

Pupil Access & Community Services
Student Support
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Please ask for: David Andrews
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Your Ref:
My Ref: PACS/DA

29th August 2003

Headteachers of Schools with Sixth Forms
(copy enclosed for the Head/Director of Sixth Form)

Dear Headteacher

**Financial Support for Sixth Form Students (Learner Support Funds)
Arrangements for the Academic Year 2003/04**

I attach updated information and guidance notes about financial support for Sixth Form students during the period September 2003 to July 2004. Supplies of application forms and information leaflets should arrive at the same time as this letter. The leaflets are intended for distribution to all Sixth Form students to assist with promotion of the scheme.

The amount of your allocation of Learner Support Funds for the period September 2003 to July 2004 will be notified in a separate letter.

The arrangements are mostly the same as those for the last school year but I would like to draw your attention to the following important changes for 2003/04 :-

➤ Help with childcare costs

The Government is introducing new arrangements for providing support with childcare costs for young parent learners in School Sixth Forms and Colleges. Further information is given in paragraph 4 of the guidance notes and in the enclosed DfES booklet. This scheme is administered and funded centrally via Manchester LEA.

Continued overleaf

➤ Income criteria for assistance under the devolved scheme

The range of qualifying state benefits has been amended to take account of the changes in the Tax Credits system. The new Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit are **not** qualifying benefits because they are not restricted to families on low incomes. However if the family receives help with health costs (e.g. free NHS prescriptions) via the Tax Credits system, the income criteria will be satisfied. Therefore a letter from the Inland Revenue confirming a Tax Credits Award is **not** a basis for establishing entitlement to help from the Learner Support Funds. However a letter from the Prescription Pricing Authority headed 'Your NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate' **is** acceptable. A sample copy of this document is included in the guidance notes (see Appendix C). It will be important to check the documents very carefully. These changes are explained more fully on pages 6 and 9 of the guidance notes.

➤ Expenditure codes

The project code (ECLSFD) and the various subjective codes used for Learner Support Funds in previous years are no longer applicable. When you are notified of your allocation you will also receive advice and guidance about the arrangements for recording and controlling expenditure from these specific funds.

Looking further ahead you will be aware that **Education Maintenance Allowances** (EMAs) are due to be introduced nationally from September 2004. Students eligible for EMAs will receive weekly payments of £30 plus bonuses, subject to them complying with the terms of a learning agreement. At present there is no detailed information available about the income assessment, the amount of the periodic bonuses or the arrangements for weekly monitoring and reporting on attendance. It also remains to be seen how the introduction of EMAs will affect the Learner Support Funds. What is clear is that Local Education Authorities will not be involved in the administration of the scheme. Ministers have decided that the functions of processing EMA applications, determining eligibility and making payments, will be carried out by a single provider operating at national level. Further Information be published on the DfES website : www.dfes.gov.uk/ema/ as it becomes available.

I am enclosing an additional copy of this letter and attachment for you to pass on to your Head/Director of Sixth Form.

Yours sincerely

David Andrews
Head of Student Support

cc Head/Director of Sixth Form

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SIXTH FORM STUDENTS
(LEARNER SUPPORT FUNDS - SCHOOLS)****ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2003/04**

- **This document provides guidance on the devolved financial support arrangements for Sixth Form students for the period September 2003 to July 2004. It also provides information about centralised schemes of financial support for childcare and residential costs.**
- **This information is for Headteachers of schools with Sixth Forms, Heads/Directors of Sixth Forms and School Finance Officers.**

1. Background

- Learner Support Funds are made available to all Local Education Authorities to provide financial help to students continuing their education at school beyond compulsory school age at school Sixth Forms. The objective is to increase and widen participation in post-16 education, contribute to an improvement in retention and achievement and promote equality of learning opportunities. The funds provide financial help to students whose access to, or completion of education is inhibited by financial constraints or barriers.
- Each Local Education Authority decides its criteria and procedures for administering these funds subject to the terms and conditions laid down by the DfES and LSC.

2. Changes for 2003/04

Important changes in the scheme for 2003/04 are shown in bold type. The main changes are :-

- New arrangements for support with childcare costs (page 2)
- Changes to income criteria (page 6)
- Evidence of help with health costs via tax credits (page 9 and **Appendix C**)
- Expenditure codes (page 11)

3. Disbursement of Learner Support Funds – Academic Year 2003/04

- As in previous years all schools with Sixth Forms will receive allocations of Learner Support Funds to be used solely for the purpose of providing financial help for eligible students within the scope of the approved arrangements.

- A proportion of the total funds available will be retained centrally for :-
 - exceptional financial support needs which fall outside the scope of the devolved arrangements (excluding childcare and residential costs for which support is available under centralised schemes);
 - a further one year extension of the Thetford Bursary Scheme and a similar one year scheme for students on the pilot Student Apprenticeships programme at Earlham High School.
 - financial support to post-16 students living in the County of Norfolk and attending school Sixth Forms outside Norfolk.
 - ‘topping up’ of allocations to individual schools if the need arises during the year
- In addition to the funding allocations to LEAs there are separate arrangements for providing support with **childcare costs** and, in certain cases, **residential costs** incurred by students who cannot easily access the course from home. These schemes are administered centrally by Manchester LEA on behalf of the LSC. Further information about them is provided in paragraphs 4 and 5.

4. **Separate arrangements for support with childcare costs**

- **Following on from the pilot scheme operated in 2002/03 the Government is introducing new arrangements in 2003/04 for providing support with childcare costs for young parents (16-19) in school Sixth Forms and Colleges. For those in school Sixth Forms the age criteria are the same as those for support from general Learner Support Funds (see paragraph 8.1).**
- The scheme provides a grant of up to £5,000 (per child) to help with the cost of registered childcare provision and associated travel costs. It is administered centrally by Manchester LEA on behalf of the DfES/LSC.
- Students with dependent children should be advised to contact a Connexions Personal Adviser and ask for a copy of the DfES booklet ‘Care to Learn ? – Childcare for Young Learners’. This gives further information about the childcare support that is available and also contains the initial registration form. A copy of the booklet has been sent to each school with these guidance notes.
- You may feel that it would be helpful to have a small supply of booklets available at the school. To place an order please call 0845 6022260 and quote the publication reference number CTL/03.
- A flow chart outlining the application process is set out in **Appendix A**
- Much more information for students, learning providers and advisers is available on the ‘Care to Learn ?’ website : www.dfes.gov.uk/caretolearn
- The following telephone help lines are also available :-
 - For students : 0845 600 2809
 - For learning providers and advisers : 0161 234 7269

5. Separate arrangements for support with residential costs

- In the academic year 2002/03 a pilot Residential Support Scheme was introduced. This is designed to help students access Level 3 education that is not available within daily travelling distance from their home (or exceptionally at Level 2 if the qualification meets a specific job requirement). The scheme helps pay for residential accommodation and may also help with the associated travel costs. The local LSC has to determine, in each case, whether or not suitable alternative provision is available locally.
- These arrangements will continue as an extended pilot scheme for the academic year 2003/04. The maximum amount payable towards residence and travel costs in 2003/04 is £3,075.
- This centralised scheme will continue to be administered by Manchester LEA on behalf of the LSC. The scheme is cash limited and applications will be handled strictly on a 'first come, first served' basis.
- Successful applicants will be eligible for support for the duration of their courses up to a maximum of 3 years.
- An overview of the application processes is given in **Appendix B**.
- A full information and application pack can be downloaded from the LSC website :-

www.lsc.gov.uk/Documents (the quickest way of finding the document is to search on 'residential pilot')

They can also be obtained by contacting David Andrews at County Hall (see paragraph 14)

- Contacts for enquiries relating to the residential support pilot scheme :-
 - E-mail : residential.edpilot@notes.manchester.gov.uk
 - Telephone contact for schools : 0161 234 7076
 - Telephone contact for students/parents :

Surnames A – F 0161 234 7078
Surnames G – M 0161 234 7079
Surnames N – Z 0161 234 7264

6. Allocations to Schools for the academic year 2003/04

- Allocations of Learner Support Funds are made on the basis of a school year (September to July), **not** the financial year (April to March).
- For the school year 2003/04 allocations will be based on the actual level of expenditure in 2002/03 plus an inflation element. There will be a minimum allocation of £500. Allocations will be notified to schools at the start of the Autumn Term 2003.

- If at any time during the school year the funds allocated to a school are found to be insufficient to meet the needs of eligible Sixth Form students, a request can be made by the school for an additional amount. Approval of such requests will of course be conditional on there being sufficient reserves in the centrally retained Learner Support Funds.
- Learner Support Fund allocations must not be used for any purpose other than to make payments for the benefit of post-16 students within the approved arrangements as outlined in this guidance.
- Neither schools nor the LEA will be allowed to retain any funds which remain unspent at the end of the school year. They will be recovered by the LSC.
- The full allocation for the year will be credited to the school's account at the start of the Autumn Term 2003.

7. Responsibilities Devolved to Schools

Under the devolved arrangements schools are responsible for :-

- ensuring that all post-16 students are aware of the existence of the financial support arrangements and how to apply for help from the Learner Support Funds;
- offering advice and if necessary arranging counselling (for example with a Connexions Personal Adviser) with a view to ensuring that no student is forced to leave a Sixth Form course or is significantly disadvantaged as a result of financial difficulties;
- encouraging and if necessary assisting students with financial needs to apply for help from the Learner Support Funds;
- making students aware of the support that may be available under the centralised schemes of support with childcare and residential costs in appropriate cases (see paragraphs 4 and 5 of these guidance notes);
- determining whether an applicant satisfies the eligibility conditions as set out in paragraph 8.1
- determining whether the income criteria (as set out in paragraph 8.2) are satisfied on the basis of evidence provided that the family receives one or more of the qualifying state benefits. **For families not receiving qualifying benefits, the responsibility for determining whether the income criteria are satisfied rests with the Student Support Unit at County Hall ;**
- determining the type and amount of support to be provided if the eligibility conditions and income criteria are satisfied, subject to the total amount of support for an individual student not exceeding £750 for the year;
- making payments of appropriate amounts to, or on behalf, of eligible students using the prescribed expenditure codes;
- establishing and maintaining robust systems and procedures which enable them to justify decisions on applications, account for payments made and to monitor :-

- how the money has been used;
- cumulative total expenditure in relation to the total amount of the school's allocation;
- the effect of approving/refusing financial support on participation and retention;
- ensuring that all records and source documents are made available and are easily accessible for audit purposes;
- providing monitoring information for the LEA as and when required;
- referring applications to the LEA (Student Support Unit) when decisions about eligibility and/or the amount of support fall outside the scope of the devolved arrangements.

8. Eligibility Conditions and Income Criteria

To qualify for financial help a student must satisfy the **eligibility conditions** and the financial circumstances of the family must satisfy the **income criteria**.

8.1 Eligibility Conditions

The student must be :-

- at least 16 years of age and under 19 on 31 August of the year in which the course starts;
- living in the County of Norfolk;
- enrolled on a course funded by the LSC at a school Sixth Form or Sixth Form Centre;
- in regular attendance on the course.

8.2 Income Criteria

- There are two ways in which the income criteria can be satisfied. The household income must **either** :-
 - (a) include one or more of the qualifying state benefits; **or**
 - (b) be less than the prescribed income limit which varies according to the number of dependent children in the family (the calculation is based on the total gross household income from all sources but any income received by the student is ignored if, as in most cases, the assessment is based on the parents' income).

Schools are responsible for determining whether condition (a) is satisfied. If it is not and a declaration of income has been made in section 15 of the application form, a financial assessment will be carried out by the Student Support Unit at County Hall. The school will then be informed whether or not condition (b) is satisfied.

- The qualifying state benefits are as follows :-
 - Income Support
 - Housing Benefit
 - Jobseeker's Allowance (income related)
 - Council Tax Benefit
 - **Help with health costs (e.g. free NHS prescriptions) linked with Working and/or Child Tax Credits.**

Please note :

- **The new Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit are not, by themselves, qualifying benefits.**
 - **However low income families receiving either of these tax credits (where the gross annual income does not exceed £14,200 as calculated by the Inland Revenue for tax credit awards) are automatically entitled to help with health costs such as free NHS prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and sight tests.**
 - **If the family is entitled to help with health costs via tax credits then the income criteria are satisfied. Information about the evidence required is given in paragraph 10.3.**
- The prescribed income limits for families **not** receiving qualifying state benefits are as follows:-

No of dependent children (including the student)	Income must be less than	
	Per year	Per week
1	£14,200	£273
2	£15,200	£292
3	£16,200	£312
4	£17,200	£331

(If there are more than 4 children the income limit is increased by £1,000 per year for each additional child)

“Dependent child “ includes, where applicable, a child living with a former spouse/partner for whom regular maintenance payments have to be made under the terms of a Court Order or other written agreement (including payments made via the Child Support Agency).

9. Type and Amount of Support

9.1 Subject to the availability of funds within the approved allocation, payments can be made to or on behalf of eligible students to help with:-

- essential course equipment and/or special clothing;
- field study courses and educational visits;

- attendance at interviews and open days at Higher Education institutions;
- other costs associated with living and learning which could be a barrier to participation or put at risk the student's continued attendance on the course.

There are no set limits on the maximum amount which can be paid within each of the categories shown above. However, the total amount paid to an individual student must not exceed **£750** for the year. If the student has exceptional financial support needs which cannot be met within this limit, the application should be forwarded to the Student Support Unit, County Hall for consideration.

- 9.2 Spreading support as widely as possible normally provides better value for money than supporting a few students with high levels of need. To many students a relatively small amount is crucial.
- 9.3 The purpose of the Learner Support Funds is to ensure that students from low income families are not disadvantaged for financial reasons and can participate fully in the normal range of educational activities available to other students. It would not be appropriate to use the funds to create special opportunities for individual students who are known to be eligible for support from the Learner Support Funds because they would then be treated more favourably than their counterparts. The objective is to provide equality of learning opportunities.

9.4 Guidance on travel costs

As a general rule assistance with home to school travel costs is provided under a separate scheme administered by the Passenger Transport Unit at County Hall. However, there are some circumstances in which it might be appropriate to provide support for travel costs from the Learner Support Funds (under the 'other costs' category). In all cases the school must be satisfied that :-

- the student's participation or continued attendance is likely to be at risk if this support is not made available; **and**
- that the household income falls within the criteria of paragraph 8.2.

Some examples are given below.

- The student is eligible for assistance under the post-16 Student Travel Scheme but is not exempt from the standard contribution of £180 for the year. If the income criteria in paragraph 8.2 are satisfied, some or all of that amount could be met from the school's allocation (preferably by direct payment to the Passenger Transport Unit).
- The student is eligible for assistance under the post-16 Student Travel Scheme and is exempt from the contribution of £180. However, he/she lives several miles from the nearest pick-up point and needs assistance with expenses incurred on travel between home and the pick-up point.

- The student is not eligible for any assistance under the post-16 Student Travel Scheme and needs help with travel costs which are necessarily and reasonably incurred.
- The student incurs extra travel costs for the purpose of attending a work experience placement which is a necessary part of the course.
- Part of the student's course is delivered away from the normal base under partnership provision arrangements and the student incurs extra costs on travel between different study sites.

10. Applications

- 10.1 Supplies of the revised standard application form to be used for 2003/04 will be distributed to schools by the start of the new school year. The standard form must be used for all applications for help from the Learner Support Funds. Existing stocks of forms for 2002/03 should be discarded to avoid confusion.
- 10.2 If the family is receiving one or more of the qualifying state benefits the completed form should be returned to the school together with the supporting documentary evidence and where necessary evidence of the expenditure incurred by the student (tickets, receipts etc). If the family is not receiving qualifying benefits and details of the household income are provided in section 15, the completed form and supporting documents should initially be sent to the Student Support Unit at County Hall.

10.3 Evidence of Qualifying State Benefits

Documentary evidence must be provided to confirm that a parent is receiving one of the qualifying benefits. The application form asks for the following supporting evidence to be provided :-

- Income Support, Housing Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance (income related) and Council Tax Benefit

'A copy of the most recent letter from the Benefits Agency/inland Revenue showing the current weekly amount received and how it is worked out.'

It is important for schools to check that :-

- the name and address in the letter match the information given under the "parent details" section on the application form;
- **all** pages of the letter from the Benefits Agency/Inland Revenue have been included;
- the document confirms the current benefit entitlement (the date on the letter should not be more than 6 months prior to the date of the application);
- in the case of Jobseeker's Allowance, it is the "income related" (i.e. means tested) allowance which the parent is receiving as distinct

from a “contribution based” allowance (this will be evident from the text of the letter).

- Help with health costs via tax credits

A copy of the ‘NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate’ issued by the Prescription Pricing Authority’.

The certificate itself is a plastic card. It is accompanied by a letter headed ‘Your NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate’ quoting the certificate number and the names of all the children in the household. If only the letter is provided this is acceptable evidence providing that the home address and names shown in it are consistent with those given on the application form. A sample copy of the letter is attached at Appendix C.

Please note :-

A letter from the Inland Revenue confirming entitlement to Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit is not acceptable evidence. This is because only those families whose gross annual income is £14,200 or less qualify for help with health costs (see paragraph 8.2) as well as the Tax Credit.

If the documents provided are photocopies they can be kept on file with the application form. However, original documents will normally have to be returned to the parents, in which case a record must be kept of the evidence which has been seen (e.g. “Benefits Agency letter dated 20 September 2003 - Income Support”) and the date on which the document was returned. This is an essential part of the audit trail.

10.4 Application forms to be forwarded to the LEA (Student Support Unit).

In the following circumstances the application form should be forwarded to the Student Support Unit at County Hall:-

- Students in families **not** receiving qualifying state benefits

If the family is not receiving any of the qualifying benefits but details of the household income have been provided in section 15, the form must be sent to the Student Support Unit for assessment (normally the form will be sent direct to the Student Support Unit by the parent). If the income criteria are satisfied the application will be passed on to the school for normal processing.

- Students with exceptional financial needs

A student may have exceptional financial support needs which cannot be adequately met within the £750 limit. Examples may include:-

- Students who are genuinely estranged from their parents and are either not receiving Income Support and/or Housing Benefit or require emergency funding as an interim measure, pending consideration of claims for such benefits.

- Students with disabilities and learning difficulties with exceptional needs which cannot be funded in any other way.

Any assistance which is approved in these exceptional cases will normally be paid from the centrally administered fund, not from the school's allocation.

10.5 Students who apply more than once during the year.

Some students will need to make several applications during the year as and when the various expenses are incurred. If on receipt of the initial application the student was eligible for assistance, it is not necessary for the student/parent to complete another full application form and re-submit evidence of the financial circumstances, subject to the parent affirming in writing that there has been no improvement in the family's financial circumstances.

10.6 Making payments before the expenditure is incurred.

If a student's financial circumstances are such that he/she is unable to meet the initial cost, payment can exceptionally be made in advance. However the student must be asked to provide proof of the expenses (receipts, tickets etc) immediately after the expenditure has been incurred.

11. Appeals

If a parent or student is dissatisfied with the decision on an application for support from the devolved Learner Support Funds, he/she may ask for the decision to be reviewed. This review will initially be undertaken by the Headteacher or Head/Director of Sixth Form. It is important to ensure that the person who conducts the review was not involved in the original decision. If the applicant remains dissatisfied he/she can appeal to the LEA. The Director of Education or a nominated senior officer will then independently review the case, in conjunction with the Council's senior education legal adviser.

12. Payments

12.1 Payments will normally be made by cheque to the parent. Exceptions to this rule are as follows:-

- Students who are classified by the Benefits Agency as estranged from their parents.

The Benefits Agency's definition of estranged is "not living with parents or anyone acting in their place and not being kept by them and either not in touch with them or separated from them for reasons that cannot be avoided". In these cases, payment will have to be made to the student.

- Field study courses and educational visits arranged by the school.

If a student is eligible for assistance with the cost of these activities, all or part of a contribution normally required from the parent can be waived and

arrangements made to transfer the appropriate amount from the Learner Support Fund allocation to the general school fund.

12.2 Payments can be withheld if a student's attendance is unsatisfactory (below 85%) ignoring absences due to illness.

12.3 **The project code (ECLSFD) and the various subjective codes used for Learner Support Funds in previous years are no longer applicable.** Separate guidance will be issued shortly about the arrangements for recording and controlling expenditure from these specific funds.

13. Monitoring Information

The LEA is required to provide the LSC with information about the use of the Learner Support Funds. Failure to provide complete and accurate monitoring information could jeopardise future funding. The full details of the information requirements for the school year 2003/04 have not yet been announced. For the time being schools should continue to keep records which will enable them to provide the following information :-

- total number of applications received;
- the number of students who received assistance (i.e counting each student once only regardless of the number of payments) and of those how many, if any, withdrew from their studies;
- the number of students who were refused assistance and of those, how many, if any, either failed to start the course or subsequently withdrew for financial reasons;
- numbers and amounts of payments analysed by:-
 - type of support provided
 - age of student at 31 August 2003

For payments made under the "other expenses" distinctions will need to be made between :-

- payments made to assist with identifiable course related costs e.g travel to a work placement (the specific purpose will need to be shown on the monitoring return);
- contributions towards general living costs;
- any other payments made under the "other expenses" category.

If there are any changes in the monitoring information requirements, schools will be notified as soon as possible.

14. Further Information and Advice

All queries about the devolved scheme and its operation should be referred to:-

David Andrews
Head of Student Support
Student Support Unit
Education Department
County Hall
Norwich NR1 2DL

Telephone : 01603 223493

Fax : 01603 223838

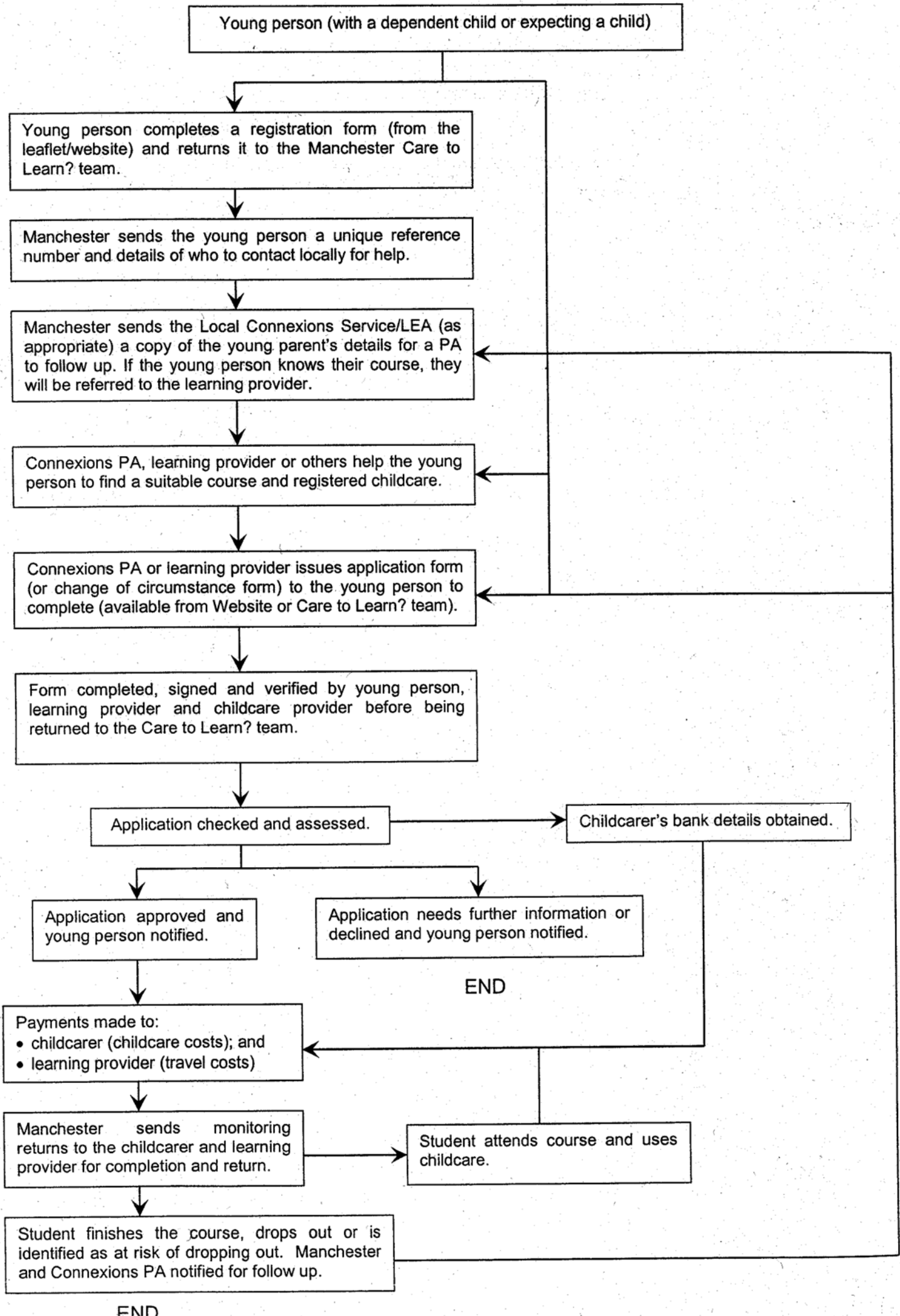
e-mail : david.andrews@norfolk.gov.uk

For queries about the financial accounting procedures please contact your Finance Support Officer in Education Financial and ICT Services at County Hall.

For queries about the separate schemes of support with childcare and residential costs please use the contacts shown in paragraphs 4 and 5.

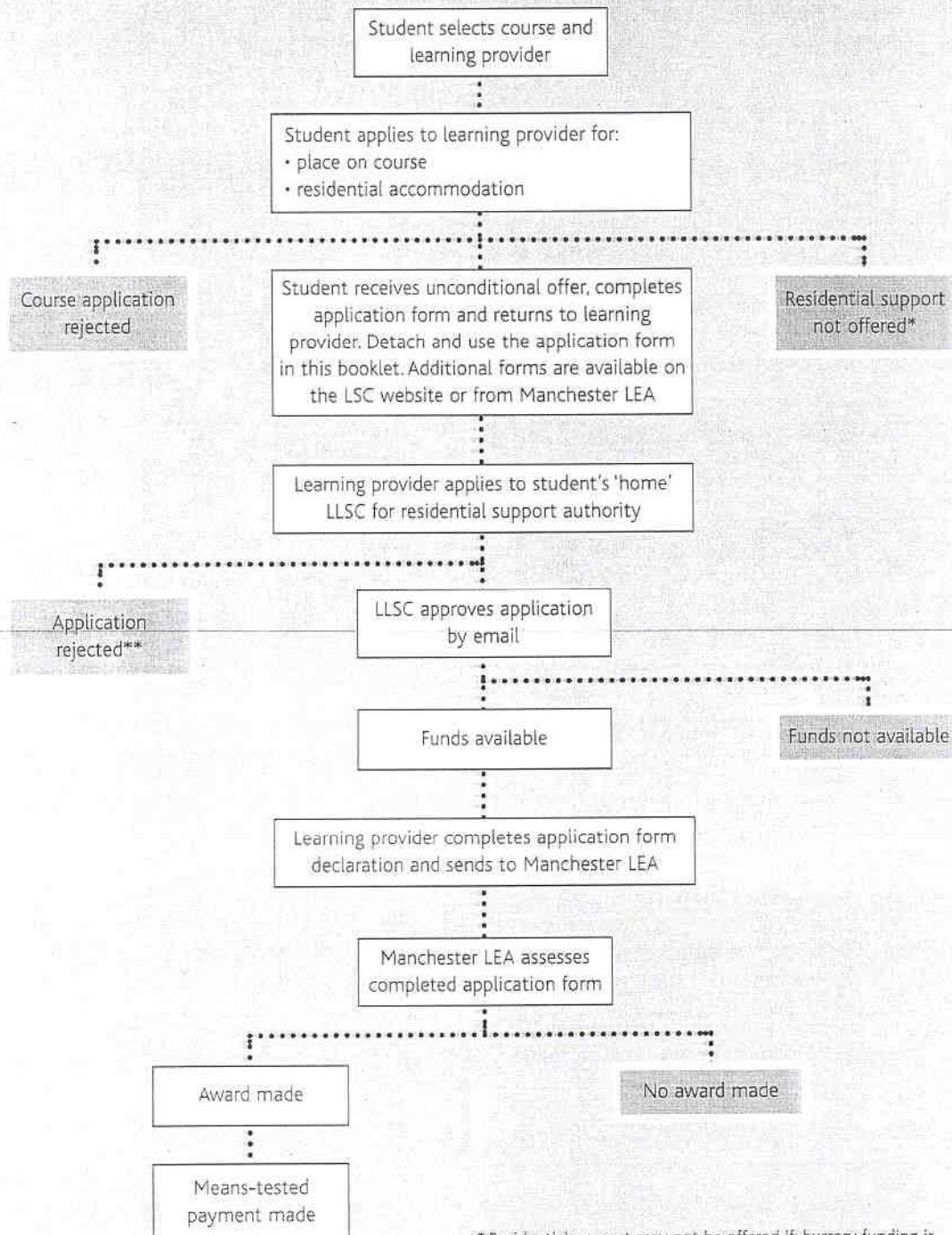
Care to Learn? Process

APPENDIX A



RESIDENTIAL SUPPORT PILOT SCHEME - 2003/04

Overview of the application process



* Residential support may not be offered if: bursary funding is available; qualification aim is below Level 3; no accommodation is available; or accommodation is not suitable for young people.

** Application may be rejected if: funding is not essential; course choice is deemed unreasonable; course provision is available locally; or course is not value for money.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Exemption Issue Office
PO Box 1011
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
NE99 2ZP
DX 714179 Newcastle 3

Tel: 0845 609 9299
Fax: 0191 203 5507
Web site: www.ppa.org.uk

Our office is open between
8.00am and 6.00pm

Certificate Number:

June 2003

Your ref:

Your NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate

Dear

Following your recent claim for tax credits, we have been notified by the Inland Revenue that you and your family meet the conditions for full help with health costs.

Please find attached NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificates for you (and your partner if you have one). The certificate(s) also entitle your child(ren) named to full help with health costs.

Children entitled to full help with health costs:

Mrs
Certificate Number:

If the above named certificate is not
attached to this letter – contact us on
the above number immediately

Please read the notes on the back of this letter
carefully. They tell you what help the certificate
entitles you to, what to do if you need to claim a
refund, or if you need a replacement certificate.

Yours sincerely

NHS Tax Credit
Exemption Certificate

NHS

Certificate No:

Name:

Valid from: 06/04/2003 Expires end: 30/06/2004

EXEMPTION OFFICER

Chairman: Anne Galbraith
Chief Executive: Nick Scholte
Director: Alistair McDonald



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE