



To:

Further and Higher Education Institutions in Wales
Learning Centres registered for the EMA and WGLG FE Schemes
Local Authorities in Wales
The Student Loans Company
NUS Wales
Student Finance Wales Stakeholder Group

August 2014

Dear Colleague

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Wales Scheme and Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education (WGLG FE) Wales Scheme for academic year 2014/15

Following a comprehensive review of further and higher education budgets, the Minister for Education and Skills has agreed to maintain the EMA Wales Scheme at £30 per week for all eligible students in academic year (AY) 2014/15. The Scheme will continue to be administered by the Student Loans Company (SLC) on behalf of the Welsh Ministers.

EMA payments may be delayed at the beginning of September, although SLC is doing what it can to minimise any impact on students and learning centres for the start of AY 2014/15. SLC will keep learning centres up to date on developments via the EMA learning centre portal.

The remainder of this Information Notice covers a number of technical amendments that will also apply to the means-tested EMA and WGLG FE schemes for AY 2014/15. The changes are as follows:

i. Scheme name change (WGLG FE only)

The Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education (WGLG (FE)) Scheme is the new name for the Assembly Learning Grant Further Education (ALG FE) Scheme. There are no other changes in terms of grant levels and household income thresholds which have been maintained at AY 2013/14 levels.

ii. Removal of existing transitional protection arrangements (EMA only)

The existing set of transitional protection arrangements introduced to the Scheme in AY 2011/12, will naturally come to an end in AY 2013/14. These provisions (set out at Part 1 “protected persons” to the current EMA Wales Scheme) will have served their purpose and do not need to be included in the EMA Scheme for AY 2014/15.

iii. “exempt person” (EMA only)

The EMA Wales Scheme provides for an “exempt person” who, if satisfying one of the criteria, is effectively ‘fast-tracked’ for EMA support.

The “exempt person” categories have been extended to include Universal Credit (UC), alongside Income Support (IS) and Income Based Employment and Support Allowance (IB ESA). UC will eventually replace IS and IB ESA (as well as several other benefits). This is to ensure that young people, who need to claim UC in their own name, are no worse off than eligible EMA students who claim IS or IB ESA in their own name until they have been migrated over to UC.

iv. EU nationals - residency evidence (EMA and WGLG FE)

The EMA and WGLG FE application forms have been strengthened for AY 2014/15. EU nationals will be required to provide evidence to SLC at the application assessment stage to satisfy the specific residency period in the UK to qualify for EMA and WGLG FE support.

v. Tax Credit Award Notice - ‘R’ Version (EMA and WGLG FE)

SLC will accept the ‘R’ version of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Tax Credit Award Notice (TCAN) as formal evidence to undertake the financial assessment of household income for EMA and WGLG FE Schemes AY 2014/15.

vi. Fraud prevention

In 2013, DfES' Governance and Assurance team completed an internal review of EMA Wales processes. The review recommended that guidance should be developed and processes strengthened to mitigate the threat of fraud and to protect public funds. As a result the following changes will be implemented from AY 2014/15:-

Dependent students (EMA only)

- The Tax Credit Award Notice (TCAN) will be a mandatory evidence requirement to satisfy that EMA applicants are financially dependent upon the address given on their EMA application form. EMA applicants must ensure they enclose the relevant pages of their household's TCAN that lists the children and young people (including the applicant) residing in the household. If applicants fail to submit the relevant evidence it may result in a delay to processing their application form.

It is recognised that the TCAN may not be available to all EMA applicants. Students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) should contact SLC if they have any questions about the evidence requirements.

Fraud Guidance

- Guidance is currently being developed by SLC and will hopefully be made available to approved learning centres by late summer/early autumn 2014 to cover the EMA and WGLG FE Schemes.

vii. Student Finance Wales (SFW) – new phone number

Please note the SFW Customer Service telephone number has changed to 0300 200 4050 (replacing the '0845' number). Calls will cost no more than calls to geographic (01 and 02) numbers and will also count towards inclusive free call packages on mobile phones. EMA and WGLG FE literature for 2014/15, including the SFW website, have been updated to the new number.

ENQUIRIES

If you have any comments about the EMA Wales or WGLG FE schemes or this Information Notice, please contact, in the first instance, the Higher Education Division, Welsh Government – email: studentfinancedivision@wales.gsi.gov.uk