

Implementation of the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots: The Fourth Year

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the local implementation and administration of the EMA pilots in the final year of the evaluation. The processes and administrative mechanisms through which EMAs have been delivered were examined, with a particular emphasis on identifying exemplars of good practice which have been developed by LEAs and by schools and colleges, which could assist the planning for the national delivery of EMA. In addition, feedback was obtained from representatives in the pilot areas on the inter-relationship that will be required between a national provider, which will manage the delivery of the scheme in 2004, and local stakeholders.

The methodology involved roundtable discussions with the members of the implementation groups in each of the original 15 pilot areas, and individual face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders in selected pilot areas. **Section 1**

A National EMA Provider

While LEA representatives had been notified that the national roll-out of EMA would involve a transfer of responsibility for the administration of the scheme from LEAs to a single national provider, their knowledge and understanding of the role and responsibilities of a new single administrative agency was limited. Consequently, their responses tended to reflect a degree of apprehension about how this could be effected without detracting from what they regarded as having been an efficient and successful pilot phase. The main concerns can be characterised as relating to issues of:

- the remoteness of a national agency;
- the need for personal contact with young people and their parents; and
- young people being disinclined to access or rely on a telephone helpline.

Notwithstanding these concerns, it was acknowledged that benefits could also be derived from having a national provider, notably in ensuring greater uniformity and consistency in the application and operation of the scheme. It was also asserted that much could be gained by the national provider through harnessing and building on the expertise which had been developed during the pilot phase, and that, whoever was to administer the scheme, the

overriding concern was that it should meet the needs of young people and their parents who could benefit from participation. **Section 2**

Young people and their parents

For most respondents, the major issue when considering the efficacy of enlisting a national provider to administer the rolled-out EMA, was how assistance would be given to young people and their parents, particularly in the completion of application forms and in dealing with queries about payments or the lack of them. During the pilot phase, representatives of LEAs, Learning Centres, Careers/Connexions Services and others had devoted considerable time to providing personal support, particularly to vulnerable and less able young people, in these tasks. Great emphasis was placed on the vital role played by this personal support in successfully engaging and retaining young people in education.

LEAs were concerned that a local stakeholder, whether it be the LEAs themselves, the Learning Centres or the Connexions Services, should be given responsibility for the provision of this support to young people. It was also strongly recommended that young people in receipt of, or applying for EMA should be given a named local contact who would be able to respond to their needs. This would inevitably add to the administrative burden of Learning Centres and Connexions Services. In the case of the latter, it was felt that there would be a training need for their staff. **Section 2.1**

Learning Centres

A concern about the remoteness of a national provider was again expressed by Learning Centre representatives. This was partly related to a possible situation where, instead of a single named contact, a succession of different ‘faceless’ individuals were at the end of the telephone line to deal with queries from Learning Centres. It was felt to be important that, in the early stages, representatives of the national provider visit local areas to explain their procedures and requirements. The idea of regional or area representatives of the national provider was also mentioned.

As well as wanting detailed guidance about what their responsibilities in relation to application procedures and attendance monitoring would entail, Learning Centres were also anxious to gain as early an indication as possible of the MIS requirements of the national provider, in order that the appropriate mechanisms could be made ready.

Other issues which were cited by Learning Centre representatives were:

- the importance of a senior person within the Learning Centre taking overall responsibility for EMA;
- the amount of co-ordination required, particularly within colleges, to administer EMA; and
- an awareness of data protection issues when providing information for the national provider. **Section 2.2**

The Role of Local Implementation in National Delivery

There was widespread awareness that EMA was to be rolled out nationally in 2004. Beyond that, however, little was known about how the initiative was likely to be implemented. Most stakeholders, and certainly those from Local Education Authorities (LEAs), knew that a national provider was to be responsible for administering the scheme, rather than responsibility being in the hands of LEAs, as has been the case during the pilot phase. Irrespective of which organisation would be undertaking this role, there was a strength of feeling that it would be essential to collaborate with a partner at the local level in order to maintain both contact and credibility with local participants and stakeholders.

While the need for one organisation to take the lead in this was recognised, the perceived success and ongoing value of the pilot area local steering or implementation groups, many of which continued to meet to share information and address problems encountered in the administration of EMA, was widely regarded as a viable model on which to base the local partnership. **Section 3**

Promoting publicity and awareness of EMA

It was widely assumed that the national roll-out of EMA in 2004 would be accompanied by a national publicity campaign. This was regarded as a welcome addition to the promotional and awareness-raising activities, which were expected to continue at the local level. It has been the case that, while the LEA has tended to take the lead in publicity for EMA in the pilot phase, other stakeholders, such as the Careers (now Connexions) Service and individual Learning Centres, have also had significant roles to play.

It was anticipated that a range of promotional activities would continue to be employed, but that Connexions Services would play more of a leading role, for example in taking over responsibility for providing information about EMA at careers evenings and open evenings. In all areas, respondents were confident that they had developed a multi-faceted and co-ordinated approach to generating informed awareness about EMA, and believed that this should continue. **Section 3.1**

Supporting vulnerable young people

The provision of support for vulnerable young people was another area which was identified as falling within the remit of Connexions, despite the fact that much of this work had previously been undertaken by LEA staff. A key aspect of this is the assistance given in completing EMA application forms, which can be time-consuming and onerous. The ability of Connexions Services to provide the required level of support will clearly be dependent on their having adequate resources, notably in terms of sufficient Personal Advisers.

A widely voiced concern was that if a national provider was unable to respond quickly to the needs of individual vulnerable young people, possibly through a local partner, then these young people may either cease to claim their EMA, or fail to apply in the first place. **Section 3.2**

The role of LSCs and LEAs

Although representatives of LEAs and local LSCs believed that the appointment of a national provider meant that they would no longer have the leading role in administering EMA, they recognised that they would inevitably be required to contribute to the rolled-out scheme at a local level. Aside from the suggestion that LEAs would have a prominent role in publicity and awareness raising, respondents from these organisations could envisage being involved in:

- co-ordinating or managing local partnerships, possibly operating in a similar way to the steering/implementation groups from the pilot phase;
- disseminating the guidance issued by DfES or the national provider about local implementation and delivery; and

- co-ordinating training for those from Learning Centres and other relevant organisations, who have not previously been involved in EMA. This would entail drawing on the depth of knowledge and expertise which has been accrued by those responsible for implementing the pilot scheme.

In discussing the likely future role of local agencies, there was general agreement that Connexions Partnerships would be increasingly important, especially in relation to addressing the needs of vulnerable or less able young people, when applying for, or accessing EMAs. Local Learning Partnerships which are managed by local LSCs could also be used to coordinate local delivery strategies following the national roll-out of EMAs. **Section 3.3**

EMA Applications, Monitoring and Payment systems

EMA Application Forms and Learning Agreements

From the Learning Centre perspective, the distribution of EMA application forms is unproblematic. However, the cost of posting forms to all potential Year 11 leavers was not necessarily regarded as inconsequential by those responsible for bearing it, as there did not appear to be any marked difference in the number of applications made, in comparison to the previous method of sending forms to all schools and colleges for them to distribute. The difficulties experienced by some people in completing the forms was regarded as being more problematic.

A major problem for those involved in the implementation of EMAs is that, irrespective of when or how the application forms are distributed, the bulk of applications are invariably not received until September. This causes a backlog and gives administrators little time to have the paperwork in place to enable payments to be made from the beginning of the term. There was widespread agreement that the administrative process would be more efficient, especially to the benefit of EMA recipients, if applicants could be persuaded to send them in earlier.

An aspect of the administration of EMA which has been broadly welcomed has been the stipulation that Learning Agreements have to be returned, duly signed and completed fully, before payment can be made. In some cases this has been reinforced by the requirements of auditors, so that LEAs recognise the need for the Learning Agreement to be in place before

authorising a payment. At the same time, there is some concern that the Learning Agreement is not necessarily read fully by the relevant parties. **Section 4.1**

Attendance and Performance Monitoring

In some institutions, it was felt that the introduction of the attendance monitoring requirements for EMA had been beneficial in tightening up the existing processes and systems within the Learning Centres.

Concerns continued to be expressed in Learning Centres about the costs incurred in administering EMA. Therefore, the indication that funding would be available to offset those costs was widely welcomed.

The idea of using the Connexions Card, or similar type of swipe card, was initially attractive, if it was able to reduce the amount of paper-based administration. However, in practice, a great deal of scepticism was prevalent, due to the perceived limitations of such a system, and, notably from those with previous experience using the card, the inadequacies of the system as currently available.

During the introduction of EMA in 1999, a great deal of attention was given in some areas to the establishment of appeals procedures. This was in anticipation of large numbers of appeals being made. It subsequently transpired that the fears of being inundated with appeals proved to be unfounded. **Section 4.2**

EMA Payment Systems

Respondents were acutely aware that during the piloting of EMA decisions to make both weekly and bonus payments had rested largely on measuring students' attendance. Other aspects of the Learning Agreement, such as linking student performance and behaviour to payments had, in the majority of cases, been a subsidiary concern. It was widely agreed that this imbalance should be addressed within the national implementation of EMA.

While many respondents from both LEAs and Learning Centres reported that they received a large number of queries each week from students in relation to EMA payments, the volume was reduced when:

- Learning Centres issued a written notification to students informing them of the reason for their payment being suspended;
- LEAs issued payment slips to students; and
- LEAs/Learning Centres issued payment schedules to students which listed payment and non-payment dates (half-term breaks/statutory holidays). **Section 4.3**

Audit

Subject to EMA auditing requirements fitting into existing audit timetables which are adhered to by OFSTED and the LSC, it was suggested that any audit requirements for EMA should be accommodated within existing arrangements. Some respondents requested that guidance should be made available to Learning Centres, to advise them of any additional audit requirements following the national roll-out of EMA, in terms of recording attendance or reasons for determining what constitutes authorised or unauthorised absence. **Section 4.4**

Perceptions and Take-up of EMA

There were no instances of any significant diminution in the levels of take up of EMA, and there was widespread enthusiasm for the decision to roll out the scheme on a national basis. Within the pilot areas, it has become well established and regarded by many young people and their parents as an entitlement. **Section 5**

Future Considerations

By focusing on the implications of the decision to roll out EMA nationally, with administration being placed in the hands of a national provider, the fieldwork has alerted the evaluation team to some aspects of the roll-out which warrant specific attention, notably:

- the importance of personal support, at a local level, for EMA recipients and those eligible for EMA;
- the need for young people to have a named contact for their queries and problems;
- the need for Learning Centres to have a named contact within the national provider;
- the importance of having a local network or partnership to support the work of the national provider – with a designated lead organisation;
- the requirement to provide adequate levels of training to staff in Learning Centres and Connexions Services;

- the intensive workload expected of different agencies in the process; and
- the potential role of Connexions Services in supporting young people in their applications and subsequent queries.
- The recommendation that the guidelines for defining young people as vulnerable, and the attendant flexibility of the regulations, be implemented in the national roll-out.
- The contention that the Connexions Card had the potential to significantly enhance the process of attendance monitoring, albeit with considerable improvement required from its present state.
- The need for more precise guidance in relation to what constitutes authorised absence.
- The introduction of incentives to encourage young people to submit their applications before completing Year 11.
- A more rigorous implementation of the criteria stipulated in the Learning Agreement over and above attendance requirements.
- Providing written notification to EMA recipients about payment schedules, in order to reduce the number of queries.
- EMA audit requirements should be piggy-backed on existing audit arrangements.

Section 6

1 INTRODUCTION

With a view to raising participation, retention and achievement in post-16 education among 16-18 year olds, particularly among those from lower-income families, the piloting of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) began in 1999. EMA is a post-16 educational allowance paid to young people (or in some areas, in the piloting phase, to their parents), eligibility for which is dependent on parental income. On the basis of evaluation evidence, the decision to roll out EMAs nationally from 2004 was announced in the 2002 Spending Review.

The piloting of EMA began in 15 Local Education Authority (LEA) areas. The scheme was subsequently extended to a further 41 LEAs in England in September 2000. The full EMA weekly 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 payments for a third year.

The large scale longitudinal evaluation of the piloting of EMA started in 1999 and will be completed in 2004. The evaluation process has involved collecting quantitative data from young people and parents in the pilot areas and also in matched control areas. In addition, in the first two years of the evaluation, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a sample of young people and parents in the pilot areas. Throughout the duration of the pilot, information has been gathered from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and other partners who have been involved in the administration of EMA at a local level. This has included a consideration of the systems and processes for delivering EMA which have been developed in each pilot area. The role of local implementation groups in devising the structure of local delivery and introducing amendments and improvements, has been a particular focus of

earlier evaluation reports (Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire et al., 2002; Maguire & Maguire, 2003).

This report focuses on the local implementation and administration of the EMA pilots in the final year of the evaluation. The processes and administrative mechanisms through which EMAs have been delivered were examined, with a particular emphasis on identifying exemplars of good practice which have been developed by LEAs and by schools and colleges, which could assist the planning for the national delivery of EMA. In addition, feedback was obtained from representatives in the pilot areas on the inter-relationship that will be required between a national provider, which will manage the delivery of the scheme in 2004, and local stakeholders.

1.1 Methodology

The methodology for the final year of the evaluation of the implementation of the EMA pilots comprised two strands:

- Roundtable discussions in the original fifteen pilot areas; and
- Individual interviews with key stakeholders in selected pilot areas.

Roundtable Discussions

When EMA was introduced, implementation groups which consisted of representatives from the LEAs which were responsible for administering EMA in each of the pilot areas, together with, in most cases, representatives of Careers Services (now part of the Connexions Service), schools, colleges, and Training and Enterprise Councils (now replaced by the local Learning and Skills Councils) were established in each area to assist in the local delivery of the initiative. Since the evaluation of EMA began in 1999, roundtable discussions have been convened with each local implementation group on an annual basis. In addition, in the first year of the evaluation, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken with representatives drawn from the LEAs, Careers Services, TECs and Learning Centres (schools and colleges), in order to elicit the perspective of key individuals to the introduction of EMA.

Within the fourth year of the evaluation, group discussions took place between March and May 2003. In a small number of pilot areas, where the local implementation group was no

longer in existence, interviews were undertaken with representatives of the LEAs. In all cases, a topic guide was used to structure discussions, which included the following broad headings:

- Role of local implementation in national delivery;
- Perceptions of aims of EMAs and desired outcomes;
- Publicity and awareness;
- Experience/expectations of the operation of EMA;
- The effect of the national roll-out of EMA;
- MIS requirements; and
- EMA administrative support.

A copy of the group discussion topic guide is provided in Annex A. Group discussions and individual interviews (see below) were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. Additional information was obtained from most areas through receiving copies of minutes of implementation group meetings, and copies of EMA publicity and administrative material.

Individual Interviews with Key Stakeholders

In the fourth and final year of the evaluation, in order to assist DfES with the planning of the national implementation of EMA, there was a requirement to collect a greater depth of information about specific aspects of the delivery of EMA than would be possible in single group sessions. Therefore, individual interviews were conducted with key representatives from LEAs, schools, colleges, local Learning and Skills Councils and Connexions Services in six selected pilot areas. The pilot areas were selected on the basis of existing good practice. Within each locality, a maximum of six individual interviews were completed. Topic guide details are contained in Annex B. The interviews with key stakeholders focused on the implementation of EMA in relation to the role and perspective of the respondent. A key element of the study design was to elicit views on what would constitute best practice in the national roll-out of EMA, administered through a single provider. Respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences of delivering EMA at the local level, and how it could be improved.

The findings of the individual interviews with key stakeholders, together with those of the roundtable discussions, form the content of the fourth year EMA implementation report.

2 A NATIONAL EMA PROVIDER

The fieldwork for the fourth year EMA implementation study was undertaken during Spring and early Summer 2003. While LEA representatives had been notified that the national roll-out of EMA would involve a transfer of responsibility for the administration of the scheme from LEAs to a single national provider, their knowledge and understanding of the role and responsibilities of a new EMA administrative agency were limited. LEA respondents were aware that DfES was in the process of selecting a single national provider which would manage the application and payment processing of EMAs from September 2004. Their knowledge about the national roll-out of EMA and the appointment of a single national provider had been obtained from information that had been released from a DfES website and from letters that LEAs had received from DfES. In addition, some LEA respondents were members of regional EMA groups, which included representatives from a number of pilot LEAs. Information about plans for the national roll-out of EMA in 2004 had been disseminated by DfES representatives at regional EMA meetings.

In some pilot areas, LEAs had written to Learning Centres advising them about the change in administrative responsibilities which would follow the national roll-out of EMA. A small number of school and college representatives had been invited to focus groups which had been organised by DfES to discuss the national implementation of EMA. However, many respondents reported that they felt that their knowledge about the appointment of a national EMA provider and more importantly, its function, was largely based on 'rumour and hearsay' and many felt that they were 'second guessing' about how a single provider would manage the administration of EMA. Notwithstanding this acknowledged lack of concrete information on which to form judgements, the feedback from respondents was useful in enabling issues about which respondents were concerned to be identified. This may provide a baseline against which the actual experience of the implementation of the national scheme may be assessed.

Many respondents were apprehensive about the appointment of a single national provider to administer EMA and the loss of a locally delivered service. Examples were cited of government agencies which had centralised services and this had led to a decline in the standards provided to their clients.

'I mean the government's track record with the appointment of national providers for other services, you know, outside of the DfES, that on the 1st September, 2004, we will feel confident that by the end of the first week of term or that by the second week of term students know that they are going to get their money.'

College Representative

There was widespread agreement that when the national EMA provider was appointed by DfES, a great deal could be achieved from building on the expertise that had been developed during the pilot phase. One suggestion included the national provider working with some Learning Centres in selected EMA pilot areas and non-pilot areas during the academic year 2003/4 to operate trial runs of the administrative systems that are planned from September 2004. This would enable the national provider to gauge the ability of both Learning Centres which had experience of EMA and Learning Centres which will be introduced to the system for the first time, to deliver EMA administrative requirements. It was felt that the crucial baseline requirement for the national delivery of EMA, was that the administrative system that supports it, regardless of who the provider is, meets the needs of young people and their parents.

'I think it comes back as well to the point about perceptions that people have. I don't think the vast majority of people actually care about the structures and delivery of service, as long as they get the service that they think they should be getting. So, if central government is saying that this thing is going to be centrally administered then that's fine, but to our customers the quality of service is all that matters.'

College Representative

The following sections explore the feedback from respondents about issues that young people, parents and Learning Centres might face dealing with a centralised EMA administrative system and some examples of good practice which may be utilised in the national implementation of EMA.

2.1 Issues for Young People and their Parents

An overriding concern among respondents in the sample to the appointment of a single EMA administrative provider, to replace the local delivery of the administration of EMA which had been provided during the pilot phase by LEAs, was the ability of a national provider to meet the needs of all groups of young people and their parents. It was argued that the number of queries that emanate from EMA application procedures and a weekly payment system, relied

heavily, in the pilot phase, on the existence of local support services. A number of issues emerged from the data which related particularly to the difficulties that may be faced in replacing 'hands on' local support with a central telephone help line system.

Assistance with EMA Application Forms

While it was widely believed that strategies could be developed between local agencies and the national EMA provider to distribute application forms, there was considerable evidence to support the view that large numbers of young people and parents continue to require assistance with form filling.

Respondent: *'But specifically to do with their form, 14 in May, 40 in June, 43 in July, 54 in August, 46 in September, 50 in October... So the peak time is over the summer, so you're looking June through to October, five months.'*

Interviewer: *'So that is for form filling.'*

Respondent: *'Yes, that's actual callers coming in wanting help with completing it. Which is quite a high number really.'*

LEA Representative

'Well in the year we had 2,500 people come in with EMA enquiries and it was split pretty well 50/50 within 40 people, between those with application forms and those just with queries, and we've only got just over 3,000 applications.'

LEA Representative

This support has mainly been accessed, during the pilot phase of EMA, by visiting Student Services/Support Departments within LEAs. Some success has been achieved in reducing the numbers of queried or incomplete application forms where the LEA has operated a one-stop-shop system, and trained staff have been able to check the application form, with the applicant, so that errors or omissions can be rectified on the spot. Examples were also found of Learning Centres where applicants were encouraged to complete the application form in the presence of a tutor, who would be able to offer advice.

From September 2004, young people and their parents will be expected to liaise directly with the national EMA provider. While Learning Centres and Connexions staff acknowledged that they may have a greater role to play at the local level in assisting young people with EMA applications when the initiative is rolled out nationally, a number of issues emerged over the withdrawal of the LEAs from the administration of EMA. These were:

- The lack of confidence that some young people will have in dealing directly with a telephone help line provided at national level and the increased levels of responsibility that might be placed on other local support services.
- The ability of Learning Centres and Connexions Services to deal with the volume of queries that they may have to deal with as a result of the changes made to the application system.
- The lack of expertise that was felt to exist among some teaching and Connexions staff in helping students submit applications for awards.
- The vast majority of queries relating to the completion of application forms emerge during the summer months, when staff at many Learning Centres are unavailable to students.

It was widely recommended that a strategy should be developed within the national roll-out of EMA, which ensured that a telephone help line service provided by a national provider was supported at the local level by a clearly defined support service.

Application Processing

Feedback from representatives in the EMA pilot areas would suggest that once EMA applications forms are submitted, applicants need to be kept up-to-date by the national provider with processing times and when first payments will be made. This has proved difficult to achieve in some pilot areas during peak times, and in all areas at the beginning of the Autumn term. While many pilot areas have developed strategies to encourage young people to apply for EMA in Year 11 in order that applications can be processed by the beginning of the Autumn term, the bulk of applications has continued to occur in September. It was a recommendation from a number of respondents that the national EMA provider should have sufficient levels of staffing to deal with the volume of applications which will occur at peak times.

Since young people and parents in the pilot areas appeared to benefit from being able to call in or to telephone a local office to discuss their EMA applications, it was suggested that calls to a national EMA provider could be managed by dedicated teams of staff who would have responsibility for specific areas or regions of the country and who demonstrate some understanding of young people's needs.

Problems with the processing of EMA application forms and delays in making first payments in the Autumn term are associated, in some areas, with students dropping out of full-time learning. It was suggested that young people should be kept fully informed about their EMA application and that some consideration be given to the EMA national provider issuing bridging payments to young people until forms are processed and/or informing students of their rights to backdated payments if processing delays occur. At present, some Learning Centres enable students to claim travelling costs from Student Support Funds until their EMA applications are processed.

EMA Payments and Withdrawals

Respondents reported that a large volume of queries continue to occur on a weekly basis, from both young people and their parents over EMA payments and withdrawals. In some areas, initiatives have been introduced in an attempt to curb the number of calls made by young people and parents about EMA payments which may be utilised within the national implementation of EMA. Weekly payment slips issued by LEAs which include the amount paid, and the payment period covered, together with the payment date, have helped to reduce the number of queries. In most pilot areas young people fail to receive any formal notification of the amounts of EMA that have been paid into their bank accounts.

Some Learning Centres write directly to the young person to inform them of their intention to withdraw the EMA weekly payment. This task is undertaken at the same time as Learning Centres advise the LEA to stop payment, and was reported to be effective in reducing the large number of telephone calls both LEAs and Learning Centres received on EMA payment dates. However, it was acknowledged that this would be a major administrative task for Learning Centres which have large numbers of EMA students.

'Something I do, ... is when I stop a payment, I write to the parents to inform them ... Well I honestly think that once you've got a separate form or a letter it doesn't take any doing and therefore I send that myself, because otherwise you end up with parents ringing up. I found that when I started that, that cut down the number of irate parents.'

Head of Sixth Form

2.2 Issues for Learning Centres

The overwhelming majority of respondents from Learning Centres valued the close working relationships that they had developed with administrative staff from LEAs during the piloting

of EMA. Close networking between LEA and Learning Centre staff had largely emanated from working together to form part of local EMA implementation groups, which were developed in 1999, to manage the local delivery of EMA. As a result, many respondents noted that they felt able to ‘pick up the phone’ or call into LEA offices, if they had a query about their students and EMA administration and that queries would be dealt with promptly. Consequently, there was an underlying concern that the introduction of a national EMA provider would end the informal working relationships that had developed during the pilot phase, and would be replaced with a distant, remote provider which could be more difficult to access. In addition, there was a genuine concern that staff at a national office may fail to understand local issues in relation to the needs of young people and any variations that exist between areas in the delivery of post-16 education and the implementation of EMA.

‘... because we’ve had a local network and had a very supportive local network, through student services (LEA) here, whereby if there’s been any challenges, any anxieties, any concerns, we know that we’ve been able to get in touch with somebody and we can put, say for example a name to a face, and that’s always, always been evident since we’ve had the pilot. But in terms of ... starting again it will be a whole new ball game and I think it will sort of reflect the impersonality as well because I don’t think I will be very keen to sort of keep on having to wait on the end of the phone for someone to deal with a particular query to do with one of my students.’

Head of Sixth Form

‘The sharp end of EMA from the student perspective is the transfer of money, and in a large system which requires very careful monitoring there are very frequent blips in payments which need fairly active, immediate investigation. What we don’t want with a national organisation running it is to have to wait, two, three, four weeks for some information feedback and so on.’

Head of Sixth Form

Learning Centre representatives argued that a baseline requirement from a national EMA provider would be a direct telephone line to a team or member of staff allocated to a specific number of Learning Centres or to a specified geographical area.

Respondents from Learning Centres recognised that with the national roll-out of EMA, their responsibilities were likely to increase. They believed that the withdrawal of LEAs from the administration of EMA would result in Learning Centres occupying the ‘front line’ between young people, parents and the national provider. Young people and parents would, in the first instance, visit their Learning Centre if queries occurred over application and payment delays, and most school and college representatives felt that they would be required to act as the intermediary between the young person and the national provider. Immediate access to

staff within the national EMA provider who were familiar with ongoing queries over application and payment delays was considered to be essential if the new system was going to work.

Learning Centres in EMA pilot areas have developed a variety of student attendance monitoring procedures in order to meet the weekly or fortnightly EMA reporting requirements. While respondents were certain that the national EMA provider would not be concerned with the mechanisms that have to be in place to meet attendance data requirements, many examples of good practice have been developed which could be utilised by Learning Centres which are introducing EMA attendance monitoring systems for the first time. Examples of attendance monitoring procedures have been outlined in previous EMA evaluation reports (Maguire, Maguire & Heaver, 2002; Maguire & Maguire, 2003). It was suggested that the national LSC, the local LSCs and LEAs could have a role to play in developing training programmes for Learning Centres which will be introducing EMA for the first time in 2004, by harnessing the expertise, knowledge and good practice which has been developed in Learning Centres in some pilot areas.

While a number of LEAs in pilot areas had introduced attendance reporting systems which required Learning Centres to provide weekly or fortnightly attendance records on every EMA student, or 'full' reporting, many LEAs had operated a system of 'negative' reporting which involved Learning Centres providing a list of students who had failed to meet attendance requirements and were to have their EMA weekly allowance withdrawn. The anticipation that the national EMA provider would require Learning Centres to provide full weekly return on every EMA student, was greeted with some apprehension among representatives of Learning Centres which had large numbers of EMA students, and in particular, which were currently operating a 'negative' reporting system. Colleges with large numbers of EMA students who are spread across a number of sites, would find the task of full reporting on a weekly basis particularly onerous. In addition, rates of incomplete or inaccurate attendance reporting appear to be smaller in LEAs where Learning Centres are required to produce attendance data two weeks in arrears, since this practice allows Learning Centre staff more time to follow up inconsistencies in attendance records.

Respondents from Learning Centres emphasised the need to receive guidance from both DfES and the national EMA provider on EMA attendance reporting requirements from

September 2003 onwards, to enable sufficient time to be available to develop systems to meet the requirements for the national roll-out. It was felt to be important that, in the early stages, representatives of the national provider visit local areas to explain their procedures and requirements. The idea of there being regional or area representatives of the national provider was also mentioned. In addition, Learning Centres would welcome guidance from DfES on EMA regulations, in particular in relation to authorised and unauthorised student absence, since it was widely recognised that greater consistency was needed between Learning Centres and individual members of staff with regard to the interpretation of existing rules.

3 ROLE OF LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION IN THE NATIONAL DELIVERY OF EMA

As indicated earlier, there was widespread awareness that EMA was to be rolled out nationally in 2004. Beyond that, however, little was known about how the initiative was likely to be implemented. At the time of the fieldwork, this was regarded as being an issue of great urgency, in order that planning for the national roll-out could take place at the local level. Most stakeholders, and certainly those from LEAs, knew that a national provider was to be responsible for administering the scheme, rather than responsibility being in the hands of local education authorities, as has been the case during the pilot phase. Irrespective of which organisation would be undertaking this role, there was a strength of feeling that it would be essential to collaborate with a partner at the local level in order to maintain both contact and credibility with local participants and stakeholders.

As well as being considered essential in addressing the need for support of recipients of EMA, and their parents, the paramount importance attached to the involvement of local stakeholders in the administration of EMA emanates in many instances from the experience of the pilots and, in particular, the significant and successful role of local implementation or steering groups. These local groups were generally perceived to have been very effective, not only in engaging the stakeholders in the implementation and ongoing smooth running of the scheme, but also in sharing ideas, developing best practice, and ensuring that all relevant stakeholders were kept informed of developments.

'Ours is carrying on – it's vital, a perfect sounding board about what schools and colleges think of it.'

LEA Representative

This area of communication between the stakeholders was valuable, so that “things don't become an issue”. It was also the case that where the implementation groups had been conspicuously successful, this success was founded on a shared commitment to what EMA was seeking to achieve.

'The LEAs have been doing a great job. We all want it to be as easy as possible for students – to avoid unnecessary work as well, but the students come first. We have a common goal.'

Learning Centre Representative

Building on this notion of a 'common goal', the EMA steering group had, in many cases, been a catalyst for close partnership working across a range of issues.

Thus, the continuation of inputs from a range of local stakeholders, working in partnership, was regarded as vital to the success of the national roll-out of EMA. While the need for one organisation to take the lead in this (the local LSC was mentioned by several respondents), the perceived success and ongoing value of the pilot area local steering or implementation groups, many of which continued to meet to share information and address problems encountered in the administration of EMA, was widely regarded as a viable model on which to base the local partnership.

3.1 Promoting Publicity and Awareness of EMA

It was also known, again by LEA representatives, but also by some other stakeholders, that the continuing involvement of the LEAs was to be focused on promoting publicity and awareness of EMA, although it appeared that little thought had been given, on the part of the LEAs, to what form this involvement may take. This absence of planning could be partly attributable to the fact that the national roll-out was still some way off, but also to a feeling that the identification of this role for the LEAs was essentially a consolation for the disappointment they had experienced in learning that they were not to be responsible for administering the national scheme. Referring to the LEA role in publicity, one respondent stated:

'It's going to be minimal, isn't it. I mean they're talking about an authority that's had EMA for four years, the publicity here is minimal, because everybody knows about it. So you're not talking about a great big role for this authority in publicity. We will do whatever the DfES suggests, but would that be, I mean that wouldn't even be a person job I don't think.'

LEA Representative

It was widely assumed that the national roll-out of EMA in 2004 would be accompanied by a national publicity campaign. This was regarded as a welcome addition to the promotional and awareness-raising activities, which were expected to continue. It has been the case that,

while the LEA has tended to take the lead in publicity for EMA, other stakeholders, such as the Careers (now Connexions) Service and individual Learning Centres, have also had significant roles to play. With the expectation of this being the main aspect of the LEA's involvement in EMA, some concern was expressed by LEA representatives about their ability to fulfil this role, given that they would no longer have staff with dedicated responsibility for administering EMA. Many of those who had held these positions were in the process of reverting to former duties, with, for example, responsibilities for student support or HE awards.

It was anticipated that a range of promotional activities would continue to be employed, but that Connexions Services would play more of a leading role, for example in taking over responsibility for providing information about EMA at careers evenings and open evenings. In all areas, respondents were confident that they had developed a multi-faceted and co-ordinated approach to generating informed awareness about EMA, and believed that this should continue. Examples were found of LEAs being contracted by Connexions to distribute information about EMA and other initiatives to local schools.

There was general agreement that awareness of EMA was now widespread, and extended beyond the pilot areas to neighbouring areas. Nonetheless, in all areas examples could be found of individuals who did not know about EMA until after they had enrolled on courses.

'A lot say they don't know about EMA, despite having had letters etc.'

Learning Centre Representative

'We incorporate the information about EMA in our admissions process, so when they're interviewed they're told "if you're a Year 11 school leaver and you do a full-time course, you may be eligible for an EMA". We give them a flyer and then it's up to them to apply to the LEA if they want to. But we have found all along ... we get so many people actually start the course, haven't bothered to apply and then all of a sudden think "oh I might be entitled to this", which again is where you get the problems with backdating payments.'

Learning Centre Representative

As far as the material used to publicise the scheme was concerned, most respondents felt that these, whether in the form of posters, leaflets, flyers etc, had been getting better as the scheme evolved. Invariably, the LEA was seen to play a pivotal role in the publicity and marketing of the scheme, with other stakeholders contributing as appropriate.

'Things about awareness mostly come from the LEA. They always come to open days, parents' evenings etc, and send out information to young people. We send out information at enrolment about the procedures. Some LEAs have open days etc to help fill forms in. It will be a big loss for students, and for colleges and schools if they don't do this.'

Learning Centre Representative

LEAs were also found to be providing substantial support, in terms of awareness-raising, to schools and colleges, through providing publicity material and having an input to open days etc. At these latter events, LEA staff were able to respond to the multiplicity of questions about EMA from young people and their parents. Schools and colleges were also involved in the publicising of EMA, with the dissemination of information and advice about EMA having become a component of many of their processes. For example, EMA was invariably mentioned at some point during the induction of students, and instances were found of a planned tutorial about EMA, with the tutor taking students through the procedures, being an integral part of the induction process.

Prior to enrolment and induction, during the summer term, some Learning Centres put on 'taster days' for Year 11 students and enlisted the support of members of the LEA EMA team to provide information on EMA. This activity was reinforced by the attendance of LEA EMA team members at parents' evenings and open days.

'No amount of glossy posters can be a substitute for people behind a desk ... face-to-face contact is the vital thing.'

Learning Centre Representative

This also raises the issue of the timeliness of information and publicity material being given to young people and their parents, for it was widely acknowledged that messages about EMA need to be available at different points in the calendar year, and provided through a variety of mechanisms. This was in order to ensure that some information gets to the appropriate target group, and that the messages are reinforced. Again, the collaboration between local partners was deemed essential, and, in the future, the potentially increasingly important role of the Connexions Service was flagged up, although concerns were expressed about this working effectively with a national provider. Referring to the crucial role played by LEAs in raising awareness, one respondent remarked:

'Connexions PAs and school staff can then fill in the gaps – when people are ready to listen. For Year 11s, it will happen over the summer. Connexions is vital then – we're measured on stopping kids becoming NEET, therefore we badger kids over the summer –

we're driven by this target. EMA is part of that guidance. But that system will go. Information to parents will be crucially missing.'

Connexions Service Representative

3.2 Supporting Vulnerable Young People

Within the proposals for the national delivery of EMA, respondents welcomed the decision to retain some responsibility for supporting vulnerable groups of young people at the local level. Three broad issues emerged from the analysis of the interviews that were undertaken in the pilot areas:

Defining a Vulnerable Young Person

Within the current EMA regulations, seven different groups of young people are classified as vulnerable, including young offenders, single parents, young carers and young people in care. In some pilot areas, additional flexibilities to EMA regulations were introduced to encourage vulnerable young people to apply for EMA and engage in learning. It was a recommendation that both the guidelines which have been developed by DfES in the pilot phase of EMA, in terms of defining the target population, and the flexibilities to EMA regulations which were introduced in selected pilot areas are implemented in the national roll-out of EMA.

Identifying Vulnerable Young People

It was widely recognised, that the Connexions Service would have a key role in identifying vulnerable young people who may wish to consider applying for EMA. The availability of EMA is a useful tool both in encouraging young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) to consider returning to full-time learning and in assisting the Connexions Service to reach its target of reducing the size of the NEET population by 2004. While Connexions Personal Advisers (PAs) were perceived to have a key role in identifying the target population, evidence from the EMA vulnerable pilot areas would suggest that a wider variety of agencies need to be engaged in identifying and supporting young people who may wish to apply for EMA. Indeed, during the pilot phase, some LEAs have relied heavily on the support of voluntary organisations and charities, to promote the awareness of EMA among groups of young people, including the homeless and single parents.

Evidence from the EMA pilot areas would also suggest that the status of young people can change very quickly. Therefore a multi-agency and a co-ordinated approach to raising the awareness of EMA was considered to be essential at the local level.

'And that's one of the big problems really that people will go in and out of that situation and particularly with someone who may actually at a point in transition be absolutely fine, on track ... and then something happens at home, and suddenly they're in a very different situation and they may become very vulnerable ... whilst the Personal Advisers will try and be in touch with as many and identify as many Year 11 who are going to need that additional support, there will be young people who are even outside the system or move into the area new, or who are working with other agencies, and they're taking the lead role in terms of support.'

Connexions Manager

One respondent highlighted the need to raise the awareness about the availability of EMA among some sections of staff within local Connexions Services. It was argued that while Connexions staff who worked with young people within education were largely familiar with EMA, a more limited understanding about the availability of EMA was felt to exist among staff who were working with young people within social services, Youth Offending Teams and youth work. It was recognised that, for some Connexions staff, a training need may have to be addressed to accompany the national roll-out of EMA.

'So I know that from the careers sector, we've got it (EMA) entrenched in what we're doing, but what I can't say is whether the Youth Offending Team know about it, whether other areas of Connexions know about it, and are pushing it ... there's a training issue isn't there, over making sure that they do know about it.'

Connexions Manager

Support Needs of Vulnerable Young People

From the experience obtained by respondents who have worked with vulnerable young people who have been in receipt of EMA, there was evidence to suggest that support needs for vulnerable young people were both labour intensive and required immediate attention. A key aspect of this was the assistance needed in completing EMA application forms and ensuring that regular payments were maintained to the young person. A widely voiced concern was that if a national provider was unable to respond quickly to the needs of individual vulnerable young people, possibly through a local partner, then these young people may either cease to claim their EMA, or fail to apply in the first place. In addition, it was felt that a national EMA provider should be alerted to the need to train their staff to be flexible in their interpretation of EMA regulations in order to meet the needs of young people.

At the local level, the ability of Connexions Services to provide the required level of support will clearly be dependent on their having adequate resources, notably in terms of sufficient Personal Advisers. Several respondents reported that Connexions PAs working in their areas

were stretched to the limit with existing responsibilities and, as a consequence, additional staffing would be needed to meet these new demands. Indeed, in some pilot areas there was evidence that Connexions Services were experiencing some difficulties with staff recruitment.

While most of the findings from the research focus on the need to ensure that groups of vulnerable young people receive adequate levels of support to encourage applications for and receipt of EMA following national roll-out, the issue of developing flexible programmes of learning to meet the needs of specific groups of young people was also raised. It was felt that some groundbreaking work had been achieved in some of the EMA vulnerable pilot areas, in helping groups of young people to re-engage with learning. Uncertainty existed about whether existing programmes, and planned initiatives, would continue to be supported and encouraged. For example, in one pilot area, flexible programmes of learning, which had been developed for homeless young people, involved running short courses at homeless shelters. Two LEAs had worked together to develop an initiative at a young offenders centre, in which young people who participate in learning programmes are paid EMA upon their release from detention.

3.3 Role of Local LSCs and LEAs in Supporting Learning Centres

Although representatives of LEAs and local LSCs recognised that the appointment of a national provider meant that there would no longer be strategic responsibility at the local level for the administration of EMA, there were various interpretations of how LEAs and local LSCs might be best placed to assist Learning Centres with the local delivery of EMA. While LEAs had occupied a central role in the delivery of EMA during the pilot phase, because of their administrative responsibilities, local LSCs had little direct involvement with the local implementation of EMA.

It was widely believed that the best way that Learning Centres could be supported at the local level, was through a co-ordinated approach to partnership working which was led by one local partner. This would involve representatives from schools, colleges, the local LSC, the LEA and the Connexions Partnership/Service and voluntary organisations coming together to discuss the national and local delivery of EMA and the relationship between EMA and the post-16 learning agenda. Some respondents believed that the local LSCs were now best

placed to manage this responsibility because of their strategic management function in post-16 learning. It was suggested that the Learning Partnerships, which are currently funded through the local LSC's Local Intervention and Development (LID) funding, could provide the forum for local agencies to discuss the delivery of EMA. However, some respondents asserted that local Learning Partnerships in some areas were dominated by colleges, had few representatives from schools and were little more than 'talking shops'. Some LSC respondents were aware of these issues and were seeking to develop a more 'hands on' role for local partners who were involved in Learning Partnerships.

'And we're developing it so that it becomes more of an active based organisation rather than talking shop. And we're going to be giving them responsibilities for them to go away and provide, produce an area's own plan for us to adopt as part of our learning strategy for participation ...'

Local LSC Representative

Much of the success from the partnership working which was developed from the local implementation groups that were formed at the beginning of the EMA pilot, was derived from members taking responsibility for developing best practice. For example, local publicity and marketing strategies were designed and sustained by many local EMA implementation groups throughout the piloting of EMA (Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire, Maguire & Heaver, 2002 and Maguire & Maguire, 2003).

Other suggestions included using Connexions Partnerships and LEA 14-19 working groups as forums in which the local implementation of EMA could be incorporated into existing partnership networks from 2004.

Local LSCs and LEAs were also considered to have a roll to play in supporting Learning Centres through:

- Disseminating the guidance issued by DfES or the national provider about local implementation and delivery;
- Co-ordinating training for those from Learning Centres and other relevant organisations, which have not previously been involved in EMA. This would entail drawing on the depth of knowledge and expertise which has been accrued by those responsible for implementing the pilot scheme; and

- Acting as the intermediary between local Learning Centres and the national EMA provider, by managing the responsibility for providing feedback on issues relating to the local delivery of EMA.

4 EMA APPLICATIONS, MONITORING AND PAYMENT SYSTEMS

4.1 EMA Application Forms and Learning Agreements

From the Learning Centre perspective, the distribution of EMA application forms was regarded as being relatively unproblematic. The potential applicants had usually received a form through the post directly to their homes, or from school during Year 11. Colleges tended not to be as involved at this early stage, because they had no way of knowing who may be applying to their institution.

'It was undoubtedly easier for the schools ... they were going straight to the kids ... that was far more effective, and it saved me a lot of time trying to chase round ... I think it made life a lot easier the forms going straight to the kids, and it must have had an effect because we've got more kids on EMAs this year than we've ever had before.'

Learning Centre Representative

However, the cost of posting forms to all potential Year 11 leavers was not necessarily regarded as inconsequential by those responsible for bearing it, as there did not appear to be any marked difference in the number of applications made, in comparison to the previous method of sending forms to all schools and colleges for them to distribute.

What was more of a problem, however, as is detailed in Section 2.1, was the form itself, and the difficulties experienced by many people in filling it in.

'It is a mammoth form, which would need a night to fill in.'

Learning Centre Representative

As discussed earlier, some potential applicants required considerable assistance in completing the form. Moreover, during the main summer holiday period, it may have been solely the Connexions Service which was able to provide the necessary support, notwithstanding the availability of LEA one-stop shops to check the application forms before they were submitted.

It was also the case that, even after four years of experience of administering the application process, different problematic issues relating to eligibility were still emerging. However, there was some support for the idea of Tax Credit information being used in the assessment process, as this would shift the onus from the LEA to the Inland Revenue.

A major problem for those involved in the implementation of EMA is that, irrespective of when or how the application forms are distributed, the bulk of applications are invariably not received until September. This causes a backlog and gives administrators little time to have the paperwork in place to enable payments to be made from the beginning of the term. There was widespread agreement that the administrative process would be more efficient, especially to the benefit of EMA recipients, if applicants could be persuaded to send them in earlier.

It had been anticipated, at the outset of the piloting of EMA, that many young people may experience difficulties in obtaining bank accounts. This had clearly failed to become a contentious issue, and can be seen as a successful element of the implementation.

Another aspect of the administration of EMA which has been broadly welcomed has been the stipulation that Learning Agreements have to be returned, duly signed and completed fully, before payment can be made. In some cases this has been reinforced by the requirements of auditors, so that LEAs recognise the need for the Learning Agreement to be in place before authorising a payment.

'It goes out with the offer letter, and we don't pay until it's back. We chase them up. It tells you how many hours their course is and we really need it, stamped and signed.'

LEA Representative

At the same time, there was some concern that the Learning Agreement was not necessarily read fully by the relevant parties. Rather, signing it was seen as a means of triggering the payment of the EMA. Some LEAs had attempted to place more emphasis on the importance of the Learning Agreement.

'We've had a push to make it (the Learning Agreement) look more official, to raise its profile with young people, because people sign it without reading it.'

LEA Representative

Another issue was that a new Learning Agreement was required whenever an EMA recipient changed courses or institutions, and, on occasions, there was a delay between notification being received of the student leaving a course, and the details of their new course being received.

'Sometimes we have to stop them because we've been notified that they've left one, and we don't know when they've started the next one, and until we know that, there might have been a two week gap ... we contact the college straight away and try and get it resolved quickly. Sometimes they're not stopped, it is a straightforward transfer, but sometimes it's not.'

LEA Representative

4.2 Attendance and Performance Monitoring

In some institutions, it was felt that the introduction of the attendance monitoring requirements for EMA had been beneficial in tightening up the existing processes and systems within the Learning Centres.

'What it's done is make sure that staff know who should be in front of them, whether they're there or not, and if they're not they've got to pass it on and it's got to be investigated. So staff have moved out of their comfort zone really, and they've had to feed information in, they've had to return their registers, they've had to confirm that student A was in their lesson and student B wasn't, and if student B wasn't there we have to follow up and get an explanation. Otherwise, it all rumbles up to me, EMA gets stopped, the student comes charging in and it's back to the teacher. So it's actually tightened up teacher procedures.'

Learning Centre Representative

Concerns continued to be expressed in Learning Centres about the costs incurred in administering EMA. Therefore, the indication that funding would be available to offset those costs was widely welcomed.

In order to prevent inappropriate stoppages of payments, one college had a system whereby anyone who had been absent during the week was sent a letter on the Friday, and had until 4.00pm on the Monday to provide an acceptable explanation for their absence. Although this was a time-consuming exercise, there could be scope for improving it through the use of electronic mail.

As far as the monitoring of attendance was concerned, the thought of providing positive reporting (i.e. listing all those registered for EMA and detailing whether or not they had the necessary attendance record for the previous week to warrant a payment being made) was somewhat daunting for those who had been making their returns manually, and highlighted the need for appropriate electronic systems to be available. However, it was now the case that, unlike in the early days of EMA, electronic systems were being used for registration. The idea of using the Connexions Card, or similar type of swipe card, was initially regarded

as being attractive, if it was able to reduce the amount of paper-based administration. It was therefore perceived to be “a good idea”.

‘If you’ve got a smart card, it’s got a chip, it’s got a record of that person’s attendance, qualifications, ongoing curricula, life would be easy, wouldn’t it?’

Learning Centre Representative

However, in practice, a great deal of scepticism was prevalent, due to the perceived limitations of such a system, and, notably from those with previous experience using the card, the inadequacies of the system as currently available.

‘Yes, but that only checks attendance, doesn’t it. It doesn’t check the other things that we look at, like non-submission of work and this sort of thing. So you could have your attendance on a Connexions Card for somebody who is not just doing any work, just turning up at college.’

Learning Centre Representative

These sentiments, about unfulfilled promises, were replicated elsewhere. There was certainly a feeling that, in relation to EMA, there had been some “backtracking” about the readiness of the Connexions Card to contribute significantly, and that, if it were to do so, a considerable investment would be required. However, the potential of the Connexions Card was widely recognised.

‘The card itself and the principle is admirable. Potentially, it is the solution, but practically there’s a long way to go.’

LEA Representative

During the introduction of EMA in 1999, a great deal of attention was given in some areas to the establishment of appeals procedures. This was in anticipation of large numbers of appeals being made. It subsequently transpired that the fears of being inundated with appeals proved to be unfounded. This was again confirmed in the fourth year implementation evaluation visits, although dealing with claims to have payments backdated was mentioned.

‘I had very, very few, if I’ve had twenty since 1999 I’d be surprised.’

LEA Representative

‘The only area of appeals that we consider are people who don’t get the form in by the first term and appeal for it to be backdated ... if it’s a genuine case, we’re more than happy to backdate that payment to the first term.’

LEA Representative

Such cases tend to be accepted as inevitable, due to the delays in completing and processing application forms, and the number of applications which are made after the commencement of the Autumn term. Overall, while there may be lots of queries and some complaints, they cannot be classified as appeals.

'Many of those things we invariably end up almost treating as a complaint, although in reality what they're complaining about is our application of the rules, but nevertheless the people concerned still are unhappy and almost wanting a second opinion.'

LEA Representative

Nevertheless, there was a concern that, with the national roll-out, appeals may become more prevalent, unless more precise guidance is provided to Learning Centres, particularly in relation to what is acceptable as an authorised absence.

'From what I've seen from the EMA best practice guide issued by DfES, they take a much more distant view of things, they just say well it's up to the institution to decide or authorise absences, they don't actually provide any guidance ... and my concern is that in the national scheme that isn't done, it's handed back, well, it's up to those institutions, the rule is that you can authorise an absence, it's up to you to decide on what basis that absence should be authorised. So that everybody would then make their own interpretation.'

LEA Representative

4.3 EMA Payment Systems

A number of issues emerged about weekly and bonus payments to EMA recipients among representatives from both LEAs and Learning Centres who had operated at the ‘front line’ during the pilot phase. Respondents raised a number of consistent points, in relation to backdating EMA payments, achieving consistency in making EMA payments, recording decision-making linked to EMA payments and providing EMA recipients with payment records. A number of suggestions were put forward which may assist with the national implementation of EMA.

Despite the fact that EMA had been operational in the pilot areas since 1999 and that there was widespread awareness about the availability of EMA, concern was expressed about the large number of young people who continued to submit EMA applications at the beginning of the Autumn term, which had a ‘knock on’ effect in relation to making EMA payments. Once the EMA application forms have been processed, Learning Centres are currently required to provide LEAs with a backdated account of student attendance which may span several weeks. This request can sometimes become problematic, depending on the volume of requests for backdated attendance records and the efficiency of student attendance monitoring systems. In addition, concern was expressed about students receiving large amounts of money in backdated payments, in particular among students who found that money had been deposited without written notification being issued to explain the payment breakdown or the period covered. Some respondents suggested that EMA weekly payments should not be backdated beyond four weeks and that greater incentives should be introduced in the national scheme, to encourage more young people to submit their EMA applications before completing Year 11.

Respondents recognised that the decision to make EMA payments lies with Learning Centres and that the EMA National Provider will act on information provided by individual schools and colleges. However, during the piloting of EMA enormous variation has existed between Learning Centres in their interpretation of EMA regulations, in particular in relation to authorised and unauthorised absence. There was widespread acknowledgement of the need for the EMA National Provider, in conjunction with DfES, to provide clear, detailed and consistent regulations in order to achieve greater consistency in making EMA payments. In addition, it was suggested that training should be provided at the local level, to ensure that the regulations are understood.

LEA representatives in some pilot areas had put forward amendments to the EMA guidance which had been issued by DfES. For example, in one large multi-cultural city, the LEA had agreed that up to four days authorised absence could be granted to students for non-Christian holidays such as Ede, Diwali and Bisacki, subject to students notifying their school or college in advance, of their intention to be absent. It was hoped that examples of local agreements such as authorised absence for non-Christian holidays will be incorporated into the national scheme.

Respondents were acutely aware that during the piloting of EMA, the decision to make both weekly and bonus payments had rested largely on measuring students' attendance. Other aspects of the Learning Agreement, such as linking student performance and behaviour to payments had, in the majority of cases, been a subsidiary concern. Where Learning Centres had introduced a system of withdrawing payments until, for example, assignments or course work were submitted, this had proved a highly effective tool in motivating students. It was argued that justifying payments on the basis of attendance is, in the majority of cases, much more straightforward and accountable than defending payments in relation to students' behaviour and performance.

Since the first port of call, for many students who have not received their EMA payment, is to speak to someone at their school or college, many Learning Centres in the pilot areas had developed systems of recording their decisions to suspend payments in order to justify decisions that had been taken. It was strongly argued that a consistent approach is implemented within the national delivery of EMA, which might entail Learning Centres recording reasons for withdrawal to the EMA National Provider, at the same time as attendance and performance data is reported.

While many respondents from both LEAs and Learning Centres reported that they received a number of queries each week from students in relation to payment queries, the volume was reduced when:

- Learning Centres issued a written notification to students informing them of the reason for their payment being suspended;
- LEAs issued payment slips to students; and

- LEAs/Learning Centres issued payment schedules to students which listed payment and non-payment dates (half-term breaks/statutory holidays).

While the cost of issuing students with weekly payment slips and termly or annual payment statements was noted, these mechanisms did appear to be effective in reducing the volume of queries about EMA payments, in particular those concerning payment withdrawals and the payment dates for bonus payments.

While all respondents were of the view that EMA recipients fully understood the weekly payment system, some respondents continued to report confusion among some young people regarding the payment of bonuses. Where payment slips were not in existence, a number of queries continued to be generated when bonus payment were made in relation to the reasons for, and timing of, the additional payments. This finding would suggest that more explanation about the nature and purpose of bonus payments needs to be given to young people when EMA is rolled out nationally.

4.4 Audit

Respondents were asked to comment on audit requirements for Learning Centres within the nationally delivery of EMA and to make suggestions about who should carry out this responsibility. It was widely agreed among respondents from Learning Centres, that their organisations were now subject to a rigorous appraisal of their attendance monitoring procedures as part of the auditing requirements which are conducted by OFSTED in schools and by the LSC in colleges.

'So for us, keeping accurate registers isn't an optional thing, it's mandatory from the audit point of view.'

College Representative

Subject to EMA auditing requirements fitting into existing audit timetables, which are adhered to by OFSTED and the LSC, it was suggested that any audit requirements for EMA should be accommodated within existing arrangements. Some respondents requested that guidance should be made available to Learning Centres, to advise them of any additional audit requirements following the national roll-out of EMA, in terms of monitoring student attendance or recording reasons for granting authorised or unauthorised absence. It was also

suggested that Learning Centres should be required to establish clear lines of responsibility among staff, in relation to decision-making for granting authorised and unauthorised absence, in order that clerical or administrative staff are not burdened with the responsibility for decisions which may later be challenged through auditing procedures.

'And presumably, colleges will have to think about more robust systems for actually ensuring that the absence is authorised, but it is still open to fraud, because if you're saying that we're going to allow authorised absence for illness and its confirmed by parents ...'

College Representative

Some respondents were aware that some financial support may be available from DfES via the LSC to Learning Centres following the national roll-out of EMA, to support them with their administrative costs. While these proposals were broadly welcomed, it was suggested that any auditing of the administration of EMA within Learning Centres should include a review which ensures that EMA administrative funding is 'ring fenced' for that purpose.

Examples of good practice were in evidence in some EMA pilot areas in relation to current audit practices. In one EMA pilot area, a member of the EMA team from the LEA, visited local schools and colleges on a regular basis for audit purposes. The audit involved the representative from the LEA choosing a random sample of EMA recipients and checking school/college attendance data against LEA attendance and payment data as well as interviewing EMA recipients. If necessary, a series of recommendations were made by the LEA representative aimed at improving attendance monitoring procedures.

'I've been audited on a number of occasions because the EMA team actually do a countrywide trawl ... and when they come they'll say, right we want to have a look at these records, these five or ten individuals, and would it be possible to make sure that these individuals are around so that we can have a chat to them. And I have no problem with that at all, because I'm a firm believer that if we are dealing with public money, then I need to be accountable, to basically say to somebody, this is the system we've got and this is the system which works for us.'

Head of Sixth Form

Audit procedures had been introduced in one EMA pilot area aimed at improving the effectiveness of local publicity and marketing. The number of EMA applications in the area was measured by postcode area, and a targeted approach to improve awareness and information about EMA was introduced in areas where numbers of EMA recipients were considered to be low. LEA staff contacted local schools and colleges in targeted areas and

arranged to give presentations and attend parents' evenings, as well as increasing the circulation of posters and flyers in order to promote the existence of EMA.

4.5 MIS

The introduction of the EMA Management Information System in September 2001 had initially caused some consternation among LEAs, as identified in the report of the third year of the pilot (Maguire & Maguire, 2003). It was apparent that these difficulties had largely been overcome, and the information requirements were not unduly onerous. Moreover, the usefulness of the data generated was acknowledged.

'It gives you an indication of where you are, what you're doing, and your performance. ... the information they produce is easily understood.'

LEA Representative

5 PERCEPTIONS AND TAKE UP OF EMA

The decision to roll out EMA nationally from September 2004 was widely welcomed. The piloting of EMA was perceived to have been successful in enabling more young people from lower income families to remain in education. It was argued that the existence of £30 or £40 per week, that was available from EMA, gave young people both a choice about whether or not to remain in full-time education beyond 16 and was a crucial factor in retaining many young people in post-16 education. However, evidence to substantiate the impact of EMA on achievement rates was more difficult to quantify.

'Since it was implemented and I've been involved in organising it ever since the implementation, I have nothing but high regard of it. I don't see it having any disadvantages apart from the cost to the Exchequer. Its use as a tool to improve achievement and focus students' minds is excellent, it has improved our attendance ... It's improved our specific attendance for some students who in the past I think would have dropped out, we run a very simple check system for a few students where they get a signature per lesson where they're just on the edge of being lost to the course, and it has made all the difference. Nothing concentrates a 17 year old mind more than a bit of money.'

Head of Sixth Form

While the heavy administrative responsibilities that Learning Centres carry in relation to EMA attendance monitoring have been well documented in earlier evaluation reports (Maguire et al., 2001; Maguire, Maguire & Heaver, 2002; Maguire & Maguire, 2003), a positive outcome from the need to provide accurate and regular EMA attendance data, has been the requirement for Learning Centres, in some cases, to radically improve their attendance monitoring systems for all students.

'Oh no. If it wasn't for EMA I wouldn't have to be such a stickler for attendance. Seriously, and this in actual fact was picked up in our OfSTED inspection that we had in October 2001, whereby they did comment on the fact that at the end of every term I did a percentage attendance for every, not just EMA students. I did a percentage attendance for all students in the sixth form, because at the end of the day what's the point in having percentage attendance at the end of the term just for EMA students, when in actual fact you should really be doing it for everybody ...'

Head of Sixth Form

Learning Centre managers pointed to the need to create student monitoring systems, both in terms of attendance monitoring and student performance procedures for all students, which avoided the creation of a bi-polar population split between EMA and non-EMA students. Many respondents were sensitive to the need not to discriminate between students on the

basis of EMA receipt, and, consequently, had developed sets of regulations which had the same standards in relation to attendance and performance for the whole student population. Despite the existence of such protocols, many respondents reported that, in general, EMA students were more compliant with regulations because of the monetary value attached to their attendance and performance.

While the introduction of EMA had brought with it strict attendance requirements and performance criteria which were outlined in individual student Learning Agreements, some respondents commented on a change of attitude among some students since EMA has become more established. It was asserted that the 'something for something' requirement outlined in student Learning Agreements had been displaced, among some students, with an expectation that EMA was now their 'right'. This had led to students challenging the authority to suspend payments, if attendance or performance requirements had been breached. This finding indicates a requirement within the national delivery EMA guidelines, that students are made fully aware of the conditions which are attached to the receipt of EMA, and that these requirements are reinforced with students, at regular intervals.

'I have to say there is a bit of a culture change now we're going into the fourth year from where originally people accepted the decisions, now there's a grumble against everything. They don't accept as much now as they did in 1999 or 2000, they don't feel it's fair to have their payment suspended. They're almost saying it's my money for 38 weeks or 36 weeks. There has been a bit of a culture change slightly. Not every student, I've no wish to generalise, but there has been a slight change in how they perceive EMA.'

LEA Representative

Two further observations were also evident from the analysis of the data in relation to students' attitudes to EMA. First, it was argued that students on a reduced weekly rate of EMA (households between £13-£30,000) were less inclined to apply for EMA, and were also less willing to adhere to the rules and regulations that surround the receipt of EMA. This latter point is not consistent with the survey evidence, which "suggest that young people from professional and managerial backgrounds (who would receive reduced weekly allowances) experienced short-term interruptions to attendance but sustained a high level of attendance overall, so allowing them to qualify for retention bonuses throughout the academic year" (Middleton et al., 2004: p 65).. In addition, it was argued that the amount of administration needed to support application and attendance monitoring for students who were in receipt of minimum amounts of EMA was not cost effective in relation to the sums of money involved.

Second, some respondents pointed to shortcomings in the EMA regulations in relation to attendance requirements which appeared to encourage students ‘not to bother’ if they had already had an unauthorised absence in a given week. Any unauthorised absence leads to the suspension of an EMA weekly payment, which appears to lead, in some circumstances, to students taking the decision to drop out for the rest of the week, on the basis that they will not receive an EMA payment.

Some discussion did emerge in relation to the national roll-out of EMA, about whether EMA should be merged with the Modern Apprenticeship training allowance and Income Support benefits for young people to form a single ‘Youth Allowance’. Respondents highlighted the inequalities that currently exist between different types of allowances paid to young people, most notably between EMA and training allowances. It was argued that while the parents of EMA students were still eligible to claim Child Benefit, Income Support and Housing Benefit for their children in full-time education, entitlement to these benefits was suspended if a young person entered work based learning. Paying a standard allowance to young people, regardless of their post-16 route, would end existing discrepancies and open up a level playing field in terms of payment routes into work based and full-time learning. In addition, paying a Youth Allowance to young people currently in receipt of Income Support could be linked to a requirement for young people to access guidance and support, which may in turn lead to higher levels of re-engagement with the education and training system than currently exist.

6 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

By focusing on the implications of the decision to roll out EMA nationally, with administration being placed in the hands of a national provider, the fieldwork has alerted the evaluation team to some aspects of the roll-out which warrant specific attention, notably:

- The urgent need for greater clarification and detail about the rolled out national scheme, notably the requirements for reporting attendance.
- Concerns over the perceived ‘remoteness’ of a national provider, and the need to establish effective communication and networking channels between the national provider and local organisations.
- The importance of personal support, at a local level, for EMA recipients and those eligible for EMA, particularly in terms of assistance with the completion of application forms and queries about payments. This would entail working in conjunction with, but not being over-reliant on, a national provider’s telephone helpline. This would be especially important for vulnerable young people.
- Priority being given to developing an administrative system which is geared to the needs of young people and their parents.
- The need for young people to have a named contact, preferably locally based, for queries and problems.
- The need for Learning Centres to have a named contact with the national provider.
- The importance of having a local network or partnership to support the work of the national provider – with a designated lead organisation. The development of a clearly defined local support service may be derived from a continuation of the networks assembled for the steering/implementation groups, encompassing representatives of LEAs, LSCs, Learning Centres, Connexions Services and other relevant agencies.
- The intensive workload expected of different agencies in the process, and in particular the need for Learning Centres to respond to administrative queries and personal support needs.
- The potentially pivotal role of Connexions Services in supporting young people in their applications and subsequent queries, and in creating more widespread awareness of EMA.
- The necessity to ensure that a multi-agency approach to creating awareness was developed, particularly when targeting vulnerable young people.

- The recognition that there will be considerable training needs, particularly among Connexions PAs, relating to the application process, eligibility criteria, payment systems and other details of EMA.
- The recommendation that the guidelines for defining young people as vulnerable, and the attendant flexibility of the regulations, be implemented in the national roll-out.
- The contention that the Connexions Card had the potential to significantly enhance the process of attendance monitoring, albeit with considerable improvement required from its present state.
- The need for more precise guidance in relation to what constitutes authorised absence.
- The introduction of incentives to encourage young people to submit their applications before completing Year 11.
- A more rigorous implementation of the criteria stipulated in the Learning Agreement over and above attendance requirements.
- Providing written notification to EMA recipients about payment schedules, in order to reduce the number of queries.
- EMA audit requirements should be piggy-backed on existing audit arrangements.

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ANNEX A

EMA PILOT AREAS

IMPLEMENTATION GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE – FOURTH YEAR

Role of Local Support in the National Implementation of EMA

Future role of local implementation groups

Remit and responsibilities

Organisation/allocation of responsibilities

LEAs willingness to take on workload of neighbouring LEAs

Perceptions of a national provider managing the delivery of EMA

Ways in which LEAs/Learning Providers/Connexions Services and local LSCs might work with a national provider

Publicity

Support for vulnerable young people

LEAs support to schools

Local LSCs support to colleges

Transition from the Local Management of the Administration of EMA to a Central Administrative System

Level of support required from pilot areas to assist a national provider

Willingness to assist with transition arrangements

Key issues with transition arrangements facing both pilot areas/national provider

Timescales

Support requirements from DfES – ***financial support***

Transferring lessons learnt in piloting phase to national roll-out

Publicity and Awareness

Information/awareness/publicity for EMAs – ***changes needed to support national roll-out***

Responsibilities for design, development and implementation of ***local publicity***

Strategies used to reach target groups – in particular ‘hard to reach’ groups

Impact of publicity strategies on take-up

Most effective methods for communicating with young people and their parents

Suggested strategies for auditing the effectiveness of local publicity/marketing

arrangements – within a national framework

How to make the National Roll-out of EMA Effective in Relation to:

Enhancing post-16 participation rates (in particular NEET group)

Enhancing the level of take-up and factors inhibiting take-up (in particular NEET group)

Its impact on other initiatives/post-16 destinations/routes

The aspirations and attitudes to learning of ALL young people

On attendance, retention and achievement in post-16 education (weekly allowance (full and partial) and bonuses – relative importance attached to each)

Behaviour

Qualification attainment and progression

Class sizes/class management

Access and entry to higher education

Administrative Support and Mechanisms (for both transition arrangements and national implementation framework)

Staffing levels and requirements – ***transition/NP***

Willingness of LEAs/Connexions Partnerships and Schools and Colleges to distribute application forms on behalf of ***NP***

Support and advice that will be needed with completion of application forms to assist ***national provision***

Standard letters to ***young people***

Procedures and timescales for action taken, and details of what this is, for non returned forms – ***Learning Centres***

Strategies introduced/planned to improve application processing procedures general help with filing in forms - ***Learning Centres/Connexions Partnerships***

Appeals – current/future arrangements and recommendations

EMA Learning Contract

Involvements of Learning Centres in completion of two part Learning Contract (Part 1 – attendance – triggers first payment) (Part 2 – learning goals - triggers bonuses)

Submission of data on LCs to NP

Changes to LCs (course changes/movement between Learning Centres)

Breaking LCs

LCs and non-EMA students

Payment Systems

Payment delays – ***role of Learning Centres***

Bank accounts – ***role of Learning Centres***

Payments for religious holidays – perceptions

Holiday/half-term breaks in payments

Bonus payments

Appeals – current/future arrangements

Preferred payment method – 1 or 2 weeks in arrears

Partnership requirements for national roll-out

Attendance Monitoring – Learning Centres

Attendance monitoring procedures (current/planned)

- schools and colleges (before and since the introduction of EMA)

- LEAs

System of reporting attendance to LEA – positive, negative or 100% reporting from schools and colleges – transition arrangements

Staffing

Staff training requirements and costs (***Learning Centres***)

Authorised/unauthorised absences – ***suggested systems to achieve standardisation***

Suspension/termination of EMA weekly payments - levels of stopped payments

(N.B admin procedures between schools/colleges and LEA/national provider and referral procedures to Connexions Service)

Use of Connexions Card

Procedures introduced/reviewed to implement the payment of attendance/achievement bonuses

Appeals-current/future arrangements

Perceptions of the national roll-out of EMAs and desired outcomes

Feedback about EMA from:

- Recipients/Non-recipients/parents
- Learning providers
- Employers /Training providers
- Neighbouring LEAs (non-pilot areas)
- Connexions Services

Feedback on:

- Proposals for national roll-out
- Preferred timescales and format for information requirements
- The introduction of auditing practices to assess the effectiveness of national administrative arrangements - ***Learning Centres***
- Examples of good practice – support given through application system/raising awareness/working with partners /monitoring attendance/payment systems***
- Ongoing liaison between LEAs and DfES
- Role of ***LGA/EMA admin board***
- View of new Management Information Reporting system – (***should CAPITA visit LEAs to offer training/support***)
- View of feedback on evaluation results
- Suggestions for continuing and improved forms of communication with DfES – conferences, letters etc
- Ways to strengthen links between national provider and local partners
- Views on secondment opportunities to DfES to develop role of ***Learning Centres*** in support of national roll-out

Further Information:

Copies of all relevant documentation relating to the administration of EMAs

Copies of relevant background material relating to the local labour market, education provision etc

Routine forwarding of data relating to the implementation of EMAs

ANNEX B

EMA PILOT AREAS
DISCUSSION GUIDE 4th YEAR

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS

Role of Local Support in the National Implementation of EMA

Ways in which LEAs/Learning Centres/Connexions Services and local LSCs might work with a national provider in relation to:

Managing local Publicity

Offering support to vulnerable young people

LEAs supporting schools

Local LSCs supporting colleges

Transition from the Local Management of the Administration of EMA to a Central Administrative System

Support requirements from DfES – financial support

Transferring lessons learnt in piloting phase to national roll-out

Views on the need for Bonus Payments to be completed by 15/12/04 at the latest

Potential problems from September 2003 to December 2004 e.g. Staffing; IT

Views on providing support to other local or distant LEAs, including Data Protection issues

Publicity and Awareness

Information/awareness/publicity for EMAs – changes needed to support national roll-out

Responsibilities for design, development and implementation of local publicity

Timing of publicity

Strategies used to reach target groups – in particular ‘hard to reach’ groups

Impact of publicity strategies on take-up

Most effective methods for communicating with young people and their parents

Suggested strategies for auditing the effectiveness of local publicity/marketing arrangements provided by LEAs/LSCs/Connexions Services and Learning Centres – within a national framework

How to make the national roll-out of EMA effective in relation to

Enhancing post-16 participation rates (in particular NEET group)

Enhancing the level of take-up and factors inhibiting take-up (in particular NEET group)

Its impact on other initiatives/post-16 destinations/routes

The aspirations and attitudes to learning of ALL young people

attendance, retention and achievement in post-16 education (weekly allowance (full and partial) and bonuses – relative importance attached to each)

Behaviour

Qualification attainment and progression

Class sizes/class management

Access and entry to higher education

Monitoring young people who withdraw from EMA - current and future monitoring procedures

Administrative Support and Mechanisms (for both transition arrangements and national implementation framework)

- Staffing levels and requirements – transition/NP
- Willingness of LEAs/Connexions Partnerships and Schools and Colleges to distribute application forms on behalf of NP
- Support and advice that will be needed with completion of application forms to assist national provision
- Standard letters to young people
- Procedures and timescales for action taken, and details of what this is, for non returned forms – Learning Centres
- Strategies introduced/planned to improve application processing procedures general help with filling in forms - Learning Centres/Connexions Partnerships
- Appeals – current/future arrangements and recommendations
- Possibility of providing 'certificates' or similar, if required, to ascertain a young person's eligibility for an additional year of EMA assistance
- Guidance requirements from DfES/national provider, e.g. circulation of application forms/attendance monitoring/authorising absence
- System of communication between NP and Learning Centres

EMA Learning Contract

- Involvements of Learning Centres in completion of two part Learning Contract (Part 1 – attendance – triggers first payment) (Part 2 – learning goals- triggers bonuses)
- Submission of data on LCs to NP
- Changes to LCs (course changes/movement between Learning Centres)
- Breaking LCs
- LCs and non-EMA students

Payment Systems

- Payment delays – role of Learning Centres
- Bank accounts – role of Learning Centres
- Payments for religious holidays – perceptions
- Holiday/half-term breaks in payments
- Bonus payments
- Appeals – current/future arrangements
- Preferred payment method – 1 or 2 weeks in arrears
- Partnership requirements for national roll-out

Attendance Monitoring – Learning Centres

- Attendance monitoring procedures (current/planned)
 - schools and colleges (before and since the introduction of EMA)
 - LEAs
- System of reporting attendance – positive, negative or 100% reporting from schools and colleges – transition/national arrangements
- Staffing
- Staff (re)training requirements and costs (Learning Centres)
- Authorised/unauthorised absences – suggested systems to achieve standardisation
- Suspension/termination of EMA weekly payments - levels of stopped payments (N.B admin procedures between schools/colleges and LEA/national provider and referral procedures to Connexions Service)
- Use of Connexions Card

Procedures introduced/reviewed to implement the payment of attendance/achievement bonuses

Appeals-current/future arrangement

Introduction of procedures to monitoring the effectiveness of Learning Centres and interventions where administration of EMA is not acceptable – who will manage this responsibility?

Feedback on:

Proposals for national roll-out

Preferred timescales and format for information requirements

The introduction of auditing practices to assess the effectiveness of national administrative arrangements - Learning Centres

The introduction of EMA inspections - who should be responsible for checking:

- a) Publicity circulated prior to the end of year 11; and
- b) That students who withdraw from the scheme are followed up; and
- c) Other considerations, e.g. audit of business plans

Ongoing liaison between LEAs and DfES

Role of LGA/EMA admin board

View of new Management Information Reporting system – (should the National Service Provider visit LEAs to offer training/support)

View on the viability of having EMA mentors to offer support and assistance to local partners and how this might work

Suggestions for continuing and improved forms of communication with DfES – conferences, letters etc

Ways to strengthen links between national provider and local partners

The ownership of responsibility for feeding back problems to the National Service Provider

Views on secondment opportunities to DfES to develop role of Learning Centres in support of national roll-out

Further Information:

Copies of all relevant documentation relating to the administration of EMAs

Copies of relevant background material relating to the local labour market, education provision etc

Routine forwarding of data relating to the implementation of EMAs

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