

Save the EMA

Defend access to education:
restore the maintenance grant

Lobby briefing by



Save the EMA Lobby of Parliament – January 19, 2011

Members of Parliament are faced with a very clear choice on Wednesday, January 19, 2011. They can vote to support the education maintenance allowance or to scrap it.

Trade unions whose members work in FE, the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Save EMA campaign represent millions of people across the country. We urge MPs to vote in support of EMA. The government must rethink its position.

Key talking points

- Around 635,000 young people received at least one EMA payment in 2009/10.
- 80% of EMA recipients receive £30 per week – that means their family income is less than £20,800.
- EMA funding will be cut from around £570 million to £75 million for its replacement system.
- The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that EMA pays for itself. All costs 'are offset' by the benefits of the system.
- The report the government relies on to justify scrapping EMA is flawed. The report over represents high achievers, under represents BAME students (91% of young people surveyed were white) and excluded young people in further education colleges (where EMA is an important factor in many young people's decisions to stay in education).

The arguments

They say: We must get the deficit under control – there is no money left

We say: The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that EMA will pay for itself. Any costs are offset in the long run. Investing in young people now makes economic and social sense.

They say: 90% of young people would have stayed on in education anyway, EMA is ‘deadweight’.

We say: The survey the government bases this argument on is not representative of students on EMA. The study cited by the government overrepresented high achievers, for the most part excluded students at further education colleges and massively underrepresented BAME students (91% of the survey were white). This survey cannot give us an accurate picture of the students who need EMA to study.

We believe the government should look again at the impact of EMA and undertake a full equality impact assessment.

They say: Support will be better targeted under the new system. The new system will be more efficient.

We say: EMA is already targeted. To receive the maximum payment of £30, a young person must come from a household with an annual income less than £20,800. No one knows what will actually replace EMA. Ministers say the replacement will be an enhanced discretionary learner support fund. This fund already exists as a type of hardship fund.

We do not know if young people receive a one off hardship payment if in need, if they will receive weekly help, if they will get help with travel costs or if everyone classed as ‘in need’ will get help. Colleges will make decision locally with a greatly diminished pot of money.

With a cut from £570 million to £75 million there is no way everyone who receives financial support now will continue to do so.

Action you MP can take

Vote for the opposition day motion on January, 19. This motion highlights the importance of EMA and calls on the government to rethink its position.

Sign Early Day Motion 943

Write to the Secretary of State opposing the scrapping of EMA.