

# include YOUTH

**Briefing Paper on Include Youth's response to the Department of  
Employment and Learning's Consultation on Pathways to Success**

## **Education Maintenance Allowance**

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## Introduction

This paper is the second in a number of briefing papers being produced by Include Youth on its response to the Department for Employment and Learning's Pathways to Success consultation.

Include Youth's submission to that consultation is grounded in the views of young people Include Youth works with, extensive practitioner based experience within and beyond Include Youth, research evidence, relevant international human rights standards and guidance and critical policy analysis. As such we have a significant amount of expertise and learning which we are keen to share.

The purpose of these briefing papers is to share that learning and those insights with members of the Employment and Learning Committee in a user friendly format.

**This briefing paper focuses on Education Maintenance Allowance and the current inequitable situation whereby young people participating on specialised pre-vocational training programmes are denied access to any form of EMA, means tested or non means tested.**

To access our full submission please click on the following link  
<http://includeyouth.org/policy/submissions>

### **Explanation of terminology – EMA and non-means tested EMA**

EMA was jointly introduced in September 2004 by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. The main purpose of the scheme is to enable young people from lower-income backgrounds to remain in post-compulsory education at school or college, with the key objectives of raising participation, retention and achievement rates in the eligible group.

Under the scheme, young people aged between 16 and 19 who attend schools and further education colleges in Northern Ireland are eligible to receive a means-tested weekly allowance of £10, £20 or £30, depending on their family income. In addition, learners are eligible to receive two £100 bonus payments, which are paid in January and June, as well as a £100 returner bonus, which is paid to those students who return to their course in the September of the following academic year.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2010/EmploymentLearning/110119\\_EMA.htm](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2010/EmploymentLearning/110119_EMA.htm)

**Currently young people on the Give and Take scheme or similar pre-vocational training programmes, unlike their peers on training programmes with Recognised Training Organisations, do not receive a weekly non means tested EMA .**

From September 2008 if a young person goes into training through one of the components of Training for Success (TfS) they will **automatically qualify for a non means tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) of £40 per week**. If their parent(s) / guardian(s) receive Income Support, means tested Job Seeker's Allowance or Housing Benefit then that benefit will not be affected either. Their parent(s) / guardian(s) will also be entitled to receive Child Benefit & Child Tax Credit provided all other conditions for receipt of the benefits are met. Travel, lodging and childcare allowances may be paid depending on individual circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

### **Review of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)**

The Pathways to Success consultation document outlined the current situation and the likely next steps in relation to the joint review of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE) and carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC).

PWC's final report was received by DEL and DE in December 2010 and the Employment and Learning Committee members received a briefing from DEL officials on 19 January 2011.<sup>3</sup> This briefing covered the background to EMA, the key findings of the Review and potential future options for EMA. The Employment and Learning Committee held a further discussion about the Review in closed session on 26 January 2011, following which it issued a press release calling for greater clarity on the issue and for consultation on any proposed changes to EMA. The Department's stated objective is to introduce a revised scheme for the beginning of the academic year 2012-13.

**Include Youth's understanding is that this issue is now with the Minister for Employment and Learning for a final decision.**

### **Include Youth's concerns regarding EMA**

**Include Youth's concerns in relation to EMA centre on the current discriminatory situation whereby young people on the Give and Take scheme or similar pre-vocational training**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/education-and-learning/14-19/its-your-choice-options-after-16/trainingforsuccess/find-out-more-trainingforsuccessni.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Op cited at note 1

**programmes, unlike their peers on training programmes with Recognised Training Organisations, do not receive a weekly non means tested EMA .**

**This specific issue needs to be addressed and resolved by the Minister for Employment and Learning in the context of any decision that is made in relation to the future of EMA.**

This issue directly affects those young people that Include Youth works with as well as many other young people participating in similar schemes to the Give and Take scheme. These young people present with multiple barriers to engaging in mainstream education and training.

100 per cent of young people on the Give and Take scheme are classified as 'NEET'. Approximately three quarters are either in care or are from a care background. 70 per cent will have essential skills difficulties. 60 per cent are from a socially and economically disadvantaged background. 44 per cent have experienced mental/emotional health problems.<sup>4</sup>

**As such there is a strong argument that these young people as a group are those who are most in need of incentives and supports to remain in education and training.** The provision of a non means tested EMA to these young people would undoubtedly provide “a particularly significant incentive”<sup>5</sup> for these young people to re-engage in a positive way with education and training.

Include Youth has consistently raised this issue with government and others over a number of years. Young people on the Give and Take Scheme wrote to the Employment and Learning Committee in May 2009 to raise their issue of their lack of entitlement to EMA. Include Youth staff and young people were subsequently invited to give evidence to the Employment and Learning Committee in September 2009 on the specific issues regarding lack of provision of a non means tested EMA for young people on specialised pre-vocational programmes such as the Give and Take scheme.<sup>6</sup> As a direct result of this the Employment and Learning Committee brought forward a successful motion to the Assembly recommending the widening of access to Education Maintenance Allowance.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For further information on the profile of young people on the Give and Take Scheme and the scheme itself please refer to Include Youth's Give and Take Evaluation Report 2008-2010, available at

<http://includeyouth.org/resources/reports>

<sup>5</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning Inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training Volume 1, Session 2010/2011 15 December 2010 paragraph 239

<sup>6</sup> <http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/employment/2007mandate/minutes/2009/090916.htm>

<sup>7</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/northern\\_ireland/newsid\\_8307000/8307507.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/northern_ireland/newsid_8307000/8307507.stm)

Include Youth subsequently raised the issue of non means tested EMA in oral and written evidence to the Employment and Learning Committee's Inquiry into NEETs.<sup>8</sup>

The young people Include Youth works with strongly believe that their lack of access to non means tested EMA is discriminatory. They equally feel strongly that non means tested EMA or a similar incentive would encourage them to remain in education or training:

*"If they stop EMA they would lose a lot of people."*

*"Financial incentives would make people more willing to stay on at school."*

There was unanimous agreement among a group of young people consulted with as part of the joint Include Youth and Youth Action NI 'Let's Talk' event in Armagh on 9 June 2011 that EMA should be available for those up to 25 years of age and that it should cover not just formal education but also other training programmes run by voluntary and community organisations.

## **Conclusion**

Include Youth recommends that the Minister for Employment and Learning urgently address this inequitable situation regarding the lack of provision of non means tested EMA to young people on specialised pre-vocational programmes such as Give and Take or other schemes, in the context of any decision regarding the future of EMA. Young people participating in such schemes, who are most in need of support to participate in education or training, should be entitled to receive non means tested EMA alongside their peers in mainstream education and training.

Include Youth commends the Employment and Learning Committee for its attention to the issue of EMA to date. **Include Youth is now calling on members of the Employment and Learning Committee to raise this issue urgently with DEL officials and with the Minister for Employment and Learning in advance of any decision being made on the future of EMA.**

Include Youth would be happy to provide the Employment and Learning Committee with further written evidence or oral evidence if this were deemed useful at any stage. The young people whom Include Youth works with would also be prepared to provide oral evidence to the Employment and Learning Committee should this be required.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2009/EmploymentLearning/100519\\_NEETs\\_NIACRO.pdf](http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2009/EmploymentLearning/100519_NEETs_NIACRO.pdf)