

Learner Support Service stakeholder e-bulletin, December 2008

Welcome to the December e-bulletin from the LSC's Learner Support Directorate.

This month, we are pleased to let you know about some improvements we are making to the Interim Learning Provider Portal as well as updating you about the handover of the contract for administering all the Learner Support schemes from Liberata to Capita.

If you would like your name added to the distribution list please email us at learnersupportupdate@lsc.gov.uk .

We are also updating the website regularly at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss

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1. Handover of the Learner Support contract to Capita

As you know, on Friday, 28 November we terminated the contract with Liberata for the administration of Learner Support Services and transferred it to Capita. As you may also know, Capita has a long history of working on learner support programmes, including EMA, having managed the administration, processing and telephone helplines in the past. Capita has brought in a new senior management team to oversee staff and operations. We are confident that the change will bring about a significant improvement for learners and learning providers in future.

What the changes mean for learners

In the 2008-09 academic year, learners will not be affected by the change. All outstanding applications will continue to be processed, and registered learners will continue to receive their payments. The learner helpline on 0800 121 8989 remains open.

Please reassure learners that they will still continue to receive their payments, including any backdated payments they are entitled to.

Learners who wish to apply for any learner support scheme, including EMA and ALG, should use the same application forms and return addresses.

What the changes mean for learning providers

In the short term there are no immediate changes to the service. The learning provider helpline on **0845 600 7979** remains open and you should continue to use your existing systems to make payments to learners.

As you will appreciate, transferring the Learner Support delivery operation from one contractor to another is a significant management challenge. We are grateful for your continuing patience and understanding during this period of change. Although we are confident that the service will improve, this is not going to happen overnight.

Over the weekend of the 20th and 21st December we made some improvements to the Interim LPP – please see item 2 for more information.

2. Improvements to the Interim Learning Provider Portal

In recent weeks we have been working on a number of improvements to the Interim Learning Provider Portal (Interim LPP) to improve the functionality and make the system more user friendly.

Over the weekend of the 20th and 21st December, the interim LPP was upgraded with additional functionality including:

- The ability to record the EMA January and July bonus payment decisions for FE learners;
- The ability to amend registrations for learners (including changing study dates, study patterns, groups and locations);
- The introduction of a 'notice board' which will be used to provide important messages;
- Additional learner information included on the "Register Learners" page to allow you to access more information.

We have produced an updated guidance document containing detailed instructions to help you to use the new functionality. Please refer to the guidance notes at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/learning-provider-portal for more information.

As well as adding new functionality, improvements have also been made to the performance of the Interim LPP.

We hope that all of these changes will result in an improved experience when using the Interim LPP. However, if you experience any difficulties or have any questions regarding the Interim LPP please contact the Learning Provider helpline on **0845 600 7979**.

Summary of previous hints and tips

A summary of hints and tips for using the Interim LPP is also available at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss/keydocuments

The latest version of the document covers:

- End of learning
- Backdating payments
- Using fields to sort columns
- Changing IDs and passwords

- Groups and locations
- Registering attendance and making bonus payments in bulk.

3. Processing EMA Applications – the latest

The latest position on the processing of EMA applications is outlined below. However, these processing figures are still being investigated by Capita and may be subject to change. We will inform you of any revisions in future editions.

As of 19th December, more than 539,000 Notices of Entitlement (NoEs) have been sent out and more than 461,000 learners have received at least one payment.

As of the same date, Capita were working on fewer than 2,600 applications, down from 11,000 applications as outlined in last month's e-bulletin on 28th November.

4. Processing ALG Applications – the latest

The latest position on the processing of ALG applications is outlined below. However, these processing figures are still being investigated by Capita and may be subject to change. We will inform you of any revisions in future editions.

As of 19th December, more than 37,500 ALG applications have been received, around a quarter more than this time last year. More than 31,000 applications have been assessed.

There were fewer than 550 applications awaiting processing. However, further information is needed from the learner in approximately 6,500 before the applications can be processed.

Helping learners to accurately complete their ALG application form

We have identified several areas in the application form that can cause confusion, leading to applications being returned to learners. It would be extremely helpful if you could please help learners to complete the form:

1. Residency (question A8). Please ensure learners complete this section. Eligibility for ALG cannot be determined without this being filled in.

2. Learning Achievements (question A10). This section should be used to record **previous** qualifications. It should **not** be used to record a qualification the learner intends to study for.
3. Income Details (Part B). All learners must complete Part B regardless of their age/marital/partner status and provide original documentation to verify their income details.

5. Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work

The decision to change our service delivery contractor has inevitably caused some disruption to the introduction of the programme and as a consequence we have decided to make two important changes. Firstly, the programme start date will now be delayed until April 2009, and secondly, the programme will now be rolled out nationally to all local authorities from April 2009. There will no longer be a pilot for the programme.

Learners who are in the target group for Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work and are looking to undertake LSC funded learning or training from January should contact their learning provider to apply for support with childcare costs from the college's 20+ Childcare support funds. They will be able to apply for Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work from around the middle of February for support with the costs of their childcare if their learning continues through April and beyond.

To make sure you receive all the latest information on the scheme please sign up for our Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work e-bulletin by sending us an email at freechildcare-adults@lsc.gov.uk.

6. Actions you may need to take

A reminder of the actions to be taken over the next few weeks. Please:

- Continue to use existing systems for making payments to learners;
- Reassure learners that outstanding applications will be processed and that all payments (including backdated payments) will continue to be made now that the contract has transferred to Capita;
- Continue to encourage Learners to apply for Learner Support schemes. Application forms are available from schools, colleges, local Connexions services and by calling the Learner Helpline on 0800 121 8989;

- Sign up for our e-newsletter telling you all about our new childcare scheme – Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work. Email us at freechildcare-adults@lsc.gov.uk

7. Keeping you informed

We will keep you up to date with the Learner Support news via this monthly e-bulletin.

You can also find out more about the Learner Support service online at www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn/lss We are updating this website regularly, so please check the website for the latest information.

If you would like to find out more about the Learner Support Service or the various Learner Support schemes, including EMA and the ALG, please go to: <http://www.lsc.gov.uk/providers/moneytolearn>