

Implementation of the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots: The Second Year

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Research Report
No 333

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ISBN 1 84185 692 4
March 2002

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the EMA implementation groups in the pilot areas who welcomed the evaluation team and who continue to respond so positively to our request for information. We thank representatives from LEAs, Career Service Companies and schools and colleges for their willingness to share their views with us.

We would also like to acknowledge the help and advice given by members of staff at the Department *for* Education and Skills, in particular Joan Fraser and Emma Marshall.

Finally, we would like to thank Jade Atkin at CRSP who gave valuable administrative support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The piloting of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) in 15 Local Education Authority (LEA) areas began in September 1999. Under the initiative, financial support, in the form of a weekly allowance, may be available to 16 to 19 year olds from lower income households who undertake appropriate full-time courses at school or college. The pilots, which will run for three years, are being administered by LEAs and are seeking to test the extent to which a financial incentive improves post-16 participation, retention and achievement rates in education. **Section 1**

The evaluation involves collecting information from young people in the pilot and control areas, as well as gathering information from LEAs and other local partners involved in the administration of EMA. This report focuses on the implementation and administration of the EMA pilot in the second year of its operation. **Section 1**

A key element of the introduction of EMA in most pilot areas was the setting up of implementation groups, comprising those charged with responsibility for administering EMAs, together with invited representatives of Careers Services, schools, colleges and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). The methodology for this strand of the evaluation involves visiting the pilot areas on an annual basis, over a three year period. In the first year, data collection included roundtable discussions with members of the implementation groups and face-to-face interviews with key individuals drawn from LEAs, Careers Services, TECs and colleges. The second year of the evaluation has consisted of roundtable discussions with members of the implementation groups, obtaining minutes of implementation group meetings and receiving copies of the administrative material produced. **Section 1.2**

Findings

Role of implementation groups

In the first year report, differences were identified between the pilot areas in the way in which EMA was implemented. In addition to variations in the membership of the implementation

groups, there was also great variability in the roles and responsibilities of individuals. The following typology was developed, based on the data gathered:

- ***Basic Administration***

This approach was characterised by minimal involvement of any organisation other than the Student Support or Awards Section of the LEA which had responsibility for administering EMA.

- ***Informative***

In this model, regular meetings were held with representatives of colleges, schools, Careers Services and other relevant organisations, who made some contribution to the development of the scheme, in order to inform them about how it was being administered.

- ***Partnership***

This involved responsibility for decisions concerning the implementation of EMA being undertaken jointly by those organisations represented on the implementation group.

The role of implementation groups during the second year of the piloting of EMA was primarily to build on the achievements of the first year. Administrators in the pilot areas continued to operate within one of the three models of implementation which had been identified. While it had been envisaged that implementation groups may evolve, in terms of their composition and move, for example, from the informative model towards a partnership model, most areas continued to operate according to how they had originally been categorised within the typology. **Section 2**

While implementation group meetings had tended to be convened twice or three times each term during the first year of the piloting of EMA, this had often been reduced to on average one meeting each term during the second year. An exception was in the South London boroughs.

The function of the implementation groups in the pilot areas had evolved from the responsibility of introducing procedures to implement EMA, to reviewing existing practices and incorporating ongoing changes to the implementation of EMA.

Regardless of the frequency of meetings, group members valued the existence of the implementation groups and considered them to have had a crucial role in the development and delivery of EMA. In a minority of cases, membership of the implementation group had expanded in order to better incorporate the views of stakeholders, notably schools, which were not represented on all implementation groups.

Also, through the regular group meetings held during the first year of the implementation of EMA, school and college staff had developed closer working relationships with each other and with representatives from the LEA. **Section 2**

Perceptions of EMA

The overwhelming view of implementation group members was that EMA is a welcome initiative, which should be continued. There was general agreement that the existence of EMA had become widely known among young people and parents in a relatively short space of time. Indeed, it was widely asserted that the receipt of the EMA weekly allowance was perceived by many young people to be an ‘entitlement’ and an accepted part of their regular income.

Some reservations were expressed about EMA, notably:

- The divisions which EMA caused between groups of young people, in relation to those who were able to claim EMA and those who were ineligible.
- The suggestion that EMA had been designed on the basis of a traditional ‘classroom’ approach to learning and that a greater degree of innovation could have been applied which may have included more flexible approaches to learning.
- The difficulty of making payments at the beginning of the school or college term.
- Some local training providers considered EMA to be a threat to the future of work based training, since the introduction of EMA was said to have reduced the number of young people opting to move into training. **Section 3**

Awareness

There was general agreement that awareness about EMA had reached very high levels. This was attributed not only to the multiplicity of awareness-raising methods used, but, crucially,

to the impact of word-of-mouth information emanating from the first cohort and their families. In terms of overall awareness, the following concerns were mentioned:

- The need to target those who had been eligible yet did not apply. More effort was focused on promoting the awareness of EMA to those groups of eligible young people who remained noticeably under-represented, especially those whose parental income fell between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 in Inner London).
- It was felt that a misinterpretation of the information may have led to some potential recipients not applying, notably in relation to the impact, or lack of it, of EMA on entitlement to other benefits.
- Lack of awareness among some support agencies and welfare rights groups.

Publicity events tended to start much earlier in the second year, and were complemented by the fact that since EMA had been operational for twelve months, there was already awareness of its availability among many young people and their parents.

A range of methods for creating awareness of EMA among potential applicants were utilised, including:

- poster campaigns in schools and colleges;
- LEAs sending letters to the home addresses informing parents and young people about the availability of EMA;
- representatives from the LEA student awards/student support services attended Year 11 parents evenings/careers evenings/assemblies;
- advertisements on local buses;
- colourful leaflets designed to attract the attention of young people;
- radio and press coverage; and
- the distribution of flyers with reply slips.

As was the case in the first year, Careers Services tended to be centrally involved in the dissemination of information about EMA. **Section 4**

Take-up

While greater levels of awareness of EMA were perceived to exist among young people and parents now that the pilot was in its second year, this had not on the whole, resulted in a

dramatic increase in the number of applications. It was somewhat surprising that in some areas, the fact that there had not been a considerable increase in the numbers of Year 11 leavers taking up an EMA was regarded as something of an anti-climax. Although, this should probably have been viewed as evidence of the tremendous success which had been achieved in the first year in generating high levels of take-up. **Section 5**

In some cases, respondents pointed to factors other than the availability of EMAs, such as the introduction of Curriculum 2000 as contributing to increasing participation rates. **Section 5**

The majority of recipients were entitled to the maximum amount of weekly allowance, with much lower proportions on the taper. Thus, one of the issues which had been identified by the implementation groups as warranting specific attention during the first year appeared to have undergone little change. **Section 5.1**

Lack of take-up from eligible young people who would attract reduced levels of EMA because of their parents' income, was largely attributed to the perceived complexities of the application procedure, the regulations which surround the receipt of EMA, and less awareness of the money which may accrue to the student through the payment of bonuses. **Section 5.1**

Most respondents from schools felt that there had been very little change in the range of courses chosen by EMA recipients in relation to non-EMA recipients. In contrast, in colleges, which have traditionally offered a greater range of vocational qualifications, several respondents referred to increased take-up of Foundation level courses, which they attributed to the impact of EMA. **Section 5.2**

A concentration of EMA students on one-year programmes had led to some concern about students' possible progression from one-year programmes to two-year advanced programmes. This would result in some students remaining in post-16 education for three years, while their entitlement to EMA would cover a two year period. **Section 5.2**

There was widespread agreement that the introduction of EMA had been greeted with concern by local training providers whose applications rates from young people for work based training had by and large fallen. **Section 5.3**

Administrative mechanisms

Members of implementation groups were broadly satisfied that the administrative systems they had introduced were working effectively, and that they provided a sound basis for making progress. However the sheer volume of young people now in receipt of EMA was a constraint in achieving administrative efficiency. **Section 6**

The staffing levels required to administer EMA both within the LEA and at the school and college level, provoked a significant amount of discussion within the implementation groups. A particular concern was that with a second cohort now in receipt of EMA, applications from two academic years had to be covered and this in turn had increased pressure on staffing. In addition, it was regularly and strongly asserted that the administrative responsibilities for the delivery of EMA should not be understated. **Section 6.1**

The experience gained from the first year of EMA has given those responsible for its administration a good understanding of when the peaks of activity occur, and enabled them to staff the functions accordingly, although where staff had been appointed on a temporary basis to cover the piloting of EMA, concern was beginning to emerge about future funding.

Section 6.2

The need for an efficient IT system was widely regarded as being vital to the effective administration of EMA. **Section 6.2**

As in the first year, concerns were expressed about the level of funding allocated by DfES. In particular, it was pointed out that there was a difference between the costs involved in setting up the appropriate administrative systems, and the ongoing running costs. Similarly, the magnitude of the administrative load, and the absence of any additional funding to compensate for this, were raised with great regularity by school and college representatives. There was little doubt that where there were significant numbers of EMA students attending a college, the existence of full-time administrative support was a baseline requirement, particularly in colleges with multiple sites. **Section 6.3**

On the whole the new standard application form was longer than the individual forms that had been designed by the LEAs. A number of key issues were identified in relation to the completion of application forms:

- the length of the form was off-putting and may have deterred some potential applicants;
- providing incomplete documentary evidence together with the application form was the major cause of forms being returned to applicants; and
- the requirement that applicants recorded ‘nil’ against all non-relevant income/benefit questions had led to large numbers of forms having to be returned to applicants. **Section 6.4**

The use of a standard Learning Agreement ensures consistency of information between young people, parents, education providers and the LEA. However, there were no identifiable problems reported in areas where a number of Learning Agreements were being used. Where schools and colleges managed the completion of Learning Agreements, the first payment of EMA was hastened. **Section 6.5**

Most respondents agreed that the initial payments of the weekly allowance to young people or parents had been made more quickly in the second year of the pilot scheme, despite the fact that at this stage applications from two cohorts of young people were having to be processed. Delays in payments continue to be caused by the large number of incomplete or inaccurate application forms received by LEAs which must be returned to applicants. While delays in payments during the Autumn term are acknowledged to constitute a problem, attempts to speed up the process can lead to other difficulties, notably overpayments being made to young people who are no longer eligible, especially those who have withdrawn from their course. **Section 6.6**

The need for schools and colleges to provide weekly returns to LEAs on EMA students’ attendance remains, in the majority of cases, an onerous task. In many schools and colleges, the issue of attendance monitoring of EMA students has intensified in the second year as the numbers of students in receipt of EMA have expanded, and in many instances doubled. While there is a consensus that data are needed by the LEAs in order that weekly payments can be made, the logistics of collecting and returning weekly attendance reports on large numbers of students is considered to be both time-consuming and costly to most education providers. **Section 6.7**

An issue of particular concern is that of the criteria for determining what constitutes an authorised absence, and the need for consistency to be established. **Section 6.7**

Impact of EMA

In all pilot areas it was perceived that the impact of the introduction of EMA had been substantial, in terms of the numbers involved and the wider implications for family incomes. The overall impact can be gauged by the fact that EMA now appears to be regarded as an established part of the post-16 infrastructure, and is firmly entrenched in the consciousness of young people, to the extent of being ‘expected’. **Section 7**

There was a general consensus that those in receipt of EMA were familiar with their entitlement to bonus payments. Also, there was some evidence that practices in terms of what was required of the student in order to qualify for the termly bonus had changed, with more attention being paid to behavioural aspects, rather than basing the award purely on attendance. **Section 7.1**

In most areas, the positive impact of EMAs on students’ attendance was confirmed, although it was recognised that wide variations did exist in the decisions taken by teaching staff over the recording of student attendance, in particular in relation to authorised and unauthorised absences. Such variations continue to exist, despite guidance notes from DfES being issued, which contained criteria for determining authorised absence. **Section 7.2**

It was widely acknowledged that the introduction of EMA has helped to improve student retention rates. There was also early evidence to support the view that the introduction of EMA may encourage retention beyond post-16 education. However, respondents considered it to be too early to gauge the impact of EMA on achievement rates, because the majority of EMA recipients were undertaking two-year courses and had not yet finished their courses. **Section 7.3**

Key issues

During the course of the fieldwork for the evaluation of the implementation process for the second year of EMA, a number of issues emerged which were felt to be important by respondents. These included:

- the ‘natural parent’ rule which, continues to be problematic, as it consumes a substantial amount of administrative time and resources in order to be implemented;
- the perception that, as presently operated, the administration of EMA places an excessive workload and resource cost, on both LEAs and local learning providers;
- the problems experienced with IT systems, particularly in relation to attendance monitoring and reporting continue to be of concern and have given rise to calls for greater uniformity in IT and reporting systems; and
- reports that the number of stoppages of EMA payments had increased in the second year.

Changes/improvements

Since the fieldwork was completed, DfES has introduced amendments to the EMA regulations. These include the introduction of the:

- siblings rule, whereby a certain degree of financial allowance in the assessment for EMA is now made for other siblings;
- the natural parent rule was amended slightly in order to make the application process smoother; and
- minimisation of evidence required from families on benefits.

There have also been changes to the application form to make the provision of benefit information more straightforward. In addition, some consideration has been given to the introduction of further changes to the EMA administrative process including the reporting of management information to the DfES. **Section 8**

1 INTRODUCTION

The piloting of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), in 15 Local Education Authority (LEA) areas, began in September 1999. Under the initiative, financial support, in the form of a weekly allowance, may be available to 16 to 19 year olds from low-income households who undertake appropriate full-time courses at school or college. The full allowance (of £30 or £40) is payable if the total parental gross taxable income does not exceed £13,000, while for those with a total parental income of between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 for the London pilot), a progressively tapered EMA, down to a minimum weekly allowance of £5 is payable.

The pilots are being administered by LEAs and are seeking to test the extent to which financial incentives improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement rates in full-time education. The scheme has subsequently been extended to approximately one third of LEAs in England.

Four variants of EMAs are being tested in the original 15 pilot areas. These offer varying weekly allowances, as well as bonuses for retention and achievement. In three of the four variants, the weekly allowance is paid directly to the young person during term time; in the fourth, payment is made to the parent. Payment can be made for a maximum of two years, although some young people with special educational needs are entitled to payments for a third year.

The evaluation process involves collecting information from young people and parents in the pilot areas and also in matched control areas. Throughout the duration of the pilot, information will also be gathered from LEAs and other partners who are involved in the administration of EMA at a local level.

This report focuses on the implementation and administration of the EMA pilot in the second year of its operation. The processes and administrative mechanisms through which EMAs are being delivered were examined, with particular emphasis on the perceptions of those responsible for the scheme's administration. In addition, valuable information about the perceived relevance and impact of EMA, and how it was being received in each locality, was collected.

A key aspect of this strand of the evaluation, as identified in the original tender document, was the need to identify which system of delivery of the EMA would be the most practical, should a national system be introduced. In the first year, the evaluation team began this process by monitoring the approaches adopted in the various pilot areas during the initial introduction of the EMA. The longitudinal element of the evaluation will enable the team to examine the ways in which the administrative processes and mechanisms are adapted and revised in the light of past experience. This is the focus of the report prepared on the second year of the implementation of EMA.

1.1 The Report

The next section of this report describes the methodology used. This is followed by a section which considers the different models of implementation adopted, with particular emphasis on the membership, remit and responsibilities of the implementation groups, and the respective roles of representatives of ‘stakeholder’ organisations. Section 3 then looks at the perceptions of EMA from the perspective of young people, parents and learning providers. Section 4 focuses on the levels of awareness about EMA and explores the publicity and marketing strategies which have been put in place, while Section 5 examines the levels of take-up of EMA. Section 6 looks at the administrative mechanisms which have been put in place, and discusses the difficulties and problems encountered. Section 7 explores the initial impact of EMA on attendance, retention and achievement rates in post-16 education. Sections 8 and 9 explore the emerging key issues and future considerations for this strand of the evaluation.

1.2 Methodology

When EMA was introduced, implementation groups, comprising those charged with responsibility for administering EMA, together with, in most cases, representatives of Careers Services, schools, colleges, and Training and Enterprise Councils (now replaced by the local Learning and Skills Councils) were established in most pilot areas. The evaluation team utilised the existence of the implementation groups for data gathering, by convening roundtable discussions involving the members of the implementation groups. In addition, in the first year of the evaluation of EMA, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken

with key individuals drawn from the LEAs, Careers Services, TECs and colleges. There was some variation between areas in the numbers of individuals interviewed and the organisations they represented, depending on the make-up of the implementation groups in each area. In all cases, a common checklist of issues to be covered was used to structure the discussions, although this was only regarded as a guide, and was not always rigidly adhered to.

Data gathering in the second year consisted of re-convening a roundtable discussion with each implementation group in all of the pilot areas. Group discussions took place between October 2000 and January 2001. The timetable was slightly later in the second year, to allow sufficient time for the processing of large numbers of initial as well as second year EMA applications to be completed. In the first year, group sessions and individual interviews were conducted between October and December 1999, which was before the first EMA bonus payments were made. The second year roundtable discussions with implementation groups have enabled data to be gathered on the experience and impact of EMA bonus payments, and where groups were convened after Christmas, representatives were able to reflect on the impact of second year bonus payments. As in the first year, in London, individual interviews were undertaken with representatives of the LEAs of each of the four boroughs.

Additional information was gained for most areas through receiving minutes of implementation group meetings, and copies of publicity and administrative material (e.g. application forms, Learning Agreements).

2 ROLE OF IMPLEMENTATION GROUPS

During the first year of the implementation of EMA significant differences were observed between pilot areas in the ways in which EMA was managed at the local level. Variations existed between LEAs in relation to the membership of implementation groups, which had been developed to manage and administer the introduction of EMA, and major differences existed in the roles and responsibilities of representatives from the LEA, Careers Service, TEC and schools and colleges. The first year evaluation report on the implementation of EMA developed a typology which, consisted of three different approaches:

- ***Basic Administration***

This approach was characterised by minimal involvement of any organisation other than the Student Support or Awards Section of the LEA which had responsibility for administering EMA.

- ***Informative***

In this model, regular meetings were held with representatives of colleges, schools, Careers Services and other relevant organisations, who made some contribution to the development of the scheme, in order to inform them about how it was being administered.

- ***Partnership***

This involved responsibility for decisions concerning the implementation of EMA being undertaken jointly by those organisations represented on the implementation group.

This typology was developed partly to provide a baseline against which the future development of the groups responsible for administering EMA could be assessed. It was suggested in the report prepared on the first year evaluation of the implementation of EMA, that the, 'partnership' model might be the most effective because *it 'entailed building on existing partnership or networking arrangement' who work collaboratively towards the achievement of a common goal (Maguire, Maguire and Vincent, p7:2001).*

It was envisaged that some implementation groups might shift between the different models identified within the typology. During the first year of the piloting of EMA, the primary objective for the implementation groups was to ensure that EMA was 'up and running', by

establishing marketing and publicity strategies, designing and validating application forms and Learning Agreements, and determining guidelines for attendance monitoring.

The role of implementation groups during the second year of the piloting of EMA has largely been to build on the achievements of the first year. Pilot areas continued to operate within one of the three models of implementation that had been identified. While it had been envisaged that implementation groups may evolve in their composition and move for example from the informative model towards a partnership model, most areas continued to operate according to how they had originally been categorised within the typology.

During the second year of the piloting of EMA, the implementation groups were found to have reduced the frequency with which meetings were held. While it was largely acknowledged that there was a need to meet at more regular intervals during the first year to enable tasks to be completed and approved, once the operation of EMA had become more established there was less of a need for such regular group meetings.

'In a way it's (the group) taken a back seat now. We haven't met as regularly this year as we did last year, I think probably because we're all up and running and we all know what we're doing and the relationship that we've developed over the last year, I think is much better. We can pick up the phone to each other and sort things out over the telephone ... '.

LEA Representative

While implementation group meetings had tended to be convened twice or three times each term during the first year of the piloting of EMA, this had often been reduced to on average one meeting each term during the second year. An exception to this pattern was found in the South London boroughs, where, at the time of the fieldwork for the earlier Implementation report, meetings involving representatives of the four boroughs were not taking place. This had changed, partly as a result of encouragement from DfES. In addition, there has been the setting up of a regular series of meetings involving representatives of all the EMA pilot areas in the South London 'quadrant' (the four original pilot areas, plus Wandsworth). The following quotations confirm that meetings are now held on a regular basis, although there were differences in recall between respondents in relation to their timing.

'We now have regular meetings with the other boroughs, plus Wandsworth. EMA has made them work together, as has the participation of DfEE¹. Meetings are held every

¹ The DfEE is now called the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

two months. We are also hoping to hold a meeting with the institutions. London has been spilt into quadrants, with Lewisham taking the lead for South London.'

LEA Representative

'The South London boroughs meet regularly and work better, but it is disappointing that some have gone away and done their own thing. It was acknowledged at the end of last year that we needed to work together better.'

LEA Representative

Furthermore, there were indications that the boroughs were now liaising more closely with local schools and colleges:

'The South London group meets regularly – once a month. This is essential, and we are now working more uniformly. In February there was also a meeting of the LEAs and institutions, where a lot of issues were raised.'

LEA Representative

The particular difficulties in London, where learning providers may have to deal with, and provide information for, a number of LEAs, and where, in turn, LEAs may have EMA recipients in around 70 different learning institutions, have highlighted the need for greater uniformity in the processes and practices used for implementing EMA².

The function of the implementation groups in the other pilot areas had also evolved, from the responsibility of introducing procedures to implement EMA, to reviewing existing practices and incorporating ongoing changes to the implementation of EMA. Broadly, meetings were convened either on a termly basis, in order to review existing procedures and plan future marketing and publicity strategies or 'as and when' necessary, in order to address a particular issue or issues which had been raised.

'The process of setting the group up was very effective. There hasn't been a meeting for a while because there have been no changes or problems to discuss.'

LEA Representative

Regardless of the frequency of meetings, group members valued the existence of the implementation groups and considered them to have had a crucial role in the development and delivery of EMA. In addition, it was widely acknowledged that the groups would continue to have a role to play.

² This was recognised by DfES. As a consequence, a conference was organised for the 16 EMA pilots now operating in the London area. Agreed standard procedures and deadlines have now been established.

'... I think we need to keep the group established because there are going to be issues which we, still need to discuss as a group, and, - but definitely not the sort of work that we were doing, which was very much a planning operation really. I mean that the group worked out the contract (Learning Agreement), worked out all sorts of things, you know, that would be suitable for everybody. And with that very much established, there hasn't been the need for that in-depth work to take place, and I think I was very conscious that all the people on the group have more than enough to do, and I wouldn't you know, call them together without a purpose ... '

LEA Representative

'It was valuable to set things up – in the early days there were regular meetings – it was good to share problems.'

College Representative

'The group meets once a term now – it is useful as it holds us together and enables a common policy to emerge.'

LEA Representative

During the first year, the importance attached to the introduction of EMA in some of the pilot areas was reflected by the fact that, during the early stages of implementation, the Director of Education, or a Deputy Director of Education, took the role of chairing the implementation group. It was felt that this was needed in order to provide a sufficiently high profile for EMA, and to instil a sense of purpose and generate momentum.

In addition, the analysis of the fieldwork undertaken in the first year of the evaluation suggested that the involvement of senior LEA officers in the establishment of EMA in an area can be integral in harnessing the support and commitment of key players, notably schools and colleges. While most of the senior officers who had been important in engaging the participation and commitment of education providers at the outset had continued their involvement during the second year, there was evidence that the role of senior officers in some implementation groups had diminished. Some senior officers who had taken an active role in chairing meetings and co-ordinating group activities had devolved their responsibilities to the other representatives from the LEA, such as those responsible for student support services, once EMA had become established. In areas where this had occurred, the implementation group had in general been less proactive in the second year.

'It was felt that it was necessary to have the Deputy Director of Education involved initially to steer things through and get it up and running. He was formerly Deputy Director without portfolio, but is now Head of Access and Lifelong Learning, with a more formal line management role for Student Support.'

LEA Representative

In a minority of cases, membership of the implementation group had expanded in order to better incorporate the views of stakeholders, notably schools, which were not represented on all implementation groups. The importance of having this representation was widely acknowledged:

'School and college representatives were used as sounding boards within the Steering Group. For example, they were asked for comments on guidelines etc. The Finance Section have not really been involved, apart from conducting an internal audit. We had to get the key players on board initially, but now there is little for them to do.'

LEA Representative

Evidence from the second year visits to the pilot areas identified that through the regular group meetings held during the first year of the implementation of EMA, school and college staff had developed closer working relationships with each other and with representatives from the LEA. In particular, school and college representatives stated that they felt more able to contact staff at the LEA with particular queries because through their participation in the implementation group they could put 'faces to names' within the LEA and had in effect established closer working relationships both with the LEA and with colleagues in other local schools and colleges.

'Well it has been very useful for me, especially as I'm in a fairly small college and quite isolated in terms of geography, to meet with other people and to discuss how they were thinking about administering it, and also then subsequently sometimes phone them and know the faces behind the names here was very good, so instead of feeling oh, this bureaucracy is imposing a scheme on us, here was X (name) and Y (name), and that was who we were talking to which made a big difference.'

College Representative

School and college representatives on implementation groups also valued the opportunity to learn about other ways of operating and explaining their own practices:

'It is valuable to share experiences and make the LEA aware of what we are doing.'

College Representative

3 PERCEPTIONS OF EMA

The overwhelming view of EMA was that it is a welcome initiative which should be continued, as exemplified by the following quotations:

'We like EMAs and we want them to stay.'

LEA Representative

'The feedback last year was incredibly positive. It has worked well, despite being rushed in late.'

School Representative

Notwithstanding the evident enthusiasm for EMAs, some reservations were expressed. Firstly, concerns were expressed by school and college staff about the divisions that EMA caused between groups of young people, in relation to those who were able to claim EMA and those who were ineligible. It was felt that young people who were ineligible for EMA on the basis of their parents' income felt that the regulations were unfair because very few received the equivalent of £30 or £40 from their parents to remain in education and this caused some resentment.

'Yes, as one kid said to me, which I thought goes down (makes sense) ... you know, I can understand, "just because my parents earn so much doesn't mean to say that they give me any more". And that's a fact. And usually if their parents are earning that much more they're usually trying to buy a house or something and can't afford it anyway.'

School Representative

Examples were found of attempts by some schools and colleges to redress the imbalance which was perceived to exist. In a school in one pilot area, young people who were ineligible for EMA were encouraged to apply for jobs offered in the school which were paid at an hourly rate to run clubs and the canteen. In other areas, Access Funding and Learner Support Funds were targeted at young people who were ineligible to apply for EMA.

It was also suggested that EMA had been designed on the basis of a traditional approach to learning and that a greater degree of innovation could have been applied. A representative from a LEA stated that EMA was organised on the premise that learning should only take place on a full-time basis within a school or college. At the same time, the new Learning and Skills Council was promoting other forms of learning, such as community based learning and

work based learning and questions were raised about the extent to which EMA would be able to respond to the changing needs of learners and the economy.

Another concern was the difficulty of making payments at the beginning of the school or college term (this will be discussed more fully later):

'The majority of people are very much in favour, although the perception of the scheme has suffered because of problems in the first term over delayed payments. There's a lot of support for EMA in the LEA and colleges – they'll grumble about it, but ultimately want it to work, because of its potential.'

LEA Representative

There was general agreement that the existence of EMA had become widely known among young people and parents in a relatively short space of time. Indeed, it was widely asserted that the receipt of the EMA weekly allowance was perceived by many young people to be an 'entitlement' and has become an accepted part of their regular income. That is, over a relatively short life span, EMA was considered to be an integral part of family income.

'There is a more positive attitude from kids at school, who are asking for application packs.'

Careers Services Representative

'Students expect it now – they've got used to it. Kids from outside the area who are not eligible feel aggrieved, because they think it's their right.'

Sixth Form College Representative

'The majority of parents think it's brilliant – they get behind their kids to get them to attend.'

LEA Representative

The only dissenting voice concerning the attitude of young people to EMA came from respondents in one pilot area. For example, a LEA representative questioned the commitment of many potential recipients:

'DfEE don't appreciate the apathy of kids – they "can't be bothered" for £30 a week. There are a lot of kids who appear to be eligible but who don't come back after being asked to supply information on the application form. We wonder about their parents' understanding of EMA in these circumstances.'

LEA Representative

3.1 Training Providers

While some implementation groups had a representative from the local TEC in attendance at meetings during the first year, this was not necessarily the case once EMA had become established in the pilot areas. However, representatives from schools and colleges and the LEA who remained part of the implementation group were aware that the introduction of EMA had a significant impact on government supported training programmes. It was argued that some local training providers considered EMA to be a threat to the future of work based training, since the introduction of EMA was seen to have reduced the number of young people opting to move into training. The response from local training providers was to enhance their publicity and marketing strategies in order to raise the profile among young people and their parents about the availability of work based training as an alternative to remaining in full-time education.

4 AWARENESS

There was general agreement that awareness about EMA had reached very high levels. This was attributed not only to the multiplicity of awareness-raising methods used, but, crucially, to the impact of word-of-mouth information emanating from the first cohort and their families.

'Kids would have had to have been buried under a stone not to know about it. There has been a very positive response about EMA – current Year 10s and Year 11s know a lot about it.'

LEA Representative

However, despite this widespread awareness, pockets of ignorance were identified, so that, for example, a member of one implementation group expressed surprise at the number of people who did not know about it.

In terms of overall awareness, some concerns were mentioned. Firstly, there was the issue of the need to target those who had been eligible yet did not apply. While some areas were confident that by the second year, the message about the existence of EMA had become established in the minds of many young people and their parents, more effort was focused on promoting the awareness of EMA to those groups of eligible young people who remained noticeably under-represented. In most pilot areas, the number of applications for EMA from young people whose parental income fell between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 in Inner London) had been small in number. The representatives from the LEA in one pilot area, designed a display board for use at parents' evenings which displayed the range of EMA entitlement in relation to parental income and which also demonstrated eligibility for full bonus payments.

'In this year's advertising, we have tried to increase the number of higher income earning families – even if they are only eligible for £5, they could still get the bonus. However, it is still seen as a lot of effort to go through.'

Implementation group member

Secondly, it was also felt that a misinterpretation of the information may have led to some potential recipients not applying, notably in relation to the impact, or lack of it, of EMA on entitlement to other benefits:

'There is still some misinformation – e.g. the effect of EMA payments on benefits – some kids say that Social Security people have said their benefits will be affected. Also, parents don't want to go to the Benefits Agency about it.'

LEA Representative

'The hardest message to get across is that benefits won't be taken off.'

LEA Representative

Also, although awareness about the existence of EMA was perceived to be generally high among young people and parents, some respondents expressed concern about the apparent lack of awareness among support agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Welfare Rights and the local offices of the Department of Social Security (DSS)³. This was mainly due to EMAs being a pilot scheme. Therefore national publicity to these groups was not possible. Some LEAs communicated directly with these organisations.

While the timing of the announcements about the introduction of EMA in the first year had compelled the implementation groups to initiate marketing and publicity campaigns at relatively short notice in each of the pilot areas, more time had been available during the second year to undertake more planning and preparation. This had resulted in publicity events starting much earlier, and was complemented by the fact that since EMA had been operational for twelve months, there was already awareness of its availability among many young people and their parents.

'But I think too, we've noticed the young people are already aware of the scheme ... I went to an event and I could hear the kids coming up to the stand with their parents, "Oh this EMA scheme, you've got to take one of these with you" or words to that effect. So I think the knowledge is out there within the young people and the parents in the city, so I think that they already know that the scheme's there, the money's there, it's just how they can access the application forms and the basic information.'

LEA Representative

³ The Department of Social Security (DSS) is now called the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

What was interesting was that, although publicity material which had, in some cases, been developed at great speed in the first year in most pilot areas was revised and updated in the second year, there was no evidence of major revisions being effected. This would suggest that the implementation groups had been highly effective, during the first year, in generating appropriate publicity material.

'The publicity material was much the same as the first year, and went out in January, eliciting 800 queries. If there were a national roll-out, we would need local discretion for advertising, because we would know the target audience.'

LEA Representative

Similarly, in most cases, the publicity strategies that had been applied in the first year were replicated during the second year of implementation. While most publicity had started after Easter in the first year of implementation, in year two, most LEAs were able to start marketing EMA to young people and their parents from the beginning of the Spring term. A range of methods for creating awareness of EMA among potential applicants were utilised, including:

- poster campaigns in schools and colleges;
- representatives from the LEA student awards/student support services attended Year 11 parents evenings/careers evenings/assemblies;
- advertisements on local buses;
- colourful leaflets designed to attract the attention of young people;
- radio and press coverage;
- the distribution of flyers with reply slips; and
- LEAs sending letters to the home addresses informing parents and young people about the availability of EMA.

As was the case in the first year, Careers Services tended to be centrally involved in the dissemination of information about EMA.

'The Careers Service sent out leaflets to every household. We also work with them at Open Days and Careers Conventions etc.'

LEA Representative

'The Careers Service do it, so we know that kids are aware of it – we have really good

relations with the Careers Service, and the other main providers also have very good links.'

College Representative

While in the first year of implementation there had been partial eligibility for EMA in two pilot areas, in the second year, EMA was expanded to cover all eligible young people in the cohort. This was welcomed as a positive move, especially in relation to the advertising and promotion of EMA. While in the first year in one pilot area, promotion of EMA needed to be restricted to young people who attended one of 32 eligible feeder schools, the expansion of the eligibility criteria to include the whole cohort in the second year enabled the LEA to increase the level of publicity about EMA. This included exploiting press and radio advertising which was planned to coincide with the publication of GCSE results. Publicity leaflets were also published and circulated to schools, colleges and careers offices. A meeting was also convened by the LEA, which included representatives from schools which had successfully managed the delivery of EMA in the first year with senior staff from schools which would be introducing EMA for the first time. The LEA was in effect managing a two-tier system, in which they encouraged partnerships between schools in order to enhance the promotion and management of EMA.

5 TAKE-UP

While greater levels of awareness of EMA were perceived to exist among young people and parents now that the pilot was in its second year and that the availability of EMA was made known to young people before their post-Year 11 decisions were being made, this had not on the whole, resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of applications.

'We're generally pleased with the take-up – 63 per cent of the cohort for the first year and 62 per cent for the second year.'

LEA Representative

An exception to this overall trend was south London, where levels of take-up in the four boroughs, which had been disappointing in the first year, were reported to be approximating those which had been anticipated.

'We have 330 Year 1s and 14-1500 Year 2s, which is up to expectations and is consistent with other boroughs.'

LEA Representative

It was somewhat surprising that in some areas, the fact that there had not been a considerable increase on the numbers of Year 11 leavers taking up an EMA was regarded as something of an anti-climax, when it should probably have been viewed as evidence of the tremendous success which had been achieved in the first year in generating high levels of take-up.

While in some EMA pilot areas, the number of new applications had exceeded the numbers received in the first year of the pilot, this was not replicated in all pilot areas. In some cases, respondents pointed to factors other than the availability of EMAs, such as the introduction of Curriculum 2000, as contributing to increasing participation rates.

It had been assumed that in the first year, the late introduction in the academic year of EMA may have resulted in fewer applications, since many young people had already made their post-Year 11 decisions. In addition, the haste in which EMA had been introduced, had led to assertions that key messages, such as the availability of full bonus payments regardless of the level of weekly allowance received, had not been fully appreciated by some potential applicants thereby resulting in fewer applications being made. The assumption was that some parents were reluctant or unwilling to complete the EMA application form in order to attract a minimum weekly amount of £5.

5.1 Distribution by Income Level

The report of the first year of the implementation of the EMA pilots noted that *'all areas reported a shortfall in what they expected to be the demand for EMA at the higher end of the taper'* (p41), and this was identified as an issue on which to concentrate in provision of information about EMA. However, despite the earlier distribution of publicity material and targeted awareness campaigns aimed at ensuring that young people and their parents were aware of the existence of EMA in relation to both the weekly and bonus payments, pilot areas reported the majority of recipients were entitled to the maximum amount of weekly allowance, with much lower proportions on the taper. Thus, one of the issues which had been identified by the implementation groups as warranting specific attention during the first year appeared to have undergone little change.

'I've just got the latest figures and there are 2,404, 1,408 are in the top bracket. And the other brackets are very, very similar, roughly 200 in each. ... there's no sort of sliding scale really, they're very much of a similar level, it's just when it reaches that £25 to £30 you're talking 50/60/70 per cent.'

LEA Representative

'There are not many applicants at the higher end of the income eligibility scale.'

LEA Representative

Lack of take-up from eligible young people who would attract reduced levels of EMA because of their parents' income, was largely attributed to the complexities of the application procedure, the regulations which surround the receipt of EMA, and a lack of awareness of all the money which may accrue to the student through the payment of bonuses.

'I'm still not sure whether parents realise about the bonus.'

LEA Representative

'It's certainly quite surprising how many parents we have on the 'phone saying that in order to get £8 a week, it's not worth the hassle It's not worth having to be there a 100 per cent and to do your homework and to get all the deadlines for £8 a week, and they don't - and that's from the parents.'

LEA Administrator

5.2 Choices of Curricula and Education Providers

The members of the EMA implementation groups were asked to comment on the extent to which the availability of EMA had impacted on student choices both in relation to the type of courses studied and the place of study. Most respondents from schools felt that there had been very little change in the range of courses chosen by EMA recipients in relation to non-EMA recipients. This was partly because, in the majority of cases, the schools continued to offer, for post-Year 11s, a relatively restricted curriculum, targeted predominantly at A levels, with some provision for attaining GNVQs. In contrast, in colleges, which have traditionally offered a greater range of vocational qualifications, several respondents referred to increased take-up of Foundation level courses, which they attributed to the impact of EMA.

'It has encouraged students at Foundation level to stay on.'

Careers Service Representative

'We have 136 on low level courses this year and 234 on Foundation level courses. Although we already had a lot of students on these courses, we've got lots of kids who couldn't come before.'

College Representative

An exception to this finding was one School Sixth Form, where students in receipt of the maximum entitlement of EMA were reported to be concentrated within GNVQ courses. Also one college representative stated that the majority of EMA students were taking one-year programmes, which led to some concern about students' possible progression from one-year programmes to two-year advanced programmes. This would result in some students remaining in post-16 education for three years, while their entitlement to EMA would cover a two year period. This could lead to some students potentially being unfunded through EMA for the final year of the course, which may lead to students dropping out of their courses if funding difficulties could not be overcome.

In addition, despite suggestions that the availability of EMA may attract some students to consider using the allowance to travel further afield for their post-16 education, there was little evidence that this was happening.

In most areas, schools and colleges were anxious to ensure that young people were made aware of the full range of post-16 courses that were available and that entitlement to EMA to eligible young people was linked to attendance at any school or college.

5.3 Impact on Other Post-Year 11 Routes

At the time the roundtable discussions were convened with the EMA implementation groups, Careers Services were finalising destination statistics for 2000 for their local areas. A mixed picture emerged in relation to the perceived impact of EMA on destination statistics.

There was widespread agreement that the introduction of EMA had concerned local training providers whose applications rates from young people for work based training had by and large fallen.

'Training providers may be concerned about work based training, although there isn't currently enough work based training provision to mop up the number of people who seek it anyway.'

Careers Service Representative

'There has been much more participation at Sixth Form level, but some training providers are miffed because of the impact on participation in training.'

LEA Representative

In some areas this had led to an increase from training providers in the marketing to young people about the range of opportunities available through work based training. In one pilot area, representatives from the Careers Service and colleges felt that the impact of EMA on work based training opportunities had been confined to reducing the number of young people entering non-employed training places and had little effect on numbers entering advanced level Modern Apprenticeships.

'Training providers are increasingly worried. Basically their applications are down and it looks as though they're going to be down again this year generally, I'm not sure yet, because we haven't finalised the destination figures for this year. But yes, there's quite a lot of concern from training providers. Adding onto the concerns that they've had over a number of years'

Career Service Representative

In another EMA pilot area, there was a consensus that although EMA may not appear to have contributed greatly towards increasing participation rates among young people in post-16 education, it had certainly improved retention rates. Indeed it was argued that had EMA not been introduced locally, staying-on rates may well have fallen due to the increased buoyancy of the local labour market which was making available an increased number of job opportunities to young people. This feeling was echoed in at least two other pilot areas.

'... the economy is booming, we are now at about 3.5 per cent unemployment, which to all intents and purposes is zero unemployment – West Quay opened in September, three and a half thousand new jobs – there is a case for saying that we need to look at the impact of the changes in the local economy on all college recruitment and retention not just on EMAs, because there are definite signs, certainly in the data that I've seen, there is an impact occurring across the board on recruitment and retention to do with college take-up because the economy is booming ... So there is a piece there which says that EMAs if they weren't there, it might be significantly worse ... '.

LEA Representative

Again, it was felt that increases in participation would be more evident in colleges.

'It hasn't radically altered Sixth Form numbers – they were slightly up because of Curriculum 2000. It could have had a bigger impact on colleges, because of them having lower level courses – we only offer A levels.'

School Representative

6 ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS

After the efforts which had been made in the first year of EMA, members of implementation groups were broadly satisfied that the administrative systems they had introduced were working effectively, and that they provided a sound basis for making progress. Nonetheless, some were in the process of seeking to improve their systems. For example, in one pilot area, plans were being made to introduce service level agreements with learning institutions, in terms of what the LEA requires of them for EMA. In some cases, it was also acknowledged that they were now able to enhance the support they provided.

'The reporting system covering this area works well south of the river.'

LEA Representative

'We've now got time for extra touches, such as sending a "congratulations" letter when kids receive their termly bonus. Last year, time was too short.'

LEA Representative

Some constraints on the ability to improve the administration of EMA were mentioned, notably the sheer volume of young people now in receipt of EMA, with there being two cohorts, a perceived lack of clarity in the guidance notes relating to certain issues, and the additional data now required⁴.

'The requirements of DfEE statistics is getting to be a problem and needs to be resolved – it now requires a five page spreadsheet.'

LEA Representative

'The statistics required are an enormous burden, requiring the system to be run on a weekly basis in order to complete the monthly returns. Next year will be even worse, because of having to do 120 returns. There are now 50 institutions from which weekly figures are required. The bulk is from 8 secondary schools and 2 colleges, but there are also Special Schools and a CTC (City Technology College).'

LEA Representative

6.1 Staffing Levels

The staffing levels required to administer EMA both within the LEA and at the school and college level, provoked a significant amount of discussion within the implementation groups. While most respondents acknowledged that the benefit from running EMA for a year, was

⁴ DfES is addressing these issues by improving guidance notes issued to LEAs which support data requirements.

that it had enabled both LEAs and education providers to develop systems to manage the delivery of EMA, they were keen to point out that with a second cohort now in receipt of EMA, student numbers had in most cases doubled and this in turn had increased pressure on staffing. In addition, it was regularly and strongly asserted that the administrative responsibilities for the delivery of EMA should not be understated.

6.2 Workload on LEAs

Within the LEAs, the management of EMA has continued to rest with the Student Awards/ Student Services Section. In some areas, staff who had been responsible for discretionary funding which has now been largely superseded had been re-allocated to the administration of EMA. It was widely acknowledged that it needed a team of staff to manage EMA within the LEA. However, the experience gained from the first year of EMA has given those responsible for its administration a good understanding of when the peaks of activity occur, and enabled them to staff the functions accordingly.

'Last year, we got the information and the forms out earlier, and had temporary staff in place to deal with the backlog – there is still a problem with the weekly maintenance of the system. We took on one full-time temporary member of staff, and some students to deal with application forms.'

LEA Representative

'The processes are better this year – there is now a senior administrator plus two full-time posts on EMA. The administration has not been a problem because of the appointment of a second person on EMA on scale 5. We are able to hit outstanding cases in 8-10 days, and then chase up those where information is outstanding. There are fewer problems and we are in a better position because of good housekeeping.'

LEA Representative

Where staff had been appointed on a temporary basis to cover the piloting of EMA, concern was beginning to emerge about future funding.

The need for an efficient IT system was widely regarded as being vital to the effective administration of EMA.

'We operate a lot better now with the systems in place, but are continually improving. To do it properly relies heavily on a good IT system, which we've now got.'

LEA Representative

In one EMA pilot area, the expansion in eligibility criteria for EMA, had led the LEA to reassess the in-house IT system which had been established in the first year, and replace it with a more sophisticated system which had been utilised by another LEA.

While the sharing with schools and colleges of the financial support that the LEA receives from DfES to administer EMA was not widespread, in one area, the LEA had distributed a proportion of the funding it had received to schools and colleges. Payment to schools and colleges was based on the number of EMA students attending and was designed to assist with the administrative responsibilities of maintaining student records, completing returns to the LEA for students' weekly allowances and bonus payments. This was welcomed by the schools and colleges as a contribution to their costs.

As in the first year, however, concerns were expressed about the level of funding allocated by DfES, with the distinction between start-up costs and running costs being evident.

'The resources allocated by DfEE were inadequate in the first year because of the significant start-up costs. Now they are possibly not drawing enough down from DfEE – now it's system maintenance costs, BACs cost and support to the EMA team. EMA is taking up more and more of the administrators' time, especially with the introduction of the second cohort. In addition, maintaining the system last summer took time away from dealing with new applications and other HE stuff.'

LEA Representative

6.3 Workload on Schools and Colleges

A number of issues were raised by representatives from schools and colleges in relation to the staffing requirements and the workload needed to manage EMA students. Invariably, however, the magnitude of the administrative load, and the absence of any additional funding to compensate for this, were raised with great regularity by school and college representatives.

'EMA is a good thing, although administratively it is a burden. We can see the benefit more clearly with having an electronic system for a weekly basis. We also have course team leaders, which provides more information.'

College Representative

'There is a lot of administrative work – a big administrative task – for no money. We've used college funds and Access Funds to pay for this, because we saw the necessity – bigger numbers this year mean that we're having to review the administrative set-up.'

College Representative

What emerged from the analysis of the discussions were some interesting differences in the sets of issues facing schools and colleges. In general, in schools, the numbers of EMA students tend to be smaller. As a result the responsibility for managing links with the LEA and dealing with student queries tends to rest with the Head of Sixth Form or a member of the senior teaching staff. This raised a number of issues in schools, in relation to the management, administrative and pastoral responsibilities linked to the delivery of EMA.

Since the number of EMA students is relatively small, this has by and large, negated the need to appoint additional clerical staff to manage the task of completing application procedures and weekly and termly returns to the LEA. By default, many senior members of staff have inherited this role without administrative backup and support and in many cases this has placed an additional responsibility upon them.

'And from talking to the Heads of Sixth, they're all saying it's generally them that's having to do it, they've no support from anywhere else, most schools seem to be under staffed with administrative support anyway, they just cannot put any kind of extra support into an EMA system.'

Head of Sixth Form

The recommendation from most respondents from schools was that they needed the assistance of part-time clerical support to manage the administration of EMA. As well as clerical support, it was recognised that teaching staff had a clear role to play in the effective management of EMA. The support of all teaching staff was considered to be necessary in order that information about students' attendance and performance could be obtained. Teaching staff were also considered necessary to advise on the assessment of student performance particularly in relation to bonus payments.

Dealing with an unpredicted level of queries from students over the weekly payments was reported to be extremely demanding in terms of staff time and skills. In addition, if EMA is successful in relation to attracting more young people into post-16 education, it was suggested that this would require staff to enhance their pastoral skills in order to deal with the additional demands from young people and parents.

'... some support for staff in handling those situations, the co-ordinators are a key group, but I would also say the Head of Sixth, Deputy Head of Sixth in our place, have picked up a lot of that, and – we've had parents come in, you know unannounced saying "I've got to see – why has the money been stopped – it's unreasonable that they haven't had the money this week", and it's good dialogue that then ensues when you can point out "well you know, they haven't turned up to two days worth of lessons, and surely this is part of their commitment", but unless it's structured and well supported dialogue, it can be quite, it can feel threatening and it can feel awkward and difficult.'

Head Teacher

Representatives from schools and colleges were universal in their agreement that the revenue that may be generated from increases in the number of students in post-16 education was not readily available at grassroots level to support the recruitment of additional staff needed to manage EMA.

'I know their argument is well you'll get more students returning to school and college and therefore you'll get more money coming into the budget. But of course, people who deal with the finances are not going to start saying "Oh well we'll take on extra staff on the basis of we might get this extra money" etc, so it just becomes another job doesn't it, that somebody has to do.'

College Representative

However, due to the larger numbers of EMA students in colleges, this had in most cases resulted in full-time administrative support being available. Sometimes administrators in colleges were solely responsible for EMA while in others the responsibility was linked to an existing student support role. There was little doubt that where there were significant numbers of EMA students attending a college, the existence of full-time administrative support was a baseline requirement, particularly in colleges with multiple sites.

'Schools/colleges are still wanting more resources for EMA – it does generate a great deal more work in terms of queries from irate parents etc.'

LEA Representative

'The college suffers because there is no central administration – there are five schools, plus a unit, each with its own administrator and registers. This means six contact points. It didn't go down well with staff when they found themselves spending half the week chasing EMA queries and data for DfEE reports – it created a lot of extra work over six departments. We need one person to co-ordinate EMA work, but can't because of being split into six different schools.'

College Representative

Respondents were asked to comment on whether the workload in relation to administering EMA was evenly spread throughout the academic year. While it was acknowledged that the

number of queries from students was ongoing, a greater volume of work existed in the Autumn term when applications were being renewed and processed for the first time and when most students were dealing with the payments for the first time. This resulted in college staff having to liaise with representatives from the LEA on a daily basis and it was suggested that greater levels of administrative support were needed over this period of time.

As with schools, college staff responsible for EMA stated that they require the support of staff at all levels to ensure that information on students' attendance and performance is accurately recorded and readily available to meet reporting deadlines. This included the support of senior members of staff to make certain that systems of reporting are introduced and monitored and from teaching staff who are responsible for collating and reporting accurate and consistent data on students' attendance and performance.

'The worst bit is dealing with people who come onto EMA late, as not all are signed up in September. From September onwards we get requests for backtracking in relation to attendance. This has to be done through the registers – for example, one has just been put on and attendance has to be calculated back to September. It is an absolute pain because there is no electronic monitoring.'

'We work with great care and try to be professional, but there are breaks in communication – e.g. we don't know if they've withdrawn, or if they have been paid by mistake. The school office can spend a full day getting the information together. Colleges get no recompense for administration, as all the administration costs go to the LEA. We now get 5 per cent top-sliced for Access Funds.'

College Representative

One suggestion for alleviating the negative perceptions among staff in some colleges about their responsibilities for administering EMA, was for more comprehensive information to be provided both locally and centrally about data requirements and examples of good practice.

6.4 Application Forms

While in the first year of implementation, LEAs in the EMA pilot areas had designed their own application forms, this had been replaced in the second year by a standard application which had been designed by the DfES. The new standard application form had been received with a mixture of reactions. In some pilot areas, it was felt that applicants had found the form easier to complete, while in others, the perception was that applicants had found the size of the form rather daunting.

'There's not any one part of the form that they've found difficult, the actual layout possibly scares a few people, people have commented on what an horrendous form, or "I daren't look at that form, I've put it away out of mind, out of sight". But when faced with filling it in and probably given a little bit of time that they have completed it. There's no particular area that is any worse or any better than any other. Some people have just thought it was an horrendous form to fill in.'

LEA Administrator

LEA representatives estimated that upwards of 50 per cent of all application forms received had to be returned because of incomplete or inaccurate information being supplied. This in turn led to a delay in the processing of many applications and ultimately to late EMA payments.

'Some people will have problems whatever the form is like. However, the form is still very complex, and is not working. The same proportion of forms have to be completed again as was the case in the first year. There is no difference in when the forms come in – from September onwards – partly because of needing to know results to see if entry requirements had been satisfied. It could be done earlier for Foundation level students. The day of the GCSE results is crucial.'

Roundtable participant

In one EMA pilot area, to overcome the backlog of incomplete applications that had been received, the LEA had notified the schools and colleges of all applications received and payments were issued before forms had been fully processed. The LEA followed up incomplete applications throughout the Autumn term. This system enabled EMA to be paid promptly to students and ensured that schools and colleges started the process of tracking attendance and performance from the beginning of the course. Furthermore, in 2001, the LEA is proposing to introduce a system whereby EMA applicants will receive provisional assessments for a number of weeks until applications have been fully assessed. Over this period, the LEA will expect to have received the required documentation needed to assess the case. If the information required by the LEA is not obtained then all EMA payments will be withdrawn. This system of provisional assessment was also under consideration in other pilot areas as a means of speeding up the application process.

LEA representatives on the EMA implementation groups had welcomed the consultation with representatives from the DfES on the design of the standard EMA application form. On the whole the standard application was longer than the individual forms that had been designed by the LEAs. A number of key issues were identified in relation to the completion of application forms:

- The length of the form was off-putting and may have deterred some potential applicants.
- Providing incomplete documentary evidence together with the application form was the major cause of forms being returned to applicants. Parents in receipt of state benefits were reported to have found the form particularly difficult to complete because of the need to provide documentary evidence which covered the whole of the previous financial year as opposed to demonstrating their current receipt of benefits.
- The requirement that applicants recorded ‘nil’ against all non-relevant income/benefit questions had led to large numbers of forms having to be returned to applicants.

LEAs, schools and colleges in the EMA pilot areas had devised a number of strategies to support the completion of application forms. Some LEAs produced their own explanatory notes to parents which accompanied the standard EMA application form. In one pilot area, advice surgeries were held in schools and colleges throughout the county which were designed to assist parents to fill in application forms. It was recognised that many parents in rural areas would encounter problems travelling to County Hall to seek advice.

In other pilot areas, staff were readily available within the LEA to offer support either over the telephone or to parents calling in at local offices. Similarly, in some schools and colleges, staff were willing to offer help to students to complete application forms.

‘Yes, I did them. And I even gave them brown envelopes because they were A4 in size I made them all sit down to do that ... it was quite complicated, 160 kids, and I made them sit down in different groups, filling them in, and they’d move a group on and fill them in, so every quarter of an hour. But yes, I did do that, but then it’s in the lap of their parents then.’

Head of Sixth Form

There was a recognition of the need for an application form which was balanced in relation to providing the LEA with a sufficient amount of detailed information for assessment purposes while at the same time being user-friendly to EMA applicants. There was widespread agreement that more changes were needed to the standard application form to enable this to be achieved.

In one EMA pilot area, it was suggested that training could be provided to EMA co-ordinators in schools and colleges to assist in the application process. Another suggestion included the introduction of an electronic application process, similar to that used by UCAS

(Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), in which applications are completed ‘on screen’ with a database which is designed to receive applications which have been correctly entered. It was recognised that such a system would require substantial resources to provide ‘user support’ and would not overcome the necessity to provide the additional financial evidence needed for EMA applications.

LEAs utilised a number of strategies to distribute EMA application forms. A standard method involved forms to be sent to young people who had completed tear off slips, attached to flyers which had been distributed to schools and colleges. In addition, supplies of EMA application forms tended to be given to schools and colleges as well as being issued directly by the LEA following requests from young people and parents.

In one EMA pilot area, EMA application forms were posted to all Year 11 leavers in April. The LEA obtained details from the Careers Service to enable forms to be posted to young peoples’ home addresses.

The issue of collecting details of the income from absent parents was highlighted in the first year report on the implementation of EMA (Maguire, Maguire and Vincent, 2001). It was evident from the discussions held with representatives from the LEAs and schools and colleges in the pilot areas, that the insistence that income details are provided by both natural parents, including absent (estranged/separated/divorced) parents in order that an assessment for EMA can be made, remains a contentious issue. In particular, representatives from the LEAs who were responsible for the processing of application forms voiced concerns about this issue. Many felt that the problem had increased in the second year, due to the need for a more rigorous application of the regulations.

In some cases, the assessment for EMA had previously been calculated on the level of maintenance paid by the absent parent together with the second parent’s income. However, LEAs were required to collect details directly from the absent parent about their level of income for assessment purposes. This had resulted in EMA being withdrawn from some young people who had been awarded the allowance on the basis of information provided on the level of maintenance paid. Some parents were unwilling or unable to provide contact details of absent parents and in some instances where contact information had been provided, some absent parents were not prepared to divulge their income details. The need for staff

from the LEA to pursue parents for information had led in some cases to harassment and distress.

'... we have a lot of trudging backwards and forwards, we have people in tears, we have people shouting, we have absent parents on the phone wanting to know what's going on with little Billy or Johnny, and getting irate and angry. We have staff being subjected to all sorts of scenarios, that they shouldn't be subject to. And they shouldn't be put in a position where they have to ask the personal questions they have to ask to try to ascertain what the family situation is, we know how to deal with them as far as the administration process is concerned.'

LEA Representative

6.5 Learning Agreements

Before the first weekly payment of EMA is made to a young person, a Learning Agreement must be signed by the young person, their parent and representative from the school or college at which they are attending. The Learning Agreement sets out the learning goals to be achieved and the requirements that the young person needs to fulfil in order to qualify for the EMA weekly allowance and for attendance and achievement bonuses.

In some areas, a standard Learning Agreement or Learning Contract (usually designed by the local EMA implementation group) is used by all schools and colleges. In other areas, schools and colleges have designed or continued to use their own individual Learning Agreements. While some LEAs are insistent that they are in receipt of a copy of the Learning Agreement before the first weekly payment of EMA is made, other LEAs are willing to accept notification from schools and colleges that Learning Agreements have been signed without the receipt of individual copies.

While the use of a standard Learning Agreement ensures consistency of information between young people, parents, education providers and the LEA, there were no identifiable problems reported in areas where a number of Learning Agreements were being used. However, it was evident from discussions with the EMA implementation groups, that where schools and colleges managed the completion of Learning Agreements as opposed to individual students returning their own forms, the first payment of EMA was hastened. In addition, some representatives from schools and colleges stated that when they brought groups of students together to complete Learning Agreements, they had used the opportunity to reinforce the regulations surrounding the receipt of EMA. Providing students with both verbal and written

details about the attendance and performance requirements had helped to alleviate any potential problems that could arise when weekly or bonus payments had been withdrawn, since students could be reminded of the conditions which were outlined within the Learning Agreement.

Some LEA representatives remained concerned about the ‘time lag’ between the written notification from the LEA to a young person or parent about their entitlement to EMA, following the assessment of the application form and the return of a completed Learning Agreement. The first weekly payment of EMA to the young person or parent is withheld until notification of a completed Learning Agreement is received by the LEA. In one EMA pilot area, in order to overcome this difficulty, the LEA intended to start issuing a Learning Agreement alongside the letter of notification about a young person’s entitlement to EMA which was aimed at speeding up the process. In most cases, a young person is expected to obtain a Learning Agreement from their education provider which can lead to further time delays.

6.6 Payment Systems

Most respondents were agreed that the initial payments of the weekly allowance to young people or parents had been made more quickly in the second year of the pilot scheme, despite a doubling in the number of applications received. Earlier first payments were attributed to the establishment of administrative systems in the first year and to the fact that many applications had been received at an earlier stage, which enabled forms to be processed before the beginning of the Autumn term.

However, concern was expressed about the number of applications that were received in the Autumn term, despite the efforts made to publicise the availability of EMA throughout the previous academic year and the earlier distribution of application forms. This led to a recommendation from some implementation groups that a target date for the receipt of applications should be introduced. It was suggested that this would encourage applicants to submit their forms at an earlier stage to allow sufficient time for LEAs to process most applications for EMA by the beginning of the Autumn term.

Delays in payments also continue to be caused by the large number of incomplete or inaccurate application forms received by LEAs which must be returned to applicants. In one EMA pilot area, to overcome the difficulties encountered at the beginning of the Autumn term in relation to dealing with large numbers of applications and Learning Agreements, the LEA issues all students with a notification which states that all initial payments will not be made until the third week of the Autumn term.

'We do build in a delay in as much as we tell students we won't pay them for the first three weeks, but then pay arrears from then on, we've said that right from the start, because in the first two to three weeks, particularly in the colleges, there can be a lot of movement between classes and so on which causes problems both within the institution and for ourselves.'

LEA Representative

While delays in payments during the Autumn term are acknowledged to constitute a problem, attempts to speed up the process can lead to other difficulties, notably overpayments being made to young people who are no longer eligible, especially those who have withdrawn from their course.

'Because of withdrawals, 63 students were overpaid at the start of the year – this happens early on in the term, when it is a nightmare to track students, because they are changing programmes. This also means that the revised Learning Agreement doesn't necessarily come through until October. Therefore, you are sitting on the yellow form which says they are continuing – back-checking takes time. If they are not on the system, this needs to be referred to the programme manager, because there may be a reason for non-attendance or withdrawal. Also, quite a few had been paid because it was not known that they had withdrawn. It is very difficult to get the money back'

LEA Representative

6.7 Attendance Monitoring

The need for schools and colleges to provide weekly returns to LEAs on EMA students' attendance remains in the majority of cases, an onerous task. In many schools and colleges, the issue of attendance monitoring of EMA students has intensified in the second year as the numbers of students on EMA has expanded, and in many instances doubled. While there is a consensus that data is needed by the LEAs in order that weekly payments can be made, the logistics of collecting and returning weekly attendance reports on large numbers of students is considered to be both time-consuming and costly to most education providers.

A number of different approaches have been developed by individual schools and colleges in relation to attendance monitoring. These include the use of:

- Electronic registration systems that are more widely used in FE Colleges, which have been adapted to provide data on EMA students. In some pilot areas, colleges were using the ‘Bromcom’ electronic system which was described as ‘excellent’ for collecting data on large numbers of EMA students.
- Manual registration systems. Manual registers are checked on a weekly basis to prepare a return to the LEA.
- Student attendance forms which are issued to EMA students who are required to collect confirmation of their attendance at each lesson and return the form on a weekly basis for submission to the LEA.
- EMA student attendance forms that are issued on a weekly basis to course tutors which record attendance and authorised as well as unauthorised absences.
- Student declaration forms which require students to confirm their attendance on a weekly basis. A weekly return is submitted to the LEA on the basis of the information provided by students. Attendance registers are checked subsequently when the information has been collected from course tutors.

It was widely acknowledged by representatives from the LEAs that enormous differences existed between education providers in the accuracy and the regularity of the attendance data they received. This could be attributed to a lack of administrative support available in schools and colleges to complete the task, to the willingness of teaching staff to assist with EMA attendance monitoring procedures and/or to the efficiency of existing student monitoring procedures.

‘... to go back to attendance specifically, based on evidence, both anecdotal and the number of withdrawals arising from different institutions, the approach has been patchy to say the least, both in the FE sector and in schools in terms of the rigour that institutions impose upon students and Learning Agreements and adherence thereto, particularly in terms of attendance.’

LEA Representative

Variations continue to exist in the ways in which LEAs obtained attendance data on a weekly basis from schools and colleges. While negative reporting (education providers notifying LEAs on student absences as opposed to providing a full report on every EMA student) was widely used in the initial stages of implementation, many schools and colleges are now

required to provide attendance data on every EMA student. This had, in most cases, resulted from guidance which had been received from DfES which encouraged some LEAs to move away from negative reporting systems. Representatives from the LEA stated that administrative staff were required to spend large amounts of time contacting schools and colleges who were failing to provide weekly returns.

Due to the difficulties encountered by many LEAs in obtaining weekly returns from schools and colleges, most were willing to accept data on either a standard form which the LEA had designed or in a format which was preferred by individual schools and colleges. LEAs continue to issue guidelines to schools and colleges in relation to their requirements for the receipt of weekly attendance data, including a timetable for delivery. However, the variations that exist between LEAs can lead to difficulties for individual schools and colleges who are submitting weekly attendance information to more than one LEA. This may suggest a need for a move towards greater standardisation between LEAs in relation to the submission of EMA weekly attendance data and a timetable for delivery.

An issue of particular concern is that of the criteria for determining what constitutes an authorised absence, and the need for consistency to be established, although there was some acknowledgement that the guidelines produced by DfES had clarified the position.

'This year, we had DfEE guidance concerning authorised absence criteria, which was a great improvement – in the first year it had been a nightmare.'

College Representative

'Some students have an "actual" attendance of only about 50 per cent, but they get parents to sign something in order to get an authorised absence. The college tries to monitor incidences of "regular authorised absence".'

College Representative

'There is a city-wide problem of unauthorised absence. The Director of Education sent a letter to all parents about it. It's always parents who ring up about money – they provide "absence" letters.'

LEA Representative

Allied to the above point were some concerns about cases of fraud having been identified, as exemplified in the following quotation:

'It is the students' responsibility to get lecturers to sign their timesheets. We have had some forgeries, but those who have been picked up have been disciplined. We now have course registers and the timesheets stay in the course register, thereby placing

more responsibility on the teaching staff. Therefore, we have had to put a new system in place, but have tried to evolve the system and be flexible.'

College Representative

In another area, where suspicions were raised by the number of repeated 'authorised absences', spot checks were carried out, even to the extent of making telephone calls to dentists, to check whether claims about dental appointments could be verified. In a two week period, these spot checks identified four cases of fraud. Another area of concern in some colleges was the use of timesheets, which could be signed by other students. Therefore, it was suggested that there should be an internal system of randomly checking signatures. Furthermore, it was felt that a uniform policy, across colleges, covering such decisions as whether to call in the police and recover the money derived from the fraud. In one college, where forgeries had been found, the policy was that the student would lose their termly bonus, as well as two weeks money, and would have to go through the college's disciplinary procedure.

7 IMPACT OF EMA

In all pilot areas it was perceived that the impact of the introduction of EMA had been substantial, in terms of the numbers involved and the wider implications for family incomes.

'EMA has had a big impact.'

Careers Service Representative

'We were surprised by numbers on EMA in the first year. There are even more this year – we are now analysing the programmes, and may be able to collate facts as a borough – this is not being done in other colleges. The impact of the EMA money on families is significant – it can mean the difference between families being fed or not.'

College Representative

The overall impact can be gauged by the fact that EMA now appears to be regarded as an established part of the post-16 infrastructure, and is firmly entrenched in the consciousness of young people, to the extent of being 'expected'.

'There has been a significant increase in kids going to college from some postcode areas from which this is not usual. The increase has been progressive and it is now becoming part of the culture for kids to stay on, although there is also a need for extra pastoral and tutorial support.'

Roundtable Discussion Participant

7.1 Bonuses

In the first year, due to the timing of the fieldwork, this strand of the evaluation was unable to report on the delivery and impact of bonus payments. In pilot areas, there are two types of EMA bonuses which are paid directly to the young person. Termly bonuses are awarded at the end of each academic term. In order to qualify for the termly attendance bonus, a young person must achieve a 95 per cent attendance record. Achievement bonuses are awarded to students at the end of their course of study, if they have satisfied the attainment targets set in their Learning Agreements. Variations exist between the EMA pilot areas in relation to the amounts paid to young people in attendance and achievement bonuses. Full bonus payments are made to all EMA recipients, regardless of the level of weekly allowance that is received.

While most areas were familiar with the payment of EMA attendance bonuses, the experiences relating to the payment of attainment bonuses were much more limited since many students were completing two-year courses. In general, the administration of bonus payments was considered to be far less onerous than the task of managing returns for the

EMA weekly allowance, which was directly attributed to the frequency with which data is required.

Some concern was expressed in the first year of the implementation of EMA, that there was a general lack of awareness about bonus payments, in particular among non-recipients who might qualify for the minimum or a reduced EMA weekly allowance. This had been tackled in many pilot areas by a heightening of awareness through publicity and marketing campaigns about the availability of bonus payments within EMA as well as the eligibility criteria.

There was a general consensus that those in receipt of EMA were familiar with their entitlement to bonus payments.

'All the students are fully aware of them and I think that does help in terms of them turning up to the lessons 'cos it's not just their weekly money, it's their bonus which could come in at Christmas time, or at Easter time, so I think that it does have quite an effect ... '.

College Representative

In contrast, in one EMA pilot area, while it was agreed that students were fully aware of the availability of bonus payments, it was questioned whether bonuses added any additional incentives to young people. Some respondents felt that it was the EMA weekly payment which offered the initiative to young people to participate and remain in post-16 education and considered bonus payments to be little more than a 'frill'.

Some school and college representatives stated that bonus payments were an effective tool to monitor student behaviour. While the threat of losing EMA weekly payments was ensuring that students attended on a regular basis, students' behaviour and performance also needs to be monitored in accordance with guidelines established in the Learning Agreement. Consequently, termly bonuses were issued as a reward to students for achieving recognised levels of performance as well as attendance.

'The termly bonus is used as a lever to jolt students into attending. The bonus has had an impact – it brings it home that it is not just on a weekly basis.'

College Representative

There was some evidence that practices in terms of what was required of the student in order to qualify for the bonus had changed, with more attention being paid to behavioural aspects, rather than basing the award purely on attendance.

'We have become stricter about the work requirement – in the first year bonuses were assessed purely on attendance, but now we take into account the work being handed in and the students' general behaviour – e.g. "messaging about".'

College Representative

'We stop quite a lot of bonuses – we go off the attendance record, but there's not much incentive because it's 95 per cent including authorised absence. Therefore, if they know the system they're OK. A few bonuses are stopped for not submitting course work, but staff are reluctant to do it. The original plan – 85 per cent including authorised absence – was a better idea.'

Sixth Form College Representative

Bonus payments are triggered using information collected by the LEA from education providers. Most LEAs use a proforma which lists students attending each school and college. At the end of each term a proforma which may also include the eligibility criteria surrounding bonus payments is issued which instructs the school and college to inform the LEA which students qualify for a bonus payment. Bonus payments are made to young people on the basis of the information submitted by each school and college. Similar to the payment of the EMA weekly allowance, variations exist between schools and colleges in their levels of efficiency in submitting bonus returns.

'What we do – we print off a list of everybody at the institution who's had an EMA, with a tick box, we send that out to the institution and say "please return this, ticking those that you wish to receive the bonus", and base that on that.'

LEA Representative

In one EMA pilot area, at the end of the Autumn term, the LEA sends an individual report to each school and college which requests information to update records on students' course details in addition to notifying the LEA about students' eligibility for a bonus payment. Since many students change course at the beginning of the academic year, this exercise has helped to ensure that the majority of EMA student records are accurate. In the second and third terms, reports are confined to collecting information about bonus payments.

7.2 Attendance

Respondents were asked to comment on the extent to which the introduction of EMA had improved student attendance. In some EMA pilot areas, it was felt that there were clear differences in attendance patterns between EMA and non-EMA students. As a direct consequence of the attendance regulations which surround the receipt of EMA, student attendance among EMA students had noticeably improved.

'Attendance is definitely up, and was mentioned by Inspectors – 200 out of 700 students are on EMA. The high expectations of EMA students has had a knock-on effect on what we do with non-EMA students – for example, we now expect 100 per cent attendance, rather than 95 per cent as before.'

College Representative

An exception to this general trend for EMA to have had a positive effect on attendance patterns was found in one EMA pilot area. This may be partly attributable to the fact that, in terms of the total student population in the local colleges, the proportion in receipt of EMA was relatively small. Therefore, any effect would be likely to be negligible.

'Institutions would have expected a better improvement in attendance etc – is it an area thing?'

LEA Representative

In contrast, in other pilot areas, respondents highlighted the introduction of a host of changes in post-16 education which had coincided or preceded the introduction of EMA which have improved both attendance monitoring procedures and student attendance. These include the introduction of Learning Agreements, which apply to all students not only EMA students, and which establish clear expectations in relation to attendance and the reporting of absences. In addition, many colleges have introduced electronic systems of student monitoring which have improved data collection and reporting.

In one college, alongside the completion of a Learning Agreement, EMA students are issued with a list of instructions surrounding the notification of absences. The college has a dedicated telephone line established to deal with calls from EMA students. If an EMA student is absent, they are expected to call the EMA helpline by a specified time, quoting their individual reference number (which is also allocated with a completed Learning Agreement). When the student returns to college they are expected to produce a self-certified sickness note or a doctor's note if the absence lasts longer than seven days. This system was

introduced to deal with large numbers of EMA students attending the college and to ensure consistency and fairness in dealing with student absences. Any student who fails to comply with the regulations has their EMA stopped.

Concern was expressed in a number of pilot areas about the role of professional judgements in attendance monitoring. It was recognised that wide variations did exist in the decisions taken by teaching staff over the recording of student attendance, in particular in relation to authorised and unauthorised absences. This in turn led to some students being awarded their EMA while others had their allowances or bonuses withdrawn. While the need for greater consistency is desirable, it was recognised that individual student needs must be acknowledged in relation to attendance issues.

‘So it’s really, it’s a fine line and I think one of the things I hope the evaluation takes back is that whilst the headlines are good on saying “Yes, there’s a rigid monitoring system, if they don’t attend, they don’t get their money” – on the other hand getting a young person who’s completely disaffected, fallen out of the system, who you’ve enticed back, who manages two days a week for the first month, that’s a real achievement and that might actually be their saving and you can’t penalise them for that because they would not have done anything before Just think there’s a danger one could end up throwing the baby out with the bath water if you’re not careful.’

LEA Representative

7.3 Retention and Achievement

It was widely acknowledged that the introduction of EMA has helped to improve student retention rates. In fact, there was some indication that EMA was having a greater impact on retention rates in schools and colleges than in helping to increase participation rates. In some EMA pilot areas, representatives from colleges reported that their own surveys of students had demonstrated that EMA was contributing towards enhancing retention rates.

‘It’s certainly helped our retention, yes. I can’t remember the percentage numbers but within the EMA cohort it is higher than the general average. We did an analysis of Access Fund recipients and EMA and access is better than the general cohort, but EMA is markedly better than that. So it is something about having a money payment rather than books or travel.’

College Representative

‘It hasn’t had a massive effect on recruitment, but certainly has on retention, when compared to non-EMA students last year.’

College Representative

'EMA has improved the retention rate – the end of January is usually the worst time for 'drop-outs'. Retention for 16 year olds was EMA – 84 per cent, non-EMA – 69 per cent.'

College Representative

'It has improved retention – up until Christmas, there was an 8 per cent improvement of EMA students over non-EMA students – we will see if that continues after Christmas.'

College Representative

While EMA may have a role in attracting some young people to remain in education who might otherwise have left at the end of Year 11, it was also suggested that EMA was acting as an incentive in retaining some groups of young people who might be prone to dropping out early in the academic year. However, this was not solely attributable to the availability of the financial support available within EMA, but to the enhancement of student monitoring procedures (in particular at colleges) which had been introduced alongside the implementation of EMA. Some school representatives also pointed to the changes in the curriculum, in particular the introduction of Curriculum 2000 which may also be acting as an incentive to encourage and retain more young people in post-16 education.

There was early evidence to support the view that the introduction of EMA may encourage more retention beyond post-16 education. The additional funding and support available from the introduction of EMA was not only instrumental in retaining young people in post-16 education but had led, in some schools, to an increase in the number of enquiries and applications for higher education places.

Respondents considered it to be too early to gauge the impact of EMA on achievement rates. This was largely attributed to the fact that the majority of EMA recipients were undertaking two-year courses and had not yet finished their courses. In contrast, the small number of EMA recipients who had embarked on one-year courses had, in the large majority of cases, completed their courses and received their achievement bonuses. It was widely acknowledged that the true test of the success of EMA on improving attainment rates needs to be largely assessed against the successful completion of two-year courses. Two reasons were given for this. First, the majority of EMA recipients are completing two-year courses and second, attainment levels at the end of two-year courses are generally of a much higher standard in comparison to one-year programmes.

8 KEY ISSUES

During the course of the fieldwork for the evaluation of the implementation process for the second year of EMA, a number of issues emerged which were felt to be important by respondents. Some of these had been identified during the first year, but continued to necessitate attention. Others were derived from the experience of having two cohorts of EMA recipients. Respondents had also thought through suggestions for improving the system, with some of those mentioned here emanating from a discussion at a Local Government Association EMA Network meeting.

‘Natural parent’

The ‘natural parent’ rule continues to be a source of disquiet, as it generates a substantial amount of administrative time and resources in order to be implemented.

‘There are still problems about the natural parent rule – although it is not as great a problem as last year.’

LEA Representative

‘The absent parent issue won’t go away – most correspondence is about that.’

LEA Representative

A suggestion was made that, for those on benefit, a stamp on the application form could prevent the need to ‘chase up’ absent parents who were not contributing to the family income.

Since the fieldwork was completed, DfES has introduced amendments to the EMA regulations. These include the introduction of the:

- siblings rule, whereby a certain degree of financial allowance in the assessment for EMA is now made for other siblings;
- the natural parent rule was amended slightly in order to make the application process smoother; and
- minimisation of evidence required from families on benefits.

There have also been changes to the application form to make the provision of benefit information more straightforward. In addition, some consideration has been given to the introduction of further changes to the EMA administrative process.

Additional workload and cost

As indicated in the earlier section, the perception that, as presently operated, the administration of EMA places an excessive workload and resource cost, on both LEAs and local learning providers, persists.

'Resources have been a problem – we have just struggled through at critical times, especially in August and September – this led to long delays, but things have gone smoothly since then.'

LEA Representative

'Five per cent, based on take-up, is extremely low to cover administrative costs. The Student Support section, which is already under-funded, tends to bale out EMA.'

LEA Representative

Information Technology

The problems experienced with IT systems, particularly in relation to attendance monitoring and reporting continue to be of concern and have given rise to calls for greater uniformity in IT and reporting systems.

'There would need to be a standard specification for an IT system for a national roll-out.'

LEA Representative

'Things have improved, but they're not perfect. The big issue is the time it takes IT suppliers to get things right. Our system works, but it could be much better. The biggest disappointment is the IT for monitoring – some schools were very interested, but nobody has got a good word to say about it. In terms of LEMAPS, all users (providers and LEAs) were unhappy. The problem was getting the co-operation from the institutions – the software was supposed to help that.'

LEA Representative

Stoppages of payments

There were reports that the number of stoppages had increased in the second year. This may have been because reporting had been tightened by schools and colleges, thereby enabling them to furnish LEAs with more accurate information on which to act. It could also have been the case that EMA recipients, while aware of the consequences, continued to contravene the regulations.

In order to tackle the problem, one LEA has introduced a system in which they identify young people who have had three or more payments withdrawn for unauthorised absence. The students are contacted and asked to explain the reasons why this is happening. If they do

not respond, the EMA is immediately withdrawn and the LEA then writes to the school or college, warning that the student is facing the permanent withdrawal of EMA and requests them to investigate. If the EMA is permanently withdrawn, the LEA was proposing to introduce a third measure which was to contact the Careers Service to follow-up, since these young people may be in need of advice and support.

Support from DfES

Some respondents reported that support from DfES was less evident in the second year, and that it was more difficult to get answers to queries. However, they also acknowledged that this might be attributable to the fact that the piloting of EMA has been extended to a number of LEAs. LEAs in particular had valued the close links which had been established during the first year of implementation. It should also be emphasised that this was not necessarily a widespread perception and since the fieldwork was conducted staffing levels within DfES have increased.

Implementation group membership

It was significant that, whereas in the first year, several implementation groups had representation from the local Training and Enterprise Council (or latterly the Learning and Skills Council), this was less evident in the second year.

Eligibility criteria

A concern which was voiced by several respondents was that the income eligibility criteria failed to take into account the number of dependent children within the household. Some respondents felt that some adjustment in the financial assessment should be possible where there were other siblings.

Third year students

The position of students who had embarked on Foundation level courses before progressing on to a two-year course, and the uncertainty about whether they would be eligible for a third year of EMA, was raised with great regularity by implementation group members.

Income assessment

In order to speed up the process of assessing eligibility for EMA, it was suggested that current income should be the deciding factor. It was also posited that those applicants whose

parents were in receipt of benefit could be ‘fast-tracked’, and their income assessment could be made on the basis of a shorter period than one year – possibly just the previous two months.

Payment systems

In order to alleviate the problems caused by basing a weekly payment on the previous week’s attendance, through attendance reporting, the idea that payment should be made on a fortnightly basis, in arrears, was favoured by a number of respondents.

LEA budget

The current practice of basing the amount paid to LEAs on the basis of what they eventually spend was criticised as it inhibited the LEAs’ ability to plan ahead – they did not necessarily know in advance what this figure might be. The preferred method of payment would be a ‘standardised’ amount, which was not dependent on the numbers in receipt of EMA.

9 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The second year of the evaluation of the implementation of EMA focused on re-visiting some of the key issues that were highlighted in the first year report, as well as identifying a number of other emergent findings and developments. The third year of the evaluation will enable further exploration of the factors which have either facilitated or impacted upon the implementation of EMA. These will include:

- ***The role of the implementation groups.*** While it was widely acknowledged that the implementation groups had a key role to play in establishing EMA, in the second year there had been a process of consolidating and building on the initial achievements. Significantly the role of senior officials from the LEA, in leading the implementation of EMA had in most cases, been scaled down. However, the role of the implementation groups in bringing together key players most notably from the LEA and from schools and colleges, had been remarkably successful in enhancing working relationships. The continued role of implementation groups and their importance to the successful delivery of EMA will be re-visited in the final year of the evaluation.
- ***EMA applications.*** While application procedures had become more streamlined in the second year, ongoing issues relating to the design of the standard application form, the supporting evidence requirements and the limited take-up of EMA from young people on the taper will continue to warrant further enquiry.
- ***EMA attendance monitoring.*** The demands placed on LEAs, schools and colleges to manage the information requirements to ensure that EMA weekly and bonus payments are paid both correctly and promptly continue to present the greatest challenge in relation to the delivery of EMA. Efforts to improve attendance monitoring procedures will be ongoing and be the subject of further review by the evaluation team with local EMA implementation groups.
- ***The role of Local Learning and Skills Councils.*** While representatives from local TECs were engaged as members of implementation groups in the initial stages of the introduction of EMA, at this stage it was too early to gauge the role of the newly launched

Local Learning and Skills Councils in the implementation and delivery of EMA.

- ***Participation, retention and achievement rates in post-16 education.*** The impact of EMA on participation, retention and achievement rates in post-compulsory education remains a critical measure of the success of the initiative. Early indications from the findings from this part of the evaluation would suggest that the introduction of EMA has had a positive effect in the pilot areas on levels of participation and retention in post-16 education. In particular, in the second year of the evaluation, respondents pointed to improved levels of retention among EMA students. At this stage, it is too early to report in detail about the influence of EMA on achievement rates, since most students undertake two-year post-16 programmes. The final part of the evaluation will be able to explore, through group discussions with members of the implementation groups in each of the pilot areas, the extent to which EMA has impacted on participation, retention and achievement rates in post-compulsory education.

Crucially, the final stages of the evaluation will be able to reflect upon, and highlight the key components of the implementation process through which EMA has been delivered and identify systems of delivery of EMA which would be most practical and effective, should a national system be introduced.

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ANNEX A

EMA PILOT AREAS IMPLEMENTATION GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE 2000

Implementation Group

Membership – organisations represented/changes over last year
Involvement of Senior LEA officers/sections within LEA
Remit and responsibilities
Timing of meetings
Organisation/allocation of responsibilities
Links with other agencies
Involvement with EMA Extensions/EMA(T)

Perceptions of Aims of EMAs and Desired Outcomes

Feedback about EMA from:

- Recipients/Non-recipients/parents
- Learning providers
- Employers /Training providers
- Neighbouring LEAs

Publicity and Awareness

Information/awareness/publicity for EMAs
Responsibilities for design, development and implementation
Strategies used to reach target groups
Feedback about EMA publicity
Adverse publicity

Experience/Expectations of the Operation of EMA in Relation to:

- Take-up
- Impact on post-16 participation rates
- Areas of study
- Attendance and retention in post-16 education (weekly allowance/bonuses)
- Qualification attainment (weekly allowance/bonuses)
- Labour market entry – full/part-time employment patterns
- Interaction with other existing and proposed student support mechanisms
- Interaction with other welfare benefits
- Impact on other initiatives/post-16 destinations/routes
- Impact on employers' demand for youth labour and recruitment of young people
- Impact on aspirations and attitudes to learning of ALL young people
- Impact on class sizes/class management

Administrative Support and Mechanisms

(Description and documentation, e.g. guidelines, forms, proformas)
Staffing levels and requirements
Use and value of standard application forms
Eligibility and means-testing
Support and advice given with completion of application forms
Returned forms
Documentary evidence
Absent parents

Application processing
Strategies introduced/planned to improve application processing procedures
Appeals

Learning Agreements

Use of standard Learning Agreement (LA)
Sources of support and advice to help young people/parents complete the LA
Understanding of the LA – young people/parents
Returning LAs
Changes to LAs (course changes/movement between education providers)
Breaking LAs
LAs and non-EMA students

Payment Systems

Payment systems- weekly payments/bonuses
Distribution of awards made across payment bandings
Payment delays
Bank accounts
Holiday/half-term breaks in payments
Strategies planned/introduced to improve payment systems
Appeals

Attendance Monitoring

Attendance monitoring procedures:
– Schools and colleges (before and since the introduction of EMA)
– LEAs
Staffing
Authorised/unauthorised absences
Suspension/termination of EMA weekly payments
(N.B admin procedures between schools/colleges and LEA and referral procedures to Careers Service)
Procedures introduced to implement the payment of attendance/achievement bonuses
Overpayments
Appeals

Feedback on:

- The Good Practice Guide
- Revised DfEE guidelines
- Changes to regulations regarding other sources of funding
- Changes to ‘natural parent’ rule
- New computer system by Student Awards Software Houses
- Ongoing liaison between LEAs and DfEE

Further Information:

- Copies of all relevant documentation relating to the administration of EMAs
- Copies of relevant background material relating to the local labour market, education provision etc
- Routine forwarding of data relating to the implementation of EMAs
- Identification of ‘key informants’ for local narrative information