

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 12 NOVEMBER 2002

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE – SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE EVALUATION

Report by Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to inform the Education Committee of the Scottish Executive's evaluation report of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) pilot scheme.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The EMA pilot was introduced to East Ayrshire Council secondary establishments at the start of the 1999/2000 academic year.
- 2.2** The objectives of the scheme are to increase the post compulsory education participation, the retention rates and achievement levels of students who are aged between 16 and 19 and who have completed s4.
- 2.3** Research has demonstrated that students from low income families are considerably less likely to stay on in formal learning after compulsory education has ceased. As a consequence, many young people from such backgrounds leave formal education without even the minimum qualifications needed for sustained employment and are at risk of social exclusion.
- 2.4** Students receive up to a maximum of £40 per week, depending on their parent's income levels. Annual bonus payments are also paid depending on academic achievement and student's attendance and conduct during the academic year.

3. SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE EVALUATION OF THE EMA PILOT

- 3.1** The Scottish Executive commissioned the University of Edinburgh to conduct research into the impact of EMA on the objectives outlined in paragraph 2.2 (above). Comparisons were made with establishments in both North and South Lanarkshire, where deprivation levels are similar to East Ayrshire. Findings were presented to the Scottish Executive in September 2002.

3.2 POST COMPULSORY EDUCATION PARTICIPATION

The report found that s5 and s6 rolls rose by 7% overall, and 9% from students from low income households between 1999 and 2002. This EMA-effect is statistically significant, and can be distinguished from other factors that may impact on participation and retention; for example changes in curriculum or the local labour market.

This increase in s5/6 rolls is contrary to the picture across the Council overall, where in the same period pupil rolls have fallen from 19,198 to 18,582. This represents a reduction of 3.21%.

3.3 RETENTION

Findings also indicate that the number of students failing to complete courses had fallen dramatically. The drop in s5/6 Christmas leavers confirms this point, as does the increase in students completing s5.

The study also found that improved retention is most evident in young people from low income families and is seen as another positive indicator of the success of EMA in East Ayrshire.

3.4 ATTAINMENT

The report stated that the impact of EMA on attainment was inconclusive. The researchers stated that the data in this area was inconclusive as they could only had two years worth of examination data.

However the Scottish Executive have agreed that with the report highlighting an increase in s5/6 rolls and more students completing courses this would point to an increase in attainment. This is also reflected in the increase in exam presentations and its resultant increase in SQA fees.

The Scottish Executive has subsequently commissioned a further study to ascertain the EMA impact on attainment. Details of this study will be reported to Committee at the earliest opportunity.

3.5 OTHER FINDINGS

Researchers found that use of the Learning Agreement could be enhanced. The view from students was that it was completed as part of the application process and was rarely reviewed with Guidance Staff during the year. To raise the importance of the Learning Agreement a working group has been set up, involving staff from the EMA administration and Guidance Teachers.

The report also found that students spent their EMA allowances on educational materials to support their learning and contributing to household expenditure.

4 SUMMARY OF THE EMA EVALUATION

4.1 The report states that:-

“EMA has made a significant and substantial impact. It is clear that EMA has had a positive effect on participation and retention”.

Further work will be undertaken to ascertain the impact of EMA on attainment and subsequent findings will be reported to Committee.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Education Committee is recommended to:

(i) note the contents of the report.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services

EC/
28 October 2002

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

EVALUATION OF THE EMA PILOT : FINAL REPORT TO THE SEELLD

Members wishing further information, should contact Euan Couperwhite, Departmental Finance Manager, Tel: (01563) 576090.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER – EUAN COUPERWHITE

AGENDA