

Scott's armed for life – thanks to EMA

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Young people who leave learning at 16 earn an estimated £185,000 less over the course of their working lives than their school friends who go on to further learning, according to research carried out by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Every year hundreds of North East students leave learning at 16 – because they think it's going to be a financial struggle to stay on. The result is that many end up in unskilled and poorly paid jobs and a vast amount of potential is lost to the region's shrinking labour market.

But as Scott Boden from Linthorpe discovered, there is a way for many of these school leavers to continue in education and fulfil their true potential. The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of up to £30 per week is available for young people from households with incomes of £30,000 or less.

Scott, who went to Kings Manor school in Acklam, admits he would have struggled financially with transport, equipment and basic day-to-day living during his three years at Middlesbrough College if it hadn't been for the £30 a week EMA he received.

A keen footballer, whose favourite subjects were languages and PE at school, Scott studied for the Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced NCFE Preparation for Entrance to the Uniformed Services at Middlesbrough College for 3 years. This

is a course which develops learners' interpersonal skills and covers teamwork, problem solving, map and navigation, physical fitness and maturity, and also helps to develop specific career choices and progression for the student. The course is designed to introduce the learner to the requirements of life and routine within the uniformed services including the armed forces (army, navy or air force) police or fire brigade.

"It was a brilliant course and I learned loads," says Scott: "We went out on expeditions and got real insiders' knowledge of what it was like to be in the armed forces. I know I definitely wouldn't have been able to cope money-wise if it hadn't been for the EMA – that £30 a week made it all possible for me. "

Now hopefully poised for a career in the Royal Navy or the Fire Brigade, Scott is totally convinced his three years at college have been well worth it: "Where would I be now if I hadn't got these qualifications? Probably in a dead end job going nowhere fast. Now I have high hopes and plans for the future. I'd like to travel and see a bit more of the world. That looks like it could be possible now with this course behind me."

The means tested EMA payments – which are a grant and not a loan - can help cover the extra cost of a college education in both academic and vocational subjects. In addition, for those demonstrating good attendance and commitment, bonus payments are on offer.

Having been piloted in parts of the North East, EMA was rolled out nationwide a couple of years ago. Take up in the region has been good with the numbers exceeding initial estimates. This year 24,687 students took advantage of the grant.

Chris Roberts, Regional Director of the LSC North East, said: “It is essential that as many people as possible are able to continue their education in order to give themselves the best possible opportunity of securing a job that makes the most of their skills, which they enjoy and which gives them more earning potential.

“This will also help improve the qualifications and skills of the region’s workforce at a time when there are more experienced people retiring than new starters entering the labour market. Something as simple as EMA, which offers a little help towards further education costs, can achieve all this.”

To find out more about EMA call freephone 080 810 16 2 19, log on to www.ema.dfes.gov.uk or visit your local Connexions Centre.

ENDS

Editor’s Note:

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England’s young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

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