

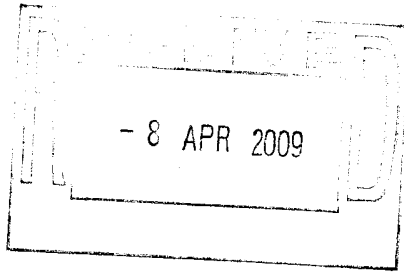
Jane Hutt AC/AM

Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau  
Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

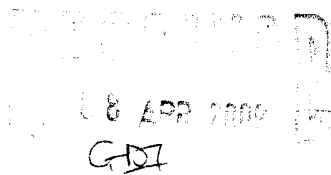


Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref PET-03-202  
Ein cyf/Our ref JH/00464/09



Val Lloyd AM  
National Assembly For Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA



6 April 2009

Dear Val,

Thank you for your letter of 24 March 2009 regarding the petition calling upon the National Assembly for Wales to recognise young people over 16 years as independent when assessing eligibility for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

Firstly, I would like say how pleased I was to hear of this petition, I am always encouraged when young people participate in the democratic process and applaud the young people from Deeside for using our petitions service to express their views on the EMA.

The EMA Wales scheme was introduced to encourage young people from modest to low income families to remain in education after their compulsory schooling. Wales like the United Kingdom in general has had a very low participation rate in post 16 education and the EMA was designed to address the problem of retaining those young people in the education environment. The use of household income levels to determine eligibility is not unique to EMA and is used widely across government.

I do not generally expect 16 year olds in education to be, or encouraged to be financially independent; however where they are independent they are automatically entitled to the full allowance of EMA. Determining the independence of a young person living within the household would be extremely difficult to substantiate and would have wider complex contradictions with other household/family benefits such as tax credits, income support and child benefits. Therefore I believe we have the right balance in place by combining prudent measures of income assessment with a system that is consistent and familiar for families.

I understand that many young people who do not qualify for the EMA incentive are disappointed. In many cases it is their first direct experience of means testing to determine eligibility for government support. We have just recently completed a first stage evaluation of the EMA scheme and are now considering its findings to determine the impact it has had in Wales and whether we can make improvements to the scheme in the future.

Sincerely,

Jane

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
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Wedi'i araffu ar honur wedi'i ...