

# Staying Away or Staying On? A Qualitative Evaluation of the Education Maintenance Allowance

Robin Legard, Kandy Woodfield and Clarissa White  
National Centre for Social Research



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Education and Employment

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**The research team**  
**Qualitative Research Unit**  
**National Centre *for* Social Research**

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department for Education and Employment.

# Executive Summary

## 1. Background

- The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) introduced the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme to provide a package of financial support for young people to stay on in full-time education after the age of 16. Eligibility for the scheme is based on total parental income up to a ceiling of £30,000. (1.2)
- The package of financial support consists of: a weekly allowance tapered in accordance with the level of parental income; a flat rate bonus for attendance payable termly; a flat rate bonus for achievement payable on completion of the course. (1.2)
- The scheme was originally introduced in 15 pilot Local Education Authority areas using four variants of the scheme in terms of: the maximum weekly allowance payable; the amounts paid for bonuses; and who receives the weekly allowance. In three out of the four variants, it was paid direct to the young person. In the fourth variant, payment was made directly to parents. The pilot has now been extended to a further 41 areas (1.2)
- The DfEE commissioned a programme of research to evaluate the EMA pilots from a consortium headed by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University. (1.1)
- *The National Centre for Social Research* undertook a qualitative investigation of the delivery and impact of the EMA scheme in four fieldwork areas selected to reflect different variants of the scheme. (1.1)
- The qualitative study was carried out using depth interviews amongst a purposively selected sample of young people and their parents who had previously participated in a *National Centre* survey of the *Destinations of 16-19 year olds*. (1.3/1.4)
- The sample of young people totalled 101, of which 55 were participants in the EMA scheme and 46 were non-participants. The sample also included a total of 50 parents of participants and non-participants. (1.6)

## 2. Decision-making at age 16

- Young people varied in relation to their intentions about what to do after Year 11 prior to the decision-making process. Some had clearly identified routes into either work, post-compulsory education or work-based training; others were unclear or undecided about which route to take. (2.1)
- The decision-making process itself was governed by a range of personal considerations, including personal motivation, and a number of external influences such as the advice of parents or teachers. (2.2)
- The personal motivation of young people electing to stay on in education or a work-based route varied. Where there was a strong motivation to follow a particular route, this was often highly influential in the final decision. Where the motivation was passive in nature, the decision was more highly influenced by external influences. (2.2)
- Young people who were unclear about which route to take sometimes stayed on in education by default. Where young people had clear career goals which could be realised either through further study or through work-based training, a range of different factors influenced the final decision. (2.2.3)
- Most parents of participants were prepared to fund their child through further education even though it meant some degree of financial sacrifice for them. However, a few non-

participants suggested that there were financial barriers to them remaining in education (2.3.1)

- Decisions about post-compulsory education had mostly been taken before young people learned of the existence of EMA<sup>1</sup>. The evidence suggests that it might have influenced the decisions of some young people who had gone into work but was unlikely to influence young people who were highly motivated to be independent or those who had a strong aversion to an educational environment. (2.3.2)

### **3. Awareness and knowledge of EMA**

- Knowledge and understanding of EMA and its objectives varied greatly. There was strong evidence to suggest that those who heard about the scheme through ‘unofficial sources’ such as word of mouth tended to have more misconceptions than those who received ‘official information’ from schools and institutions delivering post-compulsory education. (3.1.1)
- Awareness of the weekly allowance was greater than that of termly and achievement bonuses. Although recall of the learning agreement amongst participants was variable, there was wide recognition that regular attendance at school or college was required if participants were to receive EMA payments. (3.2.2)
- Timing of information was criticised in all pilot areas. Information about EMA was generally received after the decision about what to do after Year 11 had been taken. It was felt that this had reduced its potential impact on young people who were either undecided about their choice of route or who had been influenced to leave education on account of the financial cost. (3.4.3)
- The decision to participate in the scheme was usually made jointly by the young person and the parent or guardian. The primary motivation was the financial benefits of participation. Reasons for non-participation in EMA amongst those staying on in education included confusion over the rules governing eligibility and concerns about the application process. (3.4.2)

### **4. Application for and experience of EMA**

- Young people and parents tended to share responsibility for the application process. (4.1)
- Experiences of the process varied according to the length and complexity of the application form and the amount of evidence required to support the application. Also, the application process was more complicated where the parents’ financial circumstances were not straightforward. (4.1)
- The length and format of application forms differed between areas. Problems were experienced where the form was considered overly long or where the questions were difficult to understand. There were other problems: where parents were unclear about the type of evidence they had to provide, had difficulty in locating it, or were reluctant to divulge details of their financial situation. Some difficulties were experienced in obtaining advice and guidance about the application process from local EMA offices. (4.1.1/4.1.2/4.1.3)
- Timescales between submitting the application form and receiving notification of the award varied across pilot areas. While timescales reported in two of the areas were

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<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the quantitative evaluation of the first year of EMA (Ashworth et al., 2001) estimated that in comparison to control areas, there has been an average gain in participation in full-time education in pilot areas, amongst eligible young people, of around 5 percentage points.



longer, the process seemed more protracted where the application was not straightforward and where further evidence was required. Young people and parents also attributed long delays in processing to staff being inundated with applications. (4.1.5)

## **5. Receipt and use of EMA payments**

- In three of the four variants, weekly payments were made direct into young people's bank accounts. In Variant 3, payments were made direct to parents' or guardians' accounts. Whether parents chose to transfer all, or part, of the payment to the young person depended on existing patterns of intra-household transfer, family circumstances and parental perceptions of what the payments were intended for. There was little evidence of bonus payments being transferred between young people and their parents. (5.2.1)
- The principal factors that determined the use of the EMA weekly allowance were: perceptions of the intended use of EMA income; whether the allowance was payable to the parent or young person; the level of young people's financial autonomy. (5.2.2)
- In Variant 3, parents had greater influence and control over how the money was used than in the other three areas where young people had higher levels of financial independence and greater autonomy in deciding how to use it. (5.2.3)
- There were three key beliefs about the intended use of the EMA allowance which influenced how the money was spent: for educational costs; to help with general household expenses; as a reward or incentive for the young person. (5.2.3)
- The evidence suggested that how the weekly allowance was used was determined by previous patterns of expenditure and the availability of other income, such as wages, to subsidise the expenditure rather than by the level of payment received. (5.2.2)
- Overall, attitudes about the intended purpose of bonus payments were less complex than those relating to the weekly allowance. For the most part, they were viewed as for the sole personal use of young people. In addition, they were usually used for different purposes than the weekly allowance, frequently being hypothecated for seasonal spending, major purchases or for personal savings. Again, the level of bonus payment did not tend to affect the way it was used. (5.3)
- Three models of household allocative systems were being used by families in receipt of EMA, according to the degree of autonomy which the young person exercised over how the weekly allowance was used. The choice of system was determined by: the model of EMA variant; the levels of household income; whether or not the young person received pocket money or an allowance prior to participating in EMA; and the young person's history of financial independence, for example through part-time work. (5.5)
- EMA has led to increased levels of financial autonomy for some young people. (5.5)

## **6. The impact of participation and non-participation in EMA**

- The study identified three types of broad impact which participation and non-participation in the scheme had upon young people and their families: educational, financial and personal.

### ***Educational impact***

- In view of low awareness of the scheme amongst all young people during Year 11, there was little evidence in the first year of EMA having influenced decisions about whether to participate in post-compulsory education<sup>2</sup>. The impact on participants was rather on heightened motivation, and sense of responsibility to study as a result of receiving EMA. (6.1.1)
- Evidence suggested that EMA might influence some young people to stay on in education, particularly those faced with a difficult labour market or those who were unclear or undecided about their choice of route. However, non-participants who had disliked education and studying and those with a high motivation to enter employment or take up work-based training were unlikely to be influenced by the prospect of EMA. (6.1.1)
- EMA had considerable impact on the attendance levels of participants whose motivation to attend required some form of external reinforcement. This was achieved by a combination of financial incentive in the form of EMA allowance and bonuses and stringent financial penalties for non-attendance under the terms of the learning agreement. (6.1.2)
- The scheme was also having an impact on the commitment of young people to study and do well and was encouraging some young people with a fragile motivation to study to remain in education who might otherwise have dropped out. (6.1.3/6.1.4)

### ***Financial impacts***

- The financial impact on participants varied according to the level of EMA received and other sources of income and was often diminished where payment was made direct to the parent. It enabled young people either to participate more fully in educational or social activities or to save for a specific purpose. Where money was paid direct to the young person, it also helped the transition to adulthood by fostering a sense of financial responsibility. (6.2.1)
- Non-participants who were in employment or on waged training schemes generally considered themselves better off financially than if they had remained in education and claimed EMA. (6.2.1)
- The impact on family finances was higher on lower income households receiving the maximum allowance than on higher income households receiving the low taper. (6.2.2)
- The impact on participant households was to free up money for other uses. In the lowest income households, participation in EMA sometimes enabled the family to “keep above the breadline” whilst non-participation where the young person had stayed on in education sometimes put a severe strain on family finances. Parents of some non-participants who had gone into employment reported some financial hardship due to the loss of Child Benefit. (6.2.2)
- Almost half the participant sample had some form of part-time work. The financial incentives of EMA were insufficient to encourage those already working to stop doing so, although participation did provide an element of choice as to whether they wished to reduce their hours. Participation also provided the element of choice to those who were considering whether to do some form of part-time work alongside their studies. (6.2.3)

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<sup>2</sup> See, however, Ashworth et al., 2001.

### ***Personal impacts of participation in EMA***

- Apart from assisting the young person's transition to adulthood, there was some evidence that participation in EMA could have a positive or detrimental effect on relationships between young people and their parents and between parents themselves. It could also provoke mixed responses from siblings. (6.3)

### **7. Reflections**

- There were two main reservations about the scheme: it was felt that eligibility criteria should be expanded to take account of the overall financial situation of the household as well as the family income. There was also a concern about the desirability of giving financial incentives to young people to stay on in further education if they then found they could not afford to go on to higher education. (7.1)
- It was suggested that attention should be given to streamlining the application process in terms of simplifying application forms, making the evidence requirements more straightforward and ensuring that help was more widely available to applicants. (7.4)
- There was widespread support for ensuring that the scheme was widely promoted to potential applicants and at a much earlier stage during Year 11. (7.4)
- Parents and young people interviewed during the course of the study were broadly in agreement with the aim of the scheme to encourage young people to continue in post-compulsory education. In addition, there was substantial evidence that the structure of the EMA initiative, combining a financial incentive with a clearly enforced learning agreement, has a clear impact on the way in which young people participate in post-compulsory education. (7.5)
- The research has identified a complex blend of factors which mediate, increase or negate the impact of the initiative. Principal amongst these is the young person's existing financial situation, chiefly their existing personal income and patterns of personal expenditure. This accounts for key variations in how the scheme affects young people whether financially, educationally or personally (7.5)

# Staying away or staying on? A qualitative evaluation of the Education Maintenance Allowance

## 1.1 Introduction

The transition to adulthood has changed considerably in the past two decades. While for many young people from previous generations (full-time) education finished with the end of compulsory schooling, now for most young people the transition to work has become longer, as a large majority stay on after 16 and a substantial minority move into higher education. The education and training options available to young people are also wider than ever before, with a range of academic and vocational routes now available at different levels. The system for providing financial support to young people has also changed: in higher education, fees have been introduced and student loans have replaced grants. However, for students in immediate post-compulsory education, the most recent and significant change has been the introduction (on a pilot basis) of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This represents the first attempt to provide a comprehensive system of financial support for 16-19 year olds.

The Department for Education and Employment commissioned the *National Centre for Social Research* to undertake a qualitative investigation of the delivery and impact of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme. This work, carried out by a team from the Qualitative Research Unit, is part of a research programme evaluating the EMA pilots. This is being undertaken by a consortium of research organisations led by the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University. This report presents the findings of qualitative research amongst young people and their parents who either have, or have not, participated in the EMA scheme in four of the pilot areas selected for the EMA initiative. It examines the views and experiences of those from the first cohort eligible for the EMA scheme. Other reports in this research programme present issues relating to the implementation of the scheme and document the findings from quantitative research.

This section provides an overview of the objectives, design and conduct of the research. The report consists of six further sections. **Section 2** examines the decision-making process at 16 focusing on the choices made by young people and influences upon their decision-making. **Section 3** explores knowledge and views about the EMA scheme. **Section 4** examines the application process, identifying preparations needed prior to participation as well as the experience of applying for EMA. **Section 5** identifies and describes patterns in the receipt and usage of EMA payments. **Section 6** analyses the financial, educational and personal outcomes of participation and non-participation in the EMA scheme. Finally, **Section 7** reflects upon the core objectives of the scheme and assesses its success in meeting those goals.

## 1.2 The Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme

The *Education Maintenance Allowance* is a package of financial support for young people from low-income families who undertake a recognised full-time course at school or college after the age of 16. They are new awards which were originally introduced by the government into 15 pilot Local Education Authority (LEA) areas. In these areas, eligible young people receive financial support to encourage and assist them to remain in education after completing compulsory education.

The pilot has now been extended to a further 41 areas. Additionally, new schemes with the same broad objectives have been specifically targeted at young people with particular needs: young people with disabilities, young people who are pregnant or have childcare responsibilities and young people who are homeless. An additional Education Maintenance Allowance transport scheme – EMA (T) – is also being piloted for three years from September 2000. This scheme is a variation on the current EMA, but designed to test whether an allowance targeted at the cost of travelling to the educational institution is as effective in improving participation, retention and achievement as the standard EMA. These new schemes are also being evaluated as part of the wider evaluation strategy.

In order to qualify for the EMA, students have to attend school or college for a minimum of 12 hours per week (in taught sessions) and be working towards a recognised qualification. Eligibility is dependent on parental incomes: all students whose parents earn under £30,000 per annum are eligible to participate. Students in receipt of EMA are paid a weekly allowance, a termly attendance bonus payment, and an additional end-of-course achievement payment. Weekly allowances are decided by financial assessment of parental incomes with students receiving different levels of weekly allowance. All bonus payments are made at a flat rate regardless of parental income. Weekly allowances and bonus payments are linked to attendance and achievement and are designed to encourage sustained attendance and motivation throughout the student's course.

The aim of the pilot scheme is to explore the extent to which financial incentives improve participation, retention and achievement rates in post-compulsory education. Research shows<sup>3</sup> that young people from low-income families are less likely than others to remain in formal learning after compulsory education, with subsequent detrimental effects on their achievements, economic prospects and life-chances.

Four variants of the scheme have been introduced in the 15 original LEA areas. The key differences between pilot areas relate to variance in: the maximum weekly allowance; amounts paid for bonuses and who the weekly payment is made to, either young person or parent. Table 1.1 shows the structure of the different variants for the four areas visited for this component of the evaluation.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Metcalf H, 1997, *Class and higher education: the participation of young people from lower social classes*, Policy Studies Institute Report; DfEE, 2000a, *Youth Cohort Study: education, training and employment of 16-18 year olds in England and the factors associated with non-participation*, Statistical Bulletin No 02/2000, May 2000.

**Table 1.1 : EMA variant models for the fieldwork areas**

<b>EMA variant model</b>
<p><b><u>Variant 1:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum £30 weekly allowance <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £50 termly retention bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £50 achievement bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Variant 2:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum £40 weekly allowance <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £50 termly retention bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £50 achievement bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Variant 3:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum £30 weekly allowance <b>paid to parent</b></li> <li>• £50 termly retention bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £50 achievement bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Variant 4:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum £30 weekly allowance <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £80 termly retention bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> <li>• £140 achievement bonus <b>paid to student</b></li> </ul>

### **1.3 Aims and scope of the research**

As part of the evaluation programme, the *National Centre for Social Research* carried out a survey of the *Destinations of 16-19 year olds* in 1999 to establish the factors which influence the choices young people make following their post-compulsory education (PCE) at 16. The survey was conducted amongst a representative sample of young people, aged 16-19, and in most cases with one or both of their parents. This qualitative study followed-up a proportion of the survey respondents, exploring in greater depth their decision-making at this time, views, experiences and impact of EMA.

The key aims of the qualitative study were to:

- explore attitudes to post-compulsory education;
- identify factors which influence participation in post-compulsory education;
- explore attitudes to, and experiences of, the EMA scheme;
- investigate the impact of EMA on participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory education;
- explore the impact of EMA on financial decision-making, expenditure and transfers within households;
- compare and contrast different EMA variants; *and*
- identify suggested changes and improvements to EMA.

## 1.4 Research design

A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the EMA scheme, its operation, the experiences and views of individual participants and the nature and range of its potential outcomes. The study was carried out using depth interviews amongst a purposively selected sample of young people and their parents who were identified through the original survey. The design also incorporates a longitudinal element to allow the longer term impacts and outcomes from the scheme to be explored. Year Two qualitative research will return to a proportion of this original sample and explore changes over time to their participation, activities and attitudes to the scheme. In addition, interviews will be conducted with a new sample of young people who have left the scheme early, exploring the reasons for their departure from the scheme and factors underlying their decision-making.

**Table 1.2 Overview of EMA pilots qualitative work**

<b>Year One</b> →	<i>Interviews with:</i> Young people – EMA participants Young people – non-participants Parents – of participants and non-participants
<b>Year Two</b> →	<i>Longitudinal interviews with:</i> young people – EMA participants <i>Interviews with:</i> ‘early leavers’

## 1.5 Sample design and selection

The sample was not designed to be statistically representative. Unlike quantitative samples, those used for qualitative studies are chosen to ensure full coverage of the key sub-groups within the given population in order to identify and explain variations in the nature of experiences and views between them. The sample was, therefore, *purposively* selected on the basis of a range of key characteristics identified as relevant to the given population.

All the young people interviewed were aged 16-17 and drawn from the first Year 11 cohort to be offered EMA assistance. The sample consisted both of young people who were in receipt of EMA (*EMA participants*) and those who were not in receipt of EMA (*non-participants*). In addition, a small number of **ineligible** non-participants whose parental income just failed to meet the eligibility criteria were included in the research as they had been pending decisions on their eligibility at the time of the survey. These interviews proved to be a useful source of information not only about the scheme generally but also about their reactions to the eligibility criteria.

The key sampling criteria for young people were:

- **nature of participation in EMA and other current activities**

*EMA participants* who fulfilled the eligibility criteria, were in full-time education (defined as 12 hours of guided learning per week) and were in receipt of EMA.

However, some participants combined part-time work with their education. Diversity was sought in relation to employment and education activities.

*Non-participants* were young people who would fulfil the eligibility criteria for EMA but who, for a variety of reasons, were not receiving it.

Diversity was sought in relation to current activity so that young people who were in full-time or part-time employment and education were included, young people both working and studying and young people not working were included.

- **gender, age and ethnicity**

The sample sought to be balanced in relation to gender and age. All scheme participants were aged between 16 and 17 at time of first interview. In addition, diversity was sought in relation to ethnicity.

- **household income**

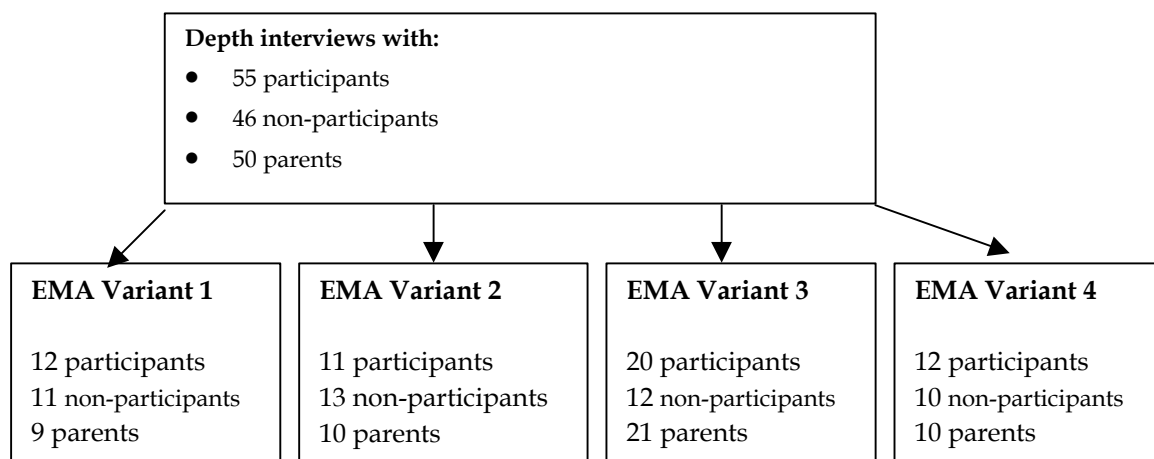
The sample included young people whose parents combined annual income ranged from below £13,000 to slightly over £30,000.

Diversity was also sought in relation to *living circumstances* so that as well as young people who live with one or both of their parents or guardians, the study also included, as far as possible, some living away from their parents; and those with young children or caring responsibilities. A proportion of the parents of the young people recruited for interview, both participants and non-participants, were also interviewed.

More participants and parents were interviewed in the Variant Three area because the EMA is paid directly to the parent. This variant differs greatly from the three other models where differences relate to the financial package being offered rather than to delivery of that package.

Further details of the characteristics and circumstances of the young people and their parents who took part are given in the following section. A full description of the sample design and method of selection is given in Appendix I. The screening questionnaire and letters of approach are shown in Appendix II.

**Figure 1.3 Overview of sample by area**





## 1.6 Sample profile

This section provides information about the composition of the sample in terms of the key variables used for its purposive selection. The principal variables used for contrast and comparison throughout the report are young people's EMA status (participant or non-participant) and the EMA variant.

Numerical data is used in this section to show overall sample size and the size of the three constituent groups (participants, non-participants and parents). It is also used to illustrate the relative weight of distribution of the key variables across the population of young people. However, given the purposive nature of sample selection, this data holds no statistical significance, it is shown solely to provide a contextual background to the findings of the qualitative study. A total of 101 young people were included in the research. The sample also included 50 parents, 30 parents of participants and 20 parents of non-participants.

### *Profile of young people in the sample*

Table 1.4 shows the socio-demographic composition of the young person sample. Age has been specifically omitted since all the young people were either 16 or 17. The sample was evenly distributed in terms of sex. As can be seen from the table a total of 15 young people from ethnic minority groups were included.

**Table 1.4 EMA sample profile by socio-demographic characteristics**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Non-participant</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>			
Male	28	23	51
Female	27	23	50
<b><i>Ethnicity</i></b>			
White	48	38	86
Bangladeshi	-	1	1
Asian Indian	2	1	3
Black	2	-	2
Black British	1	3	4
Black Caribbean	-	1	1
Mixed White & Asian	1	1	2
White/Black Caribbean	-	1	1
Chinese	1	-	1
<b><i>Household Income Band (per annum)</i></b>			
Band 1 (up to £12,999)	25	20	45
Band 2 (£13,000-19,000)	16	12	28
Band 3 (£20,000-30,000)	14	11	25
DK	-	3	3
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b>55</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>101</b>

The current activity of all those in the young person sample is shown in Table 1.5. By definition all those receiving EMA were in full-time education (which is defined as 12 hours per week of classroom based learning). However, almost half were also combining a part-time job with their studies.

Of the 46 non-participants, 20 were in post compulsory education, either full-time or on a part-time basis. In a further six cases the young person was undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship or other form of work-based training.

**Table 1.5 Current Activity**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Non-Participant</b>	<b>Total</b>
Full-time education; no job	29	8	37
Full-time education; part-time job	26	8	34
Part-time education; no job	-	4	4
Full-time employment	-	8	8
Part-time employment	-	5	5
Modern apprenticeship/work-based training	-	6	6
Unemployed	-	7	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>101</b>

Table 1.6 shows the type of institution attended and main qualification being studied by both EMA participants and those non-participants who were continuing in post compulsory education. More people were attending the sixth form at school, or a sixth form college, than a college of further education. A small proportion of the non-participants were receiving their education/training at other types of location: for example, at a training centre, in the workplace and, in one case, through home study.

**Table 1.6 Education Profile of those involved in PCE**

	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Non-participants</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Institution attended</b>			
School sixth form	23	8	31
Sixth form college	6	6	12
FE College	26	5	31
Training Centre	-	2	2
At home	-	1	1
Workplace	-	2	2
Other	-	2	2
<b>Course Undertaken</b>			
A levels	21	12	33
GNVQ	17	2	19
BTEC	7	1	8
City and Guilds	-	2	2
NVQ	3	5	8
GCSEs	-	1	1

NNEB/ childcare qualifications	4	-	4
Other training	3	2	5
Basic skills	-	1	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>81</i>

Some respondents, however, were taking more than one type of course, for example A levels and some GCSE re-sits. The types of qualifications being taken varied. The sample of those remaining in education reflects the diversity of young people in post-compulsory education. Some were following a course of academic study leading to either an A level or GCSE qualification. Other courses of study were largely vocational in nature, leading either to a BTEC or GNVQ or to a specific vocational qualification such as an NNEB in nursery nursing.

### **1.7 Analysis and presentation of the findings**

The data was analysed to explore differences and similarities across the key sampling variables, that is, between: participants and non-participants; different variant models; parents and young people; and socio-demographic variables such as gender and ethnicity. Where sub-group differences were found, for example differences relating to gender or ethnicity, they have been identified in individual sections.

Verbatim transcripts of all the interviews and discussions were analysed using 'Framework'. 'Framework' is an analytic technique developed by the *National Centre's* Qualitative Research Unit. The method involves ordering and synthesising verbatim data within a series of thematic charts. Further classificatory and interpretative analyses were derived from the analytic charts. The structure of the framework used for this study is shown in Appendix I.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to describe the range and nature of experiences and perspectives held by participants and non-participants involved in the study. As a qualitative study the findings cannot provide statistical data relating to prevalence of views, experiences or factors leading to different outcomes relating to the wider EMA population. Despite this, there is great value in exploring the factors accounting for differing experiences and assessments of the scheme. By using a qualitative approach it has been possible to identify the factors which have underpinned young people's decision-making, parents' and young people's judgements about EMA and factors that have contributed to differing impacts of participation and non-participation. Both positive and negative assessments of EMA are presented in this report as are the factors contributing to each type of assessment.

The findings are illustrated by the use of verbatim quotations, examples and case studies. Where necessary the details of the contributors or their subjects have been moderately changed to protect anonymity. Pseudonyms have been used for all quotations, examples and case studies.

## 2 DECISION MAKING AT 16 AMONGST EMA PARTICIPANTS AND NON PARTICIPANTS

This section provides a classification of the sample of young people in terms of their intentions before they came to make their decision about what to do after Year 11. It then examines the factors that influenced the decision-making process for young people in the different categories identified. The role of EMA in the decision-making process is discussed as are the specific factors that determined the choice of educational institution and course of study for those remaining in education.

In summary, the research found that:

- young people varied in the extent to which they had clear intentions about whether they wished to stay on in education or follow an alternative route after Year 11 (*see 2.1*);
- decisions about routes taken after Year 11 depended on the interplay of personal considerations and external factors (*see 2.2*);
- most parents of participants were prepared to fund their child through further education even though it meant some degree of financial sacrifice for them. However, a few non-participants suggested that there were financial barriers to them remaining in education (*see 2.3.1*);
- the decisions about continuing in education had predominantly been taken before this sample of young people learned of the existence of EMA<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence, the impact of EMA on the decision-making process cannot yet be determined (*see 2.3.2*); *and*
- in addition to the interplay of personal considerations and external factors, a number of specific factors were involved in determining the choice of institution and the choice of course (*see 2.4*).

### 2.1 Classification of the sample of young people

The intentions of young people about what to do after year 11 were moulded by several factors which later played a part in the decision-making process, for example:

- personal motivation and career goals;
- academic abilities and performance;
- the nature of their school experience; *and*
- the prevailing ethos in the home environment.

The principal distinction to be discerned was between those who had identified the route they intended to follow and those who were undecided or unclear about what route to take.

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<sup>4</sup> However, see also Ashworth et al. (2001) for further details on the estimated impact of EMA on participation rates amongst eligible young people.

### ***Clearly defined route***

Where a clear route was envisaged, young people had already decided to follow one of two options:

**An education route:** to remain in full-time education and study full-time. Within the education route, young people were oriented towards one of two pathways:

- an “academic” pathway: where the focus was on continuing to study to achieve a higher level of education in order to realise career goals (for example to study for A levels and/or continue to higher education); *or*
- a “vocational” pathway: where the focus was on obtaining a particular type of employment which could best be accessed by following a course of vocational study leading to a relevant qualification such as a GNVQ, NVQ, BTEC or other professional qualification.

**A work-based route.** Within the work-based route, young people were oriented towards one of the following pathways:

- employment pathway (finding a job); *or*
- training pathway (work-based training leading to, for example, a Modern Apprenticeship).

Within both the education and work-based routes, there was a further distinction between an “active” and “passive” motivation of the young person to follow the particular route. A young person was actively motivated where he or she wished to follow the route in order to achieve specific career goals. The motivation was passive (or reactive) where the young person had no specific career goals but was single minded about the route they wished to follow.

### ***Route unclear or undecided***

A number of young people were unclear or undecided about which route to take. This was for one of two reasons:

- they had no clear career goals and were prepared to consider either route; *or*
- they were motivated towards a particular career goal which could be realised either through a work-based or educational route.

## **2.2 Decisions about choice of route**

The decision-making process about choice of route was governed by a range of personal factors and external influences which are set out in Table 2.1. In some cases, one particular factor was likely to be dominant in the decision-making process with other factors playing a subsidiary role. This was particularly the case where the young person had identified a clear route in advance although sometimes factors such as unexpected GCSE results could change

the direction. In other cases, particularly where the young person was undecided or unclear about their intentions, the decision could be influenced by a whole raft of factors.

**Table 2.1 Factors influencing the decision-making process**

<p><b>Personal considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the personal motivation of the individual;</li> <li>• views about the value of obtaining skills and qualifications;</li> <li>• experience of school;</li> <li>• GCSE results;</li> <li>• experience of work/work placement; <i>and</i></li> <li>• personal circumstances.</li> </ul>
<p><b>External influences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parental and family influence;</li> <li>• influence of peers; <i>and</i></li> <li>• influence of teachers and careers advisers.</li> </ul>

The factors involved in each individual decision-making process were specific to that decision. However, it is possible to show, for each of the pathways identified, the range of factors that tended to determine the outcome of the process.

### **2.2.1 Clear route: post compulsory education**

#### ***Academic pathway: active motivation***

Young people who made the decision to stay on in education were usually strongly influenced by the desire to obtain qualifications in order to meet their long term career goals. These goals generally involved finding a job that would be stimulating and enjoyable as well as one that would offer the prospect of higher earnings in the long-term. Those young people with an active motivation to follow the academic pathway were also heavily influenced by their desire to follow a particular course of study and sometimes to go on to higher education afterwards. External influences such as the role of teachers or parents tended to play a more minor role in the process although they were generally supportive of the young person's decision.

Janice was keen on becoming a teacher. She had always intended to stay on at school to do A levels because she was considering going to university. She was also motivated to obtain good qualifications so she could be confident of finding a well-paid, challenging job. Her parents were supportive of, but not instrumental in, her decision.  
(Female, participant, Band 2<sup>5</sup>, Variant 2)

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<sup>5</sup> This refers to the household income level of family, see table 1.4 (page 12) for a description of the three bands.

### ***Vocational pathway: active motivation***

Young people with an active motivation to follow the vocational pathway were generally less interested in education per se but were aware of the need for qualifications to enable them to find the kind of employment they sought.

Delrose had always wanted to work with children. She was aware that she needed to obtain a qualification in order to be able to find a job in her chosen field. Had she obtained four GCSE passes, she would have been able to take a higher qualification than the Child Care Education (CCE) course that she was currently taking.

(Female, participant, Band 2, Variant 3)

Mick was influenced by his uncle to become a chef. He knew he would have to do a catering course and obtain a qualification if he wanted to find a good job. He was currently doing an NVQ Level 2 in Catering and Hospitality.

(Male, participant, Band 1, Variant 4)

### ***Academic and vocational pathways: passive motivation***

Young people who were successful in their studies but had no clear motivation were more likely to stay on in education for two reasons. Firstly, because their academic performance enabled them to do so, and secondly because they did not yet feel ready or confident enough to leave education and face the responsibilities of a job.

Samantha knew she wanted to stay on in education post Year 11 as she did not feel ready to face the labour market immediately. She also wanted to get a job with good prospects and was heavily influenced by her friends and family. Since she was interested in working abroad, she decided to take a GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism.

(Female, participant, Band 2, Variant 2)

The influence of a parent, relative or teacher assumed a greater importance where the young person had no particular aspiration. Teachers and careers advisers tended to favour young people staying on in education wherever possible. Parents, and particularly those who felt that they themselves had been denied the advantages of further education, were often highly influential in persuading young people in this category to stay on. Other external factors that influenced decisions of this category of young people were the experience of an elder sibling and the decisions of their peers to continue into post compulsory education.

Cheung had no clear idea what he wanted to do post Year 11. He was heavily influenced by his relatives to study for qualifications so he could obtain a highly paid job. At the suggestion of a relative, he decided to become an architect. He decided that an Advanced GNVQ in construction would provide him with better training for this than A levels. He was hoping to go to university to study architecture.

(Male, participant, Band 1, Variant 4)

### ***Factors influencing reversal of decision***

In some cases the original decision to continue into post compulsory education had changed due to specific factors. For example, plans might have been revised following worse than expected GCSE results. More exceptionally, pregnancy or childcare responsibilities could oblige young people to either postpone or abandon plans to continue into education. Additionally, there were a couple of examples of the decisions of young people being influenced as a result of their experiences of bullying at school.

#### ***2.2.2 Clear route: work or work-based training***

##### ***Employment pathway***

The principal motivation for young people opting for the work-based route was their experience of school. For some, it was a question of accepting that *studying* “*was not for them*” and that they felt more comfortable doing practical, “*hands on*” work. For others, it was the nature of the school environment that acted as a deterrent to staying on in education. They felt constrained by school routine and factors such as having to wear a uniform. Going into employment was a chance to be adult and independent. In some cases, the motivation to enter employment was “active” as the following case illustrates:

Julie never considered going to college as she hated school. She had always wanted to be a care assistant and, through the Careers Service, she obtained a YTS placement with a voluntary agency which she hoped would help her obtain an NVQ level 2.  
(Female, non participant, Band 1, Variant 4)

However, other young people were leaving school knowing they did not want to continue in post compulsory education but without any clear idea of the type of work they wanted to do:

Maurice was working 16 hours a week in a supermarket either on the tills or stacking shelves. Whilst he was certain that he did not want to continue in education, he did not know what he wanted to do. He took the job because he was keen to earn money so he could keep up with his friends who were earning.  
(Male, non participant, Band 3, Variant 3)

Otherwise young people, notably young males, who had reacted very strongly against their experience of school ended up being unemployed. The principal factors leading to their rejection of education included:

- feelings of inadequacy in the school situation engendered by low achievement;
- resentment of the control exercised by teachers; *and*
- peer pressure arising out of a culture in which it was not perceived as “cool” to participate in education.



Tom had never considered going to college as he did not like school or studying. His friends from school had either left to go into work or were unemployed. He was dismissive of people who remained in school whom he saw as “*swots*”. But he also did not feel any need to obtain qualifications for the type of jobs he was applying for. His parents were encouraging him to follow in his brother’s footsteps and find a catering job but, so far, he had not had any success.

(Male, non participant, Band 1, Variant 4)

### ***Training pathway***

Young people with an active motivation to follow a specific area of employment were often aware of the value of training and/or qualifications if they wanted to do well in their chosen area of employment. The possibility of being trained and assessed in the workplace, for example under a modern apprenticeship, was therefore an attractive alternative where they had firmly discounted the option of continuing in education:

Simon was hoping to be successful in his application for an apprenticeship as an electrician as he felt that it would be better than studying electronics at college because “*it is more manual and I am not an academic person as much as I try*”. His parents did not put any pressure on him to stay on in education and his friends mostly decided to take an apprenticeship.

(Male, non participant, Band 3, Variant 3)

### **2.2.3 *Undecided or unclear route***

#### ***No clear goals and no clear pathway***

Young people who had no clearly defined career goals and no clear pathway tended more often than not to stay on in education. Often this was the result of anxiety about trying to enter the labour market without any clear sense of direction and a strong susceptibility to external influences, such as parents and teachers, which tended to support education. The prospect of obtaining qualifications was often an additional factor influencing the decision in favour of education.

Max is currently doing a GNVQ in Art and Design in the sixth form. He had considered applying for a Modern Apprenticeship but decided against it because he presumed it would lead to him working in a factory for the rest of his life. Also, his father, who had himself left school at 15, advised him strongly to stay on in education to obtain qualifications.

(Male, participant, Band 1, Variant 4)

However, a notable feature of young people who were undecided about their pathway post 16 and had decided to stay on in post compulsory education was the high incidence of dropping out after a few weeks. The evidence suggests that the initial decision to stay on in post compulsory education, which was often heavily influenced by external factors, became unsustainable where the young person had little commitment either to education or to the particular course of study. These young people were liable to experience some period of unemployment after dropping out of their course.

John and his friends were all undecided about whether to go to college, or try and get a job. He considered the idea of taking an apprenticeship but was put off by the prospect of earning £40 for a 60 hour week. The teachers at school stressed the benefits of staying on in education and he was aware that his brother and sister had had positive experiences of college. He decided eventually that he would be better off continuing in education and enrolled to take A levels at college. After two weeks he decided that he did not like college and left to earn money working in a nightclub. His parents had been dubious from the start about his commitment to education and would have preferred him to take the apprenticeship which they felt would have suited his natural aptitude more effectively.

(Male non-participant, Band 2, Variant 2)

### ***Specific goal: unclear route***

Some young people had a clear motivation towards a particular career goal but were faced with a choice of route between education and work-based training. In cases such as this, personal motivation operated in conjunction with other considerations as the following case studies illustrate.

Roy wanted to become a motor mechanic. He took a summer job at a local garage but received little on-the-job training there. He had been considering taking a Modern Apprenticeship after school but his colleagues at the garage advised him that he would gain better experience, and obtain a more useful vocational qualification by studying at college than doing work-based training. Their advice led directly to his decision to take a full-time course in motor technology at FE college.

(Male participant, Band 1, Variant 1)

Fran had always wanted to go into health and beauty but was undecided about whether to stay on in the 6th form, as her mother wished, or to take a job. Before she had had a chance to find a suitable course, she had been offered a hairdressing job under the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. She was working in the salon and studying at college for one day a week for her NVQ level 2.

(Female, non participant, Band 2, Variant 4)

## **2.3 Financial considerations and the role of EMA in the decision-making process**

### ***2.3.1 Financial considerations***

Young people staying on in education had often made the assumption that the encouragement they had received from their parents to continue studying was based on the understanding that their parents would continue to provide financial support during this period. Parents of young people continuing in education mostly confirmed their willingness to fund their child through further education though parents in the lower and middle income bands were more likely than those in the higher income band to stress the financial burden that this imposed on them.

Amongst non-participants who had opted for the work-based route, the issue of finance had on occasions played a role in the decision-making process. A few non-participants in the

lowest income band said that they might have considered staying on in education if they had not been concerned about the effect on their parents' finances. This seemed to be less of a factor generally for the young people whose parents were in the middle or upper income bands.

### 2.3.2 *The role of EMA*

At this stage it needs to be made clear that EMA has only played a peripheral role in the decision-making process of this sample of young people due to the timing of its announcement towards the end of their Year 11<sup>6</sup>. The decisions about whether or not to continue in education had already been taken before young people and their parents learned of the existence of the scheme.

Views about whether EMA might have influenced their decision amongst those who had opted for the work-based route were mixed. Those who had been keen to leave studying altogether felt that the level of EMA payable was unlikely to overcome their aversion to education. Those who had been strongly motivated to find employment and start earning money also felt that the level of EMA would be insufficient temptation to change routes.

However, there was evidence that knowledge about EMA might have influenced the decisions of some non-participants who were not in education. One young person, who had been swayed by the prospect of earning money, said he might possibly have stayed on if he had known about EMA. Another young person, who had taken an apprenticeship, felt that he might have decided to stay in education if he had known he would receive money from EMA. The parents of a young man who had dropped out of school but was keen to get back into studying said that hearing about EMA had greatly strengthened his resolve to go to college and resume his education.

## 2.4 **Decisions about choice of educational institution and course of study**

The same factors that had influenced young people to stay on in post compulsory education could also play a role in decisions about the choice of educational institution or course of study. For example, the young person might be heavily influenced by advice from teachers to stay on at school. Conversely, they might wish to follow the example of peers who had elected to go to a college of further education. Results at GCSE could also lead the young person to revise the course taken. For example, worse than expected results could cause the young person to re-sit GCSEs rather than taking A levels.

However, a number of additional factors could also influence these decisions:

- **Image of the institution:** Colleges of further education were generally perceived to have a less restrictive environment than schools. On the other hand, it was argued that schools were more likely to push young people to obtain good grades. The decision about course of study was sometimes related to the decision about which institution to attend.
- **Accessibility and location:** This was of high importance in Variant 1 because of its rural nature and the distances involved but also played a role elsewhere, particularly in

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<sup>6</sup> However, see Ashworth et al (2001) for details on the impact of EMA on participation rates.

the outskirts of predominantly urban areas. For example, travel from the outlying parts of the Variant 4 area to colleges in the city could be long and difficult and had a bearing on the choices made.

- **Further education provision:** In certain pilot areas, notably Variant 3 and Variant 1, some participants said that they had been obliged to choose a sixth form college or FE college because no sixth form was provided at their particular school. Where a school had an established sixth form, with good A level facilities, this was often an inducement for those studying for A levels to stay on at school.
- **Course availability:** The range of courses available at a particular institution could affect whether or not the institution was selected. Equally, once it was selected, it could influence the choice of course taken. In some cases an institution did not offer a course in the required discipline so, for example, a student had to study sociology instead of psychology. Equally, timetabling constraints within a school or college could influence the range of A levels taken.
- **Open days/special events:** A few young people had attended Open Days or special events about the provision of facilities, either at their own school or at a college. In some cases, this had influenced the choice of institution attended and/or the courses taken.
- **Perceived value of type of qualification obtained:** There was a clear hierarchical view of the value of the different study options available within further education. This was particularly evident in the way young people compared the relative merits of A levels and Advanced GNVQs. Young people who had already decided upon a particular course of study, for example business studies, were attracted by the practical, assignment-based nature of the Advanced GNVQ course as opposed to the exam based assessment of A levels. It was also pointed out that a distinction in Advanced GNVQ was equivalent to two A levels and would not prejudice the university option. However, the prevailing view amongst young people, teachers and parents was that A levels were the best qualifications to obtain in order to compete for a well-paid, interesting job or to continue into higher education.

### 3 AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF EMA

This section explores levels of awareness of the EMA scheme among participants, non-participants and parents. Knowledge and understanding of the key components of the scheme: the learning agreement, weekly allowance and bonus payments, are also examined.

In summary, the research found that:

- the key objective of the scheme, to increase the number of young people remaining in post-compulsory education, was broadly welcomed by young people and parents (*see 3.3*);
- wide variations existed in young people's and parents' understanding of the objectives of the scheme and its key components (*see 3.2*);
- the key factors accounting for greater or lesser knowledge of the scheme were: participation in the scheme, the nature and timing of information received, current activity (whether in work or training) (*see 3.1*);
- the weekly allowance was the most highly recognised element of the scheme (*see 3.2*);
- there was no evidence to suggest geographical variance in the levels of understanding of the initiative between pilot areas (*see 3.1*);
- the timing of information about the scheme was widely criticised (*see 3.1*); and
- the key factors affecting decisions to participate in the scheme were: the nature of personal choices about post-compulsory education; levels of awareness of the scheme; understanding about eligibility criteria; the level of family income (*see 3.4*).

#### 3.1 Learning about EMA

Information about the EMA pilots was derived from a range of different sources. As a consequence knowledge and understanding of the scheme objectives varied greatly among young people and their parents.

##### 3.1.1 Views about sources, content and timing of information

Views both about the content and timing of information about the EMA scheme varied among participants and those non-participants who had heard about the scheme before they were interviewed. Earlier research within the evaluation programme<sup>7</sup> showed that pilot areas had employed different types of publicity and information campaigns. However, there was

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<sup>7</sup> See Maguire et al., 2001.

limited evidence to suggest geographic variations in the type and range of information provided to parents and young people in the four pilot areas involved at this stage of the research. Similar patterns of information dissemination were reported in each pilot area studied.

Information and knowledge about the EMA scheme came from a variety of different sources. Usually young people found out about the scheme first and parents were then informed through their child. More exceptionally there was independent parental awareness of the initiative through local media coverage, advertising or local rumour. In some cases the first non-participants heard about the scheme was when they became involved in the evaluation, whether from their initial contact with a survey interviewer or through their involvement in these interviews. There was little difference between participants and non-participants in relation to sources of information, although obviously those who had received no information prior to interview about the EMA scheme were exclusively non-participants.

Chart 3.1 details the various sources of initial information about EMA in order of those most widely mentioned. Young people most frequently heard about the EMA scheme from their school, either through being given a letter or leaflet outlining the scheme, or through an oral discussion of the scheme during an assembly or year meeting. Providers of post-compulsory education also acted as sources of information with young people being informed about the scheme when they joined their new courses at college or sixth form. Again the information was provided through a number of different mediums. Less often young people heard about the scheme through friends and family or media coverage.

### **Chart 3.1 Sources of information about EMA**

**Schools (*prior to end of Year 11*)** - through teachers, careers advisors, advertising. *Information delivered via letter, leaflet, poster, meeting*

**Institutes delivering post-compulsory education** – through teachers, advertising, student support services, fellow students. *Information delivered via letter, leaflet, poster, meeting*

**Friends, family, local acquaintances** – both by word of mouth and sharing of printed materials about the scheme

**Media coverage and local advertising** - through local TV and newspapers, national news coverage, Ceefax or Teletext, posters in public places, on buses.

**Participation in the research** (*for non-participants who had received no information about the scheme*)

Providing information at school was seen as the most efficient method of ensuring that information was widely disseminated both by parents and young people. Other suggestions made by parents and young people included advertising the scheme in widely used public places such as hospitals, libraries and GP surgeries. However, some parents felt the only way of ensuring that information would be received by parents would be to either leaflet

door-to-door or to send a mail shot through the post to all parents of children eligible for the scheme. This was not an approach experienced by any of the parents interviewed.

Satisfaction with the information provided was closely linked to whether the information was 'official', through schools or Local Education Authorities, or 'unofficial' through hearsay. Those who had received official information about the scheme, either in writing or orally at school meetings, were broadly satisfied with what they received, although some felt they remained unclear about the precise details of the scheme, particularly in relation to the bonus payments.

However, those who had heard about the scheme by chance either through news broadcasts, local advertising or word of mouth were less satisfied. In these cases parents, and young people to a lesser extent, were less aware of the scheme's key components and were troubled that they had had to search out more detailed information for themselves. The information they had received tended to be patchy and often involved no more than knowing that some money would be available to those staying on in education post-16.

Section 3.2 will explore in detail understanding of the core components of the scheme, but it is important to note here that those who had heard about the scheme through unofficial sources were more likely to have misconceptions about the scheme and less clarity about its key components than those who had received official information.

The timing of official information about the EMA initiative was criticised by some parents and young people in all four areas. Timing was seen as critical to the scheme's success in encouraging young people to remain in education. However, information was received at very different stages during Year 11 and in some cases young people had begun their post-compulsory education before they were informed about the scheme. A dominant experience was that information about the scheme was provided once the decision to remain in education, or not, had been made. This may, however, reflect operational difficulties in the first year of a new scheme rather than being a feature of the operation of the scheme. Quantitative research with the second cohort of potential EMA participants may shed further light on this issue.

The strongest criticisms of the information provided about EMA came from young people and parents who had not received any information about the scheme during the final school year. This included both participants and non-participants as some participants only learnt about the scheme on joining their further education course. These respondents clearly felt that the scheme should be more widely advertised to ensure that all eligible families are aware of it. The reasons why information about the scheme had not reached these families were not always apparent. However, there was evidence to indicate that amongst these families were young people who had persistent absences from school, for example, through truancy or because of illness or pregnancy.

Those young people with clearly defined post-16 routes were least affected by the timing of information and their choices were little affected by information about the scheme. Nevertheless, as previously described in Section 2, there was evidence to suggest that some non-participants who had been ambivalent about which route to take at 16 may have been influenced towards post-compulsory education if they had received information about the scheme at an earlier point.

## 3.2 Awareness of and views about the objectives of EMA and its components

### 3.2.1 Understanding of the scheme objectives

Where parents or young people were aware of the scheme it was broadly understood to have been introduced **to encourage young people to continue with post-compulsory education.**

A number of objectives were associated with the broad goal of encouraging young people to remain in post-compulsory education:

- supporting low-income families;
- building an educated workforce; *and*
- reducing youth unemployment.

Underpinning the objective of increasing student participation in post-compulsory education there was a widespread belief that the scheme was targeted at parents and families on a low income who might not otherwise be able to afford for their child to remain in education. Alongside this was the perception that through encouraging young people to remain in education the government was seeking to develop a more educated workforce which would improve not only the opportunities available to young people in later life, but would also help the country as a whole. Others, though, viewed the initiative more cynically seeing it as an attempt to reduce the numbers of young people who were unemployed by *'keeping them off the street'* for a couple of years.

### 3.2.2 Understanding of and views about EMA components

The EMA scheme consists of three key components: a learning agreement, weekly allowance, termly and achievement bonuses. A clear difference in awareness was established between those who were aware of the scheme when interviewed and those non-participants who were not.

#### *The learning agreement*

Learning agreements are drawn up between colleges and EMA participants. They identify requirements, such as regular attendance, which students must meet in order to retain payment of their EMA allowance. All agreements should be signed by a student, a parent or guardian and a representative of the school or college. Although, as Section 4 will demonstrate, not all participants recalled signing a learning agreement, there were high levels of awareness by all, including non-participants, that the scheme insisted upon regular attendance if young people were to qualify for weekly payments. On the whole this was welcomed for two main reasons. Firstly, it was seen as equitable that young people should regularly attend their course if they were receiving payment for it. Secondly, the learning agreement was welcomed as a way of encouraging young people to attend and it was felt that it would act as a motivator. However, as will be discussed in Section 4, some non-participants had been hesitant about taking part because of their perception of what the learning agreement would mean in practice to them.

Those who were hesitant because of their fears about the learning agreement did not form a distinct group. Whilst some were young people now in work or in work-based training, others were studying full or part-time. All, though, perceived a *'rigidity'* to the learning



agreement system which they feared would limit their independence. For some, there were fears that they would be unable to meet the requirements because of ill-health or other problems such as bullying. Others simply did not wish to be in a *'policed'* environment and were seeking a more independent form of study or employment which did not require them to maintain adherence to conditions such as regular attendance at college.

Whilst the link between attendance and payment was widely understood there was less clarity both about what happened if students broke the agreement and whether there was any connection between completion of course work and weekly payments. Some respondents were concerned that the scheme did not appear to place a high premium on achievement and application during courses. There were fears that some participants, not necessarily committed to their course, could simply turn up on a regular basis and receive payments without fully applying themselves to the course. However, in part this may be due to low levels of understanding about the core components, and once participants were involved in the scheme, awareness was raised among some participants about the role of the learning agreement in encouraging achievement.

### ***The weekly payment***

The weekly payment was the most highly recognised component of the scheme with universal awareness amongst participants and non-participants who had heard of the scheme. All were aware that the scheme involved a weekly payment although some were less aware of the amount which would be received. As will be discussed in section 3.4, the weekly payment was a major attraction when decisions were being made about participation in the scheme. Even among non-participants who had received minimal information about the scheme there was an awareness of, as one parent described it, *'the mythical £30'* which students could get paid if they continued their education.

Awareness of the model of payment, either direct to the young person or to their parent was equally high. There was more variable awareness of the means tested nature of the payment and of the different amounts paid to students whose parents had differing incomes. Parents were more aware of the means tested element than young people but, even among parents, some were not clear that not all young people would receive the full amount. Views about the fairness, or otherwise, of the means tested element and about who the payment is made to will be discussed in Section 5.

### ***The bonus payments***

Awareness of the bonus payments, whether for attendance or achievement, was more mixed than that for the learning agreement or the weekly payment. In particular, there was low awareness of the achievement bonuses which are paid on completion of the course. Equally there was some confusion around the precise requirements for receiving the attendance bonus. Recognition that these bonuses differed from the weekly payment in that they were flat-rate payments made to all participants regardless of parental income was less than universal. It is worth noting that, for some participants, this lack of clarity continued even after they had received a bonus payment.

Although participants were asked to differentiate between their early awareness of the scheme and their reflections post-participation, this was not always possible. It was clear that, in some cases, achievement bonuses were less recognised because the young person had yet to reach the end of their course and receive an achievement bonus, at the time of

interview. Stage two of the qualitative research will explore whether awareness of achievement bonuses rises as students near the end of their courses.

### **3.3 Initial responses to EMA**

There was a strong belief that the government should bear at least partial responsibility for supporting families with students in post-compulsory education. Within this context the scheme was broadly welcomed as a positive initiative. More specifically parents reported that the government should provide finance for educational expenses such as books, equipment and travel whilst parents should provide financial support for living expenses. A clear exception to this was where families had low incomes and could not support their children through post-compulsory education. In these circumstances it was felt to be fair that the government should provide additional finance to ensure young people were not denied the opportunity to remain in education. Young people themselves concurred with this viewpoint, although some clearly felt that personally they had a role to play by earning extra money through part-time work, or by applying for grants which would assist their parents financially.

#### ***3.3.1 Perceived advantages arising from the EMA scheme***

Among the advantages reported were that it would act as an incentive not only to increase the numbers of young people in education but also that it would encourage attendance and achievement by giving young people something to work for. Parents especially felt that their children would find the experience of being ‘paid’ to attend further education a strong motivator. They frequently drew parallels between the experience of participation in EMA and the experience of employment. In both cases the process of receiving a payment for individual work and commitment was seen as a positive experience which young people would find rewarding in more than financial terms. Similarly, some argued that their child would be less likely to skip lessons or shirk their workload if their own personal income was at stake. Like their parents, some young people also reported these aspects of participation as positive elements.

Another key advantage cited was that it would relieve some of the pressure on some students to take up or increase part-time work commitments. This was particularly true amongst young people or parents who believed that there were additional financial costs to be considered when participating in further rather than compulsory education. Although not all of these costs were necessarily educationally related, for example some young people thought attending further education would mean greater social expenditure, there was clear recognition that these additional costs would need to be met somehow. Part-time work was seen as one way of meeting these costs. However, EMA was welcomed as a way of ensuring that students from less affluent households would not be compelled to take on new, or additional, part-time work which might affect their studies.

Other advantages included the opportunities the scheme might provide for young people to develop a measure of financial independence and learn money management. As with the impact on personal motivation, both parents and young people positively welcomed the opportunity the scheme provided for young people to begin to learn about aspects of adulthood, such as personal responsibility and financial management.

### 3.3.2 *Perceived disadvantages of the EMA scheme*

Others were less positive in their initial responses to the scheme and there was evidence of greater cynicism about its value amongst non-participants than participants. Young people and parents questioned the wisdom of a scheme which effectively '*pays*' young people to remain in education.

Parents and young people expressed concerns about the impact of the scheme on young people who were encouraged to remain in education when they might be more suited to employment or work-based training. It was also suggested that parents might pressurise their children into staying on in order to gain financial benefits. Furthermore it was perceived that paying young people to attend when they were not really committed to a course might disrupt classes and adversely affect the chances of others on the course. For some these concerns were based on experiences, whether first-hand or anecdotal, of 'disruptive' students on their courses whilst others were simply concerned that this could be a potential problem. The young people who were more concerned or even cynical about this potential impact of the scheme were both participants and non-participants currently undertaking a range of activities including full-time education, work-based training and employment.

Some parents also questioned the necessity of the scheme arguing that the government already provides financial support through Child Benefit and other income-related benefits for parents with children aged 16-18. However, this view was less widely held than the belief that the scheme had a real role to play in supporting low-income families. Some young people and parents also questioned the value of providing financial support to young people who would, in spite of EMA, have continued in education.

A final area of concern for participants and non-participants was equity. Concerns about the equity of the scheme were threefold and related to concerns that:

- only students in pilot areas were being offered financial support;
- not all students were eligible for the scheme because of the eligibility criteria; *and*
- the amounts paid to students and families differed because of the income taper.

The ineligibility of other students was a clear source of concern for some young people and parents, both participants and non-participants. For example one parent voiced concerns that students not receiving EMA, yet working alongside EMA recipients, would feel it was unfair if they were working as hard as them yet receiving no reward. She felt that if the payment was in part a reward for hard work then all students should be able to receive it. However, as this example illustrates, this was particularly the case where respondents saw the scheme as primarily rewarding and motivating young people who chose to remain in education, rather than as a source of supplementary income for low-income families. In other circumstances, however, it was perceived as being unfair because the eligibility criteria was based on income levels without taking into consideration other financial demands on their resources. This, for example, was cited in situations where parents were supporting children through higher education and were as a result perceived to be less well off than some of the people currently receiving EMA.

There was, therefore, considerable support for some extension of the scheme which could reward all students for continuing in post-compulsory education, for example by providing all students, regardless of family income, a bonus payment for attendance and achievement.

Parents and young people also voiced concerns that the EMA scheme was only applicable to post-compulsory education rather than higher education. There was concern were that the scheme might increase expectations amongst lower income families that similar support was available for higher education.

### **3.4 Decision-making around EMA**

Section 2 reviewed the role of EMA in decision-making about post-compulsory education. This section identifies how and why young people and parents chose to participate, or not, in the scheme.

#### **3.4.1 *The decision-making process***

The decision about whether to apply for EMA was relatively straightforward in most cases. It rested upon the following factors:

- the nature of personal choices made about remaining in post-compulsory education;
- the extent of awareness of the scheme;
- the level of understanding of the scheme in relation to eligibility, payment and requirements; *and*
- the level of parental income.

Usually the decision about whether to apply for EMA was made jointly by the young person in collaboration with their parent(s) or guardian(s). Parental influence varied from general encouragement to actively becoming involved in the decision-making process. Exceptionally the decision was made by the young person or parent alone but, as the nature of the application process requires both to participate, even in these cases there was a joint agreement to apply. The following two sections describe the key factors accounting for participation and non-participation in the scheme. The evidence presented here and in the following Section is also based on the views of students who had been unsuccessful in their EMA application or who were still awaiting the outcome of their application.

#### **3.4.2 *Factors affecting the decision to participate***

Commonly, once a young person had established they were eligible to take part in the scheme then the primary factor motivating their participation was financial. Once they were aware they were entitled to some financial support then few of the parents or young people interviewed had reservations about joining the scheme. However, in some cases where potential participants calculated that the likely amount they would receive through the weekly allowance was low, the financial motivation to participate was lessened.

Financial benefit was seen as the primary advantage to taking part in the scheme. As noted above, awareness of the weekly allowance was high and both parents and young people were clear about the potential financial benefits of participation. For most, the weekly allowance was the most attractive element of the scheme although others found the idea of lump sum bonuses equally attractive. This was particularly true of participants in Variant 3. Here the variant being tested pays weekly allowances to parents rather than young people and hence increases the value of the bonus payments to the young person who otherwise would not receive a source of independent income.

The financial benefits which influenced parents and young people to apply for EMA differed. For some, a key benefit was that EMA was a way of relieving some of the financial burden from parents and the family unit during post-compulsory education. Other young people and some parents saw the scheme as a good way of introducing, or to bolstering existing, financial independence of young people. Finally, for some young people participation in EMA was seen as a way of relieving some of the pressure they were experiencing to work alongside their education. In these discussions the weekly allowance was predominant as the component seen most attractive and likely to secure financial benefits. The impact of participation and the views of non-participants about part-time work are discussed more fully in Section 6.

Participation was also seen as a powerful incentive for young people to continue to achieve educationally by parents, and in some way was perceived as a way of rewarding their achievements to date. Nevertheless, as discussed previously, there were concerns by some parents and young people that this could be seen as a form of 'bribery'. Other influences on participation included advice from and discussions with peers and teachers, however these influences were minimal compared to the promise of future financial support.

### ***3.4.3 Factors accounting for non-participation***

Four principal factors accounted for non-participation:

- a lack of awareness of the scheme and poor understanding of its scope;
- decisions to opt for a work-based route;
- dominant personal circumstances which acted as a barrier to continued education; *and*
- apprehensions or concerns about the application process.

#### ***Lack of awareness and limited understanding of the scheme***

Low awareness or poor understanding of the scheme accounted for non-participation in some cases. Firstly, some young people who might have been eligible for EMA were simply unaware that the scheme was in operation and therefore had not requested or sought information about the scheme. In these cases parents and young people could not recall being offered information about financial support from either schools, colleges or other sources. Young people in this category were currently in full or part-time education, employment and work-based training.

The eligibility criteria were a different stumbling block to application for others. These young people, both correctly and, incorrectly, believed that their application would be ineligible because of their parents income. These beliefs were based on the information that young people had received, usually through 'unofficial' sources. Few appeared to doubt this information they had received or make enquiries to clarify their eligibility status. It was also clear that some young people had not sought guidance from their parents about their actual income. In a similar way some non-participants were unclear about their eligibility because of the type of course they were choosing to follow. For instance one young woman did not apply because she was re-taking GCSEs and believed that EMA was not available in these circumstances. Others rightly assumed that the nature of their course meant they would be ineligible for the scheme; for instance in one case a young woman was undertaking an open

learning course whilst another on a part-time course knew they would not be allowed to claim the allowance.

Equally there were misunderstandings about how allowance and bonuses are calculated. Some young people who presumed they would be eligible, but only for a minimal weekly payment, decided against applying because they felt financially the return would not be worth the effort. They were surprised to discover, either from fellow students, or during the interview, that they would have received the same bonus payments as students in receipt of maximum weekly allowances. It was difficult to ascertain why these misunderstandings occurred, but some were, in part at least, due to poor understanding of the scheme based on information received.

Confusion also arose about the areas where EMA was available. It was sometimes mistakenly believed that eligibility was determined by the institution being attended. It was also sometimes reported that EMA was available outside the pilot areas. In one area a few young people reported that they had been told that if they were eligible for the scheme they would receive a letter informing them. As they did not receive this letter they assumed they were not eligible and did not seek further information. One young person later sought advice and found out that they were in fact eligible and made a successful application. From this study, which only explored the perspectives of young people and parents, it is not possible to gauge whether these difficulties were a feature of the delivery of EMA in these areas or resulted from misunderstandings on the part of the young people.

Less commonly, young people had been alarmed by the attendance requirements and this had made them less willing to apply. In these cases young people were concerned that they would have to attend college for all their lessons and disliked the idea of being monitored. Some young people cited this as a major reason for why they did not apply for the scheme, whilst for others it was an additional factor to those identified above.

### ***A decision to opt for a work based route***

There was a distinct group of young people for whom the scheme was irrelevant regardless of how much information they had received about EMA or their level of understanding of the scheme. These young people had made a clear decision to opt for work based training rather than full-time education courses. Of these, some were participating in government funded courses whilst others were pursuing vocational apprenticeships. For these young people a focus on employment or work-based training after leaving school negated the need to consider participation in EMA. Work-based training was seen as preferable to full-time study for those who were eager to be earning a wage and to join the workforce. In these instances, the chance to gain sustained work experience, study for a qualification and earn a wage was perceived as a key advantage of work-based training. However, there were others who reported that, had they received information about EMA prior to their decision-making, might have chosen an alternative route and sought a college place for vocational training.

### ***Dominant personal circumstances***

Dominant personal issues acted as barriers to the some young people remaining in post-compulsory education. These young people cited caring responsibilities, pregnancy, disability or ill health which had made full-time education an impossibility, in spite of understanding that they might be able to participate in the scheme. It also included a group

of young people who were disaffected from education either because of a record of truancy and exclusion or because of negative experiences of school such as experiences of bullying.

### ***Concerns about the application process***

Finally, concerns about the application process were key influences on non-participation for some parents and young people. Parental concerns were twofold. Firstly, some felt uneasy about divulging detailed financial information because they felt it to be intrusive. Others disliked form filling or felt overwhelmed by the length and difficulty of the task. Secondly, some single parents and some living in second families following divorce or separation were concerned about the perceived need to contact the absent parent for details of their financial situation.

*“The letter came and they wanted all the information about him as well. Which I think is unfair because if you're not in a relationship with that partner then why should their wages have anything to do with you?”  
(Parent of ineligible non-participant, Variant 2)*

Issues surrounding parents in these circumstances will be more fully explored in the following section. Generally young people were less concerned about the application process although some argued that the amounts being offered through the scheme did not merit the ‘hassle’ involved in having to set up a bank account and completing the application form. Issues around the application form will be fully explored in the following section.

## 4 APPLICATION FOR AND EXPERIENCE OF EMA

This section examines who took responsibility for applying for EMA, the key difficulties experienced in completing the application, and the timescales involved from application to receipt of EMA. Issues around the setting up and implementation of the learning agreement are discussed as are the financial arrangements for receiving EMA.

In summary:

- young people and parents tended to share responsibility for the application process, although the amount of input varied according to individual circumstances (*see 4.1*);
- the experience of the application process varied partly according to the length and complexity of the application form and the requirements to produce supporting evidence in each pilot area. However, the more complex the family situation, the greater the difficulty in completing the application (*see 4.1 and 4.1.1*);
- The timescales between sending the application off and notification of EMA being awarded varied across pilot areas. While the timescales reported in two of the areas were longer, the process seemed more protracted where the application was not straightforward and where further evidence was required. Young people and parents also attributed long delays in processing to staff being inundated with applications. (*see 4.1.5*);
- there were no reports of the financial arrangements for receiving EMA causing any major problems (*see 4.2.1*);
- understanding of the requirements contained in the learning agreement tended to increase with experience of their implementation (*see 4.2.2*); and
- attendance was being more closely monitored since the start of the year, resulting in some payments being stopped (*see 4.2.2 and 4.2.3*).

### 4.1 Experience of the application process

Participants and their parents were generally both involved in the process of completing the application form for EMA. However, the amount of input which each party had into the process differed. Sometimes the greater share of the work was done either by the young person or by one, or both, parents. In these cases, the other party was more often than not required to add a signature.

The young person was more likely to take charge of completing the application where:

- the claim was straightforward;
- the young person lived in a variant area where EMA was paid direct to the young person rather than to the parent;
- the parent/s were agreeable about the young person having their financial details; and



- the parent/s had difficulty in either understanding or completing the application form. Included in this category were cases where the young person had a better command of spoken and written English than their parents.

The parent/s were more likely to take charge of the application process where the claim process was complicated by any of the following factors:

- difficulties around locating and supplying the required evidence;
- the parent/s were reluctant to divulge their financial details to the young person;
- the young person preferred to leave the process to their parents; *and*
- where the parent/s were to be in receipt of EMA, as in the Variant 3 area where parents took a major role in the application process.

Where the process was managed jointly, it generally involved a division of labour with each party completing the section relevant to them. However, it sometimes involved the parent and the young person sitting down and completing the form together.

Experiences of this part of the application process ranged along a spectrum from relatively straightforward and simple to long, complicated and frustrating. As a general rule, the more straightforward the domestic and financial circumstances of the household, the easier it was to fill in the form and supply the documentation required: for example, where there was a two parent family and one or both parents were in stable employment.

The experience tended to become progressively more complicated where the domestic circumstances differed from the above, for example, in cases involving separation or remarriage or where one parent was absent or deceased. It was also made more complicated where the financial circumstances were not standard, for example where the parent:

- had experienced a recent change in salary;
- had taken early retirement and was in receipt of a pension;
- had been made redundant;
- was in receipt of benefits; *or*
- was in receipt of maintenance from a former partner.

#### **4.1.1 Completing the application form**

Each of the pilot areas had devised and introduced their own application forms.<sup>8</sup> Two principal factors determined people's experience of the application process: the length and complexity of the application form and the amount and type of evidence which they were required to produce to support the claim. Experiences of completing the application form depended on:

**The length of the application form.** This differed markedly between areas and as a result respondents varied in their views about the amount of time it took to complete the form. At one extreme, Variant 4 respondents referred to the application form being relatively short, containing relatively few questions, and taking less than half an hour to complete assuming the claim was straightforward in nature. At the other extreme, respondents in another pilot

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<sup>8</sup> Since this research was conducted a single EMA application form has been devised for use in all pilot areas.

area described the form as “a huge booklet” and “long and official-looking” which they found daunting.

**The nature of the questions contained in the form.** The nature and range of questions contained in the form also differed between areas. Respondents in Variant 4 were generally positive about the ease of dealing with their application form. The questions were generally considered to be minimal, to the point and easy to understand. In other areas, three principal issues were raised about the nature of the questions:

- the formulation of some of questions made them difficult to understand;
- it was not always clear how to answer the questions. This was especially the case where the circumstances being reported did not easily fit into the required format: for example, where a parent was currently off work through illness; *and*
- some questions were seemingly irrelevant, and there was some feeling that the amount of detail required was excessive.

#### **4.1.2 Meeting the evidence requirements**

The nature of the evidence people were required to produce varied according to their circumstances. For some people, producing the documentation to support their claim did not entail any undue difficulty. Others found it laborious and time-consuming. A few had found the experience of having to locate and collate the evidence an enormously difficult and frustrating task – “*a nightmare*”. Where the difficulties experienced were extreme there was a real temptation to abandon the application process.

The following factors influenced people’s experience of producing the required evidence:

**The degree to which people were clear about the information they were required to produce** - In a few cases there had been a lack of clarity about the exact type of information and the amount of documentation that was required to support the claim. This confusion tended to arise where the household circumstances were not standard: for example, where parents had separated and proof was required that the parent looking after the young person was a single parent; where proof was required that care was being provided to an elderly relative in the household, or documentary evidence that an elder sibling had taken over care of the young person.

**Reluctance to divulge information** - Some parents were very resistant to the request to divulge details of their income on paper. Concerns around this issue included the feeling that details of income were a private business and this request was tantamount to an invasion of privacy. In a few cases this issue was compounded by feelings of shame about letting other people know how small an income they had. Some parents were reluctant to let the young person have any information about what they earned and the size of the household income.

**The ease with which people could supply the evidence required** - Difficulties had also been experienced in trying to locate the particular information required to provide proof of:

- annual earnings: this was a particular problem where parents were self-employed;
- divorce;

- amount of maintenance being received;
- household bills such as gas and electricity; *or*
- amount of tax paid.

A particular inconvenience around this issue had been having to obtain the information from another source: for example, an employer or accountant. Others problems involved having to find out the details of the earnings of an absent parent, particularly where this parent did not have any responsibility for the young person's upbringing. Underpinning this view was a concern that the absent parent might refuse to comply.

**The number of requests for supplementary information** - Some parents had received requests for supplementary information which they had not anticipated. This tended to prolong and complicate the application process, particularly where each request for further documentation was accompanied by another form to complete. The evidence had often been difficult to obtain and had led to delays in the application being processed. Examples of supplementary information requested included:

- change of financial circumstances, for example where the parent had received a raise in salary;
- details of council tax paid; *or*
- tax return details.

One young man in Variant 1, whose domestic circumstances had changed during the application process, said he felt that EMA was just "playing them around" given the amount of evidence his guardian was required to produce.

**Documentation going astray:** a further inconvenience had been experienced where a parent had sent off the documentary evidence which had then gone astray in the post. Finding replacement documents had then proved difficult and time-consuming.

#### ***4.1.3 Advice and guidance sought throughout the application process***

Where participants or their parents had experienced difficulties around the application process (about the type of evidence required or clarification about questioning), they had occasionally sought advice and guidance about what to do. The main source of advice was the local LEA or EMA office. However, advice and information had also been sought from teachers at school or from Student Services within a college.

Although some people did go in person and a few had communicated in writing, the most commonly used means of contacting the office was by phone. In some areas, people had encountered considerable difficulty getting through on the phone. Some people had the impression that phones had deliberately been left off the hook. From remarks made by staff to respondents in these areas, it was apparent that they were snowed under with EMA applications and were also having difficulty coping with telephone queries:

*"We just weren't getting any advice about what we needed to send so in the end my mum rang up. They said they were working on it and only had a few people working so they can't get everyone's done straight away". (Female, participant, Band 2, Variant 3)*

Once contacted, the EMA staff response had been variable. In some cases, the staff had been helpful whereas in others they had either been abrupt, or unhelpful, or had been unable to provide any useful help with a particular problem.

Young people and parents who had been to offices in person, generally reported receiving a better service. It had proved much easier to resolve problems on a face to face basis since a member of staff was able to assess immediately what the particular obstacle was and advise how best it could be overcome.

Teachers and Student Services were also sometimes approached for advice and guidance. This was variable depending on the level of knowledge of the individual concerned. One young man, who was having difficulties understanding the evidence requirement, contacted a teacher from his previous school. With her intervention, the matter was resolved speedily.

#### ***4.1.4 Setting up the learning agreement***

All those participating in EMA were obliged to complete and sign a learning agreement before payment could be made. Recall of the process involved in setting up the learning agreement was variable. There was general awareness of having been obliged to sign a form in order to qualify for receipt of EMA. However, whilst some people had clear recall of the process involved in setting it up, others had forgotten the details. In Variant 1, the form itself had made some impact in that it was multi-coloured.

The learning agreement had been distributed through various routes. Sometimes it had been sent along with the letter notifying the parent or young person that they had qualified for EMA. It had also been distributed by school or college tutors once the young person had started their further education. In Variant 3, the learning agreement was reported as having been attached to the application form.

There were no reports of major difficulties arising from completing the learning agreement. Also it was generally understood that the learning agreement had to be signed by the young person, a parent and a representative of the school or college. The form was often filled in and signed at home by the participant and the parent and then taken into the school for the tutor/teacher to sign. Exceptionally there were joint signings by all parties at the school or college. In one case the learning agreement was completed as a joint exercise under the auspices of teachers on a school “awayday”.

#### ***4.1.5 Timescales***

It was not always easy to distil from people’s accounts the exact duration from one stage of the application process to another. However, a notable feature of the application process was the different timescales experienced between sending off the application form and notification of whether EMA would be awarded and then between notification and payment. Timescales were invariably more protracted where the application was not a straightforward one and where further evidence was required. Equally delays occurred where some kind of hitch had occurred, such as where evidence had gone astray or the learning agreement had not been signed.

In Variant 4, the timescale between application and notification was generally a matter of a few weeks. First EMA payment arrived the following week or shortly thereafter. The timescale for the Variant 2 area was somewhat longer with the longest delays being up to three months for the more complex applications.

Timescales were significantly longer in variant areas 1 and 3. In Variant 1, delays of four months were reported which meant that some payments were only coming through in late November, early December. The situation appeared to be even more variable in Variant 3. In some cases, applications had been processed within a month to six weeks. In others, delays of up to eight months had occurred between application and receipt of the first payment. This meant that some payments had not been made until Christmas and some not yet made at the time of fieldwork (March-May 2000).

Young people and parents attributed long delays in processing claims to :

- staff being inundated with applications;
- the length of time required to process application forms and supplementary evidence;  
*and*
- the number of applications from people whose circumstances required further investigation.

In addition, young people and parents attributed delays to payment of EMA to:

- not being told about the need to complete a learning agreement despite having completed the application process satisfactorily;
- the form for the learning agreement not being provided by the college tutor; *or*
- the college not sending off the completed learning agreement form.

Wherever delays in processing applications had occurred, payment was invariably backdated to the beginning of the term. Nevertheless, participants and their parents had experienced different levels of inconvenience in the interim. The main ways in which young people had coped were either using any part-time earnings they had or borrowing off their parents and paying them back when the payment finally came through. Generally, parents in income bands 2 and 3 had been able to bridge the financial gap without great difficulty. There was evidence that this was harder for parents in income band 1. For example, one single mother described how she had had to scrimp and save during that period but that her son had been able to pay her back once the payments started.

## **4.2 The experience of participation in EMA**

### ***4.2.1 Financial preparations for participation***

The system for payment of EMA allowances and bonuses was by direct payment into a bank account. This required all young people to have a bank account. Although in Variant 3 the allowance was paid direct into the account of a parent, payment of bonuses, as in other areas, was direct into the bank account of the young person.

There was little evidence of this system causing major problems because in many cases young people already had a bank account. In some cases these had already been opened by the young person themselves to receive earnings from a part-time job. Parents had also opened bank accounts on behalf of their children. Where the account was already in the name of the young person, arrangements for EMA participation were minimal. Where the account was in the parent's name, the account had to be changed into the young person's name before payment of EMA allowance or bonuses could be made.

Young people without an existing account had generally experienced relatively few problems opening one. Where difficulties had been experienced this was mainly due to young people being unaware about the need to provide evidence, for example proof of date of birth. Perceived benefits of opening a bank account included being provided with debit cards and being able to access cash and statements from cash machines.

#### ***4.2.2 Experience of the learning agreement***

Understanding of the broad thrust of the requirements contained in the learning agreement was generally high. However, it appeared that this understanding had come about more through its implementation during post-compulsory education rather than from any detailed perusal of the document either before or after signing it. Young people had generally been aware that they had been obliged to sign a document that governed the conditions under which they were entitled to receive EMA but had assumed that the contents would be broadly similar to documents they had been obliged to sign at school. In some cases, a copy of the document was kept in the house but there was little evidence of anyone referring to it.

From their experience of the scheme, participants broadly understood the learning agreement to be a contract in which the participant undertook to:

- attend every lesson unless there was a proper excuse for not doing so;
- be on time and punctual;
- do the coursework and homework set; *and*
- comply with regulations governing good behaviour.

It was generally understood that it was incumbent on participants to phone in if ill or absent and to provide a doctor's certificate if the absence was for more than three days. However, awareness of the precise conditions attached to some of the requirements was variable. For example, understanding of the attendance requirements to qualify for the EMA weekly allowance ranged between 75 and 100% attendance level. One participant in the highest income band was of the view that 80% attendance was required in order to qualify for the termly bonus.

#### ***Implementation of the learning agreement***

Participants were aware that monitoring of attendance for EMA purposes had been made more stringent since the turn of the year (2000). Initially monitoring had relied heavily on information provided by students themselves. However, this had led to abuses of the system so that attendance levels had fallen. Now systems had been changed so that checks were carried out more frequently during the day with teachers having greater responsibility for ensuring that pupils attended and for authorising absences. For example, in Variant 1,

the changeover from self-certification had led to students receiving a weekly form showing lessons they had attended and any absences recorded.

There was also some evidence of technology being introduced for monitoring purposes. There was talk of the imminent introduction of a swipe card to replace the system of teachers calling the register in Variant 2. Students at one college in Variant 4 were already using an electronic register to sign in. These innovations were generally regarded with equanimity by participants. Overall, participants and parents were generally in favour of stricter monitoring in that it was in the interests of young people to participate effectively in post-compulsory education:

*“I think it is important to have this or people will be lazing around at school and not reaching targets or not going to lessons. It gives them a kick up the bum”. (Male, participant, Variant 3)*

There was also some evidence that, as well as monitoring attendance, teachers in Variant 3 were also being stricter about imposing penalties for work not being submitted on time. One parent referred to the fact that she had had to sign her child’s homework diary from school.

#### **4.2.3 Experience of stopped payments**

The most common reasons for EMA payments being stopped was as a penalty for infringing the requirements of the learning agreement. However, there were also cases where payment had been stopped due to problems in administering the scheme.

Young people were generally aware under the terms of the learning agreement, that their allowance and/or attendance bonus could be affected if they took time off. There were cases in all areas of young people having taken time off for reasons including:

- missing a day without any good reason for absence;
- not turning up to a particular class;
- going off on holiday; *or*
- bereavement.

However, young people who had taken time off tended to be surprised at the apparent severity with which the offence was treated. Even missing one lesson had sometimes resulted in the loss of EMA for an entire week. There was some feeling that payment should be reduced in proportion to the offence rather than it being a blanket withdrawal. Others were surprised at how little time off had caused them to lose their bonus payments. This too was seen as fairly draconian by those who had experienced it.

There were also cases where the young person considered that payments had been unfairly stopped as a result of:

- absence incorrectly recorded: one young person had their payment stopped because their teacher had made a mistake in calling the register. Another had a similar experience when she had been away on a field trip which was part of her course;
- travel problems: one participant in variant 3 had been unable to register on time because of transport delays even though she was attending regularly. This resulted in her having

rows with her parents who, as a consequence, experienced a suspension of EMA payments; *and*

- the young person forgetting to submit the weekly timetable of attendance in time.

Whilst parents generally welcomed having to share the responsibility for the young person's attendance, others felt that it was something of an imposition. One mother in Variant 2 said she did not expect to have to be proactive in checking that her son attended college. The view was reinforced in Variant 3 where parents would be directly affected if their child defaulted. This had happened to one parent whose EMA payments had been stopped:

*"I knew that he had to keep to the guidelines but I didn't realise that nobody would let me know if he wasn't turning up and I would only find out if the money stopped". (Mother, male participant, Band 1, Variant 3)*

Where payments had been stopped or delayed due to administrative difficulties, these had generally occurred as a result of one of the following: overpayment of allowance: for example, where two weeks were mistakenly paid; delays in restarting payments once they had been stopped, for example due to the computer being switched off at half term; or payments suddenly being halted for no apparent reason and with no explanation.



## 5 THE RECEIPT AND USE OF EMA PAYMENTS

This section examines how money received through the EMA scheme is being used by participants. It explores patterns of usage and discusses the way in which variant models affect the control and use of EMA payments. Differences between the control and use of weekly payments and bonus payments are discussed, as is the impact of EMA finance on existing patterns of income and expenditure.

In summary, the research found that:

- young people had diverse patterns of personal income and expenditure before they took part in the scheme (*see 5.1*);
- intra-household allocations of money between parents and children varied between families and were affected by household income, young people's independent income and patterns of spending (*see 5.1*);
- EMA payments were being used for general household expenditure, expenditure relating to education costs and for young people's personal spending on social or other activities, particularly transport costs relating to post compulsory education (*see 5.2.2 and 5.3.1*);
- factors affecting the use of EMA payments included: perceptions of the intended use of EMA income, EMA variant, existing patterns of intra-household financial transfers and the level of young people's financial autonomy (*see 5.2.3, 5.3.2, 5.4*);
- parents were generally satisfied with the way in which young people were managing their EMA allowances; *and*
- three models of household allocative systems were found in households in receipt of EMA (*see 5.5*).

### 5.1 Existing sources of income

It is essential to understand the way in which young people and their parents previously conducted their finances in order to fully comprehend how income from the EMA scheme was being used within families.

All families interviewed for the study had pre-existing systems of household budgeting and financial transfers between parents and children, whether through allowances, pocket money or other less formalised mechanisms. Equally, some young people interviewed had their own independent sources of income from their part-time employment.

Parents were subsidising their children's personal finances before EMA, in a number of different ways. These included providing board and subsistence, pocket money or allowances. Young people were then using this income for personal or social activities such as the costs of going out with friends or buying clothes.

The research identified three ways in which this personal income was being transferred from parents to their children:

- through a formal system of weekly or monthly allowances (usually above £10 per week);
- through a formal system of weekly pocket money (involving small amounts of money, generally below £10 per week); *or*
- through ad-hoc transfers of money.

For some young people, formal systems of allowances provided regular sources of personal finance from their parents or other family members. In some cases these allowances were direct transfers of some or all of the Child Benefit paid to the parent, in others there was no use of the Child Benefit. Amongst this sample, there was more evidence of formal transfers of Child Benefit in lower rather than higher income families but it was not clear from the data why this should be the case. In other instances, where the family had experienced marital breakdown or the death of a parent, young people's allowances were derived from the absent parent or other sources such as bequests or pension schemes. Pocket money systems also provided regular sources of personal finance but involved smaller amounts of money, generally less than £10 per week, and were occasionally associated with the completion of household chores. Finally, in some families no formal systems were in place. In these cases parents provided their child with money on an ad-hoc basis when they felt it was needed or, in some cases, deserved.

In addition, some of the young people in the sample had part-time jobs and so were also in receipt of weekly or monthly earnings. For some, these earnings were regular and predictable, whilst for others part-time earnings were less stable and not a reliable source of income. In these cases earnings were less predictable because the young person did not work regular hours or only worked on an occasional basis, during holidays for example.

The extent to which young people were able to use their personal income as they chose to was variable. Financial independence was more marked among those who also had a regular income from part-time work than among those who did not. Those whose only source of personal income was from pocket money or ad-hoc payments from their parents experienced much less financial independence as they needed to ask their parents for additional money when they wished, for example, to make a major purchase or go out for an evening with friends.

## **5.2 Receipt and usage of the weekly allowance**

The weekly payment is central to the EMA initiative. Participants were asked to describe how the weekly payment was being used and to discuss its role alongside other existing sources of household income. Not all participants were able to comment on this as exceptionally some young people had not received a weekly payment at the time of interview (see section 4.3.2).

### 5.2.1 *Patterns of receipt*

Aside from the difficulties associated with late or stopped payments already discussed in Section 4, receipt of the weekly allowance was reported as a straightforward process by those interviewed. Nevertheless, **who** receives the weekly allowance is important in understanding how payments were being controlled and used.

Weekly EMA payments are made direct to young people through an automated transfer to their bank accounts in three of the four variants. Payments in Variant 3 were an exception to this. In this variant of the scheme payments were made direct to parents' or guardians' bank accounts. In addition to the direct receipt of payments from LEAs, there were also intra-household transfers of EMA income. This was reported most frequently in Variant 3.

Not all parents in Variant 3 made transfers of the EMA allowance to their child, but in cases where transfers occurred they did so in three ways:

- direct transfer either by cash or cheque of the whole weekly allowance, or a significant part of it, to the young person on either a weekly or monthly basis;
- direct transfer of the whole, or part of, the allowance from parent to young person's savings account; *or via*
- transfers of smaller amounts of money (usually less than £10 per week) through existing pocket money or allowances.

In some cases only one form of transfer occurred whilst in others there were multiple forms of transfer.

There were no clear patterns across families in Variant 3 to indicate why parents chose to transfer EMA income to their children or not. However, there was evidence that those in higher income bands were more able to transfer some, or all, of the EMA income to their child because they were less dependent upon it as a central source of household income. In some families EMA income was used as a substitute for pre-existing pocket money or allowances, however for other young people EMA income was additional income. Family circumstances or existing patterns of intra-household transfers were two factors which clearly affected parents' choices about whether to transfer EMA income to their children. Additionally parental perceptions of what the EMA payments were *intended* to be used for were an important factor shaping the transfer of money between parents and children.

Opinions were divided about the use intended for weekly payments with some young people and parents believing they should be used to help bolster the family income. In contrast, others saw the weekly payments as intended for the sole use of the young person, whether for educationally related expenditure or not. In Variant 3 parental beliefs about what the weekly allowance was intended for affected whether or not all, or some, of the weekly allowance was transferred to the young person. Where parents saw the money as primarily for the young person, either as a reward or incentive, then money was transferred. However, in cases where the parent believed that the money was intended to support families with young people in post-compulsory education then none, or less, of that allowance was transferred.

Jill receives £20 per week of the £30 EMA allowance paid to her parents. She is given this money in cash in addition to money which her parents give her for her bus fares and college dinners. Her parents retain £10 of the weekly allowance which is being placed in a holiday fund. In this family EMA payments were seen as a reward for the young person. In contrast, Elspeth receives £2.50 in pocket money each week and her father retains the remainder of the payment which is used as part of the general family income. Both Elspeth and her father perceived the EMA allowance as a payment designed to supplement the family, rather than being a payment or reward for the young person.

Exceptionally, intra-household transfers occurred in the opposite direction from young people to parents with young people transferring some of their allowance to their parents as a contribution towards board and lodgings.

In Variant 4, for example, John receives the maximum EMA allowance of £30 and is also earning wages of £150 each month. Each week John pays his mother £15 towards his board and lodging.

The interaction between EMA payments and young people's part-time wages will be more fully explored in section 5.4.

### ***5.2.2 Use of the weekly payment***

Weekly allowances were being used by parents and young people for a range of different purposes<sup>9</sup>. Chart 5.1 illustrates the principal uses of weekly EMA payments. Some expenditure was focused and the weekly allowance was used for specific outgoings, for example course-related expenses, whilst in other cases allowances were used in a more diffuse way across several different types of expenditure.

Course associated expenditure was a key use of the weekly allowance by young people and their parents. Transport costs formed a large component of this expenditure. This was particularly the case for those in rural areas of Variant 1, and to a lesser extent for young people living in the outlying areas of Variant 4, where some young people were travelling significant distances to attend their college or sixth form school. Expenditure on travel included purchasing weekly, monthly or termly bus passes or contributing to the costs of petrol where parents regularly drove their children to school or college. Other college associated expenditure included textbooks, stationery and the cost of food whilst at college. For those young people involved in subjects such as art, the physical sciences or drama, the money was also being used towards the extra costs of special equipment, such as sheet music, field or theatre trips.

Although course-related expenses were central to the use of some young people's weekly allowances for others this was not the case. Young people who lived near to their place of study, whose courses did not require additional expenditure, or whose parents subsidised any additional course-related costs found their weekly allowances relatively untouched by college related expenditure. For example, Jenny who lives in Variant 1 reported that most of

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<sup>6</sup> See also Ashworth et al., (2001).

her £16.66 weekly allowance was used in paying for her bus pass each week. In contrast Ahmed, who lives in Variant 2, walks to college and has no course-related expenses, retains his full allowance of £30 for other uses.

Weekly allowances were also being used for household expenditure such as contributions to board and lodgings, buying essential items of clothing or personal toiletries and contributing to telephone bills, both for the family telephone and the costs of personal mobile calls. Whilst young people in all four areas were using the weekly allowance for clothing and telephone costs, the use of the weekly allowance as a contribution to general household expenses was a particular feature in Variant 3. This was directly associated with the method of payment in Variant 3 where parents receive the weekly allowance rather than their children and, as a result, have a greater influence over its use. However, there was little evidence to suggest that young people struggled to meet their course related expenses in Variant 3 despite the weekly allowance being received by their parents. Generally, here parents provided money to subsidise course costs.

### **Chart 5.1 Uses of EMA weekly allowances**

<p><b><i>Course associated expenditure</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- transport costs</li><li>- books, pens, paper and stationery</li><li>- field trips such as visiting museums, theatre trips</li></ul> <p><b><i>Household expenditure</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- contributions to board and lodgings / to the <i>'family pot'</i></li><li>- clothes (essential items such as uniforms, coats, shoes)</li><li>- personal toiletries</li><li>- telephone costs, including mobile telephone bills</li></ul> <p><b><i>Social expenditure</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- costs associated with <i>'going out'</i> (inc. transport, food, drink, cigarettes etc.)</li><li>- clothes (fashion items, casual clothes)</li><li>- CDs, computer games, magazines</li></ul> <p><b><i>Other uses of EMA weekly payments</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- savings</li><li>- driving lessons</li></ul>
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Although there were instances of young people in other areas making contributions to general household expenses, for example in John's case discussed above, this was far rarer. This was only found to occur where the young person was in receipt of EMA and additional regular weekly or monthly earnings from part-time work.

Weekly payments were also being used to fund social expenses. Young people reported using their weekly allowances for a range of social expenses. These included: the purchase of leisure items such as non-essential clothing, CDs, computer games, magazines, make-up and the use of the money for costs associated with *'going out'* with friends such as taxi or bus fares, entrance fees, food and drink or the purchase of cigarettes. Use of weekly

allowances for social expenses varied depending both upon the extent of young people's social activities and their other sources of income. However, there were no clear patterns within the data to indicate that certain sub-groups of young people were more inclined to use their allowances on social rather than other forms of expenditure.

In some instances weekly payments were being placed in savings accounts either by young people or their parents. Most commonly, payments were being saved by young people towards future costs of higher education and major purchases such as driving lessons, cars and holidays although some savings did not have a specific purpose.

In Variant 3 some parents were saving some, or all, of the weekly allowance on behalf of their child. This money was expected to be put to various uses. One intention was that the money would be used to give the young person a financial boost when they moved onto higher education. In other cases the money was being saved towards better Christmas presents for the child or towards general family expenditure which would benefit the entire household, for example towards a family holiday or household improvements.

The use of weekly allowances is also outlined in the report from the quantitative evaluation of the first year of EMA (Ashworth et al., 2001). This concluded that young people did not seem to be using their EMA to supplement their spending on entertainment.

### **5.2.3 Factors accounting for the use of weekly payments**

Who receives and controls the weekly allowance affects, to a great extent, how that income is used. In the three areas where the money is paid directly to the young person the research found higher levels of financial independence and greater autonomy in decision-making about its use. In contrast, in Variant 3 parents had greater influence over the use of the EMA allowance either through direct control of the money or through active guidance about how the young person should spend that money. It was extremely rare to find young people and their parents making a negotiated decision about how the weekly allowance should be divided and used. Nevertheless, negotiation was found in some cases and was more common in Variant 3 where the payment is always made to the parent hence allowing more scope for interaction over the use of the money. As would be expected parents provided varying degrees of general guidance about their child's management of personal income.

The use of the weekly payment was strongly associated with parents and young people's views about the intended use of the payments. Those who believed that the payments were intended for educational costs tended to spend their allowances on educationally-related expenses such as field trips, books, travel to and from school or college, sustenance whilst at school or college. Equally those who assumed the money was intended to help young people with their college-related living costs were using, at least some of, their allowance to contribute to board, travel, clothes and food whilst at college. However, in other cases where it was assumed that the EMA weekly allowance was to support or contribute to general household finances the money was added to the general household income and used for payment of bills, food and other general household expenditure.

As would be expected, in some cases where the allowance was believed to be an '*incentive*' or '*reward*' for the young person most or all of the weekly allowance was being used by the young person for social expenses '*going out money*' and the purchase of non-essential items such as CDs, make up and items of clothing.

Young people saved their weekly allowances for a specific purpose which, without the EMA money, the young person would be unable to afford, such as driving lessons. In other cases young people were saving the allowance, either because they had sufficient income from other sources or because they spent little money on their weekly expenditure.

There was no evidence to suggest that the level of payment affected how use of the weekly allowance was targeted. Usage was instead determined by young people's pre-existing personal expenditure and the availability of other income, such as wages, to subsidise this expenditure.

#### **5.2.4 Views about the use of the weekly payment**

Levels of satisfaction about the use of the weekly payment were variable. On the whole young people were satisfied with the way in which the allowance was being used. A few young people expressed unease, either because they were unsure that they were using the money for its intended purpose or because they felt they were *'frittering it away'*.

*"I've been quite confused about this scheme to be honest ... I don't think it was made overly clear, they've never ever wrote in like block capitals 'this money is for your own pleasure use it how you want' ... or you must only use this money for your education purposes." (Female participant, Variant 3, Band 1)*

Parents also expressed a range of views about the use of the weekly allowance. Initially in Variant 2, Variant 4 and Variant 1 some parents had reported being concerned about how their children would use the weekly allowance, particularly as its direct payment to young people meant they would have little control over its use. Similarly, in Variant 3 parents expressed relief that the payment mechanism meant they could monitor and, to varying degrees, control their child's spending. In spite of these early concerns parents were generally pleased, or relieved, at how young people were managing their money. Young people also expressed satisfaction with how they were handling their incomes.

*"I think it's made me more aware of how to sort of balance my money because I've had to be very careful to watch not to go over my limit and not to go crazy and go and spend it all. I think that's had an effect on me ... and I also feel like I'm earning it in a way, even though I'm not actually working in a job. I feel like I'm going to college and working for it." (Female participant, Variant 1, Band 3)*

In Variant 3 the situation was slightly different: here there was evidence of some discord about the use of the weekly allowance. In these instances, young people felt unhappy that they were being given either too little or none of the weekly allowance and felt that it was unfair that the money was used by their parents.

*"£30 does get paid into mother's account, but we discussed having a standing order set up into my bank, so that each week £15 would go into my account, and the £30 would go into hers and I'd get half of it. ... One day I mentioned it, and it was 'no, I'm having it all, to keep you' ... I was a bit*

*annoyed at first, then I just accepted it, there's nothing I can do about it, 'cos the money is paid to her.'* (Male participant, Variant 3, Band 1)

Nevertheless, these views were rare and in most cases young people reported being satisfied about the use their parents were making of the weekly allowance.

### **5.3 Receipt and usage of the bonus payments**

Not all participants were aware of having received a termly attendance bonus at the time of interview. In some circumstances young people had been paid bonuses but had not been aware of this until they reflected upon the amount of money they had received through the scheme during the course of the interview. In other cases they had not received a payment; some believed this was because they had failed to meet the requirements of their learning agreement whilst in other cases young people did not know why they had yet to receive this.

None of the young people interviewed at this stage had reached the end of their courses or received achievement bonuses; therefore the following analysis relates only to termly attendance bonuses.

All variants of the scheme make payment of the achievement and attendance bonuses direct to the student via an automated cash transfer to their bank account. There were no variations to this pattern of receipt and unlike with weekly allowances there was limited evidence of bonus payments being transferred between young people and their parents. In a handful of cases this did occur but only in very specific circumstances, for example Andrew used his bonus payment to repay an existing debt he owed to his parents. Similarly, Meena transferred her bonus payment to her mother's bank account who was then charged with saving this money towards the costs of a holiday which Meena hoped to take on completion of her course.

#### **5.3.1 Use of the bonus payments**

Bonus payments were being used differently to weekly allowances. They were rarely used to contribute to general household expenditure and only occasionally used to contribute towards termly travel costs or other course-related expenditure (see Chart 5.2):

**Chart 5.2 Uses of EMA bonus allowances**

<p><b><i>Savings / major purchases or expenditure</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- saving for/buying a car</li><li>- saving for a holiday</li><li>- saving for the costs of HE</li><li>- saving with no target expenditure</li></ul> <p><b><i>Social expenditure</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- costs associated with 'going out' (inc. transport, food, drink, cigarettes, cinema tickets etc.)</li><li>- additional clothes</li><li>- CDs, computer games, magazines</li></ul> <p><b><i>(rarely) Course associated expenditure</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- transport costs</li><li>- field trips such as visiting museums, theatre trips</li></ul>
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As Chart 5.2 demonstrates, the use of bonus payments was characterised by personal expenses such as social costs, major purchases or personal savings. This pattern was found in all four variants and across the range of household incomes. There was no evidence to suggest that higher levels of payment for the termly bonus in Variant 4, £80 rather than £50 per term, affected the use of that payment.

The use of bonus payments was clearly associated with young people's, and to a lesser extent parents', views about what the purpose of the bonuses were. This will be explored further in the following section.

### ***5.3.2 Views about the receipt and use of the bonus payments***

Overall, attitudes about the use of the bonus payments were far less complex than those relating to the use of the weekly allowance. As already discussed in Section 3, bonus payments were perceived very differently from weekly allowances. Rather than being seen as part of a package of financial support for the family they were more commonly viewed as for the sole personal use of young people. Although some young people were uncertain about what bonuses should be used for, they were widely regarded as rewards and incentives for the young person. As such, bonuses were viewed as income 'earned' by the young person which they should control and spend as they choose:

*“The idea is I suppose treat yourself like you've worked that hard that year, just to help maybe to relax a little bit, enjoy yourself. Just extra money, just put it back in your account and if you need it to buy anything ... you buy it.”*  
(Male participant, Variant 4, Band 2)

As a result of this dominant perception there was very little discord among parents or young people about how bonuses were being used. Exceptionally, in Variant 3 one parent reported dissatisfaction that her son had received a lump sum payment despite the fact that weekly payments to her had been frequently stopped because he had failed to meet the conditions of his learning agreement<sup>10</sup>. Her objection was that it was unfair for him to receive a bonus payment when he had broken his learning agreement meaning she had received no weekly payments.

## **5.4 Interaction between existing sources of money and EMA**

This section explores the practical effect of introducing EMA income into existing family financial systems. Section 6 will continue to explore the wider impacts of participation and non-participation in the EMA scheme.

### ***5.4.1 EMA and part-time wages of young people***

Almost half of the participants involved in the study were working alongside their full-time education. Indeed some had long-term, part-time employment which provided them with regular income on a weekly or monthly basis. Interesting patterns of money management

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<sup>10</sup> It was not clear from either interview with the young person or his mother about how he had met the requirements to receive the bonus payment at the end of term when he had repeatedly failed to register for class on time.

were found where young people were in receipt of both EMA allowances and part-time wages. Young people adopted one of two approaches to handling their dual incomes.

In the first approach, all income, whether derived from EMA or employment, was combined together and treated as a single source of income. For example, Michael from Variant 2 receives £30 per week under the EMA scheme, in addition he receives £150 per month wages from his work at a local grocery store. He is studying for an NVQ in Catering and Hospitality. At present he places all of his income into the same bank account from which he draws money to buy clothes, pay for college-related travel and subsistence expenses, and to pay for any spending related to social activities.

In contrast, other young people had more complex approaches to handling the two incomes. In these cases, young people kept the two incomes separate, either physically through placing the money in different accounts or through budgeting plans whereby some expenditure was earmarked for EMA money or wages. Having separated the two sources of income the young person then selected different targets for expenditure for the two sources of income. For example some would use their wages solely for social or non-essential expenditure and use their EMA payments for course-related expenses. Others were using one source of income for savings and another for expenditure. There was no pattern as to which source was used for which purpose and no evidence that receipt of EMA had altered what use wages had previously been put to. Anna's method to managing her income is typical of those young people who have adopted this second approach.

Anna, from Variant 1, receives £15 per week from the EMA scheme and earns an additional £21 per week from her part-time job. She uses her wages for social activities and expenses and reserves her weekly income from EMA to spend on books and other equipment which she needs for her course. She saves her bonus payments for major purchases of clothes.

There was no evidence to indicate why young people should adopt one or the other approach from the data. However, there was evidence that the interaction between EMA and wages was leading to more consideration about how money should be allocated within the young person's budget. For instance Michael reported that he was planning to set up a second bank account into which he could save his weekly payments in the future.

#### **5.4.2 EMA, Child Benefit and other household income**

The study found that the receipt of EMA income was causing some changes to the use made of Child Benefit within households. In particular, parents reported being able to substitute EMA income for use on expenditure previously funded from Child Benefit income. This then released that portion of the Child Benefit for other uses.

The substitution of EMA income for Child Benefit was most noticeable in cases where parents had previously been transferring some, or all, of the Child Benefit, to their child. The substitution differed depending upon who received the weekly allowance. Where it was paid to the young person then the substitution was made by parents stopping the transfer of all, or some of the financial support they had been providing to the young person from their Child Benefit. Where EMA was paid to the parent then they continued to provide their child with money but *actively* used EMA income rather than Child Benefit.

Not all parents substituted EMA income for existing money transferred to their child or changed the amount of money they were transferring to their child from Child Benefit. In these instances EMA was seen as an additional rather than replacement source of income for the young person. This pattern was found among higher income households and those where parents strongly believed that any income from participation in the EMA scheme should be given to their child. The different financial outcomes resulting from these differing approaches to money management will be fully explored in Section 6.

### **5.5 Using the EMA allowance - allocative systems within the household**

Analysis identified three models of household allocative systems being used by families in receipt of EMA. The systems are distinguished by who:

- receives the weekly EMA payment;
- uses the weekly payment; *and*
- decides how the weekly payment should be used.

Of these three dimensions the first is variant led with parents being paid the weekly allowance in Variant 3 only.

The choice of which system is used is influenced by the prior history of intra-household financial allocation; for example, whether the young person received pocket money or an allowance prior to participating in EMA and whether some, or all, of the Child Benefit was transferred by the parent for the young person's use. Systems were also associated with levels of household income and with the young person's history of financial independence, for example wages from part-time work. The three examples below represent the three models of financial allocation:

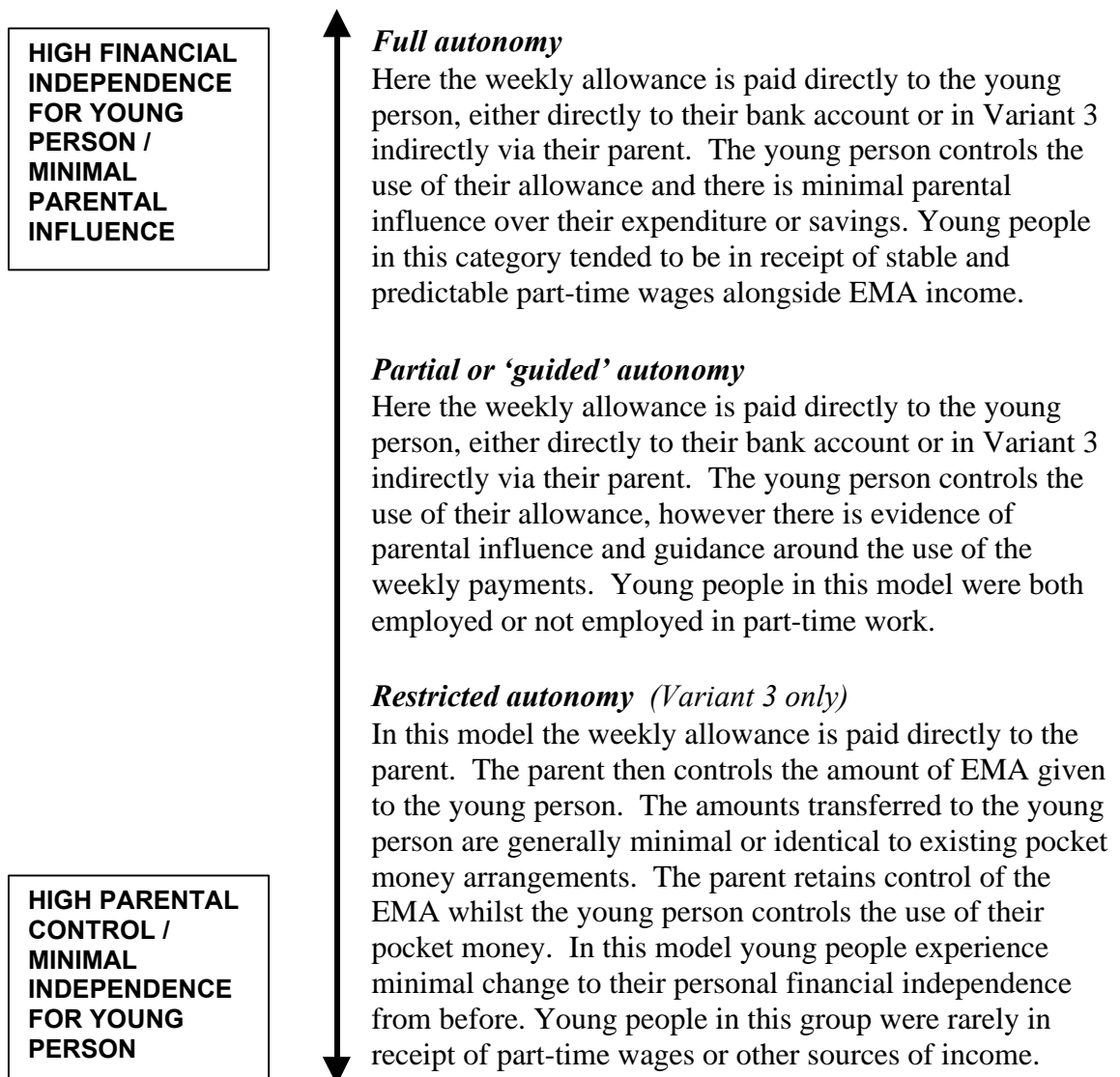
Neil is studying for GNVQs in Information Technology and Business at a sixth form college in Variant 2. He receives £21 per week from the EMA scheme and termly bonuses. He also earns around £30 a week from his part-time job as a retail assistant in a food shop. Neil manages his own income and his parents exert no control over what he spends his money on. This has been the case since he stopped receiving pocket money when he joined the EMA scheme. Although he already exercised some financial independence because of his part-time wages, joining the scheme has meant that Neil now feels financially self-sufficient.

Amelia is studying for a travel and tourism qualification at a college of further education. She receives £30 a week from the EMA scheme and she also has earnings from a Saturday job in a stationery shop. Although her parents are keen for her to control her own finances they retain an element of control over her spending and regularly offer her advice about savings and expenditure. This has always been how the family have dealt with Amelia's finances as her parents believe that it is important that they are able to guide her on the road to financial independence.

Tracy is studying for a nursery nurse qualification at a further education college in Variant 3. Her father receives £30 per week from the EMA scheme. Tracy is given £2.50 a week to enable her to pay for her bus journey to college and to buy some snacks during the day. Her father retains control over the remainder of the EMA payment. Tracey's financial situation has not changed since joining the scheme as she still receives the same pocket money as she did previously.

All three models can be considered as points upon a continuum of control with young people acting autonomously at one end of the scale and being heavily influenced by their parents' wishes at the other. It is notable that part-time wages have a similar effect to direct payments of EMA on young people's financial independence.

**Chart 5.3 The three models: full autonomy, partial autonomy and restricted autonomy**



It is difficult to isolate which factors steer the choice of allocative model as complex interactions exist between the variant model, young people's existing financial independence and household income levels. However, there was more evidence of restricted autonomy

among lower income households in Variant 3 although this was by no means conclusive, as the young person's employment status and patterns of personal spending also interacted with EMA income. Therefore, a young person in part-time work from a lower income household might have greater financial autonomy than a counterpart in another purely because they were not reliant on EMA transfers for their personal spending.

It was apparent that the interaction of EMA income and other pre-existing sources of income, such as wages, was a critical factor in increasing or heightening young people's financial autonomy. However, young people solely in receipt of EMA payments at different levels did report full financial autonomy but only in circumstances where their weekly payment, or a combination of their weekly payment with bonus payments, was in line with their personal expenditure. This, therefore, relieved them from the need to ask their parents for additional money.

## 6 THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION AND NON-PARTICIPATION IN EMA

This section explores how participation and non-participation in the scheme have affected young people and their families. It focuses on three types of broad impact: educational, financial, and personal. Section 7 will then assess the success of the scheme in meeting its key objectives.

In summary the research found EMA has had the following impacts upon participants:

### **Educational (see 6.1)**

- as a consequence of low awareness of the scheme, there was limited evidence of the scheme changing young people's decision-making about post-compulsory education<sup>11</sup>;
- the initiative, however, seems to help alleviate concerns about the costs of post-compulsory education amongst young people and parents. Additionally, some non-participants with unclear routes at 16 described how awareness of the scheme might have persuaded them to choose an educational, rather than work-based pathway;
- the scheme was found to have a considerable impact on young people's attendance patterns;
- there was clear evidence that the scheme was encouraging some students to remain in education; this was particularly true for those with fragile motivation and for some amongst lower income families; *and*
- although these are early findings the research suggests that EMA may be having a beneficial impact on young people's application to their studies.

### **Financial (see 6.2)**

- participation or non-participation in the EMA scheme was found to have financial benefits for both young people and their families;
- key financial impacts included: relieving pressures on household incomes; reducing the need for young people to take on part-time employment; increasing personal financial autonomy; *and*
- financial impacts of the scheme were mediated by: young people's existing personal income and patterns of expenditure; household income and patterns of intra-household financial transfers.

### **Other impacts (see 6.3)**

- positive and negative affects on family relationships;
- encouraging transitions to adulthood; *and*
- encouraging siblings to consider post-compulsory education as a pathway at 16.

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<sup>11</sup> However, see Ashworth et al (2001) for further details of the estimated impact of EMA on participation rates amongst eligible young people.

## **6.1 Educational impacts of participation and non-participation in EMA**

The EMA programme is designed primarily to achieve a number of specific educational objectives amongst 16-19 year olds. This section therefore explores the impact which participation in EMA has had on meeting these objectives, notably:

- the decision and motivation to participate in post-compulsory education;
- punctuality and levels of attendance at classes;
- motivation to achieve good grades; *and*
- retention in post-compulsory education.

It will also examine the impact of non-participation in EMA. For non-participants who had remained in education, the question is whether or not receiving EMA would have made any substantive difference to the way in which they participated in post-compulsory education. For those non-participants who elected to take a work-related route, issues arise as to whether, or how, EMA might have encouraged them to consider education. However, any views expressed must be regarded as hypothetical.

### ***6.1.1 Impact on motivation to participate in post-compulsory education***

#### ***Participants and non-participants continuing in post-compulsory education***

Participants had for the most part taken the decision to remain in post compulsory education before learning about the existence of EMA. The decision was therefore largely influenced by factors other than the possibility of a financial incentive to stay on. As has already been demonstrated, the decision to study arose from the intrinsic interest of the young person in continuing with study or from the perceived long-term advantages to the young person of continuing in education.

However, receiving EMA was seen to have a number of beneficial effects on the motivation to study once participants were already in post-compulsory education. Firstly, receiving EMA was seen as a 'bonus': it made continuing in education seem more attractive and there was some evidence that people felt responsible and consequently more motivated to apply themselves because they were 'earning money' for studying. Secondly, where young people were motivated to study but had anxieties around funding it, receipt of EMA helped to alleviate the anxiety. This in turn helped to raise morale and reaffirm commitment to study. Thirdly, where young people felt that receiving EMA relieved them of the need to take a part-time job, it tended to both increase the time available for, and the commitment to, study. Fourthly, knowledge that EMA was available for two years could extend a young person's educational ambitions: for example, one respondent decided to switch from a vocational course lasting one year to a two year A level course.

Whilst there was little direct evidence in the sample of young people deciding to study as a direct consequence of EMA, there was some mention by young people and parents of other young people having been influenced. Some claimed to know directly of cases – others knew of them through hearsay. In these cases, there was a directly perceived link between EMA offering an incentive to study and a difficult labour market for young people and for unskilled adults.

Unlike some non-participants not in post-compulsory education, those in education reiterated the views of participants that other motivating factors had been more important than funding considerations in their decision to remain in education, for example:

- an enjoyment of studying and a desire to achieve good grades; *and*
- the benefits of education to long-term career and earnings prospects.

### ***Non participants on work-based routes***

Some non-participants had taken the decision to enter employment before they learnt of the existence of EMA. Others had initially entered post-compulsory education but had left to enter employment or work based training by the time they were interviewed. Most of these young people had applied for EMA whilst they remained in education and the factors accounting for why they chose to leave and enter employment are discussed in section 6.1.4.

Non-participants who were currently not in post-compulsory education varied in their views as to whether EMA would have affected their motivation to study. Young people who had been undecided, and who now found themselves either out of work or in a job which they did not particularly like, considered that, had they known about EMA earlier, it could have influenced their decision to remain in education. It was said that receiving money for studying would have made them feel they were being paid to study and would have helped overcome any resistance to continuing in a classroom environment. The amount of money obtainable under EMA could also play a role: thus one respondent in Variant 2 considered that £40 was sufficient to sway the decision. There was some evidence that people in this category were considering applying for EMA to do a course the following year.

The prospect of EMA seemed to make no impact on other non-participants who would ideally have liked to have stayed on in education but decided against this, following health problems or bullying.

Young people who had opted for a Modern Apprenticeship or work-based training considered that they also had made the right choice. Part of their motivation for choosing this option was that they were not comfortable with a study environment. Their chosen route meant they were able to gain work experience, training and a qualification whilst also earning money. Studying under EMA was therefore not regarded as a desirable alternative.

There was little evidence of EMA having had any impact on those young people who had disliked school and studying. Their chief motivation at age 16 had been to leave school, whether or not they had had a job to go to. One young person said that ideally she would have liked to study (and would have applied for EMA) but was unable to overcome her dislike of the classroom situation. Where they had obtained a job, this group of non-participants generally felt more comfortable being in an employment situation.

### ***6.1.2 Impact on attendance***

There was considerable evidence of the impact of EMA on participants' attendance levels at school or college. However, the degree of impact appeared to have a strong link with the degree of young people's self-motivation to turn up to classes or tutorials. This was reported in three ways:



- **Strong personal motivation to attend** - These young people did not feel the need for any external form of motivation to attend classes/tutorials. They were keen to do well, had a previous pattern of good attendance at school and never missed a class without a genuine reason. The impact of EMA was more to reinforce, rather than alter, their pattern of attendance.
- **Fairly strong motivation** - There was considerable evidence that young people, however motivated, were vulnerable to the temptation to skip the odd class. The prospect of losing a week's EMA or the attendance bonus was generally enough of a deterrent to ensure that temptation was resisted amongst these young people.
- **Fragile motivation** - This group of young people could easily let their attendance levels fall and felt that they needed some form of external motivation to ensure this did not happen. While EMA itself had a strong impact on this group, there also appeared to be evidence of a link between the level of EMA allowance or flat-rate bonus being received and the strength of desire not to lose it. A young person in Band 1 in Variant 2 who was receiving £40 in allowance said:

*“It motivates me to go every single day without fail. I am scared of the hassle of an appeal or of having to reapply if I lost it. If I was only getting £15, my motivation would be less but I would still be concerned about attending because of the hassle of getting back on EMA.” (Male participant, Variant 2, Band 1)*

It was possible to infer that the impact of EMA on attendance was achieved through what can best be described as a judicious combination of ‘stick and carrot’. Receiving money for studying acted as a financial ‘carrot’ and also raised young people’s morale and sense of financial independence. At the same time, this financial carrot was dependent on stringent requirements relating to attendance. The penalty of losing a week’s money, or possibly foregoing an attendance bonus, for missing even a single class was therefore as likely to act as a ‘stick’ to those who might be tempted to skip the odd class as to those who would be more likely to be regular non-attenders. This impact, however, was mediated where young people were not aware that they could be penalised by losing a whole week's money simply by skipping one lesson or registration. The degree to which the young person relied upon their weekly allowance for personal spending or saving clearly also mediated the impact of the ‘threat’ of financial loss on attendance. In this way, the effect was diminished for some young people particularly those receiving minimal weekly payments or who were already in receipt of an existing stable source of income, such as part-time wages.

Likewise, in Variant 3, the fact that the parent rather than the young person would be more directly affected mediated the impact of the scheme. Some young people were concerned that if their parents lost the EMA allowance, they would reduce the amount they gave to the young person. There was also a risk of conflict between the young person and parents if this happened. These factors were often a sufficient deterrent for ensuring regular attendance. However, the deterrent effect was diminished where young people did not feel that any strong parental action would be likely or that their allowance might be reduced.

Among the young people who had directly experienced losing their EMA for non-attendance, few had missed more than a short period of time because of the penalties imposed. Losing the allowance had been a shock for those who received payments directly.

In Variant 3, the impact had depended more on how the parents had reacted. However, the general view amongst participants in all variants was that the shock of having payment suspended had ensured much higher levels of attendance subsequently.

### **6.1.3 Impact on achievement**

It is too early at this stage in the evaluation for there to be any data on the impact of EMA on outcomes: for example, whether young people completed their course and the grades they obtained. However, there was sufficient data to be able to assess the impact of EMA on the performance of young people participating in post compulsory education.

There were two principal ways in which EMA had an impact on performance:

- ensuring that coursework was completed and handed in on time; *and*,
- affecting the way the young person applied themselves to their studies.

Despite some exceptions where young people were sufficiently self-motivated not to need an external motivator, young people generally felt that participation had improved the way in which they conducted their studies. The impact on raising levels of performance was potentially greatest where there had been a tendency for the young person to underperform in the past. One young person who admitted to being very lax and underperforming badly at school had radically improved his attendance levels and was now applying himself to his studies. This in turn had elicited good feedback which had further increased his motivation to such an extent that he was actively considering going on to university in order to have a better career in the future.

Again, it is possible to infer that the impact of EMA on performance was due to a combination of stick and carrot. The carrot of receiving an allowance or bonus helped to stimulate: a greater commitment to work; the ability to cope with periods when faced with a lot of work to do; work being handed in on time. At the same time the learning agreement contained two ‘sticks’ also aimed at improving performance levels. Penalties attached to non-attendance had led to higher levels of attendance. Higher levels of attendance afforded the young person the chance to work harder and to see how they could do better and obtain better qualifications. Penalties for late delivery of assignments had made young people much more diligent about ensuring their assignments were handed in on time. This external motivator was generally welcomed by young people and was seen as an extra push for getting things done on time.

### **6.1.4 Impact on retention in post compulsory education**

One of the aims of the evaluation was to explore the impact of EMA on participant retention in post compulsory education. The evidence suggests that EMA has had a definite impact on participants whose motivation to remain in education is fragile and amongst some participants from households in lower income brackets. The impact is generally more limited amongst participants, from all income bands, who have definite goals for pursuing their post compulsory education and are receiving emotional and financial support from parents to achieve this. The impact of EMA on retention may also be more limited where young people are less reliant on EMA as a central source of personal income.

There are different ways in which EMA has an impact on retention. For those on lower incomes, there is the purely financial aspect of receiving EMA. Young people in these circumstances referred to the fact that without EMA, the financial struggle might be so great that they would have to leave education.

The risk of losing EMA concentrated the minds of young people with fragile motivation to stay on in education. Some young people mentioned that they had felt fed up with the course and had been tempted to either take a job to earn money or to look for a job that would provide them with some form of training. What had prevented them from doing so was the fact that they were receiving EMA and were not sure whether they would be able to apply for it again if they subsequently changed their mind. There was thus an incentive to remain with the status quo. The risk of losing EMA, allowance and/or bonuses, was also a factor in deciding whether to continue with the full range of courses. One young person, who was contemplating dropping one of her A levels, decided against doing so because she was unsure how her EMA might be affected.

However, it was clear that the level of EMA was not sufficiently high compared to earnings from full-time employment to keep someone on where they really did not wish to stay on in education. This was borne out by those young people who had left post-compulsory education to go into employment. Some non-participants who had been unclear about which route to take had initially gone into post compulsory education. Once there, they had claimed EMA but they had subsequently left to go into work. One of the factors that had caused this group to be undecided initially was a lack of real commitment to study. For them, neither the amount received under the allowance nor the prospect of receiving an attendance bonus outweighed their dislike of the study experience. In addition, they preferred being in a work environment and the wage they earned was more than they received under EMA. A few young people also said that other factors had outweighed the loss of EMA. One participant receiving the maximum allowance was contemplating leaving education because of frustration with the quality of the tuition and the course content.

Another way in which EMA had helped with retention was by making the prospect of education more attractive so that young people had decided either to change their course of study or to stay on and do an extra year which they had not previously contemplated. This effect was especially marked amongst those in income bands 1 and 2 where their continuing education, which they could otherwise not afford, would be subsidised by EMA.

The ability of EMA to have an impact on retention was diminished where a significant proportion of the young person's income derived from earnings through a part-time job. In these cases other factors, such as their own motivation, were more likely to help with retention. However, where the additional money from EMA was central as a way of reducing dependence on parents for personal spending and therefore, increasing a young person's independence then it remained valuable in securing retention. EMA was also less likely to influence retention where the young person had definite goals to achieve through education, especially where the young person was being emotionally and financially supported by parents. These goals were sufficient motivation in themselves, whether they were to achieve good grades in order to go on to higher education or to enable the young person to enter their chosen career on completion. Receipt of EMA was an added incentive to stay in education but not sufficient on its own to secure retention. However, what EMA did do for this group, especially for those in lower income bands, was to improve the quality of their participation. It meant that they were able to buy the books they needed and relieved

some of the anxiety and pressure around funding, including the necessity to find a part-time job. In this way it was able to remove any potential financial obstacles to sustainability.

## **6.2 Financial impacts**

The different financial implications of participation and non-participation related to young people's personal finances, family finances and patterns of part-time employment.

### **6.2.1 EMA and young people's personal finances**

Whilst the impact on individual participants differed, evidence clearly demonstrates that young people experienced financial benefits from receiving an increase in their income. Additionally, some young people indicated that this increase in income had also strengthened their financial independence.

As the amounts of extra income participants receive vary due to the tapered scale of weekly payments so does the extent to which young people believe that EMA income has positively affected their finances. All who had received bonus payments had experienced some positive financial impact on their lives. The impact of weekly payments was more variable and contingent upon whether or not the young person had other sources of income, what level the payment was at, and who the payment was made to. For those with other sources of greater income, such as earnings, then the impact of the weekly payment was lessened. Similarly, where the weekly payment was at the lower end of the scale and was not central to the young person's personal spending patterns then it had less impact on young people than for those who were receiving the full amount. In Variant 3, the impact was lessened for some young people because their parents retained control over the weekly allowance.

Nevertheless, even in cases where the actual amount received from the scheme was low, for example £6 a week, young people reported positive affects on their financial situation. Having increased personal income has enabled young people to participate in more college or school events, social activities, and to be able to purchase items, such as holidays, or driving lessons which they would not have been able to afford previously.

In some instances the financial impact of the scheme has yet to take effect because the young person, or their parent, has saved the money rather than made immediate use of it. For these participants there were clear future financial benefits to participation whether they were saving for university, a holiday or a car.

Non-participants, both eligible and non-eligible, were also asked about their financial situation and whether, on reflection, they felt they had experienced any adverse or positive outcomes resulting from choosing not to apply for EMA or from being ineligible for the scheme.

For young people that were in employment or on waged training schemes, the financial impact of non-participation was far less important than having a job which they enjoyed and which paid them a wage. On the whole they were satisfied with their income and believed that it was greater than if they had chosen to remain in post-compulsory education and taken part in the scheme. However, some of these young people were earning low wages and recognised that they had less personal income now than they would have had if they had remained in education and received the full EMA entitlement. The principal reason for this

was that they had begun to contribute to board and lodgings when their parents had ceased to receive Child Benefit because they were working.

The experiences of non-participants who were in part or full-time education painted a different picture of the implications of not receiving EMA. Their experiences were of two distinct types. Firstly, some had found attending school or college difficult financially, in particular they reported struggling with travel and subsistence costs. These students found themselves heavily reliant on their parents and exhibited less financial autonomy than those in the scheme or those in work. This was especially difficult for young people in lower income households. Some felt guilty that they needed to ask their parents for money, whilst others found it difficult to have to miss out on social activities that friends who were receiving EMA could attend. In addition, among those planning to go onto university, there was disappointment that an opportunity had been lost to save any money from the scheme towards the future costs of higher education.

In contrast, young people who had limited social lives, who were working alongside studying or whose parents were able to provide them with a regular income experienced fewer financial difficulties. For these young people non-participation had not greatly affected their personal financial situation and they reported coping without the allowance and bonus payments. In exceptional circumstances young people had been able to turn their non-participation in the scheme to their own financial advantage. For example, Brian, who is studying full-time in Variant 1, placed some pressure on his parents to increase his pocket money since he was not receiving EMA. Eventually his parents agreed to give him £50 per month which was a substantial increase on what he had been receiving from them before. Other parents of non-participants also reported feeling pressured into increasing the allowances or pocket money they gave to their children as a result of not being part of the scheme.

Increased financial independence was widely reported as a key impact of participation in the scheme. Indeed, arguably, this impact might have more of a lasting effect on young people's lives than the immediate increase in personal income reported by many. The introduction of a personal income paid directly to the young person has had a crucial impact on some young people's lives. In some cases, it was their first experience of receiving a direct income, which was greater than any existing pocket money or allowance scheme. In these instances, the scheme was found to encourage individuals to mature financially and assume financial responsibility for themselves. As financial independence is perceived as a key stage in the transition to adulthood for some, the impact of the EMA scheme had been immense. Both young people and parents perceived this as a centrally important outcome of participation. It is interesting to note that the qualities, such as the development of money management skills, being more independent and taking responsibility for oneself, which were judged beneficial by participants were echoed by the experiences of those who were working among the non-participants. The evidence suggests that the scheme is having a similar impact to employment for some young people and is fostering the same range of financial skills and personal development that employment can offer.

Young people who were in employment generally felt that their attitudes had changed and that they were now more adult for a number of reasons associated with their entry into the world of work:

- they were in a work environment which was very different from being at school;

- they were earning their living;
- they had their own bank account and could make their own decisions about how to spend their wages; *and/or*
- in some cases, their role within the family had become more that of an adult in that they were also able to make a contribution to the household budget.

Participants described similar feelings where EMA was paid directly into their bank account. It gave them a measure of financial independence; there was a feeling that receiving money for studying was similar to earning a wage: it was like breaking into the world of work. Participants also referred to the fact that learning to control their own money, even where they initially made mistakes, contributed to increased maturity. Parents of participants generally agreed that it was important for young people to learn about the value of things and what could and could not be afforded by having the freedom to manage their money. For instance, Justin described how participation had made him feel more financially independent and how he compared the scheme to having a job:

*“If you are getting paid then school does not seem like a chore anymore. It is your decision and it’s like a job, to do something for free is not quite as good as getting paid for it... You are getting rewarded at the end of it...”*  
(Male participant, Variant 4, Band 2)

Where parents in Variant 3 transferred the EMA in full to the young person, the impact was generally similar. There was evidence that where the parents retained control of EMA in Variant 3, the impact on the transition to adulthood was diminished.

In spite of this strong evidence, the extent to which participation had increased young people’s personal financial independence was dependant upon a number of different factors, and not all young people remarked upon feeling more independent. Three factors were found to influence the impact of the scheme upon young people’s financial independence. Firstly, the EMA variant being used and the pattern of intra-household transfers of money. There was far less evidence of increased financial independence in Variant 3 where weekly payments are made to the parents though, to a certain extent, this was offset where parents were making a regular payment to their child of more than their previous pocket money or allowance. However, there can be no doubt that direct payment of the weekly allowance is fundamental to fostering financial independence. Secondly, where young people had existing sources of personal income, whether from wages or other external sources, then the impact was reduced as they were already financially independent to varying degrees. Finally, where the weekly allowance was of a minimal nature, below £10, then it had a lesser impact on financial autonomy. The extent to which the impact was diminished was again dependent upon how central even that minimal amount was to the young person’s personal spending.

### **6.2.2 EMA, household budgets and family finances**

EMA has had a mixed impact on household finances. In some families it was described as a ‘*godsend*’ and had become an integral, and important, part of the family budget. Yet for others the financial impact had been marginal. In spite of the sometimes limited impact, all parents welcomed the contribution which EMA income made to the family budget.

The impact on family finances was dependent on existing household income. Not surprisingly families in higher income brackets reported more marginal impacts than those families with lower incomes. Unless their child was working and already supporting themselves in part then the financial impact was felt more keenly by parents with incomes below £13,000. Additionally, the EMA variant was found to affect the impact the scheme had on household income. In Variant 3, there was stronger evidence of EMA payments having a direct impact on general family finances than elsewhere, primarily because the money is paid to the parent not the young person and so can be absorbed into the household budget with relative ease. Nevertheless, if an EMA payment direct to the young person allowed parents to reduce the amount of money they had to give to their child then there was usually a secondary affect upon general household finances.

There were different types of financial impact on family finances resulting from participation in EMA. Some parents reported that EMA money had become an integral component of their budget which meant that they no longer had to worry about money or to *'scrimp and save'* to support their child through post-compulsory education. In particular, the additional income had relieved the burden on them for travel and subsistence for the young person (reported as being between £6 and £25 per week), pocket money/allowance payments, and money for social activities, or special educational trips and visits. Other more wide reaching impacts were concerned with the way EMA had helped the entire family because it meant that income previously spent on the young person's expenses could become *'free'* for other expenditure. For those in the lowest income households participation was described as keeping the families' above the *'breadline'* whilst for others the additional income was helping with purchases which could not previously be considered. For example, some families were being able to consider holidays which they could never have afforded and one parent described her happiness at finally being able to *'indulge'* all her children.

These views were also reflected in the accounts of non-participating parents and young people and those who were participating in the scheme but had experienced late or delayed payments. Non-participating families, both eligible and ineligible for the scheme, whose child was not earning, and whose household income was low, described the most adverse affects from non-participation. These parents reported struggling to meet the costs of their child's education and felt that EMA income would have provided a significant financial support to them, even if only relieving them of some of the financial pressures relating to travel and subsistence costs.

For example, one single mother in Variant 2 described how she had increased the hours she worked each week to support her daughter through college. Despite the fact that the family rarely received income from the absent father, the young person had been refused EMA support because her ex-partner's income was used when calculating eligibility.

In other households with higher incomes the impact of non-participation was described as marginal, especially as parents retained their Child Benefit payments and were using these for college-related costs where possible.

Interestingly, some parents whose children had chosen to enter the workforce were experiencing financial hardship since they had lost their Child Benefit payments. This was particularly true for families where the young person was earning a minimum wage or participating in subsidised work based training. In these cases, the loss of Child Benefit was felt keenly because the young person was not earning enough to make a significant contribution to the household finances. One parent spoke about having to *'pick up the*

*financial pieces*’ after losing their Child Benefit when their daughter left a college course where she would have been eligible for EMA and chose instead to join a work-based training scheme.

Finally, to underline the importance of EMA payments to some households it is worth considering those families who have experienced problems with payments. One mother from Variant 3, described how the promise of EMA income had been critical to her household budgeting. However, because her son was failing to meet his learning agreement commitments the money had rarely been received.

*“I’m living on benefits and I’m not getting the EMA coming through because he doesn’t book in on time and so he misses [his weekly payment]... so far I’ve only had three weeks money since he started last September.... When I heard about it, I thought it was going to be a God-send, ... the EMA was really going to make a difference, £30 is an awful lot of money. ... You think ‘I’m going to have this extra £30 a week during term time’... and then you don’t and you get in debt because you’re spending it and then suddenly it stops... which left me really poorly off .... [It’s] eeked away at my meagre savings.” (Parent of participant, Variant 3, Band 1)*

### **6.2.3 EMA and patterns of part-time employment**

One of the chief goals of the EMA initiative was to relieve the pressure on young people to take up part-time employment alongside full-time education. Almost half of the young people participating in EMA in the sample were also employed on a part-time basis alongside their study. Patterns of work among this group were analysed, as were the views of non-participants and participants who were not working about the role of EMA in decision-making about part-time employment. Whilst some worked in Saturday jobs, others had more substantial work commitments spread across the week and some were working up to 25 hours per week. In addition, some young people chose to work only during their vacations from school or college.

For those already in part-time work when they joined the scheme there was limited evidence that participation had had a profound impact on their existing patterns of part-time employment. Indeed among these people the dominant pattern was to continue in employment. The reduction of hours or cessation of employment was found where young people had Saturday jobs and also where they had greater working commitments. The evidence was much stronger in relation to young people who were not working, and among non-participants in education. Here findings suggest that the financial incentives of the scheme do, or could, act to relieve financial pressures and prevent young people taking up part-time employment.

The reasons why young people choose to take up part-time employment are not always solely financial and therefore, for some young people, the financial incentives of the EMA scheme were not sufficient on their own to encourage them to either reduce their working hours or give up their part-time work. Few of those who were employed when they joined the scheme altered their patterns of work after joining.

The chief reason for this lack of impact was that young people greatly valued their working experiences. Beyond financial considerations, part-time employment was valued as a way



of gaining work experience, as a social activity and as a step towards developing personal independence. Therefore, few felt that the financial incentives of the scheme could compensate the loss of their working experiences and generally saw EMA payments as additional, rather than alternate, income.

Among the young people there were some who were earning relatively substantial monthly wages, of between £150 and £200 per month. These young people did not believe that EMA payments could meet, let alone exceed, their present earnings. Nevertheless, some admitted that higher levels of EMA allowances might encourage them to give up their part-time employment but this would only occur when EMA payments exceeded their personal earnings.

In contrast there were those for whom receipt of EMA had affected the pattern of their part-time work. Some had stopped working completely and others had reduced their hours of employment each week or had chosen not to consider extra hours when offered. This was directly attributed to receiving EMA, although in some instances a clear dislike for the job was also a contributory factor.

For example, Sheila the parent of a participant in receipt of the maximum weekly allowance, described how participating in the EMA scheme had played a role in her son Craig's decision not to look for another job after he lost his paper round in January. She felt that taking part in the scheme had relieved some pressure on her son to find another job and allowed him to make his studies his central priority.

There was, however, clear evidence the scheme could, or indeed was, affecting decision-making about part-time employment, particularly among those who were not currently working. Participants who were not currently working explained how joining the EMA scheme had meant they could choose not to work. This was particularly important to those who had previously worked and found it difficult to study alongside work. Equally, those with active social lives or with many outside activities, such as music, drama or sport, were relieved that they would not have to consider taking on work which might crowd out activities that they were committed to in their spare time.

These views were also reflected in the accounts of non-participants who were studying and working but not in receipt of EMA. These young people argued that they could have stopped working or reduced their part-time hours if they had been participating in the scheme and that this might have improved the quality of their study. Others felt that participation in EMA would have allowed them to search for a job which they wanted to do rather than simply seeking out the highest paid job they could do.

For example, Kelvin is a non-participant studying for A levels in Variant 2, in Band 3, was highly motivated to get a job because he did not think it was fair to rely on his Mum who has to support his sister as well. He also thinks it is important for young people to find a job for their own independence. However, at the moment he has to look for a part-time job on the basis of the wages being offered. If he received some EMA income he felt he would be able to change his tactics and look for work which he enjoyed and which would provide work experience more appropriate to his future aspirations.

This evidence shows the complexity of the interaction between EMA and patterns of part-time work. Quantitative measurement would be required to identify any widespread, long-

term trends in young people's decision-making about part-time work. In spite of this it is possible to identify two important findings from this research. Firstly, some young people want to work whilst studying and actively seek work because of the benefits they believe work experience gives them. In these instances it is doubtful that the current level of financial incentives offered through the EMA scheme would persuade them to alter their working status. However, for others the scheme could be pivotal in either relieving the financial imperative to find part-time employment or in maintaining part-time employment at manageable levels. EMA appeared most likely to have an impact on the part-time employment patterns of young people where they were:

- working solely for financial reasons (rather than seeking personal development or social interaction for example);
- having to take on extra hours in order to meet increased personal expenditure resulting from participation in post-compulsory education; *or*
- considering finding part-time employment to meet increased personal expenditure resulting from participation in post-compulsory education.

### **6.3 Personal impacts of participation in EMA**

This section examines the impact that participating, or not participating, in EMA has on young people themselves. In particular it illustrates how the financial and educational impacts already outlined can themselves play a part in young people's transition to adulthood. The section also explores the ways in which participation in EMA can impact on other members of the family and on family relationships.

#### **6.3.1 *Transitions to adulthood***

In addition to the increased maturity deriving from a measure of financial independence already discussed in Section 6.2.1, participants were also assisted to become more responsible in their attitude through the requirements imposed by the learning agreement. The prospect, or indeed the reality, of losing money obliged young people to:

- understand the consequences of their actions: for example, failure to complete coursework on time;
- to think through decisions rather than acting on a whim: for example, whether to attend a class or not; *and*
- to think more long-term/strategically: what the implications would be of giving up post compulsory education midway through the course to go into work.

Obviously these impacts were negligible for those young people who had not been aware of the financial penalties and, to a certain degree, were also lessened in families in Variant 3 where parents retained control and usage of the full weekly allowance. Here young people did not perceive a direct personal impact of non-attendance or failure to meet requirements of the learning agreement.

There was some feeling amongst non-participants who had remained in post compulsory education that they would have benefited from EMA. One young man, whose parents were struggling financially but who was already highly motivated to pursue his studies, said that his motivation to work and do well would have been further increased had he been receiving

money from the government to do so. In addition, his confidence would have increased were he able to be financially independent.

### ***6.3.2 Impact on family members and on family relationships***

Implicit in the evidence cited by participants was a range of different impacts that the scheme could have on family relationships.

#### ***Impact on the relationship between young people and parents***

A recurrent theme amongst parents of participants was the fact that participation in EMA had eased the relationship with the young person by relieving the anxiety of both parties over funding. This was true both where the payment was made direct to the young person and where it was made to the parent. However, there were features of participation in EMA which could create problems for the child-parent relationship:

- during the application process: for example where a young person was unable to claim EMA due to parental refusal to divulge earnings;
- as a result of the learning agreement: the requirements of the learning agreement and the fact that parents had signed up to it meant that any lapses on the part of the participant could cause tension. This tension tended to be more evident in Variant 3 where the parent received the EMA payment. There were references to being nagged by parents to get assignments done on time and worries that parents would be angry if they committed any misdemeanor;
- in circumstances where delays in payment of EMA had been experienced young people had sometimes felt guilty about asking their parents to tide them over until their money came through; *or*
- where a young person dropped out of post compulsory education. In these circumstances, if the young person found work immediately, there was unlikely to be any financial pressure on the parent but where they did not, parents could be displeased at having to increase their financial contribution.

#### ***Impact on relationships between parents***

There was some evidence to show that receipt of EMA was able to improve the relationship between parents where there were severe financial difficulties within the household. Sometimes the fact that EMA was available could either win a reluctant parent round to the partner's view in support of post-compulsory education, or it could achieve the opposite effect and exacerbate tensions over whether the young person should go into post-compulsory education or find employment. The relationship between separated parents could also be affected particularly where the absent parent was not willing to provide financial details or where there was a difference of view about the value of post-compulsory education.

#### ***Impact on siblings***

There were some examples of EMA provoking different reactions from siblings. An older sibling felt resentment against her brother who was claiming EMA because she had been

obliged to give up her studies due to financial pressure. The example of the young person receiving EMA had differing impacts on the motivation of two younger siblings. In one case, the younger sibling had been fired with enthusiasm to stay on in education now that it was possible to receive money for doing so. Another had remained unmoved because he did not like school and was determined to start earning straight away.

## 7 REFLECTIONS ON THE EMA SCHEME

This final section reflects on the perceived success of the EMA initiative. In particular, it focuses on participants' and non-participants' views about the objectives of the scheme, their accounts of its success in meeting objectives, and their views about future improvements or developments needed. In addition, the role of variants in affecting the success of the scheme in the different pilot areas is considered.

In summary:

- there were two main reservations about the scheme: it was felt that eligibility criteria should be expanded to take account of the overall financial situation of the household as well as the family income. There was also a concern about the desirability of giving financial incentives to young people to stay on in further education if they then found they could not afford to go on to higher education (*see 7.1*);
- it was suggested that attention should be given to streamlining the application process in terms of simplifying application forms, making the evidence requirements more straightforward and ensuring that help was more widely available to applicants; (*7.4*);
- there was widespread support for ensuring that the scheme was widely promoted to potential applicants and at a much earlier stage during Year 11 (*7.4*);
- parents and young people interviewed during the course of the study were broadly in agreement with the aim of the scheme to encourage young people to continue in post-compulsory education. In addition, there was substantial evidence that the structure of the EMA initiative, combining a financial incentive with a clearly enforced learning agreement, has a clear impact on the way in which young people participate in post-compulsory education (*7.5*); *in conclusion*
- the research identified a complex blend of factors which mediate, increase or negate the impact of the initiative. Principal amongst these is the young person's existing financial situation, chiefly their existing personal income and patterns of personal expenditure. This accounts for key variations in how the scheme affects young people whether financially, educationally or personally (*see 7.5*).

### 7.1 Reflections on scheme objectives

Parents and young people interviewed during the course of the study broadly welcomed the scheme. They felt that the main goal of the initiative, to encourage young people to continue in post-compulsory education, was commendable, with the proviso that remaining in post-compulsory education was a suitable or appropriate route for the young person. While this view was shared by both participants and non-participants, inevitably there were different levels of awareness about the scheme.

Exceptionally, there was disquiet about the scheme. In these instances both parents and young people were concerned about introducing financial incentives to encourage young

people to study. Fears that young people would be ‘bribed’ into remaining in education when it was not an appropriate route were one cause for concern. In other instances people questioned the need for the scheme. They either believed that it was wrong to pay young people to do something which they would have done anyway and which would benefit them in later life, through higher wages, or that there was no need for additional financial support when families already received Child Benefit.

Two concerns about the objectives of the scheme were expressed in all four pilot areas. The first related to eligibility for the scheme. It was understood that the primary target for EMA was those young people from low-income families who might otherwise feel obliged to enter employment rather than post compulsory education. However, there was a feeling that eligibility based exclusively on family income was too restrictive and did not take account of the overall financial situation of the household. For example, households with a higher parental income could have less money to support a young person in further education where they were also having to support a child or children in higher education.

Concern about the introduction of a funding system for post-compulsory education when university education was no longer comprehensively funded was the second issue raised. Some parents and young people were concerned about EMA encouraging students to remain in education at 16 only to find that they can not afford to then go onto higher education. There was a fear that the scheme was raising young people’s expectations about the potential for higher education without providing an ongoing form of funding.

Although there was understanding of the broad goal of the scheme there was much less clarity about the role of the money provided through the EMA initiative. Those interviewed formed three distinct groups when it came to their views about the purpose of the financial assistance provided by the initiative. Parents’ and young peoples’ impressions of the role of EMA money had a direct impact on how that money was used and who controlled usage. This, in turn, accounted for differing outcomes.

Those in the first group saw EMA financial assistance as an aid for low-income families which was intended to bolster family income during the period the young person remained in post-compulsory education. The second group perceived the purpose of EMA finance differently; instead of supporting families the money was viewed as an incentive and motivator for young people which could encourage them to achieve educational goals and sustain attendance and achievement throughout their course. A final group saw EMA finance as directly targeted at the educational costs, as opposed to broader financial costs to the family, of supporting a child in post-compulsory education.

Among those who perceived the money as primarily aimed at bolstering family finances there was evidence that the scheme had fewer impacts on the young person directly. This was particularly marked in Variant 3 where payments are made to the parent. In particular young people reported receiving fewer personal financial benefits, experienced less growth of financial freedom and, in some instances, recorded less commitment to their post-compulsory education. However, these instances were rare and reflected an existing ambivalence about remaining in education. Nevertheless, among this group there was strong evidence of direct financial benefits for the household as a whole. In contrast, within the second group young people experienced multiple benefits from participating in the scheme including increased motivation towards study, financial benefits and increased personal independence. Within the final group the impact upon the young person was dependent upon how much control they personally had over how EMA income was spent. Although in these

cases the money was less likely to be used for personal spending, young people still experienced benefits from being able to manage the income and make financial decisions.

## **7.2 Effectiveness of the EMA scheme in meeting objectives**

The initiative aimed to improve the participation and retention of young people in post-compulsory education and to encourage achievement and completion of courses. Evidence presented throughout the report demonstrates that, for some young people, the scheme is having a direct impact on their application and enthusiasm towards their course.

### **7.2.1 Encouraging participation**

It was hoped that the scheme would encourage greater numbers of young people to remain in education. Whilst this qualitative study can not provide statistical evidence of trends in participation rates, it did reveal insights into the effect the scheme was having on young people's decision-making about post-compulsory education.

The research revealed that decision-making about post-compulsory education at 16 is a complex process influenced by a range of factors. Key amongst these were young people's individual aspirations and career goals. Although finance was a consideration in some families, it tended to be secondary if post-compulsory education was seen as a desirable and appropriate route for the young person to take. It was rare for young people or parents to argue that the decision not to remain in education had been driven by a fear of the potential costs, although both participating and non-participating parents were aware of the financial implications if their child stayed on.

Among those interviewed, there was limited evidence that knowledge of the EMA scheme had greatly affected decision-making<sup>12</sup>. However, this was partly attributable to the timing of information about the scheme in the pilot areas. Young people reported hearing about the scheme after they had made their decisions about whether to remain or not in post-compulsory education. Yet there was evidence from some non-participants who reported that they may have chosen to go into post-compulsory education had they known about the scheme earlier. It is very possible that the impact of the EMA scheme on decision-making will increase as the scheme matures and people become more aware of its existence. There was certainly evidence that some of the younger siblings of participants were being influenced by their brother or sister's experiences on the scheme.

### **7.2.2 Enhancing attendance and achievement**

The scheme was found to have a clear impact on some young people's attendance at school or college. Although it had a limited effect for those who were already strongly motivated to attend, others who had a more fragile motivation found participation in the scheme was a clear deterrent to missing classes or tutorials. Additionally, being paid to attend college was also found by some to be highly motivating.

However, the amount of EMA being paid weekly and who it was paid to affected the extent to which the scheme enhanced or maintained regular attendance. There was evidence that

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<sup>12</sup> Despite this, the quantitative evaluation of the first year of EMA indicated that in comparison to the control areas, there has been a gain in participation in the pilot areas of eligible young people in full-time education. Overall, this is estimated to be by around 5 percentage points (Ashworth et al., 2001).

some of those receiving minimal weekly payments and those in Variant 3 whose parents received the weekly allowance experienced less of the deterrent effect.

It is too early in the life of the scheme to comprehensively assess its impact upon achievement. However, interviews with young people and their parents revealed that increased levels of participation were affecting some young people's application to their studies. Regular attendance was key to improving achievement in some cases, whilst in others, participation had raised personal motivation towards studying.

As with participation, the impact of the scheme on attendance and achievement is mediated by other factors. Most important of these were the personal motivation of the individual student and the extent to which the weekly allowance and bonus payments were financially important to them. For example, those for whom the weekly payment was central to their personal budget were far more concerned about retaining their payment through regular attendance. The bonus payment component of the scheme will possibly increase in importance as students progress through their courses, however, this will require testing at a later stage of the evaluation.

### ***7.2.3 Encouraging retention***

The EMA initiative not only sought to increase participation levels but also to maintain young people's attendance through to completion of their courses. The study has identified that the scheme is affecting some young people's commitment to completing their courses and in some cases, is a key factor in diverting young people from leaving post-compulsory education courses early.

Most affected were those participants for whom EMA formed a significant part of their personal income and those whose personal motivation to remain in education was fragile. Equally, young people whose families had lower incomes reported how financial support through the scheme was enabling them to maintain their college or school courses by relieving the financial pressures on the household.

The impact of the EMA scheme on retention was lessened in some cases. Two key factors were found to limit the effect of the scheme. Firstly, personal motivation to complete courses. Where young people had an extremely strong motivation to complete their course, or indeed where circumstances meant the young person was extremely unhappy in education, then the impact of EMA was lessened. Secondly, the financial incentives of completion were less important for young people with stable, regular part-time earnings or for whom the EMA income did not form a central source of personal income.

The scheme's impact on retention will be explored again during the second stage of the qualitative research which will return to a sample of young people for a second time and which will include some interviews with early leavers. Both components are expected to shed further light on factors underpinning the role of EMA in encouraging retention.

## **7.3 The impact of variants on the operation and effectiveness of the scheme**

The purpose of piloting the EMA scheme in specified locations across the country was to test the impact of different variants of a standard design. The standard design was characterised by three core features: the signing of a learning agreement; the payment of a



weekly allowance; and the payment of financial bonuses for attendance and achievement. Variants were introduced which sought to identify the extent and nature of differing impacts resulting from variations in the following elements: the payment mechanism for weekly allowances; the amount of maximum weekly allowances; and the amount of termly or completion bonus payments. This section reviews the evidence from this component of the evaluation examining the influence of variant models within the context of other important factors.

Variants 1, 2 and 4 share a common feature: direct payment to young people, although the amounts of weekly and bonus payments differ in each area. In Variant 2 young people are paid £40, compared to £30 in the other two areas, whilst in Variant 4 there were higher bonus payments. Despite these differences, the analysis revealed similarity in the range and nature of outcomes from participation in the scheme across these three areas.

In summary, as shown in Section 6, participation in the scheme in these areas was found to lead to the following outcomes:

- increased commitment to attendance at school or college;
- sustained application to courses;
- financial benefits for families and young people; *and*,
- increased financial independence for young people.

Although the variant employed in Variant 4 involves significantly higher levels of bonus payments there was little evidence to suggest this was affecting attendance or motivation. However, it is possible that this is due to the timing of the research as no one had received a completion bonus and most had only received one termly bonus. Similarly, few differences were found to indicate that the difference of £10 in weekly payments between Variants 1, 4 and 2 was affecting outcomes. Yet, there was evidence across all four areas that young people receiving lower weekly allowances because of means-testing were experiencing fewer impacts than those receiving full allowances, although this was dependent upon the extent of their existing personal income and personal spending patterns.

The extent to which young people and their families experienced educational, personal and financial outcomes was found to be tempered by the following contextual factors:

- existing levels of personal commitment to post-compulsory education;
- household income; *and*,
- young people's existing personal income.

Whilst the broad range of outcomes in Variants 1, 2 and 4 were reflected in analysis of Variant 3 participants there were some clear differences. In Variants 1, 2 and 4 young people experienced greater financial benefits and tended to have greater control over the use of the weekly allowance. However, parents in these areas expressed greater concerns about young people being paid to remain in education, although these fears generally abated once they were able to see their children using the money in what they perceived to be appropriate ways.

In contrast, evidence from the Variant 3 area revealed differences which indicate that the variant was altering experiences of participation. In this variant weekly allowances were

paid to parents rather than young people and this difference was found to have a direct impact on the nature of financial and personal outcomes from the scheme.

The research found that Variant 3 affected the way in which households were using and controlling EMA income from weekly allowances. In Variant 3 there was greater evidence of parents retaining control over weekly allowances which resulted in patterns markedly different to those found in other variant models. Firstly, there was evidence that weekly allowances were more likely to be subsumed into the household budget than in other variants. In lower income households this led to greater direct impacts on family finances with parents reporting increased family spending power. Secondly, families in Variant 3 displayed greater levels of intra-household transfers of weekly allowances between parents and young people. This is directly attributable to the method of payment. Also resulting from the payment method was a noticeable difference in the extent to which participation affected young people's personal independence. In some cases there was also evidence that the payment method had led to increased tensions about the control and use of the weekly allowance between parents and young people. Young people in Variant 3 tended to experience fewer personal gains from participation in the scheme, unless their parents were making direct transfers of the entire weekly allowance to them. Similarly, increases in young people's financial independence were less noticeable in Variant 3 than in other areas.

However, there was no evidence to suggest that the variant employed in Variant 3 was altering the nature or range of educational, as opposed to financial, outcomes. Some young people reported trying harder at school or college because they knew, for example, that their parents would be aware if they had unreported absences. In contrast other young people reported feeling less committed to their course than they would have been if the money had been paid directly to them.

#### **7.4 Key improvements or developments needed**

Participants and non-participants made a number of suggestions about the scheme, some of which were reported earlier in the report. This section reviews the key improvements or changes which were suggested by young people and parents.

Suggestions of ways to improve awareness and knowledge about the scheme were proposed by parents and young people. In summary, *earlier and more widespread promotion of the scheme was suggested*. Participants and non-participants suggested differing times when information about the scheme should be introduced to young people at school. Year 11 was commonly seen as a critical time for post-16 decision-making and dissemination of information early during this school year was a popular recommendation. Opinions differed about providing information before Year 11. Some felt this would be advantageous because it would provide young people with an extra incentive to consider remaining in education when making their choices of GCSE subjects and starting to consider their career plans. Equally, it was thought that it might motivate young people to work harder towards their GCSE exams in the hope of remaining in education. However, others were concerned that earlier discussion of the scheme might exert undue pressure on young people who perhaps were not suited for remaining in education. This reflects a more commonly voiced fear about the potential of EMA to encourage students not suited to further education to stay on in education.

The application process was a cause for considerable concern in all four areas included in the study. Suggestions for changes to this process arise from points made in Section 4. ***In summary, people suggested that the application process should be streamlined, forms made less complicated and that help should be more widely available for applicants.*** Since this research was conducted a single EMA application form has been devised for use in all pilot areas.

The structure of the EMA scheme provoked much discussion amongst young people and their parents. Three main elements of the scheme were considered: eligibility, tapered weekly payments, and the link between attendance and payment.

Who is eligible for the scheme was a key area of concern for some of those interviewed. Two separate issues were raised in relation to eligibility. Firstly, there was widespread concern that the scheme was only open to some students, namely those whose parents earn less than £30,000 per annum. Whilst recognising that financial support was important for low-income families, parents and young people felt that the scheme could be viewed as unfair by those students who do not qualify. ***There was considerable support for a change to the scheme which would mean that all students in post-compulsory education would receive some form of payment.*** Some advocated the extension of bonus payments to all students, whilst others suggested that all students should also receive a minimal weekly payment. These suggestions were underpinned by the belief that the scheme was about motivation and encouragement and that on that basis it was unfair to reward only some students for their application and achievements.

The second concern about eligibility related to the way in which assessments of household income were made. Some families felt it was unfair that the assessment was based solely on annual income and did not take into account the wider financial context within the household. Of particular concern was the fact that parents did not believe that factors such as the number of children they were supporting through further or higher education were taken into account when assessing eligibility. ***A more comprehensive form of assessment which would take into account financial circumstances was widely suggested.***

Views were mixed about the tapered nature of the weekly allowance. Attitudes towards means-testing were associated with differing beliefs about the intention of the scheme. Where people saw the scheme as primarily aimed at supporting low-income families then there was general support for means-testing and tapered payments. In contrast where people viewed the scheme as a motivator for young people then tapered payments were seen as unfair. Here it was strongly suggested that young people should be rewarded at the same level as each other. Other suggestions included that payments should also be linked to transport needs, as some young people live further away from school or college and therefore require additional support to cover transport costs.

The payment process was also believed to need some alterations. Principal among concerns was that the length of time between application and payment should be reduced and that ***young people should start receiving their payments as soon as courses begin***, rather than having to wait for months in some cases. There was also discussion about who the weekly allowance should be paid to. Although there were some exceptions, ***people broadly argued that payments should be made to young people rather than their parents.*** This was felt to be fair, seeing as it was the young person who was attending school or college. Equally, a number of benefits were associated with paying weekly allowances to the young person including raised motivation and increased financial responsibility.

There was considerable concern about how the scheme appeared to place a premium on the link between attendance and payment. ***Strong suggestions were made that payments should not simply be contingent on regular attendance but should, in some way, be linked more visibly to achievement.*** Concern was felt that some young people might be able to earn their EMA income simply by turning up regularly even if they were not applying themselves to their course. Various suggestions were made to change this including linking bonus payments to termly improvement in grades or results. However, it was also recognised that this would be very difficult to achieve. Some young people felt that the attendance criteria were too harsh and should be relaxed to take account of emergencies and also, in some instances, to provide some leeway for young people who worked alongside their study. Again it was argued that if payments were linked to achievement rather than attendance then it would be a better system.

Finally, as mentioned above, there was concern about the lack of funding for higher education. Some people felt that the government might consider some way of extending the scheme to enable young people to continue to be funded if they wish to move on to higher education.

## **7.5 Concluding thoughts**

There can be no doubt that the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme has had a great impact on some participating families. However, the EMA scheme operates within a complex mixture of personal, financial and familial factors. As a result, often it is difficult to easily identify which outcomes can be directly attributed to the scheme. Equally, whilst elements of the scheme have a direct impact on some young people for others the impact is marginal.

The research has identified a complex blend of factors which mediate, increase or negate the impact of the initiative. Principal amongst these is the young person's existing financial situation, chiefly their existing personal income and patterns of personal expenditure. This accounts for key variations in how the scheme affects young people whether financially, educationally or personally. It is difficult to make blanket conclusions about the impact of the scheme for this reason. For some young people the addition of £15 weekly allowance to their overall budget is marginal compared to, for example, their £180 monthly wage, whilst for others, without additional sources of income, an extra £5 a week can be highly effectual. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the evidence from this research indicates that the financial element of the new initiative can, and does, have clear effects on the way in which young people consider and undertake their participation in post-compulsory education.

## REFERENCES

Ashworth, K., Hardman, J., Liu, W-C, Maguire, S., Middleton, S., Dearden, L., Emmerson, C., Frayne, C., Goodman, A., Ichimura, H. and Meghir, C. (2001) *Education Maintenance Allowance: The First Year; A Quantitative Evaluation*, DfEE.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX I**

***DESIGN AND CONDUCT OF THE STUDY***

***Research Design***

***Sample Design and selection***

***Screening and recruitment***

***Conduct of the interviews***

***Analysis***

## APPENDIX I

This appendix provides detailed information about the research methodology used during this study and elaborates on **Sections 1.3 and 1.4 of the report**.

### Research Design

The research design involved depth interviews which enabled the research team to fully explore each individual's experiences of the Education Maintenance Allowance. This not only explored their experiences of and views about the initiative but also provided rich contextual information relating to the individuals' personal circumstances, educational and employment histories. Depth interviews were conducted with participants and non-participants of the scheme and with the parents of participants and non-participants.

The fieldwork was carried out in four pilot areas which were selected to represent the different variants being tested under the scheme. They were also selected for their diversity in relation to:

- their geographical location;
- the nature of the area: whether urban or rural; *and*,
- labour market characteristics.

### Sample design and selection

The following table identifies the distribution of the sample by area:

**Table A1 Profile of the sample by EMA status and area variant**

Area	Non-participants	Participants	Total
<b>Sample of young people</b>			
Variant 1	11	12	23
Variant 3	12	20	32
Variant 4	10	12	22
Variant 2	13	11	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Sample of parents</b>			
Variant 1	4	5	9
Variant 3	7	14	21
Variant 4	4	6	10
Variant 2	5	5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50</b>



## **Screening and Recruitment**

Letters were sent to the parents of young people who had taken part in the survey of the *Destinations of 16-19 year olds* in 1999 and who had given their consent to be re-contacted for the qualitative study. The letter explained the purpose of the qualitative study and the nature of the research objectives. Enclosed with the letter to parents was a letter outlining the study to the young person. Parents were asked to pass this letter on to their child. The letters were worded in such a way that young people or their parents could choose to opt out of the research at this stage. Copies of these letters are provided in Appendix II.

Screening and recruitment for the interviews was carried out by specially trained *National Centre* recruiters in each of the study areas. The initial contact, either by telephone or in person, was made to the parent to obtain permission to talk to the young person. Recruiters then carried out a short screening interview with the young person to establish whether the respondent met the quotas, which had been set by the research team, and to obtain some further background information for example, about the current EMA status of young people. The screening questionnaire used is shown in Appendix II. The parents of a proportion of the young people that were invited to participate in the study were also invited to give an interview as part of the research.

Where a young person, and in some cases their parent, was selected they were left a letter indicating the time and location of the interview, giving reassurance about the confidential nature of the research and providing a contact telephone number for the research team. Where parents or young people were not selected, they were also left a letter thanking them for their time and help with the research.

### **Conduct of the interviews**

The interviews with young people and their parents were carried out by members of the research team who have extensive experience of conducting in-depth interviews. The interviews themselves, which were exploratory and interactive in form, were based on a topic guide, full versions of which are provided in Appendix II. These guides identified the key areas to be covered but allowed researchers to be flexible and responsive in their questioning. All interviews were tape recorded for subsequent transcription.

Interviews were conducted, where possible, at an individual's home and lasted between 1 and 1½ hours. All those taking part were given a gift of £15 in recognition of the time and effort involved. Fieldwork was conducted between March and May 2000. The timing of fieldwork was scheduled to ensure that any initial difficulties in the implementation of the scheme had been overcome and that scheme participants had been in receipt of EMA long enough to provide informed reflection.

In cases where non-participants knew little or nothing about the scheme, the interviewer provided an oral summary of the scheme and gave the respondent an official leaflet describing the scheme for that pilot area. This then enabled these respondents to express informed views about the scheme and its applicability to their personal situation.

## **Analysis**

Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were analysed using 'Framework' an analytic tool devised by the Qualitative Research Unit at the *National Centre*.

First, the key topics and issues, which emerge from the data, are identified through familiarisation with transcripts. Following this a framework of key issues is then devised. A series of thematic charts are set up using a spreadsheet package. The file consists of a series of workbooks each relating to a different thematic issue, and data from each respondent is summarised and transposed under each key topic. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or to extract text for verbatim quotation.

The experiences and attitudes of all respondents can then be explored within a common analytical framework which is grounded in, and driven by, respondents' own accounts. This helps to highlight in a systematic way the full range of issues and views articulated. The method of analysis is highly flexible and allows the researcher to make interpretative notes alongside verbatim material. The layout of the framework charts enables easy access to individual case histories and also facilitates between and within case comparisons.

A total of seven thematic charts were devised for analysing the transcripts. The full range prepared was as follows (shown in order of use):

- CHART 1. PERSONAL AND FAMILY BACKGROUND**
- CHART 2. DECISION-MAKING AT 16**
- CHART 3. AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF EMA & FACTORS INFLUENCING WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN EMA**
- CHART 4. EXPERIENCE OF RECEIVING & USING EMA (Participants only)**
- CHART 5. EXPERIENCE OF EMA: PRACTICAL ISSUES (Participants only)**
- CHART 6. IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION / NON-PARTICIPATION IN EMA**
- CHART 7. VIEWS AND REFLECTIONS ON EMA SCHEME**

**APPENDIX II**

**FIELDWORK DOCUMENTS**

**Letters of approach  
Screening questionnaire  
Topic Guides**

April 2000

Dear -----

***Destinations for 16-19 year olds: qualitative study***

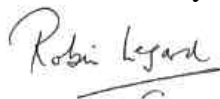
You may recall that you and your son/daughter took part recently in a survey about how young people decide what to do once they leave school at 16. The survey was carried out by *the National Centre for Social Research*, an independent research institute, on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). At the end of the interview you agreed that we could contact you about taking part in a follow-up study. This will be taking place shortly.

The follow-up study will be inviting a number of young people who were interviewed on the survey to discuss in greater depth their whole experience of deciding what to do after they left school and what factors guided their decision. We would therefore be grateful if you would pass on the enclosed letter, explaining the purpose of the study, to your son/daughter. Unfortunately it will not be possible to interview all the young people we are writing to now. However, someone from the *National Centre* may be in touch in the near future with your son/daughter about taking part in the study.

We will also be talking to a small number of the parents of the young people we interview in order to explore their role in helping young people decide whether to continue in education, go into employment or do something else. It is therefore possible that you may also be asked if you would be prepared to be interviewed. As with the previous study, all the information obtained will be treated in the strictest confidence.

We very much hope you will be willing to help us with this important research. If you have any further queries, please ring either Kandy Woodfield or myself on 0171 250 1866 or you can write to us at the above address.

Yours sincerely



Robin Legard

Dear -----

April 2000

**Destinations for 16-19 year olds: qualitative study**

You may recall taking part recently in an interview for a survey about the decisions young people face on leaving school. The survey was carried out by *the National Centre for Social Research*, an independent research institute, on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). At that time, you may remember giving your consent for the *National Centre* to contact you again about taking part in a follow-up study.

The follow-up study, which will be taking place during March and April, will be inviting a number of young people who were interviewed on the survey to talk in greater detail about the experience of deciding what to do after they left school and what influenced their decision. As with the previous study, all the information obtained will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Unfortunately it will not be possible to interview everyone who took part in the survey. If you have been selected, someone from the *National Centre* will be in touch over the next few weeks. Everyone taking part in the follow-up study will be given £15 for their time and help.

Should you be invited by one of our recruiters to take part in the study, we very much hope that you will agree to do so. In the meantime, if you or your parents have any queries, please ring us on 0171 250 1866 or write to Kandy Woodfield or myself.

Yours sincerely,



Robin Legard



**DESTINATIONS OF 16-19 YEAR OLDS**

P5921

Feb. – April 2000

**RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

ENTER SERIAL NO

Date \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER NAME \_\_\_\_\_

AREA \_\_\_\_\_

**PRE-SCREEN – INTERVIEWER CODE FROM SAMPLE SHEET**

**CIRCLE**

1. **INTERVIEWER CODE GENDER OF YOUNG PERSON** Male 1  
(FROM SAMPLE SHEET) Female 2
  
2. **INTERVIEWER CODE ETHNICITY**  
(FROM SAMPLE SHEET) **CODE ONE ONLY**
  - White British 1
  - White Irish 2
  - White Other 3
  - Mixed – White Black Caribbean 4
  - Mixed – White Black African 5
  - Mixed – White Asian 6
  - Mixed – Other 7
  - Black / Black British - Caribbean 8
  - Black / Black British - African 9
  - Black / Black British - Other 10
  - Asian - Indian 11
  - Asian - Pakistani 12
  - Asian - Bangladeshi 13
  - Asian – Other 14
  - Chinese 15
  - Other 16
  
3. **INTERVIEWER CODE CARING RESPONSIBILITIES** Yes 1  
(FROM SAMPLE SHEET) No 2

## Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is ..... from *the National Centre for Social Research*. According to my records you recently took part in a survey for us discussing the choices you made when you left school and you kindly agreed to take part in a follow-up study. We are now conducting that follow-up study in your area and would be grateful if you would spare a short amount of your time for an interview, with a view to taking part in this follow-up study. Everything that you tell me will remain confidential.

4. May I check - who else lives here permanently with you at this address?

**CODE ALL THAT APPLY** Respondent lives

...alone	1
...with spouse or partner	2
...with own children under 16	3
...with other children under 16	4
...with parent(s)/guardian	5
...with other related adult(s)	6
...with other unrelated adult(s)	7

5. What was your age last birthday?

**ENTER AGE IN YEARS**

6.

a. **Current activity** - Can I just check what you are doing at the moment? Are you..

...in education or training, and doing some paid work alongside	1	<b>Go to Q.6b</b>
...in education or training, but doing no paid work alongside	2	<b>Go to Q. 6e</b>
...in a full time job, undertaking no formal education (DESCRIBE TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT) _____ _____	3	
...in a part time job, undertaking no formal education (DESCRIBE TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT) _____ _____	4	
..neither working or studying but receiving a benefit, for example Income Support  (DESCRIBE WHICH BENEFIT(S)) _____	5	<b>Go to Q.8</b>

- \_\_\_\_\_
- ..neither working or studying, receiving no benefits 6
- ...or are you doing something else? (PLEASE SAY WHAT) 7
- \_\_\_\_\_

b. How many hours a week do you attend your school/college or training centre?

(WRITE IN) \_\_\_\_\_

Less than 15 hours	1
15 hours or more	2

c. How many hours a week do you work (WRITE IN) \_\_\_\_\_

d. What is your job? (DESCRIBE TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT)

\_\_\_\_\_

e. How many hours a week do you attend your school/college or training centre?

(WRITE IN) \_\_\_\_\_

Less than 15 hours	1
15 hours or more	2

**Go to Q. 7**

7. **Education/training activity** - Can I ask you about the education or training you are doing?

a. What are you studying at the moment?

*Interviewer note: this refers to the subject of study i.e. history/horticulture/information technology*

**PROBE FULLY (WRITE IN)**

\_\_\_\_\_

b. What is the title and level of the qualification you are working towards

Interviewer note: examples – HND, A’level, O’level, GCSE, NVQ Level 1

**PROBE FULLY (WRITE IN)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. Is the place where you are currently studying/ training....

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ... a sixth form attached to a secondary school    | 1 |
| ... a sixth form college                           | 2 |
| ... a college of further education                 | 3 |
| ... a training centre                              | 4 |
| ... a specialist college for example: drama school | 5 |
| ...other (PLEASE SAY WHAT)                         | 6 |

**GO TO Q.8**



8. a. **Financial support** - Can I ask you which of the following types of financial support you are **currently** receiving towards your course costs, living expenses and other needs?

**(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)**  
Educational Maintenance Allowance

	<b>Go to Q.8b</b>
	1
LEA maintenance grant	2
LEA travel allowance	3
Student support grant from school or college	4
Access funds	5
Government or employer sponsored bursary or allowance, for example a Modern Apprenticeship	6 <b>Go to Q.9</b>
Financial help from parent(s)/guardian	7
Financial help from other relatives	8
Income Support	9
Housing Benefit	10
Other benefit (PLEASE WRITE IN)	11
_____	12
Other (PLEASE WRITE IN)	
_____	

- b. Can I check what the current amount of EMA is that you receive for your *weekly allowance*?  
**INTERVIEWER WRITE IN, THEN CODE AS PER INSTRUCTIONS IN BRIEFING NOTE**

£ \_\_\_\_\_ per week

£30/£40 in Variant 2, per week  
£16-£29/£39 per week  
£5-£15 per week

1
2
3 <b>Go to Q.9</b>

### SUMMARY FOR QUOTA SELECTION

### INTERVIEWER CODE AND THEN CHECK QUOTA SHEET

- |  |                             |                      |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 9. Participation in EMA  | Participant (Code 1 at Q.8) | 1 <b>Go to Q. 10</b> |
|  | Non-participant             | 2 <b>Go to Q. 11</b> |
| 10. Current activity – Participants                                  |                             |                      |
| F-t educ/training, some paid work (Code 1 at Q. 6a/Code 2 at Q. 6b)  |                             | 1                    |
| F-t educ/training, no work (Code 2 at Q.6a/Code 2 at Q.6e)           |                             | 2                    |
| Pt-t educ/training, some paid work (Code 1 at Q. 6a/Code 1 at Q. 6b) |                             | 3 <b>Go to Q.12</b>  |
| Pt-t educ/training, no work (Code 2 at Q.6a/Code 1 at Q.6e)          |                             | 4                    |
| 11. Current activity – Non participants                              |                             |                      |
| F-t educ/training, some paid work (Code 1 at Q. 6a/Code 2 at Q. 6b)  |                             | 1                    |
| F-t educ/training, no work (Code 2 at Q.6a/Code 2 at Q.6e)           |                             | 2                    |

	Pt-t educ/training, some paid work (Code 1 at Q. 6a/Code 1 at Q. 6b)	3
	Pt-t educ/training, no work (Code 2 at Q.6a/Code 1 at Q.6e)	4 <b>Go to Q.13</b>
	in full time employment, no education (Code 3 at Q. 6)	5
	in part-time employment, no education (Code 4 at Q.6)	6
	unemployed/inactive (Code 5, 6 & 7 at Q.6)	7
12.	Current level of EMA	
	(Code 1 at Q. 8b.)	1
	(Code 2 at Q. 8b.)	2
	(Code 3 at Q. 8b)	3 <b>Go to Q.14</b>
13.	Non-participants: Household income band (From sample sheet)	
	Band 1	1
	Band 2	2
	Band 3	3
14.	Type of educational establishment	
	sixth form	1
	FE college	2
	training centre	3
	other	4
15.	Gender	
	Male (Code 1 at Q. 1)	1
	Female (Code 2 at Q. 1)	2
16.	Living with...	
	...parents (Code 5 at Q. 4)	1
	...elsewhere	2
17.	<b>OUTCOME OF SCREENING INTERVIEW WITH YOUNG PERSON</b>	
	Not in quota	1 <b>*END</b>
	Refusal (ENTER REASON)_____	2
	Recruited for interview	3 <b>Go to Q.18</b>
18.	<b>INTERVIEWER CHECK WHETHER PARENTAL QUOTAS ARE FULL, if not ....</b>	
	... Now that you have agreed to take part in the research could I possibly speak to your parent/s to see if they would also be willing to take part in an interview? <b>EITHER SPEAK TO PARENT OR ARRANGE TIME TO RING/CALL BACK /CONTACT PARENT</b>	
	Parent agreed (Fill in name and contact details) _____	1 <b>Go to Q.19</b>

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent refused (Fill in reason) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2 \*END

19. **FILL IN INTERVIEW DETAILS**

Interview with young person

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

TIME \_\_\_\_\_

PLACE \_\_\_\_\_

Interview with parent (where appropriate)

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

TIME \_\_\_\_\_

PLACE \_\_\_\_\_

\*END

**LEAVE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT / THANKS WITH RESPONDENT  
TRANSFER DETAILS TO APPOINTMENT SHEET**