



meeting CABINET

date 13 September 2006

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Financial support for students in post-16 school sixth form education

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the approach to be adopted for the use of School Sixth Form Learner Support Funds (LSF) for the 2006/07 academic year, for which a final allocation figure of £25,000 (reduced from £120,677 for 2005/06) has been given by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Information and advice

Background

2. A national scheme of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMAs) was introduced from September 2004. This scheme is not administered by local authorities (LAs), but nationally by a single provider (Capita). LAs have only a limited role in ensuring that post-statutory students are fully aware of the availability of EMAs. Schools with post-16 students have a supportive role in the administration of the scheme.
3. The EMA scheme has now been fully phased in nationally and with only a few exceptions all post-16 students are now able to apply for an EMA, which is subject to assessment of family income. This has led to a substantial reduction in the School Sixth Form LSF allocation.
4. The terms and conditions under which the LSF must be administered are the same both in spirit and detail as in 2005/06. The intention is to assist individuals who need help to alleviate barriers to learning and to widen participation in post-16 education.
5. We consulted schools with sixth forms in May 2005 as to potential uses for the money. A total of 11 responses out of 46 schools were received. Notification of our allocation for 2006/07 was received too late to allow us to undertake a consultation this year.

6. In the 2005/06 academic year, assistance was given to 61 students for the costs of participating in field trips, nine students for materials and equipment costs and five students for university interview expenses. In addition we were able to help two students whose parental circumstances had changed and who were unable to apply for a revision of their EMA entitlement. The feedback from students and schools who benefited from this assistance has been positive.

Proposed use of LSF allocation

7. The LA will, as permitted, deduct 5% of the LSF allocation, £1,250, for the administration of the scheme.
8. Under the EMA scheme the only circumstances where a student's entitlement can be reconsidered during the year are estrangement from parent(s), death of a parent or becoming a parent. There is no provision to take account of a change in parental financial circumstances due to retirement, redundancy or illness. The consultation with schools identified this as a cause for concern, with students whose parents had suffered an unforeseen fall in income having difficulty continuing their studies without any support. It is therefore proposed that the LSF are used to help in these cases, making a grant available, subject to income assessment, at the same rate as EMAs from the date when circumstances change, where income falls by at least 15%.
9. Although many universities no longer require students to attend for interview prior to being offered a place, in cases where an interview is required the cost of travelling to attend can be prohibitive for students from low income families. It is proposed that the LSF are used to assist those students with a family income of less than £30,810 towards the cost of attending university interviews, up to a maximum of three interviews.
10. Students from low income families undertaking high cost courses in subjects such as art and design can have difficulty meeting the additional costs for materials and equipment. It is proposed that the LSF are used to help those students with a family income of less than £30,810 undertaking such courses with the additional costs of purchasing equipment/materials, up to a maximum of £50 per student.
11. In considering how to distribute the remaining funds, account needs to be taken of other areas of concern identified in the consultation with schools, in particular students who are disadvantaged or disabled, or those from low-income families. Schools are in a good position to identify specific areas of need, for example a disabled student who may benefit from access to a lap-top computer, or students from low income families who may find the cost of field trips prohibitively expensive. It is therefore proposed to invite schools to bid against this capped provision on a first come first served basis for funding from the LSF for particular needs:

- funding for additional support for students with a disability, up to a maximum of £750 per student.
- funding to assist with the cost of field trips relating to their course of study for students from low income families, up to a maximum of £50 per student per visit.

As a means of identifying those students from low income families and to simplify the assessment process, it is proposed that schools should only bid for support for students whose family income is less than £30,810, identifying those students when submitting their bids.

Statutory and policy implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report. Members' attention is however drawn to the following:-

Financial implications

13. The LA's Learner Support Fund allocation for the 2006/07 academic year is £25,000. This will be paid in termly instalments. This represents a reduction from the 2005/06 allocation of £120,677 and reflects the national roll-out of EMAs as the main source of sixth form student support. The proposals set out in this report can be contained within the LA's 2006/07 LSF allocation.

Equal opportunities implications

14. The LA's LSF is intended to help students from low income families to access post-16 education in school sixth forms. The proposed scheme will also provide support for specific areas of need, including disabled students who may have specialist support needs.

RECOMMENDATION

15. That the Learner Support Funds allocated for 2006/07 be directed as identified in this report:
- (1) to assist, subject to income assessment, students in school sixth forms whose parents have suffered an unforeseen fall in income and who as a consequence are having difficulty continuing their studies;
 - (2) to assist students in school sixth forms with a family income of less than £30,810
 - with the cost of attending university interviews, up to a maximum of three journeys.

- with the additional cost of courses such as art and design which require the purchase of additional equipment/materials, up to a maximum of £50 per student;
- (3) to allow school sixth forms to bid on behalf of students whose family income is less than £30,810 for a contribution to:
- additional support if the students have a disability, up to a maximum of £750 per student.
 - the cost of field trips, up to a maximum of £50 per student per visit.

COUNCILLOR JOYCE BOSNJAK

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services

Reasons for recommendation

16. As the report identifies, the intention is to assist individuals who need help to alleviate barriers to learning and to widen participation in post-16 education.

Legal Services' comments (LM/18.8.2006)

17. Cabinet have delegated authority to discharge the County Council's functions conferred on or exercisable by the Council in its capacity as a Local Education Authority (section 18(2)(a) Children Act 2004)

Director of Resources' financial comments (NDR)

18. The financial implications are set out in the report.

Background papers available for inspection

Letter from Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council – Notification of Learner Support Funds Allocation for 2006/07

M19C1618