

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (EMA) - A GUIDE

EMAs will be available nationally from August 2004 to eligible young people in 5th and 6th year at secondary school or FE colleges. Around 40,000 young people could be benefiting from extra financial help to enable them to stay on in post-16 education. How does it affect you?

(1) What is an EMA?

EMA is a weekly payment of up to £30, paid directly to young people from low income families who stay on in further education after they reach statutory leaving age (i.e. after the end of their compulsory schooling). Young people may also be able to receive two bonuses of £150 if they remain on their course and make good progress with their learning.

(2) Why is the Government providing this financial support?

We recognise that for some young people there are financial barriers to participating in education, particularly for those from low income households. In addition evidence from the pilot scheme has shown EMA has a positive impact by increasing the numbers of young people participating in post-16 education, reducing the numbers who drop out of education and by providing incentives that contribute to higher attainment.

(3) Who will be entitled to an EMA?

Any young person who is thinking of staying in further education and whose annual household income is £30,000 or less should be applying for an EMA. The household income assessed for EMA purposes is the same as that used by the Inland Revenue for assessing Tax Credits.

The weekly allowance will be paid at three levels - £10, £20 and £30, subject to household income. Those young people from households closer to the £30k threshold will receive the lower £10 weekly rate. Those from families with income levels below £19k will receive the full £30 rate of EMA. The precise income thresholds will be available in early 2004.

In the first year of the national scheme, young people aged 16 planning to continue their education in school or college in August 2004 can apply. In the former pilot areas young people already in receipt of EMA and continuing their education from August 2004 will also be able to apply for EMA under the terms of the national scheme.

(4) For how long will each young person receive their EMA?

Most young people will get their EMA for three years (as long as their family income does not rise above the £30,000 per annum threshold). The EMA will be available for three years out of a possible four, for those young people who may need additional time in further education to achieve their potential.

(5) So how do young people apply?

EMA entitlement is based on an assessment of household income in the previous financial year. Application forms will be assessed by your Local Authority Education Department or by your FE college. Further information on the details of the application process and availability of forms will be made available in early 2004.

Local Authority Education Departments and FE colleges will notify all applicants about whether or not they are entitled to EMA. A young person will receive EMA payments once they have enrolled at a school or college and have started a valid programme of study. Payment of bonuses will depend on the young person showing satisfactory progress against learning objectives set in a learning

agreement set with his/her course tutor and through their on-going commitment to remain in education. All payments will be made direct to the student through his/her bank account. Payments will only be made to those students who have satisfied the attendance requirements.

(6) What does this mean for schools?

Schools have an important role in making sure young people are aware of EMA, and in encouraging them to take up the allowance. Awareness of EMA should form part of the careers education and guidance programme for young people up to and including S4. For S5/S6 students, schools will be required to notify their LA weekly/fortnightly of their decision to pay or not to pay each of their EMA entitled students. Attendance and monitoring systems will need to be sufficiently robust to show that the authority to pay an EMA is based on a satisfactory attendance record. Schools will need to keep evidence to support EMA payment decisions. There must be an appeals process for any students who may wish to challenge the reason for stopping their weekly payments or bonuses.

(7) What does it mean for local authorities?

The local authorities will be expected to co-ordinate the local implementation of EMA, ensuring that schools have clear milestones in preparing for their responsibilities.

(8) EMAs and "vulnerable" young people

EMAs should focus support on individual students, those young people who can be motivated to return to learning or who are at risk of dropping out of learning. Schools should provide a coherent programme of careers education and guidance that includes information about EMAs, alongside other financial support. LAs will work with the local Careers Scotland staff, care workers, key workers and social workers to help ensure

that vulnerable young people are informed about EMA and that "flexible" appropriate arrangements are in place.

(10) What happens next?

Raising the awareness of young people -

During 2003-04 it is important that S4 students receive information about EMA. Material will be available to help schools, colleges and Careers Scotland give messages about EMA to young people through careers education lessons, open evenings, careers conventions, career planning events and through the liaison work of Careers Scotland. Early notification might influence a young person to stay on in learning post-16.

Planning - Schools and colleges will want to make an assessment of the likely take up of EMA and the impact on participation levels in 2004-05. They are encouraged to reflect the messages in this leaflet in their prospectuses and planning documents. Detailed guidance on the requirements for administering EMA will be issued to schools and colleges later in 2003.

Guidance and consultation - A programme of regional EMA Implementation Groups and a Guidance Working Group will deliver information in autumn/winter 2003 to raise awareness in schools and colleges and amongst local partners, and to consult on the guidance for the national scheme.

Contact for further information -

EMA Team

ETLLD/Funding for Learners:

450 Argyle Street

Glasgow G2 8LG

Telephone - 0141-242-0112

Email - kirsty.craig@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Web site - www.emascotland.com