

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Committee: Children, Families and Schools Sub-Committee

Date: Monday 14 June 2004

Report of: Director Children, Families & Schools

Subject: Post-16 Further Education (FE) Student Support

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To describe to Members the scheme for Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) which will be introduced for Brighton and Hove Students aged 16-18 in September 2004.
- 1.2 To propose amendments to the City Council's policy on support for the travel and living costs of students aged 16-18, following the introduction of EMAs.

2. Recommendation

That Members approve:

- 2.1 That new students who qualify for EMA should not be eligible for further city Council grant towards their travel costs, except where the travel costs to attend a course agreed as appropriate by the City Council exceed £10 per week.
- 2.2 That each case, as in 2.1, should be considered on its individual merits and if appropriate, the balance of costs over £10 per week, be reimbursed.
- 2.3 The raising of the qualifying income threshold, for support under the City Council scheme, for families not in receipt of a state benefit, from £13,230 to £13,480, in line with the criteria used for free school meals.
- 2.4 This threshold should apply to new and existing students who cannot get EMA because they are too old for the first qualifying cohort and who will receive City Council support at the rates shown under the current policy.

3. Background

- 3.1 Under current policy, further education students aged between 16 and 19 whose families are on a very low income:

- can receive an annual grant of £425 for their travel and living costs if they attend school sixth form. This is met from the Schools Access Fund, funded directly by DfES via Sussex Learning and Skills Council. A similar scheme for students in sixth form or further education colleges is operated by the colleges themselves;
- and will normally have their travel costs reimbursed in full if they live more than three miles from the school or college they attend.

3.2 The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme has been piloted by the Government in a number of areas over the past five years. The scheme is being extended nationally from September. The first cohort of eligible students will be those entering further education this autumn whose 17th birthday falls between 1 September 2004 and 31 August 2005.

3.3 EMAs are not funded or administered directly by LEAs. Capita will be the assessment and payment body. It is for each LEA to decide what amendments to existing policy, if any, it sees as appropriate.

3.4 In Brighton and Hove from September 2004 a substantial proportion of new students will qualify for EMA. The maximum EMA of £30 per week is payable to students from households with income of £19,630 pa or below and therefore has a much wider reach than the current City Council scheme, as well as being more generous. In addition, EMA pays £20 per week to students from households with an income of between £19,631 and £24,030 pa and £10 per week to those from households with income of between £24,031 and £30,000 pa.

3.5 Students in receipt of EMA may spend the allowance as they wish but there is a general expectation that the money should be used for course-related costs, including travel. The DfES sees it as not unreasonable for an LEA to treat students on the maximum £30 pw EMA as having £10 a week to contribute towards their travel costs.

3.6 90% of those students who are currently supported by the LEA have average travel costs of less than £7 pw.

3.7 The local transport partnership, funded directly by DfES via Sussex Learning and Skills Council, provides additional support at a strategic level to students aged 16 to 19. The current policy includes:

- a free Brighton & Hove Buses BUS ID+ card (worth £20 and giving discount on all bus travel up to age 18) to Brighton & Hove students living more than three miles from their school or college and travelling there by bus, regardless of family income; and
- access to and support for a rail discount scheme operated jointly with East and West Sussex LEAs and South Central Trains, giving students a discount of one third on monthly or longer season tickets, provided the discounted fare is not less than £8 a week or the equivalent (this works out at roughly £10 a week full fare).

It is proposed to continue with this support in 2004/05, regardless of whether or not students are in receipt of EMA.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 Schools and colleges within Brighton & Hove have been consulted via the FE Student Support Sub-Group of the Learning Partnership and School Sixth Form Heads group. They have also been discussed with Sussex Learning and Skills Council.