

Implementation of the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots: The Third Year, 2001/2002

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CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Report	3
1.2 Methodology	4
2 THE CONTINUING ROLE OF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	5
2.1 Relationships Between LEAs and Local Stakeholders	5
2.2 Relationships Between LEAs and DfES	8
3 AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF EMA	11
3.1 EMA and its Interaction with Post-16 Education and Training Provision	13
3.2 EMA and the Changing Composition of Post-16 Education	14
4 PUBLICITY AND TAKE-UP	15
4.1 Local Publicity Strategies	15
4.2 Take-up and Distribution of EMA by Income Level	17
5 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	19
5.1 Staffing Levels and Requirements	19
5.1.1 LEAs	19
5.1.2 Schools and Colleges	21
6 ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS	24
6.1 Application Forms	24
6.2 Learning Agreements	27
6.3 Payment Systems	28
6.4 Attendance Monitoring	30
6.5 Administrative Data Requirements	32
7 PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF EMA ON INCREASING PARTICIPATION, RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT RATES IN POST-16 EDUCATION	34
8 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMA PILOTS – SOME RECOMMENDATIONS	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41
ANNEX A IMPLEMENTATION GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE 2001/2002	
ANNEX B DEVELOPMENTS SINCE COMPLETING THE THIRD YEAR OF THE EVALUATION RESEARCH	

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The piloting of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) began in September 1999 in 15 Local Education Authority (LEA) areas. A year later the pilot was extended to a further 41 LEA areas and at the time of this research there was a total of 56 LEAs in England operating EMA pilots. This report is based on research conducted with the 15 LEAs participating in the original pilot during 2001/2002. In July 2002, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Government's Spending Review, that the Education Maintenance Allowance would be rolled out nationally in September 2004.

Under the pilot scheme, financial support, in the form of a weekly allowance, is made available to 16 to 19 year olds from lower-income households who undertake appropriate full-time courses at school or college. The full allowance (of £30 or £40) is payable if the total parental gross taxable income does not exceed £13,000, while for those with a total parental income of between £13,000 and £30,000 (£20,000 for the London pilot), a progressively tapered EMA, down to a minimum weekly allowance of £5 is payable.

Section 1

This report focuses on the implementation and administration of the EMA pilot in the third year of its operation. The processes and administrative mechanisms through which EMAs are being delivered were examined, with particular emphasis on the perceptions of those responsible for the scheme's administration. **Section 1**

Methodology

Data gathering in the third year of the evaluation has consisted of re-convening a roundtable discussion with each EMA implementation group in all of the original 15 pilot areas. Group discussions took place between October 2001 and February 2002. The timetable was slightly later in the second and third years, to allow sufficient time for the processing of large numbers of EMA applications to be completed. **Section 1.2**

Findings

Role of the EMA Implementation Groups

While the focus for the implementation groups in the first year of the pilot was to ensure that the provision of EMA was 'up and running', by the second year of operation, the role of the implementation groups was found to have shifted to one of monitoring and review. This continued to be the case.

Evidence from visits to the pilot areas in the third year of the pilot would suggest that in most cases, the frequency of implementation group meetings had been further reduced. While in some pilot areas groups were continuing to meet once each academic term, in others the visit by the evaluation team had precipitated the first meeting of the implementation group in over 12 months. Also, the role of senior personnel from education departments in chairing meetings and forging closer ties with other local stakeholders had diminished, now that EMA was considered to be established in each locality. In those areas where the involvement of

senior officials had not been evident from the outset of the implementation, the continuing lack of support was still considered to be a constraint.

While it could be concluded that the role of the implementation groups has been reduced as EMA had become embedded as part of local student support, this should not detract from the importance that the implementation groups were perceived to have played, and continue to play, in local delivery. **Section 2**

Relationships between LEAs and DfES

Queries from the EMA pilot areas are dealt with largely through telephone or e-mail contact with DfES. LEA representatives were generally happy with the speed with which the DfES dealt with their individual queries and welcomed the e-mail contact, but some would have welcomed greater face-to-face contact to discuss the overall implementation and local delivery of EMA. **Section 2.2**

Awareness and Perceptions of EMA

There was widespread agreement among members of all implementation groups that the existence of EMA had become relatively well established in a short space of time. Concern was expressed about the fact that EMA remains, after three years of operation, a pilot initiative, since in many pilot areas it is now widely assumed by many parents and young people that the allowance is an entitlement within post-16 education. LEA representatives in particular reflected on the much lower levels of support that were available to students under the old discretionary award scheme due to the unpredictable levels of funding available within post-16 education student support from LEAs, prior to the introduction of EMA. **Section 3**

While the introduction of EMA may be perceived as providing ‘parity of esteem’ in offering equivalent levels of funding, whether the young people choose to remain in full-time education or opt for work-based training, there is some evidence to suggest that some inequalities continue to exist between the two routes. **Section 3.1**

Publicity and Take-Up

Now that EMA had entered its third year of operation, there was a general consensus that a high level of awareness existed about the availability of EMA in the pilot areas, particularly among young people who were engaged in learning. The importance of word of mouth information, from siblings or other family members who were receiving or had received EMA was also emphasised. As a result, most LEAs had abandoned more high profile and expensive publicity strategies such as press adverts or advertising on local buses, in the belief that the availability of EMA was fairly well known among most sections of the community.

Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that greater efforts could be made to inform young people, especially those who are irregular school attenders and who may also be least likely to access formal sources of advice and guidance, about the availability of EMA. One recommendation which has been implemented in some areas where Connexions Services are in operation, is for Connexions Personal Advisers to work with LEAs to ensure that young people who are not engaged in formal learning during Year 11 are given equal access to information about EMA. **Section 4.1**

Administrative Support

There was widespread acknowledgement of the requirement to provide staff with dedicated responsibility for the administration of EMA, both within the LEA and at the school and college level.

Since LEA staff are heavily dependent on schools and colleges to obtain the regular and accurate information to make EMA payments, many LEAs have moved towards a system of linking individual members of staff to particular schools and colleges, in order to establish and sustain closer working relationships. However, many respondents felt that the participation of school and college representatives on local implementation groups was the most effective means of eliciting their support.

Despite the experience of the availability of EMA over a three year period, most school and college representatives continued to emphasise the labour intensive responsibilities which go hand in hand with education providers being required to submit weekly attendance records to LEAs and the large number of queries which emanate from a weekly payment system. The perceived lack of financial support to cover this additional work was a major concern.

Section 5

Administrative Mechanisms

Most LEAs welcomed the amendments which had been introduced to the EMA application form, in particular those which related to the applicants' receipt of state benefits. Despite efforts made on the part of both LEAs and education providers to circulate information about EMA to encourage students to apply before they complete Year 11, so that applications can be processed by the beginning of the Autumn term, most EMA applications are made during August and September. LEAs continue to receive a large number of incomplete application forms, which have to be returned to applicants on at least one occasion for additional information. **Section 6.1**

In general, respondents endorsed the fact that the Learning Agreement was integral to the receipt of EMA, since it establishes the rules under which the allowance is paid and acts as a point of reference to explain the reasons for the withdrawal of the EMA weekly and/or bonus payments. **Section 6.2**

The large number of late and incomplete EMA application forms received by LEAs often results in delays to weekly payments at the beginning of the academic year. Many LEAs continue to experience some difficulties with the payment of the EMA weekly allowance, which can largely be attributed to delays in making initial payments, the regularity with which money must be paid and the accompanying information requirements. In contrast, the payment of bonuses was reported to be relatively straightforward. **Section 6.3**

In schools and colleges where electronic monitoring procedures were in place adhering to EMA attendance monitoring requirements has been less problematic.

The issue of the variation that exists among staff of education providers in relation to their interpretation of what constitutes authorised and unauthorised absence continued to be a cause for concern. While it was acknowledged that academic staff needed to apply some degree of professional judgement in determining legitimate reasons for student absences,

there was widespread agreement that a greater degree of consistency needed to be achieved.
Section 6.4

Perceptions of the Impact of EMA on Increasing Participation, Retention and Achievement in Post-16 Education

It was felt by the majority of respondents that EMA had made a big impact on improving retention rates, particularly among groups of young people who received the maximum levels of EMA entitlement¹. **Section 7**

Implementation of the EMA Pilots – Some Recommendations

The evaluation identified a number of areas of good practice which have been developed in some of the pilot areas and could be adopted in the national implementation of EMA.

- The existence of *local implementation groups* which have typically included representatives from the LEA, Careers/Connexions Service, TEC/LSC and schools and colleges have proved to be an effective tool in engaging relevant local partners in the design and delivery of EMA.
- After the initial launch of EMA, most pilot areas reduced their involvement in local media campaigns in favour of less expensive forms of *publicity and marketing* which tended to rely on disseminating information through schools and colleges. The drawback of this approach is that it focuses on meeting the needs of young people already engaged in learning and is less likely to reach excluded groups. Connexions Personal Advisers could fulfil a crucial role in advising young people in ‘hard to reach’ groups about the availability of EMA and assisting, where appropriate, with the application process.
- The high numbers of incomplete *EMA application forms* which continue to be returned, often lacking the required supporting financial information, would suggest the need for support strategies to assist applicants in the completion of the form.
- Administrative *staffing levels* need to be maximised over the summer months to avoid unnecessary delays due to the large number of forms which continue to be received for assessment and processing over this period.
- Earlier circulation and completion of EMA application forms and Learning Agreements would reduce the volume of *late payments* which occur, in particular in the Autumn term.
- The completion of *Learning Agreements (LAs)* is speeded up when schools and colleges assume responsibility both for ensuring that the document is completed by the young person and their parent(s), and for informing the LEA that payments can commence.
- The existence of *electronic attendance monitoring systems* in schools and colleges reduces EMA administration.

¹ Results from the quantitative assessment of the impact of EMA indicate that the EMA improved retention between Year 12 and Year 13, resulting in a participation gain of 7.3 percentage points in Year 13 for the first cohort included in the survey (Ashworth et al., 2002).

- Regular consultation should be considered at a number of different levels to review procedures and to consider changes to the administration of EMA. **Section 8**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATION MAINTENANCE
ALLOWANCE PILOTS:**

THE THIRD YEAR, 2001/2002

1 INTRODUCTION

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

The pilots are being administered by LEAs and are seeking to test the extent to which financial incentives improve post-16 participation, retention and achievement rates in full-time education. The scheme was subsequently extended to a further 41 LEAs in England in September 2000. In July 2002 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Government's Spending Review that the Education Maintenance Allowance would be rolled out nationally in September 2004.

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 evaluation of the piloting of EMA started in 1999. The evaluation includes a number of strands with each element being concerned with a different aspect of EMA and its impact on post-16 education participation, retention and achievement rates (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

EVALUATION OF EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE PILOTS

Main Pilot Evaluation 10 urban and rural areas and 11 control areas	Longitudinal Methods Implementation studies Surveys of young people and parents Qualitative interviews with young people and parents Collection of socio-demographic information
Leeds and London Leeds and 4 Inner London LEAs	Secondary analysis of Careers Services and LEA databases Qualitative interviews with education providers Implementation studies
Vulnerable Pilots 4 of the main EMA pilot areas	Longitudinal 'nested' case studies involving longitudinal qualitative interviews with young people and their 'significant' others Implementation studies
EMA Transport 5 LEAs	Implementation studies Surveys of young people and parents Qualitative interviews with young people and parents Collection of socio-demographic information Interviews with transport providers

Published findings from the evaluation of the piloting of EMA report the following evidence:

- EMA now appears to be regarded as an established part of the post-16 infrastructure in the pilot areas, and is said to be firmly entrenched in the consciousness of young people (Maguire et al., 2002).
- EMA helps young people to feel a degree of financial independence and can relieve anxieties in the family over funding post-16 education (Legard et al., 2001).
- The attendance regulations which surround the receipt of EMA are said to have resulted in noticeable improvements in attendance among EMA students (Maguire et al., 2001).
- EMA has significantly increased participation in post-16 education among eligible young people in the pilot areas by 5.9 percentage points (Ashworth et al., 2002).
- The effect of EMA has been particularly pronounced in urban areas, and among young men and those eligible for a full EMA award (Ashworth et al., 2001 and 2002).
- The estimated impact of a national scheme is for similar increases in participation amongst EMA eligible young people (Ashworth et al., 2002).

- EMA also appears to have a positive effect on retention, increasing the EMA induced participation gain to 7.3 percentage points in Year 13 for the first cohort included in the survey (Ashworth et al., 2002).
- Administrative data for 1998 and 1999 collected in Leeds and London, whilst not providing conclusive evidence about an EMA impact, show that participation by young people in post-16 education increased by 9 percentage points between 1998 and 1999 in the four London Boroughs and by four percentage points in Leeds (Heaver et al., 2002).

This report focuses on the implementation and administration of the EMA pilot in the third year of its operation. The processes and administrative mechanisms through which EMA is being delivered were examined, with particular emphasis on the perceptions of those responsible for the scheme's administration. In addition, valuable information about the perceived relevance and impact of EMA, and how it was being received in each locality, was collected. Findings from the first and second years of this element of the evaluation of the piloting of the EMA have been published by the DfES (Maguire, M., Maguire, S. and Vincent, J., 2001; Maguire, S., Maguire, M. and Heaver, C., 2002).

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

1.1 The Report

The next section of this report describes the methodology used. This is followed by a section which considers the implementation strategies adopted in the pilot areas, including the relationships established between LEAs and other stakeholders, and between LEAs and DfES. Section 3 focuses on awareness and perceptions of EMA, while Section 4 looks at publicity and take-up. Sections 5 and 6 address issues related to administrative support and

administrative mechanisms respectively. Following a section which concentrates on EMA and post-16 education, the concluding sections examine key issues which have arisen and future considerations relating to EMA.

1.2 Methodology

When EMA was introduced, implementation groups comprising those charged with responsibility for administering EMA within each Local Education Authority (LEA), 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 most pilot areas. The evaluation team utilised the existence of the implementation groups for data gathering by convening roundtable discussions involving the members of the implementation groups. In addition, in the first year of the evaluation of EMA, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken with key individuals drawn from the LEAs, Careers Services, TECs and colleges. There was some variation between areas in the numbers of individuals interviewed and the organisations they represented, depending on the make-up of the implementation groups in each area.

Data gathering in the second and third years of the evaluation has consisted of re-convening a roundtable discussion with each implementation group in all of the pilot areas. Within the third year of the evaluation, group discussions took place between October 2001 and February 2002. The timetable was slightly later in the second and third years, to allow sufficient time for the processing of large numbers of EMA applications to be completed. The third year roundtable discussions with implementation groups have enabled data to be gathered on the experience and impact of EMA bonus payments which are paid to young people as incentives to enhance both attendance and achievement rates. As in the first year, in London individual interviews were undertaken with representatives of the LEAs of each of the four boroughs.

Additional information was gained for most areas through receiving minutes of implementation group meetings, and copies of publicity and administrative material such as local Learning Agreements.

2 THE CONTINUING ROLE OF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

During the first year of the piloting of EMA, each of the 15 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) devised an individual implementation strategy which determined the ways in which EMA was to be managed at the local level. In the majority of cases, LEAs formed ‘implementation groups’ which were developed to manage and administer the introduction of EMA. Variations existed between pilot areas in relation to the composition of implementation groups and in the roles and responsibilities allocated to group members.

2.1 Relationships Between LEAs and Local Stakeholders

In the first year, implementation groups typically comprised representatives from the LEA, schools and colleges and the Careers Service. In addition, in some areas, a representative from the local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) which have recently been restructured under the auspices of the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) was also included on the implementation group. Within each LEA, the administrative development of EMA rests with the Student Services/Awards section. Variations were found between pilot areas, in relation to the extent to which LEAs included representatives from the implementation group in the strategic development of the scheme. Some LEAs kept sole control of local implementation within LEAs, informing local representatives through the forum of the implementation group of the development of the scheme and seeking some contribution to its development. In other areas, the LEA shared the responsibility for introducing EMA among each of the key players represented on the local implementation group (Maguire, M., Maguire, S. and Vincent, J., 2001).

Evidence from the first year of the evaluation demonstrated that the majority of LEAs involved in the piloting of EMA had employed a strategy which included inter-agency working as a tool to implement EMA. In some cases, the introduction of EMA had also enabled LEAs to rekindle working relationships with other local agencies, for example, FE colleges. Since 1993, FE colleges had become independent from LEA control and, as a consequence, many LEAs lost much of their on-going contact with local colleges. The introduction of EMA was effective in bringing representatives from LEAs and colleges together to discuss their mutual role in local delivery. This had improved relationships between LEAs and colleges, although the requirements of attendance monitoring

occasionally placed strain on this relationship. Mention was also made of close working relationships having been established with the local Careers/Connexions Services. As highlighted in the report of the first year of the implementation of EMA, effective partnership working has been established, and continues to flourish in some of the pilot areas.

While the focus for the implementation groups in the first year of the pilot was to ensure that the provision of EMA was 'up and running', by the second year of operation the role of the implementation groups was found to have shifted to one of monitoring and review. In addition, implementation group meetings had been reduced to, on average, one meeting each term during the second year (Maguire, S., Maguire, M. and Heaver, C., 2002). An exception here was in the south London boroughs, where, although more regular contact had been established between the LEAs' EMA administrators and local schools and colleges, individual borough-wide implementation groups had not been set up in the same way as elsewhere. However, termly meetings were taking place between representatives of the five boroughs and a large meeting including education providers had been held.

Evidence from visits to the pilot areas in the third year of the pilot would suggest that, in most cases, the frequency of implementation group meetings had been further reduced. While in some pilot areas groups were continuing to meet once each academic term, in others the visit by the evaluation team had precipitated the first meeting of the implementation group in over 12 months. Also, the role of senior personnel from education departments in chairing meetings and forging closer ties with other local stakeholders had diminished, now that EMA was considered to be established in each locality. In those areas where the involvement of senior officials had not been evident from the outset of the implementation, the continuing lack of support was still considered to be a constraint. This contrasted with the situation in an area which had been notable for the pivotal role played in the initial stages by the Deputy Director of Education. There it was felt that the implementation was going sufficiently smoothly to warrant convening meetings of the implementation group only when it was felt necessary.

While it could be concluded that the role of the implementation groups reduced as EMA became embedded as part of local student support, this should not distract from the importance that the implementation groups were perceived to have played, and continue to play, in local delivery. The existence of the groups was considered to have been fundamental

to establishing a local framework for the delivery of what was seen to be a new and radical form of student support which required close working relationships, in particular between LEAs and education providers. The groups provided a forum both to exchange ideas and to establish ways of working, which has been built on since the beginning of the pilot. While many groups were no longer meeting on a regular basis, members felt that meetings could be convened on an 'as necessary' basis if, and when, new issues emerged. Some LEA representatives felt that they had established closer working ties with local schools and colleges through group meetings which had enabled them to move towards e-mailing or sending letters to implementation group members to inform them of minor changes to the administration of EMA, rather than convening a meeting. Many LEA respondents felt that this level of co-operation between education providers and LEAs would not have been expected prior to the introduction of EMA and the development of local implementation groups. In some pilot areas, LEA representatives recognised the importance of the implementation group as an effective tool to 'lobby' DfES over specific issues:

'We've had a number of issues that the group has raised, where I've written on behalf of the group to the DfES ...for example the funding of third year students, that was raised as a huge issue which we raised from the group to the DfES. We've had a petition that's come via the group from one of the schools saying how unfair they felt EMA was, I think this was particularly those young people that did not benefit from the EMA payment or from the bonus payment. So it's been a bit of a platform really to sort of raise issues to DfES.'

LEA Representative

While there was general agreement about the usefulness of such a mechanism for raising issues of concern, this was not a universally accepted view. Moreover, some LEA representatives were keenly aware of the need, in the future, for effective collaborative working between, for example, LEAs, DfES, Connexions Services and education providers.

College representatives, in particular, highlighted the problem of dealing with several LEAs who were piloting EMA and who were operating a number of different administrative systems. This was particularly acute in the south London boroughs, where educational providers were likely to have EMA recipients from at least the original four pilot areas, and often from the later pilot areas in London. In order to address this issue, lead LEAs had been established to co-ordinate the reports from schools and colleges. In other parts of the country, the introduction of the second tranche of pilot areas had also increased the likelihood of schools and colleges having to provide returns to more than one LEA. The need to

establish a common administrative system, particularly in relation to reporting attendance, was considered to be a prerequisite to a national roll-out of EMA since a considerable amount of time was being spent meeting the individual requirements of each LEA. In some areas, issues such as moving towards comparable students' attendance monitoring and reporting procedures were being addressed through the creation of regional EMA groups which had been successful in bringing a number of EMA pilot areas together to discuss working practices. DfES officials were often invited to these meetings. In south London, representatives of the LEAs of the four original EMA pilot areas, together with an LEA from the second tranche of pilot areas, were meeting once a term. While it was felt that these meetings were "starting to bear fruit" in terms of collaboration and improving practices, there was also a perception that a similar group in the north London quadrant was working together more effectively. Nonetheless, the meetings were regarded as being useful in ensuring that the boroughs, which were often dealing with the same educational providers, were "singing from the same hymn sheet".

Where local implementation groups were continuing to meet on a regular basis, membership of the group included a representative from the local Connexions Service which in most cases was the existing Careers Service member of the group. In comparison, representation from the local Learning and Skills Councils on EMA implementation groups was notably absent. This could be attributed to the low profile of their predecessors, the local Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), in the development of the delivery of EMA.

2.2 Relationships Between LEAs and DfES

Members of the EMA implementation group were asked to comment on their working relationship with DfES in the delivery of EMA. The interface between DfES and local implementation groups tends to occur between representatives of LEAs and DfES. LEAs have overall responsibility for the delivery of EMA but are expected to follow EMA regulations and guidelines issued by DfES. Since the piloting of EMA began, on-going contact has been established between representatives from the LEAs and DfES. In the first year, regular visits by DfES officials were made to each of the pilot areas, but this could not be replicated in the second year because of the expansion in the number of EMA pilot areas. LEA representatives felt that the earlier interventions of DfES at the local level had provided policy makers with a realistic grasp of the issues that were affecting local implementation.

This had been supported by regular meetings convened by the Local Government Association (LGA) which had included representatives from each of the original 15 EMA pilot areas, DfES and the LGA. When the pilots had been extended to a further 41 areas, these meetings had not continued and to a degree their role had been replaced by regional meetings, which were attended by a representative from DfES.

Queries from the 56 EMA pilot areas are dealt with largely through telephone or e-mail contact with DfES. LEA representatives were generally happy with the speed with which the DfES dealt with their individual queries, but some would have welcomed greater face-to-face contact to discuss the overall implementation and local delivery of EMA. Some representatives were critical of the creation of the EMA Administration Board, whose role it was to monitor the progress of LEAs in paying EMAs to eligible young people and to consider improvements to payment and monitoring procedures. The Board was set up following consultation with the Local Government Association (LGA) and, as well as the LGA, included representatives from two LEAs, the Learning and Skills Council and the Association of Colleges. Although a letter had been sent to all LEAs informing them that the Administration Board was being set up, it was felt that the composition of the Board had been determined without consultation with the EMA pilot areas and failed to include LEA representatives who could have been selected by the pilot areas to reflect their needs. It should be stated that the way in which the Board was constituted allowed for rotation of the membership from LEA representatives.

The revisions to the Guidance for 2001/2002 produced by DfES were broadly welcomed as having been useful and appropriate, although a dissenting voice complained that when the letter outlining the changes was received, it failed to highlight the major items, such as the changes in current income assessment and the payment to those reaching their 19th birthday, which would have system implications. Furthermore, the timing of the revised guidance, coming out, as it did, in July, meant that potential EMA recipients had already been advised on the basis of previous guidelines, and were difficult to contact as they were on holiday.

However, concerns were raised about the requirement from DfES to provide details of the proportion of applications which had been processed, including the numbers who had received payments, by a specified date in November 2001. Although LEAs had always been required to provide data relating to applications received and payments made every four

weeks, they were being asked to ensure that all details were up-to-date for that academic year. It was felt by some respondents that a lack of clarity meant that they were not fully aware of the information requirements, and they were therefore dismayed to receive a letter about their performance². This ‘annoyance’ was further compounded, in some areas, by the fact that the letter had also been sent to senior LEA officials, who subsequently contacted those responsible for the administration and demanded to know why the authority had not fulfilled its duties.

² DfES reported that there were three different types of letters sent to all 56 pilot LEAs. The first, which went to the majority of the LEAs, stated that the EMA Administration Board were pleased that the performance of the LEA was acceptable against three specified criteria. The second, which was sent to a small number of LEAs, stated that they were slower than the majority of LEAs in either processing applications or paying young people. The third letter emphasised the need to provide Management Information (MI) by a certain date each month as that LEA had not done so on two out of the last three months. LEAs wrote back to say that dates when MI was required were not clear and DfES ensured that a reminder was sent out 2 days in advance of the final deadline to remind LEAs to provide this information.

3 AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF EMA

'... it's part of the landscape now, EMA, schools are aware of it, colleges are aware of it and students are aware of it.'

College Representative

There was widespread agreement among members of all implementation groups that the existence of EMA had become relatively well established in a short space of time. Indeed, concern was expressed about the fact that EMA remains, after three years of operation, a pilot initiative, since in many pilot areas it is now widely assumed by many parents and young people that the allowance is an entitlement within post-16 education. LEA representatives in particular reflected on the much lower levels of support that were available to students under the old discretionary award scheme due to the unpredictable levels of funding available within post-16 education student support from LEAs prior to the introduction of EMA. While it was widely assumed by most implementation group members that EMA would be rolled out nationally, there was a note of caution by some members about making this assumption, as well as an underlying concern about the shape of the post-16 funding regime without the existence of EMA.

An exception to this general acknowledgement that awareness of EMA was now widespread was a London borough. A high proportion of young people living in the borough tended to travel outside the borough for post-16 provision, especially in the case of college provision, and, as the adjacent areas did not have EMAs, awareness was not as high as might be expected. Other respondents also expressed surprise about the number of late applications from students who claimed to have only just learnt about the availability of EMA. Some felt that schools were not sufficiently informative about EMA, and this accounted for some young people not knowing about it. Accordingly, in some areas, additional effort had been made to generate awareness about EMA. For example, one LEA had sent out letters to all Head Teachers encouraging them to promote EMA and to provide information to students.

During the course of the piloting of EMA, some LEAs had conducted their own surveys to evaluate students' level of satisfaction with the administration and receipt of the allowance, as well as receiving feedback from school and college representatives. It was felt that among EMA recipients the existence of the provision was a positive development within post-16 education. EMA was considered to have been instrumental in enabling many young people

to benefit from post-16 education. In addition in the rural pilot area, it was felt that the introduction of EMA had opened up greater choice of provision by enabling young people to meet the transport costs of travelling to a wider range of education providers.

'But from the grassroots level, it's a very positive step forward because it's acknowledging the fact that some young people are disadvantaged and I'm afraid the reality is that if you're on a lower income you can't afford to send your children to college, this £40 a week does make a huge difference.'

College Representative

'It is still seen as a very good thing for kids. I get a buzz when EMA kids ask for HE forms. The feedback from parents and schools is positive. Parents feel that it's all right, and make decisions on that basis.'

LEA Representative

The usefulness of EMA in subsidising travel costs was not restricted to the rural pilot area, for similar points were made in the London boroughs.

'A lot of parents said that they couldn't afford for their kids to travel without EMA.'

LEA Representative

However, differences did emerge between the different variants of EMA which are being tested in the pilot areas in relation to whether it is the young person or their parents who controls the spending of the weekly allowance. From the feedback received from implementation group members, in EMA pilot areas where the weekly allowance is directly paid to the young person, parents appear to have little direct involvement in the way in which the weekly allowance is used by the young person. In contrast, in pilot areas where the EMA weekly allowance is paid directly to the parent(s), it was felt that the allowance is far more likely to form part of weekly household income rather than being transferred to the young person for their own personal use.

Concern remains about the inequalities that the introduction of EMA has created for two different groups of students; namely those who do not qualify for EMA because parental income exceeds EMA eligibility and students who attend a school or a college in a pilot area but reside outside the area. While schools and colleges are not informed by LEAs about the individual amounts of EMA that students receive, non-recipients of EMA are generally aware of the levels of funding that EMA students receive and remain aggrieved by it. In most cases, the level of support, for example through Learner Support Funds, offered to students who fail to qualify for EMA, either because parental income exceeds £30,000, or because they live

outside an EMA pilot area, falls well below the maximum levels of entitlement within EMA. Many colleges target their Learner Support Funding at students who are ineligible for EMA. This may take the form of a cash allowance or assistance with transport or equipment costs. Students who fail to qualify for Learner Support Funds continue to rely on parental support throughout their post-16 education, although there was a widespread consensus that most parents could not afford to pay their sons or daughters £30 or £40 each week as an incentive to remain in education. Despite the introduction of EMA, part-time working remains an important source of revenue for many young people in post-16 education.

3.1 EMA and its Interaction with Post-16 Education and Training Provision

While the introduction of EMA may be perceived as providing ‘parity of esteem’ in offering equivalent levels of funding to some young people whether they choose to remain in full-time education or opt for work-based training, there is some evidence to suggest that some inequalities continue to exist between the two routes. Young people who remain in full-time education receive a maximum EMA weekly allowance of £30 or £40 each week, in addition to their parents’ continued entitlement to Child Benefit, and are expected to attend school or college for a minimum of 12 hours each week. In contrast, young people who opt for the work-based training route receive a minimum weekly training allowance of £40 for a minimum of 16 hours work per week (which may go up to 40 hours each week). Moreover, entitlement to Child Benefit ceases once a young person leaves full-time education.

The adverse effect of EMA on Modern Apprenticeships was again mentioned at a minority of roundtable discussions, although the strength of feeling about this issue was less pronounced than in previous years.

In some areas, the importance of EMA in supporting young people to remain in education had been heightened by financial constraints on the LEA, which had resulted in the withdrawal or severe reduction of post-16 discretionary funding. This led the representatives from such authorities to express concern about the possibility of EMA not being rolled out nationally. Others were managing to maintain some allocation of minor awards.

The differences which continue to exist between the two routes may enable some schools and colleges to exploit these factors in order to attract some groups of young people. Also, young

people may perceive full-time education plus EMA to be a ‘softer’ option to work based training. In order to address the imbalances which exist, some Connexions/Careers staff have worked with local training providers and employers to encourage them to increase the levels of training allowance and the number of employed placements that are offered to young people in order to fill training vacancies.

3.2 EMA and the Changing Composition of Post-16 Education

If EMA was to be successful in attracting more young people into post-16 education, this would include engaging young people who would not have traditionally stayed on in education. The challenge to many schools and colleges, which as a result of the introduction of EMA are drawing in non-traditional post-16 students, is to develop strategies which respond to the pastoral and curriculum needs of an increasingly diverse 16-19 population. In some cases, this has included evaluating how teaching staff interface with young people and developing teaching styles that enable individual as well as group needs to be addressed. Additional support needs were considered to be both time-consuming and costly in relation to the demands that were placed on teaching staff. It was felt by some college staff that the expansion of 16-19 education, which has come about through the introduction of EMA, will form part of the widening participation agenda which is evolving in most colleges, and may include introducing flexible course entry points throughout the academic year and greater use of inter-agency working to meet the needs of specific groups of students.

Nonetheless, colleges were perceived to be supportive of EMA, and viewed it as a welcome addition to the provision available to young people.

‘Colleges are getting on board more now. They are supporting the notion of EMA and getting their systems going.’

LEA Representative

‘The feedback from colleges is very positive.’

LEA Representative

4 PUBLICITY AND TAKE-UP

This section explores the strategies that have been applied in pilot areas to raise awareness of the existence of EMA and to encourage take-up among eligible young people and their parents. In particular, it examines the shifts in focus within local publicity campaigns now that EMA has been up and running for over two years, which involves an increasing emphasis on targeting specific groups of young people. Finally, this section attempts to identify the most effective methods which have been utilised within the EMA pilot areas to ensure that there is maximum coverage of the availability of EMA to encourage widespread take-up.

4.1 Local Publicity Strategies

During the first and second years of the piloting of EMA, LEAs, in conjunction with assistance from Careers/Connexions Services and schools and colleges, employed a range of methods for creating awareness of EMA among potential applicants, including:

- poster campaigns in schools and colleges;
- representatives from the LEA student awards/student support services attending Year 11 parents evenings/careers evenings/assemblies;
- advertisements on local buses;
- colourful leaflets, sometimes designed by local students, to attract the attention of young people;
- radio and press coverage;
- the distribution of flyers with reply slips;
- LEAs sending letters, which in some instances also included EMA application forms, informing parents and young people about the availability of EMA; and
- providing leaflets and other forms of information to Education Social Workers, youth services, and the local Social Services department.

In future, it is anticipated that the Connexions Service will be a key channel of information. Indeed, in an area where Connexions was already established, Personal Advisers had been provided with a 'script' to help them inform young people about EMA. It was also intended to deliver training sessions for Advisers, so that they were aware of relevant issues pertaining to EMAs when they were in schools and colleges.

In London, standard forms and leaflets had been produced for all the participating LEAs. This was not only more cost-effective but, given the amount of intra-LEA travel by students, was less confusing for applicants. In addition, general mailshots providing information about EMA, were undertaken by the Careers/Connexions Service which had responsibility for the south London boroughs. The issue of local students attending 'out of borough' schools was being addressed by printing special leaflets for distribution in those schools. Here, the co-operation of the Heads of Sixth Form was vital.

Apart from scheduling publicity campaigns slightly earlier in the third year in order to make information available to help young people with their Year 11 decision-making and to encourage EMA applications to be made at an earlier stage, the strategies used in the pilot areas had not significantly changed.

Now that EMA had entered its third year of operation, there was a general consensus that a high level of awareness existed about the availability of EMA in the pilot areas, in particular, among young people who were engaged in learning. The importance of word of mouth information that many young people and parents obtained from siblings or other family members who were receiving or had received EMA was also emphasised. As a result, most LEAs had abandoned more high profile and expensive publicity strategies such as press adverts or advertising on local buses which had been used in the first year, in the belief that the availability of EMA was fairly well known among most sections of the community.

Most LEAs continue to rely on local schools and colleges 'to get the EMA message across'. This usually takes the form of the LEA sending a supply of letters with tear off slips to request further information or publicity booklets to local schools for distribution to all Year 11 pupils. In addition, LEAs supply schools and colleges with EMA application forms. The onus then rests with the schools to distribute the information to young people.

While this approach is considered to be a cost effective method of ensuring that information about EMA reaches a large number of young people, there are some limitations in its ability to target all groups of young people and their parents. First, a supply of leaflets or letters is not guaranteed to reach every young person. Some LEAs have attempted to tackle this issue by sending a named letter to each Year 11 pupil via the school to ensure maximum coverage. Second, sending information to pupils through schools does not guarantee that parents

receive it. Third, young people who are excluded from school or who are frequently absent, are most at risk of failing to find out about the existence of EMA. To ensure that information reaches every Year 11 student and their parents, some LEAs have obtained a list of addresses of all Year 11 students from their local Careers/Connexions Service. Information about EMA and an application form is then posted to every household to ensure that as many young people and parents as possible are made aware of the availability of EMA. However, the drawback for some LEAs in adopting this strategy was the availability and cost of staff time to prepare the mail shot and the postage costs.

Alongside the circulation of information to young people and parents through schools and colleges, many LEAs continued to raise awareness about EMA through attendance at careers conventions and through visits to schools in which representatives from Student Services/Awards give talks on sources of student funding. In addition, information about EMA is made available to students at interviews with Careers/Connexions staff and is incorporated into Year 11 options material. College staff also publicise EMA as a source of funding when students visit to discuss course provision and to enrol for post-16 courses.

However, implementation group members in some pilot areas highlighted concerns about EMA publicity which continues to focus heavily on young people who are already engaged in learning. It was acknowledged that greater efforts could be made to inform young people about the availability of EMA, especially those who are irregular school attenders and who may also be least likely to access formal sources of advice and guidance. One recommendation which has been implemented in some areas where Connexions Services were in operation, was for Personal Advisers to work with LEAs to ensure that young people who are not engaged in formal learning during Year 11 are given equal access to information about EMA. In addition, in one pilot area, consideration was being given to 'fast track' EMA applications from vulnerable groups of young people to ensure that EMA payments are made promptly.

4.2 Take-up and Distribution of EMA by Income Level

Levels of take-up had in some pilot areas continued to rise throughout the three year period, while in other areas EMA application rates had plateaued. LEA representatives expressed overall satisfaction with the number of applications that had been received. However, some

respondents were unclear about how application targets, which had been determined by DfES, had been calculated and suggested that this was an area where further information would be welcomed.³ Some LEA respondents felt that they had done themselves a disservice by ‘sticking to the letter of the law’ in assessing eligibility, whereas other LEAs had been cutting corners.

Since the number of EMA recipients from income groups who would attract a minimum or reduced level of weekly entitlement has been much lower than the level of take-up among those who attract the maximum EMA weekly entitlement, LEA representatives were asked whether any change had occurred in the pattern of applications. It was generally reported that the number of applications and recipients from income groups who qualify for a reduced or the minimum level of weekly allowance had not significantly changed. It was also reported that, as most EMA recipients are eligible for the full amount, there is a focus on these, rather than on those on the taper. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the perceived complexities of the EMA application form and the regulations which surround the receipt of EMA, most notably the need for full and regular attendance, continue to deter applications from higher income groups, despite their entitlement to full bonus payments. It was also felt in at least one LEA that there were problems with inaccurate information about EMA, and its impact on entitlement to benefits, being given by Jobcentre Plus. In London, there was a feeling that many parents, whose income meant that their son or daughter would be eligible for a partial rather than a full award, ‘couldn’t be bothered’ to fill in the forms for EMA.

³ A letter was sent by DfES to the LEAs in July 2001 explaining how these figures were calculated.

5 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Many implementation group members had been engaged in the delivery of EMA for a three-year period. As a result of their experience, representatives from LEAs and education providers were in a strong position to comment on the administrative responsibilities that are required to implement EMA both at the start-up stage and as an ongoing system of student support. The administration that surrounds the delivery of EMA, from the perspectives of both LEAs and individual learning providers, continues to provoke a significant amount of discussion in most pilot areas. The responsibilities which surround the EMA weekly payment system and the large numbers of queries that emanate from it account for a significant amount of the administrative workload. In addition, the receipt of large numbers of incomplete application forms continues to present a challenge to many LEAs.

5.1 Staffing Levels and Requirements

There was widespread acknowledgement of the requirement to provide staff with dedicated responsibility for the administration of EMA both within the LEA and at the school and college level. In the first year of the piloting of EMA, many staff had been expected to juggle the administration of EMA alongside other student support responsibilities. The sheer weight of numbers of young people in receipt of EMA in the second year of operation, together with a clearer recognition of the scale of the administrative task, led many LEAs and education providers to address the issue of providing adequate levels of staffing. The following sections explore the staffing levels that most LEAs and education providers provide and consider to be needed to administer EMA, as well as highlighting some of the issues they continue to face.

5.1.1 LEAs

The management of EMA within LEAs lies with the Student Awards/Student Services Section, which in the majority of cases also administers higher education student awards. Most LEAs have a team of staff who are responsible for EMA applications and payments. Since staff within the LEAs are heavily dependent on schools and colleges in order to obtain the regular and accurate information to make EMA payments, many LEAs have moved towards a system of linking staff to a small number of schools and colleges in order to establish and sustain closer working relationships. However, many respondents felt that the

participation of school and college representatives on local implementation groups was the most effective tool to engage support. In one pilot area, a member of the EMA team from the LEA visits schools and colleges to audit administrative procedures in order to identify ways in which working practices between the LEA and education providers can be improved.

Many LEA respondents felt that the administration of EMA remained under-resourced in terms of staffing and, in some instances, EMA staff remained dependent on higher education administrative staff to assist at peak times. For some, the lack of commitment from senior levels had been disappointing, and it was felt that their interest only became apparent when complaints had been received. In contrast, another LEA representative asserted that “the commitment from senior officers is still there – there’s a feeling of pride in having the scheme and running it well”. Indeed, many respondents felt that there would be a shortfall in provision without the additional support that was provided by LEAs to meet EMA administrative costs. Some LEAs expressed concern about the reduction in EMA administrative funding, which is paid by DfES to LEAs, from five per cent in the first two years, to a percentage based on the variant used, which averaged around 3.74 per cent. Indeed, several had concerns that, for EMA administration, a five per cent figure was not regarded as sufficient.⁴

‘And I have to say that the only reason EMA works ...is because we do this shared scheme where the higher education team help EMA because we sit together, and staff resources are shared. If they sat independently they (the EMA team) wouldn’t have enough money to pay the number of staff they would need to do the job, it’s as simple as that.’

LEA Representative

At the beginning of the pilot, some LEAs had invested in updating or renewing IT systems to support the administration of EMA which had invariably assisted with local implementation. However, there was some reluctance to commit any further expenditure until a decision was taken over a national roll-out of EMA. In addition, some respondents raised the issue of whether, in the event of the national implementation of EMA, the administration for EMA

⁴ DfES reported that “The 5% contribution towards administration costs received at the outset reflected a start-up element. This was rolled forward into year two of the scheme largely because in that year the Department was introducing EMA to a further 41 LEA areas, and it was administratively complex to calculate administration costs in a different way for different groups of areas. In year 2001/2002, with all of 56 pilot LEA areas through the start-up phase, the funding levels were equalised and the start-up element was no longer required. Now the 56 LEAs running the EMA pilots are all treated in the same way.”

may be transferred from LEAs to the recently formed local LSCs (Learning and Skills Councils) which manage the funding of most post-16 education and training provision.

Inevitably, perhaps, some areas were still experiencing problems with the IT systems which had been introduced to cope with the demands of the implementation of EMA.

'We had a new IT system, but by the second week in September, we still didn't have any payment files – however, we still managed to make payments in September. There were a few niggles, but it was OK until Christmas, when the file was wrong for the termly bonuses – it tried to pay a bonus of £1,000. This stopped us making weekly payments for three or four weeks. After that, there was a problem when the system would only do a payment run up to a certain name, because of a problem with the server.'

LEA Representative

5.1.2 Schools and Colleges

School and college representatives were unanimous in their agreement that the administrative workload that was needed to support the effective implementation of EMA required the commitment of staff at a number of different levels. The second year evaluation report on the implementation of EMA (Maguire, S., Maguire, M. and Heaver, C., 2002) noted differences between schools and colleges in the ways in which the administrative responsibilities for EMA were managed. Since the numbers of EMA students in schools tend to be smaller, the responsibility for managing links with the LEA and dealing with student queries rested, by and large, with the Head of Sixth Form or a member of the senior teaching staff. In contrast in colleges, where the number of EMA recipients tended to be much greater, and where teaching departments could be spread across a number of different sites, the responsibility for co-ordinating the administration of EMA was assumed by support staff who had often been appointed to the task on a full-time basis.

The different approaches adopted by schools and colleges to managing the administrative responsibilities which surround the delivery of EMA have, in most cases, continued to operate. Some schools have engaged the help of administrative support to assist teaching staff where EMA student numbers are sufficiently large. School representatives considered part-time administrative support to be a baseline requirement for schools in the event of EMA being implemented nationally, given the amount of professional time currently allocated to performing the administrative duties which surround the submission of weekly returns to LEAs and dealing with some non-payment issues. In contrast, it was felt that the input from

teaching staff should focus on dealing with non-routine attendance and performance issues. School management support was considered to be required in ensuring that there was greater uniformity between staff in applying the criteria for authorised and unauthorised absence among EMA students.

The staffing requirements to administer EMA in colleges differ enormously from those needed in most schools. FE colleges are, on the whole, much larger than schools. Colleges have a greater diversity of students in terms of total numbers and the age range of the student population and, in most cases, provide a wider range of courses, often spread between a number of different sites. The job of co-ordinating the administration which surrounds the receipt of EMA is considered to be both demanding and time-consuming. While the sheer number of EMA students has driven most colleges to employ administrative staff to support the delivery of EMA, college representatives also highlighted the need for input from staff at a number of different levels to ensure that EMA administrative systems are both efficient and equitable.

Examples were cited of colleges which had appointed teams of four or five EMA administrators, where large numbers of EMA students attended and where college departments were spread over a wide geographical area, although in most instances there was at least one member of the administrative staff who had specific responsibility for EMA. In most cases, EMA administrators in colleges are attached to the Student Support Service. They are largely responsible for compiling and submitting weekly attendance records and bonus payment requirements to the LEA. However, much of their time is consumed in dealing with the large number of enquiries received from students, students' parents and, to a lesser extent, the LEA.

Given the large number of part-time and full-time teaching staff who work in colleges and staff turnover rates, most college representatives emphasised the need to establish an agreed code of practice which determined the requirements for staff to complete attendance registers accurately in accordance with EMA regulations and to apply absence criteria consistently, which was recognised and adhered to by all members of staff. This would require the endorsement of senior management within the college. Lack of consistency in reporting absence was considered to be a particular problem in colleges. An example of good practice was where a college representative regularly conducted staff development sessions, followed

by visits to departments to ensure that staff were aware of EMA attendance monitoring procedures.

Despite the experience of running EMA over a two year period, most school and college representatives continued to emphasise the labour intensive responsibilities which go hand in hand with the requirement to submit weekly attendance records to LEAs and the large number of queries which emanate from a weekly payment system, and the perceived lack of financial support to cover additional work. While most college representatives were sensitive to the fact that any increase in student numbers which resulted from the piloting of EMA indirectly brought with it extra revenue to colleges, many continued to voice their concerns that this was not being directly used to relieve the responsibilities which accompanied the piloting of EMA, that is at enhancing Student Support Services. Comparisons were drawn between the administration of EMA and the administration of Learner Support Funds (formerly Access Funds), where colleges can use up to five per cent of Learner Support Funding to cover administrative costs. However, the management of Learner Support Funding also involves colleges managing the responsibility for assessing applications, making payments and budget control, which are duties undertaken by the LEA within the administration of EMA.

While most of the discussion in relation to the staffing requirements needed for the effective implementation of EMA focused on administrative responsibilities, some respondents highlighted the additional student support required by some EMA students in relation to both their pastoral and curriculum needs. If EMA is successful, it will engage in post-16 education greater numbers of young people who previously may have been unwilling or unable to participate in learning. It was recognised that some EMA students do place additional demands on staff resources with regard to behavioural and learning issues and this has had a significant impact on staff development needs. The ability to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse post-16 student population, which may result from a national implementation of EMA, was an important issue for many education providers with regard to providing sufficiently high levels of trained staff.

6 ADMINISTRATIVE MECHANISMS

This section explores the administrative systems that support the delivery of EMA. In particular, it looks at application procedures, attendance monitoring systems and payment processes that have been introduced by LEAs and education providers to ensure that, wherever possible, the delivery of EMA is both effective and efficient. It identifies exemplars of good practice that have been developed in EMA pilot areas, which should assist with national implementation. The section concludes with observations and feedback by LEA representatives on the EMA administrative data management systems that have been introduced by a company subcontracted by DfES to collate EMA data.

6.1 Application Forms

A feature of the piloting of EMA has been the development of a standardised EMA application form. In the first year of the pilot, LEAs developed their own application forms which were superseded in the second year by a standardised form, devised by DfES in consultation with LEAs. At the beginning of the third year of the pilot, a revised common application form was introduced by DfES and was customised by most LEAs to include individual logos and additional questions to assist with processing. Most LEAs welcomed the amendments which had been introduced to the EMA application form, in particular those which related to the applicants' receipt of state benefits. An outstanding issue for many LEAs relates to the distribution by DfES of the revised EMA application form, which many felt left insufficient time in the academic year for the form to be customised, printed and circulated to education providers, young people and their parents.

Application forms are available to students and their parents from LEAs and education providers. Most LEAs circulate batches of application forms to schools and colleges for distribution to students, although some underlying concerns surround this approach. It was felt that this form of distribution fails to ensure that information and application details reach every Year 11 student (see Section 4.1). In order to counteract this, some LEAs post EMA application forms to each Year 11 student's home address, while other LEAs send EMA information and an application form to schools in envelopes which are individually addressed to each Year 11 student.

Despite efforts made on the part of both LEAs and education providers to circulate information about EMA to encourage students to apply before they complete Year 11, so that applications can be processed by the beginning of the Autumn term, most EMA applications are made during August and September. Large numbers of students continue to apply for both post-16 courses and for EMA in August after GCSE examination results are published, and this remains a persistent problem to LEAs in relation to the administration of EMA. Some respondents felt that little could be done to affect this behaviour, since young peoples' decision-making continues to be heavily affected by the publication of examination results. It was suggested that the only way to tackle the problem was to radically increase staffing levels in LEAs to deal with the surge in the number of EMA applications that are received in August and September. Another suggestion involved LEAs enlisting the help of enrolment staff in schools and colleges and developing software systems which enabled students to submit EMA application forms on-line, at the same time as they enrolled for post-16 courses.

LEAs continue to receive a large number of incomplete application forms, which have to be returned to applicants on at least one occasion for additional information. In some pilot areas this process has been speeded up by LEAs returning relevant sections of the incomplete application form accompanied by an explanatory letter, as opposed to returning the entire form to the applicant. While most respondents were in agreement that the EMA application form had been simplified, in particular in relation to providing information on entitlement to state benefit, it was reported in some areas that at least 50 per cent of all application forms received by LEAs continue to be incomplete. A number of strategies were employed by LEAs to help with the application process. These included:

- providing a telephone help-line service to deal with queries;
- operating a Help desk within the LEA;
- LEA staff visiting schools and colleges to provide advice on form filling;
- engaging the support of Connexions Service staff to help with EMA application forms, particularly for vulnerable students; and
- seeking the assistance of staff in schools and colleges to help students complete application forms.

While respondents recognised that the problem of dealing with a large proportion of incomplete application forms was also a significant feature in higher education loan/fees

applications, three issues were raised in relation to the administration of EMA, which draws from a wider range of students, and requires that payment is monitored and cannot be done in advance. First, EMA applications have to be processed by LEAs alongside the requirement to make weekly payments, which is labour intensive and not a feature within higher education grants and awards. Second, it was felt that delays in administration were far more likely to lead to vulnerable students in post-16 education failing to start or dropping out of post-16 education because of their reliance on weekly payments. Third, the length of the EMA application form and the information requirements remain daunting for less able students and their parents.

In order to deal with information requests from applicants about the processing of EMA application forms, many LEAs had introduced IT systems which enable staff to record the receipt of application forms, issue letters which acknowledge the receipt of application forms and track the progress of individual applications if queries arise. These systems help staff to deal with enquiries from applicants both swiftly and efficiently. Both representatives from LEAs and education providers continued to express their concerns about the negative impact of delays experienced in EMA application processing on the ability of schools and colleges to retain some young people in learning, in particular where EMA was a young person's primary source of income. Some college representatives highlighted instances in which EMA eligible young people had sought help from Learner Support Funding either because of the delays they were experiencing in receiving their initial EMA payments or because they had considered the EMA application process too complex. In order to address the issue of the time lags experienced by some applicants in the receipt of EMA due to the length of time needed to acquire additional information to support the application, a 'bridging' payment scheme could be introduced. This could provide applicants with a reduced/minimum level of weekly payment which could be reassessed when the full application was completed.

The application process for students wanting a second year of EMA funding did not appear to present LEAs with too many difficulties. Most LEAs send application forms to students' home addresses for completion. One LEA representative suggested that second year applications could be conducted by means of a telephone review which would reduce the administrative task involved in processing re-applications. This system was reported to be used by other government agencies which administer benefit payments. The issue of supporting, through EMA, mainstream students who embark on a three year programme of

study remains problematic in pilot areas, since EMA entitlement normally covers a two year period. Further guidance from DfES which would give LEAs more discretion to provide EMA funding over a three-year period would be welcomed.

The first and second year reports on the evaluation of the implementation of EMA raised the concerns of many representatives in the pilot areas about the requirement in EMA application guidelines to obtain income data from absent parents. The subsequent changes that were introduced to the EMA regulations have been broadly welcomed by respondents. However, some disquiet was expressed about the need for LEAs to obtain full income details from absent parents who pay voluntary maintenance payments when this is no longer a requirement for parents whose maintenance payments have been calculated by the Child Support Agency.

6.2 Learning Agreements

Before the first EMA weekly payment is made, the LEA must be satisfied that a young person has signed a Learning Agreement (LA) which must be endorsed with a signature from a parent and a representative from their school or college. Letters sent by LEAs advising applicants of their EMA assessment usually inform applicants that they have to complete a LA before weekly payments can be made. While the format and style of individual LAs vary between LEAs, and often between individual learning providers, the document sets out the terms and conditions under which the young person is entitled to receive EMA. This includes requirements relating to students' attendance, behaviour and their individual learning goals. The existence of a common LA or a number of individual LAs does not appear to impact upon the speed and efficiency with which the task is completed.

In some areas, the impetus to complete and return the Learning Agreement to the LEA rests with the young person. However, where education providers assume the responsibility for ensuring that Learning Agreements are signed and for notifying LEAs, this usually hastens the EMA payment process. In some pilot areas, education providers submit lists of young people who have completed LAs alongside weekly attendance records rather than returning individual copies of LAs, thereby reducing paperwork. In addition, some education providers use the opportunity of completing LAs to bring students together to outline EMA regulations.

This can be beneficial if queries emerge over attendance or performance issues (Maguire, S., Maguire, M. and Heaver, C., 2002).

In general, it was felt that the LA was integral to the receipt of EMA, since it establishes the rules under which the allowance is paid and acts as a point of reference to explain the reasons for the withdrawal of the EMA weekly and/or bonus payments.

'... but I think it's absolutely crucial in terms of a psychological process of the understanding of something for something, that this money is for a commitment almost over and above that which you would expect in different circumstances. And I think that process is absolutely vital.'

College Representative

However, some respondents were of the opinion that the need to complete a separate LA in order to receive EMA often caused unnecessary delays to the payment process. It was suggested that, since most colleges require students to complete learning agreements whether they are in receipt of EMA or not, the need to fill in an EMA LA was an unnecessary duplication of effort. In addition, it was proposed that the regulations which are outlined in the LA are added to the EMA application form, so that parents and young people can complete both forms at the same time.

6.3 Payment Systems

The large number of late and incomplete EMA application forms received by LEAs often results in delays to weekly payments at the beginning of the academic year. Those who make early and complete EMA applications can expect payment within the first three weeks of the Autumn term, although the bulk of applications take longer. Some LEAs have adopted a policy of non-payment to all students until the third week of the Autumn term to enable staff to deal with the large number of queries which exist from late applicants and to allow for the significant amount of movement which takes place among young people who wish to change courses or move to a different school or college in the early stages of the academic year.

The receipt of weekly attendance reports from education providers triggers EMA weekly payments. Some LEAs insist that education providers complete an attendance report on a weekly basis on each EMA student. This system ensures that LEAs receive full and regular information on all students and avoids the risk of large numbers of over-payments being

made, since individual student attendance records can be checked. However, obtaining full attendance records on a weekly basis from each education provider with students in receipt of EMA is both time-consuming and resource intensive for both LEAs and education providers, particularly if paper systems of attendance monitoring are in operation. This system appears to work most effectively when IT systems have been developed by LEAs which enable education providers to e-mail attendance information.

Alternatively, some payment systems are based on a negative attendance reporting system. This entails schools and colleges informing LEAs on a weekly basis of students who have been absent, so that the EMA weekly payments can be withdrawn. In some areas, even if there are no student absences to report, LEAs insist on a nil return from education providers, to confirm that attendance registers have been checked. However, in other pilot areas, payments continue until the LEA receives notification from an education provider that weekly payments should stop. This reporting and payment system remains heavily dependent on the diligence and goodwill of education providers to provide regular attendance information. In pilot areas where staffing levels are stretched, this can lead to large numbers of over-payments being made. In some cases, education providers are failing to submit regular attendance returns and, due to limitations in staffing levels, LEAs are unable to contact each school and college on a weekly basis to confirm whether absence among EMA students is being reported.

As far as bonus payments were concerned, while many LEAs continue to experience some difficulties with the payment of the EMA weekly allowance, which can be largely attributed to delays in making initial payments, the regularity with which money must be paid and the accompanying information requirements, the payment of bonuses was reported to be relatively straightforward. LEAs normally require education providers to complete a return at the end of each term, thereby triggering the payment to eligible students of the attendance bonus. In addition, some LEAs write to students to inform them about their entitlement to, and payment of, attendance bonuses, which avoids the possible confusion that may arise when additional money is paid directly into bank accounts. Notification to LEAs of students' examination results from schools and colleges enables the payment of achievement bonuses. However, due to the delay in receiving this information from schools and colleges, the payment of achievement bonuses is often made a considerable time after students have

received their examination results. Again, a letter issued by LEAs explaining the nature of the payment avoids any misunderstandings which may arise over potential over-payments.

6.4 Attendance Monitoring

The requirement for schools and colleges to either notify LEAs of student absences (negative reporting) or to provide full attendance records to LEAs (full reporting) on a weekly basis, is heavily dependent on the ability of both education providers and LEAs to work together to ensure that EMA payments are made. LEAs require education providers to prepare weekly attendance returns which are both accurate and delivered on time. Delays in receiving information may result in the late payment of weekly and bonus allowances. Missing or inaccurate information from education providers may also lead to overpayments being made. Therefore, LEA representatives have continued to emphasise their dependence on local education providers to make ‘the EMA system’ work.

The methods used by education providers to monitor the attendance of EMA students were outlined in the second year report on the implementation of EMA (Maguire, S., Maguire, M. and Heaver, C., 2002). It was reported that a number of electronic and paper based attendance monitoring systems were in operation and that significant ‘differences existed between education providers in the accuracy and the regularity of the attendance data’ LEAs received (Maguire et al., 2002 p.33). Most education providers have continued to find attendance monitoring and, in particular, the queries that emerge from payments being withdrawn or withheld, to be both time-consuming and demanding in relation to staff resources.

In colleges, student attendance monitoring procedures are generally more complex to administer, since student populations are larger, they cover a wide range of full and part-time course provision, and colleges often operate from a number of different sites. In contrast, attendance monitoring procedures in schools tend to be straightforward, since student populations are smaller, a limited range of course provision is available and schools tend to be based on one site. In addition, in schools where staffing levels are smaller, applying a consistent approach to attendance monitoring is simpler, particularly in terms of establishing the grounds for defining and granting authorised and unauthorised absence to EMA students.

Generally speaking, in schools and colleges where electronic monitoring procedures were in place or have been recently introduced, adhering to EMA attendance monitoring requirements has been less problematic. On the other hand, paper based systems are both time consuming and resource intensive in relation to staffing. While schools and colleges in some areas suggested that having administered EMA for three years, EMA attendance monitoring procedures had become 'routine' in the majority of cases, the requirement to provide weekly attendance data to LEAs on EMA students remained an onerous task. Many school and college representatives argued that the time and effort needed to track EMA students to ensure that payments were made was a major distraction to addressing the need to introduce rigorous monitoring procedures for all students. Some respondents felt that some duplication of effort existed in checking attendance records on the part of education providers and LEAs, which could be overcome by developing links between the IT systems used by education providers and LEAs. While several LEAs have explored the possibility of establishing greater compatibility between the data collection systems used, there was some reluctance to consider further investment in EMA management information systems until a decision is taken about national implementation.

In order to overcome the problems of meeting the tight timescales which education providers must adhere to in relation to submitting attendance data to LEAs on a weekly basis so that payments can be made one week in arrears, some pilot areas have introduced a system that allows more time for schools and colleges to prepare their weekly returns. This involves schools and colleges preparing attendance data two weeks retrospectively, thereby providing them with greater flexibility to deal with late time sheets and to chase up queries with both staff and students. Pilot areas where a system of working two weeks in arrears has been introduced advocate this approach to EMA attendance data collection for national implementation. Even where the timescale for completion of returns is achieved, an additional problem can result from there being a high proportion of 'unknowns'. This leaves the administrators with the dilemma of deciding whether these should be interpreted as constituting absence, therefore requiring payment to be stopped, or whether it was merely a case of a lack of information. It was reported that some colleges are reluctant to change the status from 'unknown' to 'no'.

The issue of the enormous variation that exists among staff within and between different education providers in relation to defining authorised and unauthorised absence continued to

raise concern. While it was acknowledged that academic staff needed to apply some degree of professional judgement in determining legitimate reasons for student absences, there was widespread agreement that a greater degree of consistency needed to be achieved. Many respondents requested further detailed guidance from DfES as well as implementing staff development programmes which worked towards establishing a greater degree of standardisation in determining authorised and unauthorised absence.

Most education providers were aware of the potential scope for students to defraud attendance monitoring systems. This may involve students forging staff signatures on attendance monitoring sheets or falsifying letters from parents to justify attendance. The issue of fraud appears to be more acute in colleges, where there may be large numbers of EMA students who require confirmation of attendance from a number of teaching staff and where tutors may have only sporadic contact with their students. While many education providers have introduced mechanisms to validate the authenticity of information received from students to qualify their attendance, the potential for fraud continued to exist. It was argued that in schools and colleges where EMA was adequately supported and resourced, sufficient time could be allocated to enable staff to check student attendance records and supporting documentation, thereby reducing the opportunity for fraud. In cases where fraud has been proved, some colleges have expelled students from their courses, in line with their normal college procedures and following appropriate warnings. It should be emphasised here that, despite an apparent potential for attempts at fraudulently claiming an allowance, few instances of specific cases were cited.

6.5 Administrative Data Requirements

In September 2001, the DfES introduced an EMA management information system (MIS), which is externally managed by an independent company. This was based on the MI that the LEAs had been previously required to report to DfES on a four weekly basis but involved a new method of reporting. The introduction of the new reporting method led to some teething difficulties, including those listed below, although it is important to emphasise here that these were the perceptions of respondents, or attendees at roundtable discussions, and were not necessarily an accurate reflection of what should have been the case. Issues mentioned were:

- short lead-in time given to the introduction of the new system;

- limited information and training provided at the briefing sessions by the company responsible for the MIS;
- a perceived lack of consistency between the information provided by LEAs and the outputs prepared by the company;
- the existence of various administrative systems developed by LEAs in response to the introduction of EMA which were in some cases unable to respond quickly to some of the management information requirements and the unwillingness of LEAs to invest in new IT systems until a decision is taken about the national implementation of EMA; and
- the perceived inflexibility in reporting timescales which can result in inaccurate reporting.

The introduction of the new EMA MIS had also created some difficulties between some LEAs and the company responsible for the MIS and DfES, which had largely resulted from what were perceived to be unscheduled demands from the company for management information⁵.

'It is very time consuming to fill it out, and also another little bugbear, we report four weekly and then we have a date by which we have to get the stats back by, which I have in my diary, I write them in red. So on the 15th February we are supposed to report for the period 1st January to the 1st February, now you can bet that on say the 8th of February I'll get a note, an e-mail, from ... saying we haven't had your stats up to the 1st February yet, because they always need them earlier than the actual closing date, I don't know why, I think it's for the team meetings they have at the DfES, I'm not really sure, but they shouldn't give us dates to respond by if they're then going to bring it forward.'

LEA Representative

Several respondents from LEAs were widely in agreement that there was a need to enhance the collection of EMA statistical data, although they felt that wider consultation than undertaken through the MI consultation group about the development of the new EMA MIS and about the rationale behind information requirements⁶, would have paved the way towards increasing partnership working. Nevertheless, some respondents felt that the introduction of the MIS system had assisted them in enhancing the speed with which they processed the data.

⁵ DfES reported that the company responsible for the MIS attended the EMA conference held in March 2002 to address many of the issues arising and to ensure that LEAs knew how to contact them for support.

⁶ DfES reported that the EMA guidance includes information about the reasons for collecting MI and this is updated annually.

7 PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF EMA ON INCREASING PARTICIPATION, RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT RATES IN POST-16 EDUCATION

EMA implementation group members were asked to comment on the extent to which the introduction of EMA had improved participation, retention and achievement rates among young people in post-16 education. While some schools and colleges had conducted their own surveys to measure the impact of EMA, most of the findings are based on anecdotal evidence.

There was a widespread belief that it was difficult to isolate the influence of EMA on young people's post-16 decision-making or to measure the extent to which EMA has helped to improve attainment rates in post-16 education, given the raft of policy changes which have been introduced in recent years. These include the launch of Curriculum 2000, the enhancement made to guidance provision which has come about through the piloting of the Connexions Service, and improvements made to student monitoring procedures. However, where colleges have conducted their own performance measures of EMA, the number of students in the 16-19 age bracket had increased. This was largely attributed to the number of students in receipt of EMA, and attendance and attainment rates being better among EMA recipients. In addition, it was widely asserted that these changes had come about in a climate in which local labour markets were buoyant and, as a consequence, had increased the number of opportunities for young people to enter employment. Interestingly, it was mentioned by a college representative on one implementation group that, while attendance levels generally had improved, they were low for enrichment activities, which are not included in the Learning Agreement.

It was felt by the majority of respondents, that EMA had made its biggest impact on improving retention rates, in particular among groups of young people who received the maximum levels of EMA entitlement.

'We've always thought in the past that it's not made a great deal of difference to decisions to stay on post-16, but it might have made a difference to them carrying on, in other words it reduces the drop out rate in post-16 education, we've always thought that over the last three years of getting money.'

College Representative

'Just anecdotally what tutors do say though, like the £5 a week has no impact whatsoever, to be quite honest, it's neither here nor there as far as most students are concerned, it's only when it's at the £30, for the kind of students who are really in need of support.'

College Representative

In one area where student drop-out had been a persistent problem prior to the introduction of EMA, a pattern of regular non-attendance preceding withdrawal had been identified. To address this, the implementation group had decided to intervene by identifying those who had absences in four or more consecutive weeks, and ask the school/college to counsel them.

EMA representatives from schools and colleges emphasised the importance of EMA as the 'carrot and stick', which could be used as an effective tool to motivate some young people to attend school or college and to achieve results. However this approach to engaging young people in learning is not without its critics. Some respondents felt that the introduction of EMA had, in a minority of cases, resulted in some young people staying on in education solely for the financial incentives that were on offer.

'I feel that the scheme in total has I'm sure achieved the objective, and that is to get some youngsters to college or staying on at school that perhaps wouldn't have done, and to get their attendance better than it might otherwise have been, and so on. So perhaps we've achieved that, but I do feel quite strongly that the other effect that it has had is to make people, students and families, quite cynical and calculating about things.'

College Representative

Although most respondents felt that it was too early to make claims about the impact of EMA on achievement rates, in one area it was stated that there had been a significant increase in the proportion of Year 11 students achieving five A*-C grades, and it was conceivable that making a greater effort in order to be awarded an EMA may be a factor.

8 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EMA PILOTS - SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

This section identifies the lessons which have been learnt in relation to the effective implementation and administration of the EMA pilot. It aims to establish areas of good practice that have been developed in some of the pilot areas, which could assist with the national implementation of EMA. It draws solely on the fieldwork which has been conducted in the 15 EMA pilot areas since the beginning of the evaluation in 1999. The evaluation team has utilised, to a large extent, the existence of local EMA implementation groups for data gathering. However, this process has been restricted to convening one round table discussion with each local EMA implementation group on an annual basis. In addition, in the first year of the evaluation of EMA, individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken with key individuals drawn from the LEAs, Careers (now Connexions) Services and TECs (now local LSCs).

Local Implementation Groups

The existence of local implementation groups which have typically included representatives from the LEA, Careers/Connexions Service, TEC/LSC and schools and colleges have proved to be an effective tool in engaging local players in the design and delivery of EMA.

- Local implementation groups were particularly influential when ‘partnership’ or inter-agency working was in evidence because it ‘entailed building on an existing partnership or networking arrangement’ towards the achievement of a common goal (Maguire, Maguire and Vincent, p7:2001).
- In the first year, local implementation groups were found to be most effective when meetings were chaired by a senior member of staff, usually a Director or Deputy Director of Education, since this leadership raised the profile of EMA and helped in engaging the support of key local players.
- In some areas, the representatives of schools and colleges who were appointed to EMA implementation groups held the responsibility for disseminating information locally. This enabled schools and colleges to be kept abreast of local developments while at the same time, reducing the need for most education providers to attend regular meetings.
- While the frequency of meetings of local implementation groups was reduced after the first year of delivery, the meetings continued to have an important role in informing group members about developments in local implementation and in engaging their

support. Local groups were vital in establishing closer working relationships between LEAs and education providers, upon which the delivery of EMA remained heavily dependent.

Publicity and Marketing

In the first year of operation, EMA implementation groups adopted a range of publicity and marketing strategies. These included:

- poster campaigns in schools and colleges;
- representatives from the LEA Student Awards/Student Support Services attending Year 11 parents evenings/careers evenings/assemblies;
- advertisements on local buses;
- colourful leaflets designed to attract the attention of young people;
- radio and press coverage;
- the distribution of flyers with reply slips; and
- LEAs sending letters to the home addresses informing parents and young people about the availability of EMA (which proved to be highly effective in ensuring that all Year 11 students and their parents received information about EMA).

After the initial launch of EMA, most pilot areas reduced their involvement in local media campaigns in favour of less expensive forms of publicity and marketing which tended to rely on disseminating information through schools and colleges. The drawback of this approach is that it focuses on meeting the needs of young people already engaged in learning and is less likely to reach excluded groups.

Careers/Connexions Services tended to be centrally involved in the dissemination of information about EMA (Maguire, S., Maguire, M. and Heaver, C., 2002). Connexions Personal Advisers could also fulfil a crucial role in advising young people in 'hard to reach' groups about the availability of EMA and assisting, where appropriate, with the application process.

Application Procedures

The release of the standard EMA application form by DfES earlier in the academic year would provide more time that is needed at the local level for its publication and circulation.

The high numbers of EMA application forms which continue to be returned incomplete, or without the required supporting financial information, would suggest the need for support strategies targeted at assisting with the application process. These might include:

- visits to schools and colleges by EMA administrators;
- open days held by EMA administrators;
- targeted support given to ‘hard to reach’ groups; and
- ensuring that assistance is available during enrolment periods at schools and colleges.

Staffing levels need to be maximised over the summer months to avoid unnecessary delays due to the large number of forms which continue to be received for assessment and processing over this period.

A closing date for receipt of EMA applications could be introduced in the Summer term. This would guarantee that forms would be processed to enable payments to be made at the beginning of the academic year. This may help to reduce the volume of applications received over the summer months and provide some incentive to make applications for EMA earlier. However, to ensure that access to financial support continues to exist, EMA applications should be processed throughout the academic year.

Learning Agreements

- The completion of Learning Agreements (LAs) is speeded up when schools and colleges assume responsibility both for ensuring that the document is completed by the young person and their parent(s), and for informing the LEA that payments can commence.
- To avoid unnecessary amounts of paperwork, schools and colleges can provide the LEA with a list of young people who have completed LAs on a weekly return, as opposed to returning individual copies of each LA to the LEA.
- To reduce the delays in payments caused by the requirement for a parental signature on a young person’s LA, it has been suggested that the conditions outlined in the LA could be attached to the EMA application form. A signature which would confirm acceptance of the conditions of the LA could be obtained from the parent or responsible adult at the application stage.

- The requirement for a young person to obtain careers advice before changing their course and thereby needing an amendment to their LA, is not widely followed and should be emphasised in guidance.

Payment Systems

- Earlier circulation and completion of EMA application forms and Learning Agreements would reduce the volume of late payments which occur, in particular, in the Autumn term.
- Despite initial concerns, young people do not appear to experience any great difficulties in opening bank accounts.
- LEAs which issue payment slips alongside EMA weekly and bonus payments appear to receive fewer queries.
- Most LEAs favour a weekly EMA payment system.
- Few problems were encountered, either by LEAs or by schools and colleges, with the administration and payment of both retention and achievement EMA bonuses.

Attendance Monitoring

- The existence of electronic attendance monitoring systems in schools and colleges reduces EMA administration.
- Schools and colleges need to appoint members of staff to manage EMA administration and provide sufficient levels of staffing to deal with the large number of enquiries received from young people and parents on a weekly basis.
- ‘Positive’ attendance reporting, which requires schools and colleges to provide a full attendance record on each EMA student on a weekly basis, reduces the number of overpayments made.
- Pilot areas which operate a system of reporting attendance two weeks in arrears have a greater capacity to investigate queries which arise in relation to attendance and payment issues.
- Greater consistency needs to be achieved by education providers in relation to determining EMA students’ authorised and unauthorised absence.
- Establishing a system by which each school and college appoints an EMA ‘link’ person provides a clearly identifiable point of contact for young people, parents and the LEA.

- Pilot areas where a system of working two weeks in arrears has been introduced advocate this approach to EMA attendance data collection.

Monitoring and Review Meetings

Regular consultation should be considered at a number of different levels to review procedures and to consider changes to the administration of EMA:

- The local EMA implementation group can act as a forum to exchange ideas and consider changes to local delivery.
- In some pilot areas, annual review meetings have been convened between the administrators of EMA (currently the LEA) and *all* education providers, to obtain feedback on EMA applications, attendance monitoring and payment procedures.
- Meetings between the administrators of EMA (currently the LEAs) and DfES could be organised at a regional level or at a national level.
- The criteria for selection for membership of national or regional EMA Administration Boards or similar bodies should be made public.

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ANNEX A

EMA PILOT AREAS

IMPLEMENTATION GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE 2001/2002

Implementation Group

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

Perceptions of aims of EMAs and desired outcomes

Feedback about EMA from:

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

Publicity and awareness

Information/awareness/publicity for EMAs
Responsibilities for design, development and implementation
Strategies used to reach target groups
Feedback about EMA publicity
Adverse publicity
Changes in levels of awareness
Mis-information
Impact of publicity strategies on take-up
Most effective methods for communicating with young people and their parents
Whether letter sent out to every potential eligible young person
Whether letter contained application form and full EMA details, eligibility etc.

Experience/expectations of the operation of EMA in relation to:

- level of take-up and factors inhibiting take-up
- labour market entry - part-time employment patterns
- interaction with other existing and proposed student support mechanisms
- special action taken to attract hard to reach groups e.g. YP who truant

The effect of the introduction of EMA on

- post-16 participation rates (in particular NEET group)
- other initiatives/post-16 destinations/routes
- 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 from school to FE/Level 2 to 3/Level 3 to HE (weekly allowance (full and partial) and bonuses - relative importance attached to each)
- class sizes/class management
- participation, retention and achievement rates among ethnic minority groups/young people with disabilities/white 'w/c' males
- among students who have completed 2 years of support

Administrative Support and Mechanisms (description and documentation, eg guidelines, forms, proformas)

- Staffing levels and requirements
- Use and value of standard application forms
- Eligibility and means-testing
- Support and advice given with completion of application forms
- Returned forms
- Documentary evidence
- Absent parents
- Application processing
- Standard letters and procedures for follow up of forms
- Procedures and timescales for action taken, and details of what this is, for non returned forms
- Strategies introduced/planned to improve application processing procedures
- Appeals
- Impact of administrative and support mechanisms on take-up
- Suitability, compatibility and impact of IT systems

Learning Agreements

- Use of standard Learning Agreement (LA)
- Sources of support and advice to help young people/parents complete the LA
- Understanding of the LA - young people/parents
- Returning LAs - examples of good practice among LEAs/schools and colleges
- Changes to LAs (course changes/movement between education providers)
- Breaking LAs
- LAs and non-EMA students
- Annual renewal of Learning Agreements

Payment Systems

- Average time to first payment
- Payment systems - weekly payments/bonuses
- Distribution of awards made across payment bandings
- Payment delays
- Bank accounts
- Holiday/half-term breaks in payments
- Strategies planned/introduced to improve payment systems
- Appeals
- Preferred payment method - 1 or 2 weeks in arrears
- In house/bespoke systems

Attendance Monitoring

- Attendance monitoring procedures
 - schools and colleges (before and since the introduction of EMA)
 - LEAs
- System of reporting attendance to LEA – positive, negative or 100 per cent reporting from schools and colleges
- Staffing
- Authorised/unauthorised absences
- Suspension/termination of EMA weekly payments - levels of stopped payments (N.B. admin procedures between schools/colleges and LEA and referral procedures to Careers Service)
- Procedures introduced/reviewed to implement the payment of attendance/achievement bonuses
- Styles of letters to explain bonuses
- Overpayments
- Appeals

Feedback on:

- the Good Practice Guide (not renewed in 2001)
- revised DfES guidelines (new guidance notes to go with regulations were issued in 2001)
- examples of good practice - support given through application system/raising awareness/working with partners/monitoring attendance/payment systems
- changes to 'natural parent' rule
- changes to sibling rule
- ongoing liaison between LEAs and DfES
- view of new Management Information Reporting system
- view of feedback on evaluation results
- suggestions for improved forms of communication with DfES – conferences, letters etc.

Further Information:

- copies of all relevant documentation relating to the administration of EMAs
- copies of relevant background material relating to the local labour market, education provision etc
- routine forwarding of data relating to the implementation of EMAs
- identification of 'key informants' for local narrative information

ANNEX B

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE COMPLETING THE 3RD YEAR OF THE EVALUATION RESEARCH

Since the research for this report was completed, the Department for Education and Skills has made the following changes to the central administration of EMA:

EMA Application Form – The 2002/03 form was re-designed by a Project Group comprising of the Department's EMA Unit members and representatives from LEAs. The group focused on simplifying much of the language used on the form. They also added a list of non-taxable benefits, which are not considered as part of income for assessment purposes. This gives the LEAs a clearer view of how income eligibility should be assessed.

Development of the 2003/04 form is nearing completion. New LEAs have been invited to join the project group to provide fresh perspectives during the development stage. The development of the form is keeping to the timescales laid out in the project plan and the intention is to distribute the final form to LEAs in February 2003. This will give LEAs sufficient time to customise, print and circulate the forms to education providers and subsequently allow them to reach their target audiences earlier and thus more effectively.

EMA Administration Board – LEA membership on the EMA Administration Board has changed for the academic year 2002/03 with representation of the non-London LEA changing from Oldham to Tameside LEA. This was in response to requests for fresh LEA input into EMA Administration Board meetings. There have been some improvements to both the MIS website and the related Administration Board Report for the 2002/03 academic year to make the data easier to understand.

LEAs were informed prior to the start of the 2002/03 academic year of the standards expected by the EMA Administration Board in terms of performance. They have also been informed of the main dates of the EMA Administration Board meetings when reviews of performance will take place. Early indications are that LEA performance is up on the same time last year.

Management Information (MI) and associated benchmarking – Representatives from the DfES, LEAs and the MIS contractor met to discuss how the reporting system can be improved. The focus of developments has been primarily on making the website more user friendly, the data clearer and easier to interpret.

The DfES supported the development of 'automatic data transfer' mechanisms with some of the Pilot LEAs. The development allowed LEAs to transfer data direct to the MIS website without the need for data input. This facility is now available to the majority of pilot areas and should contribute to easing the burden of administration on many LEAs.

The coverage of MI has been extended to capture LEA data on Childcare Pilots, Vulnerable Pilots and the monitoring of take up by ethnic background and the presence of disability.

Eligibility Estimates - DfES improved their methodology for estimating EMA eligibility and take up by LEA for the 2001/02 and 2002/03 academic years. Early indications are that the revised estimates are much closer to the actual uptake of EMA.

Training - The external organisation running the EMA MIS Website has provided a series of training sessions to LEAs on the transfer and interpretation of data. In addition, some LEAs

now operate in-house training on the transfer of their own data to the system to cover sickness/annual leave of their team members. This training should help improve the regular provision of data to the website from all 56 LEAs.

EMA Conference – The EMA Conference was held in March 2002. It was attended by 53 of the EMA Pilot Areas. At this conference a ‘Good Practice Guide’ for LEAs was distributed, a presentation was given on the 2nd year Evaluation Implementation Report and LEAs discussed ways of ensuring ‘Continuous Improvement’ in the delivery of EMAs. This conference was cited as an opportunity to share good practice and to gauge opinion of issues relevant to LEAs prior to announcement of a national rollout of EMA. Feedback from the conference from attendees has been very positive and the information gained continues to lead to improvements in processes used by both DfES and the LEAs.

EMA Good Practice Guide – DfES has drawn together the experiences and expertise from the initial piloting of EMA. ‘The Good Practice Guide’ is based on the information from the first two years of the evaluation of the implementation of the EMA pilots and the experience of LEAs that had developed their own systems and processes. The guide is designed to offer a strategy to help Local Authorities with the implementation of EMA.

Revisions to EMA Guidance – Revisions have been made to the 2002/03 EMA Guidance. These include clarification to sections covering authorised absence and student age in the final school year.

London Quadrant LEAs – The London LEAs have been working as three different quadrants, with each quadrant having a leader. The role of the Leader varies between the quadrants. The primary role is to co-ordinate and standardise the approach to EMAs throughout the quadrant. Brent, who co-ordinate the North London quadrant have agreed to collate and disseminate all attendance data for all their LEAs. This has resulted in improvements in the quality of data from the North London Quadrant.

Single point of contact (SPOC) – A single point of contact facility has been established within the DfES EMA Unit to offer advice and guidance to LEAs and members of the public. The facility is co-ordinated by a single member of the EMA Unit. This has allowed for greater consistency in the resolution of queries, by combining the roles of those members of staff who previously took responsibility for individual regions.

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