



METHODIST COLLEGE BELFAST

EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE (EMA) POLICY

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) provides financial support for students from low income households who decide to stay on in education after they reach the statutory leaving age (at the end of compulsory schooling).

Methodist College is committed to helping students apply for and receive EMA payments. The College follows the Department of Education guidelines for the management of EMA.

Key messages

The aim of EMA is to increase participation and retention in post-compulsory education. This should help students make informed choices by giving them the opportunity to think about further education without as many financial worries.

EMA is based on a 'something for something' principle. Students must earn an EMA by signing an EMA Learning Agreement and achieving objectives linked to attendance, school work and behaviour.

EMA is a means-tested £30 weekly allowance, paid fortnightly during term time. Payments are made according to the student's attendance and behaviour at school, as per the objectives in their Learning Agreement.

Two bonus payments of £100 may be made if students achieve goals that are set down by the College in the Learning Agreement, in discussion with the student. The first is made in January and the second in June.

EMA is normally available for up to three years. Students are entitled to a maximum of 117 attendance confirmations for EMA.

EMA does not affect any money students earn from a part-time job. It does not affect any benefits paid to families, such as Child Benefit, Tax credits or Income Support.

Students should have (or have applied to open) a bank, building society or credit union account that accepts direct credits before applying for EMA. EMA is paid to the student on a fortnightly basis, directly into their bank account, subject to confirmation of attendance and behaviour criteria being satisfied.

The EMA Learning Agreement is between the student and the College. We can only discuss payment issues with the student concerned and not with a third party.

In order to receive an EMA payment, the student must have signed their EMA Learning Agreement and, in respect of the week to which the payment relates, attended every learning session in connection with their course. If the student has not attended every learning session, the College must have authorised their absence. Examples of Authorised and Unauthorised absences are found on pages 5 and 6 of this policy.

EMA payments are not made during school holidays.

Responsibilities

- The College Rolls and Records Department and the Administration Assistant for Senior School are responsible for processing the paperwork and payments for EMA.
- The Head of Senior School is responsible for the effective operation of this policy.
- The Head of Senior School is responsible for ensuring that all enrolled students receiving EMA have a signed Learning Agreement.
- The Head of Senior School is responsible for ensuring that student attendance information is passed to Rolls and Records for recording on the College EMA Portal, in order to satisfy the conditions of the EMA award.
- It is the responsibility of the student to determine their entitlement to EMA. Once a student has applied for an EMA and has submitted an application form, with all the relevant documentation, their application

will be assessed. If the student is approved for an EMA they will be sent an Award Letter.

- It is then the responsibility of an approved student to complete and sign an EMA Learning Agreement. This is available from the Administration Assistant for Senior School. Approved students will not receive any payments until they have signed their Learning Agreement.
- In order for students to qualify for backdated payments, they must apply for EMA support by 30 September 2019. Eligible students who apply by the deadline could have their payments backdated to the start of their course. For students who miss the deadline, payments will be made from the date they submit their application.
- It is the student's responsibility to ensure that their attendance record is accurate and up-to-date. They should follow up, initially with their Tutor, any absences which may affect their payments. To verify reasons for non-payment, the student should then speak to Rolls and Records or the Administration Assistant for Senior School and finally speak directly to the Head of Senior School to discuss any unresolved issues.
- It is the responsibility of the student to inform the College and all relevant bodies if their personal circumstances change.
- The Heads of Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth are responsible for advising the Head of Senior School about students who have not met the attendance requirements or are being considered for disciplinary action.

The EMA Learning Agreement

EMA Learning Agreements are a clear and concise way of specifying exactly what is required of the student in order to receive their weekly allowances and bonus payments. The Learning Agreement is signed by both the student and the Head of Senior School. A new Learning Agreement is needed for each academic year for all eligible students, regardless of whether they are new or returning.

The Learning Agreement sets out the responsibilities of the student and the school. It clearly defines acceptable attendance, performance and behaviour objectives, in other words what is expected from the student. By signing the agreement, the student commits to the objectives defined by the school in return for a weekly EMA allowance.

Students will be spoken to at the time of signing a Learning Agreement to ensure that the College Policy and all objectives are understood.

Students will be interviewed by the Head of Senior School if they are not meeting the objectives and risk losing their bonus payment.

The College Learning Agreement Objectives

- Attendance (including authorised absences for genuine illness, university visits, music examinations, sporting events, etc.) of 95% and above is expected.
- The student must attend all timetabled classes, including Study periods and Tutorial. Following investigation, any confirmed unauthorised absence will result in loss of payment for that week.
- If a student arrives late to class after the roll has been marked, it is their responsibility to ensure that they have been registered. If an error occurs, the student needs to ensure that it is corrected by speaking to the teacher concerned and by informing Rolls and Records. If an issue remains unresolved beyond a two-week period, payment may not be made, unless Rolls and Records receive an indication from a teacher that a class register amendment has been made.
- The student must attend school punctually. An accumulation of ten 'L' codes in a term for being late after registration closes (which is punished by a week of Free Period detentions) will result in loss of payment for that week.
- A 'U' code (for registering after 10.00 a.m. without an acceptable excuse) will result in loss of payment for that week.
- All absences must be explained by a text (via Schoolcoms) or a note from a parent or guardian within two weeks of the day of absence.
- Unexplained absences that remain beyond the two-week period will result in a loss of payment for that week, unless there has been an administrative error. (Please note that payment dates are set by EMA. If a note has not been submitted by the Friday morning prior to the date for the next payment, then EMA cannot be paid at that time.)
- Students who are off school due to illness for a period exceeding two weeks must provide a medical note from their GP to satisfy the requirements of EMA. Students with multiple periods of unspecified illness may also be required to provide a medical note for clarification.
- If a student has failed to meet coursework deadlines, payment may be stopped for that week (at the discretion of the department involved).

- If a student gets a Stage 2 or 3 detention they will lose payment for that week.
- If a student is suspended, the bonus payment for that term will not be made.
- If a student merits a second Stage 3 detention in a term, their bonus payment will not be made for that term.
- The student must attend all examinations related to their course, both internal and external.
- Failure to attend any meetings / corrective actions arranged by teachers (without a genuine excuse) will result in loss of payment for that week.

Absences

Authorised absences

The following are examples of acceptable reasons for absence:

- Genuine illness, explained by a text (via Schoolcoms) or a note from a parent or guardian within two weeks of the day of absence. Students who are off school due to illness for a period exceeding two weeks must provide a medical note from their GP to satisfy the requirements of EMA. Students with multiple periods of unspecified illness may also be required to provide a medical note for clarification. If the period of illness exceeds three weeks, payments may be stopped, since the purpose of EMA is to facilitate students attending school.
- A visit to a university open day or a university or career-related interview.
- Aptitude tests required for university applications (e.g. UCAT).
- A work placement that is an integral part of the student's course.
- Attendance at a funeral, wedding or Civil Ceremony of close family members.
- Attendance at a probation meeting.
- Severe disruption to a student's method of transport that leaves them with no method of travelling to school.
- A driving test. Please note, absence for a driving theory test will not be authorised, since it can be booked for a time outside the school day.
- A family emergency, such as the need to look after a family member.

- Extracurricular activities, such as sport participation or music examinations. The activity must represent a significant personal achievement.
- Medical or dental appointments which could not be made outside the school day.

Unauthorised absences

The following are not acceptable reasons for absence:

- Holidays, since families are expected to take these outside of term-time.
- Part-time jobs within the school day.
- Leisure activities.
- Birthday or family celebrations (not including weddings, etc.)
- Babysitting siblings.
- Driving lessons.

These lists are not exhaustive and only give some examples as guidance. EMA absences are subject to the rules found in the College Attendance Policy.

Right of appeal

Appeals against Entitlement must be made directly to the Department of Education and cannot be considered by the College.

Appeals in respect of an EMA non-payment should be made in writing to the Head of Senior School within five days. Appeals will only be considered if they relate to special circumstances which may result in some type of discretionary entitlement related to the process.

The letter of appeal should state clearly the reason for the appeal, the basis for the appeal and the acceptable outcome.

Recovery of Funds

Prior to the authorisation of payments to a student, they are required to sign their Learning Agreement, acknowledging and confirming that they understand they will have to repay, on demand, any overpayments which may for any reason be made to them.