RESEARCH

# Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots: Implementation and Reported Impacts in the First Two Years (2000-2001/2001-2002)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second and final report of the evaluation of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Vulnerable Pilots. These pilots were introduced by the Department for Education and Employment (now the Department for Education and Skills) in 2000 and extended the scope of the main EMA pilots by focusing on young people believed to be especially vulnerable to economic and social exclusion in four LEA areas.

The evaluation has focused on three specific groups of young people who were the original focus of the Vulnerable Pilots, young people who are homeless, teenage parents and young people with disabilities. The definition of 'vulnerability' has since been widened to encompass many more young people, such as young offenders and those who finish compulsory education with no or low qualifications. **(Section 1.1)**

Eligibility criteria are that the young person must be aged 16 to 19 years when they apply; they must be vulnerable in at least one category of the definition; they must have at least 12 hours of guided learning each week; and their parents' income must be £30,000 per annum or less.

Young people who qualify can receive weekly payments during term time of up to £40 per week depending on parental income. As with the main EMA, receipt of payments depends on whether young people have met attendance and other performance criteria laid down in a Learning Agreement. However, there are additional flexibilities in the Vulnerable Pilot scheme to take account of vulnerable young people's particular difficulties. These flexibilities are:

- EMA can be claimed for up to three years, instead of two years;
- study can take place outside mainstream education;
- non-mainstream courses, such as life skills, numeracy and literacy courses, can be studied;
- EMA payments do not have to be made into a bank account;

- bonus payments can be spread throughout the year instead of being paid as a lump sum termly or on successful completion of the course of study;
- young people who are homeless do not have to provide proof of residence in order to be eligible to receive an EMA;
- young people who are estranged from their families are classified as independent students whether they are in receipt of Income Support or not; and
- teenage parents are entitled to receive a proportion of backdated payments of EMA on their return to education following a period of maternity leave.

Childcare Pilots to assist teenage parents with meeting the costs of childcare whilst in post-16 education are also operating in five areas, three of which are also EMA pilot areas. Therefore, the evaluation examined the views of those involved in implementing the Childcare Pilots operating in EMA pilot areas, in addition to the views of those responsible for implementing the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and of young people themselves. **(Section 1.3)**

The evaluation has used both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the delivery and outcomes of the scheme. Quantitative evidence has been drawn from the evaluation of the main EMA pilots. **(Section 1.4.1)**

A qualitative study of implementation strategies and other issues arising from the Vulnerable Pilots for LEAs and other local stakeholders has involved face-to-face interviews with LEA administrators, education providers and other key agencies in the four Vulnerable Pilot areas. The 2002 interviews followed up relevant post holders and the steering groups who were first interviewed in 2001. **(Section 1.4.2)**

In early 2001 qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with small numbers of homeless young people, teenage parents and young people with special needs and their 'significant others'. Follow up interviews were conducted with the young people only in early 2002 to capture their detailed perceptions and experiences of the Vulnerable Pilots at least one year after its introduction. **(Section 1.4.3)**

## 2 A DESCRIPTION OF VULNERABILITY

This chapter uses data from the large scale longitudinal surveys in the main EMA pilots to provide a background description of young people who might be eligible for the Vulnerable Pilots scheme because they were homeless, teenage parents, or had special educational needs or disabilities and who were eligible for EMA on income grounds.

### 2.1 Method

Data are from the first and second wave of interviews with young people who finished compulsory education in the summer of 2000 and who were, therefore, potentially eligible for the Vulnerable Pilots. Data about homeless young people, teenage parents and young people with special needs or disabilities in these samples from 10 of the EMA pilots areas (including the four running the Vulnerable Pilots) and 11 control areas have been combined. Throughout, the three groups of vulnerable young people are compared to young people with none of the three vulnerabilities. **(Section 2.1.1)**

The definitions of the three vulnerabilities used to identify young people in the data were as similar as possible to those in DfES Guidance, although the definition of 'homeless' excluded those who were 'roofless' who could not be included in the surveys, and focused on young people not living with their parents. Some comment is also needed on how vulnerable young people have been defined for the purposes of this analysis. Teenage parents have been defined in our sample as young people who report that they have one or more children but no partner. This may be slightly different to the DfES guidance to local authorities:

> *'Those young people who have the primary child care responsibility'.*
>
> DfES, 2000, p.5

The definition of young people with special needs has followed as closely as possible the broad definition of 'disabilities' used by the Department in its original guidance notes to the local authorities administering the Vulnerable Pilots:

> *'Those with a statement of Special Education Need, or who have been recognised as having a disability through the Disability Discrimination Act. Many of these young people may also be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance'.*
>
> DfES, 2000, p.5

The definition from the survey data, therefore, includes young people who said that they were registered disabled, had a disability that limited their daily activities, or who had special needs, whether or not they reported having a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Data have been weighted to allow for differential non-response and for attrition where appropriate. **(Section 2.1.2)**

## 2.2 Gender and Ethnicity

The analysis identified 122 'homeless' young people; 52 teenage parents; and, 1432 young people with special needs. Almost all teenage parents were young women, who were also over-represented among the homeless. In contrast, young men were over-represented among those with special needs. White young people were over-represented in each vulnerable group. **(Section 2.2)**

## 2.3 Socio-Economic Background

Vulnerable young people were more likely to live in rented accommodation than were non-vulnerable young people, although young people with special needs, most of whom were still living with their parents were far more likely to be living in owner-occupied accommodation than either of the other two vulnerable groups. Teenage parents and homeless young people were particularly likely to be living in private rented accommodation which may provide less stable tenure. **(Section 2.3.1)**

Both teenage parents and homeless young people had parents with lower educational qualifications than the parents of young people with no vulnerability. In contrast, the parents of young people with special needs had only slightly lower qualifications than the non-vulnerable. **(Section 2.3.2)**

## 2.4 Educational Experiences

Overall, vulnerable young people were more likely than young people without vulnerabilities to report poor patterns of school attendance during years 10 and 11, to have played truant on a regular basis and to have been either temporarily or permanently excluded from school. Homeless young people and teenage parents had particularly unstable experiences of

education during Years 10 and 11 compared with young people with special needs who were more like non-vulnerable young people in that they reported relatively stable and positive experiences. **(Section 2.4.1)**

Reported levels of both experiencing and being accused of bullying were high among all groups, but were very much higher among each vulnerable group, including young people with special needs. **(Section 2.4.2)**

Vulnerable young people were less likely than non-vulnerable young people to have aimed during Year 11 to remain in full-time education after the end of compulsory education and were more likely to have intended to take a work-based route. Vulnerable young people had also found the decision about what to do after the end of Year 11 more difficult and were less likely to feel that they had made the right decision. **(Section 2.4.3)**

Negative experiences of education during Years 10 and 11 were reflected in vulnerable young people's levels of achievement at the end of Year 11. They achieved less well than young people who were not vulnerable, with even the generally more positive experiences of young people with special needs not having translated into higher levels of achievement. **(Section 2.4.4)**

## 2.5 Post-16 Routes

Although fewer young people in each vulnerable group had hoped to continue in post-16 education than among non-vulnerable young people, this was still the preferred option for the majority of vulnerable young people. However, most of the homeless young people and teenage parents had not achieved this aim, with large proportions of those who had aimed to remain in education not in employment education or training (NEET) at the time of their first interview, at least four months after the end of compulsory education. Again, young people with special needs were different in that they seemed to have achieved their aims to almost the same extent as young people without vulnerabilities. **(Section 2.5.1)**

In terms of what young people were actually doing in Years 12 and 13, less than one-third of homeless young people or teenage parents were in full-time education compared with almost three-quarters of young people with no vulnerability. Again, the pattern for young people

with special needs was more like that for non-vulnerable young people. By Year 13 the proportions in full-time education in each group had fallen, but particularly among young people with special needs and those with no vulnerabilities. **(Section 2.5.2)**

Whilst homeless young people and teenage parents were far less likely to remain in post-16 education than young people with special needs or non-vulnerable young people, when they remain in education their course choices were very similar to those of the non-vulnerable in terms of opting for academic or vocational courses, between one third and one half opting for each. In contrast, young people with special needs who remained in education were much less likely to have opted for academic than vocational courses (more than three-fifths). **(Section 2.5.3)**

# 3 THE CONTEXT OF VULNERABILITY: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

This chapter provides an overview and synthesis of findings from the qualitative research conducted in both years of the evaluation with stakeholders and young people, relating to the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots.

## 3.1 Administration of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots

### 3.1.1 The role of steering groups

The steering groups established during the first year of the pilots to implement the initiatives continued to operate during the second year but their remit had extended so that they became a forum to discuss good practice as well as identifying aspects of service delivery which needed to be improved. A key issue was trying to ensure that all groups of vulnerable young people accessed the initiative, rather than just those initially targeted, and all agreed that the best way of achieving this was through inter-agency working. The difficulty in all pilot areas was that identifying the relevant agencies and developing productive working relationships took time and resources.

### 3.1.2 Funding

All LEAs involved in the pilots were dissatisfied with the level of funding they received to administer the initiatives and felt that they effectively subsidised the pilots. While LEAs

were reimbursed by DfES in accordance with the number of vulnerable students who were in receipt of EMA, this subsidy was dwarfed by the costs that LEAs had incurred in the l intensive marketing and promoting strategies needed locally to identify the target population, in the cost of meeting the additional support that vulnerable students needed to make EMA applications and in liaising with Learning Centres over, in some cases, quite complex payment issues. Many education providers also argued that they should be funded for the additional work involved, particularly because there were now more eligible young people than anticipated as a result of the widening of the definition of vulnerable.

### 3.1.3 Supporting vulnerable young people

All local stakeholders stressed that having systems in place to support vulnerable young people was crucial to the success of the schemes. Re-engaging vulnerable young people in education was an incremental process throughout which intensive support was required. Vulnerable young people themselves also highlighted the importance to them of effective and sympathetic support.

### 3.1.4 Publicity for the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots

Publicity for the Pilots was deliberately low key, sensitive and targeted because of the need to avoid stigmatising or further marginalizing vulnerable young people. Publicity strategies focused on professionals and key stakeholders working with vulnerable young people. Word of mouth was said to be the most effective means of raising awareness and some LEAs used vulnerable young people themselves to talk about the pilots to other vulnerable young people. These strategies were confirmed in the interviews with vulnerable young people who had got most of their information about the pilots from professionals and other young people.

### 3.1.5 The application process

The majority of professionals and young people felt the application process was time consuming and difficult. The main difficulties were in providing information on parental income in the previous year and submitting the supporting documentary evidence required. It was felt that the application form needed to be shortened and simplified, particularly as many vulnerable young people also came from vulnerable families. However, there was less dissatisfaction with the absent parent rule in the second year following its amendment. Although the re-application process was easier for some, this was not the case for all, especially those with special needs and it was suggested that the renewal process could be

simplified and streamlined. If possible, applications from vulnerable students were fast-tracked because of their greater reliance on the financial support provided by EMA and the Childcare Pilots. This highlights the importance of being able to identify vulnerable young people at an early stage (see below, Section 3.3).

### 3.1.6 Attendance monitoring

Most difficulties in relation to attendance monitoring were experienced by education providers in the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas and related to the definition and checking of 'authorised' absences to ensure that young people had met the attendance criteria before each weekly payment was approved. This was time consuming, often involving a meting with the young person, because education providers were reluctant to stop payments to vulnerable young people. For teenage parents the verification system was sometimes easier for the education provider because they were able to contact a dedicated worker who was in close contact with the young person and could ring or visit the young person to find out the reason for any absence. This was equally important to the teenage parents who would get help to resolve any problems. Education providers difficulties in checking on authorised absences were compounded by having to make weekly returns on attendance. One LEA had introduced a two weekly system to give providers more time and this had been widely welcomed. Other LEAs also proposed a two weekly system, especially if the pilots are rolled out nationally and more vulnerable young people will be eligible. A two weekly system, it was said, would avoid instances of payments being wrongly stopped and would thereby reduce feelings of dissatisfaction among vulnerable young people. The interviews with young people confirmed this; their sense of injustice and real financial hardship was considerable when payments were wrongly stopped and appeared to reinforce negative attitudes to education.

An electronic system of attendance monitoring was favoured, but this would require pump-priming funding to ensure that a system was developed that could operate across all education providers. Whilst manual systems were time consuming they had the advantage of facilitating discussions with the student about their performance, thereby acting as a n early warning system about young people's problems. It was suggested that this might help retain young people by preventing their problems escalating to the point where they might drop out of education.

### 3.1.7 Delays in issuing EMA payments

Delays in starting payments were said to occur because of the time taken to process application as a result of missing income information and supporting documents. Some education providers and other organisations helped young people to submit applications to try and avoid these delays which some vulnerable young people reported had caused them considerable financial hardship.

### 3.1.8 Stopped EMA payments

LEAs as well as education providers were reluctant to stop EMA payments unless they were sure there had been a breach of the attendance criteria or Learning Agreement because of the hardship this would cause. There were fewer instances of stoppages in the second year of the evaluation because of the better systems in place to check authorised absences and the fact that young people had become more familiar with the system. However, across the LEAs some young people reported incidences of payments being stopped for what seemed no good reason and did not recall receiving a letter to provide them with an explanation for the stoppage.

## 3.2 Role of Key Agencies and Partnership Arrangements

All the agencies involved with the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots stressed the need for good inter-agency working and during the second year of the pilots these relationships had been consolidated and extended to organisations working with different vulnerable groups of young people. However, this took time and resources. Partnerships were seen to enhance the implementation and delivery of the pilots in that they:

- helped to establish appropriate and inclusive definitions of vulnerability;
- improved the identification of vulnerable young people;
- helped to clarify support needs and enabled agencies to support vulnerable young people throughout their return to education; and
- facilitated the development of appropriate educational provision.

Although LEAs said that their relationship with the DfES was generally good and supportive there were two main concerns expressed, first, about late issuing of guidance and regulations

and, secondly, that the experience and expertise they had acquired from administering the pilots should be reflected in any national roll-out.

### 3.3 Identifying Vulnerable Young People

Progress had been made in identifying vulnerable young people with LEAs trying to do so by sifting through records of standard EMA recipients to see if any of them met the vulnerability criteria. Other strategies to improve identification included:

- Connexions Service providing detailed information on specific vulnerabilities of school leavers;
- Working with organisations to identify vulnerable young people who had already dropped out of education;
- Publicity strategies already described in Section 3.1.4; and
- A standard pro forma on which students could disclose their vulnerability.

However, identifying vulnerable young people raised issues of data protection and confidentiality, with some young people being reluctant to disclose their vulnerability. LEAs also wanted clear and concise guidelines on the definition of 'vulnerable'.

### 3.4 The Need for Advice and Support by Vulnerable Young People

Vulnerable young people need high levels of ongoing support if they are to return to, and remain in, post-compulsory education. Support was needed to complete application forms, advise on courses and to resolve problems that arose once the young person was in education. All involved in supporting vulnerable young people reported that these students lacked the confidence to make decisions independently. This level of advice and support is costly.

### 3.5 Perceived Value of the Pilots

The financial element of the pilots was particularly important to vulnerable young people's initial decision to return to education, particularly because EMA is disregarded in calculations of other benefit entitlements **(Section 3.5.1)**. However, there were non-financial advantages reported by all who took part in the evaluation, particularly in facilitating and

supporting the process of re-engaging disaffected young people with learning. The flexibilities meant that the return to education could be within a comfortable setting and at a pace vulnerable young people could manage. The young people themselves who had managed to sustain their return to education reported that they now enjoyed learning and had plans for their futures which would not have been possible without the support of the pilots **(Section 3.5.2)**. Sustained participation in education had also reduced their social isolation and assisted their personal development in numerous ways. The opportunity to achieve and be successful was a new experience for most of the young people which had made them feel less excluded from society. Young people contrasted the positive experience of 'earning' EMA with the stigma attached to receiving welfare benefits. **(Sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4)**

For teenage parents the provision of childcare had been crucial, not just because of the financial assistance but because of the support provided to find suitable childcare, arrange transport and to have in some cases and incremental return to learning. However, childcare arrangements needed to be flexible to give young mothers additional time outside of their 'learning hours' so that they could do course work while their child was being cared for. Young mothers also emphasised the benefits of childcare for their children. **(Section 3.5.5)**

### 3.6 Value of Flexibilities in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots

The two main advantages of the specific flexibilities allowed in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots were that:

- EMA can be claimed for up to three years, instead of two years. This gave young people the extra time they needed to re-engage with learning at their own pace and to address some of the complex issues they were facing; and
- Study can take place outside mainstream education on a part-time basis and can include a wider range of courses. This enabled professionals to develop tailored learning packages to meet the individual needs of vulnerable young people. However, some concern was expressed by both professionals and young people about the quality of some non-mainstream provision.

Young people themselves were often unaware of the flexibilities of the EMA pilot, many assumed that the regulations that applied to them applied to all young people.

### 3.7 Perceived Limitations of the Scheme

The age criteria were seen to be a major limitation of the pilots. The maximum age of 19 years was said to be too low for vulnerable young people, particularly those who had left education who were said to need 'time to sort themselves out'. Teenage parents who, for example gave birth at 16 or 17 years needed time after the birth to get used to both the baby and their new role before contemplating a return to education.

The pilots had also highlighted deficiency and unevenness in provision in terms of non-mainstream sites and courses, childcare and transport.

It was also suggested that financial help needs to be provided to teenage parents to allow them to retain their childcare places during holiday periods.
There was also said to be a lack of awareness or recognition of the real time and costs involved in supporting vulnerable young people to return to education.

### 3.8 Participation, Retention and Achievement

The aims of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots were to increase participation, retention and achievement among vulnerable young people in post-compulsory education.

Three key factors affected **participation** by vulnerable young people:

- The *financial incentive* provided by EMA which removed one of the potential barriers to education;
- *Access to suitable education provision*, particularly non-mainstream or part-time education allowed young people to overcome the negative experiences of compulsory education which most of them reported; and
- *Access to adequate and effective support* at all points through the process of returning to education which required an holistic approach so that young people had somewhere to go and get the range of help that they needed when they needed it.

  **(Section 3.8.1)**

In terms of **retention** in education**,** although the financial element and support remained important, the main factor appeared to be a positive learning experience combined with improved future prospects. Additionally for teenage parents there were the positive benefits of childcare for their child's development. **(Section 3.8.2)**

The timing of fieldwork for the evaluation meant that many of the young people had not completed their courses at the time of the second interview so that measures of **achievement** in terms of qualifications gained are not possible. However, all involved emphasised that achievement in terms of these pilots cannot be measured solely by qualifications because of the far greater and more complex challenges faced by vulnerable young people. It was suggested that sustained participation in post-16 learning, particularly for teenage parents and homeless young people, should be considered a significant success. Among these young people who did sustain participation, retention was motivated by attachment to and investment in learning and education came to be seen as a valuable resource for enhancing future study and employment opportunities. This growing attachment to learning aligned homeless young people and teenage parents more closely with young people with special needs who had a stronger attachment to learning from the outset. For many young people this represented a significant breakthrough. **(Section 3.8.3)**

**Chapters 4, 5 and 6** contain detailed evidence from administrators and stakeholders and young people collected in the second year of the evaluation which have already been synthesised and summarised in **Chapter 3** (above), and so are not summarised here. **Chapter 4** reports on homeless young people**, Chapter 5** on teenage parents, and **Chapter 6** on young people with special needs. Each chapter considers first the perspectives of LEAs, education providers and other professional stakeholders responsible for administering and implementing the Pilots and, secondly, the views of vulnerable young people themselves.

## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE

The findings from the evaluation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots suggest the following guidelines would enhance practice and make the pilots more effective and responsive to the needs of vulnerable young people. These guidelines are presented as a supplement to recommendations from the evaluation of the mainstream pilots (Maguire et al., 2002).

***Administration and Delivery***

- Fast-track vulnerable student applications.
- Simplify the application form.
- Provide a shortened application form for independent students.
- Application forms and guidance notes for applicants should be available in languages other than English.
- Good liaison between education providers and key staff involved with particular groups of vulnerable young people to verify authorised absences.
- Prior written notice to inform vulnerable young people of stoppages to EMA payments.
- Stoppages of EMA payments should be used as an early warning system to trigger advice and support.
- Learning Agreements need to incorporate more relevant and tailored learning goals.
- More specific target setting between education providers and young people would allow modular bonus payments to reward short-term gains of vulnerable students and might enhance the role of bonus payments.
- The payment of attendance and achievement bonuses need to be more timely.
- Verification of income and residency details requires swifter action as subsequent payment delays are considered demoralising.

***Identification***

- Include self-identification option in application forms/packs.
- Clearer definitions of vulnerability are required to ensure consistency between LEAs.
- Each area should establish a consistent method by which key agencies can report student vulnerability to the LEA.
- Identifying students as vulnerable has to be achieved in such a way that it does not lead to further marginalisation or exclusion.
- Effective exchange of destination and attainment data is required between the Connexions Service and each LEA.
- Need to resolve data protection issues to allow information to be exchanged between agencies.

***Partnership***

- Collaboration between key agencies and the LEA promotes identification of young people and maximises local resources.
- Increasing partnership working raises awareness of the aims of the pilots.
- In the absence of high profile publicity for the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, key agencies need to be made aware of the scheme through face-to-face meetings.
- Referral of students who dropout of courses or the pilot scheme requires a clearly agreed policy between the LEA, education providers and careers services.
- A point of referral is needed at the point at which a vulnerable young person begins to experience problems so as to avoid the young person dropping out of education.
- Effective support which meets the individual needs of vulnerable young people is vital.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot Projects is being undertaken for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) by a consortium of organisations, led by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP), and including the National Centre for Social Research and the Institute for Employment Research. This consortium is also responsible for the evaluation of the main EMA pilots so that the Vulnerable Pilots evaluation has been able to draw on evidence collected as part of the main evaluation. This is the second and final report of the Vulnerable Pilots evaluation.

## 1.1 Background

The Department for Education and Employment (now the Department for Education and Skills) launched the main Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Pilots in 1999. The scheme aims to provide financial support for young people who stay on in full-time education after the age of 16 by enhancing participation, retention and achievement amongst young people from low-income backgrounds who are currently under-represented in post-16 education.

The Education Maintenance Allowance Vulnerable Pilots were launched in 2000 and extended the scope of the main EMA pilots by focusing on young people from particularly hard to reach groups that are believed to be especially vulnerable to economic and social exclusion. Three specific groups were identified by the government's Social Exclusion Unit in their publication *Bridging the Gap* (1999), young people who are homeless, teenage parents and young people with disabilities, and these groups were the original focus of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots.

Four LEAs were selected to implement the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, each of which was already operating the standard EMA pilot, and each was asked initially to concentrate on one of the three vulnerable groups. However, it was soon recognised by DfES and others that the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme could be of value to other vulnerable young people, so that the

full list of eligible vulnerable young people now includes:

- young people who are homeless;
- teenage parents;
- young people with disabilities;
- care leavers, or those still in care;
- young carers;
- young people who are currently excluded from secondary school;
- young offenders;
- young people with no or low qualifications;
- young people who the LEA are satisfied are estranged from their families; and
- young people who have been identified as needing additional help through the Learning Gateway.

All of these groups are now entitled to support from the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme if they reside within any of the four relevant LEAs and meet the necessary age and income criteria of the scheme[1].

Table 1.1 shows which areas were involved in the EMA Vulnerable and Childcare Pilots.

[1] As with young homeless people, teenage parents are treated as independent so their own, rather than their parents', income is assessed.

**Table 1.1 EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots, by LEA**

| | Location | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilot Type** | **LEA 1** | **LEA 2** | **LEA 3** | **LEA 4** | **LEA 5** | **LEA 6** |
| Mainstream EMA Pilot | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at young people who are Homeless | ● | - | - | - | - | - |
| EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at Teenage Parents | - | ● | ● | - | - | - |
| EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at young people with Disabilities | - | - | - | - | - | ● |
| Childcare Pilot | - | ● | - | ● | ● | - |

## 1.2 Entitlement and Flexibilities

In order to be eligible for the Vulnerable Pilots scheme young people must fulfil the following eligibility criteria:

- Parental income must be £30,000 per annum or less;
- Young person must be considered vulnerable on at least one of the categories listed above;
- Young person must be engaged in at least 12 hours of guided learning each week; and
- Young person must be between the ages of 16-19 when they apply to the scheme.

As in the main EMA pilot, young people who meet these criteria receive a weekly allowance, the level of which is tapered according to parental income. If annual income is £13,000 or less students are paid the maximum weekly allowance of either £40 in one area or £30 in other areas. School and college staff authorise weekly payments on the basis of whether young people have met attendance and performance criteria. Young people agree to these

criteria by signing a Learning Agreement, which also includes details of their programme of study. The young person, a representative of the education provider and parent(s) (where applicable) must all sign the Learning Agreement, which should be submitted by applicants at the start of their programme of study with their application form for EMA. Young people can also receive termly 'retention' bonuses and an 'achievement' bonus if they complete their course successfully.

However, for vulnerable young people the EMA scheme has been made more flexible to take account of the added personal pressures and challenges that may affect their participation, retention and achievement in education. The following flexibilities apply in the four areas operating the vulnerable pilot scheme:

- EMA can be claimed for up to three years, instead of two years;
- study can take place outside mainstream education;
- non-mainstream courses, such as life skills, numeracy and literacy courses, can be studied;
- EMA payments do not have to be made into a bank account;
- bonus payments can be spread throughout the year instead of being paid as a lump sum termly or on successful completion of the course of study;
- young people who are homeless do not have to provide proof of residence in order to be eligible to receive an EMA;
- young people who are estranged from their families are classified as independent students whether they are in receipt of Income Support or not; and
- teenage parents are entitled to receive a proportion of backdated payments of EMA on their return to education following a period of maternity leave.

### 1.3 The Childcare Pilots

Childcare Pilots were introduced from September 2000 in five areas and aimed to provide teenage parents with assistance with childcare costs. Three of the pilots were in existing EMA areas and the remaining two in areas supported by the Early Excellence Centres (EEC). Evaluation of the EEC based Childcare Pilots focuses on the experience of young people, exploring barriers to, and facilitators of, childcare provision and is the subject of a separate report. Within EMA areas, the evaluation concentrates on young people's experience of the pilots, and whether and how the support provided enhances EMA provision. In addition, the

views of those involved in implementation of the Childcare Pilots are also explored in the EMA areas.

The Childcare Pilots provide teenage parents with up to 95 per cent of their childcare costs if the teenage parent is participating in post-16 education and their parental or independent income is less than £30,000 per annum. If income is less than £13,000 per annum, teenage parents can receive a maximum of £100 per week towards childcare costs for one child and £150 per week for two children. Childcare is eligible for funding if it is delivered by a registered childminder or a day nursery, but not if provided by family members. Teenage parents are also entitled to transport support if 'excessive' journeys are required between place of study, home and the childcare provider.

## 1.4 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots has employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore both the delivery and outcomes of the scheme. The research has focussed on how the pilots are being implemented, as well as on young people's experiences of the scheme, recognising that both delivery and experience of the scheme are fundamental to the success of the pilot.

### 1.4.1 Quantitative evidence

The evaluation of the Vulnerable Pilots has been able to draw on evidence from the quantitative evaluation of the main EMA pilots. This has involved longitudinal surveys of large random samples of young people in each of the 10 main EMA local education authority (LEA) areas, including the four responsible for implementing the Vulnerable Pilot scheme, and in eleven control areas[2]. Two cohorts of young people were included in these surveys, young people who reached the end of compulsory schooling in the summer of 1999 (Cohort 1), and those who finished compulsory education in summer 2000 (Cohort 2). This second cohort includes young people who were potentially eligible for the Vulnerable Pilots and, therefore, analysis has focused on this group who were interviewed for the first time between

[2] Further details of the quantitative evaluation methodology and findings can be found in Ashworth et al., (2001) and Ashworth et al., (2002).

October 2000 and March 2001 (Wave 1 interview) and for a second time between October 2001 and March 2002 (Wave 2 interview).

Inevitably, the numbers of vulnerable young people in each pilot area included in the surveys are too small to allow comparisons between pilot areas or between pilot and control areas. Data for all vulnerable young people in the pilot and control areas identified in the surveys have, therefore, been combined. Although this means that little can be said about their direct experience of the Vulnerable Pilots, there is so little (longitudinal) data available on vulnerable young people that analyses of their backgrounds, routes through and experiences of education, and levels of attainment provides invaluable insights into their circumstances, as well as a useful context for the more in-depth qualitative studies of vulnerable young people that also form part of this evaluation.

### 1.4.2 Implementation study

An in-depth exploration of implementation strategies and other issues arising from the Vulnerable Pilots for LEAs and other local stakeholders was also undertaken in order to explore their perspectives on the operation and effectiveness of the pilot schemes. In the first year of the evaluation (2001), face-to-face interviews were conducted with administrators from the LEA, education providers and other key agencies involved in implementation of the pilots in each of the four vulnerable pilot areas. In 2002, follow-up interviews with individuals in the same posts and with the steering groups in five of the six areas took place to trace changes and developments in implementation strategies and elicit views on how far the scheme had been successful in reaching vulnerable groups. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, with a small number by telephone.

### 1.4.3 Vulnerable young people

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with small numbers of homeless young people, teenage parents and young people with special needs, and with other people in their lives who the young people identified as having had a significant influence on their decision-making. These interviews were undertaken in early 2001 and follow-up interviews were undertaken with the same young people (but not their 'significant others' in most cases) in early 2002. The second wave of interviews aimed specifically to capture young people's detailed perceptions and experiences of the Vulnerable Pilots at least one year after its

introduction and to explore the factors they considered had been important in their choice of what to do following compulsory education and to their subsequent 'success' or 'failure'.

## 1.5 Report Outline

Chapter 2 contains evidence from the statistical analysis of vulnerable young people in the main EMA surveys to provide contextual information on the background and experience of vulnerable young people. Chapter 3 synthesises findings from all pilot areas on implementation strategies and experiences of young people during the second year of the EMA Vulnerable and Childcare Pilots. The subsequent chapters report findings from each pilot area in turn, comparing and contrasting implementation approaches and young people's experiences between the first and second year of the pilots (Chapters 4 – 6). The report concludes with recommendations for best practice in future development and extension of the Vulnerable Pilots (Chapter 7).

# 2 A DESCRIPTION OF VULNERABILITY

This section of the report draws on data from the large scale longitudinal surveys being undertaken as part of the evaluation of the main EMA pilots. The aim is to provide a background description of vulnerable young people who might be eligible for the Vulnerable Pilots scheme. Throughout, the experiences of vulnerable young people are compared with those of young people who were not vulnerable under the scheme.

The chapter first describes the source of data used in the analysis and the definitions of vulnerability (Section 2.1). The vulnerable groups of young people are then examined according to their gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background (Sections 2.2 and 2.3), followed by an exploration of their educational experiences and achievements during school Years 10 and 11 – the last two years of compulsory education (Section 2.4). Section 2.5 describes the routes taken by these young people after completing compulsory education.

## 2.1 Method

### 2.1.1 Sample source and size

Quantitative data on the circumstances of these young people are rarely available because of their relatively small numbers in the population of young people as a whole. The longitudinal surveys for the EMA evaluation include data on two cohorts of young people in 10 EMA pilot areas and 11 control areas. These young people (and their parent(s) or guardian wherever possible at the first interview) will be interviewed at least three times at one year intervals. For the purposes of this analysis, it was decided that the focus should be on young people in the second Cohort of the evaluation; that is, young people who finished compulsory education (Year 11) in the summer of 2000. This group included the first young people to be potentially eligible for the Vulnerable Pilots scheme and would have been aged 16 or 17 years at the time of interview. Data from young people who took part in both of the first two interviews with this cohort have been included in the analysis; that is, from interviews that took place between October 2000 and March 2001 (Wave 1 interviews) and from the second interview that took place between October 2001 and March 2002 (Wave 2 interviews)[3].

[3] Further details of the survey methodology can be found in Ashworth et al., 2001 and Ashworth et al., 2002.

Even among a total sample size of 7,326 EMA income eligible young people who participated in the first two waves of interviews, the numbers of vulnerable young people would be too small to focus specifically either on the particular areas where the Vulnerable Pilots scheme is operating, and/or to make comparisons between the experiences of young people in the pilot and control areas. Indeed, initial analysis suggested that the composition and size of the vulnerable groups in those areas that are operating the Vulnerable Pilots were not significantly different from other EMA pilot areas. Therefore, the analysis has combined the samples from the pilot and control areas and looks at all young people who would have been eligible for EMA on income grounds at the first wave interviews.

### 2.1.2 Definitions

Some comment is also needed on how vulnerable young people have been defined for the purposes of this analysis. Teenage parents have been defined in our sample as young people who report that they have one or more children but no partner. This may be slightly different to the DfES guidance to local authorities:

> *'Those young people who have the primary child care responsibility'.*
>
> DfES, 2000, p.5

The definition of young people with special needs has followed as closely as possible the broad definition of 'disabilities' used by the Department in its original guidance notes to the local authorities administering the Vulnerable Pilots:

> *'Those with a statement of Special Education Need, or who have been recognised as having a disability through the Disability Discrimination Act. Many of these young people may also be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance'.*
>
> DfES, 2000, p.5

The definition from the survey data, therefore, includes young people who said that they were registered disabled, had a disability that limited their daily activities, or who had special needs, whether or not they reported having a statement of Special Education Need.

Capturing homeless young people (and, indeed, adults) in survey data is problematic since samples cannot include those who do not have a recognisable and at least semi-permanent address. However, homeless does not necessarily mean 'roofless' for the purposes of EMA eligibility. For the purposes of EMA Vulnerable Pilots, young people are defined as

homeless who:

> *'have no permanent address, and who are estranged from/living with their family'.*
> DfES, 2000, p5

It is possible from data collected on the young person's household to identify those young people who were not living with a biological, step or foster parent, or guardian or grandparents. Throughout this chapter, therefore, homeless does not include young people who were living on the streets or in hostels at the time of the Wave 1 interview and will, therefore, under-estimate 'true' homelessness among this age group. It should also be borne in mind that the circumstances of the group defined as homeless here may be quite different to those who are genuinely 'roofless' or living in hostels.

Throughout this Chapter data have been weighted to allow for differential non-response and percentages are weighted results. The weights used are those which have been constructed for the main EMA quantitative evaluation and, briefly, ensure that the sample is representative of all young people in the LEA areas in the evaluation. Where data from Wave 2 have been used, a further weight has been applied to compensate for 'attrition', that is, for young people who left the sample between the first and second waves[4]. The unweighted numbers on which analysis has been based are also provided in each Table or Figure. The numbers of teenage parents and homeless young people in the sample were relatively small and the findings of sub-group analysis relating to these two groups should be treated with caution. All findings based on fewer than 20 unweighted cases are reported in parantheses () in Tables and Figures.

## 2.2 Vulnerability, Gender and Ethnicity

Using the definitions in Section 2.1.2 above, 122 young people were identified from the Cohort 2 Wave 1 data as homeless; there were 52 teenage parents; and, 1432 young people with special needs[5]. This means that less than one in one hundred young people interviewed were teenage parents (0.8 per cent); just over one in one hundred were identified as homeless

[4] For further details of the weighting strategy see Ashworth et al., 2002.
[5] Unweighted bases vary from these numbers throughout the report because of item non-response; that is, not all young people answered all of the questions or gave incomplete information.

(1.1 per cent); and, more than one in five had special needs (21.2 per cent). Some of these young people might have been experiencing more than one of these vulnerabilities, being a teenage parent and homeless for example, but further investigation of the data showed that the numbers involved were very small, so that this has been ignored in what follows. Almost nine in ten of the teenage parents were women (88.1 per cent) and almost four-fifths of those classified as homeless (79.3 per cent). This pattern was reversed among young people with special needs, almost three-fifths of whom were young men (59.5 per cent) (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Vulnerability and Gender**

| | Male Per cent | Female Per cent | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Total per cent of sample | Unweighted N |
| Homeless | 20.7 | 79.3 | 1.1 | 121 |
| Teenage Parent | 11.9 | 88.1 | 0.8 | 52 |
| Special Needs | 59.5 | 40.5 | 21.2 | 1432 |

In terms of ethnicity, all of the teenage parents were white, with only one exception who described herself as of 'other' ethnic origin (figures not shown). White young people were also slightly over-represented among the homeless (88.9 per cent of the homeless) and there were only eight homeless young people from the other ethic groups so that conclusions cannot be drawn (Table 2.2). White young people were also over-represented among young people with special needs, making up 92.8 per cent of the special needs population, but only 85.5 per cent of young people with no vulnerability. Indian, Pakistani and, particularly, Bangladeshi young people were under-represented among the special needs population.

**Table 2.2 Homelessness, Special Needs and Ethnicity**

**Column per cent**

| | Homeless | Special Needs | No vulnerability |
|---|---|---|---|
| **White** | 88.9 | 92.8 | 85.5 |
| **Indian** | 0 | (1.7) | 3.3 |
| **Pakistani** | 0 | 2.5 | 6.2 |
| **Bangladeshi** | (6.2) | (0.4) | 1.7 |
| **Black** | (1.2) | (0.8) | 1.1 |
| **Other** | (3.7) | 1.8 | 2.2 |
| **Unweighted N** | 121 | 1426 | 5595 |

## 2.3 Socio-Economic Background

All of the vulnerable young people in this analysis were eligible for EMA on income grounds at their first interview, that is, their or their parents' incomes were less than £30,000 per year. These young people were, therefore, already relatively deprived on income grounds. Further investigation of their socio-economic background was undertaken using the young people's current housing tenure and the highest educational qualifications of their parents[6].

### 2.3.1 Housing tenure

Homeless young people, those with special needs and teenage parents were less likely to live in owner occupied accommodation and more likely to be in rented accommodation than were young people with no vulnerability (Table 2.3). However, there were differences between the vulnerable groups with almost half of young people with special needs living in accommodation that was owned outright or with a mortgage (46.8 per cent). This reflects the

[6] It was not possible to investigate the socio-economic group of vulnerable young people because questions to establish this were included in the parent's questionnaire at Wave 1. Hence, there was an extremely low response rate to these questions for young people who were homeless and teenage parents, who were far more likely to be living independently.

fact that most of these young people were living with their parents. In contrast, nearly three quarters of homeless young people (73.4 per cent) and teenage parents (68.0 per cent) were living in rented accommodation. A large proportion of homeless young people were living in private rented (26.6 per cent), rather than social rented, accommodation, more than four times higher than among young people as a whole. Rented accommodation, particularly in the private sector, may provide less stable tenure and suggests a higher level of material disadvantage among homeless young people and teenage parents. Evidence from the qualitative findings of the evaluation also suggest that teenage parents and homeless young people were subject to greater levels of financial deprivation and experienced less stable accommodation arrangements than young people with special needs (chapters 4, 5, 6).

**Table 2.3 Vulnerability and Current Housing Tenure**

**Column per cent**

| | Teenage Parents | Homeless | Special Needs | No Vulnerability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Own/Mortgage** | (31.7) | 17.7 | 46.8 | 63.0 |
| **Social Rented** | 53.3 | 46.8 | 45.1 | 30.1 |
| **Private Rented** | (15.0) | 26.6 | 7.3 | 6.1 |
| **Other** | 0 | (8.9) | (0.8) | 0.8 |
| **Unweighted N** | **52** | **116** | **1427** | **5592** |

### 2.3.2 Parents' qualifications

The highest educational qualifications obtained by the young person's parent(s) were classified according to the educational level achieved (Table 2.4). Broadly, Level 4 or 5 qualifications are those at University first degree or post-graduate level; Level 3 represents qualifications at A Level standard or equivalent; Level 2 includes qualifications equivalent to 5 A*-C GCSEs; and Level 1 or below are qualifications obtained below Level 2. The 'Other' category includes a miscellany of craft and lower grade technical qualifications that could not be easily classified into Levels 1 – 5.

Each group of vulnerable young people had parents with lower educational qualifications than the parents of young people who had no vulnerability. However, the parents of young people with special needs had only slightly lower qualifications and similar patterns of qualifications to the non-vulnerable group. In contrast, the parents of homeless young people and teenage parents had very much lower qualifications; less than one in ten young people in these two vulnerable groups had parents with qualifications above Level 2, compared with almost one-third of young people with no vulnerability. At the other end of the qualifications scale, around one half of the parents of homeless young people and teenage parents had no educational qualifications compared with only just over one quarter of those with no vulnerability.

**Table 2.4 Vulnerability and Highest Educational Qualification of Parents**

**Column per cent**

| Highest Parental Qualification: | Homeless | Teenage Parents | Special Needs | No Vulnerability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level 4 or 5** | 0 | (3.6) | 13.7 | 18.6 |
| **Level 3** | (9.7) | (5.4) | 12.5 | 13.3 |
| **Level 2** | (19.4) | (28.6) | 20.3 | 22.5 |
| **Level 1 or below** | (16.1) | (3.6) | 10.1 | 8.8 |
| **Other** | (6.5) | (7.1) | 8.5 | 9.5 |
| **None** | (48.4) | 51.8 | 35.0 | 27.3 |
| **Unweighted N** | **24** | **45** | **1417** | **5592** |

It seems clear, therefore, that in addition to their 'identified' disadvantage in terms of eligibility for the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, these young people were already disadvantaged in terms of their housing tenure and their parents' educational background, and this was particularly so for homeless young people and teenage parents. Findings from the qualitative research with vulnerable young people presented later in this report suggests that teenage parents are especially keen to set a positive example to their children in terms of educational

participation and gaining qualifications, which may reflect their awareness of the educational disadvantage of their own parents (chapter 5).

In the remainder of this chapter the educational background of vulnerable young people themselves are examined, focussing on their experiences whilst in compulsory education, their achievements at the end of Year 11, and their decisions about what to do at the end of Year 11. It is important to explore the educational experiences of vulnerable young people, particularly those who were homeless or teenage parents, in order to examine whether they were already disadvantaged educationally, before the events which led to their vulnerability in EMA terms.

## 2.4 Vulnerability and Educational Experiences

The first wave of interviews in the main EMA surveys collected information from young people about their experiences during the final two years of compulsory education, Years 10 and 11. Young people were asked about their:

- attendance patterns, including self-reported truancy;
- history of any temporary or permanent exclusion from school;
- experiences of being bullied and being accused of bullying;
- decision-making about their destinations at the end of Year 11; and
- qualifications achieved at the end of Year 11.

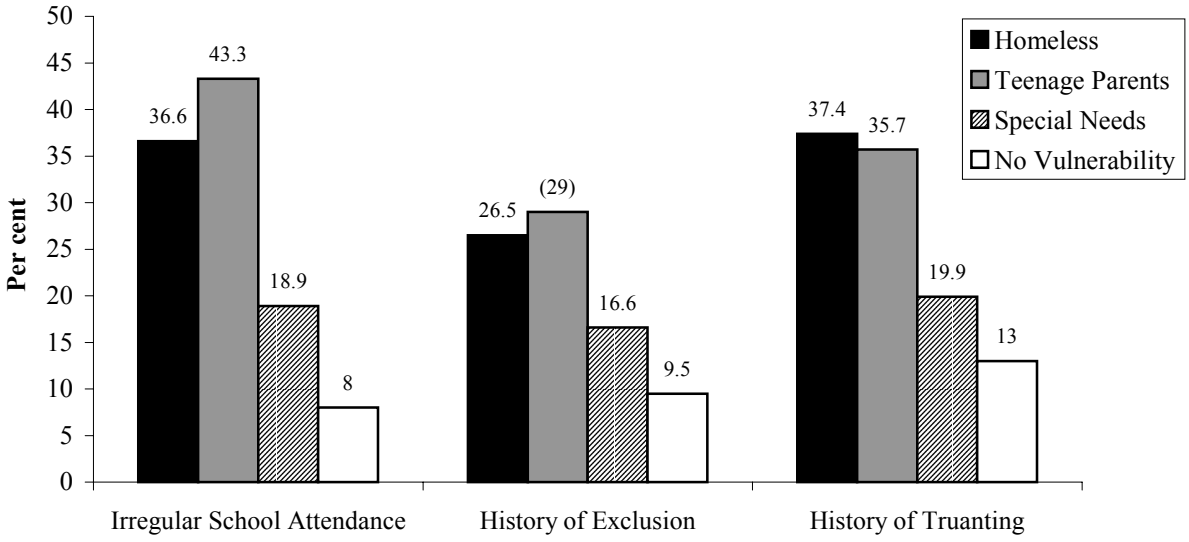
### 2.4.1 Attendance, truancy and exclusion

Overall, vulnerable young people were more likely than young people without vulnerabilities to report poor patterns of school attendance during Years 10 and 11, to have played truant on a regular basis (that is, other than for the odd day or lesson) and to have been either temporarily or permanently excluded from school (Figure 2.1).

However, young people with special needs were more like non-vulnerable young people than either homeless young people or teenage parents, in that they reported relatively positive and stable secondary school experiences. Just over one in six young people with special needs reported having been temporarily or permanently excluded from school (16.6 per cent) – almost twice as high as among young people with none of the vulnerabilities (9.5 per cent), but much lower than either homeless young people (26.5 per cent) or teenage parents (29.0

per cent). Young people with special needs also reported higher levels of truancy (19.9 per cent) than young people with no vulnerability (13.0 per cent) but, again, at much lower levels than among homeless young people (37.4 per cent) or teenage parents (35.7 per cent). Young people with special needs were also more likely to report irregular school attendance during Year 11 (18.9 per cent) than young people without vulnerabilities (8.0 per cent), but their levels of absence were, again, very much lower than those of homeless young people (36.6 per cent) or teenage parents (43.3 per cent). This is surprising, given that many of these young people will have experienced high levels of sickness during their school careers.

**Figure 2.1 Year 11 Attendance, Truancy and Exclusion**




Unweighted Ns: Vary according to item non-response.

It is clear that homeless young people and teenage parents had particularly unstable experiences of education during Years 10 and 11 in terms of attendance, truancy and exclusion. Among teenage parents:

- almost one in ten (8.3 per cent) had been permanently excluded from school, (1.4 per cent of young people without the specified vulnerabilities); and
- around one in five (20.3 per cent) reported having played truant for 'weeks at a time' (3.6 per cent of non-vulnerable young people).

The patterns for homeless young people were similar:

- almost one in ten (8.4 per cent) had been permanently excluded from school; and

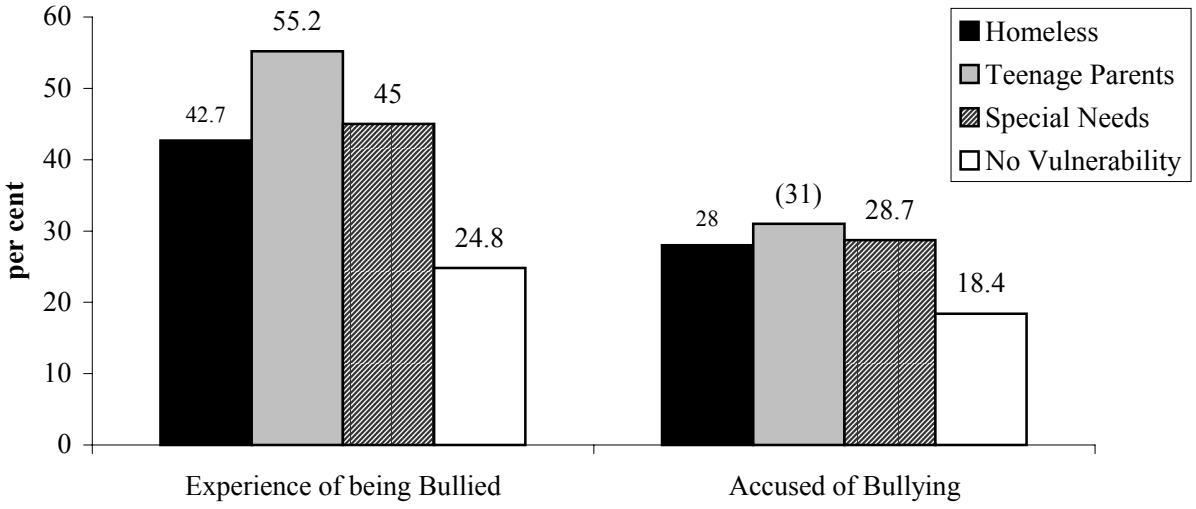
around one in seven (13.3 per cent) had played truant for 'weeks at a time'.

These findings corroborate qualitative evidence from the first year of the evaluation, in which many of the teenage parents and homeless young people also reported poor experiences of secondary education (Allen et al., 2003).

### 2.4.2 Experiences of bullying and accusations of bullying

Young people were asked whether they had either been bullied while in Years 10 and 11 at secondary school or been accused of bullying (Figure 2.2). Reported levels of both experiencing and being accused of bullying were high among all groups, with almost one quarter of young people with no vulnerabilities reporting that they had been bullied (24.8 per cent) and just under one in five that they had been accused of bullying (18.4 per cent). But levels of bullying were very much higher among each vulnerable group, including young people with special needs. Teenage parents were, apparently, especially vulnerable to bullying with more than half reporting that they had been bullied (55.2 per cent) and almost one third that they had been accused of bullying (31 per cent).

**Figure 2.2 Experiences and Accusations of Bullying**




Unweighted Ns: Vary according to item non-response

### 2.4.3 Decision-making in year 11

Young people were asked what they had intended to do when they finished compulsory education when they were in Year 11, and how easy the decision had been to make.

Vulnerable young people were less likely than young people with none of the specified vulnerabilities to have aimed during Year 11 to remain in full-time education after the end of compulsory education. Almost four-fifths of non-vulnerable young people (78.0 per cent) had intended to remain in education, compared with only just over three-fifths of homeless young people (61.4 per cent).

Vulnerable young people had been more likely to intend to take a work-based route post-16, with young people with special needs being particularly likely to have aimed for a full-time job (16.9 per cent), and homeless young people favouring work-based training (14.5 per cent). It is also worth noting that vulnerable young people, particularly those with special needs (6 per cent) and the homeless (4.7 per cent), were more likely to report having been undecided about their post-16 destination while they were in Year 11.

**Table 2.5 Vulnerability and Post-16 Aims During Year 11**

**Column per cent**

| | **Homeless** | **Teenage Parents** | **Special Needs** | **No Vulnerability** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Continue in education** | 61.4 | 67.8 | 64.2 | 78.0 |
| **Full-time employment** | 16.9 | (13.6) | 18.0 | 8.5 |
| **Work based training** | (14.5) | (11.9) | 9.7 | 9.3 |
| **Other** | (1.2) | (3.4) | 3.3 | 1.2 |
| **Undecided** | (6.0) | (3.4) | 4.7 | 2.9 |
| **Unweighted N** | 119 | 51 | 1396 | 5600 |

Young people were also asked how easy or difficult they had found it to make their decision about what to do after Year 11 (Table 2.6). Generally vulnerable young people had found the decision harder to make than had non-vulnerable young people, with almost one third of teenage parents (30.0 per cent)and young people with special needs (32.6 per cent) saying that the decision had been fairly or very difficult.

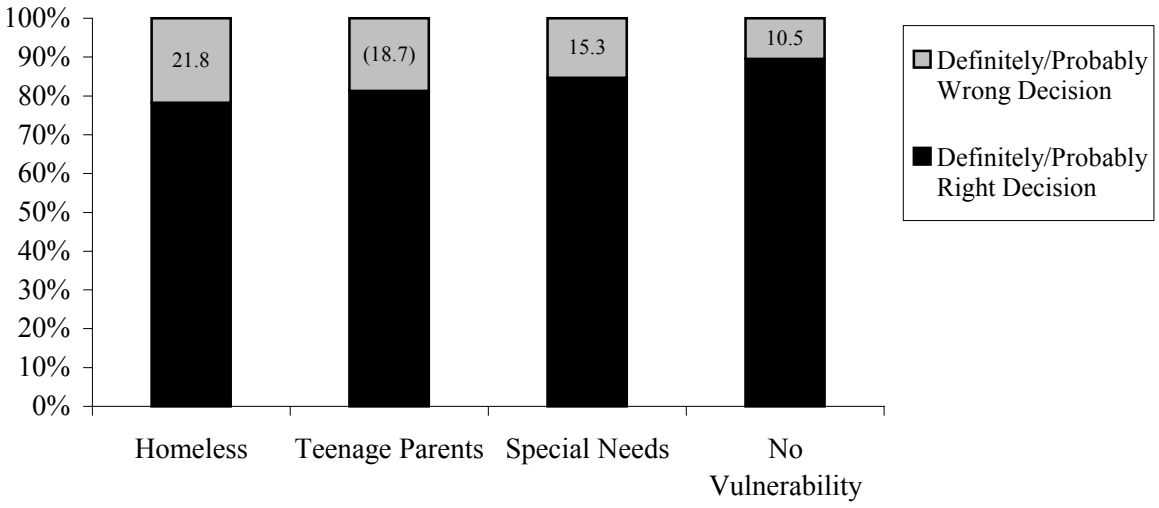
**Table 2.6 Ease of Decision about Post-16 Destination**

**Column per cent**

| | **Homeless** | **Teenage Parents** | **Special Needs** | **No Vulnerability** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Very or fairly easy** | 48.8 | 55.0 | 55.4 | 61.0 |
| **Neither easy nor difficult** | 23.2 | (15.0) | 12.0 | 12.1 |
| **Fairly or very difficult** | 28.0 | (30.0) | 32.6 | 26.9 |
| **Unweighted N** | 122 | 52 | 1429 | 5601 |

Finally, young people were asked to reflect on whether they felt they had made the right decision about what to do after Year 11 (Figure 2.3). Although a large majority of young people, whether vulnerable or not, felt that they had definitely or probably made the right decision, vulnerable young people were less likely to say this than young people who were not vulnerable. Homeless young people seemed to have been the least satisfied with their decision, with more than one-fifth believing they had definitely or probably made the wrong decision (21.8 per cent) compared with only just over one in ten young people who were not vulnerable (10.5 per cent).

**Figure 2.3 Satisfaction with Decision**




Unweighted Ns: Homeless 118; Teenage Parents 50; Special Needs 1411; No Vulnerability 5562

### 2.4.4 Year 11 achievement

Detailed information was collected about the qualifications gained by young people at the end of compulsory education (Year 11). For the purposes of this analysis GNVQ qualifications have been equivalised to GCSE passes and grades using a scale provided by the DfES[7].

The generally negative experiences of education in Years 10 and 11 reported by vulnerable young people were, perhaps inevitably, reflected in their levels of achievement at the end of compulsory schooling. Vulnerable young people achieved less well at the end of Year 11 than young people who were not vulnerable, with even the generally more positive experiences of young people with special needs not having translated into higher levels of Year 11 achievement (Table 2.7). Compared with young people who were not vulnerable (6.7 per cent), almost one third of teenage parents had finished compulsory education with no qualifications (31.1 per cent), and homeless young people (27.2 per cent), and young people with special needs (22.7 per cent) had not faired much better. Only just over one in ten homeless young people (11.1 per cent), and teenage parents (11.5 per cent), had reached the highest level of achievement (GCSE 5+ A*-C passes), compared with well over two-fifths of the non-vulnerable (43.6 per cent).

[7] For details of this scale see Ashworth et al., 2002.

**Table 2.7 Qualifications at the End of Year 11**

**Column per cent**

| | Homeless | Teenage Parents | Special Needs | No Vulnerability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **No exams taken/passed** | 27.2 | (31.1) | 22.7 | 6.7 |
| **GCSE D-G passes** | 32.1 | (36.1) | 33.0 | 19.3 |
| **GCSE 1-4 A*-C passes** | 29.6 | (21.3) | 28.8 | 30.3 |
| **GCSE 5+ A*-C passes** | (11.1) | (11.5) | 15.5 | 43.6 |
| **Unweighted N** | 122 | 52 | 1432 | 5604 |

## 2.5 Post-16 Routes

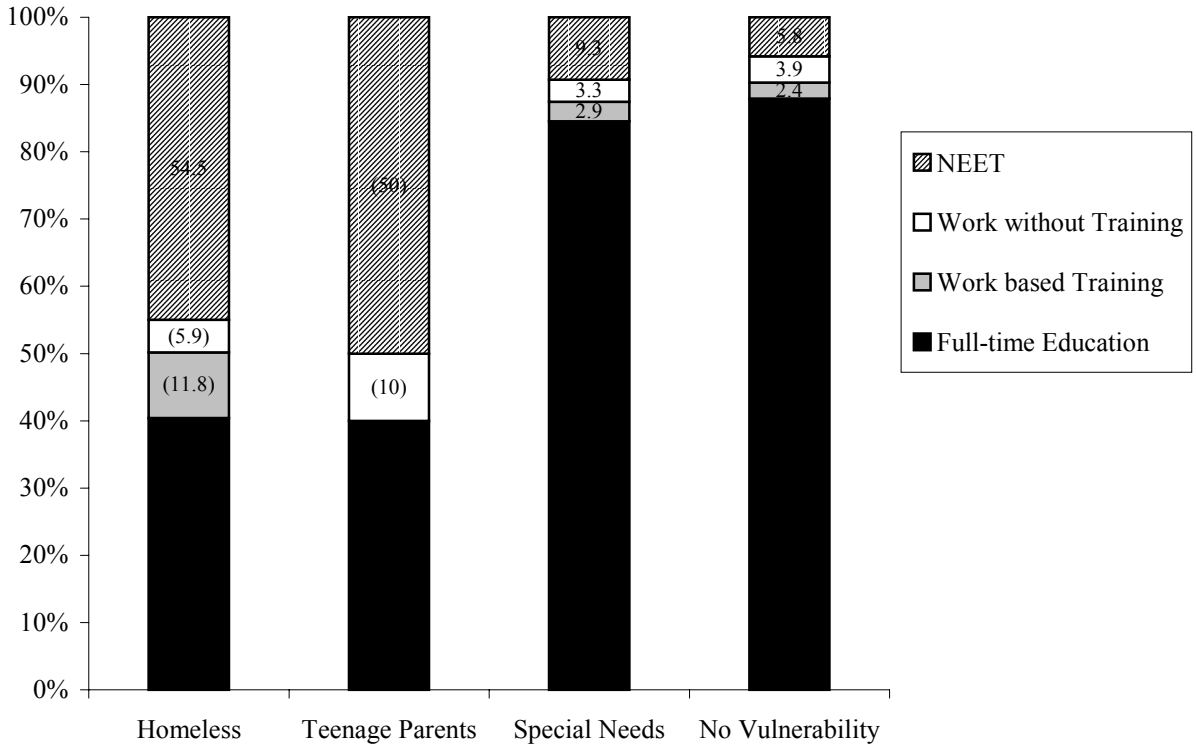
This section considers the actual destinations of vulnerable young people following the end of compulsory education, beginning with an analysis of the extent to which they had achieved the aims that they had in Year 11. The destinations of young people in Years 12 and 13 are then described, followed by an examination of the courses chosen by those young people who remained in education post-16.

### 2.5.1 Achieving Year 11 aims

Approximately two-thirds of each group of vulnerable young people had hoped to continue in full-time education post-16, compared with almost four-fifths of young people with no vulnerability (Table 2.5). Figure 2.4 shows the proportion of young people in each vulnerable group who had intended to remain education who had actually achieved this aim and were in full-time education at the time of their first interview, at least four months after the end of compulsory education. It is clear that most of the homeless young people and teenage parents had not achieved this aim. Only two-fifths of teenage parents who had aimed to remain in education after Year 11 were actually in full-time education in Year 12 (40 per cent), and half were in the NEET group (50 per cent). Furthermore, of those teenage parents who were in work, none were apparently receiving any training. The experiences of

homeless young people had been only slightly better; almost one half who had hoped to remain in education had done so (49 per cent), but more than half were NEET (54.5 per cent).

**Figure 2.4 Extent to which Vulnerable Young People Achieved their Year 11 Aims of Entering Full-Time Education**




Unweighted Ns: Homeless 69; Teenage Parents 35; Special Needs 936; No Vulnerability 4356.
Base = Young people who had intended to remain in full-time education

The figures for young people with special needs are more encouraging; this group seemed to have achieved their Year 11 aims to almost the same extent as young people without vulnerabilities, perhaps reflecting the success of policies specifically aimed to assist the transition from compulsory education for young people with special needs. Over four-fifths of young people with special needs who had wanted to remain in education had done so (84.6 per cent), and less than one in ten were NEET (9.3 per cent).

Although numbers are too small in the other destination categories to draw any conclusions from a comparison of aims with actual destinations, it seems that the pattern for education described above was repeated for other destinations. Young people who were homeless and

teenage parents were far less likely to have achieved their Year 11 aims and much more likely to have become NEET than either young people with special needs or non-vulnerable young people. (Figures not shown).

### 2.5.2 Destinations in Years 12 and 13

Table 2.8 describes what young people were actually doing in Year 12 and Year 13 irrespective of what their original intentions had been. Examining, first, destinations in Year 12, unsurprisingly in the light of the evidence in Section 2.5.1 above, less than one third of homeless young people (32.5 per cent) or teenage parents (28.8 per cent) were in full-time education, compared with almost three quarters of young people with no vulnerability (73.6 per cent). In addition, a very large proportion of both groups were NEET; 40 per cent of homeless young people and 50.9 per cent of teenage parents. Again, the pattern for young people with special needs had more in common with young people who had no vulnerability, although almost twice as many in the special needs group were NEET (18.3 per cent) than non-vulnerable young people (9.5 per cent).

By Year 13 the proportions in full-time education had fallen in each group, but particularly among young people with special needs and those with no vulnerabilities. Although the numbers of vulnerable young people in other destinations are small, it seems that the proportions in work with training had increased for all groups, but that numbers in the NEET group had remained almost unchanged.

**Table 2.8 Destinations in Year 12 and 13**

**Column per cent**

| | Homeless | | Teenage Parents | | Special Needs | | No Vulnerability | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Yr12** | **Yr13** | **Yr12** | **Yr13** | **Yr12** | **Yr13** | **Yr12** | **Yr13** |
| **Full-time Education** | 32.5 | (25.0) | (28.8) | (20.0) | 64.4 | 49.2 | 73.6 | 63.5 |
| **Work based training** | (6.3) | (12.5) | (5.1) | 0 | 5.8 | 6.0 | 6.7 | 6.3 |
| **Work with Training** | (6.3) | (15.0) | (1.7) | (13.3) | 3.2 | 17.4 | 2.5 | 12.8 |
| **Work no training** | (15.0) | (7.5) | (8.5) | (3.3) | 8.3 | 9.6 | 7.7 | 7.7 |
| **NEET** | 40.0 | (40.0) | 55.9 | (63.3) | 18.3 | 17.8 | 9.5 | 9.7 |
| **Unweighted N** | 119 | 46 | 51 | 24 | 1396 | 980 | 5538 | 4265 |

### 2.5.3 Courses chosen in post-16 education

Young people who were in full-time education in Year 12 were asked about the courses they had chosen to study, including any GCSE resits. The results have been grouped into those who were studying academic courses only, those who had opted for vocational courses and those who were combining academic and vocational options (Table 2.9).

Although, again, it should be borne in mind that the numbers of young people in each sub-group are very small, the differences between young people with no vulnerability and teenage parents or homeless young people were very much smaller than those seen in previous analyses. These two vulnerable groups were somewhat less likely to have chosen solely academic courses and more likely to have chosen vocational only courses. However, young people with special needs had a very different pattern of options, with less than one quarter (23.2 per cent) studying purely academic courses and more than three-fifths (62.1 per cent) having opted for vocational courses. It seems, therefore, that whilst homeless young people and teenage parents are far less likely to remain in education post-16 than young people with special needs or non-vulnerable young people, when they do their course choices are very similar to those of the non-vulnerable.

**Table 2.9 Courses Chosen in Post-16 Education**

**Column per cent**

| | Homeless | Teenage Parents | Special Needs | No Vulnerability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic** | (42.3) | (35.3) | 23.2 | 47.3 |
| **Vocational** | (42.3) | (47.1) | 62.1 | 33.9 |
| **Academic and vocational** | (15.4) | (17.6) | 14.8 | 18.8 |
| **Unweighted N** | 35 | 17 | 889 | |

Base: Young people in full time education

However, reflecting their much lower levels of achievement at the end of Year 11, vulnerable young people who remained in education were much less likely to be studying for qualifications at Level 3 ('A' or 'AS' levels or their vocational equivalent) than were young people with no vulnerability. In general, vulnerable young people were more likely to be studying for Level 1 qualifications (GCSE Grades D-G or their vocational equivalent), or Level 2 (GSCE Grades A*-C or their vocational equivalent. Young people with special needs were far more likely to be studying for 'other' qualifications, presumably on courses tailored to meet their particular needs.

**Table 2.10 Level of Courses Chosen in Post-16 Education**

**Column per cent**

| | Teenage Parents | Homeless | Special Needs | No Vulnerability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Level 1** | (25) | (15) | 30 | 14 |
| **Level 2** | (25) | (31) | 25 | 20 |
| **Level 3** | (44) | (46) | 31 | 60 |
| **Other/unspecified** | (6) | (8) | 15 | 6 |
| **Unweighted N** | 17 | 35 | 911 | 4130 |

Base: Young people in full-time education

# 3 THE CONTEXT OF VULNERABILITY: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

This chapter provides an overview and synthesis of findings from the qualitative research conducted with stakeholders and young people relating to the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots in both 2001 and 2002. The findings are described under the following headings:

- administration;
- the role of key agencies;
- perceived value of the pilots;
- perceived limitations of the pilots; and
- participation, retention, and achievement issues.

## 3.1 Administration of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots

### 3.1.1 The role of the steering groups

During the first year of the pilots (2000), steering groups were established in each area to address issues relating to the implementation and administration of the pilots. These groups proved useful, in that they were able to ensure that the pilots were responsive to local needs and concerns (Allen et al., 2003). The steering groups continued to operate during the second year of the pilots but their remit extended so that they became a forum to discuss good practice, as well as identifying aspects of service delivery which needed to be improved. Within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas, a key issue for the steering groups was trying to ensure that all groups of vulnerable young people accessed the initiative rather than those initially targeted. Across EMA Vulnerable and Childcare Pilot areas all those involved with the administration and implementation of the initiatives agreed that the best way of achieving this was through enhanced inter-agency working as well as links with organisations working with particular groups of vulnerable young people. However, the main difficulty for all pilot areas was the time and resources involved in identifying relevant agencies and developing productive working relationships.

### 3.1.2 Funding

All LEAs involved in the pilots were dissatisfied with the level of funding they received to administer the initiatives. There was general agreement that the LEAs effectively subsidised the pilots as processing application forms, responding to queries from other professionals, as well as from young people, and supporting young vulnerable people took more time and resources than had been envisaged originally. The majority of education providers also reported that administering the pilots, especially returning attendance data to the LEAs and supporting vulnerable young people, took significant time and resources. Many also pointed out that the widening of the definition of vulnerable to include young people with no/low qualifications, meant that within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas, there were more eligible young people than anticipated. The level of administrative work and the support required by vulnerable young people led many schools and colleges to argue that they should be properly funded for their additional work.

### 3.1.3 Supporting vulnerable young people

EMA administrators, education providers and other organisations working with vulnerable groups of young people all stressed that, while effective administrative procedures were important to the success of the pilots, equally vital were the systems that supported vulnerable young people. There was general agreement that re-engaging vulnerable young people in education was an incremental process throughout which intensive support was required so that these young people could overcome some of the barriers to education they experienced. The interviews with vulnerable young people also highlighted the importance of effective and sympathetic support to enable them to resolve personal issues, while at the same time meeting educational requirements.

### 3.1.4 Publicity for the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots

Publicity for the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots was deliberately low key. All those involved with these pilots recognised the need for sensitive and targeted publicity so as to avoid stigmatising or further marginalizing vulnerable young people. The following publicity strategies were adopted by the LEAs:

- Placing publicity material where professionals working with vulnerable groups would see it, as well as in locations used by particular groups of young people. For example, information aimed at teenage parents was placed in Mother and Baby Units, in Health

Centres and in other community venues. Leaflets aimed at homeless young people were placed in hostels.

- Sending information about the pilots to relevant organisations and to key personnel within the LEA.
- Doing presentations to professionals and vulnerable young people, and attending sessions at a variety of locations to talk to vulnerable young people and/or their families.

The experience of all those involved in the pilots was that 'word of mouth' was the most effective means of raising awareness of the pilots. Hence, some LEAs used vulnerable young people themselves to talk to others in similar situations to themselves about the benefits of the pilots.

The young people interviewed did not refer directly to any publicity materials, their most important sources of information about the pilots were professionals and other young people. This supports the decision of the LEAs to invest time and resources in developing effective links with relevant organisations.

### 3.1.5 The application process

Throughout the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and Childcare Pilot areas the majority of professionals and young people thought the application process was time consuming and difficult. For some young people, the initially difficult experience of applying for EMA meant that when they re-applied the procedure was seen to be more straightforward because it was familiar. However, this was not the case for all involved, especially those with a disability or who had special educational needs.

The particular difficulties encountered with the application were:

- providing information on parental income;
- providing information on the previous year's income; and
- submitting supporting documentary evidence required by the application form. Many
- vulnerable young people experienced difficulties in finding even basic information such as birth certificates and they needed help and advice to sort out these queries.

Within LEA 1[8] the application form for independent students had been shortened and simplified as these young people did not have to provide information on parental income. This was seen by other respondents to have been a positive step, but it was stressed that this process needed to go further. The experience of those involved in administering and supporting vulnerable young people through the application process was that many of these applicants came from vulnerable families and were unable to rely on help and support from parents. Lowering the reading age required by those completing the application form was seen to be important.

It should be noted that the findings from the first year of the pilots (and from the main EMA evaluation, Maguire et al., 2000) reported considerable dissatisfaction with the 'absent parent' rule. The interviews conducted during the second year reported fewer problems with the amended absent parent rule.

Some of those interviewed also suggested that the renewal process should be much simpler and more streamlined than the application process. During the second year of the pilots those who wished to continue receiving EMA had to reapply using the same application form as in the first year. The question was raised whether the form could be shortened, thereby speeding up processing.

Applications from vulnerable students within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas were fast-tracked, providing the EMA administrative team were aware that a young person met the vulnerability criteria, because vulnerable young people were known to be more reliant on the financial support than other young people who were able to call on the support of their families. This highlights the importance of being able to identify vulnerable young people as soon as possible and is discussed in Section 3.3.

### 3.1.6 Attendance monitoring

Education providers have to return information on students' attendance and performance to EMA administrative teams to initiate weekly payments. Throughout the two years of the pilots, in the majority of LEAs this was a manual task which was described as time

[8] Each of the six EMA vulnerable pilot areas has been anonymised and numbered - see Table 1.1 for definitions.

consuming for schools and college administrators as well as for tutors. In most educational institutions students were required to have timesheets signed by each tutor, which were then submitted to the school and college administrators who completed the necessary paperwork and sent it to the LEA's EMA administrative team. Within the Childcare Pilots, the procedure for returning attendance information was the same as for the main EMA and, apart from the level of extra administrative work, did not cause particular difficulties. However, within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas, reconciling the attendance data with the flexibilities available to eligible students proved especially challenging. In terms of monitoring attendance, the main difficulty was in relation to authorised absences. Education providers had to ensure that the reasons given by students for their absences were valid which inevitably meant some checking and, often, a brief meeting with the young person, before payments were stopped. This checking process was felt to be necessary by education providers who were reluctant to stop payments to vulnerable young people because they were aware how reliant these students were on the financial support provided by EMA. It was also more straightforward to resolve any discrepancies within the school or college before the data was sent to the EMA administrative team. For some LEAs, verifying authorised absences for teenage parents was not problematic as schools and colleges were able to contact a dedicated worker who was involved in the day-to-day running of the pilots. These members of staff were in close and regular contact with the young people and so could ring or visit to find out the reason for the absence. Equally important to the teenage parents, these workers were also able to help resolve particular problems so that the young person could return to education as soon as possible.

While education providers were, and did, check up on authorised absences, the difficulties they experienced appeared to be compounded by the fact that in most LEAs attendance data had to be returned on a weekly basis. Trying to sort out problems relating to attendance with vulnerable students within this time period proved very difficult. To help ease the attendance reporting problems, LEA 1 had introduced a two weekly reporting system effectively giving education providers more time to resolve outstanding issues. This was widely welcomed within this LEA, and respondents from other LEAs suggested that it would be beneficial for them as well, especially if and when EMA was rolled out nationally and the numbers of vulnerable students increased. Some education providers suggested that extending the

reporting window would avoid instances of payments being wrongly stopped. This, they added, would reduce feelings of dissatisfaction with some aspects of education and would, perhaps, promote a positive attitude to learning. It was hoped that this administrative strategy would persuade vulnerable students that everyone involved in EMA was trying to help them, and that education providers did not always assume the worst, in this case that absences were unauthorised. Instead, with a two weekly attendance reporting system the vulnerable young people would be given a chance to explain their reasons for non-attendance. The interviews with the young people suggest that this would be welcomed as their sense of injustice, as well as real financial hardship, when payments were wrongly stopped was considerable, and appeared to reinforce negative attitudes to education.

Across all the pilot areas there was some discussion about the potential for electronic collection and processing of attendance information. A few educational institutions did have electronic attendance monitoring but these systems were often incompatible with other systems used in the LEA. In some instances, manual systems had to be operated alongside the electronic system because the latter could not provide the weekly attendance information within the time required to process EMA awards. The general consensus from respondents was that if an electronic system was to be developed, LEAs would require pump-priming to develop a system that could operate across all education providers and which would provide the EMA administrative team with the information they required.

While there was general agreement about the time consuming nature of operating a manual attendance reporting system, there was seen to be one advantage. Within some institutions, some tutors used the signing of the time sheets as a means of 'beginning a conversation' with a student if their performance, progression or behaviour was not satisfactory. However, all involved in the Vulnerable Pilots stressed that this strategy should be used as a 'carrot rather than a stick' (which is a position endorsed by DfES) and as an early warning system about any problems being experienced by the vulnerable young person. It was suggested that this early warning system might also help retain vulnerable young people, as it could prevent problems escalating to the point that the young person dropped out of education. Prevention, it was suggested, was better and cheaper than cure, by which respondents meant that keeping vulnerable young people in education was better than trying to re-engage them after they had left the system.

### 3.1.7 Delays in issuing EMA payments

The main reason reported for delays in starting EMA payments was the time taken to process application forms. EMA administrative teams stated that a percentage of all forms, especially those from vulnerable young people, had missing information, mostly in relation to parental income. The process of verifying parental income was also reported to be slow. A further reason for delays was missing supporting documentary evidence. The EMA administrators had to contact applicants to request further information, all of which took additional time and resulted in payment delays for the young person. To overcome this, some education providers and other organisations helped young people to complete application forms and to submit the necessary paperwork.

Education providers and other organisations working with vulnerable young people were aware that delays in receiving EMA payments caused some of these students financial hardship. Vulnerable young people reported having to borrow money from family or friends or going without certain essential items including food. Colleges tried to alleviate this situation by using Access Funds to bridge the time between starting college and receiving EMA. However this option was limited, and not available at all to non-mainstream providers.

### 3.1.8 Stopped EMA payments

For the reasons described earlier, LEAs operating the Vulnerable Pilots reported that they were very reluctant to stop EMA payments unless they were sure that there had been a breach in the attendance criteria or other aspects of the Learning Agreement. During the second year of the Vulnerable Pilots, the systems in place to check authorised absences, combined with the fact that vulnerable young people had become established in their courses and familiar with the systems, meant that there appeared to be fewer instances of stopped payments. However, on the rare occasions that stoppages occurred, this was seen to act as an early warning system by alerting education providers to difficulties being encountered by vulnerable young people, and could also be used to reinforce with young people the need for sustained commitment.

Across the LEAs, some young people reported incidences of EMA payments being stopped unfairly, and for what seemed to be no good reason. The interviews conducted with the young people did not always provide explanations for these stoppages because the young

people said that they had not received explanations as to why payments had been stopped. However, most young people were contacted by letter to inform them that their EMA payment would be stopped and stated the reason for this course of action, but it seemed that young people did not recall receiving such a letter. Some respondents involved in the administration of EMA within the LEAs and educational institutions suggested that vulnerable young people needed to be informed before the EMA payment was stopped, so that they had a chance to resolve outstanding issues and to plan for the drop in income.

### 3.2 Role of Key Agencies and Partnership Arrangements

All of the agencies involved with the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots stressed the need for good interagency working. Effective collaboration was deemed essential to the pilots if they were to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. During the second year of the pilots, the relationships established at the outset of the pilots between different agencies were consolidated and extended to other organisations also working with different groups of vulnerable young people. Those interviewed reported that this collaboration was seen as a positive outcome of the pilots but that establishing these relationships took time. The partnerships in place during 2001/02 were seen to enhance the implementation and delivery of the pilots in four ways:

- Partnership helped to establish appropriate and inclusive definitions of vulnerability. LEAs looked to key agencies to provide them with guidance on key issues and factors that needed to be taken into consideration when defining vulnerability. For example, one LEA sought advice concerning disability and special educational needs to reduce the likelihood of excluding eligible young people.
- **Partnership improved the identification of vulnerable young people.** LEAs were especially reliant on other agencies in attempts to improve the identification of vulnerable young people, especially those who had dropped out of education. Identifying vulnerable students was important to ensure they received the flexibilities of the Vulnerable Pilots, the most important of which were seen to be the right to a three year EMA award, increased flexibility around authorised absences, and the potential to study in non-mainstream education provision.
- **Partnership working helped to clarify support needs and enabled agencies to support vulnerable young people throughout their return to education.**

Organisations working directly with vulnerable young people were aware of the kinds of issues that potential students had to overcome if they were to return successfully to education. LEAs were keen to draw on this expertise to ensure that the systems required by vulnerable young people were available to them which meant that these organisations had to be involved in the initial process of setting up the pilots, so that young people could be directed to appropriate sources of help and support. It was anticipated that the new Connexions Service would make a significant contribution in supporting vulnerable young people in education when it became fully established.

- **Partnership facilitated the development and supply of appropriate educational provision for vulnerable young people.**

For example, in one area the LEAs and SureStart Plus agreed joint funding arrangements for an education initiative. In another LEA, homeless organisations and local education providers provided accredited courses based in hostel and foyer locations. In one area, the Teenage Parent Co-ordinator worked closely with Connexions and local education providers to identify appropriate education and on-site childcare provision. A common perception was that such collaborative activity was encouraged by the focus on vulnerable groups.

### 3.2.1 Role of DfES

Each LEA reported a clear line of reference in their dealings with DfES and considered most of the advice received to have been helpful and supportive. However, there was some concern expressed about guidance and regulations having being issued late which caused confusion at local levels and increased frustration, especially amongst education providers who had to change procedures so as to comply with the new guidance.

It was reported that, although national steering group meetings had been held approximately once each quarter, some LEAs felt that their views had been aired but not acted upon. The concern was expressed that the experience and expertise that had been acquired through administering the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots should be reflected in the way the initiative was rolled out nationally.

### 3.3 Identifying Vulnerable Young People

Across the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas, progress had been made in the process of identifying vulnerable young people. The LEAs attempted to identify them retrospectively, for example by sifting through the records of standard EMA recipients to explore whether any of them met EMA Vulnerable Pilot criteria. One LEA received detailed information from the Connexions Service showing the specific vulnerability of school leavers, which the LEA were then able to cross-reference with their own records and with incoming applications. Other strategies involved working with a range of other organisations to identify vulnerable young people, especially those who had already dropped out of education. EMA administrative staff sent information to those working with vulnerable young people, placed publicity material in locations that were used by potential applicants and tried to engage young people who were already part of the pilots in talking to others who might also benefit from the initiatives. One LEA developed a standard pro forma for students to disclose their vulnerability and for key agencies to highlight a young person's vulnerability.

Identifying vulnerable young people raised a number of issues relating to data protection regulations. It was recognised that some students did not wish to disclose vulnerability and were under no obligation to do so. Indeed, some young people did not want anyone to know their personal circumstances as they felt this would cause them further problems with their families, or could lead to them being marginalized by educational staff and/or other students.

All LEAs wanted clear and concise guidelines relating to the definition of 'vulnerable' so that other agencies and organisations were clear which young people came under the remit of the pilots. Lack of clarity caused confusion and administrative difficulties. For example, there was considerable discussion about the change in the definition of young people with no/low qualifications which narrowed eligibility.[9]

### 3.4 The Need for Advice and Support by Vulnerable Young People

The findings from the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots emphasise the extent

[9] DfES report that regulations and guidance were issued which encouraged LEAs to broaden, retain but not to restrict eligibility.

of the advice and support which vulnerable young people need if they are to return to, and remain in, post-compulsory education. Those involved stressed that the level of support required was high and had to be available to vulnerable young people from the outset, so that they had help to complete the application forms, advice about which courses to enrol in, and support to help them resolve issues that arose while they were attending post-compulsory education. All of those involved in supporting vulnerable young people reported that these students lacked the confidence to make decisions independently. For example, those working with homeless young people and teenage parents reported having to reassure them about their decision to return to education, to accompany them on course visits, or to childcare providers.

A key task for staff involved in the running of the pilots was to put together tailored learning packages that met the needs of individual students. Within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas this often meant accessing non-mainstream education provision and ensuring that the young person had adequate transport. In addition, those working with teenage parents across all the areas had to help organise childcare and make sure that it met the needs of the young mother as well as the child. When problems arose, these staff often acted as mediators between childcare provider, college and the young person. All of this took time and resources but was seen as crucial to enabling vulnerable young people to participate in education. The level of advice and support required by these young people was often not available from family networks.

## 3.5 Perceived Value of the Pilots

### 3.5.1 Financial support

The financial element of the pilots was particularly important and attractive to vulnerable young people, especially when they were deciding whether or not to return to education. For vulnerable students, knowing that they could financially manage to return to education while supporting themselves and, in the case of teenage parents their children, was essential if the first step back to learning was to be taken. The disregarding of EMA in calculations of benefit entitlements was seen to make returning to education more worthwhile for vulnerable young people as the award meant a real increase in their income. Vulnerable young people confirmed the fundamental role of EMA funding, and teenage parents and homeless young people, in particular, reported hardship in the absence of EMA during holiday periods or when payments were stopped.

### 3.5.2 Re-engagement with learning

The majority of those involved in the pilots, professionals and vulnerable young people, agreed that one of the main benefits of the initiative was that it facilitated and supported the process of re-engaging disaffected young people with learning. The pilots helped to encourage vulnerable young people to try education again. Financial, practical and emotional support was provided which enabled young people to address the complex issues they had to overcome if they were to return to education. Within the Vulnerable Pilots, the flexibilities available to vulnerable young people meant their return to education could be within a setting, and at a pace, they were comfortable with. The interviews conducted with homeless young people and teenage parents reported how those who had sustained their participation in education found they enjoyed learning, and that they now had plans for their futures which would not have been realistic or possible without the support they had received from the pilots.

### 3.5.3 Enhanced support networks

Sustained participation in education reduced the social isolation experienced by vulnerable young people and broadened their social networks. Homeless young people and teenage parents reported that they developed strong peer relationships through attending college or other courses, and regarded these as important to their experience of education.

### 3.5.4 Personal development

The majority of vulnerable young people described themselves as feeling more confident, able to cope with the demands of complying with a routine, more able to complete work to deadlines, and generally felt they had '*grown up a lot'* since participating in post-16 education. These feelings were particularly emphasised by young parents, who felt that juggling parenting responsibilities with the demands of a course had been a significant achievement. Those young people who had sustained participation in education also felt an increase in their self-worth, as a result of achieving a qualification at whatever level. The opportunity to achieve, and to be seen to be successful, was a new experience for most of the vulnerable young people who took part in the pilots. These feelings gave them hope for their futures and made them feel less excluded from society.

Amongst the young people there was a clear sense of stigma attached to receipt of welfare benefits, whereas 'earning' EMA made them feel better about themselves as they were not

just relying on *'money from the social'*. Young people aspired to financial independence and so looked forward to a day when they '*don't have to ask anyone for anything',* but could support themselves.

### 3.5.5 The provision of childcare

All teenage parents involved in the pilots emphasised the importance of the provision of childcare in their decision to return to, and remain in, education. However, the experience of professionals and young mothers suggest that simply providing financial assistance for childcare was not enough, as teenage parents needed help and support to find suitable childcare, to negotiate with providers, and to arrange transport. Leaving a young child in an unfamiliar setting and returning to education which, in all likelihood, had not been a positive experience, (as suggested in Chapter 2), required great determination as well as support. Those teenage parents within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas had the flexibility to attend a course in, perhaps, a community setting, and to find suitable childcare before embarking on a college course. This incremental return to learning was seen as positive.

Flexibility around childcare was also reported to be important. Some LEAs were able to provide financial assistance for childcare that was not tied to the hours the young mother attended classes, which meant that these teenage parents had a few hours to go to the library, to do course work or, when the child had been ill, to catch up on course work. This flexibility took considerable pressure off the young mothers.

The benefits of childcare for their children were emphasised by all of the young mothers and included increased sociability and learning, language development, and numeracy and literacy skills. Teenage parents described the positive impacts of childcare as an influential factor in staying in college, as the child's welfare and development was considered a priority. Many reported that they would leave college to care for their child if childcare was considered detrimental.

## 3.6 Value of Flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots

The value of the flexibilities available to vulnerable young people were recognised by everyone who participated in these pilots. Those flexibilities identified as essential were:

- EMA can be claimed for up to three years, instead of two years; and

- study can take place outside mainstream education and this could be on a part-time basis and include a wider range of courses.

The importance of these two flexibilities were in providing professionals with the scope to develop tailored learning packages to meet the individual needs of vulnerable young people. Within this study, vulnerable young people experienced a range of problems so that a 'one-size fits all' approach would not have worked. The particular needs of each young person had to be addressed if the barriers to returning to education were to be overcome successfully.

The provision of EMA for a third year was also seen to be crucial as this gave vulnerable young people the time they needed to re-engage with learning, their re-entry to education could be at a slower pace than for those not experiencing problems. For example, the third year availability gave vulnerable young people the opportunity to study life skills courses which equipped them with the skills they needed to undertake successfully a more challenging course. It gave other young people the time to find the right course, as they had the scope to do an introductory course and still qualify for funding for the subsequent two year course. The funding of a third year also meant that vulnerable young people had the time to address some of the complex issues they were facing while participating in education.

However, some concerns were expressed by both professionals and vulnerable young people about the impact of the flexibilities on the actual experience of learning. There was some concern relating to the quality of some non-mainstream education provision which professionals and young people stressed had to be of an acceptable quality. Also, participating in non-mainstream education was not seen to be an end in itself. Many of the vulnerable young people in this study had experienced social exclusion so that attending non-mainstream education was seen as a step towards overcoming exclusion and beginning a process of re-integration into mainstream society, the world of work, education and training.

It should be noted that the vulnerable young people themselves were often unaware of the existence of the flexibilities of the EMA pilot. However, this is not to say that young people did not receive full entitlement. For example, young people participated in non-mainstream education but were not aware that this was a flexible provision, many assumed that regulations that applied to them also applied to all other young people.

### 3.7 Perceived Limitations of the Scheme

The age criteria were seen as a major limitation of the pilots. It was widely perceived that young people were eligible for support until the age of 19 years but the experience of professionals and young people involved in these pilots suggests that this age needs to be extended if more vulnerable young people are to return to post-compulsory education[10]. It was suggested that many vulnerable young people, especially those who have left education, need time to *'sort themselves out.'* Hence it is only when they are older, perhaps 17 or 18 years of age, that they are ready to contemplate education. Extending the age limit was also seen to be important for teenage parents so as to include those who had a child when they were aged 16 or 17 years of age and who took time off after the birth. The point was made repeatedly that teenage parents with young children are often reluctant to leave them during the first months of the child's life. The advice and guidance received by all new mothers, regardless of age, is that the first few months are important for bonding between mother and child. Also, if the teenage parent is following current Government advice and is breast-feeding, returning to education soon after the birth is often not possible.

Local and educational infrastructure was also seen to limit the scope of the pilots. Whilst not intended to address such issues, the pilots highlighted deficiencies and unevenness in post-16 provision. Many agencies perceived a shortage of non-mainstream sites, course provision, childcare and transport. For example, very few providers offered non-mainstream courses in subjects such as Parenting or Life Skills, although such provision was considered critical to developing basic educational skills and attachment to learning for vulnerable young people. Conversely, a number of agencies reported they routinely offered in-house education for vulnerable young people, but did not have the expertise to organise and deliver this education in a format that would attract EMA funding for young people.

The experiences of teenage parents identified a particular problem which arose from the lack of any financial support to help meet the costs of paying a retainer to retain for childcare places during holiday periods. Teenage parents struggled to find the money, with some going into debt as a result. Staff involved in the pilots stressed that it was not cost effective to have

[10] DfES guidance stipulates that vulnerable young people are eligible to receive three years EMA support within a four year period, which may extend the availability of EMA to some young people up to and beyond the age of twenty.

to re-arrange childcare provision every year and they also pointed out that continuity of childcare was important for the well-being of the child. Satisfactory childcare was also essential if the teenage parent was to continue in education and, for these reasons, staff tried to find additional money to meet some or all of the cost of the retainers. It was suggested that this issue needs to be addressed prior to national roll out.

A final limitation of the pilot provision was said to be the lack of awareness or recognition of the real time and costs involved in supporting vulnerable young people to return to education. Many LEAs reportedly subsidised the initiatives, so that staff had the time necessary to work with other agencies to develop provision, as well as ensure the systems to support vulnerable young people were in place.

## 3.8 Participation, Retention and Achievement

The aims of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots were to increase participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory education amongst vulnerable young people. The findings from this study suggest that different factors affect each of the above aims and these are discussed below.

### 3.8.1 Participation

Three key factors have been identified as affecting the participation of vulnerable young people in post-compulsory education. These are:

- the financial incentive provided by EMA;
- access to suitable education provision; and
- access to adequate and effective support at all points throughout the process of returning to education.

*Financial Incentive*

As discussed above, the financial incentive provided by EMA played a major role in encouraging vulnerable young people to return to education. For many, receiving £40 per week during term time represented a significant and real increase in their income, as this money was disregarded in benefit calculations. However, while the prospect of this money was attractive, it also reassured vulnerable young people that they could afford to return to

education as they would be able to buy books, pay for lunch and for transport. The money provided by EMA removed one of the potential barriers to education and meant that vulnerable young people had *'one less thing to worry about.'*

*Access to suitable education provision*

Many of the vulnerable young people interviewed as part of this study in accord with the experience of the professionals involved with the pilot, and of the findings of Chapter 2, had had negative experiences of compulsory education. Most of the vulnerable young people, with the exception of those with a disability or who had high educational needs, had not enjoyed learning and had become disengaged from the learning process. Deciding to return to education represented a significant change in perspective. Being able to return to non-mainstream provision or to education on a part-time basis made education, at least during the initial period, seem possible. The young people were reassured by education that seemed relevant to them, that took place in familiar settings, that had smaller class sizes and that also gave them the scope to address the personal issues they were experiencing.

*Access to adequate and effective support at all points throughout the process of returning to education*

The decision to return to post-16 education was not an easy or straightforward decision for many vulnerable young people. They needed help, advice and support throughout this process from the point at which they were looking for something to do, through completing application forms, as well as with resolving issues that arose while in education, especially during the early months. The level and type of support required by vulnerable young people has been discussed above but, to reiterate, a holistic approach was required so that the young person had somewhere to go and get the help that they felt they needed. Although practical help was needed, for example with application forms, equally important was emotional and developmental support.

### 3.8.2 Retention

Once vulnerable young people returned to post-compulsory education the main factor that appeared to affect retention was a positive learning experience, combined with the potential of improved future prospects. The financial element of EMA and the support provided by professionals continued to be important and these were vital parts of the learning package, but an attachment to, and enjoyment of, learning had also developed. Over the period of the

pilots, vulnerable young people had grown in confidence, had an increased sense of their own self-worth, and had plans for their futures in which education played an important role.

Amongst teenage parents there were additional factors in their decision to remain in education, including the positive benefits of childcare for their child's development. Also, in some cases, the support received in times of difficulty strengthened teenage parent's resolve not to leave courses early.

### 3.8.3 Achievement

The timing of the second phase of fieldwork for this evaluation means that there is insufficient data to reach any conclusions about the impact of the pilots on the achievement of vulnerable young people. At the time of interview, many young people had yet to complete their courses, either because they were on the second year of a two year course or because they had moved onto another one year course at the end of year one. Those who had completed courses had achieved various levels of qualifications from basic literacy certificates through to NVQ qualifications. However, other indicators of achievement were identified by all involved in the pilots which emphasise that the success of the pilots cannot solely be measured in terms of qualifications gained. Instead, a wider definition has to be adopted that incorporates the personal, social and emotional developments achieved by these young people. Young people who were defined as homeless, teenage parents and young people with disabilities all faced greater challenges than their mainstream contemporaries in terms of sustaining participation and attaining qualifications in post-16 education. These challenges included lack of stability, low levels of or no support, the presence of a disability and/or learning difficulties, caring responsibilities, a weak financial position, independent living, and complex personal issues, as well as a negative experience of compulsory education. Given the barriers listed above, sustained participation in post-16 learning might be considered as a significant success in its own right.

Success for young people may also be defined in terms of their growing attachment to learning. Teenage parents and homeless young people in particular, often entered post-16 education with a negative view of education and their potential to succeed within it. For these young people, participation was initially driven by the financial significance of the EMA weekly allowance. However, as time passed, retention became motivated by attachment to and investment in learning with education regarded as a valuable resource in

terms of enhancing future study and employment opportunities. This growing attachment to learning among homeless young people and teenage parents aligned them more closely with young people with special needs who had a strong attachment to learning from the outset. Attachment to learning encouraged retention and also engendered a sense of pride in vulnerable young people, who felt that they were finally able to make real life gains by committing themselves to regular attendance and keeping up with the demands of their course. For many young people, this represented a significant breakthrough in providing a basis for fulfilling aspirations for future education and employment opportunities, as well as providing a daily structure and purpose to their lives.

# 4 FOCUS ON HOMELESSNESS: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

The EMA Vulnerable Pilots defined young people as homeless if they '*have no permanent address, and … are estranged from/living independently of their family*' (DfEE, 2000). Under this definition homeless young people included those living in a range of circumstances, including those who were roofless, living in hostels or other sheltered accommodation as well as those staying with friends. While all the EMA Vulnerable Pilots included young people with a range of vulnerabilities, LEA 1 had a special focus on those who were homeless. In addition to the general flexibilities that apply to those participating in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, two specific flexibilities applied to homeless young people that did not apply to other vulnerable groups (Section 1.3). First, homeless young people did not have to provide proof of residency in order to be eligible for EMA and secondly, they were regarded as independent students without having to be in receipt of Income Support.

This chapter discusses the EMA Vulnerable Pilot operating in LEA 1 from the perspective of those operating the pilot, as well as from the perspectives of young homeless people participating in the scheme. The first section of this chapter reports on issues arising from the implementation and administration of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot. A roundtable discussion was held with the steering group and individual interviews were undertaken with personnel involved in implementation and administration of the pilots in 2002. Those interviewed included LEA staff, education providers and key agencies working with homeless young people. Their experiences and perceptions of administration and delivery of the scheme are reported, as are their views on the significance of the scheme to young people. The remainder of this chapter discusses the experiences of homeless young people who participated in the pilot. In 2001 15 homeless young people were interviewed, in 2002 these young people were contacted and seven agreed to be interviewed again. Of the remaining eight from the original 15, six could not be traced, one declined to participate and a further young person did not attend their appointment and was then uncontactable. The purpose of these interviews were to explore their experiences and perceptions of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot, and to discuss any changes in their attitudes or circumstances, and their plans for the future.

## 4.1 Implementation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot

LEA 1 was nominated by DfES to become an EMA Vulnerable Pilot area in March 2000. The original focus was to provide support for the needs of young people who were homeless or estranged from their family and who were aiming to participate in education. Although efforts were made to attract all groups of vulnerable young people, as allowed within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot flexibilities, the focus of delivery in LEA 1 in the second year remained on homeless young people.

The LEA launched the vulnerable pilot by convening a meeting to raise awareness of the initiative and to gain the co-operation of a number of key agencies. The range of attendees was broad, and included representatives from local homeless organisations, the Leaving Care Team, Youth Offending Team, Careers Services, local colleges and a key note speaker from the Rough Sleepers Unit; a national organisation representing the homeless, (see further Allen et al., 2003).

Based on those who attended this initial meeting a steering group was formed, which met once a term to discuss issues arising from the administration of the pilot, as well as specific problems related to increasing participation in education amongst homeless young people. This group continued to operate during the second year of the pilot. During the roundtable discussion held in 2002 members of the steering group reflected on the implementation of the vulnerable pilot. They acknowledged that the first year of the pilot had involved a steep learning curve, as they struggled to address the range and complexity of issues which face homeless and other vulnerable young people. The first year of the pilot had involved raising awareness of the scheme and making links with relevant organisations. During the second year, these processes were consolidated and the steering group was trying more actively to address the needs of other groups of vulnerable young people. Members of the steering group agreed that their meetings during this second year provided a useful forum for sharing good practice and discussing administrative and delivery mechanisms, as well as considering the effectiveness of the pilot for vulnerable young people.

There was considerable discussion about the impact of the changing of the definition of the vulnerable groups as it applied to the LEAs. Although LEA 1 maintained its focus on homeless young people, other groups of vulnerable young people were eligible to participate

in the pilot. The difficulty was that the initial launch of the pilot had brought together organisations working with homeless young people, but those working with other vulnerable groups had not been represented, so that it took additional time to establish the necessary links with relevant organisations. The steering group were aware that, while they had made progress in trying to include other groups of vulnerable young people, further work was necessary.

> *'I went to the initial launch and I thought that was really useful but it was quite a shock that it was suddenly this much wider range of vulnerable students we'd got to deal with, how to ensure that those students were identified for the project as well, which made it much more complex, and obviously we've not got it right yet with the young offenders because there's so few presenting themselves, and similarly the young people who have been previously excluded, I'm surprised at the low numbers, but I think that initial launch enabled people to be aware of it, and certainly a wide range of agencies were invited.'*

An additional concern of some steering group members was the actual implementation of the flexibilities and the tensions that arose from the need for consistency in interpreting the flexibilities, discretion and equity. The particular issue discussed was authorised absences where it was accepted that a homeless young person might have more authorised absences because of the chaotic nature of their lives. However, for a young person who was vulnerable because they had no/low qualifications, the authorised absences rule might be more rigidly interpreted because what was important for the young person was to establish the habit of attending the course on a regular basis. Discretion was very important, but the question was how to manage this equitably and discretely so that it did not create resentment or stigmatise students. Also arising from this discussion was the increased volume of work required to check and resolve authorised absences and the importance of identifying the nature of the vulnerability. In some instances, colleges only knew that a young person was vulnerable because the list sent by the EMA awards team placed a 'V' beside the names of those students entitled to the flexibilities. Data protection and confidentiality issues meant that it was not possible to share detailed personal information. While colleges accepted this, it made implementing and administering the pilot especially challenging as decisions had to be made on a case by case basis.

### 4.2 Administration of the Vulnerable Pilot

The systems for administering the vulnerable pilot had been established during the first year of the pilot and they were not significantly changed in year two. However, some key

improvements had been made including the introduction of a shortened application form for homeless young people, as well as a pro-forma which asked students to identify whether they were vulnerable under the EMA definition. These and other administrative processes are discussed below.

### 4.2.1 Staffing and resourcing

Responsibility for the design and delivery of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot aimed at homeless young people rested with the EMA Project Manager, based in the Student Support Services section within the LEA. A small team administered the pilot and their main responsibilities included maintaining EMA records, processing applications and issuing weekly payments.

The EMA team also provided telephone and face-to-face support for applicants, schools and colleges, and key agencies advocating on behalf of vulnerable young people. Overall, staffing and administration of the pilots were similar to levels established in the first year and there was continued regular liaison between the EMA Project Manager and the administrative team.

Schools, colleges and other organisations that worked with the EMA administrative team accepted that they did their best, but respondents highlighted the large volume of work that the team handled. Many suggested that more staff were needed to process the application forms, to deal with queries and to provide the necessary support to applicants. Respondents stressed the higher level of support required by vulnerable young people to fill in application forms and to collect and submit the supporting documentation. Respondents from schools and colleges felt that supporting vulnerable young people through the application procedure was left mostly to them. While they were keen to help and support the young person, they were unable to cope with the additional volume of work associated with one-to-one support. This difficulty was compounded because of the increased numbers of young people who were defined as vulnerable. One college representative highlighted the fact that most of their students met the 'no/low qualifications' criterion and were, therefore, vulnerable. He and others commented that when the original pilot began they had anticipated just homeless young people being entitled to the flexibilities. The additional groups of vulnerable young people meant that, while schools and colleges were managing with current staffing levels, they would struggle to deliver a satisfactory service when EMA was rolled out nationally and the numbers of vulnerable students increased even more.

### 4.2.2 The application process

As homeless students were classified as independent young people if they did not reside with parents, they were not required to provide information concerning parental income or to provide proof of residency. This meant that substantial sections of the standard application form were redundant. As a result, a revised and shortened version of the application form was designed for use by homeless students in 2001/02 which removed the sections relating to income. While staff from schools, colleges and other key agencies acknowledged the improvements to the application form, many still felt that both the revised and standard EMA application forms remained too complex. Their experience was that vulnerable young people continued to need considerable support to complete both the revised and standard application forms.

Staff at schools, colleges and from other key agencies in LEA 1 stressed that vulnerable young people often had very little, if any, support from families and pointed out that many come from vulnerable families. As a result they needed help and support from other sources if they were to complete the application form. Many of those interviewed concluded that vulnerable young people needed someone to advocate on their behalf. This person needed to sit down and go through the application form with the vulnerable young person, identifying the supporting documentation required and helping the young person get it. For example, many homeless young people did not have copies of their birth certificate and did not know how to get a copy.

Once the form was completed, help and support was necessary to chase up the application and to respond to any queries that arose. Without this help it was thought that many vulnerable young people would simply not pursue their EMA award and would drop out of education. The majority of the delays in processing the application forms and in students receiving their awards was due to missing information and/or lack of supporting documentation.

Within LEA 1 every effort was made to 'fast track' EMA applications from vulnerable young people because all those involved in the pilot were aware of how dependent these young people were on the EMA award. To help with this process, young people were asked on a voluntary basis to complete a pro-forma which collected a range of information including if

they met the vulnerable criteria. This system was seen to be helpful, but reinforced the importance of identifying vulnerable young people (see Section 4.2.3).

A further difficulty with the application process arose because applications from vulnerable young people continued to be received throughout the year, especially from homeless young people, who did life-skills courses at hostels, or part-time courses, which could start at various points throughout the year. Although the EMA administrative team received large numbers of application forms at the start of the autumn term which created delays in processing, they also had to cope with a steady stream of applications from vulnerable young people which had to be fast-tracked.

All students had to complete a Learning Agreement as part of the EMA application. Those interviewed regarded the Learning Agreement for vulnerable young people as less formal than the one completed by students receiving a main EMA award. In the Learning Agreement completed by vulnerable students, the goals to be achieved were made as relevant as possible to the particular young person. Many of the students were issued with a simplified sheet stating, "this is your learning contract", which identified what they must do in order to receive their award. In general the Learning Agreement was seen as beneficial, as it reminded the young person that in order to receive an EMA award they had to attend their course, complete coursework and behave in an acceptable way. For some vulnerable young people the Learning Agreement was reported as giving them an opportunity to achieve which, as Chapter 2 has shown, many had not experienced before. Staff from schools, colleges and hostels which ran courses for homeless young people stressed that many had never been given the opportunity to achieve in the past, and some gained enormous satisfaction from meeting their Learning Agreement goals. For other vulnerable young people the Learning Agreement was irrelevant until their EMA award was stopped, usually because of non-attendance. Staff working with these young people found it helpful to have the Learning Agreement as a tool for reminding young people that they had to meet certain criteria to receive their award.

### 4.2.3 Identifying vulnerable young people

Identifying vulnerable young people proved problematic for all involved with the implementation of the pilot. In LEA 1 good working relationships had been established during the first year of the pilot with many of the key agencies working with homeless young

people. These working relationships continued in the second year and helped to identify homeless young people who were eligible for EMA. While staff were pleased with the progress they had made, they accepted that more remained to be done so as to ensure homeless young people were aware of EMA and that, once they applied, were identified as being vulnerable and entitled to the flexibilities. Work continued with hostels and other organisations to raise awareness of EMA but there were thought to be other homeless young people who were 'hidden', perhaps because they were sleeping on friends' floors rather than living in hostels, who would also benefit from the EMA flexibilities. This suggestion is confirmed by the findings in Chapter 2 that there is, indeed, a significant range of living arrangements which could be included as homeless under the official definition of 'vulnerable'. Respondents stressed the importance of making sure that all these homeless young people could be identified as vulnerable since the flexibilities within EMA were important in assisting young people to manage the difficulties they encountered. The concern was that if homeless young people were not identified as vulnerable they would be more likely to drop out of, or remain out of education.

A further concern during the second year was that there were other vulnerable groups of young people that were not being identified. Staff were aware that some vulnerable young people were not returning to education or, if they did, were not receiving the flexibilities they were entitled to which might enable them to remain in education. For example, ex-young offenders and teenage parents were thought to be under represented in the pilot. These, along with other groups of vulnerable young people, would benefit from the EMA flexibilities but the difficulty was how to include them, sine the steering group had not been able to develop the necessary links with the range of organisations who worked with other groups of vulnerable young people. The lesson they had learned from the first year of the pilot was that attracting and maintaining vulnerable young people within the EMA pilot required considerable effort and resources. Good working relationships were needed with the myriad of organisations that worked with other vulnerable groups so that staff were in a position to discuss EMA and its entitlements. While some links had been made, the implementation group acknowledged that this was an area that needed further work.

The difficulties in implementing and administering EMA were compounded by the fact that many young people were reluctant to identify themselves as vulnerable. Some were thought to believe that stigma would be attached to vulnerable status, as well as that they would be

subject to intrusive questioning from other students as to why they were not living with their parents. Others thought that they would be further disadvantaged if people knew they were vulnerable. Throughout the two years of the pilot, staff had worked with some homeless young people who simply did not want anyone to know that they had left home or the reasons why they had done so. For example, some did not want to give any parental details in case information was passed on to their parents, and considerable reassurance and support was required to persuade vulnerable young people that this would not happen and that all information was confidential.

Education providers also reported great difficulty in identifying vulnerable young people. As mentioned above, in an attempt to improve identification the LEA introduced a pro-forma that asked students to indicate whether any of the vulnerable categories applied to them and this had helped with the identification of vulnerable young people.

> *'The colleges are in the same position as [the LEA]. When they get a student walking through the door, students are not necessarily going to self-identify themselves as being vulnerable. We printed our additional questionnaire asking them to self-identify and it has had some effect.'*

As already described in Section 4.1, a further problem for education providers related to the nature of the young person's vulnerability. The LEA's practice of identifying vulnerable young people on the lists of young people who received a EMA award by placing a 'V' beside their name with no additional information caused real administrative difficulties for education providers because of the way in which they tried to implement the flexibilities. As described above, if a young person was homeless or a teenage parent the authorised absence rule would be applied quite flexibly, so that the young person had time to resolve the particular difficulties they were facing. However, if the young person was vulnerable because they had no/low qualifications the authorised absence rule would be rigidly enforced as staff wanted to establish a routine of attending school or college. As a result, education providers had to work on a one to one basis with vulnerable young people to ascertain the nature of their vulnerability. To try and improve the identification of vulnerable students some colleges within LEA 1 circulated information about the vulnerabilities to course and class tutors so that they could, when appropriate, identify vulnerable young people.

> *'If a student is vulnerable because of a homeless state, we would certainly be more understanding, whereas if they're vulnerable because of no qualifications then I think we'd want to be strict about [attendance].'*

*'Because he was vulnerable he was able to restart in that provision. So, it does make a difference and I think actually for workers like myself, it takes dealing with individuals to realise what a difference being identified as vulnerable means.*

The tension that emerged between disclosure of specific vulnerabilities and issues of privacy and data protection was not resolved during the second year of the pilot. All those involved with the pilot recognised that this was a key issue that had to be resolved, especially if EMA was going to be rolled out nationally. Some of the steering group members suggested that there should be standardised procedures for staff from different agencies to inform the EMA administrative team and others that a young person was defined as vulnerable, and to provide some details of the nature of the vulnerability. Without this information some of the implementation group were concerned that only those vulnerable young people who were 'easier' to identify would benefit from the flexibilities and the opportunity to return to education.

In addition, many of the vulnerable young people within the pilot in LEA 1 had multiple vulnerabilities and it was not always clear which vulnerability was dominant.

*'The irony is that some of them might fit every single one of those [vulnerable] groups, being estranged, being looked after, being excluded from school, not having qualifications, being young offending, being disabled, being on Learning Gateways, but they might have their own flat and so they might not actually be homeless, so had we not expanded that then they might have dropped through which is the irony of it all.'*

Key agencies were particularly alert to the personal circumstances of vulnerable young people and recognised that a broad and flexible definition of vulnerability should be applied, because of these multiple vulnerabilities, some of which were not recognised in the three original target areas of teenage parenthood, disability or homelessness. In this sense, the broader definition of vulnerable young people was welcomed; it was just proving more difficult to operationalise.

### 4.3 Advice and Guidance for Eligible Young People

As in the first year, staff from the EMA administrative team, key agencies and education providers emphasised that a considerable amount of support work was required to encourage and prepare vulnerable young people for participation in post-16 education.

*'It's a massive, massive step before they even get to think about education being relevant ... 80 percent of our kids who have got no daytime activity are not at that stage.'*

For many vulnerable young people, especially those who were homeless, the decision to return to education was seldom straightforward. Time and support was required to help them address the complex personal issues they faced and to overcome their lack of confidence. Key Workers, Personal Advisers and other staff helped them fill in application forms, accompanied them to interviews for prospective courses and generally provided assistance and reassurance when it was required.

*'I think most young people find forms confusing and sometimes their parents find the forms confusing as well, so to actually get it completed I think they do need quite often to be with somebody ... You're dealing with so many different issues with young people, ... there's careers, employment, education and a training focus; dealing with benefits. Vulnerable students, they do need a lot of support to make sure it happens'.*

In the second year the LEA continued to provide guidance notes for applicants that outlined eligibility criteria, entitlement and basic application procedures for the main EMA. These notes included the free phone help line number and address of the EMA team, where applicants could access further advice and guidance. The LEA produced an EMA manual for all those involved in the administration of the pilot scheme, based on DfES guidelines and LEA policies. The LEA stressed that local education providers and key agencies used this as a guide, but they were also at liberty to apply discretion in the way in which they delivered the pilot. As in the first year, the LEA did not challenge the use of local discretion.

Some of the respondents interviewed, especially education providers, were concerned at the amount of time required to support vulnerable young people. In addition to help with the application process, young people also needed help to resolve personal and educational issues that arose throughout the year. It was not just a case of getting homeless and other vulnerable young people to return to college, it was equally important to ensure that the systems were in place to help them complete their course.

### 4.4 Role of Key Agencies

As outlined in Section 4.1, from the outset the LEA had aimed to foster strong links with key agencies in an attempt to use their experience to identify and support specific groups of

vulnerable young people.

> *'We saw the agencies as being the key ... If you give them the information so that when they're working with their clients they can pass it on.'*

Those administering EMA in LEA 1 recognised that, although homelessness was often the core problem, vulnerable young people faced other difficulties, therefore the links with youth offending teams, social workers and others were vital to the success of the pilot. The difficulty for those implementing the EMA vulnerable pilot was bringing together agencies working with other groups of vulnerable young people, for example, teenage parents and those with no/low qualifications. While some links had been made, they were not as well established nor as effective as those with the homeless organisations because of insufficient time and resources.

### 4.4.1 Education providers

Education providers were very supportive of the EMA vulnerable pilot. They recognised its importance in enabling homeless and other vulnerable young people to return to and remain in education. However, some education providers considered that the LEA was too reliant on them to explain and promote the scheme to young people, as well as ensuring that the LEA was fully aware of the student's vulnerability.

> *'I think there's an assumption that as long as the young person is going to the college, the college will sort it out. The college will sort out the EMA, the college will sort out the vulnerable status. What I've found in practice with young people I've been dealing with, it's been our end that's needed to really push for the fact that this young person's a vulnerable student.'*

Within LEA 1 respondents in schools and colleges felt that they and teaching staff were at the front line of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, as they not only had to deal with day-to-day administration including attendance monitoring, but also with supporting vulnerable students and teaching them. Within some institutions, tutors were known to be resentful of the paperwork related to EMA which generated considerably more work. In some institutions large numbers of students were in receipt of EMA and significant numbers were vulnerable, which often meant resolving issues around authorised absences or progress. Timesheets and Learning Agreements had to be signed and monitored, which also took time.

As in the first year of the pilot, concerns were voiced about the disruption that is sometimes caused to classes which include vulnerable students and to changes in the relationship between tutor and student. In addition, there was an awareness of how challenging it was to teach groups of students many of whom were vulnerable, as is demonstrated by this respondent:

> *'they're put as a group and the whole group is a nightmare, I take my hat off to those lecturers and the lecturers do, they get them through it, they get them the qualification out of it, it is an absolute struggle …'*

These concerns were less of an issue for those who provided courses in hostels because they were working with smaller groups of students and had access to specialist support when it was required.

### 4.4.2 Specialist key agencies

Specific agencies, such as those aimed at homeless young people, care leavers or young offenders, were well placed to identify a range of vulnerable young people. Many of these agencies were able to integrate support for EMA Vulnerable Pilot applicants into the advisory role of their Key Workers and were accustomed to encouraging young people to re-engage in varied forms of education, training or employment.

Within LEA 1 numerous initiatives had been developed aimed at delivering education to homeless young people. There was extensive collaboration between agencies in a bid to deliver education in the most appropriate setting. For example, it was acknowledged that some homeless young people were not ready to attend courses at a college, but needed a more relaxed and familiar environment as a first step to returning to education. Hostel workers linked with colleges so that courses were provided within the hostels tailored to meet the needs of particular groups of young people.

> *'There are ESF funded projects around the city and there are other projects that are funded to work with this client group, and in some cases it's about matching the two things up really. I also think colleges and projects are looking to work more closely together really, so [there is] a lot of opportunism in it, people setting things up and trying to meet needs, and EMA is one layer of that'.*

Whilst the EMA Vulnerable Pilot did not necessarily initiate this type of collaboration, it facilitated co-operation by providing an avenue of funding for young people.

Many of those on the steering group were aware that if other groups of vulnerable young people were to access the pilot, other specialist agencies would have to be brought on board.

### 4.4.3 Connexions

The Connexions service was commonly viewed as having the potential to provide an integrated advisory service for a range of vulnerable young people. It was also expected to provide the LEA and other agencies with relevant information to enhance tracking and targeting of vulnerable young people.

> *'It's about linking these systems together, I know for a start Connexions, with bringing Personal Advisers on-line, they're going to be targeting the most vulnerable, their targeted service is going to be aiming at the most vulnerable 13-19 year olds so they're going to have databases that flag up all those young people'.*

It was assumed that Connexions had the potential to play a key role in providing attainment and destination information for young people leaving school at Year 11, and vulnerable young people who left secondary education before this point. There was also an expectation that Connexions would collate relevant information that could be accessed easily by the LEA, education providers and key agencies. However, the role of Connexions would not be formally established in this area until after April 2002, following the end of fieldwork for this report.

A Connexions Card pilot scheme had been planned, aimed at incorporating young people's attendance details, attainment records, transport credits, student financial support such as EMA, and a local reward/discount scheme applicable to all schools and colleges within the city. The basic infrastructure was put in place through a joint effort between the Careers Service (to become Connexions) and the LEA so that information could be exchanged across a compatible platform. However, this pilot was terminated before it began when the contract was awarded to a different company.

> *'The new scheme, the technology and the new card, is not compatible with the original pilot system'.*

Consequently there is no longer any system in place which will be capable of 'joined up' working to the level originally envisaged, which would have involved schools and colleges across the city, the LEA and local Connexions Service. Throughout the interviews there were real anxieties that the new card would not be capable of supplying the EMA administrative

team with the attendance information they needed from schools and colleges to issue EMA payments.

### 4.5 Attendance Monitoring

During the first year of the vulnerable pilot, processing and returning attendance information was problematic for education providers. All agreed that it was time consuming and required significant resources. The difficulties experienced in the main EMA pilot were replicated in the vulnerable pilot with the additional complications caused by the flexibilities (Maguire et al., 2002). Colleges and schools operated manual systems for recording attendance information which differed across institutions. In essence students were required to get tutors to sign their timesheet, which they, or the tutor, would return to the EMA Co-ordinator. Problems arose occasionally when students were ill or away, as time sheets could not be processed until their return. This could cause delays in payments to students.

Within institutions staff had to go through each time sheet manually, recording whether the student had fulfilled the attendance Learning Agreement targets. All staff processing the time sheets were aware of how important the EMA payment was to vulnerable students and that, for homeless students, the £40 payment equated to half their income. As a result, they reported being very diligent in checking whether absences were authorised before they stopped a payment. This inevitably involved several telephone calls and perhaps talking to the student.

In an attempt to overcome some of the difficulties in returning attendance information to the EMA administrative team, LEA 1 introduced a two week reporting system which provided schools and colleges with additional time to process the time sheets and to resolve any outstanding issues. Education providers approved of this change as it was said to reduce the number of appeals relating to stopped payments because anomalies could be resolved within the school or college.

### 4.6 Perceptions of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot

Within LEA 1 the Vulnerable Pilot was viewed very positively by all involved. It was seen to be providing an important and valued service to vulnerable young people, in particular, to

those who were homeless. Although there were concerns about some of the administrative procedures and the increased volume of work for schools and colleges, the general consensus was that the EMA Vulnerable Pilot enabled young people who had become distanced from the educational system to return and, perhaps more importantly, to achieve.

### 4.6.1 Awareness

During the second year, the profile of the vulnerable pilot increased and there was a growing awareness among education providers and other key agencies of the groups of vulnerable young people who were eligible for EMA. As the pilot became more established, the LEA became more aware of other specialist agencies that could help identify other groups of vulnerable young people who would also benefit from the pilot.

As in the first year of the pilot, there was some discussion about the best strategies to use to raise the profile of the vulnerable pilot. There had been general agreement during the first year that it would have been inappropriate to undertake a similar advertising campaign to the main EMA, for example advertising on buses and so on. All those involved in the pilot were aware of the need for sensitivity in any advertising so as to avoid stigmatising potential recipients. On reflection, most were satisfied that the best way to access vulnerable young people was through a combination of key agencies and informing schools and colleges about the flexibilities contained within the vulnerable pilot.

### 4.6.2 Value of flexibilities

The EMA Vulnerable Pilot flexibilities were regarded as appropriate and essential if the needs of vulnerable young people were to be met in such a way as to encourage a return to education. Those involved in the pilot recognised that vulnerable young people often needed to take small steps towards participation in mainstream learning and that the flexibilities enabled this to happen.

> *'We're not saying to them, "You have to start at 9:00 and finish at 4:00, you have to do that five days a week". We are saying, "Come along to a one day fun day and then build on from that". So changing people's outlook is the main issue, and self-confidence is a starting block. Of all our care leavers we're ashamed to say, it's a national statistic, that something like 50-60% of care leavers have no day time activity and that means no training, no employment, no college, nothing, ... but this helps.'*

For many homeless young people, participation in education was an incremental process whereby students began by attending courses for a few hours each week, and attendance was gradually built up. The flexibilities also meant that students could study outside mainstream education provision and that they could undertake a wider range of courses such as life skills courses. It was hoped that these flexibilities would help vulnerable young people to participate in mainstream provision eventually and the experience of the first and second years of the pilot suggested that the vulnerable pilot was achieving this.

> *'Just to be there and see kids walk past this room and stick their heads round and say, "What are they doing there?." "Well, they're doing some learning", then say "Can I do that?" Kids who have been through all the systems, had horrendous lifestyles, to be asking, "Can I go and join that group of people who are doing that learning?", it's phenomenal to hear it really'.*

The flexibility of education provision enabled hostels and other organisations to provide courses during the summer and other holiday periods. Experience had taught many specialist workers that vulnerable young people (including those who were homeless), needed some regular activity and that long periods away from studying increased the likelihood that some would drop out.

Finally, the entitlement to three years of EMA for vulnerable students was seen to be essential. As stated above, many homeless students returned to education incrementally, and needed to do courses that would help them with basic life skills before they were ready to engage in a two year course. The three year entitlement enabled this to happen and therefore, was welcomed by all involved in the vulnerable pilot in LEA 1.

### 4.7 Factors accounting for the effectiveness of the Vulnerable Pilot

Although the pilot was seen to provide a good basis for encouraging and supporting re-entry into education, staff within key agencies were concerned about the limited provision of non-mainstream education[11]. Within LEA 1 courses were provided in hostels, but respondents questioned what would happen when EMA is rolled out nationally as there is known to be a shortage of such courses in rural settings and where transport is limited.

[11] This area of non-mainstream provision is outside of the remit and control of local EMA schemes.

A further perceived limitation of the pilot was seen to be the age limit of 19 years, although as noted earlier this is a particularly poorly understood area of the EMA policy. Many specialist workers said that it often took vulnerable young people, especially those who were homeless, a year or so to sort their lives out before they could even contemplate returning to education. This meant that many were 17 years old by the time they took their first steps towards returning to education and therefore, would not be entitled to a three year award. Respondents suggested that this was an area of policy that needed to be reviewed.

### 4.8 Defining Success

There was general agreement that the EMA Vulnerable Pilot represented a significant incentive for many vulnerable young people to participate in education. The flexibility of the pilot was regarded as a strength, as it enabled the LEA and education providers to respond in different ways to the varied needs of vulnerable young people. It also afforded vulnerable young people the opportunity to succeed in diverse forms and levels of learning.

All those involved with the vulnerable pilot stressed that success could not be measured solely in terms of educational achievement, as the young people who participated in the pilot had to overcome considerable other challenges as well. The growth in self-confidence, addressing a variety of personal issues, living independently, and even managing a bank account were also important measures of success which underpinned any educational achievement. Non-mainstream courses helped in that they offered basic skills such as numeracy and literacy, and also included other elements such as confidence building. Skills such as these were considered to be fundamental building blocks in preparing vulnerable young people for mainstream education. This view is summarised by the respondent cited below, who was keen to stress that the Vulnerable Pilots should be viewed in a longer term context and that there were real social and financial benefits to society as a whole if a vulnerable young person, especially a homeless young person, re-engaged with education.

> *'... they'd be incredibly upset if it was just down to figures and the finances, because it fits so well into all the other Government agendas, social exclusion, the regeneration, whatever, and I think it ought to be looked at in that context and not purely in terms of figures and numbers.'*

However, qualification attainment was not discounted altogether. Education providers and key agencies recounted positive stories of vulnerable young people who had now progressed to higher education, vocational training or employment.

> *'I do think EMA is a really good thing, it is bringing people back into education, it is working and the amount of vulnerable people coming back into education, more importantly staying in education is up … often they start off and find that they cannot afford to survive, they don't stay, but [now] young people are staying.'*

## 4.9 Revisiting Participants One Year On

This section examines the outcomes, experiences and impacts of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and post-compulsory education for homeless young people during the second year of the pilot. The views of those participating in the pilot were explored and these have been divided into three groups: 'sustainers', 'early leavers' and 'completers'. 'Sustainers', were those young people still receiving EMA and participating in post-compulsory education. 'Early leavers', were young people who left college and withdrew from EMA before completing their course. 'Completers' were those young people who completed their courses and were no longer in education. The only young homeless person to fit this description was one young woman who had recently completed her course and was now seeking work. It should be noted that, as she was not participating in any employment, education or training at the time of interview, she had most in common with the early leavers group.

### 4.9.1 Tracing participants

Amongst all the vulnerable young people who were re-contacted as part of this evaluation, the homeless young people proved the most difficult to trace. It should be recognised that those missing are likely to be those young people with the most chaotic lifestyles and, by association, most likely to be experiencing higher degrees of vulnerability. Only seven out of the original sample of 15 young homeless people participated in interviews during the second year of the pilot, an additional two young people were traced but did not take part and six were untraceable. It should be noted that young men proved particularly difficult to trace for this second wave of interviews so that, whereas in the first year there were more young men than young women in the research, in the second year the reverse was the case.

**Table 4.1 Homeless Young People Involved in Interviews During 2000/01 and 2001/02**

| HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE | |
|---|---|
| **YEAR 1 (2000/01)** | **YEAR 2 (2001/02)** |
| **Participants**<br>15 young people | **Participants**<br>7 young people |
| **Gender**<br>6 females<br>9 males | **Gender**<br>5 females<br>2 males |
| **Age**<br>1 aged 16<br>7 aged 17<br>6 aged 18<br>1 aged 19 | **Age**<br><br>1 aged 17<br>3 aged 18<br>3 aged 19 |
| **Living arrangements**<br>5 in hostel accommodation<br>3 in housing association accommodation, living alone<br>1 living alone in privately rented accommodation<br>1 living with partner<br>5 living with/staying with relatives/family | **Living arrangements**<br>1 in hostel accommodation<br>3 in housing association accommodation, living alone (1 with children)<br>1 living with partner and child in rented accommodation<br>2 living with / staying with relatives / family |
| **Current activity**<br>1 early leaver from EMA, previously undertaking GCSEs<br>3 studying for A-levels<br>3 studying towards BTEC National Diplomas<br>2 studying towards AVCE<br>1 studying towards City & Guilds, Level 1<br>5 studying for non-mainstream pre-entry level courses | **Current activity**[12]<br>2 early leavers from EMA (Early leavers)<br>1 completed post-compulsory education – now seeking employment (Completer)<br>2 studying towards AVCE (Sustainers)<br>2 studying for non-mainstream pre-entry level courses (Sustainers) |
| **EMA receipt**<br>14 receiving £40 a week<br>10 in first year receipt of EMA<br>5 in second year receipt of EMA | **EMA receipt**<br>4 receiving £40 a week:<br>3 in second year receipt of EMA<br>1 in third year receipt of EMA |

[12] Bracketed text indicates into which group the young person was placed for analysis.

### 4.10 Living, Financial Situation and Current Activity

*Sustainers*

Young people who were homeless and continued in education had experienced a range of changes relating to their living arrangements. These included moving from living in a housing association hostel to an independent council flat, moves between a number of hostels and relocation to 'independent living' accommodation. Young people resident in rented council accommodation experienced the most stability. However, the overall financial position of this group showed little sign of improvement from last year in terms of levels and sources of income. Those living independently reported having to deal with increases in outgoings and typically, this group received EMA allowance in conjunction with Income Support. Those who had children also received Child Benefit.

*Early leavers*

Both early leavers had been asked to leave their hostel, one for misbehaviour and unpaid rent, the other because of drug use on-site. Both had limited or unclear options about where to live next. A range of residential outcomes emerged in Year 2, including the shift from residence in council accommodation to moving in with a relative. One early leaver received less income this year because of the loss of their EMA funding when they stopped attending the hostel course as a result of their exclusion from the hostel. The other early leaver had recently become a mother and was now receiving JSA and Child Benefit which had increased her income. Also, she did not socialise as much as she previously had done which had reduced her outgoings, although this was balanced by increased expenditure arising from the costs of looking after her new child. Neither young person was in education, employment or training, although one was in the process of seeking work.

*Completers*

The one young person who had completed post-compulsory education had returned to the family home prior to last year's interview and intended to stay there. Although the loss of EMA had reduced her income, parental support meant that she now had reduced living costs.

### 4.11 Support Networks

*Sustainers*

Sustainers reported stable or enhanced support networks in terms of family and significant others. One young person talked about the role of his support worker in a very positive manner.

> *'He's the first person I'll go and talk to and ask for support and ask what I should do, not social workers ... He's like a father figure to me. Always been there, always helps, helps out with anything.'*
>
> Chris, 18, LEA 1, sustainer

There was a notable absence of outside agencies, such as employment advisers and social workers in the young people's lives this year, with the group now appearing to require less support, either as their relationships with their family continued to improve, or because they were becoming increasingly independent. Increased contact with friends whilst at college was often described as having added a further dimension to the young person' s everyday life. However, the one young parent in this group was a rare exception to this as she found that her parenting responsibilities had reduced the amount of time she had available for socialising with her friends.

The reduction in professional involvement in the young people's lives should not be interpreted as suggesting that ongoing support from professionals was less important for this group. Ongoing support remained critical, particularly when problems arose (whether these were related to EMA, housing, financial or other issues). However, the young people reported feeling more confident in managing their lives on a daily basis and, therefore, tended only to seek help in relation to specific difficulties.

*Early leavers*

Early leavers had experienced a range of changes in the support they were receiving during the second year. Whilst one early leaver had experienced increased contact with their family, and some increased financial and practical support, the other retained only minimal contact with their family. However, both early leavers experienced a notable change in the role of significant others in their lives. The involvement of these, formally key, supporters had lessened in both cases. Reasons for this were directly related to the changes in their lives: leaving hostel accommodation, becoming a parent and, in both cases, leaving education. For

the new mother, the isolation of coping with a baby, detachment from her significant other and loss of contact with friends, had resulted in a considerable reduction in support which troubled her greatly.

*Completers*

There was a definite improvement in close support for this one vulnerable young person; now that her mother's partner had left, relations within the family home had improved. Although having left college, contact was maintained with her significant other, a college tutor. Her tutor performed an advisory role in supporting her career decision-making and had helped her to find work experience.

### 4.12 Positive Experience of Education

Those who attended a mainstream college described their second year experiences in a positive way, and reported feeling a lot more relaxed at college as compared to their school experience. They described being more able to mix with mature students and form new friendships. Those who did not attend mainstream colleges argued that the flexibility of being allowed to study in a hostel meant they had more direct and ready access to tutors and that help and support were available when required. This was partly due to small class sizes but also because tutors became '*good friends',* as a result of the constant role they had in the young person's day. They talked of how they did not need to compete for attention, as they would in a larger college classroom. It was also apparent that the ease of being able to *'fall out of bed and go downstairs'* provided an extra incentive to keep up with classes. However, opinions were divided about the educational value of these sessions, with sessions varying between those described as '*proper'* lessons where they felt they were learning, to others where the young people felt that the work they were given, such as drawing *'silly pictures'* was not serious enough.

### 4.13 Barriers to Education

The young persons' financial situation was still perceived as the main barrier to education with EMA helping them to overcome this obstacle. However the homeless young people, particularly the early leavers, still perceived a small number of problems relating to their experience of education.

*Sustainers*

Some young people in hostels reported that continuous changes in teaching staff unsettled the class and did not motivate them to learn. Others also came across difficulties in their relations with other students and found it very distracting in class if surrounded by others who were disrupting lessons.

The young mother in the sustainers group encountered some problems that seemed to be similar to those experienced by the sample of teenage parents, in particular a perceived lack of flexibility of staff towards coursework, deadlines and punctuality. Lack of easy access to a computer also caused problems, in that it was more difficult to keep up with typed course work, resulting in work being handed in late. Other teenage parents reported similar difficulties (Section 5.10.2).

*Early leavers*

Neither of the early leavers was employed or engaged in any kind of education or training. Reasons for leaving were mainly the result of having been asked to leave their hostel, thus having to leave the hostel course that they had been attending. One young man reported feeling de-motivated by, as he saw it, poor EMA administration, which led to him not receiving payment for a number of months despite attending college. The other early leaver saw her changing priorities as the key barrier to continuing her education. Having recently become a mother she was currently taking time off to be a parent. However, it should be noted that this young woman had also had to switch hostel colleges twice because of continued drug misuse and disruptive behaviour and she had been dissatisfied with course content in the second year.

*Completers*

The young person who had completed her course had decided to pursue a career, though she still saw further education as a possible part of her future.

## 4.14 Knowledge and Experience of EMA

The view of EMA was largely unchanged from last year. Participants in the scheme in the second year still perceived it as a positive attempt to encourage participation and retention in education. In comparison to last year, young people seemed to have acquired more of an

understanding of the details of EMA, such as the Learning Agreement and authorised absences. Early leavers also shared the view that the scheme was a good idea, though there was some frustration with EMA when it came to payment issues, particularly when money was backdated. This problem is discussed in more detail below.

### 4.14.1 The EMA re-application process

All the homeless young people staying in education this year had re-applied for EMA. The scheme was regarded as an added bonus whilst attending college and, if available, it should be applied for. Although the young people were aware that they had to go through the application process again, they expected their application to be renewed automatically. These young people tended to learn about the re-application process through various means, such as word of mouth and sometimes through EMA administrators. The application process itself was described by all to be straightforward and *'hassle free',* particularly as this was the second or third year of application, the young people felt they now *'knew the system'*. Reflecting this growing confidence, some had completed the forms themselves, although others had still required support to complete the form, which was provided either by significant others or, in one case, by a family member.

### 4.14.2 Eligibility criteria

Knowledge of the eligibility requirements for receiving EMA varied, but there was an overall awareness that it existed for young people living on low incomes. This reflected a shift in awareness from the typically minimal knowledge young vulnerable people had about the scheme in the previous year. Feelings of a lack of fairness within the criteria were voiced, with reference to the cut-off point based on parental wages. Despite their own status as independent students, which meant this criterion did not apply to them, these young people still felt uncomfortable with the general EMA criteria being related to parental income for many of the same reasons expressed by students participating in the main EMA pilots (Legard et al., 2001). The young mother also expressed concern that there was no difference in the amount of EMA allowance paid to those without children which was a view shared by some other teenage parents (see Chapter 5).

### 4.14.3 Learning Agreements

Views on the Learning Agreement remained unchanged from last year; knowledge and memory of the Learning Agreement was limited. Attendance requirements were the most

familiar aspect of these agreements and all of the young homeless people were aware of the procedures for authorised absences. Some confusion existed about the relative roles of the Learning Agreement and application form in triggering payments. For example, one young person attributed the slow payment of their EMA allowance to the fact that he could not sign their Learning Agreement until he attended the first day of college. He believed that this meant that it took longer than it should have to process his payments, despite the fact that he had completed his application form weeks before. Others were similarly unaware that payment was reliant on both the Learning Agreement being signed and processed, and the processing of the application form. As a result, they were frustrated when their payments arrived, in their minds, late and in arrears.

#### 4.14.4 Awareness of flexibilities

As was evident last year, there remained a low level of awareness concerning the flexibilities offered by the EMA pilot scheme. Confusion existed concerning the age at which entitlement ended. Those in receipt of EMA for the third year understood that this would be the last year that funding would be provided. This caused anxiety for those wishing to continue in further education because they expected they would face a lack of funding support.

#### 4.14.5 Receiving payments

The mechanisms of receiving EMA were unchanged from last year, apart from one unusual exception. In this case, instead of receiving the weekly EMA payment direct into her bank account, one young woman now collected the EMA allowance in the form of a cheque. The only reason she could think to give for this change was that it was perhaps due to her being 19 years of age and slightly older than the others. She stated that the new system was inconvenient. She did not report any other circumstances which might have explained the necessity for this change, such as difficulties with her bank account. Apart from this case, the other homeless young people reported that their receipt of payment was straightforward.

#### 4.14.6 Complying with EMA requirements and changes over time

Homeless young people reported mixed experiences of complying with the various EMA requirements. These reflected the range of experiences reported during the previous year, some reported that requirements were fair and easy enough to keep up with, whereas other young people felt that a few of the procedures should be changed. One particular example

was the process of keeping up with timesheets and having them authorised by the college. The view that a register could just as easily be signed was articulated by one young person who experienced other students asking her questions as to why she had to do things differently to the rest, which was *'none of their business'*. It was not clear whether this young woman was the only student in her class in receipt of EMA support, which may have accounted for her feeling that she was treated differently. The young parent still in education encountered difficulties in keeping up with attendance when she had a child to cope with at the same time, particularly when the child was ill. This was a common problem found amongst teenage parents (Section 5.12.4).

### 4.14.7 Uses of the weekly allowance

The uses to which the weekly allowance was put varied, as last year. The key use during the second year was for funding educational expenses such as books, stationary, lunches, and other course-related expenditure such as travel to college. The remainder of EMA was spent as part of the young person's household budget, on, for example, gas and electricity bills. For the two homeless young people with children, the weekly allowance helped to pay for items such as nappies and food. Some young people reserved Income Support to meet living costs such as food and bills, and used EMA as money for socialising and clothing. In exceptional cases, the allowance was used entirely on such 'non-essentials' as computer games. Although use of the EMA allowance had not changed greatly since the previous year, there appeared to be more emphasis from the group of sustainers on using their allowance for educational purposes. Although no explanation for this was immediately apparent, it reinforces the emergent picture of young homeless people's growing attachment to learning.

### 4.14.8 Bonus payments

All sustainers had some experience of receiving an EMA bonus payment, most typically for attendance. However, it was reported that bonuses were often delayed and arrived during the next term. Those who had not received their bonus when they should have done did not generally follow up the problem, as payments were usually made eventually. Some felt that the achievement bonus should be paid at the end of each year and not at the end of the course, as this would have been a fairer system for those on courses longer than one year. The young people tended to spend their bonus payments on a *'treat'* for themselves or to repay debts, reflecting findings from the sample of young people eligible for mainstream EMA (Legard et

al., 2001). They felt it was a positive incentive which made them feel appreciated and recognised for their hard work.

### 4.14.9 Stopped payments

Of the seven homeless young people interviewed in the second year, all had experienced some loss of their weekly allowance. Some described stopped payments when they had been late to college by 10 minutes, or had to miss a class due to a medical appointment or the *'Social'*. The young people were not always able to remember whether they had sought authorisation for these absences, and it was unclear how many of the stoppages were caused by a failure to authorise properly an acceptable absence rather than an unjustified absence.

The sustainers generally felt that the EMA administration was fair and they were not overly concerned with the rare occasions that they had lost a payment. Most did not see any point in appealing, except for one young person who had appealed when they lost a payment for what they perceived as a justified absence and had their payments re-instated. In contrast, the early leavers reported less satisfaction with the equity of the system and described incidents when they felt that their absences had been justified but which were deemed unauthorised, for example one young person had been ill but had not received a GP's note. In contrast, in another case a young person had been unsettled for a while, constantly moving between hostels because of behavioural problems and failures to comply with hostel regulations. During this time her weekly payments were stopped whilst she was not regularly attending the hostel classes. As her lack of attendance was unauthorised and primarily caused by her own behaviour, she did not seek to appeal against this stoppage although she was affected financially by the loss of income. Both early leavers argued that some members of education staff were inflexible and not supportive or flexible enough in their interpretations of the criteria for authorised absences. This was also a strong criticism voiced by teenage parents and will be returned to in Chapter 5.

Despite the number of stoppages experienced by the seven young people, few reported that the occasional stoppage had caused serious financial implications for them. However, there was one exceptional case where the loss of EMA income had become a major problem and the reasons behind the stopped payment were thought to be unjust. The young parent in the group who was still in education found it a lot harder than those without children to keep up with college *and* look after her children, reflecting similar accounts from the group of teenage

parents (Section 5.12.8). She perceived college staff to be unreasonable and felt that more flexibility around her college hours was required. She was not always able to meet EMA attendance criteria and subsequently missed out on weekly payments as staff refused to authorise her absences. This young person also faced another problem unique to the sample. She reported that the amount of EMA she received was soon to be reduced from £40 to £20 per week but she was not aware of the reasons behind this reduction. She anticipated that debt would accrue as her overdraft increased and, in turn, that this would have a negative effect on attendance at college as she would not be able to afford travel costs, subsequently leading to further stoppages of EMA weekly payments.

Of the early leavers, only one person felt that their loss of income had a huge impact on their motivation towards education. In this case, EMA payment had not been received for two months, despite reporting constant attendance at college. Having been expecting the money to be paid into the bank, the young person fell into increasing debt. This young person had subsequently left post-16 education and could offer no explanation as to why his payments had not been received and had made no effort to ascertain the reasons why. It should be noted that in the previous year his significant others had noted that his commitment to meeting the attendance criteria was weaker than they would have hoped.

#### 4.14.10 Seeking advice and support

Most young people cited the EMA Co-ordinator within the college as the person they went to for advice concerning difficulties with EMA. Those that managed to speak to the co-ordinator were not always impressed with what they had to offer, specifically when they were unable to remedy payment problems. In addition, some reported difficulties in being able to get an appointment with their EMA Co-ordinator. For those residing in hostels, their Support Worker was usually the person they went to for help, who was often very supportive around difficulties with the EMA administration and application procedures, emotional support, as well as offering other practical support with issues such as housing difficulties. In other cases course tutors also assisted with problems, although one person in particular considered their tutor unreasonable and unconcerned about the administrative mechanisms of EMA. Here the young person felt that the tutor had not sufficiently understood the nature of the flexibilities granted to vulnerable students and, as a result, refused to authorise absences.

### 4.14.11 Holiday periods

Homeless young people described holiday periods as a difficult time, as this was the point at which they realised what the weekly EMA allowance meant to their overall income. Some young people would go without shopping for a few weeks or have to borrow from others in order to stay afloat. Those with children found it a particular struggle without the extra income. One parent described how she tried to put money away before the holidays, though she found she could not afford to continue to do so. Another enquired about a hardship fund payment for the summer period. During these periods the young person was unable to increase their income as they believed a part time job would deprive them of their Income Support. The predominant view across the sample was that it would not be worth getting a job because, not only would they have to come off Income Support, but during this time they would have to pay more rent too as Housing Benefit would be cut. One young person described how she took on a job to give her extra income, but did not tell Social Services in the hope that she could continue claiming Income Support. She was subsequently *'caught out'* and had to pay it all back which led to a debt crisis. It was felt by most that during the holiday periods, particularly summer, EMA should be made more flexible. One young person summed this up:

> *'I don't think EMA should be responsible to support us through the holidays because that's an Education Maintenance Allowance, its not to support you living ... but rather than just handing out more money for holidays make it more flexible for people to get part time work and temporary work and then come back on (to benefits).'*
>
> Dianne, 18, LEA 1, sustainer

### 4.14.12 Budgeting and money management

It did not appear that EMA had made any significant difference to the young homeless persons budgeting and money management skill and, where changes in budgetary skills were noted, these arose from factors other than EMA. Some young people living in hostels felt that they still had not got to grips with their money and needed support from their key workers, whilst others felt that they had learned how to budget because of the experience of living in a hostel. In the cases of the two young parents, one found it difficult to work out her budgeting, whilst the other argued that the increased responsibility of having a child had increased her financial awareness and budgeting skills.

### 4.15 The Advantages of EMA

All young people in this sample felt that without EMA, people in their highly vulnerable situation could not have afforded to go to college and complete their education. Benefits alone could not have met the costs of books, stationery, travel and their education-related costs. One young person summed up what the entire group voiced:

> *'I think if I did not have EMA I don't know what I would have done because I could not survive on £40 a week ... I wouldn't be able to afford to go to college ... at the same time I'm not going to be able to get a decent job because I haven't got any grades. So the EMA, that made a lot of difference.'*
>
> Sara, 18, LEA 1, sustainer

The exceptions to this were those attending hostel based courses college and living on the same premises where there were few, if any, educational or travel costs.

The weekly allowance also meant that homeless young people could concentrate on getting a qualification and did not have to worry about their financial situation. Other advantages voiced included the motivation provided by the attendance and achievement bonuses, and encouraging young people to aim for enhanced employment opportunities once they had gone through the college system. Young homeless people constantly referred to EMA as a good incentive to engage in post-16 education, despite the disincentive of late or stopped payments that had been experienced by some young people. Despite the evidence suggesting that these stopped or late payments could act as a significant de-motivator to sustained participation, these young people, including the early leavers, retained a sense of optimism about the potential of the scheme for others in situations similar to their own.

### 4.16 Limitations of EMA

The limitations of EMA were discussed in less detail than its advantages by the young people, who tended to concentrate on more positive features of the scheme. Those who did comment on any negative aspects of EMA suggested that the allowance should be extended for longer than three years and beyond the age of 19, particularly by those who hoped to continue into higher education but were not sure if they could afford to do so. Other limitations were the inflexibility of timesheets and the protracted time taken for bonuses to come through. Amongst the early leavers, there was some anxiety in cases where they had expected to receive their weekly allowance, budgeted for it in their weekly expenditure, only

to discover at the end of the week that they had not received the payment into their account, because of what they perceived as a failure in EMA administration to authorise their absences.

### 4.17 Personal Development

Young people's sense of their personal development varied, from experiencing an improved sense of independence, particularly among those moving away from residing in a hostel, to increased maturity developed through the more *'grown-up'* environment of college, and more positive experiences within their social circles, mainly made up of new college friends. For some of the homeless young people, increased stability in their lives led to them forming closer relations with their family. All of this had brought about a growing confidence in themselves, particularly as a result of staying on at college and having the prospect of a completed qualification.

### 4.18 Factors Influencing Participation, Retention and Achievement

#### 4.18.1 Participation and retention

The predominant theme arising from the accounts of young homeless people who were still in education during the second year was that they required less input from significant others or other support networks in sustaining participation in post-compulsory education. Instead, young people expressed a strong and independent desire to continue self-development through education and associated education with future self-sufficiency at a financial and emotional level. It was evident that, following the initial financial motivation of EMA, this group of young people felt that they were finally *'getting somewhere'* within education and EMA was helping them to continue on this path. However, it is important to remember that it proved impossible to trace a significant proportion of the sample and that their experiences in the intervening year may have been very different.

*Sustainers*

Sustainers described several patterns of decision-making in relation to remaining in education. For some it was a perceived 'return on investment', as they were still on the same course and, having got so far, continued to work for the qualification. For others it was a continued investment in the future, whereby choosing an advanced level of study enabled

them to improve their employment prospects. There was an exception where one young person was soon to leave college as he was about to become a parent, and was concerned about providing financial support for his partner and child. Although all were still receiving EMA, it was not mentioned as a factor in the decision-making process. Throughout this group, financial incentives were no longer pivotal in sustaining their return to post-compulsory education, as was the case last year; their priorities lay in the more lasting recognition of the value of education for future access to work.

*Early leavers*

Both young people in this group had been asked to leave their previous hostels, with the effect that they had to leave their courses. The new mother felt that education was no longer an option now she had a baby to look after, though she expressed the desire to return to education at some point in the future. The other early leaver's motivation was mainly related to financial circumstances and EMA had played a large role in his decision-making. He had chosen not to go back to college and instead, had looked for a job, because he was no longer receiving EMA. The reasons for his loss of EMA were difficult to explore, but he felt that he had been unfairly treated. Nevertheless, his description of his attendance suggested that he may have been failing to meet attendance criteria.

*Completers*

One young person had finished her course and was seeking employment to improve her finances. Although she had tried another course, she had come to the decision that this particular subject was not right for her and was costing too much without EMA. She felt she would need a part time job to help finance the course, but would not be able to juggle both work and study.

### 4.18.2 Measuring achievement

Achievement for the sample of young homeless people was generally defined as being able to sustain attendance and participation in education. Having found themselves in a vulnerable situation, the ability to be able to keep up with post-compulsory education, thanks to their EMA allowance, was regarded as the greatest possible achievement for them. For those who were parents, the ability to cope with the demands of child rearing and attending college was also construed as a personal success. Furthermore, achievement was acknowledged when

young people received certificates which recognised their abilities, and so increased their sense of personal worth.

### 4.19 Developing a Future – Changing Future Plans

Among young homeless people interviewed this year achievement in, and enjoyment of, college had led to continuation in education and, for most, this fuelled plans to enrol again next academic year. This was evidence of an increased attachment to learning. The young people who had sustained their education appeared a lot more focused on the future this year, and all discussed their long-term plans to begin a career or provide for their family. They regarded qualifications as their way into an enhanced career pathway.

> *'If I go straight into working in a shop, you don't get much money ... you only get like £4 an hour, and I couldn't live on that for the rest of my life ... So at least in college you get a chance to get better jobs and things.'*
>
> Faye, 19, LEA 1, sustainer

One early leaver shared these future plans stressing their future commitment to education in order to achieve these aims. This young parent argued that they were providing for their children in the future, as well as setting them a good example for when they, too, grew up.

### 4.20 Future Education

There was a major worry for those young people with plans to continue with their course or enter higher education that, without EMA, they would not be able to take this route because of their financial circumstances. They hoped that the EMA allowance would be extended beyond 19 years of age and allow them to continue their education, and that this would eventually enable them to start a career. One young person described this predicament as though they were being *'left in the lurch'* after three years of support, nobody wanted to help. They did not appear to know of any alternative support sources such as learning support or college access funds. Some young people suggested that the Benefits Agency should continue to support people in their vulnerable situation, stressing that they could not survive on Income Support alone and continue in education.

However, an increased attachment to learning has meant that some of these young people were beginning to look at cheaper alternatives within education such as training schemes or

night school classes. This was true for one of those who had dropped out of education, as well as amongst those who had sustained their engagement with courses. These options were not mentioned last year and it could be inferred that, having been exposed to education for a longer period of time and begin to enjoy it and see its merits, they hoped to continue.

There were areas of college life that young homeless people felt could be changed in order to help them. One of these was to do with support from teaching staff; those who felt they were not receiving enough advice and support from college tutors argued that neither they, or the EMA scheme, were taken seriously enough. Those who had problems with the content of the course (those young people in hostels), suggested that *'proper'* lessons, and not just *'a cooking day'*, should be encouraged. The young parent still in education suggested that, if the college were to allow her more flexible hours of attendance, she would be able to better improve punctuality.

# 5 FOCUS ON TEENAGE PARENTS: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

Within the EMA Vulnerable Pilots two initiatives were aimed at teenage parents: the Teenage Parent Pilot and the Childcare Pilot. Within these pilots teenage parents were defined as young people who have the primary childcare responsibility, which was usually determined by receipt of Child Benefit. Both initiatives operated within LEAs that were already piloting the main EMA provision.

The Teenage Parent Pilot operated in two LEAs and, in addition to their entitlement to EMA, teenage parents were also eligible to the flexibilities described in chapter one. These flexibilities included the right to claim EMA for three years, to study part-time and to undertake courses outside mainstream educational provision. Within teenage parent extensions to EMA provision, students who became pregnant during their course were given a backlog of their EMA payment in one lump sum if they returned to full-time education for at least a four week period following maternity leave absence.

Eligible students in the three LEAs where the Childcare Pilots were implemented were provided with an additional means-tested allowance to assist with up to 95 per cent of childcare costs[13]. A maximum of £100 per week for one child and £150 for two children was available. In extreme circumstances, where the place of childcare, the place of learning and the teenage parent's home were significantly distanced from one another, an additional transport allowance of up to £20 per week was available to help with transport costs.

This chapter is in two halves: the first focuses on implementation and administrative issues and draws on the experiences and views of key staff involved with the pilots. Roundtable discussions were held with the steering groups in each LEA which reflected on the progress of the pilots during the two years they were operating. These discussions were supplemented by interviews with key personnel who were involved in administering and delivering the pilots. Those interviewed included: LEA administrative staff, student support staff in schools and colleges, Careers/Connexions Services, Re-Integration and or Social Exclusion Teams,

[13] The childcare allowance was only payable for registered childcare providers, such as day nurseries, crèches and childminders, rather than, for example, to pay grandparents to care for children.

Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators, and staff from other key agencies including SureStart co-ordinators. It was not possible to arrange a roundtable discussion in LEA 5 and so the views and experiences of staff and young people from this LEA have not been included in this report. The remainder of the chapter then reports on the experiences of teenage parents who have participated in the pilots. Of the 15 teenage parents interviewed in the first year of the pilot, 14 were re-contacted and 12 agreed to be interviewed. The purposes of these interviews were to explore the experiences and perspectives of teenage parents in relation to the pilots, as well as their attitudes and experiences of post-16 education.

## 5.1 Implementation and Delivery Strategies

Table 5.1 shows the basic provision available to teenage parents within the four pilot areas. LEA 2, LEA 4 and LEA 5 were selected by DfES to implement the EMA Childcare Pilots. LEA 2 and LEA 3 were also chosen to implement the teenage parent extensions. As with the other EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas in which the EMA flexibilities were available to other groups of vulnerable young people, these two LEAs focused on teenage parents during the first year of the pilot. However, during the second year attempts had been made to include other groups of vulnerable young people including those who were homeless, ex-young offenders and those with no/low qualifications. As with LEA 1, the difficulties encountered by the LEAs in trying to broaden the scope of the pilots were related to the time and resources required to establish effective interagency links. Again as described in the previous chapter, these links were necessary to bring all relevant agencies together in such a way that would enable them to co-ordinate policy and to integrate practice. While some progress had been made, the two LEAs operating the teenage parent Vulnerable Pilots acknowledged that more remained to be done if all groups of vulnerable young people were to be included.

**Table 5.1 EMA Teenage Parent Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots, by LEA**

| | LEA 2 | LEA 3 | LEA 4 | LEA 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EMA Teenage Parent Pilot & Childcare Pilot | EMA Teenage Parent Pilot - | - Childcare Pilot | - Childcare Pilot |
| Standard EMA per week | £30 | £30 | £40 | £30 |
| Retention bonus per term | £50 | £80 | £50 | £50 |
| Achievement bonus | £50 | £140 | £50 | £50 |
| Flexibilities | ● | ● | - | - |
| Maternity leave allowance | ● | ● | - | - |
| Childcare fees | ● | - | ● | ● |

Only LEA 2 operated the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and the Childcare Pilot. Within this LEA teenage parents were entitled to receive standard EMA payments and bonuses, claim childcare allowance, teenage parent benefits and assistance with travel where distance between childcare provider and educational institution is great. As stated above, they were also entitled to the flexibilities available under the EMA vulnerable pilot.

Within each area, the LEA administered the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots and were steered by similar representatives across all four LEAs. This involved collaboration between the Careers/Connexions Service, local education providers, Youth Services, health representatives and those with specialist experience with teenage parents. As in the first year, the steering groups continued to operate and to provide a forum for the exchange of information on good practice and for discussing particular aspects of administration. Across all the LEAs there was little evidence of any suspicions between agencies as the pilots had become established and had demonstrated their worth in helping re-engage teenage parents in education.

In one LEA the steering group met less often than in the first year simply because there was not the same need to bring people together, as the local relationships between agencies

enabled the exchange of information around good practice and policies without the need for formal meetings. In the other two LEAs the steering groups continued as in the first year, providing a forum for discussion and a strategic overview of policies aimed at teenage parents. However, during the second year there appeared to be more activity outside the steering group meetings, as those involved with the teenage parents and Childcare Pilots worked with other initiatives also aimed at assisting teenage parents. Those responsible for delivering the initiatives had become established in their posts and had created effective networks with education and childcare providers, as well as other relevant local authority teams and organisations.

### 5.1.1 Staffing and resourcing

As in the first year, EMA teams based within Student Services section of the LEAs had lead responsibility for the administration of the pilots. The experience of all the LEAs involved in the EMA Teenage Pilots and the Childcare Pilots were that both were time consuming and expensive to administer effectively. A small team administered the pilot and their main responsibilities included maintaining EMA records, processing applications and initiating weekly payments. These teams responded to queries about applications and payments from individuals, as well as from schools and colleges. As in the first year, the LEAs differed in the computer software they used to process awards and to issue payments, with some preferring in-house systems that coped better with exchanging information between organisations within the LEA.

There appears to have been little difference in staffing levels between the first and second years of the pilots. However, some LEAs reported that the amount of funding they received from the DfES to administer EMA had been reduced, although that allocated for the teenage parent or Childcare Pilots remained at 5 per cent. The difficulty for LEAs was that five per cent did not cover the costs of administering the pilots and so they had to meet the shortfall in funding.

During the first year, LEA 2 had redistributed some of the monies they received for administering EMA to local schools and colleges in recognition of the increase in work arising from the pilots. This process had not continued in the second year so that some staff within schools and colleges were frustrated that they now had to meet the costs of this additional work. Within schools and colleges in the other LEAs, the administration of the

pilots had become firmly established and accepted by education providers. However, as reported in the previous chapter in relation to homelessness, there was some concern expressed about the widening of the definition of 'vulnerable'. Schools and colleges were able to cope with the relatively small numbers of teenage parents and to administer the flexibilities to which they were entitled. Some education providers, especially colleges who had higher numbers of vulnerable young people than schools, were concerned about the increase in administrative work as a result of the wider definition of vulnerability, since it now included students with no/low qualifications, those who were homeless, students with disabilities, as well as other groups of vulnerable young people.

LEA administrative teams continued to have good relationships with education providers. It was common practice for each education provider to have a named contact with whom to liase within the LEA. This appeared to work particularly well for teenage parents, where schools or colleges who were concerned about the attendance or progress of a particular teenage parent could contact the person responsible for running the pilot. As stated above, these staff were in regular contact with teenage parents and so could help to resolve difficulties over authorised absences and with meeting the terms and conditions of the Learning Agreements. As a result, administrative staff within educational institutions did not have to contact individual teenage parents to check whether absences were authorised. The problem that arose because a similar system was not in place for other groups of vulnerable young people and so education providers had to sort problems out themselves. This took time and resources.

Those responsible for the day-to-day running of the initiatives described the lengths to which they went to raise the profile of the pilots so that teenage parents, and those professionals working with them, were aware of the help available for this group of vulnerable young people.

### 5.1.2 The application process

Teenage parents and other vulnerable groups of young people continued to require considerable help and support to complete the application forms. Staff responsible for day-to-day delivery of the Teenage Parent and Childcare Pilots worked with young mothers to help them complete their EMA application forms and to organise childcare. In practice these staff put together individual packages consisting of education for the mother and childcare for

the young baby, as well as other help and support the teenage parent would need such as transport to and from college. It was the experience of these staff that such processes had to happen simultaneously, as young mothers were reluctant to make a commitment to return to education without knowing how their young child would be cared for.

Within the two LEAs which operated the vulnerable pilot, applications from vulnerable young people were fast-tracked whenever the status of the young person was known. While staff at the administrative team made every effort to ensure this happened, they had to rely on the young person disclosing this information, or on schools and colleges informing them that a young person met the vulnerable criteria. Within one of the LEAs that operated the childcare pilot, some staff suggested that applications for assistance with childcare costs should be sent out with the EMA packs, as it was thought that this would reassure teenage parents who were likely to worry about organising and affording childcare.

Staff in schools and colleges provided considerable support to vulnerable groups of young people although they often referred teenage parents to the named specialist worker because of the help needed to organise childcare, especially if provision was not available on site. Personal advisers from Connexions Services also provided help and support throughout the application process and it was hoped, as this service became more established, it could provide the intensive support teenage parents and other vulnerable students required.

Teenage parents from across all the LEAs tended to apply to colleges rather than schools. As a result, many schools reported relatively little additional work in relation to teenage parents applying for EMA. As in LEA 1, teenage parents applied for courses throughout the year. The two LEAs which operated the EMA Vulnerable Pilot were better able to cope with this type of demand because of the flexibilities relating to courses and studying outside mainstream provision. Respondents stated that many young mothers who had given birth during the summer were not ready to return to education at the start of the autumn term. They did not have the time nor energy to complete application forms and to sort out courses, as well as childcare, during the first weeks of motherhood. Therefore, the ability to apply to courses starting later in the academic year was seen to be instrumental in encouraging teenage parents back into education.

All staff reported that the application forms remained long and difficult to complete. The difficulties that young people had experienced during the first year in collecting the supporting documentation continued and, while the changes to the absent parent rule were acknowledged, it remained a source of complaint. Some staff within colleges questioned the nature of the income data required and suggested that it would be easier for all involved if current financial circumstances could be used. In some LEAs there was considerable discussion about delays in processing application forms. Staff within the EMA administration teams were adamant that these resulted from outstanding queries not being resolved, such as missing information, rather than difficulties arising from processing procedures. The number of outstanding queries and level of missing information were seen to emphasise the need for adequate support and help for students to complete forms, especially if they were vulnerable students who could not rely on help from family members.

All vulnerable students, including teenage parents, had to complete a Learning Agreement. The LEAs operating the vulnerable pilot had greater flexibility to organise tailored education packages for the teenage parents and, as a result, Learning Agreements were generally more individualised. LEAs did not report any specific difficulties in relation to the Learning Agreements. As in LEA 1, they were seen to be useful as they could encourage young people to achieve and behave in an acceptable way. A concern expressed by one respondent was that one tutor was using the Learning Agreement more as a 'stick than a carrot', threatening to stop the EMA award without exploring the reasons for the unacceptable behaviour which was, in this instance, falling asleep in class. When this issue was discussed with the tutor and the staff responsible for the day-to-day running of the pilot, the tutor accepted that, whilst it was possible to stop an EMA payment for this behaviour, it was inappropriate to do so without exploring the reasons for the behaviour. EMA staff suggested that the Learning Agreement was better used as the beginning of a discussion about any problems the student was experiencing, and that only after this should any decision to stop the payment be made.

### 5.2 Identifying Vulnerable Students and Teenage Parents

The two LEAs operating the Vulnerable Pilots found it difficult to identify vulnerable students, although respondents found that this was easier for some groups of vulnerable young people. For example, students who had special educational needs and those with no/low qualifications were easier to identify than other groups of vulnerable young people,

especially those who were no longer part of the educational system. With respect to teenage parents, respondents in all the LEAs experienced the greatest difficulty in identifying those who had left school and had a baby. Those teenage parents who were aged less than 16 years generally returned to education via Mother and Baby Units, but girls who were 16 years old when they had their child were not required to return to school or college and, as a result, many dropped out of education and out of sight. The only way to identify these young women was through specialist workers such as health visitors, midwives, teenage pregnancy co-ordinators, and other project workers, such as those involved in SureStart, or family planning workers. This demonstrated the need for established links and effective working practices with other agencies and organisations, as it was not possible for one person to identify all the teenage parents across the LEA who were not in education without considerable help from other professionals.

In the two vulnerable pilot areas identifying eligible students also had resources implications as the LEA received a higher administration rate from the DfES if students were vulnerable. During the second year, one LEA paid students their entitlement EMA during the first term while they waited for confirmation of whether students were vulnerable under the no/low qualifications criteria. A substantial number of students were found subsequently to meet these criteria and the LEA felt that *'there is a term that we are doing ourselves out of an extra admin fee.'*

Across the pilot areas, the LEAs did not make education providers aware of who was classed as a vulnerable student. EMA co-ordinators in schools and colleges became aware of the vulnerability of some students who approached them for assistance in completing the application form. In some institutions, it was considered important to pass this information on to teaching staff in order to ensure that young people received their entitlements to the various flexibilities. In other institutions, the decision was taken not to disclose details of vulnerability to teaching staff as this was not regarded as critical to the operation of the pilot and the information was regarded as confidential.

Education providers and other key agencies were expected to alert the LEA of any vulnerable applicants because it was felt that they were well-placed to identify a range of vulnerable students. In an attempt to broaden the focus of the Vulnerable Pilots, LEAs were in the process of trawling through EMA student records to ascertain whether any of these students

were eligible for inclusion in the EMA Vulnerable Pilot. As far as possible, vulnerable students were identified from personal details such as address details and type of course, or other information which could signify to the LEA various vulnerabilities such as homeless status, disability or special educational needs. This broader approach contrasted to that adopted in the first year, where each LEA reported a strong focus on teenage parents.

Many LEA staff acknowledged that it had taken them time to shift from concentrating on teenage parents to a broader inclusion of other vulnerable young people. This was attributed in part to a perceived lack of clarity in the original guidelines, particularly around students with no or low qualifications. These difficulties were compounded by a lack of experience and expertise in working with hard to reach groups and relevant agencies. Furthermore, LEA staff and some key agencies reported that the low key nature of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots meant that the importance of identifying young people as vulnerable was not always understood.

As in the first year, publicity for both the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and the Childcare Pilots remained low-key due to the sensitive nature of the groups being targeted. Leaflets outlining the help and support available to teenage parents were displayed in doctors' surgeries, health clinics, community centres and in other locations were teenage parents were likely to attend. Work continued with other professionals from health, social and education backgrounds to inform them of the pilots and how they could help vulnerable young people. The two LEAs operating the Vulnerable Pilots tried to widen the scope of the project by raising awareness amongst relevant professionals, but all agreed that they had not succeeded because they had not had the time and resources necessary to match their efforts for teenage parents.

It was common practice for staff from the LEA to visit Year 11 students and distribute literature outlining the range of financial and welfare support available to them should they wish to participate in post-16 education. However, although LEA staff referred to the EMA standard provision, direct references were not made to the EMA Vulnerable Pilot or to the Childcare Pilot.

In some LEAs teenage parents who had been part of the vulnerable or Childcare Pilots were used as peer workers and attended groups of teenage parents to tell them about the pilots and to discuss issues relating to returning to education. The use of peer supporters was seen as

important as many teenage parents had less than positive experiences of education, as indicated in Chapter 2. Many had poor attendance and achievement records and, therefore, needed to be convinced that returning to education was practical, worthwhile and possible. Talking to other teenage parents who had benefited from the pilots was seen as positive.

### 5.3 Advice and Guidance for Eligible Young People

Continued advice and guidance for all eligible young people was seen as vital by all involved in the pilots. Vulnerable young people, including teenage parents, needed ongoing help and support if they were to return to education. Teenage parents, in particular, needed to be assured that their young child would be properly looked after while they were studying. As a result, the decision to return to education was seldom a straightforward one, or one that could be made quickly as so many other things, including childcare and transport, had to be arranged.

The type of help and support provided by those running the pilots, as well as by other staff such as Teenage Parent and Pregnancy Coordinators and Personal Advisers, included practical information about courses, financial assistance with childcare, and ensuring that teenage parents had the emotional support and confidence to explore childcare options and to begin to think about returning to education. To deliver this level of support, staff visited teenage parents at home, accompanied them to visit childcare providers, to their first day of college, and were available to help resolve any problems over childcare, transport or course requirements. It was the opinion of those involved in the pilots that this level of support was necessary if teenage parents were successfully to return to, and, remain in education.

The advice and guidance offered to applicants in the scheme was wide-ranging. The importance of confidence building and self-esteem development were commonly articulated as key factors in supporting vulnerable young people and preparing them for participation in post-16 education. Fragmented education histories, and often educational failure, were seen to be common experiences that undermined the self-esteem of many teenage parents. Also, as described earlier EMA administrative teams, education providers and other key agencies often assisted vulnerable young people and their families with the practicalities of completing the application form.

Within the two EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas those responsible for running the pilots spent considerable time ensuring that courses were suitable and in developing learning packages for teenage parents. Finding courses and childcare that 'matched up' was often challenging, especially in rural areas where availability was complicated by limited public transport.

LEA staff, education providers and key agencies commented that advice and guidance for young people and their families did not terminate once the application procedure was complete. For some applicants, EMA and education-related difficulties were encountered after application. Careers services, in particular, reported involvement in advocacy on behalf of vulnerable young people and parents who wanted to appeal against stopped payments but who did not have the skills nor confidence to do so alone.

### 5.4 Role of Key Agencies

The experience of the first year of the pilots demonstrated the importance of good working relationships with other agencies and organisations involved in helping vulnerable young people. During the first year good links had been established with childcare and Early Years Teams, colleges and those working with teenage parents. As in the homeless pilot area, the difficulty in the second year was creating similar links with those organisations who supported other groups of vulnerable young people. Across the LEAs respondents were aware of the importance of these links, the difficulty was how to establish and maintain them. During the second year, the interagency links to deliver effectively the aims of the pilots to other vulnerable groups were still in their infancy and, therefore, had limited success.

Two of the main roles of key agencies were seen to be identifying vulnerable young people and teenage parents, and helping to support and maintain them in education. In all the LEAs the first year of the pilots had involved a steep learning curve in understanding and addressing the needs of teenage parents. During the second year the links with key agencies had been consolidated and enhanced to that working practices were made more effective. In one LEA the aim was to ensure that teenage parents had one point of contact and that one member of staff would help resolve education, childcare and transport difficulties so that the system appeared seamless to the young parent.

### 5.4.1 Role of education providers

Education providers were supportive of the pilots as they recognised that vulnerable students, including teenage parents, needed additional help and support if they were to engage successfully in post-compulsory education. Educational institutions within the vulnerable pilot areas expressed more concern about the volume of additional work that resulted from implementing the flexibilities for all vulnerable students. As in LEA 1, the particular concern was around those with no/low qualifications as this group could be relatively large, especially within colleges.

The role of education providers in relation to teenage parents did not appear particularly problematic, mainly because of the relatively small numbers who participated in the pilots. Providing help and support to these young people came under the remit of student welfare services within larger colleges and they had good links with the EMA teams, as well as with specialist workers. Returning attendance and Learning Agreement information to the EMA administrative teams for teenage parents was subsumed within the general EMA returns and was not identified as a problem. However, education providers did encounter difficulties in relation to verifying authorised absences. Those institutions with access to teenage pregnancy and other support workers reported fewest difficulties, as these staff would check on the reason for the absence and resolve any problems. With respect to teenage parents, the flow of information between education providers, EMA administrative teams and specialists workers improved during the second year and enhanced the running of the pilots.

In the vulnerable pilot areas there was some concern expressed by educational institutions about the volume of additional work that would arise from administering these pilots. Although these institutions already administered EMA, they were concerned about the level of additional support required for vulnerable students. As in LEA 1, they were also concerned that much of the onus for identifying vulnerable young people rested with them instead of with the EMA administrative teams. While institutions were keen to help, many felt that they did not have the necessary systems to enable them to supply the level and detail of information required.

Schools and colleges collected attendance information manually; timesheets for EMA and the Vulnerable Pilots were signed by tutors and returned to those administering the pilots. Delays in payments often arose because timesheets were incomplete as students forgot to

have the sheet signed. Resolving the reasons for these delays took time, and the idea of a similar two-week reporting period, as operated in LEA 1, appealed to most institutions.

As the pilots became more established within the LEAs and parents and students became more familiar with how they operated, staff in schools and colleges reported that occasionally decisions to stop payments were disputed. In some instances parents turned up at educational institutions and insisted that the decision to stop the EMA payment was overturned, as they knew that discretion to authorise weekly payments rested with an individual institution. Respondents found such aggressive incidents difficult to deal with and suggested that additional training was necessary for staff.

Education providers had a limited role in arranging and/or providing childcare. Some larger colleges had onsite crèche facilities which were a popular option amongst teenage parents. However, in most instances childcare and transport provision was left to specialist workers.

An issue raised during the interviews conducted during the second year was the role and use of Learning Support Funds which were administered by colleges. Staff involved in the day-to-day running of the pilots were concerned with what would happen to teenage parents once the pilots finished. Considerable time and effort had been required to set-up childcare places and other support systems required by teenage parents, and those involved thought that education providers were unaware of the amount of money and other support needed. The specific concern was that Learning and Support Funds were cash limited, as opposed to EMA and childcare awards that were drawn down for eligible students. Replacing this by a cash limited fund meant that money would inevitably have to be rationed, and the concern amongst respondents was that assistance would be targeted on students who had better educational records than teenage parents.

### 5.4.2 Specialist key agencies

As in the first year, specialist agencies played a key role in identifying vulnerable students, in supporting them through the application process as well as throughout their courses. These staff included Personal Advisers, Teenage Pregnancy Workers, SureStart employees, and members of Early Years and Childcare Teams. Some of these workers had direct responsibility for the pilots while others worked closely with the pilots.

In one LEA, the Teenage Parent Co-ordinator managed a team of workers who identified, advised and supported teenage parents. The Teenage Parent Co-ordinator raised awareness of the pilot amongst workers in the health sector through mailings and presentations. Key Workers had close contact with their vulnerable client group and had a keen sense of their current needs. They were also able to plan learning packages to meet individual needs and, as stated above, also had a key role in practical matters such as organising transport, education and childcare for young people. Although there was recognition of the primary vulnerability of young people, it was also recognised that many had multiple vulnerabilities as with the homeless pilot. These often include low self-esteem, unstable living conditions and lack of qualifications. Consequently, the intense nature of support and guidance for vulnerable young people was considered integral to the role of key workers; equally as important as helping vulnerable young people to complete the application form.

### 5.4.3 Connexions

It was hoped that, once Connexions Personal Advisers were better established, they would be able to provide support and assistance to teenage parents and other groups of vulnerable young people applying for EMA. As the Connexions Service was still new, it remained to be seen how effective it would be. Within one LEA Connexions staff continued to refer teenage parents to those running the EMA pilot, as these staff were known to have the expertise and links to childcare provision.

However, Connexions Personal Advisers also supported vulnerable young people in some areas, through assisting them to complete the application form and helping them to respond to any difficulties encountered during the application process. In one LEA, Connexions planned to enhance the Personal Adviser service through the introduction of Universal Advisers based in local centres, and Inclusion Advisers who were to be based in schools and colleges. The Adviser roles aim to target young people in general and vulnerable groups of young people in particular.

> *'It seems to work well where there are areas of social deprivation, which we have again here, a lot of young people in vulnerable groups. So the universal Personal Advisers will be in the team with Careers ... The Inclusion Advisers [have] an interest in financial support, what students are entitled to, their rights and responsibilities, the Personal Advisers for Inclusion will be working from this college'.*

It was planned that the EMA Co-ordinator would pass on information of poor attendance to the Connexions Service who would then track students. The Inclusion Adviser would offer advice and guidance, outline all options for financial support and provide or facilitate counselling. It was envisaged that Connexions would also play a positive role in providing help and support regarding new destinations for vulnerable students who found that education was not an appropriate route for them.

As in LEA 1, Careers/Connexions data was used in all three LEAs to track vulnerable young people and other EMA recipients, thereby identifying those who had, or were becoming, disengaged from education. Respondents also commented that, as the Connexions Service was to have a key role in providing young people with streamlined access to support between the ages of 14 to 19, this should improve the support available and prevent young people from fall through existing gaps in provision.

### 5.5 Perceptions of the Pilots

In general, both the vulnerable and Childcare Pilots were viewed positively across the LEAs. Most of the discussions about the benefits of the pilots centred around the help they afforded teenage parents, rather than other groups of vulnerable students. However, it was recognised that the flexibilities available under the EMA Vulnerable Pilot would help all vulnerable students to return to, and remain in, education.

Those who participated in the roundtable discussions and the interviews mentioned the level of support and, therefore, resources needed to re-engage teenage parents in education. They stressed that resolving educational issues was only one aspect to overcoming the barriers to education. Other factors had to be addressed including childcare provision, poor educational histories, negative experiences of school and transport, as well as issues relating to self-confidence. Despite the high level of input required, the majority of those who participated in the discussions were very positive about the pilots and wanted them to continue. There was, however, one dissenting voice who questioned the pilots from the perspective of value for money. This person wanted to know whether teenage parents did actually continue in education or move on into jobs. Whilst this person acknowledged that the pilots were beneficial to teenage parents as well as their children, there was concern about the costs incurred in delivering the support required.

A further benefit of the Vulnerable Pilots was seen to be the way in which it promoted interagency collaboration. The nature of the pilots meant that LEAs did not necessarily have the expertise and experience in-house, and so had to co-opt other professionals to draw on their experience.

> *'I think what it has made us do here… is to work in partnership and I know a lot of people say partnership working, whatever, and sometimes I know it has been lip service and you just sit round a table and whatever. But I think really, and I genuinely believe this, that in [name of LEA] with the vulnerable pilot, you have to work in partnership with these people because that is where these vulnerable people are coming from. We don't know as an LEA, we haven't the knowledge or we don't know where these people are, to help them or give them help. We have to depend on our partners, like referring people, and also it works both ways. We can refer young people to them and especially with the teenage parents, …because no one was there really for these people. Whereas now you have SureStart Plus, you have got the Reintegration Team, you have us that can help them with college and hopefully the PAs will be more involved. You need that partnership to feed into us so we can help them. On the whole it has worked. We have one or two areas where we are really homing in on this year and that is Youth Offending Team and the homeless and maybe the excluded group, but for the others we are happy how it is going. I think as it has gone on and people get to know what we are doing I think it has really improved.'*

EMA and the pilots were also seen to have changed attitudes towards education, so that now young people and their families who had very little, if any, experience of post-compulsory education were staying on. This was partly in response to the lack of employment opportunities, but also because of EMA and the opportunities it offers young people. The fact that young people could remain in education and still bring home some money had *'changed the culture,'* so that attending college now had a status similar to work.

> *'The amount of times parents have said, we don't go to college in our family, no one has ever gone to college, we are not clever enough and they really thought that people who go to college are brainy. And now it is just a progression now, if they go to college they expect this money. … I really do think that people are thinking maybe college is a way of going forward and they are bringing some money in and being a bit more independent and I think it just gives them a chance of doing something else rather than going down the "Work without Training" route, which in this area that is what people did. So we are pleased with how it has gone.'*

### 5.5.1 Awareness

During the second year considerable progress had been made by the vulnerable and Childcare Pilots in terms of raising awareness amongst professionals about the type of help available. However, in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots it was recognised that further work was necessary to

ensure that all professionals working with vulnerable groups other than teenage parents were aware of the help available to their client groups.

Effective links had been made with health, community and social professionals who came in contact with teenage parents so that they were able to inform the young women about the pilots, or to refer them to the schemes. The degree of contact with health and community workers varied between the pilot areas as this usually built on existing working practices. Those LEAs which did not have a history of collaboration were still establishing links with other agencies, although progress had been made from the first year.

Concern was also expressed by a number of agencies that many schools were still relatively unaware of the Vulnerable Pilots, mainly because most vulnerable young people seemed to prefer to attend college or non-mainstream provision. Also colleges were seen to be more aware of the flexibilities of the pilot than schools as they were more likely to have provisions in place to support teenage parents, such as crèche facilities and ring-fenced Access Funds.

Schools and colleges were seen to have the greatest awareness of vulnerable young people with disabilities and special educational needs, as they had statutory duties in relation these students. By contrast, education providers had few clear indicators of other vulnerabilities and so these went undetected, unless the student chose to divulge such information.

### 5.5.2 Value of flexibilities and childcare support

All those involved with the pilots recognised the importance of the EMA flexibilities and of the childcare support and stated that they played a key role in helping teenage parents and other vulnerable young people return to, and remain in, education. Those LEAs in which the Vulnerable Pilots operated appreciated the flexibilities as they enabled them to be more responsive to local needs.

> *'If we've identified groups in the community that we think need some support, EMA will come out and look at how we can start that provision.'*

The particular flexibility of the Vulnerable Pilots that was seen to be especially important was the entitlement to a third year of EMA. As in LEA 1, this extra year gave vulnerable students time to catch up and meant that they usually completed courses and gained qualifications. It was felt that this would not have been possible without the additional funding. The ability to

study in non-mainstream settings encouraged some young people who were not ready to return to college to participate in education. As in LEA 1, re-engaging in education was recognised to be an incremental process and had to progress at a pace, and in a setting, with which the vulnerable young person was comfortable. Finally, the flexibilities were seen to promote increased understanding from colleges and schools towards vulnerable young people. Those involved with the pilots have asked schools and colleges to:

> '*be a little bit more flexible with these[vulnerable students] because we need to do that. If they are homeless and they don't turn in, we just need them to sit down and think about it a bit more. So we are hoping that the colleges are not being as hard with these and that we can work together on that to give them a bit more of a chance and a bit more leeway. And we feel that is coming through now.'*

Childcare provision was considered essential if teenage parents were to return to post-16 education. The LEA who did not have separate funds for childcare provision from the pilots used other local monies to fund provision. This made the task of arranging childcare more time consuming, as this process involved negotiating with other fund holders who might be working to different targets.

### 5.5.3 Limitations of the vulnerable and Childcare Pilots

The experience of the second year of the pilots demonstrated that these schemes were able to deliver effective help and support to teenage parents. As stated above, the two LEAs operating the Vulnerable Pilots encountered difficulties in trying to deliver similar help and support to other groups of vulnerable young people. These were mainly the result of the widening of the definition of vulnerable young people after initial efforts had concentrated on teenage parents. The second year of the pilots saw improved working relationships with other organisations. As stated above, the difficulty for those involved with running the pilots was the amount of time required to establish these relationships. Given this situation, it was only during the second year of the pilots that they had been able to start to deliver help to all groups of vulnerable young people. LEAs operating the Childcare Pilots did not have the flexibilities that would have enabled them to put together creative and tailored learning packages for teenage parents. Some of the staff interviewed in these areas would welcome the opportunities that the EMA flexibilities would bring.

Other limitations of the pilots related to their geographical location and to the level of current educational provision. The experience of the second year of the pilots confirmed that trying

to deliver effective help and support to vulnerable young people in rural areas posed particular problems, including limited mainstream educational provision and a lack of non-mainstream alternatives. A limited transport infrastructure meant that many vulnerable young people did not have the range of educational options available to them that would meet their needs. Even if these vulnerable young people were able to travel for between one and two hours, transport and other costs were thought to be prohibitive. These difficulties were experienced by all vulnerable young people, but teenage parents had the additional difficulty of limited childcare provision. To overcome the lack of suitable provision required even greater input from those running the pilots to put together appropriate learning and support packages. Within rural settings, interagency links were vital if new initiatives were to be developed that would fill some of the gaps in non-mainstream provision.

Some limitations identified by respondents related specifically to teenage parents and mostly centred around childcare issues. The payment of childcare was always raised as an issue in the interviews because although the Childcare Pilots paid for 95 per cent of childcare costs, in some areas a number of teenage parents struggled to find the other five per cent, and occasionally went into debt because of this shortfall. Respondents stressed that there were usually good reasons for this. For example, the teenage parent had to move accommodation, or the child was ill and had to attend hospital appointments. In response to this need, one LEA used other funds to meet the shortfall and funded childcare provision entirely. This was seen to have positive benefits for all involved: the teenage parents did not incur debts and the childcare providers did not experience problems with payments, which had in the past made them reluctant to accept some teenage parents from the pilots.

The payment of retainers during holiday periods in order to secure a childcare place also caused problems. EMA awards did not continue during the holidays and this created difficulties for teenage parents who either had to pay all, or a percentage, of the fee to retain the place which caused teenage parents stress and anxiety. Those involved in organising childcare provision were aware of the importance of continuity of care for the baby, but also for the peace of mind of the teenage parent. Failure to pay the retainer and the loss of a childcare place could, and did, increase the likelihood that some teenage parents would drop out of education. This was regarded as a waste because of the considerable effort that had gone into securing childcare provision and in helping the teenage parent to return to

education. In response, one LEA paid small retainers to childcare providers to ensure continuity of provision and this had been welcomed by all involved in the pilots.

There was a need for education provision which began throughout the academic year, as teenage parents who had given birth during the summer were unlikely to be ready to return to education during the early weeks of parenthood. Indeed, respondents highlighted the contradictions in some of the current parenting advice from Government and other professional organisations which advocated breast feeding and stressed the importance of mother and baby bonding during the first weeks of life. It was recognised that teenage parents in compulsory education returned to education usually after the first couple of months, but respondents pointed out that this was because they attended Mother and Baby Units where they were able to be with their child. This type of provision was seldom available for teenage parents in post-compulsory education. For older teenage parents, education and childcare provision were often on different sites. Therefore, courses that started at different times throughout the year were seen to be vital if teenage parents were to return to education.

As in the first year, respondents stressed that the experience of the pilot during the second year reinforced their professional opinions that the age limit of the vulnerable and Childcare Pilots should be extended, especially for teenage parents because of the time some teenage parents took to adjust to parenthood before they were ready to return to education.

### 5.6 Defining Success

Overall the vulnerable and Childcare Pilots were regarded as being successful in that they provided the necessary help and support to enable vulnerable young people to participate in education. LEA administrators, education providers and key agencies stressed that success should not be judged solely in terms of the numbers of young people completing courses. Instead, a broader definition of success was required that encompassed and reflected the barriers that vulnerable young people, including teenage parents, had to overcome if they were to re-engage in post-compulsory education. Key amongst these were confidence building, learning and coping with education alongside parenting, and addressing other dominant personal issues. Organising lives effectively to deal with sensitive and taxing personal issues was regarded as a success in itself. The benefits of the pilots were seen to

extend beyond the teenage parent to their child, as it was felt that if the mother returned to education they increased their chances of finding a job or going on to higher education which, in turn, might improve the life-chances of the child.

## 5.7 Revisiting Participants One Year On

This section examines the outcomes, experiences and effects of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots from the perspectives of teenage parents who participated in the pilots. As stated above, the purposes of these interviews were to explore the experiences and perspectives of teenage parents in relation to the pilots, as well as their attitudes and experiences of post-16 education.

The findings have been divided into two groups based on the educational outcomes of the teenage parents; sustainers and early leavers. Sustainers were teenage parents who were still receiving EMA and participating in post-compulsory education (either studying for the same course as last year, or on a new course). Early leavers were those teenage parents who had left education and withdrawn from EMA before completing their course.

Within the group of early leavers there is a subgroup of teenage parents who subsequently returned to education and enrolled on a different course ('returners'). This sub-group of young people will be examined where their experience was distinct from the early leavers and sustainers. Otherwise they are included in the discussion of sustainers.

A further group should be the 'completers' – those young parents who had finished their courses and were no longer in education. The only young parent to fit this description was in a unique situation as she had left employment (after completing her course) because of the discovery of her child's disability. At the time of interview the extent and permanency of the disability was unknown, and until that was clearer the young parent did not know what her future would entail. She is included among the early leavers group for the purposes of analysis, as she was not participating in any employment, education or training at the time of interview and had most in common with this group.

### 5.7.1 Tracing participants

At the time of the first interview teenage parents were asked to give details of a contact person in order to assist in tracing them for the second year of the study. The contacts were individuals who the teenage parents anticipated they would be in touch with a year later. Letters were sent to the young mothers at the same address as the previous year and to each of the contact people. It was possible to trace 14 of the 15 teenage parents and 12 attended an interview.

**Table 5.2 Details of each Sample in the First and Second Year, Teenage Parents**

| TEENAGE PARENTS | |
|---|---|
| **Year 1 (2000/01)** | **Year 2 (2001/02)** |
| **Participants**<br>15 | **Participants**<br>12 |
| **Gender**<br>15 young women | **Gender**<br>12 young women |
| **Ages**<br>1 aged 16<br>6 aged 17<br>8 aged 18 | **Ages**<br>1 aged 17<br>5 aged 18<br>6 aged 19 |
| **Living arrangements**<br>5 in housing association accommodation<br>4 in privately rented /owned accommodation with partners<br>3 in mother and baby hostels<br>3 in family home with parent(s) | **Living arrangements**<br>6 in housing association accommodation<br>2 in housing association accommodation with partners<br>1 in privately rented accommodation alone<br>1 in mother and baby hostel<br>2 in family home with parent/s |
| **Current activity**<br>1 early leaver<br>2 studying for National Diploma<br>6 studying towards GNVQs, Level One, Level Two, intermediate and advanced levels<br>2 studying childcare and parenting<br>2 studying catering (qualification unclear) with basic skills English and Maths<br>1 on range of adult learning courses<br>1 on Access course | **Current activity**<br>**Early leavers**<br>3 not in education, employment or training[14]<br>1 employed p/t<br>**Completers**<br>1 unemployed (not actively seeking work, at time of interview)<br>**Sustainers**<br>3 studying towards GNVQ levels 1, 2 & 3<br>2 studying towards BTEC National Diplomas - level 2<br>**Returners** [15]<br>1 studying GNVQ level 2<br>1 studying for combination of Open Learning courses & GCSE |
| **EMA and Childcare receipt**<br>10 receiving full EMA weekly allowance<br><br>6 receiving funding from Childcare Pilots<br>5 receiving transport costs<br><br>11 in first year of EMA receipt<br>4 in second year of EMA receipt | **EMA receipt**<br>**7 receiving full EMA weekly allowance**<br><br>3 receiving funding from Childcare Pilots<br>3 receiving transport costs<br><br>5 in second year of EMA receipt<br>2 in third year of EMA receipt |

[14] One of these young mothers is the early leaver from year 1 of the research study at the time of interviews with young people.

[15] These teenage parents left education after 1st year interviews, during the same academic year and returned to education at the beginning of the academic year 2001-2002.

## 5.8 Living, Financial Situation and Current Activity

*Sustainers*

The living arrangements of this group of teenage parents varied, with some remaining in the same accommodation and others having changed address and circumstances. Those living in their family home had continued to do so. Young mothers who were living in housing association accommodation last year were still doing so this year, although they may have changed address to other housing association properties, either because of difficulties with neighbours, or because they were offered improved accommodation. Other changes within this group included a move from living with a partner to living alone, either as a result of the breakdown of the relationship, or where the relationship had been in difficulties and had since improved by living separately, and from a hostel to a privately rented flat. In this case the hostel had been a source of support for the young person when her child had been born, but she had to wait until the age of eighteen to secure independent housing through social services.

The financial situation of this group remained largely unchanged from the first year in terms of the level and sources of income. In some cases, there had been increases in income as fathers began to contribute financially through informal or formal CSA arrangements. Other new sources of income included a part-time job and the receipt of Disabled Living Allowance (in separate cases). Typically, this group was in receipt of their EMA allowance, Income Support, and Child Benefit, as well as receiving financial help from partners/fathers in some areas. These mothers had either continued their participation in last year's course or progressed to a more advanced course, or in the case of the returners had re-entered education to participate in an entirely different course.

*Early Leavers*

Within this group there was a range of stability and change within the young mothers' current situations. Those living in housing association accommodation last year were still living in housing association accommodation alone or with a new partner. In one instance the young person was resident in a mother and baby hostel and had been for the last year. In another case, a young mother was still living with the father of the child, but had moved area and was now in housing association accommodation, rather than the privately rented flat of last year.

Within this group there had been changes in the sources of income, with the majority having experienced a drop in income as they were no longer in receipt of EMA. Where income had decreased in comparison to last year, sources of income were Income Support, Child Benefit and, in one instance, financial support from the father of the child. In one case a source of income was wages from the young woman's part time work, although this still represented a drop in income in comparison with last year. Where the financial situation of the young mother had improved compared to last year, additional sources of income were either Incapacity Benefit, or increased funding from the father of the child. One young parent had also had another child and so was receiving increased Child Benefit, as well as contributions from the younger child's father.

### 5.9 Support Networks

There was a recognition on the part of some teenage mothers in the study that, without the support of families or partners, they would not have remained in education, or have been able to cope with staying in college. This support largely took the form of help with the provision of childcare outside of college times, either on an ad hoc or regular basis. This help allowed the teenage parent to complete college work at home, helped with travel to childcare, or gave the young mother an important rest or personal time.

> *'The support of me family's the most important thing keeping me there – they're there loads, I mean if it wasn't for me mum I'd have to take Claire to school and then go to college that just mean like me missing an hour and then to get on the bus and then I'd have to come home an hour early to get her ...'*
>
> Katherine, 19, LEA 3, sustainer

*Sustainers*

A theme common among the accounts of young mothers staying in education or returning to it this year was that support in their personal lives from friends and family members had remained very stable or had increased. However, the involvement of outside agencies had lessened, including only an after-care social worker and a counsellor, because children were now too old to require a health visitor, or because young parents had moved away from supported accommodation to independent living. Where families had been important in the support systems of young mothers last year, they remained as a central source of support this year, or in some cases had increased their level of support. This was particularly the case where families had initially reacted negatively to the young person becoming a parent. In

addition to family support, there were examples of peer networks broadening through making friends while at college, and this support was often described as adding a particularly rich dimension to the life of the young person. Fathers of the child and their families, as well as the young person's own family, often provided welcome support and regular breaks by providing childcare for set periods or when required by the young person. This stability or increase in support was generally recognised as beneficial by the young mother.

> *'If I said to her tomorrow 'mum I am going down library for an hour do you mind watching Leanne?', my mum is all for me to get me work done and she loves Leanne to pieces and she treats her as one of her own anyway… So I know that I haven't got a problem with things like that, but I know that I am lucky in that way 'cause I've always had my mum there behind me, always – it helps a lot.'*
>
> Stacey, 19, LEA 4

It was reported that in some cases course tutors were sympathetic to the difficulties faced by the teenage parents and offered flexibility around deadlines and, in one case, allowed time off to complete coursework. Some members of staff were seen to be less rigid than others in signing EMA timesheets, and on occasion would overlook a lack of punctuality. In these situations, teenage parents expressed relief that their EMA allowance had not been stopped, as this would have added to their difficulties.

A minority of teenage parents reported that they lacked adequate support. This was because the parent of one teenage mother had left the area, and another young person had split up with their partner.

*Early Leavers*

The early leavers varied in the amount of support they were receiving compared with the first year. Factors accounting for increased support were sharing parenting responsibilities with a partner who had moved in with the young person over the year, or receiving more support from their families than last year. In another case, support surrounding the young mother had decreased because the young mother had moved away from her family and friends and, despite receiving support from her partner and partner's family, described herself as feeling more alone than last year. For another young mother the support received from her own family had decreased, as they perceived she needed less help as the child grew older, and her partner of last year had been sent to prison.

Overall the presence of outside agencies was lower this year for this group, for the same reasons as for the sustainers. Compared to the group of young mothers who had remained in education, peer groups and friends provided less support for early leavers. In addition, leaving college had resulted in the loss of some sources of support, such as tutors or careers advisers. For those without alternative support, leaving college reduced the overall level of support they were receiving.

## 5.10 Experience of Post-Compulsory Education

### 5.10.1 Positive experiences of education

For many young mothers in this study, peer relationships were an important part of their educational experience. Positive experiences of this nature were reported to have reduced isolation at college, enhanced social life outside of college and contributed to a feeling that the young person was gaining something back which they felt had been lost in becoming a parent at such an early age. Sally explained the impact of this aspect on her.

> 'I can have a good gossip and my childhood comes back a little bit. Cos I remember doing the stuff that they do now and thinking 'Oh I wish I was doing that again really' and do it now a little bit ….Just hanging round on the streets and going to your mate's house and parties and clubs. Just teenager things. The boring stuff that nobody understands why we do it.'
>
> Sally, 17, LEA 3, returner

Where staff at educational institutions had been supportive, this was reflected positively in teenage parents accounts of their experiences of education. On reflection they felt that this support had been most needed during their first year in post compulsory education, and, although appreciated, was not as necessary during the second year as young parents were more experienced in balancing the demands of parenthood and education. This support entailed flexibility around meeting deadlines and opportunities to talk to staff privately about difficulties and concerns. For some young parents this support had, most importantly, extended into periods where they had missed college due to their child's health problems. In some cases, teenage parents reported that staff sent them college work at home, and even telephoned them to discuss how they were coping.

### 5.10.2 Negative experiences of education

Relationships with staff and other students were cited as a source of difficulty by some teenage parents. Difficulties in relating to other students occurred when young mothers felt they were the 'odd one out', as they were the only parent on their course or were of a different age to other course members. Young people had either resolved these situations by talking to other course members or to staff. However, some young mothers experienced difficulties in their relationships with staff. These ranged from a feeling that there was a lack of flexibility around deadlines and punctuality, to feeling the member of staff was embarrassing the young parent in front of other students, or refusing to offer support when it was needed. These teenage parents sometimes felt that some members of staff disapproved of their situations. Early leavers and returners were among those reporting the most negative experiences of education.

On some courses, only word-processed rather than hand-written work was accepted. This also presented a difficulty for teenage parents who did not have access to a computer at home and who did not have childcare provision outside of their taught hours, as they could not use college or public computers whilst their child was with them. Young mothers often studied and did coursework in the late evening when the child was asleep, and so had to initially hand-write essays and coursework and then find time in lunch hours and around classes to type them up. This situation resulted in work being handed in late and worries over the amount of extra time required to complete assignments.

> *'This course is a problem for me because you have to have all your work typed and I haven't got a computer. And the only access to a computer I've got is if I go into college. But then I can't take Charlie into the college, sit him next to a computer for 2 hours while I type it up, you see. It's a bit of a catch 22.'*
>
> Sally, 17, LEA 3, returner

## 5.11 Seeking Advice and Support

Teenage parents in post-compulsory education frequently referred to the negative perceptions of others concerning the label of 'teenage parent'. Young mothers reported that other people had low expectations of them and assumed that they would drop out of college and become

'no hopers' and 'stereotypes'.

> *'Its like whatever I do people are always watching me to fall on me face…. they are like looking at you as if to say, well…..(laughs). But I don't know, its like sometimes I think maybe I am just paranoid but then I think well I wouldn't be paranoid if there was nothing to be paranoid about..'*
>
> Stacey, 19 yrs old, LEA 4, sustainer

This was the reason given for an apparent difficulty, or reluctance, on the part of some young parents to seek help in solving a problem, even where relationships with members of staff were unproblematic. For example, one teenage parent related talking to staff about not being able to access a computer and was told that she should be able to find someone to care for her son outside her course hours so that she could use the college computer. This teenage parent and others felt that their isolation and other difficulties would not be treated positively, and this deterred them from seeking support.

## 5.12 Knowledge and Experience of EMA

Knowledge and experience of EMA was generally unchanged from last year. Participants in the pilots this year understood that EMA was supposed to be an 'incentive to learn' and that it helped people go back to college and stay there. Everyone felt that in theory EMA was a good idea, including the early leavers. Problems encountered with EMA by this group were largely related to individual experiences of how the scheme had been administered by particular staff and did not change their views of the pilots in principle.

### 5.12.1 The re-application process

Young mothers staying in education this year had all re-applied for EMA and childcare awards. EMA was regarded as a positive bonus in attending college and, if available, it should be applied for. The process of re-applying varied between schools and colleges within the same area, as well as between LEAs. In some cases, the forms were sent 'automatically' to the young person from the EMA administrative teams within the LEAs. Other young parents telephoned the EMA administrative teams when they had decided to stay on, or other students and friends who were re-applying had discussed it with the young person, prompting them to re-apply. The forms were described as 'pretty straightforward' to complete and young people commented that, having done it before, meant that it was easier for the second year. In an unusual case assistance was sought in completing the forms from a family

member, although this is likely to have arisen from the young person's learning difficulties. In general the processing of the application forms across all the LEAs was reported to have been quicker in the second year than the first. Although there were some reports of major delays, they were not as prevalent as in last year's accounts. Young parents were unclear of how long the delays had been, but attributed them to the increase of EMA applications in their college this year, a problem of administration, or because forms were returned to a young person to correct.

### 5.12.2 Eligibility criteria

Views on eligibility were largely unchanged from last year, which is to say that young parents living alone with their child knew they were automatically eligible. There was also a high level of awareness that in other circumstances eligibility depended on the level of household income, although any further details were unclear. Young people were also largely unaware of the sliding scale of the weekly allowance relating to the level of household income. One change from last year was an increased awareness about being able to receive EMA for a third year.

### 5.12.3 Learning Agreements

Views on the Learning Agreement remained unchanged from last year in that there was little importance attached to the Learning Agreement and, in some cases, little recollection of it. However, despite a general lack of recollection across the sample of the Learning Agreement itself, young mothers demonstrated awareness of the compliance requirements and associated receiving EMA with conforming to a series of rules, including the need to attend college (unless with an authorised absence), to complete work on time and behave well.

### 5.12.4 Complying with EMA requirements

Complying with EMA requirements was an area in which teenage parents who were still attending college or who were involved in academic study this year had mixed experiences. There were reports that, in some colleges, administration and teaching staff had become stricter about enforcing EMA requirements in order to receive EMA payments in the current academic year (2001-2002). This involved being stricter about time sheets and the signing of them, and about informing the college about absences before 10am. There was recognition that the system had been open to abuse last year, (young parents can be self-certifying for some absences, as can young homeless people living independently). However, some

teenage parents described difficulty with phoning in before 10am if they did not have a phone in their home and they were absent due to a child's illness. Other parents only used a mobile phone and when they had little or no credit found it difficult to phone in.

There were also differences in the way in which attendance requirements were enforced. For example, one teenage parent in a vulnerable pilot area notified college on the first day of absence that she was unable to attend college for the rest of the week but she was still required to phone in every day in order to confirm her absence. In other cases, the system for monitoring attendance had become easier for young parents where colleges had moved to using registers to record attendance, rather than using the student timesheet system.

### 5.12.5 Awareness of flexibilities

Within the two LEAs operating the Vulnerable Pilots, awareness of flexibilities was largely unchanged from last year. There was still some confusion in one area about who pays or resources the childcare provision, in some cases young parents believed it was EMA, others were unclear. Young people were also unclear of eligibility regulations for transport support.

One teenage parent had needed a careers adviser to explain to the EMA administrative team why she should receive EMA for a third year before her application was approved.

> *'They [the Civic Centre] did ask [name of careers adviser] why I was having it for three years instead of two and she like explained my circumstances and that my first year available didn't go to plan and that I was doing well on my second year and that the childcare weren't available and first year and it is now and things like that so, I got it for a third year.'*
>
> Stacey, 19, LEA 4, sustainer

### 5.12.6 Uses of the weekly allowance

EMA was the primary source of funding any expenses associated with college, such as paying for equipment or equipment loans, books, stationery, travel to college and for any college day trips. It was also used to meet childcare fees and this was regarded as an educational expense. After educational expenses, the remainder of EMA was then either absorbed into the household budget, helping to pay for things such as nappies and food, or used for expenses outside the usual weekly budget, such as buying shoes or repaying loans to family members or friends. In other cases, usually for the young mothers in the most advantageous financial positions, the remainder of EMA after educational expenses was used

as money for 'treats'. These uses for the weekly allowance were similar to last year's uses, although there was more emphasis from the group of sustainers and returners on using their allowance for educational expenses than there had been throughout the sample last year.

### 5.12.7 Bonus payments

Young parents were often unclear about the percentage of attendance required to qualify for the retention bonus and there was also confusion about what period bonuses were for, with bonuses often being delayed and arriving during the next term or towards the end of holidays. A common experience was relief in receiving them, especially during the holiday or half term breaks, as they substituted for the weekly allowance. Occasionally they were used to buy clothing or treats. The completer among the sample had received a bonus at the end of her first year, but was unclear about whether that had been for attendance or achievement, and she could not recall how much she had received. A sustainer who had completed a course (and enrolled on a new course this year) had received an achievement bonus and that bonus was a welcome contribution to the parent's summer budget. Another in the same position thought that she had, but was unsure.

### 5.12.8 Stopped payments

All teenage parents still in education had experienced stopped payments at some stage, and some from all three areas in which the interviews took place complained that they sometimes lost their weekly EMA allowance for 'no reason'. To some, whether they received EMA seemed entirely random, and these young mothers reported attending one week and not receiving the allowance, and not managing full attendance in another week and being paid the allowance. In other cases young mothers reported that tutors would not accept their notes, including notes from the doctor or a letter from the hospital detailing an appointment. These decisions were not appealed because the young people thought there was little point in appealing because the decision had been made and would be difficult to overturn. There was a rare report, from one young person, of a whole class losing their EMA payments for a week where an individual had misbehaved in class. Teenage parents felt this was particularly unfair to them, as they relied on the weekly allowance more than students who were not parents and who were living with their families. There were instances of payments being stopped because young mothers had failed to ring in with their valid reason for absence by 10am, or had failed to do this for every day they missed college.

The effect of an EMA payment being stopped for a week depended, as in the first year of the study, on the teenage parent's financial circumstances. The financial implications were far-reaching for teenage parents whose other income sources were Income Support and Child Benefit. Young mothers sometimes borrowed against their EMA from family members, and when EMA did not materialise this made their financial situation difficult. Where young mothers had other sources of income, such as Disability Living Allowance or contributions from their child's father, the EMA allowance was less of a central part of their weekly budget and its loss was less keenly felt. Feelings of loss were magnified whenever teenage parents felt the stoppage had been unjustified.

For some teenage parents among the group of sustainers and returners, stopped payments resulted in a lack of motivation to attend for the rest of the week, as the award had already been lost for the entire week. In some instances, it led to a cycle of non-attendance which increased the financial difficulties encountered, and resulted in lost payment for the following week and so on.

### 5.12.9 Holiday periods

Teenage parents described the holiday periods as the time when they realised the importance of the weekly EMA allowance to their overall income. For some young mothers the summer holiday, in particular, was a time of financial struggle. During this period many teenage parents were unable to increase their income, as they believed that a part time job would deprive them of Income Support receipt. Added to this was the difficulty of finding childcare to enable them to work. Although outgoings decreased by not attending college, this did not balance with the decrease in income and, hence, holiday periods were a struggle. Most teenage parents accepted the general principle about not receiving an EMA while not attending college, but still felt this left them with difficulties.

Some young mothers in Childcare Pilot areas reported that a fee had been paid by the pilot scheme over the course of the summer holidays to retain their childcare placement, so that children had been able to keep the same place from one academic year to the next, as long as enough notice was given. Retaining the childcare placement in college crèches over the summer holidays was easier than in other childcare settings, as students returning to college were given priority over new students.

### 5.13 The Experience of Parenting

The experience of parenting over the last year had been mixed and bore no relationship to whether the parent was an early leaver or sustainer. The accounts of parenting experiences over the last year fell into two distinct categories; those who felt that parenting had become easier with time, and those who felt it had become harder and more challenging. The explanations for parenting becoming easier were presented as developmental; the children were able to do more for themselves as they got older, could entertain themselves for short periods, and could effectively communicate their feelings and desires. Increased confidence in parenting was also described among this group. For those who found parenting more demanding, descriptions of the energy required to keep up with the child, based partly on the child's increased independence, greater mobility and growing interest in their environment, were recurrent. A rare voice described parenting as having remained unchanged from last year; still difficult and isolating.

Teenage parents often received a free childcare place at a college crèche if they were in EMA areas that did not operate a Childcare Pilot. However, for teenage mothers who were attending a course at a different college site from the crèche, the journey to the childcare placement and back increased the strain of managing college, and affected punctuality. One teenage parent described how unhappy she was at the quality of care given to her child at an alternative childcare placement whilst on the waiting list for a place at the college crèche. She reported that this undermined her attendance, as she was unwilling to leave her child in the crèche for more than a few hours at a time.

Teenage parents in Childcare Pilot areas were able to exercise more choice over childcare placements and selected placements convenient to college or to family members who helped with childcare. Choosing their childcare placement had been important to them, as they felt they had control over, and responsibility for, the quality of care their child received and had, in the main, visited different childcare options before making their decisions.

Teenage parents who used college childcare provision had less flexibility compared with those in the childcare pilot areas who could choose the most appropriate provision for their circumstances. Furthermore, teenage parents in Childcare Pilot areas often had a 'study day' in which they had no, or few, guided learning hours, and during which they continued to

receive childcare support. This provided teenage parents with the opportunity to catch up with course assignments and homework, and was a welcome opportunity to study in the college with access to college computers and libraries. Teenage parents from areas not operating the Childcare Pilots were less likely to have a 'study day' included in their college package of childcare provision.

Young mothers expressed concern at the quality of their parenting because of the amount of time they spent attending college and doing coursework. Some addressed this by setting aside a specific time each week that was seen as belonging to the mother and child. This reduced the worry but often did not entirely alleviate the feeling of being, in some way, a 'bad parent'. The college day was protracted for young parents, because of the time involved in getting ready in the morning, and travelling to childcare placements and back. On returning from college, caring for the child was a priority and college work, in the account of some, was difficult to fit alongside that. Tiredness was a large factor in daily college life and something young parents sometimes found difficult to cope with, particularly leading up to exams. The result was that young mothers fell behind with college work and had to catch up in college holidays or at weekends, or in some cases working very late into the evenings to meet deadlines.

### 5.14 Transport Support

Transport support in the form of a travel pass was important in reducing the cycle of missed EMA payments and non-attendance seen in other areas. Young parents could still get to college and back without charge if EMA payments were stopped in any given week. The bus pass was also valued outside of college, as it gave teenage parents an opportunity to travel freely at weekends and outside of study hours.

### 5.15 Advantages of EMA

*Sustainers and returners*

EMA had an important impact on the financial position of teenage parents. As stated above, where a young mother was receiving Income Support, Child Benefit and Housing Benefit the weekly allowance was an important 'extra' and played a role in the weekly household budget.

*Early leavers*

The financial impact of the loss of EMA was difficult for the early leavers. One teenage parent described her financial position as 'better off' than last year as she now worked part-time and received Working Families Tax Credit. Where young mothers were no longer in receipt of EMA, but received largely the same sources of other income as last year, they explained that the absence of education-related costs such as bus fares to college, books, stationery and lunches in college, meant that they were only marginally worse off than in the previous year. However, many of these young mothers could not afford to use public transport and, if they were unable to walk to visit family or friends, then they experienced increased isolation because of the decrease in income. It should be noted that, often, early leavers had not received EMA weekly payments in the time leading up to leaving college, and so had become accustomed to life without EMA support.

EMA per se was not felt to have made any significant difference to the young mothers' budgeting skills. Financial management skills had increased over the year for all involved with the pilots but this was not attributed to the pilots themselves, rather young people described how the experience of managing various different sources of income had increased their skills. However, EMA was received at different points in the week to state benefits such as Income Support, and this was appreciated by young mothers whose budgeting benefited from income arriving in instalments over the week.

### 5.16 Limitations of EMA

Teenage parents identified very few limitations of EMA. However, for early leavers perceptions of poor administration of EMA and of unjust decisions surrounding the weekly allowance were considered de-motivating. This was also the case where teenage parents did not understand why payments had been stopped. Some felt there were students on their courses who were not interested in learning but who were just there for the money, and that this had a negative impact as these students were described as people who just 'muck about' in class.

As with young homeless people, the young parents also felt that it would help to have a 'retainer' paid to help them through the financial struggle of long college holidays. Childcare provision was broadly seen to have improved since the first year, although some difficulties

were experienced. None of the young parents were aware of other aspects of the Vulnerable Pilots, such as the provision of non-mainstream education and greater flexibility in relation to courses eligible for EMA.

### 5.17 Personal Development

Personal development was central to the experience of teenage parents sustaining participation in education, and this was less evident amongst early leavers. Where teenage parents had experienced negative attitudes or stereotyping, they took a great deal of personal pride in staying in college, and having the completion of a qualification within sight. Where young parents were achieving grades above pass mark, or had completed successfully a course last year, these successes contributed further to their increased self-esteem and confidence.

> *'I did better than I thought I would [in last year's course], it made me feel like, you know, I can do it when I put my mind to it…um … I felt like it gave me more options of what I could do next. Well it's like you know I could have worked after I got it or stayed on progressing in the subject. Yeah. It just made me feel like really good.. It's just a nice feeling knowing that you've achieved something that you wanted.'*
>
> Natalie, 18, LEA 3, sustainer

The EMA weekly allowance and bonuses were seen to be 'earned' compared to benefits that were simply received. This view of the EMA allowance was common amongst young parents and, as a result, receiving the weekly allowance increased their sense of personal worth and achievement. However, this also meant that when the weekly allowance was lost, where parents felt the loss to have been unjustified there was an increased sense of frustration and de-motivation in attending college after losing the payment.

The weekly EMA allowance continued to play an important role in motivating attendance on a day-by-day basis, except for cases where mothers felt that they had been unfairly penalised if they missed a single day but attended the rest of the week. Where young mothers were struggling to organise themselves, or find the energy required to attend college, EMA was

often a deciding factor in going in.

> *'It's the fact that you know if you've got thirty pounds behind you then you can afford to do it. You can afford everything and it will encourage you- I think it encourages most people thinking god I've got thirty quid at the end of the week if I go to all my lessons and it does encourage most people to go to college all the time.'*
>
> Hazel, 18, LEA 2, sustainer

All of the young parents who had sustained their participation in education described how they would have returned to college without the weekly allowance, but would have struggled more financially. Early leavers discussed their plans to return to education when their children were of school age, and did not express overt concern at managing without the weekly allowance. This finding is seemingly incongruent with the important role EMA played in their weekly budgets, but this is because young mothers were adamant that their decision to return to education this year was not based on their receiving EMA, rather it was motivated by their attachment to learning and future plans.

### 5.18 Improving EMA

There were areas of college life that young parents felt could be changed in order to help people in their position. One of these was timing; young mothers felt that if a course started later than 9am, or had more flexible hours of attendance, they would be able to improve their punctuality, and described how getting from dropping a child off at a childcare centre to the college on time was difficult. Other young mothers pointed to the support they had received from staff in college and cited this as being one of the most helpful aspects of overcoming barriers in returning to education.

Alongside the plans young parents had for education, there were also plans for employment. These were often career choices that involved a large aspect of caring, such as nursing, midwifery, social work, and childcare. Other areas of interest were I.T., business and administration. Not all young parents were clear about what they wanted to achieve in life, but all were positive and ambitious in their plans for the future and, especially, in moving away from reliance on state funded benefits and becoming their family's provider.

## 5.19 Influences on Participation, Retention and Achievement

### 5.19.1 Participation and retention

*Returners*

Among the teenage parents there was some surprise expressed at how much they had enjoyed learning. Often young mothers in this study had entered education with the main motivation of gaining qualifications in order to increase their earning potential, to have a career and provide for their families, rather than for the enjoyment of learning. This enjoyment had influenced their decision to stay on for another year, or to go on to higher education. Enjoyment of learning had increased motivation to complete course assignments and had made juggling childcare responsibilities and college obligations more bearable. Young mothers articulated a strong desire to be independent and better off than benefits allowed. These aspirations motivated teenage parents when difficulties were encountered.

Teenage parents reported the positive benefits of nursery or crèche provision on child development and were aware that childcare was only available because they were attending college. This was also a motivation to stay in college.

The experience of college in previous years contributed to the ease with which young parents coped with their course this year. This was especially important where young people had progressed this year to a more advanced and demanding course. Managing parenting alongside studying improved with practice, and the effect of this was that difficulties in coping with college were reduced, as were factors associated with early leaving such as falling behind. Parents reported fewer thoughts of leaving education when coping was easier. For young mothers in their second year, or who had completed a significant proportion of their course, there was a determination not to 'throw away' what they had achieved so far. This sense of having made it so far increased any reluctance to 'give up' now.

> *'I find it a lot easier this year. Yeah. Like I say I've had more time to juggle it and Fay has got older and like I've been studying for longer so I know what to expect, and I've got this far…you know.'*
>
> Natalie, 18, LEA 3, sustainer

The returners had either started looking for a new course soon after leaving last year's course, believing something else to be more suitable, or had attempted to support themselves through employment. In the latter case the young mother discovered she was in a worse position financially than when she received Income Support, so she had returned to college to get the qualifications to remedy that situation. EMA had been an important factor as it increased the financial appeal of being at college compared to earning a low wage.

*Sustainers*

For some young people there had been little perceived choice this year, as their course was a continuation of what they had been doing last year and, having come so far, they were not prepared to give up. The weekly allowance of EMA played little role here, but in two Childcare Pilot areas it was acknowledged that childcare payments facilitated participation. For others, their course choices were advanced levels of subjects undertaken during the first year. Being able to receive EMA made this a more worthwhile option, although was not described as a deciding factor. These young parents did consult other people such as parents, aunts and careers advisers in their decision-making, and tended to emphasise their general enjoyment of college more than other young parents.

Those sustaining their participation in EMA for the third year had plans to go to university. These teenage parents were unusual in the sample and their situations ranged from having a conditional offer for Autumn 2002, to beginning to make decisions for UCAS application for Autumn 2003 (taking a year out to wait until the child would be of school age). These young parents had entered post compulsory education with either low or no qualifications and had required three years to obtain university entry level qualifications.

*Early Leavers*

The early leavers often had not made definite decisions about this year. These young people expressed an attachment to learning and a desire to return to education but at a more convenient future point, such as when the child was of school-age, or when they knew what they wanted to do. Young mothers in this situation wanted to concentrate on child-caring or felt that their role as a parent was performed better by being with the child full-time.

Two of the three early leavers were unemployed and were not engaged in any kind of education or training. The exception here was a young mother working part time who felt

money to be the current family priority. Reasons for leaving education often related to a negative experience of college the year before, and often involved, as at least part of the reason, the way in which EMA had been administered. These young people reported feeling discriminated against, losing their EMA weekly allowance for being around five minutes late for class and feeling de-motivated for the rest of the week. Some teenage parents had left when they felt they were being singled out by a staff member who was reported to refuse any flexibility around deadlines and attendance. The relationship with a member of staff was reported as the primary reason for leaving by some young parents where that member of staff had been their course tutor, and was felt to be the sole decision maker on whether they had received their EMA. One young mother described her experience last year with sadness.

> *'I'm not that bothered about what they think anymore because I was vulnerable when I just had Leah and that and I was going to college.... I loved the course that I was on, and doing the work I was keeping up with it as well, but if you're treated badly, I couldn't put up with that for any longer, I had to just leave. It's a shame but I did want to carry on with it, but you can't.'*
>
> Joanne,18 yrs, EL, LEA 4

Losing EMA on a regular basis reduced motivation to attend college. If EMA had been lost for a week, getting to college was financially problematic, as was buying equipment or eating lunch at college. Attendance was made difficult by the financial loss of EMA and, where young mothers felt this was unjustified, there was little motivation to attend and so began a cycle of non-attendance, non-payment and, in some cases, falling behind with college coursework. In other cases, delays and problems in receiving EMA had been so large that young mothers gave up expecting to receive it, and this was a factor, alongside other difficulties experienced, in leaving college.

For others, falling behind with their work has been their only or major difficulty and was perceived as an insurmountable problem. These young mothers had not felt it would be possible to catch up on missed work. This was particularly difficult where support with childcare from family and partners had been minimal or non-existent.

### 5.19.2 Attainment

Teenage mothers in this study often had a disrupted experience of education, in many cases entering post-compulsory education with low or no qualifications (see Chapter 2). In addition were the demands of being a parent, in many cases a single parent, with, or without,

the support of family and friends. Young mothers related their surprise and pride in some cases that they had sustained their participation in a college course towards completion, or at being in their second or third year of education. Consequently, sustained attendance and participation should be seen as achievements in such challenging circumstances.

# 6 FOCUS ON SPECIAL NEEDS: IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

For the purposes of EMA, young people who had a Statement of Educational Need or who had been recognised as having a disability under the Disability Discrimination Act were entitled to claim EMA for up to three years. In addition to this, the EMA Vulnerable Pilot allowed students with disabilities to study a range of non-mainstream courses that met their needs and to attend non-mainstream institutions that were able to deliver appropriate education.

This chapter discusses the EMA Vulnerable Pilot in LEA 6 from the perspective of those operating the pilot, as well as among young people participating in the scheme. The first section of this chapter reports on issues arising from the implementation and administration of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot. A roundtable discussion was held with the steering group and individual interviews were conducted with personnel involved in the implementation and administration of the pilots in 2002. Those interviewed included LEA staff, education providers, and staff from key agencies working with young people with disabilities. Their experiences and perceptions of administration and delivery of the scheme are reported, as are their views on the significance of the scheme to young people. The remainder of this chapter discusses the experiences of the young people (or, where necessary, their advocates), who participated in the pilot. In 2001 nine young people who had a range of disabilities were interviewed, and in 2002 eight agreed to be interviewed for a second time. The purpose of these interviews was to explore their experiences and perceptions of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and to discuss any changes in attitudes or circumstances, as well as their plans for the future.

## 6.1 Implementation of the Vulnerable Pilot

The EMA Vulnerable Pilot with particular focus on students with disabilities was introduced in LEA 6 in September 2000. The target group included young people with a range of impairments, as well as those with statements of special educational need. As in the other vulnerable pilot areas, EMA could be claimed by other vulnerable young people within this LEA, including those who were homeless, those with no or low qualifications and teenage parents. However, during the year the focus of the pilot remained on young people with

disabilities or special educational needs. Throughout the second year efforts were made to extend the scope of the pilot so that it included other groups of vulnerable young people but, as in the other vulnerable pilot areas, this had been met with limited success. There were still groups of vulnerable young people who were known to be under-represented in the pilot including ex-offenders and homeless young people.

As in the first year, the EMA steering group continued to meet on a regular basis, approximately once a term. During the first year the group met primarily to discuss administration issues. This focus changed slightly during 2001/2, so that the group became a forum to discuss good practice and to try and achieve consistency in the way the pilot was administered across the area.

### 6.1.1 Staffing and resourcing

As in the first year, the vulnerable pilot was administered by the LEA and was located within the Student Support Services section. Staff working within this section were familiar with processing applications for financial support from students in higher education, and were able to draw on the expertise and time of colleagues from this section to help with the processing of EMA applications. As in the other LEAs, staff from within LEA 6 reported that the funding they received to administer the vulnerable pilot did cover not fully the administrative and support costs. Several respondents stated that the Local Authority subsidised the vulnerable pilot and examples were quoted from another LEA which did not subsidise the pilot in the same way. As a result, the pilot in this other LEA was said to be under-resourced and the quality of the service provided was believed to have suffered.

> *'...they're fighting to give some semblance of service if you like and make sure that every child benefits from it, and every child will benefit from it because I know the people will pull out the stops, whether they get 10 applications or 20, they'll all get processed but the speed of the processing will be affected because they've still only got three members of staff or whatever they can actually pay for, whereas here [LEA 6] it is subsidised, it pays for the staff. If EMA was to sit alone somewhere else they would struggle, because they sit with the HE team, the HE team will help them out and will process some of their application forms, check them all through, so it's not just money subsidy, it's the time subsidy as well.'*

Education providers continued to be dissatisfied as they did not receive any funding to help cover their administration and support costs. Three areas were identified as requiring additional resources. First, returning attendance information which often involved resolving

discrepancies relating to authorised absences. This was seen as time consuming, especially in schools and colleges that had hundreds of students claiming EMA and a substantial number of these eligible for the flexibilities because of the no/low qualifications rule. Secondly, providing attendance information for students whose claim had been backdated for up to ten weeks. This was often not a simple task as tutors had to check individual registers, collate the information, and the school or college then had to arrange for payment to be backdated. It was acknowledged that educational institutions should be able to get attendance information from the register system, but this did not always prove to be possible. Finally, some teaching and administrative staff within schools and colleges spent considerable time supporting vulnerable students through the application process. For these reasons many schools and colleges felt that they should be reimbursed for the additional work.

The Access database set-up during the first year continued to be used for the pilot. This database was updated periodically to deal more effectively with information requests from DfES, and to address any minor difficulties with storing or retrieving information.

### 6.1.2 The application process

The EMA administrative team in the LEA fast-tracked applications from vulnerable young people and recognised the need for additional support throughout the application process for this group of students and their families.

> *'The staff will jump through more hoops than would be expected of them for services provided to everybody, so I think the general awareness is raised amongst the administrative team.'*

In discussing the application process nearly everyone interviewed suggested that the application form needed to be simplified, especially for use with vulnerable students. Respondents stated that the reading age necessary to understand the form was too high, which meant that students and their families were unable to complete the forms without considerable help. The experience of the first and second years of the pilot convinced many of those interviewed that vulnerable students often came from vulnerable families. It could not be assumed, therefore, that students could rely on family assistance to complete the forms. Simplifying the form would also reduce the high percentage of forms returned to students because of missing information. Those interviewed also suggested that the application form should be available in a number of different languages. Currently it is just

the guidance notes informing potential applicants where to seek assistance that have been translated.

For some respondents the second year of the Vulnerable Pilots demonstrated the need to differentiate between the application and renewal process. It was suggested that, given the difficulties that some students experienced in applying for EMA, the renewal process should be streamlined so that the same information was not being requested twice. Vulnerable students, especially those with disabilities, did not always keep copies of application forms so that being confronted with the same application for the second year created as many problems as it did in the first year.

An issue raised in LEA 6 relating to the application process was the difficulty that some parents encountered who were receiving other disability benefits. Staff involved in supporting parents claiming EMA reported that the disability benefits received by some parents and students had been stopped or reduced. This had necessitated long and protracted appeals processes. The effect of this was to make other parents of students with disabilities very wary about applying for EMA in case it affected their receipt of other benefits. Those interviewed stressed the need for the DfES to issue guidance to prevent this happening and to reassure parents that EMA would not alter other benefits received. It was felt that without such reassurance there would continue to be groups of vulnerable students who would not claim EMA despite being eligible. Under current regulations the receipt of EMA should not interfere with Income Support. However, it is possible that the incidences reported above reflect the complexity and the confusion that may exist when a young disabled person starts to claim benefits in their own right. It is possible that, under some circumstances, parental income may be reduced. If this happens simultaneously with the application and receipt of EMA it may explain the two events becoming linked.

> '*We've had a few parents who have had real issues with the other claims they've got, one Mum phoned up and said "I'm not entitled anymore, all these years and suddenly everything's changed and I've got to give my car back in", she had to go to appeals and things like that, so I think that's scared some of them off in a sense, "if you get this, it will affect you in such a way" and so they haven't done it'*

The Learning Agreement which had to be completed as part of the EMA application process had been amended so that it was similar to the one completed for higher education awards. Simplifying the Learning Agreement so that it fitted onto an A4 sheet and *'virtually looks*

*and feels the same, like Higher Education really…posed little problems, and it's benefited us as far as admin is concerned.'* It was acknowledged that vulnerable students, especially those with special educational needs, had very little recollection of the Learning Agreement. In many instances it was a form that was sent home and signed by parents, which then disappeared amongst all the supporting paperwork necessary to apply for an EMA award. Staff within schools and colleges accepted that the Learning Agreement could be a useful tool if it was used as the basis for a discussion about attendance, performance and or behaviour between teaching staff and students.

### 6.2 Identification of Vulnerable Students

Within LEA 6, identification of vulnerable young people had become more effective during the second year of the pilot. The LEA reported that their focus had shifted away from a concentration on young people with disabilities and special needs to encompass other vulnerable groups more fully. This process became more effective as the pilot developed.

> *'We've got to consider [all vulnerable categories] and they've got to be made aware that they've got all these other leniencies in the regulations and rules. … Last year it was more geared to the disabled and that's where we did focus, this year we've just gone for the whole lot really and the networking has helped with that.'*

At the start of the pilot, identification of eligible students with disabilities or special needs was based on type of school attended, as entered on the standard EMA application form. Consequently, students attending a special school were identified as vulnerable and considered eligible for support from the vulnerable pilot. However, this strategy missed many young people with disabilities and special needs who attended mainstream schools. The extent to which mainstream schools had been briefed about the flexibilities available for vulnerable students was unclear. However, this situation had improved greatly during 2001/2 as a range of approaches were used to identify vulnerable young people and this process was undertaken by the EMA administrative team, education providers and with co-operation from Careers/Connexions staff.

These processes included the following:

- The LEA inspected all applications to identify students with vulnerabilities, indicators such as young people living alone, course choice and education provider were used to assess the vulnerability of students. Statements of special educational needs, registered disability and no/low qualifications were also used as potential markers of vulnerability.
- Education providers were also involved in the identification of vulnerable young people in the same way as last year. The LEA considered education providers to be in a prime position to identify vulnerable young people with disabilities and to promote the pilot, as they were often aware of the young person's financial background and had a long-standing relationship with parents. However, the LEA continued to feel disappointed with the response from some education providers. The LEA felt that some special schools in particular, were not promoting the scheme to eligible young people as effectively as possible.

*'They know what sort of background the young person comes from, by and large they know whose parents are in a working situation, those parents who are in a benefit situation, they've probably got a good feel for all of those kids' home circumstances, they will have acquired that. But they don't ever ring up and say, "I know her mum and dad are on benefit but she's not on this EMA list, have I missed something?" They send in what we ask them to do ...'*

*'They don't go the extra mile.'*

- Other key agencies also identified a range of eligible young people to the LEA. In 2001/02, Connexions provided the LEA with a list of all young people leaving compulsory education which included details of student vulnerability. The LEA was able to cross-reference this list with any applications that they received from young people, and sent targeted mailings to young people with disabilities and special needs. This mailing was sent to young people care of their parents or legal guardians, but it had not generated a high response rate.
- SureStart Plus which began in 2001/2, helped to identify teenage parents to the LEA.
- The LEA planned to develop specific targeting strategies in relation to each vulnerable group.

## 6.3 Advice and Guidance for Eligible Young People

Within LEA 6 the advice and guidance felt to be required by students with disabilities differed from that needed by other groups of vulnerable young people. Chapters Four and Five has discussed the level of support and advice that homeless young people and teenage parents require to prepare them for post-16 education. For example, these groups of vulnerable young people need considerable help and support finding appropriate courses, gaining self-confidence, as well as overcoming negative experiences of education. For students with disabilities and special educational needs the situation was substantively different. Many of these students were well established in education and indeed, as reported in earlier reports, (Allen et al., 2003), had fewer alternatives to education than other groups of students. Therefore, the type of help and advice that the majority of this group of students needed was with the application process. Some students with special needs, especially those in mainstream schools and colleges, did require additional help and support to enable them to participate fully in post-compulsory education. Respondents expressed concern about the proposed closure of some special schools within the LEA which would leave many students with little option but to attend mainstream education, where it was anticipated they would need considerable support. If, and when, this policy was enforced it was expected to place greater demands on all involved with the vulnerable pilot as, for example, these young people would need assistance to achieve appropriate learning packages.

Specific help with the application process was provided by the EMA administrative team who provided a telephone help line. Students were also encouraged to visit the Civic Centre, where the team was based, if more detailed help was required. However, the feedback received by the administrative team was that students with disabilities and or special educational needs preferred to seek help from the school or college because of the established and trusted relationships with teaching staff. In response to this, the EMA team members attended various student and parent sessions within these institutions, so that they were available to answer any questions relating to EMA in a setting that was more familiar to potential applicants.

## 6.4 Role of Key Agencies

Operating the pilot for two years had demonstrated the importance of involving a number of key agencies, as it became apparent within the first year that a range of skills and expertise were necessary if different groups of vulnerable young people were to participate in the pilot. The links that had been established during the first year were consolidated and expanded in the second year. For example, links had been made with the SureStart Plus initiative so that teenage parents were informed of their entitlement to the flexibilities under the pilot. However, respondents suggested that further time was necessary if they were to work effectively with the range of agencies and organisations who had regular contact with groups of vulnerable young people. Respondents stated:

'*as a result of EMA the networking has come about; it's sort of evolved. We didn't before, I have to say. ...now, we've got contact with the Sure Start Plus manager and the Senior Welfare Officer who's seconded to her. We've got a good working relationship.'*

*'Definitely,.. we've managed contact with lots of people, very helpful, very pleasant, very positive people, through the EMA pilot that weren't known to us when we were doing HE.'*

### 6.4.1 Role of education providers

As outlined above, education providers played a key role in identifying vulnerable young people who had disabilities, as well as supporting them during the application process. However, this supportive role extended into administrative aspects of the pilot including attendance monitoring, resolving authorised absences and assessing performance for the achievement bonuses. The role of education providers, especially special schools and colleges, was encapsulated by the respondent below:

*'It starts from needing to support parents and students in the process from the beginning...explaining the system ... where they get the paperwork, once they've got the paperwork how do they fill it in and they often bring it into us. I know that the LEA does have a service to help them but they're often vulnerable parents as well as vulnerable students, so they're not used to going into big buildings, civic centres etc.. Once they get information back we've had difficulties of even them being able to fill the form in because of complex cultural language issues. ... So it goes from the very initial beginnings right through to the weekly student getting the signature bit. It has increased the burden on what we have to do which is administrative rather than educational, I have concerns about that where I've had to redistribute someone who should be dealing with educationally, who's dealing administratively.'*

The difficulty for schools and colleges was that EMA placed an additional administrative burden on them for which they received no financial support. As a result scarce resources

were often stretched further as institutions tried to meet the additional demands placed upon them.

*Attendance monitoring*

This additional workload affected two groups of staff; tutors and administrative workers. The systems operated by schools and colleges across this pilot area differed, but essentially involved tutors signing individual timesheets which were returned by the students to the administrative staff who completed the necessary paperwork. However, some students, especially those with severe learning difficulties, were unable to do this, so that tutors had to return the timesheets. The difficulty lay in was the amount of paperwork generated by this process as students attended different classes and, perhaps, courses away from the main school or college site.

*Authorised absences*

As in the other vulnerable pilot areas, resolving 'authorised' absences was mentioned as a particular problem, although not necessarily for students with disabilities or special educational needs. The general consensus was that these students had good attendance records and tended only to be away from school or college when they had a legitimate reason such as illness or a hospital appointment. The difficulties encountered arose mainly in relation to other groups of vulnerable students who attended mainstream education. Reasons for non-attendance had to be verified which took time and often resulted in payments being delayed while this process was ongoing. It was also suggested that the definition of authorised absence was too vague and open to interpretation by individual tutors. There were instances reported of some tutors authorising some absences, while the same reasons for these absences were rejected by other tutors. Clear guidance was called for by all involved in the pilot, staff and students, to avoid any confusion.

*Achievement bonuses*

The need for clarity was also discussed by education providers in terms of the achievement bonuses. Again, some respondents thought that the guidelines were too vague and open to interpretation, which lead to inconsistencies and confusion. However, some staff within

special needs schools stated that:

> *'kids [with special needs] don't ever fit the norm ... it's very difficult for us to set targets because the youngsters don't work in that way.'*

A further difficulty highlighted by some staff within schools and colleges was that they were seen to be responsible for whether the young person received their achievement bonus of £140. There were instances of parents aggressively challenging the decisions of education staff. One respondent also commented that under the current system teaching staff have to police EMA (that is monitor attendance and progress), and this role was thought to have created tensions between some teachers and students.

> *'It's a good, positive thing but when you have to apply the negatives, then it's not so nice, is it, and it brings a new dimension to the teacher/pupil relationship.'*

### 6.4.2 Specialist key agencies

As in the other vulnerable pilot areas, the role of specialist agencies developed as the pilot progressed. The specialist agencies involved at the start of the pilot worked with young people with disabilities and special educational needs. However, in response to the widening of the definition of vulnerable, other agencies were contacted and became involved in the pilot. Initially, the role of these other agencies was in identifying vulnerable young people, but this extended into a more supportive and facilitating role that enabled vulnerable students to participate in post-16 education.

As the pilot developed, it was seen as part of a range of initiatives aimed at helping vulnerable young people. Hence, the pilot was able to work in partnership with other initiatives, such as Sure Start Plus, in order to meet the needs of particular groups of vulnerable young people.

### 6.4.3 Connexions

There were high expectations of the Connexions Service which, at the time of fieldwork, was not fully embedded in the area.

> *'When Connexions gets up and running properly, it will be brilliant then, hopefully if it delivers what it says it will deliver, that will be brilliant.'*

Respondents were aware that transitions for vulnerable young people were very difficult times during which they needed support. These transitions included moving from

compulsory to post-compulsory education or returning to learning after a period away. It was hoped that Connexions would be able to offer an appropriate level of support to these young people and ease the transitions, as well as ensuring they were successful.

During the pilot, the Careers/Connexions Service provided the LEA with destinations information. However, as Connexions came on stream, it was able to provide the LEA with details of vulnerable students. This new development provided further scope for the LEA to estimate the scale of potential applications from vulnerable young people, and enabled cross-referencing of applications to ensure that young people received their full entitlement from the pilot.

### 6.5 Perceptions of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot

The vulnerable pilot was regarded very positively by all those involved with it. It was seen to provide valuable support to vulnerable young people that enabled them to participate in education. Feedback to the steering group and education providers suggested that EMA, including the vulnerable pilot, was helping to change perceptions about post-compulsory education. Whereas in the past it was felt that some parents were reluctant to allow their children to stay on in education when they could be working and earning money, education was now a viable option as the young person 'earned' £30 per week. It was stressed that for many poor families £30 per week was a significant amount of money.

In particular, for students with disabilities or special educational needs the vulnerable pilot was welcomed as it treated these young people, who were often marginalized, the same as all other young people, that is, they had the right to EMA. The financial award of £30 per week gave these vulnerable students some degree of independence and recognised their educational efforts in the same way as other students.

> *'It gives them independence; they've actually got their own money – although they may have learning difficulty, they've got the same needs as any teenager…they may not be able to read and write, but they know who's top of the pops, whether it's Adidas or Nike…A lot of youngsters come from poor families and the access to that money…you know, if they're going to college, you've got to dress the same as everyone else…to have whatever else anybody else is having…youngsters with learning difficulties are exactly the same as anybody else…(they) haven't got the same confidence as an ordinary sixth former, so it gives them the independence…I think (the money) is very, very important to this group, and that is why I wish it was not means-tested. …it's a reward really because most*

*youngsters with learning difficulties actually do work hard. …they try to the best of their ability…even if they do away with it for the mainstream, I think it should be maintained for the vulnerable groups.'*

### 6.5.1 Awareness

Overall, awareness of the vulnerable pilot had increased from the first year. Education providers, key agencies and EMA administrative staff all reported a higher awareness amongst other professionals, as well as among parents and students. However, it was pointed out that many young people, including those who were vulnerable, were aware of the £30 a week rather than that it was an EMA award. Young people with learning disabilities were known to have a limited understanding of the detailed working of the pilot, although most were aware that they received some money for attending school or college, completing their work and behaving properly.

It was commented that publicity within the LEA relating to the Vulnerable Pilots could be improved. Some respondents felt that the publicity had been too low key and that more needed to be done to raise awareness of vulnerable young people and their families.

### 6.5.2 Value of flexibilities

The most frequently cited aspect of the flexibilities available to vulnerable students was the entitlement to an extra year of funding. All those interviewed stressed that vulnerable young people, especially those with learning difficulties, needed at least an extra year in post-compulsory education if they were complete their courses. Respondents pointed out that for many young people with learning difficulties, finding the right course takes time because they are less articulate, and more unsure about what they wanted to do.

*'in the first year they have a go at different things; they have three or four options, see if they like it, whether they've got any abilities to move on in a particular area.'*

There was less detailed discussion about the other flexibilities, although respondents welcomed the fact that vulnerable young people were able to study in non-mainstream education provision. This was thought to be of most use to those vulnerable young people who had negative experiences of compulsory education.

Many respondents regarded the flexibilities as part of a strategy to widen participation in education and to 'level the playing field' for vulnerable young people. Under the flexibilities

the needs of different groups of young people could be met, so that post-compulsory education became a possibility. With respect to young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs, the flexibilities enabled these students to be treated the same as all other young people and, as stated above, recognised their efforts to study and learn. The flexibilities were seen to be 'part of a jigsaw' which has changed lives, in that they have helped to improve self-esteem and self-confidence among students with special needs.

### 6.6 Limitations of Vulnerable Pilot

Within this LEA some of the perceived limitations of the vulnerable pilot were related to administrative issues and to the fact that the initiative was a pilot. It was accepted that all new initiatives required time to become established, and that this was just beginning to happen as the pilot was coming to an end. Those involved in the pilot stressed the need for clear and concise guidance so as to avoid confusion and to provide all those involved with the time to develop action plans, rather than finding themselves constantly changing their focus. It was also hoped that concise guidance, especially in relation to the definitions of vulnerability, would increase consistency in the way that the pilot was implemented in local schools and colleges.

As in the other pilot areas, the age criteria was seen as a limitation, because vulnerable young people required more time to complete their education. Extending the age limit beyond 19 years was suggested as a way of overcoming this limitation.

A final limitation of the pilot was the paperwork involved. The application process was thought to be cumbersome and too difficult for many vulnerable students and their families. As stated above, those administering the pilots within schools and colleges also found the level of reporting required to be time consuming. It was suggested that finding ways to streamline this aspect of the pilots would benefit all involved.

### 6.7 Defining Success

Many of those interviewed were unsure whether the pilot would be able to demonstrate considerable increases in the numbers of vulnerable young people participating and remaining in post-compulsory education. However, respondents insisted that this was too

blunt a measure by which to judge the success of the pilots. The time and resources invested in the pilot were thought to have resulted in personal and social gains for the individuals, their families, and for wider society. Those interviewed stated that educational achievement was just one aspect of success; the other dimensions were just as important and should be included in any assessment of success or value for money.

## 6.8 Revisiting Participants One Year On

This section examines the experiences and perspectives of young people with disabilities and or special educational needs. The participants were initially interviewed in 2000/01 when they were all enrolled in full-time education. The majority had remained in education in 2001/02, with the exception of one young person, who was not engaged in any education, employment or training. Therefore, this chapter has a strong focus on issues relating to sustaining participation for young people with disabilities and special educational needs. Perceived barriers to participation are also discussed.

### 6.8.1 Tracing participants

The young people involved in this research proved to have very similar trajectories and stable living arrangements; the majority continued to participate in education and to reside with family members, as was the case last year. All were traced through school and home contact points and the subsequent attrition rate for this sample was low. All nine of last year's participants were contacted, and eight agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Details of the sample of young people with disabilities and special educational needs are provided below (Table 6.1). It should also be noted that, although significant others were not due to be interviewed in this year's research, the support needs of two young people were so great that it was necessary to ask family members to participate in interviews on their behalf, as had been the case last year. Their views were sought in relation to how EMA operated in the lives of young people, and their understanding of the perspectives and aspirations of young people with high support needs.

**Table 6.1 Details of each Sample in the First and Second Year, Young People with Disabilities/Special Needs**

| YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES/SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS | |
|---|---|
| **Year 1 (2000/01)** | **Year 2 (2001/02)** |
| **Participants**<br>9 young people | **Participants**<br>8 young people |
| **Gender**<br>3 females<br>6 males | **Gender**<br>2 females<br>6 males |
| **Ages**<br>7 young people aged16/17 years old<br>2 young people aged 17/18 years old | **Ages**<br>6 young people aged16/17 years old<br>2 young people aged17/18 years old |
| **Living arrangements**<br>8 living with parent/s<br>1 living with grandparents | **Living arrangements**<br>7 living with parent/s<br>1 living with grandparents |
| **Current activity**<br>1 studying for A Levels<br>1 studying for AVCE<br><br>7 studying non-mainstream courses, pre-entry level | **Current activity**<br>1 studying for A Levels<br>6 studying non-mainstream courses' pre-entry level<br>1 young person who had left education due to illness |
| **EMA receipt**<br>8 receiving £30 a week<br>7 in first year receipt of EMA<br>1 in second year receipt of EMA | **EMA receipt**<br>7 receiving £30 a week<br>6 in second year receipt of EMA<br>1 in third year receipt of EMA |

## 6.9 Living, Financial Situation and Current Activity

This sample of young people with disabilities and special needs was settled in terms of their living and educational circumstances. Some young people had experienced episodes of illness, but most were largely pursuing similar lives as in the previous year. With the exception of one young person, all had identical living arrangements as last year, that is, with their families. One young person was now living in a one-parent, rather than a two-parent household. One young person had transferred to a mainstream college between the first and second year of interviews, as she had already stayed on for two years at the 11-18 special school previously attended. However, she continued to maintain contact with staff and friends from this school. She was now engaged in a specific learning package aimed at developing pre-entry level competencies in preparation for a Level 1 vocational course in Health and Social Care.

With two exceptions, these young people continued to participate in varying forms of special education. One young person was engaged in mainstream learning and was continuing successfully in Level 3 study, although he continued to receive support at school with numeracy and literacy. At the time of interviews last year, one young person had recently undergone a major operation and was not certain about future educational plans. In the intervening year she had decided to leave education and was currently trying to decide what she wanted to do in the future. As was the case last year, none of the young people in this sample had part-time jobs. Most of the young people continued to receive Disability Living Allowance which reflected their ongoing support and care needs.

## 6.10 Support Networks

The young people in this sample continued to rely on family members for practical and emotional support. Young people and parents reported a lack of support from external agencies (with the exception of schools), and were particularly critical of what they perceived to be a slow and indifferent Social Services department.

In general, young people looked to their tutors for support concerning educational and or careers advice. Staff at schools and colleges also provided them with information about EMA. Those attending special schools had been informed about EMA by tutors in the

previous year, and so tended to ask questions of these tutors. Parents also relied on school staff, rather than LEA administrative staff, to gain advice and help relating to EMA. The reason given for this was the close and ongoing relationship that young people and parents had with staff at special schools.

Young people had good social networks but these were mostly centred around schools or colleges. As a result, most young people only saw friends while attending their courses unless they were independently mobile.

### 6.11 Attitudes to and Experience of Post-Compulsory Education

Young people with disabilities and special needs continued to express positive attitudes towards education and enjoyed their time at school or college. All young people, including the individual who had left education, recognised that education was important to them as it would help them secure employment.

*'You can have a good job when you've finished.'*

Richard, 19, LEA 6, sustainer

*'I wanted to get my education before I started working.'*

Katherine, 19, LEA 6, sustainer

Parents of young people with high support needs adopted a similar approach, in that education was valued irrespective of EMA funding. Parents emphasised that, for these young people, education provided a secure and stimulating environment to address social and learning needs. In this context, the financial role of EMA was considered secondary to the importance of the stimulation offered by participation in education.

*'School said it's best for him to carry on and we decided yes, they said he can stay until he's 19, and we said okay… We carried on because we think it would benefit him, not for money, for him.'*

Wasim, 18, LEA 6, sustainer

All those interviewed suggested that there were few alternatives for young people with disabilities or special educational needs other than education. While the young people themselves were confident about their career options after education, those parents interviewed expressed concern as to what the future held for their children.

Those young people who continued in education had progressed, in terms of continuing to the second year of two-year programmes of study, or they had started new courses building on successful study in 2000/01. Despite an appreciation of the financial benefits of EMA, this was not regarded as a critical factor to participation in post-16 learning and, as stated above, young people with disabilities and special needs expressed a clear commitment to, and enjoyment of, learning.

The young person who had dropped out of education had an ambivalent view of education. During a long period of recuperation from a serious operation, she had experienced full autonomy in deciding how she would spend her time each day and had enjoyed the regular company of family and friends. However, on a brief return to mainstream school, this young person felt distanced from many of her peers, and found the environment restrictive and childlike. She also felt overwhelmed by the prospect of completing a backlog of coursework for two Level 3 vocational courses.

> *'I was due to go in for an operation and I decided not to go back because it was impossible for me to catch up on the course, I'd missed that much.'*
>
> Amanda, 19, LEA 6, early leaver

Consequently, she expressed little desire to re-engage in education in a school environment, and regarded any future participation in education as preferable within a college setting. Paradoxically, this young person expressed disappointment with herself for not completing her courses and reported that she missed the intellectual challenge and stimulation of education, as well as the company of peers. Although she maintained strong social connections with family and friends, long periods of the day were nevertheless spent alone. She reported that the absence of EMA was a significant disadvantage, as she now had to rely on parents for financial support. However, EMA had not proven to be a strong enough incentive to re-engage her in education during 2001/02. Although this young person expressed an interest in gaining employment, she regarded appropriate opportunities as limited for wheelchair users such as herself.

### 6.12 Barriers to Education

For young people with disabilities and special needs, the major barrier to participating in education was limited choice of provision, particularly after the age of 18. Most young people, as well as the parents interviewed, believed that after the age of 18 suitable education

was often based in residential settings, which were often some considerable distance from their homes. The distance, combined with the fact that the young person would have to leave familiar and supportive environments, were identified as barriers to participation in future education. It should be noted that many of these young people had remained in one school throughout their educational careers and leaving all their friends, as well as their families, proved a daunting prospect. One young person had considered attending residential education but, following a trial period, had found this too regimental and too remote from family. He also considered that many of the young people there were far less independent than he was and felt demoralised by this. This young person was used to an independent lifestyle and, although he received practical and emotional support from family, he owned and drove his own transport which was central to his independence. Instead, this young person opted for a mainstream local college that included a unit for all post-16 learners with special educational needs and disabilities. In both the first and second year, he reported strong relationships with peers and maintained an active social life with peers during and outside of study hours.

One parent speaking on behalf of a young person with high support needs did not regard education as difficult to access until the age of 18, and reported close relationships with the special school attended by his son. He considered that his son received a high standard of care and that the education received was appropriate, particularly as it included independence training. However, he expressed concern regarding participation after age 19, as he was aware of limited educational provision, especially for young people with high and complex needs. Another parent of a young person with high support needs considered opportunities limited even before this stage, in the sense that at the age of 16 her son had to transfer from his 11-16 institution to a post-16 provider. This transition was said to have been unsettling for the young person, and the parent was not confident that all education institutions provided identical levels of care or education.

The young person who dropped out of education in the first year regarded the most significant barrier to re-entry into education her own uncertainty, as she did not know what she wanted to study.

## 6.13 Factors Influencing Retention

For young people with disabilities, education was valued in terms of its social dimensions, as well as the fact that it could enhance employment prospects, and these factors were the main reasons why young people continued in education. The receipt of EMA, although welcomed, played a minor part in the decision to attend post-16 education.

*'I'm trying to get more experience really, ready for when, if, I can get a job.'*
Tom, 19, LEA 6, sustainer

Indeed, many of the young people interviewed intended to continue in education beyond the age of 19. One young person had already decided that he would like to attend an agricultural college in 2002/03 to become a gardener. Another young person had embarked upon a specific learning package in order to work towards a qualification in Social Care, which would continue into 2002/03. Another intended to participate in further education for a third year in order to undertake an AVCE qualification in IT, and so strengthen his application for entry to university. The long-term view of education taken by young people with special needs was similar to that of young people from the other vulnerable groups who had remained in education (see chapters 4 and 5); education was important to the achievement of their long-term aims.

## 6.14 Knowledge and Experience of EMA

Young people with disabilities and special educational needs continued to view EMA as a positive initiative, which facilitated participation and enabled young people to be less reliant on parents at a time when they felt themselves to be young adults. As last year, most young people were aware of attendance criteria that related to weekly payments. This section briefly examines young people's understanding of the EMA re-application processes and their awareness of EMA eligibility criteria and conditions.

### 6.14.1 The re-application process

Most young people and parents said that they had been prompted to renew their EMA applications by information sent to them by the LEA or special schools. All of the young people reported that parents had taken the major responsibility for completing and returning forms, and it was common for young people to simply sign the completed form or answer

specific sections on course details. Those young people who had re-applied found the process relatively straightforward, although they reported that completing the forms took considerable time and effort, as for the first application.

### 6.14.2 Eligibility criteria

Many young people were not aware of the specific eligibility criteria surrounding EMA, although most were aware that it aimed to assist young people from low-income backgrounds to participate in education. Most young people had no opinion of the equity of the criteria, although one student perceived that numbers at his mainstream school had risen sharply in response to EMA financial incentives. A similar view had been expressed last year by another young person at a mainstream school, who repeated the assertion this year that the financial incentive of EMA was attracting a range of young people into education who would otherwise have had no interest in participation. This young person noted that those with weak commitment to education were attracted by EMA funding. However, the requirement to maintain regular attendance and keep up with coursework was seen to have driven them back out of education, and this was regarded as just.

> *'There was that many people that left school but came back, and you could tell who they were, it was all rowdy lads, all the disruptive ones, they came back just to get some money. And then after a week, they're gone within a week, they couldn't hack the work. I don't see why people like that can justify doing nothing and get paid.'*
>
> Amanda, 19, LEA 6, early leaver

### 6.14.3 Complying with EMA requirements

Most young people believed that EMA requirements were clear. All understood that in the case of illness it was necessary to inform the school or college of absence. This was regarded as standard practice, particularly for those who used transport provided by the school or college. However, one parent speaking on behalf of his son, expressed the view that absence criteria were too stringent for young people with high support needs:

> *'It's too strict (...) My son, he's mentally handicapped, if he misses one day they shouldn't stop him in my opinion. They've given him this because he's not a normal child, but they treat him the same as everyone else.'*
>
> Wasim, 18, LEA 6, sustainer

This parent reported that his son had behavioural difficulties and this resulted in him becoming extremely agitated at times. During these episodes, it was not considered safe or appropriate to encourage him to attend school, and on other occasions his son simply refused

to attend school. However, this was considered to be part of his son's mental rather than physical condition and, therefore, his parent did not feel that he could report this to school as illness. As a result this young person had not attended school for a full week for a whole term, and so had not received any EMA payments for several months. This parent felt that the criteria for young people with high support needs should reflect better the complexity and challenging circumstances of their lives by rewarding shorter periods of attendance. The experiences of this parent suggest that the use of authorised absences need to be explored and explained more fully to parents and young people.

### 6.14.4 Learning Agreements

As last year, the young people interviewed had very little recollection of completing a Learning Agreement. However, when the criteria for receiving EMA was discussed, most young people knew that they had to attend school/college to complete their course work and to behave in an appropriate manner. Unlike the other two groups of young people in this report, none of these young people reported having payments stopped because of breaches in their Learning Agreements.

### 6.14.5 Awareness of flexibilities

Young people continued to be unaware of the flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and, consequently, most did not know that they were entitled to support for three years. As most attended courses in schools and colleges they did not know about the flexibility to study in non-mainstream provision. Those interviewed regarded themselves as being part of EMA, not of the vulnerable pilot operating in the LEA. The young people did not differentiate between themselves and other students in post-compulsory education, as they attended schools and colleges and completed their course work.

### 6.14.6 Uses of the weekly allowance and bonus payments

Various uses of the weekly allowance were reported but it was clear that the EMA weekly allowance was ring-fenced for young people's needs, rather than being incorporated into household expenditure on a regular basis. As stated above, the EMA weekly allowance provided young people with a level of financial independence from parents. Furthermore, all of the young people felt that they had effectively earned their EMA weekly allowance and bonuses, through attending school or college regularly and completing coursework. Several of the young people reported using the funds for educational expenses such as equipment.

Young people also saved some or all of their weekly awards for a variety of reasons, including saving to go to university and learning to drive. One young person reported that his EMA allowance was occasionally borrowed by parents to assist with household budgeting, but that this was repaid quickly. One young person reported using the EMA bonus towards the cost of a mobile telephone. In general, bonuses and backdated payments were saved and/ or used for treats, including going on holiday.

The young people interviewed did not use their weekly EMA payments for transport to and from school or college, as this was provided by the Local Authority.

One parent reported that he was still aiming to purchase electronic and computing equipment for his son who had high support needs and severe learning difficulties. Another parent stated that EMA funds were spent on items that would stimulate their son, such as games and toys, as he had high support needs and severe learning difficulties. Both parents considered these items as essentials to aiding the development of these young people. They also considered that the EMA allowance was for the benefit of the named young person, rather than for general household expenditure or for use by other siblings. Parents reported other uses of the weekly allowance, such as contributions towards the cost of clothing and toiletries. These were considered legitimate uses of the weekly allowance as they contributed to the overall care and well-being of young people with high support needs.

### 6.14.7 Stopped payments

Most young people had not experienced any stoppages to their EMA payments because of non-attendance or administrative error. Only one young person experienced sustained stoppages, as a result of non-attendance (see 6.14.3). During the first year, some young people had experienced delays in receiving their awards and it appears this was largely the result of forms being returned for further information. Similar delays were not reported during the second year of the pilot.

## 6.15 Role of EMA

None of those interviewed described EMA as critical to their decision to remain in education

and none regarded the potential loss of EMA as a reason to disengage from education.

*'I'd still go to college, learn all the things I need to before I get a job.'*
Kevin, 18, LEA 6, sustainer

Although they felt that EMA facilitated their participation in education, most stated they would have found the means to continue without the financial support of EMA.

The majority of young people with special needs entered post-16 education with a strong commitment to learning and to remaining in education. This is in contrast to initial attitudes of homeless young people and teenage parents and confirms the findings of Chapter 2 of this report. Most young people with disabilities and special needs lived in stable living circumstances and received varying levels of financial and emotional support from parents, which may explain their different attitudes towards education and contrasting appraisal of the financial value of EMA. Young people with disabilities and special needs regarded EMA as having most significance in that it provided affirmation of their decision to continue education after 16, enabling financial independence rather than financial survival, and encouraging the acquisition of life skills such as self-management of finances. Among young people with special needs, financial independence was regarded as an important form of personal development. Evidence from the parents of young people with disabilities and special educational needs suggested that the receipt of EMA funds alleviated pressure on household budgets. However, the financial benefits of EMA may have been invisible to some young people who were simply aware that their parents provided the necessary support, but were not aware of any financial difficulty involved in achieving this. In contrast, young people living independently, such as homeless young people and teenage parents, were more likely to have direct experience of budgeting for themselves and for their children, and this may account for the centrality of the financial element of the scheme in their perceptions.

The young person who had left education last year now regretted leaving in terms of the loss of qualifications, reduced peer contact and absence of EMA funding.

*'I miss school, yes. ... Okay, you're doing work but you have a laugh with your friends. ... Sometimes, I think I could be sitting there doing [school] work and I'm thinking, I'd love to be doing that.'*
Amanda, 19, LEA 6, early leaver

She reported, both this year and last year, that funding had made a difference to her financial and personal standing. EMA allowances had allowed her to meet the costs of equipment and reinforced a sense of independence from parents. However, this was clearly not enough to draw her back into education as at the time of interview she had not participated in education for over 12 months. Although she was still in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, she had no other income apart from casual payment for undertaking book keeping for her parents' small business. EMA was considered to have been a significant loss.

### 6.15.1 Influences on budgeting and money management

Young people with disabilities and special needs gained a sense of independence from being able to access their own bank or post-office accounts. As many had no experience of part-time employment, the EMA weekly allowances served as a form of wages; money was being received on a regular basis in return for consistent attendance and progression.

> *'You have to work for your EMA and if you don't you don't get it… I think working for the EMA is the right thing to do.'*
>
> *Kevin, 18, LEA 6, sustainer*

> *'It's good that you get rewarded for good work … when you've got a job you have to work to get paid, well why not work at school to get paid, because you're working for something that you want to do in the future.'*
>
> Amanda, 19, LEA 6, early leaver

Young people's financial awareness was high, in that they were aware of how much they gained from the weekly allowance, how much they had in their accounts, and were able to recall what money had been spent on. However, it is difficult to say that these young people gained budgeting skills, as they were not reliant on this resource for daily living expenses, unlike teenage parents and homeless young people.

### 6.15.2 Personal development

Among young people with disabilities and special educational needs, EMA was regarded as a reward for consistent attendance and progression. A secondary benefit of this was the independence achieved by young people which had the effect of validating their decision to continue in education, and increased their sense of self-worth. The impact of this cannot be over-emphasised, as these young people were aware of their lack of independence and limited labour market opportunities. In this sense, EMA gave them a sense of inclusion and of being

entitled to the same rights and opportunities as other young people who did not have disabilities or special educational needs.

### 6.16 Limitations of EMA

The young people in this sample perceived only two limitations of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot. The first was the inflexibility of attendance criteria described in Section 6.14.3, and the second was the lack of certainty in funding opportunities after age 19, at the end of current EMA funding. Parents were not aware of any other funding mechanisms equivalent to EMA for young people over the age of 19. This anxiety was heightened by lack of clarity and lack of confidence in Social Services to assist young people and parents to find suitable support and provision after age 19.

### 6.17 Achievements and Future Plans

Young people with disabilities and or special educational needs were strongly committed to education and had extremely high retention rates. Progression was also positive, with the great majority of young people in this sample engaged in a second year of study that built on the previous year. The vast majority of the young people intended to continue in post-16 education for a third year, and hoped to gain access to university, to begin mainstream qualifications, to undertake vocational study, or to develop further independence training or specialised learning.

# 7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE

The findings from the evaluation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots suggest the following guidelines would enhance practice and make the pilots more effective and responsive to the needs of vulnerable young people. These guidelines are presented as a supplement to recommendations from the evaluation of the mainstream pilots (Maguire et al., 2002).

***Administration and Delivery***

- Fast-track vulnerable student applications in recognition of the financial significance and motivational effects of the scheme on this target group.
- Simplify the application form so that the reading age required by those completing it is lower.
- Provide a shortened application form for independent students as they are not required to complete significant sections of the standard form on parental income.
- Application forms and guidance notes for applicants should be available in languages other than English.
- Good liaison between education providers and key staff involved with particular groups of vulnerable young people proved to be an effective and efficient way of verifying authorised absences.
- Prior written notice should be given to vulnerable young people informing them of stoppages to EMA payments.
- Stoppages of EMA payments to vulnerable young people should be used as an early warning system to trigger advice and support.
- Learning Agreements need to incorporate more relevant and tailored learning goals.
- More specific target setting between education providers and young people would allow modular bonus payments to reward short-term gains of vulnerable students and might enhance the role of bonus payments.
- The payment of attendance and achievement bonuses need to be more timely.
- Verification of income and residency details requires swifter action as subsequent payment delays are considered demoralising.

***Identification***

- Include self-identification option in application forms/packs to serve as a voluntary approach to collecting information on vulnerability.
- Clearer definitions of vulnerability are required to help ensure that access to the flexibilities is consistent across LEAs.
- Each area should establish a consistent method by which key agencies can report student vulnerability to the LEA.
- Identifying students as vulnerable has to be achieved in such a way that it does not lead to further marginalisation or exlusion.
- Effective exchange of destination and attainment data is required between Connexions and each LEA.
- Need to resolve data protection issues to allow information to be exchanged between agencies.

***Partnership***

- Collaboration between key agencies and the LEA promotes identification of young people and maximises local resources aimed at meeting vulnerable young people's needs.
- Increasing partnership working has raised awareness of the aims of the pilots among local statutory agencies, education providers and non-educational agencies.
- In the absence of high profile publicity for the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, key agencies need to be made aware of the scheme and this has proved to be most effectively achieved through face-to-face meetings, rather than through simply mailing information.
- Referral of students who drop out of courses or drop out of the pilot scheme requires a clearly agreed policy between the LEA, education providers and careers services. At present referral is undertaken at the discretion of each local institution, and so varies widely.
- A point of referral is needed as soon as a vulnerable young person begins to experience problems so as to avoid the young person dropping out of education.
- Effective support which meets the individual needs of vulnerable young people is vital.
- This support has to respond to the practical, emotional and social problems vulnerable young people experience.

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