

include YOUTH

BRIEFING ON CUTTING OF PATHWAYS EMA BY DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

For further information contact

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What has happened?

The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) sent a letter dated 1 April 2015 to all organisations administering the Pathways EMA informing them that as of 29 March 2015 Pathways for Young People EMA would no longer be funded by DEL. This letter was the first and only indication that organisations received that this funding was being cut.

A business plan for Pathways EMA had been agreed in July 2012 for the remainder of that financial year, plus the following two financial years, bringing it up to the end of March 2015. However, the Pathways to Success Strategy, a key commitment within which was the introduction of the Pathways EMA, continues until 2020. Given this it was fully expected that the implementation of this commitment to the provision of the Pathways EMA to continue.

DEL's letter dated 1 April 2015 indicated that the Department is currently trying to identify resources to extend the EMA scheme, but that there is no certainty that funding will be found.

In response to an Assembly question by Mr. Robin Swann MLA on 13 April 2015, Minister Farry suggested that the current financial circumstances whereby money had 'dried up', was in fact the reason that the Pathways EMA had been cut.

However, on Radio Ulster's Good Morning Ulster programme on 22 April 2015 the Minister was less categorical, stressing that *'the issue is still alive on my desk, and I am giving it ongoing consideration'*. He further indicated that there were a number of budget related decisions that needed to be made over the coming weeks and that Pathways EMA was one of these.

As is likely to be the situation for other programme providers, Include Youth is only in a position to continue payment of a training allowance to participants on its ESF Give & Take scheme for a very short time. This raises the real risk of some young people disengaging from our programmes given their reliance on the Pathways EMA.

Introduction of Pathways EMA

The decision to introduce the Pathways EMA in the Pathways to Success Strategy in 2012 followed a lengthy campaign by young people on Include Youth's Give & Take scheme and their advocates. This campaign highlighted the inequity of a situation whereby young people continuing on in school post 16, participating in FE or Training for Success all received a financial incentive and support for their efforts, while those young people who faced the most barriers to participation and were the most disadvantaged received no such incentive.

On the publication of the Pathways to Success Strategy Minister Stephen Farry indicated that he had listened to the concerns expressed, including by the Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee, and that the introduction of the Pathways EMA was a response designed to "*address the anomaly that exists in the system for those who are participating under the European Social Fund schemes*".¹

Unequal treatment of young people who are NEET

Include Youth's understanding is that the new programmes being developed under the T:BUC /United Youth Programme will include the provision of an allowance for young people. Alongside this, EMA and the Youth Training allowance will continue to be paid to young people, creating a situation once again whereby those young people who are most disadvantaged and who face the most barriers will be treated less equally than their peers.

Participants on Include Youth's Give & Take scheme have noted the re-introduction, through this decision, of unequal treatment of them vis a vis their peers, saying that all they want is to be treated '*fairly*' and '*the same as*' their peers on mainstream programmes. Young people indicated that they relied on this allowance to help with bills including utility and food bills as well as their rent. They voiced their concern that withdrawal of this support would lead to '*extra stress and pressure*' and in some cases might even place them at risk of homelessness. In addition to the practical benefit of the allowance, the young people felt strongly that this allowance provided both motivation and recognition of their efforts on the programme and that its removal made them feel '*irrelevant*' in the words of one young person.

¹ Official Report (Hansard) Mon 2 July 2012 Vol 76, No 3, page 194

Issues and Questions

This arbitrary and illogical decision therefore raises a number of significant questions which we believe DEL needs to provide urgent answers to. These are as follows:

1. How will DEL ensure the continued implementation of the commitment in the Pathways to Success Strategy 2012-2020 to introduce a training allowance for young people participating on programmes who are NEET (paragraph 5.8 Pathways to Success Strategy)?
2. Prior to introduction of the Pathways EMA, in June 2012, Minister Farry indicated to Include Youth that he expected approximately 4,500 young people in total, or 1000 young people a year, to benefit from this allowance and that the scheme would cost in the region of £1.5 to £2 million up to March 2015². The most recent figures provided by DEL to the NEETs Advisory Group in September 2014³ suggest that at that point a total of 1,669 young people were receiving Pathways EMA. 1,019 of these young people were on CIF programmes and the total cost to September 2014 was £92,607.13. Over a two year period up to September 2014 650 young people on ESF funded programmes had received the Pathways EMA at a total cost of £251,294. A further £181.50 was paid to a participant availing of the LEMIS service. The total spend therefore on Pathways EMA up to September 2014 amounted to £344,082.63, suggesting a significant underspend. **What amount of funding was earmarked in the Business Plan for Pathways EMA agreed in 2012 and how much of an underspend was there?**
3. CIF funded programmes ended at the end of March 2015. This left the 2014-20 ESF programmes for young people who are NEET, plus a small number of other employability programmes, as being potentially eligible to apply for the Pathways EMA on behalf of the young people that will be enrolled on their programmes. Based on the number of successful ESF applications for programmes to work with young people who are NEET, and the targets set therein, **what costings had DEL developed for the continuation of Pathways EMA over the lifetime of the Pathways to Success Strategy?**
4. The programme targets set by Include Youth in its recent ESF funding application were premised on the assumption that DEL would fund the provision of a Pathways EMA allowance for participants. **Contrary to what the Minister suggested on Good Morning Ulster on 22 April, organisations do not have any discretion to directly pay this training allowance to young people themselves.** Payment of a training allowance was not factored into those funding applications. **Has DEL considered the implications of the non continuation of funding of the Pathways EMA, given**

² Meeting held between Include Youth and Minister Stephen Farry in relation to Pathways to Success Strategy 11 June 2012. Meeting attended by Michael Bower Alliance Party, Jim Walker and Pascal McCulla DEL, Koulla Yiasouma and Sara Boyce Include Youth.

³ Pathways to Success Action Plan September 2014 Action No 31

the likely impact on recruitment and dropout rates, on the programme targets set by those organisations successful in their bids to work with young people who are NEET?

5. The Pathways to Success Strategy has recently been evaluated for DEL by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion. **How has the impact of the provision of the Pathways EMA to young people between December 2012 and March 2015 been evaluated and what were the findings of that evaluation?**
6. DEL's Equality Scheme 2011-2016 sets out its arrangements for compliance with its Section 75 statutory duties. Chapter 4 of this Equality Scheme details its arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies. Paragraph 4.1 makes it clear that in the context of Section 75, *“‘policy’ is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland. In respect of this equality scheme, the term policy is used for any (proposed/amended/existing) strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, e.g., ‘draft’, ‘pilot’, ‘high level’ or ‘sectoral’.*⁴

The decision to cut the Pathways EMA is a policy decision as defined by DEL's Equality Scheme and the Equality Commission's Guidance. **Has DEL undertaken the relevant screening /equality impact assessments of this decision, and if not, does it now propose to carry out these steps to ensure compliance with its Section 75 statutory duties?**

In addition to this, in its Budget 2015/16 Statement DEL indicated that it gives priority to promoting equality of opportunity and to ensuring 'fair and inclusive delivery of its programmes and services'. It also committed to equality screening each programme reduction.

Has this equality screening been undertaken and if so what data did DEL rely on?

7. In the NI Executive's Budget 2015/16 DEL stated that given the budgetary pressures it was facing that it planned to focus on two broad priorities, one of these being to 'protect programmes for the most vulnerable in our society'.

Can DEL explain how its decision to cut Pathways EMA is consistent with this stated priority?

8. The first and only indication that Include Youth received of the decision to cut Pathways EMA was in the letter from DEL dated 1 April 2015. **What information and/or consultation with other programme providers in the Community and Voluntary sector, with the NEETs Forum, the NEETs Advisory Group or other**

⁴ Department for Employment and Learning Equality Scheme April 2011 (approved by ECNI 14/9/2011)

relevant statutory or voluntary/community sector stakeholders was undertaken prior to DEL making this decision?

Response by Include Youth to date

Include Youth has written to DEL asking the questions outlined at 1-8 above. We are awaiting a response.

We also wrote to the Employment and Learning Committee outlining our concerns and asking that the Committee raise these with DEL and Minister Farry. The Committee has agreed to do this when the Minister appears before their Committee on 29 April 2015.

Blair Anderson, an ex-Give & Take participant and Sara Boyce, Include Youth's Policy Coordinator (Employability) were interviewed about this issue on BBC's Good Morning Ulster radio programme on Wed 22 April. The Minister Stephen Farry responded on air to the points they had raised. Click on the following link to listen to the audio clip (at 2h 8 m 44 secs) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05qzrqg#auto>

Young people on Include Youth's Give & Take scheme attended the Employment and Learning Committee on Wed 22 April as observers to listen to the Committee's initial discussion on this issue. The young people have initiated a letter writing campaign to the Minister Stephen Farry, similar to the successful letter writing campaign conducted by Give & Take participants in 2012.

Next steps

Include Youth is calling on other organisations who provide services to or work with young people affected by this decision to raise it in whatever way they see appropriate. Organisations should feel free to use the information and questions provided in the above briefing paper as they see fit.

From the Minister's comments on Radio Ulster on 22 April **it would appear that there is a short window of a few weeks at most where influence can be brought to bear on DEL to reverse this decision and find the necessary funding to continue to deliver on its commitment in the Pathways to Success Strategy to provide the Pathways EMA to young people who are NEET and participating on non mainstream employability programmes.**

As noted above the Minister, accompanied by his senior civil service team, is due to be questioned on this issue by the Employment and Learning Committee on Wed 29 April, so it may be helpful to communicate your organisation's concern regarding this decision before that date. **Organisations may also wish to raise it with OFMDFM given their remit for children and young people, equality and human rights.**

Should you require any clarification of any information in the above briefing paper, or any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Sara Boyce, Policy Coordinator on 90 311007 /07710953270 or sara@includeyouth.org