

To:

Registered EMA Learning Centres
The Student Loans Company
NUS/USI
NI Commissioner for Children and Young People
Children's Law Centre

21 September 2020

Dear Colleague

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (EMA) SCHEME FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2020/21.

This Information Notice provides details of the EMA scheme for Northern Ireland students during academic year 2020/21. Please ensure that it is circulated to all staff and colleagues who administer the scheme within your organisation.

Application Forms

We are extremely grateful to Learning Centres that have taken delivery of and distributed their EMA application packs during what has been an extremely challenging time for all.

Ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students is of the utmost importance as we prepare for the new 2020/21 academic year. We appreciate that every effort is being made by Learning Centres to ensure that applications reach students as early as possible for completion and return to the Student Loans Company.

Application forms and guidance notes for academic year 2020/21 are available to download via the NI Direct website at:
(<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/education-maintenance-allowance-application-forms-and-guidance-notes>).

EMA scheme for academic year 2020/21

The awards and income thresholds for the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme have been maintained at academic year 2019/20 levels.

Attendance

The EMA scheme is designed to provide support to eligible students undertaking eligible further education courses in Northern Ireland that normally require attendance at a Learning Centre. However, we recognise the importance of Learning

Centres continuing to maintain and adhere to Government COVID-19 guidance in planning for and supporting new and returning students from September 2020. We expect Learning Centres to continue to operate and maintain their own absence/attendance policies.

For students engaged in learning, including blended learning as a combination of online and attendance, Learning Centres should provide attendance confirmations to the Student Loans Company in the normal way for weekly allowance payments to be released. Student absence for reasons of illness, self-isolation or Learning Centre closure due to COVID-19, can be treated as authorised absences, at Learning Centres' discretion.

Backdated EMA Payments

For academic year 2020/21 we are extending the period for applicants to be considered for backdated EMA weekly allowance payments. It has traditionally been the case that eligible students who submit their EMA Application Form to the Student Loans Company before 30th September will have their weekly allowance payments backdated to the beginning of term, whilst those who submit their application after 30th September have their payments backdated to the date that it was received by the Student Loans Company.

For academic year 20/21, students who submit their EMA Application Form to the Student Loans Company before 3rd December 2020 will have their weekly allowance payments backdated to the beginning of term, whilst those who submit their application after 3rd December will have their payments backdated to the date that it was received by the Student Loans Company.

Eligible returning students may also receive backdated EMA payments to the beginning of term if their EMA Learning Agreement is signed/agreed by 3rd December 2020. If an eligible returning student signs their EMA Learning Agreement after 3rd December they will only be eligible for backdated EMA payments to the signed date confirmed to the Student Loans Company by their Learning Centre.

In addition, the deadline for the signing of Part 2 of EMA Learning Agreements, in order to be eligible for consideration for January Bonus Payments, is to be extended. Those students who sign Part 2 of their EMA Learning Agreement by 21st December 2020 will be eligible for consideration for the January Bonus, whilst those who sign Part 2 after 21st December will not. The actual release of the January Bonus Payment will, however, continue to be dependent on the student meeting the terms of Part 2 of their EMA Learning Agreement.

EMA payments remain subject to the Student Loans Company receiving confirmation that students are engaged in learning and have agreed their EMA Learning Agreement. We would still encourage students and learning centres to agree to their EMA Agreement as early as possible.

Please note that the EMA application packs for academic year 2020/21 were printed prior to the impact of COVID-19, and therefore some printed EMA forms refer to 30th

September to qualify for backdated weekly allowance payments and 7th December for consideration of the January Bonus. We ask Learning Centres for their support in helping to communicate the extended deadlines (3rd December and 21st December respectively).

EMA Learning Agreement via email / electronically

In recognition of the difficulties that some students may have in attending their Learning Centre due to COVID-19, to physically sign their EMA Learning Agreement, for academic year 20/21 we are content for students to complete and agree their EMA Learning Agreement via email / electronically.

Enquiries

If you have any queries about EMA or this Information Notice, please contact the EMA Customer Services Team at **emainfo@slc.co.uk**.