Implementation of the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots: The First Year

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DfEE

**Department for
Education and Employment**

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Background

The piloting of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 15 local education authority (LEA) areas began in September 1999. Under the initiative, financial support, in the form of a weekly allowance, may be available to 16 to 19 year olds from low-income households who undertake appropriate full-time courses at school or college. The full allowance is payable if the total parental taxable income does not exceed £13,000, while for those with a total parental income of between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 for the London pilot), a progressively tapered EMA, down to a minimum weekly allowance of £5 is payable. The pilots are being administered by LEAs and are seeking to test the extent to which a financial incentive improves post-16 participation, retention and achievement rates in education. The scheme has subsequently been extended to a further 41 pilot areas.

Four variants of EMA are being tested in the 15 original areas. In three of the four variants the weekly allowance is paid directly to the young person during term time, with additional bonuses payable for retention and achievement. In the fourth variant the allowance is paid to the parent. Payment can be made for a maximum of two years, with some young people with special educational needs being entitled for a longer period.

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

A key element of the introduction of EMA in most pilot areas has been the setting up of implementation groups, comprising those charged with responsibility for administering EMAs, together with invited representatives of Careers Services, schools, colleges and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). The methodology for this strand of the evaluation involved the collection of data from:

- roundtable discussions with members of the implementation groups;

- face-to-face interviews with key individuals drawn from LEAs, Careers Services, TECs and colleges; and

- minutes of implementation group meetings; copies of publicity and administrative material produced.

Given the innovative nature of the EMA pilot, and the fact that it was announced at a time of other pressures on LEAs, it would have been unlikely that EMAs would be introduced without 'teething troubles'. Overall, however, in administrative terms, the introduction of EMA could be regarded as having been remarkably successful. This is demonstrated by the extent to which administrative mechanisms and procedures were put in place, despite the problems and difficulties encountered by individual areas. The close contact maintained during this year between the implementation groups and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) EMA policy team has also meant that a number of difficulties relating to implementation have already been addressed by officials – for example, the team have been involved in the development of revised guidelines.

Findings

Implementation

Differences were found between the pilot areas in the way in which EMA was implemented. Membership of the implementation groups varied by area. In addition to officers from the Student Awards or Student Support section, which was responsible for day-to-day administration, the groups would also commonly include representatives of other LEA departments, notably the Payments section, as well as local colleges and the Careers Service. In addition to variations in the membership of the implementation groups, there was also great variability in the roles and responsibilities of individuals. The following typology has been developed, based on the data gathered:

- *Basic Administration* - characterised by minimal involvement of any organisation other than the Student Support or Student Awards Section of the LEA, which has responsibility for administering EMA;

- *Informative* - involving regular meetings between LEA officials and representatives of colleges, schools, Careers Services and other relevant organisations; and,

- *Partnership* - where responsibility for decisions concerning the implementation of EMA is undertaken jointly by those organisations represented on the implementation group.

At this early stage in the life of EMA it was difficult to identify evidence pointing to one particular model working better than others.

Other findings suggest that the:

- involvement of senior LEA officers in the establishment of EMA could be of great importance in eliciting the co-operation and commitment of other parties, notably colleges and schools;
- role of the Careers Service varied according to the extent to which a partnership was operating. Where there was real sharing of responsibilities and decision-making, the Careers Service was very much to the fore; and,
- initial stages of implementation may require a group which provides the driving force to get the scheme up and running.

Administrative Mechanisms

Despite the fact that the timing of the announcements about the introduction of EMA gave LEAs very little time to put appropriate administrative mechanisms in place, the implementation had been effective. Among the issues emanating from the administration were the:

- additional costs incurred by LEAs and by schools and colleges;
- occasional misinterpretation of publicity material and information; this would be revised in the light of this experience;
- difficulties that were encountered in trying to contact young people who were no longer at school;
- wide variety of mechanisms employed to process applications; this highlighted the need for a more uniform system to be adopted;
- problems experienced in the processing of applications, especially in relation to parental income, bank account details and supporting documentation; this pointed to a need for a simplified application form;

- delays in dealing with a backlog of applications, and consequent delays in payments; this could be alleviated by a computerised system tailored to the needs of the EMA initiative; and,

- although the necessity of introducing systems for the monitoring of students' attendance had caused problems for some schools/colleges, EMA appeared to have had a positive effect on attendance levels.

Initial Impact of EMA

Overall, it was found that the LEAs and implementation groups broadly welcomed EMA as an initiative which was seeking to address some of the problems facing the pilot areas and, as such, would sit alongside other measures being introduced, such as Education Action Zones, the enhancement of Access and Student Support funds, the Widening Access agenda and the proposed Connexions strategy, currently targeted at enhancing educational attainment.

The aims of EMA were perceived to be to:
- enable those young people who might have left full-time education because of financial constraints, to continue in education;

- offset any disadvantage felt by those from low income households with the potential for staying on, so that all young people had access to the same/a similar range of choices;

- reach particularly deprived young people, such as those estranged from their parents; and,

- allow students to concentrate on their studies and not have to take part-time work to support themselves.

Overall, the response to EMAs was positive; this was because the scheme was seen to be tackling the issue of the financial constraints on families which may act as a barrier to education for some young people, and the fact that the level of funding was expected to have a significant impact.

A number of reservations were, however, expressed. These included concerns over the:
- mechanics of implementing EMA;

- possibility that young people for whom the work-based training route into the labour market might be a more suitable option could be dissuaded from leaving the education system;

- effect on students' ability or desire to continue with their education once their EMA entitlement had expired; and,

- fairness of the termly bonus because of its reliance on discretionary judgements about *'application, effort and achievement'*, as well as the more objective measure of attendance.

A number of other issues also emerged from what was regarded by some respondents as an 'experimental' first year of EMA. These included the:

- requirement to monitor attendance, which has caused difficulties in some areas because of the wide variety of methods adopted. This points to the need for a uniform system to be applied;

- freeing up of Access Funds and other sources of discretionary funding for allocation to students who were not eligible for EMA;

- low level of take-up by those young people whose total parental income was towards the higher end of the taper. This was to be addressed by better information and publicity; and,

- beneficial impact of EMA on attendance.

Problematic Issues Identified

Although it should be stressed that the initial implementation of EMA was highly successful, despite considerable time, resource and logistical constraints, the following problematic issues emerged from the fieldwork discussions:

- LEAs having to interpret some DfEE guidelines and make decisions about policies, systems and practices as they went along;

- the monitoring of attendance;

- the need to obtain details of parental income;

- the stipulation that the income of the 'natural' parent had to be assessed;

- resentment from those in boundary or neighbouring areas who were deemed ineligible;

- additional workloads and costs to LEAs and, to a lesser extent, to schools and colleges;

- lack of take-up by those from higher income levels who would still qualify for small EMA amounts at the top end of the taper and, as a result, for bonuses;

- people experiencing difficulty in completing the application form, resulting in large numbers being sent back for additional details, and delays in the processing;

- some young people having difficulties in obtaining bank accounts;

- setting up appropriate IT systems to cope with the administrative requirements;

- resentment and frustration from those (and their parents) who did not meet the eligibility criteria; and,

- late payments.

Since the fieldwork was undertaken, however, the regularity of contact between the DfEE EMA team and those responsible for the scheme's implementation has resulted in a number of revisions being made, notably the:

- distribution of a Good Practice Guide, drawn up by practitioners;

- development of revised DfEE guidelines;

- changes to the regulations relating to other sources of funding;

- production of a single application form;

- assistance in developing computer systems from a secondee from an LEA working in DfEE; and,

- ongoing work between LEAs and DfEE to improve current procedures.

These improvements continue to be made and will clearly be a central focus of subsequent fieldwork. Indeed, as part of the development and improvement process many of the problems identified are being addressed by the DfEE, working with LEA colleagues.

Future Considerations

The experience of the first year has alerted the evaluation team to some aspects of the piloting process which warrant specific attention through the remainder of the evaluation, notably the:

- role of the implementation groups;

- extent to which senior LEA officers participate in, or lead, the implementation groups;

- changes which have been made to the administrative processes.

- levels of retention, and the impact of bonuses; and,

- greater awareness of EMAs among employers and training providers, the potential role of the Local Learning and Skills Councils, and the fact that schools and colleges will have had a full year's experience on which to base their views of EMAs.

Implementation of the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots:
The First Year

1. Introduction

The piloting of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), in 15 local education authority (LEA) areas, began in September 1999. Under the initiative, financial support, in the form of a weekly allowance, may be available to 16 to 19 year olds from low-income households who undertake appropriate full-time courses at school or college.

The pilots are being administered by LEAs and are seeking to test the extent to which a financial incentive improves post-16 participation, retention and achievement rates in full-time education. The scheme has subsequently been extended to a further 41 areas.

The full allowance (of £30 or £40) is payable if the total parental gross taxable income does not exceed £13,000, while for those with a total parental income of between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 for the London pilot), a progressively tapered EMA, down to a minimum weekly allowance of £5 is payable.

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

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

This report focuses on the implementation and administration of the EMA pilot in the first year of its operation. The processes and administrative mechanisms through which EMA was

introduced were examined, with particular emphasis on the perceptions of those responsible for the scheme's administration. In addition, valuable information about the perceived relevance and impact of EMA, and how it was being received in each locality, was collected.

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

Implementation groups, comprising those charged with responsibility for administering EMA, together with, in most cases, representatives of Careers Services, schools, colleges, and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were set up in most pilot areas. During the first year of the pilot, close contact was maintained between the implementation groups in the pilot areas and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) EMA policy team. This occurred through the EMA team regularly visiting the areas, attending meetings (such as those organised by the Local Government Association), and providing detailed and hands-on assistance and support. Therefore a number of the difficulties related to implementation which are recorded here have already been addressed by officials – for example, the team have been involved in the development of revised guidelines and the production of a single application form.

It should, however, be acknowledged that the implementation of any new scheme is unlikely to be without 'teething troubles'. This is particularly relevant to the EMA, given its announcement midway through the academic year, at a time of other pressures on LEAs. It is therefore inevitable that this report will highlight aspects of the scheme which did not appear to work well. Overall, however, in many respects, the introduction of EMA could be regarded as having been remarkably successful. This is demonstrated in the extent to which appropriate administrative systems and procedures were put in place, despite the problems and difficulties that individual areas experienced.

The report

The next section of this report describes the methodology employed. This is followed by a section that considers the different models of implementation adopted, with particular emphasis on the membership, remit and responsibilities of the implementation groups, and the respective roles of representatives of 'stakeholder' organisations. Section 4 then looks at the administrative mechanisms which have been put in place, and is followed by an examination of the difficulties and problems encountered. Section 5 focuses on the impact of, and response to, EMA, during its inception phase. Section 6 describes the problematic issues identified during the first year of the pilot. Section 7 highlights those issues which will be of particular interest for the next round of the evaluation with administrators and 'stakeholders'.

2. Methodology

It was originally planned that data gathering would be concentrated in the September to December 1999 period, effectively at the time that EMA was introduced. However, at an introductory conference, attended by representatives of the pilot areas' implementation groups, it became apparent to the evaluation team that the respective areas were adopting differing approaches and were at varying stages of preparedness. Therefore, it was agreed that initial contact would be made earlier, so that the thinking behind these different approaches could be explored. Accordingly, ten of the original pilot areas were visited during May to July 1999, so that discussions could be held with the implementation groups. The exceptions to this were Leeds and the four London boroughs where it was decided that, until a decision was forthcoming concerning how EMA was to be implemented, it would not be appropriate to undertake visits.

More intensive data-gathering took place in the ten areas between October and December 1999, when, in addition to roundtable discussions involving the members of the implementation groups, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken with key individuals drawn from the LEAs, Careers Services, TECs and colleges. There was some variation between areas in the numbers of individuals interviewed and the organisations they represented, depending on the make-up of the implementation groups in each area. In all cases, a common checklist of issues to be covered was used to structure the discussions, although this was only regarded as a guide, and was not always rigidly adhered to.

The one-to-one interviews enabled issues to arise which were pertinent to the interests of a particular organisation and were therefore a valuable supplement to the group discussions. Input from representatives from schools and colleges was confined to the group discussions with implementation groups.

In Leeds, the delay in implementation, as a result of ongoing discussions about the design of the pilot in this area, meant that the same process was followed slightly later. The position in London was, however, somewhat different. Whereas at the outset it had been envisaged that a single implementation group, comprising representatives of all four boroughs, would

oversee the introduction of EMA, this did not happen. Instead, once it was decided that a different model of implementation to that originally proposed would be required, the original group fragmented and the administration of the scheme was taken up by each of the LEAs for its own borough. Therefore, individual visits were made to each of the LEAs and, in addition, South Bank Careers, which covers the four boroughs, was also visited.

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

3. A typology of implementation

Differences emerged between pilot areas in the way in which EMA was implemented. In addition to variations in the membership of the groups brought together to oversee and administer the process (see below), there were also major differences in the roles and responsibilities of individuals representing the LEA, Careers Service, colleges and schools. In order to highlight the most important differences in approach, the following typology has been developed from the data. However, the types represented here should be regarded as somewhat crude simplifications of the more complex patterns found in different localities.

- *Basic Administration*

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

- *Informative*

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

- *Partnership*

  Responsibility for decisions concerning the implementation of EMA was held jointly by those organisations represented on the implementation group.

Basic Administration

The clearest example of this approach was found in the London boroughs. Following the fragmentation of the London implementation group, responsibility was taken on by the respective Student Support sections which were already under severe pressure from heavy workloads. Nonetheless, there have been some continuing links between the four boroughs, mainly concerning the development of common software for monitoring school and college attendance (although Southwark has not been involved in this, since it operates a different computer system). The short lead-in time (about three months) before the first EMA participants would be embarking on their courses, meant that the LEA staff responsible had very little time in which to put in place the necessary administrative mechanisms. This

resulted in limited contact with local learning providers (schools and colleges) and with other agencies, such as the Careers Service. Lewisham differed slightly, in that it had organised regular meetings with local colleges.

Informative

This model could be characterised as being an extension of the *Basic Administration* model in that, while the Student Support or Awards section of the LEA continued to have responsibility for deciding on how EMA would be implemented, there tended to be greater involvement from more senior LEA officers, and considerably greater and more regular contact with other agencies. In some cases, this entailed very large implementation groups, as in Southampton, where early meetings were attended by two representatives of each school and college. However, the size of the group was turned to their advantage in Walsall, where smaller task groups were set up to look at, and design the details of, specific components. As in other areas, the frequency of meetings in Walsall was dictated in the early stages by the need to complete a wide range of tasks in a relatively short time. Thus fortnightly meetings were held initially, before a change was made to a monthly format.

Partnership

The 'partnership' model is one where decision-making and allocation of tasks was shared among the organisations. This was found in several areas and invariably entailed building on existing partnership or networking arrangements. For example, in Oldham it was stated that:

> *"There is a strong history of partnership and working together. For example, from 1997 there has been money from the Social Exclusion Unit, and there is similar experience from New Start. Once the partnership ethos kicked in, the 'usual suspects' came together, and the different agencies have tried to make it work."*
>
> (Careers Service representative)

In this case, the 'usual suspects' included the LEA, the Careers Service, the Chamber/TEC, local colleges and Special Schools. Although schools were not well represented, they were said to be happy with the implementation, while external training providers, which provide

work-based training for young people through Modern Apprenticeships and National Traineeships, had not responded to initial requests to be involved in the implementation group.

From the visits, it was clear that all the groups represented on the implementation group were making significant contributions. The degree of partnership could also be gauged by the fact that, with the departure to another authority of the LEA officer who chaired the implementation group, that position was to be taken by the Head of the Careers Service. The commitment of the organisations was such that the loss of this individual would be unlikely to jeopardise the effectiveness of their partnership working.

A similar process took place in Nottingham, where an implementation team was established, headed by the Director of Education and comprising representatives of the Careers Service, colleges, schools and the TEC. Members of the implementation group worked together to achieve a list of tasks, such as the design of the application form, the Learning Agreement and publicity information. The group called on art students at a local college to design publicity material, which would attract the attention of the target group of young people who were eligible for EMA. In Walsall and Cornwall, existing networks had also provided a starting point for implementation groups for EMA.

Effectiveness of the Models
At this early stage in the life of EMA it was difficult to identify evidence pointing to one particular model working better than others. This was partly because of the differences in the effectiveness with which the pilots were introduced in different areas and the range of factors which could impact on measurable aspects of success. For example, take-up of EMA may depend on the quality of publicity materials as much as the implementation model. Other factors which may have been of great importance in this inaugural year were the particular variant being tested, and variations in the timing of announcements.

It should also be emphasised that the model adopted in a pilot area in the first year will not necessarily stay the same over time. The fieldwork took place at a relatively early stage of what may turn out to be an evolutionary process for some implementation groups. It has

already been suggested that in some areas where the 'basic administration' model was in place at the time of the fieldwork, more collaborative working has developed since that time.

Group Membership

Group membership varied by area. In addition to officers from the Student Awards or Student Support section who were responsible for day-to-day administration, the groups would also commonly include representatives of other LEA departments, particularly the Payments section, as well as local colleges and the Careers Service. For example, in Middlesbrough two groups were established to administer/oversee the scheme:

- a large group including all school and college heads, and Careers Service representatives; and,
- an office team/group which met every three weeks, comprising representatives of the Student Awards section, Finance, and IT.

In most areas, representation from schools and TECs was more variable. For the TECs, even where there was no direct representation on the implementation group, links tended to have been established through other forums, such as Lifelong Learning Partnerships. This was the case in Middlesbrough and Nottingham. Others who were occasionally represented included LEA post-16 advisers.

In Leeds, despite delays caused by the timing of the decision about how EMA was to be implemented, the LEA established an implementation group and actively involved its members in decision-making. Instead of having representatives from each post-16 provider in the area, a senior member of staff from a school and one from a college were chosen to represent the interests of every school and college in the area and were responsible for feeding back developments.

In addition to eliciting the collaboration, commitment and perspectives of schools and colleges through representation on the implementation group, other mechanisms were identified. For example, in Nottingham, a meeting to which representatives of all schools and colleges were invited, was held in November in order to gain feedback on how the administration of EMAs was working. The rationale for holding this event was that, while

considerable effort had been made to provide information and support for the schools and colleges, including the distribution of a manual of guidance about EMA, they had *"no idea how effective it has been. Nobody has complained, but we really don't know whether it's working for them… …we were particularly concerned to find out about the advertising side of things"* (LEA representative).

In some cases, the make-up of the group changed to enable more informed decision-making. For example, in one area, where initially all secondary school heads were invited to attend meetings, the group started becoming too large. Therefore, it was decided to form a smaller task group, comprising representatives of an outer borough college, an inner borough college, a special school and three schools from within the borough, as well as the LEA representatives. The first concern of this group was to design an acceptable Learning Agreement and an attendance monitoring system.

The role of Senior LEA Officers

The importance attached to the EMA in Nottingham, Bolton, Southampton and Gateshead could be gauged by the fact that, during the early stages of implementation, the Director/Deputy Director of Education chaired the implementation group. It was felt that this was needed to provide a sufficiently high profile for EMA, and to instil a sense of purpose and generate momentum. In Stoke-on-Trent, the Director of Education was prominent at the outset in discussing the details of EMA with representatives of schools and colleges, although thereafter the running of the pilot was left very much to administrative staff of the Student Awards section. Even without a direct input from a senior LEA officer, there tended to be a requirement to feed back information on a regular basis. For example, in Lambeth, the Student Support section had to report to the Chief Executive on a weekly basis, so that she could brief Members of Council.

The fieldwork would therefore suggest that the involvement of senior LEA officers in the establishment of EMA can be of great importance in eliciting the co-operation and commitment of key parties, notably colleges and schools. Moreover, while LEAs will invariably have regular communications with schools, traditional working relationships with colleges may have become neglected since the severing of direct financial links. Therefore,

the authority and weight associated with a Director or Deputy Director of Education may be necessary to engage the participation and commitment of colleges.

The role of the Careers Service

The role of the Careers Service varied according to the extent to which a partnership model of implementation was operating. Thus, in Middlesbrough, Gateshead, Oldham and Nottingham, where there was real sharing of responsibilities and decision-making, the Careers Service was very much to the fore, particularly in designing publicity and awareness material.

> *"We've been members of the implementation group from the start, and involved in the planning from day one. We had a role to play in creating the publicity, and in face-to-face contact with clients who might want to take up EMA."*
>
> (Careers Service representative)

The Careers Service representatives were invariably willing to undertake this task, because it gave them some degree of control over the messages which were being directed to Year 11 students. A particular concern of representatives of the Careers Service generally, was that students should receive impartial information about the full range of opportunities open to them. Staying on in education, and applying for EMA would be one of the options presented to those who were eligible. Allied to this was a belief that the economic environment in which young people would be seeking employment should also be a consideration, and that they should be made aware of the likely implications of their decisions, in terms of job-finding.

Where there was less of a partnership arrangement, Careers Service representatives tended to be dissatisfied with their lack of involvement, often expressing disquiet about the expected level of input, which amounted to little more than discussing courses with all EMA students. This somewhat restricted role entailed liasing with the LEA, ensuring that Careers staff knew about EMA, informing young people about EMA, and negotiating revised Learning Agreements.

In another pilot area, the Careers Service's limited involvement in the implementation had left them with a role which they perceived as being to focus only on those who dropped out from EMA. Complaints from Careers Service representatives about the lack of a leading role in the implementation were echoed in other pilot areas.

The future role of implementation groups

The membership, remit and *modus operandi* of the implementation groups were not necessarily regarded as fixed and, in some areas, there was a willingness to adapt these aspects of the group as a result of the experience of implementing EMA. In Walsall, the group was judged to have been invaluable in providing mutual support for the organisations represented and to have strengthened networks and partnerships which had been established for different purposes. It was regarded as an excellent forum in which difficulties could be thrashed out and where queries could be dealt with. As far as the future was concerned, it would continue to operate *"as long as EMA was experimental…. certainly until the next cohort was on board"* (LEA representative).

Several pilot areas shared the view that for any new initiative to work, there needed to be a group which provided the driving force to get the scheme up and running. Once it had become established, and it was felt that the momentum could be sustained, there was less need for a group with regular meetings. For example, in Nottingham, where considerable effort had gone into setting up the implementation group, it was thought that the group might not need to exist until the end of the pilot if EMA was running smoothly. However, the group would continue to meet as long as they felt there was a purpose to it. Further, in Nottingham the focus of the group's attention had also shifted. Initially, meetings had tended to be concerned mainly with administration and publicity. Once immediate administrative tasks had been completed, they moved on to look at incorporating EMA into other processes such as target-setting and records of achievement, and linking it to policies aimed at broader goals, such as combating social exclusion, and effecting wider access to learning.

In Gateshead, the implementation group had met monthly in the early stages of implementation in order to address issues as they arose. By the time of the second visit from the evaluation team in November, it was acknowledged that there was now less need to meet

with such frequency, but that it would be beneficial to increase the representation from schools and colleges on the group. In other areas, it was asserted that the implementation group would carry on throughout the life of the pilot, particularly in Oldham and Leeds where the establishment of an implementation group was regarded as *"essential"* (LEA representative).

Despite the early fragmentation of the London group covering the four boroughs, it was suggested by one respondent that the re-establishment of the group in the future could prove useful, especially as they were dealing with the same colleges on an individual basis. In particular, this group could investigate the possibility of introducing a common system for recording attendance, including a software package that would ease the workload of both the LEAs and the schools and colleges.

4. The process of implementation

A central focus of the fieldwork during this initial implementation stage of EMA was the administrative mechanisms that had been devised to cope with the introduction of the scheme. This section highlights the issues which had emerged by the time of the fieldwork.

Staffing and Resources

There was universal agreement among the respondents that the cost to the LEA of implementing the EMA pilot would exceed the amount which would be received from DfEE. It was suggested that there should have been a payment to cover set up costs, as well as a percentage to cover running costs. Responses to the perceived financial problem varied from area to area, with some LEAs feeling that the benefits to be derived from EMA outweighed any initial cost incurred by them.

> *"It does mean that we are going to have a budget problem, but the Education*
> *Committee know about it and are prepared to underwrite it, because they can see*
> *the value of the scheme."*
>
> (LEA representative)

This contrasted with the approach in another area, where keeping a close watch on expenditure incurred was a prime consideration. This had worked to the detriment of the scheme and resulted in overworked staff, so that, belatedly, it had been decided that additional staff had to be taken on to cope with the administrative burden.

Irrespective of the cost expectations at the outset, in most areas implementation was placing an additional burden on what were often said to be severely stretched resources:

> *"They have had to put systems in place without any additional funding. The LEA*
> *has used well over its allocated resources."*
>
> (Implementation Group member)

"Extra resources are being derived from current sources. We have got agreement for a new post, but this will not be until the New Year."

<div align="right">(LEA representative)</div>

"No additional staff have been provided. Staffing has been a major problem, because of the level of additional cost, and the late decision. Existing staff were used for eligibility. An extra member of staff with experience of mandatory awards was allocated because the members (councillors) were keen for the scheme to go well."

<div align="right">(LEA representative)</div>

The notion that the new system required for EMA was merely an extension of what was going on already was challenged by some authorities:

"You can't say 'well, you were already giving out discretionary grants' – it's a whole new ball game, the rules are different, the staffing requirement is different."

<div align="right">(LEA representative)</div>

Nonetheless, some authorities felt able to benefit from their experience from other aspects of their work, notably that concerning Higher Education, across a range of activities required for administering EMAs.

"It was quite exciting actually. There were a lot of new challenges. We drew a lot on our experience of HE, in that we knew how to target people, we had mechanisms for posting out details to potential clients, and we were used to designing application forms, so we just modified things which were already there. We obviously wouldn't have been able to cope with our existing staffing, so we appointed two extra staff to clerical posts on temporary contracts for 12 months in the first instance."

<div align="right">(LEA representative)</div>

Most LEAs had appointed at least one additional member of clerical staff to deal with the extra workload generated through the administration of EMA. However, given the pilot status of EMA, most clerical staff appointments had been made on a temporary basis.

There was less agreement about the costs incurred by schools and colleges. The monitoring requirements were acknowledged to place extra pressure on the person responsible for administering or co-ordinating EMA, who had to provide the returns detailing attendance by the following Monday. In colleges, overall responsibility was usually taken by someone who had a remit for Student Support/Services, while in schools it was often the Head of Sixth Form. For those with teaching commitments, it represented a further administrative task. However, while some LEAs were sympathetic, others were robust in declaring that the monitoring was only what schools and colleges should have been doing anyway.

A considerable additional administrative problem for colleges arose when information on EMA students had to be collected and collated from a range of departments and, in some cases, from different sites:

> *"Because we've got a greater number of students in the college who are getting EMA, the one person couldn't physically check all the attendances, so some of the work has gone out to the faculty bases. They're all doing it, but some of them are doing it without complaint and some are doing it with complaint."*
>
> (College representative)

In Southampton, one college had employed a clerical officer almost entirely devoted to EMA. They argued that the post was necessary and that they could not have coped without it. The implementation group in Oldham, where college representatives played significant roles, was sensitive to the needs of colleges and other learning providers. Therefore, in order to assist them in the administration of EMAs, a Providers' Pack was developed and distributed. This contained:

- basic details about EMAs, including eligibility criteria, and requirements for those receiving payments;
- a summary of the application process;

- an outline of the responsibilities of schools and colleges;

- an example of an absence return form;

- guidance about the completion of the absence return form; and,

- a flow chart detailing the process for EMA students' reporting of absence.

Awareness and Publicity

There was widespread agreement that the relatively late timing of the announcements about the introduction of EMA meant that things had been rushed. As a result, the publicity material produced was invariably being revised in readiness for the next cohort. A range of methods for creating awareness and informing potential applicants about the characteristics of EMAs were employed, including:

- sending flyers, often with reply slips, to schools and colleges;

- information leaflets for young people;

- poster campaigns, again targeted at schools and colleges;

- local radio and press advertising (although this was not tried in Leeds because of the partial eligibility); and,

- attendance by young people/parents at school and college open evenings and parents' evenings.

During the early stages of development, the different implementation groups were able to assist each other in the design of the material. Thus, a particularly eye-catching poster and accompanying leaflet which were in use in Nottingham were used as a template by other authorities. Annexes A and B contain two examples of material targeted at Year 11 leavers which provided a great deal of relevant information about EMAs. The first is a flyer, which was also produced in the form of a poster, by the implementation group in Middlesbrough. Here, the information is presented in an attractive, simple, and accessible form, and provides explanations about the type of award, the eligibility criteria, levels of the bonuses and requirements for obtaining the bonuses. The second is a leaflet distributed to young people by Southampton LEA, which is informative, easy to understand and concise. It also provides a tear-off slip to enable the recipient to send for an application form. In addition, the leaflet

contains information about eligibility, and indicates how the money will be paid, and the need for a bank account.

Responsibility for producing the publicity material and information varied between areas, with the LEA taking the lead in some, the Careers Service in others, and, occasionally, whichever member of the implementation group volunteered. In Walsall, the TEC representative had actively promoted awareness of EMA through his membership of the Education Business Partnership and the Lifelong Learning Alliance.

Some difficulties were caused by the inadequacy of publicity material which sometimes gave confusing, insufficient or misleading information. This led to a surfeit of queries or unsuitable applications. Such promotional material was quickly withdrawn. In several areas, doubts were expressed about the impartiality of the information given to students by schools and colleges, either because they implied that the EMA was only available if the student studied at a particular institution, or because they restricted the distribution of information leaflets to those students who had expressed an intention of continuing within the school, rather than those who were considering applying to a local college.

There were also problems with misleading information being given out by local press and radio, as in one area where the impression was given that anyone who stayed on at school would be eligible for EMA. Nonetheless, there had been some remarkable successes in generating an interest in EMAs from initial flyers, notably in Cornwall, where these elicited around 4,000 enquiries.

Contacting those young people who were no longer at school was a particularly acute problem in London and Leeds because of the timing of the final decisions about EMA. In areas such as Oldham, efforts could be (and were) made to contact such young people through Careers Service records to identify those who may be eligible. However, in London, the difficulties were compounded by the fact that Careers Service records do not indicate in which ward young people live and the electoral register is unable to identify people by age.

When the Oldham implementation group was visited in November, strenuous efforts were being made to 'chase up' those who had left school and may be eligible for EMA:

> *"The LEA liaises with the Careers Service about students they do not know about. As a follow-up, the LEA telephoned colleges about outstanding cases and, in most cases, there was confirmation that they were on courses. A question was raised about whether they were those at the top end of the taper - if so, an offer would be made to back pay them to September. Take-up has built up and we are still digging them out - otherwise a lot of people will miss out - we are passionate about getting them."*
>
> (LEA representative)

This raises an important point, for it was apparent that some authorities were more assiduous than others in 'digging out' potential EMA recipients. It may be that burgeoning awareness about EMAs will preclude the necessity to chase up young people in this way. However, if this does not happen, wide discrepancies could emerge in the proportion of eligible young people claiming an EMA.

Finally, an issue which was raised by several respondents was that, in designing information and publicity material, care had to be taken to avoid the possibility of stigma being attached to those who were eligible for EMAs, through the means-testing element.

Application Procedures

A wide variety of mechanisms for processing applications was employed, dependent on the level of sophistication of the systems in place, some being computerised and some manual. The starting point for most areas were systems which already existed for processing discretionary and mandatory awards. This led to great variability in the speed at which the whole process was operationalised.

An additional difficulty was the need to design an application form incorporating sections for completion by both the parent, dealing with income information and supporting documents, and the student, including details of bank accounts. Problems had arisen in most areas, as a

result of what was perceived to be excessive complexity in the forms being used. This led to an acceptance that the forms should be simplified and that assistance needed to be provided to many of those completing them.

"The forms which were used were too similar, so that applicants thought they'd already filled them in. The application procedure needs to be simplified, by changing the colour of the forms, and asking for a bare minimum of information to be supplied. There also needs to be help available to complete the forms - this is not a massive problem for the academically able, but is for those with less ability."

(Implementation Group Member)

"On the application form, there have been difficulties with the 'all income' category, as it includes income additional to benefits. We are trying to be as nannyish as possible. It is difficult for 16 year olds to fill in (and for some parents), so there is a responsibility to mother them."

(LEA representative)

An example of the extent to which LEAs were prepared to exhibit flexibility in the identification of the information required to satisfy the eligibility criteria was provided in Walsall, as evidenced in the following quotation.

"We've always made it quite clear on the forms what people needed to send in. We put a little strip down the middle of the questions saying 'send your P60 in for this' etc. If somebody has lost their P60, we give them an A4 sheet that they can take to their employer and their employer can stamp it, and we're quite happy to accept that. The same applies to DSS information, all they have to do is fill in the front page, and we send it to the DSS office."

(LEA representative)

This flexibility was also extended to the amount of detailed information and documentation they required of applicants' parents when assessing income, and was different from other

areas. Whereas most LEAs asked for details and supporting documentation on DSS/benefit income in the same way as earned income (i.e. as a total for the previous financial year), in Walsall they were content to know what benefit was received over a certain period. This made it easier for DSS to verify.

The difficulties involved had led some authorities to consider simplifying the process by automatically allocating a full amount award where parents were in receipt of benefit, with only a declaration of what they had earned in the previous year being required. In cases where information from the Child Support Agency (CSA) was needed, consideration was being given in Southampton to asking applicants for authorisation to approach the CSA directly. Respondents in Oldham and Greenwich also explained that they were exploring the possibility of using the Housing Benefit database to obtain income information, although audit problems and the additional complexities where single parents were involved suggested that this may not be a feasible option.

Clearly, asking applicants to re-submit forms because all the information was not provided was a costly and time-consuming process. The experience of many LEAs was that the availability of 'hand holding', redesign, and streamlined procedures all helped to improve the administrative process as it significantly reduced the number of times application forms had to be returned because they had been completed incorrectly. Further, while it was widely acknowledged that there had been difficulties concerning the clarity, layout and degree of guidance required for completing the application form, LEAs seemed confident that most of these problems would be resolved in time for the next cohort.

However, it was also felt that some aspects, relating to incomplete forms and lack of supporting evidence, would continue, notably:

(i) Income details of both natural parents
Asking for details of the income of 'both natural parents', including the absent (estranged/separated/divorced) parent, even after 15 years of absence was problematic. This

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was clearly a contentious issue, with respondents failing to understand why it was required when current household income was the more relevant measure. The process was often hindered by the loss or mislaying of important documents, such as divorce papers and letters from the CSA, and invariably provoked anger, resentment, and sometimes considerable anguish. Leeds LEA had written, on behalf of their councillors, to local MPs about this. In some areas, a *"pragmatic approach"* (LEA representative) was taken, with the authority being willing to accept at face value a declaration that the applicant did not know the absent parent's whereabouts.

(ii) Problems with bank and building society accounts

The provision of incorrect bank account details or Building Society accounts which did not accept BACs payments, resulting in delays to payments, were reported. The advice of the local authority's payroll section was found to be useful here, and, as one respondent indicated: *"Next year we'll learn from our experience and make the request for bank details much clearer - or we could give applicants a form to take to their bank, and ask them to stamp it to say that the details given are correct".* However, it should be emphasised that most 16 year olds already had, or had little difficulty in obtaining, bank accounts.

(iii) Problems with income details

A further problem involved asking for income details and supporting documents covering difficult periods of time (e.g. DSS benefit receipt over a financial year) and in unfamiliar ways (e.g. asking for P60s from people who only have wage slips).

Most authorities had to set up a new database system to cope with EMA, usually in collaboration with the IT section of the LEA. While the majority were computerised systems, there were examples of manual systems operating. In one area, a new computerised system had been advocated, but rejected on grounds of cost, and the fact that their existing system was not 2000 compliant. This resulted in some information being stored on a database, while the remainder was maintained manually. Three of the four London boroughs were using the same software package and so could share experiences. As was the case with other authorities, a package which had been developed by Belfast City Council was being adapted. Although it was not fully operational at the time of the fieldwork, it was hoped that the

system would be running by the time the following year's EMA recipients were embarking on their courses. As a consequence, it was hoped that the administrative procedures would work more efficiently.

In Nottingham, the Careers Service had been developing an extensive database of young people, as part of an initiative to create a long-term tracking facility. This was being linked to, and enhanced by, the data being collected on EMA recipients, through a process of computerised data transfer.

The combination of a short lead-in time before EMA became operational, the problems highlighted above concerning the completion of application forms, and the need to develop administrative systems quickly meant that, at the start of the Autumn term, there were backlogs of applications to be processed. This inevitably led to delays in payments, so that most authorities did not make their first payments until some time in October, usually after experiencing severe pressure from a barrage of calls, either asking for details of progress, or complaining about the delay.

Payment Systems

Once EMA application forms had been processed, LEAs notified young people and parents by letter about their eligibility and the level of allowance that would be paid. Receipt by the LEA of a completed Learning Agreement triggered the first payment. Most areas had anticipated a large number of appeals against decisions made about EMA eligibility and the withdrawal of the EMA allowance due to unauthorised absences. Indeed a significant amount of time had been spent at implementation group meetings designing appeals procedures. In the event, very few appeals had been lodged from young people and parents at either school or college level or with LEAs.

The delays in the processing of applications inevitably had an impact on the timing of initial payments, so that in some instances payments were made by cheque until all relevant details had been processed for the BACS system to be used. In some areas, the sending out of flyers with these cheque payments, explaining that there was a delay, placated concerned students.

An issue concerning payment which was raised in Cornwall was the effect of late payments of EMA on transport costs and set up costs for hairdressing and catering students. As a consequence of the late payments, it was claimed that some students, who could not afford season tickets, were having to take later buses in the morning at cheaper fares. This meant that they were often late for school or college. Some students were also unable to purchase the equipment they required until the first payment of EMA was received.

As far as retention bonuses were concerned, none had been payable at the time of the fieldwork. Therefore, respondents could only speculate about any possible effects or problems. The policy agreed in Oldham was that all students who had met the attendance requirements would automatically be paid. Following that, a list detailing all students who had missed one or more session would be compiled to assist in determining entitlement to bonuses. In assessing eligibility for the bonus, colleges would merely have to indicate whether or not a payment should be made, without needing to give a reason. Overall, it was anticipated that the payment of the retention bonus would be relatively straightforward.

Learning Agreement

All students in receipt of EMA are required to have a Learning Agreement, signed by themselves, their parent and the educational institution at which they are studying. As well as details about the student, the course they are undertaking and their entitlement to a weekly allowance and additional bonuses, the document sets out the parent's responsibilities, the criteria for assessing the retention and achievement bonuses, and the conditions which have to be satisfied in order to receive the allowance.

Learning Agreements were normally issued to applicants after they had been offered EMA. Colleges tended to be familiar with this type of document, although it was a new idea for many schools. A common problem for LEAs was that many variants would be in operation if colleges were allowed to adopt their own model. Therefore, they considered it preferable for the Learning Agreement to be designed by the implementation group.

Annex C provides an example of a Learning Agreement which was being issued by Southwark LEA. It is concise, yet spells out the responsibilities of all parties to the

agreement - the student, the parent, and the learning provider. In all, there are four copies of the agreement, so that all the parties have a copy.

While guidelines from the DfEE suggested that in the event of a young person changing their Learning Agreement, advice and guidance should be sought from the Careers Service before the Agreement was changed, in practice there was little evidence that this was happening. This may be attributed to the timing of the interviews between Careers Service representatives and members of the evaluation team, which took place in the autumn term when few changes had taken place, or to the fact that schools and colleges were largely unaware that Careers Service involvement was necessary.

Although the need for a parental signature on the Learning Agreement could delay the process, there was a suggestion that if it signified a partnership between the education provider, the parents and the student, it could be powerful in sustaining the commitment and attendance of the young person and, therefore, in raising achievement. In Bolton, where the EMA is paid to the parent, one respondent wondered whether the Learning Agreement, and the part played by parents, may incite parents to encourage their children to go to college when it may not be in their best interest. There was also concern that the 100 per cent attendance requirement might prove *"a bridge too far for a lot of these kids"*.

A concern was expressed in some areas that students and parents might not fully understand what they were signing up to and that the signing of the Learning Agreement was merely seen as 'a means to an end', in that it would trigger the payment of the EMA allowance, rather than as a commitment to achieve agreed learning targets. Broadly, however, Learning Agreements were regarded favourably by representatives from schools and colleges.

> *"Learning Agreements are useful for us in colleges, because you can say to a parent, and to the student, that this is what they've agreed to, so that when the student is in breach of the Learning Agreement, because they are not attending, or their behaviour is unacceptable, or whatever, you can utilise it to raise their consciousness. This year, every student in the college has signed an agreement that they will attend, irrespective of whether they are on EMA. It was an*

experiment this year, and the parents have welcomed it, because they feel that they
have been able to wave it at the kids and say 'look, I've signed up to say you will
attend".

<div align="right">(College representative)</div>

Finally, it was generally found that fewer problems occurred when responsibility for returning the Learning Agreement rested with the school or college, than when the onus was on the student.

Monitoring Attendance

The monitoring of students for attendance and achievement was again a contentious issue during the early implementation. Nonetheless, LEAs had successfully implemented systems for enabling them to base their weekly payments on students' attendance for the previous week, and, despite the headaches associated with it, there was a general perception that the imposition of such a system and the implications for the payment of EMA had helped to improve attendance rates within institutions where students were in receipt of EMA. This was not a straightforward task, as, in each area, a variety of recording and reporting mechanisms tended to operate, dependent on the make-up of post-16 provision.

This diversity of mechanisms was even more acute in the London boroughs where, although the overall numbers on EMA were relatively small, they were distributed among a large number of providers. These difficulties were compounded where learning providers, especially colleges, operated from several sites, and where the course of study undertaken by the student entailed units or modules from different departments, so that monitoring their attendance for any one week required several registers to be examined.

"Tracking them is a nightmare, very time consuming – they're on that many
different registers, you have to locate the registers and collate the information."

<div align="right">(College representative)</div>

"Monitoring and returns – that's where we're failing at the moment."

<div align="right">(LEA representative)</div>

In Walsall, three approaches were identified within schools: i) teachers complete absence slips and return them to the LEA; ii) the student takes round a sheet for completion by the tutor, and; iii) a check is made of the whole register.

An example of the absence report form in use in Southampton is given in Annex D. This form enables institutions to provide a list of all those students whose payments should be stopped, rather than having to complete a separate form for each student. Also, in order to meet the Tuesday deadline for the return, it can be faxed, emailed or posted. The instructions for completion of the form are clear, and it is designed to require a minimum of time to fill in. Similar systems were in operation elsewhere, with reporting forms listing all students currently in receipt of EMA being sent to schools and colleges on a Thursday, for completion and return by the following Tuesday. At a feedback session in one area, it was suggested by the school and college representatives that receiving this weekly list was in itself useful, because they are not always up to date themselves with which students are on the system. This was especially the case in the colleges, where students may be undertaking parts of courses from a number of different departments.

Although no additional FEFC funding was available, colleges tended to be more used to operating a monitoring system and had already gained experience of the difficulties which may be encountered. This may be attributed to colleges' involvement in government supported training programmes, where monitoring trainees' attendance is an integral part of managing the programme. Therefore, implementing a similar system for EMA recipients was relatively unproblematic:

> *"We'd changed our electronic registration system, and we'd had the teething problems. This is our second type of system – it's not just the students or the system or the administration of it, it's actually absolutely dependent on the teaching staff who are marking those registers and them understanding the value of the bit of paper they've got in their hand - so we've been through a pain threshold generally."*
>
> (LEA representative)

Some difficulties did arise despite this accumulated experience. An interesting comparison was made in a Bolton college where, in addition to the students receiving EMA from Bolton LEA, there was a student from Oldham for whom the form detailing attendance was said to be much more complicated and required considerably more information. In London, some institutions had EMA recipients from four different LEAs. A greater problem was identified where education providers outside the LEA boundary were being asked to complete the returns. Some had little or no knowledge of EMA and were certainly not keen to accumulate additional tasks.

In order to circumvent some of the difficulties encountered, some authorities initially opted for a 'negative reporting' system, whereby they assumed that, unless they heard to the contrary, the student had been attending and behaving acceptably. This practice was subsequently abandoned after advice from DfEE. At the time of the fieldwork, no mention was made of the system of negative reporting having resulted in over-payments.

5. The initial impact of EMA

Relevance of Aims

As far as the LEAs and implementation groups were concerned, EMA was welcomed enthusiastically as an initiative that was seeking to address some of the problems facing the pilot areas. As such it would sit usefully alongside other measures being introduced. Thus, this positive response to the piloting of EMA was often asserted with a proviso that EMA should not be seen in isolation, but should be regarded as a potentially valuable addition to the raft of measures, (such as Education Action Zones, the enhancement of Access and Student Support funds, the Widening Access agenda and the proposed Connexions strategy) that are currently being targeted at enhancing educational attainment. More locally in Nottingham, it was seen to link directly into the education development plan's focus on drop outs and under-achieving pupils, while in Southampton it was stated that:

> *"at a policy level EMA fitted very comfortably with the visions and values of the city - the anti-poverty strategy, lifelong learning, all the core values. It has parked itself very nicely, we haven't had to adapt policy in order to justify the pilot."*
>
> (LEA representative)

Similarly in Oldham, the EMA pilot coincided with the introduction of targets for participation in learning. It was described by one Careers Service representative as:

> *"a great idea - a just idea and is likely to work. It has potentially got a lot to offer when it is more equitable."*

Moreover, in South London EMA was described as *"revolutionary and wonderful"* by one LEA officer.

In line with the intended thrust of policy, the aims of the initiative were perceived to be to:

- enable those young people, who might have left because of financial constraints, to continue in education;

- help to provide a 'level playing field', so that young people had access to the same/a similar range of choices, irrespective of family income;

- reach particularly deprived young people, such as those estranged from their parents; and,

- allow students to concentrate on their studies and not have to take part-time work to support themselves.

Respondents from both the LEA and the Careers Service in Gateshead welcomed the fact that EMA was tackling the issue of financial constraints on families which may act as a barrier to 'appropriate' education for some young people. Here, as in other areas, it was noted that although awards or allowances had been made available in the past, the funds provided under EMA were of a much greater magnitude and were expected to have a significant impact as a result. In Southampton, within the LEA, EMA was particularly warmly welcomed by the Student Welfare section, as it was seen to address the needs of a relatively poor city *"in a sea of wealth"*.

An interesting suggestion, made by several Careers Service and TEC representatives, was that, through EMA, the Government was effectively raising the school-leaving age to 18. One argument emanating from this was that, given the propensity for employers' provision of initial vocational training to vary according to the economic cycle, then a school-leaving age of 18 would force schools and colleges to reassess, and modify, the quality of their post-16 training. Should this happen, differing views emerged about the consequences for the competition between post-16 options; some respondents suggested that it would lead to greater collaboration and the development of seamless provision through to 18, while others predicted an intensification of the competition for young people between schools, colleges, training providers and employers, with the last two groups being likely to miss out.

In Cornwall, the local TEC, Careers Service and colleges were addressing the effect of increased participation in post-16 provision on government supported training provision through plans to integrate the two types of provision. Proposals had been drawn up to enable young people to attend a college to complete vocational courses linked to progression to Modern Apprenticeship programmes in a related field. This would provide the opportunity for a young person to 'graduate' from a vocational course which led to relevant work-based training and, at the same time, would enable training providers to meet the needs of employers by providing them with young people with relevant skills and qualifications.

Some reservations were expressed, although in schools these tended to focus on the mechanics of implementing EMA, rather than on the aims of the scheme itself. More generally, there were concerns about the potential impact on the work-based training route into the labour market, and especially on Modern Apprenticeships. It was felt that the message EMA would convey was that, once again, academic education was being valued above vocational training (despite the wide range of full-time vocational courses which are undertaken by students attending colleges of further education). Careers Service and TEC representatives were prominent in voicing concerns about the any assumptions that staying on at school or college might indisputably be a good thing. This does not imply that Careers Service representatives were opposed to the introduction of EMA. They also welcomed the fact that the initiative is targeted at young people whose family circumstances might lead them to drop out of formal education and consequent qualification attainment. Rather, their worry was that those young people for whom work-based training may be the most suitable option, would be encouraged to stay on within education and, ultimately, may not attain qualifications which were meaningful in labour market terms.

The appropriateness of the courses being undertaken by EMA recipients was also raised by some Careers Service representatives:

> *"If the aim of EMA is to empower young people to access appropriate education,*
> *it's great, because finance is an issue (half the cohort is on EMA). But there is*
> *also a need to look at dropouts. The key thing is that kids are doing the*
> *appropriate course. In order for that to happen, there needs to be appropriate*

advice and guidance, especially during the first term and after Christmas. There should also be the opportunity to do 'taster' courses, so that they find what they're good at."

(Careers Service representative)

Similar reservations were voiced by TEC representatives, whose contact with private training providers made them aware of the potentially damaging effect on those providers of greater proportions of 16 year olds staying within the education system. Although it was conceded that there had been little discernible effect in this first year of the pilot, the expectation was that there would be a greater impact in the second year of EMA. The TEC representative in an area where the EMA is paid to the parent, wondered whether some parents *"might be encouraging/over-encouraging these kids to go to college when it's maybe not the best option for them"*. In another area, the TEC representative expressed mixed feelings about EMA, in that it would be regarded as positive only if it marked a genuine attempt to help families that were not able to fund young people to continue in post-16 education. Again, worries that some young people for whom an apprenticeship or similar training may be a more appropriate option, might decide to stay on, led TEC representatives to suggest that greater support should be given to the work-based vocational route. Questions were also raised about the efficacy of EMA if it merely resulted in a shift in the distribution, by route taken, of those young people who could be regarded as committed anyway (rather than helping to tackle the problem of those who were at risk of disaffection or disengagement from the system). Subsequent findings from the quantitative interviews with young people in the pilot and control areas found that the EMA may have drawn young people into education from each of the three destinations of work and training, unemployment or 'other' (see Ashworth et al., 2001).

Other reservations concerned the effect on students' ability or desire to continue with their education once their EMA entitlement had expired, and the fairness of the termly bonus, because of its reliance on discretionary judgements about students' application, effort and achievement, as well as the more objective measure of attendance. Some respondents recommended that students should be made aware that the responsibilities governing attendance did not rest with the tutor or college or school, but were also determined from guidance about EMA entitlement which had been drawn up by the DfEE.

As well as the concerns over the appropriateness of staying on for some young people, doubts were also raised about the type of provision that was being chosen; in particular, the value, in labour market terms, which students may derive from opting for one year courses instead of obtaining their full entitlement to EMA funding for two-year courses.

Finally, in London, the way in which the scheme was being implemented, with only residents of certain electoral wards being eligible for EMA in 1999, raised concerns over equity.

However, it should once again be emphasised that, despite the expression of some reservations and concerns, the response to the piloting of EMA was largely positive.

Implications for Schools and Colleges

In addition to the general welcoming of EMA, a positive impact was said to be that it enabled Access Funds and other sources of discretionary funding to be allocated to students who were not eligible for EMA. A college in Nottingham identified a variety of sources (EMA, ESF, Fast Forward, Access), some of which emanated from the Single Regeneration Budget. Their policy was to ask students and their parents to complete a common application form, after which the college determined which source would be most appropriate in terms of providing best value. In Leeds and the London boroughs, where eligibility for EMA was partial, the LEA was able to target available funds at those young people who were ineligible for EMA because of the ward in which they lived or the school they attended. One Sixth Form College in Leeds, which drew from two feeder schools, only one of which was eligible for EMA, targeted its access funds on young people from the school which was not eligible for EMA.

It was also anticipated that EMA would reduce the customary high levels of dropout from courses immediately after the Christmas break, as this often occurred for financial reasons. However, the timing of the fieldwork, most of which was undertaken in November and December 1999, meant that it was too early to ascertain whether this proved to be the case.

Not all schools and colleges were initially enthusiastic about the possible impact of EMA, as the following quotation suggests:

"Schools and colleges have had to be persuaded of the benefit of having more students and of greater retention".

(Careers Service representative)

Aside from fears that EMA would increase workloads, other issues were raised. At the initial meeting with the implementation group in one area which took place before the beginning of the first academic year in which students would be in receipt of EMA, a school's representative asserted that Year 12 young people within the school were apprehensive about *"the type of young person who will be encouraged to stay on".* Their concern was about the motivation and what they regarded as the potentially disruptive behaviour of entrants to the sixth form who, in previous years, may not have stayed on. These reservations were echoed by the teacher representative on the implementation group, although, overall, there were few instances of such fears being voiced.

A major consideration for schools and colleges was the need to monitor attendance, either because they would need to construct new mechanisms for doing so or because they would need to amend existing ones. From the LEAs' perspectives, this caused difficulties because of the wide variety of methods adopted and would suggest the need for more uniformity. However, at this stage of the evaluation, with fieldwork being conducted during the first term of implementation of EMA, it was not possible to identify and propose an ideal model for monitoring attendance.

Nevertheless, there was an absence of sympathy among some LEA representatives for colleges which protested about the additional cost of implementing EMA. An LEA representative was robust in saying that it brought no *"extra costs"* for colleges – *"the value of what colleges get back more than compensates for what they've spent".* He further asserted that they were only being asked to do what they should have been doing anyway.

The implementation group in Leeds reported on the resentment and criticism from parents whose children were not eligible for EMA because of the feeder school attended. Similarly, a considerable burden was placed on LEAs in the London boroughs through having to respond

to calls from parents who were unsure about ward boundaries, or were protesting at the perceived unfairness of the eligibility criteria.

Finally, while some schools and colleges had been concerned that the payment of EMA might stigmatise young people because of its dependence on levels of parental income, there was no evidence that this had happened. Indeed, school or college representatives expressed their surprise at the openness of students in discussing their entitlement to EMA and the amount of the weekly allowance they received.

Take-up

In most areas, the number of applications had approached or even exceeded the levels anticipated by the LEA in terms of the numbers of young people applying for, and subsequently receiving EMA[1]. The exceptions were the London boroughs, where take-up was short of expectations. This was largely attributed to the timing of announcements about the pilot and so the boroughs were confident that take-up would be much improved in 2000. They based this optimism on the fact that current Year 11 students would be made well aware of EMA, through input from schools and colleges, the Careers Service, LEAs, and their peers, throughout their final year of compulsory schooling. The availability of EMA would therefore be a consideration at the time of young people's decision-making about post-16 destinations.

Another concern, which was common to almost all areas, was the low level of take-up by those young people whose total parental income was nearing the £30,000 limit. Various reasons were suggested for this, including a:

- lack of awareness among some potential recipients at the higher end of the taper that they would be entitled to the full amount of the retention and achievement bonuses;
- reluctance by some parents to divulge financial information for what was seen as a relatively small weekly amount of EMA;

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[1] However, returns sent by LEAs to the DfEE did not support this picture in some cases, and also showed that in some areas, slower processing of applications meant that the number of EMAs paid did not reach expected levels. Performance in this respect did, however, improve after the period of fieldwork.

- an unwillingness to invest labour through time-consuming form-filling for a relatively small amount of EMA; and,
- misleading publicity material which gave the impression that eligibility was restricted to those with a total parental income of £13,000 or below.

There was a general consensus that information and publicity would need to be re-assessed to ensure that all those who may be eligible are made aware of the possibility of an EMA. In Middlesbrough, where publicity in the first year had been targeted at low-income families, consideration was being given to ensuring that middle-income families were also made aware of EMA.

The impact on Post-16 Destinations

At the time of the roundtable discussions, early indications were emerging of the 1999 destination statistics, which were indicating an increase in post-16 participation rates. The tendency was for this increase to be attributed to EMA, although some respondents felt that the vast majority of those on EMA would have stayed on even without its introduction.

In Gateshead, the early indications from the post-16 destination statistics were that there had been an increase in the proportions staying at school, but no equivalent increase in colleges. This raised a concern that schools, through having a 'captive audience' during Year 11, were able to persuade young people to use their EMA by remaining at school. In contrast, a respondent from a London borough wondered whether a perception that colleges were regarded as *" more lenient, or an easier ride than schools, could lead to young people opting for colleges"*. Again, this reveals concerns over the appropriateness of the course taken, and the reasons for choosing it.

In Middlesbrough, where it was suggested by some training providers, that EMA may have encouraged those who would have gone into Modern Apprenticeships to remain in education, at this early stage it was not necessarily seen as a threat by training providers. However, as mentioned earlier, some TEC representatives were concerned about the potential impact on the work-based route.

Information from the quantitative aspect of the evaluation has estimated the impact of the EMA on the participation rates of eligible young people in full-time education. This shows that in the first year, there has been an overall gain of five percentage points in the pilot areas in comparison to the control areas (Ashworth et al., 2001).

Attendance and Retention

Although it had been expected that it would be too early to be able to comment on the impact of the EMA on students' attendance and retention, a beneficial impact had been perceived in some areas. This was said to be the case in Lewisham in relation to the local college, while in Middlesbrough, where post-16 provision is almost totally in colleges, it was asserted that not only had there been an improvement in customary attendance figures among EMA recipients, but that their example was, to some extent, being followed elsewhere in the colleges by non-EMA students. This had resulted in *"the best retention ever"* (College representative), and was regarded as a positive knock-on effect of EMA. In Oldham, there was said to have been a perceptible improvement in attendance which, it was believed would have an effect on retention rates over time. This perception was repeated elsewhere, with the pressure on EMA recipients to attend regularly being reinforced by the requirements for schools and colleges to monitor and report generally on attendance levels and student performance.

Future Prospects and Expectations

There was universal agreement that it was difficult to assess the potential of EMA in 1999 because, by the time of its introduction, many young people had already made decisions about their future. In some areas it was suggested that it was not quite 'for real' until EMA had been one of the options available to a cohort from the beginning of their final compulsory school year. This led to some respondents referring to it as "experimental".

Thus it was anticipated that the experience with the second cohort of eligible young people from September 2000 would be different. Not only would publicity and information material have been available from the start of the school year and reinforced at careers events, open evenings, careers interviews and so on, but most school students would have heard about EMA through word of mouth, and from siblings and peers.

However, one continuing problem that would arise from more widespread awareness was how to restrict the information to those who would be geographically eligible. In all pilot areas there are boundary issues of some sort and invariably there are some pupils who attend local LEA schools but reside outside the area, as well as those who live within the boundary but go to school elsewhere. Concern was expressed by some LEAs that this will again lead to demands on LEA officers' time as they deal with resulting queries.

6. Issues identified

The previous sections have identified a range of issues that have been regarded as problematic in the initial launch of the pilot EMAs. These cover problems associated with the process of implementation, the administrative mechanisms in place, and the initial impact of the scheme. Here, those which have been foremost in the fieldwork discussions are listed. However, two points require emphasis once again. Firstly, it should not be inferred from this list that the initial implementation of EMA has been bedevilled by problems, for, as indicated at the outset of this report, the LEAs and implementation group members in the pilot areas have achieved a highly successful introduction of EMA, despite considerable time, resource and logistical constraints. Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, in many respects, the initial impact of the EMA has been regarded as positive. Secondly, it is invariably the case that, where possible, individual areas have revised their procedures and practices since the fieldwork took place and in the light of the experience gained during the first year.

Policy Formation

The timing of the introduction of EMA – relatively late in the school year – meant that LEAs felt that they had to interpret DfEE guidelines and make decisions about some policies, systems and practices over all aspects of EMA as they went along. While the assistance provided by DfEE and forums such as that convened by the Local Government Association had been valuable, there was a feeling that more could have been achieved through sharing experiences.

Monitoring of Attendance

As detailed previously, considerable problems have been encountered in setting up adequate attendance monitoring systems which enable the payment of EMA to be made on time.

Parental Income

Most parents who fill in application forms are in the lower income brackets and are not used to providing information about their income for the previous year. The suggestion was made that a shorter period, such as the previous two months, may be more appropriate. It was also

the case that some parents (and applicants) were reluctant to lay their finances open to public view.

'Natural' Parent

Examples were given in several pilot areas of cases where anguish or friction within families had been created by the requirement to obtain information relating to the 'natural' parent. This occurred where the student was unaware that their 'dad' was not their real father or where the young person had left home and effectively broken ties with the parental home. Consequently, it was sometimes difficult to contact the natural parent for this information.

Neighbouring Areas

Given that the pilots are being implemented in selected areas, it was not surprising that resentment arose among those in neighbouring areas who were not eligible. While this was most acute in Leeds and London because of the nature of the model in those localities, it was also true, to a greater or lesser extent, in all areas.

Additional Workload and Cost

The administrative burden imposed by the EMA pilot had created greater additional workloads than had been anticipated and the proposed payment of a percentage of the amount paid out to recompense was regarded as inadequate. There was a strong feeling among LEA representatives that, while this extra money may contribute to running costs, it did not address the issue of the substantial set up costs which had been incurred. Schools and colleges had also been expected to take on additional administrative responsibilities, particularly in relation to monitoring attendance and the drawing up of Learning Agreements[2].

Lack of Take-up at Higher Income Levels

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[2] In the second year, however, an administrative payment has been provided to cover the set up costs for the scheme.

Perhaps because of information about EMA being targeted too narrowly at low-income families or being insufficiently precise, all areas reported a shortfall in what they expected to be the demand for EMA at the higher end of the income taper.

Completion of Application Forms

Most areas reported large proportions of application forms (usually between 50 per cent and 75 per cent) being incomplete and incorrect and having to be returned. This inevitably created an additional administrative burden and, crucially, delayed the process of awarding the EMA.

Bank Accounts

A minority of areas reported difficulties being experienced by 16 year old applicants in opening a bank account for receipt of EMA payments, although this was not felt to have been a major problem.

IT

The need to set up new systems meant considerable extra work for those involved in the provision of IT within LEAs. The system had to be set up within a timescale, which was not always possible to meet and this led to delays in processing claims.

Eligibility Criteria

The resentment felt by parents of those who found they were not eligible led to complaints in some authorities. Again, this could relate to both boundary issues and income levels.

Late Payments

Most pilot areas experienced some delay in making initial EMA payments to young people and parents as a result of the administrative problems associated with processing EMA application forms.

7. Future considerations

The first year of the evaluation of the EMA, which has focused on the implementation of the scheme from the perspectives of administrators and other stakeholders, has charted processes, successes and difficulties emanating from the rapid setting up of the system. Subsequent work will inevitably re-visit the key issues. The experience of the first year has, however, alerted the evaluation team to some aspects of the piloting process which warrant specific attention.

First, the role of the implementation groups themselves requires continuing consideration, in particular the degree of partnership of those involved. Allied to this, the extent to which senior LEA officers participate in, or lead, the implementation groups, may be vital in 'driving' the initiative forward and in enlisting the full support of other partners and sectors, such as further education.

Second, having been through the 'experiment' of the first year, there was great awareness among those implementing EMA of improvements which could be made, especially in aspects such as publicity and the processing of applications. For example, a standard application form would have been of great benefit, instead of local pilot areas having to design their own and then contend with the deficiencies that emerged.

However, the regularity of contact between the DfEE EMA team and those responsible for the scheme's implementation in the pilot areas has already resulted in a number of revisions having been made to the implementation process. Notable among these are:

- the distribution of a Good Practice Guide, drawn up by practitioners.
- the development of revised DfEE guidelines;
- changes to the regulations relating to other sources of funding;
- the production of a single application form;
- assistance in developing computer systems from a secondee from an LEA working in DfEE; and,
- ongoing work between LEAs and DfEE to improve current procedures.

These improvements continue to be made and will clearly be a central focus of the subsequent fieldwork. Particular attention will be paid to levels of retention and the impact of bonuses, both following the Christmas vacation and the main summer break. The levels of take-up, the effectiveness of promotional material, the processing of applications, and the perceptions of members of implementation groups on how EMA is regarded, both by recipients and by learning providers will also be examined.

Taking these things into consideration, the fieldwork to be conducted covering the administrators and stakeholders, will need to consider the greater awareness of the scheme among employers and training providers, the potential role of the Local Learning and Skills Councils, and the fact that schools and colleges will have had a full year's experience on which to base their views of EMA.

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 Research Brief 257.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A

Education Maintenance Allowance

The **EMA** is a Government project which helps you with extra cash as you seek those vital **qualifications**. Middlesbrough is one of 12 areas in the country where the **EMA** is available.

So, what's the EMA about?

It's an allowance to help young people stay on in education and gain qualifications after they are 16

If you live in Middlesbrough and are leaving Year Eleven at secondary school this summer, you could get £30 a week to help you stay on in full time education.

There will also be a £50 bonus for effort and attendance available every term and another £50 at the end of the course for attainment. What do we want from you? Well, commitment to gaining those **qualifications**. And you must turn up regularly!

Interested? Then just contact **Joy Hill** or **Kevin Flanagan** on our **EMA Hotline** (01642) 264993. You can also get information from your school careers teacher, Teesside Tertiary College, Middlesbrough College, Cleveland College of Art & Design or St Mary's Sixth Form College.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

ANNEX B

Student allowances to help with course costs

SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

Learning pays

Your guide to Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs)

For more information please contact any of the following:

- Student Awards Service
  Benefits Services
  Southampton City Council
  Civic Centre
  Southampton
  SO14 7SA

  Telephone: 01703 833555

- Your Year 11 tutor or the sixth form or college you want to go to

This leaflet contains information about Education Maintenance Allowances. If you need assistance with translations please telephone 01703 833333

此冊有包含有關教育生活費用津貼的信息。如者需要翻譯
譯文，請來電話： 01703-833333

This leaflet is also available in large print

Designed, printed and published by Southampton City Council

Please return to :

EMA Applications
Student Awards Service
Benefits Services
Southampton City Council
Civic Centre
Southampton SO14 7SA

Are you a Year 11 pupil?

Do you live in Southampton?

Are you going on to a sixth form or college in September?

If your answers are yes...

Southampton City Council can offer you an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). It is to help you with your living expenses and some of your course materials while you are studying.

What is the allowance for?

The allowance is to help you with your attendance at sixth form or college and with the costs associated with your course. The money will be paid for the weeks you are attending, but not during the vacations.

How much could you get?

You could be entitled to payments of up to £30 per week depending on your parents income.

More good news!

✓ If you stay on your course and if your attendance is good you could receive a bonus at the end of each term

✓ Also - if you successfully complete the course you could get another bonus

You can apply if:

✓ You are a current Year 11 pupil about to finish school

✓ You are going to stay on at sixth form level or go to college full time for up to two years

✓ Your parents gross taxable income is less than £30,000 a year

✓ Your home address is within the boundary of Southampton

How can you apply?

Complete the cut-off slip and return it to the address overleaf, or see your careers teacher.

How will you get the money

✓ **You will need to have a bank account.**

✓ The money will be paid directly into your bank account every week.

✓ The amount will depend on your parents income.

✓ The maximum allowance is £30 a week. The minimum is £5.

✓ Allowances are not payable if your parents earn more than £30,000 per year

Learning Days

✂ -

PRINT CLEARLY AND RETURN IN AN ENVELOPE

Students full name _____

Address _____

_____

Postcode _____

Current school _____

College/courses you are applying for _____

ANNEX C

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE
LEARNING AGREEMENT

Southwork. Education

STUDENT NAME _____   EMA REFERENCE NUMBER _____

COLLEGE/SCHOOL _____   COURSE _____

SECTION A - SCHOOL/COLLEGE TO COMPLETE

QUALIFICATION AIM	LEVEL	START DATE	END DATE	HOURS PER WEEK	NO. OF WEEKS

ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT Please give details	WORK PLACEMENT/EXPERIENCE/FIELD TRIPS/OTHER Please give details

SCHOOL/COLLEGE DECLARATION

I agree that the above named school/college will make available the programmes listed in this agreement, and that I have discussed the aims, objectives and outcomes of the programme with _____ (name of student)

I confirm that I have explained that failure to keep to this agreement will lead to the EMA being stopped.

Signed _____   Date _____

Name _____ (Please print)   Position _____

SECTION B - STUDENT TO COMPLETE

STUDENT DECLARATION

I agree to:
1. Meet the attendance requirement set out in my timetable
2. Submit all homework/course work on time
3. Abide by the rules of the school/college
4. Tell the school/college immediately if I am unable to attend.

I understand that if I do not keep to these agreements, my EMA will be stopped.

Signed _____   Date _____

SECTION C - PARENT/GUARDIAN TO COMPLETE

PARENT/GUARDIAN DECLARATION

I agree to support the school/college in working towards the learning goals in this agreement and will encourage _____ (name of student) to attend regularly and submit course work on time.

I understand that if _____ (name of student) does not keep to the agreements shown above it will mean that the EMA will be stopped.

Signed _____   Date _____

Name _____ (Please print)   Relationship to student _____

WHEN COMPLETED, PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO:
SOUTHWARK COUNCIL, STUDENT SUPPORT SECTION, 1 BRADENHAM CLOSE, LONDON, SE17 2QA

White copy – for Southwark LEA   Pink copy – for Education Provider   Yellow copy – for Student   Blue copy – for Parent/Guardian

ANNEX D

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCES - EXCEPTIONS REPORT

Exceptions Report for the Week Ending:

ONLY COMPLETE THIS FORM FOR STUDENTS WHO SHOULD HAVE THEIR EMA PAYMENTS STOPPED

_____ / _____ / _____

Please return to:
Student Awards Service, Southampton City Council
Email - student.awards@southampton.gov.uk

Please indicate in this box if you have no exceptions this week

HOW TO COMPLETE THIS FORM:
Column 1 - Has there been a material change to the student's course?
Column 2 - If yes, please give details
Column 3 - Has the student changed college?
Column 4 - If yes, please give details

Column 5 - Has the student had any unauthorised absence this week?
Column 6 - Has the student withdrawn from their course?
Column 7 - If yes, what was their last date of attendance?
Column 8 - Has the student broken the Terms and Conditions of their EMA Agreement?

NAME	SCC REF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
		Y / N		Y / N		Y / N	Y / N	/ /	Y / N
		Y / N		Y / N		Y / N	Y / N	/ /	Y / N
		Y / N		Y / N		Y / N	Y / N	/ /	Y / N
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