

Important changes to EMA

The Secretary of State recently announced several changes to EMA, which includes the introduction of an EMA Guarantee for new applicants, the extension of £30 EMA to all e2e learners and new bonus arrangements for Work-Based Learning and short course FE programmes.

EMA Guarantee

From 2008/09 a learner will be eligible for EMA at the same amount for a period of up to three years, this will be known as the EMA Guarantee. Successful first-time applicants will be guaranteed a minimum level of support after a one-off assessment, even if their household income changes. Should the household income decrease from year to year, a learner will be entitled to reassessment for the beginning of the next academic year.

Currently young people have to make new applications each academic year. This means that a young people could be eligible for EMA at 16 but ineligible in subsequent years. The EMA Guarantee alongside the Higher Education Student Support guarantee will give young people the security to allow them to look ahead to completing their programme of study and progressing to Higher Education. There will no longer be uncertainty as to the financial support they will receive.

New e2e arrangements

All e2e learners starting a programme of study on or after 30th June 2008 will receive the maximum £30 weekly EMA payment, regardless of their household income. This is intended to encourage young people not in education, employment or training to enter training and eventually progress on. It will ensure that financial support is not a barrier to young people wishing to enter training. The extension will be available to learners aged 16-18 who enrol on LSC funded e2e programmes.

Learners who progress from e2e onto other programmes will be reassessed for EMA according to their household income, they will not automatically carry the £30 eligibility onto other programmes such as FE or WBL. An e2e learner receiving £30 EMA will not automatically be eligible for the EMA Guarantee or the Higher Education Student Support guarantee, they must reapply and their eligibility will be based on their household income.

EMA Bonuses/Weekly Payments – 08/09

The criteria for the payment of EMA bonuses have been revised to further drive attainment by including an element of learner effort and behaviour and by removing the link to attendance. The weekly payment criteria will also include a link to effort and behaviour. The change is a direct result of the consultation carried out with providers in 2007.

There will be two bonus models: the “Academic Year Model” which is similar to the current FE bonus but does not include a September bonus and the “Short Course/WBL Model” where a bonus is accrued on a weekly basis.

Academic Year Model

Learning programmes that follow the academic study pattern (September to July) must attract this model. A bonus of £100 will be paid in January and July in each year of learning. The criteria for attendance over set weeks has been removed.

Short Course/WBL Model

All short courses and e2e/PLA must attract this model. Bonus payments are accumulated at a rate of £5 per week. The learning provider and learner agree the criteria for the bonus payments and their frequency at the start of the learning programme – the first bonus cannot be paid until the learner has completed a minimum of 10 weeks. After that point, the learning provider (in agreement with the learner) can choose when to pay the accumulated bonuses and use them to their best effect to encourage and motivate the learner.

For both bonus models, at the start of learning, the learner and provider will agree the criteria that must be met for payment of the bonus and should include progress against/achievement of learning goals, effort and behaviour and could also include an agreed attendance pattern.

The proposed changes to the EMA bonus models serve to further align FE and WBL bonuses by removing the criteria for attendance over set weeks in FE and ensuring that both models have a clear focus on learner effort and behaviour.