouraged to maintain a watching brief for programme design and learner eligibility issues, and feed them into discussions with the LSC Learner Support Team for advice on suitable solutions and approaches.

Guidance for Providers

- Guidance should be provided in relation to courses of no set length and instances where the learner experience can be variable, to ensure that eligibility criteria are being applied correctly within individual providers.
- Local information sharing would be helpful to assist smaller/newer providers to get to grips with the EMA system and reporting requirements.
- Updates to the EMA guidance to reflect the new types of provision eligible for EMA would be of significant benefit. Much of the guidance does not reflect the new criteria and providers have struggled to recognise how to register the learners on the system.

The Learner Application Process

- It would be worthwhile to review the application process in respect of:
 - simplification of the forms – reference was made to the ease of completion of the ‘care to learn’ forms;
 - EMA payment options – some learners do not have bank accounts and have temporary addresses which make it hard to open an account. Would a postal order be a suitable alternative?

DN: These recommendations are not an option as the form and policy are set.

Maximising Impact

- Consideration should be given to whether it would be appropriate for all eligible learners participating in certain types of new provision to be entitled to the maximum EMA of £30 a week regardless of their household income, as is the case for those on E2E programmes. This would help make the new types of provision more comparable to E2E in relation to financial support.

DN: This recommendation is unlikely to be taken forward in the current climate.

- Consider the extent to which flexibility in EMA payments would have significant effects on learners, and investigate whether there is any potential to make the EMA payment more flexible but without increasing bureaucracy/administration.

DN: This recommendation is unlikely to be taken forward as system design and policy have been set.

- To maximise the impact of the EMA criteria on new providers, identify and share good practice in linking learner targets to the EMA amongst existing providers offering EMA. Providers new to offering the EMA should be signposted to this information.

Larger-Scale Measurement of Impact on Young People

- Once the MI captures a greater level of detail, it may be worthwhile to further review the impact of the new criteria on learners at a later date, by undertaking larger-scale research and drawing on performance data from the ILR, for example.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY METHODS

Provider Survey

1. Sample source: The LSC provided a list of 122 providers approved for EMA under the new criteria. After the removal of any duplicates, the total sample available was 112 providers.
2. Table A1.1 presents details of the number of interviews achieved.

| Table A1.1: Outcome of Contacts | |
|---|------------|
| Total records loaded | 112 |
| Interviews achieved | 77 |
| Refusals | 13 |
| Not available in fieldwork/no one meets the survey criteria | 3 |
| Unobtainable - phone just rings, teaching staff unobtainable. (those that have been called 15+ times) | 8 |
| General call backs (have been tried at least 10 times) | 3 |
| Other | 8 |
| Response rate (interviews as proportion of those available in fieldwork, 112) | 69% |

3. Average interview length was 22 minutes.
4. Fieldwork dates: 28th October – 4th December 2008.
5. Response by institution type is presented in Table A1.2.

| Table A1.2: Response by Institution Type | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Institution Type | No. in sample (available in fieldwork) | No. of survey responses | Response rate |
| College | 12 | 11 | 92% |
| External provider | 16 | 13 | 81% |
| Other | 15 | 11 | 73% |
| School | 25 | 13 | 52% |
| WBL Contractor | 41 | 29 | 71% |
| TOTAL | 109 | 77 | |

Learner Survey

1. A postal survey was used to capture perceptions of EMA recipients participating in programmes that would not have been eligible under the previous EMA criteria. The learner details (from the EMA learner database) did not contain e-mail addresses or telephone numbers, and therefore a postal survey was the most suitable option.
2. The postal survey was distributed to 318 learners identified as most likely to be participating in programmes that would not have been eligible under the previous EMA criteria. These 318 learners were at 27 different providers.
3. A total of 59 completed surveys were received, representing a response rate of 19%. Table A1.1, below, indicates that the number of learners responding to the survey decreased with age. There were also more females than males responding to the survey.
4. The low number of respondents to the survey means that very few findings in the survey are statistically significant, especially when the sample is stratified by gender, age or level of programme. Furthermore, as we do not have details of all learners accessing EMA through the programmes new to the EMA, we are unable to comment on how representative the achieved response is.

| Table A1.1: Profile of Learner Respondents | | | |
|--|--------------|--------|------------|
| Category | Sub-Category | Number | Percentage |
| <i>Gender</i> | Male | 22 | 37% |
| | Female | 37 | 63% |
| <i>Age</i> | 16 | 25 | 42% |
| | 17 | 28 | 47% |
| | 18 | 6 | 10% |
| <i>TOTAL:</i> | | 59 | |

5. The learners responding to the survey are from 14 different providers. The responses may, therefore, be skewed by the experiences of learners at these particular providers or on these particular programmes of learning.
6. The majority of respondents were in receipt of £30 per week (55 of 59). One learner was receiving £20, two were in receipt of £10, and the remaining learner was not sure.