

# Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots: Implementation and Reported Impacts in the First Year

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ISBN 1 84185 934 6  
March 2003

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We are grateful to the EMA implementation groups in the pilot areas who welcomed the evaluation team and who continue to respond so positively to our request for information. We thank representatives from LEAs, Careers/Connexions Services and Schools and Colleges for their willingness to share their views with us.

We would also like to thank the young people, their families, friends and support workers who participated in this evaluation. Their views, experiences and opinions have greatly enhanced our understanding of the role that EMA can play in the lives of vulnerable young people.

We would also like to acknowledge the help and advice given by members of staff at the Department *for* Education and Skills, in particular Sue Rogers and Ganka Mueller.

Finally, we would like to thank Sharon Walker and Rita Khatri at CRSP who gave valuable administrative support.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Chapter 1 Introduction**

The EMA is being piloted with a view to raising participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory education among 16-18 year olds. This is a means-tested allowance paid to 16-18 year olds (and in some areas to their parents). The pilot provision started in September 1999 and was originally planned to continue for three years. At the end of the pilot, some form of EMA will be extended nationally and will include support for vulnerable young people (**Section 1.1**).

From September 2000, four EMA pilot areas began introducing flexibilities to meet the needs of more disadvantaged young people. Childcare Pilots also commenced aiming to address the specific needs of teenage parents in three of the existing EMA pilot areas.

Consequently, in the four LEAs operating EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People, eligibility conditions have been adjusted to help young people to participate in post-compulsory education. Each LEA focuses on the needs of one specific vulnerable group. The Childcare Pilots were introduced in three LEAs that already operated the main EMA scheme. The Childcare Pilots offer an allowance to assist with the costs of childcare if a teenage parent decides to participate in full-time post-compulsory education. Overall, the evaluation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots covered six LEAs.

The methodology for the evaluation of the EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots is divided into three parts. Case studies have been undertaken in each of the pilot areas in order to review local strategies of implementation and administration of EMA. The collection of contextual data forms another component of the overall evaluation. Qualitative interviews conducted with vulnerable young people and their significant others form a third strand of the evaluation. Throughout the report, pseudonyms are used to safeguard the anonymity of all participants (**Section 1.2**).

### **Chapter 2 EMA aimed at Young People who are Homeless**

Within the DfES working definition of young homeless people, there is an aim to include a range of young people in different circumstances. For example, young people who are ‘*roofless*’, living in hostel accommodation or in other sheltered accommodation or staying

with friends are considered homeless. Young people who are homeless do not have to provide proof of residency in order to be eligible to receive an EMA. Also, young people who are estranged will be considered as independent students without having to be in receipt of Income Support (**Section 2.1**).

Cross-agency partnerships were evident in the implementation of flexibilities aimed at young people who are homeless in LEA 1. The Implementation Group comprises of representatives from a number of organisations, namely the Careers Service, local colleges (not schools), the Youth Offending Team and a number of voluntary organisations that deal with homeless groups. A high level of support for the initiative from homeless organisations was also evident (**Section 2.1.1**).

Those interviewed in relation to implementation articulated a number of issues that had emerged with the introduction of EMA flexibilities in LEA 1. These related to resource issues as well as classroom dynamics. The need for enhanced levels of student support was identified due to increasing pressure on already over-taxed systems of student support. College staff also noted the additional challenges that they had to deal with in terms of the behavioural problems of some students (**Section 2.1.2**).

Although EMA flexibilities were largely considered to be a positive introduction, it was also felt that they did not fully embrace the needs of young homeless people. Consequently, a number of suggestions for improvement were voiced. There was a suggestion that EMA flexibilities for young homeless people should be extended to cover those who are over the age of 20, as hostel-run education programmes are open to young people above the age of 20. It was also suggested that a more flexible approach to learning was required in the regulations of EMA if it was to have a broader appeal and impact. A further suggestion for ensuring sensitive provision of EMA flexibilities for young homeless people was that absences should be more closely verified with the education provider before payments are withdrawn.

At the time of implementation interviews, 83 homeless or estranged young people in LEA 1 were registered for receipt of EMA and benefited from EMA flexibilities (**Section 2.1.3**).

Young people participating in the pilot scheme had experienced varied patterns of homelessness and their current accommodation varied in its degree of stability (Section 2.2.1).

Young people had both positive and negative experiences of compulsory education. Negative experiences persistently included interrupted or ceased schooling arising from: absenteeism, bullying, dominant personal issues, and poor relationships with staff or authority figures. Positive experiences were characterised by peer support, strong personal motivation and consistent support from staff around dominant personal issues (Section 2.5).

Barriers to post-compulsory education could be overcome when young people were encouraged by strong support networks to seek self-development and associate post-compulsory education with future independence (Section 2.6).

Most of those interviewed were outside of traditional educational routes into post-compulsory education on joining the scheme and, therefore, their awareness of the EMA scheme and its relevant flexibilities was reliant upon their access to informed support workers.

There was limited awareness of the EMA flexibilities as being any different to the main EMA scheme; nevertheless awareness of the financial implications of participation, and associated requirements on students was high. Despite the *'invisible'* nature of some EMA flexibilities (for example, the opportunity to study outside of mainstream establishments) there was strong evidence to suggest the importance of such flexibilities in decisions to return to education (Section 2.7).

The application process was often considered as problematic. Consequently, young people required significant support in the completion of application forms and in establishing bank accounts. (Section 2.9)

The consequences of participation in EMA were far-reaching for many of those interviewed. Financially, the scheme provided a key addition to low income as well as providing the opportunity to save for the future and think, long-term, about the transition to independent living. Participation also had an impact on increasing the commitment and motivation to learn and to achieve. Finally, there was evidence that participation in the scheme, and in

post-compulsory education, was helping young people to reassess their future plans and to have greater confidence in their own abilities (**Section 2.10**).

### **Chapter 3    EMA and Childcare Pilots aimed at Teenage Parents**

Within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme, teenage parents are defined as those young people who have the primary childcare responsibility, which can usually be determined by receipt of Child Benefit on behalf of a young child. Within teenage parent extensions to EMA provision, students who become pregnant during their course will be given a backlog of their EMA payment in one lump sum if they return to full-time education for at least a four week period following maternity leave absence (**Section 3.1**).

The EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at teenage parents and the Childcare Pilots are steered by similar representatives across the four LEAs implementing the schemes. This often involves a union between the LEA, Careers/Connexions Service, local education providers, Youth Services, health representatives and those with specialist experience with teenage parents. In all areas, the Careers/Connexions Services are usually central to providing Personal Advisers who underpin the delivery of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. However, despite examples of cross-agency working, this did not always signal a comfortable union (**Section 3.1.1**).

It is evident that identification of teenage parents was a challenging task for all pilot areas. Each LEA publicised the existence of the teenage parent extensions and the Childcare Pilots at locations such as doctors' surgeries, community centres and in local schools and colleges. Health Visitors and other support agencies were also common contacts across the extensions and Childcare Pilots, in terms of identifying eligible young people (**Section 3.1.2**).

A number of issues relating to absence monitoring were raised. For example, the onus on each school or college to authorise and verify student absences was not always welcomed. In contrast however, LEAs expressed an interest in receiving greater information from schools and colleges regarding absence, particularly in relation to recording absences for young homeless people.

High take-up correlated with the existence of positive relationships within implementation teams, cross-agency working and good will from local education providers (**Section 3.1.3**).

Several impediments to take-up were identified. This was attributed in part to the lack of lead-in time available for the launch of EMA extensions and Childcare Pilots. It was also stated that the effort required to gain relatively low numbers of students had been great and reflected the difficulty of the task. Further, it was felt that although take-up might be low, great strides had been made for the individuals concerned, as their self-confidence and self-esteem was perceived to have increased and this was reflected in their re-entry into education.

Substantial numbers of the target group here tended to be non-attenders prior to becoming pregnant and this compounds the difficulty in encouraging many teenage parents to re-enter education and attend regularly (**Section 3.2**).

Becoming pregnant whilst still in compulsory education had a disruptive effect on the education of teenage parents as they often left school to complete their education in an alternative environment. Experiences of school were varied and were often drastically different once the young woman had become pregnant (**Section 3.6**).

The key barriers for these young people were childcare (funding childcare, shortage of provision for young children, and social and cultural attitudes towards childcare), transport, finance, time, personal skills and lack of confidence, negative experience of school and other influences such as the views of partners. Factors accounting for the surmounting of barriers were a strong will towards self-development, often driven by the responsibility of becoming a parent, practical solutions to childcare issues, information, support, and availability of part-time study. (**Section 3.8**).

Awareness of EMA before embarking on post-compulsory education was high, through schools, Mother and Baby Units, word of mouth and support staff with knowledge of the scheme. Young parents were aware of '*visible*' flexibilities such as childcare funding and transport funding but awareness of other flexibilities was limited (**Section 3.9**).

EMA played an important role in the return to education. In providing childcare funding, it was a crucial enabler for some teenage parents. The financial incentive of the weekly allowance ranged in effect from encouraging the decision to being an added bonus. The flexibilities of lower levels of requisite guided learning hours a week was also important (**Section 3.10**).

Childcare served as a particularly strong barrier to participation in education for teenage parents. Many did not feel it appropriate to rely on family members in order to care for their children, as they felt that this should be their responsibility. Consequently, many teenage parents felt deterred from engaging in education. Teenage parents also reported that age limitations operating at crèche and nursery facilities often precluded the care of their very young children. Furthermore, shortage of childcare provision was frequently noted. Options were further restricted as many teenage parents had strong preferences for particular types of provision, namely crèche and nursery facilities above childminding provision. In some areas, there was a strong mistrust of childminder services. Many teenage parents valued the early stages of their child's development and felt that this was an important bonding period, which took precedence over participation in education (**Section 3.10.1**).

Specialist advisory agencies were key in making teenage parents aware of local childcare provision. They were also important in making teenage parents aware of education providers that would accommodate their childcare needs and those that offered courses to develop parenting skills. This advice and support was deemed particularly valuable to teenage parents. Consequently, teenage parents often maintained links with such agencies after the EMA application process was completed (**Section 3.11.4**).

The financial impact of EMA was profound in the lives of many of the young parents as it provided a valuable contribution to their weekly budget. In households where parents were living with a working partner, EMA was also important as it was regarded as money belonging to the teenage parent and/or the child (**Section 3.12**).

Missing payments and the lack of EMA in the holidays has a large effect for some young parents. In holidays, young parents cannot supplement their income with part-time work as they do not have childcare provision, and if they could work, they would risk their eligibility for Income Support. Teenage parents rely on the receipt of Income Support, which also enables them to be eligible for receipt of EMA. Therefore, lack of EMA funding could be problematic during the long summer break (**Section 3.12.5**).

Early evidence suggests that for many teenage parents who returned to education, support from the EMA Vulnerable Pilot has served as a key enabler in not only increasing initial

participation, but also in sustaining that participation over time. Childcare support was found particularly useful for young mothers (**Section 3.12.7**).

## **Chapter 4    EMA aimed at Young People with Disabilities**

Young people who have a Statement of Educational Need or have been recognised as having a disability through the Disability Discrimination Act are entitled to claim EMA for up to three years. In addition to this, the EMA Vulnerable Pilot allows students with disabilities to study a range of non-mainstream courses to suit their needs and attend non-mainstream institutions able to deliver appropriate education (**Section 4.1**).

In LEA 6, the target group of young people with disabilities is broadly based and includes young people with physical impairments as well as those with statements of special educational need. In LEA 6, as in other EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas, flexibilities were applicable to a range of vulnerable students such as homeless young people and those with no or low qualifications. However, in practice, the focus of implementation remained on students with disabilities rather than other groups (**Section 4.1.1**).

Responsibility for launching and administering the EMA flexibilities provision rests with the Student Support Services team that deals with grants and awards to students in higher education. The EMA implementation group that had been established to assist in the design and delivery of main EMA provision, was briefed on the introduction of EMA extensions and Childcare Pilots but had no active role in its implementation. The launch of the EMA provision for vulnerable students was considered difficult and this was attributed in part to a belief that the LEA had not been fully briefed about the eligibility conditions and the nature of the flexibilities that would be available to young people.

Identification of eligible students was based on type of school attended as entered on the standard EMA application form and this allowed easy identification of students who attended special schools. However, as many eligible young people attend mainstream schools, this approach may exclude a high number of potential applicants. Also, many parents reported difficulty in completing the application forms and the consequent high level of returned forms, was reported to have led to some delays in making initial weekly payments to students (**Section 4.1.2**).

At an EMA Vulnerable Pilots Steering Group meeting in January 2001, it was reported that 43 young people were in receipt of EMA flexibilities provision for young people with disabilities in LEA 6. Take-up from young people in special schools was reported to be disappointing. Several possible reasons were presented to explain this low level of take-up. These include a lingering perception that claiming EMA would jeopardise receipt of other benefits such as the Disability Living Allowance. Also, the nature and volume of information requested on the EMA application form was considered intimidating to potential applicants. Furthermore, while efforts were made to identify eligible young people, there was a view that had further support been available to the LEA to target vulnerable groups, take-up would have increased. This included having time and resources to work more closely with agencies directly supporting vulnerable young people as well as having staff available to help with the application process (**Section 4.1.3**).

The decision to remain in education meant various things to young people with disabilities. For example, parents of young people with severe learning difficulties tended to emphasise school as an important environment for fostering their child's personal development. Some of the young people interviewed regarded education as a means of enhancing employability (**Section 4.2**).

Awareness of the flexibilities of the scheme was low amongst the young people interviewed. Also, recollection of the Learning Agreement was poor, although the basic obligation to attend was widely understood and observed (**Section 4.6**).

Views and experiences of the EMA scheme tended to be very positive. However, for most young people with disabilities and their families in this study, the role of EMA was peripheral in the decision to remain in education. The receipt of EMA was regarded as an important means of practical support and for some of the young people it offered a degree of independence (**Section 4.8**).

## **Chapter 5    Conclusions**

Although each LEA received DfES guidance concerning implementation, each had autonomy to develop strategies relevant to localised needs and specific target group concerns. Whilst this allowed opportunities for innovation, it also created a situation in which EMA flexibility and Childcare Pilots were delivered in varied forms across the country. However, the



Personal Adviser role was identified as critical to the take-up of EMA Vulnerable Pilots. There was some concern that the Personal Adviser role required full training and resourcing. Evidence suggests that those LEAs that were unable to establish strong relationships with other partners were also the ones to disclose the least amount of satisfaction with take-up. Actual levels of take-up in these areas was relatively low compared to take-up managed elsewhere (**Section 5.1**).

Establishing partnerships was recognised as a particularly effective means of enhancing implementation of the pilots. Although establishment of partnerships presented a challenge to LEAs, inter-agency activity was valued for the role it played in identification of vulnerable young people and in terms of the opportunities it created for pooling funds targeted at particular vulnerable groups (**Section 5.1.1**).

Great efforts were often required to identify vulnerable groups and a further challenge was involved in encouraging vulnerable young people to participate in education. Referrals from a range of key agencies were considered the most effective means of identification of vulnerable young people. This was supplemented by targeted promotion of the scheme in a bid to attract applications from vulnerable young people (**Section 5.1.2**).

The onus is on the education provider to verify an absence as authorised and for those implementing teenage parent extensions and Childcare Pilots, there was felt to be an extra burden. One LEA suggested that schools and colleges should endeavour to gain full explanations of absence before stopping payments of vulnerable young people, particularly in relation to homeless young people who were deemed vulnerable to frequent spells of absence. Education staff suggested that there should be greater flexibility in interpretation of absence, particularly when students attended courses but simply arrived and registered late. Uneven identification of absence existed within and between LEAs in the absence of specific agreements between all of those involved in implementation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots (**Section 5.1.3**).

The difficulty of identifying vulnerable young people and then encouraging post-16 participation led some to appreciate that relatively minor levels of take-up signify real challenges and real successes. Consequently, it was asserted that evaluation criteria for EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots should reflect the specific challenges of increasing

participation amongst vulnerable young people. The continuing experience of vulnerable young people is also considered an important criterion for judging success, alongside participation rates or the financial impact of EMA Vulnerable Pilots (**Section 5.1.5**).

Effective implementation strategies were identified. These included regular discussion and local evaluation of pilots; broad and inclusive partnership working; data sharing between the LEA and key agencies; local absence policies; involvement of Careers/Connexions Services and independent advice and support for vulnerable young people (**Section 5.1.6**).

Regardless of awareness, the existence of the scheme was broadly welcomed by both young people and their significant others as a positive way to encourage participation in post-16 education. The scheme was seen to provide additional motivation, and was also viewed as a fundamental financial support measure which could assist vulnerable young people and their families in maintaining participation (**Section 5.2**).

EMA Vulnerable Pilot flexibilities were largely invisible to those participating in the scheme. However, when students discussed their experiences of participation many of the positive features they identified were because of the flexibilities provided to them (**Section 5.2.1**).

The role of the scheme in providing an incentive to remain in, or return to education varied across the three groups. For young disabled people, the influence of the availability of EMA was peripheral. There was greater diversity amongst teenage parents; some described the scheme as a significant incentive in their decision to remain in post-compulsory education. Others though, described limited impacts of the scheme. In contrast, young homeless students were frequently encouraged to return to education through a combination of factors directly linked to elements of the scheme. Key amongst these were the opportunity to study in a non-mainstream location and the potential financial impact of participation (**Section 5.2.2**).

Although experiences of participation were largely positive, some experienced difficulties with payments. Payments lost due to absence for example, whilst found also in the evaluation of the main EMA scheme, engendered particular hardships amongst these groups of students (**Section 5.2.3**).

Taking part in EMA provided financial as well as educational benefits to vulnerable young people. Participation in the schemes also provided participants with a sense of self-worth. The integral relationship between '*doing something*' (i.e. attending school or college regularly) and receiving a weekly payment was crucially important for participants (**Section 5.3.1-5.3.3**).

The three groups were very different in relation to the barriers they were facing in terms of participation in post-16 education and in their previous experiences of education. This again indicates the importance of flexibility in the measures employed in order to ensure that the scheme could effectively meet individual needs (**Section 5.4**).

For young disabled students the move into post-compulsory education was generally less problematic than for teenage parents or young homeless students. Students with disabilities tended to have less broken compulsory educational careers and more stable living circumstances. Both young homeless people and teenage parents described financial barriers as key obstacles to their return to education. These financial barriers not only related to immediately obvious costs, such as childcare, but also the associated costs of travel or course-related expenses (**Section 5.4.1-5.4.2**).

Access to education was a key issue for all three groups of potential students. Access barriers were of two main types: physical barriers, relating to access to buildings or transport difficulties; access to courses was also limited at times due to dominant personal issues, poor previous educational experiences and limited choice of non-mainstream provision. Additional barriers to accessing education included young people's perceptions or negative feelings about education (**Section 5.4.3**).

The young people interviewed also faced a range of personal barriers in their return to education. These included such things as dominant personal issues like addiction and a legacy of fear about traditional schooling from poor past experiences. Course flexibilities offered under the EMA pilots had a major role to play in encouraging participation for these students (**Section 5.4.4**).

The evidence from interviews with participants indicates that without wider support networks many of the young people may have never heard about the opportunities offered under the

EMA scheme or, more broadly, would not have felt sufficiently empowered or supported to return to education (**Section 5.4.5**).

The primary factors likely to lead to young people being diverted from their courses were negative experiences of the course or institution, financial factors and overriding dominant personal issues (**Section 5.5**).

In evaluating the success of these schemes, the question of what constitutes a '*successful outcome*' or what '*achievement*' entails has been found to be more complex. The study identified three broad ways in which achievement could be interpreted. These were: conventional measures of educational achievement, measures of success in creating new or increased attachment to learning, and the development of personal life skills which assist in overcoming deep-rooted social exclusion (**Section 5.6**).

A summary of key policy issues to emerge from the evaluation is provided. Key areas for consideration include the effectiveness of administration and implementation strategies, the role and diversity of support required by young people, the value of existing and further flexibilities within the pilot and the need for a diverse measure to effectively chart the success of EMA targeted at vulnerable young people (**Section 5.7**).

# **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP), the National Centre for Social Research (NCSR) and the Institute for Employment Research (IER) to evaluate the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots.

This report focuses on the first year of the EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots. The analysis of implementation of these pilots draws on interviews with implementation groups and key informants and stakeholders. Eligible young people and their significant others also provide evidence of the impact as well as difficulties involved in the EMA Pilot for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots. The integrated evaluation that follows discusses the degree of flexibility and level of effectiveness of EMA in relation to vulnerable young people.

## **1.1 EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots**

The EMA is being piloted with a view to raising participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory education among 16-18 year olds. This is a means-tested allowance paid to 16-18 year olds (and in some areas to their parents). The pilot provision started in September 1999 and was originally planned to continue for three years. At the end of the pilot, some form of EMA will be extended nationally and will include support for vulnerable young people.

Four models of EMA are being evaluated. Variations exist in terms of the weekly amount of EMA available, to whom it is paid (either the young person or their parents), the amount which is paid as a retention bonus and the amount which is paid as an achievement bonus. The full weekly allowance is payable if the total parental taxable income does not exceed £13,000. For those with a total parental income between £13,000 and £30,000 (£13,000 to £20,000 for the London pilot), EMA is progressively tapered down to a weekly allowance of £5.

From September 2000, four EMA pilot areas began introducing flexibilities to meet the needs of more disadvantaged or vulnerable young people. Childcare Pilots also commenced aiming

to address the specific needs of teenage parents. The introduction of the EMA flexibilities and childcare provision was in response to recommendations in the Social Exclusion Unit's report, Bridging the Gap (1999). Action 8 of the report states:

*'The Government will ... establish an additional set of small-scale pilots along EMA principles, starting in 2000 so they sit alongside the second cohorts of the pilots currently planned. These will test out the additional support that might be required by the following groups:*

- *young people who are homeless;*
- *young people with disabilities.*

*These will be in addition to the recent decision to explore, within the existing EMA pilot timetable, how the study programme and attendance requirements set out in the Learning Agreement can take account of the particular needs of teenage parents.'*

The original focus of the EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People, and therefore the evaluation, was on young people who are homeless, young people with disabilities and teenage parents. Consequently, in areas that have introduced EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People, eligibility conditions have been adjusted to help vulnerable young people to participate in post-compulsory education.

The following flexibilities to EMA regulations have been agreed in those areas operating the pilot scheme for vulnerable young people:

- the flexibility of studying outside of mainstream schools and colleges for part of their study time if adequate provision is available;
- the opportunity to study a wide range of courses to suit their needs;
- the option of receiving modular style EMA bonus payments;
- the opportunity to claim EMA for up to three years;
- students who become pregnant during their course to be given a special allowance in one lump sum if they return to full-time education after a period of absence for maternity leave;
- young people who are homeless not to have to provide proof of residency in order to be eligible to receive an EMA;
- the option not to have EMA paid into a bank account; and
- young people who are estranged from their families to be considered as independent students without having to be in receipt of Income Support.

It was proposed that each of the four pilot areas would focus specifically on one group of disadvantaged young people. Initially, this was to be as follows:

- LEA 1 Homeless young people;
- LEA 2 Teenage parents;
- LEA 3 Teenage parents;
- LEA 6 Young people with disabilities.

In order to respect anonymity of participants, LEAs are numbered from 1 to 6 and pseudonyms are used as a substitute for names of individuals.

While the emphasis remained on the development of EMA Vulnerable Pilots for the allocated group of young people in each LEA, the initiative was extended to cover all groups of young people considered vulnerable to social exclusion within EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas. For example, this could include care leavers or those in care; young carers; young people who are currently excluded from school; youth offenders; young people with no or low qualifications; young people who are identified as being estranged from their families and young people who are identified as needing additional help through the Learning Gateway, where they reside within an EMA Vulnerable Pilot area.

Childcare Pilots were introduced from September 2000 in five areas. Three of these were located in existing EMA areas and two were founded in areas supported by the Early Excellence Centres. This report is concerned with evaluation of Childcare Pilots located in pre-existing EMA Pilot areas. The evaluation focused on young people's experience of the Childcare Pilots and how far this support enhanced EMA provision. The views of those involved in implementation of the Childcare Pilots were also explored. Childcare Pilots based in the Early Excellence Centres are the subject of a separate evaluation.

The Childcare Pilots, in the form of a tapered allowance, are designed to help with the costs of childcare if a teenage parent decides to participate in full-time post-compulsory education. A young person eligible for a childcare payment will also be eligible to apply for EMA. Therefore, the EMA is paid in addition to the childcare allowance. The childcare allowance is means-tested and is aimed to assist with up to 95 per cent of childcare costs. The maximum weekly allowance is £100 each week for one child and £150 each week for two children. The young person is required to contribute 5 per cent of childcare costs.

Overall, the evaluation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots is based on research undertaken in six LEAs (Table 1.1). Three areas operate EMA Vulnerable Pilots, two areas operate Childcare Pilots and one area operates both the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and Childcare Pilot. The focus of the evaluation was to determine the varied implementation strategies taken to deliver EMA in each pilot area, and to assess the influence of EMA on the experiences of vulnerable young people.

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

Pilot Type	Location					
	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 Methodology

The evaluation of the EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots is longitudinal in nature. First year findings reported here, form the first part of a two-year study into the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. The methodology for the evaluation of the EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots is divided



into three components. Firstly, case studies have been undertaken in each of the pilot areas in order to review local strategies of implementation and administration of EMA. The collection of contextual data forms the second component of the overall evaluation. Qualitative interviews conducted with vulnerable young people and their significant others form a third strand of the evaluation.

### **1.2.1 Case studies of delivery**

The case studies of delivery build on the work already being undertaken by the main EMA evaluation team with administrators and stakeholders in each of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and Childcare Pilot areas.

Roundtable discussions were convened with local strategy/implementation groups to consider implementation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. Interviews were also arranged with key personnel in each locality. These interviews included representatives from the LEA, Social Services, Careers/Connexions Services, project workers for young people who are homeless, for young people with disabilities and for teenage parents, as well as school and college representatives. The main aim of these discussions was to pinpoint the strategies used to identify and target the eligible population. In addition, it was considered important to identify the support mechanisms that have been established to encourage young people to make applications for EMA and/or childcare provision and to encourage vulnerable young people to participate in post-compulsory education.

Case studies of EMA delivery were undertaken between October 2000 and February 2001 by CRSP and IER. Roundtable discussion and interviews lasted for a maximum of 1 hour and 30 minutes. These were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Roundtable discussions and interviews were scheduled for 2001/2002 to monitor developments and changes throughout the pilot and to identify examples of good practice. Findings for the second year of the pilot will be reported separately.

### **1.2.2 Collection of contextual information**

As additional contextual information was needed to identify the infrastructure and support services in each locality, interviews were carried out with representatives from support

services – examples include Social Services departments and voluntary groups that work with young people who are homeless, young people who have disabilities or teenage parents.

The collection of contextual information was completed between October 2000 and February 2001. This work was undertaken by CRSP and IER, with each organisation extending the links that had already been established in the pilot areas through existing work with administrators and stakeholders.

### **1.2.3 Qualitative research with eligible individuals**

EMA flexibilities apply to all groups of vulnerable young people as opposed to one specific target group in each area. However, it was agreed with DfES that the sample of young people interviewed for evaluation purposes should be drawn from the three original target groups; young people who are homeless, teenage parents and young people with disabilities. Qualitative work with young people and Key Workers or significant others has been undertaken by CRSP and NCSR.

The central objective of this qualitative work is to evaluate whether the childcare allowances and flexibilities to EMA eligibility rules prove to be effective in enabling young people from vulnerable groups to participate in post-compulsory education. More specifically, it aims to:

- investigate attitudes to post-compulsory education and explore the factors that influence participation in post-compulsory education;
- understand the educational and support needs of teenage parents, young people who are homeless and young people with disabilities with respect to participation in post-compulsory education;
- identify the barriers these young people face when attempting to access post-compulsory education;
- investigate attitudes to and experiences of the childcare allowance and EMA flexibilities;
- explore whether the childcare allowances and extensions to EMA meet the needs of these young people and enable their participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory education; and
- explore views about possible changes or improvements to the design of the childcare allowance and extensions to EMA.

A three stage qualitative evaluation was proposed to meet the evaluation objectives outlined here. Stage 1 and Stage 2 have been undertaken and are reported on here. Stage 1 involved interviews with young people in early Spring 2001. Stage 2 of the evaluation involved interviews with young people's significant others in late Spring 2001. Table 1.2 displays the number of interviews undertaken with vulnerable young people at Stage 1 and their significant others at Stage 2.

**Table 1.2      Number of Interviews Undertaken with Vulnerable Young People and Significant Others at Stage 1 and Stage 2**

	Number of interviews undertaken	
	Stage 1	Stage 2
Target group	Interviews with young people	Interviews with significant others
Homeless young people	15	18
Teenage parents	15	27
Disabled young people	9	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>59</b>

Stage 3 forms a longitudinal element within this evaluation that includes follow-up interviews with young people in Spring 2002. This involves a selection of young people who were interviewed at Stage 1 and will provide the opportunity to evaluate impacts of EMA flexibilities in the second year of implementation. This will form the subject of a separate report.

The evaluation team has employed a case study methodology to the qualitative research undertaken with young people and their significant others. The case study approach involves investigation of the circumstances and key issues particular to each young person. Within this research, the perspectives of each young person are considered alongside those of their significant others. Young people were asked to recommend a parent, Key Worker or an alternative significant other to participate in interviews. This approach was considered to be

particularly valuable for the evaluation of EMA Pilots for Vulnerable Young People and Childcare Pilots, where great emphasis has been placed on the role of Personal Advisers in assisting vulnerable young people to claim EMA whilst undertaking further education. The combined perspectives of the young person and significant others help to develop a detailed understanding of the experiences and outcomes pertinent to each young person's case.

The qualitative work with eligible members of the target groups has been carried out with young people who are:

- currently in receipt of EMA (EMA participants); and
- early leavers from the EMA scheme (Early leavers).

## 2 IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF EMA VULNERABLE PILOTS AIMED AT YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

### Summary

In summary, the research found:

- Implementation involved effective cross-agency working and take-up was considered high.
- Young people participating in the pilot scheme had experienced varied patterns of homelessness and their current accommodation varied in its degree of stability.
- Reasons for leaving the family home included domestic violence or abuse, breakdown in family relationships caused by the young person's disruptive behaviour and dominant personal issues such as drug misuse or criminal activities.
- Young people had both positive and negative experiences of compulsory education.
- The key barriers facing these young people in returning to post-compulsory education were: financial difficulties, unstable accommodation, a negative legacy from experiences of compulsory education, dominant personal issues and limited support networks.
- Barriers to post-compulsory education could be overcome when young people were encouraged by strong support networks to seek self-development and associate post-compulsory education with future independence (both financial and emotional).
- Most of those interviewed were outside of traditional educational routes into post-compulsory education on joining the scheme and, therefore, their awareness of the EMA scheme and its relevant flexibilities was reliant upon their access to informed support workers.
- Negative experiences and perceptions of education among the young homeless people in this study often existed where there had been a lack of stability in housing, educational institutions and difficulties in the family home.
- There was limited awareness of the EMA flexibilities as being any different to the main EMA scheme, nevertheless awareness of the financial implications of participation, and associated requirements on students was high.
- Despite the '*invisible*' nature of some EMA flexibilities such as the opportunity to study outside of mainstream establishments, there was strong evidence to suggest the importance of such flexibilities in decisions to return to education.

- The financial incentives of the EMA scheme had a varied impact on decisions to return to education, for some the incentives '*sealed the decision*' whilst for others they were a primary motivating factor.
- The application process was generally problematic and young people required significant support in the completion of application forms and in establishing bank accounts.
- The consequences of participation in EMA were far-reaching for many of those interviewed.

## **2.1 Implementation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot - Homeless Young People**

Within the DfES working definition of young homeless people, there is an aim to include a range of young people in different circumstances. For example, young people who are '*roofless*', living in hostel accommodation or in other sheltered accommodation or staying with friends are considered homeless. Young people who are homeless do not have to provide proof of residency in order to be eligible to receive an EMA. Also, young people who are estranged will be considered as independent students without having to be in receipt of Income Support.

For young people who are considered homeless there is a relaxation of the normal eligibility rules for EMA. This enables the young person to undertake part-time study, allows at least part of their required study hours to take place in settings other than schools or colleges, such as at hostels or foyer locations. In the case of part-time study, it is also possible to receive EMA for three years. The requirement to have a fixed address is relaxed, as is the requirement for a parental income means test in cases where young people are estranged from their families.

### **2.1.1 Implementation and delivery strategies**

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

Responsibility for the design and delivery of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at homeless young people in LEA 1, rested with the EMA Project Manager. The EMA Project Manager for LEA 1 is based in the Student Support Services team within the LEA.

### **2.1.2 Identifying young people**

The EMA Project Manager pursued the strategy of identifying key organisations that could assist with the implementation of this particular mode of EMA provision. Subsequently, representatives from homeless groups together with local colleges, the Youth Service, the Youth Offending Team and Social Services accepted the invitation to form an EMA Implementation Group. This group now acts in an advisory capacity to the LEA. Its major role is to devise strategies to identify eligible young people and to contribute ideas to enhance the delivery of EMA provision specifically targeted at homeless young people in LEA 1. To this end it meets approximately once each term. The responsibility for the design of a simplified EMA application form which replaces the requirement for young people to provide details of parental income with a section which seeks endorsement for the application from support workers and guidance information for referral agencies rested with the LEA.

The Implementation Group comprises of representatives from a number of organisations, namely the Careers Service, local colleges (not schools), the Youth Offending Team and a number of voluntary organisations that deal with homeless groups. A high level of support for the initiative from homeless organisations was evident. However, a notable absence of representation was reported from statutory bodies, including the Education Welfare Department and the Youth Service.

LEA 1 is largely reliant on external agencies to inform young people about the flexibilities that exist within EMA. After considering data protection protocols, it was accepted that it would be more appropriate for support agencies to inform young people of EMA Vulnerable Pilot provision, rather than risk LEA intrusion into confidential or sensitive records. Local colleges have also become an important source for identifying varied categories of vulnerable students. Further education colleges received enhanced funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), where they could demonstrate recruitment of students from a varied range of '*vulnerable categories*'. Consequently, college students who have been identified as vulnerable for LSC statistical purposes can be more readily identified as eligible for the additional flexibilities that exist within EMA.

The Education Department in LEA 1 is the only source to provide an EMA application form. Hence, young people or support workers are required to contact the LEA in order to apply for this provision. Support agencies and education providers were critical of the LEA for its unwillingness to provide them with a supply of EMA application forms. It was argued that a greater number of young people may be encouraged to apply for EMA, if application forms could be accessed from a number of sources. The requirement for a young person or a support worker to contact the LEA to obtain an application form was seen to potentially delay some applications.

Before receiving their first payment of EMA, vulnerable students are required to complete a Learning Agreement in which the terms and conditions for receipt of the weekly allowance and bonuses are established. In LEA 1, any student who has a weekly payment withdrawn on three occasions is permanently suspended from the receipt of EMA.

Those interviewed articulated a number of issues that had emerged with the introduction of EMA flexibilities in LEA 1 and these related to resource issues as well as classroom dynamics. The need for enhanced levels of student support for vulnerable students had the effect of increasing pressure on already over-taxed systems of student support. College staff also noted the additional challenges that they had to deal with in terms of the behavioural problems of some students. There was also speculation that high numbers of part-time staff and inexperienced staff were not in a favourable position to deal with such challenges. The combined effect here was an inability of some institutions to deal adequately with an increased vulnerable student population.

Although EMA flexibilities were largely considered a positive introduction, it was also felt that they did not fully embrace the needs of young homeless people and a number of suggestions for improvement were voiced. There was a suggestion that EMA flexibilities for young homeless people should be extended to cover those who are between 19 and 20 years of age, since this age group often participates in hostel education. It was also felt that for young homeless people, who are involved in temporary accommodation arrangements with friends or living on the streets for example, it is often impossible to commit to a prescribed number of hours of study each week. It was suggested that a more flexible approach to learning was required in the regulations of EMA if it was to have a broader appeal and impact. A further suggestion for ensuring sensitive provision of EMA for young homeless



people, was that absences should be more closely verified with the education provider before payments are withdrawn.

### **2.1.3 Levels of take-up**

At the time of implementation interviews, 83 homeless/estranged young people in LEA 1 were registered for receipt of EMA and benefited from EMA flexibilities.

## **2.2 Background to Young People who are Homeless**

Table 2.1 presents a profile of the homeless young people who participated in the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme and were subsequently interviewed. Young people were recruited via contact with the LEA, or through their educational institution or hostel. Table 2.1 specifically outlines gender and age characteristics of young people, their living arrangements, current activities and EMA receipt. Details of significant others who were interviewed are detailed in Table 2.2. Significant others were identified by young people as an important part of their support network.

**Table 2.1      Profile of Homeless Young People Sample**

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**HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE (15)**

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**Gender**

6 young women, 9 young men

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**Ages**

1 aged 16

7 aged 17

6 aged 18

1 aged 19

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**Living arrangements**

5 in hostel accommodation (further 2 young people recently left hostel accommodation)

3 in housing association accommodation, living alone

1 living alone in privately rented accommodation

1 living with partner

5 living with/staying with relatives/family

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**Current activity**

1 early leaver from EMA (EMA participant and studying for GCSE at time of recruitment, left education at time of interview)

3 studying for A-levels (3, 2 and 1 A-levels respectively)

3 studying towards BTEC National Diplomas

2 studying towards GNVQ

1 studying towards City & Guilds, Level One

5 studying for CLAIT or OCN qualifications to eventually take GCSEs

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**EMA receipt**

14 receiving £40 a week (1 early leaver)

10 young people in first year of receipt of EMA

5 young people in second year of receipt of EMA

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**Table 2.2      Significant Others Interviewed in Relation to Teenage Parent Sample**

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**SIGNIFICANT OTHERS (11)**

11 interviewed, 1 on behalf of 4 young people (data analysed separately for each young person, i.e. data were collected equivalent to 14 Significant Other interviews)

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**Relationship to young person**

4 friends and family (partner, sister, grandmother, best friend)

7 professionals

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**Professional roles**

Professionals included:

Key workers

After Care workers

Hostel managers

College welfare and support officers

Head of sixth form

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**2.2.1    Living arrangements**

The definition of homelessness within the EMA Vulnerable Pilots includes young people who have no permanent address, and who are estranged from/living independently of their family. The diverse range of participant living circumstances exemplifies the broadness of this definition. Young people had a wide variety of living circumstances ranging from living with relatives temporarily, or hoping for it to become permanent, to independent living in housing association or council accommodation, medium term hostel accommodation as a transitional step towards independent living, or short-term accommodation, either with friends or in hostel accommodation. There was also variety in the length of time since the young people had left their family home. This ranged from placements into care in middle childhood or early teens, to more recent departures from home (for instance, within the six months prior to taking part in the study). The latter group here, those who had left home more recently were usually over the age of sixteen when they left, or were close to that age. However, a feature common to all young homeless participants was that they were no longer resident in their parental home and felt unlikely to return there in the foreseeable future.

A varied history of housing circumstance existed among the young people in this study. For those who have been in care since their early teens or before, housing histories were characterised by instability and involved foster homes, children's homes, hostels, occasionally juvenile remand centres and, for some, short periods living on the street. Sometimes these periods of instability also included brief returns to the family home, before leaving on a more permanent basis. For those in hostels, their current accommodation was acting as a stepping stone towards independent living. However, young people also described being asked to leave hostels, for a set period of time, because of behaviours such as drug use on the premises or aggression. In these circumstances some had stayed with friends for short periods whilst others had slept rough or stayed with family. At this point in the evaluation, young people aged 18 years or over could live independently where their level of independent life skills allowed. It was less common to find young people living independently with a partner. Young homeless people were also living with relatives on a temporary basis although some reported that in the past, long periods had been spent with one relative. These included older sisters, grandmothers, aunts and uncles. The young people currently living with relatives were usually those who had left home within the last six months or those who had left due to disruptions in parenting. None of the young people who had been through the care system were currently living with a relative, although some had lived with relatives for lengthy periods and over several years in the past.

### **2.2.2 Reasons for leaving the family home**

A dominant pattern among young people was that leaving the family home had occurred in their early teens. This had often involved a breakdown of relationships within the family. More than one factor was described as contributing to leaving home, and the problems experienced were frequently long standing, often culminating in a particular event that led to the permanent break from home. This is illustrated vividly:

*'I had a lot of problems at home with my parents, domestic violence and stuff like that. I was in and out of home from about 14, but then I had a big ... fight with my dad and the police were involved, it made it really difficult to stay there, the police were pestering me to press charges and prosecute ... but at the same time my mum was still having a relationship with my dad ... so in the end I moved out.'*

Katrina, homeless participant

The key factors described as contributing to the break from home included:

- experience of domestic violence and abuse;
- disruptive behaviour by the young person;
- breakdown of relationships with one or both parents;
- disruptions to family life for other reasons; and
- dominant personal issues.

### ***Domestic violence and abuse***

A key factor that acted as a catalyst for leaving home was domestic violence. Some young people experienced abuse, either physical or emotional from one parent that was denied or overlooked by the other parent. In other situations, young people were physically abused, as were their mothers.

### ***Disruptive behaviour of the young person***

Another factor young people regarded as a key influence on leaving home was their own behaviour. For some this was the primary reason for being ‘*kicked out*’ of the family home or being placed in care. In these cases, leaving home happened when parents felt they could no longer cope with their child’s behaviour. Typical disruptive behaviour included prolonged truancy from school; anger management issues and violent behaviour; criminal activities such as burglary, theft, car crimes, grievous bodily harm, criminal damage and prostitution; and continued drug or alcohol misuse.

### ***Breakdown of relationship with a parent***

These young people pointed to a failure in their relationship with a parent, explaining for example that there were always arguments or a legacy of poor relationships – this was true for both natural parents and stepparents. A common factor in this breakdown was the presence of a difficult relationship with a parent or stepparent. Young people also left the family home when relations with a lone parent broke down and were felt to be beyond repair while living with that parent. Similarly, some family relationships broke down as the result of the young person forming personal relationships (both peer group or intimate relationships) with which their parent(s) disagreed.

### ***Other disruptions to family life***

Young people also left home as the result of other disruptions to family life. These disruptions included the death of a lone parent, the imprisonment of a parent, and a parent moving away while a young person felt tied to the area. In an exceptional case, one young person was abandoned by their parent in the family hostel in which they were staying after repossession of the family home. While these circumstances would have caused major upheaval in the life of any young person, the effects for these young people were dramatic because they did not know or could not live with their other parent.

### ***Dominant personal issues***

Dominant personal issues were prevalent for young people that took part in the research. The severity and relevance of dominant personal issues varied in the lives of homeless young people. Young people and their significant others recognised that dominant personal issues had a substantial impact on the life of the young person. The most severe and problematic dominant personal issues were often found among young people who have been subject to long periods of instability, often who had been in the care system. Conversely, those who left home later, or had experienced a higher level of housing stability had experienced fewer or less severe dominant personal issues. In exceptional cases, among those who had left home in the last six months, there was no evidence of dominant personal issues. Dominant personal issues related to:

- weak personal skills, such as low levels of literacy and numeracy, problems of anger management, lack of confidence and self-esteem, or lack of social skills;
- learning difficulties;
- addiction, drug or alcohol abuse;
- offending;
- psychological issues, for example self harm, depression/anxiety; and
- teenage pregnancy and its effects.

## **2.3 Current Status of Relationship with Parents**

The frequency of contact with parents and the state of relationships between homeless young people and parents, varied widely across the study.

### **2.3.1 Low level relationship with parents**

In these cases the young person does see, or have contact with their parent(s) on a (fairly) regular basis, but little or no support is offered, or the issues that led to leaving home are still dominant within the relationship.

*'She just brings the past up and starts shouting at me and saying "you did this to me and you did that" and that makes me feel really bad and that's why I don't hardly see her 'cause we just don't get on at all ... We can get on but ... if I stay more than about two hours then that's it we start arguing.'*

Lucy, homeless participant

### **2.3.2 Improving/good relationship with parents**

Where the reasons for leaving home centred on the breakdown of parental relationships, this often improved once the young person was away from home. This also applied where only one parent had been the primary reason behind the young person leaving home. With the young person away from home, the parent who was not the reason for leaving home was more able to improve and develop their relationship without their partner present. This involved the young person seeing that parent away from the family home.

### **2.3.3 No contact/relationship with parents**

Here the young people had no contact with their parent(s), or that contact was infrequent. In exceptional circumstances, parents were not even aware of the young person's activities or whereabouts.

## **2.4 The Significant Others**

Young people were asked to name other people for interview that had been significant in their decision-making and return to education. It is of interest that, unlike the teenage parent group, there were relatively few nominations from this group. Some young people felt that they had returned to education without significant help from others and that they had little long-term support. Some young people did not nominate anyone for interview, others only named one where they had been asked to provide two names if possible. One of the professionals in this sample, a welfare and support officer in a college, was the sole nominee of four young people. Often young people felt that their circumstances had forced them to become self-reliant. Yet interestingly, in some interviews they mentioned individuals who had been involved in their decision to return to education. These individuals were frequently

described as having been supportive and yet at the end of interview the young person declined to nominate them as a significant other. This demonstrates the strength of feeling of independence, self-reliance and, even, isolation held by some of these young people despite clearly having been advised or being supported by professionals.

Where significant others were named and interviewed they were commonly professionals; either Key Workers or After Care workers or support/welfare staff from an educational institution. There were incidences of peers being named and interviewed. Young people rarely nominated family members. Consequently, only one grandmother, and a single sister were named and no parents were interviewed. One parent was nominated, but due to complicated family circumstances, it was decided not to interview that parent as this could enflame already problematic family relations.

## **2.5 Experiences of Compulsory Education**

A key finding from the study is the extent to which experiences of compulsory education have long-term effects on young people's attitudes and motivation to participate in post-compulsory education. For young homeless people this was a particularly dominant theme. The following sections explore the experiences that these young people had during their years at school. The predominant message from homeless young people was that their school experience had often been negative. Accounts of a positive experience of school were rare among this sample.

### **2.5.1 Negative experiences**

Negative experiences of school were related to and illustrated by the following factors:

- truancy and absenteeism;
- experiences of bullying;
- family or accommodation instability;
- dominant personal issues; and
- poor relationships with staff/authority.

The experience of school was described as having had a resounding impact on the current activities and decision making of homeless young people. This was clearly articulated by those significant others who work as professionals and who have extensive experience of the circumstances of young homeless people. Their view was that homeless young people have



often endured instability during their school years or problematic home situations. This was believed to have adversely affected their experiences of, and attitudes towards the importance of school and more broadly, education per se. This experience was believed to endure beyond school and to colour the thinking of the young person when options for post-compulsory education were being considered or tried out.

*'We've been aware for quite some time that we live in a Bermuda Triangle ... Every resident that had been on a training course or at college never completed ... we'd get a call from tutors asking us what's happened because they've not seen them for a month ... They've had bad experiences at school for one reason or another ... Basically anything that is to do with education or training gets put under the same umbrella. "It's not worth me doing because I can't do it." And that's due to previous experiences at school.'*

Key Worker

### ***Truancy/absenteeism***

Truancy or prolonged absenteeism was a persistent theme amongst these young people. Some described being absent from compulsory education for long periods, in some cases these absences extended to two years. This meant prolonged truancy over periods of several years for some, others described single school years where their attendance in school fell to fifty per cent or less. In extreme cases, long absences led to a termination of education - in that the young person just stopped going to school, or left school. Some young people reported that they did not return to school after a temporary exclusion, or did not start at a new school after being excluded from another. Other young people had been absent from school because of the situation at home or their own dislike of school and felt they had been 'self taught'.

### ***Bullying***

Bullying was another prevalent theme of young people's experiences of compulsory education. Young people had often been the victim of bullying in school, and in some cases, the experience of being bullied was a prolonged ordeal. This bullying frequently contributed to subsequent absenteeism or truancy from school. Others explained the negative impact of being a bully, often alongside truancy, absenteeism and other negative factors in the school or home environment. In these cases, young people described being excluded from school for bullying other pupils or demonstrating aggressive behaviour to pupils or staff. For some, becoming a bully was often directly attributed to earlier personal experiences of being

bullied. The potential long-term legacy of bullying is illustrated by the following quote from a hostel manager:

*‘ ... ... I know some schools are developing really strong quite powerful anti-bullying policies ... you talk to the girls who are in our internal college bullying comes up over and over and over again...so I do think that’s a big factor.’*

Hostel Manager

### ***Instability***

The instability of family life and housing circumstances also contributed to negative experiences of school. Young people who moved home frequently, or moved care placement on a frequent basis, often found these moves entailed a change of school and resulting upheavals in personal support and friendships. For other young people a change in housing circumstances did not necessarily bring about a change in school, but the instability in their world outside of school was perceived as contributing to their negative experiences of school life.

### ***Dominant personal issues***

The impact of dominant personal issues significantly reduced the priority given to education by some young homeless people. School was not rated as important in comparison to situations in the family home, unstable housing situations or drug or alcohol problems. Where school was stripped of its importance in this way, some young people stopped attending or significantly lost their interest or motivation to attend school.

### ***Staff/authority***

For some young people the experience of school was marked by problematic relations with staff, often alongside other factors. Some young people expressed a problem with being told what to do; their relationship with teachers was coloured by this attitude towards authority. Other young people felt victimised by staff and pointed to this as a contributory reason for their failure in education. These young people felt that staff disliked them and as a result there was ‘*no point trying*’.

## **2.5.2 Positive experiences**

Nevertheless, there were also positive experiences of compulsory education amongst the sample. Again, there appeared to be a positive relationship between leaving the family home

in recent times or having more stable family life and positive experiences of school. Positive experiences were based on the following factors:

- support from peer group networks;
- strong personal motivation; and
- good relationships with staff and authority figures.

### ***Peer support***

Experiences of strong peer group support were important to positive experiences of school. Some young people had strong friendship groups, or friendships with individuals, and these were a source of support during difficult periods in the life of the young person. Emphasis was placed on the attitude of a peer or friendship group in the young person's experience of school; it was an important influence on the young person's own attitude. Young people who were in friendship groups where the attitude toward education was positive described their attitude and experience of education more positively.

### ***Commitment to education***

A personal commitment to the value of education was also an important factor. For some this was found within the peer group. Others found their own motivation in their commitment to education and belief in its importance, sometimes despite difficult external circumstances and a lack of support in their home. These young people enjoyed learning and the sense of achievement it provided.

### ***Staff***

Unlike those young people who experienced problematic relations with staff, for other young people teachers and staff were positive influences in their education. The support provided was both educational and more pastoral, providing help or advice around difficulties faced in the home life of that young person.

## **2.6 Post-Compulsory Education - Barriers and Facilitators**

The previous sections have demonstrated how the chaotic lives of these young people during compulsory education affected their attitudes towards, and experiences of, education.

Unsurprisingly, a number of these factors were echoed in their views and expectations of post-compulsory education.

### **2.6.1 Personal and practical barriers**

The barriers perceived to enrolling in post-compulsory education were both of a practical and personal nature. This section reviews the barriers young people expected to face, or indeed, had needed to overcome when attempting to access post-compulsory education.

Personal barriers stemmed from lack of stability in personal life experiences as well as previous negative experiences of education, especially where young people had encountered difficulties in both of these areas. The barriers were felt to be pervasive and powerful for many of the young people, although in rare cases there were felt to be no barriers as a continuation of education had always been that young person's expectation and plan. Again, those perceiving little in the way of barriers to a continuation of education tended to be young people who had left home later, and who articulated a positive experience of school. The differences between the barriers perceived by the young people and their significant others were often in the detail, extent or predominance of those barriers, rather than the factors constituting barriers themselves.

### ***Finance***

A predominant barrier for homeless young people was finance. Young people worried about meeting the costs of education, as well as being unable to earn money while in full-time education. There were also concerns expressed regarding the cost of living.

Financial barriers were acute for some, particularly those living independently in housing association or council accommodation. Some young people had considered working full-time as an alternative to education, but felt that their existing level of qualification meant they would be earning minimal wages that might not cover their existing rent and other living expenses. This is underlined by the fact that vulnerable young people living in hostel or supported accommodation often pay a minimal rate whilst in receipt of benefit but are expected to pay higher rates if they begin to earn wages above a certain level.

## ***Housing***

Young people frequently articulated their desire to find a stable housing situation before committing to a course in post-compulsory education. For example, some found it hard to enrol for a year's course when they had little idea of where they would be living in a few months, or indeed if they would have a place to live for the duration of a college course.

*'It [education] doesn't really seem important now. But I can always carry on when I'm older I can always come back to education, I really I need to sort out a home first ... Make sure I've got a place, I can't live here for ever. Got to get somewhere to live.'*

Luc, homeless participant

## ***The influence of school experiences***

The experience of school had a lasting influence for some of the young people in this study. Young people believed that post-compulsory education would be *'just like school'*, especially as far as following rules and having behaviour continually moderated the way a teacher moderates behaviour in a classroom. This was seen as undesirable, and for some young people too difficult a prospect. This underlies fears that colleges would be rigid institutions much like schools.

Significant others also cited institutional rigidity as a barrier to further education for young homeless people. However, they also felt that this was related to a perception on the part of young people that post-compulsory education would not be accessible to them because of their lack of previous qualifications. This again was seen as being rooted in a lack of self-confidence. Significant others also expanded on the impact of school experiences as creating barriers. The fact that many of the young people had been out of education for some time was seen as critical by significant others. A lack of recent familiarity with, or exclusion from, education was blamed for creating barriers to participation and retention in post-compulsory education. These barriers included a lack of routine, instability in personal circumstances and low motivation to persist in education.

It is worth noting that one barrier to entering post-compulsory education and staying in a mainstream institution was cited repeatedly and a good deal of weight was given to it by both young people and significant others. This factor was the young person's fear of large group environments. For those young people who had been through the care system, left home at a younger age, or experienced acute dominant personal issues, this was an important barrier. Embarking on further education was perceived as an intimidating prospect when the building

is large and unfamiliar and where there are large class sizes. Significant others often regarded this as a manifestation of a more general lack of self-confidence in the young person's educational ability as well as overall sense of self. Young people themselves clearly felt that this resulted from their previous experiences of the school environment.

*'[At the hostel college] here I know everyone here that goes there so that's quite good ... When I'm at a place where I don't know everyone I seem to drink so I can like feel confident. So I get in trouble for it so I would most probably get kicked off the course ... new places and new people make[s] me feel dodgy.'*

Danny, homeless participant

### ***Personal issues***

For those with extreme dominant personal issues there was a clear perception that priority should be given to addressing these issues. This was particularly true of those with a history of drug or alcohol misuse. Young people felt a need to overcome these problems before they could embark on a return to education. Young people and significant others both felt it was important for the landscape of young people's lives to be free of overwhelming personal issues before that young person could realistically commit to continuing their education.

### ***Support***

Limited personal support around the young person was a barrier noted by both young people and their significant others. Young people felt they were lacking in support from families. Young homeless people described how they did not know what to do next in life, lacked directional advice from parents or family and did not always know what options were open to them or how to go about exploring those options. This was a more practical view of the lack of support than that articulated by significant others. Significant others were more concerned about the emotional and motivational impact of this lack of encouragement and support from family and sometimes peer groups in returning to education.

## **2.6.2 Stepping over the barriers - Factors accounting for the return to education**

The decision to return to education was driven by a number of factors. These involved issues surrounding self-development, practical benefits, and the support given to the young people. Although in exceptional cases the decision to participate in post-compulsory education was a long-standing goal, for many it was not. For the latter group more than one factor was influential in overcoming the barriers experienced. Broadly, overcoming the barriers usually involved a combination of a heightened desire for self-development and a growing

recognition of practical or financial incentives, both of which were frequently facilitated by the advice and guidance of significant others.

### ***Self-development or the desire for increased independence***

In terms of self-development a need to ‘*do something*’ and a desire to prove or achieve success in something were important. Often embarking on a return to education was part of, or a culmination of an ethos of self-improvement and a need to move on from past problems. For those young people with a history of criminal activity, or drug or alcohol addiction, a return to education was an important part of getting back on track, and was expressed alongside a desire to permanently change their life for the better. Often, the decision to participate in education was rooted in a belief that they had previously ‘*failed*’ in education. It was also linked to plans for the long-term future in respect of improving employment opportunities and ‘*bettering*’ oneself. In contrast, those whose expectations had always involved post-compulsory education decisions formed part of a long-term commitment to ‘*getting on in life*’. This desire for self-development was at the most basic level a desire to achieve a basic level of numeracy and literacy or to reach a Year 11 level of qualification attainment in an attempt to rectify past experiences.

In another sense, young people had a heightened sense of self-reliance. This was rooted in the level of independence from family that many of them had had, often for prolonged periods, and their expectations that they would continue to need to rely upon themselves in the future because they had limited support networks, family or otherwise to fall back on.

*‘I’ve got to go to college and get some qualifications cause no one is going to help me, no one. You need to get some in your own way, in your own life like what are you going to do, what are you going to do for money food, clothes, whatever.’*

Simon, homeless participant

### ***Practical benefits from returning to education***

Young people associated numerous practical benefits with a return to education that helped to overcome barriers. EMA is important in achieving this and will be discussed further in Section 2.8. Here practical benefits, separate from the role of EMA are reported. Current and future financial factors were clearly pivotal. As a result, for some young people there was recognition that education could be a means to an end of improved employment opportunities and this was a strong factor in their decision to return to education. Where

schemes such as EMA offered additional financial benefits there was a clear financial imperative in returning to education.

### ***Flexibilities***

Young people in the study often assumed that flexible study arrangements were available to all, not any specific groups. Also, not all homeless young people chose to participate in non-mainstream education. However, the option to take up non-mainstream provision such as outreach colleges, proved critical for some. ‘*Outreach colleges*’ was the name given to education delivered by a mainstream provider to hostel residents and on hostel premises. Teaching occurred in a designated area of the hostel that was barred to residents not participating in education. Students attending these colleges had a three or four day timetable covering set subjects. Teaching groups were small and each student worked at their own level with as much support as they required. Hostel staff were called upon in the event of problems. These colleges provided a practical solution to many of the barriers presented by problems of low self-esteem, lack of confidence, poor social skills and fear of unfamiliar and large group situations.

*‘[The difference is] small group, familiar surroundings, the person who can act as the advocate ... feeling comfortable with that ... ’*

Hostel Manager

They were viewed by hostel staff as a potentially crucial stepping stone in removing barriers in the long term and the aim was often to enable participation in mainstream institutions at a later date. Young people in the study who were students in these colleges had often attempted post-compulsory education in mainstream colleges. However, after brief periods they had chosen to leave or had been asked to leave. They had sustained participation at an outreach college for a longer period than that achieved in mainstream settings.

### ***Personal support***

For many of the young people the personal support given to them, particularly by professionals, facilitated a return to education. This support was provided in terms of encouragement and emotional support as well as practical advice, information and guidance through decision-making and the practicalities of enrolling in college.



## **2.7 Awareness of EMA Flexibilities for Homeless Young People**

As with previous studies of EMA the young people had heard about the scheme through a variety of sources (Legard, 2001). However, as this group on the whole had not followed the traditional educational path and were outside of the educational environment when they joined the scheme, there was more evidence of the crucial role of non-educational support workers in disseminating information about EMA and the educational opportunities it could provide.

### **2.7.1 When and how young people first heard of EMA**

When and how young people first heard of EMA varied as is demonstrated below.

- At school. Young people were informed of the availability of EMA through tutors and assemblies in school in Year 11.
- By word of mouth. Elder peers or acquaintances were in receipt of EMA while young people were of school age and so were aware of it before they returned to education.
- At college open days at or just after enrolment. In these cases young people had already decided to return to education before they were aware EMA existed.
- In hostels. Young people were informed by Key Workers or After Care staff before the decision to enrol in post-compulsory education. EMA was often explained as part of the package of returning to education and used as an incentive to get young people back into education.

### **2.7.2 Views about the purpose of EMA**

This varied among young people, but all perceived the scheme as a positive attempt to encourage either participation or retention, or both. These positive beliefs resonated throughout the sample of young people and significant others and in principle, the goals of the scheme were welcomed. The range of beliefs of the purpose of EMA among young people were:

- to get people into education, to provide incentive;
- to '*even the field*' and remove disadvantages of those students with less financial resources/ less secure environments;
- to help people to stay in college and not drop out;

- not to get people into college, but to help those who already wanted to go to manage financially; and
- to provide a wage for learning without which some students would need to consider paid work as an alternative option.

### **2.7.3 Understanding and views of the scheme**

As with participants in the main EMA scheme, understanding and views of the scheme varied (Legard et al., 2001). Overall, there was not a high level of understanding of the details of EMA amongst homeless young people. Knowledge of bonuses was limited to those who had either received bonuses or had received letters explaining why they were not receiving a bonus. Knowledge of the flexibilities, or of EMA Vulnerable Pilots as a separate scheme from the main EMA scheme, was rare. However, once participating in EMA, awareness of requirements that need to be met to receive the weekly allowance was high.

### **2.7.4 Awareness of the flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot**

There was limited awareness amongst young people that the EMA scheme they were participating in differed in any way from the main EMA scheme, except for the strong belief that if you are independent of parents, or receiving Income Support you are automatically eligible. The flexibilities that enable the young homeless person to be in receipt of EMA, such as the possibility for learning to take place outside of mainstream colleges, were not immediately recognised by young people. Exceptionally, these flexibilities were recognised, but only after young people had joined the scheme. Potentially more important, in relation to scheme effectiveness, was the low level of awareness that eligibility could last for three years rather than two, or that eligibility could apply on a 'rolling' basis for short courses.

*'Well next year I'll probably won't be able to go to college again because I won't be able to afford to go to college, because I'm just struggling on the money I get now so next year I won't get the EMA and then I've been told I'm not entitled to any grants or anything like that to go to college next year because I'll be eighteen. So I'll probably have to give up my housing benefit and my income support and get a full-time job to be able to survive cause I won't be able to survive on just my income support. So I'll have to get a job and then if I get a job I can't have my housing benefit and everything else*

*so I'll just have to give it up and get a full-time job.'*

Diane, homeless participant

Additionally, there was recognition that colleges can be more flexible or less strict for some groups of people. However, this was not perceived as resulting from being on the EMA Vulnerable Pilot. For some young people this lack of awareness of the scheme can be explained by the fact that they were in their second year of receipt of EMA and had begun on the scheme before the extensions were piloted. For these young people there was little visible difference either to the money they received from EMA or to their course.

### **2.7.5 Eligibility**

Knowledge of the eligibility requirements for receiving EMA varied, but there was an overall sense of it being available to those students who are '*not well-off*'. Feelings of a lack of fairness within the eligibility criteria were commonly articulated, but this was in reference to the geographical eligibility; the perception that students resident outside the city are not eligible. As with other EMA schemes, knowledge about eligibility criteria can be categorised in three distinct groups:

- full awareness of criteria for eligibility and details;
- awareness of criteria in vague terms and that there is a cut-off point based on parental wages; or some awareness of sliding scale, but not of limits or income requirements; or no awareness of sliding scale for parental incomes of between £13,000 and £30,000, but understanding that EMA exists for young people from low income situations;
- no awareness of eligibility criteria and belief that EMA was open to all students.

## **2.8 The Role of EMA in the Decision to Return to Education**

As with the main EMA pilots some young homeless people had not heard of EMA before they made the decision to return to education. Therefore for them EMA did not have a role in the decision to return to education. However, in contrast to the main EMA participants, it was more common amongst this group for young people to become aware of EMA either before or while making the decision to enrol in post-compulsory education. For these young people EMA played a role of varying importance within the decision making process.

### **2.8.1 Sealing the decision**

The decision to return to education was not an easy decision for some of the young people in this study. For these young people a return to education was fraught with financial concerns,

or concerns relating to self-confidence and a belief that college would be like school co-existing alongside a desire for self-improvement. In these situations young people credited EMA with tipping the balance, or sealing their decision. The presence of the weekly allowance often abated financial concerns. This extra money also provided incentive enough to overcome other barriers and motivation to succeed in self-development.

*'I can't say that if I didn't get it [EMA] I wouldn't have bothered. I think I would have still but it just gave me a bit of a boost to get into the course.'*

Leo, homeless participant

### **2.8.2 EMA - A primary reason for deciding to return to education**

The young homeless people living in hostels, council or housing association accommodation were in receipt of Income Support. This provided them with £42 a week. The EMA weekly allowance in LEA 1 is £40. Therefore, participation virtually doubled their weekly income. This was often the primary reason cited for the return to education. This was common for those young people living in hostels where outreach colleges are taught. Since these colleges overcome many of the barriers produced by personal issues, the barriers remaining were then mainly motivational. The prospect of doubling the weekly income was often enough motivation to attempt a return to education for these young people who had few other attractive opportunities and could not afford increased hostel rent should they find employment.

### **2.8.3 EMA - An added bonus**

Some young people were fulfilling their own long-term expectations in continuing their education after leaving school. For these young people awareness of EMA did not play a role in the decision but provided an added bonus. Some of them had decided to return to education before becoming aware of the existence of EMA and viewed EMA as an added bonus. The young people who had been committed to returning to education regardless of EMA tended to be those that left home later, had experienced lower levels of instability or were living with relatives.

### **2.8.4 The role of flexibilities – A hidden influence in the decision**

As previously discussed, there was a low level of awareness of the flexibilities in the EMA pilot scheme. However, for those young people for whom receiving the weekly allowance was important in the decision to return to education, these flexibilities were also a crucial part

of that return. The EMA weekly allowance was often a deciding factor for those who study in hostel outreach colleges. It was also an influential factor for those on courses that would not be eligible within the main EMA scheme. Some of these young people would not be returning to education without being able to attend a hostel outreach college or study a relatively low number of hours a week, because of the barriers mainstream education presents to them. Therefore, without these flexibilities these young people would not be receiving EMA in their chosen route of return to education. And where the EMA weekly allowance was an important factor, or a primary incentive in the return to education, it can be argued that without the '*hidden*' flexibilities alongside the weekly allowance these young people would not have decided to return to education. This is due to these young people requiring both the flexibilities of the EMA rules and the weekly allowance in order to return to education. Without the EMA Vulnerable Pilot (rather than the main EMA scheme) they could not, in some cases, have received both the allowance and participated in a suitable course.

## **2.9 The Experience of EMA**

### **2.9.1 Application processes and forms**

The application for EMA was often described as a difficult process. Even where young people felt the forms were not too difficult, the required documentation and proof of independence made the process fraught and time-consuming. For some young people, who did not want to have to get proof of independence from their parents because they did not want parents knowing where they were, this was particularly difficult. Many of the young people had had their application sent back repeatedly and felt they were being asked to provide different things each time. Delays were common and were between 6 and 20 weeks. One young person described his experience:

*'Tiresome, ... bureaucratic ... I had to go all over the place. I had to go to college then I had to get to the housing – benefit agency and spend like at least an hour waiting ... I just needed it in writing [that he is an estranged student].'*

Stefan, homeless participant

Some young people were in their second year of receiving EMA and were living at home when they had initially applied. Most young people required support in filling out the application form, and this was received from professionals in colleges and hostels. Many young people also required assistance in providing all the information needed either from

hostel workers, or from benefits offices. However, one young person in his second year of receiving EMA commented that the new application forms used in his hostel for independent young people were a vast improvement on the form he had to use previously. There were additional complaints that the form asked for too much information and detail about income. In experiencing delays, all young people had received support from either college or hostel staff and such professionals were often critical to ensuring that young people persisted in their application.

### **2.9.2 The Learning Agreement and meeting requirements**

Knowledge and memory of the Learning Agreement was limited, and where young people remembered signing an agreement, little could be recalled of the details within it. This reflects earlier findings from the main EMA evaluation (Maguire et al, 2002). The Learning Agreement was filled in by the young person in conjunction with college staff and consisted of aims relating to handing work in on time, attendance and behaviour standards. Within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot the Learning Agreement had been re-written and simplified by a Welfare Officer in one college in LEA 1 in an attempt to make it more relevant and memorable to the young person. . However, while Learning Agreements were not well recollected by young people, and the point and terms of these agreements could not always be recalled, awareness of the requirements was high. Attendance requirements were the best-known aspect of EMA and all of the young homeless people were aware of procedures for authorising absences and the risk of losing the week's allowance where any absence was not authorised. There was awareness that part of EMA meant meeting deadlines for coursework and assignments too, although awareness of this was not as great as for the attendance requirements. This quote illustrates how young people were more likely to remember the terms and recognise them as more important than the Learning Agreement itself.

*'You have to be there so many hours, you can only have certain amount of attended absences and you have to obviously attend all your lessons and good behavior and stuff like that. You sign an Agreement thing, I think, for that.'*

Diane, homeless participant

### **2.9.3 Setting up a bank account and receipt of EMA payments**

All of the young homeless people received their EMA payments into a bank account. Despite the flexibility, which means that the weekly allowance does not have to be paid into a bank account, young people often described delays in payments caused by their not having set up

an account initially. Young people fell into three groups around their experiences of payment into a bank account. Some young people already had a bank account set up, and therefore the issue of an account presented no problems for them. Other young people had to set up an account, but described this as being unproblematic. A final group, though, found arranging an account problematic. While hostels can provide a permanent address, some still experienced problems around establishing a bank account. For the young people who found arranging an account problematic, going into a bank to set up an account was a nerve-racking ordeal and took several attempts. It was sometimes problematic for homeless young people to provide the required documentation such as a birth certificate without considerable delays. Young people living in hostel accommodation were usually accompanied by a member of hostel staff to help them open an account successfully. Despite initial difficulties there was a sense that once established, a personal bank account was of benefit as it made the payment process automatic, and one young person felt that having an account encouraged her to save money. There are also examples of colleges and hostels helping further in setting up accounts. One college organised for a local bank branch to spend a morning in the common room in college with three members of staff to set up accounts.

*'We've got a very good relationship with [name of bank], contacted the manager of the local branch and said, 'Look, you know, I've got a lot of kids who are going to be wanting to open bank accounts, lots of form filling, rather than me doing it 20 million times can your team come into college and help us get them to fill in the forms?', and they did!'*

Head of Sixth Form

In one hostel, the Key Worker described having had '*an agreement*' with another bank to be able to set up accounts without documentation such as birth certificates, which he would get to them at a later date. This bank subsequently cancelled this agreement (possibly because some of those documents were not produced) and the Key Worker is looking for an alternative bank.

#### **2.9.4 Seeking advice with EMA difficulties**

A variety of arrangements were in place to deal with difficulties in the receipt of EMA and experiences of dealing with problems varied. Some young people did not have an EMA adviser, and when experiencing problems with EMA went straight to the LEA. Other young people identified designated members of college staff who dealt with EMA queries. However, they had sometimes found these sources unhelpful. This was either because they

could not pinpoint the specified individual when seeking help, or because this individual had been unhelpful in the past. Some young people were not aware of formal arrangements for support and advice, as they had not yet had a need for them. Young people who named a specific adviser or member of support staff available through informal networks, had often found them helpful and would return for advice and support in the future. In hostels, Key Workers dealt with problems of payment. One young person's social worker liaised with college staff on his behalf when there was a problem with EMA. Overall, homeless young people found a means of dealing with EMA problems through a designated member of staff or in direct liaison with the LEA.

### **2.9.5 Bonuses**

There was a varying level of awareness of the bonuses available in the EMA scheme. Those in their second year of receipt of EMA were more likely to be aware of bonuses and to have received at least one retention bonus, referred to as the '*attendance bonus*' by young people. Young people who had received bonuses were likely to have endured less instability, or were living with relatives. There were rare exceptions to this and where this had been the case, young people felt particularly positively about having had their attendance level rewarded. There was some confusion as to how the bonus scheme operated; for example in an outreach college, students seemed under the impression that there was only one bonus available, for the best attendee in the college. Significant others articulated the opinion that for those young people with prevalent dominant personal issues, or who were subject to a great deal of instability, the termly bonus was too distant or long-term a prospect to provide any meaningful incentive.

## **2.10 The Impact of EMA on the Lives and Education of Homeless Young People**

The evaluation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot has identified a range of financial and educational impacts of participation. Due to the specific circumstances of homeless young people, some of these impacts are far greater than for other groups of young people who are in receipt of EMA. Similarly, the research has revealed a broader range of impacts that were not necessarily directly intended outcomes but which could be seen in a highly favourable light.



### **2.10.1 Making a difference - The impact of EMA on financial circumstances**

EMA has a major financial impact on the lives of homeless young people. Most homeless people are in receipt of Income Support and live on a basic income. Outgoings vary depending upon their individual living arrangements, but in itself, EMA almost doubles the amount of weekly income these young people receive. Some young people felt that without it they would not have survived financially. The impact for others is that for the first time they have an income that facilitates a level of living above survival.

*'It's made it a bit easier cause it's like got me extra money and extra things. It's like when I was in a hostel used to buy my washing powder and whatever extra food and like stuff like candles or whatever to brighten up when you go back there ... It looks better and makes you feel better.'*

Simon, homeless participant

This impact varies from facilitating a higher standard of living to a feeling that some young people would not be at college without it. For other young people there were alternative sources of money that could have been pursued without the presence of the EMA weekly allowance, such as asking a relative or finding part-time work. In these circumstances, EMA was felt to be a preferable source of financing. The impact of EMA on the young person's financial situation resonates in other ways too. Having an income means far more to some young people than just financial gain.

### **2.10.2 The amount of EMA - Views and opinions**

The amount of money in the weekly allowance was often seen as adequate, and considered a fair exchange for full attendance in college. Some young people and hostel staff felt it should be more, but not substantially so. Other hostel staff were concerned that it was too much, and incurred risk for young people with chaotic lifestyles. Where young people felt the amount was insufficient, they were likely to be living independently and to have more financial outgoings than those living in hostels or staying with relatives. One young person suggested the amount should be decided on an assessment of need, which could be done by Social Services. This young person felt it was unfair that young people living at home with parents and not having to contribute to food or bills were in receipt of as much money as an independent young person receiving no financial help from their family.

### **2.10.3 EMA and part-time work**

Only one young person had a part-time job alongside his post-compulsory education. He was not receiving Income Support, was staying with a relative and worked an average of twenty hours a week on top of his five-days-a-week, full-time college course. He felt that his college work might have been affected by his part-time job, but that it was important to him to have a high level of financial independence and autonomy. No other homeless young person was in paid employment. Some young people felt that without EMA, they would have sought part-time employment and that this could have been potentially damaging to their attendance and achievement in college.

### **2.10.4 Use of EMA**

EMA was used in a variety of ways. One key use was for meeting educational costs such as lunches, stationery, books and other course-related expenditure as well as travel for some young people. After educational costs, EMA was either subsumed into the young person's living budget, or used for other expenditure. Some young people reserved Income Support to meet costs such as contribution to rent (hostels), food and bills and used EMA as money for '*non-essentials*' such as socialising and buying clothing. Some used EMA, particularly large back payments, to buy items in readiness for a move to independence. Young people in hostels hoping to move to their own flats had bought electrical items or household goods in preparation for a transition to independent living. In exceptional cases, the back payment had been used to buy a vehicle. Other young people used back payments to re-pay debts incurred whilst awaiting EMA payments or to meet other debts. One young person, resident in a hostel, was saving the money for a holiday because he had never been on holiday before. Again some of the significant others interviewed expressed concern about the danger of these large lump sum payments for vulnerable young people with chaotic lifestyles and limited experience of financial management.

### **2.10.5 Losing payments and its impact**

Occasional lost payments were an experience common to many young people in the study. Most of the young people reported receiving their weekly allowance continuously. Some young people who had payments stopped felt that this was a fair decision as they should have been in college, were not, and therefore did not get their week's money. Others felt that stopped payments were unjust. One young person appealed and had payments re-instated. Another was appealing although did not expect to have payments re-instated and felt they

would '*understand if they're not*'. Other young people had appealed to their college or the LEA but had not received the missing payment(s). There was some feeling among these young people that there was '*little point*' in appealing. Whether a young person appealed seemed to relate to how they felt about the support for EMA in college. This ranged from some young people describing the designated EMA support person as being '*useless*' and feeling they were '*never backed up by college*' to other young people feeling that the relevant person in college could be relied on to do '*all they could*'. However, this was no guarantee of a successful appeal. It seemed that where young people felt confident in their advocate in college they were more likely to seek recourse for lost payment. Any examples of young people trying to deal directly with the City Treasury were rare. In an extreme and unusual case a young person described how last year in a sixth form he rarely got EMA payments. The school saw EMA as a privilege and whenever the young person was given detention, his week's allowance was removed. This was a frequent occurrence. At the time of interview, the young person was in a different institution and had not had a similar experience. The impact of lost payments varied. For some young people missing a payment was a disappointment. Others felt that financial impact was not too problematic for one week, especially where they were to blame. For most young people missed payments were infrequent occurrences and therefore did not have substantial financial impact.

Significant others in hostel colleges had not yet experienced any young people missing a payment. Some argued that outreach colleges did not enforce boundaries and guidelines well enough, but that this issue was currently being explored. In some cases hostel staff felt it to be of real benefit to the young person that they should be penalised where they do not attend, however authorised absences should be flexible and decided by the Key Worker. The benefit of penalisation was that it would help young people to learn the importance of meeting agreements and sticking to routines. A significant other in a college in LEA 1 described administrative problems with the LEA when payments were missed without just cause. This significant other followed up cases of non-payment and perceived that the LEA '*fob off*' young people and blame the college for the difficulties.

#### **2.10.6 The impact of holidays - periods of non-payment**

While some young people thought it fair that there were no payments during holidays others expressed concerns about the likely impact of a loss of income during these periods. As a hostel worker pointed out, vulnerable young people often have substantial difficulty with

budgeting. To have their budget cut in half for several weeks at a time presents financial difficulties in the life of the young person. For most young people the shorter holidays of Easter and Christmas were seen as manageable although difficult. For young people on a course that is more than a year long the summer holidays presented great difficulties. This was particularly so for young people living independently without the support of hostel facilities.

Some young people spoke of wanting to seek employment for the summer holidays in order to replace the money lost to them through EMA. However, taking a full-time summer job, which would be the preferable option for many of the young people in this study, presents problems itself as working for more than 15 hours a week means losing Income Support. Young people felt that the potential loss of Income Support would be problematic to their re-application and could affect housing benefits that cover rent over the summer. Therefore, they felt there was no realistic way of substituting their lost EMA payment through full-time work in the summer, despite this being their preferred option. One young person suggested that paying a retainer of £10 or £15 a week during the summer could make life less difficult for the young person, and that alongside that payment could be revision classes for the course so the young person is still earning a retainer through attendance. Young people often seemed unaware of how much paid work they could do without losing their Income Support.

### **2.10.7 Impact on commitment and motivation in education**

The impact EMA has on commitment to, and motivation in education, was clearly recognised by participants. For all the young homeless people in the sample, EMA increased their motivation to attend. Even young people who claimed that EMA was a bonus and that they would be in college without it, felt that the weekly allowance encouraged their regular attendance and dissuaded them from absenteeism. Others felt that this motivation to attend all lessons had kept them safe from a '*downward spiral*' of truancy and non-attendance. These young people believed they would have missed a few classes, or some of college and then fallen behind in their work as a result. Falling behind could have been a potential catalyst to dropping out - against which EMA had provided a clear safeguard. Young people who had been primarily motivated by the availability of the weekly allowance in their decision to return to education perceived a large shift in motivation and commitment. These young people claim to have begun college '*just going for the money*'. After brief periods, this orientation had changed and evolved into a commitment to learning and

education, rather than a commitment to gaining extra money. In this sense, it can be argued that EMA is having some success in overcoming barriers that are more than simply financial. EMA was seen to provide an incentive to return to education and positive experience appeared to reinforce retention and commitment to learning.

*‘One thing that I have noticed over the time that the college have been here is that once the young person gets used to the tutors and gets used to the routine and all that type of stuff, they become committed to actually attending.’*

Support Worker

### **2.10.8 Other impacts**

The impact of EMA resonated beyond a purely financial motivation to attend. Some described an increase in self worth as unlike state benefits young people must actively fulfil obligations in order to receive EMA, therefore they described enjoying the financial gain more because they felt as though they had earned it, and had achieved something worthwhile with their week as a result. For other young people EMA financial support facilitated future planning. For example:

*‘... but now I have got the money I can look ahead now and get my flat and sort my life out and get my GCSEs done and over with and then get a job, a proper job.’*

Sara, homeless participant

For other young people the independence EMA provided was important. One young person described how EMA improved the relationship he had with his relatives (with whom he is staying) because he no longer had to ask them for money and felt he was less of a financial burden to them. For other young people, EMA financial support alleviated personal worry and anxiety once fuelled by their weak financial situation..

Chapter 5 will explore in more detail the success of the Vulnerable Pilots in achieving improved participation, retention and achievement. However, there is little doubt from the evidence presented that the EMA Vulnerable Pilot for young homeless people was positively affecting young peoples’ experiences of, and attempts to re-enter, education. Nevertheless, the specific personal circumstances of these young people present the scheme with challenges. These challenges, particularly dominant personal issues such as substance abuse or criminal behaviour, mean that for some young people participation in the EMA scheme may not result in an initial sustained return to education. In these cases, wider personal support is required. Despite this it is important to note that even the young person

interviewed who had been forced to leave the scheme because of overriding financial issues spoke in a more positive way about her long-term ambitions for greater involvement in education. This was, in no small way, attributed to the opportunities that her short-term participation in education had revealed.

### **3 IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF EMA VULNERABLE PILOTS AND CHILDCARE PILOTS AIMED AT TEENAGE PARENTS**

#### **Summary**

In summary the research found:

- Higher levels of collaboration between the LEA and agencies such as Careers/Connexions Services and Teenage Parent Co-ordinators encouraged more effective information sharing.
- The Personal Adviser role was particularly developed in relation to teenage parents, more so than for homeless young people or young people with disabilities.
- Differing levels of take-up existed across areas implementing the schemes and this was attributed to differing levels of success in identifying eligible young people.
- Teenage parents were 16-18 years old and had children under the age of 3. The response to their pregnancies ranged from pleasure and a lack of surprise, to shock and worry.
- Teenage parents were living in a variety of arrangements; living with their parent(s), alone in council accommodation, in hostel/supported accommodation and living with their partners.
- Teenage parents were often not in contact with the biological father of their child, or were no longer in a relationship with him, but some still had contact with him, or in rare cases lived with him.
- Teenage parents had usually experienced disruption to their education because of their pregnancy.
- Experiences of school were both positive and negative.
- The key barriers for these young people were childcare, transport, finance, time, personal skills and lack of confidence, experience of school and external influences (such as the views of partners).
- Reasons accounting for the surmounting of barriers were a strong will towards self-development, often coupled with and driven by the responsibility of becoming a parent,
- How barriers were overcome involved discovering practical solutions to childcare issues, receiving information and support, availability of part-time study (overcoming issues of time) and the realised benefits of childcare.

- Little difference was apparent between the experiences and impacts of the Childcare pilots and the Teenage Parent pilots at this early stage.
- Awareness of EMA before embarking on post-compulsory education was high.
- Young parents were aware of '*visible*' flexibilities such as childcare funding and transport funding.
- Awareness of requirements for receiving the weekly allowance was high.
- EMA played an important role in the return to education and had a profound impact on the lives of many of the young parents.
- Missing payments and the lack of EMA in the holidays has a large effect for some young parents.
- Participation in the scheme was an enabler into education for young parents who wanted to participate in further education already. In addition, it often provided motivation in sustaining attendance.
- Positive experience of post-16 education generated a sense of achievement in educational and personal terms. Positive experience also reinforced retention and encouraged long-term commitment to education.

### **3.1 Implementation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at Teenage Parents and Childcare Pilots**

Within the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme, teenage parents are defined as those young people who have the primary childcare responsibility, which can usually be determined by receipt of Child Benefit on behalf of a young child. Within teenage parent extensions to EMA provision, students who become pregnant during their course will be given a backlog of their EMA payment in one lump sum if they return to full-time education for at least a four week period following maternity leave absence.

Eligible students in areas where the Childcare Pilots are being implemented are provided with an additional means-tested allowance to assist with up to ninety-five per cent of childcare costs. A maximum of £100 per week for one child and £150 for two children will be paid. In extreme circumstances where the place of childcare, the place of learning and the teenage parent's home are significantly distanced from one another an additional transport allowance of up to £20 per week can be paid to teenage parents.



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

### 3.1.1 Implementation and delivery strategies

LEA 2, LEA 4 and LEA 5 were selected by DfES to implement the EMA Childcare Pilots. LEA 2 was also selected by DfES to implement the teenage parent extensions, as was LEA 3. Despite the leeway given to LEAs to broaden out provision of EMA to all vulnerable young people, all authorities here continued to concentrate on providing extensions for teenage parents. The infrastructure required to do this was in place before the broader provisions were made by DfES and, consequently, all authorities here felt that they were in a better position to focus on teenage parents rather than other groups of vulnerable young people.

**Table 3.1 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	●	-	●	●

Table 3.1 outlines the basic provisions within each pilot. EMA flexibilities apply within LEA 2 and LEA 3 only. Eligible young people in LEA 2 are 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.

Within each locality, the LEA administers EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. The EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots are steered by similar representatives across all four LEAs. This often involves a union between the Careers/Connexions Service, local education providers, Youth Services, health representatives and those with specialist experience with teenage parents. In all areas, the Careers/Connexions Service is usually central to providing Personal Advisers who underpin the delivery of EMA teenage parent extensions and Childcare Pilots. Their role is particularly noticeable in comparison to the lack of any Personal Adviser network specialising in housing issues or disability. Between April 1999 and April 2000 LEA 2 and LEA 4 were involved in the piloting of the Connexions Service. In both these areas the local Careers Service formed an integral part of the new Connexions Service.

In LEA 2, an EMA flexibilities implementation sub-group was formed which includes the EMA manager from the LEA, together with managers from the Youth Service and Careers/Connexions Service who are responsible for providing Personal Advisers. The strategic planning group, which was established for the implementation of EMA, has no direct involvement in delivery of the EMA flexibilities and childcare provision. The EMA sub-group meets approximately once every two months.

In LEA 2, the Childcare Pilot runs alongside EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at teenage parents. The LEA 2 Youth Service and LEA 2 Careers/Connexions Service share joint responsibility for implementation. The representative from the Youth Service who manages EMA flexibilities and the Childcare Pilot is also currently employed as the Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator for the county. Both the Youth Service and the Careers/Connexions Service provide Personal Advisers who identify young people eligible to participate in the scheme and support them through the application process. All Personal Advisers received initial training from the Early Years Registration Service, organised by the LEA. Within LEA 2, the Personal Advisers focus on building the confidence of teenage parents to re-enter education and supporting young people through the application process. This contrasts to their major objective within the main EMA scheme, where the principle aim is to raise awareness of the scheme. The approach taken to EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots in LEA 2, is aimed to be proactive and supportive.

The steering group in LEA 4 that is charged with implementing the Childcare Pilots consists of a range of representatives from LEA 4's support and voluntary services and local education providers. LEA 4 Careers/Connexions Service, a local Sixth Form College and College of Further Education, the local authority's Children's Information Service, the Teenage Pregnancy Adviser and Childminder Provider Team are all members of the steering group. This meets on a regular basis, approximately once a term. Tasks were allocated among group members at an early meeting. This mirrored the set-up and operation of the original EMA pilot where this structure and approach had been found to be successful.

In LEA 4, an overall project co-ordinator was appointed from the team of Personal Advisers that had been created in the Careers/Connexions Service. Information sharing arrangements were also put in place. The representative of the local authority's Childminder Provider Team provided the Personal Adviser Team with information concerning childcare places. It was the responsibility of the Personal Adviser Team to provide the EMA Team based in the LEA with information to enable payments to childminders and to remain in contact with students on a fortnightly basis. The Personal Adviser Team advised young people of their education and career options and availability of suitable childcare.

In LEA 5, a Steering Group for the Childcare Pilot was established as a sub-group of the standard EMA Steering Group. The steering group comprises of representatives of the LEA, local colleges, health visitors, community midwives, the Careers Service, the Midwifery services, and the local Health Authority's Teenage Parent Co-ordinator. Initial enquiries concerning the Childcare Pilot are channelled through to the LEA administrator who will discuss eligibility and childcare provision. The applicant is then referred to a Personal Adviser who would then make an initial home visit. The Careers Service employs and mentors the Personal Advisers. The Careers Service also produced the specification for the Personal Adviser role.

A steering group, comprising of representatives from the LEA's main EMA team, the Social Inclusion Unit and Re-integration Officer, local colleges and the Leaving Care/After Care Team oversees implementation of EMA in LEA 3.

Implementation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots is characterised by a high degree of collaboration between the LEA, local education institutions, the health sector and

those with special interests in the needs of vulnerable young people. In LEA 4, information was exchanged between the Childminder Provider Team and the LEA. In LEA 3, positive links were established between representatives from the EMA Team, the Social Inclusion Unit, the Re-Integration Officer and the Leaving Care/After Care Team. In other areas, there was also evidence of collaboration across local schemes that shared a common interest in the needs of teenage parents. In LEA 4 for example, EMA Childcare provision is only one of several initiatives that can be accessed. The Steering Group had established links with agencies offering other sources of funds and awards, such as those for lone parents, including the New Deal. The Personal Adviser also liaises with the Early Years section of the Local Authority. In LEA 3, in addition to the EMA provision, some assistance with childcare costs through colleges' Learner Support Funds is available to students at local colleges. However, despite the examples of cross-agency working that are evident in the descriptions of implementation groups, this did not always signal a comfortable union. Tensions emerged between the Careers/Connexions and Youth Services in LEA 2, with each suspicious of the other's parameters of expertise. In LEA 5, it was felt that the LEA had not communicated effectively with other groups, and was perceived to demand information and commitments without clear guidance or appreciation. There was also an absence of any collaboration with other schemes concerned with covering common ground.

### **3.1.2 Publicising the scheme and identifying young people**

Each LEA publicised the existence of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots at locations such as doctors' surgeries, community centres and in local schools and colleges. Health Visitors and other support agencies were also common contacts across the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots, in terms of identifying eligible young people. LEA 2 distributed a flexibilities and childcare publicity leaflet that included freephone numbers. This generated a number of enquiries. Referrals from local schools and colleges were also made. However, referrals from the Personal Adviser network were considered as the primary source.

In LEA 4, leaflets and posters were distributed across doctors' surgeries, in pregnancy advisory centres, in churches, and at local schools and colleges. LEA 4's Mother and Baby Unit also helped the LEA to seek out potential applicants from the Mother and Baby Unit's records. Information was also circulated to local midwife associations. Personal Advisers

were regarded as the most important source of support for teenage parents in terms of helping to find appropriate courses and childcare places.

In LEA 5, distribution of leaflets was undertaken at local colleges. Health workers were also sent publicity concerning the Childcare Pilot. Other local agencies and education providers were informed of the pilot. Health visitors were originally identified as the major potential source of referrals. However, identifying teenage parents to the LEA was considered a breach of young parents' confidentiality and was not pursued as an avenue of referral.

In LEA 3, leaflets and posters were distributed amongst all Steering Group members, doctors' surgeries, a local hospital and Careers Centres. In this area, data sharing arrangements were established between the LEA, local health services and Social Services. Links with health visitors were also formed. It was envisaged that this would contribute to increased take-up in the future.

It is evident that identification of teenage parents was a challenging task for all pilot areas. Even in LEA 3, where positive links had been established with health service agencies, the task remained a challenge. In LEA 5, the task was particularly difficult, having relied on the single source of health visitors who in the event, felt unable to provide referrals. Most areas learned from their year's experience and offered suggestions for improving identification of young people. Representatives in LEA 3 expected that improvements in identification would develop in later years due to new data sharing arrangements between the LEA, health services and Social Services. LEA 4 felt that the experience gained throughout the first year placed them in a position to improve links with health professionals and other parties interested in identifying teenage parents. LEA 2 felt that the potentially most useful source lay in referrals gained from support agencies.

The completion of Learning Agreements and attendance monitoring procedures for young people on EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots mirrors that which is followed by young people involved in the mainstream EMA scheme. However, tension arose between schools, colleges, and the LEA. The onus is on each school or college to authorise and verify student absences. For example, if a student's absence is caused by the illness of a child, the school or college have to obtain information from the childcare provider to verify whether the child was indeed absent at the specified time. Some schools and colleges did not welcome

this extra administrative burden. However, LEAs expressed an interest in receiving greater information from schools and colleges regarding absence. Hence, a tension exists here between perceived time and resource constraints for schools and colleges and interests of LEAs that would like greater detail and more time spent on recording and verifying absences.

In relation to absence monitoring, college staff also suggested that there might be greater flexibility in interpretation of absence, particularly in cases where students were late. The challenge of punctuality was regarded as especially great for teenage parents, but may also apply equally to homeless young people. LEAs noted an uneven identification of absence within and between LEAs in terms of the authorisation of absence and differing level of reporting. Such differences arose in the absence of specific agreements between all of those involved in implementation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots.

### **3.1.3 Levels of take-up**

In LEA 2, the joint provision of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots was expected to attract high numbers of teenage parents into education. In January 2001, 11 students were in receipt of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and or Childcare provision and this was perceived as a relatively low figure<sup>1</sup>. This level of take-up was largely attributed to the lack of lead-in time available for the launch of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. It was stated that the effort required to gain this low number of students had been great. Further, it was felt that although take-up was low here, great strides had been made for the individuals concerned, as their self-confidence and self-esteem was perceived to have increased and this was reflected in their re-entry into education. In this area, five out of six teenage parents involved in the pilot had not undertaken education before the pilots. This experience was marked by a perceived increase in self-confidence and self-esteem and was considered a success in its own right.

In LEA 3, 11 students were participating in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots at the time of interviews. Consonant distance between school and college and the young person's home were regarded as an arrangement that would encourage participation. Interviewees also felt that teenage parents were reluctant to utilise childcare provision outside of the immediate

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<sup>1</sup> The Childcare Pilot is a separate initiative and has its own eligibility criteria. Teenage parents may apply for assistance under this scheme regardless of their entitlement to EMA.

family and it was suggested that this might inhibit take-up. Substantial members of the target group here often had poor attendance records prior to becoming pregnant and this compounded the difficulty in encouraging many teenage parents to re-enter education and sustain attendance. Eighty per cent of the Re-integration Officer's caseload had been referred because of their high rate of absence from school. Therefore, EMA Vulnerable Pilots needed to offer an incentive strong enough to counteract the patterns of previous experience.

In LEA 4, at the time of interviews, 11 young people were receiving Childcare Pilot provision, a level of take-up which exceeded expectations for the first year of operation. In this area, it was evident that positive relationships had been forged in terms of implementation teams, and good will from local colleges in particular was evident. This was expressed in terms of the innovation some colleges were willing to introduce in terms of tailoring courses to meet the needs of teenage parents in the form of course content and with a sensitivity to the number of hours and times of day suitable for teenage parents. One college also planned further innovation. It had been noted that the lack of timetable information during the summer period meant that teenage parents could not make childcare plans in advance. In response, the college agreed to provide a Call Centre service during the summer holidays to provide timetable information that could benefit all prospective students.

Those interviewed had observed that teenage parents tended to undertake foundation level courses in vocational subjects such as hairdressing, so making it difficult for them to reach Level Three of study in the two year period currently covered by the main EMA Pilots and the Childcare Pilots. Three year funding currently applied to those in EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas only. Consequently, a national extension of funding to cover a three-year period was suggested. Two related factors were identified here in explaining why take-up may be undermined and these related to childcare provision. It was noticed that among teenage parents, there is a preference for nursery provision above childminder provision but there is a greater shortage of nursery places. On a related point, within colleges in particular, it was found that although crèche facilities were often available, this was often for children over two years of age. This was regarded as a probable source inhibiting take-up.

Across LEA 2, LEA 3 and LEA 4 the Vulnerable Pilots and the Childcare Pilots were viewed positively in that they helped teenage parents to return to education. The pilots also promoted joint working and encouraged the development of innovative practices within schools and

colleges. However, for those interviewed this success was tempered by the amount of time and the level of resources required to achieve this in comparison to mainstream EMA provision. Many of those interviewed also pointed out that take-up of the pilots was also influenced by factors outside their control such as the availability of suitable childcare provision, attitudes to childcare as well as the teenage parents' previous experiences of education.

In LEA 5, despite high expectations of potential levels of participation, there was a great deal of disappointment with the actual level of take-up of the Childcare Pilot. At the time of interviews, only one applicant was in receipt of support. Predictions had forecast that at least 50 young people would participate in the pilots. This represented at least one referral from each of the 50 health visitors in the area. However, health visitors felt that for ethical reasons, they could not disclose personal details of teenage parents as is required for a referral. Consequently, health visitors made teenage parents aware of Childcare Pilots but did not make referrals to the LEA. Furthermore, a tense relationship existed between health visitors and the LEA that may also have undermined information-sharing initiatives. Other reasons for this poor level of take-up were suggested. Although awareness of EMA Childcare Pilots was considered high amongst health visitors, interviewees suggested that across Social Services as a whole, awareness might be poor, so contributing to the lack of referrals. Take-up was also seen to be undermined by the inflexibility of course start dates, making it impossible for teenage parents to begin courses at varied periods of the year following a period of maternity leave.

Students are required to make a five per cent contribution to childcare fees and this was regarded as an excessive figure for many teenage parents who were thought to rely on family members for free childcare provision. However, within EMA Childcare Pilots, family members cannot claim the childcare allowance as this is payable to registered childminders and nurseries only. Furthermore, the introduction of a five per cent contribution to childcare costs was considered too costly for many young mothers who were accustomed to free provision from family members and many of whom were thought to be on low incomes. The final reasons advanced for poor take-up related to the perceived preferences of teenage parents. It was suggested that teenage parents often prefer to spend one or two years with their child before undertaking further education, employment or training. However, EMA



Childcare Pilots relate to the 16 to 18 age range which might not capture an adequate age range of young parents.

### **3.2 Background to Teenage Parents**

Table 3.2 presents the profile of teenage parent respondents involved in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots or Childcare Pilot schemes at the time of first contact. Details of their elected and interviewed significant others are included in Table 3.3. The young people were recruited via contact with the LEA and in some cases through local Mother and Baby organisations.

Table 3.2 specifically outlines teenage parents' housing circumstances, current activity and participation in EMA. The teenage parents included in the study were diverse in terms of their personal circumstances, financial situations and educational experiences. Nevertheless, they formed a cohesive group in relation to their family composition and ages. The fifteen teenage parents who participated in this study were all teenage mothers aged between sixteen and eighteen. All of their children were under three years old at the time of the study. Generally, the mothers had only one child, although in rare cases there were two children under the age of three. Those with two children reported coping with two young children as particularly difficult.

**Table 3.2      Profile of Teenage Parents Sample**

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<b>TEENAGE PARENTS (15)</b>
<hr/>
<b>Gender</b> 15 young women
<hr/>
<b>Areas</b> 5 in LEA 2 5 in LEA 4 5 in LEA 3
<hr/>
<b>Ages</b> 1 aged 16 6 aged 17 8 aged 18
<hr/>
<b>Living arrangements</b> 5 in housing association accommodation 4 in flats with partners 3 currently in Mother and Baby hostels 3 in family home with parent(s)
<hr/>
<b>Current activity (at time of interview with young person)</b> 1 early leaver 2 studying for National Diploma 6 studying towards GNVQs, Level One, Level Two, intermediate and advanced levels 2 studying childcare and parenting 2 studying catering with basic skills English and Maths 1 on assortment of adult learning courses 1 on Access course
<p>NOTE: These were current activities at time of interview with young person. By time of interviews with Significant Others there were a total of 4 early leavers from post-compulsory education.</p>
<hr/>
<b>EMA receipt (at time of interview with Significant Others)</b> 10 young people receiving £30 a week (LEA 3, LEA 2) 5 young people receiving £40 a week (LEA 4) 6 receiving EMA funded childcare (3 in LEA 4, 3 in LEA 2) 2 parents receiving transport costs to childcare (LEA 2) 3 had used EMA funded maternity leave option (one on maternity leave at time of

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interview, unsure about return to college)  
 11 teenage parents in first year of receipt of EMA  
 4 teenage parents in second year of receipt of EMA

**Table 3.3      Significant Others Interviewed in Relation to Teenage Parent Sample**

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**SIGNIFICANT OTHERS (27)**

27 people interviewed,  
 3 on behalf of 2 young people (data analysed separately for each young person, i.e. data were collected equivalent to 30 Significant Other interviews)

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**Relationship to young person**

14 friends and family  
 13 professionals

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**Friends and family**

Mother or father (of teenage parents)  
 Peers  
 Partners (including both partners who were and were not the biological father of the child/ children)  
 Aunt

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**Professionals**

Youth workers  
 Social workers  
 College programme managers  
 EMA administrators  
 Student financial adviser  
 Careers advisers  
 Mother and Baby Unit support workers  
 College support officers  
 College tutor  
 Project workers

---

**3.2.1    Becoming pregnant**

The age at which teenage mothers became pregnant varied between fourteen and seventeen years old. Significant others interviewed about these cases sometimes indicated that they felt it likely the pregnancy was planned. Teenage parents had varying reactions to finding that they were pregnant. Some were unsurprised and pleased to find themselves pregnant. Their reasons for being pleased included having always wanted to have children young or the desire

to have someone to love unconditionally and permanently, who would love them in return. In contrast, others were shocked because they believed they had been using contraception. The decision to continue with the pregnancy varied in difficulty for these young mothers. One group found themselves warming to the idea of parenthood after the initial shock of discovering the pregnancy subsided and looked forward to the birth of their child. A second group, although they did not consider termination an option, found that they were overwhelmed, anxious and scared at the prospect of becoming a parent. For a final group, the discovery of pregnancy came too late for the option of termination to be viable. In these cases, there was shock during the pregnancy and the child's birth frequently led to a difficult period of personal adjustment. For example, one mother found she was pregnant at seven months as the result of being raped. For her the remaining period of pregnancy and the childbirth were extremely difficult times of personal adjustment. The father of the child was subsequently imprisoned for the offence.

### **3.2.2 Disclosing the pregnancy – Telling parents they will become grandparents**

The disclosure of the pregnancy to families took different forms. One group of teenage parents disclosed their pregnancy to their mothers or other family members and sought support from them and professionals. However, in some cases this support was not immediately offered, in other cases this support was not forthcoming at all even during latter stages of the pregnancy or after childbirth. In contrast, some young mothers concealed their pregnancy for as long as possible. At the extreme end of the spectrum was one young person who only informed her family when she was seven months into her pregnancy. Anxiety and fear about family reactions were dominant in the young mothers' accounts of disclosing their pregnancy. Even in cases where teenage parents had received immediate support, they still worried about being a disappointment to their parents and wider families.

*'I came home told me mum and said, "What will I do about this?" and she was more concerned about me and I didn't think she'd be like that I thought she'd be really annoyed ... She was really supportive. If me mum [hadn't] have been here I don't know what I'd a done. She's been brilliant, she's been fantastic.'*

Tara, teenage parent participant

The reactions of families were similarly varied when the pregnancy was disclosed. Particularly common was anger from fathers and in some cases this led to a refusal to support their daughters in their journey towards parenthood. Where this was the reaction, the young person often left the family home. This was most common where there were pre-existing

relationship difficulties between the young person and their parent(s). Other parents reacted with disappointment and a feeling of sadness or anger at the young woman '*wasting*' her life. However, this reaction frequently softened during pregnancy as parents had time to adjust. A final group of young women received full and unconditional support from their family from the outset.

### **3.2.3 Housing circumstances**

The housing circumstances of young mothers were varied. Before becoming pregnant most teenage mothers had always lived in a family unit with either a lone parent, both parents or mother and a stepfather. In some cases, young people had moved between their mother and their father, who were living separately. In unusual cases, the young women had been in care in children's homes or foster care, and were in the care system when they became pregnant. The birth of a child frequently, although not always, caused a change in housing circumstances.

One group were still resident in their family home at the time of interview and had always been so. These young people lived with either both parents or a single parent, and with or without other siblings. In these cases, the family home was a supportive environment and often a critical source of help in caring for the new baby. In addition, some young mothers had lived with the parents of the father of their child in the past. However, at the time of interview none of the teenage mothers were living with their partner's parents.

One common pattern was that the young mother left her family home on disclosure of her pregnancy to her family, or shortly before the birth of the child. In some cases, the young women were asked or forced to leave when their parents discovered the pregnancy and the young woman's intentions to keep the child. Others left home voluntarily for practical reasons such as limited space in the family home, or because of a desire for greater independence. This move towards independence sometimes involved moving in with a partner, who was normally the child's father. Destinations on leaving the family home varied. Some of those interviewed were resident either in Mother and Baby Units or sheltered hostels for young mothers, or had at some point been resident there. For many of the teenage parents in this sample these hostels or units were seen as an important stage in the transition to independence and becoming a parent. Others, mainly aged 18, were living in accommodation provided by the Local Authority and in rare cases had used Mother and Baby

Unit accommodation as a pragmatic route into council housing. Not all mothers living independently had come through the Mother and Baby Units; some had applied for Housing Association accommodation from home and this tended to involve long waits. Those who had been living in care at the time they became pregnant tended to move into Mother and Baby Units either shortly before or after the birth of their child.

### **3.2.4 The father**

Teenage parents varied in the level of seriousness and commitment they attached to the relationship with their child's father. The level of practical and emotional support as well as the financial contribution received from fathers also varied.

#### ***No relationship***

Here the mother was no longer in a relationship with the father when discovering her pregnancy, or had never been seriously involved with him. In these cases, the teenage mother either chose not to inform the father, or told him at a late stage of the pregnancy. These mothers infrequently spoke about the reaction of the father to the news of their pregnancy but where they did there was often the expression of shock or disbelief on the father's part. Within this group, there was a pattern of minimal involvement of the father in the child's life. In some cases, fathers did see their children, but financial contributions were rare or non-existent. The mothers in this group rarely expressed any desire for the father to become involved in their lives.

#### ***Past relationship***

Dominant amongst this sample was that a previously committed and meaningful relationship with the child's father had broken down either during the pregnancy or shortly after the birth of the child. The failure of these relationships was often painful for young women to recall. However, for some the end of the relationship was a relief.

Within this group, the contact the father had with his child, and his level of involvement and support were often directly related to how the relationship ended. For example, where the teenage mother and the father had parted on bad terms there had sometimes been arguments and disagreements over seeing the child. In one case, this resulted in a legal battle where contact was granted and supervised by a Family Liaison Officer. Yet, in other cases, the end of the relationship also indicated the end of the father's involvement with the child. In

contrast, where relationships had ended on positive terms the father often saw the child on a regular basis. In rare cases, the teenage mother felt her relationship with her former partner had improved since their relationship ended and the father saw the child frequently and often. However, none of the fathers in this group were felt to be making any real financial contribution to the child's upbringing – most were either students themselves, unemployed, or earning insufficient income to support the child.

### ***Ongoing relationship***

Unusual amongst those interviewed were mothers living with their partner, usually in privately rented, or owned accommodation. In all but one case, these partners were the natural fathers of the child. There was one case where the partner was not the natural father and contact with the natural father was very limited (by the choice of the natural father). This young mother viewed her present partner as the father of the child, since they shared the parenting role.

These fathers (including the non-biological father) shared certain characteristics. Chiefly they tended to be older than the mother and in full-time employment. In one exceptional case, the mother's partner was also seventeen and a full-time student. However, significant others described this as an unstable relationship that was increasing in difficulty. The mother in this case had dropped out of college by the time her significant others were interviewed. In most of these relationships, the partner had been supportive since the pregnancy was discovered and remained committed to both the relationship and the child.

The young mothers here also shared common characteristics. They often had fewer dominant personal issues than others in the sample and described themselves as having little in the way of support needs outside the family home, although there was an exception to this. They rarely identified themselves with the label of teenage mother and its derogatory implications in the way that others in this study did. This is illustrated by Sally's comments:

*'When I was pregnant you know I had a letter from a social worker, "Do you need any support?" and people like the midwives, "Oh we've got teenage clubs where you can go and talk to other teenage mums", and I didn't feel it right for me. ... I just sort of imagined ... excuse the phrase, like teenage rebels having babies at home with their mums and I just didn't think I was like that ... '*

Sally, teenage parent participant

### **3.3 The Impact of Becoming a Parent**

Having a child rings in major changes in the life of the young person. It was usual for the teenage mothers to have described the period after giving birth as a difficult time of adjustment. Many young mothers described a feeling of isolation, either in the initial period after the birth or a more pervasive, long-term sense of isolation. The impact that becoming a mother had on their social lives was widely reported. They described being unable to take a full part in their former social life, and being unable to see friends, or partake in activities (such as going to clubs, sports) that they did before and this contributed to feelings of isolation. This isolation was magnified where young mothers had little support from their family, but remained an issue even where young mothers had a great deal of support from their family. Those living with partners often found that the initial period after the birth put some strain on their relationship, but when the child started sleeping more that strain was eased. For some young people trying to adjust to having a young child had been difficult and had had a detrimental effect on their own mental well-being. In these cases, episodes of post-natal depression were reported, for some mothers this depression was more persistent.

After the initial period of difficult adjustment most of the young mothers felt that having a child or children had had a large impact on what they were like as a person. Some described this as a steep learning curve, or period of '*growing up*', becoming more mature and placing their child's needs before their own. This change was often seen as positive. Becoming a mother was also seen as something that had added to personal motivation. In these instances, becoming a parent had given them a drive to succeed or achieve for the child. This motivation was often closely tied to the feelings of maturity and responsibility having a child had brought to the young mothers' lives.

Other young mothers, or their significant others, spoke about more negative impacts that becoming a parent had had on their personality. These parents were described as being quieter than they were before, less happy or '*bubbly*', and suffering from low self-esteem and self-confidence. These young mothers tended to avoid social situations, or viewed them as difficult, and seemed increasingly isolated by their role as a parent.

### **3.4 Dominant Personal Issues**



Dominant personal issues ranged in their nature and severity for the teenage parents. Some teenage parents, often those living with a partner, did not have any dominant personal issues. For others, these issues had been present either previously or had developed since they became pregnant and had their child. The persistence of dominant personal issues varied, some found them to be temporary whilst others were experiencing long-term difficulties. These were felt to have an effect on their coping abilities, as well as their social interaction and personal skills. Dominant personal issues were more prevalent where the young mother felt a lack of emotional support, or felt socially isolated. A range of dominant personal issues were experienced by teenage parents:

- mental health issues, such as depression, post-natal depression and anxiety;
- social isolation and loneliness;
- low self-confidence and self-esteem;
- eating disorders;
- learning difficulties; and
- long-term impacts of previously abusive relationships.

### ***Mental health issues***

Mental health issues were a common problem for the young mothers interviewed. They ranged from temporary post-natal depression to long-term depression. Linked to these were a lack of social life and a feeling of a lack of personal support. These mothers were often those who had discovered the pregnancy later on, whose relationship with their partners had failed shortly before or after the birth, and whose family were not supportive in any way, or with whom they had little contact. In some cases anxiety accompanied depression and young people described experiencing panic attacks since the birth of their child, which had continued to occur. In these cases, psychiatric assistance had been offered or suggested, and one teenage mother was seeing a psychiatrist on a regular basis.

### ***Social isolation***

Some teenage parents described a feeling of isolation, which was accompanied by loneliness. These parents felt that they had lost their friends as a result of becoming a parent, did not have any social life and often conveyed frustration at the amount of time spent in their accommodation, alone with their children in the absence of company from peers or other adults.

*'Just the emotional thing of having two kids that are dependent on you - being 17 years old and not being able to have the freedom that a lot of 17 year olds out there have got. I would say just the desperation and the drudgery of life ... just in terms of space away from the kids, space away from that responsibility of having the kids, I think she*

*finds it - I mean we would all - but she finds it really, really tough.'*

Youth Worker

### ***Weak personal skills***

Significant others often spoke about how they felt that becoming a parent had undermined the young mother's personal skills. They perceived reduced self-confidence and diminished self-esteem since having the child. These in turn tended to make social situations intimidating or problematic and therefore had become a barrier to future social contact for the young person.

### ***Eating disorders***

In unusual cases, significant others described a concern for the young person's eating patterns and behaviours as a developing problem although teenage parents did not mention this.

### ***Learning difficulties***

One young mother had a learning difficulty. Her significant others described how she had found it difficult to understand her pregnancy until the child was born. Her specific learning difficulty meant that she required a high level of support to assist her in developing her parenting skills.

### ***Long-term impacts of previously abusive relationships***

In exceptional cases, young people had previously been in violent or abusive relationships. The experience of these relationships continued to affect the young person either in relation to personal confidence or personal safety. In one case, a significant other believed that a current relationship was becoming abusive, and that this was affecting the young person's self-esteem. Some young women had been in relationships in which partners were domineering and controlling. Professional significant others noted the detrimental influence boyfriends could have on the life of the young mother where they did not want the child in childcare, or had strong views on the role of a mother which restricted the young woman from other activities. Although this was not present in the circumstances of any of the young mothers at the time of interview, there was some evidence that this had been the case in the past, and once again had affected their self-esteem.



### 3.5 Support Systems – The Support Young Mothers Receive

The development of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot schemes and other government initiatives targeted at supporting teenage parents indicate the widespread awareness of the support needs of young mothers. This section describes the support that these young mothers had been offered, used or refused during the course of their pregnancy and post-childbirth.

#### 3.5.1 Family

Young people were receiving differing levels of support from their families. For some, family support had been constant and considerable, both where the young mother was living in the family home and where they were not. Those young mothers afforded a high level of support from their family often appeared to have adjusted to being a parent with greater ease and happiness. They argued that the support of their family had allowed them important breaks away from their child, for example to go out with friends. Other examples of this support included the young person's mother taking care of the child when they were ill to allow the young person to continue attending college when the child could not be in their usual childcare placement. These teenage parents also described feeling closer to their own mothers since the birth of their own child.

The mother of one young woman, who was interviewed as a significant other, noted the importance of that initial support immediately after the baby was born. She felt her daughter had difficulty initially in bonding with the child, but grew in that bond, and in confidence in the first few months of being a parent and although now living independently still receives daily help and support from her family.

In contrast, others had been separated from their family because of their pregnancy. For some of these mothers a lack of contact, infrequent contact or anger on the part of their parents continued over time. In other cases, families had become more supportive with time.

*'When I first got pregnant I lived with me dad, I left home ... So when I left home I wrote him a letter I tried phoning him up we didn't speak for four months. But at Christmas we were united again and I couldn't ask for a better granddad now he's brilliant with Courtney, he's brilliant with me and I think it was, half of that was I never got on with me dad at all.'*

Ellie, teenage parent participant

Yet, this increased support or diminished anger could be a slow process and teenage parents in these circumstances, even where they saw their parents regularly, did not yet feel that they were totally supportive.

Where teenage parents received a high level of support there was recognition of its importance. Often these mothers felt that without the support of their family the situation would have been much more difficult, or even intolerable. For other young people this level of support was sought and received from their partner, with or without support from their family. In these cases, there was often a strong feeling of being a family unit, and recognition of the support this provides. In other cases, often where the young person is not living with a partner, the father or partner is felt to be lacking in the support he provides to the young mother. In exceptional cases, the father's family were a source of support, often looking after their grandchild at weekends or on regular days and providing relief, and in rare cases provided emotional support to the teenage mother. In contrast, some young mothers experienced difficulty in their relationships with paternal grandparents. In an extreme case the paternal grandparents refused to accept the child was their son's, insulting the teenage mother with insinuations of promiscuity and demanding a paternity test which later proved their son the father.

### **3.5.2 Friends**

A common experience for teenage parents was losing contact with the majority of friends either from school or before they were pregnant. This was attributed to a lack of social life or ability to go out on the part of the young mother.

*'I think 'cause she actually left school and she went back again, I think they sort of tended to drift apart because when you've got a child – a girl, teenager that hasn't got children and a teenager that has, the one that hasn't wants to be out enjoying themselves.'*

Aunt of teenage parent participant

Changing address to take up accommodation in a residential Mother and Baby Unit also caused dislocation to friendships. Furthermore, friends' disapproval of the young person becoming a parent also caused friendships to break down. In some cases, teenage parents described not losing their friends until after they had given birth. In rare cases, young mothers felt rejected by friends when they were pregnant but had regained interest from friends since the birth of their child. Where old friends had kept in regular contact since the

birth, they tended to be one or two closest friends. In these cases, the support and help of these friends seemed influential for the young person. Where young mothers felt they had lost all their friends, there were feelings of anger, resentment and occasionally envy at the lives these friends were able to lead.

For many young mothers new friends had become important since becoming a parent. These friends were often young mothers themselves, and had been met in Mother and Baby Units or at college. There was some evidence of reconciliation with old friends when they had become parents themselves. Significant others, and particularly professionals with much experience of teenage parents, felt that contact with other young parents was crucial for teenage parents. Finally, where young people were living with partners there was a lack of contact with friends from before the young people had become pregnant. However, these young mothers did not always feel this was detrimental since they had their partner.

### **3.5.3 Professional support**

It was common for young mothers to receive support from professional agencies. The extent and nature of this support varied. Those parents receiving the least support from agencies were often living with their partner or in the family home. Consequently, they felt that support from external agencies was not required.

The main agencies to provide support to teenage parents were Mother and Baby Units and sheltered hostels. In Mother and Baby Units, staff often supported the young person in an educational and parenting context; providing emotional support and developing life and educational skills. Young mothers also received support from their colleges, naming their tutors or careers advisers as significant others. In contrast, some felt they received less support from their college than required. Most young mothers kept regular appointments with a Health Visitor although the level of care varied. In some cases, the Health Visitor simply checked on the baby's physical well-being whereas in others, the Health Visitor was involved in caring for the young person, particularly where they were experiencing difficulties such as depression. Support was also received from youth workers. Where a social worker was involved in the life of the young mother and baby they were rarely cited as a source of personal support, although this was the case for one young person. A youth worker in the study argued that this was because for a young mother a social worker was

perceived as having an agenda, and their involvement implied to the young mother that she was not coping with being a parent.

#### **3.5.4 The significant others**

The significant others nominated by teenage parents were evenly balanced between family, friends and professionals. Young mothers living at home often nominated their own mother as a significant other, as did some young mothers who were not living at home. Partners were often nominated. Friends and other family members were less common, but were present among the sample of significant others. Professionals nominated included independent or educational youth workers. College staff were nominated and interviewed – both from the teaching profession and support staff. Mother and Baby Unit staff were also nominated. Unlike the young homeless sample, few young mothers felt they could not name other people who had been significant in their lives. All of the teenage parents nominated two or more significant others whereas the homeless young people, in comparison, could name fewer sources of significant personal support.

### **3.6 Experiences of Compulsory Education**

Becoming pregnant whilst still in compulsory education had a disruptive effect on the education of the teenage parents as they often left school to complete their education in an alternative environment. Experiences of school were varied and were often drastically different once the young woman had become pregnant.

#### **3.6.1 A break in education - The effect of becoming pregnant**

Often the young mothers in this study were due to give birth before their schooling had ended and many moved to a different education provider for the duration of their pregnancy. . Other young people became pregnant while at school, but were not due to give birth until after the end of their final school year, and in rare exceptions pregnancy did not happen until the young person was in post-compulsory education. For those mothers who were due to leave school before the baby was due, there was no disruption to education but young mothers felt that being pregnant interfered with what their level of achievement may otherwise have been. One young mother sat her GCSE examinations whilst seven months pregnant, when the only other person aware of the pregnancy was one close friend. She felt

this had adversely affected her achievements. Others too felt their pregnancy affected their level of achievement, for example;

*'I felt disgusted really that just [be]cause I was pregnant that I was like kicked out of school[and sent to a Mother and Baby Unit instead] but I think that my GCSE grades could have been a lot better if I'd been at school, because I'd have had the teaching behind me and everything.'*

Stacey, teenage parent participant

Young mothers who had had to leave their secondary school because of pregnancy, either to go to Mother and Baby Unit schools, or to return to education after the birth of the child, usually did not return to the same school after giving birth. Often the young person continued their education in a Mother and Baby Unit school. These parents felt this environment was emotionally supportive, although often limited in the subjects on offer for GCSE. For example, some units are unable to teach sciences because they lack a laboratory and the correct equipment. In rare cases young people were sent to other non-mainstream institutions. This included a 'special school' run in the local further education college. Home tuition was also provided as an alternative in one case. In another exceptional case a young woman who left compulsory education during Year 11 because of her pregnancy, did not finish her education. Her school told her that she would be provided with home tuition and that they would contact her. The mother of this young person made one fruitless attempt to contact the school after not hearing from them. The young mother did not attempt to find an alternative means to finish her education as she felt she was pre-occupied with her newborn child.

Beyond the common experience of disrupted education, young mothers' views about and experiences of school were mixed. Chapter 2 demonstrated how homeless young people interviewed shared a common experience of disrupted and, mostly, negative experience of compulsory school. In contrast, young teenage parents were more akin to the mixture of school experiences within the wider EMA sample (Legard et al, 2001) although clearly some experiences were particular to their becoming a parent.

### **3.6.2 Negative experiences**

#### ***Bullying***

Young mothers reported being the victim of bullying at school, in some cases for prolonged periods. Bullying was both related and unrelated to their pregnancies. After becoming



pregnant, some young women reported verbal abuse from their peers and experienced bullying which primarily took the form of name-calling relating to their perceived sexual promiscuity.

### ***Teachers***

Some young women disliked the teaching staff in the school, and found them unsupportive prior to becoming pregnant. For others, the attitude of staff towards their pregnancy was considered disturbing, as they felt staff disapproved of the pregnancy and their decisions to become parents. In some cases, this led to a fear of the teaching staff.

### ***School work***

The nature of school work was a factor in negative experiences. Some were not stimulated by the subject matter taught in school, others felt it was too demanding and they struggled with the work.

### ***Absences and disruptive behaviour***

Almost without exception, those who described their school experiences as negative also reported a history of truancy. This was usually for short periods when they felt particularly unhappy in school because of bullying or school work. In exceptional cases, teenage parents had displayed disruptive behaviour at school either alongside truancy or independently. These behaviours included missing classes, smoking and swearing in school.

## **3.6.3 Positive experiences**

### ***Friendship group***

A strong friendship group was often described as the primary reason for having had a positive experience of school. This removed the young person from dangers of being bullied or isolated. This sometimes changed when the young person became pregnant. Young women were also influenced by the positive attitude towards education held by their friendship group.

### ***Motivation and enjoyment***

Although a friendship group often shared a young person's positive attitude towards school, this was not always the case. Some young people did not have a strong friendship group and yet enjoyed schoolwork and were motivated to learn.

### **3.6.4 Early leavers from college**

With one exception, the early leavers in this sample left college after their interview for this study. This was reported by significant others who were interviewed later. Early leavers had fallen behind with their studies due to maternity leave or because of illness in their child or themselves. Significant others felt that missed work and assignments led to the young mothers feeling that it was impossible to cope. This was compounded by living circumstances of early leavers who were all living away from the family home, either independently or with a partner. To catch up with missed work proved too demanding on top of childcare obligations and running a household. However, significant others reported that these early leavers were still committed to returning to education and completing a qualification but felt it would be easier when the child was either a little older, or of school age.

One teenage mother, who was the only early leaver interviewed after she had left college reported that a lack of support at college had contributed to her decision to leave. She had lost several weeks of payment of EMA because she was late for classes on one morning each week when buses were late from her childcare placement. After this, there was a period of her being ill and requiring hospital treatment, and she fell behind with work. She felt discouraged by this and by the college, who told her that if she could not complete her assignments by the given deadline she would be ejected from the course.

*I'd told them I'd be in hospital over Christmas and I'd probably still have these problems but they didn't want to know. ... They just said, "Well it's nothing to do with us". I didn't think they were very supportive. They didn't really care they didn't - they were too busy dealing with the normal people who didn't have children they was all-everything alright with them.'*

Joanne, teenage parent participant

### **3.7 Barriers Parents Faced in Accessing Post-Compulsory Education: Personal and Practical**

The previous sections have shown that, with the exception of being parents, these young people shared many similar characteristics with others in their age group participating in the main EMA scheme (Legard et al., 2001). This section reviews the barriers these young people faced in considering a return, or move to post-compulsory education paying particular attention to the specific issues they faced as young mothers.

The barriers to post-compulsory education faced by young mothers were both personal and practical. The significant others nominated by young people emphasised the importance of personal issues such as a lack of self-esteem or low self-confidence in decision-making about the return to education. It is also worth noting that at the end of compulsory education the young mothers sometimes took a break of a year, which they often devoted exclusively to parenting. The experience of this break in education had been mixed; whilst young mothers felt it was important to be with a young infant full-time, and were glad they could do so, this break often exaggerated or created isolation, leading to the young person eventually feeling a need to '*get out of the house, or do something*'. However, where a break in education had been the case significant others also felt that the break had made education a more intimidating prospect on which to embark.

### **3.7.1 Childcare**

Childcare was the major barrier to young mothers continuing in education. Without funding young mothers could not afford the costs involved in childcare. The alternatives to paying for childcare were also described as unappealing; often young mothers did not want to place, as they saw it, '*their responsibility*' with their own family, and although some had considered it, asking their mother to care for their child was rarely perceived as a viable option.

Although in principle young parents preferred to leave their children with relatives rather than strangers, it was felt that asking their family to assume the total burden of childcare for college hours was too much and was relinquishing their own responsibility of childcare.

Without provision of suitable childcare, a return to education was perceived as impossible.

Availability of childcare was also an issue. Parents reported that some crèches would not accept children under a certain age, which varied, but was sometimes as old as two years. In some cases these restrictions were in place in college crèches and mothers felt strongly that if they were to leave their young children they only wanted to do so if the child was close to them and easily accessed in case of an emergency. This was a real and serious barrier for some mothers, although they were also aware that restrictions were in place to protect the children because younger children require a higher ratio of staff to children than those who are older. Mothers also reported a shortage of childcare placements in crèches and this was another practical barrier preventing a return to education.

Although childcare was a serious practical barrier to returning to education there were other, more personal, difficulties associated with the issue of childcare which made young mothers hesitate about returning to education. Where the child was very young, mothers expressed concerns about placing their child in childcare. A dominant view was that mothers wanted to have the time to develop a relationship with their child through one-to-one care. This was often coupled with a deep mistrust of childminders. Attitudes towards childcare expressed more confidence in a crèche than ‘*never knowing who a childminder might be*’. Mothers also expressed concerns that others might denigrate their role as a mother if they were not caring full-time for their child, especially when they were very young. The young mothers hesitantly suggested this concern, and significant others mentioned it more candidly. These ‘*cultural barriers*’ to childcare where perceptions of childcare and its implications are negative were particularly prevalent in rural areas. One young mother spoke of the barriers she felt prior to starting post compulsory education:

*‘Well I always, they were all on at me go to college, go to college and I was going no I’m not going to leave my kids cause then I wouldn’t leave them no-where I wouldn’t even let my mum watch them or anything ... .. Like now I leave, I can leave them easier now cause I’m use to it but then I won’t let no-one look after them no-one not at all ... ’*

Ruth, teenage parent participant

### **3.7.2 Transport**

Getting to and from college was perceived as something that would be unaffordable or very difficult. This was particularly relevant in the rural areas where young mothers often lived further away from their local, or chosen, college. Using public transport was often described as difficult as it entailed leaving home very early and trying to manage alone on busy buses with prams, pushchairs and other baggage necessary for childcare. It also meant getting home later, and therefore attending college realistically took up much more of the day than it would for other students without childcare responsibilities. This was a particularly exaggerated barrier where the childcare placement was not on the same site as the college or educational institution. In these cases mothers had to take a bus to the childcare placement and then another to college.

### **3.7.3 Finance**

Finance was seen as a major barrier by both the teenage parents and their significant others. Income was a source of major concern for these young people and a resource in which the

child's needs were the uppermost priority. Concerns over finance related to the extra expenditure that college might incur in relation to travel, equipment and food costs. In courses such as hairdressing, the initial outlay for equipment could be as high as £140 and such costs were prohibitive for some young parents.

#### **3.7.4 Time**

Time posed a significant barrier for these young people. Both parents and their significant others reported how caring responsibilities severely restricted young mothers' ability to return to education. Often young mothers were the sole provider of childcare and, if living independently, of household management. The young people were concerned about how they could manage to complete their homework or assignments at home whilst also caring for their baby and running the household. Young people also worried about attending college when they had been up all night with their child. There were concerns that it would be impossible to find the time in which to be a full-time mother, student and run a household without either the child or college work suffering.

Time clearly posed a significant barrier to education for some of the young mothers, '*are there enough hours in the day?*'. Yet there was an added dimension to this concern. Teenage parents worried that a commitment to education would leave them too tired on a daily basis to spend quality time with their child. This concern reflects a persistent struggle articulated by the young mothers about juggling the immediate needs of their child with the longer-term benefits of gaining an education.

*'I suppose it's the concentration levels on each part, on the college side of it and the home, the mum side of it, it's two very different demanding things.'*

EMA Administrator

#### **3.7.5 Personal skills**

Lack of self-esteem, confidence, motivation and life skills were all perceived as barriers to returning to education. Young people worried that a return to education meant having to meet new people. This was particularly difficult for those who had suffered, or were still suffering from depression. Significant others spoke about the impact that considerable breaks in education (for pregnancy and childbirth) often had on young peoples' personal resources. For many the return to education was seen to involve significant adjustments and the need for considerable support from friends, family and professionals.

### **3.7.6 Experience of school**

Negative experiences of school provided a dissuading influence on two levels. Some young people worried college may be like school, and did not want to repeat their previous experiences. These fears were heightened, in some cases, by low self-esteem. In a more practical way, some young people felt that their lack of qualifications or poor secondary school record was a barrier to continued education. They felt they were unable to take the course they wanted to without relevant GCSEs and were often unaware of other courses that could provide alternative access to the courses they wanted to undertake in the future. One young mother describes the difficulties she encountered in wanting to re-take her GCSEs.

*‘When I came to college I came for an interview and I originally wanted to retake and the guy spent we were in his office for about an hour up to an hour and a half and we were going through all this and how to make up a whole week for the right hours to get EMA. And then because of my record of achievement, “Sorry we don’t think you’ll be able to handle this many hours.” After we had been sitting there for an hour and a half so he could try and sort out what retakes I could do to make up the hours. And then at the end of it all he was just like, “Oh, I’m sorry from your past record I don’t think you’ll be able to handle all this work”.’*

Alice, teenage parent participant

### **3.7.7 External influences**

Finally, there was clear evidence that, in some cases, the father of the child or the partner of the young mother presented obstacles to their continued education. In these circumstances, significant others, and to a lesser extent teenage parents, felt that partners’/fathers’ views were influential in decision-making. Specifically, some fathers or partners were perceived to have highly restrictive views of what a mother should and should not do when she has a small child. For some of the young mothers these pressures were a significant obstacle to returning to, or sustaining, education.

## **3.8 Stepping Over the Barriers - Factors Accounting for the Return to Education**

Many teenage parents described personal and practical barriers that had impeded their participation in post-16 education. Other teenage parents who had always wanted, and expected, to participate in post-compulsory education described barriers that were largely practical in nature. Overall, a growth in self-development and the financial benefits of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots, played an important role in removing personal and practical barriers and so facilitated participation in post-16 education.

### 3.8.1 Self-development and becoming a parent

Becoming a parent provided some young mothers with a drive to succeed that may have been absent in their lives prior to becoming a parent. This was precipitated by a sense of responsibility for the child in the long-term, which led young parents to seek education in order to maximise their future earning potential. Additionally, the desire for self-development was driven by a need to do something, to get out of the house and ‘re-engage’ with the outside world. These feelings were common amongst young mothers who had taken a break from education and spent their time almost exclusively on childcare in their home. This had been an isolating experience and education was seen as a way of overcoming that isolation. For some teenage parents there was also a desire to prove themselves to their own parents. This was strongly expressed as a desire to demonstrate to their parents that their life had not ended because they had become a parent and that they did not intend to remain on benefits for the rest of their life. This was often an influential factor where parents had expressed disappointment with their daughters for becoming pregnant.

*‘If I didn’t have my kids I wouldn’t be bothering to go to college ... I don’t want them to like get picked on ‘cause I’m like on Income Support or something ... cause I want to give them more than like, cause now I get like £93 a week and I want to give them more.’*

Ruth, teenage parent participant

### 3.8.2 Childcare and related issues

Awareness of childcare funding and availability of suitable provision were critical to the decision to return to education. However, while the EMA Vulnerable Pilot and the Childcare Pilot played a financial role in enabling access to childcare provision, other issues emerged. These related to the young mothers’ distribution of time and feelings about being a ‘full-’ or ‘part-time’ mother; the implication being if they were studying for a large proportion of the week, they were failing to be a ‘full-time mum’ to their child. The type of provision available to young parents was also important as many had particular childcare preferences. Whilst the nature of childcare provision was important, so too was the programme of study to be undertaken by the young person which could accommodate their parenting role. Many teenage parents had a history of truancy and negative experience in their years of compulsory schooling and felt hard-pressed to find an accessible course that awakened their interest in learning and could accommodate their parenting role.

### ***Information and support***

Teenage parents were often not aware of the educational options and support available to them until they were offered guidance or given information. In these cases the knowledge that childcare could be funded (either through EMA or in LEA 3 through other funding,) and that part-time courses were available, overcame many of the practical barriers. Significant others had also played an important role in encouragement and emotional support, often alongside an advisory or informational role. This support and guidance was important in enabling the young person to seriously consider returning to education where they had not seen it as an option previously, and led to the decision to return to education. These significant others tended to be professionals with whom young mothers had relatively recently met. The introduction of this support had often been important in the decision to return. Mother and Baby Units were particularly key in providing this information and support.

*'We tell all of them that when they first found out they were pregnant it was the end of the world but for so many of them it's the beginning because it's a fresh start and quite a lot of them take that on board. ... But no, we don't sort of give them the option. Staying at home's not an option. And those who say, I want to be with me baby, then we encourage them to go on the flexible learning and do another GCSE at night school at least for one year till their baby's older.'*

Mother and Baby Unit Project Worker

### ***Time to be a mother***

Teenage mothers were often on courses that were not full-time. As a result, young mothers had at least one full day during the week where they were not in college. These days were often devoted to the child and to household tasks (where the young person lived independently). The ability to return to part-time, rather than full-time study, overcame an important barrier for young mothers. Teenage parents felt more committed to parenting as they had several days a week where they could be exclusively with the child, and this enabled them to feel as though returning to education meant still remaining an active parent.

### ***Parents' perceptions of childcare provision***

Although there was clearly a negative attitude towards childcare by 'strangers', evidence suggested that this barrier to education could be overcome. Teenage parents often mistrusted childminders, but felt more confident with a crèche or nursery situation. For a teenage parent in this study to be using a childminder was rare, and where it was happening the childminder



was used occasionally in addition to the use of a crèche. Where young people could place their child in the college crèche, there were aspects of this care that overcame some misapprehensions about childcare. Firstly, these types of childcare meant parents could often 'pop in' to see their child in their lunch breaks and any gap between classes. This served as a reassurance to many parents. Secondly, in a college crèche parents often got to know other parents using the crèche, which also offered them personal reassurance. Also importantly, many young mothers grew to recognise the importance of peer socialisation for their child by making use of formal childcare, and this applied to all forms of crèches whether on-site or off.

*'The baby before ... I was thinking she was a bit slow like, but as soon as she started to go in the crèche, she like really come out, didn't she – she was talking and walking and everything like straight away.'*

Best friend of teenage parent participant

### ***Educational programmes of study related to childcare***

In some areas, young mothers were participating in childcare and parenting courses. This meant that the child was part of the course; they were present in the classroom and involved in the course that covered a range of parenting skills and issues from play to paediatric first aid. These young mothers could still use external childcare options and were encouraged to do so on one day in three that they attended the course. This was described by youth workers as an ideal transition back into education; young mothers were surrounded by other young parents and the course was described as a supportive environment. Teenage parents were also re-introduced to learning using a part-time childcare option, which allowed them to move away from some cultural and attitudinal barriers about leaving a child in childcare. These courses were also seen as providing a useful access route for those who had not taken GCSEs or did not have enough GCSEs to do what they eventually planned to at college.

### **3.9 Awareness of EMA Flexibilities and Childcare Provision for Teenage Parents**

Unlike the mainstream EMA recipients (Legard et al, 2001), teenage parents were often aware of EMA before they made their decision to return to education. Only in exceptional cases were parents not aware of the scheme before they started college.

### **3.9.1 When and how young people first heard of EMA**

As with other groups, awareness of EMA came from a number of different sources. The key sources were:

- school assemblies and tutorial periods in Year 11;
- Mother and Baby Units and other mother-child organisations;
- older friends and acquaintances already participating in post-compulsory education;
- careers advisers who distributed leaflets/information when young people were deciding whether to apply to college;
- leaflets distributed in colleges after term had begun; and
- friend's parent (who was employed in local college).

### **3.9.2 Perceived purpose of EMA**

Young mothers saw the EMA as having four key purposes:

- to encourage young people to continue in education;
- to increase numbers of people participating in further education;
- to encourage retention and attendance; and
- to provide financial assistance for college expenses.

Few, if any, of those interviewed directly related the EMA scheme to providing parents with additional resources to overcome barriers to education associated with parenthood.

### **3.9.3 Understanding and views of the scheme**

Attitudes towards the EMA scheme were resoundingly positive among teenage parents and their significant others. Teenage parents often saw the money from the weekly allowance as providing a real incentive to sustained attendance at college and felt that the income from it was better than benefits because '*you are doing something for it*', in a sense earning it.

Teenage parents often viewed the EMA weekly allowance as extra money for the child, and therefore viewed it positively. Understanding of the scheme did vary, but there was a predominant awareness of attendance requirements, and of '*visible*' elements such as childcare, where it was applicable, and of the help available with transport costs. Some teenage parents did have a low level of awareness of all aspects beyond basic attendance requirements. Significant others also gave positive responses to the scheme. These views

were particularly positive when significant others had detailed knowledge of the EMA scheme.

*'I suppose the major advantage would be that it's given them, it's opened a college option to them that maybe wouldn't have been there beforehand. It's just making it more of an attractive option to them. I suppose like you were talking about the payments the motivation to go in, there could for some young people be that sort of motivation to go in, if you don't go in you don't get paid.'*

Personal Adviser

### **3.9.4 The flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots scheme**

Few of the teenage parents recognised that they were being afforded extra entitlements under the EMA scheme beyond those parts of EMA that were highly '*visible*'. Differences in entitlement between themselves and their peers were attributed by some to the way in which their college made allowances based on circumstances, such as being a lone parent. Within the range of flexibilities on offer in three areas, there were varying levels of awareness. Some flexibilities were widely recognised, whilst others had little or no recognition amongst teenage parents. Highly '*visible*' flexibilities such as the payment of extra money or funded childcare were most recognised. '*Invisible*' flexibilities were less well recognised as being part of the EMA scheme. This included the flexibility allowing vulnerable young people to claim EMA for up to three years. However, some teenage parents recognised that this entitlement was particular to teenage parents.

In LEA 4 and LEA 2, there was a high level of awareness of the provision of childcare through EMA. However, some young mothers did not know who or what funded their childcare. In LEA 3 there was some confusion as to how childcare fees were paid. Some incorrectly assumed that their childcare was funded by EMA, others were unsure. In LEA 2, young mothers were often aware of funding being available for transport to childcare placements and some young mothers took this up. There was awareness of paid maternity leave within EMA only where it had been or was being used by teenage parents; where it had not been required there was low awareness of it. However, in one case there had been some confusion as the young mother was not clear that she had to remain in education for up to four weeks on her return in order to qualify for a maternity leave lump sum payment; she had felt that there were unnecessary delays in receiving this.

### **3.9.5 Eligibility**

Some young mothers, especially those living independently, were usually aware of the eligibility criteria that applied to their situation. This was that if you were not living at home or with a partner, you were automatically eligible. There was also a high level of awareness that eligibility depended on income in the household if you were not living independently. However, details of the sliding scale of weekly allowance dependent on income were not as widely known. One young person in LEA 3 recalled that she had been told if you *'haven't got a wheelie bin then you are eligible for EMA'* since only areas where residents are affluent are perceived to have *'wheelie bins'*. Young people were also generally aware that EMA was only available to those living in a certain area and felt that this aspect of eligibility criteria was unfair. A view that some young people held was that eligibility based on parental income was also unfair. This was because of a strong belief that even if a young person's parents have a considerable income it does not guarantee that they will give any money to their son or daughter attending college. Young people participating in the main EMA scheme also expressed this opinion (Legard, 2001). Low levels of awareness of any eligibility criteria did exist among the sample, but were more unusual. These views included a belief that EMA existed only for teenage parents, and another that all young people between sixteen and eighteen years old are eligible for EMA.

## **3.10 The Role of EMA in the Decision to Return to Education**

The role of EMA in the decision to return to education was pivotal for teenage parents. The role that EMA played ranged from totally essential, or enabling to a large degree in teenage parents' decision-making.

### **3.10.1 Childcare**

Young people in LEA 2 and LEA 4 argued that without Childcare Pilots it would have been impossible for them to be in college as there was no other way they could afford to fund childcare. Many of these young people had wanted to go to college prior to enrolling, and often had not taken decisive action in that direction until they became aware that the Childcare Pilots met the cost of childcare. As a youth worker in LEA 2 pointed out, having childcare funding available was overcoming the major barrier to returning to education.

*'When they're first considering it they think they might use the childcare, so that takes the looking after your kids barrier away and they start exploring the education option without thinking, "I can't do it because I've got kids". And then what we've done is we've got down the education thing and then they've sorted the other things out for their kids. But if we hadn't been able to say: "We can pay for your childcare", we would never have got over that very first barrier.'*

Youth Worker

Some young mothers in LEA 3 also described their funded childcare as an enabler to their return to college, although this was not funded by EMA. This childcare did not cover days not in college in guided learning, such as work placement days or study periods. Teenage parents sometimes had to find alternatives for one day a week. Those teenage parents with supportive families used their relatives as a childcare resource to meet these needs, others found the gap in funded childcare difficult.

### **3.10.2 The courses available**

Teenage parents on the non-mainstream Childcare and Parenting Skills course in LEA 2, returned to college because they could attend together with their children, and did not have to leave them with strangers. Without the EMA Vulnerable Pilots including participation in such non-mainstream courses as flexibility, these teenage parents would not have been able to receive EMA. This course had influenced participating teenage parents to progress to a second year in college in a range of courses and qualifications, when the childcare provided by EMA will become crucial.

### **3.10.3 EMA – Providing a key incentive and motivation**

Both in addition to childcare provision and without it, EMA was found to provide a motivating incentive to return to education. The weekly allowance was appealing as an addition to Child Benefit and Income Support. This was often coupled with a feeling of wanting to do something and to *'get out of the house'*. The additional financial benefits of going to college because of EMA lent a return to education extra appeal. This financial incentive often coincided with a strong desire on the part of teenage parents to provide for the child to the best of their ability. This desire, the will to *'do something'*, and a recognition of the potential future benefits of employment provided by greater education motivated a return to education and were seen as beneficial enough to overcome other personal barriers.

### **3.10.4 EMA – An additional bonus**

There were teenage parents for whom EMA was seen as a bonus. These parents felt that without it they would still be in post-compulsory education. Some of these parents are from LEA 3 and were aware that EMA does not fund childcare. Other parents from this group were in the fortunate circumstances where childcare could be provided without requiring funding from EMA or a college. This group includes those who either had their children on the course with them, or who had relatives and friends who provide childcare. One teenage parent's mother cared for her child and had done so since 1999, the year before the EMA Vulnerable Pilots were introduced. Another had arrangements with a friend and relatives for different days of the week.

These parents all reported a strong resolve to go to college anyway and described EMA as a bonus to their weekly income, but without it they felt they would still be in post-compulsory education.

*'It [EMA] just came along with the course really, if you did the course you got the money and I wanted to do the course so that's. Yeah. I didn't do the course for EMA, I did the course cause I wanted to do the course but at the end of the day the money was a bonus.'*

Alice, teenage parent participant

## **3.11 The Experience of EMA**

### **3.11.1 The application process**

Overall, the young mothers found the application process for EMA problematic and required assistance with it, although exceptionally it did not present difficulties. It was often unclear as to why the form presented more difficulty to some teenage parents than others, as recollection of difficulties experienced was not detailed. Young people had assistance from a range of people in completing their applications including parents, support workers, youth workers, college staff, and careers advisers.

Teenage parents felt that the application form was too long, and that it required too many documents in order to complete. There were also some complaints that the form asked too many questions, some of which (such as ethnicity and religion) seemed unnecessary. Some young mothers were confused and unsure about which sections they had to fill in and which they could leave blank. Others had had the application form sent back several times as a

result of not understanding clearly what they needed to provide. This led to delays for these applicants.

After applications for EMA were submitted, teenage parents faced a wait for their first payment ranging from three weeks to five months (this was exceptional and involved a parent undertaking a range of adult learning programmes and short courses, whose timetable varied every week). Most teenage parents felt that their applications had taken an unnecessary amount of time to be processed. When payment arrived, it was backdated in a lump sum, which teenage parents felt was useful. However, the delays were a deterrent to continuing in education for some and, in some cases, led to young mothers borrowing money from elsewhere until payment arrived.

### **3.11.2 The Learning Agreement and meeting requirements**

As with other groups included in this study, recollection of the Learning Agreement varied. However, the teenage parents fell into three main groups, those who had:

- little recollection of the content of the Learning Agreement, but sound knowledge of meeting its requirements in attendance (non-attendance incurs non payment);
- little recollection of the content of the Learning Agreement, but sound knowledge of meeting attendance requirements and completing assignments on time; and
- clear recollection of the Learning Agreement and its terms.

Of the young people who did not clearly recall the Learning Agreement, some admitted that they had not read the document. One teenage parent explained that this was because there were so many forms and documents to complete at the time of enrolling in college.

Regardless of their level of recollection of the agreement and its contents, teenage parents were clearly aware that any failure to attend without authorisation meant the week's allowance was not paid. There were a variety of views on this issue. The dominant view for teenage parents was that this was unfair. Young people appreciated the sentiment of the requirement and its motivational effect, and saw the principle as fair but often felt it was too stringent. There were strong opinions that it was unfair that being late for one lesson meant losing the week's allowance. Teenage parents felt that there should be more flexibility built in on this point; buses were sometimes late, children had to be taken to childcare placements

and teenage parents had often been up much of the night attending to a young child. This reflects a view amongst some teenage parents that the college itself was inflexible. This was often reflected in the handling of time sheets. In some colleges, if time sheets were not handed in on a Friday this also meant loss of the weekly allowance, regardless of any authorised absence. A youth worker in LEA 2 expressed concerns that the attendance requirements for receiving EMA were in danger of being used as '*a stick rather than a carrot*', and that the power of this aspect of EMA was left in the hands of college tutors who signed time sheets.

### **3.11.3 Setting up a bank account and receiving EMA**

Most of those interviewed had existing bank accounts before joining the scheme. In the few exceptions to this, the young mothers did not feel it had been particularly difficult to open an account. There were contradictory views surrounding the issue of the day of payment. Some parents had experienced problems with their banks whereby if the payment had not arrived before a certain time on a Friday afternoon (e.g. before 3.30pm) it would not clear until after the weekend. This was a source of frustration to teenage parents as it meant that the allowance could not be used for (food) shopping over the weekend, or for transport to college. However, there was an appreciation of the fact that EMA payment arrives at a point in the week when '*the Social*' has run out, or is running out. In most cases, the delays young people experienced in receiving EMA into their bank accounts seemed attributable to confusion with their time sheets or with college administration. In some cases, a weekly allowance was paid the following week, doubling the amount received in that payment. This was inconvenient for the young person, who had budgeted to have it during the previous week. Overall, most parents appreciated the benefits of having payments made directly into their bank account, which was felt to be a safer form of transfer than a giro or cash, which could get stolen. Some also felt that it was easier to manage their finances knowing that the money was being paid in to their account on a specific day.

### **3.11.4 Seeking advice with a problem with the payment of EMA**

Across the group of teenage parents, some felt that they had been provided with an appointed person to give support and advice in case of EMA difficulties whilst others did not. Advisers providing support included: youth workers, college EMA officers, college financial advisers, and careers advisers. Often the advice given was useful in resolving problems. Nevertheless, some felt responses to their problems were too inflexible; one young mother felt she was



repeatedly penalised for being a few minutes late for a class by losing her week's allowance and that appealing was pointless as the college were inflexible on this issue. Others felt their designated points of problem-solving did not deliver assistance, for example;

*'I've been to the council and they're supposed to be sorting it out, and obviously me course tutor's sorting it out, but nothing ever seems to be done.'*

Sally, teenage parent participant

For those without a designated point of reference for difficulties, resolving problems was more problematic. Often these young people recalled being referred from the LEA to the college and back again without any resolution to their difficulties. Most of these difficulties related to payment issues and, specifically, to stopped payments resulting from '*unauthorised absences*' that the young person argued were related to their caring responsibilities.

### **3.11.5 Bonuses**

Teenage parents had rarely received bonuses. The level of awareness of bonuses was initially low until teenage parents had received letters informing them they were not eligible for the bonus, or in a few cases had received the bonus. Teenage parents had often fallen below the attendance requirement for the termly bonus, and they were likely to cite their caring responsibilities as the reason for this. There were rare exceptions such as one young mother who had had her child in her second year of college. She had participated in the EMA scheme during her first year and had received every bonus in that first year. Bonuses were not felt to provide much incentive for teenage parents on the part of significant others, as other aspects of EMA (such as childcare and the weekly allowance) which were seen to be more important. Some significant others also felt that an incentive over the period of an academic term was too long-term a prospect to provide incentive.

## **3.12 The Impact of EMA on the Lives of Teenage Parents**

As with the main EMA scheme for young people from lower income families who are not deemed vulnerable, the evaluation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots aimed at teenage parents has identified a range of financial and educational impacts of participation. This section reviews the impact of EMA participation across a number of different areas. One of the objectives of this study was to examine the differences in experiences and impacts between the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. At this stage, little difference emerged between the

Childcare Pilot and the EMA Vulnerable Pilot aimed at teenage parents, often reinforced by some young mothers' lack of recognition over how their childcare was funded. However, further comparative data is anticipated in the second year of the evaluation.

### **3.12.1 Making a difference to financial circumstances**

Without exception, the weekly allowance had impacted positively upon the financial situation of all teenage parents receiving it. The extent of this impact depended on the situation in which the young person was living. For example, those living with a partner who was earning wages tended not to feel as great an impact as those living alone and independently. Many teenage parents raised the issue of childcare when asked how EMA affected their financial situation, pointing out that without childcare funding they could not be in college, and therefore the effect on their situation was far reaching. The availability of childcare, or the impact EMA payments had on a young person's ability to pay for childcare was a major outcome of participation for many. The pilots performed three major financial roles:

#### ***A pivotal role in funding the cost of living***

Some teenage mothers felt that the weekly allowance was a vital part of their weekly budget, and that without it life became a lot more difficult financially. These parents tended to be those that were living independently in housing association provided accommodation, paying bills and travelling to college. EMA now formed a crucial part of their weekly budget for the cost of living.

#### ***Funding for more than life's necessities***

For this group, the weekly allowance meant that parents could do a little more than exist at necessities only level. In these instances teenage parents clearly differentiated between their EMA money and their other sources of income; namely Child Benefit and Income Support. The EMA weekly allowance meant there was money to spend on clothes, or occasional 'treats', after educational expenses were covered. Although these parents felt they could survive without EMA, the money it provided afforded a difference in their quality of life. Teenage parents in this situation felt that EMA helped their financial situation. It is important to note that the occasional 'treat' was often mentioned in relation to their child. For example, EMA provided teenage parents with the opportunity to buy a toy or take their child out for the day which they would not otherwise have been able to afford.

*'I think it's improved – when she's had payment it's improved life you know shall we say it's given her a little bit more money you know to go and buy some clothes or to you know do something which she wouldn't have had that money to go and do, just bulk out the budget each week which you know whatever you get extra is great.'*

Youth Worker

### ***EMA – providing something extra***

In contrast, those parents who received financial support from sources other than Income Support and Child Benefit did not find EMA had such a resounding impact on their financial situation. This was usually the case for mothers who lived with wage-earning partners. However, EMA was crucially seen as *'their'* money.

It is worth noting that significant others often perceived the financial impact of EMA as being greater than that stated by the young person. It is difficult to know what to attribute this dissonance to. Some young mothers were clearly keen to distance themselves from any of the stigma they perceived as being associated with labels such as *'lone parent'* or *'teenage mother'*, as well as the idea that they are *'bludging off the state'* or *'living in poverty'* which might suggest that they were under-emphasising the financial impact that EMA had.

### **3.12.2 The amount of EMA weekly allowances - views and opinions**

Overall, young mothers felt that both the amounts of £40 and £30 a week were fair in their respective areas. However, they would be delighted to see the amount increased. One teenage parent commented that, although her view was biased because she has two young children, she would like to see the amount increased on a need basis. One young person suggested it would be beneficial to increase the amount to £50 a week, and hence award £10 a day for attendance, removing the danger of missing a week's payment for missing one lesson. Significant others were more critical of the amount of EMA weekly allowance suggesting it should be higher for teenage mothers. One significant other suggested a further means-tested basis to awarding an amount as a fairer way of allocating a sum for the weekly allowance.

The level of childcare support was roundly accepted and seen as sufficient, except where parents had two children. A youth worker in LEA 2 suggested that it was unrealistic for there to only be an additional £50 a week for the second child (up to £100 a week for the first child), and that on this allowance it would be impossible to fund full-time childcare for two children.

### **3.12.3 Use of EMA weekly payments**

EMA payments were used in a variety of ways by teenage parents. In some cases, the weekly allowance was a vital part of the weekly budget and absorbed into household expenditure. For other teenage parents EMA weekly payments were seen as quite distinct from living costs and were used on '*non-essential*' items. In this latter group, teenage parents occasionally viewed the money as belonging exclusively to their child and spent the money accordingly on children's clothes or toys. Teenage parents living with partners who were earning a wage often saw their EMA allowance as '*their*' money within the household. In addition, both groups of parents used their EMA to meet any educational costs they incurred such as equipment, travel, or stationery. Beyond educational expenditure, use of EMA fell into two clear groups:

- living costs: nappies, food, utility bills, '*back-up*' for unforeseen expenses/bills; and
- non-living allowance: clothes for the child, clothes for the young mother, socializing, large household purchases such as a fridge/freezer or carpets, particularly where back payments were made in a lump sum.

### **3.12.4 The impact of losing payments**

The impact of losing payment was dependent on the importance of EMA within the young person's financial situation. One young mother who used EMA as a vital part of her living expenses income felt a large impact from loss and felt it was unjust. This young mother was late for occasional lessons in the morning, or would miss a single lesson. Losing her weekly allowance had far-reaching financial implications and became a disincentive to attend for the remainder of the college week after the missed or late lesson. This became a pattern she attributed to tiredness, the child having been up much of the night, and late running buses. This young person has since dropped out of college. Some parents had not missed any payments because all of their absences so far had been authorised. Others felt lost payments had been unjust and keenly experienced the financial shortfall. Examples of this type of loss included reports from teenage parents that, although their absence was authorised, due to their child's illness they could not submit their time sheets in time for the college deadline. This incurred non-payment for the week. Another parent reported that for one course a teacher frequently failed to turn up. Consequently, no register of attendance was taken and student time sheets were not signed which resulted in lost weekly payments.

### **3.12.5 Coping with holiday periods**

Although there was recognition by some teenage parents that non-payment in the holiday was fair under the terms of the scheme, holidays presented problems and difficulties for teenage parents. The fairness of non-payment was recognised on the basis that they were not attending college and some expenses decreased such as transport costs to college. However, because of problems some had experienced, they argued that a '*retainer*' paid during holiday periods would be useful. The problems presented by non-payment included:

#### ***Budgeting and childcare responsibilities***

For parents who relied on the income of the weekly allowance holidays were financially difficult. Holiday periods were a struggle as the EMA weekly allowance had become absorbed into budgeting for bills, food and nappies for the child. Young people found existing without it difficult.

#### ***Childcare and implications***

Young mothers found studying and completing assignments during the holiday period problematic. Without the childcare funding and provision they relied on in term time, young mothers were often solely responsible for childcare during holiday periods, particularly where they were without the support of their family. Consequently, childcare responsibilities precluded many teenage parents from engaging in part-time employment during the summer vacation to substitute for their EMA weekly allowance.

Significant others also pointed to potential difficulties for young mothers undertaking courses of more than one year, or who plan to return to college next academic year. It was recognised that childcare providers were unable to hold places for the children of teenage parents for the following year without a retainer. This could present problems in areas where there is shortage of childcare, or where the mother uses the college crèche for convenience or because it reassures her to be able to see the child at lunchtimes. This issue can be little understood to date, as at the time of the study, teenage parents had not yet reached the end of the first year and so were not yet faced with this dilemma.

### **3.12.6 Impact on commitment and motivation in education**

For some teenage parents, the financial rewards of EMA provided the key incentive to participate in further education. However, over the course of the year many of these young people reported that they had developed a commitment to learning:

*'I only went at first because it was £30 a week for like just sitting down and writing, and then I got into it and I thought, yeah, I will stop another year so I have nearly finished my course now and then I am going to do my Level Three'.*

Katherine, teenage parent participant

For all teenage parents, the attendance requirements of EMA were reported to provide motivation on a day-to-day basis, even among young people who claim they would have gone to college without EMA.

### **3.12.7 Other impacts**

Significant others commented on a number of benefits to participation in education for teenage parents. They reported that young mothers appeared to grow in confidence and seemed happier having participated in further education. Social contact with other young parents and peers was also regarded as one of the non-educational benefits of participation and was considered important to the personal development of teenage parents.

Not all teenage parents used childcare support in the first year as they were engaged in Childcare courses where the child could be brought into the classroom. The flexibility of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot enabled non-mainstream study options such as this, which accommodated the parenting role and developed vulnerable young people's confidence and sense of commitment within a learning environment. As a result of the positive experience of such courses, many of the teenage parents here planned to progress to mainstream vocational or academic courses in the following year. In effect, non-mainstream courses such as this provided a transitional route into mainstream education for teenage parents, including those who were initially uncertain about participation in post-16 education.

Another impact of EMA was the freedom provided by the travel pass in LEA 3. Not only did this provide transport to and from college and childcare placements, but was also valid for the rest of the week. This assisted young people as it meant that travel was not an expense and removed it as an issue of difficulty outside of college hours.

For teenage parents living with their partners, EMA delivered a feeling of independence. This was particularly the case where their partner was earning a wage that paid household expenses. The EMA weekly allowance was often seen as ‘*my money*’ by these parents and meant that they did not need to ask their partners for money to spend on extra expenses such as educational costs, clothes, or socialising.

In summary, participation in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots aimed at teenage parents, has had a consistently positive impact on young mothers. However, there were cases where the responsibilities of both parenting and education were felt to be too much to cope with and resulted in young mothers leaving education early when they fell behind with their studies. Early evidence suggests that for many teenage parents who returned to education, support from the EMA Vulnerable Pilot has served as a key enabler in not only increasing initial participation, but also in sustaining that participation over time. Childcare support was found particularly useful for young mothers. However, the importance of childcare funding through the Childcare Pilot scheme varied depending upon other local initiatives such as childcare support offered through Learner Support Funds in further education institutions. These issues will be returned to in Chapter 5.

*‘I don’t know that they can do a lot more for teenage parents than they’re already doing. I think it’s an absolutely fantastic scheme for young people ... It’s such a support to know that you’re going to get some money weekly, that they’re going to help you out with the childcare provider even though you’re going to have to put a small amount towards it yourself, they’re going to help you out with transport, what more could you possibly ask for, really?’*

EMA Administrator

#### **4 IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF EMA EXTENSIONS AIMED AT YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

##### **Summary**

In summary the research found:

- There was an absence of an effective means of identifying young people with disabilities. Cross-agency working was limited and this may have contributed to lower take-up and identification of the needs of young people.
- Young people with disabilities are a diverse group with a range of educational and support needs.
- The educational and support needs of young people with disabilities can place heavy demands on their primary carers. Financial resources were seen to be very important in helping provide the necessary care and support.
- The decision to remain in education meant different things to different respondents. Young people who did not have high support needs, tended to appreciate the utility of education as a means to furthering their future employment ambitions. The parents of young people with severe learning difficulties and high support needs, tended to emphasise school as an important environment for fostering their child's personal development. Many teachers considered education to be the most accessible activity for young people with disabilities and special needs and perceived numerous barriers to paid employment.
- For young people and their families, the role of EMA in the decision to remain in education was peripheral, reflecting the strong preference for education over paid employment or training at this stage. Many young people expressed long-term hopes for labour market participation.
- Flexibility to participate in non-mainstream education was considered a key feature of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme as many young people in this sample were participating in non-mainstream courses delivered by special schools and special units.
- The receipt of EMA was seen as an important means of practical support for young people with disabilities who rarely participated in part-time paid work. For some of the young people EMA weekly payments also offered a degree of independence and self-validation.



- Young people and significant others tended to report positive experiences and views of the EMA scheme.
- Knowledge of the scheme's aims and regulations was basic and tended to be restricted to awareness of weekly attendance requirements.
- Young people and their families reported that there was a lengthy wait for the initial payment from the scheme.

#### **4.1 Implementation of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots - Young People with Disabilities**

Young people who have a Statement of Educational Need or have been recognised as having a disability through the Disability Discrimination Act are entitled to claim EMA for up to three years. In addition to this, the EMA Vulnerable Pilot allows students with disabilities to study a range of non-mainstream courses to suit their needs and attend non-mainstream institutions able to deliver appropriate education.

##### **4.1.1 Implementation and delivery strategies**

The EMA Vulnerable Pilot, with particular focus on disabilities, was introduced in LEA 6 in September 2000. The target group included young people with physical impairments as well as those with statements of special educational need. As in the other EMA Vulnerable Pilot areas, EMA can be claimed by a range of vulnerable young people within this LEA, such as young people who are homeless and those with no or low qualifications. In practice, the focus of implementation in LEA 6 has remained on students with disabilities rather than other vulnerable groups of young people.

Responsibility for launching and administering the EMA flexibilities provision lies with the Student Support Services team, which also deals with grants and awards to students in higher education. The implementation group that had been established to assist in the design and delivery of main EMA provision was briefed on the introduction of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots but had no active role in its implementation.

A number of factors were reported to have made preparations for the launch of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots very difficult. This included a belief that the LEA had not been fully briefed about the eligibility conditions and the nature of the flexibilities that would be

available to young people at an initial meeting with DfES officials in April 2000. LEA administrative staff in LEA 6 understood the target group to include young people with physical impairments according to definitions used in the administration of higher education grants and awards. However, the eligible group was much broader and included young people with statements of special educational need for example. This misunderstanding was not rectified until a second meeting in July with DfES officials, local professionals with knowledge and experience of the disabilities field, the Careers Service adviser who deals with special schools and relevant LEA officers.

In the absence of a viable alternative at the start of the pilot, identification of eligible students was based on type of school attended as entered on the standard EMA application form. Consequently, recipients who acknowledged attendance at a special school were identified as vulnerable and considered eligible for support from the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme. However, this strategy may have formed the basis for gross underestimates as many young people with disabilities and special needs attended mainstream schools. The extent to which mainstream schools had been briefed about the flexibilities available for vulnerable students was unclear. In one school visited by the evaluation team, staff were unaware that flexible arrangements were available for vulnerable students.

#### **4.1.2 Publicising the scheme and identifying young people**

Promotion of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots finally got underway in June 2000. The approach taken was to brief various support agencies that worked with disadvantaged young people in order to raise awareness and establish a route for referrals. This included colleagues within the local authority who deal with young people with special needs, Education Welfare Officers who have links with the Youth Offending Team and the Teenage Pregnancy Team, the Youth Service and the local Careers Service. Briefings were supplemented by a poster and leafleting campaign for EMA, which made reference to the extra support available '*for students with disabilities, teenage parents, homeless young people, those living in care, and young carers*'. In co-operation with the Careers Service, LEA administrators sent out letters to the families of the new intake of sixth form pupils in each of the LEA 6 special schools and residential colleges. The LEA administrators also attended a number of coffee mornings and parents' evenings at local special schools to promote the scheme and to offer help and advice concerning the application procedure.

The difficulty experienced by many parents in completing the application forms and the consequent high level of returned forms, was reported to have led to some delays in making initial weekly payments to students. It was also felt that a face-to-face briefing for school staff would have been preferable to the written guidance that was issued in terms of clarifying administrative processes and attendance monitoring procedures. Overall, attendance monitoring appeared to run smoothly although administrative staff reported that not all schools and colleges were prompt in making their weekly returns, which inevitably led to extra time being taken to collect information.

#### **4.1.3 Levels of take-up**

At a meeting of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots Steering Group in January 2001, it was reported that 43 young people were in receipt of EMA flexibilities provision for young people with disabilities. Take-up from young people in special schools was reported to be disappointing. For example, only one third of sixth formers at one special school were supported by EMA, in spite of estimates that up to two-thirds of these young people could be eligible. Several possible reasons were presented to explain this low level of take-up. These included a lingering perception amongst some families and possibly amongst teachers, that claiming EMA would jeopardise receipt of other benefits such as the Disability Living Allowance, which is paid to young people with care needs and mobility difficulties. The weekly rate of this allowance is higher than the weekly allowance available in any EMA Vulnerable Pilot area. Secondly, the type and amount of information requested on the EMA application form was considered intimidating to potential applicants. Even when applications were submitted, it was estimated that 60 per cent of forms were returned to applicants, as requested information had not been included. Also, while efforts were made to identify eligible young people, there was a consensus that had further support been available to the LEA to target vulnerable groups, take-up would have increased. This included having time and resources to work more closely with agencies directly supporting vulnerable young people as well as having staff available to help with the application process. Consequently, it was felt that information concerning the flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots had failed to reach all vulnerable young people.

## **4.2 Background to Young People with Special Needs**

Although continuing education after age sixteen is the norm for young people with disabilities and special needs (Bradley et al., 1994; Tomlinson Committee Report 1996), many arrive from a context of poor previous educational experience, low educational attainment and low-income backgrounds. The Social Exclusion Unit (1999) have reported that those with special needs are more likely to have been excluded from school and to have left school with no qualifications. Young people with special educational needs also tend to come from lower-income backgrounds than the general population (Hirst and Baldwin, 1994; Wagner et al., 1993). The effectiveness of transitional planning and the level of active involvement of young people with special needs within this have also been questioned (Mitchell, 1999; Tisdall, 1997). Furthermore, ill health and disability have been identified as key characteristics amongst young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (DfEE, 1999).

This section of the report focuses on young people with special educational needs and disabilities that were all eligible for support from the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme during 2000/01. The evaluation aimed to explore the influences on young people's decisions to continue in post-16 education and uncover perceived barriers into education and other destinations for young people with disabilities and special needs. The significance of EMA and experience within the scheme were also addressed. Influences on participation and implications for retention and attainment were also explored.

Key sampling dimensions included type of post-compulsory education attended by the young person, type and severity of any impairments and social groupings such as gender and ethnic origin. However, within this LEA, attendance at special school was used as the main criterion for defining eligibility for the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme. Consequently, most recipients and therefore, potential interviewees, tended to be engaged in this post-compulsory education at special schools. Other criteria used by the LEA to define eligibility were statements of educational need and registered disability. The LEA approached EMA Vulnerable Pilot participants on behalf of the evaluation team.

Young people were asked to return consent forms to the LEA, and this information was then passed on to the evaluation team. Two of the young people in the sample had high support

needs and interviews were conducted with their parents on their behalf. One participant also required an interpreter to relay interviewer questions and return her responses. Details of research participants are included in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1      Profile of Young People with Disabilities Sample**

<b>YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (9)</b>
<b>Gender</b> 3 young women, 6 young men
<b>Ages</b> 8 aged 17 1 aged 18
<b>Nature of disabilities</b> 2 with no learning disabilities 7 with learning disabilities
<b>Health</b> 5 with health problems 4 without health problems
<b>Living arrangements</b> 7 live with both parents 1 lives with mother 1 lives with grandparents
<b>Current activity (at time of interview with young person)</b> 7 studying for non-mainstream awards (All attending special schools) 1 studying towards two Advanced GNVQs (Attending mainstream school) 1 studying two AS Levels and Key Skills in English, Numeracy and IT (Attending mainstream school)
<b>EMA receipt (at time of interview with Significant Others)</b> 6 receiving £30 a week 1 receiving £20 a week

Each young person in the sample was asked to nominate up to two people who were significant in supporting them in their daily lives or in their decision-making. In total, eleven significant others were interviewed. A profile of significant others is included in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2      Significant Others Interviewed in Relation to Young People with Disabilities Sample**

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**SIGNIFICANT OTHERS (11)**

11 people interviewed

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**Relationship to young person**

7 Primary Carers (5 parents, 2 grandparents)

1 sibling

3 Special School teachers

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In three cases, the young person did not or was not able to nominate a significant other. Also, the relatively low numbers of significant others here partly reflects the limited social networks of some of the young people in the sample. Two parents commented on the sense of isolation, in relation to the lives of young people with support needs as well as their own role as primary carer. One parent described a very isolated existence with no contact with friends, self-help groups or other support organisations – ‘*there is nothing to talk about or discuss, only Martin*’. (Pseudonyms are used throughout this report to respect anonymity of participants.) Similar sentiments were expressed by Wasim’s father who was disappointed with what he perceived as the lack of support offered by the local Social Services department, a situation, which he feels, is exacerbated by his family’s minority ethnic status.

The presence in the sample of a young person, Tony, who is not receiving EMA was unintended. During the interview he demonstrated an understanding of EMA and, following an interview with his mother and stepfather, it was discovered that an application had been made on his behalf. However, parental income of his mother and absent father was calculated to be above the eligibility threshold and so he was not considered entitled to support from the scheme.

All interviews took place between April and June 2001. Young people were given the option to be interviewed at home or at school. Relatives of young people were interviewed in their own homes. Professionals were interviewed at their place of work. Where permission was given to record interviews, tape recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

### **4.3 Current Status of Health, Disability and Special Needs**

#### **4.3.1 Low educational qualifications**

Seven of the nine young people had spent their entire school career in the special school system. Of these, five were now pursuing life skills courses, designed to develop personal, social and independence skills in preparation for adult life. Kevin explained what his course had covered to date:

*'We have to look at information handling, number handling and we also have to do home management.'*

Kevin, disabled participant

Life skills courses were being undertaken at pre-entry level and were therefore classified as non-mainstream provision. Such courses being undertaken by the young people here varied between one and two years in length. Of the other special school students, Katherine was pursuing a one-year Care Work course and Martin, a young man with multiple and profound impairment, was following what was described as a three-year '*Special Needs Curriculum*'. In contrast, the two young people in mainstream schools were both working towards Level Three qualifications. Amanda was studying Health & Social Care and Leisure & Tourism courses at GNVQ Advanced Level. Richard was working towards AS levels in Art and Technology.

#### **4.3.2 Disability and special needs**

Within this sample, impairments experienced by young people varied widely. Across the sample, young people experienced difficulty with activities such as mobility, manual dexterity, physical co-ordination, speech, hearing or eyesight, memory or learning. Five of the young people also had recent or ongoing health problems and some had experienced interruptions to their education as a consequence. Most of them had multiple health problems and two had recently undergone major operations. Health problems included asthma, epilepsy, hydrocephalus, and suppressed immunity to infection. The support needs of young

people in the sample varied according to the severity of impairment or health problem and it was not always possible to disentangle what aspect of young people's difficulties were being supported within education or at home. In the most extreme cases, young people had no motor skills and had multiple and severe learning difficulties. Other young people had no physical impairments or health problems but had statements of educational need.

Another set of support needs, less frequently encountered in this study, related to challenging behaviour as reported by Wasim's father:

*'He has a behaviour problem, but not every day, sometimes when he wants to do something, we don't let him do it ... then maybe he loses temper ... More or less, say 75% all right, 25% is problem, behaviour problem.'*

Father of disabled participant

The high support needs of some of the young people in this sample extended to communication difficulties. Of the nine young people in this study, three were reliant on a third party to represent them. In Suraiya's case, her communication difficulties were compounded by her limited knowledge of English. Communication difficulties also affected the level and type of appropriate participation in education for these young people. All three young people in the sample who had high support needs, were undertaking non-mainstream courses with the intention of providing stimulation and very individual learning targets. Mainstream attainment was not a realistic or appropriate target for these young people.

This brief outline indicates the complex and sometimes intensive educational and other support needs of this sample. Most of these young people had low educational qualifications on entry to post-16 education and most now participated in non-mainstream learning below that of Level 1. Such were the support needs of some of the sample, that they would not attain any mainstream qualifications throughout their entire educational career. For others, low attainment coupled with learning difficulties would entail a longer period of engagement in post-16 education compared to many of their peers. Young people with health problems and physical disabilities had experienced interruptions to study, due to medical appointments and complex medical conditions, and they too may require an extended period to complete programmes of study. Some of the young people in this sample only required help with physical activities and others required learning support for core subjects in a mainstream setting. The degree of support required was variable, but all students received some level of educational or practical assistance.



#### **4.4 Experiences of Compulsory Education**

With the exception of one young person, all of the young people had spent some or all of their school careers in a special school. There were no reported incidences of bullying or of suspension or exclusion from school. Indeed, all of the young people who were able to voice their opinion indicated that they enjoyed school.

Some school careers were more fractured than others. For example, Katherine had been at the same school since the age of five and liked ‘*everything*’ about it. However, Martin had spent the early part of his primary school career outside of the UK. At the age of seven, he was enrolled at a special school in England and transferred to his current school at the beginning of Year 10. Suraiya arrived in the UK from Bangladesh at age twelve having received no formal schooling prior to this. After beginning her education in a mainstream primary school, Amanda transferred to a special school for children with physical disabilities for two years before moving again to her local mainstream comprehensive school at the age of 11. She has since had two periods of prolonged absence during Year 8 and Year 12 due to health problems.

#### **4.5 Post-Compulsory Education - Barriers and Facilitators**

The choice of destination at the end of compulsory schooling was influenced by a number of factors. These included a sense that qualification attainment would enhance future employment opportunities; a perception that employment opportunities were restricted for young people with disabilities and special educational needs; a belief that education was a means of personal development and stimulus for young people, particularly those with high support needs. In addition, choice of educational institution was influenced by a sense of security with institutions attended at Year 11. Advice and guidance informing the decision to remain in education was often reported to be limited.

##### **4.5.1 Employment issues**

The reasons given for ‘*stopping on*’ at school were often related to employment prospects. For Richard, Amanda and Tom there was an acknowledgement of education and, more particularly, qualifications as a stepping-stone to achieving future employment aspirations. All three saw college or university as the next step in the progression towards this goal.

While Tony had not yet decided what he wanted to do when he left school, Katherine was aiming to go to college to train to become a care worker, and Kevin envisaged a similar route towards his goal of becoming a gardener. Tom had already visited several colleges in anticipation of a move there following completion of his current course of study. In no case was EMA given as a reason for remaining in education. However, the financial assistance provided by the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme was still viewed as useful. The recipients involved in the scheme were from low-income backgrounds and the support needs of three of the young people in particular were considered high, involving high expenditure such as extra laundry and specialist equipment in all three cases.

Whilst education was regarded as an accessible and positive activity, some young people and significant others perceived employment opportunities as limited. This was attributed to the young person's disability as well as the existence of discrimination, as articulated by one parent:

*'You can't work in a shop, you can't do things like that, hairdressers, 90 per cent of jobs you can't do because you're restricted to your chair, [...] they all say [...] that they don't discriminate against disabled, but how many disabled people do you see?'*

Parent of disabled participant

Tom also reported that he had enjoyed work experience although he later commented that this came to a premature end, as the employer was unable to accommodate wheelchair-using employees without contravening fire regulations.

*'There were stairs up to the staff room and that you see, and if I wanted the loo or anything there was a downstairs loo, if I [wanted] a rest I had to climb up the stairs on my hands and knees.'*

Tom, disabled participant

Such experience may contribute to the perception of limited opportunities for young people with disabilities.

A small number of the significant others were teachers and their view reflected a perception that, for those in special schools, there were few employment opportunities and consequently, little alternative to continuing education after age sixteen:

*'The majority of our students stay on, some continue their education at college but its very few who choose to leave to get a job, partly because their employment possibilities are more restricted than a mainstream school.'*

Teacher of disabled participant

Most recipients and significant others considered that EMA funding positively reinforced the decision to continue in post-16 education, which was regarded as a welcome approach.

#### **4.5.2 Value placed on education**

For some significant others, emphasis was placed on the intrinsic value of school as a means of enhancing their child's emotional, intellectual and social development. Martin's mother continued to send him to school because it offered him interaction, stimulation, and therapy. Although she was aware of day services and other special provision for disabled adults, she was not sure what will happen when her son finally leaves school at the age of 19. Wasim's father adopted a similar position. He believed that his son derived benefit from attending school and anticipated that his son will remain in education until he is 19, after which he will rely on professional advice:

*'What professional people decide because ... I am just a parent and if better for Wasim to go in college, I happy because I want his bright future, because it's a very difficult world to live, that only I interested, brighter future, that's all I am interested.'*

Father of disabled participant

#### **4.5.3 Security of school**

The majority of this sample was undertaking non-mainstream courses in special schools. However, such provision is limited and so this may impact upon young people's choice of destination. Furthermore, most of the young people in this part of the study had chosen to continue further education at the same special school that they had attended at Year 11 and this level of stability appeared attractive to some as articulated by one young person.

*Interviewer: What persuaded you to stay on at school rather than go to college?*

*Richard: I thought it would be better because I know the place a lot more, I know what the teachers are like, where the classes are, that was why.*

Richard, disabled participant

Both Amanda and Richard indicated that they had considered transferring from their mainstream schools to a college. However, familiarity with the school site and with teaching staff had influenced their decision to stay on rather than go elsewhere. Other young people at special schools reported that familiarity with their surroundings was an important factor in

their post-16 destinations. This sample did not include any young people who had changed institution since Year 11.

#### **4.5.4 Advice and guidance at Year 11**

In talking about their decision to remain in education, only Amanda, Richard and Tom mentioned the involvement of a Careers Adviser who they described as having talked through various options with them. In spite of all three having undertaken a period of work experience during Year 11, none of them had been tempted to leave school to pursue training or employment. Moreover, in spite of reporting broadly positive views of their work experience, none of these three, or Katherine the other young person with work experience, was currently engaged in part-time work.

Most of the significant others in the study were the young person's primary carer(s), these were mainly parents and, in Tom's case, his grandparents. They were aware of advice and guidance that had been offered to young people whilst at school, including advice from teachers, careers advisers and social workers.

*'In Year 11 I think it was Careers Information, and a year before they are preparing the children because they know they're going to have to make a choice, so I think it was done through the school and his Careers, and that's when he decided to stay on.'*

Father of disabled participant

*'We had a meeting with his headmaster and these two social workers ... and they said there that Tom needed extra education.'*

Grandparent of disabled participant

Post-16 education and qualification attainment was seen to be accessible and to offer a route to 'a better job'. In contrast, alternative routes such as employment, were sometimes perceived as less accessible. Education was also seen to provide useful activity for young people with high support needs although they were not expected to attain any mainstream qualifications. Education was seen to provide mental and social stimulus for young people who may otherwise have experienced isolated periods of inactivity at home. Consequently, many young people and significant others opted for participation in post-16 education even before they were certain of receiving any EMA funding.

#### **4.5.5 Personal issues**

A number of young people in the study required high levels of practical support from their families, without which they would not have been able to participate in post-16 education. For example, Suraiya had epilepsy and received a lot of assistance from her mother, such as help with getting dressed. Other young people's conditions required support from parents in terms of time and money. For example, some parents needed to undertake extra laundry and ironing because of the medical conditions that some young people had. Others such as Martin required regular medication and was unable to eat food that had not first been blended. Tom relied on his main carers, his grandparents, to manage his medication and assist with his mobility difficulties. In contrast, other young people in this study required less intensive support from their families. Kevin and Tony both described how they managed quite well at home and their parents confirmed this. In spite of some limited mobility and access problems outside of the home arising from being a wheelchair-user, Amanda, in the words of her sister, *'don't rely on people ... she just gets on with it.'* For a number of young people, family support was fundamental to enabling them to participate in education. Across this sample, parents expressed a high level of commitment to enabling their son or daughter to participate in education, as this was regarded as both a positive activity for young people as well as a release for themselves.

#### **4.5.6 Level of support needs**

The personal care needs of some young people in the sample served as a barrier to learning. Some had high support needs that precluded them from undertaking mainstream education and required specialist curricula that addressed their very individual needs. In contrast, not all young people's learning was so heavily restricted. For example, one young person simply required learning support for literacy and numeracy. Another young person had a physical disability but no learning difficulties. However, the majority of young people were undertaking qualifications at Level 1 or below, and theoretically would require longer than a two-year period to achieve Level 3 qualifications. However, the target of Level 3 qualifications was a realistic goal for only two of the participants. A more typical route would equal that of Katherine, who aimed to undertake a Level 1 vocational qualification in mainstream education after a two-year period of post-16 special education.

#### **4.5.7 Finance**

Most of the young people were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and/or Severe Disablement Allowance. The exception to this was Richard who reported that he was in receipt of no benefits other than EMA. However, the young people within this sample were from low-income households and all considered the level of EMA financial support to be useful. All significant others also indicated that EMA was a welcome means of support. For example, Martin's mother was a lone parent and received state benefits as her sole source of income. In spite of being a qualified nurse, she was not able to work as she had full-time responsibility for caring for Martin who was often at home because of ill health.

Consequently, EMA was regarded as beneficial on a financial level as well as an incentive for young people to progress in education. However, most young people and significant others did not regard it as a contributory factor in the decision to remain at school. Most reported that this decision had been made because it provided the best option for the immediate and longer-term future of young people and the decision to continue in education had been made before they were aware that they were eligible for support from the scheme.

### **4.6 Awareness of EMA Flexibilities for Young People with Disabilities and Special Needs**

#### **4.6.1 When and how young people first heard of EMA**

Most young people in this part of the study reported that they were first made aware that they could apply for the scheme at the end of Year 11 – their final year of compulsory schooling. Kevin, Tony, Amanda, and Katherine all received a letter and/or application form from school. Richard described how his head teacher had talked to his year group about the scheme. Tom was less certain about the manner in which he first became aware of the scheme. Both Tom and his grandparents appeared to be the least well informed about the scheme of all the respondents. This may be because the school that Tom previously attended was in an adjacent Local Education Authority that did not run an EMA pilot. Amanda described how the official announcement of the scheme was preceded by rumours that '*the payments are coming to school*' – an indication that awareness of the main EMA pilot, which had been running in LEA 6 since 1999, had filtered down to the younger cohorts of pupils in this mainstream school at least.

The parents of Kevin, Martin, Tony and Wasim reported that the scheme was initially brought to their attention by their child's Year 11 school. Wasim's father recalled that his initial response had been guarded, as he was concerned that the equivalent money might be deducted from other benefits. Martin's mother was also cautious when she first heard of the scheme, believing that eligibility would be restricted to those young people studying towards GCSEs and A levels. All parents of recipients recalled signing the Learning Agreement although some with more certainty than others. Tom's grandparents had discovered the existence of the scheme through the local Careers Service although, by this time, Tom had already completed his first term in Year 12. As Tom's Year 11 school was outside of the LEA 6 area, there had been no promotion of the EMA scheme through this channel. Tom's grandparents had seen no posters and explained that because they live near the local authority boundary, they do not receive the local newspapers for LEA 6. They had no recollection of the Learning Agreement and were unclear about the attendance requirements.

The teachers in the study were familiar with the various aspects of the scheme with one, perhaps surprising, omission. They knew the scheme as EMA but were unaware of the additional flexibilities for vulnerable students. The introduction of EMA flexibilities appears to have made no difference to teachers' experience of the EMA scheme that had been running in LEA 6 since September 1999. This was partly because under the main EMA scheme young people with special educational needs were entitled to a third year of EMA funding.

#### **4.6.2 Understanding and views of the scheme**

All young people and parental representatives had a basic level of knowledge of the scheme. All were aware that an application had to be made and that they must attend school regularly in order to receive the weekly payment and termly bonuses.

*Interviewer: Do you know what you have to do in order to get your EMA?*

*Tony: Do you mean your money? You have to bring your own equipment to school, a good attendance and I'm not sure of the last one.*

*Tony, disabled participant*

Each young person was also aware of the amount of weekly allowance received and that this was paid into his or her bank account. More detailed knowledge of the entitlements and restrictions of the scheme, and of their obligations as recipients, was variable. None of the young people were aware of the flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme. Indeed

none were aware of the distinction between the main EMA scheme and EMA Vulnerable Pilots. Only Amanda recalled having to sign a Learning Agreement or equivalent type of document. Knowledge was sketchiest around what might be seen as the finer detail of the scheme – eligibility criteria, non-payment during holidays, and the need to re-apply on an annual basis.

Primary carers had much the same basic knowledge as young people. However, there was a greater awareness amongst primary carers of the income eligibility criterion and restriction of payments to term-time but as with young people, no knowledge of the scheme's flexibilities. There was also uncertainty amongst parents about whether applications had to be submitted annually.

Many young people in this part of the study did not need a financial incentive to continue with their education since they were planning to do so before they were aware of EMA. However, in spite of delays in the processing of applications and the receipt of initial payments, these recipients were positive about the scheme both in terms of the support it offered them and the obligations that they were required to meet.

*'If I was telling a friend about this, I'd advise them to stay at school anyway, but having EMA is just an extra bonus and that because you've always got the money for your school things, like buying text books, files and that.'*

Amanda, disabled participant

There was universal approval for EMA from all of the significant others in the study. Its utility as both a means of support and an incentive to continue with education, at an age when many young people placed a high premium on the autonomy and choice offered by a regular income, was widely recognised.

*'I think EMA is wonderful, I just wish it had been around a couple of years ago when my son was 16, it is a good incentive for the majority of students.'*

Teacher of disabled participant



## 4.7 The Experience of EMA

### 4.7.1 Application processes and forms

The young people's involvement in this process varied. For Amanda, Kevin and Tony their recollection was that they were simply asked to add their signatures to the forms filled in by their parents. Kevin recalled that the form filling had taken a long-time to complete:

*'Well, it took my parents all of the six weeks holiday to do it.'*

Kevin, disabled participant

Katherine recalls that she completed the form jointly with her mother, while Richard claimed to have completed most of the application form himself. He recalls that while he had no problems with the form, one or two of his friends did and that they subsequently sought help from their form teacher. Tom's view spoke of experience:

*'It was all right. All forms take a long time don't they?'*

Tom, disabled participant

All of the primary carers in the study had completed the application form and some had found it more difficult than others. Kevin's parents had found the task an onerous one and had struggled with particular questions. They had had to contact the school, for example, to find out the details of their son's course of study. Martin's mother had also relied on the school to provide course details but, in comparison to the forms for Severe Disablement Allowance, she had found the application process to be *'quite simple'*. Wasim's father had relied on help from a schoolteacher friend to complete the application form. He suggested that it would be helpful if different language versions of the form were available.

Tom's grandparents had relied on support from the LEA when completing the form and were very pleased with the response:

*'I mean you ring a lot of places and you don't know what's going on, like disability living allowance, like you're still none the wiser but I will say, and they actually, she says to me, "I'll get the information off your headmaster myself, if you don't mind me doing that, to save you worrying about it", and that's exactly what they did.'*

Grandparent of disabled participant

#### **4.7.2 Learning Agreement and meeting requirements**

While most were unfamiliar with the term and, in some cases, the concept of a Learning Agreement, all were aware that they had an obligation to attend regularly. Amanda and Richard were also aware that they were expected to complete their coursework to a satisfactory standard.

Amanda was critical of the requirement that parents must sign the Learning Agreement:

*'I mean we're all 17 now, we all do everything for ourselves, we don't take our Mums and Dads out with us no more, I thought it was stupid. I could understand it on the big form, having your parents signature, but on this one I just thought it was better having your teacher and you, they're teaching us and I'm being taught by them, it's got really nothing to do with the parents because we're the ones going to school.'*

Amanda, disabled participant

However, in spite of this, she agreed with other young people, that the obligations of the scheme were not unreasonable.

None of the young people reported having breached their attendance obligations. Both Amanda and Richard indicated that they had been absent due to illness but that this had been authorised.

There were no complaints from significant others about the obligations placed upon young people in the Learning Agreements. The consensus was that this was fair and reasonable.

From the point of view of the teachers in the study, the power to stop the weekly payment for breaches of the Learning Agreement was seen as a useful means of regulating the behaviour of both students and, occasionally, parents. Suraiya's head teacher described how she had stopped her weekly payment of £30 for poor attendance. Suraiya's parents were upset at this loss of money but the resulting discussion between themselves and the head teacher enabled the attendance requirement to be clarified. The payments were reinstated and Suraiya's attendance has since improved.

#### **4.7.3 Setting up a bank account and receipt of EMA payments**

While Kevin and Tom were not sure when they began receiving their weekly payment, Richard, Katherine and Amanda each reported that there had been some initial delays. In

Amanda's case the first payment, which was backdated, was not received until December. In response to these initial delays, the young people reported that approaches were made to the local authority. In Richards's case the approach was made by his head teacher, while Katherine recalled that her mum made a phone call. There were no reported problems with weekly payments once these had been established and none of the young people had experienced payment stoppages.

At the time of interview, Amanda had received two bonus payments, and Richard had received one. The other young people were unsure whether they had received bonus payments or not.

Most of the young people already had bank accounts. For those who did not, there were no reported problems with setting them up. This had often been done with the assistance of their primary carer:

*'It was easy, because my Mum was there.'*

Katherine, disabled participant

Once payments had begun to be received, there were no reported problems. However, there were reports from several parents of considerable delays between the submission of their application and notification from the LEA that EMA had been awarded.

*'I thought, "we'll have to get the forms in in the six week holiday, otherwise by the time he goes back to school it isn't going to be sorted out", but as it happened it didn't make any difference anyway because it took them so long to process it.'*

Father of disabled participant

This resulted in some young people not receiving their first payment until several weeks after the start of term. It had also caused anxiety, as some parents were unaware of the reason for the delay.

#### **4.8 Consequences – The Impact of EMA on the Lives and Education of Young People**

For young people with disabilities and special needs, EMA was an unexpected bonus with some very positive implications:

*'We won't have to borrow so much money off our parents.'*

Kevin, disabled participant

*'If you haven't got a part-time job, you can get money and you can put it in your bank account for your future, that's what I'm doing.'*

Richard, disabled participant

In all cases, the money was either being saved or used to contribute to day-to-day living expenses (including materials for school). Where the money was being saved, there was always a specific goal in mind such as a holiday, a computer or a car.

The young people had very few criticisms of the scheme. The exception was the inconvenience and confusion caused by delayed payments. Also, having seen some of her friends apply and not receive EMA, Amanda was not convinced of the rationale for means testing:

*'I get paid [EMA] plus I've always had pocket money off my Mum and Dad, now my friend, she isn't allowed to have it because her Dad earns too much, and she doesn't get a penny in pocket money, whereas the money I have, I've been getting my pens and stationery and everything for school, she hasn't got nothing, so I think it's stupid to go on your Mum and Dad's [income].'*

Amanda, disabled participant

Young people and parents also reported that the weekly allowance provided a sense of independence and validation for young people with special needs, many of who did not engage in part-time work and were reliant on family members for financial support. EMA was also seen to provide scope for young people to begin to manage their own finances and so learn an important life skill. This was considered a particularly important benefit for young people with special needs who were often dependent on family members.

#### **4.8.1 Making a difference – The impact of EMA on financial circumstances**

Several of the parents in this study identified how the support offered by EMA eased the pressure on their own, limited financial resources:

*'If they stopped it tomorrow I don't think Kevin would stop going to school tomorrow, but we would certainly notice the difference, we might find that we were struggling, we'd have to find the money from somewhere else to help him out, especially concerning clothes.'*

Father of disabled participant

However, EMA was not simply absorbed into the household budget. As in most cases it was paid directly to the young person, this ensured that young people had some control over how the money is spent. Not all of the young people in this study were able to administer their own bank accounts. However, even in those cases where the primary carer manages the young person's finances there was recognition by the carer that the money was for the benefit of their child:

*'It's very important because he gets the money, he must be benefited.'*

Father of disabled participant

The appeal to young people of a regular allowance and, in the case of EMA, its potential to tip the balance in favour of a decision to carry on with education was recognised by Amanda's older sister:

*'I think money is still an issue at the end of the day for most kids ... I think if the money's there, you're going to think "if you're in school, you get more qualifications, I get paid for it, it's better than getting a job, it's easier than getting a job", because jobs ain't that easy to get now, you can't just land a job just like that.'*

Sister of disabled participant

#### **4.8.2 Participant suggestions for improving the scheme**

Comments about how the scheme could be improved were mainly limited to the promotion and administration of the scheme. From the perspective of primary carers, improvements are required to ensure that information about the scheme, and details of how to apply and where to seek assistance if required, are delivered in a timely, effective and sensitive manner. Primary carers would appreciate more efficient processing of applications although they are not on the whole, unsympathetic to the demands placed on local authority staff. Being kept informed of the progress of their applications would help alleviate some of the anxiety.

Tony's parents were aggrieved that their son had been judged ineligible for support under the natural parent rule, which takes account of the income of his absent father when assessing eligibility. His mother also felt that the scheme should be promoted more sensitively to avoid building up false expectations:

*'I think it's too highly advertised to a child like Tony ... and I said to Tony before I knew, "you might not get all of it because both of us are working", and for the child, money is, you know ... and then to come to it, he got nothing.'*

Mother of disabled participant

## **5      ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES - THE SUCCESS OF THE EMA VULNERABLE PILOT SCHEMES IN IMPROVING PARTICIPATION, SUSTAINING ATTENDANCE AND ENCOURAGING ACHIEVEMENT**

The EMA Vulnerable Pilots were developed alongside the main EMA scheme in order to meet the needs of young people deemed to be at greater disadvantage. Specifically, the pilots were targeted at those identified in the Social Exclusion Unit's report as requiring sustained or intensive support in their return to post-compulsory education (SEU, 1999). At their outset, the pilots were extended versions of EMA, which focused on one specific disadvantaged group, that is young teenage parents, young disabled students or those who were living in unstable accommodation. However, the scope of provision was later broadened to include other vulnerable young people. Despite the widened application of the pilots themselves, this element of the EMA evaluation research focused on the experiences of homeless young people, or students with disabilities or special needs, or teenage parents who had participated in the EMA Vulnerable Pilot schemes.

In this chapter, we consider the overall impact of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots in achieving their specific objectives as well as the experience of implementing the pilots. As with the main EMA scheme, the Vulnerable Pilots were designed to raise participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory education among targeted groups and this chapter explores their success in meeting these objectives. In addition, the research has highlighted the broader impact of the scheme, both in isolation and in conjunction with other support measures, on the lives of young people. Therefore, this chapter also examines the potential of the schemes in helping to overcome deep-rooted causes of social and educational exclusion.

### **5.1      Implementing the Pilots**

Although each LEA received DfES guidance concerning implementation, each had autonomy to develop strategies relevant to localised needs and specific target group concerns. Whilst this allowed opportunities for innovation, it also created a situation in which EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots were being delivered in varied forms across the country. For example, in some authorities there was a great deal of cross-agency working. This applied at the level of integrated working within various sectors of the Local Authority

as well as in relation to cross-agency working involving voluntary and specialist organisations. There was evidence of joint responsibility between the Careers/Connexions Service and Youth Service; agencies concerned with teenage parenthood were often involved in implementation of the pilots; and there was evidence of positive relationships between the LEA and local organisations concerned with shelter and education for homeless young people. There were also instances where such relationships were absent or were not working effectively. Those LEAs that were unable to establish strong relationships with other partners were the ones to disclose the least amount of satisfaction with take-up. Those LEAs, which had undertaken a broadly inclusive approach to partnership working, tended to be more successful in reaching vulnerable young people.

Although the Personal Adviser role was not utilised across all areas, all LEAs identified it as critical to the take-up of EMA Vulnerable Pilots. The Personal Adviser provided advice concerning education and training options, identified childcare places where necessary and helped young people to complete application forms. In one LEA, the critical task of raising the confidence of teenage parents to return to education was also considered integral to the role of the Personal Adviser. There was some concern that the Personal Adviser role required full training and resourcing.

There was a distinct feeling across LEAs that they would have benefited from a greater degree of implementation guidance and suggestions from DfES, particularly in terms of identifying their initial target group and other vulnerable young people. In one area, this was cited as a major reason for the relatively narrow application of EMA Vulnerable Pilot regulations. DfES guidance was considered important in terms of how LEAs interpreted regulations and how they implemented and applied EMA. LEAs suggested that earlier and clearer guidance would have been useful for identifying vulnerable young people.

### **5.1.1 Partnership working**

On the subject of partnerships and collaboration, it should be noted that these provided a challenge to all LEAs, even those that managed to develop effective relationships. For example, although the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme was effectively implemented, tensions still arose between professionals in one area, where they were charged with joint responsibilities but had differing expertise; such issues need to be acknowledged if similar suspicions or rivalries are to be overcome. The suspicion has perhaps emerged from

traditions of independent working of each sector wherein the role and skills of other sectors are not fully appreciated. To an extent, this was overcome through increased and open collaboration. However, it also required clear guidance concerning the role and responsibilities of EMA implementation group members in order to avert poor relationships that developed in some areas where particular groups felt as though their efforts were being taken for granted, or were too loosely defined.

Where effective partnerships were forged between the LEA and those with special interests in the target group, this helped to provide direction towards identifying eligible young people and in designing a targeting strategy. However, where there was a lack of this type of collaboration, there was also a lack of creative implementation. The initial narrow interpretation of DfES regulations within one LEA targeting young people with disabilities, was a reflection of this. Those students in LEA institutions who attended residential or special schools, had a physical disability, or a statement of educational need, were focused on as the target group. This effectively excluded many eligible students in mainstream schools or in post-16 institutions, particularly those with non-statemented special needs. Broad collaboration with schools, colleges and special interest groups may have highlighted the consequences of this interpretation earlier and may have helped to forge a broader definition of eligible young people. However, only one source within this LEA was considered to have assisted with the launch and implementation of the pilot. Through collaboration and partnership the LEA may also have been able to establish information sharing arrangements to encourage a more effective means of identifying students as other LEAs had done.

A further feature of collaboration that requires recognition is that between related initiatives. Those localities that had established cross-agency working to implement EMA Vulnerable Pilots also tended to establish inter-agency links with related initiatives. This led to sharing of information and even informal arrangements to share financial resources in order to meet the specific needs of vulnerable groups.

### **5.1.2 Identification of vulnerable young people**

All LEAs conceded that the difficulty of identifying vulnerable groups was partly a reflection of their lack of experience in such activity. However, most felt that it was also the nature of the task. Therefore, it was felt that the great efforts often required to identify target groups and the further challenge of encouraging vulnerable young people into education required due



recognition. However, most LEAs relied on referrals from key agencies as the primary means of identifying vulnerable young people. Most LEAs recognised that key agencies such as homeless organisations would have direct contact with vulnerable young people and expected key agencies to have an informed understanding of the issues and needs of vulnerable groups. Despite some difficulties with this approach, such as data protection issues, all LEAs relied on this approach to identify young people and considered it the most effective. Most reported that they intended to widen their contact with key agencies in the coming year in order to enhance this form of identification. Identification by key agencies was also supplemented by targeted publicity. Leaflets were distributed at venues such as doctors' surgeries, advisory centres and Mother and Baby units. It was hoped that sensitive targeting would encourage young people to apply to the scheme and identify themselves as eligible in accordance with information contained in promotional literature. However, this form of promotion was not expected to attract or reach as many young people as those recruited to the scheme through key agencies.

### **5.1.3 Attendance monitoring**

In terms of attendance monitoring, all LEAs followed the patterns that had been developed for the main EMA pilots. Therefore, the administration of EMA Vulnerable Pilots did not cause any additional difficulties. However, there were concerns regarding attendance monitoring and these related to authorisation of absences. The onus is on the education provider to verify an absence as authorised and for those implementing teenage parent extensions and Childcare Pilots, there was felt to be an extra burden. Teaching and administrative staff responsible for EMA felt that it was necessary to verify with the childcare provider whether the child was absent in order to authorise the mother's absence. This added responsibility and increased workload was not welcomed. In contrast, one LEA suggested that schools and colleges should endeavour to gain full explanations of absence before stopping payments of vulnerable young people, particularly in relation to homeless young people who were deemed vulnerable to frequent spells of absence. Also, teaching and administrative staff suggested that there should be greater flexibility in interpretation of absence, particularly when students attended courses but simply arrived and registered late. The challenge of punctuality was regarded as especially great for teenage parents, but may also apply equally to homeless young people. Uneven identification of absence existed within and between LEAs in the absence of specific agreements between all of those involved in implementation of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and fuelled tensions in some areas.

#### **5.1.4 Experience of involvement in main EMA pilots**

Some LEAs demonstrated that they had learned from their main EMA experience and from the EMA Vulnerable Pilots experience over the last year. One LEA for example, organised the EMA Vulnerable Pilots implementation group along similar lines as their pre-existing EMA implementation group. All LEAs now also could see means of improving implementation strategies and approaches to the identification of young people based on experience and knowledge gained in the first year. The target for most was to develop means of greater take-up and awareness building through utilising relationships with existing and potential partners.

#### **5.1.5 Defining and evaluating success**

The evaluation of the success of EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots needs to embrace a range of criteria in order to reflect the specific challenges of increasing participation amongst vulnerable young people. The difficulty of identifying vulnerable young people and then encouraging post-16 participation, led some to appreciate that relatively minor levels of take-up signify real challenges and real successes. For example, it was reported that the majority of teenage parents from a particular hostel were now undertaking post-16 education where none had previously done so, and this was presented as a significant success for this relatively small number of young people. Furthermore, many vulnerable young people have had previous negative experience of education. For instance, many teenage parents in one locality were identified as having poor attendance records during their years of compulsory schooling. Therefore, participation and retention in post-16 education represents a substantial change and challenge for such groups even though this is on a small-scale. Developing the confidence required to re-enter education was a primary source of activity for Personal Advisers in one area, in recognition of the enormity of the task facing many vulnerable young people. Some institutions set individual challenges and targets for vulnerable young people with the aim of addressing their individual needs and encouraging long-term participation. The flexibilities of the pilots and childcare support aim to allow vulnerable young people to change their lives at present, without having to wait until they have a fixed address, or until their child is of school age for example, the effectiveness of such flexibilities should therefore be a criterion of success. The continuing experience of vulnerable young people is also important to consider and this should not be overlooked in the heavy focus on participation rates or the financial impact of EMA Vulnerable Pilots.

Consequently, the effective implementation and impact of EMA Vulnerable Pilots needs to be considered broadly. The process of implementation has proved to be effective if it is of a collaborative nature. Implementation has been more effective where relationships between various actors are flexible, although all have agreed responsibilities and expectations of each other. However, in the first year of the pilots there were indications of a need for greater guidance from DfES in terms of designing implementation structures and identifying partners.

### **5.1.6 Effective implementation strategies**

The overall experience of implementation suggests that particular strategies were extremely effective in terms of delivering the pilots and identifying hard-to-reach groups:

- Steering group meetings proved effective forums for regular evaluation of implementation strategies. These meetings also served as a key forum for developing partnerships.
- Effective partnership working enhanced implementation of the scheme. Key agencies such as homeless organisations and those focusing on teenage parenthood were critical to identifying vulnerable young people and providing specialist support and advice to young people as well as to the LEA. Partnership working also evolved into integrated working, with varied EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots being linked with other initiatives in order to provide specific vulnerable groups with single enhanced packages of support. For example, teenage parent initiatives in one area linked together to provide enhanced childcare funding.
- Partnership was most effective where the LEA was seen to embrace an inclusive approach in its relationship with other agencies, rather than where it was seen to have a one-sided approach to implementation that did not deeply involve other agencies.
- Data sharing arrangements between the LEA and key agencies were critical to identification of hard-to-reach vulnerable young people.
- Partnership working also contributed positively to developing cohesion around discretionary policies. For example, where education providers, Careers/Connexions Services, the LEA and other key agencies had agreed absence policies in advance of the pilot being implemented, this allayed tension when young people disputed stopped weekly payments.

- Involvement of Careers/Connexions Services proved to be an important component to implementation . Careers/Connexions Services often supplied Personal Advisers to support specific groups of vulnerable young people and provided independent advice concerning post-16 destinations and the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme.
- Those areas that had access to Personal Advisers were able to offer comprehensive support to young people both prior to and during application to the scheme, as well as during their participation in post-16 education. The Personal Adviser role involved encouraging and reassuring vulnerable young people regarding participation in education. Personal Advisers were also able to access informed advice concerning financial issues and educational opportunities, particularly where creative packages of learning were involved.
- Specialist organisations and Careers/Connexions Services considered it important to provide independent and sustained support for vulnerable young people when dealing with payment or attendance problems and supporting retention in post-16 education as well as providing appropriate advice concerning other destinations.

## **5.2 Participant Reflections on the Experience of the Pilots**

The case study methodology used to research young people's perspectives, aimed to accurately capture the perceptions and experience of young people and their '*significant others*' concerning the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots. In this section, we consider views about the goals of the scheme and users' experiences of participation in a number of different areas.

### **5.2.1 Awareness and perceptions concerning the objectives and structure of the pilots**

Awareness and knowledge about the EMA Vulnerable Pilots varied, as with findings from the main EMA scheme (Legard et al., 2001). Highest awareness was amongst those young people who had been present at school during Years 10 and 11. This was less likely to be true for teenage parents who had been absent due to pregnancy during these years and for young homeless people who had experienced fractured educational careers. Amongst all groups, there was little or no awareness of the flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots. The EMA Vulnerable Pilots were rarely recognised by the young people as being '*anything different*' from the main EMA scheme. In this sense, the extensions available under the pilots

were *'invisible'* to those participating who either assumed that every student on the EMA scheme was eligible for similar flexibilities, or had not considered their entitlements in comparison to others on the scheme. In contrast, significant others, particularly those working in a professional capacity, had greater levels of awareness that the scheme was *'going beyond'* that offered to other less vulnerable young people.

Regardless of awareness, the existence of the scheme was broadly welcomed by both young people and their significant others as a positive way to encourage young people to return to education. The scheme was not solely associated with providing additional motivation but was also viewed as a fundamental financial support measure that could assist vulnerable young people, and their families, in beginning or sustaining their post-compulsory educational careers. Again, despite the limited awareness of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots as distinct from the main EMA scheme, there was widespread support for the perceived objectives of the scheme. Chiefly, significant others and young people welcomed a policy which was designed to provide additional assistance to young people who wanted to continue, or return to, post-compulsory education. As with previous findings, the incentive aspect of the scheme was seen as highly positive, although in the case of these three groups of vulnerable young people, the practical, financial outcomes of EMA participation were rated more highly than amongst some in the main sample for whom practical or financial issues were deemed less important. For young people in the main EMA scheme, perceived financial benefits of the scheme were tempered where the weekly allowance was paid to parents rather than young people, where young people engaged in part-time work or where less than £10 was received as a weekly allowance (Legard et al., 2001). Vulnerable young people received payments directly to their own bank accounts, were less likely to be engaged in part-time work and were more likely to be in receipt of the maximum allowance, particularly as many were living independently. The relatively weaker financial position of those who were not engaged in part-time work and those living independently, may also account for a stronger appreciation of the income gained through the EMA weekly allowance.

### **5.2.2 Experiences of joining the scheme**

The role of the scheme in providing an incentive to remain in, or return to education varied across the three groups. As seen in Chapter 4, for young disabled people the influence of the availability of EMA was peripheral to their decision to participate in post-16 education. This was for two major reasons: either the young person had a long-term commitment to

remaining in education regardless of EMA support or the young person was unaware of their entitlement to apply for EMA support. In contrast, homeless young people were frequently encouraged to return to education through a combination of factors directly linked to elements of the scheme. Key amongst these was the opportunity to study in a non-mainstream location and the potential financial impact of participation.

Experiences of the process of application and information gathering were variable. There was greater evidence that young people found out about the scheme from professionals, either teachers or support workers, compared to others in the main EMA scheme that may have sought out information. Once information about eligibility had been obtained, participants differed in the ease with which they experienced the application process.

One clear difference for these three groups was the additional difficulties faced due either to their personal literacy levels, the lack of support during the application process or complications arising from their personal circumstances such as not having a birth certificate or not wishing to contact absent parents. This often caused the application process to be lengthy and problematic. Providing that the young person was able to access informed guidance and support from a family member or professional, then these difficulties were generally overcome. The research also revealed some innovative solutions to these problems being used by significant others to help overcome these barriers. For example, a support worker in a hostel for young homeless people invited a local bank to send a representative to the hostel to assist young people with setting up their first ever bank accounts. Despite the flexibility which releases these young people from needing a bank account to participate in the scheme there was evidence that this was the preferred option for payment and that setting up a bank account also carried with it a sense of financial and personal independence which was positively experienced. This again underlines the importance of flexibility, not only in the design and implementation of the schemes but also in how support workers assist young people to overcome potential barriers.

### **5.2.3 Participating in post-compulsory education through the EMA Vulnerable Pilots**

As noted previously, EMA flexibilities were largely invisible to those participating in the Vulnerable Pilots. However, when students discussed their experiences of participation many of the positive features they identified were a reflection of the flexibilities provided to them.

Of prime importance were flexibilities around course duration and location and the opportunity to access childcare through additional financial assistance.

Although experiences of participation were largely positive, some young people experienced difficulties with payments. Some experienced delayed or backdated payments which reflected findings from the main EMA scheme (Maguire et al, 2002). Other difficulties, such as payments lost due to absence, whilst found also in the main scheme had particular resonance amongst vulnerable students. Where difficulties had been experienced, there was criticism that providers were being inflexible of their interpretation of attendance rules. This was a specific difficulty for young mothers who experienced problems when their child was ill or childcare was unexpectedly unavailable. In some instances, payments were subsequently reduced causing financial difficulties as a result. These students also viewed holiday periods with some anxiety. This anxiety was exacerbated for those whom participation in the EMA scheme had enabled to develop a basic standard of living or financial independence above previous levels. Similarly, those on '*roll-on-roll-off*' short courses were also concerned about their financial security and future eligibility for EMA assistance. Until longitudinal interviews are completed at Stage 3, it will be difficult to assess what type of impact losing EMA payments during holidays or at the end of short courses has had on these students, but their anxieties were clearly expressed in the first year. Solutions suggested included providing a lower weekly allowance but extending payment through holiday periods, which it was argued would help with regular budgeting; or to pay a small retainer during holiday periods which, it was argued, would also encourage retention. A clearer expression of future entitlement was also perceived as one way of encouraging retention and bolstering confidence about students' plans for education.

### **5.3 The Impact of Participation**

The study revealed financial, educational and wider personal impacts that had resulted from participation in the EMA Vulnerable Pilots.

#### **5.3.1 Financial impacts**

As with findings from the main evaluation study, the financial impact of the scheme was found to vary depending upon the young person's personal circumstances. Due to the nature of the sample, there was greater evidence of the financial impact of the scheme than was

found amongst the general sample of EMA participants. Many of those interviewed were living independently and primarily financing their living costs through a range of state benefits. The exception to this was the sample of disabled students who tended to be living with their families. Nevertheless, these young people or their families were similarly in receipt of state benefits, either in isolation or alongside other family income. In all situations, the importance of the financial outcome from participation in the scheme appeared heightened.

Often, the importance of EMA weekly payments was seen as an integral part of the household budget. This was equally true for single, homeless students, teenage parents and the families of disabled students. The income gained from participation in the scheme was described as having an important impact on household budgets and was frequently depicted as lifting that household out of poverty. The financial importance of EMA was felt most acutely by young homeless people who had existed on state benefit, generally Income Support, until they joined the scheme. For these young people joining the scheme did not solely provide an opportunity to finish their education but also a real, and tangible, financial incentive to do so as participation generally led to a doubling of their weekly income.

### **5.3.2 Educational impacts**

Young people frequently described how taking part in the EMA scheme had allowed them to remain in or return to education. This in turn meant that some were encouraged to consider a wider range of educational options than before and all were seeking to complete their courses and achieve varying levels of qualifications. Although many in the sample were interviewed early during the course of their studies, all expressed clear recognition of the educational benefits of participating in post-compulsory education. These included qualifications but also improved levels of literacy and numeracy and inter-personal skills.

### **5.3.3 Personal impacts**

It is important to consider the benefits recounted by participants that did not relate directly to educational achievements or financial improvements. Taking part in EMA provided participants with a sense of self-worth which they had not experienced before. The integral relationship between '*doing something*' such as attending college regularly, and receiving a weekly payment was crucially important for participants. Their sense of achievement in attending classes and completing assignments was heightened by the regular receipt of EMA



income that was viewed as a clear recognition of their commitment. Some went so far as to describe this as a personal validation of their commitment to '*turning a corner*' in their lives. This was emphasised by the almost universal acceptance of the links between receipt of EMA and student obligations around attendance and achievement. These responsibilities were supported and accepted by almost all of those young people who participated in the study. '*Gaining something for something*' was seen as a far more fulfilling route than the simple receipt of benefit and had emotional impacts that are difficult to measure.

The following sections explore in more detail the success of the pilots in meeting their key objectives which were as follows: increasing participation in post-compulsory education; improving retention and encouraging achievement.

#### **5.4 The Role of EMA Vulnerable Pilots in Improving Participation in Post-Compulsory Education**

The various aspects of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot Scheme performed contrasting functions for different groups of vulnerable young people. For example, young people with disabilities appeared to require little financial incentive to participate in post-16 education compared to young people who were homeless and teenage parents. There was a strong perception of limited labour market opportunities for young people with special needs and a strong sense that qualification acquisition could facilitate future labour market entry. Furthermore, young people with special needs generally reported positive experiences and regular attendance during Year 11, whereas mixed reports were received from teenage parents and homeless young people. Consequently, EMA Vulnerable Pilots were not regarded as a strong incentive to continue in education, as most young people with disabilities and special needs reported that they would have chosen this route in the absence of EMA. However, EMA support was still valued highly for its role in providing a positive reinforcement of participation as well as encouraging a sense of self-worth and promoting self-management of finances. These factors were regarded as particularly important for young people with special needs and disabilities who were unlikely to engage in part-time work and were often reliant on family members. In contrast, EMA Vulnerable Pilots were seen to have an extremely important financial function for teenage parents and homeless young people. Many lived independently and were often reliant on state benefits as their sole source of income to purchase course-related equipment, meet transport costs and meet non-education related costs of living. Many teenage parents

also had to meet costs related to childcare. Consequently, the financial element of EMA was regarded as a strong incentive for participation and retention.

Specific flexibilities of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots also went some way to meet the differing needs of vulnerable young people. For example, homeless young people benefited from relaxed regulations concerning proof of residence. Two teenage parents benefited from backdated maternity payments on returning to education within a given period. Flexibilities also proved effective in addressing needs that were common to many vulnerable groups. For example, the flexibility to participate in non-mainstream locations and programmes of study, offered support to a range of vulnerable young people. Young people with housing difficulties and teenage parents were able to engage in non-mainstream provision as a precursor to participation in mainstream learning. Also, for some young people with a range of special needs, non-mainstream provision was appropriate for their entire educational career. The flexibility to gain an extended period of financial support from the scheme addressed similar financial barriers faced by vulnerable young people. This flexibility recognised that many vulnerable young people had low qualifications on entry to post-16 education for a variety of reasons, such as poor previous educational experience, learning difficulties or interruptions to education related to poor health, pregnancy, childcare issues and unstable accommodation. Consequently, the scheme removed financial barriers and provided other flexibilities that facilitated engagement in an extended period of study. Overall, general and specific flexibilities enabled the EMA Vulnerable Pilots to meet the needs of contrasting vulnerable groups and individuals.

#### **5.4.1 Overcoming the barriers accounting for low participation**

As previous chapters have established, the three groups of students differed in the barriers they faced when considering a return to post-compulsory education. Nevertheless, the barriers they described can be grouped into three categories: financial barriers, access difficulties and personal barriers.

Making the decision to continue in education, or return to education, was not easy for many interviewed during the course of the study. Multiple factors, including financial and personal issues, were considered when making the decision. For young disabled students the move into post-compulsory education was generally less problematic than for teenage parents or young homeless students. This reflects the more stable educational and personal lives of

students with disabilities who tended to have less broken compulsory educational careers and who had more stable living circumstances than students in the other two groups. Students with disabilities expected to continue in post-16 education and in many cases EMA was seen as ‘*an added bonus*’ rather than a deciding factor. In contrast, there were examples both amongst teenage parents and young homeless people of the scheme playing a key role in the decision to return to education.

However, across all of the groups who participated in the study there was clear evidence of ways in which participation in the scheme was easing the route into, or the return to, education.

#### **5.4.2 Reducing financial barriers**

In the main EMA study young people differed in how much financial issues affected their decision to stay in post-16 education (Legard et al, 2001). The factors accounting for the different influence of financial issues were related to the young person’s personal circumstances and included: their existing financial independence, the extent of their personal outgoings and their families’ financial situations. Therefore, whilst for some the financial incentive of the EMA scheme was high, for others it was much reduced.

In contrast, for two of the three groups affected by the EMA Vulnerable Pilots, financial imperatives were clearly important in achieving improved participation. Both young homeless people and teenage parents described financial barriers as key obstacles to their return to education. These financial barriers not only related to immediately obvious costs, such as childcare, but also the associated costs of travel or course-related expenses. Similarly, there was still significant evidence to suggest that the financial impact of the scheme was important in bolstering family finances.

#### **5.4.3 Facilitating access to education**

Access to education was a key issue for all three groups of potential students. Barriers to access were of two main types: physical barriers, relating to access to buildings or transport difficulties; access to courses was also limited at times due to dominant personal issues, poor previous educational experiences and limited choice of non-mainstream provision. Additional barriers to accessing education included young people’s perceptions or negative feelings about education. From this study, which included only those who had chosen to

continue in education, it is difficult to discuss these issues. It is possible that the accounts of those who chose not to continue in education would provide greater insight into the range of barriers facing vulnerable young people.

Young disabled people described how they encountered physical barriers to education, views that were mirrored by young mothers with small children. The physical inaccessibility of educational buildings acted as a major disincentive to some students. Access was also an issue, albeit in a different form, for some of the young homeless students. Here the physical and social environment of traditional post-compulsory education establishments had been seen as threatening or intimidating. The flexibility provided through the EMA Vulnerable Pilots which allowed them to study outside of mainstream education with greater one-to-one personal support, was a major step in overcoming this barrier.

Overall, the opportunity to study for fewer hours, over a longer period, on a range of appropriate courses and in non-mainstream settings were important enabling factors for all of the vulnerable groups involved in the study.

#### **5.4.4 Overcoming personal barriers**

The young people interviewed faced a range of personal barriers in their return to education. These included such things as dominant personal issues like addiction and a legacy of fear about traditional schooling from poor past experiences. Course flexibilities offered under the EMA Vulnerable Pilots had a major role to play in encouraging participation for these students. Elements of the flexibilities such as enabling study in non-mainstream settings, supporting participation in short courses or the ability to receive funding from the scheme for three years, were highly rated. Some homeless young people and those with disabilities argued that the non-mainstream flexibility of participation was a deciding factor, either in the choice to remain in education or to return to education. Many young people assumed that such flexibilities were general entitlements and were not aware that these applied to specific groups only. We will return to the issue of whether it is important for the EMA Vulnerable Pilot flexibilities to be '*visible*' in achieving their goals in the final section of this chapter.

#### **5.4.5 The importance of EMA alongside other factors in overcoming barriers to education**

The findings present firm evidence that participation in EMA Vulnerable Pilots was key to some young people in overcoming barriers to education. Nevertheless, interviews with young people and their significant others identified the crucial role that wider support mechanisms had in encouraging and supporting young people in their decision to return to, or continue with, their education.

The support networks described included: family support, particularly for young people with disabilities and teenage parents; peer support, especially true of young homeless people and teenage parents; and professional support, such as social workers, educational advisers and Key Workers. These support networks played a number of key roles in assisting the decision to remain in, or return to, education. Such roles included: identifying means of financial assistance during the course (often EMA); assisting young people with choices about courses; providing support during the application process (both for the course and EMA); and, in many ways most importantly, providing ongoing encouragement and emotional reassurance that education was a viable and sustainable route.

Without having interviewed non-recipients of EMA from these three groups, it is difficult to identify to what extent these broader support networks are critical to vulnerable students. Despite this, the evidence from interviews with participants indicates that without wider support networks many of the young people may never have heard about the opportunities offered under the EMA scheme or, more broadly, would not have felt sufficiently empowered or supported to return to education. It is important to recognise that, for these students, the financial support of the EMA scheme provides an important element of support. Support and guidance is also required to address the wider range of vulnerable young people's dominant personal issues. The evidence of significant others clearly points to the importance of EMA being promoted within a wider support network, something which the Connexions Service should be able to play a pivotal role in providing. However, the marginalized nature of some young peoples' lives, especially those with children or those living in temporary accommodation who have been outside of mainstream education for some time, indicate that the success of EMA Extension Pilots also relies heavily on the involvement of the widest possible array of agencies ranging from health to hostel workers.

## **5.5 Sustaining Continued Attendance**

The research has demonstrated that overcoming barriers to participation is an initial step towards ensuring that young people in these groups are persuaded and encouraged to remain in education. However, it could be argued that sustaining that commitment to education is more problematic for these groups than achieving their initial participation. Faced with ongoing dominant personal issues, financial pressures and personal worries, these groups of students often face difficult decisions about remaining on courses that they have begun. For example, changes in childcare arrangements or health problems of children were experienced as highly disruptive to young mothers ability to sustain attendance on their courses. Similarly, young people with ongoing personal issues such as substance dependence also found sustained attendance difficult.

In this section, we explore the role of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots in helping young people to remain within their chosen educational route. The research identified a range of factors that are potentially disruptive to continued and sustained participation in post-compulsory education for vulnerable young people. The primary factors likely to lead to young people being diverted from their courses were: negative experiences of the course/institution; financial factors; and overriding dominant personal issues. Yet, at the same time, the scheme was identified as playing a key role in encouraging or increasing the attachment these young people had to the concept of continued education and the positive impact it might have on their lives. The key factors identified as affecting retention were: experiences of the course; financial factors; dominant personal issues; and extent of young person's attachment to learning.

### **5.5.1 Experiences of course**

Student experiences of the course affected individuals' commitment to sustained learning. Overall, the flexibilities created through the pilot scheme mediated young people's participation in education. For example, where flexibility was applied to young parents' attendance, this helped to support retention. Similarly, the ability to study with a close, small peer group outside of traditional educational establishments was starkly evident when the experiences of young homeless people were examined. Here, on numerous occasions, young people described how their attendance and, more importantly, commitment to education had

been fuelled by the avoidance of returning to traditional '*classroom*' type settings. Conversely, poor experiences and unmet expectations led to reduced commitment.

### **5.5.2 Financial incentives**

The financial incentives of the EMA schemes have been clearly documented in this and other evaluation reports (Maguire et al, 2002; Legard et al., 2001). However, financial incentives for vulnerable young people ought not to be underestimated. Unlike the main EMA participants these young people tended not to be in part-time work and also faced additional financial burdens such as parenting responsibilities or because they were living independently. This added a significant financial incentive to participate in the scheme. It was clear that for many, the financial outcomes of sustained participation in EMA provided a strong inducement to remain in education. However, this was not the case for all who were interviewed, some simply found the burden of participation too difficult in combination with the practical day-to-day experience and demands of education.

### **5.5.3 Overriding dominant personal issues**

Alongside the issues faced by the wider student population in sustaining post-compulsory education, these three groups of students face additional difficulties due to the nature of their personal circumstances. Whilst it was striking to find that participation in EMA Vulnerable Pilots was instrumental in overcoming many of the barriers caused by these circumstances, at the same time it is important not to overlook their sometimes pervasive impact on young people's lives.

The accounts of young people and their significant others identified the undermining impact that dominant personal issues can have. These can range from drug or alcohol misuse to health issues or caring responsibilities. The extent to which such issues can '*divert*' a young person from their education appears to depend a great deal upon the support mechanisms available to them, the flexibility of their education provider in responding to their needs and their own personal resilience.

The varying accounts of teenage parents illustrate how the different responses of colleges to unexpected absences due to childcare difficulties or health problems can affect sustained attendance. Here the flexibility afforded under the EMA Vulnerable Pilot scheme can have a major role to play in ensuring sustained attendance, allowing providers to apply more

flexibility in the rules relating to attendance. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that in some circumstances, no amount of flexibility will overcome some of the persistent dominant personal issues faced by young people in these groups. For example, one young woman interviewed during the course of the study was hugely positive about her involvement in the scheme and her return to education. However, on returning to interview her nominated significant other, it was revealed that she had since left her course, and returned to living in unstable rather than hostel accommodation. Her Key Worker noted that a range of factors, including her peer group and erratic drug usage, had led to her being removed from the course. Despite this, the flexibility of the eligibility rules for the EMA Vulnerable Pilot meant that she could return to the course after a '*cooling-down period*' and would have the opportunity to resume her education.

#### **5.5.4 Retention through increased attachment to learning**

Despite identifying a range of factors that can potentially disrupt the positive incentive effects of the schemes, the research has also revealed the critical role the scheme has in broadening horizons and encouraging a longer-term attachment to learning.

Even where initial participation was driven by financial factors, there was strong evidence that over time, participation in education became more important than the financial outcomes of being '*on EMA*'. Young people described how, over time, they experienced a growing sense of achievement and increased recognition of the future opportunities that might be available to them if they completed their courses. So, whilst EMA was affecting decisions about returning to education, it was also found to be playing a part in changing attitudes about the value of education. For some, participation in the scheme had facilitated re-engagement with a social world from which they had been estranged for some time. In these cases, retention was also related to young people making a sustainable return to the '*mainstream*' social world with its routines, responsibilities and interaction with others.

#### **5.6 Achievement**

A key goal of these pilots, as with the main EMA scheme, was to encourage and reward retention and achievement, through the payment of bonuses. The retention bonus is paid on a termly basis and an achievement bonus is paid at the end of a course to reward course progress and completion. It is too early for this study to draw any conclusions relating to the



influence of EMA Vulnerable Pilot bonus payments. At the time of interview, most of the young people interviewed for this research had not been on their courses long enough to have received any bonus payments. However, over the course of the next academic year the research team will be returning to some of the young people interviewed at this stage. A key purpose of these longitudinal interviews will be to understand the nature of changes both to young people's attachment to education, their attendance patterns and progress made during the course of the previous year. These interviews will allow us to explore in depth factors that might affect participation and achievement in the long-term.

Nevertheless, evidence from this stage of the study has raised some key issues relating to the interpretation of achievement in relation to these very specific groups of students. Unlike the main EMA scheme where achievement is predominantly judged by course completion and pass rates, judging achievement is more problematic in relation to the EMA Vulnerable Pilots. In evaluating the success of the scheme, the question of what constitutes a '*successful outcome*' or what '*achievement*' entails has been found to be more complex. The study identified three broad ways in which achievement could be interpreted. These were: conventional measures of educational achievement, measures of success in creating new or increased attachment to learning, and the development of personal life skills which assist in overcoming deep-rooted social exclusion.

### **5.6.1 Educational achievement**

Educational achievement is a conventional measure used to judge the success of such schemes and retains validity for judging the success of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots. The success of the scheme in supporting young people to complete courses or gain qualifications is clearly an important measure of its success. Nevertheless, the nature and scope of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots suggest that other measures may also be valid in measuring success.

### **5.6.2 New or increased attachment to learning**

As described in the preceding section, there was strong evidence that participation in the course was producing a new or strengthened desire to continue in education. For young people who have been effectively disconnected from the education system for a number of years, this renewed enthusiasm could be seen as an additional measure of the scheme's success.

### **5.6.3 Personal life skills development and overcoming social exclusion**

Critically important for these groups, particularly those previously most excluded from society and education is the impact participation is having on personal life skills. Across all three groups, there was evidence that achievement should not simply be measured by qualification outcomes but should also include the extent to which education has made positive changes to the young person's life. There was some evidence of far-reaching improvements in personal skills such as confidence, social interaction, independence and basic life skills such as financial management. These developing skills were helping vulnerable young people to begin to overcome some aspects of social exclusion and contemplate participating in mainstream activities. For example, one young man who had experienced an ongoing anger management problem which had led to his exclusion from several schools and colleges, found that after a short time on an EMA eligible hostel course, he was beginning to think about the future with employment as a viable opportunity.

Similarly, the personal independence which came, for some, with receipt of EMA payments was allowing young people to think more broadly about their futures and consider options which before they had thought impossible or improbable. For example, amongst disabled students there was evidence that the combination of a measure of financial independence with ongoing participation in post-compulsory education was allowing students to consider wider employment possibilities for their future than they had previously considered.

## **5.7 Key Policy Issues**

In this final section, we consider the policy implications of the findings from this evaluation. In particular, this section focuses on key areas found to be having a critical impact on the success or failure of the scheme in meeting the needs of vulnerable young people.

- An important finding is that the effective administration and implementation of EMA requires considerable cross-agency working and the regular, timely sharing of key information.
- Administrators, implementers and providers require a thorough awareness of the stigma, fear and other cultural barriers vulnerable groups of young people may have to overcome in order to return to, or remain in education. These factors, such as a legacy of fractured

and negative experiences of compulsory schooling clearly have a great influence on the later educational aspirations and participation of vulnerable young people.

- Identification of hard-to-reach vulnerable young people is greatly enhanced by cross-agency working. The pooled expertise of key agencies can provide an informed background to specific vulnerable groups and may contribute to a broad search and support network.
- Key support agencies provide an important role in assisting young people's decision-making concerning post-16 participation in education and in supporting young people throughout the application process.
- Dominant personal issues of vulnerable young people require a range of support if retention and achievement in education are to be secured. This emphasises the need for effective network arrangements in the delivery of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots.
- A strategic response to the complex needs of young people might entail extending support beyond the application process and continuing to support young people throughout their participation in post-16 learning.
- The vulnerable students accessing the scheme often experienced complicated and multiple barriers to educational participation. However, evidence demonstrates that particular structural features of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots were perceived to remove important barriers to participation and were seen to improve retention. For example, participation in non-mainstream courses and provision of childcare support were reported to be important in meeting vulnerable students' needs.
- Despite the flexibilities already included in the schemes, young people and significant others indicated a need to consider alternative parameters of entitlement. For example, funding student study up to Level Three qualifications, providing longer duration of funding or extending the age eligibility for the scheme were suggested as additional means of encouraging greater take-up and retention among vulnerable young people.
- The findings illustrate the wide impact the scheme can have on young people's lives. Impacts reached beyond purely financial or educational improvements, which suggest that the success of the scheme can be judged on wider criteria rather than being solely linked to qualification attainment.
- Awareness of the EMA Vulnerable Pilot as something different to the main EMA scheme was limited. This raises the question of whether the additional flexibilities for these young people should be made '*visible*' or not. Evidence from the first year of the pilots

suggests that flexibilities remain effective despite being '*invisible*' and avoids the possibility of vulnerable young people being differentiated from their mainstream peers.

The study has revealed the complexity of barriers to education faced by young people living in unstable circumstances, teenage parents and disabled young people. It has also demonstrated the critical role that EMA Vulnerable Pilots can play for young people in these vulnerable groups. Extended eligibility periods, flexibility around the location and type of eligible courses, relaxation of attendance rules, and financial assistance, have all played a significant role in encouraging sustained attendance. Consequently, the findings indicated a level of success in meeting chief educational aims. A range of other outcomes also emerged which key individuals and significant others considered fundamental to the life-course of vulnerable young people. Participation in education and support from the pilot schemes were seen to have cultivated a growth in confidence and independence, aided the development of long-term planning, fostered a growing attachment to learning and encouraged the development of life skills such as financial management. Consequently, it would be appropriate to take account of a broad range of educational and other outcomes when measuring the future success of the EMA Vulnerable Pilots and Childcare Pilots.

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Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

ISBN: 1 84185 934 6  
Ref No: RR396

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